

## An Introduction to Pema Lingpa (1450-1521)

Terton Pema Lingpa was born in a bull shed (*Baribrang*) in the Tang valley and he had a difficult childhood. About a year after his birth, his mother could not breast feed him because she gave birth to his brother Guru. He was, thus, brought up by his grandfather who fed him honey and butter. His grandfather was a blacksmith; Pema Lingpa worked with him from a young age and learnt the skills of a blacksmith, silversmith, carpenter, mason and tailor. However, Pema Lingpa was a very religious child. He would build temples and *chortens* while playing as a young boy, chant prayers or give blessings to the sheep he was herding. It was due to his religious faith, spiritual power and strong connection to Guru Rinpoche that Pema Lingpa later discovered many hidden treasures and became one of the greatest *tertons* or treasure discoverers.

*Terton* Pema Lingpa was definitely the greatest figure Bhutan has ever produced for both his high stature in the Himalayan Buddhist world and the pervasive impact he had left through his teachings and lineage. His life and works continue to shape the lives of thousands of people around the world and defines the Bhutanese identity. He is Bhutan's foremost cultural hero and spiritual father. He was an artist, architect, traveller, lama, writer, poet, negotiator and the head of a large family. His personality and life defies a simple description and explanation but his legacy continues to permeate the lives of all Bhutanese even today.

This lyrical story by Kunzang Choden, who is also from Tang, describes in a beautiful narration Pema Lingpa's second act of discovering treasures from Membartsho in 1476. Known as discovering treasure in public or *tromter*, this episode is the most well known case of performing miracles and extracting treasures in Pema Lingpa's life. Pema Lingpa himself wrote about this event in his autobiography:

*On the cliff, in front of the crowd, I held a butter lamp in my hand and jumped into the lake swearing the oath: "If I am an emanation of a devil, may I die in this river. If I am the heart-son of Guru Rinpoche, may I return with the required treasure and not even this lamp be extinguished." Some spectators said: "He committed suicide out of disgrace." Other told my parents: "Your son has killed himself". Then, I emerged from the lake without any harm with a statue of the Buddha and a sealed skull".*

The author has taken literary licence to change the butter lamp to a flaming torch which is in accordance to one rendition of the various versions of the oral tradition. Her book brings this important story to our children in poetic verses and highlights the culture of faith and devotion which has developed from this miraculous act of Pema Lingpa. The book is the first of its kind to introduce the important figure of Pema Lingpa, the cultural concepts of *tertons*, hidden treasures and hidden lands and the sacred spot of Membartsho to the children, who are the heirs to the rich legacies left behind by the great master Pema Lingpa.

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