

A Step Away from Paradise

EXCERPT No. 4

The Miracle

From Chapter 18, The Miracle

When Tulshuk Lingpa was in Sikkim preparing his trip to the Hidden Land, the king sent representatives to determine his motives and to find out whether he was a fraud. Some in the royal palace even thought he was a spy looking for a new route through the mountains by which the Chinese—who had just overrun Tibet and had their eye on Sikkim—could invade. The representatives told Tulshuk Lingpa that he'd have to perform a miracle to demonstrate his powers. The following excerpt takes place on the morning of the miracle.

Tulshuk Lingpa led the representative, his main sponsors, closest disciples, and family down a short path to where large smooth stone shelves jugged out over the empty space of the valley. There wasn't enough room for everyone there, so people crowded the slope above, back to the small field where they'd started. The lamas started burning clouds of *sang* [pine bough incense].

“From today onwards,” Tulshuk Lingpa said, “there is no one, not even a king, who can either stop us or help us. We can appeal only to the *dharmapala* and *mahapala*, the guardian spirits of Beyul [the Hidden Land] and the keepers of the gate. From today it starts.”

He took out the *pecha* [scripture] he had received as *ter* [hidden treasure] above Dzongri, the text he'd received from the *dakinis* [female spirits] especially to appease the guardian spirits of Beyul and to entice them to open the way. He unwrapped it and held it in his hands. And as he began chanting the text, Mipham, Namdrul, Géshipa, and the other senior lamas looked at each other. They understood the significance of his reading this text. Each, in his own way, was ready for a tear in the fabric of reality.

Since no one knew what form the renting of reality would take and what miracle was about to occur, some were looking intently at Tulshuk Lingpa. Others were watching the sky, awaiting a sign. Yet others were looking towards Mount Kanchenjunga, because that is where they were

to find the secret hidden country. One man told me he was looking down the steep slope to the Tashiding monastery because it was the holiest place.

When Tulshuk Lingpa finished the text, he was standing in a dramatic pose, with his right foot in front of the left. When he lifted his forward foot, there, where no one was expecting the miracle to occur, imbedded in the stone, was the imprint of his foot.



Tulshuk Lingpa's Footprint ~ Sinon Monastery, West Sikkim



Kunsang performing a ritual at the site of Tulshuk Lingpa's footprint;
Tashiding monastery on top of hill in background, 2005

Rigzin recalled for me that he was there and personally saw the rock flowing like water. “The rock was boiling and red in color,” he told me. “My brother saw it also; everybody who was there saw this.” Others described to me smoke rising from the rock, and the collective gasp that went through the crowd at the sight of their lama leaving his footprint in stone.

There is a strong tradition within Tibetan Buddhism, especially in the oldest branch, the Nyingma, of great lamas proving their miraculous powers by leaving their footprints in stone. Padmasambhava’s preserved footprints are found wherever tradition holds he visited, and they are still, after twelve centuries, places of pilgrimage. The great lamas of the past have even left imprints in stone of their hands, elbows, and heads. Yet leaving an imprint in stone was a deed of the legendary heroes of the past, and none could recall a lama having performed this deed in anyone’s living memory. Even the Dalai Lama, the spiritual and temporal leader of the Tibetan people, had never performed such a miracle.

As word of the miracle spread up the hill to the small field and the monastery, a light rain began to fall, a special and auspicious type of rain with widely spaced individual drops, large and filled with sunlight, known in Tibetan as a Rain of Flowers.

The crowd parted to allow Tulshuk Lingpa and his lamas to climb back up to the monastery through clouds of incense, the very air resounding with the sound of horns and conch shells. With pressed palms, they bowed and prostrated themselves before this miracle-working lama. Then the hundreds who had gathered in Sinon that day filed by the footprint and paid homage to it.

I have spoken with many people who were present that day for Tulshuk Lingpa’s miracle. While some say the rock began to seethe and bubble and a purple smoke arose, others simply say they were just looking at the sky and suddenly it was there. Most agree the footprint deepened with time, and moisture came out of it. People bent down to put their forehead to it and many tried to take up the moisture with a corner of their clothing. Some wanted to lick the footprint, but they were stopped by others who thought that would dirty it.

About two hours later Tulshuk Lingpa was with his family inside his wood-slat hut at the monastery having a bite to eat after the morning’s exertion when there was a loud and aggressive knock at the door. Kunsang opened it to the highest law official of the kingdom, the police

commissioner who, with pistol holstered and ready, was backed up by ten uniformed policemen with rifles. They burst into the room and started ransacking their things.

“Where is this miracle you have been promising the king?” the police commissioner demanded. “I must see you perform it.”

Yab Maila pushed through the armed police and entered the room. “You have missed the miracle, it’s already occurred,” he averred. “It was announced for eight AM. It is now after ten. Where were you?”

“I was galloping my horse up the hill from Legship. We are far from the capital and it took longer than I thought. If you are to do a miracle for the king, you must at least wait until the official representative of the king arrives!”

“We waited,” Yab Maila said, “and he came. We didn’t start until Geduen Trunyig arrived. You, sir, I’ve never met.”

“Geduen Trunyig wasn’t deputized by the king to view the miracle. I was.”

Just then Geduen Trunyig pushed into the room.

“It is true,” he said. “Last time I was sent by the king. But today I came as a private citizen, out of my own interest.”

The police commissioner cleared the things from a low table onto the floor with a sweep of his arm. Out of his jacket he produced a large map of the Kingdom of Sikkim, which he unfolded and laid on the table.

“If you have it in mind to take His Majesty’s subjects to the hidden valley of Shangri-La, I demand you show me on the map exactly where on the slopes of Mount Kanchenjunga this hidden valley is. In the name of the king I demand that you show me!”

“If Beyul were on the map, it wouldn’t be Beyul,” Tulshuk Lingpa calmly said. “You won’t find it on any map. Beyul exists, but off the map.”

This infuriated the police commissioner.

“What do you mean you won’t find it on a map?” he insisted. “Is it too small to put on the map?”

No,” Tulshuk Lingpa said, calmly. “Rather it is too large. Your map of Sikkim couldn’t contain it, for the Great Hidden Valley hidden in Sikkim is three times as large as the outer Kingdom of Sikkim. And besides, if it were on the map, everyone would go. What would be the use? No one would need a *terton* to open it.”

The police commissioner was practically fuming.

“You say you performed a miracle? Show it to me.”

Tulshuk Lingpa led the police commissioner with his ten-strong escort armed with rifles down to the stone outcropping of rock to see the footprint. The police commissioner bent down and examined the footprint as if it were a crime scene. He scratched it with his fingernail. “You have made this by hand. You have carved it,” he declared. “And besides, since I wasn’t here when this occurred, how do I know the footprint wasn’t already here when he put his foot on it? Bring me some of the old people of this village. I demand to know if this footprint was here before.”

Some of the villagers were right there, and some of them quite old, “We have been here since our birth,” they told him, “and we have never seen this before. This was a miracle. There *was* no footprint before.”

The police commissioner had with him a little case with the tools of his trade. He opened it now and took out a tape measure. He measured the footprint, and it was quite small. Then he demanded to measure the lama’s foot. There was a murmur of dissent, but Tulshuk Lingpa assented. He measured the lama’s foot, which was considerably larger than the footprint.

“Unless you perform a miracle again right now and in front of my eyes and put your other foot in stone right next to this one, I will declare you a fraud and have to take you in. You think you are going somewhere from where you will never return? That might just be the case: I’ll take you to Gangtok—where there is a nice cell waiting for you.”

Yab Maila protested. “Tulshuk Lingpa performed the miracle in front of Geduen Trunyig,” he said, “one of His Majesty’s ministers. What right do you have to take him away?”

“You performed this before a minister who was here in an unofficial capacity. While he might have been sent to perform a preliminary investigation, I was sent by the government to witness the miracle, not him. Now you must perform a miracle for me.”

The villagers got angry. “We thought he was the representative of the palace,” they called out. “He came early in the morning. You were so late. We thought he was the official representative so we proceeded. Performing a miracle is no joke. It cannot be repeated!”

The police commissioner was not in the least sympathetic. He was not even Sikkimese. He was Punjabi, from way down on the Indian plains a thousand miles away.

As Rigzin Dokhampa told me, “What do Punjabis know about footprints in stone? The Indian police officer didn’t understand that when you put your foot in stone, you don’t leave the imprint of the tips of the toes or the back of the heel. The footprint is naturally smaller than the foot that made it. When the police commissioner measured it, he got it wrong. He said Tulshuk Lingpa was a fake; he didn’t know.”

The police commissioner announced that he was taking Tulshuk Lingpa to Gangtok. He grabbed hold of Tulshuk Lingpa’s arm to drag him to where they had tied their horses, but he sorely misjudged the situation.

The man that the crowd had waited generations for, the one who had just performed a miracle to demonstrate his power to the king and who held the key to the promised land of immortality in his hand, was not so easily to be led off to jail by a Punjabi representative of the king, commissioner of police or not.

A melee ensued in which Tulshuk Lingpa and the commissioner of police formed the inner circle, surrounded by the ten deputies, their rifles held firmly across their chests but useless against this unruly mob of robed lamas, old ladies shaking their fists, children, and barking dogs.

The police commissioner had no choice but to give in. “I’ll leave,” he told the crowd, “but I will recommend to the king that Tulshuk Lingpa be ordered to Gangtok to perform a miracle at the palace—and if he fails, be thrown in jail.”

One of the lamas shouted out, “Even if he performs a miracle for the king and all his ministers, you’ll still throw him in jail!”

“That’s not true,” he retorted. “If Tulshuk Lingpa performs a miracle, I will personally carry him on my shoulders and parade him around the palace grounds to the accompaniment of trumpets and drums!”

He pointed his finger at Yab Maila and Kunsang Lama, the head of the monastery. “You two came last time to announce the time for the miracle. You’ll will come again and tell us when the next miracle will be performed, but this time in Gangtok. You will come and announce it personally to me, the police commissioner.”

Neither of them gave the police commissioner the slightest indication that they would do what he said.

Someone yelled out, “You might want a miracle, but you’re not going to get it. By that time, we’ll be in the Hidden Land!”

And with that, the crowd parted and the police commissioner and his armed deputies swung themselves up onto their horses and thundered down the mountain towards the Rangeet River, where official police jeeps were waiting to take them with their red lights flashing back to the capital.

Even Tulshuk Lingpa, who had earlier not been afraid of going to Gangtok to perform a miracle for the king, realized the danger. By evening, Tulshuk Lingpa, his family, and disciples from Himachal Pradesh all started packing. Since openly fleeing would attract pursuers—and possible problems at the border to India—Tulshuk Lingpa announced he was leaving the kingdom for a few days to see Chatrul Rinpoche at his monastery in Jorbungalow outside Darjeeling and he was taking with him only his disciples from Himachal Pradesh. Of course they would never return to the kingdom. Tseram, which Tulshuk Lingpa had pointed out from above Dzongri and which was near the Western Gate, was on the Nepal side of Mount Kanchenjunga. From Darjeeling they could easily cross over into Nepal and depart from this world for one so much greater without having to worry about so small a potentate as the King of Sikkim.

Fearing that the police commissioner had sent an order to all the border crossings not to let Tulshuk Lingpa and his followers flee the kingdom, Tulshuk Lingpa made sure they had a few bottles of liquor ready as they approached the Indian border at Jorethang. “If the border guards give us trouble,” he told his disciples, “we’ll get them drunk. We’ll say we are only going overnight to Darjeeling.”

Shortly before they reached the border with India, he stopped at a stream known as the Rhembang Khola. He scooped some water in his hands and drank it. “This stream,” he declared, “comes straight from Beyul.”