

**School of Religious Studies
McGill University**

Course: RELG 556 Issues in Buddhist Studies
Time: Wednesdays 10:35 AM – 12:35 PM
Location: Birks Building, Room 105
Instructor: Professor Rinpoche Sherpa

The Tensions and Teachings of Gampopa

At the dawn of the period that can be regarded as the renaissance of Tibetan Buddhism, from the late tenth century, attempts were made to promote the conventional Buddhist sutric teachings and to reestablish monasticism. This was coupled with attempts to restrict Buddhist mantric practices --- resulting in a new tension.

Efforts, not made without difficulties, to understand and synthesize Buddhist sutric and mantric teachings and practices greatly contributed to the formation of what is Tibetan Buddhism today.

The tensions caused by attempts to align these two divergent Buddhist realities are interestingly exemplified in the life and personal teachings of the physician-turned-monk-and-yogi Gampopa (1079-1153), who is renowned for having synthesized the sutric teachings of the monks of the Kadam tradition with the mantric practices of the siddhas/yogis of the Kagyu tradition.

This seminar explores some of Gampopa's most important ideas, probing his hagiographies (*nam thar*), as well as some of his homilies (*tshogs chos*), dialogues (*zhu lan*), manuals of instructions (*khrid yig*), and treatises (*bstan bcos*). Major themes to be considered include: the fluidity of thoughts and richness of Gampopa's pedagogy, being situated as he was at the dawn of the later flowering (*phyi dar*) of the Buddhism in Tibet; his graded path (*lam rim*) and yogic instructions; the role of conceptual thought (*nam rtog*) in practice; and the importance of his third path.

Subjects:

1. Evidence of the tension
2. Meaning of death
3. Capacity of compassion
4. The Basic Goodness
5. Two Basic States (*gnas lugs gnyis*)
6. Two Armors (*go cha gnyis*)
7. The Role of Conceptual thoughts
8. Can Mahamudra be taught?
9. Permissibility and Attainability
10. The Three Paths

Schedule:

Date Subject

- Sept. 7 Course intro, basic introduction to topics to be covered
- Sept. 14 Evidence of the tension
- Sept. 21 — continue —
- Sept. 28 Meaning of death
- Oct. 5 Capacity of compassion
- Oct. 12 The Basic Goodness
- Oct. 19 Two Basic States (*gnas lugs gnyis*)
- Oct. 26 — continue —

- Nov. 2 Two Armors (*go cha gnyis*)
- Nov. 9 The Role of Conceptual thoughts
- Nov. 16 Can Mahamudra be taught?
- Nov. 23 Permissibility and Attainability
- Nov. 30 The Three Paths

Academic Integrity:

“McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures” (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information). (Approved by Senate on 29 January 2003)

Language Submission:

“In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.” (Approved by Senate on 21 January 2009 - see also the section in this document on Assignments and Evaluation.)