LIFE STORIES OF BUDDHIST MASTERS

Stories about Buddhist masters are told to illustrate certain teachings or their implementation in life. In particular, the teacher-disciple relationship plays an important role when it comes to the wholeness of Buddha's transmissions.

In all Buddhist schools and traditions, there are outstanding masters who have had a strong influence on their disciples, their times, and the times that followed. "It is not ideologies that change the world, but the People" as it is said in a quote. Thus a Buddhist teacher will always be, in a certain way a benchmark and an inspiration for the part of the teaching he represents.

In Buddhism, many qualities are mentioned that the student will gradually develop in himself.
For example, if one speaks about patience or respect, these qualities should also be consistently experienced by the master. In this way one leaves the level of conceptuality to experiences, from which own insights develop.
On the different levels of the Buddhist teachings teachers play a very different role. On their respective level of realization they reflect, as much as possible in every situation, what they teach. If a master is able to express these abilities uninterruptedly, his life story is told, written down as an example of the possibilities of development and passed on.

In Theravada Buddhism, mindfulness, related meaningful behavior with body, speech and mind, and mind-calming meditations play a central role. The teacher acts accordingly in a meaningful way. In the Great Way teachers inspire mainly through their realization of compassion and wisdom, while in the Diamond Way joy, love, fearlessness and energy are exemplary. The teacher thus expresses uninterruptedly the wholeness of the enlightened qualities for the student.

Especially in Tibetan Buddhism, life stories of enlightened masters are often told. The Tibetan word for such a biography is "namthar", translated back into our language it means "profound liberation". "Everything is the teacher" is often said in the Diamond Way, which is why life stories are so important for students. Through them he learns which obstacles the master overcame to reach the perfect realization, in order to to be able to help the beings in the best possible way.

A few examples of famous masters of many Buddhist schools from the past and present are:

Atisha (980 - 1054), Bodhidharma (440 - 528), Garab Dorje (unclear dates; was the first to teach the Dzogchen), Gampopa (1079 - 1153), Hakuin Ekaku (1686 - 1769), Jamgön Mipham Rinpoche (1846-1912), Marpa (1012 - 1097), Milarepa (1052 - 1135), Obaku Kiun (d. 850), Könchok Gyalpo (1034 - 1102), Kumārajīva (334 - 413), Lama Ole Nydahl (b. 1941), Master Sheng Yen (1930-2009), Padmasambhava/Guru Rinpoche (8th c.), Rangjung Rigpe Dorje = 16th Karmapa (1924 - 1981), Ryochu Nyory (1793-1868), Sakya Pandita (1182 - 1251), Shantideva (8th cent.), Shítóu Xīqiān (ca.700 - ca.790), Shunryu Suzuki (1905 - 1971), Takuan Soho (1573 - 1645), Tenzin Gyatso = 14th Dalai Lama (b. 1935), Thich Nhat Hanh (b. 1926), Vimalamitra (8th cent.), Wonhyo (617 - 686), Xuanzang (602 - 664), Yeshe Tsogyal (757 - 817).