

Message from the Dalai Lama on Bön Tradition

“The Bön tradition is commonly associated with the kingdom of Zhang Zhung, which existed around Mount Kailash and the region to the west of Tibet until the time of the seventh century Tibetan King, Songtsen Gampo. We Tibetans regard Bön as the ancient, indigenous religious and cultural tradition of our ancestors, which is the source and embodiment of many aspects of the Tibetan way of life. With the advent of Buddhism in the Land of Snows, most Tibetans became Buddhists.

Nevertheless, Bön remained and has experienced periods of growth and revival since the eleventh century, so that prior to the Chinese occupation it was practiced in many parts of the country.

“The Bön Tradition has bequeathed the present generation a strong legacy of education and training in philosophy, monastic discipline, ritual and meditation. It encourages a combination of literary study, vibrant debate and personal reflection.

“Bön monasteries, their monks and lamas suffered no less than their Buddhist counterparts from the turmoil that followed the Chinese takeover of Tibet. A handful of dedicated teachers have been responsible for preserving and passing on the Bönpo spiritual and cultural transmission.

“Here in exile in India, the Bönpo community has established a settlement at Dolanji in the hills around Solan in Himachal Pradesh, where they have made efforts to preserve the Bönpo way of life. Similar to the four Tibetan Buddhist traditions, the Bönpo community elects representatives to the Assembly of Tibetan People’s Deputies.

“The focus of the settlement is Tashi Menri Ling Monastery, where young monks receive complete traditional training. In addition to classes in grammar, medicine, astrology and poetry, they are also provided with a modern education. I have seen for myself that the students are provided good facilities for study and that the monks are well disciplined. I therefore welcome any assistance that may be extended to the monastery.”

His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama