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A Report on an Educational Television/Film Series on Tibetan Buddhism

A series of four television/film programs on Tibetan Buddhism is presently being coproduced by Dr. Edward W. Bastian and Professor Joseph W. Elder of the University of Wisconsin-Madison. This project has been supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Smithsonian Institution, the U.S. Office of Education, the University of Wisconsin Graduate School and WHA-TV, the PBS affiliate in Madison. These are designed to teach and motivate beginning to intermediate students of subjects ranging from world religion to cultural anthropology; the target audiences include junior and senior level high school students, college students and Public Television audiences.

The working titles and purposes of these four programs are as follows:

1). *The Wheel of Life* (29 minutes)

This program focuses on a classical Indian and Tibetan painting called the "Wheel of Life," which was created to teach the fundamental doctrines of Buddhism. Fine examples of this painting have been photographed in Nepal, India and Ladakh over the past five years; they provide a colorful and stimulating presentation of such doctrines as the Four Noble Truths, the Three Jewels, the twelve links of Dependent Origination, the path of Enlightenment, and the stages of rebirth in the Desire Realm of *samsāra*.

2). *Tibetan Buddhism: Preserving the Monastic Traditions* (29 minutes)

This program focuses on the traditional monastic career preserved by Tibetan Buddhist monks of Sera Monastery in Karnataka, south India. The film observes a boy's decision to enter the monastery and his family's influence on that decision. It documents the boy's ordination ceremony and observes his future career through the daily lives of other younger and older monks. It observes daily manual activities of cooking, cleaning, building, farming, printing scriptures from wood blocks, painting tankas and

molding food offerings. The film documents and explains the style and content of Sera's scholarly curriculum up to the study and practice of the Buddhist Tantras. It focuses on the memorization, classwork and debate of six subjects: Logic, Epistemology, the Three Jewels, the Four Noble Truths, the Middle Path and Great Compassion. The film concludes with an overview of the study and practice of the Buddhist Tantras at Gyume monastery, including: making a maṇḍala, training in the tantric voice, taking an initiation, and holding a fire ceremony.

3). *Tibetan Buddhism for the Laity* (working title) (56 minutes)

This program follows the cycle of life and religious ritual of a family during the four seasons of the year in the Tibetan cultural regions of Ladakh. Observing the close religious, cultural, social and economic relationship between the family and a neighboring monastery, this program documents major religious rituals revolving around the planting and harvesting of crops, the healing of diseases, and propitiation of major Buddhist and local deities. The program concludes with a careful documentation of the colorful winter festival at the monastery. It also observes the major craft and artistic activities of the Ladakhi village. This program aims to provide a beginning to intermediate student or television viewer with a stimulating and accurate portrait of Tibetan Buddhism in an indigenous rural setting.

4). *The Transmission of Tibetan Buddhism to the West* (working title) (56 minutes)

This program documents efforts of refugee Tibetans in India (including His Holiness the Dalai Lama) to preserve their Buddhist heritage, and it documents efforts by Westerners to practice and promulgate Tibetan Buddhism in America.

Beginning in India with interviews with the Dalai Lama and documentary sequences of preservation efforts of Tibetans in Dharmasala and Manali, India, this program then focuses on the historic initiation of 1,500 Americans into the *Kālacakra Tantra* (Cycle of Time) in

Wisconsin during the summer of 1981. The film contains interviews with American devotees, and scenes of the preparations for the *Kālacakra* initiations, including the controversial township hall meetings where local residents tried to prevent the initiation ceremonies from taking place. This program also contains the first complete documentation ever produced of these initiation ceremonies, the most significant of all public Tibetan Buddhist rituals. The Dalai Lama allowed complete access to the preparations for and conferral of the *Kālacakra Tantra* initiations performed by 18 Tibetan monks from the Namgyal Monastery. This program has significant historical value for our understanding of Tibetan Buddhism and its transmission to the West.

Thus far, one of the above films has been completed and released for world-wide distribution. This film, *Tibetan Buddhism: Preserving the Monastic Tradition*, has been shown at the Annual meeting of the Association of Asian Studies, at Chicago and the 5th Annual conference of the International Association of Buddhist Studies at Oxford.

The General Membership Meeting of the conference passed a resolution that states, in part: "The . . . Meeting endorses by enthusiastic acclamation [these] . . . films of the living Buddhist traditions. The meeting urged [that these] . . . superbly accurate and sensitive portrayals of Buddhist practices and beliefs be made available to as wide an audience as possible." The second film, to be released in late 1982, will be the one tentatively titled: *Tibetan Buddhism for the Laity*. The remaining films will be released in 1983.

For further information on this series on programs, contact Dr. Edward W. Bastian, Educational Communications, P.O. Box 1421, Madison, Wisconsin, 53701, telephone (608) 233-3118.