The Man Who Traded 4,000 Siva Lingams
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Born of a German aristocratic family dating back to the ninth century, Ernst-Egon Von Lixfeld finds his religious roots in Tibetan Buddhism and his life's fulfillment in the ancient Siva Lingam. Ernst-Egon is now known by the Tibetan name Tsa-Jon Narain and to many as "the Lingam Man." He studied Tibetan Buddhism at the Thubten Sangag Choeling monastery in Darjeeling and in 1975 "took refuge in the Dharma" with His Holiness, the Kannapa Lama (who ranks second only to the Dalai Lama). Today he is an Indo-Tibetan art dealer and Indologist whose main business is the acquisition and selling of rare tantric Lingams produced from the Narmada river in central India. Tsa-Jon is of medium height, with a quiet and peaceful demeanor. During the 1970's he spent about half of his time in India and is fluent in Hindi.

The Siva Lingam is to Saivites the simplest and most ancient symbol of Siva, especially of Parasivam, God beyond all forms and qualities. Scriptures require that every temple have a Siva Lingam installed. A similarly shaped stone, the Salagrama, is sacred to Vaishnavites.

HINDUISM TODAY interviewed the Lingam Man during his recent visit to our editorial offices in Hawaii:

Hinduism Today: How did you come to be involved with the Siva Lingam?

Tsa-Jon: "In my search of higher consciousness in India, I was presented a Lingam as a gift in Benares. Pashupatinath [Siva temple in Kathmandu, Nepal] was instrumental in opening me up to this mission of bringing Siva Lingams to the West. At first I had sort of rejected it, because of my not accepting that Spirit wanted me to do this. And there in Pashupatinath I had this experience with one of the Lingams in the pavilion. It made me feel that I had to let go, become involved with

the Lingams and open myself up to all the power and all the mystery and information that the Lingams represent and have. It was a very enlightening experience that turned me around and made me become almost fanatically involved with the Lingams.

My good friend and partner at that time, John Lewis, [and I] traveled throughout South India looking for a source of Lingams. I found that the brahmins in the temples did not have as much information about the Lingams and their origin as did the sadhus who were in retreat in the more secluded areas. [Our search] brought us up North to the Narmada river and Bhopal [in central India] where we went to see the curator of a museum. He told us to go to Onkar Mandhata [about 120 miles to the Southwest]. This is a very small and holy town at a confluence of the Narmada and a secondary river which cuts across the Narmada to create an island about a mile long and a quarter mile wide. On that island is an ancient, ancient city whose walls are built in the shape of an "Om." At the center of this Om is a Shiva temple in which is a Lingam that is five and a half to six feet, very thick, very wide and broken in some spots. The temple is dormant, it is not an active temple.

There are a lot of tantric sadhus who live on the island in caves. In one of the caves was a naturally formed Lingam out of limestone that was being tended and worshipped by a Saivite sadhu. We experienced at sunset some very strong energy coming from this Lingam stone, a feeling of euphoria, a state of bliss.

Another thing that was very unusual-the area sort of draws people to die, just like Benares. When we were there, we noticed this donkey coming down the river bank, this old donkey. We didn't think much of it until we found a day later that the donkey had died right near the ghats area. It was just one more thing that indicated to us that this was a very, very holy and special site, that even the animals in their incarnation where drawn there to die.

HT: What exactly is the "tantric Lingam" found at Onkar Mandhata?

Tsa-Jon: Most of the Lingams in the Siva temples in India are hand carved out of granite or basalt. The tantric Lingam is actually a gem stone, crypto-crystalline quartz with goethite and iron oxide making up the classic tantric markings. By

"classic tantric markings" I mean that the stone has a red coloration in an oval shape, an unbroken center line, an outer red line, and then a third outer perimeter line that goes around this whole shape. The classic Lingam then has no other marking except this one horizontal marking three-quarters of the way up from the bottom representing raising consciousness. The Lingam is always stood so that marking is at the top of the Lingam, representing the sixth chakra, the third eye. The form should be not too fat, not too thin. It should be concentrically formed without pits or gulleys. The classic Lingam is a grey color with red markings. The finish on the stone should be as high a polish as possible. This is the classic tantric Lingam, and there are many variations from that.

HT: How are these Lingams created?

Tsa-Jon: The stone itself comes out of the river asymmetric in shape and then it is hand polished. The selection of stone is a process which comes from first one out of a hundred pieces that the villagers wash the mud off of has the red marking, and then one out of those hundred pieces has the classic tantric markings. Then they are cut [by workers] so the markings are in the most tantric locations, the upper portion of the Lingam. They are cut by a chisel and a hammer so they are more concentric, more oval, and when they get them to that shape, they start the polishing process. They'll use different hardness stones to get a smooth surface, [then] do the final polishing with pumice.

HT: Is any of this mechanized?

Tsa-Jon: No, this is all pretty much hand work. There are some mechanized tools, like wheels that they use in their polishing, but not in the modern sense of using huge polishing machines. I've seen the work myself and they still use the old hand methods because machinery is not able to keep the form, it'll make a side flat. But your hand would rub that stone and keep it in a smooth concentric form.

HT: How many workers are involved?

Tsa-Jon: It is a cottage industry of villagers along the river, not more than a couple

of hundred workers. Usually they are brahmin families. They are in charge of it and have other people working for them. But the brahmins are the ones in control of the Lingams.

HT: What did you discover in investigating the traditional knowledge about Siva Lingams?

Tsa-Jon: I discovered that some of the beliefs held by most people in India in the connection with Lord Siva, in particular the sexual connotations of the Lingam, were not as prevalent as was the teaching that the Lingam represented the origins of all creation. The tantric teaching [is that] the combination of male and female energy represents the causation which brought about all of creation. The stone represents the very beginnings of our creation of our universe, of having a stagnant energy and introducing a second energy. By introducing a second energy the causation happened and all things were created, as the "big bang" theory [of physics] would say. The stone itself, the body of the stone, is representing this one energy, whereas the red coloration on the stone is the second energy which is coming out of the original energy. In that sense, we have a God who is one almighty omnipotent power who creates within Himself a second power, causing the universe to be created.

HT: Please describe your business.

Tsa-Jon: My business is in three parts. I sell to metaphysical bookstores or practitioners. I sell to healers who use the Lingam in acupressure and other chakra realignment, using the balancing resonance of the Lingam to bring balance to the individuals aura and chakras. And I sell a great deal to art galleries who buy the stone for its shape and esthetic value. Over a period of ten years I've sold more than 2,000 Lingams in Europe. My business [in America] now is up to 1,000 Lingams a year.

HT: What is the threat to the Lingams source?

Tsa-Jon: The Indian government has a program to dam the Narmada river in order

to produce hydroelectric power and to irrigate the land-which has become very dry and arid due to the amount of forest that has been cut down. The area where the Lingams are being collected will no longer have a dry season when the level of the river drops as much as 20 feet. With the damming, that level will stay constant and it will stay high. It is very likely that the number of Lingams being retrieved will be cut in half.

HT: How would you summarize your work?

Tsa-Jon: I feel particularly honored to have been chosen by Spirit to be able to bring Lingams, to make a livelihood with the Lingams. My attitude about it is really that I'm doing spiritual work with the Lingams, though I am not a practicing Vaishnavite or Saivite. I certainly feel that in my own way I am contributing. In many cases I will give a Lingam to someone I think it belongs to and can't necessarily afford it. I've given many, many Lingams away. I feel that you only get what we give. By my generosity I'm allowing spirit to be generous to me.

Tsa-Jon's business, Jewel of the Lotus is at 1223 Wilshire Blvd., #304, Santa Monica, CA 90403.

Left: The ancient city of Onkar Mandhata is surrounded by an "Om" shaped wall. Bottom Left: The bed of the Narmada River near Onkar Mandata during the dry season. Local artisans search the river rocks for those with the sacred red marking of the Lingam. Bottom Middle: The red-marked rocks are worked into the traditional Lingam shape with the use of small metal chisels and hammers. Bottom Right: The rough-shaped lingams are then hand-polished to a high luster. Brahmin priests and others will travel from all over the world to select lingams for installation in temples or for personal worship of the transcendent Siva.

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