

1983

**FOLK CULTURE
OF
TIBET**

NORBU CHOPHEL

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Contents

1. Dedication		V	
2. Publisher's Note		VII	
3. Introduction		IX	
4. Part	I :	Superstitions	1
		Superstitions on Children	3
		Superstitions on Man and Clothes	11
		Superstitions on Food	22
		Superstitions on Animals	24
		Miscellaneous Beliefs	27
5. Part	II :	Superstitions : Translation of Karma	
		Chakme's <i>The Mirror of Omens</i>	51
6. Part	III :	The Language of Ravens	67
7. Part	IV :	Physiognomy of Man and	
		Woman	73
8. Part	V :	Dream Interpretation	87
9. Acknowledgement			105

**TO MY SPONSOR MISS R. G. MAKKINK
OF DEVENTER, HOLLAND.**

Publisher's Note

Folk Culture of Tibet by Norbu Chophel is a compilation of miscellaneous Tibetan beliefs and superstitious that continue to play an important role in the day to day lives of many Tibetans. We are happy to publish this work on folk culture intended for general readers. Research and compilation on this important aspect are being carried on in our institute. We hope to publish more specialised works on the folk culture of Tibet in the future.

Gyatso Tsering
October 1984

Introduction

This book is not intended as a definitive and conclusive book on Tibetan folk culture in that it does not contain the entire folk culture of Tibet. Also, it is not aimed to introduce any specific folk culture of any particular region of Tibet. It is presented without any distinction of the different regions as it would be practically impossible to compile everything within a short period into one single volume. This will involve a very patient effort for over a long period. But this is definitely intended to be an introductory book on Tibetan folk culture.

This collection that I have attempted is neither scholarly in appearance nor in fact. In this I have included a chapter on Tibetan superstitious beliefs, with emphasis on superstitions regarding and connected with children, dream interpretation, physiological interpretation, and interpretation of the language of the ravens (crows), etc. Though the chapters on superstition and dream interpretation do not cover very much, my sole intention is to give a rough knowledge of them in this book and I will take the reader deeper into their secrets in the next edition of this book.

In the course of reading through this book, the reader will come across numerous unfamiliar terms like *lung-ta* (luck or luck-potentiality) and *dip* (unclean halo), etc. Where necessary and possible I have given explanatory notes in parenthesis and in footnotes.

The problem of presenting an accurate translation of some of the words is great. I am not the only person to face this difficulty, other proficient writers have also faced the same problem. Those writers who have no sympathy and care in ruining a culture, have not taken any pains to present the best to the reader in that many words are inaccurately translated and transliterated, not adhering to the

standard rule, and are also given in wrong phonetic rendering, especially the names of persons. If a word cannot be given in proper phonetics, it is best that the word is retained in standard transliteration form. The difficulty in translation arises because some concepts of the Tibetan culture are not acceptable to a non-Tibetan or to someone who is not adequately familiar with Tibetan culture and with the terms. In order that I convey the best meaning of the terms and that the reader comprehends the most of it, I have given long footnotes as a ready reference. In others, I had to retain the terms as they are in standard phonetics so as to remain as close to the actual meaning of the terms in the context as possible and not lead the reader to misinterpret the meaning in its particular context.

As in the case of other culture of the world, Tibetan culture is a very vast subject. The best way to know and appreciate this unique culture and thereby understand Tibetan civilisation, is to live with a Tibetan community for a good number of years. This is the best method and no book can excel it.

Tibet is not a miracle-filled land as many still think, nor are Tibetans miracle performers. Tibet is a very normal land and the Tibetans are as any other human beings. It is only that the geographic location of Tibet has isolated it from the rest of the world for a very long time. It was only through the writings of a few sporadic travellers that the rest of the world finally came to know of Tibet. These travellers, majority of them, have not painted a very correct picture of Tibet; they have projected Tibet as a land where everything done is a miracle. "If you haven't been to Lhasa, I can tell you anything about it", as a Tibetan saying goes, they have taken advantage of their one time visit. Some writers have taken good advantage of the little knowledge they have of Tibet and have written numerous books which are widely read throughout the world, and because of these books, the readers have imagined Tibet to be a land full of miracles. For instance, though he has not travelled to Tibet, Lobsang Rampa had the audacity to write half a dozen books on Tibet only by staying in Kalimpong,

India, and listening to stories of Tibet from a Tibetan. Here I want to let the readers know that you cannot pierce your third eye and become an incarnate lama nor is Shambala or Shangri-La in Tibet. Everybody is still looking for them!

Norbu Chopel

December 1983

Dharamsala

PART I

This section contains traditional Tibetan superstitions collected wholly from oral sources. In some cases comparisons have been made to varify and to offer an honest translation. These do not comprise Tibetan superstitions in entirety.

Superstitions on Children

Nine months and ten days is the usual period of gestation, but the Tibetans believe that if, by chance, a horse walks over a pregnant woman, or if she goes under a horse, or even if its shadow falls on her, she will undergo what is known as *Ta-dip* (*rTa-sGrib*; *rTa*: horse, *sGrib*: polluted, invisible darkness/halo)¹: that is, she will remain pregnant for twelve months, the length of time a mare gestates.

There are also cases of the child in the womb disappearing after a thunderstorm. Tibetans believe that thunder is nothing but the cries of a dragon, and it is the dragon that takes the child away from the womb. This is not a fictitious belief as some people have witnessed this, not only of human beings but also of domestic animals. People have taken their pregnant cows and yaks for grazing, and found them no more pregnant after a thunder .

*

*

*

When a mother gives birth to a child, she should not touch any of the family properties or her own hair immediately

-
1. *Dip* or *sGrib* has several distinct meanings, but, in general, it is an invisible, unclean halo. A man often suffers from this if subjected continuously to unclean things, not necessarily refuse, but also unseen and supposedly clean (outwardly, but unclean from within) objects. If subjected to filth a man may suffer from common sicknesses like colds, headaches, etc. but will also undergo *dip*. For instance, a pious man will suffer from *dip* if he visits a butchers' meatshop arcade. In both cases the man will be sick with a heavy drowsy feeling in his head and can only be purged by observing a rite of purification. The same with a man attending funeral—he must remove any *dip* that may have accumulated by undergoing a simple rite of inhaling incense smoke. Further, if a Tibetan sees a man with a lot of muck in his eyes, he would say that *dip* has fallen on the man; seldom eye-infection, etc.

after delivery. If she does, it is believed that the particular thing will wear out or be lost quickly. Some orthodox people would give the mother a stone or wood to touch.

* * *

The Tibetans claim that they can determine the sex of the baby while it is still in the womb. Apart from seeking the help of an incarnate lama's clairvoyant insight and prophesying powers, if the mother discharges blood before delivery it is a boy and if there is no discharge of blood, it is girl. The blood that is discharged is called *Dung-trag* (gDung-khrag) which means "lineage blood". It is so called because a lineage breaks up when the family has no male descendants.

* * *

Tibetans faithfully believe that a child can change its sex even after it is born. They say there are many eye-witness accounts of such cases. Most westerners, however, are absolutely opposed to this belief. They say that Tibetan belief is based on the undeveloped and elongated condition of the female genital which looks like a penis at birth and which slowly begins to develop into a proper female genital. This may be correct and believable but it does not answer for a girl changing into a boy.

According to the Tibetans, a change of sex is mainly caused by curses, especially of women, who are not in good terms with the woman delivering the child. This is probably because they are believed to possess traces of black witchcraft. To avoid such misfortunes, especially a change of sex from a boy to a girl, the mother should avoid quarrelling with other women. Also, she should not visit other women's houses or eat anything given by another woman. As further precaution, she should touch the baby's genitals or put on a gold ring on the penis immediately after the baby is born.

* * *

There is a saying that if the child in the womb is a boy and

the father is present at the time of delivery, the child will not come out readily from the mother's womb because it is believed that she feels shy before his father.

* * *

When a child is born, a purification ceremony is performed. If it is a boy, this takes place on the 3rd day after birth, and on the 4th day for a girl. In some places of Tibet this difference is not observed. The ceremony is performed to free the baby from the impurity of the delivery. Until this has been performed, people avoid visiting the house. In any case, the family would not allow anyone in as they believe that the entire atmosphere within the house has been polluted by the delivery. After the purification ceremony is done in the morning, neighbours, friends and relatives arrive with presents to celebrate the birth and welcome the baby to the world.² This purification ceremony is called *Bang-so*. It involves a short religious ceremony and the burning of incense, the all-purifying material, and the common Tibetan method of cleaning invisible dirt. The mother washes her face and hair (in warm water only) and puts on clean clothes.

* * *

Although this attitude has changed somewhat, Tibetans generally prefer the first child to be a girl so that when she grows up, she will not only be more useful to the family, the mother in particular, but also because it is believed that it will ensure her parents' long life.

* * *

An infant is never or rarely taken out of the house at night, to prevent evil spirits and other malignant beings from causing it sickness and cursing it. As well, they want to protect the child from seeing anything frightening in

2. Buddhism considers this human realm as the most fortunate realm. Tibetans call it the 'Precious Human Birth' not because we can think and enjoy all the comforts, but because in this life/birth we can accumulate enough merit and attain Buddhahood.

the dark, things that adults cannot see but they can. If the baby must be taken out, soot from the hearth is put on its nose and chest. This is drawn upward in a dark line, using the third finger.

* * *

It is a common custom that some time after a child is born all its hairs are cut off. The cut-off hair is called the 'birth-hair', considered to be rather unclean and impedes the natural growth of the hairs. This cutting is believed to ensure a good growth later on, and is commonly done after the child attains one year in age.

* * *

It is believed to be very inauspicious to buy or to make clothing for an unborn child. If one has bought a piece of cloth to make napkins from, the napkins are never made before the child is born. If this practice is not adhered to, it is believed that the coming child will die very soon. Many people take this superstition very seriously because they have witnessed the truth of it.

* * *

Whether asleep or awake, an infant makes a lot of faces. The medical reason for this is that there is wind in its intestine caused by wrong sucking or feeding and this causes pain and the resulting frowns. When there is no wind, it smiles. The Tibetan explanation is that there is a dwarfish creature called *Thep-rang* (small fairy-tale creature) who irritates the baby, making it frown and look unhappy, but when the *Thep-rang* plays with the baby it smiles.

Another belief is that the baby looks unhappy when it remembers its terrible experiences in the hell realms, when it remembers happier times and lighter tortures in the hell, it smiles.

Yet another explanation for and belief about an infant's frowns and smiles: it is believed that an infant is looked after by a invisible pig and a monkey who take turns to tend to it on alternative days. On the pig's day, it is be-

lieved that the child's flesh grows and it is quieter and sleeps better than on the monkey's day, when the bones are said to form and develop and so cries more often.

* * *

Either three days after a child is born or on an auspicious day the child is taken out of the house for a short outing. The ceremony is called *Go-don* (sGo-'don) meaning "exit". After this the child is not taken out again for at least a month. (This practice is completely ignored nowadays!).

* * *

Why is an infant's grip so tight at such a tender age. The Tibetan answer is: it is believed that they possess a wish-fulfilling gem in their hand and do not want anyone to take it away.

* * *

If an infant smiles on meeting a man for the first time, it is believed that the man will live long. "You are auspicious, and may you also live long" an older Tibetan would respond when a baby smiles on meeting him. On the other hand, if it cries or makes no pleasant facial expressions, the man will have a short life or else difficult days lie ahead for him.

* * *

A child born on the 30th of a month³ will always be asking for something — give me this and that, and so on — always wanting something.

* * *

Children are very fond of saying and doing all sorts of things. Tibetans believe that children are capable of predicting the future and revealing the unknown, quite inadvertently. For instance, children love to play war games

3. Not necessarily the eve of the next month because some Lunar months will not have the 30th day; a month can finish on the 29th and some months will have the double 30th and so on.

and enjoy it immensely, sometimes winning, sometimes losing and lurking behind the enemy like real commandos. But the older Tibetans dislike such games believing that they will produce real war or fights, and so they scold the children saying: "Stop this unlucky game!" or "Stop creating superstitions!" If the child says something auspicious or acts in a very auspicious manner in front of an elderly Tibetan, the child will be lucky in being rewarded with something.

* * *

If possible, Tibetan parents like their babies to be named by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Otherwise they will take the child to a high incarnate lama for naming. But some less orthodox parents themselves may name the child after the day on which the child was born, or else they choose a name at random. For instance, if the child is born on a Saturday (Tibetan: *Penpa*), they may name the child *Penpa Dhondup* (for a boy) or *Penpa Dolma* (for a girl), and so on. But generally people want an incarnate monk (lama) to give the name because it is believed to carry more potent significance and also because it will minimise sickness and other unpleasant incidents befalling the child. Sometimes when a child is seriously ill, an incarnate lama may propose a change in its name in order to regain its health. On rare occasions, when a child or an adult who is certified to have died comes back to life again, the strange new name of *Shi-log* (literally, return from death) is given.

Prebirth or womb names are also sought by anxious parents from high incarnate lamas.

When a family encounters difficulty in bringing up children, that is if more than one child dies, then such strange names as *Khyi-kyag* (literally meaning "dog shit") and *Ta-khog* may be given to the survivor or the next child born. It is believed that this will ward off future misfortunes for them.

This is based on the common Tibetan belief that if people talk very much about you, whether criticism or praises, a curse known as *mi-kha* (literally meaning "human mouth")

befalls you and you become sick, or a similar misfortune befalls you. In the case of a child, the same belief applies but many children die from the effects of *mi-kha*.

By giving it an awkward and uncommon name, people will not be easily tempted to utter the name of the child very often, as they would if it had a common easy-to-say name, thus reducing the chances of *mi-kha* befalling it.

* * *

Walking over a child's clothes is avoided whenever and wherever possible because doing so can cause it bad health caused by *dip*, in the form of blocked nose and cold. To do this is also considered a sin on the part of the perpetrator. For that matter, walking over each other's clothes is to be avoided absolutely.

If the child is at the walking stage and you walk over its clothes, it will cause him to trip and fall down frequently because the child's personal deity has been degraded and cannot guide the child properly. But, fortunately, this does not last forever. It will go off itself in course of time and can be removed quickly by doing a simple purification ceremony of running the clothes over incense smoke and also by immersing the child's body in an incense smoke.

The same is true of adults, though to a lesser degree, and everybody including women themselves, avoid walking under another woman's clothes, especially if the garment is worn below the waist. This is also believed to be degrading to one's personal deity.

* * *

If a child cries incessantly for no reason whatsoever, it is believed that a visitor from afar will arrive soon.

* * *

If a child bends over and looks backward between its legs, the action is believed to indicate that its mother is or will be pregnant soon. It is said that it is looking through to see who is coming after him.

* * *

It is believed by the Tibetans that whether the child is due for delivery or not, it will not come out of the womb unless its particular star is out — the star under which it is destined to be born (see later for explanation on this).

* * *

There is a belief that if a newborn baby has a good growth of hairs on its head, the parents will not have to encounter many difficulties on their journey through life.

* * *

Some mothers have an abundant flow of breast milk, enough for their babies and some to spare. But those who believe in the old superstitions avoid letting even a drop of their breast milk spill, especially in a place where it may be trampled upon. The belief is that if her breast milk is spilled in a dirty place she will get sores on her breast and/or her supply of milk will dry up. Some mother even avoid mentioning that they have abundant milk because they believe that this will also result in its drying up as a result of *mi-kha* befalling her.

* * *

When a father or mother returns from a distant place, it is regarded as bad for them to go straight to their infant children to greet them. They should rest to cool down the body, and then take a bath or have a nice wash.

If the child is picked up immediately after they arrive, it is believed that it may be influenced by the unclean air the parent has brought from afar which can cause it *dip*, resulting in sickness or even carry curses.

* * *

Though the practice and belief has now somewhat died, some parents still avoid putting on socks and shoes on a baby before it is one year old and cap/hat before it is five years old. To put on footwears on a baby before it is one year and cap or hat before it is five years old are believed to be inauspicious.

* * *

The birth of a sexless or bi-sexed child with many heads is believed to be very ominous. The country where the child is born will experience very bad events.

* * *

If a child in the womb talks, cries or laughs, there will be bad events in the country resulting in its own extermination.

* * *

The birth of a freak child (unnatural characteristics such as two-faced, three eyes, pig's head, one-handed and headless) are believed to be very ominous: Wars and other bad events will follow.

Superstitions on man and clothes

As part of their national costume, Tibetan women wear a multi-coloured striped (horizontally) apron called *pangden*. It was worn in Tibet as a sign of maturity but now it shows the woman's matrimonial status — that she is married. The belief is that if the wife does not wear the apron, it will adversely affect the husband's life span, probably causing his untimely death or at least some sickness.

* * *

If a sick person on his way to hospital meets a person carrying wood, milk or cow-dung, it is believed to be a good omen — he will have a very successful treatment and recuperate very quickly. Likewise to meet a woman is also an auspicious sign portending a quick return to health. On the other hand, to meet a man, especially a monk, is a very ominous prognostication.

* * *

It is regarded as inauspicious to marry a girl who is nineteen years old or to marry a girl one year older than oneself. In both cases it is believed that misfortunes and unhappiness will be experienced by the family. In addition, the man who marries a girl one year older than himself will be

ruled by the wife — he will be hand pegged.

* * *

For a man to die on a Sunday, or on the 9th, 19th or the 29th days of any Lunar month is considered very ominous for those left behind in the family or the community. It is believed that nine more people will follow him to the grave in quick succession. The saying is nine but many people have seen two or three members of the family or community die soon after occurrence of death on one of those ill-fated days.

* * *

According to Tibetan belief, the menstrual period of woman is very unclean — not in the literal sense, but in the same sense as *dip* has been explained. A woman undergoing her period should avoid coming into physical contact with a man, especially if he is a monk, and also should avoid entering temples or other sacred places. Otherwise it causes *dip* to the man and is very sinful for the woman.

* * *

Whether a sick person recuperates or not is not strictly due to the medicines or the medical treatment given him. It is a common belief among the Tibetans that the recuperation of a sick person depends, to a large extent, on the doctor's way of treating the patient — his moral treatment (attitude) and the way he guides the patient and also the patient's faith in the doctor. Tibetans often say 'the doctor does not suit me' when he is not getting well with that particular doctor's treatment or 'the doctor suits me very well' when he often gets well with this doctor's treatment. This is probably based on the belief of the working of the favourable or unfavourable element co-ordination (please see below for explanation on this point).

* * *

The Tibetan Lunar calendar has a twelve-year cycle. Each year is known by the symbolical astrological deity of the

twelve-year cycle and is related to one of the five elements to identify the particular year.

The twelve-year cycle is:

- | | |
|----------|---------|
| 1. Jiwa | Mouse |
| 2. Lang | Bull |
| 3. Tag | Tiger |
| 4. Yo | Hare |
| 5. Druk | Dragon |
| 6. Drul | Snake |
| 7. Ta | Horse |
| 8. Lug | Sheep |
| 9. Tel | Monkey |
| 10. Ja | Bird |
| 11. Khyi | Dog |
| 12. Phag | Hog/Pig |

The five elements are:

- | | |
|----------|-------|
| 1. Sa | Earth |
| 2. Chu | Water |
| 3. Me | Fire |
| 4. Chag | Iron |
| 5. Shing | Wood |

The significance of the twelve-year cycle and the corresponding elements can be explained in great detail by astrologers, but any elderly Tibetan can give you a rough idea. For example: Suppose a baby is born in the year of the Tiger. It is said that he or she will be very pious and if it is a boy, he will be very brave, too. But generally, if a girl is born in that year, it is not regarded as good because girls are expected to possess 'feminine' qualities in preference to such male characteristics.

In a family, if one of the family member's element in relation to the year is either Earth or Water, it is said that the family will do well in agriculture. If both elements are present in the family, it is better still — they will have even better success.

1. Tiger	—	Horse	—	Dog
2. Hog	—	Hare	—	Sheep
3. Mouse	—	Dragon	—	Monkey
4. Bull	—	Snake	—	Bird

These are combinations of birth years which are generally favourable. For instance, if three persons, one of whom was born in the year of the Tiger, one in the year of the Horse and one in the year of the Dog were to undertake something jointly or live together, the combination would be good. The characters and thoughts go well together. The one born in the year of the Tiger is dominant; he will be the most influential, and the one born in the year of the Dog will be least influential. They will be able to co-operate and so on, but the problem is that in the year of the Tiger, the one born in the year of the Horse will undergo a difficult period. The year will not be favourable for him. Likewise, the one born in the year of the Dog will undergo difficulties in the year of the Horse. The other combinations are similar and can be explained in the order they are given.

The elements also play a vital role. There can be co-ordination of elements or no such co-ordination. If a wife and husband are constantly quarrelling, it is said that their elements do not suit each other, just as fire and water cannot exist together in the same place. Because of this it is always necessary to find out this 'suitability' by means of astrological calculations and through divination⁴.

* * *

According to a strictly adhered-to Tibetan custom (it is also strictly forbidden by Buddhist law), no marriage is organised between close relatives. The gap must be at least seven generations distance. It is said that the offsprings of such incest will not be good — they will be very bad-man-

4. For more reference on methods of divination see *Divination and Oracles*, edited by Michael Loewe and Carmen Blacker, Allen & Unwin (1981), pp. 3—37, and Rene de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons of Tibet*.

nered, quick to pick up fights, lazy, will have bad health throughout their lives and, also, will not have good features.

* * *

Tibetans hold a common belief in regard to the small white spots that appear on finger nails. Such spots are believed to indicate that the person will acquire some new clothes in the near future: the bigger the size of the white spot, the bigger the quantity.

* * *

Why do warts appear? There may be a biological answer to it but the Tibetans have their own belief: they say that burning of lice brings warts as the revenge of the hearth-deity.

A curious method of removing them is carried out on the 15th day of any Lunar month, preferably when a holier occasion falls on this day. The person with warts should go up on the roof and taking a broom should pretend to sweep away the warts. Someone down below should then call out to him, "What are you doing?" The person with warts should reply. "I am sweeping away the warts". It is believed that the warts will slowly disappear in due course of time. Another method of removing them is to rub the warts on the place where a hare has slept; it must be done when the place is still warm.

* * *

It is believed that each of one's five (or six as some choose to count) sense faculties of eye, nose, tongue, ear and body (mind, the sixth) has its own distinct high or low karmic fortune.

A man's tongue with good karmic fortune gets lots of good food to eat; an eye with good karmic fortune sees many different and good things and so on. And, as for the body, externally the person may not be handsome but he will appeal to everybody.

* * *

A man born with horns is regarded as the reincarnation of king Lang Dharma (the legendary 41st king of Tibet who tried to destroy and remove Buddhism from Tibet, and who was believed to have had horns on his head). It is believed to be very ominous prognostication.

* * *

If a rat chews away clothes, it is considered an ominous sign for the owner, especially if the clothes are worn below the waist. It predicts that the owner will be sick in the near future.

* * *

It is a common belief that if one does not wear clean and decent clothes when going out in public, his *lung-ta* (luck-potentiality) will decrease and thus make him susceptible to the effects of curses.

* * *

Having triplets is regarded as very good and auspicious, being a manifestation of the Three Bodhisattvas (Avalokiteshvara, Manjushri and Vajrapani). Not because of the fancy of its rareness, but because of its applied equivalence to the Three Bodhisattvas is it considered auspicious.

* * *

A man born with a tail (so far, as people have witnessed, a small extension of the tail-bone) is regarded as the manifestation of monkey father⁵, the father of homosapiens. It is regarded as good and auspicious.

* * *

It is inauspicious to mend an article of clothing while you are wearing it — always take it off and mend it.

* * *

5. Tibetan theory of world creation, the mankind. Briefly, it is said that we are the descendants of a monkey father and a sea ogress. For more reference on this theory, see 'TIBET' by Thubten Jigme Norbu and Collin Turnbull, Penguin books.

“Never marry a girl whose front two teeth are separated by an empty space” is a common Tibetan saying. It is said that girls with such teeth will not make good wives and will also adversely affect your life span.

Reap not horse’s teeth,
Reap not donkey’s teeth.
Reap like the ‘white-gem’ sheep’s teeth.

The Tibetans crush and throw heavenward an extracted tooth while uttering the above prayers to ensure a good replacement of the teeth.

* * *

If the sole of your foot itches, it means that you will have to travel very soon.

* * *

If your palm itches, it is believed that someone is back-biting you. Some people say that it is not both palms, but only the left palm. Those who make this distinction say that itching of the right palm indicates that a good news awaits you.

* * *

A wart in the middle of the palm is believed to be a sign that you are blowing away your money as soon as it comes into your hands — you are very extravagant.

* * *

On the other hand, a wart on the edge of the palm near the little finger, means that you will have lots of money in future.

The same belief applies in the case of small black spots which the Tibetans call ‘medicine spots’. And, if the spot is right below your eye, it is said ‘the enemy under the eye’ which means your own enemy is within your sight and control. In many cases the spot slowly climbs up above your eye and if this happens, it means you have lost control of your enemy.

Likewise, some people have the spot near the lips, mostly at the side of the mouth. Mao Tsetung (Tibetans call him Mao Tsethung — Tsethung means short life span) was believed to have had such a ‘medicine spot’ at the side of his mouth and more or less inside his mouth. It is believed that he conquered Tibet when the spot was right at the side of his mouth and that he would have conquered the whole world if it was fully inside his mouth.

* * *

“I guess there is some good news for me”, someone will say when the corner of his right eye itches or vibrates.

* * *

Tibetans believe that one may have a ‘fire-hand’ or ‘water-hand’, etc. This means that if a fire-handed person lights a fire, it will light easily and quickly. On the other hand if a water-handed person lights a fire it will not light easily because fire does not burn in water. A fire-handed person need only to fiddle a little with a dying fire and it will flame up again. Similarly, food prepared by one person may not taste very good while that prepared by another tastes delicious even if they are given the same ingredients to add. This is explained by the belief that some people possess an invisible power which enables them to prepare food deliciously. This power is called *lag-chus* (Lag-bcud; *lag-hand*; *bcud-nourishment*).

* * *

By calculations, an astrologer can find out where a person’s star is located and in what way it will affect his life. If it falls right on the swirl on the back of the head, there is no question of his becoming a king. If it falls on his knee, he will become a very busy man and will always be on the move for some reason or other. It is said that his feet are turned by the whirl of the wind. If the star falls in his palm, it is said that he will be rich.

* * *

A Tibetan will not dispose away his hair carelessly after it has been cut or when it comes out loose after combing; he will collect the hairs and deposit them in a remote or a high-up place where nobody would trample upon them. The reason is that if you throw your hairs all over the place, everybody will step on them, making you prone to absent-mindedness and untidiness in the future.

* * *

As I mentioned somewhere else in this book, each person has his own high or low karmic opportunity or fortune. This opportunity takes effect right from the very day you are conceived in your mother's womb. If the karmic opportunity of the child in the womb is high, his parents will be the ones who will be rewarded with goodness and abundance of everything until he leads his own life.

* * *

Sometimes it so happens that a guest arrives just after you finish having your tea or meal. This is also considered unceremonious. It is interpreted as: that the guest has said something against you and thus the tea or food has finished just on time. Because he has spoken ill of you, the finishing of tea and food has made him an unwelcome guest.

* * *

Sudden change in the general habit of the people is believed to be a sign that there will be a radical change soon. During the 13th Dalai Lama's rule it was noted that people, specially the aristocrats, suddenly took up to wearing felt hats, copying the English, as a fashion. It is said that His Holiness the Dalai Lama told them not to wear it until the right time came, which was not very far away. This is because in India it was commonly worn at the time Tibet lost its freedom.

Also just before Tibet was invaded, lots of new houses were built in Lhasa. Most of the people abhorred this sudden construction of houses as if preparing for an unexpected

guest. There it was, the Chinese came and lodged themselves in these new houses.

* * *

Sometimes it happens that we say somebody has died when he actually hasn't. This is believed to be an auspicious sign for the person: he will have a long illness-free life.

* * *

The people of Kham (the Khampas of Eastern Tibet) are great meat-eaters and fearless fighters. Most of their folk lore seem to circle around battles and bravery. One such example is that if someone leaves a bone with lots of meat on it, they say that the person who left it will be easily defeated, just as he was unable to tackle the bone.

If they came upon a deserted camp site they give one look at the pieces of bones and say whether the people who camped were brave or not.

* * *

If you come across a dead body while you are setting on a journey, it is an auspicious prognostication. It predicts that you will have an easy and comfortable journey.

* * *

To inadvertently wear a dress inside-out or a shoe on the wrong foot are believed to be auspicious signs. They presage good tidings.

* * *

It is inauspicious to wear a hat tilted at an angle early in the morning when you are wearing it for the first time that day. By wearing it that way, you will not be able to accomplish your works on that day.

* * *

Before setting on a journey one must always see that

one's *shoe laces* are neatly tied. If they are open or loosely tied, misfortunes will come to you on your journey.

* * *

Whether the hat is in good condition or not, to find one is considered very ominous. It is believed to bring sickness to that person.

* * *

Before putting on any clothes, especially if they are second-hand, they are lightly spat on and held over burning incense to remove any traces of *dip*, which may pollute one's ray of wisdom, and offend one's individual deity.

* * *

In Tibet a woman with no earring is frowned upon. Anything, regardless of its value, could serve the purpose for it was believed that a woman with no earring would be reborn a donkey in her next life. In some parts of Tibet males also wear earrings, but this is not out of fear of being reborn a donkey but as a provincial custom.

* * *

If you look carefully, you will notice that elderly Tibetan ladies wear multi-coloured silks at the end of their hair plaits. These may be braided into one plait or two. Originally, women wore black silks in their hair but the fashion now is to wear coloured ones. Black then came to be a sign of mourning. Also, Tibetan woman never leave their hair loose because it is believed that this is the style only of witches.

* * *

Superstitions on Food

When tea is served to someone, it often fails to fill the cup. A common Tibetan belief is that this means that the

person drinking from the cup has been backbiting the one serving the tea. But if the tea poured fills right to the brim it is believed to be a good sign — sincere friendship and cordiality exist between the two

* * *

It is considered inauspicious to exit someone's house and have only one cup of tea — always take two cups, or a little bit may be added to the cup, to remove the inauspiciousness.

* * *

Chang (a favourite Tibetan beverage, prepared from fermented barley in Tibet, but now, commonly, from barley and rice) is the most popular drink of the Tibetans, second only to tea. Some hold the same belief regarding the serving of this as they do of tea. But the nomads say that the person drinking from a half filled glass will have a daughter, and if it is filled right to the brim it means that the person will have a son.

* * *

People believe that roasting meat, especially raw, directly over the flame of the stove of fire displeases the deity of the hearth and the perpetrator will be punished with illness. Generally, Tibetans avoid roasting meat directly over the flame.

* * *

Though the addition of garlic to food may make it more tasty, Tibetans believe that after eating garlic one is unfit to visit *temples*, monasteries and other holy places for seven days, the length of time it is needed to get rid of the garlic stink.

* * *

Tibetans are great meat eaters, compelled simply by a geographical location where vegetables cannot be grown in abundance. At the same time, they did not forget that to eat

meat is a great sin, especially of a buffalo with canine teeth because it deprives one of the opportunity to take rebirth, and one will be condemned to remain in hell for life after life.

* * *

When you are preparing food or tea over a new stove or with new pots, if the food or tea boils over and spills over the pot, it is a very auspicious sign indicating that, as far as food is concerned, you will have plenty to eat in the future.

* * *

It is believed that food prepared mechanically by machines is less tasty than that prepared by human hands. Likewise, it is also believed that food cooked over wood-fuel tastes much better than that prepared over burners or kerosene stoves.

* * *

Superstitions on Animals

It is a common belief that if dogs howl at dawn, something very unpleasant will happen within the next few days — someone will die, as it very often happens so.

Prior to the Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1959, dogs were heard howling like human beings not only at dawn but throughout the night. And, although the howling of dogs is not the cause of such events but only a harbinger, people still shoo away and throw stones at the howling dogs.

Also, at the time of Chinese invasion of Tibet, dogs in the street were seen digging in the ground. This is interpreted as digging graves.

* * *

If you see four dogs and four crows run, cry and chatter, it is a very ominous prognostication: there will be an invasion of the country.

* * *

If a bitch bears a puppy with one, three or four hind limbs, either the king will die or famine will come to the kingdom.

* * *

Tibetans tame cats not so much because they like them but because they keep away the rats and mice. They eat so many rodents and so they are considered very sinful. It is believed that they report badly on you when they go to hell despite your kindness to them.

One common saying is that a dog always feels sad that its master might die soon, whereas a cat waits for its master to die so that it can eat his brain. They say that is the reason why a cat always curls up near the pillow.

* * *

Although cats are considered very sinful and jealous animals, it would be very sinful on our part to pluck even a single hair off one, let alone to kill it. It is believed that even if you were to offer a hundred butter lamps to the Bodhisattvas and Gods, it will not save you from the sin you have committed.

* * *

Sometimes we notice a cat washing its face by licking its paws and running it over the face, sometimes just the face and other times right behind the ears. This behaviour is believed to be the harbinger of a visitor to the owner of the cat or to the house where the cat commits the act.

If the cat washes from right behind its ears, the visitor will be from a far off place, but if it washes just the face, the visitor will be from a closely place.

* * *

It is believed that the snoring of cats is nothing but reciting the six sacred syllables: "OM MANI PADME HUM".

* * *

The howling of jackals is believed to be an inauspicious indication, as is the howling of dogs at dawn.

* * *

The hooting of an owl is understood to be a call to the beaver to bring it its food, but the laughing of an owl is very ominous.

* * *

Cocks may crow at night or at dawn but at dusk their crowing is a very ominous prognostication.

* * *

To hear a horse neighing at night is also very ominous.

* * *

When you catch a bat, study the inside of its wings. Sometimes you will find lots of figures and diagrams. If it has a drawing of a walking stick and begging-bag (Tibetan: *Thang-kuk*, a small leather pouch for preparing tsampadough, called *pak* in Tibetan; very common in Tibet and a trademark of beggars), you will become very poor in the future. While patterns like gems, dice and cobwebs prophesy that you will become rich. And figures of monks predict that you will very likely lead a religious life.

* * *

If crows build their nests where ants have built their nests, it is a very ominous sign.

* * *

If rats and kakars mate out of season, the entire kingdom will cease to exist in the very near future.

* * *

It is very inauspicious to see a white crow.

* * *

It signifies death of the entire population of the country if insects should change their natural colours.

* * *

If a flock of crows should land on the ground and utter nothing, but point their beaks at the ground and fly away after a short while, it means the soldiers of the country will die or surrender to the enemy.

* * *

If crows play in the garden and ducks play on the ground, the country will soon cease to exist.

* * *

If a piece of meat falls down from the beak of a carnivorous bird, it signifies that the king will dictate a very severe order to his subjects — something that the subjects will hate to obey.

* * *

If a vulture or a human-flash-eating bird should land on a roof and chatter a lot, it means the owner of the house will die very soon.

* * *

If a cow gives birth to a human being, the women of the country will suffer severe misfortunes.

* * *

Miscellaneous beliefs

If you urinate on a hearth or walk over it, you will develop sores, usually on or around the sex organs. For that matter, urinating on any place where a fire had been lit is dangerous — you will be punished by the hearth-deity. The belief arises because wherever a fire is lit a deity of fire-protection is believed to dwell there.

* * *

Urinating on a well or into puddles which have oozed out from the rocks on the ground is very dangerous because *nagas*⁵ dwell in these places and they will curse and inflict diseases on you.

* * *

Similarly, snakes and frogs are also believed to be manifestations or representations of *nagas*. Thus it is believed that by harming snakes and frogs a serious mishap can result; they can cause you sickness, etc.

Diseases caused by *nagas* cannot be cured by seeking medical help. They must necessarily be cured by tantric ritual methods by first appeasing and then seeking forgiveness of the *naga*. If possible, the particular *naga* must be identified but, if this is not possible, a general *naga* appeasement ritual may be performed, the message of which will ultimately be conveyed to the particular *naga* who has been offended and inflicted the disease. Generally, the *nagas* are believed to be like children — easily angered by the slightest irritation and appeased by the slightest appeasement.

* * *

To pretend to be dead or sick is detested by Tibetans, or at least by the older generation. If someone pretends to be dead or does or says something inauspicious, he would be rebuked by others with the admonition: "Stop creating superstitions", because to do such things is believed to produce actualities.

* * *

The nomadic people of Tibet had a peculiar belief: before they leave a camp, a last fire is lit in the hearth. Because

5. Naga: Tib. Klu, pronounced lu, a creature of the lower realms. The six realms are 1. God, 2. Men, 3. Asuras, 4. Animals, 5. Ghosts, and 6. Hell Beings. Gods, Men and Asuras belong to the Upper Realm; Animals, Ghosts and Hell Beings belong to the Lower Realm, and Nagas come under the Animal realm.

it is believed that a hearth deity resides there, they make a final offering to it by throwing over the fire a handful of *tsampas* in it. When they ride away, they see if the *tsampa* produced smokes out of the fire. If it has, it is an auspicious sign. On the other hand, if it produces no smoke it is an ominous sign; it prognosticates a bad camp on their next stop.

* * *

Tibetans seldom utter the name of a deceased person. It is always substituted by "*zhing-shag*", meaning the one who had left for the heavenly abode, or "*tshe-'das*", meaning the late or the departed, etc. *Zhing-shag* is an honorific term and usually reserved for monks, incarnate lamas and others of respected personality, and the latter word is used for the common people.

The reason why the name of a deceased person is not uttered is because of the belief that the deceased experiences tortures of heavy hailstorm and rain of sharp nails in the hell realm when his name is uttered here in this world.

* * *

Many Tibetans complain of having been pressed down upon by a ghostly spirit at night in their sleep. It is not necessary that this should occur only during the night, it can also happen in the day time. A Tibetan says that he has been pressed down by a ghost at night when he had a dreamy feeling of someone exerting pressure on him and trying to strangle him. In such cases the person experiences great difficulty in breathing and struggles violently in sleep.

Tibetan belief says that the person has been 'pressed down upon' by a ghost when such things occur, but a more practical reason is that the person has been keeping his hands directly on his heart and this causes difficulty for the heart to beat normally. When that happens, he has a problem breathing which is interpreted as someone trying to strangle him.

So whether because the ghost relieves him or that he has removed his hands from his heart, the person experiences great relief when he is relieved of this torture after a long struggle. Usually the person wakes up right after this and, if he does so, as soon as he wakes up, he utters the six sacred mantras — *OM MANI PADME HUM* — in an attempt to ward off the evil spirit.

* * *

The mountains, lakes and trees are believed to speak to us in many strange ways. Some people explain this by saying that these are the abodes of spirits and gods. And, because of this belief, small shrines are built high up in the mountains. The mountains, lakes and trees show strange visions (specially lakes in particular) before us utter strange prophetic sounds. In Tibet, there are certain lakes, the Lhamoi Lhatso in particular, which are consulted as oracles to reveal the unknown. The Lhamoi Lhatso was consulted by the Tibetan Government in finding out the clues to the search for the successive reincarnation of the Dalai Lamas.⁶ This lake was also visited by the devout to make prayers and watch for prophetic visions that may appear. It is believed that if you do not believe in it or that you are very sinful, the lake will not reveal anything to you.

It is a very common belief among the Tibetans that almost everything is believed to make a noise when something weird or bad is happening or is about to happen. Fire is no exception. Sometimes the fire in the hearth makes a very strange wooshing sound. This is interpreted as announcing a visitor to the house.

And, on the eve of Chinese invasion of Tibet, many people heard hills and lakes howling with strange sounds. Also, all over Tibet people heard gun-fire and other heavy booming sounds in places where there was no fighting. They interpret this as the sound of fighting between the

6. For more reference on this lake and the discovery of the 14th Dalai Lama, see 14th Dalai Lama's autobiography, *MY LAND AND MY PEOPLE*.

gods and demons — the Protectors of the *Dharma* versus the demons. It is said that those endowed with extra-visual perception could witness the fight and relate the scene to others.

* * *

To break a cup is unlucky incident. Some people wash their hands after breaking one because they believe that by doing so, they can wash away the habit of breaking which will prevent further breakages.

* * *

It is not good to count the stars because it is said that if one does so, the stars in turn will count us — one corpse, two corpses, three corpses and so on. But if one were to count the stars as one god, two gods, three gods and so on, they would count us as one human being, two human beings and so on, in response.

* * *

Whistling inside the house, especially in the kitchen and family store-house is absolutely avoided by Tibetans. This is not the place to whistle your favourite tunes because it is believed that whistling causes all the food stuff to run out quickly.

* * *

Whistling at night is also discouraged because it is believed to arouse ghosts and other nocturnal spirits. If a woman whistled at night she might be accused of being a witch. In general, whistling at night is abhorred; it is believed to invite ghosts and other malignant spirits.

* * *

All celestial planets are abodes of heavenly beings according to a Tibetan belief. And it is believed that to face a mirror to the sun causing a direct reflection is a sin which will earn negative karma.

This is the reason why the older Tibetans were not surprised or convinced that man had set foot on the moon in July 1969. They say that the planets are unreachable — the nearer you try to travel towards them, the further they travel away from you. So, for the Tibetans, no one has or will set his foot on the moon.

* * *

On several Buddhist festivals Tibetans offer many butter lamps or candles outside their homes to the Gods. If there is too much wind and it blows out the lamps, it would be regarded as very ominous, presaging a very gloomy future. There will be commotion and disturbing events such as war during the coming year.

* * *

The old western story that there is a pot of gold at the end of a rainbow also applies in Tibetan lore. It is said that there is a wish-fulfilling gem at the end of a rainbow. To obtain it, one must cover himself completely with excrement and set out on a dog similarly covered. By doing so the rainbow loses its distintegrating power and remains, where it is, and you obtain the pot of gold or wish-fulfilling gem.

* * *

Tibetans fervently believe that every-thing has its own god, like the hearth-deity, fire-deity and earth-deity and so on. So, before building a house or constructing a fire-place/hearth, the particular god must be appeased with prayers and offerings. When building temples or monasteries, the place is consecrated and the spirits tamed to avoid their curses.

In case you are compelled to build a house in a place where it is believed that *nagas* are dwelling there, the place must not only be consecrated, the *nagas* must be appeased and asked to shift their dwelling place by making a model palace of the *nagas* and placing it in an appropriate place.

* * *

Tibetans not only avoid calling bad diseases by their name but many also avoid calling snake a snake. 'Long rope' is appropriately substituted.

Similarly, people substitute 'noseless' for rat because it is believed that by calling them by their names they will appear in reality.

* * *

Three and thirteen are universally acknowledged as unlucky numbers. But, as well as these two, the Tibetans have a long list of other unlucky numbers, mostly referring to a person's age. They believe that a person will encounter sickness and other misfortunes when he is three, thirteen, twenty-five, thirty-seven, forty-nine, sixty-one, seventy-three, and eighty-five years of age. These are called the obstacle years (Tib: *Kag*, literally, to stop).

Thirteen is called 'thirteen children's obstacle' which means this is the year of sickness and misfortunes. Twenty-five is more applicable to women, thirty-seven to men. Forty-nine, again, more applicable to women, and sixty-one to men and so on, alternatively after every twelve years.

Beside these, the number twenty-one is also considered an unlucky number. Twenty-one is called 'ominous twenty-one', when a bunch of misfortunes happen together.

* * *

Tibetans believe that if you tend flowers with love and care or plant many flowers, you will increase your stock of merit, and will be rewarded with nice clothes in the next life.

* * *

Books and all that we learn from or which teach us things are most important in our present and future lives. It is said that if one keeps one's books tidy and nicely covered, one will be rewarded in the next life with lots of nice clothes to wear.

For that matter, a Tibetan would never think of using a

piece of paper with Tibetan script on it for wiping or cleaning something even if in dire need. If someone sees a piece of paper with a Tibetan script on it, he will pick it up and put it in a clean place where nobody will walk on it. Religious scriptures and other books of learning are never kept in places where people usually walk or sit.

* * *

No one can tell a Tibetan that there is no such thing as a ghost. They believe that a person becomes a ghost after his death if he is very attached to something that has to be left behind; his wealth, for instance. Others may become ghosts as a result of dying in great anger. The ghost of one who died in attachment will haunt that place and the ghost of the one who died in anger will take revenge on the person who caused him that anger or his death. Unless suitable and elaborate exorcism rites are performed and prayers offered they will remain ghosts for life after life, for many aeons or hell-ages.

Because of this Tibetans are very careful about death. When a man is about to die, we avoid trying to cause him any anger, and utter pleasant things like the name of his personal teacher in his ear, which will keep his mind occupied with those names or whatever it may be and not indulge in bad things. This will help his rebirth. We also have worldly possessions, especially those that are expensive or precious, taken away from his sight. These will cause attachment in him and cultivate a bad rebirth for himself.

* * *

“An action undertaken on Friday is better and more fruitful than those done on other days of the week.” This is a common belief among the Tibetans. It is said that anything done on a Friday will bring very successful results except taking bride because that will bring no male offsprings to the family.

* * *

To accidently step on excrement or get it anywhere on

one's body, or to be splashed by bird-droppings are believed to be auspicious signs.

* * *

The productivity of land and the nutritional quality of agricultural products, according to a Tibetan belief, depends on the extent to which the land is 'disturbed', i.e. the degree of exploitation to obtain gold and other precious minerals. The more mining is done, the less will be the land's productivity and the nutritional value of its products.

Because of this, each local government in Tibet was particularly vigilant to see that no one displeased the deities who protect the land and give nourishment. They also saw that no one dug up excess minerals and precious stones which also contribute to this productivity of land and nutritional value of its products. That is why Tibetans have never had to utter the word famine in living memory until the Chinese occupation. After the Chinese takeover, shortage of food was an annual happening and famine a common thing.

* * *

It is inauspicious and unceremonious to serve food or drink to a guest in broken bowls or cups. If one did so, it would mean that the person is an unwelcome guest in the house.

Likewise, it is also inauspicious to drink the first cup of tea of the day in a broken cup. Generally, in every Tibetan family, each member of the family has his or her own cup, bowls and plates. But if his or her cup is slightly chipped, he or she would not drink the breakfast tea in that cup but in another which is not broken.

* * *

Just as it is inauspicious to sweep the house right after someone has left, it is also inauspicious to shut the door right after a guest leaves. It means "good riddance to bad rubbish" — meaning that he was an unwelcome guest.

* * *

The general instructions given for taking most Tibetan medicines are that you should crush and eat them at least half-an-hour before or after meals, and that you should not take any alcohol before completing the entire course of medicine. But there are certain medicines called 'Precious Pills' for which you must memorise a whole list of instructions. Tibetans still in Tibet, and older generation Tibetans in exile, know these instruction by heart. Most of these medicines cure not just one illness, but several. And if you don't have any illness for it to cure, it simply improves your health. These medicines are also taken as a last resort cure — akin to terramycin of the aleopathic system which is taken as a last resort cure, before operation.

These instructions that you are given in taking those 'Precious Pills' are that you should abstain from meat, liquor, eggs, raw fruits and vegetables at least one week before and after taking the medicine. You are also advised against sexual intercourse when you are taking these medicines. Except for the last precaution, all the other instructions are acceptable to anybody as having biological reasons, but there are instructions and precautions to be followed, including the one mentioned above regarding abstinence from sexual indulgence, that cannot be understood as having any relation either to the medicine or to the human body. To a westerner these instructions would seem very absurd without any justifiable reason behind them, but a Tibetan or any other person who knows the Ayurvedic and Tibetan system of medicine would understand them. The word 'Precious' (Tib: *Rinchen*) itself would explain the whole thing clearly.

The superstition-based instructions given are that you should crush the pill under the cover of darkness (no light whatsoever should fall on it) in a clean and unbroken cup, with water added to dissolve it. It is then covered with a clean silver cup-cover to protect it from light and dust. These instructions are for auspiciousness and an important part of the whole instructions given in taking such a medicine.

The pill must be taken early the next morning at dawn

between 3 and 5 a.m. after reciting the special prayer dedicated to the Medicine Buddha. After taking the medicine you should go back to a very warm sleep.

* * *

Tulkus (reincarnations) are bodhisattvas who, in their past lives, have earned enough merits to be reborn in this state, and have the powers to remember the past and foresee the future. They have also gained total freedom over the cyclic chains of worldly existence.

Tulkus are born into selected families who are either pious, simple and honest or who have the capability to bring up the tulku. Some of them choose the house or the type of family into which they wish to be reborn. To cite an example, the 13th Dalai Lama never failed to visit and stay in the house where the 14th Dalai Lama was to be born. It is also said that he admired the family and the house very much. Also, one of the reincarnations of Tsona Rinpoche had a very talkative mother, so that wishing to be born to a quiet mother, he was born to a dumb mother.

To have a tulku born into the family is a great privilege for the family, but it has often happened that after the birth of a tulku, the family went through a period of difficulty. In most cases, one of the parents died or some misfortune befell the family. For instance, to cite an example, a mother became insane after giving birth to a tulku.

With such misfortunes to the parents and the family in general, all inauspiciousness and obstacles that may befall the tulku are removed. If the family does not suffer from any of them, the tulku will not live long.

* * *

It is a common occurrence that whenever a person loses a lot of money or something valuable, the first thing he would do is to consult someone skilled in divination who can tell him whether the lost thing will be found or not. If it will be found, he will generally instruct the one consulting about the loss on what to do and in which direction

he should go searching for it.

In many cases, the one who has lost something would be told that, with the loss of the thing, it has removed the sickness or death that would have befallen him if the thing was not lost: the loss has taken away the misfortune with it. So with this explanation, a Tibetan would hardly give any more thought to the lost thing.

So whenever a Tibetan loses something, whether valuable or not, he would console himself, even without consulting a divinity, that the loss was primarily for the welfare of his own health.

On the other hand, as explained before, if someone finds a lot of money or something valuable, he would interpret it as bringing in sickness and other misfortunes. With the loss of the thing, the other man's misfortune has been removed, while the one who finds it is being showered with the misfortune that the other man has discarded.

* * *

If you hear your name being called three times, answer as it is a human being calling your name; if your name is called out only twice, it is a deity, and if only once, it is a ghost and you should not answer. Always wait for your name to be called out three times, especially at night.

If you respond when your name is called only once, it is believed that you will be taken away by ghost. This is what a Tibetan belief says, but it has happened that a person was taken by a ghost without being called at all.

Now, you will wonder how a ghost takes you away. As many Tibetans have seen, no matter how tightly your doors and windows are bolted, you will be taken away by the ghost without opening those bolts. How a ghost takes a person without opening the bolts or how he comes in when the doors and windows are bolted from inside, is a big mystery. Nobody has seen such an incident occur as no ghost would come if two people are together and awake.

What happens when someone is taken away? The ghost will take him and leave him in a very far-off and dangerous place where it would be practically impossible for ordinary

people to reach. In most cases, according to many eye-witnesses, the man is left wedged between rocks high up in a precipitous place overlooking a big river or ravine. He is deposited there and left to die if no rescue party discovers him.

There are some people who have been taken away only once, but there are others who are constantly taken away. To cite an example, a neighbour of ours is a constant victim. In most cases he had to be searched for but once or twice he came back on his own after missing for three or four days.

When asked how he gets taken away, he said he does not remember anything, and was awakened when a cold wind blew on his face. When a ghost takes you away, you have no control over your body or the senses. It is like a guided tour, and your body just follows the invisible guide. According to the Tibetan belief, being taken away by a ghost is nothing but that the spirit of the ghost has replaced your own and is guiding your body.

How to wake up such a ghost victim? If you find him in a dangerous area, do not awaken him right there. First get him to a safe place and then throw cold water on him or give a hard slap on his face. There is no need to worry of his getting hurt from slap because, no matter how hard you slap, he will not feel the pain after waking up; the ghost has taken the pain with him.

What I found out was that this Tibetan belief of 'being taken away by ghost' is the same as what westerners term 'sleep walking'. In this trance also, you are believed to have the capability to tackle even the most dangerous place, and be woken up by slapping or by throwing cold water on you.

* * *

It is inauspicious to start on a journey on the fourth day of new year — misfortunes will come to you if you do so.

* * *

It is also inauspicious to start on a journey on a Saturday.

But if you are compelled to start your journey on an inauspicious day, there is a way to cheat superstition. You should pretend to leave the day before the actual departure date, taking all your baggage. You can leave the baggage with somebody and return home and start out again the next day, the actual, but inauspicious, day. This way you have cheated superstition by making it think that you have started on an auspicious day.

* * *

Sweeping the house and throwing away the refuse is never done at night. If you are compelled to sweep your house at night, you must not dispose of the refuse until the next morning.

* * *

It is also inauspicious to sweep your house right after someone leaves, especially if he is leaving on a long journey. If you do so, the man will encounter misfortunes on the journey, and it is also akin to the ritual procedures followed on the 29th day of the 12th month (Lunar). (See below for further explanations on this).

* * *

Tibetans never sweep their houses, wash clothes, borrow or lend money or other things on the first day of the new year. Thorough sweeping, cleaning and white-washing are done prior to New Year Day on an auspicious day fixed by the astrologers. Also all loans are refunded before the new year.

The reason behind this is the belief that if you sweep your house on the first day of the new year, it will always be dirty and you will be sweeping it all the time. Similarly, if you borrow or lend anything, specially money, on the first day of new year, you will always be in debt. "Rich is the man who has no debt to pay" is a common Tibetan saying and everyone tries to round the year off by repaying their loans and returning all borrowed things.

As for the annual mass cleaning, usually done on the 29th day of the 12th month, all the refuse is collected and disposed of in the evening along with the effigies of evil spirits in an auspicious direction, preferably at a junction of three roads.

A special gruel is prepared on that day for dinner called *Gu-thug*, "the 29th day brew". Effigies of malignant spirits are made with dough, and each member of the family is given a small piece of dough which is rubbed all over the body starting at the head and ending at the feet, as a gesture to remove all sicknesses — then a small piece of cloth from some clothing worn below the waist, is enclosed inside the dough. It is then pressed inside the palm to give the impression of the inside of the right hand fist, and circled three times around your body, saying prayers for good health during the coming year. This is placed with the effigies.

During the dinner there is great fun and enjoyment as each person gets something in his gruel, a piece of cotton, a drawing of a moon and sun, woollen threads plaited clockwise and anti-clockwise, a chili, a coal, a lump of salt, etc. Each of these have a specific meaning. The sun or moon indicate that the person who gets these is kindhearted — his heart is clean like the moon (free of demerits), salt means that the person is lazy, and chili indicates that the person is very talkative and quarrelsome. From the last bowl of gruel you have, you contribute nine drops to the container with the effigies. When all the members of the family have finished eating and added their nine drops, a senior member of the family lights a firebrand and shouts 'Come Out!' This is aimed at the spirits and others who have laid curses and brought misfortunes and sicknesses. He is assisted by another man carrying the container, and once they are outside the house they should not look back. With them go all the spirits and other malignant beings who cause misfortunes and sicknesses, but if they look back, it is believed that the spirits will also come back into the house and all misfortunes and sicknesses will be repeated in the coming year.

On this day, the womenfolk take a bath and shed the dirt

with the other refuse of the house. Mind, the dirt is not actually collected and disposed but presumed to be chased out with other refuses. And, on the eve of new year (that is if the 12th month has the 30th day), the men take baths and shed their dirt. It is inauspicious for the women to take baths on the eve, they must necessarily do it on the 29th day or on an auspicious day preceding new year.

* * *

To find an egg is considered very inauspicious. It is termed 'hairless wealth', meaning it has no value, and it is not capable of bringing good luck, in fact it hinders the finder from getting good luck.

* * *

To find a hat is considered inauspicious no matter in what condition it is. But should someone lose a hat, he will not be much perturbed, remembering the old belief and adage, "to lose a hat relieves one of a year's misfortunes". So the loser is relieved of misfortune, while the finder takes his place.

* * *

It is inauspicious to sharpen knives at night because it is believed to adversely affect the lives of one's domestic animals. And, it is also believed that this very knife will be the one which will be used for one's own destruction.

* * *

Saturday is a day to win good luck and store wealth. On Saturdays people do not pay any loans nor do they lend anything precious because if they do, they would be parting away with their fortune-potentiality (*gyangs*).

For that matter, nothing precious or of value to the family is allowed to be given away. Should someone want to borrow money on a Saturday, the one requested would expediently tell a lie rather than break the law of not

lending anything — rather he would not want his fortune-potentiality to go out of the house.

* * *

Tibetans consider it very inauspicious if it snows on the first day of new year. It is believed that the following year will be very bad — the crops will fail and frightful events will take place.

As an exemplary incident, it snowed on the first day of the Tibetan new year in 1959 in many parts of Tibet, presaging the Chinese invasion of Tibet.

* * *

When constructing a new house people draw big fearful faces or obscene figures and put them up in a prominent place for wide visibility. This will keep the people from looking at the new house too many times. In this way it will avoid jealousy and excessive compliments or condemnations. Nobody would want to listen to negative remarks, but the Tibetans believe that excessive compliments are also not good because they bring adverse effects. By drawing such figures, it will ensure the house a longer existence and a happier life therein for the residents.

* * *

Crying at night is bad and inauspicious. It can cause one's luck (Tibetan: *rLung-ta*; pronounced *lung-ta*)⁷ to decline and thereby make one susceptible to curses and other misfortunes.

* * *

Generally it is believed that a carpenter, no matter how successful he is in his business, cannot become rich. This

7. *Lung-ta* is more than just luck, but this is the most acceptable and the nearest English equivalent available. It can be increased by flying prayer flags on auspicious days which is of two kinds: general auspicious days which are auspicious for everybody and, auspicious according to one's birth. Generally, it is said that everybody has his own karmic high or low *lung-ta*.

is based on the belief that to trample upon or cut even a small plant is an unwholesome deed, not to mention the big trees that are cut down for his business.

* * *

Tibetans find it necessary and auspicious to draw a swastika on the foundation of a new house. This will make the house stable and firm.

* * *

It is also believed that to build houses with stones that have been used for burial purposes or with mud taken from cracked ground is inauspicious. These are believed to destabilise the house, and misfortunes will come.

* * *

To find a rope is considered very auspicious. "Finding rope, even if it has been used for carrying corpses, is auspicious", a Tibetan would say and take it with him.

In Tibet a dead person is very seldom cremated or buried. The reasons being that wood is very scarce, and the ground is very hard and frozen most of the time. The poor just have their bodies dumped into rivers. The bodies of incarnate lamas and great teachers are kept intact by some kind of mummifications (with salt), or their ashes are preserved in urns so that pilgrims may remember these teachers.

Feeding away of the corpse was the most common practice. The body is wrapped in a new cloth, blessed by a monk and tied up in a sitting position. It is then handed to a special person⁸ who carries it to an isolated place where birds and beasts of prey wait (many places in Tibet have a place marked for this purpose). The man would chop the body into pieces and feed them to the animals (the bones are crushed and mixed with *tsampa*), thus enabling the deceased to earn some final merit before passing through the ordeal of the

8. See Evans Wentz, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, pp. 25-26.

different stages of *bardo*,⁹ a period of seven weeks after death and final entry into hell, during which the mind-continuum roams in the seven globes of the planetary chain (stations of active existence) for seven days each.

* * *

To find money is inauspicious, but since nobody would want to leave the money where he found it, the bad luck can be removed by stamping on the money. After this simple rite you may take the money without any feeling of guilt or fear.

* * *

To find a needle is believed to be very auspicious. It is believed that successful days lie ahead. They will pass as easily and comfortably as a needle pulls a thread through cloth.

* * *

To find onyx or coral is inauspicious, but to find turquoise or conch-shell is auspicious.

* * *

When one is haunted by very frightening dreams, bolstering the foot of the bed with pillows is believed to stop them.

* * *

Drawing of the sun and moon on the door will gather good fortune and thereby all your desires will be fulfilled.

* * *

Drawing *swastikas* on the door keeps away ghosts and other evil spirits. They will not be able to harm you. Some put horse-shoes in place of *swastikas*.

* * *

9. See Evans Wentz, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, pp. 6 and 29, and H.P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*.

A common, yet often unnoticed experience is that if a person with boils or any sores crosses a bridge or river, the person experiences more pain. This is believed to be from an influence of the *nagas*. To counter such an increase in the pain, the person should pick up white and black stones before crossing the bridge and bring them back with him when returns. Nobody has been able to explain the relationship between the stones and the *nagas*, but the trick has worked with many people.

* * *

Sometimes the fading sound of a bell lingers faintly in the ear. Tibetans believe this to mean that a dead relative or a friend in hell is asking that person to collect merits for him. So on hearing such a sound, one would immediately recite the six sacred mantras, "OM MANI PADME HUM" several times, pretend to collect them in the palm and put them into the ear which, finally, reaches the dead person.

Another belief is that this ringing is an indication that someone is backbiting you.

* * *

It is believed that counting pimples and sores will increase their number.

* * *

If you blow on some other family's cooking-stove, you will get sores on your mouth — you have fallen prey to curses inflicted by the hearth-deity of that family.

* * *

Tibetans attribute the causes of sicknesses and death to external forces, such as the local protective deity (Tib. *Yul-lha*), the earth-deity (Tib. *sa-dag*), *nagas* (Tib. *klu*), and even human curses. So whenever a person is sick, the counsel of divination (oracle) is first sought to find out the cause of the sickness and to find out what religious

rites should be conducted to appease or, if necessary, exorcise the causative factor.

* * *

The question of infection or contraction of disease does not depend, according to old Tibetan belief, upon the seriousness and infectiousness of the disease but upon the strong feelings of doubts — supposed or real — entertained by the person. If he has the slightest suspicion, he will easily contract the disease even if it is a very minor and non-infectious one. On the other hand, a person will not contract the disease even if he lives with the diseased person for a very long time and that the disease is a very infectious one.

Another example would be: suppose you visit a friend's house and have tea in a cup which you feel is not properly cleaned. As soon as you have the suspicion you have prepared yourself a sickness — you will get tiny blister-like pimples on your tongue or sores on your mouth and a sore throat. This is also possible if your glass or cup gets changed with that of a person you are not usually accustomed to sharing a glass with and you are compelled to drink from the other person's glass. You have noticed this change and had the suspicion and you get pimples or a sore throat, but the other person, not noticing the mix-up, has no such suspicion and thus does not get sick.

* * *

Excessive winning in one's early gambling career is ominous. It is believed to be a warning of a bad gambling future for you.

* * *

The number of eggs that hatch into chickens is directly proportional to the weight of sin (unwholesome deed) committed by the person who is putting the eggs under the mother-hen. The heavier the weight of his unwholesome deeds, the more the number of hatched chickens and vice versa.

* * *

Before giving money to anyone, older Tibetans would rub the money lightly on the chest so that one's fortune-potentiality (Tib. *gYang*s) does not go away with the money but stays with the family.

* * *

If you want to buy *zi* (onyx), you should first find out a little about the background of the family from whom you want to buy it — whether they have suffered acute poverty or from any serious and infectious disease. You should not buy any *zi* from such people because you will also follow suit and suffer the same fate after you buy the *zi*; also, your luck will not be good.

* * *

If you throw or roll stones down hill, it can diminish your luck. On the other hand, if you throw stones uphill, your luck will increase.

* * *

If you stand at the edge of a precipitous cliff or roof, it is possible that a ghost can push you over. This is what the Tibetans believe in and always avoid letting children play near such dangerous places.

* * *

Tibetan parents do not allow their children to play with knives, and also the grown-ups do not play with knives because it is believed that ghosts can swing your knife and hit the other person and kill him.

* * *

It is believed that if you look at the moon, especially when it is full, it will improve your eye-sight. This is because, as I mentioned earlier, sun, moon and other planets are all abodes of gods and rays coming from such divine places are precious and medicinal.

* * *

If trees bear fruits out of season, the king and his subjects will die at the hands of the enemy.

* * *

If a tree which has already dried up and is beyond bearing any leaves, should bear leaves unexpectedly, it means that the male population of the country will fight amongst themselves.

* * *

If a fruit bearing tree bears a fruit not of its own kind, the owner of the tree will die very soon.

* * *

If the sun rises from the west and sets in the east, the king will be killed by his subjects.

* * *

If you are troubled by spirits and misfortunes thereof, moving to a new house will end your troubles. You may also resort to religious rites to exorcise and ward off evil spirits and human curses.

* * *

If hot and cold seasons reverse, the coming year will be bad with sickness and wars.

* * *

Rainbows at night are considered very ominous. It is believed that the country will suffer greatly — the king will die, there will be civil strife, famine and sickness in the country.

* * *

If the ends of the rainbow point to a river, it will rain very soon. And, if the ends point to a grassy area, there will be sunshine; if it is already raining, it will cease in a short while.

* * *

Rainbows on auspicious days are believed to be very good. The kingdom will flourish and all evil deeds shall disappear. And even if there is a heavy rainfall during the next seven days, the crops will not be damaged.

* * *

If the rainbow has more pale white shades in it, a hermit will die. If it has a predominance of red or yellow colours in it, bad events will follow; a predominantly bluish tint to it indicate that the harvest will be very poor.

* * *

PART II

TRANSLATION OF KARMA CHAKME'S
THE MIRROR OF OMENS

The Mirror of Omens

Karma Chakme alias mKhas-grub ra-ga A-say (17th century) was one of the greatest scholars of the Karmapa school. Most of his works (about 50 volumes) dealt with the lives of the people of Kham region and he was greatly interested in the popular belief and superstition as an approach to the comprehension of the more profound religious truths. The essence of all his works is the simplicity and lucidity of the language he used because he believed that it is pointless to write and collect vast numbers of works without the common people being able to understand them. Though he himself belonged to the Karmapa school, he was also a great master of the Nyingmapa school of thought as noted by 'Jam-dbyangs mkhen-rtse in his Collected Work: "Yongs-'dzin rin-po-che' di-ni mdo-khams 'dir gsang-chen rning-ma'i bstan-pa-la bka'-drin gzhan-'gran med-pa zhig yin-ching/Kyad-par rang-lugs rdzogs-chen-pa-dang rig-'dzin kun-bzang shes-rabs sogs-kyi yongs-'dzin yin-pas' dir-yang chung-zad bris-pa-yin/'".

This section contains selected extracts from Karma Chakme's collection, a manuscript which is untitled and completely torn. I am very grateful to our research scholar Mr. Tashi Tsering for lending me the original text (also untitled and mutilated). It helped me a lot in making final corrections because the former text which I had obtained was a poor copy of the original one and contained a lot of inaccuracies. This work deals with omens and their meanings.

The Tibetan title of this text is 'Chag-med rin-po-ches mdzad-pa'i kun-rdzob gya-sel me-long. Rev. Tharchin gave this work an appropriate English title, THE MIRROR OF OMENS, when he published it half a century ago. It was edited and published by Rev. Tharchin and printed by the

Church of Scotland Guild Mission at the Tibetan Press, Kalimpong, in 1934. For further references on the life of Karma Chakme see *The Collected Works of the Great 'Jam-dhyangs mkhyen-brtse'i dbang-po*. Published by Gonpo Tseten, Gangtok, 1980, pp. 447, and *Chos-'byung no-mtshar gnam-gyi rol-mtsho stag-sgang mkhas-mchog nag-dbang blo-gros*, Vol. III, pp. 245-250, published by Ugyen Tenpai Gyaltzen, Paro, Bhutan, 1979, and *Biographical Dictionary of Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism*, Vol. VII, pp. 449-452 published by Library of Tibetan Works & Archives, Dharamsala.

A month of auspicious undertakings

- First**¹⁰ A day bringing all luck — all your works will be accomplished quickly and bring prosperity to you.
- Second** If you construct a hearth in your kitchen, wealth will pour into your house.
- Third** If you start on a journey on this day, all your under-takings will be fulfilled to your complete satisfaction.
- Fourth** Wash your hair on this day and it will become the admiration of other people — they will envy its beauty.
- Fifth** If you enter monastic life on this day, you will become a revered monk attaining great erudition and wisdom.
- Sixth** If you begin ploughing your field today, you will reap a very rich harvest.
- Seventh** If you move into a new house, you will have very happy days ahead.
- Eighth** If you buy cattle and other possessions, you will live a very prosperous life — literally, you will be surrounded by wealth.
- Ninth** This is the day to exorcise the cycles of curses and misfortunes that come from

10. All dates are of the Lunar calendar.

your enemy, such as putting an end to your family lineage and causing untimely death, etc.

- Tenth If you practice meritorious deeds such as buying new items for the altar, you will gain all-round good luck.
- Eleventh If you throw a feast on this day, there will be abundant food in the house in the future.
- Twelfth You should build canals and dams on this day — they will be very successful and paying undertakings.
- Thirteenth If you attain an honourable position (like job promotion etc.) on this day, you will do very well and gain fame.
- Fourteenth If you draw a mandala on this day, you will be reborn in the god's realm.
- Fifteenth If you make offerings to the gods and bodhisattvas, a rain of good fortune will be showered upon you.
- Sixteenth If you hire a servant on this day, you will be happy with him — he will be a good servant and will remain with you forever.
- Seventeenth If you undertake to continue the work sickness and death will keep away from you for a long time.
- Eighteenth If you do the "throwing away of oblation" ceremony (Tib: *Tor-kyag*), your enemy will vanish into the dust and be conquered once and for all.
- Nineteenth If you start on a journey, you will walk a primrose path of happiness.
- Twentieth This day maintains an equilibrium for all work — no special benefit or misfortune will come out of any work you do today.

- Twenty-first** If you plough your field on this day, your store will overflow with food.
- Twenty-second** If you begin your studies today, you will become saturated with knowledge.
- Twenty-third** If you build a house, it will be as indestructible and invulnerable as the adamantine sceptre.
- Twenty-fourth** This day is very suitable for exorcising evils.
- Twenty-fifth** If you buy a new field, your wealth will increase.
- Twenty-sixth** If you wash your hair today, all your negative karma will vanish.
- Twenty-seventh** If you start on a journey, the day is very auspicious and your work will definitely be accomplished.
- Twenty-eighth** If you build a canal or dam, you will not be harassed by floods, and other curses and misfortunes will also disappear.
- Twenty-ninth** This is also a good day for exorcising evils.
- Thirtieth** If you sow seed in your field, grains and wealth will increase.

Abstinence during the 30 days of a month

- First** Do not cut your hair because it will adversely affect your life span and health.
- Second** Do not wear any new clothes today, otherwise you will be troubled by sickness.
- Third** Do not journey with a woman, otherwise you will die very soon.
- Fourth** Do not take out the body of a deceased person out of the house for burial or cremation, otherwise you will have internal strife in the family and might lead to internecine.

- Fifth** Do not start on a journey on this day because it is very likely that you will not return home.
- Sixth** If you cross a river today, your wealth will diminish.
- Seventh** Do not stitch anything, otherwise it will be very bad for your eyes.
- Eighth** Do not weave anything, otherwise your property will wear out/be exhausted quickly.
- Ninth** Do not sing today, otherwise you will have to mourn in the very near future.
- Tenth** Do not sleep in the day time for your consciousness will roam out of your body.
- Eleventh** Do not buy a horse today because you will have to carry a corpse on it.
- Twelfth** Do not buy a dog because the dog you buy will be a manifestation of devil.
- Thirteenth** Do not buy fowls today because they will bring ill-luck.
- Fourteenth** Do not measure any wood or stick because it will reduce your life span.
- Fifteenth** Do not kill any lice today, otherwise your karmic wisdom will diminish.
- Sixteenth** Do not wash your hair this day because it will bring lots of grey hairs.
- Seventeenth** Do not eat any special food outside your usual menu because it will reduce your karmic opportunity to have enough food.
- Eighteenth** Do not wear any new clothes, otherwise the dogs will dislike it and show hatred towards you.
- Nineteenth** Do not wear new shoes on this day because it will make you poor.
- Twentieth** Do not conduct any business transactions, otherwise you will gain no profit.
- Twenty-first** Do not hire a new servant on this day because he will be an evil spirit and

- bring destruction on you.
- Twenty-second** Do not seek medical treatment; it will not be of much help to you.
- Twenty-third** Do not sharpen a knife today because this very knife will be the one that will hurt you.
- Twenty-fourth** Do not brew any alcohol because it will bring sickness upon you.
- Twenty-fifth** Do not dig the ground because the *nagas* will dislike you and cause you sickness.
- Twenty-sixth** Do not pitch a tent or throw fishing nets in the river because it will bring curses and back-biting from others.
- Twenty-seventh** Do not ride an ox. This has significance of bad luck and brings all sorts of bad tidings and quarrels.
- Twenty-eighth** Do not sow seeds because the harvest will be very small.
- Twenty-ninth** Do not build new stores or a hearth because no wealth will come to you.
- Thirtieth** Do not begin your study on this day — you will not be intelligent and will not learn anything.

* * *

The Omens of Fire

For this, absolutely dry cow dung or wood should be used. If the fire makes many crackling sounds at the beginning, this implies that there are ghosts or spirits in the house. If it burns with equal flames of a whitish colour and gives off only a little smoke, this is a good indication. If it burns a darkish red and emits a lot of smoke, it is an ominous sign. And the longer the fire takes to die out completely, the more auspicious it is.

* * *

The Omens of Dog barking

On a desolate night when nobody is about, if your dog

barks once it means a thief will come to your house. If it barks twice, it means a guest will arrive. Three times mean you will not become sick for quite some time to come. Five barks indicate joy and six means sorrow. Seven indicate a quarrel, eight means you will have to travel. Nine signify that it will snow, and ten signifies that you will find something valuable. There are no interpretations beyond the count of ten.

* * *

Miscellaneous beliefs

You should not allow crows to eat your faeces because this is believed to adversely affect your life span.

* * *

If the shadow of a flying vulture should fall on your body, it will have a harmful effect on your health and life span. If the shadow falls on you and the vulture is flying eastward, you should pretend flying, taking one step to the west. This will neutralise the effect.

* * *

If you fly prayer flags from bamboo poles having fifteen sections, it will appease both the gods and *nagas* more than usual and bring good fortune to yourself.

* * *

Whenever you come into possession of a new *bu-pa* (a bagpipe-like instrument used in Tibet to blow on fire; set of bellows), it is an auspicious indication that a son will be born into your family. Because of this, the *bu-pa* should be treated with delight and affection.

* * *

If a bear comes to your house early in the morning, it is a manifestation of the medicine *naga* and must be appeased with offerings of milk. Should it come in the evening, it is the manifestation of the black demon *naga*, and must be chased away with due caution.

* * *

When sleeping your head should face either to the west or north as these are auspicious directions. But if you are compelled to place your pillow towards the other two directions, you must put your shoes under it to ward off ill-fortune.

* * *

When you acquire a new cup, it should not be kept upside down for the first five days as it is very inauspicious to do so. Drinking from a skull cup will make you blue in the face. Drinking from *zab-ye*-wooden (a kind of a tree found in Tibet) cups will make you handsome, popular and wise. Drinking from a china cup tastes better, and drinking from the egg-shell of a vulture will remove any poison from the drink.

* * *

You should have something to eat in your mouth when you are wearing new clothes. And if you sit down soon after putting them on, you will be unhurried, cool and calm, but if you walk after putting them on, you will always be in a hurry for no reason.

* * *

After putting on new shoes for the first time, take seven steps to the north; it is an auspicious direction.

* * *

Wearing too many different clothes in a single day will reduce your karmic-opportunity to wear clothes, and in future you will have fewer new clothes.

* * *

Having a rosary decorated with many accessories will make you more thoughtful, but the thinking will not be at all fruitful.

* * *

To wear a raw rat skin or anything made of rat skin will

cut your life-thread. It is also said that it will “stick you to the ground”, which means your luck will decline and everything will turn topsy-turvy.

* * *

It is very inauspicious to sing or dance in the family treasure-room.

* * *

Eating the tongues of too many animals reduces the functioning capacity of one's tongue. But if you remember to cut a small piece from the tip of the tongue which you plan to eat and throw it away before eating, it will not be so harmful.

* * *

To eat the meat of an animal killed that very day is unwholesome and earns more negative karma than usual, It is a great sin, because of which you will be born a *Sin-po* (a ferocious sub-human who is not only carnivorous but also a cannibal) in the next life and will go back to hell.

* * *

Eating the hearts of too many animals diminishes your capacity to practice religious deeds and takes you further from enlightenment.

* * *

Having obtained a new horse you should think of it as precious and supreme (Tib. *Ta-chog rin-po-che*). You should make an effigy of the horse and make offerings to the *nagas*. This will make the horse very useful to you.

When you ride it for the first time and it neighs for the first time, your fortune will increase if you pray for your luck to flourish. But if the horse lies down on your first ride, it signifies that your luck is low. To counter this, you should sing with all your might, and this will help you to regain good fortune.

* * *

When a sheep arrives at your house for the first time, you should feed it with a variety of grasses and pray for an increase in your wealth.

* * *

When you obtain a new donkey, the first time it brays you should repeat "I believe you" three times. This will console the donkey and thus make it much more obedient and useful to you.

* * *

If you catch the first dung before it falls to the ground from a cow or ox recently purchased, and place it in the crack or cranny in the wall of the shed, it is said you will find something equal to the value of the animal within one month.

* * *

When a new dog arrives, the steps to your house should be strewn with *Che-mar* (a mixture of roasted, powdered barley and butter — a Tibetan method of giving an auspicious welcome to someone) to welcome it.

* * *

When fowls arrive at your house for the first time, you should feed them until they are completely satisfied. If the cock's first crow is towards the south, you will witness many deaths. If it is to the north, you will have good luck and all your wishes will be fulfilled.

* * *

If you should catch a pigeon, rub some butter on its forehead and set it free, otherwise it will make your prayers have an adverse effect on you, and will also pray for evil things to befall you.

* * *

Black birds or dogs should not be beaten, stoned or terrorised because this displeases *Mahakala* and you will be

cursed with misfortune. Likewise, red birds or dogs represent the flesh-eating creature (*Sin-po*) of the lower realm, and, thus for you own good, you should not be mean to them.

* * *

A family which keeps a sheep, a monkey and a wolf will be able to eliminate the effects of curses from neighbours and others who envy their well-being.

* * *

It is inauspicious to send only a knife to a relative; always send a needle along with it.

* * *

In Tibet the men were very fond of wearing a dagger, sword or knife along with a long case of chopsticks etc. at their waist. However, no one would wear an empty scabbard or case because of their belief that whoever did so would starve.

* * *

Practically all the knives made in Tibet have a handle of horn. It is believed that to possess a knife with a horn handle means good luck and that prosperity will bless that person and all his wishes will be fulfilled.

* * *

It is believed that playing dice too much reduces one to poverty. This is an unknown quality of the dice game.

* * *

You should pray for happiness on the day you first hear a cuckoo call; it will bring good results.

* * *

If you should find a round black stone in your path, you should break it then and there, for it is the iron house of hell which has no outlet.

* * *

If you find a wooden cup, shoe, stick or *thang-kuk* (see above for explanation) in your path, be careful of what lies ahead and beware of bad tidings.

* * *

If you find a knife in your path, cut the nearest piece of wood. Only then is it auspicious to take it with you.

* * *

If you find bowls used for offering water to the gods or a red clay pot, rub some coal, soot or dirt on them before taking them with you, to avoid inauspiciousness.

* * *

Beliefs on Travelling

If you are setting out on a journey on foot, first take seven steps in an auspicious direction which can be found by consulting an astrology almanac, if a calendar and almanac are available. If not, it is the direction towards which magpies have faced the doors of their nests. And if you are travelling on horse-back, then first ride the distance of an arrow's flight without stumbling. If one is able to walk or ride this initial distance with a steady posture, it is an auspicious prophecy that you will be able to accomplish your project without much trouble. On the other hand, if you should fall while testing your luck in this manner, it is an ominous prognostication.

Sometimes you may be compelled to travel on an inauspicious day and thus encounter misfortune. To ward off such misfortune you should swing your knife or sword towards the east, spit towards the south, light your flint facing west and throw a handful of dust to the north. It is believed that by these actions you can reverse all possible adversities to prosperity.

* * *

It is said that if you return home after two days you will have very bad dreams. To return after six days means you

will lose all your possession. Returning after nine days means something will worry you, and after ten days someone will always be thinking of you. Returning after eighteen days is a sign that you will witness no happiness, literally, with your eyes. Returning after twenty-four days will bring you more enemies at home and coming after twenty-nine days away you will find your horse or property stolen or that something bad has happened to them.

If you have been away more than a month, you should not return on a date which ends in an odd number. After an absence of two months, do not return on any date if is an even number. And, finally, if you should see anything auspicious and pleasing on the way, before taking another breath, you should look at it carefully. Thus you will come to know luck. If you should see anything inauspicious or unpleasant, close one eye before looking at it again.

* * *

On a level path if, for some inexplicable reason, you are unable to walk, take a few horse hairs and put them inside your shoes; you will be able to continue after that.

* * *

If you cannot walk uphill, carry an arrow in your hand and you will find it possible.

* * *

If you cannot walk downhill, carry a roundish stone or some mud in your hand. It is believed that by carrying such a stone or mud, you will have no more trouble in walking.

* * *

In the case of being chased by wolves, tie your shoes with your belt and drag them behind you. The wolves will run away.

* * *

The Language of Ravens¹¹

There are *Brahmin*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya* and *Sudra* ravens. Those that are like yoghurt are Brahmins; those with red eyes are Kshatriyas; those with stocky bodies are Vaishyas; those with lean bodies, who eat refuse and meat are the Sudras.

Examining the Language

There are meanings in the language and behaviour of ravens which accurately convey messages and portents. These can be interpreted, if observed and understood correctly. Included in this guide are the means to interpret the cawing of ravens while one is at home, various signs encountered while travelling; signs indicated by the location of nests and general indications in the sound of the birds' cries.

In order to interpret their cawing when you are at home, the location of raven should be noted, during the particular periods of the day given below, relative to a location in your dwelling which is frequently used — e.g. meditation seats, work desk, living room. When you are outdoors — walking, travelling, etc. — the latter portions of this guide will prove useful.

In general, the more one attends to the actions of ravens, the more apt they will be in responding to your interest. It would, therefore, be beneficial to keep this guide handy around the house, and carry it with you when you go visiting, trekking, or into retreat. In this way you will quickly develop a new and rewarding relationship with these intelligent and helpful creatures.

11. Reproduced with the permission of Mr. & Mrs. James Mullens.

Examining The Language

First Period: (First light-sunrise-early morning):

When a raven caws in the:

- East: Your prayers will bring fruitful results.
- Southwest: an enemy will come.
- South: friends will come.
- Southwest: you will achieve some unexpected gains.
- West: a great wind will arise.
- Northwest: a guest will come.
- North: a lost property will be found.
- Northeast: a woman guest will come.
- Overhead: a guest will come.

Second Period (mid-morning until mid-day):

When a raven caws in the:

- East: a close friend or relative will come.
- South: Praise and raise in status will be received.
- Southwest: family lineage will increase.
- West: a long distance will have to be travelled.
- Northwest: the king will be replaced.
- North: great fortune will be realised.
- Northeast: a quarrel will occur.
- Overhead: earnest desires will be fulfilled.

Third Period (early afternoon until mid-afternoon):

When a raven caws in the:

- East: you will find something valuable.
- Southeast: a fight or quarrel will occur.
- South: a wind will blow.
- Southwest: an enemy will arrive.
- West: a woman will arrive.
- Northwest: a close friend or relative will come.
- North: a good friend or sweetheart will arrive.
- Northeast: something will be burnt by fire.
- Overhead: you will find a way to please the king.

Half-fourth Period (later afternoon):

When a raven caws in the:

- East: unpleasant events will occur.
- South: guests will arrive.
- Southeast: you will acquire something valuable.
- Southwest: strong wind will blow in seven days.
- West: a storm will come.
- Northwest: you will find a lost property.
- North: the king will arrive.
- Northeast: you will have a raise in status and position.
- Overhead: there will be hunger or famine.

Fourth Period (sunset until dark):

When a raven caws in the:

- East: an enemy will arrive.
- Southeast: you will suffer a loss.
- South: death from disease will occur.
- Southwest: your desires will be fulfilled.
- Northwest: you will find some wealth.
- West: a close friend or relative will come.
- North: the king will receive an honour.
- Overhead: whatever you have in mind will be attained.

Signs while Travelling

When travelling near dams, river and other things connected with water, as well as along gorges, and at cross-roads, a raven cawing on the right side means the journey will be successful.

When travelling or walking on the road, a raven cawing from behind means things sought after will surely be acquired;

flapping its wings: great obstacles will be encountered;
catches your hair with its beak: it is a sign of death;
eating refuse or filth: food and drink will be obtained;
cawing from a thorny bush: an enemy will attack you;
cawing from a dead tree: there will be no food or water.
When travelling or walking on the road, a raven cawing

and sitting on a castle at any time means good lodgings will be found;

cawing from a place on your mat: the arrival of an enemy is predicted;

facing a door: a great danger is predicted;

holding cloth in its beak: garments will be found;

cawing from your forehead: it is a sign of death;

cawing from a roof with a red thread in its beak: the house will be burnt;

holding a twig in its beak: something will be found;

cawing at sunrise: you will find something valuable;

just cawing: your desires will be fulfilled. And, if many ravens gather and caw early in the morning, it is predicted that a strong wind will blow.

Nest location Interpretations

If a raven makes its nest —

on the east face of a tree: it will be a very prosperous year with abundant rainfall;

on the southern side of a tree: the crops will be bad;

on the middle of a tree trunk: a great danger is predicted;

below the half mark of a tree: attack and defeat by an enemy is predicted;

in a wall, or ground or by the water-side: some misfortunes will fall on the king

Interpretations of Raven's Language

ka-ka (high-pitched): You will obtain something valuable.

Nga-nga: You will encounter suffering.

ka-ka (high-pitched): you will find some clothes.

Gha-gha (heavy): Your desires will be fulfilled.

Gha-ga: You will obtain some wealth.

Finally, if you witness indications of any danger or misfortune or have any feeling of it, you must offer *torma* (Buddhist cone-shaped cakes) to the raven. It is best that you offer a *torma* made out of a frog's flesh as it is the favourite dish of the ravens. In this way you can ward off any misfortunes or dangers that may befall you.

PART IV

PHYSIOGNOMY OF MAN AND
WOMAN

Physiognomy of Man

The life of a hundred year old man can be divided into ten stages:

1. Lying on the back: the stage of infancy when he cannot sit or stand.
2. Playful stage: when he can stand up and walk.
3. Growing up more: when he begins to differentiate happiness and sadness.
4. When he reaches manhood and becomes brave.
5. When wisdom, strength and pride grow within him.
6. When he can differentiate between good and bad: accept goodness and discard the bad.
7. When he gains a lot of spiritual wisdom.
8. Ageing: deterioration of the powers of the senses.
9. Ages more: cannot utilize the senses.
10. Death.

In a standard size or normal man the length of his face is 14 or 12 finger widths (fw.) measured with his own fingers, in length and 12 fw in breadth. The cheek is 5 fw. and jaw is 4 fw. The breadth of the nose is 2 fw. and 4 fw. in length. The nostril is half or one fw. in width. The length of the ear is 4 fw. and the breadth of the top of the ear is 2 fw. The length of the lips is 4 fw. and a little over half fw. in breadth. The chin is 2 fw. in length (downwards) and 3 fw. in breadth.

From the neck to the pubic area is 3 handspans. The sex organ is 5 or 6 fw. in length. The thigh is 25 fw. in length and 8 fw. in breadth. The knee is 4 fw; the length of the shin is 2 handspans. The heel is 5 fw. and the length of the foot is 14 fw. The toe is 4 fw. The length of the shoulder is 18 fw., and from the tip of the shoulder end to the base of the fingers is 3 handspans.

Intrepretations of the different parts of the body

A man who has a bulky body like that of an elephant will lead a rich and easy life, and will be intelligent too.

Face:

- Long or round face: — will accomplish all works
— his desires will be fulfilled.
- Like a goat or monkey's face: — is likely to become rich with material wealth.
- Like a horse or donkey's face: — will experience continuous sorrow in his life.
- Like a duck or dragon's face: — will have great wealth.
- Like a parrot's face: — will become a king.
- Dry face with lots of patches: — will become a liar or a thief.

Lips:

- Dry upper lip: — will experience peren-
nial sorrow in this life.
- Thick lips: — is undesirable will quarrel even with friends.
- Red, medium thickness lips: — will gain wealth and wisdom.

Cheeks:

- Beautiful and fleshy cheeks: — will become a leader.

Teeth:

- 24 or 30 teath: — will lead an easy life.
- 31 teeth — will gain wealth.

32 teeth	— will become a king.
39 teeth	— is a very bad person.
Unbroken and firm upper teeth:	— will earn lots of wealth.
White and sharp teeth:	— will become a learned person.
Twisted and not firm teeth:	— parents will die when one is young.
Like a monkey's teeth:	— will live without food — suffer poverty.
Tongue:	
Short and round tongue:	— will not be clever or intelligent.
Whitish tongue:	— will be rough in character.
Red tongue:	— will become a king.
Palate:	
Yellow or black palate:	— is not; will starve for food.
Red or purple palate:	— is of low caste.
Nose:	
flat, crooked, big and heavy nose:	— this is undesirable.
High and beautiful nose:	— this is good.
Forehead:	
Small forehead:	— will own no wealth.
Dry forehead:	— will experience perpetual sadness in his life.

Short wrinkles on the forehead :	— will have many illnesses.
Two-line wrinkle:	— will live upto sixty years of age.
Four-line wrinkle:	— will live upto ninety years.
Five-line wrinkle:	— will live beyond ninety.
More than five wrinkles:	— will have much sorrow.
Forehead without wrinkles:	— is a descendent of the heavenly dwellers.
Big and half-moon-like face with three lines running upward:	— will undoubtedly gain wisdom.
Vertical lines on the forehead:	— will experience perpetual sadness.
Eyes:	
Heavy or protruding eye balls:	— will experience much sorrow.
Like a goat or sheep's eyes:	— will be fond of fighting.
Blood-red eyes :	— will have many illnesses.
Wet and teary eyes:	— will suffer poverty and sorrow.
Blinking constantly:	— is a man of great merit.
Blinking many times in rapid succession :	— will have a very short life.
Blinking infrequently :	— will live long.
Blinking twice at a time:	— will become a servant.
Dusty eye-brow area :	— will experience perpetual sorrow.

- Red eye-brow area : — will own great wealth.
- Black eye-brows: — will have an illness-free life.
- Caved-in eyes: — will have a long life.
- Triangular eyes· — will be intelligent.
- Eyes of wild animals: — will become a leader of some sort.
- Like a duck's eyes: — will be rich.
- Red eyes: — will earn great wealth.
- White and pale yellow eyes: — has descended from a reputed family, and will earn great wealth.
- White and black eye-balls: — will have good vision and become intelligent.
- Back:**
- Fair, long, flexible, fleshy, straight, balanced and short back: — will acquire spiritual and material affluence and great wisdom.
- Like a snow-lion's back: — everybody will praise him; he will become a leader or receive other's admiration.
- Like a horse's back: — will experience both happiness and sorrow in equal proportion.
- Hand:**
- A thumb, neither too thin nor too fat and reddish in colour: — will become a leader/king.
- Oversized thumb: — will experience many sufferings in his life.

- Very small fingers: — will be quarrelsome.
- Too long or too short index-finger: — not good.
- Very long little finger: — will accomplish good deeds and vice versa.
- Very long thumb: — he is sympathetic and kind hearted.
- Very short thumb: — he has a demonic heart.
- White and cracked finger nails: — will become very poor and have a very low place in society.
- Irregular and twisted nails: — will become a vagabond and will have to beg for his food.
- Pale (yellowish) nails: — he will kill a popular man.
- Red nails: — will become a parise-worthy leader.
- Clockwise running whorls on the fingers: — he will have more sons, and vice versa.
- If they are equal in number: — lots of sons and daughters.
- The lines on the three divisions of a finger upward. Three lines together on the little finger: — he will have a prosperous life.
- A sweaty but not too fleshy hand with pale finger nails: — will have prolonged suffering.
- Yellow palms: — will own great wealth or become a person of great learning in the "ten different sciences".

- A long palm length with lots of lines:** — will be intelligent.
- Broken lines on the palm:** — has a very short life span.
- Short lines on the palm:** — will face many problems in his life.
- Long and fleshy palm:** — will become very popular.
- Small palms:** — will remain a servant throughout his life.
- Long and red palms:** — will gain a lot of wisdom.
- Stomach:**
- Like a fish or snake's stomach:**
- Like a tiger, lion or peacock's stomach:** — will have a very happy and prosperous life.
- Navel:**
- Clockwise turning navel:** — it is a good sign.
- Caved-in or protruding navel:** — this is also a good sign.
- Hips:**
- Fleshy and soft hips:** — will have a prosperous life.
- Bony and bluish-coloured hips:** — will have a sorrowful life.
- Lower abdomen:**
- Bulging lower abdomen:** — will quarrel much.
- Gait:**
- Walking like an elephant:** — will be wealthy.

- Walking like a duck:** — has a concentrative mind.
- Calves:**
- Like a deer's calves:** — this is a good sign.
- Like a horse's calves:** — this is also a good sign.
- Thin and long calves:** — life will be full of sorrow.
- Fat and equally-balanced calves:** — this is a good sign.
- Thighs:**
- Beautiful and fat thighs:** — will live for a hundred years.
- Fat thighs:** — he will be able to tempt many women to have sexual relations with him.
- Genital:**
- Sitting on the toes, if the heels can reach the penis:** — his life will be full of sorrow.
- Penis which is hard like a wood:** — his lineage will break up.
- 5 fw. length penis:** — this is good.
- Concealed penis:** — will gain wisdom.
- Silvery, red or yellowish penis:** — will gain wisdom.
- Pale blue and sweaty penis:** — life will be full of sorrow.
- Urine:**
- Far-reaching and noisy urination:** — will have a good health.

If the urine goes to the right:	— the next child will be a boy.
If it goes to the left:	— the next child will be a girl.
Bluish-coloured urine:	— this is considered very bad.

A man who looks carefully where he is walking; has a round head and breast like that of a woman; has long earlobes and talks very slowly and seldom, and speaks nothing but the truth: these are the qualities of a bodhisattva.

Physiognomy of Women

The five unworthy qualities of a woman are:

1. Attachment to other than one's own husband.
2. Jealous of other women.
3. Wickedness/Nasty-mindedness.
4. Miserliness.
5. Always does what is not good or acceptable.

Interpretations

Hair:

Having yellow hair:	— will always quarrel with her husband and with other women.
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Eyes:

Red or yellow eyes:	— she will fall in love even with her own son and father.
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Nose:

A small nose:	— she will be a slave.
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12. Brown, blond and auburn coloured hairs are categorised as yellow hairs by the Tibetans.

- Very thin nose:** — her husband will die soon.
- Deep nostrils:** — she will be a pauper and a vagrant.
- High and beautiful and nutmeg flower-like nose:** — she will gain spiritual benefits and become a leader.
- Tongue:**
- Red and long tongue:** — she will become a good singer with proficiency in musical instruments.
- Voice:**
- Like a peacock or cuckoo's voice:** — she will become a queen.
- Like a parrot or duck's voice:** — she will be wealthy.
- Teeth:**
- Crooked upper teeth:** — her mother will die when she herself is young.
- Body:**
- Black patches on the body:** — her husband will die soon.
- White and beautiful patches:** — she will have a husband who is intelligent, full of wisdom and dignity.
- Hand:**
- Fleshy, red, long and small hands with no empty spaces between her fingers:** — she will be popular and of high wisdom.

Feet:

- When standing barefeet, if the little toes of the foot does not touch the ground: — she will become a prostitute.
- If the third toe does not touch the ground: — she will be very quarrelsome.
- If the second toe does not touch the ground: — she will indulge in adultery.
- If the big toe does not touch the ground: — her brothers and sisters will die soon.
- Crooked toe nails: — she will become a slave.
- Very fat or narrow feet: — she will become a servant.
- Skinny feet: — she will suffer from hunger.

Breast:

- Uneven and crooked breasts: — she will fall under the curses of her husband. After marriage her life will take a bad turn.
- Dry nipples: — she will witness no happiness in her life.

If a woman has a thin waist and the navel turn clockwise with two or three lines below it; she has not much hair in the armpit and the shoulders are high; her breasts are high, hard and not sagging, they are even and fair, she will get a good and faithful husband.

A woman with lotus-like fair eyes, long like the petals of a lotus flower; long neck and black hair; nipple like the seed of a rhododendron flower; the nose is very slightly tilted to the left; she smells of chang (Tibetan brew); heavy,

broad based breasts; flashy calves — these are qualities of a woman who is easily angered.

The eight mental and the eight physical deficiencies of a woman as stated in the Buddha's Sutra are:

Mental Deficiencies:

1. Persistent suffering from delusions;
2. Fickle-mindedness;
3. Unreliability;
4. Dullness;
5. Hypocrisy;
6. Attachment to sensual objects;
7. Possess low intelligence; and,
8. Lacks confidence.

Physical Deficiencies:

1. Lack of sworl on the head;
2. Having short neck;
3. Having big breasts;
4. Sagging flesh on the body,
5. Heavy voice;
6. Extreme humility;
7. Fearing worldly existence; and,
8. Always encounters obstacles in her life.

In all the realms of existence, there is no enemy like a wife, no prison like worldly existence and no watchman like one who is related to you by blood.

PART V

DREAM INTERPRETATION

Note

In the west dreams have, recently, become a subject of scientific study, and it has been proved that a moderate amount of dreaming is necessary to maintain a person's emotional equilibrium: to spend nights without dream over a prolonged period is as harmful as excessive dreaming.

For many centuries dreams have been accepted as a meaningful part of life by the Tibetans, and have played a vital role in their lives. Tibetans have accepted them as having a positive meaning, for, when somebody had a very bad dream the previous night, he would not leave on a journey or venture to do anything important the next day. He would interpret the bad dream as portending misfortune in the work that he undertakes.

Most Tibetans do not find it difficult to interpret their own dreams unless there are very confusing complexity of symbols. The Tibetan interpretation of dreams is made in two ways: in accordance with the written literary and medical traditions which have been preserved unchanged for centuries, and in accordance with the oral tradition which has also been handed down from generation to generation for an equal number of centuries. Here I did find a slight difference in the interpretation of the two traditions. Either the oral tradition is the distorted version of the written tradition or it has been that way I have made no attempts to analyse as my aim here is not to present any scholarly work nor look at dream interpretation from the point of a psychologist's view.

Though it is not certain when such interpretations of dreams evolved, they have been used for many centuries by the Tibetans although unknown to foreign researchers. It may be possible that an in-depth study of Tibetan method

of dream interpretation will give some direction to western scientists who are interested in the study of dream.

Though generally people do not make any distinction in the periods of dreaming, reliable and learned Tibetans do make the distinction. They divide the night into three periods or there are three distinct periods of dreaming during the night. A dream just before awakening is regarded as portending the immediate future — for self and others. And dreams in the early part of the night are scenes or events that impressed the mind during the day and not prophetic. Dreams in the second half of the night foretell the future and warn of events that will come true.

The scientific approach to excessive dreaming is that it upsets the emotional equilibrium, but the Tibetan interpretation in such cases is that the dreamer is being influenced by external forces like *nagas*, *tsan* (brtsan), etc. Religious rituals can then be performed to appease or exorcise, as directed to nullify the effect. The Tibetan interpretation does not make a direct translation of the dreams, instead they are tackled from the point of inner meaning, what is revealed from within the dreams, beyond their obvious meanings. It is something like reading between the lines of a fixed rule. For instance, if you dream of climbing a hill, it does not mean that you will have to climb a hill the next day; it means you are ascending to success — good luck is favouring you.

Some dream symbols and their oral tradition interpretation

I have covered a very little on this as there are number of dream symbols for which there are different interpretations — different from province to province and person to person. I have included only those few for which I have been able to find a compromised interpretation.

Right in the middle of a good night's sleep if you are tortured by a dream of your mother or friend dying or being very sick, don't worry because according to the Tibetan interpretation, instead of your mother or friend dying or

falling sick, it implies that they are very well and can look forward to good days. On the contrary, if you dream of everyone at home merry-making in their best clothes, you can expect some bad news.

Sometimes we can also dream of dead relatives or friends. To see them in nice, new clothes means that the dead person is being reborn in this world, in the human realm. But, if you are seen merry-making with such dead persons, it indicates a misfortune for you — probably a death sign.

Climbing up a hill means your luck¹³ is rising, but climbing down a hill or falling over a cliff means that your luck (Tibetan: *lung-ta*) is on the decline. To counter such decline in one's *lung-ta*, stabilise and even to raise it, a propitious day, according to the person's birthday and from the astrology almanac or a generally auspicious day is chosen. In the morning of that day prayer flags, with emphasis on the colour of one's element, are put up on the usual prayer hill¹⁴ as manifestations of adoration and appeasement to the gods and deities.

But it must be remembered that a single tormenting dream is not sufficient reason to resort to ritualistic aid. It is only after a continuous decline in *lung-ta* and disturbing dreams, and even then only after consulting the medium of an oracle or *mopa* or the divination of an incarnate lama to find out the cause of such dreams that rituals should be done. The oracle will explain the cause and give directions as to how to neutralise the effect.

Dreaming of raw meat is ominous: something bad will definitely happen to you. Dreaming of your tooth coming off signifies that you will be sick soon.

Dreams of being chased by dogs, cats or monkeys may

13. *Lung-ta* or (rlung-rta): Actually 'luck' is not the exact meaning of the Tibetan word *lung-ta* (Literally: wind-horse, an auspicious symbol of a horse bearing a flaming wish-fulfilling gem), but since luck is the only nearest English equivalent, it has been used in the preceding paragraphs and, henceforth, the Tibetan word itself will be used.

14. Every Tibetan community earmarks the nearest hill/hillock as the prayer hill, duly sanctified with *pujas* performed by lamas.

also be experienced. To encounter such animals in the dream signifies an evil omen for that person. It is said that the person is being influenced by *tsan* (Tibetan: *btsan*) when he dreams of dogs. To dream of monkey means that the person is being influenced or affected by curses from the local protective deity. It is called *yul-lha*, and explained before under superstition. Most Tibetans appease this deity every month with offerings and prayers to ensure good health, good harvest and prosperity.

The snake is also one of the many dream symbols. If a man dreams of snakes it is said that *nagas* are placing their spells upon him. This interpretation is applicable to woman also, but generally it is said that she is becoming pregnant when she dreams of snakes or frogs. Similarly, to dream of finding coral or turquoise means that a wandering consciousness¹⁵ is entering her and she will become pregnant. To appease the *nagas*, offerings should be made (detailed method of appeasing *nagas* has been explained already).

Besides many others, meat, monkey and frogs as dream symbols seem to be unique to the Tibetans. Many people, especially in the west where everything is advanced and mechanised and the people very materialistic, apparently do not dream of such symbols. This is because of the cultural gap. Symbolical differences are not a crucial factor because they can always be interpreted in a general way. For example, a poor man may dream of simply walking up a hill, a poor farmer may dream of climbing up the hill in his bullock-cart or on his horse while a rich man may dream of climbing up in his car. The crux is whether he is climbing up or down; the mode is not important.

Dream Interpretation according to Medical Text

This is an extract from the *Ambrosia Heart Tantra: The Secret Oral Teaching on the Eight Branches of the Science*

15. It is a Tibetan Buddhist belief that a union of a man and woman does not ipso facto bring forth an offspring; it is their union plus the entering of that consciousness that creates pregnancy. This is based on the Buddhist concept of the cycle of rebirth.

of Healing (Tibetan: *bDud-rtsi snying-po yan-lag brgyad-pa gsang-ba man-ngag-gi rgyud*). Dream interpretation comes under Chapter VII as one part of the three Signs of Death. Though in the past physicians employed dream interpretations to come to a part of the conclusion in determining the conditions of his patient, whether he will get better or worse, this practice is more or less ignored nowadays, with more usage of practical methods.

Signs that one has been seized by the Lord of Death and, thus, is soon to die, are dreaming that one is riding a cat, monkey, tiger, fox or a corpse. Dreams of riding naked to the south upon a buffalo, a horse, pig, donkey or a camel indicate death. Omens that one has come under the power of the Lord of Death are dreaming of a willow tree with a bird's nest (on top) growing from the crown of one's head, a palyra tree or a thorny tree growing from one's lotuses emerging from one's heart, falling off a cliff, sleeping in a cemetery, one's head breaking, being surrounded by crows, spirits of beasts that eat their young (e.g. scorpions), the skin falling from one's limbs, entering the womb of one's mother, being carried along by a river, being stuck in a swamp, being swallowed by a fish, receiving iron or gold, losing in trade or quarrel, wishing to dance, taking a bride, being naked, having one's hair and bear shaved, drinking alcohol with deceased acquaintances or being dragged by them, wearing red clothes and garlands, and dancing with deceased acquaintances. Such dreams are not good, and a patient who has incessant dreams of such symbols due to an ailment blocking the passage through which consciousness moves (i.e. the vital channel) will die. But a healthy person will not necessarily die as a result of frequent dreams of such symbol for this may be averted through worship.

The six kinds of dreams:

1. Seeing,
2. Hearing,
3. Experiencing something that was witnessed during waking hours,

4. Praying for some desired object,
5. Fulfilling one's desire, and
6. Those arising from ailments.

Dreams in the early part of the night may arise due to an obstruction of the vital channel by mixing phlegm as it begins to digest food. In the middle of the night this channel may be blocked by the digestive bile, and late at night it may be obstructed by the fire-accompanying wind. Thus dreams at these times do not generally produce effect.

If a dream is seen and clearly remembered upon waking up, assuming that one awakens shortly after the dream has occurred, it does produce results. At this time, if one dreams of meeting and worshipping a deity, or seeing a great buffalo, holy or famous men, a flame burning, an overflowing lake, blood and filth smeared on one's body, wearing white clothes, raising a banner or an umbrella, receiving fruit, climbing up a mountain, a fine house or a fruit-laden tree, riding a lion, elephant, a horse or cow, crossing a river or ocean, going towards the northeast, escaping from misery (e.g. from a prison or a dark room), defeating one's enemies or being praised by a deity or one's parents, one will have long, illness-free life and gain wealth.

* * *

Zim-lam Tag-pa

This means dream interpretation, and this faculty is reserved only for the high incarnate monks and Doctors of Divinity (Geshe). If you want to find out the cause of certain illness or the like, you give one piece of clothing (a shirt or a vest, but not pant or socks — something that you wear in the lower portion of your body for these are considered unclean) to the lama. He will put it under his pillow when he goes to sleep and meditate and invite a dream to come to him. He will have a dream-vision illustrating the cause of the sickness. It may take one day, three days or even five days for the dream-vision to come, depending on the powers of the one causing the illness. In this the lama

will only dream of the cause of the illness and will not dream the methods to ward it off.

* * *

Dream interpretations according to written sources:

According to Longdol Lama's *sung-bum*, before you get down to interpreting dreams you must know which part of the night it was when you had the dream. Was it at dusk, mid-night or dawn that you had the dream? A night is divided into three parts:

1. Dusk.
2. Mid-night.
3. Dawn.

DUSK: Dreams during dusk are only reflections/rewinding of events that impressed the mind during the day time. It could also be events of the past three days. Some dreams may also be the result of one's deeds in the previous lives, but this cannot be confirmed positively.

MID-NIGHT: Whatever a man encounters at mid-night in his dream is because of the influence of ghosts, spirits, demi-gods and other sub-human beings. There are no specific interpretations and the symbols will bring or bear no consequences.

DAWN: Dreams at dawn and just before you wake up in the morning are sure prophecies of events that will come to the dreamer in the future. Only dreams during this period call for interpretation.

Extracted from Longdol Lama's *sung-bum*, the following are possible dream symbols and their interpretations:

- | | |
|---|------------------------------------|
| Ascending a hill or mountain: | — you will gain success. |
| A very clear and sunny day: | — prosperity will come to you. |
| A very good harvest; finding or giving food or clothes: | — you will definitely gain wealth. |

- Wearing nice clothes: — you will receive praises and gain respect.
- Carrying weapon in your hand: — you will subdue your enemy.
- Wearing ornaments: — you will gain fame.
- Crossing a river safely: — this is a very good sign — all your wishes will be fulfilled.
- Playing musical instrument; beating drums and blowing on conch-shells: — these are sure sign of coming fame.
- Riding uphill on a lion, tiger or dragon: — you will gain honour.
- Finding riches; receiving praise or being enthroned; — you will gain wealth and social fame.
- Drinking tasty water or nectar: — you will have a very long and prosperous life.
- Eating delicious food; hearing good news; meeting close friends or encountering good things. And, after waking up if you feel happy about the dream: — you will definitely be rewarded with good fruits of life — a prosperous and illness-free long life.
- While meditating, if you dream of constantly falling over cliff; climbing a very steep hill; walking on a road with lots of barriers or with sorrowful and frightful sights: — these are sign of obstacles lying in your path to enlightenment. This is mentioned in the Buddha's *Sutra*.

- Passing through a hailstorm, on a muddy path or through dirty area; wearing dirty clothes getting filth on your body: — you will get *dip* (unclean halo) and find dirty things.
- Seeing abundant gold sand; riding naked on a saddleless horse or donkey: — you will be able to accomplish your plans.
- Crying with a collarless shirt or *chupa*¹⁶; holding or looking at *melong*¹⁷ or holidaying without a hat: — you will experience sorrow.
- Dressing for a battle: — you will be free of sickness and no curse will befall you.
- Wearing a nice hat: — you will be knighted or appointed to be a leader.
- A nice house: — you have auspicious events waiting for you in the offing.
- Broken bow and arrow: — human curses will befall you.

16. *Chupa*: a Tibetan (over-coat-like) gown worn by both sexes though different in style.

17. *Melong*: a magic mirror used in divination. For more references on this, please see Michael Loewe and Garmen Blacker, *Divination and Oracles*, pp. 8-9 and plate following page 20.

Being wounded by weapon;
running away from battle
field; flood; huge fire;
thunder; hail and going
in a trench or drainage
system:

— ominous sign of other
people's curses befalling
you.

Your body being tied;
travelling under-ground;
being imprisoned; being
cut into pieces:

— evil spirits have
overpowered you.

Riding naked on a donkey
facing south, and red
flowers:

— a disastrous fate will
befall you soon. This
is an early sign that a
big and inevitable
disaster that you are
destined to suffer will
take place soon.

Lone man dressed in white;
white birds flying, and a
landscape of a solitary
mountain:

— local deities will affect
you.

Demolished old temples;
fox, and small children:

— these are effects of
sub-human beings.

Many snakes, frogs and
other similar animals;
girls and green scenery:

— influence of the *nagas*
— curse will come.

Cliff, trees and armed
horseman:

— influence of ghostly
beings (*btsan*).

Many dusty-faced children;
precipitous cliff:

— influence of *thep-rang*
(tiny fairy-tale
creature).

Monk, donkey, cat, monkey
and dog:

— influence of king.

And if these animals give you (in the dream) food, talk nicely and show amiable faces:

— this is an auspicious sign.

But if they show frightening and angry faces:

— this is an ominous sign.

And, if you have a happy feeling after this dream:

— this is a good sign and some good luck might come your way. But it is a bad sign if you have a frightened feeling — you are being influenced by demons.

Repeated occurrence of such dreams:

— someone is cursing you or the deities are affecting you.

Finding holy books; flying in the air; climbing the *jonpal* tree (the divine tree); debating:

— you will gain wisdom.

Lovely and peaceful vegetation; blossoming flowers; beating cymbals; possessing the precious sword (*rinchen raldi*); dressed beautifully; being joyful:

— signifies that all your pious deeds shall bear fruit.

Unfamiliar scenery and nice houses; charming boys and girls giving you food and drink made out of flower:

— this signifies that your path to education will be fruitful and shower you with abundant wisdom.

**Building ships or bridges;
finding a vase or
discarded things; sun
or moon shining and
clearing darkness:**

— some helpful friends
will come to you and
you will overcome an
enemy or an evil thing.

**Being drenched in rain
and sudden flood:**

— people will come to
give you things —
signifies fruit bearing
of your deeds.

Dreams signifying death:

**Black woman taking out
your intestines; climbing
a hill of dust (from
where you cannot
escape); riding south
on a camel, east on a
donkey and north on a
monkey; wearing red
clothes; plucking red
flowers; walking in vast
empty plain; tying one's
forehead:**

— these signify death.

Also, drinking and merry-making with a dead person
signify death.

Dream symbols and their interpretations according to Karma Chakme's 'The Mirror of Omens'.

**Finding turquoise; building
stupas; wearing a new
hat; singing on top of
a hill; blowing on a
conch-shell; riding a
thoroughbred horse; sun
shining:**

— these are all auspicious
signs.

- Dreaming of finding coral; cutting wood; wearing shoes; descending at dusk; being chased by wild animals, and digging the ground: — these are ominous signs. (See Oral Tradition for difference in the interpretation on coral, etc.)
- Dreaming of gold or silver: — these are prophetic signs that you will be able to accomplish something you have to undertake.
- Dreaming of landslide and hail-storm: — you will receive many compliments that it might have adverse effect causing *mi-kha*, and you might get sick.
- White woollen cloth or scarf: — dreams of such articles reveal that the right time has approached for you to travel on the journey that you have been contemplating of.
- Dreams of garlic, onion and other black seeds: — these mean that other people are backbiting you.
- Dreaming of sheep, goat and deer: — these mean that your soul is roaming out of your body. As soon as you wake up you must utter the six sacred syllables: *OM MANI PADME HUM*.

Dreaming of fox or wolf:

— these mean an enemy of yours is cursing you, and you must avert it.

Dreaming of being naked; travelling to or in an unknown place; plucking red flowers; riding south on a donkey; feasting and dancing with deceased person; tree growing out of your body; being chased by black figures; being cut into pieces; climbing a sand hill:

— these are all ominous signs of approaching death.

* * *

General signs of death (Not dream symbols):

1. Not being able to smell burning incense and fantisizing unknown places.
2. Many flies being attracted to your body and carnivorous birds hovering over you.
3. No sound when you try to click your finger nails.
4. Sudden arrival of lice on your body or sudden disappearance of lice from your body.
5. Your tongue stops functioning properly right in the middle of talking.
6. Sudden reversal in a person's character.
7. Besides being due to sickness, if a person bleeds three *de* (a quantitative measurement in Tibet, like a bushel) full of blood from the nose, he will die after three years.
8. If a sick person does not become well on being given reasonable and direct medical treatment but recuperates on being given the reverse or unsuitable treatment, it is a sign of death.
9. Sneezing while excreting: — will die after a month.

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| 10. Sudden loss of sense of hearing: | — will die after three months. |
| 11. No blood under the finger nails: | — will die after six months. |
| 12. If a man discharges blood and a woman discharges sperm: | — he or she will die after a month. |
| 13. Sneezing during sexual intercourse: | — will die after a month. |
| 14. Very strong sour smell coming out of your body: | — will die after six months. |
| 15. Not being able to taste anything: | — will die after five days. |
| 16. Not being able to smell: | — will die after three days. |
| 17. Very cold, strong odour emitted from the body: | — will die after one day. |
| 18. Limbs losing heat: | — will die after two days. |
| 19. Shrinking nose-tip: | — will die after seven days. |
| 20. If your breath is cold when you exhale and warm when you inhale: | — will die after ten days. |
| 21. Dry teeth: | — will die after six months. |
| 22. Not being able to see one's tongue: | will die after eight months. |
| 23. Sweating nose-tip: | — will die after four months. |
| 24. A black mark in the centre of the tongue: | — will die after two days. |
| 25. Sudden sinking-in of the eye-balls: | — will die after four days. |

26. Seeing the moon in the day time and the sun at night; shrinking nose with dry snort on the nose; shadowless in the sun; no steam from the body and not being able to smell a burning lamp:

— Signifies death very soon.

27. Feeling very lonely and sad in your present house and environment, and you feel like going away:

— these are general signs of death based on the mind.

* * *

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