

Theirs is the true lost horizon.

The Tibetan homeland is still so remote, unmapped, unsurveyed, and unexplored that in 1979 less is known about its great Chang Tang plateau and Himalayan-high mountain ranges than is known about the craters of the moon.

Tibet remains a mystery.

It is now 29 years since Mao Tse-tung's armies invaded what had almost always been an independent sovereign country and declared it an autonomous area within the People's Republic of China. It is 20 years since rebellion broke out in Lhasa and the Dalai Lama, Tibet's spiritual and temporal leader, fled to India. Yet the southward flow of refugees has never completely stopped. Today there are more than 100,000 uprooted Tibetans in India, Nepal, Sikkim, and Bhutan; at universities in India, Europe, and the United States, Buddhist scholars from Lhasa attempt to preserve Tibetan Lamaism, which is essentially Indian Mahayana Buddhism of the seventh to twelfth centuries.

Nobody knows exactly how many Tibetans there are. Tenzin Gyatso, the 44-year-old fourteenth Dalai Lama now living in exile at Dharmasala in northern India, estimates there are 6 million in Tibet itself. A Chinese census in 1963 put the number at 1.2 million. Another four million or so people of Tibetan origin and culture populate the Himalayan border regions.

Whatever their number, most Tibetans are nomadic shepherds who live in yak-hair tents and move about much of the year in search of grass for their large herds of yaks, sheep, goats, and horses. Aside from Lhasa (population 50,000) and some town-like monasteries, before the Chinese occupation almost no human habitations existed; the Tibetan herdsman's life, like that of the Arab Bedouin, revolves around his livestock, their wool for clothing and shelter and their meat and milk for food.

The Tibetans are racially and culturally close to the Mongols of Genghis Khan's historic hordes. Their beliefs, although transfigured by Indian Buddhism and the secular refinements of the Chinese, still have strong undertones of Mongol shamanism with its "possessed" oracles, amulets, and magic charms. Yet except for the Khampa warriors of eastern Tibet, who can be excitable and brutal, most Tibetans are remarkably cheerful, calm, humorous, intelligent, and kindly. Paradoxically, I find them the least "foreign" of all Asians.

Their harsh land has made them very hardy. Mostly occupying a high plateau 600 by 800 miles between the Himalayas and Kunlun Mountains at altitudes of 12,000 feet and more, they graze their yak and sheep herds on barren, treeless, windswept wastes broken by thousands of often saline lakes (one, Nam Tso, covers 950 square miles), snow-covered mountain ranges soaring above 20,000 feet, and great

jutting rocks of shale, schist, and limestone. Tibet is the source of all the great rivers of Asia: the Sutlej and Indus, the Ganges and Brahmaputra, the Salween, Yangtze, and Mekong. Violent gales, dust storms, and icy winds blow almost every day.

Until the Chinese occupation the wheel, considered sacred, was never used: horses, camels, yaks, sheep, and men provided the only transport over rugged tracks and precarious bridges spanning deep narrow gorges. Even the way of death was harsh, the bodies being cut up and fed to buzzards (a custom still practiced among most Tibetan refugees).

One man in four was a Buddhist lama. Some of the monasteries were vast and the Dalai Lama's Potala Palace in Lhasa is claimed by most Tibetans to number 10,000 rooms. While the ecclesiastical dignitaries were mostly high-born nobles, the Dalai Lama himself was usually a poor herdsman's child, chosen through oracular revelation, born at the moment of his predecessor's death, and generally believed to be his reincarnation.

In 1973 the present Dalai Lama shocked his people by warning that while the Dalai Lama in the past helped unify the Tibetan people, he may have outlived his usefulness. "I might be the last Dalai Lama," he had also warned in 1972. "It is not important. What is important is that Tibet should benefit." During a visit to Europe in fall 1973 when he met the Pope, the Dalai Lama spoke of

his desire to return to Tibet and not spend his days "like an exiled European king surrounded by his court." He even voiced a willingness to accept the role of a purely religious leader.

During Mao Tse-tung's lifetime Tibet remained virtually cut off from the outside world, a garrison state with 300,000 Chinese troops. But the Tibetans are a stubborn people and the threat of insurrection in event of seriously worsening relations with Russia has never been lost on Peking. No one today expects traditional Tibet to ever be restored. The Dalai Lama himself has stressed that resistance to change in the late twentieth century is futile; he concedes the Chinese have brought many needed reforms. But, as he has observed, "Great unexpected changes have occurred in the world; it is my hope the Chinese leaders will review the new realities."

Apparently this has been happening. The most dramatic indication was when the Panchen Lama, the second most revered traditional spiritual leader in Tibet, showed up for the Fifth Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in Peking's Great Hall of the People in late February 1978. It was the Panchen Lama's first public appearance since China's Great

Cultural Revolution and many Tibetans had assumed he was dead. In 1964 he was stripped of his post as chairman of the election committee for the Tibetan region and charged with "opposing the people, the fatherland and socialism." Since then he had been variously reported as being in a labor camp or "studying" Maoism in Peking.

Like the Dalai Lama, the Panchen Lama is regarded as a reincarnation of Buddha. He originally collaborated with the Chinese after their conquest of Tibet in 1950. His crime in 1964, according to Tibetan lamas who escaped to India, was failing to denounce the Dalai Lama and calling for "a halt to the oppression and religious persecution" of Tibetans.

Many ordinary Tibetans tend to dismiss the Panchen Lama as a Chinese. As the story goes, he was born in 1937 in China's Sinkiang province; as a boy named Kum-bu-tze-den he was discovered at age six at play in his father's peasant hut by pilgrims searching for the reincarnated spirit of the previous Panchen Lama. The child was said to have selected his predecessor's clothes and spectacles from a pile of garments and to have cried, "Lama!" Many Tibetans contested the choice, asserting that Chinese

Nationalist pressure was involved; he grew up under the protection of Chiang Kai-shek's soldiers.

In 1944, still never having set foot in Tibet, he was enthroned as the Panchen Lama. In 1949 Radio Peking announced that the Panchen Lama, then 12 years old, had "appealed" to Mao Tse-tung to "liberate Tibet." He met the Dalai Lama for the first time in 1952, repairing a breach that dated from the time of their predecessors; they visited Peking together in 1954 and, each carrying a movie camera, toured India together in 1956. The Panchen Lama did not join in the Lhasa rebellion that led to the Dalai Lama's flight into exile in 1959. Instead he came to be treated as one of China's officials. Then, in 1964, the Chinese military commander in Tibet began attacking unnamed "schemers" who plotted "the restoration of the integration of politics and religion." It soon became evident the target was the Panchen Lama himself.

The rehabilitation of the Panchen Lama after 14 years has generally been interpreted as a conciliatory gesture toward Tibetans by China's post-Mao leadership. The Dalai Lama himself suggested in March 1978 that China may reinstall the Panchen Lama as its figurehead in Lhasa, in order to make a more convincing case, especially to Tibetans in exile, that conditions are improving in Tibet and that it enjoys relative autonomy. He noted Deputy Prime Minister Teng Hsiao-ping's reputation as a pragmatist.

Teng himself, in a visit to Kathmandu in February 1978, indicated China was in no hurry to open Tibet to the outside world. Tibet's mountainous terrain and high altitude complicated the development of tourism and trade, he told the Nepalese, who had just opened the first foreign consulate in Lhasa. "I had wanted to stop at Lhasa on the way here," Teng said, "but my colleagues did not allow me. Lhasa is almost 4,000 meters above sea level and anyone who

*Migrant peasants — Khampa tribals on Tibetan-Nepal border.*



wants to go to Tibet must get a medical checkup."

Few of the trickle of foreigners so far allowed into Tibet have seen much more than Lhasa. And many reports were evidently colored by the desire to keep on the good side of the authorities in Peking. Author Han Suyin (*Love is a Many-Splendored Thing*) went in 1975 and came back full of praise for the Chinese role there. Left-wing British journalist Felix Greene made a propagandistic film, "Tibet—Roof of the World," shown on BBC in February 1978. A more accurate observer was Washington columnist David Broder who accompanied James Schlesinger there the same year, and said "about half of our three-day visit was occupied with propaganda sessions on the evils of the old regime and demonstrations of the achievements of the new."

Perhaps the best look at Lhasa for many Tibetan refugees was a 45-minute documentary film made during the visit of King Birendra of Nepal in 1976. The visit, at least for Tibetans, was dampened by Nepal's rather ruthless disarmament of Khampa guerrillas in Mustang in advance of the journey. All Khampas, guerrillas or not, were forced to evacuate this western border region of Nepal and hundreds were jailed. Eight Khampa leaders are still being held in a Kathmandu prison awaiting trial for "illegal possession of arms." One shocking aspect of this affair is that no one has mentioned that the arms were supplied by the CIA, presumably with the knowledge of the governments of India and Nepal.

Nor is Nepal the only government guilty of treating the Tibetans shabbily in the rush to have good relations with post-Mao China. In October 1977, after the Dalai Lama's New York representative asked the State Department whether a visit by the exiled Tibetan leader would be welcome, he was informed it "would be inconvenient at this time." When a Chicago couple, Ted and Deborah Miller, wrote a letter of protest, Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs Hodding Carter III

replied that since the Dalai Lama had not applied for a visa, the question of denying him one did not arise. Asked why Tibet seemed excluded from President Carter's human rights policy, the State Department spokesman replied:

*The President has a strong commitment to human rights and its important role in our foreign policy. I may add that our views on human rights reflect the fundamental values of the American people and a desire to see these rights extended to all peoples.*

The Dalai Lama eventually did apply for a visa and toured the United States in fall 1979.

The State Department has also set down a new requirement for Tibetan exiles when they become U.S. citizens and want passports. Now they have to list "China" as their place of birth. "Tibet," though it was not invaded by China until 1949 and not completely occupied until 1959, is no longer acceptable. This official American evasiveness and bureaucratic harassment is only a step above a recent demand by Bhutan's government that all its Tibetan residents become Bhutanese citizens and sever their links with the Dalai Lama or continue to endure the beatings, arrests, and robbery Tibetan refugees increasingly suffer at the hands of Indian and Nepalese border guards. Hodding Carter might do better to explain just where those jailed Khampa guerrillas in Kathmandu got their "illegal arms" in the first place. (They were parachuted down in boxes from American Air Force cargo planes in 1960-61 over the Mustang region.)

The Dalai Lama himself has warned his people, "We cannot expect New Delhi or Moscow or Washington to change their policies for our sake. But that does not mean that we should remain inactive. We should be ever vigilant, constantly observing the changes in the international situation and be prepared for all eventualities. Hard work, unity and perseverance are

our only hope. Do not expect miracles. And do not expect me to make prophecies because I cannot."

In March 1978 he took note of post-Mao China's campaign to present its occupation of Tibet in a better light:

*Recently the Chinese have intensified their propaganda about the "unprecedented happiness in Tibet today" through radio broadcasts and pictorial magazines. It is very difficult for the few selected foreign visitors, who are taken on guided tours for a few days and have to listen to explanations through interpreters carefully chosen by the Chinese, to know and tell us the actual welfare and conditions of the Tibetan people. It is obvious to impartial observers that these reports which are artificial, biased, one-sided and unreliable will not be accepted by people who are able to see both sides of the picture.*

*If the six million Tibetans in Tibet are really happy and prosperous as never before there is no reason for us to argue otherwise. If the Tibetans are really happy the Chinese should allow every interested foreigner to visit Tibet without restricting their movements or meetings with the Tibetan people. This would enable the visitors to really know the true conditions of Tibet. Furthermore, the Chinese should allow the Tibetans in Tibet to visit their parents and relatives in exile. These Tibetans can then study the conditions of those of us in exile living in free countries. Similar opportunities should be given to the Tibetans in exile. Under such an arrangement we can be confident of knowing the true situation inside Tibet. This is morally right and practicable. Instead of doing this why are the Chinese indulging only in propaganda to woo the Tibetans in exile to return?<sup>1</sup>*

Undeniably the first few years of China's occupation in Tibet were extremely brutal. In 1960 the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) on behalf of the United Nations published a lengthy report

in which it found the Communist Chinese regime guilty of genocide, a deliberate attempt to exterminate the Tibetan people. The ICJ, meeting in Geneva, reported the Chinese violation of human rights in Tibet included a denial of:

*the right of life, liberty and security of person by acts of murder, rape and arbitrary imprisonment; torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment inflicted on Tibetans on a large scale. . . . The Tibetans were not allowed to participate in the cultural life of their own community, a culture which the Chinese have set out to destroy.*<sup>2</sup>

Undeniably also, some 100,000 Tibetans, often braving 16,000-foot passes in Winter, have sought refuge in India, Bhutan, and Nepal, mostly arriving penniless and held together only by loyalty to the Dalai Lama—and a strong desire to preserve their Tibetan Buddhism and culture.

Will this culture survive? History provides plenty of examples of peoples with distinctive cultures who, after long years of alien domination, managed to stage astonishing comebacks: the Greeks survived the Ottomans, the Jews the Diaspora, the Persians the Arabs, and so on.

There are good reasons for thinking it will. First, there is the presence of the Dalai Lama himself (still relatively young in his early 40s) and what is left of his government and state institutions at Dharmasala. Second, many rehabilitation schemes in India and Nepal over the past 20 years have succeeded: ancient monasteries have been refounded; Tibetan schools are filled; traditional handicrafts, especially the wonderful pure wool rugs, are being produced for ready markets abroad, and a vigorous community life has been re-established in dozens of settlements.

Third, most of the frontier people of the Himalayas, such as the Sherpas, possess a way of life and a religion very close to those of the Tibetans.

*Ngodup (left) and Chhodak. Anna Purna in background.*

The opening of Nepal to foreign scholars and scientists, not to speak of the wholesale invasion of mountaineers, trekkers, and tourists, has revealed many little-known Tibetan-like peoples who until the past decade have lived in isolated mountain valleys with little or no outside contact.

Finally, the major adversary of traditional cultures today is technology, not ideology or military force. And Tibet's harsh climate and terrain, supporting as it does nomads and livestock, a primitive agriculture, and little else, itself dictates that most of the inhabitants must follow something akin to Tibetan traditional culture. The Chinese have long found it necessary to garrison Tibet with troops from similar mountain regions.

The culture of Tibet is remarkably resilient. Take the case of Ngodup Tsering, now 25, who fled into Nepal with his family when he was only 7 years old. I first got to know Ngodup in October 1973, when he served as my guide on a 140-mile, 14-day trek along Nepal's most popular Pokhara-Jomosom trail, and since then at his village of Tashi Pakhiel (population 664), just off the trail seven miles north of Pokhara. Originally a refugee camp, Tashi

Pakhiel is now a permanent-looking settlement of stone houses, a rug-weaving cooperative (the superior quality raw wool used is imported from China), school, shops, a cooperative-run inn, and a monastery festooned with the usual Tibetan prayer flags. Though a steady flow of foreign trekkers passes Tashi Pakhiel every day and Ngodup sometimes hires out as a guide, and though he had not been in Tibet for 18 years, Ngodup's Tibetan culture seems to survive almost completely intact.<sup>3</sup>

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As a small boy, clad in a ragged sheepskin against temperatures that rose above 70° Fahrenheit by day and fell below freezing at night, Ngodup spent his days running up and down the dunes with his father's sheep and yak, keeping a constant watch against roaming packs of wolves or a giant hawk which could swoop down and carry off a baby lamb in its claws. These marauders, the extremes of heat and cold in a single day, the seldom-ending winds, and the rarified, breath-catching air were not the only hazards. In Zungru, the western Tibetan "country" where Ngodup lived (by air it is only 150 miles directly north of Kathmandu, but across the high Himalayas), there were also Khampa bandits who



sometimes rode in on horseback to demand food, money, clothes, rifles, and knives. This was tolerable as the fast-moving Khampas had little interest in the livestock that was the family's real wealth; they owned about 200 yak, 700 *lepcha* sheep and 25 horses, about average for a nomad family in Zungru.

A tiny nomad country, Zungru was unusual in that it was subject not to the Tibetan government but directly to the Dalai Lama who sent officials periodically to collect cattle, butter, and cheese. There was a lamasery, Dsalung, and a borax mine. Sometimes the family roamed as far as Bangba Chugdso, a large country of grasslands and snow mountains, where the men snared muskdeer with loops. Once Ngodup visited his grandmother's country of Yangbachen, where there were juniper forests; the dry wood was taken to Lhasa.

One day, when Ngodup was seven, the Khampas came, this time not to plunder but to warn there had been an uprising in Lhasa. The Dalai Lama had fled to India and Chinese soldiers were moving into Bangba Chugdso. "You must run as fast as you can," the Khampas' leader told them. "The big people, the rich people and the lamas are being robbed and killed so you must run."



During the night many of Ngodup's neighbors fled south toward the Tsangpo River. Ngodup's father and one brother went also but his grandmother was too old and frail to travel and the rest of the family stayed behind with her, tending the yaks and sheep. One day Chinese soldiers came to their encampment and asked about Ngodup's father. They told his mother not to try and join him, saying, "There is no reason to leave. We have come to bring you a new life. So why should you want to run?" In the days that followed the family heard alarming reports of lamas being sent into forced labor, of public executions and of whole families being shipped off to China. When Ngodup's father returned for them one night, they were ready to go.

They fled with only a single horse for the grandmother to ride; one of Ngodup's two brothers and a sister followed behind with the rest of the horses and the herd of sheep and yaks. They never caught up. Years went by before the family learned they had been intercepted by Chinese soldiers and forced to return to Zungru. Today both are married and live the old nomadic life.

Ngodup, his parents, grandmother, and older brother (who eventually went on to India to join its army) managed to reach the Nepalese border town of Dolpo but without money. They sold the horse for 200 rupees, one-tenth of its worth, but considered themselves lucky — others were selling horses and livestock for pieces of bread.

For the next three years Ngodup and his family became beggars, wandering up and down the frontier towns. In the age-old beggar's cry of Tibet, "*Biccha magne! Biccha magne!*" they went from one house to another, their sheepskin garments covered with patches, filthy, their hair long and unkempt as was expected of hungry derelicts. Finally they reached a large refugee camp at Dorpatan, a week's journey from Dolpo. They were turned away

*The peasant as refugee — Tibetan in Nepal.*

but given enough food to reach the western Nepal town of Pokhara.

Here a United Nations relief official settled them at Tashi Pakhiel, then only an improvised camp of grass huts. Soon permanent stone houses were built and, at the age of 11, Ngodup entered school.

Ngodup remembers, "I couldn't understand the teacher for she spoke the Tibetan language. It was my mother tongue but I only knew the dialect of Zungru. But after six months or so I could understand and learned to read and write." After five years, Ngodup finished first in his class and was sent to Kathmandu for three years' medical training to enable him to set up a dispensary in Tashi Pakhiel. His final examination took the form of treating 97 patients in a single day. Five years ago, with the help of a letter from the Dalai Lama, Ngodup was admitted for higher studies in Kathmandu; he hoped to become a doctor. But he lacked enough money to continue; today he makes what he can selling Tibetan artifacts to tourists, guiding for foreign trekkers in the spring and fall trekking seasons, and in between weaves rugs at the village cooperative, where average monthly earnings are \$40 (not bad, as most families have several members working, including almost all Tashi Pakhiel's women).

Although Ngodup has a happy, easy-going disposition and enjoys life, taking each day as it comes, like most of his fellow villagers he wants sometime to return to Tibet and resume the nomadic life in Zungru. "I feel I want to go," he says. (By jet, Zungru lies only one hour north of Kathmandu; to go by foot, however, means a circuitous route via Dolpo on the western Nepalese border, requiring at least four weeks. Nomads from Zungru do trade at Dolpo twice a year and pass on messages from Ngodup's brother and sister on the plateau.) "What can I say?" Ngodup goes on. "Once we have freedom we won't stay in Nepal even though we have good houses and everything and a pleasant life. We will follow His

Holiness Dalai Lama and go where he goes. Tibet is our motherland, where we were born." Ngodup gropes for the right words. "The life was free," he says.

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If culture is defined as a lifestyle, a design for living, a ready-made set of solutions to problems so that individuals in each new generation do not have to start from scratch, then Ngodup's culture is remarkable in the way it has adapted to and essentially survived a non-nomad environment. Most peasants I have studied have seen their cultures radically transformed in their lifetimes, so that in almost every village in the world we find a substantial generation gap. One difference among the Tibetan refugees is their consciousness that the Chinese seek to change their culture radically—if not to destroy it—and their determination, with considerable help from Western scholars and academic institutions (especially the British, Canadians, and Swiss), to preserve much of that culture intact. Accordingly, Ngodup's beliefs do not vary significantly from those of his 72-year-old ex-nomad father nor, one can presume, his father's present beliefs from those of 50 years ago when he was Ngodup's

age and had almost no contact with the outside world.

This is what makes the Tibetans so exceptional: at a time traditional cultures are breaking down everywhere, they seem, in the face of tremendous odds (the Chinese cultural revolution in the homeland, the alien environment of the Himalayan foothills, the occupation of rug weaving instead of herding, the frequent contact with international tourists and mountaineers), to be keeping to their old ways and views of life better than most peasants (the term, peasants, being used here in the anthropological sense, to connote rural people who are distinct from primitive tribals).

At the heart of this culture is, of course, religion. Though we tend to think of Tibet as "the land of the lamas," far from being an ancient home of early Buddhist doctrine, Tibet did not receive the faith until 1,200 years after Guatama's death (543 B.C.). In 642 A.D., about the time Islam was rising in Arabia, a Tibetan king, Songdsengombo, prompted by his two wives, one Nepalese and one Chinese, sent a mission to India in search of Buddhist scriptures. Until then Tibet, a hermit kingdom, was home to an animist religion, Black Bon

(pronounced *beu* as in *monsieur*), characterized by devil-dancing and human sacrifices. King Songdsengombo was converted to Buddhism, and made it the official religion. Still, Bon demonolatrny remained the religion of most Tibetans until the eighth century, and is still a minority religion in Tibet; some of the Tibetans in Tashi Pakhiel remain its adherents.

Everyone knows the familiar story of how the Nepalese prince, Siddharta Gautama, renounced his wife, child, and estate at the age of 29 and took to the road as an ascetic, hoping he might find the causes of human misery and their cure. In the Ascetic Brahmanism then dominant in India, salvation came in austerity and self-mortification, but after six years Siddharta found they brought him no permanent satisfaction and he renounced them forever. Instead, seated one day under his famous fig tree, the inspiration came to him that all human misery was due to desire and its solution lay in ceasing to desire. When Siddharta fully grasped this simple principle, he achieved that state of perfect enlightenment called Buddhahood; he had attained Nirvana. The prince, like all southern Asians, then and now, believed in transmigration, that when one dies, the concentrated result of all past thoughts, speech, and action (*karma*), finds its way into another body and starts again on the ever-revolving wheel of life. As Ngodup described the essence of his Buddhist faith to me, Buddha's theory was that (1) existence necessarily involves suffering and sorrow; (2) these are caused by desire—whether for sensual pleasure, prosperity, or for existence itself; (3) one can escape from suffering by ridding oneself of all such desire; and (4) to accomplish this end there is only one way, what Buddha called the "Noble Eightfold Path." These are the famous "Four Noble Truths" of Buddhism.

Once desire is eliminated, you attain that condition of sinless calm called

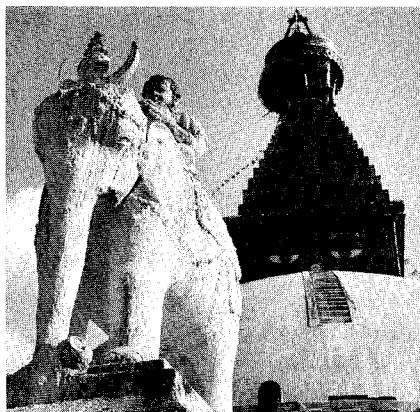
*Carrying goods along the rocky trail near Ngodup's village.*



Nirvana and further, after the dissolution of your body, you achieve that extinction of life called Pari-Nirvana, when there is no more rebirth. You have finally escaped the wheel of life. Unlike the world-accommodation of Confucianism, world-conquest of Islam, the messianic expectations and rigid law of Judaism, or the world-affirmation of twentieth-century Christianity, Buddhism is the religion of world-rejection, which may explain its current appeal to disaffected Western youth.

The world, according to Ngodup's beliefs, is an endless repetition; unless you renounce desire—for pleasure, success, or life itself—your destiny, working itself out through your *karma*, will be to be reborn again and again until the breaking up of the universe. If we accept Buddha as the originator of the Wheel of Life picture, he indicated five different regions in which a man may be reborn: those of gods, man, animals, ghosts, and purgatory, to which was later added a sixth, that of the *titans*.

This diagram of The Wheel of Life is a notable feature of Buddhism; it is portrayed on the walls of the porticos in the lamasery in Tashi Pakhiel. The wheel, as usual, is clenched tightly in the claws of a monstrous animal which Ngodup said symbolized the hideousness of clinging to life. On the panels between the six spokes are painted the realms of possible reincarnation: the Lha (gods) country, where gods and goddesses dwell in gardens and palaces and pluck the fruit of the wish-granting tree; the Lhamayin (titans) country, where the roots and trunk of the tree are located and where envious, warlike people fight in vain against the Lha; man's country, with all its woes of birth, sickness, poverty, struggle, and death; the animals' country, where beasts prey on each other and are hunted by men or forced to bear their burdens; the Yidag (ghosts) country, haunted by the spirits of the miserly and gluttonous, with huge swollen stomachs and spindly



*Bodnatt, the main Tibetan temple in Nepal.*

legs and necks; and Nyalwa (purgatory), where savages with animal heads inflict torture on those condemned by an inexorable judge, the King of Death. Even the lotus-born Lha gods, though they live for thousands of years, at last die miserably to be reborn again, even as animals.

As Guatama's teachings were not recorded for three centuries after his death, they were subject to many interpretations; one system, Mahayana, offered salvation to all and substituted good works for good deeds; Hinayana Buddhists limited salvation to celibate mendicants. But the major innovation was the displacement of Buddha's agnostic idealism with theism; Buddha came to be worshipped as God, an omniscient being, enduring from all eternity. Another Mahayana innovation was the creation of a kind of Heaven, Dewajen, which admitted of no birth or death, change or suffering.

Gradually more and more spells, magic, incantations and ritualism crept into Buddhism and, about the end of the seventh century, Tantrism, a mixture of Shiva-worship and magic was introduced, as were the bloody Hindu goddess, Kali, and all sorts of demons. It was this decadent form of Buddhism that spread to Tibet, where a multitude of demons from the old Black Bon religion further diluted Guatama's original faith. In about the tenth century, the theory of Adi-Buddha, a primordial Buddha, or creator of the universe, was

imported from India, as was the practice of enlisting the help of demoniacal Buddhas and "fiendesses" to attain spiritual powers.

Once Buddhism took root in Tibet, its followers split into four powerful sects; the Sachyaba sect was dominant after its recognition by Genghis Khan, who conquered Tibet around 1200, and 70 years later by his descendant, Kubla Khan ("In Xanadu did Kubla Khan/A stately pleasure-dome decree:/Where Alph, the sacred river, ran/Through caverns measureless to man/Down to a sunless sea."<sup>4</sup>). This lasted until the Mongols were driven out of China by the Mings (1368), who deemed it politic to give the Grand Lamas of the three other sects equal rank. But around 1400 a lama named Tsongkaba reorganized one sect around the name, Geluba, and it soon eclipsed the others. An important reformer, Tsongkaba tightened monastic discipline, insisted on celibacy and frequent prayer, and greatly reduced, but could not annihilate, the Tantrik and magical element in Tibetan lamaism. His nephew was the first Dalai Lama; to insure the stability of succession, the theory of reincarnation of the deceased lama was introduced; when one died a search would begin to find a nomad infant born at the exact same moment.

The other sects survived, as did the Bon religion, though, influenced by Buddhism, it became the White Bon, dropping human sacrifice. The fifth Dalai Lama became Tibet's first priest-king, justifying his divine power as an earthly reflex of the Bodhisat<sup>5</sup> Janresig, whom he also identified with the King of the Dead, the judge who decides the form of each soul's reincarnation. The Panchen Lama was second only to the Dalai, and regarded as even more holy because he was not contaminated by ruling the temporal government.

When the hopelessly dissolute sixth Dalai Lama died in 1703, the Manchu emperor of China seized

suzerainty in Tibet, including control of its foreign policy. He tried to introduce a nominee of his own as the seventh Dalai Lama, but this was resisted and until the present Dalai Lama fled to India in 1959, the Gelupa sect continued to prosper and the Dalai Lama was recognized by all Tibetans as the ruler of Tibet and supreme pontiff of Tibetan Lamaism.

The troubles with China continued. The 13th Dalai Lama, born in 1876, fled to Peking in 1904 when a British expedition entered Tibet. He returned in 1909 but had to seek asylum in Darjeeling at the approach of a Chinese military expedition a year later. Chinese troops were driven out of Tibet during China's 1911 revolution; their present occupation dates from 1949.

Considering Buddhism's history in Tibet, it is amazing how much of the lofty philosophy and ethics taught originally by Guatama have managed to survive. At the same time magic and supernatural deliverance is a universal quality of all village religion, just as philosophy characterizes the religion of urban intellectuals the world over.

Ngodup believes in Guatama Buddha's "Four Noble Truths" and the "Noble Eightfold Path." Every morning when he awakes and just

before going to sleep at night, with the aid of a rosary, he recites *Om mani padme hum* 108 times. In doing so, Ngodup explained to me, he is praying that all creatures, human and animal, be allowed to go to heaven, or Dewajen. The utterance of *om* is to free the Lha, the *ma* the Lhamayin, *ni man*, *pad* animals, *me*, those in purgatory, and *hum*, the unfortunates in hell. He found the notion of praying for one's own self or family very strange (I told him about, "Now I lay me down to sleep..." with the roll call at the end of "God bless..." even, as a child, including my dog, cat, and the corner grocer, Mr. Liederman); Tibetans, when they pray, pray for all humankind.

But aside from Buddhism itself, the Tibetans have all sorts of deeply held folk beliefs. For instance, Ngodup believes that men are descended from Dak-sin-mo, a demoness (hence the Tibetan fondness for raw meat), and a monkey who lived in a cave on Gonbo mountain, southeast of Lhasa. He attributes man's wisdom to the monkey. While Tibetans possess no legend of the Flood, as do all the Middle Eastern religions, there is a tradition that all but the highest mountains were once covered by water. (It is interesting how the Tibetan creation myths

come closer to scientific fact than our own do; there is nothing in Genesis about man's descent from the ape.)

The creation story as told in the old Tibetan sacred texts goes more or less as follows. "In the beginning the universe was void and there existed only the two spirits, Adi-Buddha and his consort, Chijam Jelmo." Adi-Buddha successively created the elements: fire, water, wind, and earth; from these he constructed four worlds: the white and crescent-shaped Lupang, the blue Dsambuling (ours), the red Balanjo, and the green Draminyen, separating each with seven seas and seven mountain ranges, in the center of which he placed a great mountain, Rijel Lhunbo. (The number, seven, seems to have the same fascination for Tibetans as it did for the authors of the Old Testament.)

Time in the Tibetan cosmos is measured by *kalpas* or ages; as men grow more sinful, successive generations have shorter lives (Ngodup said eventually life expectancy will be ten with marriage at five).

In Ngodup's house, as in every home in Tashi Pakhiel, there is a small room kept as a chapel, or the house of offerings. There are three altars, adorned with offerings of butter and *tsamba* (ground cooked barley, the Tibetans' staple), and butter lamps, silver or brass goblets, bowls, flowers, and sticks of incense. A wooden structure behind holds idols and sacred books. Often lamas come in the evening from the village monastery (40 lamas) to recite scriptures, beat drums and clash cymbals (the noise is to remind the chapel of the needs of the family and its prayers).

Mechanical prayer is an obsession with Tibetans. Tashi Pakhiel's houses are adorned with prayer flags (the prayers supposedly sort of waft up when the flags flutter in the wind), and there are cylindrical prayer wheels in the porticos of lamaseries (you revolve them while

*Woman and child in Ngodup's village.*





passing by drawing your hand along their surfaces, without pausing). Tashi Pakhiel has hand wheels (the lamas walk about spinning them like tops), table wheels, water prayer wheels, wind wheels, and fire wheels (turned by the hot air of butter lamps.) This fondness of Tibetans for ritualistic practice is also seen in the special celebration of almost every third or fourth day on the calendar, mostly by burning incense, offering tea, wine, and barley, prayers, and the beating of drums and clashing of cymbals; especially during the seven-day Tibetan New Year celebration the noise of drums, cymbals, and the huge (up to six- or seven-foot long) trumpets never ceases. On the last day each family burns the evils and the bad luck of the past year in a little straw hut put outside the house and the new year starts with a clean slate.

One reason Ngodup wants to return someday to Tibet is to visit a temple in Lhasa, called the Jokang, which houses Tibet's oldest statue of Buddha; like a Muslim and Mecca, no Tibetan dies easily without this pilgrimage which he believes will purify him from sin.

One cultural change in Tashi Pakhiel is that its women no longer bear their children in secret (they used to disappear into the forest or mountains and come back carrying the babies in their gowns). But while the women now give birth at home with a Kathmandu-trained midwife in attendance, most of them insist on lying on the ground, or if they have one, giving delivery in a stable. (Did the same notion exist in Bethlehem?) If a woman has lost several sons in infancy or childhood, she may call her first living son Patru ("piggy") or Chitru ("doggy"), a name it will bear all its life (in Tashi Pakhiel there was a Chitru). (In Egypt, such children were called, "Shahhat," or the word for "beggar.") Ma and Pa are the Tibetan words for one's parents.

Unlike most peasant societies, Tibetans are very tolerant about premarital sexual intercourse and adultery. A girl who has a child

before marriage is regarded as a bit immoral, but she is not harshly condemned, nor is the child ever taunted as a bastard. Both polygamy with sisters and polyandry with brothers still occurs; in Tashi Pakhiel there was no woman who had also married the brother of her husband but Ngodup said his brother now serving in the Indian army has proposed he take a wife for both of them; the brother's reasoning: his wife will always have a man in the house. Also, as Ngodup put it, "We can only afford one house and when you have two wives in the same household, there can be trouble."

Tashi Pakhiel had a sorcerer, a *mo-ba*, but unlike those in most peasant cultures, while he would diagnose an illness (usually telling the sick man a certain goddess, snake, or demon was angry with him), he did not try to cure it.

Tibetans have a strong belief in ghosts, that is the spirits of men who have not gone to the King of Hell but remained behind, haunting the place where they died. This angry ghost is known as a *Dre*; according to Ngodup, I once saw one.

It happened in 1963 in eastern Nepal, along the route of what was later to become a Chinese-built highway from Lhasa to Kathmandu. I was then the Delhi correspondent of the *Washington Star* and wanted to be the first American to travel this route to the Tibetan border and take photographs of the hundreds of Chinese and thousands of Nepalese coolies working on the highway (against the Himalayan background, it was a spectacular sight). Unfortunately the route mostly passed through low-lying valleys and jungle, gaining the high altitudes only near the border. The incident took place at a village called Balafi, 80 kilometers northeast of Kathmandu. The villages in the area were very poor — the short, stunted inhabitants wore only loincloths and dirty rags — and infested with a vermin called *urus*, which came out of the walls of the village huts and into your sleeping bag at night.

Having been up half the previous night fighting them off, I was determined in Balafi not to sleep in a village hut. But some Chinese engineers, who had the only house sprayed with DDT, refused to let me enter their compound (those were back in the pre-Nixon visit days). In desperation I took my Tamang porter and went to sleep in a pavilion in the village graveyard, putting candles in each corner so it did not seem too spooky (the Tamang, who did not like it a bit, curled up in an inner corner with a cloth pulled over his head).

I went to sleep on the pavilion's wide stone steps under the stars and awoke about midnight. The candles had gone out but there was moonlight. Down the slope to the left of the pavilion was a deep gorge crossed by one of those precarious rope bridges so common in the Himalayas. I saw a figure in loose white clothing standing there. Slowly, as I watched, he crossed the bridge, climbed up the slope toward the pavilion and for a moment stood there quite near, weeping. He looked Tibetan. I asked him in English what was wrong but he turned and went away. In the morning I had the Tamang ask the villagers who it was. They seemed to anticipate the question and answered excitedly that it was the ghost of a Tibetan merchant who, on his way to Kathmandu, had fallen to his death from the rope bridge some weeks before.

In Tashi Pakhiel, 15 years later, Ngodup and his family told me this must have been a *Dre*. I described the man's clothing; they said it was a Tibetan *chuba*, a loose tunic belted at the waist that is sometimes white. Hearing the story, Ngodup at once wanted to visit Balafi; eventually we went but in the bright sunlight the pavilion in its graveyard and the rope bridge looked harmless, especially as traffic was passing nearby on the new highway. But I did not care to spend the night, nor did Ngodup.

Ngodup said a *Dre* can be produced in four ways: one who has died by

the sword or another weapon in violence; a rich man who thinks only of losing his possessions on his deathbed; someone who dies suddenly of a seizure (thought to have been the victim of a *Dre*); or (my *Dre*) a man killed by falling, drowning, burning, or suicide. The Tibetans questioned me intensively about the Balafi incident. My strongest memory was not feeling fright (after all, I merely thought it was someone in trouble) but I do remember a strange sense of grief. Ngodup's theories were: (1) the *Dre* had been placated by my sympathy (as Tibetans believe they can be); (2) turned off by my use of English; or (3) really been after the Tamang (who slept through it all). A Nepalese professor at the University of Kathmandu told me I was lucky; if the *Dre* had spoken, I would have fallen under its spell, jumped off the bridge, and stayed in Balafi haunting the place myself. All I know is that I saw *something*. Ngodup claimed a *Dre* had killed a woman in Tashi Pakhiel a year before, striking a blow on her back one night; she died two days later.

Tibetans have a special lama, called a Podeb, to perform the funeral rites of the dead; the Podeb pulls the deceased's hair to release the spirit, calls "*Heek! Pett!*" nine times to raise it from the body, and then chants prayers to send the spirit to Dewajen (or heaven). The Podeb can tell if the spirit has been released by a minute swelling on the forehead. Then a soothsayer is called in to fix the date of burial, usually within seven days of death. He also decides which of the four ways the corpse should be disposed of, whether by heaven, fire, water, or earth. Only the highest lamas are cremated and their ashes preserved and only the bodies of lepers or badly diseased or criminal persons are thrown in rivers or buried in the ground. The most common method, universal in Tashi Pakhiel, is to call a special lama called a Joba who, after praying, beating a drum and blowing a trumpet, cuts up the corpse and feeds it to vultures (this happened to Ngodup's mother, who

died at the age of 43, five years ago, of tuberculosis).

Normally the corpse is laid face downward, the head wrapped in a cloth (once the Tashi Pakhiel Joba made the cuts on a male corpse face up and at the first incision on the chest, the dead man's arm flew up and hit him in a reflex movement of the muscles, giving everybody a good fright). In order to induce the vultures to eat, the Joba has been known to cut himself a piece of flesh and eat it. (While this practice sounds gruesome, it is similar to burial rites of the Parsees, who are among the most wealthy and Westernized people in India.)

If a Podeng and Joba are not present to fulfill their duties at a death, Ngodup said, a man's spirit can walk again in the body after three days, but stiffly, unbending, and in a straight line. This zombie-like apparition is called a *rolang*; they are said to prey on the living and only a wolf, *yeti*, or lama can kill one.

Belief in the *yeti*, or Abominable Snowman, is almost universal among the Tibetans, as it is among fully eight or ten million Sikkimese, Bhutanese, Northern Indians, Nepalese, and others who inhabit the high Himalayas or Tibetan plateau. As Sir Edmund Hillary has observed, there is no doubt they accept the fact the *yeti* actually exists (Hillary, in 1960-61, undertook a ten-month investigation of the *yeti* and concluded it was "a legend.") Like his fellow villagers, Ngodup takes it for granted that a five to seven-foot-tall apeman, with black-brown hair, a monkey face, robust jaw, no fangs, no tail, and arms that reach to its knees, is a natural part of the local fauna.

In Tashi Pakhiel I found no less than eight of the villagers, including Ngodup's father and all of them elderly, who claimed to have seen a *yeti* in their pre-1959 days herding yak on the Tibetan plateau. Tibetans call a *yeti* a *dremo* (pronounced *tey-moo*), which some authorities, such as British writer Desmond Doig, insist is really the rare Tibetan blue

bear. But shown pictures, the people of Tashi Pakhiel inevitably pointed to a gorilla, not a bear. Their descriptions fit the *yeti* pattern: "very thick hair, especially around the head, but a hairless, monkeylike face," "brown-black (the Tibetan blue bear is actually golden brown with blueish undertints)," "goes on two legs or four," "from a distance looks like a man," "the hands and feet are manlike."

One old man said the more fierce Khampas used to hunt *dremo* and eat its meat. "When a *dremo* attacks," he said, "it always turns its head away; it fears to look a human closely in the face. The Khampas would throw a blanket-like net over its head and club it to death." He himself had seen a *dremo* and was vehement it was not "a monkey or a bear like you can see in the zoo in Kathmandu." (The only *dremo* reportedly ever captured was said in 1954 to be in the Panchen Lama's zoological garden in Shigatse; it was alleged to be a *yeti* but before anyone could investigate it, Shigatse was swept by a disastrous flood. The Panchen Lama's zoo was washed away and whatever it was perished.)

An elderly woman in Tashi Pakheil told how a girl from her tribe was kidnapped and held two or three years by a *dremo*, who forced her to bear him two children. She said, "At last she was found and brought back. The poor girl was unable to speak or anything. She died soon afterward." (Abduction stories are not uncommon; even Englishmen and Canadians (by Big Foot) have claimed to have been kidnapped by ape-like creatures and taken to their caves.)

Ngodup told a famous legend about Yuthok, the "first doctor in Tibet." He said,

*One day Yuthok was coming by horseback and someone called him. Suddenly a yeti leaped out of the trees and took Yuthok's bridle and led his horse into the forest to a cave. Yuthok was really surprised and afraid also. The dremo took Yuthok from his horse and carried*

him into his cave. There a female yeti was lying, crying with pain and near death. A bone was caught in her throat. Yuthok tried to examine her but she fought and clawed at him until the dremo hit her. Then Yuthok was able to remove the bone. While he was doing this the dremo went outside to Yuthok's horse and put something in his bag of medicines. Then he took Yuthok back to his horse and released him. Yuthok rode away very frightened. But the dremo was happy and jumped about making noises to show his gratitude. When Yuthok reached the nearest lamasery the people gathered around. He opened the bag and found the head of a dead woman wearing a tiara of turquoise and coral in her hair. It was the dremo's way of saying thanks.

Ngodup's 72-year-old father said he had seen *dremos* when he was herding yaks. He said they quite often would try to attack the herd, seizing the yak by their horns, twisting them and breaking their necks. (There have been reports of yaks being killed this same way even in 1978 from Sikkim and eastern Nepal near Everest). The father said, "They eat the yak meat and put the skin on the rocks. If we found a yak's skin on the rocks, we would say a *dremo* had killed and eaten it. They lived near the snowline just above the forest but moved up and down depending on the season." Ngodup told me, "If you want to trek to Dolpo near the Tibetan border, you can see a *dremo* for sure." (I made a mental note to keep away from Dolpo.)

In the West, since the first reports of its existence reached London in 1832, people have debated the possibility that a bipedal primate, unknown to modern science, perhaps an anthropoid descendant of *Gigantopithecus*, has been fighting extinction in the high Himalayas. For the Himalayan peoples themselves, there has been nothing to debate. Many Buddhist monasteries treasure *yeti* scalps and other relics, *yetis* appear on their wall paintings and *yetis* are

described in an eighteenth century manuscript on Tibetan wildlife. Sikkim's forest department announced in March 1978 that it would field eight wildlife teams in a new national park below Mount Kanchanjunga to "study ways to improve the *yeti*'s natural habitat." Since 1958 the government of Nepal has officially listed the *yeti* as a "protected species." Hillary, in his book, *High in the Thin Cold Air* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1962), noted that while the Sherpas (whose culture is nearly Tibetan) believed in the *yeti*, "they believe just as confidently that their gods live in comfort on the summit of Mount Everest. We found it quite impossible to divorce the *yeti* from the supernatural."<sup>6</sup> Tibetans accept the *Dre, roland*, descent from demoness-monkey ancestors, mechanical prayers, a universe of seven seas and seven mountains, and the "Four Noble Truths" of Gautama Buddha in the same cheerfully calm and uncritical way.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Himalayan invasion of disaffected international youth since 1970, which the Tibetans still characterize as the coming of the "hippies," though it seems now to have peaked, fits into this tolerant world view with remarkable ease. Ngodup has been a guide-porter to almost 30 trekking parties, ranging from the out-and-out heroin addicted Berkeley street freak to a recent geological expedition from Warsaw University. To Ngodup, the one's "That's far out man. You're into it," is not all that different from the other's "Are you Hinayana or Mahayana?" He enjoys them all and shares the Tibetan tolerance for weird behavior (such as mass nude bathing on Pokhara's Phewa lake or at the hot springs of Tatapani, four days toward Jomosom from Pokhara). Yet his culture, strange and ancient relic that it is, is governed by rigid, traditional codes and a deep Buddhist religious faith with all its supernatural supports. While the chanting, drums, and cymbals in exotic temples adorned with goddesses, demons, and

dragons are "groovy" to see, they represent a culture that is just the opposite from the free, loose, parentless society the Western youths seek. In their colonies of cheap "lodges" and cafés, these youngsters have created a world for themselves (if you don't gag on hashish fumes) that is just as isolated and restricted as that of the jet tourist who zooms in and out and wants to see Nepal all handily packaged up in a neat 72-hour Technicolor dream.

A majority of those Ngodup guides into the Himalayas are young, pot-smoking, long-haired youths, what he calls "half-and-half hippies." He says, "They ask how was life in Tibet, what can they see in Mustang; some are interested in monasteries, all are interested in the mountains. A few want to know about the *yeti*. Most are afraid of leeches. And some ask, 'Are there bandits in the mountains?' I say, 'Who can tell? Things can happen.'"

Ngodup has little use for the true non-trekking, sedentary hippie, saying they're "bad, so bad. Always broke. They don't want to pay you money." Sometimes Ngodup takes his ever-ready store of old Tibetan jewelry and coins into Pokhara's hippie colony, for petty trading is an ingrained in the Tibetan character as an untiring sense of humor. Once a French youth tried to steal an ornamental knife from him and another time an American hippie, perhaps high on drugs, hit him in the face. Afterward Ngodup told me, "A hippie is a man who has a character different from other men. The way he dresses, the way he talks. We Tibetans, we're not really rich in culture or qualifications. But I think these hippies look worse than us. They say, 'My f-----g government, I don't like it, they criticize their parents, they smoke hashish all the time, they don't want to work. I've never smoked hashish. Among Tibetans nobody smokes, ever. But among Nepalese, so many. And Tibetans are very honest up to now. Maybe we are very proud.'"

Ngodup recognizes being a dropout can be a temporary phase. "Seven years ago one American man came. He had long hair and funny, patched clothes. This year he came back. Now he looks like a government officer, short hair, good clothes. Now he's really changed. Staying in a fancy hotel, not a hippie room. When I see something like this, I'm happy. I told him, 'You're not a hippie anymore.' 'No,' he said, 'my parents didn't let me do what I liked. Now I'm an engineer.' He gave me \$50 and a pair of pants. Craig E. Morehouse was his name."

The growing number of trekkers each year has also given Ngodup a whole new lore of true horror stories. Five years ago an American girl and her Norwegian companion were camped near Pokhara when, in the dead of night, fiercely howling attackers pelted their tent with rocks. Terrified, the couple fled into the darkness, the Norwegian finally stumbling, bloody and injured, into Tashi Pakhiel. Ngodup saw he was taken to a hospital then led a party of young village men to hunt for the girl, at first thought dead. They found her unharmed in a cave. The couple's possessions were looted.

Then there is the gruesome tale of three Germans, one of whom broke his leg while they were lost in a forest near Ghandrung and was left behind in a cave while the others sought help. It took them two days to find him again, and when they did he was dead from shock and exposure, covered with leeches. In May a young German, accompanied by two Nepalis he met on the trail, stopped in Gorapani forest to rest. One asked him for a rupee, which he gave him; the other went behind him, hit him on the head with a rock and stripped him of his camera, money, and jacket. The Gorapani forest, five days out on the trek to Jomosom, can be dangerous. (One American and one Japanese were found murdered there and other lone trekkers have simply vanished.)

"One or two may get killed a year," Ngodup said. "Who knows? If somebody asks you where you're going and for how long and you say

Mustang, it means three weeks or so. You must have ten or twenty thousand rupees on you. A poor man in the mountains, he can live for six months on that."

Despite this (fairly rare) hazard, a remarkable number of young Americans, Europeans, and Japanese set forth into the Himalayas all alone. This translates easily into Tibetan terms as lamas often go into the high mountains to meditate. This spring one of Tashi Pakhiel's lamas, Sherab, went to live in a cave on Lapchi, a mountain near the Tibetan border. Ngodup said, "He won't eat. He can meditate for six months without food. He chews a white stone in his mouth, that is all. He's meditating. He has no feeling for himself. Whatever he's meditating is for the welfare of all human beings. We call it *akar-chulen*."

There is something very satisfying in all the mystery and wonder of Ngodup's world. Some of it comes from the setting itself; one is always climbing up and down sun-drenched ridges over vast misty valleys terraced with wheat, rice, and vegetables. The villages change from lowland thatched brick houses to drafty stone Sherpa or Tibetan chalets in the highlands. Gaining altitude you move across alpine meadows blazing with flowers or those acrophobic stone-step traverses across rocky cliff faces that are so peculiarly Tibetan. Always the track is peopled: bronzed Tamangs and Gurungs, trident-wielding, ash-smearing *sadhus* on their way to some remote Himalayan shrine, or tousle-haired Tibetans moving in mule caravans with bales of wool to the tinkling of bells. Or Pan-like cowherds piping flutes, bare-legged porters with muscles like rope, old women bent double under bundles of green grass, herds of goats, laughing children.

Only the highest Himalayas are really deserted, the land of what Hillary called "the perpetual challenge of icy spire and rock tower, high in the thin cold air." It is wonderful in solitude to watch a

sunset reflected against the ramparts of the Annapurna range or fishtail-shaped Macchapuccare, as their glaciers turn fiery red; then the light goes out, the sky grows dim and they are swallowed up in mist and darkness. Then you think uneasily maybe there is *something* after all in the forest that looms so darkly between you and the safety of the nearest village—a man-monster, a *yeti*, Gigantopithecus still at large. You scramble down the track, almost falling, the panic real but soon forgotten over glasses of hot *rakshi* around the fire of a comfortably bolted and shuttered inn. The young trekkers, fresh-faced or drug-worn, having spread their sleeping bags out for the night, listen in fixed fascination as Ngodup speaks of Tibet. "Many lakes and hills of sand. Mountains higher than the Himalayas. I can't explain it. It's an unbelievable thing." "Tell us about the Potala palace," says one of the girls. "It is a place where gods and goddesses live, oh many. And so many rooms. I can't tell but my father says there are too many." Anywhere else, the disaffected youth might listen with skepticism, even cynicism, waiting for the ripoff. Now their faces glow in the firelight like children hearing a fairy tale. For Ngodup believes what he says; somehow the traditional culture of the Chang Tang plateau has survived. To Ngodup the massive blackness of the Himalayan night, the stars that look down as well on his remote northern land of ghosts, gods, saints, and demons, and his own fate, seem so wonderful or fearful that the lurid unreality of his words pales and mingles with the real.

**NOTES**

1. Quotes from the Dalai Lama were provided by the Tibetan representative's office in Kathmandu.
2. Quoted in *Tibetan Review*, New Delhi, Vol. XIII, Nr. 4, April 1978, p. 18.
3. Also spelled "Tarshi Palkhiel" or "Tashi Palkhiel;" I have used Ngodup's spelling which is the way it is pronounced. The settlement's Nepalese designation is "Hyangcha." Hence the village's mailing address is Tashi Pakhiel Handicraft Center, Post Office Box Nr. 8, Hyangcha, Pokhara, West Nr. 3, Nepal. Ngodup means "Merit" and Tsering, "Long Life."
4. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Kubla Khan*.
5. A Bodhisat is one who has achieved enlightenment but has foregone Nirvana in order to teach and serve others.
6. A detailed account of the *yet's* history and recent episodes was prepared by the author for publication in *International Wildlife* magazine, 1978.