

CHAPTER V

DISCIPLES OF YORE AND THEIR CONTEMPORARY EMULATORS

THE incidents connected with the admission of a disciple by a mystic teacher, the first years of his novitiate, the tests imposed on him, the peculiar circumstances in which spiritual illumination dawns upon him, might in many cases supply the material for a most curious novel.

Hundreds of such wonderful stories, either ancient or of recent date, handed down by oral tradition, written in the biographies of famous lamas or even told by living witnesses, are circulated all over Tibet.

Translated into a foreign language, read in countries whose customs, thoughts and physical aspect are so different from those of Tibet, the charm of that strange "Golden Legend" largely vanishes. But when told with the pathetic accent of a believer, in the *chiara oscura* of a monastic cell or under the rocky ceiling of a cave-hermitage, the very soul of Tibet reveals itself in all its mystic powerful originality, athirst for occult knowledge and spiritual life.

I shall, first, tell briefly the fantastic and symbolic story of Tilopa's initiation. Though he himself was a native of Bengal and never crossed the border of Tibet, he is considered as the spiritual ancestor of one of the most important of the "Red hat" sects, that of the Kagyudpas.

I may add, by the way, that it is in a monastery of this sect that the lama Yongden began his novitiate at the early age of eight.

Tilopa is seated reading a philosophic treatise when an aged beggar woman appears behind him, reads or makes a pretence of reading a few lines over his shoulder and asks him abruptly: "Do you understand what you are reading?"

Tilopa feels indignant. What does this witch mean by putting him such an impertinent question? But the woman does not allow him the time to express his feelings. She spits on the book.

This time, the reader jumps up. How can that diabolical wretch dare to spit on the Holy Scriptures?

In answer to his vehement reproaches, the woman spits a second time on the book, utters a word that Tilopa cannot understand and disappears.

Strangely enough, that word which was nothing to him but an unintelligible sound, yet suddenly calmed Tilopa's anger. An uncomfortable sensation spreads all over his frame. Distrust, doubt of his knowledge arise in his mind. After all, it may be true that he has not understood the doctrine expounded in that treatise, or any doctrine whatever, and that he is but an utter ignoramus.

What did that strange woman say?—What word has she pronounced that he has not been able to catch? He wants to know it. He feels that he *must* know it.

And so Tilopa started in search of the old woman. After much wandering and exertion he found her at night in a solitary wood (others say in a cemetery). She was seated alone, her "red" eyes shining like live coals in the darkness."

¹ It must be understood that the strange woman is a *dâkinî*. Tibetans call them *Khadoma*, but in mystic terminology they often use the Sanskrit name *dâkinî* or its abbreviation *dâkî*. These are a kind of fairies who play a great part in mystic lamaism, as teachers of secret doctrines, and are styled "mothers." They often appear in the shape of an aged woman and one of their peculiar signs is that they have red or green eyes. There are two kinds of *Khadomas*: The spiritual ones who do not belong

In the course of the conversation that followed, Tilopa was directed to go to the *Dâkinî*'s land, in order to meet their queen. On the road, dangers of countless kinds awaited him: abysses, roaring torrents, ferocious animals, delusive mirages, ghastly apparitions, hungry demons. If he allowed himself to be overpowered by fear, or missed the narrow, thread-like path winding across that terrible region, he would fall a prey to the monsters. If, driven by thirst or hunger, he drank at the clear springs or ate the fruits hanging at hand on the trees by the road, if he yielded to the fair maidens inviting him to sport with them in pleasant grooves, he would become bewildered and incapable of finding his way.

For his protection, the woman gave him a magic formula. This he must repeat all along the road, keeping his mind entirely concentrated on it, uttering no word, listening to nothing.

Some believe that Tilopa actually achieved the phantasmagoric journey. Others, better informed regarding the various experiences that may be undergone during certain peculiar states of trance, see in it a form of psychic phenomena.

Anyhow, Tilopa saw the countless frightful or alluring sights, he struggled across steep rocky slopes and foaming rivers, he felt himself freezing amidst snows, scorched on burning sandy steppes, and never departed from his concentration on the magic words.

At last, he reached the castle whose bronze walls were glowing with heat. Monstrous gigantic females opened wide mouths to devour him. Trees, with branches holding weapons, barred his way. Yet he entered the enchanted palace. There innumerable sumptuous rooms formed a labyrinth. Tilopa wended to our world and are called "Khadomas of wisdom," and the *Khadomas* who, either incarnated as woman or not, belong to our world.

his way through them and reached the queen's apartment.

There was the beautiful fairy seated on her throne adorned with precious jewels, and she smiled at the daring pilgrim as he crossed the threshold.

But he, unmoved by her loveliness, ascended the steps of the throne and, still repeating the *mantra*, wrenched from her the glittering jewels, trampled under foot the flowery garlands, tore away her precious silk and golden robes, and as she lay naked on her wrecked throne, he violated her.

Such conquests of a *dākinī*, either by sheer violence or by magic devices, are a current theme in Tibetan mystic literature. They are an allegory referring to the realization of truth and to some psychic process of self-spiritual development.

Tilopa handed down his doctrine to Narota, a learned Kashmiri, and a Tibetan pupil of the latter—the lama Marpa—brought it to his own country. The foremost disciple of Marpa, the famous anchorite poet Milarespa, in his turn, communicated it to his disciple Dagpo Lhajee. And the lineal succession still continues nowadays under the name of the Kagyudpa sect.

We find in the biography of Narota an amusing description—not as fantastic as might be supposed—of the tests devised by a master of the "Short Path" to train and direct his disciple.

A brief summary will give an idea of it.

Narota—or Naropa, as Tibetans call him—was a Brahmin of Kashmir who lived in the tenth century A.D. Deeply learned in philosophy, he was also believed to be an adept in magic.

Having been greatly offended by a rajah to whom he was chaplain, he resolved to kill the prince by an occult process. For this purpose, he shut himself up in an isolated house and began a *dragpoi dubthab*.¹

¹ A magic rite to bring about death or injury.

As he was performing the rite, a mother fairy appeared at a corner of the magic diagram and asked Naropa if he deemed himself capable of sending the spirit of the rajah towards a happy place in another world, or of bringing it back into the body which it had left and resuscitating it. The magician could only confess that his science did not extend so far.

Then the mother fairy assumed a stern mien and reproached him for his heinous undertaking. She told him that no one had the right to destroy who could not build up again the being destroyed or establish it in a better condition. The consequence of his criminal thought, she added, would be his own rebirth in one of the purgatories.

Terror-stricken, Naropa inquired how he could escape that terrible fate. The Khadoma advised him to seek the Sage named Tilopa and to beg, from him, initiation into the secret doctrine of "*tsi chig lus chig sangyais*." That is to say the mystic doctrine of the "Short Path" which frees a man from the consequences of his actions, whatever they may be, by the revelation of their true nature, and ensures the attainment of buddhahood "in one single life."¹ If he succeeded in grasping the meaning of that teaching and realizing it, he would not be reborn again and, consequently, would escape a life of torment in the purgatories.

Naropa stopped the performance of the rite, and hastened towards Bengal, where Tilopa lived.

Tilopa, whose fantastic initiation by a *dākinī* I have just related, enjoyed a great reputation when Naropa started to meet him. He belonged to a tantric sect

¹ That is to say that buddhahood is attained in a short time, during the very life in which one has begun the training, instead of the usual course which requires many centuries, during which death and re-birth take place several times.

and was one of those *avadhutas*,¹ of whom it is said that "they like nothing, hate nothing, are ashamed of nothing, do not glorify in anything, are utterly detached from all things, having cut off all family, social and religious bonds."²

As for Naropa, history shows him to have been a man of refinement, deeply convinced of his superiority as a member of the Brahmin caste and a learned doctor. The meeting of these two different characters brought about a series of incidents which may well appear to us rather like rough practical jokes, but must have been a heart-breaking drama for Naropa.

The first meeting of Naropa with Tilopa occurred in the courtyard of a Buddhist monastery. The cynic ascetic, naked, or nearly so, was seated on the ground, eating fish. As the meal went on, he put down beside him the fishes' backbones. In order not to defile his caste purity, Naropa was on the point of passing by at some little distance from the eater, when a monk started to reproach Tilopa for parading his lack of compassion for the animals³ in the very premises of a Buddhist monastery. And so saying, he ordered him to depart at once.

Tilopa did not even condescend to answer. He muttered some magic words,⁴ snapped his fingers and

¹ An ascetic who has cut himself entirely off from the world and has renounced all social and moral rules and laws, believing that he has reached a state of enlightenment where the distinction between good and evil does not exist any more.

² *Mahānirvāna tantra*. It is a current description of the Sage which is found in countless texts.

³ Because the food he ate had been obtained by killing the fish.

⁴ Such resurrections are a favourite theme in Oriental stories. We read in Milarespa's biography that the lama Chörsdor of Gnog resuscitated, in the same way, a number of birds and field mice which had been killed during a hailstorm. A still queerer story was told me by a Korean. A holy monk, so runs the story, met on his way a man who was boiling, near a river, a broth made

behold! . . . The fish bones were again covered with flesh, the fishes moved as if living, they went up in the air for a while and vanished. No vestige remained of the cruel meal on the ground.

Naropa was petrified, but suddenly an idea flashed through his mind. This strange wonder-worker, no doubt, was the very Tilopa whom he was seeking. He hurriedly inquired about him, and the information given by the monks agreeing with his own intuition, he ran after the yogin, but the latter was nowhere to be found.

Then, in his eagerness to learn the doctrine that could save him from the purgatories, Naropa wanders from town to town, with the only result that each time he reaches a place where Tilopa is said to be staying, the latter has, invariably, just left it a little before his arrival.

It is quite probable that Naropa's biographers have lengthened and exaggerated his peregrinations, but their account is certainly grounded on actual facts.

Sometimes—so goes the story—Naropa met, as if by chance on his way, singular beings who were phantoms created by Tilopa. Once, knocking at the door of a house, to beg food, a man comes out who offers him wine. Naropa feels deeply offended and indignantly refuses the impure beverage.¹ The house and its master vanish immediately. The proud Brahmin

with the fishes he had just caught. The monk, without uttering a word, took the pot and swallowed the boiling broth. The man was astonished to see how he could bear the touch of the boiling liquid, but yet scoffed at him, reproaching him for his sinful gluttony. (Chinese and Korean Buddhist monks never eat animal food.) But the monk, still keeping silent, entered the river and micturated. And, then, with his water the fishes came out living and went away swimming in the river.

¹ Orthodox Brahmins are not allowed to drink strong drink. To offer wine or spirit to them is to treat them like a low-caste man and is, consequently, an insult.

is left alone on the solitary road, while a mocking voice laughs—"That man was I: Tilopa."

Another day, a villager asks Naropa to help him to skin a dead animal. Such work, in India, is only done by untouchable outcastes. The mere approach of such men makes a Hindu, belonging to one of the pure castes, unclean. Naropa flees, utterly disgusted, and the invisible Tilopa scoffs at him: "That man was myself."

Again, the traveller sees a brutal husband who drags his wife by her hair, and when he interferes, the cruel fellow tells him: "You had better help me, I want to kill her. At least, pass your way and let me do it." Naropa can hear nothing more. He knocks the man down on the ground, sets free the woman . . . and lo! once more the phantasmagoria disappears while the same voice repeats scornfully: "I was there, I: Tilopa."

The adventures continue in this same vein.

Proficient magician though he may be, Naropa has never even conceived the idea of such display of supernatural powers: he stands on the brink of madness, but his desire to become Tilopa's disciple grows still stronger. He roams at random across the country, calling Tilopa aloud and, knowing by experience that the *guru* is capable of assuming any form, he bows down at the feet of any passer-by and even before any animal he happens to see on the road.¹

One evening, after a long tramp, he reaches a ceme-

¹ In one of the deceitful apparitions, Tilopa had taken the shape of a hare. To be able to show oneself under various shapes is one of the supernormal powers with which Tibetans credit their great *naljorpas*. It is related that Milarespa showed himself as a snow leopard and as a crow to people who visited him in his snow-buried hermitage of Lachi Kangs. The legend of Gesar of Link contains numbers of such prodigies. Suggestion, no doubt, plays an important part in visions of this kind which are not all mere tales. I have been able to see something of them myself.

tery. A crumbled-down pyre is smouldering in a corner. At times, a dark reddish flame leaps from it, showing shrivelled-up carbonized remains. The glimmer allows Naropa to vaguely discern a man lying beside the pyre. He looks at him . . . a mocking laugh answers his inspection. He has understood, he falls prostrate on the ground, holding Tilopa's feet and placing them on his head. This time the yogin does not disappear.

During several years, Naropa follows Tilopa without being treated as of any importance. His master teaches him nothing, but by way of compensation, he tests his faith in him by means of twelve great and twelve small ordeals.

Space is lacking to describe each of the twenty-four tests which, in fact, often repeat the same details. I shall confine myself to a few.

According to the custom of Indian ascetics Naropa went on a begging round. Coming back to his master he offered him the rice and curry which he had received as alms. The rule is that a disciple eats only after his *guru* is satisfied, but far from leaving something for his follower, Tilopa ate up the whole contents of the bowl, and even declared that the food was so much to his taste that he could have eaten another bowlful with pleasure.

Without waiting for a more direct command, Naropa took the bowl and started again for the house where generous householders bestowed such tasty alms. Unfortunately, when he arrived there, he found the door closed. Burning with zeal, the devoted disciple did not let himself be stopped for so little. He kicked the door open, discovered some rice and various stews keeping warm on the stove in the kitchen, and helped himself to more of what Tilopa had so much enjoyed. The masters of the house came back as he was plunging a spoon in their pots and gave him a first-rate thrashing.

Bruised from head to feet, Naropa returned to his *guru*, who showed no compassion whatever for his suffering.

"What an adventure has befallen you on my account!" he said with mocking calm. "Do you not regret having become my disciple?"

With all the strength that his pitiful condition left at his disposal, Naropa protested that far from regretting having followed such a *guru*, he deemed the privilege of being his disciple could never be paid for too dearly, even if one was to purchase it at the cost of one's life.

Another day Tilopa, passing by an open drain, asked the disciples who walked with him: "Which of you would drink of that drain water if I ordered him to?"

It must be understood that it was not here only a question of overcoming natural disgust for the filthy liquid, but of being defiled according to the religious Hindu Law.¹ Nevertheless, while his companions hesitated, the Brahmin Naropa ran forward and drank the foul beverage.

Another test was still more cruel.

Master and disciple lived at that time in a hut, near a forest. Once, returning from the village with Tilopa's meal, Naropa saw that during his absence, the latter had fabricated a number of long wooden needles and hardened them in the fire. Greatly astonished, he inquired about the use Tilopa meant to make of these implements.

The yogin smiled queerly.

"Could you," he asked, "bear some pain if it pleased me?"

Naropa answered that he belonged entirely to him and that he could do whatever he liked with him.

¹ At that time, tenth century A.D., Buddhism had already greatly degenerated, reverting to a number of Hindu superstitions strongly condemned by the Buddha.

"Well," replied Tilopa, "stretch out your hand." And when Naropa had obeyed, he thrust one of the needles under each of the nails of one hand, did the same to the other, and finished with the toes. Then he pushed the tortured Naropa into the hut, commanded him to wait there till he returned, closed the door, and went away.

Several days elapsed before he came back. He found Naropa seated on the ground, the needles still in his flesh.

"What did you think while alone?" inquired Tilopa. "Have you not come to believe that I am a cruel master and that you had better leave me?"

"I have been thinking of the dreadful life of torments which will be mine in the purgatories if I do not succeed, by your grace, in becoming enlightened in the mystic doctrine, and so escaping a new rebirth," answered Naropa.

As years went by, Naropa threw himself down from the roof of a house, crossed a blazing fire and performed a number of other fantastic feats which often put his life in jeopardy.

To conclude, I shall relate one more of these curious tests, the story being rather amusing.

Master and disciple were strolling in the streets when they happened to meet a wedding procession accompanying a bride to her husband's house.

"I desire that woman," said Tilopa to Naropa. "Go, bring her to me."

He had scarcely finished speaking before Naropa joined the cortège.

Seeing that he was a Brahmin, the men of the wedding party allowed him to approach the bride, thinking that he meant to bless her. But when they saw that he took her in his arms and intended to carry her away, they seized on everything they could find—the palanquin's sticks, the torches that lighted the way of the procession and other implements—to belabour poor Naropa. So

soundly was he cudgelled that he fainted and was left for dead on the spot.

Tilopa had not waited for the end of the performance to pass quietly on his way.

When he came to his senses again and had painfully dragged himself along until he overtook his whimsical *guru*, the latter, as welcome, asked him once more the usual question, "Do you not regret . . ." And, as usual also, Naropa protested that a thousand deaths seemed to him but a trifle to purchase the privilege of being his disciple.

At last, Naropa got the reward of his long tribulations. But not in the form of regular teaching and initiation.

If we trust the tradition, Tilopa seems to have used, on that occasion, a queer method somewhat akin to that patronized by the Chinese teachers of the Ts'an sect. There is no doubt that, though left apparently untaught, Naropa had been able to grasp a number of points in the "Short Path's doctrine," during his lively period of probation. However, the manner of his full enlightening is related as follows :

Naropa was seated near a fire in the open with his master. Quite unexpectedly, the latter took off one of his shoes and soundly slapped the disciple's face with it. Naropa saw all the stars of heaven, and at the same time the inner meaning of the "Short Path's doctrine" flashed into his mind.

Naropa had, later on, a large number of disciples, and, according to the tradition, was a most kind master, sparing his pupils the painful ordeals which he had himself so bitterly experienced.

Already advanced in age, he left the monastery of which he was a reputed doctor and, retiring in solitude, devoted twelve consecutive years to uninterrupted contemplation. He is said to have finally reached "the excellent success,"¹ that is to say Buddhahood.

¹ *Mchog gi dnos grub.*

Naropa is especially known in Tibet as the spiritual teacher of the lama Marpa, who was himself the master of the famous ascetic poet Milarespa whose religious songs are most popular all over Tibet.

If Naropa showed himself a mild spiritual father, such was not the case with Marpa, who tortured the poor Milarespa for years, commanding him to build a house unaided and then ordering him several times to pull it down when nearly finished, and rebuild it again.

Milarespa was to dig out the stones alone and to carry them on his back. The repeated rubbing of these hard loads caused sores which became infected on account of the earth and dirt that entered them. Marpa pretended to ignore the martyrdom which his disciple endured. When, at last, yielding to the supplications of his wife Dagmedma,¹ the lama condescended to look at the bleeding back of Milarespa, he coldly advised him to place a piece of felt on it with holes to isolate the sores. This is a process commonly used in Tibet for the sore backs of pack animals.

The house built by Milarespa still exists in Lhobrag, Southern Tibet.

Tibetans do not entertain the least doubt regarding the complete authenticity of such stories. If we cannot vie in faith with them, we must, however, beware of considering all traditional accounts of the novice *naljorpas'* exertions as mere fictions. It would be also an error to believe that such facts belong to a remote past and cannot occur again nowadays. The Tibetan mind has not changed since the time of Marpa. In the house of many lamas I have recognized the very picture of his home and customs, as they are depicted in Tibetan literature, while Marpa himself appeared to me personified by the master of the house.

¹ Marpa, who lived before the reform of Tsong Khapa, was a married lama.

The young monk in quest of a spiritual guide has also remained the image of his predecessors. If not quite equal in zeal to Naropa and Milarespa, who have been, in all times, exceptional characters, he is still ready to bear uncommon hardship, make a number of sacrifices and see many prodigies. And so the fantastic adventures of yore are lived over again every day at the four corners of the "Land of Snows."

However barbarous the physical ordeals with which the hermits think useful to test the quality of their disciples may appear, these are, nevertheless, the lightest part of the training. The really dreadful trial is the purely mental one.

This begins when the first idea arises in the candidate for initiation of begging the guidance of a mystic anchorite. So many things are rumoured about these *gomchens*, their life is so mysterious, their appearance and the rare words they utter are so exceedingly strange that, for Tibetans already inclined to superstitious terror, they seem a thousand times more to be feared than gods and demons. Indeed, they must be so, for they are credited with the power of enslaving gods and demons. Lost travellers or hunters have more than once related that while wandering across solitary hills they have had a glimpse of non-human beings attending on some of these hermits.

To betake oneself to such a master, to put one's present life and one's fate hereafter in his hands is a hazardous step. It is easy to imagine the hesitations, the conflicting feelings, and the anguish which prey on the mind of the aspirant to secret lore.

The long distances which the candidate generally has to travel through desert regions to reach the hermitage of the master whom he has chosen, the wild majesty of the site in which such hermitages are generally situated, all these again contribute to deeply impress the young monk.

Psychic training undertaken in such a disposition, in such surroundings, and under such a master cannot help being fantastic. Around the disciple abandoned to prolonged solitary meditations, heaven and earth quake and whirl so that he can nowhere find a firm footing. Gods and demons mock him with visions at first appalling, then ironical and disconcerting when he has conquered fear. The maddening succession of impossible occurrences may continue ten or twenty years. It may torture the disciple until his death, unless, one day, he awakes from the nightmare, having understood *that which was to be understood*, and, bowing at the feet of his impassive master, takes leave of him without asking for any more teaching.

Among several stories which I have heard from anchorites and *naljorpas*, regarding their initiation, the following is typically Tibetan.

When he betook himself to a lama *gomchen*, Yeshe Gyatso was not quite a novice in mystic training. He had spent several fairly long periods in strict seclusion, endeavouring to find an answer to a question which puzzled him painfully.

What is the mind? he asked himself. And he tried to catch his mind in order to examine and analyse it. But the fugitive thing—"as the water that a child endeavours to keep in its closed hand"—always escaped.

His *guru*, a lama from the monastery to which Yeshe belonged, seeing him tortured by his unsuccessful efforts, directed him to an anchorite whom he knew.

The journey was not very long. Only about three weeks—which is reckoned a short time in Tibet—but the track went across desert regions and passes 18,000 feet high. Yeshe started, carrying on his back a few books, a blanket and the usual provisions: roast barley flour, butter and tea. It was in the second

month of the Tibetan year.¹ Deep snow covered the ground and all along his way the traveller could behold those awe-inspiring frozen landscapes of the high summits which seem to belong to another world.

One evening, at sunset, he reached the *gomchen* hermitage, a vast cave, in front of which extended a small natural terrace that had been enclosed by a wall.

Some distance below, a few huts sheltered those disciples who, for a short time, were allowed to stay near the lama. The anchorites' dwellings stood on the upper heights of a mountain formed by blackish rocks, commanding a view of the emerald-green water of a small rippleless lake.

I arrived there once, at dusk, as Yeshes had done many years before, and looking at the desolate scenery lighted by the dim twilight, I could understand how strong an impression it had made on him.

Yeshes asked one of the lama's disciples to beg for him the permission to be admitted to his master.

The *gomchen* did not allow him to climb to his cave. This is habitual and did not astonish Yeshes, who had never expected to be received immediately. He shared the cell of a novice and waited.

After a week had elapsed he timidly ventured to have the hermit reminded of his request. The answer came at once. He was ordered to leave the place immediately and to return to his monastery.

He cried out his despair to the eyrie of the teacher, and prostrated himself at the foot of the rocky slope. But no compassionate answer broke the dead silence of the desert. Yeshes had to go.

The same evening, a hail-storm swept across a barren tableland which he had to cross. He distinctly saw giant threatening phantoms, lost his way in the darkness and was wandering about all the night. The following days brought nothing but trouble. The weather

¹ In March. The Tibetan New Year fell early in February.

DISCIPLES OF YORE AND COME
remained awful, the traveller had exhausted his provisions, he was nearly drowned in crossing a mountain stream and reached his *gompa*, at last a victim of disease and despair.

Yet, the faith which he had intuitively put in the stern *gomchen* remained unshaken. Three months later he started again. As during his previous journey, he met terrible storms on the high passes. The credulous Yeshes did not fail to ascribe them to supernatural cause. Either, he thought, the lama had let the winds loose to test his steadiness of purpose, or evil spirits had stirred them up to prevent him from reaching the *gomchen's* hermitage and being initiated by him in the mystic doctrine.

That second journey did not prove more successful than the first one. Yeshes was not even allowed to bow at the feet of the hermit, but was sent back immediately.

He made two more journeys to the anchorite during the next year and the second time he was at last admitted before him.

"You are mad, my son," the *gomchen* told him. "Why are you so obstinate? I do not accept new disciples. I have also got some information about you; you have already pursued philosophic study and spent a long time in meditation. What do you hope for, from an old, ignorant man?"

"If you really wish to learn the secret mystic lore, go to the lama N . . . at Lhasa. He is conversant with all works of the more learned authors and is fully initiated in the esoteric traditions. Such a master is just what a young well-read man like you needs."

Yeshes knew that this way of speaking is usual with *gurus*. It is a way of testing the degree of confidence and esteem in which the candidate disciples hold them. Moreover he was full of faith.

So, he remained obstinate, testified in various manners

of his sincere devotion and earnestness, and was finally accepted by the lama.

Another monk whom I have known had sought an anchorite teacher for reasons that had nothing to do with philosophic or mystic pursuits. If I relate his case it is because it contrasts with that of Yeshe and shows another aspect of the Tibetan mind.

Karma Dorjee was low born. As a little boy, in the monastery where he was a *geyok*,¹ he had been the butt of ridicule and contempt of the young novices of his age who belonged to a higher social class. These vexations had embittered his young mind and he confessed to me that he was but a little over his tenth year when he had sworn that he would rise above those who humiliated him.

When he was grown up, his companions had at last to refrain from too open manifestations of their scorn, but they revealed it clearly enough by their silence and their aloofness. Karma Dorjee was proud and possessed a strong will, he still dreamed of keeping the oath taken in his early youth. His low birth and his monastic condition left him only one way of reaching his aim. He must become a famous *naljorpa*, a magician, one of those who coerce the demons and make them their retainers. In this way he could revenge himself on his tormentors and make them tremble before him.

In this not very pious frame of mind, Karma Dorjee applied to the head of his monastery for a two years' leave, being desirous, he said, to retire to the forest for meditation. Permission he knew is never refused to such requests.

Karma climbed high up on the hills, found a convenient place near a spring and built a hut there with branches and mud. Immediately, in order to imitate

¹ A young novice of poor parentage whose family cannot maintain him, and who does menial work at a lama's house for his living. See Chapter III.

the *reskyangpas*,¹ he discarded all clothes and let his hair grow. Those who brought him supplies of food at long intervals found him seated cross-legged and naked even in the heart of winter, apparently sunk in a deep trance.

People began to talk about him, but he was still far from the fame he desired. He realized that his hermitage in the forest and his nakedness were not sufficient to obtain it for him. So he went down to his monastery, and this time asked permission to leave the country in search of a spiritual teacher. No one endeavoured to detain him.

Karma's peregrinations were much more fertile in incidents than those of Yeshe, for the latter at least knew where he was going and under which lama he wished to practise the mystic life, while Karma had no idea of either and tramped at random.

After a time, as he did not succeed in discovering a magician whom he thought capable of leading him to the topmost heights of the secret lore, he resolved to seek one by an occult process.

Karma was a staunch believer in gods and demons. He knew by heart the story of Milarespa who, with their help, had caused a house to fall down on his enemies, and remembered many other tales of terrible deities who brought the bloody heads which he had claimed into the middle of the *kyilkhors* (magic diagram) constructed by the magician. He had acquired himself a certain knowledge regarding *kyilkhors*. So he drew one with stones in a narrow gorge and began his conjurations in hopes that the mighty wrathful Lords Towos would direct him to one of the masters whom they serve.

In the course of the seventh night a mountain stream

¹ The *naljorpas* who have acquired the power of developing *tumo*, the internal heat, and wear but a single cotton dress (*reskyang*) or even remain naked. See Chapter VI.

that flowed in the gorge suddenly rose with startling rapidity. An enormous quantity of water—probably due to the breaking of a natural dam or to a cloud-burst higher up the hill—suddenly swept across the defile and the young monk was swept away with his *kyilkhor* and his small luggage. Whirled along amongst the rocks, Karma was lucky enough to escape being drowned and came aground at the end of the gorge in an immense valley. When day broke he saw at a distance, a *ritöd* (hermitage) that stood sheltered by a rocky wall on the spur of a mountain range.

The sun rose bright as it does on the tableland of Central Asia, and the little white-washed house appeared rosy and luminous under its first touch. Karma could clearly discern the rays of light that flashed from it and rested on his head.

Certainly his long-sought-for master lived there. The help of the deities answering his summons was not to be doubted. He had intended to walk up the gorge and to cross the mountain range, but they had brought him down to the *ritöd*. The intervention had manifested itself in a somewhat rough way, Karma admitted, but he ascribed this to a cause that could not but flatter his vanity. The *Towos*, he thought, have not been able to resist the strength of my conjuration, but foreseeing what a powerful magician I shall become, after I have received proper teaching, felt angered at the idea of eventually becoming my slaves.

Rejoicing in his glorious future, Karma did not give a thought to the loss of the provisions and clothes that had been carried away by the flood. And as he had stripped himself of all garments, to resemble Heruka¹ when officiating before his *kyilkhor*, he now confidently marched toward the hermitage in a state of nature.

As he neared it, a disciple of the anchorite came down to fetch water at a stream. The *trapa* almost let fall

¹ A deity represented as a naked ascetic.

the bucket he carried when he caught sight of the strange apparition.

Tibetan climate greatly differs from that of India, and if unclad ascetics, or pseudo-ascetics, are legion in the latter country, it is not so on the heights of the "Land of Snows." There, only a very few *naljorpas* adopt that simple fashion, and as they live far away from all tracks, in the recesses of wild mountains, one has few opportunities of catching a glimpse of them.

"Who lives in that *ritöd*?" inquired Karma.

"My master, the *geshes*¹ Tobsgyais," answered the *trapa*.

The aspirant magician did not put a second question. What information did he now require? He knew all that he needed to know. The deities had led him to his very *tsawai lama*.²

"Tell the lama that the *Chöskyongs*³ have brought him a disciple," said the naked traveller. Quite bewildered, the water-carrier reported his words to the hermit, who commanded him to show in the strange visitor.

Lama Tobsgyais was a well-read man, the grandson of a Chinese official and of his Tibetan wife. According to Karma's account he appears to me to have been a gentle agnostic, who had perhaps adopted a hermit's life by the desire to study without being disturbed by troublesome people and by an aristocratic taste for solitude. This is rather frequent in Tibet. In fact, Karma really knew very little about his *guru*. As we shall learn, by his own story, he did not see much of him, and the few particulars he could tell me about his parentage and character he had learnt from two disciples of the lama, who were inmates of the *ritöd*.

In situation Kushog Tobsgyais' hermitage followed

¹ A high graduate monk scholar.

² The spiritual guide.

³ According to Lamaists, deities who have taken an oath to protect the Buddhist doctrine and its followers.

the rule set down in Buddhist Scriptures: "Not too near to a village. Not too far from a village." From his small window the anchorite saw a wide uninhabited valley, while crossing the hill on which his dwelling was built, was a hamlet, at a distance of half a day's march.

The hermitage was furnished with an ascetic simplicity; but a large library and some beautiful scrolls of painting on the walls showed that the hermit was neither poor nor ignorant of art.

As Karma Dorjee, a tall athletic fellow, clad only in his long plaited hair, stood before the thin refined scholar he has described to me, they must have formed a curious picture.

After having prostrated himself with the utmost fervour before the lama, he once more announced himself as a disciple brought by the deities to the very feet of the master.

The lama allowed him to relate the story of the *kyilkhor*, the "miraculous" flood and so on without interruption. Then, as Karma once more repeated that he had been brought "to his feet," Kushog Tobsgyais remarked simply that the place where the water had carried him was rather far from them. Then he inquired the reason of his wearing no clothes.

When Karma, full of his own importance, had mentioned Heruka and the two years which he had spent naked in the forest, the hermit looked at him silently for a while, then, calling one of his attendants, he said calmly:

"Take that poor man into the kitchen that he may sit near the fire and drink very hot tea. Find him also an old fur robe and give it to him. He has been shivering for two years."

And with these words he bid him leave.

Karma put on the shabby *pagtsa*¹ with pleasure.

¹ Sheep skin.

The flaming fire, the generously buttered hot tea refreshed him agreeably after his nocturnal bath. Yet his physical comfort was diminished by the mortification of his pride.

The lama, he thought, had not welcomed him as he ought to have welcomed a disciple brought to him "miraculously." However, he intended, after having satisfied his hunger and taken a little rest, to make the *gomchen* understand who he was and what he expected from a teacher. But Kushog Tobsgyais did not give him the opportunity of further explanations. He seemed even to have entirely forgotten his presence in the *ritöd*, though no doubt he had given instructions about him, for the two disciples continued to feed him well and the very same place, next the fire, was always put at his disposal.

Days and weeks went and Karma grew impatient. The kitchen, however comfortable it was, now seemed to him a prison. He wanted to work, to go out to fetch water or fuel, but the lama's disciples did not allow him to leave the hermitage. The lama's orders were positive: He had to eat and warm himself, that was all his duty.

Karma felt more and more ashamed at being treated like a pet animal that is not expected to do anything in return for its food. At the beginning of his stay he had repeatedly asked his companions to remind the lama that he expected an audience, but the latter had always declined to take any message, saying that they would not dare to trouble their lama, and that when *Rimpoche*¹ wanted to see him he would send for him.

After a time, Karma gave up asking useless questions. His only comfort was to watch for the lama's appearance on a small balcony where he sometimes sat, or to listen when, at long intervals, he explained a philo-

¹ *Rimpoche*, "precious one." The most reverential title of address for a lama.

sophical treatise to his disciples or to an occasional visitor. Beside these rare gleams, the empty hours dragged on while he revolved the various circumstances which had led him where he was again and again, in his mind.

A little more than one year passed in this way. Karma became a prey to despair. He would gladly have borne the most cruel ordeals the lama could have had devised, but this complete forgetfulness amazed him.

Though during his first and only interview with the hermit, he had carefully avoided telling him anything regarding his low birth, he now suspected that the latter, through his supernormal powers, had discovered it. Thus he explained the way in which he had been treated. Probably the master despised him, did not consider him worthy to be taught, and fed him only out of pity. Every day this idea took firmer footing in his mind, and cruelly tortured the proud Karma.

Still convinced that a miracle had brought him to lama Tobsyais and that no other *guru* existed for him in the world, he did not think of undertaking a new journey to find another master, but the thought of committing suicide sometimes came into his mind.

Tibetans believe that in order to progress on the mystic path, one must meet one's true *tsawai lama*, that is to say the spiritual teacher of whom one has already been the disciple during previous lives, or if this cannot be contrived, the lama of whom one has been the loving relative, supporter or faithful servant. The tie formed in that way is that of the "past deeds"¹ as Tibetans call it.

Karma was sinking in despondency when a nephew of the anchorite arrived at the *ritöd*. The visitor was a lama *tulku*, head of a monastery and travelled with

¹ *Sngon las*.

a large retinue. Clad in shining robes of yellow brocade, wearing a gilt glittering hat shaped like a pagoda, the lama and his attendants stopped in the plain at the foot of the hermitage. Beautiful tents were pitched and after having refreshed himself with tea that the hermit had sent in an enormous silver teapot, the *tulku* went up to his uncle's dwelling.

During the following days, the *tulku* noticed the strange figure of Karma with his ragged sheep skin robe and his hair which reached to the floor. He asked him why he was always seated next the fire, doing nothing.

The aspirant magician took time by the forelock. He had at last found favour with the deities. There could be no doubt that they had aroused this interest in the *tulku's* mind.

He introduced himself with all his titles, told about his long retreat naked in the forest, the conjuration and the *kyilkhor* in the gorge, the flood, the rays of light which, springing from the hermitage, rested on his head. He ended by relating the forgetfulness of Kushog Tobsyais and entreating the *tulku* to plead on his behalf.

From the account which I have heard, it appears probable that the lama to whom Karma now told his story was of the same stamp as his uncle. He does not appear to have been in the least moved by pity and merely inquired about the kind of teaching which his interlocutor craved from the hermit.

The question gladdened Karma. Now he had found somebody who would speak to him about the matter he had so much at heart. He boldly declared that he wished to acquire magic powers, such as that of flying in the air, of causing the earth to quake. . . . But he prudently avoided confessing why he wanted to work wonders.

The *tulku*—Karma realized later on—was only amused

by such childish ambitions, but he promised to convey his request to Kushog Tobsgyais. Then during the two weeks of his visit he did not even look in the young man's direction again.

The day came when the *tulku* took leave of his uncle. Karma looked sadly at the *trapas* attendants at the foot of the hill, who were holding by the bridle the richly caparisoned horses ready to start. The man whom he had considered as a Heaven-sent protector was to depart without having obtained any answer to his request. Most likely Kushog Tobsgyais had not granted it. Despair again overwhelmed him. . . .

The *tulku* passed the hermitage's door and Karma was about to salute him with the usual triple bowing down, when the latter gave him this laconic order :
"Follow me."

Karma Dorjee felt rather astonished. He had never been asked to do any service. What could the lama want ?

When he reached the foot of the hill the *tulku* turned toward him :

"I conveyed to *Kushog rimpoche* your desire of acquiring the various magic powers which you mentioned," he said. "*Rimpoche's* reply was that he has not got the books which you must study in his *ritöd*. A full collection of them exists in the library of my monastery, so *Rimpoche* has desired me to take you there, in order that you may begin work. There is a horse for you, you will travel with my *trapas*."

Then he left Karma and joined the small group of the dignitaries of his *gompa* who had accompanied him in his journey. All turned towards the hermitage, respectfully bowed their farewell to the invisible anchorite, vaulted into the saddle, and started at full trot.

Karma remained motionless, lost in amazement. A *trapa* gave him a push and put the bridle of a horse

in his hand. . . . He found himself on the back of the beast trotting fast with the lama's attendants before he had realized what happened.

The fourth day after his arrival at the *gompa*, a *trapa* informed Karma that, according to the *tulku's* order, the collection of books mentioned by Kushog Tobsgyais had been carried in to a *tsham khang*. He could begin his study at once. Food would be sent regularly to him from the monastery.

Karma followed his guide and was led up hill to a tiny pleasantly situated whitewashed house. From the window he could look down on the monastery with its gilded roofs and beyond it a valley enclosed by woody slopes. Inside the cell, next a small altar, thirty big *potis*,¹ carefully wrapped in their "robes"² and tied between carved boards, were placed on several shelves.

A wave of joyful pride swept across Karma's mind. At last, some one had begun to treat him with proper respect.

The *trapa* informed him that the *tulku* did not wish him to remain in strict seclusion. He was at liberty to live as he liked, to fetch his water at the stream near by, and to walk outside wherever and whenever he wished. Left alone, Karma buried himself in the books. He learnt by heart a large number of magic formulas, built scores of *kyilkhors*, using more *tsampa* and butter to make the *tormas* than for his meals. He also practised the many various meditations described in the treatises.

For about eighteen months, his zeal did not slacken. He went out only to fetch water, did not speak a single word to the *trapas* who twice a month brought him his

¹ *Poti*, a volume.

² Tibetan books are made of detached oblong sheets of paper and usually wrapped in a piece of cloth—cotton or often silk—which is called their robe : "*namza*" spelt *nabzah*.

food and fuel supply, and never so much as glanced through his window at the world outside.

Then, slowly, thoughts that had never occurred to him crept into his mind during his meditations. Certain words of the books, certain figures of the mystic diagrams appeared to him as pregnant with significations formerly unsuspected. He often stood long in front of his window, watching the monks going in and out of the monastery. Finally, he walked across the hills, examining the plants and pebbles, looking attentively at the clouds travelling in the sky, observing the ever-flowing water of the stream, the play of the lights and shadows. He also spent hours watching the villages scattered in the valleys below, the peasants working in the fields, the animals passing loaded on the roads and those who roamed free across the pasture grounds.

Every evening after lighting the altar lamp, Karma Dorjee sat in meditation, but he gave up trying to follow the practices taught in the books. Late in the night, and sometimes till dawn, he remained sunk in a trance, dead to all sensations, to all cogitations, seeing himself as on a shore, watching the slowly mounting tide of a white luminous ocean ready to submerge him.

Several months elapsed and then one day or one night, he did not know which, Karma Dorjee felt that his body was being lifted from the cushion on which he was seated. Without changing his usual cross-legged attitude of meditation, he passed through the door and, floating in the air, travelled a long time. At last he arrived in his country, in his monastery. It was morning, the monks were coming out of the assembly hall. He recognized a number of them: officials, *tulkus*, certain of his old mates. They appeared tired, painfully preoccupied, with dull, joyless faces and heavy gait. Karma examined them with curiosity. How puny and insignificant they seemed from the height

where he now stood. How astonished, how awe-struck they would be when in a moment he would appear to them enthroned in mid-air! And how those who had treated the low-born monk with contempt would prostrate themselves, trembling before the triumphant *dubto*, the magician who baffled the apparent laws of nature! . . .

Then, as he dwelt on these ideas of victory, scorn awakened in the inmost depth of his mind and his elation subsided. He smiled in derision at the meanness of a revenge on such paltry puppets. They did not interest him any longer. . . . His thoughts went out to the bliss of watching the flowing tide of the strange rippleless, white, luminous ocean.

No, he would not show himself to the monks. That Karma Dorjee who had suffered in the monastery was as contemptible as those who had wickedly humiliated him. He rejected them all together. . . .

Thus thinking, he started to leave the place.

Then, suddenly, the monastery buildings were shaken and cracked. The neighbouring mountains pitched and tossed in confusion, their summits tumbled on each other, while new ones arose. The sun crossed the sky like a thunderbolt and fell on the earth, another sun sprang out, piercing the heavens, and the rhythm of the phantasmagoria went on with increasing speed till Karma discerned nothing but a kind of furious torrent whose foaming waves were made of all beings and things of the world.

Visions of this kind are not very rare among Tibetan mystics. They must not be mistaken for dreams. The visionary is not asleep. Often, in spite of his imaginary peregrinations, the sensations he experiences and the scenery he perceives, he remains quite clearly conscious of his actual surroundings and of his own personality. Often, also, when going into a trance where they are liable to be interrupted, they quite

consciously hope that none come by, or speak to them and trouble them in any other manner. Though they may be themselves incapable of speaking or moving, they hear and understand what is going on around them; but they do not feel connected with any material objects, all their interest being absorbed in the events and sensations of the trance. If that state of trance is abruptly broken by any exterior agent, or if he who experiences it has to break it himself by a strong effort, the shock that ensues is peculiarly painful and leaves a prolonged feeling of discomfort.

It is to avoid these unpleasant effects and the consequences which they may have on the general health of those who suffer them, that rules have been devised for coming out of a period of ecstatic meditation, or even of ordinary meditation, if it has lasted for any length of time.

As an instance, one is advised to turn the head slowly from one side to another, to massage the forehead and the crown of the head, to stretch the arms while clapping the hands behind the back and bending the body backward. There are numbers of similar exercises, and each one may choose whichever suits him best.

The followers of the Zen sect in Japan, who meditate together in a common hall, appoint a kind of superintendent who is skilled in detecting when a monk is overcome by fatigue. He refreshes the fainting and revives their energy by striking them on one shoulder with a heavy stick. Those who have experienced it agree that the ensuing sensation is a most pleasant relaxation of the nerves.

When he returned from his strange journey, Karma Dorjee found himself seated at his usual place in his cell. He curiously inspected the objects around him. His small room, with the books on the shelves, the altar, the hearth, was the same that he had seen the

day before; nothing had changed during the years that he lived in the *tshams khang*.

He got up, looked through the window. The monastery, the valley, the woods wore their usual appearance. Nothing had changed, yet everything was different.

Karma calmly lighted the fire and when the wood burnt brightly he cut his long hair and threw it into the flames. Then he made tea, drank and ate without haste, put some provisions in a bag and went out, carefully closing the *tshams khang's* door behind him.

In the monastery he walked straight to the *tulku's* mansion, and meeting a servant in the courtyard, he told him to inform his master that he was leaving and to convey him his gratitude for his kind hospitality. Then he left the *gompa*.

He had already gone some way when he heard somebody calling him. One of the young monks belonging to the *tulku* household ran after him.

"*Kushog rimpoche* wishes to see you," he said.

Karma Dorjee returned with him.

"You leave us?" asked the lama politely. "Where are you going to?"

"To bow down at the feet of my *guru* and thank him," answered Karma.

The *tulku* remained silent for a while and then said sadly:

"My worshipful uncle is 'gone beyond sorrow'¹ six months ago."

Karma Dorjee did not utter a single word.

"If you wish to go to his *ritöd*," continued the lama, "I will give you a horse, it shall be my parting gift. You will find one of *Kushog Tobsgyais'* disciples living in the hermitage."

Karma thanked his host but accepted nothing.

A few days later, he again beheld the white little

¹ A reverential expression to say that a lama is dead.

house from which he had seen the light springing and coming towards him.

He entered the lama's small private room where he had been admitted but once, remained long prostrated before the seat of the departed anchorite and spent the night in meditation.

In the morning he took leave of his master's successor. The latter handed him a monastic toga that had belonged to the late hermit. Before he died Kushog Tobsgyais had expressly commanded that it should be given to him when he came out of his *tshams khang*.

From that time on Karma Dorjee led the life of an itinerant ascetic, somewhat like that of the famous Milarespa whom he deeply venerated. When I happened to meet him he was already old, but he did not appear to be thinking of settling anywhere.

Few are the anchorites or other *naljorpas* whose novitiate has proved so strange as that of Karma. It is because it is, indeed, quite peculiar that I have ventured to give so long an account of it. Nevertheless, the spiritual training of a disciple always includes a number of curious incidents. Many strange descriptions which I have heard, and my own experiences as a "disciple" on the heights of the "Land of Snows," incline me to believe that most of them are perfectly authentic.

CHAPTER VI

PSYCHIC SPORTS

The Lung-gom-pas Runners

UNDER the collective term of *lung-gom* Tibetans include a large number of practices which combine mental concentration with various breathing gymnastics and aim at different results either spiritual or physical.

If we accept the belief current among the Lamaists we ought to find the key to thaumaturgy in that curious training. Keen investigations do not, however, lead to extraordinary enthusiasm for the result obtained by those who have practised it, seeking to acquire occult powers. Nevertheless, it would also be an error to deny that some genuine phenomena are produced by the adepts of *lung-gom*.

Though the effects ascribed to *lung-gom* training vary considerably, the term *lung-gom* is especially used for a kind of training which is said to develop uncommon nimbleness and especially enables its adepts to take extraordinarily long tramps with amazing rapidity.

Belief in such a training and its efficacy has existed for many years in Tibet, and men who travelled with supernormal rapidity are mentioned in many traditions.

We read in Milarespa's biography that at the house of the lama who taught him black magic there lived a *trapa* who was fleetier than a horse. Milarespa boasts of similar powers and says that he once crossed in a few days, a distance which, before his training, had taken him more than a month. He ascribes his gift to the clever control of "internal air."