The Marriage of Wisdom and Method

By Marco Pallis

Studies in Comparative Religion, Spring, 1972
Reprinted with Permission*

If only we could presently be transported, as on a magic carpet, to some Tibetan temple where the monks have gathered for their daily office we should notice that each monk, while taking part in the deep-throated psalmody, was also executing certain symbolical gestures with the aid of two objects, namely a bell held in his left hand and something looking like the thunderbolt of Jupiter in his right. These gestures actually reproduce the conjugal play of Wisdom and Method which the two ritual objects so used respectively represent. The bell *(dilbu* in Tibetan) stands for Wisdom, while Method is represented by the *dorje (vajra* in Sanskrit), a root that is also present in the name Darjeeling, which means "the place of the Dorje". The same two emblems also frequently figure in sacred art, pictorial or sculptural, where they are to be seen either separately or else grasped in the hands of various divinities as they retrace the same gestures as the monks of our imaginary temple scene.

According to the traditional symbolism Wisdom, the bell, is female and Method, the *dorje*, is male. The lamas say that both these principles must be brought into play and harmoniously blended if ever spirituality is to ripen its proper fruit in enlightenment; they must not be allowed to get out of step, otherwise some degree of spiritual lop-sidedness will result, impeding the purpose in view. Usually this idea is expressed by saying that Wisdom is the eye and Method the legs and that if one of these fails the man will be helpless. There is a happy parable current in Tibet pointing this moral, which runs as follows: two men set out to reach the city of Nirvana, but neither could make much headway because the one was blind while the other was lame. Eventually they decided to join forces, so the lame man climbed on to the blind man's back and so they set out together, with the man who had eyes pointing out the way while the man with sound legs advanced along it, and thus they arrived safely in the city.

Insistence on the guiding principle that Wisdom and Method must keep close company and not be allowed to outstrip one another means, among other things, that disciples undergoing training with a spiritual master are not encouraged to over-stimulate an appetite for abstract theorizing or to spend effort on anything but strictly necessary tasks. Economy of instruction is the rule in Tibetan spirituality-the word economy" is here to be understood according to its primitive meaning of "good housekeeping", which includes both storing and spending. Wisdom, when acquired, should not be kept in store too

*No part of this document may be reproduced or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without permission.

long, lest it go stale on you. It must be used while it is still fresh (and this is where Method comes in), providing food, as it does, not only for the mind but also for the body ; every element in man, be it even the most outward, is able to participate in the regenerative process, and indeed must do so if that process is to be complete. One must be as chary of useless activities as one is generous of necessary ones; which means, in effect, a proper rationing of thoughts, speech, reading and the like, as well as of the more obviously bodily occupations.

As for effort and its strenuous demands, these must be rightly guided, otherwise they too will exhaust themselves by dispersion; here again it is Method that will help to canalise them, by enclosing the effort within wisely determined limits, in which even bodily factors such as breathing, posture etc. may play a part. When a stream has to pass through a narrow channel its force increases thanks to this very constriction : it is this idea which lies behind many of the contrivances resorted to by Tibetan and other contemplatives and which at first sight might seem unaccountably external and elementary as supports for an experience destined to take place in the innermost heart of man. In fact this kind of discipline, though it makes demands on perseverance and therefore, necessarily, on the will, once accepted is able, by compensation, to relieve the will of quite a considerable burden by establishing a rhythm in effort ; human propensity to habit can thus be turned to good account, since nothing is more wasteful of energy than spasmodic attempts requiring ever renewed impulses of will to keep them going. If this is true, for instance, of an art like music, it is doubly true of the supreme art of contemplation, hence the importance of a sound spiritual technique or method.

In the eyes of the lamas any doctrine, therefore, which is communicated minus an accompanying method calculated to attune the whole being, and not merely the thinking mind, to its reception, presents dangers and these will increase in proportion as the doctrine itself grows more profound. Only metaphysical realization can eliminate these dangers altogether and this cannot be guaranteed unilaterally by any human expedient ; a grace will always be implied which is not in itself an evocation of the methods applied. Yet without some kind of spiritual discipline there is small hope of anyone’s becoming aware of what is being offered him by the divine hand of mercy; otherwise all one would have to do would be to sit and wait in a state of complete passivity, a quietism in the wrong sense. Such an attitude is at the very antipodes of the true state of contemplative repose-Tibetan *Yogins* are called *Naljorpas*=obtainers of tranquility; that state represents, in fact, the most intense state of activity open to man, that in which all his powers of attention are brought to bear on a single point and maintained there, with every out-facing agent of dispersion or agitation entirely stilled.

All this explains why the best Tibetan teachers, like their fellows in India and elsewhere, are on the whole suspicious of erudition and ratiocinative virtuosity; for though these characteristics can some-

times go hand in hand with spiritual insight, the opposite is far more often the case, hence the need, in all but exceptional cases, to discourage any tendency to mental gluttony as also the tendency to over-stimulate the thinking faculty ; the former tends to foster a quantitative conception of knowledge, while the latter tends to confine knowledge to the field of relationships, in all their endless combinations, to the exclusion of any understanding of things in themselves, in their essential Suchness, this being beyond the resources of the discursive mind as such. When the thinking mind single-handed abusively attempts such a thing the result is but a series of abstractions that have parted company with their archetypes.

Knowledge, in the real sense, the one invariably given to it by the Tibetan lamas, is always to be regarded as 'concrete', that is to say, it always implies an equating of knowing with being, intellect with existence, theory or vision with realization. It is with the former that Wisdom is specifically concerned, and Method with the latter. Here again, it were well to be reminded that Wisdom, to remain such, demands the latent presence of Method and vice versa : the Taoist symbol of the *yin-yang,* with its dark and light halves, interlocked and with each showing a speck of the opposite hue, provides an admirable illustration of this mutual dependence. The distinction of Wisdom and Method, apart from its obvious convenience of expression, does in fact correspond to a reality which will persist, at least in a certain degree, so long as the world of relativities (which is also the world of illusions) has not been abandoned. As long as there is yet a way to be followed, each member of the syzygy has his or her distinct part to play; though they co-operate in the closest manner, their influence remains, as it were, parallel. But just as parallel lines are said to meet in infinity-used thus, the latter term is rather loose-so in Enlightenment, the goal of all spiritual ways, does the distinction of Wisdom and Method disappear, this being the final consumation of their marriage and its issue, the two in one.'[1]

Let us now return for a moment to consider the two objects previously mentioned as symbolizing the partners of our chosen theme, namely the bell and *dorje.* The bell, which always bears the same device and is cast from a special alloy yielding a clear and beautiful tone, is, as we said, regarded as the female principle. The handle is crowned with the head of the goddess *Prajna Paramita,* or Wisdom Transcendent, here equated with *Tara,* the mother of the *Bodhisattvas* or beings dedicated to Enlightenment. As for the *dorje,* its symbolism is multiple: chiefly it is an *axial* symbol signifying the thread of Enlightenment passing through the centre of every being or world and especially of man, who is a central or axial being by definition: hence the frequent reference, in the Buddhist scriptures, to "human birth hard to obtain", with the added injunction that this rare opportunity should not be wasted, but turned to profit while the going is good.

The axis itself is flanked by four (sometimes further subdivided into eight) phlanges, with a constriction where the hand lays hold of the *dorje* in the middle. These phlanges correspond to the four directions of space which between them "encompass" the universe. A precisely similar symbolism attaches

to the three-dimensional cross of which the *dorje* is but a variant: Christians should always remember this metaphysical meaning attaching to the central emblem of their tradition, for the cross, by thus "measuring" the worlds, already pre-affirms the truth that He who is raised thereon is One who shall be both Judge-to measure something implies sitting in judgment and Saviour.

Regarded from another point of view the central axis corresponds to the Way, spiritual life. This is its cosmic aspect, of which the counterpart, in the human microcosm, is the intellect or true intelligence, the organ wherewith it is possible to contemplate the divine mysteries, of which each station in the line of vision marks a degree of understanding. This transcendent faculty is commonly indicated, in Indian and Tibetan images, by the third or frontal eye. With most beings this eye is as if asleep, or rather it is the being itself that takes its own blindness for granted until one day, by the "opening of the third eye", it becomes aware that it has had the power to see all the time and had not noticed the fact! The third eye has no other meaning but this; it is not connected, as some would have us believe, with the acquisition of unusual psychic powers-indeed, any addiction to their pursuit, as the Lamas are continually reminding people, will create a fatal obstacle to the opening of the intellectual eye. To point this out would not be necessary but for the fact that Tibet has long been a favorite hunting-ground for those whose aim it is to explain—I should have said, to explain away—the traditional symbols and myths in psychological terms. If materialism whether dialectical or merely de facto is the enemy religion is most obviously having to face in the world today, this confusing of spiritual and psychic is like a secret plundering of the arsenal in the rear by self-styled allies: for, needless to say, whatever pertains to the psycho-physical vehicle belongs to the "physical" world, in the Aristotelian sense, and therefore falls under the reproach of being but an aggregate, impermanent and vowed to old age and eventual decomposition—I have here used Buddhist language; this means, in effect, that it is devoid of any transcendent character or selfhood—here again I have stuck to the Buddhist expression of a truth which, in other traditions, will necessarily assume a different form, according to the characteristic "economy" of each tradition in question, by which its various modes of expression are determined.

☼ ☼ ☼

We must now make a brief digression in order to deal with certain accusations that have often been leveled by hostile religious propagandists against the practice of a "spiritual method" as understood in India and Tibet, as also among the Sufis: the accusations in question amount to this, namely that in the Eastern traditions Method, spiritual technique, is regarded as operating in a quasi-mechanical way as if postures, breathing exercises, repetition of formulas and so on could, as efficient cause, be guaranteed to produce a given result in the sphere of the spirit, thus by-passing Grace; and secondly, that in these same traditions the moral perfections are neglected as being more or less irrelevant to knowledge. One can only start off by giving the lie to both the above strictures which contradict all the known facts, as proved by any number of sacred texts and instruction books for aspirants in all manner of languages, as

well as by the personal testimony of still living teachers and their disciples. It is interesting to recall a similar scandal that took place in the Christian world in the fourteenth century, when Barlaam the Calabrian attacked the Hesychasts of Mount Athos and their yogic practices. Their defense by St. Gregory Palamas might serve as a precedent in all similar cases.

What has previously been said about the function of Method should suffice to answer the first accusation, at least in part. Method cannot of itself compel knowledge, but it can help to create favourable conditions for its revealing. Its action is twofold: positively, it will provide adequate "supports" for meditation (or for prayer, wherever that word applies); negatively, it strives by various skilful devices to inhibit any movements of body or mind that might divert the stream of attention into side-channels or disperse it in eddies. By definition, Method when applied is concerned with the world, the environment, the way, not with the goal itself; it is Wisdom that takes care of the latter. Given, however, that the methodic prescriptions are faithfully carried out it is only a very small abuse of language to promise a result and even to describe that result as fruit of the method; that the expression is loose is proved, if by nothing else, by the self-evident disproportion between the means deployed and the result to which these means are conducive.

The same argument applies to prayer: when it is said that if a man prays sincerely and with centred attention God will surely hear him, is one then to be accused of prejudging the decisions of God? The basic assumption is the same in both cases, namely that if existing veils be withdrawn the Light, which is ever shining, will instantly light up the intellect, whose very nature it is to serve as its transmitter ; if prayer be offered with wholehearted love, then pre-existing Grace will not withdraw itself. Nothing is more paradoxical than the idea of prayer, since it seems to make man into the subject and God into the object. It is in the very nature of things that the cosmos, which is mirror as well as illusion, should thus reverse the image. Enlightenment is the restoration of the true relationship.

The second accusation is still easier to answer: the Eastern traditions yield to none in the attention they give to the virtues and their cultivation, charity, humility, purity and the like. Differences of emphasis exist, but basically all religions stand together in this respect. In fact the cultivation of the virtues is a *sine qua non* of Method, so much so that it is often taken for granted and therefore hardly mentioned. Nevertheless, any number of allusions, often elucidated at great length and detail, are to be found in the traditional books: one has only to mention the frequent statement that any kind of sexual perversion renders the methods of concentration nugatory is but one example of the kind, but these could be multiplied to cover compassion and all the other virtues. At every turn one is told that the ego is the chief enemy to be overcome ; subduing the ego does not go without moral effort, everybody knows that. To
attribute absurdities to people reckoned in other respects intelligent is decidedly disingenuous!

If all religions are alike in the importance they give to the virtues in relation to spiritual aims, they differ somewhat in the character they attribute to each virtue: for instance the Buddhist compassion and Christian charity, though overlapping to a very great extent, are not quite identical either as regards their intellectual premises or in practice. The same applies in other cases; the "flavour" is different. In the Christian ethic emphasis is all along on the will, its right and wrong exercise; hence also the almost obsessive reference to sin. Sin is a human fact; Buddhists do not underrate its importance, far from it, but with them, as also with Hindus, there is always a certain suggestion of bad management about sinning, that accords well with the perspective of gnosis, *jnana*, whereas the perspective of love sees in sin primarily a betrayal of the divine Lover by his human counterpart, to the prejudice of the hope of their eventual union.

It might sound rather far-fetched were one to suggest, for instance, that charity is also a kind of skill, one that can be property or improperly exercised, a conception which automatically relates it to Method. Such a suggestion, however, would not astonish a Tibetan since, for him, spirituality always has an element of art about it; hence also his own avoidance of the extremes of moralistic exaggeration into which some others so easily slip. After all, is it so unreasonable to argue that uncharitableness, inasmuch as it exacerbates the ego-forming tendency, is a form of incompetence, opposed as it is to man's proper destiny? There is nothing in this attitude to prejudice the ultimate result, even though few, in practice, go so far as to reduce all their moral problems to a question of skill. All I have wished to show, by stretching this example somewhat, is that a virtue can be treated as an element of Method without forfeiting one bit of its intrinsic character: it is it a question of perspective and, as was said in another context, of spiritual "economy".

Tibetans as a rule are not very "sin-conscious", if one may so put it, though they certainly are not indifferent to the question: there is indeed one respect in which they might even claim, with some small show of plausibility, to go further than their Christian fellows, as I will illustrate from my own experience. When talking to them I had often noticed the fact that when any ethical breach happened to be mentioned they invariably described it as "a very great sin", whether one was discussing murder or some minor act of irreverence or the like.

This habit of theirs rather tickled me, so one day I said to a friend: "if what you have just mentioned amounts to a great sin, what then would you describe as a small one?"—I was thinking at the time of the Catholic definition of mortal and venial sins, as applying to the case in question. "It is rash so to label any sin", my friend answered, "for one neither knows the dispositive causes which rendered that sin possible nor its eventual consequences. In the absence of such knowledge, how can one presume to label it as small? Better to keep on the safe side."

There is a story, classical in Tibet, which is meant to bring out just this point, it runs as follows: A certain man, through some inadvertence, had fallen into the clutches of a demon, who threatened him with some horrible punishment unless he agreed to commit at least one sin; the only concession he was prepared to make in answer to the man's pleading was to allow him a choice out of three possible sins, to wit: taking life (by killing a goat), having illicit sexual intercourse with a woman, or getting drunk. The poor man debated long before arriving at a decision, for he came of a right-living family and all three sins were equally repugnant to him. At last he said to himself: to take life, that is unthinkable! And to defile myself with that woman, how could I ever face the shame? I hate the idea of getting drunk, but after all, many decent people occasionally take a drop too much, this is clearly the one to choose as being the lesser evil; it's only common sense!" So he took the cup of strong-brewed barley whisky from the hand of the demon and drained it, though with disgust.

No sooner had the whisky gone down than the man began to feel merry; a few minutes later he was making violent love to the woman and soon after that, seizing a knife, he was slaughtering the goat in order to provide them both with a good dinner.

"How then", said my friend, "dare one make a distinction between a small sin and a great?"

Till now we have been speaking of the marriage of Wisdom and Method under various aspects; it is time something was said about their divorce, since this too is a possibility. Firstly, what are the consequences of trying to pursue Wisdom in isolation? The Tibetans will answer that this is just the error of the so-called "Self-Buddhas", conventional butt of all Mahayanist writers, those who seek Enlightenment for themselves alone, ignoring the interests of other suffering beings: an intellectual blind alley therefore, an escape from the world without a compensating reintegration of the world. In contrast to this, the *Bodhisattva,* who embodies the Mahayana's ideal, is described as "deferring" his own exit into *Nirvana* until the last blade of grass shall have reached enlightenment. Such comparisons must of course not be taken too literally, for it is more a question of contrasted attitudes than of actual fact.

The real point of the above confrontation is that such an abstracting of Wisdom will lead, almost inevitably, to a confusing of Wisdom itself with what are merely its reflections in the discursive mind, mental formulations, conceptualism in general. All Buddhist schools agree that here lies the danger; in Zen we have the most extreme expression of this condemnation. Once such a confusion has gained a hold, the tendency to replace metaphysical Knowledge, joint fruit of Revelation and Intellection, by a "philosophy" in the ordinary sense of the word will be well-nigh irresistible: already one can discern here the first outlines of that "science according to the flesh" against which St.

Paul has given warning. First, sacred doctrine loses its "concreteness" by the suppression of the corresponding means of realization and then, by progressive stages of abstraction, it sheds, imperceptibly but inescapably, more and more of its transcendent elements until it has become wholly profane and arbitrary, a mere market for human opinions devoid of any possibility of verification.

Doctrinal materialism, a relativism treated as absolute and axiomatic, but marks an advanced stage of this process; what further may still lie ahead it would be hard to guess.

Secondly, Method, when divorced from Wisdom: this, as the Tibetans will agree, has the effect of chaining men fatally to *samsara,* the World of Birth and Death, without hope of escape. Once man ceases to connect technique with transcendent principles and aims, or in other words with Wisdom, there is nothing to keep his native inventiveness from running to seed; the more it is indulged the quicker it will become man's master, and, incidentally, it will extinguish in him the true creative instinct, which is bound up with a sense of the sacred, replacing art by a monstrous display of ingenuity and manipulative dexterity that stops at nothing. With man's tastes and tendencies becoming daily more sophisticated, virgin nature, nursery of the contemplative spirit since time immemorial, by dint of continual inroads, well-nigh disappears. As for man himself, he becomes identified, to all intents and purposes, with his sole animality, with the belief, that is to say, that it is possible both to live by bread alone and be at peace. But such bread never satisfies, for do what man will, the spiritual urge is there, frustrated and gnawing at his heartstrings. That is his hell, but, strangely enough, it is also his last hope, since one day he may yet awaken to the real cause of his discontents and this, for every man in whatever situation or state of mind, is the first step into the Way. But meanwhile, till this happens, the nightmare must needs continue.

On this note we will conclude the first, more general portion of this essay. It now remains for us to examine a number of examples, all based on personal observation or experience in the Tibetan world, of how the conjoint principle of Wisdom and Method operates in various circumstances of spiritual life.

There are two main currents into which the religious life of Tibet divides itself, respectively associated with the Gelugpa, the Order of Virtuous Usage or "Yellow-hats", as they are familiarly called, and the rest of the monastic community labeled together as "Red-hats" but really containing three separate associations, namely the Nyingmapa or Order of Ancients, the Kagyüdpa or Order of the Oral Tradition and the Sakyapa: the latter Order takes its name from Sakya, an ancient monastery in a high valley some eighty miles north of Everest, which in the thirteenth century occupied premier place in the Tibetan world, with its hierarch acting as representative of the Mongolian Khan who then, and for some time after, held distant suzerainty over Tibet. The temple of Sakya, which I and my friend Richard Nicholson visited in 1947, was of unbelievable splendour, a treasure-house of all the arts at their very purest, and its library of manuscripts, many of them in Sanskrit, is likewise

magnificent;[2] but the Sakyapa Order itself has nothing very specific to tell us as far as our present discussion is concerned ; it goes in with the three others, all of which will be drawn upon in turn for examples.

The *Gelugpa*, who were mentioned first, have for the last four or five centuries been the dominant Order in Tibet, numbering as they do both the Dalai and the Panchhen Lama among their members. The former has been the temporal ruler of the country, as well as its senior abbot, since the seventeenth century. The Gelugpa are the result of the reform carried out at the end of the fourteenth century by a great saint, Tsong Khapa by name, who came from the province of Amdo east of the Koko Nor; he started life as a Sakyapa, but later initiated a movement designed to counteract the laxity he perceived among the monks of his own and kindred orders, on much the same lines as occurred repeatedly during the Christian Middle Ages. In some ways the Gelugpa, with their very large monasteries, rather remind one of the Cistercians, though the universities which are also a feature of the Order are more reminiscent of the great scholastic institutions run by the Dominicans at a somewhat later date.

It must be understood, when classifying Tibetan spirituality under these monastic headings, that this does not mean that only professing monks are included under any given label. The Orders merely provide a framework, because each represents a distinct type of spirituality, with doctrinal emphasis on some ideas rather than others, with its own books and artistic themes, as also with its own characteristic methods. Each ideal, moreover, expresses itself in the choice of particular divinities or, to be more accurate, divine aspects, the attributes and symbolism of which correspond, visually, to ideas which, for that Order, are central. Every lay person in Tibet is the follower of one or other of these Orders and participates with more or less of intensity in the graces inherent in that particular spiritual current. When a member of a family is about to embrace the monastic life—every family dedicates at least one child in this way—he will naturally be sent to a monastery belonging to the Order of which that family are devotees. What we are chiefly concerned with here is the character and form variously assumed by Wisdom when viewed as doctrine, and by Method, viewed as spiritual discipline or practice; classification according to the chief monastic Orders is an obvious convenience for this purpose.

It goes without saying that all these Orders have many features in common; they share all the basic things of Buddhism and most of the traditional practices specific to Tibet. Nevertheless, there is a considerable difference of outlook, as between the various Orders and especially between the older foundations (the “Red-hats”) and the Gelugpa, amounting to a difference of “spiritual genius” and imprinting its unmistakable stamp on Sage and ordinary disciple alike.

We have seen that the Gelugpa were the outcome of a reform, chiefly in the moral field, hence the

name of “Virtuous Usage”. Visible results of this reform were: a very detailed rule aiming at a return to primitive Buddhist usage, strict enforcement of celibacy and total prohibition of alcoholic drink, and lastly a marked insistence upon reading and study generally, on lines closely reminiscent of the mediaeval Scholastics of Europe. The *Geshe* or doctor of divinity is a typical Gelugpa figure, absent in the other Orders, and his is the mentality that dominated the scene in the established church, if one may so describe the Yellow Order because of its association with the government—many officials were monks and in the theocratic arrangements of modern Tibet all high offices were held jointly by a monk, who was always a Gelugpa, and a layman, drawn from the nobility; history has even known a monk commander-in-chief and there would doubtless also have been a monk-admiral if Tibet had possessed a seaboard. Nevertheless, it must not be thought that the Gelugpa, despite their greater proneness to Organisation (which is always the mark of a reform, its strength but also, after the initial momentum has passed, its weakness in so far as this may tend to favour a too secure mediocrity)—it must not be thought, however, that the Gelugpa have in principle renounced the contemplative ideal, and many of them proceed far along that road, just like their red-hatted rivals. In no case is a Buddhist monk formally dedicated to external works of various kinds, as in the case of many foundations of Latin Christianity; if scholastic study is also an external work in its way, its object, as forming part of Method, is to provide the aspirant with theoretical preparation to be subsequently “realized” in the contemplative life. In respect of its ideals, Tibetan monasticism stands much nearer to the Greek East than to the Roman West. “Works of Charity”, as understood amongst us, are not for the monk, save incidentally, or rather his chief work of charity is to attack evils and errors, not in their symptoms, but in their very root so that, for him, anything less must be reckoned a distraction from “the one thing needful”.

All Tibetans look on the true contemplatives as protectors of mankind, qualified physicians for its ills and as its one and only insurance. For those who achieve this purpose in any high degree whether they still be monks or, as often happens, have exchanged the monastic habit for the tattered garment of the wanderer, the people’s reverence is unbounded and no one would ever dream of asking such a *naldjorpa* (obtainer of tranquility, the same meaning as “Hesychast”) why he acts thus and not otherwise or where he intends to go next. In this way even the ignorant are able to recognize the presence of Wisdom when they meet it, and this, even more than any formal reminders, is a means of ensuring that all men share, at least to some extent, in the gifts of the Spirit. Indeed it can never be said of any Tibetan, even one seemingly worldly, that he is quite immune to a sudden call into spiritual life ; these things may by now have ceased in Tibet as a result of the invasion, but they were still very much alive when we were there in 1947-48 and even the landscape, seemed to be bathed in silent contemplation, as if inviting each passerby to participate.

To return to the Gelugpa: their spiritual method can be summed up in three words: study, meditation, contemplation. According to the *Lamrim* (="stages of the way"), a standard treatise of the Order compiled by its founder, the object to be striven for is the simultaneous acquisition of *hlak-thong* or Transcendent Vision and *shi-ne,* Abiding Tranquility, which respectively correspond to the active and passive poles of contemplation. An ordinary monk is known in Tibet as *trapa* which means "schoolman"-the title "lama" properly belongs to three kinds of people only: firstly, *Lama Tulkus,* those who, like the Dalai Lama, are regarded as providential vehicles of a given celestial influence for which they provide the bodily support, each successive descent of this influence being described as a "rebirth"; secondly, heads of initiatic lines ; and thirdly, one's own spiritual guide, one's personal Lama. Any loose use of the word "lama" is foreign to the Tibetans.

A typical Gelugpa centre of learning which I have visited is Tashilhunpo, near Shigatse, the seat of the Panchhen Lama and one of the four great universities of Tibet, the other three being close to Lhasa. On first coming to the place it immediately made one think of Oxford, with its many students living several to a staircase where also a larger room was occupied by a tutor who instructed his pupils in small groups. The personal tie between tutor and students is always a very close one, as happens throughout the Orient. Among the students themselves mutual courtesy is the rule, apart from which they display the normal liveliness of young people everywhere, though never to the point of boisterousness such as would run counter to the monastic ideal.

Study itself consists, for the Gelugpa apprentice, in memorizing the Scriptures as well as various commentaries and metaphysical treatises—and also in analysing the meaning of what has thus been fixed in the memory, under tutorial guidance; there is a certain approximation to philosophy in the way this is carried out. This course of study can last from three or four up to ten years or more—it is said that at least that long is required in order to obtain a doctorate or "gesheship". As for contemplation, the declared object of all this study, it can well be imagined that many, indeed the majority, stop somewhere short of fulfillment, which rather justifies the scornful comments of a Red-Hat friend of mine when he said: "A Gelugpa always has his nose in a book, but he never gets anywhere". This criticism is not altogether just: the best of the Gelugpa—and they are not a few—do try and apply the learning they have acquired as intended, by spending longer or shorter periods in secluded meditation at one of the mountain retreats (*rito*) which every important monastery maintains for this purpose; but nevertheless the tendency to exteriorise one's point of view, as a result of so much purely mental activity, exists among the Gelugpa when viewed as a whole, and this is evidenced in a less flexible, more moralistic attitude to things generally, wherein they show themselves on average more hide-bound, in an intellectual sense, than their opposite numbers among the Red-hats.

Taken at its most typical, the Gelugpa spiritual programme starts out from the idea of impermanence. This, in the Buddhist view, is the very corner-stone of Wisdom and a constant point of reference when-

ever attention shows any signs of flagging. Continual dwelling on this theme with the aid of all kinds of moving illustrations lets the aspirant eventually see that he himself and the rest of the beings in the universe share a common fatality in the ephemeral nature of their joys and the continual recurrence of suffering and death, extending even to their personal consciousness, the thing they all call “I”. The logical effect of regarding things in this way is a powerful welling up of compassion which then becomes the driving force behind all subsequent effort : at its highest this sense of kinship in suffering becomes an irresistible call to Bodhisattvahood, self-dedication to the cause of all beings, with a view to their deliverance from the Round of Birth and Death through their Enlightenment. That is why, in the Gelugpa teaching, compassion is actually identified with Method itself. This, coupled with a pushing of impermanence to the point of recognising the voidness or lack of self-nature of all things (which is the keynote of wisdom in this tradition), brings the spiritual traveler to that sublime station where vision transcends all possible expression and when every agitation is stilled in the peace that passeth understanding.

Turning now to the Red-hat Orders, one meets here a great variety of methods pursued against a background that is much less of a pattern than with the Gelugpa. Though Nyingmapa and Kagyüdpa monasteries, mostly small, are to be found scattered all over Tibet, as well as in the cis-Himalayan Buddhist states where they predominate, there are also numbers of their adherents who do not belong to a monastic community; these include laymen who, after spending several years under instruction by the lama of their choice, return home to lead dedicated lives for the rest of their days; to whom must be added others, fewer in number, who have felt called to a life of heroic contemplation, men and women leading a solitary existence in some retired spot where herdsmen or villagers will periodically bring them food, asking no questions and speaking only if first spoken to, knowing full well, as they do, that these people above all others are benefactors of mankind by their very presence and that “the terrible resolution to seek the solitudes and meditate all the rest of one’s life for the sake of suffering creatures” (as Mila Repa put it) is the greatest gift anyone can share with his fellows. These hermits could be found, in ones and twos, throughout the Tibetan world, living in caves close to the glaciers, or else wandering along one of the endless tracks that cross the high plateau, leaves borne hither and thither before the wind of the Spirit, that bloweth where it listeth; some of them even returned after a time to the neighbourhood of human settlements where they lived quietly, teaching a few chosen disciples, and it is in their ranks that the greatest Lamas are mostly to be found.

As far as practice is concerned, the disposition of these so-called “unreformed” foundations remains very fluid, as compared with the highly organised Gelugpa, and even monastic communities sometimes exhibit exceptional features: for instance, one small Kagyüdpa centre up in the mountains near Shigatse where I was a frequent visitor, consisted of a convent of nuns with a male Lama at their

head, and a kindlier or more cheerful set of people I have never met. Another such example was Samding, on the Yamdok lake right in the middle of Tibet; but here relations were reversed, for the Lama was a woman and all the other inmates were men. If these things are apt to shock the prudery of some, they do not astonish the Tibetans, all of whom start out from a basic assumption that a profound spiritual awareness must needs possess different criteria of what is or is not expedient, as compared with the average mind for whose sake rules and safeguards chiefly exist. The one thing to avoid, as all agree, is any hampering of those who, spiritually speaking, mean business; is not the freedom of this spiritual elite in the common interest of all and would it not be folly for the unqualified to try and limit its scope in terms of their own ignorance? And if some, or even many of those who set out on this path fall out somewhere by the wayside having proved unequal to the great demands made upon them, well, mediocrity can quietly be left to stagnate in its own fashion and no one worries.

☼ ☼ ☼

A common feature of both the Nyingmapa and Kagyüdpa Orders is that many of their Lamas are married and also that alcohol is permitted on the strength of an alleged dispensation given by Padma Sambhava, the Apostle of Tibetan Buddhism; what exactly that dispensation was meant to cover is not clear, however. Judging by what one has seen in some Nyingmapa centres outside Tibet, heavy drinking there is far too common and many a vocation must have been hopelessly blurred from this cause. In Tibet itself this evil was far less in evidence than in the Himalayan regions.

A point about the Nyingmapa needing mention is their expertise in various traditional sciences: for this reason they were much consulted by the population, as calculators of horoscopes, exorcists and especially as performers of propitiatory rites of all sorts. One Nyingmapa lama, a most delightful person with whom we were on friendly terms during our stay at Shigatse, was employed by the government as a hail-warden, whose duty it was to watch from a specially constructed tower for storm-clouds that might empty themselves in hail on growing crops, always a fear in Tibet at certain seasons. Whenever a suspicious-looking cloud appeared the lama hastened to the top of his tower and there performed the appropriate rite, which included the display of a complicated geometrical diagram most cunningly fashioned. This lama once inquired of me whether England ever suffered from hailstorms and when I answered that sometimes this did happen he asked gravely what measures the government there took to guard against the danger; he was surprised when we told him that our welfare services did not provide for this!

Though, as explained above, many members of the older Orders belong to monasteries, the unit that really counts in this particular world is the *gyüd* or initiatic line which, by its diverse membership cuts across all other arrangements. At the head of each such spiritual family stands the *Gyüd Lama,* through

whom the direct line of the "apostolic succession" is transmitted. These *gyüds* originate in many different ways. Some have been founded by noted saints of antiquity or even of quite recent times, men whose pre-eminent wisdom and virtue have won spontaneous recognition from the people, many of whom have come to them asking for spiritual guidance, which in Tibet is tantamount to discipleship. Others again trace their origin directly to celestial inspiration : this applies to the *Kagyüdpas* as a whole, though subsequently this Order, once accounted a single *gyüd*, has given rise to many separate initiatory lines each of which now counts as a *gyüd* in its own right. The story of one Nyingmapa *gyüd* that arose in our own time will best illustrate the way these things are apt to happen.

Many years ago in the city of Lhasa a woman from Western Tibet used to go round with her daughter chanting certain sacred sentences in a very beautiful voice. By dint of this daily invocation the daughter became strongly drawn towards the contemplative life, so she decided to retire into a cave that had once belonged to Padma Sambhava aforementioned, the founder of the Nyingmapa Order. There she spent many years in silent meditation until gradually, no one quite knows how, disciples began to gather round asking for her doctrine till quite a little community of cave-dwelling hermits grew up there. Soon pious hangers-on from the city, some of them belonging to the high nobility, found their way to the place, bringing their offerings; if they could not face that life themselves, at least they could participate in this indirect way. Eventually the fame of the Precious Reverend Mother, as she came to be known ("functional" names are always preferred to personal ones in such cases; the people coin these for themselves), spread far and wide. This woman Lama lived to close on a hundred, so I was told by one of her adherents, teaching the common run of her disciples during the day but reserving the night hours for the elite. This case is a typical one; but for the Chinese invasion her chosen successor would doubtless now be carrying on the line as *gyüd Lama,* bestowing initiation and teaching even as he or she had been taught by the sainted foundress of the line.

Something must now be said about the prevailing ideas among the Red Orders concerning the moral law and its applications, since this too is a most characteristic feature of their perspective. Though they accept, like all Buddhists, the idea of "gathering merit" (or avoiding demerit), closely connected, as it is, with the idea of *karma,* concordant action and reaction as the determinant of birth, it does not play, in its ordinary form at least, as great a part in their calculations as it does with the Gelugpa, for whom it remains central. All Tantrik followers (from *tantra*=a methodic treatise, one or more of which belong to each gyüd) look on every vice as the shadow, as it were, of its corresponding virtue and as a source of power which, though it has been misused, should not be so much eliminated as transmuted into the virtue it is by rights. Thus, instead of applying the will, by frontal attack, to the mere repression of the vice in question they prefer to look round for a spiritual method whereby the desired transmutation can be brought about and it is to perseverance in this method, when found, that the will is properly to be

applied. As it is usually expressed by the Tantrik teachers, the poison itself must be converted into *Amrita*, the Elixir of Immortality.

It will readily be recognised that this point of view is properly an alchemical one, a fact which bears out the generally intellectual nature of the Red-hat perspective; this point of view is such as to exclude that sentimentalism, which in proportion as a standpoint becomes externalised and moralistic, is sure to intrude itself more or less.

The initiatic side of the Tibetan tradition is known as "the Way of the *Mantras" (*Tibetan: *Ngaki Lam*), to contrast it with *Doi Lam*, the Way of the *Sutras*, the canonical Scriptures with their commentaries and theoretical treatises generally. The latter is the common appanage of all men and the subject-matter of scholastic studies. The Way of the *Mantras, on* the other hand, is only accessible under safeguards because of its essentially practical or "operative" character, which might lend itself to abuse. Alchemy of the soul is not a field in which arbitrary experimentalism is either safe or desirable. Therefore access to this way requires, as its first condition, regular attachment to an initiatic line *(gyüd)* in which it is possible to receive instruction from a qualified lama who then becomes one's own Spiritual Master or guru. In order to join the *(gyüd)* a postulant's qualifications must first be considered by the *Gyüd-Lama* or his representative, who may accept or reject the candidate without giving any reasons ; rejection does not, however, exclude the possibility of renewing the request at a later date. Before the newcomer is ready to become a regular disciple of the lama in the fullest sense, he must undergo a preliminary training known as "the prelude" (*ngon-dro*) which chiefly consists of four specified exercises known as the four *bum* from the fact that each exercise has to be repeated one hundred thousand times. This introductory course, apart from its general purpose of conditioning body and mind to the higher things to come, can also serve in some sort as a filter against those who are attracted out of mere passing fancy, lacking perseverance. Nevertheless once a person has become attached to the line by a conferring of the initiatory *lung* (= authorisation) it always remains open to him, however faint-hearted he may have shown himself at the start, to return to the attack by taking up his spiritual task where he left off. The effect of any initiatic grace is ineffaceable in itself, however it may be received or acted upon. To belong to an initiatic family is to participate, whether actively as intended, or else more or less passively, in a stream of spiritual influence flowing downwards and onwards from the original source of revelation, through the dynasty of lamas, celestial or human, which providentially has been entrusted with its transmission. In a sense such a *gyüd* (the word literally means "lineage") corresponds, in a specific form, to what tradition itself is in a more general and all-inclusive way ; an initiatic line is, as it were, a given artery through which the traditional spirit flows with peculiar intensity. If the Way of the *sutras* primarily is the vehicle of traditional wisdom in its more general sense, the way of the *mantras is* concerned with the best means of "realizing" that to which the *sutras* have already drawn

attention, in other words, with Method.

Each further step in the initiatic path will require its appropriate *lung* or *wang* (*wang*=power or faculty) allowing the exercitant to renew his strength on the completion of one big effort and before he faces another. The whole process should be looked upon as one journey, whether long or short, punctuated with convenient halting-places which will vary in importance according to the degrees of knowledge to which they correspond. Such a journey is never without its perils, and for its accomplishment it calls for effort well sustained and well directed; whatever may happen on the way, the time must finally come when the traveler will be asked to stake all he possesses in a single throw for the purpose of gaining the pearl of great price; as for the rest, he must be content to rely on his Lama's grace, as the saying goes. In any case, no spiritual journey is ever taken alone, whatever may be the appearances; there is always a downflow of grace, but for which no such journeying would either begin or continue.

The inaugural *lung* often relates to the use of a book, special to the *gyüd* concerned, containing all the instructions necessary for the four *bum*; this book has to be memorized, an easy operation for most Tibetans whose education always includes a good deal of learning by heart, but difficult for the casual foreigner; for greater ease of memorizing, many of the Tantrik treatises are given in verse. Until the lung has been duly conferred it is unlawful to read the book or even to turn its pages. Despite this salutary prohibition a certain amount of information concerning the contents of these books has reached the West, which can only mean that some of those entrusted with this "initiatic secret" have broken their trust, either by handing the texts to foreigners or else by divulging details about them: a text like the Tibetan "Book of the Dead", to give one instance, might have been better left unpublished, for taken out of its proper context it has only served to feed the curiosity of all kinds of sensation-mongers as well as to provide material for the dubious interpretations of profane psychology. This book ostensibly concerns two classes of people, namely the dying, for whose express benefit it exists, and lamas whose special task it is to attend on the dying and who, in order to perform this office, have to receive both an initiation and training in its ritual. There is, however, some authority for supposing that this text is also designed to serve as a guide to a methodic process of "initiatic death", as a prelude to "spiritual regeneration"; in which case its profane disclosure, in violation of the traditionally imposed conditions, must be regarded as still more undesirable than if it had been a question of funeral rites alone.

The lung itself, in the case of a book, consists in a reading of the whole work aloud by the empowering Lama in the hearing of the disciple. In practice, however, there are various admitted ways of abbreviating the task; even so, such a reading takes a considerable time, so that a pause at half time is usual when tea is served and all the participants are allowed to relax. Such a break for tea is also usual in temple services, being typical of the matter-of-fact way in which the Tibetans regard all these things.

The above description, bare as it is, will, it is hoped, have given some inkling into the workings of the initiatic life as lived in Tibet; many parallels can doubtless be found in other traditions but the Tibetan spirituality possesses, as we have seen, some features of its own.

Coming back to more general considerations, the chief spiritual means in vogue among the Tantrik schools fall roughly under two headings: visualisation, and *mantra* or incantatory formula; these methods may either be employed singly or else in combination according to the tradition of each particular *gyüd*.

Visualisation consists, essentially, in the imaginative evocation of various divinities, and the Tantrik books are largely taken up with detailed instructions for constructing such and such a *mandala* or circle centred on a given divine aspect, of which the attributes, colours, attendant deities, names, etc., together with their symbolic correspondences have to be memorized in their proper order and correctly grouped round the presiding figure at the centre. To construct a *mandala* requires a combination of sacred geometry and figurative imagery, and many examples exist, beautifully drawn either on scrolls or on the walls of temples, to serve as mnemonic aids for those who practise this kind of meditation; one of the most splendid series of such *mandalas* was to be found painted on the wall of the upper cloister of the great temple at Sakya. They are also sometimes depicted on the ground, using coloured earths and pebbles, in connection with certain rites at the termination of which these marvelous symbolic designs will be effaced; one could compare them, perhaps, with the sand-paintings of the Navajo Indians of North America.

Two complementary phases are recognised in the creation of a *mdndala* respectively called *kyepa* (=producing) and *dzogpa* (=exhausting or perfecting). By drawing the divinities, as it were, out of himself and then reabsorbing them in the order described (a process which will be repeated as often as the instructing lama thinks fit), the exercitant is led to awareness that "the Kingdom of Heaven is within you" ‘ but also that whatever partakes of form, be it even divinely informed, is in the last analysis illusory, leaving room only for THAT which has no form, no name and no expressible attributes. The above gives a very inadequate picture of the principle behind the methods of visualisation but at least it affords an inkling of how such methods are expected to work.

With *mantra* the process is analogous, inasmuch as a *mantra* represents a sonorous form of the divinity, parallel to the visual forms already mentioned. A *mantra* can consist of a single syllable or name or else it may be formed out of several words which do not always, however, connect up into a sentence that can be logically analysed, in fact the opposite is more commonly the case. For the most part these formulas are of the kind called *zung (dharani* in Sanskrit) and because of their seemingly haphazard

character foreign commentators have readily described them as “gibberish” only fit to deceive the heathen. In reality, their virtue is in some measure bound up with their “non-logical” (not illogical) character, since one of the objects of meditating on such a formula is to penetrate its meaning without engaging the mind in a rationcinative operation to the detriment of intellection. Discovering the “secret” sense of a *zung* therefore is something comparable with the *koan* or “spiritual conundrum” of the Zen adepts, in China and Japan.

A *mantra* can either provide a theme for meditation or else it can be “invoked”, that is to say repeated whether aloud or silently and this practice, the Indian *japa,* is widespread in Tibet; the word used to describe it is *deba* which literally means the purring of a cat. It has been universally recognised that invocation, as a spiritual “support”, is peculiarly suited to the needs of the Dark Age forming the closing phase of a human cycle, when many spiritual means that were available in more favoured times have become impracticable. Deeper reasons apart, it is easy to see that the very simplicity and conciseness of this method, requiring no extraneous apparatus for its exercise, recommends its use in unusually difficult circumstances: a man might invoke even in the presence of scoffers and persecutors without their being aware of the fact, whereas any other method would attract attention and consequent reprisals.

Needless to say the concentrated use of *mantra* is no facile expedient intended for the simple-minded (though they too can use it after their own fashion) but on the contrary it demands an intellectual preparation of no small consequence; the element of repetition is merely incidental, valuable as this is to ensure both continuity and rhythm. In Tibet, as in other places where *mantra* is methodically used, a *lung* or initiatic empowerment must precede the use of any given formula, otherwise its invocation will remain at best rather ineffective and at worst dangerous, because of the irregular emission of the *mantra’s* inherent power.

All mantras now in use in Tibet were originally brought from India by the Tantrik initiates of the first centuries following the introduction of Buddhism into the Land of Snows ; they invariably remain in their Sanskrit form because a *mantra,* being as it were an *ikon* composed of sound, will not suffer mispronunciation, and still less translation into another language. The Indian science of *mantra* is insistent on this point. However, in practice and by dint of their repetition by people unacquainted with the phonetics of Sanskrit, many of the *mantras* used in Tibet have by now parted company with their spelling so that an Indian hearing them would be quite shocked by their present rendering on the part of the Tibetans, which to his ears would sound truly barbarous!

In this connection there are some good stories to tell; but before doing so, it should be explained that

Tibetans, as also Hindus, have a happy way of occasionally turning even a hallowed rule upside down, just to make sure that peoples' minds do not get so imprisoned in the rule as to render it self-contradictory, which can easily happen where "the spirit of either...or", so ingrained in European minds, is pushed to the point of pedantry. Many stories exist in which even highly venerated saints have had the tables turned on them by seemingly inferior or sinful people, stories in which, by a paradoxical reversal, the saint has been made to stand for "the letter which killeth" and the sinner for "the spirit which saveth". This ability to laugh at the things one venerates, though without losing one's veneration in the process, provides spiritual life with a healthy outlet; but it does not go with a sentimental outlook and this probably accounts for the fact that this kind of humour has rarely found a place here in the West. But now for a story:

It is related of the fifth Dalai Lama, commonly known as the "Great Fifth", that after he had completed his splendid monastery-cum-palace on Potala Hill overlooking the city of Lhasa, he often used to sit at his window watching people making their circumambulation of the sacred edifice, a pious practice that had continued to our time: the circuit is always taken in a clockwise direction as it is considered disrespectful to turn one's left side towards any eminence or building that becomes an object of pilgrimage; it must always be passed on the left, with the right side turned towards it.

One day, while the great pontiff was sitting by his window as usual, he perceived a female figure of radiant appearance apparently doing the circuit; her attributes were those of the goddess *Dölma* (=Saviouress, her Sanskrit name is *Tara).* Moreover on several successive days the same thing happened, so the Dalai Lama instituted an inquiry and found out, to his astonishment, that the divine Mother was not alone in her circumambulation, she was in fact accompanying a poor old man.

The Dalai Lama ordered the man to be brought before this : "Do you know", he asked, "that each day as you walk round the Potala the Lady Dölma bears you company? Also the air above you is filled with propitious signs, rainbows, Banners of Victory, Wheels of the Doctrine, flowers and many others. How do you explain this favour you have received?" The old man felt far from reassured by the sovereign's interest in his affairs; indeed this terrified him. All he could say was that he had been quite unaware of any of these supernatural manifestations. When questioned further he declared, however, that for some forty years it had been his daily practice, as taught him by his own spiritual master, to recite the litany of Dölma which he had combined with the sacred tour; this was all the light he could throw on the matter, since till that moment he had not given it any thought but that of carrying out his teacher's instructions.

Filled with admiration at the old man's piety, the Dalai Lama asked him to recite the litany in his presence but was rather taken aback to find that the text, as repeated by this simple soul, was full of mistakes; and as for the *mantras* included in the litany, they were almost unrecognisable. He therefore

told the man that he must learn to recite it properly, since it was hardly respectful to the goddess thus to distort words composed in her praise. Much abashed at his own ignorance the old man promised to do as the Pontiff had directed and hurried home to look up the text and memorize it afresh.

Several days later the Dalai Lama was back at his window whence he perceived the old man walking round as usual; but of the goddess there was no sign; and in the sky not a single rainbow or flower was to be seen! Hastily word was sent to the old man telling him to recite the litany just as he had been accustomed, mistakes and all. The next day Dölma reappeared at his side while the air was filled once again with all kinds of resplendent symbols. Then the Dalai Lama realized what had been the matter ; prior to his interference, well meant as it was, the old man's mind had been absorbed in Dölma to the exclusion of all extraneous attachments, hence the sublime realization that was vouchsafed him.

Another tale couched in the same vein was told me by my friend Rai Bahadur Densapa, Sikkim's distinguished elder statesman; he himself is a mine of traditional lore and one of his sisters was married to the Sakya Lama whose spiritual ancestor figures in this story. The said lama, whose vast learning earned for him the title of *"Sakya Pandita",* was once on his way to India, probably for the purpose of collecting books for the library that was one of the glories of his abbey, which takes its name of *"Sa-kya"* (=tawny earth) from the lonely valley where it is situated, on a level with the highest summits of the Alps. As he was approaching the frontier of Nepal the lama ran into another Tibetan, a *dubtob* or *yogi* endowed with supra-normal powers, who likewise was bound for India, so they decided to continue the journey together. As they walked along the Sakya Pandita asked the *dubtob* how he managed to gain such remarkable powers and the latter said it was thanks to a certain *mantra*; by dint of its concentrated invocation the powers had developed of their own accord. Where upon he repeated his *mantra* to the lama.

Now, as we said before, that Sakya Lama was a great Sanskritist in whose ear the distorted version of the Sanskrit formula as uttered by his rather rustic companion struck a most discordant note, so much so that he could not forebear from saying to the *dubtob:* "Though your *mantra* has brought you un-doubted benefits, I am bound to point out that you are mispronouncing it badly and with a *mantra,* this simply won't do. I myself speak Sanskrit fluently, so do let me show you the correct way to say the words". The *dubtob,* who had no pretentions to being a scholar, was only too glad to be coached by his learned companion; after some little practice he got the words right to the satisfaction of his instructor, following which the pair of them continued their way towards Nepal.

Just as they were arriving at the frontier, however, there suddenly appeared before them the menacing figure of a gigantic Hindu *yogi,* his face and body all smeared with ashes, who called out in a voice of thunder: "Not a step further! No Buddhists shall pass here! By years spent in austerities I have gained irresistible powers; you will defy them at your peril, so go back to where you came from". Stung by his

words the *dubtob* answered: “I am sure my own powers are greater than yours. I accept your challenge! Let each of us do what he can, we will soon see which of us is the stronger”. “Before we two engage in such a contest” said the Hindu, “let it be laid down as a prior condition that whichever of us comes out victorious, his defeated opponent will become his disciple and follow his doctrine”. “Agreed” said the *dubtob*, “now show me what you can do”, the words were hardly out of his mouth before the Hindu soared up into the air above his head : “Now bring me down if you can” he shouted “or else confess yourself defeated !” “Yes, bring down this insolent fellow” said the Sakya Lama, “This is the time to use the power of your *mantra* to good effect”.

Thus encouraged, the *dubtob* paused for a moment to concentrate his mind and then pronounced the words of the *mantra* with meticulous correctness, once, twice, thrice ... but nothing happened: the Hindu remained poised in the air. “This has never happened to me before” murmured the *dubtob*, “what ever can be amiss ?” The Hindu yogi burst out laughing : “What are you hesitating about ?” he cried, “say you are beaten and recognise my mastery!” This gibe, however, was too much for the *dubtob’s* patience: “My *mantra* has never failed me yet” he bellowed “and this time you shall feel its power”; but in his excitement he forgot all about his recent lesson in Sanskrit—his old habits reasserted themselves causing him to revert to the *mantra’s* Tibetanized form, distorted as this was: the Hindu dropped like a stone at his feet, begging for mercy! “Now take me for your disciple”, he said, “for I take refuge in the Triple Gem and from henceforth I become a follower of the Middle Way. Teach me, oh my master, how to follow it faithfully, till the goal of Enlightenment be reached”.’[3]

As for the Sakya Pandita, history does not record how he took this unexpected outcome of his scholarly advice the reader must be left to draw his own conclusions on the subject

It now remains for us to consider one last example of a spiritual method, one which is akin to Invocation by reason of its repetitive character but in which neither words, nor even thoughts, need play a part, its essential instrument being the body alone, so much so as almost to justify one’s coining the term “Somatic Invocation” in order to describe it. It consists in carrying out a sacred circumambulation or even an extended pilgrimage by successive prostrations; that is to say the exercitant measures his length all along the route chosen, making a mark where his head touches the ground each time he prostrates himself, on which mark he takes up his stance before proceeding to repeat the gesture.[4] This practice by its obviously exceptional character, belongs to the category of methods describable as “extraordinary”; it represents a special manifestation of the heroic trend in Tibetan spirituality, but otherwise it is not of particular importance.

In our time the disciples of the Gyalwa Karmapa, head of an important branch of the Kagyüdpa Order,

have shown a certain addiction to this method, carrying it to lengths which may well seem to most of us to approach the limit of bodily and nervous endurance. In one case one of these disciples, with the approval of the lama, decided to connect the new *stupa* erected by the king of Sikkim on a lovely wooded spur below his residence with the Cathedral of Lhasa, the *Jo-Khang* (from Jowo=Lord), prostrating himself all the way; this passage includes, among other ups and downs, the crossing of; the main watershed of the Great Himalayan range! Still more remarkable was the pilgrimage undertaken by another disciple of the same lama to the sacred mountain of the Kailas, known to Tibetans as "Precious Snow"; the starting-point was Lhasa. If to the clockwise circuit of the mountain itself one adds the outward and homeward journeys this man will have covered something like three thousand miles in the course of his pilgrimage. It is reckoned that for one in training two or three miles per day represents a good average, which makes of this journey a matter of about three years' steady going.

If some should feel minded to question the spiritual usefulness of this *tour de force,* the answer will be that, apart from any question of "gathering merit" which here is not the point, it is quite certain that one who has been through such an experience will never be the same man again, as far as his attitude to worldly values is concerned; detachment will almost have become second nature for him. Needless to say, this exceptional case has been mentioned, not for the sake of any sensational appeal it might have for certain minds—Tibetans themselves never dramatize these things—but because it marks a kind of extreme in the realm of methodic self-dedication that is only conceivable in traditional surroundings where the norm of spiritual endeavour is consistently high. There is no doubt that the Tibetans, in our time, had a fair claim to being considered the most religious people in the world: it is this fact, more than anything, which presently has endowed their fate with something like a cosmic significance.

If in the course of this excursion across the Tibetan scene one has been content to think mostly in the present tense as if the things here described were still just as one left them twenty-five years ago, this is not due to unawareness of what has been happening since in that stricken land, or to any facile optimism regarding the ability of its once contented and carefree people to withstand the pressure now being put upon them. The mind recoils at imagining that so many things vividly present to one's own recollection are already of the past, harried out of existence under the dreadful system which is being imposed, with fanatical meticulousness, upon the defenceless inhabitants of the snow-girt plateau.

It would not be in keeping with the purpose of this essay to spend time in analysing the catastrophic political events affecting the Tibetan world during the last few years; the above summary allusion is simply by way of rounding off a chapter. There is, however, one question sure to crop up in the minds of readers, namely whether despite the systematic repression of their religion the Tibetans have had to suffer, something of the Buddhist spirit may not still be preserved under the surface of their now nomi-

nally secularist society. May it not even be, as some will ask, that ensconced in remote corners of the mountains a saint or two will still be meditating in unruffled calm for the benefit of. creatures, subsisting, as such people are able to do, on a minimal amount of nourishment periodically brought to him in secrecy by some devoted person as in past years, All this is possible, over and above the fact that it is not easy to eradicate the piety rooted traditionally in the consciousness of a whole people, even when disposing for this hellish purpose of the many and novel resources available to the modern State, resources which the worst of ancient persecutors did not even dream of.

All one can say, in answer to the above questions, is that no information is actually available, or likely to become so at an early date; one can only speculate on the basis of human probabilities, hoping against hope that the still fertile seed of the Dharma may be lying here and there unnoticed waiting for a turn of events that will allow it to germinate afresh. For if the fatality of impermanence, as the Buddha has taught, attaches to all things in existence, be it even those we deem most irreplaceable and holy, it is a grave error to forget the no less certain fatality affecting things that are evil and destructive: looking around the world today one is sometimes tempted to forget the latter aspect of a truth that cuts both ways and it is as much an entanglement for the mind to dwell exclusively on the one alternative as on the other: hope, as well as faith and love, lies where these twin aspects meet.

Returning to Tibet: we must not forget either those lamas among the refugees in India and the Himalayan border kingdoms who are still in a position to impart the traditional teachings, wisdom and method together; they include some eminent names, mostly from the region of Khan in what was nominally Chinese territory, where in our time many of the greatest masters were to be found. Let it not be said that these lamas should have stayed behind to share the fate of their immediate flocks; many did so, while others who as persons certainly did not lack the virtue of fortitude considered it their duty to conserve, given an opportunity to do so, the knowledge entrusted to them by their predecessors in the line of initiation. Christ said when sending out his first disciples to preach the Gospel: “when they persecute you in one city, flee ye into another”; it will always be a matter of spiritual judgment when to opt for the crown of martyrdom or when to avoid it for the sake of carrying on a task laid upon one by the Divine hand. Often one is given no choice over this matter, while sometimes the decision is left to oneself, in which case it is not for outsiders to prejudge it. All one can say now on the subject is that some eminent Masters are still carrying on with their spiritual task outside the borders of Tibet and this fact, for the outside world, must be accounted an advantage.

It is for time to show what the outcome of the Tibetan *diaspora* will be. Meanwhile one can only ask for the prayers of all men of good heart, on behalf of those who have had to stay behind in what, till recently, was in all senses the most religious-orientated country in the world and also perhaps the happiest.

[1] It would be still truer to say that “method” is the dynamic aspect of THAT which, when statically regarded, is known as “wisdom”, in which case the idea of a “marriage” disappears in favor of a principle which only becomes polarized in our own mind, while remaining ONE at its own level.

[2] At the moment of writing (1972) it has not been possible to ascertain the fate of Sakya with certainty; there have been reports of its total destruction, which still await corroborating or otherwise. In any case it is unlikely that the move able works of art or books are still in position, even if the main buildings have escaped being quarried for their materials.

[3] Somewhat similar stories occur in Hinduism ; but needless to say, there the respective roles are reversed and so is the final result. The essential point to grasp in all contests of this type is that whichever way the inter-religious opposition is turned, it is still the same truth that emerges. This is an important observation for anyone who is seriously concerned in the now very pressing question of inter-religious communication at an “oecumenical” level: the old traditional differences had their *raison d’etre* and cannot simply be brushed aside, but this does not mean that one need be imprisoned by them. To respect these differences at the level of their own validity is in fact a first condition of any eventual inter-communication of a genuine kind. Orthodoxy (not pharisaism) can speak to orthodoxy; neither heterodoxy nor a diluted faith is able to speak effectively to anyone. Contemplative intelligence, the “eye of the heart”, can render all forms transparent, including one’s own form ; it does not do away with those forms-indeed far from it-nor does it encourage, in the name of so-called charity, an attitude of intellectual flabbiness as deadly to mutual understanding as it is to faith.

[4] A rough pad of wood and leather is worn when carrying out this practice for any length of time, as an indispensable protection for the hands.