



stones are added to make the pile grow bigger. Some travellers place leaves, flowers, small branches, incense and food as their offering.

Sometimes a cairn marks the spot from where one could get a view of the citadel of a deity. It is said that in the past, the cairns served as land boundary markers between places falling under two or more jurisdictions.

3.3.1.3. Invocation of Bon Deities

Bon tradition of worship and festive events are still popular in different districts. Here are some examples: The district of Ha observes the *bongko* or *boenko* that takes place once in three years. Likewise, Bala bongko is observed in Bjena Gewog of Wangdi Phodrang and the lhabon is practised in the communities of Mangde district.

Similarly, *Gazang lhasoe* is an invocation ritual performed in Martsala while *ahoe* is performed in Kheng region and *cha* in honour of the Guru zhe in Menbi community in Lhuentse. Likewise, *kharpbu* is held in the villages of Tsamang in Mongar to invoke Guru zhe, while it is performed in honour of the Ode Gongjen in Zhemgang. Similarly, *yaklha* is celebrated annually in Ura on the 15th day of the 7th month of the lunar calendar in honour of the Ode Gongjen, respected in Bumthang as the god of livestock, *norlha*. Additionally, there are other rituals commonly known as lhasoe performed in most villages across Bhutan, which are dedicated to various spirits and deities of the respective locality. These rituals and festivals are performed so that the villages get timely rainfall and good harvests, to ensure that the health of both people and animals remains sound, and to avert any other natural calamities.



Although no animal sacrifices are made in most of these rituals, some require meat elements. *Ap chungdu lhasoe* in Ha requires a yak for annual sacrifice although it is a Buddhist form of invocation to a member of the Buddhist pantheon.

3.3.2. Buddhist Tradition

Buddhism is founded on the teachings of Gautama Buddha some 2500 years ago. No religious rites were taught at the early advent of Buddhism. At that time, the practice was known as *dolug*, tradition of the sutra. The tradition of rituals is said to have emerged during the visit of Guru Padmasambhava to Tibet in the 8th century, through the secret tantric teachings known as *sangngag*.

3.3.2.1. Invocation Rituals

A popular invocation ritual amongst Bhutanese in their daily life is *serkem*. It is an offering of wine or black tea

or milk along with some food substance and gold dust in a chalice. The offering is made by chanting prayers accompanied by the sound of bell and drum. Food substances can be grains, roasted rice, barley, fruits and biscuits. This offering is made to the invisible spirits, deities of the land, and to dharmapalas, invoking their protection and blessings for day-to-day activities. Once the ritual is completed, the offering is thrown away in a clean place, mostly on rooftops.

Likewise, invoking spirits that live in the water or the earth, such as *lu* (naga) is also popular as Bhutanese believe that they are the custodians of water and the underworld as well as being deities of wealth. Offerings to these beings involve only smoke offering (i.e. the burning of incense) with fine brocades, rice, milk, cheese, butter and honey. If the underworld beings are not pleased or if humans happen to mistreat them, they create havoc through causing untimely rain, epidemics, droughts, and sickness to both humans and animals. Therefore, in order to coexist peacefully with the spirits of the water and the earth, it is very important to respect each other's presence and live harmoniously.

3.3.2.2. Purification Rituals

Keeping the residence free of impurities, negative forces and obstacles is accorded the highest degree of importance. Therefore, purification and cleansing rituals composed of producing smoke, and sprinkling of water are conducted frequently to keep impurities and imperfections away from the area. The purification ritual called *lhabsang* is very popular, and must be performed first thing in the morning before starting any new activity. It is an offering of smoke, serkem, and ritual cakes. For the purification ceremony, branches of aromatic trees and shrubs such as juniper, mountain azaleas, and other herbal plants are used together with a mixture of flour, butter and a little milk, which is then added to the already smoking branches. In addition to this, forest products that resemble meat and alcoholic substance through colour and taste are also used as smoke offering ingredients. These items are put in the fire or ember from time to time until the purification ritual is completed.

The cleansing ritual is known as *thrueso*, and involves cleansing with the help of pouring ambrosial water by a lama. The ablution water is a mixture of water, edible camphor and saffron. Normally the mixture is held in a *bumpa*, (ritual vase with a long spout). The *bumpa* is ornamented with a peacock feather and sacred *tsa kusha* (tiger grass) plumes. The lama holds a mirror, a

symbolic item to capture the deities that are invoked in the ceremony, and a white silk scarf symbolising a towel, with which to wipe off the impurities. Varieties of plants that produce aroma are lit to spread scented smoke. This ceremony is widely offered for a various reasons, such as the clearing of impurities caused by resentment, adverse conditions, negative energy and negative dependency. Some perform the ceremony before starting a new project or setting out on a long journey.

3.3.2.3. Summoning Rituals

Once born in this human body, it is important to strive to do well or at least survive meaningfully in society. To survive, one must acquire wealth and honour. In order to acquire wealth there is a ritual for summoning prosperity, *yangkuk*. During this ritual the gods and goddesses of wealth, Namse and Tsheringma are invoked. A long list of items for the prosperity casket (*yangdrom*) must be gathered, such as precious metals, precious gemstones, nine cereal grains, small statue of Dzambhala, and a collection of soil, wood, water and stone pieces from sacred sites. After prosperity has been summoned, the collected items are sealed and kept in the altar room. Once this ritual is in progress, it is believed that giving things away leads to loss of prosperity so should be avoided, while receiving things brings in prosperity and is considered good. Therefore, giving things away should be done only after three days from the completion of the ritual.

Another important ritual is the summoning of life, *tsbekhug*, which is dedicated to Amitayus, the Buddha of Long Life. This ritual is to lengthen the life of a person by reciting Amitayus mantra as well as receiving empowerments of Amitayus. Similarly, when a person happens to get frightened at night or at very perilous



locations, his or her soul is likely to be stolen by wandering spirits or demons. In such a case, the person will get sick and if not treated accordingly in time, he or she will soon die. Therefore, in order to reinstate the soul, a ritual for summoning or restoring the soul (*lakug* or *lalu*) is carried out.



3.3.2.4. Rituals for Accumulating Merits

Tshog or feast offering accumulates merit, as it is an action aligned with one of the six paramitas (transcendental actions) of giving away alms to the deities and to all sentient beings. At every meal, a plate of food is offered at the altar to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, dakas and dakinis. On a bigger scale, a tshog offering or *tshogkhor* is organised on the 10th and 25th days of each lunar month. At a grand level, the offering can be *tshogbum* or 100,000 offerings of tshog.

If such offerings are made wholeheartedly and with pure intentions, one will accumulate enormous merit, especially if the offerings are genuinely dedicated to the benefit of all sentient beings. If one does not have anything to offer, it is still possible to accumulate merit equal to that of those who do. One just has to feel happy and praise what others do and wish that all sentient beings benefit from their offerings, besides wishing for a manifold increase in the fortune of the sponsor.

3.3.2.5. Wrathful Rituals

Wrathful rituals in Buddhism are known as *nansék phangsum* – *nanpa* for pressing, *sekpa* for incinerating and *phangwa* for hurling away. This ritual is comprised of chanting liturgical verses, conjuring hosts of spirits, and then repelling the negative forces, incinerating the evil spirits, and hurling the ritual cakes into the fire in order to suppress and clear all evil and negative forces.

When a household experiences lots of quarrels and heated verbal skirmishes both within and outside, loses belongings, and gets angry unnecessarily, it is a sign that adversity has struck. In order to suppress these adversities, the family performs a ritual to avoid disastrous results.

The burning or fire ritual is offered to the deity of fire. This ritual has the power to set everything in order in the event that other rituals have no effect in improving harvest, sickness, or misfortunes. During the fire ritual, if names of deceased people are written on a piece of paper and put it into the fire, these beings will be liberated from the samsaric world. The ashes from the fire offering have mystical power to prevent pests when scattered over a field, thus resulting in a good harvest.

Similarly, people are subject to various maledictions

from humans, gods, demons and spirits. In case other rituals have no effect on the maledictions, then the hurling ritual is the last and most effective of all. It has to be conducted by a great lama, as these three rituals are very complex and powerful. In the past, this ritual served as defence from enemies, so it was performed to keep the enemies at bay. This ritual has the mystical power to eliminate enemies and maledictions.

In line with the above, the exorcism ritual *gegtre* is also part of this wrathful ritual as it involves the driving away of evil and negative forces from houses or communities, thereby inviting peace, health, and prosperity to the households and community. The overall significance of performing these wrathful rituals is for peace to pacify sickness, demons, hindrances, and everything that is disharmonious, for the benefit of others.

3.3.2.6. Rituals for General Wellbeing and Prosperity

As described above, rituals are generally performed for the wellbeing of the people and animals. However, every ritual has its own significance. Here, in contrast to the rituals described above, some rituals or rimdro for the wellbeing of human and animals are described. The list is not exhaustive but just examples for general understanding.

An interesting and commonly known rimdro is *mikha*, to avert evil curses. The ritual consists of preparing an effigy having the beak of a bird. The effigy portrays all the body parts of a woman including breasts and genitalia. Material belongings including farming tools and edibles have to be laid around the effigy and thrown away along with the effigy. *Mikha* is also called *kharam*, the negative impact of backbiting. Therefore, in addition to this ritual, *kharam shing*, carved wooden phalluses are also fixed on poles driven into the ground near the entrance gate (if any) or fixed in front of the house by the approach path. The images are faced outwards, towards the direction from which visitors would approach, since their function is to ward off any potential evil eye emanations from passers-by. Similarly, the painted depictions of phalluses commonly seen on the front of Bhutanese houses are believed to ward off the evil *kharam*.

Another very common, important, elaborate and effective ritual performed by the Bhutanese is *jabzhi* or the ritual of Four Hundred Offerings. It is a ritual performed in order to overcome four great devils or evils: the evil of aggregates (*phung poi due*), the evil

of afflictions (*nyonmong pai due*), the evil of death (*chidag ki due*) and the evil of the son of god — lust — (*lhai bui due*). Therefore, one hundred stamped clay figures (*tshatsha*), one hundred butter lamps, one hundred effigies of a person, and one hundred ritual cakes are made respectively to overcome those four evils.

Yet another important but rarely performed ritual is *doema yudog*, a ritual of Tara, the sublime mother. It is one of the greatest and most elaborate rituals performed in Buddhist tradition. Although it suppresses all evils and enhances health and wealth, the main purpose of performing this ritual is to ward off black magic and other dangerously harmful activities plotted against the people and animals of the household.

Zandre khajur is a ritual performed to drive away harmful spirits in a household responsible for such things as sickness, quarrels and fights among the family members, and lack of ability to accomplish anything. It usually happens after the death of a person where the evil spirit that stole the life of the late person takes up residence in the house and creates havoc in the household. In such a situation, *zandre khajur* is performed to divert the evil spirit. Likewise, the list of rituals will go on based on the different themes and purposes but these are some of the important rituals that are performed for the wellbeing of the people and the animals.



