

MAJOR TIBETAN LIFE CYCLE EVENTS-- BIRTH AND MARRIAGE CEREMONIES

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Introduction

In two articles we propose to survey the major Tibetan life cycle events which we consider to be for a layman the most common: birth, marriage and death. Our basic concern will be an investigation of these events from a religious and ceremonial point of view. Unlike in Christianity or Hinduism where there are special religious ceremonies associated with birth and marriage (such as Christening or Hindu purification rites and a religious marriage ceremony), there is no proper religious equivalent in Tibetan Buddhism. However, there are certain ritual activities which are performed at the time of birth or marriage but which are not necessarily specific to these occasions. They are mainly rituals whose main purpose is to procure prosperity and eliminate evil. On the other hand, funeral rituals are of utmost religious importance. Whereas birth and marriage ceremonies are concerned with gaining blessings for prosperity and happiness in this world, funeral rites are concerned with purification, elimination of sins and guiding the dead person through the state of *bar do* and helping him to gain a better rebirth or even, if possible, Buddhahood.

Since the ceremonies connected with birth and marriage differ due to regional variation and historical tradition, we do not intend to give a complete survey of all these variations.

The description of birth and marriage ceremonies given below is based on two short works in Tibetan which have recently been published in Dharamsala, with the concern of preserving the traditions connected with these events among Tibetans in exile. The booklet concerning birth ceremonies bears the Tibetan title: *bod kyi sngar srol byis pa skye geo bya tshul po tā la yi them skas zhes bya ba dge'o*. It was compiled by Thubten Sangay and published by the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, in 1975. The other on marriage customs bears the Tibetan title: *bod du chang sa rgyag tshul gna' bo'i lugs bzang yang gsal bde skyid rdzogs ldan gsar pa mgron du gugs pa'i pho nya zhes bya ba bzhugs so*. It was compiled by Phun tshogs dbang rgyal Bar zhi and edited by Thubten Sangay and also published in Dharamsala in 1976. In using these sources we have extracted the information mainly concerned with the religious activities concerned with those events. At the end, we supply a selected annotated bibliography, selected according to the added information and variation it can add to our presentation.

Birth and Marriage Ceremonies

Birth

The booklet on Tibetan Birth Ceremonies not only describes various rituals performed for the well being and protection of the newly born baby and mother, but also provides long descriptions of practical methods of child rearing. Here, ritual aspects of birth will be concentrated on but mention shall be made of practical aspects when they indicate a typical Tibetan mentality or a particular way of behaving on such occasions.

When both parents especially the pregnant mother, have good dreams (i.e. dreams of fruit, a white conch shell, jewels, ornaments, sun-rays) they indicate that the pregnancy is proceeding well and safely. However, when the woman dreams of

clouds, quarrels, weeping or being carried away by water, then this indicates that the pregnancy is in jeopardy. In order to avert the danger, a lama should be requested to perform some suitable rituals for the well being of the expected baby and the parents should carry amulets prepared by the lama according to his discernment of the signs.

There are signs which Tibetans believe indicate the sex of the child to be born. Signs which indicate that a boy will be born are: the mother's right hip is raised, the right breast sheds milk first, she sways toward the right, the centre of her naval is high, she dreams of horses, bulls and males of different animal species. On the other hand, when all the above signs are orientated toward the left. The naval grows evenly and the mother has a desire to meet men and she takes pleasure and delight in songs music and ornaments, then it is believed that a baby girl will be born. When both sides of the naval are high and the centre is low and the other signs are mixed, then twins are to be expected. When all the signs are mixed, then it is said that the child will be a hermaphrodite.

Pregnancy is believed to last thirty eight weeks or until the first half of the tenth lunar month. During this time the mother should take care of what she eats and drinks. She should not visit people who are evil and of impure disposition or partake of their food. She must not wear old or other people's clothes. Very hot or cold drinks as well as *arak* should be avoided and *chang* can only be taken in moderation. She should not eat too much or work too hard. Sexual abstinence should be observed. Once a month she should pay a visit to a lama in order to be sprinkled with holy water. She should also request him to perform the *tshe dbang* (life-empowerment) ritual and recite appropriate mantras. As the time of birth draws near, in order to eliminate winds in the body, she should eat

small doses of good food such as meat, nourishing soups, milk and butter. When it is obvious that the birth is imminent, the house should be cleaned and incensed. Suitable *mantras* should be recited and incense offered to the local deities.

If the birth is difficult, a special *gto* (magic device) must be made. A nine-dotted dice is placed on a square base of butter. The father, the maternal uncle or other people of suitable disposition, recite the following mantra:

"Om sha sha - open the path. Shu shu - open the path. Open the doors of the combined four elements."

This mantra may be recited a hundred or a hundred and two times. Then the *gto* is placed inside the woman and the birth should follow soon afterwards. Another *gto* may be performed when birth proves difficult. A butterfish is made and the following mantra should be recited:

"Om ka ka - open mother's path. Ki ki - open mother's path. Shon shon - open mother's path. Ma mo open the path of the four elements."

This mantra should be recited a thousand times. The open-mouthed butter-fish should be pointed towards the mother's abdomen with a 'phu' sound. Water should then be poured over the fish and caught underneath in a dish to which should be added the burnt feather of a peacock and eight bear's hairs accompanied by the recitation of the above mantra a hundred times. The sound 'phu' is made over the water which is then given to the mother to drink.

There are several other *gto* which may be performed. In some traditions if the mother is given dried fish from the *Ma pham* or *gYu mtsho* lakes and drinks a little cold water, then the baby should be born quickly.

As soon as the baby is born, the woman helper ties the umbilical cord with a cotton thread and smears the naval with a spice and some sesame oil. She then recites the following verse:

"Oh, my child, you are born out of love,
 May you live for a hundred years,
 May you see a hundred autumns,
 May you live long and be glourious,
 May the nine evils be destroyed,
 May you have prosperity, happiness and wealth."

The woman helper then takes the child and washes it in scented water. The cloth in which the baby is to be wrapped should be incensed to deter demons. Then the woman-helper opens the baby's mouth with her forefinger and covers its head with a piece of raw silk soaked in a little oil. Before the baby suckles at the mother's breast, the woman helper makes the sign 'hriḥ' in saffron, on the baby's tongue to promote wise speech. For protection against the local deity, she pours a little water mixed with musk into the baby's mouth. Then she gives it a little honey mixed with butter. The baby can then suckle. Alternatively, according to others, the syllable 'dhiḥ' may be marked in saffron on the baby's tongue in order to effect a sharp mind or the syllable 'hriḥ' in *giwang* (an animal extract used in medicine) for long life and the increasing of merit.

In order to avert inauspicious occurrences in the house, a lama should perform a *sbyin sreg* (*homa*) ritual. Similarly, the spirits which may cause misfortune or harm to the baby should be propitiated.

Soon after the baby is born, the mother's vulva should be covered with the skin of a black snake. The placenta should be buried deep in the ground so that dogs or wild animals

cannot dig it up. If the baby is born in the first, fifth or ninth month it should be buried towards the east; if in the second, sixth or tenth month, to the west; and in the fourth, eighth or twelfth month, to the south. The mother can then put on clean clothes and the whole house should be incensed.

A lama is then summoned to conduct a special ceremony to pray to the protective deities and the deities that protect against illnesses. According to whether the child is a boy or a girl, four arrows or four spindles respectively, are placed in the different parts of the house. For protection from the sky, one is attached to the top of the house fence; for protection from intermediary space, inside the house; from doors, on the lintles; from the earth, under the house. For protection against demons, a thread over which *mantras* have been recited, is tied around the baby's neck together with a piece of *shu dag* (rush) and around the wrists.

Each month, on the date of the baby's birth, tormas and food should be offered to the protective deity and a small *glud* (ransom) to the demons. A name may be given to the baby by someone who knows the appropriate recitation that goes with it. Otherwise, a lama may be requested to give the name. The name can be that of the prominent planets at the time of the baby's birth. If all the previous children in the family have died then it is better to give the newly-born baby a different name each month so as to confuse the *sri* (evil sprites) of the babies that have died so that they do not attack the new one. The baby's birth may be celebrated on an auspicious day. A ceremonial scarf is presented to a religious image in the house and prayers are directed to the protective deities. *Chang* is drunk with friends and neighbours.

For the first time that the baby is taken out of the house, an auspicious day is chosen for the child. It is washed and

dressed in clean, new clothes. Before it is actually taken out, a *gto* should be made. A cord used for donkeys is tied to the baby's neck and it is carried outside by the paternal uncle if the baby is a boy and the maternal aunt if a girl. Outside, the house is circumnambulated in a clockwise direction and the cord is discarded. Then, along with the parents, the child is taken to such holy places as the temple or a chöten and then to its root lama for blessing. (If this lama was not asked to name the child before and the child still does not have a name, then the lama will be requested to give the child a name now.)

When asleep, the baby should face north or east and the head should be covered in a cotton cloth soaked in a little oil. In order to become sharp of mind and firm of body, the baby should be given medicinal substances such as musk, gold dust, mustard, honey, butter and sugar. For protection against the *sa bdag*, *klu*, *gnyan*, etc. a bundle containing medicinal substances is attached to the baby's neck.

In former times, in the eighth month after the baby was born, ear piercing would take place. If a boy, the right ear would be pierced; if a girl, the left. A dog's hair would be drawn through the hole. Also, it was believed that if the first word that the baby uttered was *a ma* then the mother would die first; if *a pha*, the father. It was considered best if the child just uttered the sound 'A'.

When the child is one year old, an auspicious day is chosen to worship the protective deities and the chosen deity on behalf of the child. At the end of the first year the baby should be able to walk. However, if it does not, then a *gto* is performed. A white cow is taken and the baby is seated astride it facing backwards. The person holding the child says: '*Daya, daya*' and makes the cow walk. This was believed to help and encourage the baby to walk.

Physical illnesses aside, the baby can be afflicted or tormented by demons. The following signs are indications that the baby is afflicted by the five *pho gdon*, the seven *mo gdon*, the two *rgyal bsen* and the four *sprul*: the baby always cries, especially in the early morning and the evening, it looks frightened and is out of breath, the baby trembles and it groans, it moves in sleep, when awake it bites its lower lip, it scratches its mother, the eyes are turned, it does not take the breast, it foams at the mouth and the nails are of a dark colour. To appease the deities causing the baby misfortune, they should be offered *yas* (special offerings) and *glud* (ransom made of tsampa) as well as *mdos* (thread crosses). Holy water should be sprinkled on the baby and an amulet prepared. A lama should perform a fierce recitation and appropriate rites in order to subdue the demons.

Besides the usual ways of diagnosing illnesses, there are three others recognised by the Tibetans: examining the veins behind the ears, examining the sound of the baby's voice and examining the mother's milk. There are three veins behind the ear. The three behind the right ear refer to the lungs, liver and kidney; the three behind the left, to the heart, spleen and kidney. When the veins are dark in colour, it indicates high temperature; when yellowish, gall bladder disease; yellow-grey, a cold; very pale, phlegm; red, blood disease. When the veins are not clear (i.e. when they cannot be seen) then it means that the baby is affected by demons and there is a danger of death. A lama should be summoned to perform the ritual for long life as well as the ritual for dispelling demons.

Diagnosing illness by listening to the voice of the baby shows that when the voice is thin and long, the liver is affected; stout, coarse and long, a cold; difficulty in speaking, the lungs; like a goose, vomiting disease; mixed sounds, demon affliction.

Examination of mother's milk is a form of diagnosing illnesses suffered by the mother. A metal dish is filled with water and fresh milk is taken from the mother and poured into it. If the milk floats on the top, there is no need for a medicinal cure; if it stays in the middle, a cure is called for; if it forms itself into a pillar shape, then there is serious risk of death; when it curdles, the mother is affected by a demon. When the colour of the milk is dark, this indicates a blood disease; yellow, gall bladder disease; bubbly, lungs and wind; blue, phlegm; looking like wool, a demon.

Illnesses are usually treated with medicines but, in some cases such as diarrhoea and vomiting, magical devices are made use of. Protective threads are made by winding up three threads together, then cutting them in half. Twenty one knots are then made in each half and the following mantra is recited "*Yama chad*" (Cut the demon of death). The sound '*phu*' is made and one knotted triple thread is put around the neck and the other around the waist. The same thing is done for vomiting except that the mantra "*Yama shig*" (Kill the demon of death) is recited.

Besides medicines for curing, preventative medicines are also made. For example, from a black rock facing north which never gets sunlight, black sooty dirt is scraped. A medicine which looks like moss with red hairy roots and which grows on such rocks is collected. Also hairs from the heads of both the mother and father of the baby are required. All these things are put together and burnt. The ashes should be put in a little *chang* and given to the baby to drink. This brew should prevent the baby becoming ill for twelve months. Likewise if musk, treacle and a rush taken from a lake are mixed and given to the child in a little *chang*, it will remain unaffected by illnesses or demons for twelve years.

Marriage

As there is no religious significance attached to marriage, the learned monkhood never wrote or took an interest in devising a special ritual associated with marriage. It was only as late as the nineteenth century that one of the leading religious scholars of the *ris med* movement, Kong sprul *Yon tan rgya mtsho* (1833-99) attempted to bring some uniform pattern and give a religious significance to the marriage ceremony. On the basis of old Tibetan and Bonpo customs he wrote a marriage ritual for the prince of Derge, which was divided into eight sections. The first part is concerned with the dispelling of evil spirits which precede the party leading the bridegroom's house. The second is concerned with the purification of the bride in order to prevent offence being made to the *thab lha* (hearth god). The next part of the ceremony concerns spreading a carpet for the bride to sit on. Next the bride, seated on the carpet, is offered the three white things to eat. Then she is given a new name. After that there is the performance of invoking the deities for protection and benign attitude. The seventh part is the summoning of prosperity (*g-yang 'gugs pa*). The final part consists of prayers and invocations for blessing and happiness.

Perhaps the oldest marriage ceremony is preserved in the Bonpo tradition. As there are certain elements in it which have survived in one way or another in the Buddhist marriage ceremonies, it is appropriate to describe it here. The Bonpo ceremony begins with an account of the first marriage which took place between a man and a goddess. A beautiful goddess called *Srid leam 'phrul mo che* was sought by both men and gods. A man named *Ling dkar*, the lord of *rGya* requested the father of the goddess to give him his daughter in marriage. The father of the goddess replied that it was impossible for a black-headed man to marry a goddess who belonged to the gods residing

in heaven. *Ling dkar* argued that if men and gods came together then the men would respect gods and the gods would provide them with protection. The sun and the moon remain in the sky but their rays fall on the earth and provide warmth and from the earth a vapour rises and reaches the sky. This and similar arguments convinced the father of the goddess to consent to give her in marriage to *Ling dkar*. He was obliged to make rich presents of gold, turquoises, arrows, cattle and the like which were to be brought by the seven kinsmen of the groom riding on white horses. Before the goddess left her home she played dice with her brother for her share of the parental inheritance. The game of dice was presided over by a priest. Although the goddess wanted half of the inheritance, she received only a third.

When the goddess left her home, her father gave her an arrow, her mother a spindle and her brother a turquoise. She made salutations before the gods, the priest, her parents and her brother. The seven kinsmen of the groom attached a white piece of silk to the goddess's right lap and led her away to the land of men. At the same time the priest performed the ritual of summoning 'prosperity'. This ritual is considered to be of great importance for it is believed that when the bride or groom leave home permanently, the prosperity of the house may also disappear. This ritual is performed both at the bride's and the bridegroom's house. In the case of the bride it is performed to prevent the disappearance of prosperity and in the case of the groom whose house the bride is being led to, it is performed to increase prosperity. The meaning of the word *g-yang* is rather abstract and vague and carries a rather symbolic significance of wealth and prosperity. In some parts of Tibet, when people sell a horse, they take some hair from the horse's mane and attach it to the doorway of the enclosure where the horses are kept in order to retain the *g-yang* of the horses.

The second part of the wedding ceremony is the actual marriage ritual. It is called *lha 'dogs* (adhering to the gods). Here a woollen thread called *dmu thag* (sky cord) is attached to the groom's girdle and a blue thread called *g-yang thag* (prosperity cord) to the bride's. The groom holds an arrow and makes an offering of *chang* and *torma* to the five deities of the head (*pho lha*, *sgra lha*, *srog lha*, *ma lha* and *zhang lha*). The bride holding a spindle, offers curds and barley flour mixed with butter. The officiating priest offers a piece of gold (ring or ear ring) to the groom and a turquoise to the bride. In this case the piece of gold is called *bla gser* (soul gold) and the turquoise, *bla g-yu* (soul turquoise). Then, the officiating priest together with the couple seated on a white felt mat on which a swastika design of barley has been made begins a ritual chanting. The first part of the chanting describes the origins of the world. Next there follows the story about the origin of the arrow, spindle and material of the sky-cord and prosperity-cord.

From the union of *Phyva gang g-yang grags*, the father and *Srid pa'i gdong bzang ma*, the mother, there came into existence three eggs. From the first golden egg was hatched a golden arrow adorned with turquoise and feathers. This arrow symbolised life: fish-eye of the groom. From the second egg, which was turquoise, a turquoise arrow was hatched adorned with gold and feathers -- this was the arrow of the glory of the bride. From the third, a conch egg, a golden spindle came out. From the rays of the sky and the vapours of the ocean, a white mass of *Bon* was formed and then spun by the wind and wound round a tree. This thread was called sky-cord and prosperity-cord. The ritual concludes by saying that the groom's *bla-gser* and the bride's *bla g-yu* were born and grew up separately but now they are made united. The verses continue with the invocation of trusting the young couple to the gods:

"May the arrow of manhood and the spindle of womanhood remain united.

May the cords, the *dmu-thag* and *g-yang thag*, remain uncut.

May the union of gods and men remain firm."

There are three kinds of arrow in the marriage ritual. The first one is called *lha mda' sgro dkar*, an arrow with white feathers which serves as the *rten* (residence) for the five gods of the head; it was brought by the five kinsmen of the groom who came to collect the bride as part of the bride-price. The second arrow called *tshe mda' nya mig* ('life-arrow fish-eyed') is the groom's arrow and a symbol of manhood. The third arrow, given as a parting gift by the goddess's father, is called *dpal mda'* ('glorious arrow). The ritual role of the third arrow remains uncertain but, in some marriage ceremonies as we will see later, it is attached on the bride's back, as she leaves her home. -In Amdo, especially among Bonpo families, an arrow with silk streamers of five colours was brought into the house when a baby boy was born by the maternal uncle. This was done in accordance with the marriage ritual which stated that when a boy was born, an arrow should be placed on the pillow, when a girl, a spindle. The custom of placing the spindle seems to have been discontinued.¹

The Tibetan Buddhist marriage ceremonies vary from region to region. A simple wedding ceremony usually consists of a gathering of relatives and guests who come together to offer the young couple scarfs and wish them every happiness. The wedding ceremony is called the *chang sa* (beer place) which

1. The information concerning the Bonpo marriage ritual i.e. the story of the marriage between the goddess and the man, the origin of the arrow, etc. is based here on one lecture of a series delivered by Samten Karmay in Tokyo: *A General Introduction to the History and Doctrines of Bon*, The Toyo Bunko, Tokyo 1975.

renders its main tone very well. It is mainly a social occasion during which much *chang* is drunk and food consumed. In more elaborate ceremonies, special offerings of *chang*, cow-dung and incense are placed inside and outside the house for the local deities as a propitiation for them not to cause any obstructions to the occasion and to the newly wedded couple. Also, sometimes, a monk is invited to perform a rather general kind of ritual for bringing blessing and prosperity to the married couple.

Nowadays, the Tibetan people in exile, have become aware of their old traditions and make an effort to preserve their customs which, in a new setting and changing life style, tend to be forgotten and replaced by customs acquired from indigenous neighbours. Here we will give a short summary of the different stages of the wedding ceremony, concentrating more on its religious aspects as described in the booklet already mentioned above in the introduction.

First of all, the family of the potential groom send a messenger to the house of the girl to request the year of the girl's birth. Once this is known, a visit is paid to the astrologer to determine whether the birth dates of the boy and girl form a good astrological combination and whether they have a chance of living a reasonably successful married life. At the same time, for the same purpose, *mo* (divination) is performed by a lama and a special prayer of granting *lung* (permission) is recited before the *chos skyong* (protective deity). Once all the three ways of seeking approval are positive, a special party of people is dispatched to visit the family of the girl. The members of the party, as well dressed as possible, offer the girl a white scarf and some garments. They state that the *mo*, *lung* and *rtsis* of the boy and girl are compatible. They offer *slong chang* (begging beer) and request the parents of the girl to agree to give her in marriage. Once their proposition

is accepted a second meeting is arranged to draw up an agreement that their families be related through the marriage of their children and other matters of the dowry. The second meeting usually takes place some fifteen or twenty days later. When the second visit is made, the messengers of the young man make offerings of butter, dry tea, rice, barley, etc. Sometimes, the mother is offered *nu ring* (price of the breast) in the form of an apron and other presents.

The parents of the girl should invite a *snags pa* (tantric priest) or a Bonpo priest to perform a special ceremony called *lha dkrol* which consists of making offerings, libation and incense to the protective deity and making a request to allow the girl to leave the house. The girl joins the priest in worship and making offerings. This ceremony is performed in the temple of the protective deities (*mgon khang*) or otherwise in the house before an image of the protective deity.

A second visit is then paid to an astrologer in order to establish an exact date for the wedding. The astrologer establishes the time, discerns the auspicious and inauspicious factors of the date, calculates the path of the wedding party (*lam rtsis*) and decides what ought to be done in order to eliminate evil influences and hindering spirits which might disturb the procession of the bride to the groom's house.

When the bride does leave her house, together with her dowry she receives an arrow which is attached to her back. At the same time, a woman dressed and adorned with jewelry, performs the ceremony of summoning prosperity with an arrow with silk of five colours attached to it. This is done as protection against the loss of wealth and prevention against plagues and illnesses. In elaborate wedding ceremonies, there is also the custom, at the bride's house, of performing the ceremony of the inner door, the ladder, washing the hair of the bride, and attaching a turquoise to it.

The groom's party should pitch the necessary tents for resting, cooking tea, etc. about half way between the bride's house and that of the groom. When the bride's procession and the groom's welcoming party meet in the tents, the bride is offered a welcoming turquoise. The groom's envoy offers the turquoise reciting verses which eulogize it as a symbol of youth, elixir of life, love and joy. It is offered to the bride's head for increased blessing and good omens. Before mounting the horse again, the bride is offered an arrow adorned with the silk of five colours and feathers and a mirror. As this offering is made, verses are recited which tell of the arrow with its notches and the five coloured silk of many family generation's excellent qualities, prosperity and purity. The bride should ride a pregnant mare, the colour of which should be decided by an astrologer.

When the wedding party approaches the groom's house, a *snags pa* or a Bonpo priest should perform a ritual of propitiating an appropriate deity to avert the *bag 'dre* which usually follows wedding parties as well as offering a *glud* (ransom) to the demons. By the door of the house special devices called *mtho po* are positioned. They are black to avert the *'dre* and white to propitiate the blessing of the *pho lha*, *mo lha* and others. On the spot where the bride is to dismount from the horse, the welcoming party should arrange rice, grain, salt and a white felt mat on top of which they should place a leopard skin and on top of it a tiger skin with the design of a swastika made on it in wheat. A recitation is made by the bride's party which refers to the skins and praises the parents and their good and noble lineages. The mother of the groom comes out of the house holding a milk container in her left hand and an arrow with some silk attached to it in her right. She joins her hands with the bride's and offers her the milk to drink. Then the father recites verses which refer to the door of the house. The verse describes the door as having a lintel of blue turquoise,

the step up to it of gold, a frame of lapis lazuli overhung by a string of shells and with a mirror and other ornaments. Beyond this door is the wealth and happiness of the family. When the recitation is finished he places a white scarf over the door. Then the bride's party recites verses about ascending a ladder into the nether regions of the house. Here again the verses describe in a poetic way the ladder as being made of precious stones and jewels. They attach a white scarf to it and climb it to enter a room. After everyone inside receives scarfs, they all go onto the roof of the house where the bride receives a new name and is entrusted in prayer to the deities of the house. *Bsang* (insense) is burnt, five prayer flags are hung, a white scarf with verses is attached to the pole of the big prayer flag and one is placed on an image. Then the prayer for the bride is recited. Wheat grain, *tsampa* with butter and *chang* are scattered by all the assembled people. Then, still on the roof of the house, the ceremony of summoning prosperity is performed by a boy and girl holding arrows and *tsampa* with butter. The remaining part of the wedding celebrations consist of revelries and the distribution of presents to the marriage party, servants, astrologer, etc. Finally, mutual visits are agreed upon.

Now we give the translation of some of the more important verses recited at different times during the wedding ceremonies.

Verses recited at the main door of the house

Om *svasti*, may there be blessing.

This is the gate, auspicious and adorned.

It's blue lintel is made of turquoise.

It's yellow threshold is made of gold.

It's frame is made of lapis lazuli.

It's red panels are made of magic sandalwood.

It's latch and chain are made of conch shell.

It's studs and bolts are made of gold.
Beyond this gate are the doors of gold and turquoise;
There is the treasury of *Vaiśrāvaṇa*¹
Heaped up with perfect wealth and every wish.
With this pure scarf (of) the inner treasury,²
Today at this auspicious moment,
I hold and open the gate.
May always one hundred auspicious doors be open.

Verses before ascending the ladder

This is the climbing ladder dividing
The sky from the earth.
It is the tall ladder with thirteen high steps.
It's two sides are made of lapis lazuli.
It's handrail is made of diamonds.
It's rungs are of the seven piled up jewels.
For this auspicious ladder leading upwards,
I have this scarf with the seven royal emblems.

Verses for the pillar

In this beautiful house equal in all respects
To the gods' palace of the *Tushita* Heaven above,
I wish to describe the components of the pillar
Produced from the magic sandalwood.
On the outside it is square -- the palace of the gods.
Within, is the strong castle of the *pho lha*
Who provides protection and defence.

1. *Vaiśrāvaṇa* is the god of wealth.

2. In Tibetan, a treasury of store-room is called *bang mdzod* and here, as a play on words, the scarf is referred to as *nang mdzod*.

Below is the jewel-stone, the permanent plinth,
It is round and of self-produced hard material.
It has three ornaments which are capital head,
Garland and wish-granting jewel,
With a long curve, a short curve and a curve-cover,
With an excellent cross-beam, beam-base and streamers,
With lotuses, symbolic squares, sun and moon --
Such are all the thirteen parts of the pillar.¹
This is the pillar of firmness and permanence,
The foundation of splendour and excellence.
In this house from the previous existences
Till this moment today,
It perpetuates constantly prosperity and every wish.
Today, at this auspicious moment,
I offer a white scarf to adorn this pillar.
May life and wealth prosper forever.

1. Here, for the sake of readability, the translation, the text has been simplified. The thirteen parts of the pillar are:

(a) *bre* -- capital or top of the pillar. (b) *'phreng* -- painted or carved garland round the pillar. (c) *nor bu* -- drawing of the wish-granting-jewel. (d) *gzhu ring* -- shorter curve (of the capital). (e) *gzhu thung* -- shorter curve of the capital. (f) *gzhu khebs* -- curve-cover or the surmounting part of the curving part of the capital. (g) *gdung ma* -- cross-beam. (h) *gdung gdan* -- beam's base. (i) *gdung khebs* -- streamers or decorations on the beam. (j) *padma* -- lotus designs on top of the beam. (k) *chos brtsegs* -- 'dharma-heap', piled up symbolic squares above the lotus designs. (l) *nyi-zla* -- sun and moon designs. (m) *ka stegs* -- plinth.

For a drawing of the pillar with the Tibetan names of its different parts see G. Tucci, *Tibetan Folk Songs*, Ascona, Switzerland, 1966; Illustrations: Fig. 3. Also, for the importance of the central pillar, its symbolism and that of the whole house, see Corlin, 'The symbolism of the house in *rgyal thang*' in *Tibetan Studies*, ed. M. Aris & A.S.S. Kyi, Oxford 1979, pp. 87-92.

Verses recited when offering a scarf to the bride

Om *Svasti*, may there be blessing.

Today, this auspicious day of

The planets and stars in a happy conjunction,

On this seat with the excellent *svāstika*

And a cushion, elegant, superior and perfect,

Appears this maiden without comparison,

Whose body shines like the body of a heavenly goddess,

Beautiful, charming and well-composed,

Endowed with a good complexion, softness and best scent

To this lady who is like a precious gem

Fulfilling every wish of touch and the rest,

I offer first this excellent grain and *tsampa* with butter,

I offer this jade vessel, the symbol of prosperity,

Filled with the ambrosia, the best elixir of *Jambudvīpa*,

The Nectar of the Indra's divine ambrosia from above,

And the drink and food of India, Nepal and Tibet.

I place pure inner treasury,

Adorned with the eight auspicious symbols.

May well-being increase.

Offering the chang vessel

This is the precious and beautiful round vessel,

Made from the five kinds of jewels,

Well filled with the divine ambrosia,

Beautifully bedecked with pats of yellow and white butter,

With this bamboo from the southern land of *rMa bya*

I sprinkle three times to the right and left

This ambrosia which is like the one

Produced by the churning of the divine ocean.

Oh, may those present here seated around

Become satiated with this ambrosia (which trickles)

From the roots of this paradise tree,
The tree of Enlightenment,
With branches, leaves, flowers and pollen.
Covering it with a silk diadem of five colours,
I offer a scarf which increases and enlarges
Good luck and the rest.

Prayer for the bride

Om *svasti*, may there be blessing.
We entrust this young woman (called ...)
To the lama, the deity, the protectors of *dharma*.
The *dgra lha*, the god of wealth, the master of treasures,
And to the steadfast gods who protect.
May they always protect and defend her,
Remain in her constant companionship,
Increase wealth and multiply the family with many sons,
Promote strength, merit power and good luck,
Lengthen life and splendour, until her hundredth year.
May there be blessing which brings the splendour of every wish.

Summoning g-yang (prosperity)

Just like a metal clings to a magnet,
May the store of fortune and prosperity which grants wishes,
Pour unhindered and together with joyful dances,
Into this excellent house surrounded by happiness.
We summon all fortune, prosperity, wealth and fame
Of *Hiranagarbha*, *Nīlankaṇṭha*, *Viṣṇu*,
Nemi the *cakravartin* and others,
Of every lofty prosperity
Conspicuous in the present life.
We evoke good luck, prosperity, wealth and fame

Of the immortal drink of many excellent herbs,¹
The wish-granting jewel of divine power,
And the seven royal emblems carried before mighty men.
We evoke all the fortune, prosperity, wealth and fame
Of the eight auspicious symbols:
Gem, umbrella, golden fish, beautiful vase,²
Lotus, white conch shell coiling to the right,
Banner of victory, endless knot and wheel.
We evoke all fortune, prosperity, wealth and fame
Of the eight auspicious items.³
Spontaneously produced by the causal flux
From the origination of true virtue
And blessedness of true happiness
Bestowed by the son of the leader *Śuddhodana*.
We evoke all fortune, prosperity, wealth and fame
Of long life, freedom from illnesses, all wishful aims,
Power, might and perfect wealth,
As well as every happy entertainment.

1. The text reads: *legs bris tshogs kyi 'chi med btung ba* -- Here the word *bris* remains unclear. It could be a mistake for *'bri(mo)*, female yak or *'bri mog* or *'bri ka*, the name of a medicinal plant.

2. *bum ba* (vase) added here does not belong to the number of the eight auspicious symbols.

3. The eight auspicious items (*bkra shis rdzas brgyad*) are the eight things given special attributes and associated with *Sākyamuni's* life events. They are:

(a) *me long* -- mirror. (b) *gi vang* -- secretion from animal glands, especially the elephant's, used as an ointment.
(c) *zho* -- curds. (d) *dūrvā* -- grass used as a seat. (e) *bil ba* -- fruit said to prolong life. (f) *dung dkar g-yas 'khyil* -- white conch coiled to the right. (g) *li khroi* -- powder.
(h) *yungs kar* -- white mustard.

Selected Annotated Bibliography

Aziz, B. *Tibetan Frontier Families*, Vikas Publishing Pvt. Ltd., 1978

In this book, which is a 'brief historical portrait spanning three generations of a Tibetan people living in *D'ing-ri* on the Tibet-Nepal border', Aziz describes Nuptial rituals in the context of a wider frame of reference i. e. that of the wider context of *D'ing-ri* social and economic relations. She writes that

"marriage in *D'ing-ri* is not a religious affair, but it is nevertheless, a highly formalised event preceded by elaborate negotiations and culminating in a deeply symbolic song-drama known as the *mo-lha*" (108).

All classes of *D'ing-ri* society have a marriage celebration; those less well off with fewer kin and *dga' gnyen* (mutual aid) networks keep the affair modest, whereas those with status and wealth stretch it out for six days and collect significant amounts of property from reciprocating friends and from bride-wealth. Betrothal amounts to binding exchanges of bridewealth and dowry. Bridewealth, usually consisting of livestock and cash, is given first, with the reciprocal dowry being brought with the bride at the time of the wedding, the most valuable part of which is an item of jewelry called the *mgul rgyan* (necklace) which remains the property of the bride. This *mgul rgyan* symbolises the bond of marriage and is not provided for those who cohabit or marry without undergoing formal exchange.

Preferably the marriage is an elaborate cultural and community affair. The ideal procedure involves a procession by the girl and her party, her formal acceptance at the entrance of the groom's house, presentations of symbolic foods,

employment of a ritual specialist to sing the *mo lha* wedding song, recitation of texts by a monk and presentation of gifts by assembled friends in strict accordance with the rules of reciprocation -- all spread over five or six days of drinking, feasting and dancing.

Of special interest in Aziz's account of Tibetan marriage is her reference to the *mo-lha* wedding poem to which it is difficult to find mention in other references. She describes it as being sung throughout the nuptial event, introducing the marriage and concluding it in such a manner that it provides a ritual framework for the entire proceedings. The performer of this poem is called the *mo lha ba* or *mo dpon*. Aziz believes that the poem, containing explicit references to spirits, may have been more religious an event in the past than it is today and that the *mo dpon* figure was once somebody with wider ritual roles and interests. His dress, his dramatic style of performance and his hereditary involvement all suggest vestigial elements, which were earlier a part of a religious tradition.

Bell, C. *The People of Tibet*, Oxford University Press, 1928

In a section on marriage, Bell describes how the preliminaries and the wedding ceremony itself necessarily vary to some extent in the different districts and provinces in Tibet. He gives, in detail, what happens among the upper classes of Central Tibet. After ascertaining the date of the girl's birth, the relatives of the bridegroom consulted either the Dalai Lama, the Tashi Lama or some other high lamas, in addition to their own deities, as to the suitability of the girl. The visit of the bridegroom's party to ask for the girl in marriage is called *slong chang*. On that day, the parents of the bridegroom offer money and an apron as *nu rin* to the bride's mother. On the day of the wedding, when the bride is ready to leave the house, one of the senior servants of the bridegroom's party

puts a turquoise on the top of her head-dress and plants a *mda' dar* (arrow flag) on her back, near her neck. This elderly retainer then describes the good qualities of the turquoise and the *mda' dar* in suitable terms. At this stage, her parents give the dowry, which is mainly in ornaments and to a lesser extent in clothes and money.

"A well-to-do family may give an out-going daughter a set of ornaments on the following scale, namely: a gold charm box, a pair of gold earrings, a head dress of coral and turquoise for daily use, another set of pearls for use on occasions of high festival or ceremony, a necklace of jade, coral and pearls, and other varied ornaments. They may add a pony for riding and some money." (180)

When the time comes to depart, the bride rides on a mare with a foal. On the way she is twice offered beer from a small pot. She does not drink but flicks a little out with the thumb and finger of the left hand as an offering to the gods. When she arrives at the bridegroom's house, she dismounts on a stack of twenty to thirty loads of wheat and rice and other presents. Feasting, singing and dancing follow. Since the bride has lost the protection of the household gods, she must accordingly be brought under the protection of her husband's deities. Therefore, she pays a visit, along with her husband, to his oracle and they make offerings in the chapel of his guardian deity (*mgon khang*).

Das, Sarat Chandra, 'Marriage Customs of Tibet' *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1893 Vol LXII, Part III: 6-31

In this article, Das describes the marriage customs of *Pu hrang*, *mNga ris* and the country around Lake Manasarovara (all in Western Tibet); *dBus* and *gTsang* (Central Tibet); Sikkim and Ladakh. He discusses marriage by capture of which relatively

few remnants remain in central Tibet, but a survival of which may be traced in the part played by the *rkun chen* (thief) in the marriage customs of Sikkim, Bhutan and Spiti. A portrayal of Tibetan marriage customs includes the pre-nuptial observances, such as consultation of astrologers and the *slong chang*. The actual marriage festivities last for three days at the house of the bride's parents. A *sngags 'chang* (tantrik priest) propitiates the *pho lha* and the bride's mother is offered *nu rin* which consists of a present of five or nine articles (Das does not enumerate them). When the bride leaves her parent's house, the *sngags 'chang* tries to prevent the *nāga* following the bride to her husband's place by burning them some incense. A priest (of the Bon religion) now performs the ceremony of *g-yang 'gugs* (invoking good luck) and a small arrow studded with five precious stones and five scraps of silk of five colours, is fixed on the neck of the bride's dress. She mounts a horse and her parents present her with an auspicious scarf called *bkra' shie btags* and *skyel chang* (farewell beer) to be served to her at a short distance from the gate of their residence. She must wear an amulet to protect her against evil influences and the evil spirits of the ten quarters for during her journey from the place where the farewell beer is served i.e. when she parts company with her parents and friends, and the place where she is first received with what is called the welcome beer, she is not accompanied by any guardian spirit either from her father's side or from the bridegroom's quarter. As soon as the bridal party arrives at the bridegroom's house, fear least some evil spirits have followed the bride, a *glud* (ransom) is made of cloth or barley painted with coloured butter and thrown on the ground before the bride. Then the officiating priest recites a few benedictory verses describing the door, house, etc. of the bridegroom. Then the mother of the bridegroom dressed in her best apparel, with a tray containing the *mda' dar* and some barley flour mixed with butter in

her right hand and with a jar of milk in her left, comes to receive the bride. She is conducted to the marriage altar and seated to the left of the bridegroom on a carpet containing the figure of the swastika on a floor painted with a paste of wheat flour and water, whereupon a sumptuous dinner is served to them. When the auspicious hour of solemnizing the marriage arrives, the *sngags 'chang* makes an offering to the gods, and gives a new name to the bride, connecting it in some manner with the name of the mother in law. When this is performed a small piece of wood about six inches long, is held to the lips of the bridegroom. The bride now sits in front of her husband and takes the other piece of wood between her lips. In the meantime, a tuft of wool is placed in the hands of the bridegroom who draws out the fibres to some length. The bride takes it from his hands and twists it into a thread. This is called the ceremony of the first work of harmonious union.

Although the way in which Das describes these Tibetan marriage customs tend to imply a religious ceremony (e.g. the use of vocabulary such as the 'marriage altar', 'solemnizing the marriage') no spiritual vows are actually made by the bride and groom. What is essential to the solemnization of the marriage is the bestowal of a new name upon the bride which signifies her social incorporation into her husband's household, this being accompanied by the ceremony of the first work of harmonious union signifying cooperation between husband and wife.

Tucci, G. *Tibetan Folk Songs* Artibus Asiae, 1966

In this book, besides editing and translating the folk songs from Gyantse, Western Tibet, Tucci incorporates a section on marriage songs. These are based on a manuscript containing the marriage songs and rituals used in the valley of *Myan' cu* — between Gyantse and Shigatse. This manuscript was taken down

to Sikkim in order to introduce among the families of the high classes the same rituals as practised in Central Tibet, revered by the Sikkimese as a kind of holy land. The songs are sung partly by the bride's party, partly by the bridegroom's and partly by both. They mostly comprise a series of blessings and praises. Not only the bride and bridegroom are praised; the parents of the bridegroom are also alluded to. Blessings are bestowed on the house as well as the various objects and food used during the marriage ceremony. Each part of the house and every utensil is consecrated and propitiated by the offering of *kha btags*. The song ends with the dismissal of the go-between and the bride is blessed for introducing all sorts of blessings into the house of her husband.