Sherpas through their rituals

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6. Offering rituals: problems of religion, anger, and social cooperation

Theoretically, Buddhism rejects the world, and validates no part of it. But analyti-
cally we have seen that Buddhism validates the world all too well, contributng to
the reproduction of the two most pervasive and discomfitting dimensions of Sherpa
experience — social atomism and social hierarchy. The discomfiture of social ato-
mism has several aspects — economic insecurity, family conflict, personal isolation.
And the discomfiture of social hierarchy also has several aspects — social insecurity,
social resentment. The religion, in aligning itself with these pervasive social tenden-
cies, can itself be shown, as we shall discuss in this chapter, to be resented. Theo-
retically part of the solution, it is really part of the problem.

Yet the Sherpas assume, in an ongoing way, the absolute indispensability of
their religion. Village life is regularly punctuated by religious rituals that seek the
protection and support of the gods. The religious ideals may sometimes be a sort of
cultural burden, but the religion is also conceived of as having brought civilization
to the Sherpas’ ancestors, and as having made and continuing to make true society
and culture possible.

This view is couched in myths and stories concerning the establishment of
Buddhism in Tibet: The myth (recounted in Chapter 4) of the building of Samyang
monastery is perhaps the classic example. All of them detail some situation in which
people were trying to accomplish some task, or simply trying to go about their busi-
ness, but were harassed by demons and then were saved by the intervention of a
religious figure. In the Samyang tale, the problem is solved by the Guru Rimpoche
teaching the Sherpas’ ancestors how to make offerings to the gods to gain their
protection. It is these rituals of offerings that constitute the ongoing core of Sherpa
village religious practice, to be analyzed in this chapter.

Three strands of meaning will be isolated. First, I will examine symbolism of
“the body” in the ritual, and relate this to the problem of the monastic sector,
whose most distinctive features are celibacy and asceticism, rejection of the body.
The monastic sector in turn is taken to symbolize the religion as a whole, and the
problems the religion poses to the Sherpas, particularly its contribution to the
atomistic tendencies of the society. \(^1\) Second, I will isolate symbolism of moods, of anger and “bliss,” and discuss ways in which these are problematic to Sherpas in the context of a variety of social structural and cultural factors. And third, I will examine the fact that the offering rituals are couched in an idiom of social hospitality, particularly in the yangdzi or “persuasion” mode. Hospitality, the basic form of lay sociality, becomes in the ritual the structure of mediation between lay and religious perspectives. In forcing their gods to accept hospitality, the Sherpas get their religion to work for rather than against them.

The ritual calendar and the rite of offerings

First, a brief summary of the ritual calendar:
In February there are rites pertaining to the New Year. The offerings to the temple guardian are renewed, and various households hold *kangsur* rites, in which the local guardian gods and spirits are given offerings so that they will renew their protection of the village. At the conclusion of this period, a large all-village *tso* rite is held in the temple, directed to the high gods of the religion. *Tso* are explained

[Image of the reincarnate lama of Thami monastery]
simply as joyous parties of communion with the high gods, and they conclude every specific ritual performance as well as every full ritual cycle. They celebrate the renewal of well-being brought about by the rituals that preceded them.

In April there is the great Dumji festival. Dumji is explicitly an exorcism; it utilizes the above-mentioned kangsur texts in which the guardians are mobilized against the demons, but in addition it involves the lamas enacting, through costumed and masked dances, the actual divine encounters with and triumph over the demons. It goes on for five pressure- and excitement-packed days, and concludes again with a large all-village tso.

In May comes Nyungne, which also concludes with an all-village tso. Nyungne stands out from the rest of the ritual calendar in being concerned with other-worldly salvation rather than this-worldly successes, and in being addressed directly to the high gods rather than operating through the intermediaries of the local guardian gods (all of whom, however, are ultimately reflexes of the high gods).

From June through August there are again a series of household-sponsored kangsur rites, for the local, lower, guardian gods. There is a large all-village tso in July, marking the midyear. The various household kangsur may be seen as clustering around this event, although some may come before it and some after it.

In September there were, when I was in the field, a number of privately sponsored tso, held to gain merit for deceased parents of the sponsoring households, and in October there was a large temple tso on the occasion of the Nepalese holiday of Dasain. Dasain involves the sacrificial slaughter of animals, and the Sherpas hold tso on that day to make merit and counteract the sin brought upon the world by the Nepalese rites.

In November or thereabouts the village shrines are repainted, and in December come the great monastery festivals of Mani-Rimdu. (See Jerstad, 1969; Paul, 1972.) Mani-Rimdu parallels Dumji in being a full-scale exorcism, complete with masked impersonation of the gods and enactment of defeat of the demons. But the Mani-Rimdu festivals are held in monasteries rather than in villages, and the lay people gather at the monasteries and form a highly responsive audience for the rites.

From this brief sketch we can see that, apart from Nyungne, there are really only two kinds of rituals in which the Sherpas commune with their gods — the kangsur rituals (including the big exorcism festivals based on, though including more than, the kangsur texts), and the tso rituals. The former are directed to ferocious guardian gods, and specifically demand their protection from the demons, while the latter are directed toward the high gods of the religion, and are conceived as rites of communion with them, involving no specific demands. However, except for cases in which the point is simply to make merit (as in memorial-tso, or on Dasain), tso are never performed alone. They are always part of a cycle that includes the negotiations with the guardian gods for protection. Every single kangsur performance (indeed, every ritual performance of any kind, including Nyungne, funerals, and so forth) concludes with a tso — and every full cycle of privately sponsored kangsur concludes with a public tso. It is significant, too, that no new altar is constructed for
the performance of tso at the conclusion of, say, a kangsur ritual. I stress these points in order to show that the high gods of the religion are behind, and assumed by, all rituals directed to lower deities, even though they are not directly addressed in those rituals. It is as if the distinction between kangsur and tso allows the high gods to keep their hands clean, and to enter the party only after their underlings have dealt with the messier issues.

The significance of these arguments will be clear in the course of the analysis. But it is important that they be established in a general way at the outset, to justify the fact that I will collapse the differences between the two kinds of offering rituals in the analysis that follows in this chapter. All such rituals have an unvarying minimal structure, or ordered set of events, and this structure in turn has essentially the same meaning, though not the same emphasis or importance, in every such ritual. Further, as the myth of the building of Samyang monastery indicates, whatever else the gods are asked (or not asked, in the case of tso) to do, the basic expectation of the outcome of these rites is that the gods will continue to protect the people and their endeavors from the onslaughts of the demons. Thus I will not, in this chapter, analyze any particular ritual, but rather the general structure within which, despite the variation of form and occasion, the Sherpas seek the help, and especially the protection, of their gods. And although this basic ritual form is also enacted by monks in monasteries, it will be viewed specifically from the point of view of the lay people, who see it, describe it, and intend it in terms appropriate to their own situation.

The structure may be summarized briefly. The first stage is always a purification rite, a sang, which itself may take many different forms, but which consists most commonly of offerings to the rather touchy and changeable local spirits to assure their good humor and benevolence, and hence to purify the area and the participants. Following the sang, attention shifts to the main altar, upon which is arrayed a set of offerings freshly constructed and assembled by the lamas for the performance of the particular ceremony, and disassembled and disposed of at the end of the performance. The altar items are collectively referred to as *chepa*, "offerings," for everything that goes on the altar is casually said to represent some worldly category of gift for the gods.

The presentation of the offerings is guided by and synchronized with the reading of a text appropriate to the god and the occasion. At the opening of the service, the gods are invited to come and attend the feast being held for them. Loud music is played to attract their attention. Incense is flooded through the area, and grain and beer are sprinkled skyward, all as gestures of invitation and welcome. The *serkim*, or sprinkling of grain and beer, is also itself an act of offering for the lower spirits, the guardians of the guardians as it were.

Following the invitation and welcome, the gods are invited to be seated in the *torma*, molded dough objects that have been prepared to receive their presences. Then measures are taken to protect the ritual from the antireligious demons: The torma of the gods of the four directions is set outside the temple or the house as a
receptacle for and an offering to them, so they will guard the boundaries of the precinct. And the special torma for the demons (the gyek) is thrown out as food for them, to satisfy temporarily their greedy desires and divert them from entering the temple and eating up the offerings. This is invariably a dramatic moment — the music slowly rises to a crescendo as the ritual assistant picks up, then holds aloft, the demons’ torma; finally there is a cacophonous crashing climax, accompanied by demoniac whistles, as the assistant dashes out the door and throws the torma hard and far from the precinct.

Next the gods are presented with all their offerings (the entire altar) and urged to eat fully and enjoy themselves. While they are partaking of the offerings, the lamas read “praises for the goodness and admirable qualities” of the gods, and recite the mantra appropriate to the chief god of the group. They then read “prayers for favors immediate and to come,” and during the course of these readings representatives of the community approach the altar and perform prostrations, which signify apologies for past offenses and help cleanse one of sins.

The ceremony always concludes with the tso, an offering to the high gods of cooked or otherwise immediately edible foods that have been laid out upon a bench at the foot of the altar. After being offered to the gods, the tso food is divided up among all the people present and eaten on the spot. The lamas read a brief benediction, and as they finish they allow their voices to trail off, suggesting the departure of the gods. The altar is dismantled, the butter lamps are allowed to burn themselves out, the lamas take away the raw grain, and the torma are given to children, taken home to sick or elderly persons, or fed to the village dogs.

Such is the elemental form of most Sherpa ritual performances. It all seems rather standard to anyone familiar with cross-cultural and historical religious data. The gods are contacted; they are given offerings; the people communally eat some of the offerings at the close of the ceremony. At least three things, however, make this a Sherpa ceremony of the genre, and give one entrée to its meaning in Sherpa culture. These are: (1) those peculiar items, the torma cakes; (2) the special kind of help or benefit sought from the gods — protection against the demons; and (3) the idiom through which the rite is formulated — that of social hospitality and the host-guest relationship. I will examine each of these elements as a way of arriving at some of the problems with which the ritual is dealing, and then return to the full sequence of ritual action to see how it in fact deals with them.

The problems of the ritual

_ Torma and the body problem_

A torma is a dough figure, basically conical in form, ranging from several inches to several feet in height. The basic form may be elaborated upon by molding the figure
itself, and by adding other dough elements. Some torma are left uncoated, while others must be colored red, black, or white, using melted butter colored with red vegetable dye or charcoal, or left undyed for white. Each torma is also decorated with bits of butter shaped into discs, dots, petals, flames, etc. All these variations in shape, color, and decoration have significance.

Although there are several different understandings concurrently held in the culture, and several different levels of meaning, the primary significance of the torma is as an abstract representation of, and a temporary “body” for, a god. Every god, from the lowliest locality spirit to the Buddha himself, has a prescribed torma; conversely, every torma has a name and identity from the god it represents. Whenever a god will be invoked in a religious service, a torma should be made for him beforehand. Then, when his name is called, he comes and enters the torma, where he remains through the reading, listening to people’s petitions and receiving their homage. Because the Tibetan pantheon is enormous, there are literally hundreds of different torma forms, all achieved by performing transformations on the little conical cakes of dough (see Figure 7).

The second significance of torma is as food for the gods. This interpretation is held most often by laymen, either together with the body notion, or alone. But it was also explained by a lama that this is an orthodox interpretation in some of the other sects of Tibetan Buddhism. While a number of torma on the altar are designated specifically as food torma, in a general sense it is held that all the torma are food offerings for the gods to whom the ritual is directed.

The same duality of meaning is expressed in exegesis on the decorations of the torma. When asked the meaning of the color coatings, lamas often replied offhandedly that red is like giving the god a monk’s robe, which is red in Tibetan Buddhism. On the other hand, the orthodox meaning, also articulated by the lamas, is that red coating is for a god who eats flesh and drinks beer, while white coating represents a god who follows the so-called Brahmin-Chhetri purity rules, eating no meat and drinking no beer (and usually wearing white clothing). The two exegeses are, of course, contradictory, because monks, despite wearing red robes, observe the dietary purity rules: A red robe and a meat-and-beer diet simply do not go together. In orthodox point of fact, all red-coated torma are for ferocious, meat-eating gods, but if one asks lamas what red coating means, without reference to any particular torma, they will frequently say that it represents monks’ clothing.

It is noteworthy, then, that while “gods’ bodies” rather than “gods’ food” is the more orthodox meaning of the torma as such, the more orthodox significance of the coating of torma refers to the diet of the god, rather than his clothes, his bodily covering. The food and body meanings are thus both ultimately embodied in orthodoxy.

Now, how a god appears in outward bodily appearance, and the diet that suits his taste, are related to one another as metonymic aspects of his mood or disposition. The interrelations between food, body, and mood will be important for subse-
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Figure 7. Torma (from Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 351)

sequent analysis. For the moment, however, let us focus on the issue of body, raised exclusively by the torma and some of its immediately associated items on the altar.

Sherpa religion is ambivalent about the body. Their Mahayana heritage glorifies the bodhisattva, who has achieved salvation but returned to the world in bodily form to “help” others find the way. The bodhisattva concept has been institutionalized in Tibetan religion more literally than among any other Buddhist group, in the figure of the *tulku* or reincarnate lama who is actually identified as a living bodhisattva available to the direct acquaintance of the members of the community. The image of the bodhisattva makes the point that the body is a good thing, insofar (*but only insofar*) as it is a vehicle for practicing the religion — for learning, teaching, and exemplifying religious precepts, and for performing meritorious deeds. In
all other respects the body is a bad thing in that, according to teachings of classical Buddhism that have carried through into Sherpa religion, the body is the agency of desire for sensuous pleasure, which in turn leads humanity into sin.

The religious ambivalence concerning the body is nicely illustrated by some verses from a fourteenth-century Tibetan lama. They sum up Sherpa sentiment well:

Now listen, you who would practise religion.  
When you obtain the advantages, so hard to obtain,  
(of a well-endowed human body)  
It is best to accumulate merit  
By practising religion and so put all to good use.  
...  
Wine and women, these two  
Are the robbers who steal away your good conduct.  
Keeping far off from loved ones like poison  
Let this be your protective armour!  
...  
The best way to good rebirths and salvation  
Is purity of personal conduct.  
So never demean it. Hold to it  
As dearly as the apple of your eye!

(Snellgrove, 1967: 159–60)

Thus in this Mahayana tradition the body is considered valuable as a means of helping others, but the “help” is primarily by the example of “purity of personal conduct” and not by direct support of those with whom one is socially involved: “[Keep] far off from loved ones like poison…” Any other use of the body, any other appreciation of it for any other purpose, is bad, leading to sin, poor rebirth, and entrapment in the round of evil and suffering.

Other Sherpa beliefs, not derived from Buddhist orthodoxy, support the generally negative view of the body encouraged by Buddhism. Sherpa pollution beliefs stress the defiling propensity of the body, and its tendency to impair the mental (psychological, spiritual, moral, etc.) functions (Ortner, 1973a). Even Sherpa commonsense notions contribute the point that the body and its desires lead to children, who are felt to be a nuisance and who must be supported by hard labor. The body then, as a sum of all these points, is almost utterly negative in theory.

At the social level, the question refracts in a very important way through the major social category distinction of the culture: lay versus monastic. The only proper way out of the body problem, according to the religion, is to become a monk, that is, to practice celibacy and denial of sensuality while devoting all one’s energies to the religion. This remains a strong cultural ideal; most boys think about (or more accurately, toy with the idea of) becoming monks, although few do, while most older men wish they had. Yet despite (or possibly because of) this fact, there are indications of ambivalence on the part of the lay community vis-à-vis the monks. One strong piece of evidence for this is that the charity system of giving to monks
is in disarray. Sherpa monks do not even try to sustain themselves by begging as, according to orthodoxy, they should; they are supported largely by their families, with supplemental support from endowments given to monasteries by a few wealthy people. A lama explained this by saying that in these evil times people think monks are lazy and so begrudge them food. The lama said it was to save the laity from the sin of their bad thoughts that Sherpa monks do not beg.

And the laity evidently do have such bad thoughts, although they are not often expressed. I recorded only one disparaging remark by a layman against religious personages, but it was a telling one. A nun had come begging for food, and after I gave her the standard offering, she began poking around the shelves of the house and asking for other things. After she left, a man who was present shook his head and remarked that although religious people were taught every day not to need and want many material things, yet they seemed to come out even greedier and more materialistic than everyone else. This is certainly an overstatement — monks as a group probably have about the same distribution of greed and materialism as the population at large, and there are a fair number of genuine saints among them who redeem the reputation of all the rest.

The impression of greater greed and materialism in monks is probably related to the fact that they do not work. Because they are forbidden to perform physical labor, and are supported by others, theirs is indeed any easy life compared to the rest of the population. Further, because they must largely be supported by their families, this means that they generally come from fairly well-to-do families in the first place. Thus it cannot be denied that, by and large, they constitute an elite group. On these points, however, the resentment of monks is not so much a religious issue as it is part of the problem of social privilege in lay society, as discussed in the preceding chapter.

As for the specifically religious issues involved in resentment of monks, however, when the lama said that lay people perceive monks as “lazy,” he implied that it is because lay people are clouded with ignorance concerning the true value of their religious ideals. And the layman who said monks were greedy implied that the problem was one of individual religious actors not living up to those ideals. In either case, the ideals themselves are not questioned. Only one sector of the population, the noncelibate village lamas, actually questioned the monastic ideal per se, complaining of the injustice of the higher status of monks in the religious hierarchy. And their complaints strike at what seems to be the heart of the matter.

A village lama, they said, is constantly on call for the religious needs of the people. When there is a request for a religious ritual, he must drop whatever he is doing and respond to this request. A monk, on the other hand, does nothing but seek his own personal salvation; he does not respond to the needs of the people. It seems contradictory to the lamas, then, that monks are defined as more worthy of respect than lamas. Monks sit higher than lamas when both are participating in a single ritual, and monks gain infinitely more merit for their calling. The lamas in
some of their bitter moments were obviously resentful of this state of affairs. The point that monks are only out for their own salvation, and do not have the needs of the lay people at heart, feeds directly back into the issue of conflict between lay interests, needs, and concerns, and the highest tenets of the religious ideology. Monks are only enacting what the religion has stated as the ideal. They are merely exemplifying the precepts of the religion, the ideal of nonattachment. If they are resented, then, it is not only because of their soft life and their elite social associations, but because they exemplify a system of norms and beliefs with which it is difficult for lay people, in the normal social process, to come to terms. It is this conflict, in its various aspects, that we shall see to be at the heart of the offering rituals.

_Gods, demons, and the problem of moods_

The primary object of offering rituals is to get the gods to renew their primordial struggle against, and reenact their original triumph over, the demons and the forces of anarchy and violence. There are vast numbers, types, and grades of supernatural beings in the Sherpa universe, but I shall focus on the two extreme types — the high gods who preside over the system (and over every ritual), and the demons who pit themselves against the system (and against every ritual). The highest gods of the religion are defined as having achieved salvation and bliss. They are utterly fulfilled and self-contained; they “need nothing” and are basically not interested in worldly affairs. Their general disposition is said to be benevolent to and protective of humanity, but they are self-absorbed; unless people actively keep in touch with them through offerings, they will, as suggested by a number of myths, withdraw ever further and leave humanity at the mercy of the demons.

All gods designated as such (hla) have two mood aspects — _shiwa_, peaceful and benign, and _takbu_, fierce and violent. The “same” god in his different aspects usually has different names; the benign form is considered more basic, while the fierce form is said to be adopted for the purpose of fighting demons. The appearances of the two dispositional aspects of gods are depicted with great realism and in great detail in scroll paintings and temple frescoes, both available in the villages for all to see. Gods in their benign aspects are usually shown in pastel colors, in calm postures, with relatively few limbs, and relatively pleasant expressions on their faces. Gods in their terrible aspects are depicted in dark and harsh colors, with snarling faces, in threatening postures, and usually with an excessive number of heads, eyes, teeth, arms, etc. A _takbu_ god, further, is usually shown in sexual consort with a goddess, or he is at least depicted with an erect penis, while _shiwa_ gods generally sit blissfully alone.

At the opposite extreme from the gods are the demons, all of whom are considered to be intrinsically evil, and aggressive against humanity. Not only threaten-
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...ing to individuals, they are also a menace to the religion in general. They try to tempt lamas and monks into sin, to eat temple offerings, and to undermine the religion however they can. Every Sherpa can recount tales of the struggles of gods and great lamas to subdue the demons and hence defend the faith. This dual aspect of the demons — enemies of the people, enemies of the faith — will be seen to be important to the successful symbolic outcome of the ritual.

The basic Sherpa rituals, then, ask for the help of the gods in combating the forces of evil. This involves making the high gods “happy,” by feeding them, so that they will want to “help us” by engaging in the struggle against the randomly aggressive demons. Yet it would also seem to require, as we shall see in the analysis, making the high gods themselves a bit angry, so that they will be drawn down from their bliss long enough to engage in this struggle. The symbolism of the supernatural types, in short, seems in part to represent a complex commentary on the regulation of mood — the question of the optimum interrelationship between self-contained bliss, random aggression, appropriately focused anger, and active benevolence.

In what sense is regulation of mood problematic to Sherpas? While in day-to-day interaction they do not appear to manifest, like some other groups in the anthropological literature, rigid control of temperament — actually, they appear to a Western observer relatively spontaneous and open — nonetheless there are unmistakable indications that Sherpas experience chronic difficulty in dealing with anger and other bad moods. There are, of course, all those demons to witness this point, and the fact that most of the gods with whom the Sherpas are most involved are ferocious takbu types. But one need not look beyond the human realm for such projection. The merest slight from a neighbor is taken to mean that he or she is angry with one, whereupon one immediately searches for some fault one may have committed. On the other hand, one’s own bad moods (including lethargy as well as evil temper) are considered puzzling; one often puts them down to having encountered some pollution, rather than to an outside provocation. The feeling of the individual, in short, seems to be, “If my neighbor is in a bad mood, I must have done something wrong, and if I am in a bad mood I must have done something wrong.”

All of this indicates a culturally engendered confusion, for the individual, about the locus, meaning, and sources of anger. Without attempting to postulate a single source of this problem, I shall here simply draw attention to some aspects of the culture and social structure that would tend to reinforce and regenerate it.

In the first place, there is a religious prohibition on violence — killing, fighting, angry words, and even angry thoughts are all considered highly sinful, bringing religious demerit to those who so indulge, and hence hampering their chances for a good rebirth and for salvation. These indulgences are also considered polluting, such that they may undermine one’s physical and mental well-being in the present life as well. Now Sherpas are quite scrupulous about not killing, but as for the rest, fighting, angry words, and angry thoughts are relatively frequent and commonplace.
Thus the point is not that they do not have outlets for expressing anger — they do it all the time — but consistent with the cultural prohibition, there are no clear-cut models available for its expression in controlled and articulated ways. An angry Sherpa cannot challenge to a duel, mobilize his lineage for a vendetta, organize a war expedition, bring litigation, provoke a witch trial, participate in a collective confession, or in short have recourse to any socially organized mode through which he and others can get to objectify, comprehend, and systematically restructure disturbing feelings within a culturally sanctioned context. Only one secular form seems at least intended to provide such a structure — the institution of “joking” at parties which was discussed already in Chapter 4 — but it is often only partially successful.

Thus, when anger is expressed in the culture, in the absence of institutional forms for rendering it orderly, manageable, and comprehensible to both the angry party and the observers, it often takes the form of a tantrum. I witnessed several such outbursts, in which the individual (generally after drinking) simply went out of control and began to abuse and attack everyone in reach, ultimately to be dragged away, literally kicking and screaming, by kinsmen and friends.

The situation is strongly compounded by the peculiar fact of Sherpa social structure noted above — the highly diffuse authority structure of the society. Although there are, as noted, status differences in the society, the high-status people have no recognized powers of any sort. Among the Khumbu Sherpas, apparently, there are certain elected village officials (von Furer-Haimendorf, 1964: 104) but even there it is acknowledged that

large spheres of social life lie outside the jurisdiction of these officials. The settlement of disputes relating to these spheres is left to private mediation, and the inability — or unwillingness — of the village community as a whole to assume authority in dealing with such matters, is one of the peculiar features of Sherpa social organization. (ibid.)

In the Solu village in which I worked, on the other hand, the situation is more extreme: There are no formal leadership roles, no elected “village officials.” Currently, the villages are required to elect a representative to the district panchayat council, and in Dzemu one or another of the “big men” is generally “elected” to this post. But the post carries with it, at least at the time I was in the field, no formal powers that could be exercised within the village. Or again, there are two what might be termed “protopolitical” organs within the community, the temple committee and the school committee, each functioning to oversee the affairs of the respective institutions. These committees again are made up largely, but not entirely, of “big people,” but they have no powers for dealing with disputes even concerning the school and the temple, no less in affairs not arising in connection with those institutions.
At the same time, the pattern of community "unwillingness" to deal with disputes in any systematic way holds true. I recounted above the Khumbu murder story, in which (as it is told) no one knew what to do about the murderer after the crime. He stayed in his home for two weeks while the villagers, though deeply upset, did nothing, and he finally ran away to Tibet. Two more examples from my own field experience will suffice. On one occasion, a big man from another village got drunk and disrupted the Dumji festival dancing. Even though, at Dumji, there are two ritual figures who are designated with authority to keep order during the festival, nobody interfered with this man, and he disrupted things for more than an hour. It was only when he went up into the temple balcony and began to lay about among the women with a stick that he was finally dragged away by some kinsmen and taken home. On another occasion, some young English trekkers came through the village and we secured lodging for them with the woman who lived next door. The next morning the woman came in and complained that they had stolen a valuable teacup. As they had not yet left the village, we went down and stopped them, but they claimed they had taken nothing. The villagers who had gathered around agreed with our suggestion that they should open their rucksacks and demonstrate that they did not have the cup. They sullenly opened their sacks, but said that they were not about to empty them out. At that point we tried to get our neighbor or anyone else to go through the sacks (we did not feel that we should ourselves be the prime actors in this drama) but neither the aggrieved woman nor anyone else would undertake this. Everyone stood around shifting from foot to foot, and finally the trekkers closed up and shouldered their packs and walked away. Although we and everyone else felt fairly certain that they had the cup, and although the woman was a respected member of the community, no one was willing to have a confrontation with them to defend the woman's interests.

As things now stand, then, Sherpa social structure does not provide channels for dealing systematically with socially disruptive behavior. Further, tendencies toward such behavior (as well as tendencies toward virtuous behavior) are thought to be inherited personality traits, to run as it were in the family, and hence not really to be amenable to change. The upshot of all this is general social paralysis in the face of socially threatening situations. There is a feeling — all things considered, a quite realistic feeling — that nothing can be done, or at least nothing effective.

Thus, aspects of social structure and cultural belief converge against the formulation of any models for the systematic comprehension and constructive transmutation of ill feeling. The angry gods and violent demons dealt with in the ritual signal the fact that the ritual is in some sense an attempt to deal with this problem. Part of the analysis, then, will be an attempt to show how the ritual works to help its participants achieve a particular subjective orientation, consonant with the realities postulated by and experienced in this culture. In particular, for the Sherpas, it is a matter of "correctly" understanding the nature and sources of one's moods and dispositions, and discovering appropriate, constructive, and comfortable forms and courses for them to take.
Offering rituals

Hospitality, anger, and body

The Sherpas make the explicit analogy between the offering ritual and social hospitality. The people are the hosts, the gods are their guests. The people invite the gods to the human realm, make them comfortable, and give them food and drink, all of which is meant to give them pleasure, "to make them happy" so that they will want to "help" humanity by providing protection from the demons.

According to the native model, all of the business of the ritual in relation to the gods is accomplished by the same mechanisms whereby human cooperation is obtained in hospitality (and especially yangdzi) practices. Thus the music, incense, and sprinkling of grain and beer with which the ceremony opens are described as "invitations" and "gestures of welcome" to the gods. The gods are then "seated" in their torma, and the assemblage of altar offerings is served as one serves the food and drink of a party for the sensuous enjoyment of the guests. Thus aroused, pleased, and gratified, the gods, like one's neighbors, will feel "happy" and kindly disposed toward the worshipers/hosts and any requests they might make.

Further, just as ordinary social hospitality assumes and accords a latent power of coercion to the host, so does the ritual. In social hospitality the invitation may take the form of a disguised command that it is virtually impossible to disobey (see Chapter 4); similarly, the invitation portion of the ritual text contains mantra that do not ask but actually conjure the gods into coming. And the invitation to the gods is coupled with various sensuous temptations (music, incense, food, and drink) that lure rather than merely invite the gods.

Second, the seating of a guest in ordinary hospitality has a culturally defined latent coerciveness — once he can be got into a seat, he must accept the proffered hospitality or risk gravely insulting the host. Once in the house and seated, in short, he has become a guest and must follow through in the appropriate ways. The coerciveness of the seat is also seen in funerals where, in order to make sure the soul does not wander off and miss the reading of the totul, a special seat is prepared for the soul with a mystic design in the center; the soul is conjured into sitting there and its presence is thus assured for the remainder of the reading. Similarly, then, the conjuring of the gods into their torma receptacles is a coercive gesture that controls their presence and their availability for being fed, pleased, and petitioned.

And, finally, just as feeding the guests is seen as intrinsically powerful and coercive in ordinary social hospitality, so the feeding of the gods is not only propitiatory but coercive in the ritual. In discussing the effectiveness of yangdzi, I stressed that food and drink are thought to have certain natural effects upon people, such that, having been wined and dined, they become more open, friendly, and receptive to oneself and one's wishes. (The converse holds too — not feeding others automatically makes them angry and uncooperative at the very least.) Drink in particular, through its intoxicating properties, is said to render the personality expansive and the resistance to various temptations and imprecations low. That analogous effects are expected to take place in the gods' dispositions is seen in the (already cited)
passage from one of the ritual texts: "I am offering you [the gods] the things which you eat, now you must do whatever I demand." (Quoted in von Furer-Haimendorf, 1964: 193). Thus, as in yangdzi, the guests (in this case the gods) are not only being given pleasure in the vague hope that they will be kindly disposed toward their host. The various pleasurable offerings mask mechanisms assumed to have intrinsic coerciveness.

The hospitality model is thus applied intact as the native gloss on the action and expectations of the ritual. And this extension makes perfect sense — a tried and more or less true procedure for gaining assistance in ordinary life is applied to an apparently similar situation in dealing with the gods. But how similar is the situation? The gods, unlike people, have no bodies and hence no sensuous desires; they are specifically said to "need nothing." If nothing else, then, this point serves to call into question the appropriateness and efficacy of the hospitality structure itself, which, perhaps, is exactly what is intended. In other words, it may be that social hospitality is a problem, and that the ritual, cast in the idiom of social hospitality, is at least in part a device for dealing with it.

At this point we must reexamine hospitality through different lenses. For present purposes, two problematic aspects of these events come to the fore: First, hospitality is one of the major contexts of village life in which the moral implications of "the body problem" are most sharply highlighted; and second, it is the matrix par excellence where the issue of confusion over anger and other moods is most seriously raised.

First, the body problem: Hospitality raises the issue of body not as an abstract concern with relevance only for one's ultimate salvation, but as a conflict between religious ideals and the pragmatic requirements of worldly social life. The religious ideal devalues the body, but social pragmatism indicates that sensuality is not only personally pleasurable but a socially constructive mechanism; it is the body with its weaknesses that renders others subject to social manipulation. The whole hospitality ethic dictates that it is a good and socially useful thing to give others sensuous pleasure, by providing them with food and drink, because when people are thus gratified they will, in a word that has great import in the culture, help one another. Without the hospitality procedures, the Sherpas feel that they would be virtually at a loss for means of gaining social cooperation, especially from higher-status figures who have no ongoing obligation to them. Virtually the only way to get people to do something in the culture is to make them want to do it, to generate in them some sense of obligation. Thus the whole hospitality system with which villagers are so much involved virtually all of their nonworking time, and upon which the whole integration of village social life is felt to depend, winds up putting people in direct conflict with the highest ideals (and even the lower-order beliefs concerning pollution and the like) of their culture and their religion.

The conflict between the religious devaluation of sensuality and the necessary social manipulation of sensuality finds much concrete expression. A cultural notion — fully borne out by experience — is that hostesses force one to eat and drink too
much, making one drunk and lethargic, analogous if not equivalent to polluted states that signify an upsurge of the lower aspects of one's being. In particular, hostesses are said to tempt village lamas with too much food and drink, undercutting whatever minimal gestures toward asceticism these clerics, falling short of full-scale monkhood, try to make. I have even seen a drunken father trying to force his monk son to drink beer. And local villagers who try to swear off drinking are subject to the most intense sorts of pressures by hosts and hostesses to take a drink. All of this serves to point up the vital importance of sensuous susceptibility for the social workings of village life, and the conflict between that and the ideal of ascetic self-control stressed by the religion. Even the slightest gesture of asceticism, such as swearing off drink, is a threat to village social dynamics.

These points further illuminate some of the meaning of the villagers' ambivalence about monks: Rejection of sensuality, while good in terms of ultimate salvation, seems virtually immoral from the perspective of village life. Ascetic leanings represent social nonavailability; sensuous susceptibility is the basis for real social help and mutual support.

As for the problem of mood, the Sherpa party is meant to make people happy, and it does that quite often and sometimes quite intensely. It is meant to pacify anger and create mutual benevolence, and it often performs these functions as well. But it also generates plenty of anger, anxiety, and ill feeling. This is not to say that Sherpas do not experience the various moods in other contexts of their lives, but only that they seem to experience all of them most intensely, in the most complicated mixture, in a short period of time, and in a confined and rigidly structured social space, at a party.

We have already discussed, in Chapter 4, the notions of angry host and angry guest, and the mutually irritating and anxiety-provoking aspects of the host-guest relationship. And we have seen too the ways in which the long period of drinking and "joking" may produce a great deal of tension. The joking of course is not supposed to culminate in fighting — on the contrary, it is obviously meant to provide a nonviolent format for the articulation and resolution of ill-feeling. Yet it often becomes quite vicious, an intolerable provocation that culminates in a fight between the parties to the repartee. If the fight comes late in the event, the party may actually break up, leaving a residue of anger and bad feeling all around. Or if the fight breaks out, and some friends hustle the fighters off to their respective homes, the party will continue, but with the pall of the unresolved fight over it. Or a fight might not break out, but in that case at least some of the guests spend the rest of the evening sulking and smoldering with anger. All these outcomes are at least as probable as the ideal of the mass of happy and satisfied guests warmly in the host's debt at the end of the party.

Now it is not only true that some large-scale parties turn out exhilaratingly well, but also that there are many instances of smaller-scale visiting and inviting in which the chances of both high exhilaration and strongly provoked anger are low. But it is also true that when a host invites a few people to a small party he often wants some
particular favor from them, and these parties thus turn more on the anxieties of the host-guest relationship described above — the host’s anxiety about being able to bring off his persuasion, the guest’s feeling of being pressured and coerced, the fear of each of angering the other. Either way — large parties with highs of good feeling and lows of surliness and resentment, small parties with their smaller pressures and anxieties — the Sherpa hospitality situation is a matter of the complex experiencing of a mixture of moods and feelings generated by sensuous stimuli and problematic social relationships.

Hospitality, then, is a situation in which the two problems outlined above — “body” and “anger” — are highlighted and intensified in various ways. It is fraught with contradiction. It is supposed to be a form for making people happy — stimulating the senses and feelings in positive ways, and soothing and pacifying aroused ill feelings — yet it often generates, or at least serves as the matrix within which is generated, as much ill feeling as good. And it is the situation par excellence that highlights the contradiction between the standard ethics of village social life, which value the sensuous susceptibility of the body as a means of gaining social aid and cooperation, and the ideals of the religion, which strongly oppose as inimical to salvation, any pandering to sensuality. The guest who doesn’t eat, who leaves “with an empty mouth,” may be such a charged figure precisely because he summarizes all these issues: not eating means anger, not eating means asceticism, both anger and asceticism mean (from different starting points) social noncooperation.

The solutions of the ritual

Let us now return to the action of the ritual, to analyze the symbolic development and handling of each of the problematic issues outlined above. For the problems are not simply represented; they are dramatized in particular relationships to one another and modulated toward particular resolutions.

Social hospitality provides the metaphor, the outer form as it were, in which the ritual is encased. We saw above both the surface analogy — invitation, seating, feeding — and the hidden analogy — the command beneath the invitation, the entrapment underlying the seating, the intentional manipulativeness of the feeding. Yet it is clear that much more is going on in the ritual than this analogy allows us — and perhaps the participants — to see. Let us look more closely at the offerings and at the action surrounding them.

The structure of the altar platform is that of a series of steps. On the first or lowest step are placed the \textit{chinche}, the “outside offerings” [also called, in Tibet, “the offerings to accomplish drawing near” (Ekvall: 166)]. These include the “eight basic offerings” — water for drinking, water for washing, a flower for good smell, incense for good smell, a butter lamp for light, water for cooling, a simple uncoated torma for food, and cymbals for music.

On the next step are arrayed the \textit{nangche}, the “inside offerings.” The nangche
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represent offerings of (not to) the six senses. There should be cloth, as clothing, signifying touch; a plain torma, as food, signifying taste; incense, signifying smell; cymbals, as music, signifying hearing; a mirror, signifying sight; and a sacred book, signifying the sixth sense, thought or spirit. The nangche level is often omitted in setting up simple altars, but it was stressed by the lama informant as conceptually important.\textsuperscript{13}

The next two steps comprise the sangche or "secret offerings." On the lower of the two are the torma of the lesser gods of the constellation being worshiped, the "soldiers," "helpers," etc., of the high god. On the right-hand end of the row, as one faces the altar, stands the special torma that will be thrown out to the demons, somewhat separated from the others, usually with a butter lamp interposed. On the top row in the center stands the large main torma, for the focal god of the text being read on this occasion. This is called the torma che, the "senior" or "head" torma, or the khil-khor torma. Khil-khor (Skt., mandala) means a constellation of gods, of which the khil-khor torma represents the head god; it also means the palace and more generally the heavenly realm or abode of that god and his constellation. Khil-khor also refers to a diagram of this realm/palace/constellation, the minimal reduction of which is a complex geometric form combining in various ways circles and squares, each inside the other (see Ortner, 1966; Tucci; Snellgrove, 1957). A khil-khor diagram should be placed under the head torma.

The main torma is flanked by its two immediate guardian torma. To the gods' right goes the dutsi, a mixture ideally composed of all the foul ingredients of the world, said to signify semen, and usually represented by beer. The term dutsi literally means demon juice. To the gods' left goes rakta, ideally menstrual blood, usually represented by tea.\textsuperscript{14}

In front of the completed altar a bench lower than the first level of offerings is set up. On this bench is placed the tso food, a set of cooked or otherwise immediately edible foods that will be offered to the gods at the end of the service and then eaten by the people (see Figure 8).

The offerings are said to be presented in order from the bottom to the top of the altar, from the "outside" to the "inside" to the "secret" offerings. One lama's exegesis presents the sequence as follows. The chinche or "outside" offerings are "for people" — the worshipers are transformed at the beginning of the action into (low-level) gods, and are propitiating themselves with the first-level offerings. Then the people/gods at the first level offer the nangche or "inside" offerings at the second level to the chepi hlamu, the offering goddesses. The nangche offerings, it will be recalled, are composed of symbolic representations of the six senses. The offering goddesses in turn offer the sangche or "secret" offerings of the top level to the gods of the ceremony, the secret offerings being the torma and the polluting liquids.

Following the presentation of the offerings, hymns of praise to the gods are read, prostrations are made by members of the congregation, and prayers of petition for favors are entered. Finally, the tso feast is offered, said to be a party in celebration
Figure 8. Schematic representation of an altar
of the positive effect the ceremony has wrought — the gods are said to be in good moods as a result of receiving their offerings, and they join the worshipers in a party in which they and then all assembled consume the tso foods.

Let us now try to construct, in our terms, the sense being constructed by the ritual action itself. I suggest, first, that the rite may be read as an extended and systematic pollution of the gods, through a double process of embodying and, contrary to the native model that says they are being “made happy,” infuriating them, all strangely enough producing the positive outcome of triumph over evil. In the process, I will try to show, the participant is meant to experience a transformation of consciousness concerning both his body and his anger. And finally, all of this, by being encompassed within the hospitality framework, winds up reconciling the felt contradiction between pragmatic social life and religious values. We must now look to see how the trick is really done.

**Bodying the gods**

The rite can be read, first, as a series of symbolic acts and representations that encase the gods more and more tightly in more and more substantial forms, especially, though not exclusively, in bodies. If we turn the sequence of altar action upside down, and read from the top of the altar downwards, rather than from the bottom up, we see an interesting development of meaning. A justification for this analytic inversion is created — and perhaps the point is not lost on the worshipers either — by the hospitality structure of the ritual, which dictates that the first step of the action is the installation of the gods in their seats, the torma, which stand at the top of the altar. And the conclusion of the rite is always the offering of the tso, explicitly a party in the most festive sense, the tso foods standing at the bottom, actually below, the altar.

The very first move, then, in this reading, is to force the gods to take bodies at the “secret” level of the altar. The body itself, as discussed above, is a pollution to the spirit; it is also the source of semen and menstrual blood, both highly polluting, representations of which flank the senior torma on the highest level of the altar. Further, in the Sherpa view of human reproduction, the body is the product of semen and menstrual blood; conception occurs as a result of their being mixed. The torma body which the god is forced to adopt is thus, it may be inferred, both the source and product of its polluting companions on the altar. It seems clear, then, that these items are not here for the god to eat, but as the generators and sustainers of the bodily form that he has been forced to adopt. They set up a self-sustaining system, like the poles of a battery, which keeps his body powerfully charged, which in turn keeps him trapped inside it.

Beyond this, the torma have coatings of “clothing,” as described above, developing further the gods’ physical encasement. And the head torma at least, which summarizes all the others, is placed on his khil-khor, the geometric representation of
his palace and his realm. The khil-khor design depicts enclosures within enclosures — squares inside circles, circles inside squares. Thus each of these elements stresses ever heavier layers of physical encasement. The body encases the god’s spiritual essence, the clothing encases the body, the palace encloses the embodied god, and the boundaries of the territory enclose the palace.

It is noteworthy that, according to various textual translations and exegeses, the verbal material at this early stage stresses descriptions of the physical appearances of the gods. According to a summary of a text given to von Furer-Haimendorf by a Sherpa lama, the invocation is followed by “detailed descriptions of the gods” (1964: 193). [The “informant thought that these were recited in order to prove to the deities, believed to suspect their worshipers of being ignorant of their true nature, that the lamas are well aware of their appearance and character” (ibid.).] A bit later, theoretically following the offering of the torma and the polluting liquids, “the seat of the god is then described in detail” (194) — the seat presumably being his heavenly realm and palace, as signified by the khil-khor upon which he is also actually sitting. We also see, in a “hymn of praise” from a different text, translated by Waddell, careful attention to details of the deity’s physical appearance — face, hair, hand, foot — as well as his (actually “her”; the hymn in this case is to a goddess) spiritual and magical powers (437). Thus there is great stress throughout the textual material, which accompanies and directs the symbolic action, on the outward physical forms the gods have taken.

Having boxed the poor fellow in, as it were, the second level provides those important entries — the senses — to the now shielded interior of his being. We saw that the second-level offerings are representations of the senses, a point which is difficult to comprehend except in the context of the present interpretation. So the ritual action now gives him sight, hearing, smell, touch, etc., to render him susceptible to the further machinations of the worshipers.

Finally, moving down to the third level, the outside offerings, the ritual action stimulates and arouses the god with gentle sensuous offerings. His body is caressed with cleansing and cooling waters, incense and flower scents are wafted before his nose, softly glowing candles flicker before his eyes (the Sherpas explicitly think of the light of butter lamps as a soft and gently light), sweet music is sounded to his ears, and he is fed a bit of delicately prepared food (the food torma) and drinking water. At this point too, hymns in his praise are sung, caressing his pride as well. Now, surely, he is at the worshipers’ disposal.

For what has been done? He has been, it seems clear, turned into a human being, trapped in a body and suffused with sensuous desires. And to prove it, he is now invited to the tso feast, where the food is real human food, none of that torma and incense business, but cooked rice and vegetables, sweet corn stalks and raw peas, oranges and bananas, even packaged biscuits from the bazaar, and big jugs of beer. The only indications of the divinity of the guest at this point are the fact that the cooked rice is formed into the conical torma shape (and it is called a tso torma), and the fact that the guest is courteously allowed to eat first.
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The molding of anger

The demons, as we saw above, manifest and signify capricious and unpredictable anger and violence. The potential allies of humans in the struggle against the demons are the gods, but they are problematic too. The shiwa gods, in their state of blissful fulfillment, are utterly detached from the world, and indifferent to its affairs. The ferocious takbu gods, on the other hand, are the more logical allies of the people, because they are by definition engaged in the struggle with the demons — that is why they are ferocious. Yet if the takbu gods are already fighting the demons, why do people have to perform the ritual at all? To answer this we must recall that the takbu state is a special transformation on the shiwa state. All gods need nothing and are fundamentally fulfilled and blissful. Takbu gods are still gods; they presuppose and point to the fulfilled, self-contained state from which they came and to which they can return. The general tendency — the “pull,” as it were — of the whole religious system is toward shiwa bliss; the implied threat of the takbu gods (and hence the precipitating factor of the ritual), is that they will abdicate their struggle, subside into bliss, and leave people at the mercy of the demons. According to one informant, discussing the seasonal offering rites performed by households, “If you don’t do [these rites] the big gods will go away.” And part of the refrain of this ritual, called out repeatedly by the householder at appointed moments in the lama’s reading, means, according to the informant, “Please [gods] don’t go away.”

In short, the problem for the ritual is less to get rid of the demonic “enemies” (indeed, the exorcismic elements in these, compared to other Sherpa rituals, are marginal) than to stimulate the active support of the rather inert divine “allies.” And this in turn, given the shiwa “pull” of the system, seems to be a matter not of making the gods “happy” (they are tending toward too much happiness already), but rather of making (or keeping) them angry. Indeed, as I will try to show in this section, we can observe over the course of the ritual a controlled and systematic arousal of — and, simultaneously, a particular shaping and formulation of — godly anger. I will return below to the difference between divine and demonic anger, to the doublethink of infuriating the gods while claiming to make them happy, and to the paradox of giving offerings to beings who “need nothing.”

If we accept the notion that part of the problem is not only to combat capricious violence, but also to combat emotional detachment (“bliss”), then the whole first part of the ritual — in which the gods, contrary to their natures, are trapped in bodies, encased in heavy material forms, fed, and otherwise polluted — can be seen as an attempt to infuriate the gods, to rouse them to passionate reaction. We must recall the general attitude concerning the body in Buddhist and Sherpa thought — it is the agency of desire (“attachments”), which is the source of frustration, which is the source of anger. Thus bodily the gods, and providing various things to sustain and fortify their bodies (the semen and menstrual blood, the food) must be assumed to anger them, if the body → attachments → frustration → anger logic has any force. And following the offering of the altar to the gods, the worshipers
perform prostrations, theoretically as apologies for past offenses, but conceivably as apologies for polluting and angering the gods within the ritual itself.

While the above points are somewhat speculative, or at least merely deductive, the arousal and shaping of godly anger can be seen quite clearly in the so-called Hymns of Praise, read while the gods are consuming their offerings. The one text I have at hand is actually to a shiwa (blissful) goddess, Drolma, the highest goddess of the pantheon and a deity of personal mercy rather than demon killing. Even so, in it we see clearly the verbal shaping of the deity’s anger and its orientation against the proper foes. The hymn begins, as is appropriate to Drolma, with praises to her mercifulness: “Deliveress sublime,” “Rich . . . in pity’s store,” “Soother of our woe,” etc. But then it modulates into stronger dispositions, getting down to the business that people (at least the Sherpas, if not all Tibetan Buddhists) tend to be at least as interested in as mercy and pity: power and fury against the demons.

Hail to thy tut-tārā huṇi [her mantra]
Piercing realms of earth and sky
Treading down the seven worlds,
Bending prostrate everyone!

Hail! adored by mighty gods
Indra, Brāhma, Fire and Wind
Ghostly hordes and Gandharvas
All unite in praising Thee!

Hail! with Thy dread tre and phat
Thou destroyest all Thy foes:
Striding out with Thy left foot
Belching forth devouring fire!

Hail! with fearful spell tu-re
Banishing the bravest fiends
By the mere frown of Thy brows
Vanquishing whole hordes of foes!

The text may be read as a symbolic device for shaping and orienting the deity’s anger, read after the offerings have strongly aroused it, while she is eating the offerings. Even in these brief verses we can see that the goddess is read through a series of very specific modulations of her mood, each then directed against the various fiends and foes. First her mantra is said to “pierce” evil — it is sharp; then she “treads down” heavily; then she “belches fire” — broadcasting rage; then — perhaps so focused and controlled now is her anger — she “merely frowns” and it is enough to “vanquish whole hordes of foes.” While one would certainly need to look closely at a range of similar texts, presumably they all have the same general form and intent.

The meaning is carried not only by the words, but by the other media of the ritual — the physical manipulation of the altar items and other ritual instruments by the lamas, the prescribed hand gestures (mudra) made by the lamas as they read, and the music that weaves through the reading. The music is probably of paramount importance, and unfortunately here I am not competent to offer an analysis analo-
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gous to the one just suggested for the text. The pace and intonation of the chanting varies with different parts of the texts; in some places there are recognizable and repeated melodies with which the lay people often hum along. The percussion instruments — large drum and bells — sometimes accompany the chanting, and again people recognize and tap along with some of the rhythms. From time to time the full orchestra plays. The orchestral music is sometimes a series of extended chords, even in length and rhythm, and sometimes accelerating melodies that begin with long deep blasts upon the alpine horns, then build to a cymbal-clash climax. All of this, it may be argued, conveys to the worshipers the intent of the text concerning the moods of the gods and their readiness for encounters with the demons. Indeed, the music is probably the primary vehicle through which the unlettered layman may understand and experience the divine mood conversions taking place.

It does not take much imagination to suggest that what is being manipulated here are the moods of the worshipers themselves. I have already described the culturally engendered problems the Sherpas have in dealing with anger; given the general prohibition upon its expression, there are few structures within which a Sherpa learns to comprehend and order his unruly feelings. The ritual lays out these moods in pure archetypal forms — the absolute detachment and self-contained bliss of the gods, the absolute violence of the demons. It then proceeds to transform bliss itself into anger or violence, but of a controlled and focused sort that can triumph over the uncontrolled violence of the demons. The rite is hence both a “model of” a complex emotional state — let us call it positive anger, or an anger of commitment — for which few models are provided in ordinary Sherpa life (or perhaps in any life), and a “model for” achieving such a state.

It is important to be clear on this point: I am not saying that the rite simply provides some sort of symbolic outlet or catharsis for repressed anger that has no avenues of expression in the culture. What I am saying is that, as indicated above, although the Sherpas experience much anger, and in fact express it (or explode with it) not infrequently, they have very few resources for understanding or dealing with it in any systematic way. Both their own and others’ bad moods, not to mention rages, are largely mysterious to themselves. The rite provides a symbolic vehicle not only for the expression of those moods, but for their structuring: One participates in a sequence over the course of which one’s feelings are sorted, as it were, into the elements of a morally approved pattern, and the achievement of this patterning is the resolution of the “problem of anger.” If this discussion is accepted, it would explain why the rite seems more concerned with building anger (in the gods) than with destroying it (in the demons). For it is at least as important, given this thesis, to experience how and of what one’s mood is constructed, as to dissipate it; indeed, that is the condition for overcoming it.17

But this is not all that the ritual is about. It would distort it as much to reduce it solely to this “subjective function” of providing a template for the structuring of emotional states, as it would to reduce it to the social function of dramatizing (say) the proper relationship between monk and laity, although as suggested above, it
Sherpas through their rituals might also be doing some of the latter. We must not lose sight of the fact that this is a religious ritual; its religious import remains to be delineated.

Hospitality: mediating religion and the social order

Religion can be minimally defined as a metasystem that solves problems of meaning (or Problems of Meaning) generated in large part (though not entirely) by the social order, by grounding that order within a theoretically ultimate reality within which those problems will "make sense." At the same time it must be realized that religion, by virtue of being a metasystem that is separate from and yet addressed to the social order, itself engenders paradox, contradiction, and conflict. When one says that religion is an autonomous element of a sociocultural system, one is not saying that it floats free of a social base; one is simply saying that while it is responding to (both "reflecting" and attempting to solve) some problems, it is creating others.

By making offerings to their gods in the idiom of social hospitality, the Sherpas are saying something about both their social order and their religious order. Sherpa hospitality, as we have seen, is a vital element of the Sherpa social process, yet it is also fraught with problems. It is a locus, for the participants, of complex feelings and moods that are disturbing in other areas of life, and disastrous in this particular context — a context intended to be pleasing, soothing, and productive of social cooperation. Further, hospitality has the problem of being implicitly denigrated by the religious devaluation of sensuality, a point that ultimately calls into question the entire morality of secular existence. At the same time, from that secular perspective, hospitality opens a serious question concerning the morality of the religious world view and ethos, for it is hospitality that, according to the culture, renders people cooperative and mutually supportive, as opposed to a religious orientation in which it is every man for himself, pursuing his own salvation.

Actually, the religious critique of the social order, specifically of hospitality practices, and the social critique of the religious order, have more subtle and detailed dimensions. Let us look a bit more closely at both.

Even if we grant, as certain defenders of Sherpa religion might well argue, that the religion does not utterly devalue sociality as such, it can at least be argued to take the following stance: The trouble with the social order, as it is normally lived, is that people treat it as an end in itself. Entertaining, feeding, helping one's neighbors are not ipso facto wrong or irreligious, but they become so when used primarily as means to personal self-enrichment and self-aggrandizement, and this is how they are normally used. What the religion might claim to be criticizing is only a certain mode of sociality, namely, "interested" as opposed to "disinterested" giving. One should live the social order, enact its forms, in the name of some higher good; the ideal is to give with no thought of material gain, to give as a meritorious act. One's own merit will not only improve one's fate, but also increase the general
store of merit in the world and thus contribute to world salvation. The right kind of sociality, "disinterested" benevolence, reestablishes one's contact with this higher moral order, regrounds one in the religious cosmos, and ennobles all one's words, thoughts, and deeds.

These points of the religious critique of the Sherpa social order clarify a number of issues about gods and demons. In the first place we can see that, among other things, the demons are bad because they represent the worst form of the wrong kind of sociality: They make demands upon others (by making people sick and demanding ransom for the patient's health) for their own trivial, personal ends — the pure pleasure of food and other rewards. Second, we can see why divine takbu anger is "good" while demonic anger is "bad": takbu anger by definition is directed against the demons in their role of enemies of the moral system, while demonic anger represents petty rage at personal frustration. Takbu anger is universalistic, concerned with a relatively disinterested defense of the system; demonic anger is particularistic, because even their enmity toward the religion is based on the fact that the religion limits their activities and frustrates their desires. (The problem from the other point of view is that the takbu gods' anger, though more social and "engaged" than the shiwa gods' bliss, is still too abstract; takbu gods defend the system but not the people. I will return to this in a moment.)

Finally, the distinction between interested and disinterested giving helps solve the central paradox of the ritual: We can understand how Sherpas could reconcile or at least rationalize giving offerings to beings who "need nothing." When one feeds people who are needy, one is potentially playing upon their need, and banking (almost literally) on their gratitude as insurance for future favors. When one feeds beings who need nothing, one's aims are theoretically purer. One's gift is humble in relation to their wealth, it is more literally a sacrifice, and effaces rather than aggrandizes oneself. In fact, of course, this is not the spirit in which the ritual is conceptualized by the lay people, but technically it can be used, and was used by lama informants, to rationalize the paradox of offering material things to totally fulfilled gods.

From the secular point of view, on the other hand, the fine distinctions between good and bad — interested and disinterested — sociality that the religion might be claiming to make are probably largely lost. While secular criticism of the religion is, as was noted, very rarely heard, it seems clear from all our discussions that the religion may appear to the lay perspective extremely antisocial, and hence virtually immoral. It appears to devalue all those social forms that render people cooperative and helpful among themselves, and that in fact make Sherpa social life possible. If people and demons are too "interested," the gods are too "disinterested." The gods from this point of view thus represent all the tendencies of Sherpa religion that encourage the pursuit of one's own salvation while ignoring the needs of others, a salvation which, moreover, itself consists of utterly self-contained, asocial bliss. They represent everything from the doctrine itself, to the monks who live its tenets, to the villager who seems unresponsive to social forms and does not fulfill his social
responsibilities. In theory, the only “help” for people that the religion sanctions is help-by-example, the showing of the way to salvation by reincarnate bodhisattvas and monks. The ritual says that this is not enough. The gods must be actively engaged on behalf of humanity, and if it takes a bit of magic and manipulativeness — a judiciously chanted coercive mantra, a dose of pollution, some well-phrased flattery — so be it.

The Sherpa ritual of making offerings to the gods, cast in the idiom of social hospitality, is an attempt to deal with all these problems. The symbolism of the ritual catches up and reworks the issues so as to render a different judgment upon each. Through the symbolic process of the ritual, as I will try to indicate in this final section, religion in the most general sense is made to be less selfishly oriented than it, in pure dogmatic form, appears to be, while secular life is made to be less sinful, self-interested, and mired in sensuality for its own sake than it, from the religious perspective, appears to be. The application of worldly forms — bodies, food, hospitality — to divine processes — engaging the gods to fight the demons — results in simultaneously rendering the religion more moral, and providing ultimate moral sanction for those worldly forms. The gods are rendered socially “engaged” rather than self-absorbed, while the forms of human existence are shown to contribute to the preservation of cosmic order, by functioning as the stimuli and vehicles for defeating those enemies of cosmic order, the demons.

The essence of this process would seem to lie in the relationships of encapsulation between the various levels of a symbol-work in the ritual. The core of the ritual, the central dynamic, is the transformation of the gods’ mood from abstract bliss (present in takbu rites as a tendency, and by implication) through abstract anger (defending the system) to a final state which has the dual properties of anger against the demons and (and also because of) active benevolence toward humanity. That this emotional transformation is culturally, and not just analytically, the essential dynamic of the ritual, is evidenced partly by the fact that when one asks Sherpas why they do these rituals, the first answer is almost invariably “to make the gods happy.” For a long time I treated this as an almost phatic statement, but I came to understand that the mood changes of the gods form the premises upon which everything else depends.

The whole system of mood states and transformations in the ritual, in turn, is carried by (encapsulated in, represented by, and often engendered by) the body symbolism. The lama molds the torma from formless dough to represent appropriate bodies for each of the gods of the ritual, and the formal elements of the torma (shape, color, decorations) are the major loci of visual representation of the shiwa/takbu mood distinction. Further, the differential treatment of the gods’ and demons’ torma exhibits the difference between godly and demonic anger, and deals differently with the two types: The demons’ torma is thrown out of the temple and smashed, a gesture that both portrays their indiscriminate and scattershot violence, and wards it off by forcing them to scatter and chase the crumbs; the gods, on the other hand, are invited into their torma, a move which portrays the more focused and responsive nature of their dispositions, and which actually (as we saw) begins the transforma-
Offering rituals

tion of their mood. Finally, and most importantly, through the sequence of first enticing the gods into the torma "bodies," then endowing them with organs of the senses, then stimulating those senses with the delicate "outside" offerings, the active anger of the gods is aroused. This anger thus becomes available for shaping in line with human modes of emotional response, and in relation to ends with which humans are concerned. In short, most of the visual development of the mood process of the ritual is carried by the treatment of the torma, that is, by the treatment of the body symbolism. And by having this critical symbolic role in effecting the success of the ritual, the body itself receives strong validation as a vehicle for moral action.

But the process is not complete. By endowing the gods with body, they are rendered human, but only in a very crude sense. They are still lacking that final critical dimension of humanity, sociality. The final transformation, then, is effected in two ways. In the first place, the tso is performed as the conclusion to the ritual. It is at the point of the tso that the gods have been symbolically brought as far as possible to the human state of corporeality and sensuousness, for here they are feasted with real human food as opposed to the divine foods of torma, incense, and the like. And the tso foods stand beyond and below the outer offerings of the altar, again indicating the point that the gods have been almost fully brought to the human state. But the critical point is that the tso feast is actually shared with the gods by the human worshipers, whereas the other altar items are not made part of any social feasting. In the tso, in other words, with its most explicit social hospitality ("party") format, the gods have finally become social allies. Only now can it truly be said that they have been humanized.

But the point of interest here is that, only at the point of the tso, when the gods have been as fully "humanized" as possible, are they finally asserted to be "happy." The tso is always said to be joyous, an expression and celebration of the final transformation of the gods to a positive, benevolent, and expansive mood, ready and eager to help humanity by doing battle with the demons. This conclusion to the ritual thus dramatizes the point that the human bodily state is, ideally, also a state of active benevolence vis-à-vis others, and, further, that both of these conditions — bodiness and benevolence — find their fullest and best means of expression in the context of a party, the context of social hospitality.

But if the only representation of hospitality in the ritual were in the tso, the moral attitude of the ritual toward hospitality would remain ambiguous. If the transformation of the gods to a state of sociality and active alliance with human concerns were merely the closing act of the body-and-mood-manipulation drama of the central part of the ritual, then hospitality would merely be the last in a string of clever tricks. The whole system of problems revolving around hospitality — its immorality from the religious point of view, and its challenge in turn to the ascetic ethic — would stand unreconstructed. But in fact the entire sequence of ritual action, from beginning to end, is encapsulated in an idiom of hospitality. The gods are cast as guests from the very outset of the ritual, and the development of their alliance with humans by the end is the product not (only) of cheap manipulation,
but (also) of working through a full social event, from the manipulative invitation at the beginning to the establishment of mutual respect and at least temporary mutual trust by the point of parting. And the torma are not just bodies, trapping, irritating, and manipulating the moods of the gods; they are also food, tokens of social exchange in the creation of bonds of higher mutual interest.

With this, the full statement of the ritual on the problems with which it is concerned can be articulated. The thrust of the ritual, through its many layers, is simply to make the gods "human" — to make them corporeal, to make them susceptible to sensuous pleasure, to make them angry, to render them socially engaged, to get them to "help." The significance of this point is twofold: to validate the human modes of being and operating in the world, by showing their contribution to the preservation of cosmic order and not just to individual self-interest; and to "humanize" the religious order, that is, to counteract its essentially antisocial bias, by literally turning the gods into human beings and forcing them to become agents of direct social help and support. Put in other words, the ritual figuratively humanizes the religion, by literally humanizing the gods, while at the same time sacralizing the apparently irreligious and sinful social forms by having them serve as vehicles for a collective moral struggle.

In the process of this double movement, however, the various aspects of humanness that play a role in the ritual are themselves transformed and restructured. Anger in the ritual is developed and then transcended in a controlled and satisfying way. It achieves a complex structure that is neither the frustrated rage of the demons nor the abstract moralistic hostility of the gods toward the enemies of the faith. It becomes an anger of social commitment, generated by identifying one's own needs with the needs of one's social allies, and hence moving to a more universalistic (but still not totally abstract) mode of emotional response. As for the body, the sequence of ritual action shows a similar movement from treating it as an instrument of personal pleasure, to celebrating it as a vehicle of collective triumph over the forces of evil. And finally, the fact that the gods respond to the hospitality procedures, despite needing nothing and having no use at all for paltry human offerings, provides a model of the way in which hospitality should ideally be treated and responded to: in a spirit of essentially disinterested benevolence. The gods enter into social partnership with the people not because they needed all that food and felt obligated for having been satisfied by it, but in recognition of the goodness of the act of giving itself.

In sum, the religious ideal of "help" (as an abstract exemplification of The Way) is transformed downward by being integrated into a system of practical social alliance, while the lay social forms are transformed upward and brought into line with the religious ideal by being rendered more universalistic and stripped of simple self-interest. In these rituals, in other words, religion and society may be said to reach a compromise. But the great fragility of this compromise is attested to by the frequency with which it must be constructed and reconstructed, over and over, in the religious life of Sherpa villagers.
their past lives are born with good spiritual tendencies and are the ones who
become monks; monks in turn have the best chance to achieve salvation. Women,
on the other hand, have no direct chance for salvation; they can only hope to be
reborn as men and from that position aim for higher things. The point that no one
is intrinsically better or worse off in his opportunity to strive for salvation applies
primarily to normal males within the normal social scale.

22 Obviously these built-in tendencies of the reincarnation system parallel the
actual economic advantages of wealth, and the disadvantages of poverty, discussed
at the beginning of the chapter.

23 And this morning there was an event (the kungsang) at which all the people
in the host's reciprocity network brought him gifts of food, money, and beer, and
everyone, by tradition, got utterly drunk. Drunkenness is culturally considered to
be a state of psychic disintegration, contributing further (from an analytic point of
view) to the pollution that the exorcisms will be rectifying.

24 The cremation, as noted, is also an exorcism, and it follows a sequence of
psychic and social disintegration that has precisely the same structure as the sequence
of events leading up to the final grand exorcisms.

25 Tibetans also had gyepshi and other rituals with dough scapegoats as well.

26 This particular lama had a phenomenal knowledge of ritual and doctrinal
detail, and generally when he "forgot" something it was of a sexual or otherwise
esoteric nature.

27 To avoid confusion, it should be noted again that the Tibetans had both
gyepshi exorcisms with dough lut, and the human scapegoat ceremony. The Sherpas
have combined the gyepshi, which they use in quite orthodox form, with the do
dzongup, an apparently heterodox ritual in which the key figures, the peshangba,
are nonetheless quite clearly modeled on the Tibetan human scapegoats.

28 The suggestion that the highly orthodox gyepshi runs contrary to the popular
will expressed in the tiger exorcism may explain why the Sherpas, who are usually
reasonably forthcoming with exegesis on their own rituals, were unable to come up
with anything beyond "feeding the demons" in explaining the gyepshi. I made
many attempts to get people to explain what was going on in gyepshi, what the
various items signified, and so forth, but virtually to no avail.

29 In light of the point that this ritual is recognized to be somewhat defiant of
orthodoxy, it may not be insignificant that the peshangba, representing the ordinary
lay people, take the cymbals away from the lamas, and complete the ritual on their
own terms and in fact in a way that lamas say is technically incorrect (attempting
to kill the demons outright).

6. Offering rituals: problems of religion, anger, and social cooperation

1 One could also, as in the preceding chapter, relate the monastic sector to the
rich, and to the problem of social hierarchy; here a different aspect of the problem
is being brought into focus.

2 For a discussion of some aspects of the sang ritual, see Ortner, 1973a.

3 Quotations from Waddell: 431.

4 The torma also has phallic connotations. These are not orthodox, but are
nonetheless fairly overt in the culture (Paul, 1970: 352). This connotation will not
be incorporated into the analysis, although it would not, I think, be contrary to it.

5 In the history of Tibetan Buddhism, celibate monasticism did not become a
generally accepted ideal until the fifteenth century, when there was a successful
reform movement that called for a return to a purer Buddhism and that became
institutionalized as the Gelugpa sect. The Nyingmawa sect resisted this reform for a long time, and continued to permit its lamas to marry and remain in the villages serving the lay people’s religious needs. Later, however, this sect (still in Tibet) began to mimic the politically and religiously dominant Gelugpa sect’s monastic system, while retaining the institution of married lamas (banzin). The whole thing has not fully sorted itself out even today, among the Sherpas. Some Sherpa monasteries were celibate from their founding; some were “married monasteries,” communities composed of “monks” and their families; and there were and are married lamas in the villages. One “married monastery” started a reform toward celibacy within the present generation. It now only accepts celibate candidates, and although the married monks have not actually been purged, they cannot sit on the same row of seats in the temple as the celibate monks.

6 For a discussion of the difficult and contradictory role of village lamas vis-à-vis monks on the one hand and lay people on the other, see Paul, 1970: 582–8.

7 There may be at least one other (symbolic) basis for lay ambivalence about monks. The only times monks systematically come into villages and homes are for funerals. Monks thus not only cut themselves off from lay life; they are associated largely with death. To meet a monk in a dream is a bad omen, suggesting a funeral.

8 For an extended discussion of the Sherpa system of supernatunal beings, see Ortner, n.d.a.

9 Actually there are four mood aspects: shiwa (ZHi Ba) — “mild”; gyewa (rGyas Pa) — “increasing or expansive”; ‘ong (dBang) — “powerful”; and takbu or towu (Drags Po) — “fierce” (Ekvall: 169). But the Sherpas largely operate with the shiwa/takbu opposition. As a general rule, the high gods have both benign and fierce aspects, while the lower guardian gods (sungma) have only fierce aspects for the Sherpas.

10 For a discussion of this issue from another point of view, see Paul n.d.a.

11 While the general model is hospitality, the context makes clear the assumption that this is yangdzi, or “persuasion” hospitality, in which the guests are entertained as a prelude to making some demand of them. The tso at the conclusion of the ritual is also referred to as a party, but it is distinct from the body of the ritual, and as we shall see, it is more in the nature of generalized, celebratory, and non-instrumental hospitality.

12 See note 13, Chapter 5.

13 Beyer calls these offerings “sense gratifications,” and his entire discussion assumes that these are offerings to (not of) the senses of a god (157). But each offering is presented with a recitation of a verse, and the texts of these verses seem to me ambiguous on the of/to question. For example:

The most excellent of sounds
in all the worldly realms of the ten directions
(all that is melodious to the hearing of the Conquerors)
are emanated as hosts of the Lady Diamond Sound;
and these we offer up to the hosts of glorious gurus.

There is no explanation of why the line, “all that is melodious to the hearing . . .” is in parentheses, and it may represent a later addition that distorts the original meaning in the direction of “gratification to the senses.” At the same time, “emanated as hosts of the Lady Diamond Sound” strikes me as implying that the offering is an aspect of the deity, rather than to her, or at least that it can be read either way. I am fairly certain, however, that I understood my Sherpa lama informant correctly, and if he gave an idiosyncratic/unorthodox interpretation, it still seems significant that he came up with this particular one. It should be noted that
there is actually an offering torma used in certain rites that is a quite realistic (and rather gruesome) dough composite complex of sense organs — ears, nose, tongue, etc. Here there is no question that the offering is an offering of the human senses to the gods.

14 Shiwa gods, benign and pure, theoretically eschew these delicacies. Yet my notes show these items on altars of shiwa rituals. Possibly their presence could be explained as offerings to the ferocious guardians of the shiwa gods. In any case, most Sherpa rituals are directed toward the takbu divinities, who demand this sort of fare.

15 The orthodox function of this is to facilitate the process of visualization of the god for the ritual practitioner.

16 Tre and phat are “mystic spells used by wizards — phat means break or smash!” The hymn is translated by Waddell (437). He ends with “etc., etc., etc., etc.” — obviously there is much more in the same vein. For a different translation, see Beyer: 211ff. Beyer’s translation, which is quite beautiful, downplays the sharpness and anger evident in Waddell’s.

17 It should be noted that Tibetan Buddhism, being highly psychologically sophisticated, does not miss this point in its esoteric practices. High-level meditation consists of mentally constructing, bit by bit, detailed mandalas, which in turn become the source of mystical comprehension of cosmic unity. “The mandala born, thus, of an interior impulse became, in its turn, a support for meditation, an external instrument to provoke and procure such visions in quiet concentration and meditation. The intuitions which, at first, shone capricious and unpredictable are projected outside the mystic who, by concentrating his mind upon them, rediscovers the way to reach his secret reality” (Tucci: 37, emphasis added).

18 Not just gods; the best, most meritorious objects of charitable giving are high reincarnate lamas, who are the objects of so much donation that they are generally quite rich.
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