

The Mystery of the Kailash Trail



Chapter 4 Wild yaks-trail

Bharat Bhushan

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Pre-publication draft manuscript

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About the book

The oldest mystery known to the Oriental World. It is said that nobody dares to venture out to walk on the Kailash Mountain. And it is also said that those who walked up the mountain, never returned. In all these centuries, they have gone within, never to return.

About the author

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Chapter 4: Part 1: Did wild yaks walk down the Dirapuk slopes?

Sangye and Yeshe walked around the broken tent trail and searched for sight of more tracks of the herd of large yaks. They could not find any sign along the tents. It was amazing, thought Sangye, for he had heard of such a herd in stories that his great grandfather would tell of one visit to the *Kang Renpoche* when he had returned to the Qinhai plains after a pilgrimage. He had been almost blind and had to stay back in the village when others would go out in search of wild horses for trapping and herding. Most villagers had merely heard the stories and had smiled in indulgence and gone about their work.

Sangye stood quietly, on the trail, looking at the mountains above the Dirapuk areas and the Drolma La Pass region. These were unknown mountains, and there had been no explorations, and no known hunters from many years who had entered these areas. He had heard of no one who had gone and returned. He watched the slopes, the turns, the gorges, the passes, the cliffs, the peaks and the smaller peaks. These mountains could hide such a mystery. A herd of ten thousand large wild yaks would have easily hidden themselves inside these ranges, he told himself.

He had come to the *Kang Renpoche* hills and valleys, for so many years, in search of talk and gossip of wild horses and trade of rare breeds of Tibetan animals. He was no longer strong enough to go inside these mountain ranges to hunt and lay down traps and track the trails of wild animals for it would take long weeks to do so. His

own son, Yeshe's father, was not interested in the art of tracking and tracing a trail. It required lots of patience and offered almost no returns, except the thrill of moving about in the mountains. It required you to be at one with these magnificent mountains and ranges. Yeshe may still pick up on these skills. Such a legend as this, the trail of the large wild yaks could be just the answer, he thought.

“Come, Boy, lets go back to the house, and think about what is to be done,” Sangye said, walking slowly, deep in thought, and spoke a prayer, “Yeshe, you, of my own blood, this could be very well a true fact, that large wild yaks did come down the mountain trail from the higher ranges. There was such a story and talk, but that was of a time long before even your father was born. This mountain has blessed us, with what fate will have for us in the future. Come, bow your heads, and thank the most enlightened one, and thank the thousand Buddhas who came to Tibet, and thank the Dharmakaya Amitabha Buddha, for opening up the magic of these mountains. We have much to be thankful for.”

Yeshe knew that his grandfather believed that every mountain in these ranges, around the *Kang Renpoche* was a Buddha, and that the old man was also convinced that each mountain was a living being. He stood next to Sangye, bowed his head in prayer, but try as he could, he could not focus, for his thoughts were racing. Large wild yaks? Taller than the tallest wild yak? Heavier than the heaviest wild yak? Not one, but many? Could it be true? Was such a thing possible? They had walked down a single trail. There were several other trails in the region, and they chose to walk between the tent lines on this

trail? They would have never known or suspected if they would have come down any other trail.

Sangye knew his grandson well. He knew that he would be extremely curious and excited. He was like he had been at that age. Sometimes he wondered if his own son had betrayed him by not becoming a trailsman or a hunter. He had set up shop and started cooking food. How could he do so? Was that all that life had to offer? These mountains, the tallest of the world, these valleys, the most mysterious of all, the animals, the trees, the clouds and the gods. Where would you get all these in the world? These were all here. Sangye waited patiently for his grandson to start with his questions and wondered if he would be true to his blood and ask to be allowed on the trail.

For now, it would have to wait, thought Sangye. We need to know if there would be tracks of the herd of large wild yaks down in the Lhachu valley. There could be sign on the mountain streams, and there could have been sightings by others in the valley. This was one of the most crowded valley in the area, with the number of pilgrims and movement of animals and the establishment of tented eateries and camping areas.

The old man and his grandson walked out of the trail and returned to the eatery. Sangye pointed towards Dirapuk. There seemed to be some activity going on. Two monks, of different coloured robes, and old trailhand and guide and a young yak-boy accompanied by two yaks and a mastiff pup were walking near one of the mountain streams, looking at the ground, as if search of a trail. Could it be so obvious, he wondered. They must be searching for tracks of the wild yaks. Let Yeshe pull his

own deductions. He would now know if his grandson was a future trailhound or not.

Yeshe spoke, with excitement, “Grandfather, look at that group of people. They are not looking up or around and they are not walking away from each other. And they are not close to each other. They are walking about, looking at the ground, and they are walking about in a wide circle. They are searching for something. Could it be that they are searching for trail of the large wild yaks? They must have known something. Can we go there and see about what is going on?”

Sangye smiled, with happiness in his heart, and said, “Yeshe, it could be. And yet, it may not be. But let us go there and find out. But slow down, my boy, and do not tell them about what it was that we saw on the trail above our eatery. It may frighten people and pilgrims and your parents would lose their trade. Let us first know about what is it that they search for. Let us be sure, absolutely sure.”

Yeshe nodded in agreement. He had not thought of the danger of disclosing such information. A drop in trade, even for a couple of days, would destroy their meagre business. They depended on the income of each day, while out here. He decided against calling out to his dogs, and went down in a small run to join up with his grandfather, who could walk quite fast on the slopes. It was on the plain flat ground that the old man walked very slowly. As he would usually remark, the plain grounds were not meant for walking, it had to be ridden on horses or mules or yaks. It was the slopes that were meant for climbing.


They met up with the monks and the old pilgrim guide and the yak-boy. The old guide and Sangye seemed to know each other. They bowed in respect. Sangye went up to the monk from the Dirapuk monastery and offered his respects, with his palms brought together, and said, "O Master, you who are blessed with the opportunity to be in service and in constant prayer to the most enlightened one, I greet you. It is indeed a sacred blessing, for, in the shadow of this great mountain, I am able to meet with you, and with the monk from the Choku monastery, as his robes make him out to be. You seem to be in search of something. Did something get washed down from the monastery?"

Dawa, the old pilgrim guide, smiled at the Qinhai horseman's guile and curiosity, and replied, "Great horseman from Qinhai, you are a patient bird that circles these mountains in search of what you seek, for so many years. So did your father, and so did his father before him. I know you from many years. Drop the pretense. You are coming down the trail from where we stand. You must have seen spoor and trail of what we search for here. Or, you would never have come down from the warmth of your eatery, where your son cooks hot soup in the morning instead of running ahead of you."

Brother Tameng and the monk from Dirapuk smiled at this banter. They were used to the talk and the tradition of discussion in this part of Tibet. The monk from Dirapuk spoke, "O Sangye, I greet you. This is Norbu who is a yak-boy with the tour group from Shiquanhe. His two yaks that were with him, inside his tent to hide from the rainstorm behaved strangely at night. His mastiff seems to have been very scared and timid at night. He is walking about quietly even now. And,

Brother Tameng from the Choku monastery has a really mysterious story to tell us, he says. Let us hear him. For now, we are following old Dawa, in looking at the river stream, and to see if it would tell of anything that moved through the night.”

Sangye replied, “O Masters, and old Dawa, I understand. From what Norbu has told you, and of what Dawa is looking for, and he is correct that I come to meet you with purpose, is it possible that you are all searching for spoor and trail of a herd of wild yaks? Very large wild yaks?”



Chapter 4: Part 2: The trail above Dirapuk is to be explored.

Brother Tameng and Dawa looked at each other and smiled. The monk from Dirapuk spoke out, “What? What large wild yaks are you talking about? There are no wild yaks near the Dirapuk area and neither are they known from this valley. What are you talking about, Qinhai horseman? Yeshe, what is your grandfather saying?” Norbu looked scared. No wonder his yaks had behaved strangely. Why did his mastiff go weird then? Are mastiffs scared of wild yaks, he wondered?

Dawa spoke to the monk from Dirapuk, bowing, “O Master, please forgive us. Brother Tameng and I, we are scared. We are worried that people will not believe us. We have not spoken to anyone. That’s why we did not tell you about our search. The Dirapuk to Drolma La area, and the slopes between the two places, are the entrance to the valley from the North. We wanted to scout for sign on these riverbeds and the smooth sand before it was filled up with pilgrims and trekkers walking around. The domestic yak would have destroyed all trail.”

Norbu, Yeshe and Sangye stood close together, alongside the monk from Dirapuk. Brother Tameng bowed in reverence to the sacred mountain peaks, one by one, and added, “Brothers, you are all devout people, tied to your circle of life, and to this sacred mountain. What happened yesterday was very strange, and we could not have imagined that such a thing would come to pass. We do not want to add to the mystery. We want to search for what could be possible. For what has

happened can have several reasons. We will discuss them later. We need to think fast, before the valley gets crowded.”

“Yesterday, at night, through the rainstorm, old man Dawa, and I, with permission from my Master Rinchen, moved about near the Choku monastery slopes. I will tell you the rest of the events later, but we saw very large, really large wild yaks. We saw an entire herd of these animals. They were enormous. At least one or two feet taller than the largest wild yak you would have seen or heard about. At least 300 to 400 kilos heavier than the heaviest wild yak you would have known or been told about. We are not bluffing. We saw them. They were huge. All. Not a single animal in the herd was smaller than any other,” Brother Tameng continued.

“We do not want to waste time. It is very important that we know what we saw was true and we should know what really happened. I will tell you the other details later. But something truly different happened out there in the rainstorm. Now, old man from Qinhai, how are you able to ask us the exact question? What do you know? Have you also seen these wild yaks? Do you know of them? How do you, from far away Qinhai, know about wild yaks in this valley? Have you seen them at Dirapuk or at Drolma La?”

Sangye looked back at the mountains above, northwards of Dirapuk, and pointed. He said, “They came from there. They came from the valley above Dirapuk. It’s a really long valley, and needs about four to five days of riding on a fast horse to go through it. They came from there. I did not see them. Neither did my grandson, here. We saw tracks of the animals. We saw only one track.

Not a single track in any other place did we see out there. These were really large animals, I can tell. Old man Dawa and myself, we know each other from many years gone by. What we do not know about these valleys does not exist here at all. But, this was different.”

Dawa nodded. He looked up at the valley entrance, above Dirapuk. It could be possible. This contour was in a straight line, from above Dirapuk, down to the Lhachu valley, down the river stream, going past Choku monastery, to the spot where the circle of stones would be. There was no deviation, no turn off, and large animals like those yaks that they had seen, any obstacle would not stop them. The river streams were shallow at night, and they would be getting deeper now, through the day, as the slopes brought the waters down. What was there? Were there more wild yaks in that valley? Where had they gone? Did they return on the same path?

Yeshe was excited. He could sense that Norbu was also very excited, hearing about the herd of large wild yaks. Norbu’s mastiff was standing close to him, not moving away. He was looking very scared. He thought back to his own two mastiffs. They had also behaved very strangely. They had not barked, and neither had they accompanied them in the morning. That was so very unlike them. They would usually be moving about much earlier than Yeshe or Sangye. So what had happened had also frightened the mastiffs?

“Masters, I have a simple question, for I am not a great trailsman as my grandfather is, and am not like old man Dawa. I am like Norbu here, from another land, with my parents and family, with our animals and trade,” said Yeshe, “I am curious about a different aspect. I can

understand the excitement about the herd of very large wild yaks. If I exist, someone could be larger than me. If I am hunted, I will hide. I do not see the mystery in what you say. I will definitely move about when I cannot be, will not be, hunted. But, the mystery that I see, is in the mastiffs.”

“Look at Norbu’s mastiff. He looks so timid and scared. Our mastiffs are still hiding in the cave and sheds back beyond the eatery that my parents manage. Something else is happening. It is continuing. You saw the wild yaks at night. We saw trail of the wild yaks that moved through the valley. We do not see them now. But, the mastiffs are acting scared even now, late in the morning. What is wrong with them?”

Sangye patted Yeshe, with pride, and said, “Come, Masters, my friend Dawa, let us go and have some hot soup and noodles. I will show you the trail behind the Dirapuk area. No pilgrim goes up there. That area will not be disturbed. We can find trail and sign out there. That is wild and remote area. The valley will not be good for sign. The rains have flattened out the sand and mud. Waters are feeding the river streams from the slopes. All sign would have been wiped out. Come, be our guest. We will be honoured, that Masters from the Choku and Dirapuk sacred temples would come to bless us. You must be tired, Master. Do not get misled by old man Dawa. He is full of energy and strength. He does not need food.”

Dawa added, “Yes, Masters. Let us go up the valley. There must be a story out there. I will ask Yeshe’s mother to give you a separate stove and utensils. I will cook soup for you and add my own recipes. Who knows

when we will eat again in the day? I fear that we will have a very long day ahead of us. We will also speak to Norbu's masters and request them to take another yak boy and animals. Norbu has seen his yaks' behaviour and his mastiff understood that something happened. We will need to keep them with us."


He spoke to Norbu, "Boy, go and request your pilgrim guide to come and meet us at the eatery. Tell him that the holy master of Dirapuk and Choku want him to meet them. We will talk to him. Will you accompany us today? Are you frightened? You have been blessed, my boy. You are going to be part of the mystery of the valleys of the mountains of *Kang Renpoche*. Go, get him with you to the eatery."

Norbu smiled with relief. He was getting worried that he would have to travel with the pilgrim group and would go away from the excitement. He had wondered about getting away from the group. He had already decided to pretend to be unwell and stay back at Dirapuk. That would have been bad, for he would have placed the group to trouble. He knew old man Dawa would not be refused. Other yak boys could take his place. For it was only one day's trail from Dirapuk to Drolma La Pass and then down to Zitalpuk and to Darchen. He ran to the pilgrim group's tent to talk to his group leader. His mastiff ran alongside him, quietly, without barking.

The group started walking up to the eatery. Brother Tameng held on to the walking stick that Dawa had given him. He was thankful for the support. He had a prayer wheel on the other hand, and was twirling it slowly. He waited to catch his breath, and looked back at the Choku monastery and the valley. He could not

believe that he had seen all that he had indeed seen. And, he was happy that the old nomad horseman from Qin Hai had also seen trail of the herd of large wild yaks. But, what of the wolves? Should he talk about them?

Yeshe's parents were surprised to see the odd group that walked in. Old man Sangye, with their own son, Yeshe, the two monks, one from Choku and the master from Dirapuk, and old man Dawa. What was going on, wondered Yeshe's father. He rushed to welcome them, bowing low.



Chapter 4: Part 3: Are the large wild yaks ranging near *Kang Renpoche*?

Sangye asked for Yeshe's father to get some fresh soup and noodles cooked for the group and also to get buckets of hot water for them to wash up. Brother Tameng patted old man Dawa in his appreciation of Sangye's thoughtfulness. He said, "Old man Dawa, we are either stinking and very smelly, or your friend Sangye is indeed very thoughtful and considerate. Let us get cleaned up and refreshed with food, my friend. Who knows what this day is going to lead us into?"

Dawa smiled and nodded. He knew Sangye and could guess where this would lead towards during the coming hours. The old Qinhai horseman was a pure out and out trailsman. This sort of a mystery was the challenge of his lifetime for him. Dawa felt the same challenge that was inviting him to sink in. Here they were, in the most mysterious place on Earth, and they had thought that they had heard about all the mysteries that were to be known.

Yeshe's mother felt blessed to be serving to the two monks from the monasteries in the valley. They were actually here, in her eatery, sitting down to partake in what she was cooking. This was a story that she would take back with her to Qinhai and she knew that all the women-helpers would take back to Darchen. There would be gossip and stories and rumours that would be woven inside one another, and the final story would not be anything about the real reason that this strangely mixed up group would have for getting together.

She felt that she knew and understood the old man Sangye, better than her own husband did. Yeshe was also similarly attracted to his grandfather, she knew. Her son would never manage an eatery. He was trapped with them, here, having to take care of the animals and help in the eatery. She saw the tourists, pilgrims and visitors to the valley, those who came in from so many different places, nations and locations, of very different religions and rich and poor and those who had left everything behind them. She knew that her son was better than many among those who visited, even if they were rich and had better equipment.

Sangye was talking to the old man Dawa, while the two monks were washing up in the secluded area of their cave behind the eatery. Two boys and Yeshe were waiting near them to help and provide more buckets of hot water. Old man Dawa was speaking, “Wild yaks are common in the plains and hills away from this region. I have seen herds of more than two hundred wild yaks in one grassy plain. I have hunted them and have skinned some myself. We are familiar with domestic yaks and we live with them all our lives. I know what I saw at night. These were wild yaks that we have never seen.”

The monks came into the eatery, cleaned up and looking eager to join in the discussion. Yeshe’s mother would not allow Sangye and Dawa to sit with the monks until they had gone and cleaned up. She chased them out of the tent. Brother Tameng smiled at the two old men pretending to be frightened of Yeshe’s mother. He bowed in prayer, along with the monk from Dirapuk, before beginning to eat. Yeshe came to them and sat nearby on a small stool, waiting to get them more noodles and soup. His mother came back with tetrapacks

of orange juice, “especially smuggled in from Ladakh,” she said, in a whisper.

It was not much of a luxury, but it was certainly a thoughtful gesture on her part. The orange juice and other juice packs, tetrapacks and cans, came in through Ladakh, smuggled in by Changpa nomads, in huge quantities. There were other smuggler gangs along the border with Nepal and the tourist and spiritual circuit certainly welcomed these supplies. Whenever raided or caught, the eatery owners would explain them away as supplies purchased from tour groups.

Norbu entered the eatery with his pilgrim tour owner and came to sit near the two monks. The pilgrim guide, Bipinbhai Shah, was a regular tour operator, who would stay in the valley for more than six months, and had come to the *kora* for the past ten years. He knew his place in an open location, in front of the two monks from the local monastery. Their word was law to the local peoples, and if he refused them, he would not be able to operate in the region. Norbu had not told him much, and he did not know the details or reasons why the boy would not accompany him.

Bipinbhai Shah did not bother too much about the reasons. After all, he was not married to the yak-boy, he thought. He needed two yaks to carry the baggage, and he did not mind it if different yaks took on the burden. But, he was curious. A little bit. Something strange must have happened for the monk from Choku and the monk from Dirapuk to sit in this miserable eatery outside the regular camping areas. He did not even allow his pilgrim group to eat in these tented eateries. His group usually set up their tented places, inside a compound, and

cooked their own food. It was safer and cleaner for the tourists and pilgrims.

He sat reverentially on a stool at some distance from the monks. The old pilgrim guide from Choku came up to Bipinbhai and asked for him to allow Norbu to stay back. He told him, “Bhai, I know you from earlier. You are a good and fair man. We need your help. I know Norbu, as I know his family at Shiquanhe. The two monks have decided to travel to some remote areas, and we need Norbu’s help and his two yaks. This is all sudden, and we have no time to go to Darchen and get new help teams. Can you manage without him?”

Bipinbhai nodded in agreement. His mind was thinking fast. This was really weird. This old man was definitely lying. There were many pilgrim guides in the Dirapuk area without any work. Holy men do not just go out wandering in these hills. But, he could not disagree. He was given a bowl of soup. He knew it would be made of vegetable stew, since the two monks were also drinking from similar bowls. He sipped at his bowl politely, knowing that it would be a sacrilege to refuse, and later, bowed and stood up and left the eatery.

Norbu walked out with Bipinbhai and bade farewell. The pilgrim guide was fond of Norbu, since he had accompanied the group on several *kora*. He paid him his entire fees, and added some money in a liberal measure, to retain goodwill. Bipinbhai knew his economics in this region. The added ‘tip’ that he paid to Norbu, he knew, would bind the boy to his pilgrim group as an unpaid obligation. The boy would be back with his yaks and with his pilgrim group for the next year, and he would be

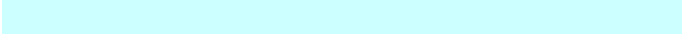
more than enthusiastic, thought Bipinbhai, and waved at him, as he went back.

The two yaks and his mastiff, his tents and other baggage, had been brought up to the eatery and had been kept in the custody of two helper-boys from Darchen. The boys knew Norbu, and were excited at these sudden happenings. Something strange must have happened, they gossiped. Norbu returned to the tented eatery and went to sit with Yeshe. The old man Dawa patted him in affection, and said, "Welcome, boy, get some hot soup and noodles inside you. Yeshe's father will get some Darchen boys to feed your yaks and your mastiff."

Brother Tameng and the old horseman, Sangye, had been in discussion with each other. It was the monk from Choku monastery, Brother Tameng, who spoke, as though he had come to a decision after seeking advice from Sangye. He said, "Brothers, we do not know what is to happen in our lives now. The circles of our lives bring us all together, and our circles have met each other. This valley is the most mysterious place on this world. This valley is also the most sacred place on this world. We are fortunate that we are here, and we saw or experienced what we did yesterday."

"We do not know where the herd of large wild yaks went. We do not know what happened to the twelve pilgrims who sat out there in the circle of stones below Choku. Why did the pilgrims sit out in the open in the rainstorm? Why did the wild yaks not frighten them? Why did the wild yaks come to the circle of stones? Why did the wolves wait at a distance? Was there any connection? We may never know anything about all these events."

He continued, “What we do now know, because of old man Sangye and young Yeshe here, is that the herd of wild yaks came down the slope behind this ridge. They seem to have come down the long slope behind Dirapuk. This is certain knowledge. We can try to find answers to these questions. Let us plan and let us go inside the valley and try to explore this region and see if there are any wild yaks, if they are very large, and if there are more of them. If we saw only male wild yaks at night, there must be others. There must be female wild yaks, and there must be young ones, and there must be herds inside these valleys. Let some of us go into the valley.”



Chapter 4: Part 4: Did the wild yaks come down from a *Beyul*?

Old man Dawa looked at Brother Tameng, and said, “We should explore the valley. Who will go? It may take days or weeks to travel inside and return. Will Master Rinchen permit you to go away from the Choku monastery? I am keen to go inside. My life is spent, and there is nothing more for me to do. I would like to seek the truth of the incidents that have happened. We need to plan.”

The monks from Choku and Dirapuk looked at each other, and at a gesture from the other, Brother Tameng spoke, “My brother monk and myself, we have discussed this issue. We will need to consult with our seniors and elders before we move out of the *kora* area. You are free to go. You and old man Sangye can plan the details. We will provide you with whatever support you need. That would be of no problem. We can also organize a chain of support, to move food and goods to you if you keep setting up camp sites that we can recognize.”

Sangye nodded in agreement, bowed to Brother Tameng and said, “Masters, it is correct that you advice us about going in to this mysterious valley at the earliest. We will need your help, guidance and support in being able to stay inside the valley for many days if required. The small settlement of Dirapuk would not be of enough help. You may need to get help from Darchen and Shiquanhe also. I will go, with my grandson, Yeshe, if his parents would permit, and old man Dawa and the young lad, Norbu.”

The monk from Dirapuk interrupted, “Take Norbu, but do not take him too far. We have not informed his parents. Let him return after a day’s journey. We will get two others to be ready to return with him to join you. Let Norbu be the one who would always return to Dirapuk and go back into the valley to provide you with goods and supplies. He has two yaks, and his Mastiff will give him courage. When he returns, I will get some men from the monastery to take mules and yaks and dogs to go with him. They can help set up an advance camp at a day’s journey.”

Dawa and Sangye agreed with the wisdom and the plan. It would be necessary to make sure that they would not be trapped inside the valley if it would rain or snow suddenly. Nobody would know the locations. The people from the Dirapuk area were used to traveling in this habitat and terrain. They could take care of themselves while helping others. Yeshe looked at his parents, who were standing nearby. His eyes asked the question. His mother came up to him and patted him and nodded her permission. She was proud of her son, and knew that this was a god-sent opportunity for the boy to learn from the old man.

“What about you, Brother Tameng?” asked Dawa, “You were the most curious and most strong in this search. You wanted to find out about the reason why those twelve pilgrims were sitting out in the open *kora* area. If you would have just stayed back at Choku because of the rainstorm, we would not have known about the herd of large wild yaks and we would not be here, planning to go inside the valley. Would you not come with us?”

Brother Tameng smiled, and replied, “Old man, you are right. My heart says that I should go with you, and move about in the valley. But I would need my Master’s permission. I will also need to send word to Darchen and other monasteries to organize supplies for you. Who knows how many days you would need to be inside those high terrain and forests? Who knows what’s out there? I will also try to join up with you. I want to talk to some of the pilgrim guide operators and take good alpine tents, sleeping bags and other supplies from them. We will need them as we go higher, or stay longer, if we have to.”

“But, I also need to return to Choku, because I fear for what we are about to do,” he said, and continued, “I fear that this valley could be a *Beyul*, one of the hidden valleys of peace and refuge, of our way of life, of the way of the Buddha in Tibet. This valley may be one of the lesser known of the 108 valleys that are known and listed as *Beyul*. Or, this could be one of the unknown ones, and may be one of those that are spoken rarely. I will need to consult with Master Rinchen. We will also send word out to all other monasteries. There may be scrolls or records with us or others.”

Yeshe and Norbu had never heard of a *Beyul*. The old man Sangye had heard of these hidden valleys that were protected by the spirits and by the hidden records to prevent them from being damaged or destroyed. It was usually forbidden to establish houses or to do farming or take animals for grazing in these valleys. He nodded, to himself, thinking, that if nobody had ever gone inside, and if this valley was indeed quite long, it could be also be an unknown old glacier that may have retreated in some portions.

The monk from Dirapuk explained for the benefit of Yeshe, his parents and Norbu. He said, “There are many unknown and hidden valleys in these sacred lands. Some are known about, and we know that they are unknown. Some are not known, for they are deep within prohibited areas, and we do not know that they are *Beyul*. The locations of such ones are hidden within the verses written in secret scrolls and may have been forgotten. Some reason may have caused them to be kept a secret, and with passing generations, we may have forgotten that such and such scroll holds such and such secret.”

“However, this place, the valley around the *Kang Renpoche*, and with the number of monasteries in this area, it would be difficult to forget such a place,” he added, “It could be known to our elders and they may not have related the scroll to this exact valley. Let us stay back and find out. Let Dawa and Sangye, Yeshe and Norbu, travel inside the valley. We will make our enquiries. If this valley would indeed be a *Beyul*, we would need to convey and submit the necessary prayers and conduct the necessary rituals to seek permission for us to enter and disturb the spirits that would be resident inside.”

Brother Tameng spoke, “Yes. We have to be careful. What we saw were incidents that we do not understand. Let us not forget the wolves. They are the natural predators of the wild yaks and yet they did not seem to harm them. It may be because they are the wiser since the yaks were quite large and fearsome. The wolves may consider us, our homebred yaks and our mules and our dogs as easy prey. This long valley could also be an old


glacier that has broken up at various locations over hundreds of years. We should be careful.”

Sangye sent Yeshe and Norbu to start organizing the animals and supplies. Yeshe’s father went inside their store and began to pick out supplies that would last more than a week for the entire group. He had two alpine tents that he had been given to him by an expedition team from Norway. They had visited the Dirapuk eatery and stayed with them during a *kora*. They did not want to carry the heavy tents with them since they would be driving back to Kathmandu and flying back to Norway. He had taught Yeshe to open the tents and use them, to ensure that the cloth did not start rotting if left inside the packages. These tents would be useful today, he thought, everything happens for a purpose, and the most enlightened one must have sent the expedition from Norway to give him these tents.

There were two sacks of dried out charcoal that had been made for specific use in these high altitudes. This was his reserve supply from Shiquanhe and Ngari, for the days that he could get trapped in a snowstorm or avalanche if it hit these parts. These two sacks of charcoal would be useful to Yeshe and his grandfather. He would send word to his cousin at Shiquanhe and pass on a list of requirements. The goods could be with him inside of a week, if the weather held. He could be the person to stay here, and make sure that his father, and his son, both who were very precious to him, would return safely.

The two monks left the tented eatery, and began to walk back to their monasteries. Old man Dawa walked with Brother Tameng for a distance, and returned. Yeshe and

Norbu were busy getting the animals and supplies paired off in a sensible manner. Sangye went to get his Mastiffs. The dogs would be useful to warn them of the wolves and to give them courage. The monk from the Dirapuk monastery spoke to some helpers to send across prayer clothes and a prayer wheel as blessings for the team. Yeshe's mother walked out of the tented eatery, and looked quietly at the peaks of the *Kang Renpoche* mountain, and prostrated on the ground, in deep reverence, and prayed with all her heart, for the blessings of the most enlightened one, for her son, for his grandfather, for old man Dawa and for the young Norbu, their animals and their dogs.



Chapter 4: Part 5: Seeking permission from the gods and spirits to enter the valley

Sangye looked at the young Norbu and his grandson, Yeshe. He knew that their youth would help them in this search into the unknown and unexplored valley. Old man Dawa would also be able to travel with the group. He was happy. This is how he would have wanted his life to shape up, to be in search of the great unknown of the mysterious mountains of the greater Himalayas in Tibet. It would be a group that could stay inside the valley for many days or weeks. They would need to plan in that manner, he thought, for who knew what was out there.

They were ready to move within the hour. Sangye had paired up with Yeshe, while Dawa was with Norbu. They would ride out on Sangye's chosen horses. He had picked them from his knowledge of their strength, courage and loyalty to him. They would never bolt from danger and they were used to moving about on higher terrain. Four yaks were chosen. All four animals were with black hair, for there were other yaks that were white, pied and brown. Sangye wanted all the four yaks to look true to the wild breed. He did not want the other domestic yaks to stand out in the wild habitat and in the mysterious valley.

Yeshe and Norbu moved out the four horses and yaks. The three mastiffs walked out behind them. Sangye and Dawa said a silent prayer, looking up at the great *Kang Renpoche* peak and waved out to Yeshe's parents. The local pilgrim guides, yak-boys and other helpers came to greet the team. The word had gone out to everyone in

Dirapuk that the monks from the two monasteries had asked Sangye and Dawa to go inside the unknown valley in search of a sacred place, that had several holy spirits and gods. They were to go and return with unknown treasures that the holy gods had left hidden within these valleys.

The monk from the Dirapuk monastery returned to meet the group and asked them to stand together, for he would recite a prayer to seek the permission of the gods and sacred spirits, to allow them to enter the hidden valley and let them know the secrets that were within. He spoke to the four of them, after the prayer, and instructed, “These are areas that we do not know about. Brother Tameng has gone to consult with Master Rinchen if anything is known about this particular valley. We will also send word to the other valleys and try to find out any knowledge that is known or heard earlier or written in the various religious books.”

“Since we do not know about the place, I have just now spoken a prayer to the guardian spirits of these mountains around Dirapuk, to permit us to travel within. Let us wait sign of any type or from anyone that may suggest that we should not enter. If there is no inauspicious sign, you may proceed ahead. I have also brought prayer clothes and sacred stones for you to place at the entrance to the valley above the trail at Dirapuk. You will be the first to lay the stones to be used to construct an entrance to this mysterious valley.”

Sangye, Dawa, Yeshe and Norbu bowed in respect. The local pilgrim guides, the helpers from Darchen and the yak-boys joined the group and bowed low in respect to the prayer and the rendition that the monk had made to

the good spirits of the mountains around Dirapuk. The monk continued, “All those gathered here. You are the fortunate devotees today. Immediately after our friends and brothers enter the valley, you will all join in the construction of the entrance that the monks will lead from Choku and Dirapuk. If my Brother Tameng does not return in time, we will leave a corner of the entrance, for him to install.”

This was a traditional practice, for the devout to establish a stupa-like entrance structure, made of loosely held stones from the location. The entrance would be invested with the strength of the gods and spirits and it would allow those who would pass through the opening to be blessed. The oldest such entrance in the valley was the well-known Yam-Dwar (*the entrance of Yama, the God of Death*) near Darchen. Sangye and Dawa stepped up on the trail and laid the stones for the first two corners, while the monk from the Dirapuk monastery placed the third corner. Yeshe placed a stone to connect the stones of Sangye and the monk, while Norbu placed a stone to connect the stones of Sangye and Dawa. Yeshe’s parents placed the next two stones followed by the locals.

The group of four crossed the stones that signified the sacred entrance that had been installed across the trail. They looked back towards Yeshe’s parents, the locals and the monk, and waved. They looked up at the *Kang Renpoche* Mountain and bowed in respect and reverence. As if in mutual consent, they walked along their horses. Yeshe and Norbu’s horses following the yaks, while Sangye and Dawa led from the front. The three mastiffs ran back and forth, wondering about the fuss and being generally happy about everything.

The trail seemed to climb initially away from Dirapuk and entered a riverbed that was covered by extremely large boulders. This could have been the reason why people had not dared enter the valley, thought Sangye. So, where had the wild yaks walked in from, if the valley entrance was totally blocked by the boulders? There had to be an entrance somewhere, he thought. The four of them spread out, searching for a way through the large stones. The yaks were tied some stones along with the horses. The mastiffs were also asked to stay near the animals.

Old man Dawa wondered if this was the end of their search. There did not seem to be any possible entrance amongst the boulders. Yeshe and Norbu were getting impatient. They had been eager to go ahead, fast, inside the valley and meet up with the wild yaks. This huge landslide on the riverbed looked like a disaster for their search even before it had begun, thought Yeshe. Some of the boulders were ten to fifteen feet in height, and most looked like they were 4-5 tonnes in weight while all gaps and spaces between the large ones were stuffed with smaller ones, mud, old and dead trees, and bushes and grassy clumps that seemed like they had always existed in this place, for centuries.

There was absolutely no sign anywhere of any movement of animals. There was no trail of Chiru, or wild yaks or wolves. Strangely, there was no sign of any domestic yaks or horses having been brought up to these places to graze, though there was ample sign of grass and palatable bushes. The local sheperds and their goats and sheep did not seem to have discovered this place. How could such a location have remained undiscovered,

thought Sangye. Was this place known to have evil spirits, he wondered?

Dawa and Sangye walked around, quietly, peering within and above and around the boulders. There did not seem to be any sign of boulders having been disturbed by the herd of large wild yaks that would have walked down this trail. Dawa looked for sign, some sign, that twelve large wild yaks would have left behind, accidentally or by the very size and weight of the animals. The entire area was stony. The trail had stopped on either side of the rocky landslide. The rocky spread was about thirty metres wide, entirely blocking the valley, and seemed to be at least fifteen metres high. They could not see beyond the rock wall that blocked the entrance.

“There had to be another way through this wall,” said Sangye to Dawa, “Let us walk back for some distance, and look for a higher location. We could look for what we can see from above this rock wall. I will go back and climb any narrow trail that I can find. Let Yeshe and Norbu stay with the animals. You keep searching here. The wild yaks would not have had to squeeze through this wall. That goes against all aspects of animal behaviour. Think of the heavy rainstorm during the night. No animal, wild or domestic, would have risked a passage into the unknown. There has to be a trail in this maze. We are not able to see it.”

The sheer sides of the rock and the mountains alongside were almost like a box that had been filled up with stones. Strangely, thought Norbu, the yaks, horses and dogs were looking very peaceful. They did not seem to be disturbed in this location. Had they come to the right

location? What if the herd of wild yaks had indeed moved up this valley, and been blocked off at this stonewall, and had actually returned back through Dirapuk to walk through the Lhachu valley? It would mean that they had never come out of this unknown valley. He wondered if he should speak of his doubts to Dawa and Sangye.

He looked at the enthusiasm on Yeshe's face. He had seen the pride that Sangye had in starting on this search. Old man Dawa was very happy. They looked content, even if they were totally blocked. There was no sign of anger or exasperation. He would ask later, he told himself.

