

## Beliefs in Bhutanese Life

Beliefs in entities that some may deem as supernatural play a prominent role in the life of many Bhutanese. Dreams and omens can be taken seriously as timely indications of more important and greater things. Many of the decisions they make are based on their interpretation of their dreams and omens. Such beliefs are an important part of the country's culture and they do not always have a connection to the Buddhist faith. These beliefs must have existed long before Buddhism came to Bhutan in the 8<sup>th</sup> century.

Before the advent of Buddhism, people of Bhutan believed that the forests, trees, rocks, wood, mountains, rivers, lakes, swamps, and even the ruins of houses or fortress were possessed by spirits who had the capacity to help or punish humans. People believed that if they worshipped the spirits and deities of natural sites, the spirits would bless them with boons and support them in any endeavor. However, any form of disrespect towards these spirits is also believed to bring misfortunes to the individual or family. Naturally, people seek assistance from these spirits and deities almost every day of their life. They also pray for protection against illnesses and misfortunes. Whenever accidents or illnesses occur in a family, oracles or astrologers would be consulted.

People have numerous beliefs. For instance, when a person is about to go on a long journey, the person may seek advice from astrologers, who in turn use calendrical calculations to determine an auspicious time and day to embark upon the journey. There are also numerous interpretations of dreams and omens. For example, if while traveling one comes across someone carrying a bucketful of water or a load of firewood, it is considered a very good omen and it is believed that any task that has been planned will be successfully accomplished. If people encounter someone carry an empty vessel, they believe the opposite.

In a common belief system, the days coinciding with 2, 8, 14, 20 and 26 of the Bhutanese lunar month are considered inauspicious for travel. The days are called Tashi Gacha (ཏེ་གཞུ་གྲུ་), which literally translates as 'the horse dies and the saddle breaks'. Bees, which symbolize wealth, are considered harbingers of wealth when they build their nest on one's house. Yet on the contrary, people believe wasps' nests bode various misfortunes. If one hears the dogs crying at night or even during the day, people consider that it signifies death approaching from the region where the dog is facing. People immediately chase the dogs away if they are facing towards their house. If one sharpens the knife or cut fingernails at night, it is said to shorten one's life or bring one's mother's death. It is also considered inauspicious to cut one's hair on 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> days of the lunar month.

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