



Green Tara and the Dalai Lama's Biographer

By Gilah Yelin Hirsch

Abstract

Born and raised in Montreal's large Jewish enclave of 20,000, from the mid 1940's to the early 1960's the author was deeply educated in sacred and cultural studies in Judaism, Torah, Hebrew and Yiddish as well as secular schooling in English and French. During her early childhood she began to question all received information – and she inexplicably “knew” that there was a place called Tibet and a person called the Dalai Lama. As an established artist and scholar, the author was invited round the world, facilitating her ongoing search. It was not until 1994 when she was a visiting artist in London that she met a diplomat who told her that, indeed, both existed in the mystical Himalayas. Ultimately, she not only found Tibet, but was also welcomed by the Dalai Lama's biographer as an anticipated incarnation of Tibetan Buddhist deity Green Tara, and she finally met the Dalai Lama.

Keywords: Tibet, biographer/Kuno, spiritual journey, *tuomo*, reflection, recognition

Introduction

From the time I was a little girl in the mid 1940s in Montreal, Canada, I somehow and inexplicably knew that there was a place called Tibet and someone called the Dalai Lama. I grew up in one of the largest Jewish ghettos in North America, more than 20,000 people dedicated to perpetuating Judaism and Jewish culture in all respects. Many were Holocaust survivors or their children and grandchildren. I attended the parochial Jewish Peretz Elementary School, in which the school day was divided in half. Secular studies were conducted in French and English, while Hebrew and Yiddish were the languages dedicated to Jewish culture, history and Torah.

My mother, Shulamis Yelin, was a renowned poet and author, a literary celebrity in Montreal and Canada, who suffered severe mental illness which would now be diagnosed as Borderline Syndrome. Although she sought psychiatric help throughout her life, the fledgling discipline could not help her. My father, Ezra Yelin, was a brilliant self-taught polyglot who spoke, read and wrote thirteen languages, and put himself through McGill University soon after he arrived from Poland. When I was eight, he was injured in a car accident that triggered the deterioration of all motor functions over a period of twelve years. My elementary school attendance was curtailed so that I could care for my father while my mother taught school. My mother was terribly abusive, both physically and emotionally to both my father and myself throughout my childhood. My salvation was reading and as a young child I read the great philosophers, writers, early feminists, Freud and Jung, all included in the floor to ceiling library of my parents' small apartment. I also read daily newspapers from age 5 on and was terribly worried

about the Korean war. I was looking for answers to the suffering of my family as well as trying to make sense of a world in turmoil.

Although I did not know it at the time, I was born into a lineage of questioners. My father hailed from seven generations of rabbis in Bialystok, Poland. He was rabbinically trained but was an atheist humanist and chose to go into business instead of pursuing a religious life. He was a scholar at heart and failed completely in business, making my mother, a teacher, the resentful breadwinner long before his illness rendered him incapable of working.

The Yelin rabbis of Bialystok were luminaries and theological visionaries. My great grandfather, Rabbi Aryeh Leib Yelin, had written the last entry into the Bavli Talmud, *Yefeh Aynayim*. Literally this means beautiful eyes, but his *parsha* (chapter) was about perspective and attitudinal change. He was in the first wave of rabbis who were *Misnagdim*, opposed to Hasidism, the belief and practice of traditionally received Torah, and were encouraged to question everything and adopt a thoughtfully considered stance regarding religion in a modern world. My great uncle, David Yelin, was responsible for instituting the Hebrew language as the *lingua franca* in Israel and continues to be known for revolutionizing the use of the formerly dedicated sacred language. The David Yelin Academy in Jerusalem is the premier secular teacher-training academy in Israel.

When I was eight I asked my orthodox Torah teacher in Yiddish why the nouns and pronouns for God in the Torah were written as both male and female, but we only referred to God as male. My teacher walked through the aisles of 19th C desks, grabbed my long red hair, and threw me out. I was never allowed back. That was the beginning of my feminist stance.

When I was ten I wrote Albert Einstein and asked how he could reconcile being the greatest scientist in the world while still believing in the God of the Old Testament. I had read that he had written, "God does not play dice with the universe". Yet this God who created the world also created so much suffering, illness, war, poverty and death. I received a reply from the great man a week after posting the letter. The key line was "Always form your opinion according to your own judgment. You have shown in your letter that you are able to do so." Einstein died within two months, while the letter became the guide of my life. Twenty years later I was invited to present my theory on origin of alphabet at Princeton where I was taken to Einstein's house and desk where he had written me that life-affirming letter.

Jews were not permitted to live in various affluent sections of the city such as Hampstead, Westmount, and Town of Mount Royal that are on or near Mount Royal which gives Montreal its name. These spacious streets with English style Neo-Norman or stone multistoried mansions, were surrounded by large manicured rolling lawns featuring old, dignified pine and maple trees as well as flowering shrubs and rock gardens. Rather than the usual multicolored Christmas lights, the trees in these areas were hauntingly decorated with blue lights adding an ethereal quality to the holiday season during the many snow-covered months of this northern city.

Those who were not Jewish were referred to as Gentiles. It was not until I attended a public high school that I met non-Jews, although there were very few in Outremont, the predominantly Jewish section of the city where I lived. Other than a Jewish deli and the soon to be renowned St-Viateur bagel bakery, there was little evidence of foreign culture while I was growing up. Years before the arrival of the groundbreaking pizza restaurant in Montreal in 1959, the only quasi-foreign element in this insular culture was Montreal style Chinese food. This mostly sweet and sour variety of Cantonese cuisine was and continues to be much loved by Montreal Jews.

Early intuitive and spiritual awareness

I was 12 or 13 when I discovered a much-used copy of *The Third Eye* (1956) by Tuesday Lobsang Rampa, in a musty bookshop in downtown Montreal. I devoured it word for word, image by image as the author described his life as a monk in a Tibetan monastery. All that I read was astonishingly familiar as if I had actually lived there myself. I subsequently read all I could find by this author. Many years later I discovered that Tuesday Lobsang Rampa was the pen name of Cyril Henry Hoskin, (1910–1981), the son of a British plumber, who claimed that his body was occupied by the spirit of a Tibetan monk named Tuesday Lobsang Rampa.

At fourteen I experienced my first psychic event. While my mother was so terrifying and abusive, I was very close to her sister, my aunt Dena whom I closely resembled both physically and temperamentally. Rare visits with Dena were the cherished moments of beauty, ease, love and generosity in my childhood. One afternoon in December I was playing basketball in the gym after school. The Phys Ed teacher announced, “4 o’ Clock: Time to leave!” I tried for one more basket and accidentally hit a light which went out. At that moment I recalled a 17th C image in a Canadian history book depicting a church congregation in which all the candles suddenly are extinguished. The stunned priest announces that this signifies the death of an exalted person. Soon after, the 4 PM death of General Montcalm on the battlefield was confirmed. Although extremely vivid to this day, the image left me immediately and I walked home. When I came into the apartment, I told my mother that Dena had died at 4PM. I had not been informed that Dena was ill and was in the hospital for breast cancer. Dena had indeed died at 4 pm. Although I was profoundly saddened by my beloved aunt’s death, I was far more deeply shocked by my intuitive knowing.

That year I also first experienced the diversity of humanity when I traveled to New York City. My myopic world opened substantially as I rode the subways with people of many colors, speaking many languages. I was fascinated by the lavish possibilities each person held in terms of their stories and histories. I began to yearn for a larger worldview – as well as the desire to see the world at large.

While in high school I won various scholarships, which gave me the opportunity to travel to Europe and the Mideast beginning at age fourteen. As a Jewish student, I won a National Leadership Scholarship to spend a summer on a *moshav* (partially privately-owned collective farm) in Israel, as well as a second trip the following year to visit various parts of Israel. I was fluent in Hebrew, having gone to a Hebrew speaking summer camp in Quebec, Canada for twelve years. My first year of university at 17, 1961/62, was at McGill in Montreal, but I longed to attend the Sorbonne in Paris. However, due to parental restriction and advocacy of an alternative direction, I spent my second year of college at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, studying archeology with Yigael Yadin and Hebrew literature. That year the great Nietzsche scholar Walter Kauffman was the visiting philosopher at the Hebrew University. I was the only young person who voluntarily attended the lectures and from the start, Prime Minister David Ben Gurion kept a seat next to him for me and invited me to participate in the discussions after all the lectures.

Growing up I had imagined I would become a writer and psychologist. My world opened wider when I was a student at UC Berkeley during the explosive years of 1964 – 67 when I graduated. Instead of accepting a full four-year fellowship toward a PhD in Clinical Psychology at Stanford University, I followed my then husband to UCLA and became an artist by accident when I was twenty-seven. Despite not having had any experience as an art student or artist, I was accepted into UCLA’s graduate MFA program, based only on the submission of ten small original paintings that I had created at Berkeley for an art history course. I flourished immediately as an artist and was showing my paintings in major museums nationally in my second year of graduate school. I became active in the women’s movement and in 1971 was one of the founders in Los Angeles of the first feminist artist organizations in the world, (Los Angeles Council of Women Artists, LACWA), a far-reaching milestone in the eight-year old’s trajectory of seeking gender equality.

In the 1970s my painting and theoretical work embraced the Kabbalah, the ancient Jewish tradition of mystical interpretation of Hebrew letters and language. Although not a trained scientist, as a result of years of solitary wilderness experience, I discovered and developed a theory on the origin of all alphabets, ancient to modern, based on five patterns in nature that mirror the neurons and neural processes of perception and cognition. I called my hypothesis *Cosmography: The Writing of the Universe* when I was invited to present my theory at a scientific conference in 1981. The hypothesis was accepted into science and after years of presenting *Cosmography* at conferences world-wide, I released an hour-long film documenting the discovery process in 1995.

I showed that the first form of the oldest alphabet, Hebrew, variously called Ancient Hebrew or Ancient Semitic or Aramaic, is based on the five original forms I had isolated and photographed in nature. I suggested further correlations between the five forms that mirror neurons and neural processes of perception and cognition, and forms in art and architecture that have survived in all cultures throughout time and history.

Even with an exceptionally strong and substantive Jewish education, research and experience, I was inexplicably possessed by this *known unknown*. Wherever I went I asked about the existence of a Dalai Lama and Tibet. Years of disappointing questioning and searching ensued.

In 1979 I was a Visiting Artist at St. Martin's School of Art in London. There I met a Canadian diplomat who assured me that both Tibet in the mysterious Himalayas, often called Shangri-La, and a spiritual leader called His Holiness the Dalai Lama, existed. I was told that it was impossible to visit as the altitude was prohibitive and very few had undertaken the treacherous journey. I discovered and devoured the books of French opera diva turned Tibetan explorer, Alexandra David-Neel. She was not only the first woman to visit Tibet, but was also trained as the first woman *lama* in the early 1900s. *Magic and Mystery in Tibet*, 1929, was followed by many books about her travels in which she described Tibetan Buddhism and mysticism. As I read, my knowledge as well as my desire to follow in her footsteps to this legendary place were fueled. Some years later, with my passion fully ignited I found German explorer Heinrich Harrer's memoir, *Seven Years in Tibet* (1952).

My search for Tibet

I was determined to find both Tibet and the Dalai Lama. In 1986/87 I received a sabbatical from my university, California State University Dominguez Hills Los Angeles, where I have been a tenured Professor of Art since 1973. I also received a substantial Senior Arts Grant for my painting from the US National Endowment for the Arts and set out with a backpack September 1, 1986, for a year's solo travel in fifteen Asian countries. I had just turned forty-two years old and was finally realizing a wish I had held since childhood.

Although I had no itinerary, my route was dictated by weather patterns. I traveled first through Japan, where it became embarrassingly clear that I had confused all things Chinese and Japanese, two very different cultures. Montreal Chinese food had barely cracked the immense trove of cultural knowledge as everything that was foreign had been labeled Oriental. Not only was Japanese culture fully divergent from what I had come to know as Chinese, but also, I was face-to-face with the thrilling realization that I would be visiting many entirely unique cultures during the year.

I would go to China next, hoping to find Tibet (unmarked on any maps) before the cold and snows of the world's highest mountains would make the "Roof of the World" impassable toward the end of October.

Unbeknownst to me at that time China permitted only a very few tightly chaperoned tour groups in circumscribed areas of China. These were mostly medical tours as Chinese medicine, particularly acupuncture, was beginning to gain recognition in the western world. I arrived alone from Japan in a small plane to the tiny, one shack airport of Shanghai in the dark of night. There was one raw bulb illuminating the "airport". I spoke neither Mandarin nor Cantonese and was held there overnight. I did not know what would happen - would I be extradited to Japan or to the US?

In a mysterious and odd turn of events, the next day I was issued a document, which declared in Chinese that I was "a group of one". This peculiar adaptation of linguistics permitted me to travel independently throughout China and to experience a great deal that could never have been shared by other foreign groups.

I arrived in China as a Sinophile. I loved all things Chinese, the beauty of all the arts, the food, and the limited vestiges of culture that I had gleaned in museums. I began to meet artists who heard of the single woman artist traveler interested in information about history of all alphabets, sacred ritual, evolution of ideas. At the time homosexuality was illegal, punishable by death. I was invited to meet a group of gay writers and artists, in an underground tunnel who talked about their dire plight. Some spoke English and others translated. Eventually in my travels I came to a remote small village where I witnessed the execution of a gay man in the town amphitheater after he had been paraded through the streets in an open truck.

This was the time of the first arrival of western psychology into Chinese universities. Freud and Jung were being read and discussed by the new generation of scholars. I was told, however, that the new ideas were wreaking havoc among the families of the leading-edge students. While families had been living together in one room for eons, procreating on natural instinct in beds next to their parents and

siblings, the sudden introduction of Freud's theories regarding sexuality had instilled embarrassment, self-consciousness and guilt. The one-child, boy-only rule of China was already harsh, and the new psychology had created a shyness, inability to perform and impotence in the newly educated male population. Pressure to produce a male child was extremely heightened, causing serious emotional illness and disruption of marriages. Aborting female fetuses was already practiced, which has resulted in a greatly unbalanced population.

I was given the opportunity to interview Zhang Bao who was then ninety-five years old and was living in a concrete high rise in Beijing. Central to the Maoist regime, he had been the translator of Mao's *Little Red Book* into Russian and English and was sent to New York to inaugurate the *China People's Daily*, the only Communist newspaper in the US since 1948. The office was equipped with an escape route for him in case the FBI came in search. The receptionist in the front office had a secret buzzer under her desk, which would alert Zhang Bao in the rear office to leave quickly if necessary. The buzzer was suddenly activated one day as FBI agents burst into the front office. Zhang Bao managed to escape through the rear window, and returned to Beijing just in time to be sent to the fields as a prisoner-farmer during the Cultural Revolution. After ten years of hardship during that regime, he was sent to a gulag in Siberia for eighteen years of hard labor and torture during the Russian takeover. When he was released he was once again in Beijing as a translator until retired to this dismal apartment on a very high floor reached only by infinite numbers of stairs. I happened to visit on the day that poetry was re-allowed in China after having been made illegal during the Cultural Revolution.

Zhang Bao's son and I were sent to the basement of the building and there found an ancient trunk, which we hauled up the many steps to the elder's miserable one room home. Zhang Bao opened the trunk and wept as he pulled out scroll after scroll, beautifully calligraphed colophons of poetry. His son and I pasted the long scrolls over the windowless concrete walls and the room was transformed into an exceptionally powerful and soulful poetry museum. Zhang Bao prepared tea for us with his single burner Sterno flame as he told his story. He recounted that after being released from the gulag he lived in Moscow for a while, where he connected with a Russian woman. He was returned to Beijing before she gave birth to the son they had conceived together. On a visit to China in the mid 1990's I met Zhang Bao's Russian son who had been living in Moscow and had returned to discover his father forty years later.

I had innumerable enlightening experiences throughout my month of travels in China. I managed to get to the most remote places of the immense country to see ancient Buddhist caves as well as the better-known treasures in many Chinese cities and territories. Although I discretely asked about Tibet, there was only denial and I learned nothing about the continuing existence of Tibet, the horrific persecution of Tibetans and the destruction of more than thirteen hundred Tibetan monasteries. Even though Tibet was not identified on any map in China, it remained a fantastical destination that I was driven to discover.

While Lhasa had been the capital of Tibet for hundreds of generations, the capital city was not recognized by the Chinese. China Airline was the only airline flying to Lhasa, and only from Chengdu, the western-most Chinese city in the province of Szechwan. Despite the ubiquitous phrase associated with the tin-can planes and dubious flight record of China Airlines, "*China airline always crashes*", I had no choice. The alternative would have been several weeks of hard trekking from Chengdu, the western-most Chinese city in the province of Szechwan. The weather was already growing cold. I opted to stay in Chengdu until I could get a flight on the infrequent plane to Lhasa. I discovered the only hotel in Chengdu, Xing Xiang, and was led to the bar which resembled the bar in the first *Star Wars* film – all sorts of "bad guys" dressed in outlandish costumes speaking many languages and dialects, rough and ready adventurers and criminals. No women. Hotel room doors were open, one could grab a bed and sleep hoping not to be disturbed by who knows what.

Two days later I flew from Chengdu to Lhasa in an unheated unlined fuselage with no seats. I was one of seven passengers seated on the unpadding, cold metal floor of the small plane. We held on to straps attached to hooks on the metal walls. The attendant literally threw candies and key chains at us, her idea of airline welcome protocol.

Before I left Los Angeles, I had placed my finger on my topographical globe, feeling the great difference in the height of Tibet from the rest of Asia. I flew into the arid outskirts of Lhasa at 12,000

feet altitude. I had prepared for this potentially dangerous altitude by taking Diamox – a drug that provides more oxygen to the brain to avoid often lethal altitude sickness - three days before and continuously while there. I stayed in the one hotel that looked clean enough and included an oxygen tank in each room. Yak burgers were served in the cafeteria.

Connecting with the Tibetans

My first night in Lhasa I experienced a remarkable dream. I was a Franciscan nun in the seventeenth century searching for my “lost brethren” who had fallen into a hole in the “Snow Mountains.” I saw myself dressed in a dust-colored burlap habit tied with a rough rope at the waist. My normally auburn hair was black and cut into a square around my face. I didn’t quite recognize myself, but I knew I was the nun. I followed the tracks of my “brethren” through the hole in the snow-covered mountain and found myself in a small city that was clearly marked by a river, bridges and tall white sculptures that looked like abstractions of a human. I was familiar with the location; however it was dark, approaching nightfall. All landmarks and geographical points were perfectly vivid and remain so to this moment. I never found my “lost brethren” in the dream.

I awoke and immediately made a map of what I had seen. I didn’t know then that “Snow Mountains” is the English translation of the Tibetan name for the Himalayas. I also didn’t know then that the large human-like abstract sculptures were representative of the Buddha, and venerated by Tibetan Buddhists. I carefully folded and tucked the map into the pocket of my journal.

I was in an altered state during the two weeks I was in Tibet. I went from one monastery to the next and was devastated to find most destroyed. Each monastery represented one of the four sects of Tibetan Buddhism and had been a self-contained sacred city of several thousand monks. I witnessed many displaced monks and nuns who had been beaten and tortured. I learned that the peaceful Buddhist country of Tibet had first been invaded by Communists China in 1949. Since that time, over 1.2 million out of six million Tibetans have been killed, over six thousand monasteries have been destroyed, and thousands of Tibetans have been imprisoned and tortured. By the time I visited Lhasa monks and nuns were self-immolating in protest to the Chinese repression.

At death Tibetans are either ceremoniously cremated or ecologically returned to the earth in sky burials. I had read about sky burials and went to the site on a mountaintop near Lhasa to witness the ritual. As the terrain is rocky and ground burial is impossible, it is here that the bodies of recently deceased persons are brought and ritually hacked into many pieces, which are left to feed always swirling vultures.

It was very cold, rainy and icy. Blizzards churned up every few hours, but the Barkhor street markets were going full tilt. I walked everywhere alone surrounded by maroon clad monks and nuns and magnificently outfitted tribal and feudal lords of various Tibetan families. I was dazzled by the opulent costumes of both male and female Tibetans—silks and brocades of many colors, woven “aprons” of fine colored threads and yarns, and lavish furs of yak, sheep and goat. Women and men were gorgeously and heavily adorned with jewelry of silver, turquoise, coral and many other minerals and gemstones. Some wore exceptionally rare and coveted “Z stones” around their necks. Despite the dark wintry days, people were brilliant.

One could find anything for trade or for sale. Products brought to this Himalayan market from the ends of the earth ranged from silks, cottons and damasks from India and China, animal parts and potions such as snake venom and antlers both used for virility and fertility, foods and spices of all sorts, portable electronics to pirated DVDs. Tibetan physicians checked the nine or thirteen pulses and urine of ailing patients and disseminated herbs. The dentist worked continuously during a snowstorm in the crowded open market with a jar of teeth that had been pulled from patients in pain, and were ready to be glued into another mouth as needed. Cold *chang*, Tibetan beer, was sold in the market as well as hot Tibetan tea. There were hardly any foreigners at the time.

Yak was the staple of the culture. Yak meat was eaten, the milk of the female *dzo* was made into butter and cheese, yak butter tea is the perpetual and pervasive drink at all times, while yak fur is used for clothing and tent making and yak dung is used for insulation in the yurts and tents, as well as for

fuel. Candles made of yak butter were the only source of artificial light. The dank, sour smell of yak permeated everyone, everywhere and everything, including my many layers of clothing and my body.

Lines of devout worshippers waited at all times to enter the holiest of Tibetan temples, the Jokhang. Some arrived on their knees from days of trekking, performing arduous and taxing prostrations throughout their journey. It is said that every Tibetan Buddhist must do at least 100,000 prostrations in their lifetime to earn appropriate merit. I joined the long line of tired, reverent worshippers to enter the temple. Young monks bowed slightly as they distributed hot buttered yak tea with immense metal tea pots and poured the steaming sour milky liquid into the carved wooden cups that every pilgrim and monk carried.

The sacred chanting persisted day and night with no break. The level of musical frequency of the chant sustained high energy, both physical and emotional. Devout elderly individuals spun their own small prayer wheels while many worshippers circumambulated the temple clockwise and turned large, human-sized prayer wheels, continually sending the prayers into the universe for all sentient beings. Om Mani Pad Me Hom...

I visited the Medical School and the School of Astrology, both integral to the training of monks. I was always the only woman in any of these environments. I had reached my destination, finding Tibet but not the Dalai Lama.

I was not allowed to visit the interior of the Potala Palace, which I learned had 1423 rooms, and I was repeatedly told how the Chinese had invaded Tibet in 1959. The Dalai Lama had fled over the Himalayas and was welcomed by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to establish a temporary home for the Tibetan government in exile. To this day, the Dalai Lama continues to live in exile in McLeod Ganj, above Dharamsala, northern India.

My time was limited as the harsh Himalayan storms were occurring more regularly. It was time to go south to the warmer climate of Kathmandu, Nepal. I met three westerners in Lhasa also bound for Kathmandu. We hired a Tibetan driver and jeep for the weeklong trip from the roof of the world to the lush jungles of Nepal. We would see many more monasteries, heartbreaking devastation and destruction, and lonely outposts of Tibetan families, usually consisting of one woman and two husbands who were often brothers. Polyandry is a common practice of very remote families. In this way, one husband could be moving the sheep and yaks to fertile pastures at lower elevations while the other guarded the wife and children at the yurt. These were lonely existences of very hard work.

Our trip down the Himalayas was memorable for its richness and variety of experience. We stayed in Tibetan homes along with the sheep and yaks, sometimes sharing the room with the animals. People were very friendly and forthcoming, generous and inquisitive. For most we were the first white people they encountered and they were fascinated by the color of my hair and freckles.

Although I knew no Tibetan, I was somehow able to make myself understood everywhere we went. By this time my "Pidgin" along with body language was quite eloquent. This was to prove very useful throughout the year of travel.

Everyone had his or her stories of persecution. And each showed us their illegal photographs of the Dalai Lama, bringing them forth from hiding places in each room. Mention of the Dalai Lama or practice of Tibetan Buddhism was forbidden by the Chinese. Yet each Tibetan family expected to and was honored to give one of their sons to be a monk in a monastery, as young as three or four-years-old. This continued to be practiced despite the destruction of so many monasteries. The little boys would live in the monasteries the rest of their lives, tutored by older monks. I observed many little red-robed boys sleeping in piles like puppies in each of the monasteries I visited throughout my various visits over many years to Tibet, Nepal, India and Bhutan. The children comforted each other in this form of close body contact.

I was devastated and heartbroken by what I found in Tibet and knew that the direction of my life was clear, that I was to become a proponent of Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism.

We made our way down the mountains, often stuck in the mud having to shovel out of deep ruts or stopped midstream by landslides of boulders. We learned that body cleanliness was not a priority in the hard life of Tibet and we smelled terribly as the concept of showers did not exist. Drinking water was hard won and carried a long way by our hosts.

Toward the end of the week we were traveling in increasingly dense green territories as we eased our way down into Nepal. Luxurious forests, flowers, monkeys and exotic birds greeted us, even as we visited the cave of the Tibetan saint Padmasamb, three days before arriving in Kathmandu. Having come from the glaciers, snow and sandy aridity of the Tibetan Plateau to the lushness of the Kathmandu Valley, we were relieved to have left the disturbing realities we had witnessed, yet continued to be grateful to have seen what was left of Shangri-La. And we very much delighted in anticipation of comfort of all sorts in Kathmandu.

At that time, the only way to receive mail was through Poste Restante, a service of American Express. The international offices sprinkled throughout the world gave adventurers a secure address for mail, a reliable bank to realize much needed financial activities, telegram services, long distance telephone opportunities, news of the world, and English-speaking help. As I had not prepared a fleshed-out travel plan, I had given few Poste Restante addresses to the people who might wish to contact me. Although I kept a detailed daily journal and was constantly photographing, I had barely written any letters during the first many weeks of travel.

One of the letters awaiting me in Poste Restante in Kathmandu had been forwarded to me from Los Angeles. I was thrilled to read that Rajiv Gandhi was inviting me to participate in the first International Interdisciplinary conference on *Space*, which would be held in New Delhi in November 1986. My accommodations and stay were to be taken care of and I was asked to speak about my theory on the origin of the alphabet. I was focused on reaching New Delhi in time for the conference.

After the cold and difficult travel in Tibet, the ease of Kathmandu was welcoming. I melted into hot showers, with softened and relaxed vigilance, as I basked in the sunny warmth and splendor of exotic gardens, indulged in fresh and delicious food, shopped for supplies, swapped stories with other travelers, and visited Durbar Square, Pashupatinath, and Bodhanath, as well as other historic sites, towns and areas around the fabled city. As many travelers do, I arranged a two-week trek in the Himalayas (Annapurna mountains) from Pokhara, Nepal to Jomson Muktinath, Mustang region of Tibet, with a fourteen-year-old Nepali boy as my guide. I carried my own fifty-pound pack which had by then become an organic component of my body. With no common language, yet dependent as we were on each other in this intimate and difficult trek, we always understood each other. I explained to him that the tiny one-inch globe I carried represented the world. I showed him where I lived and pointed to the other side of the globe where he lived, and hoped to somehow convince him that the relatively large ribbons of blue representing oceans, were much bigger than the streams we passed as we trekked. He called me “monkey in the forest”, entirely unlike the “trekking armies” that we saw daily, groups of fifty or more hikers, served by a hundred Sherpas who carried their gear, set up camp, and cooked gourmet meals.

I flew from Kathmandu to Srinagar, Kashmir. While in Kashmir, I lived on a houseboat and enjoyed the beauty of the light as it changed on Lake Dahl. I began to understand Muslim culture and practice, the extraordinary quality of their crafts such as the complex carpets and other textiles, as well as immense waterproof, intricately painted *Papier Mache* water urns and other vessels, detailed mosaic tile ornamented architecture, gardens of labyrinthian intricacy and astonishing beauty. I admired the Kashmiris adaptability to the very cold winter when I noted that they carried small coal burning heaters under their robes.

I eventually reached Ladakh, far north of Srinagar by covered truck transport. This isolated Himalayan region at 10,000 feet, is administered by India and part of the larger Kashmiri territory. Ladakh is another enclave of Gelugpa Tibetan Buddhism in the western Himalayas. On arrival I knew that I had entered into yet another world. I visited remote monasteries, and witnessed unusual rituals. In the freezing cold subzero weather, I saw the monks out of doors, dressed only in their robes with naked arms, head and necks exposed, practicing *tuomo*. I had read about *tuomo* in Alexandra David-Neel’s *Magic and Mystery in Tibet* years before. While I shivered and froze in my fleece and Gor Tex expedition suit of many layers and Sorrell triple inner-shoe knee-high boots topped by waterproof gators designed for Himalayan explorers, the monks chanted and whistled as they worked, clearly impervious to the cold. As in Tibet, I never took my clothes off or fully washed. I experienced what most arctic travelers report – that at some point, one’s clothes are so stiff with dirt and bodily emissions that they can stand on their own.

I was delayed in flying out of Ladakh by continuous blizzards. I slept in the freezing house that generously accommodated a stranded foreigner and ate the wonderfully hot and nourishing yak soup that was prepared for me for several days. Finally, a small propjet arrived from the south and I was able to fly to New Delhi a day before the conference was to convene.



I arrived at the opulent conference hotel, one of the most lavish hotels in Delhi and made my way to Reception dressed in my filthy, smelly expedition suit, wearing my immense backpack and carrying my walking stick. Around me people were dressed regally and looked at me as if I were a homeless vagrant, waiting for a handout or an ouster out of this palatial environment. Space not needed. As I presented my letter from Gandhi to Reception, a tall Tibetan male dressed in the maroon and saffron robes of a Tibetan abbot, approached the suspicious hotel employee and told him that I was expected, and that I was to be given a very special suite. The abbot's authority was indisputable and Reception acted as directed. Before I was ushered to my suite, the Abbot told me that I was awaited after the conference in

McLeod Ganj, Dharamshala, in the Himalayas of northern India, the home of the Dalai Lama. I never saw the Tibetan abbot again.

By this time the logic that had characterized my thinking when I left Los Angeles had long ago evaporated. I followed blithely when led to the most luxurious suite imaginable. A large platter of assorted fruit, biscuits, wine and tea awaited me in this extravagantly spacious of accommodations. Sumptuously embroidered fabrics adorned the tall arched windows and covered the marvelously carved bed and princely furniture. The walls glistened with reflecting mosaic tiles. I removed my brittle clothes and stepped into the room-sized shower of steaming water and fragrant soap. My matted hair and itchy body were rapturous to be so pampered. I remained in the shower for a very long time. To this day, it remains as one of the most sensuous experiences of my life. Several sets of new and beautiful clothes had been prepared for me to wear. I donned the red, black and gold embroidered long tunic, pants and stole, transforming from a filthy vagabond into an elegant conference participant.

The conference lasted ten days. During the long sessions of the many days, the eighty delegates sat around an enormous oval table, each of us with our translator. Despite the international good will that underlined the conference, the Cambodians and the Vietnamese seated next to each other would not speak between themselves, even through their translators. Each evening splendid receptions were held at the various embassies of the countries represented. The Indian Minister of Culture gifted us with cultural presentations representing the different arts of India in addition to the indigenous cultural presentations at the various guest embassies. On a few free afternoons off, we could visit the many sites and museums in New Delhi. The friendships that were forged with representatives from France and Holland as we visited many significant sites together have remained to this day.

As soon as the conference ended, I traveled to Dharamshala by overcrowded bus, a grueling twelve-hour drive up the Himalayas. I was once again in my now clean expedition suit, but each time we stopped it became soiled again. Rest stops (toilets) were then oozing fields of garbage, human feces, urine, and dead as well as live insects and animals. One had to have urgent need of bodily relief to step anywhere near these immense percolating, stinking cesspools. The drive was harrowing as the road was narrow, one side butting up against the mountain and the other a drop of thousands of feet to the bottom of the barely visible ravine. When it rained, it was all the more treacherous as the bus skidded and slid. As one vehicle ascended and another descended, one would have to halt, the bus close against the mountainside, to allow the other to pass. There was no protocol followed and we could see evidence of fully occupied buses having fallen off the mountain to terrible tragic deaths.

Once in Dharamshala, a bustling midsized Indian hill town created by the British army during the occupation of India, I was directed to take a thirty-minute taxi drive further up the mountain to McLeod Ganj where I was told I would find the residence of the Dalai Lama. The steep, winding drive brought me to the tiny town, perched like a bird's nest at 7,000 feet on the edge of a Himalaya. When I reached

McLeod Ganj I was directed to the official information office of the Dalai Lama, which was then in Hotel Tibet, the only hotel and located at the intersection of the three streets of the town.

Kuno, second to the Dalai Lama

As I entered, a Tibetan gentleman wearing western clothes approached and told me I had been anticipated. He presented me with a *Khata* (ceremonial scarf), and welcomed me as Green Tara. He knew my name, that I had been traveling for months and where, and that I had come most recently from New Delhi. He had arranged a room with six beds for me in Hotel Tibet, a most humble abode indeed, a far cry from the magnificent hotel in Delhi. I learned later that all hotel rooms at the time had many beds, as Tibetans traditionally slept many in a room, much as most third world nations do.

Ngawandhondup Narkyid introduced himself, told me that he was the Dalai Lama's official biographer, and that he would be my host in McLeod Ganj. I was to call him Kuno, his nickname. He bade me to follow him and led me to the temple in the courtyard of the Namgyal Monastery, also the site of the Dalai Lama's residence. Inside a large room in the temple, Kuno ensconced me on something like a throne on a dais. After intoning prayers around me, deer-masked dancers in deer costumes began a ceremonial dance obviously in my honor. I believed I was in some sort of dream or experiencing a hallucination. In a temple redolent with golden deities I was being treated and venerated as a deity, the deity of creativity and compassion, Green Tara. Up to that point I had never heard of her.



For the next two weeks, Kuno was my host and guide. He listened to my stories about my childhood and my experiences in Lhasa and affirmed that I belonged in the Tibetan lineage and tradition.

He toured me around the temple and the "palace", referring to the Dalai Lama's Residence. Rather than being palatial it is a large ranch house. Kuno showed me his office and apartment adjacent to those of the Dalai Lama and introduced me to the secretary and cook that he shared with the Dalai Lama. During the next few days Kuno took me to many sacred places, where I was shown deities that are normally hidden as they are said to be the most powerful and only accessible to the most advanced clergy. I was introduced to the highest *lamas* (venerable ones), *rinpoches* (reincarnated holy men) and *geshes* (spiritual teachers). I vocalized my concern about being taken as an unwitting imposter, and that I felt incapable of participating in the rituals, bowing, prostrations. I said, "I am Jewish and cannot bow before a human or an idol". (At the time I didn't know the word deity.) He patiently assured me that I should never bow to anyone or anything, and that even when I would meet the Dalai Lama, I should speak with him as I spoke normally with Kuno and anyone else.

Wherever we went, Tibetans bowed to Kuno. It was clear that he was second to the Dalai Lama in all things. I was often astonished to see Kuno become ferocious in anger and Tibetans falling to the ground in front of him in both fear and respect. I learned that he had been the general of the Tibetan army and was second in command to the Dalai Lama. When I asked him how he reconciled this great anger with his non-violent, loving, caring, generous self, he answered that sometimes it is useful to feign anger outwardly while inwardly never wavering from the compassionate love he felt for everyone and everything. This outward action was useful in correcting "ignorant behavior", but true anger should never be held or expressed. This would cause a stain on the "stainless essence" (Tibetan image for soul) of the bearer of anger. Each situation required a measured reaction.

I continued to stay in the Hotel Tibet. One particularly freezing night, Kuno and I returned to the "palace" later than the guards expected. Kuno could not enter the heavily guarded gate and returned with me to my room in the hotel. I went into the bathroom to change clothes and when I returned to the room, Kuno was sitting in a lotus position on one of the beds meditating. He was in deep trance and I could see a physical opaque golden aura radiating around him, about three to five feet wide. His eyes were open but he was not seeing. I was mesmerized by what I was witnessing, one of the practices I

had read about being reified in front of me. By changing his frequency, the properties and qualities of the space around him were transformed.

On one occasion I sat in Kuno's office and showed him the map I had made in Lhasa. He selected a book from many on the shelf behind him and turned to a designated page. A facsimile of my map was spread across the double page, detail for detail, absolutely accurate in all respects, as if the map had been reproduced mechanically by a copier. He then flipped through the book to an image of a red-haired woman, hands in teaching *mudra* (sacred position), standing before a large throng. He looked at me and said, "This is who you are, this is who you have always been, Green Tara". I found this shocking.

I was instructed and shown different rituals and various practices every day. I was being prepared for something. I met the Dalai Lama's Nechung oracle, watched him in trance dancing with an immense, hundred-pound headdress for many hours. I was told that one is born into the position of oracle as it is genetically transferred from father to son in each generation. Oracles have short lives due to the exceptionally taxing work of their bodies. Yet, to be of the family, as well as the Dalai Lama's oracle, held the greatest respect and honor. The reigning Nechung Oracle is called upon at moments of crucial and impactful decision. For example, the time of the flight into exile from Tibet after the Chinese invasion and plot to kill the Dalai Lama, was ordained by the previous Nechung Oracle.

Kuno told me that the Dalai Lama was away from McLeod Ganj at the time. During the coldest months His Holiness would live and teach in the monasteries of south India. However, I was told that I would meet him, several times – and I did.

By the end of December the population of McLeod Ganj had dwindled considerably as those who could migrate south did so to avoid the grueling cold. Although Kuno stayed on as person in charge, it was time for me to leave to continue my travels. I had many countries to visit before returning home to Los Angeles in August as I had planned. When I left McLeod Ganj, I was certain that this marvelous dream had ended - or perhaps it never happened, perhaps it was all a blip, a crease in time and space.

I continued my travels throughout India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Burma (now Myanmar), Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Bali, Sumatra and Java. I was beginning to make sense of the great differences from culture to culture, and the many alphabets and languages which validated my theory on origin of alphabets. I was profoundly educated about diversity and commonality. I learned that joy is culturally determined: in some cultures, one hoped for many wives, in others, one wished for many husbands; in one, one would wish for sons, in others, daughters; some were heterosexual, others homosexual; and the gods changed every few miles. Yet grief was experienced consistently in the same way from culture to culture: loss of contact, rejection and abandonment. This proved to be my greatest teaching and deepest learning from that year.

I believe it was in Sri Lanka that I received a letter forwarded to me from Los Angeles. The letter affirmed my acceptance to a highly respected artist colony in New Hampshire for a six-week period beginning at the end of June 1987. Although I had planned to return to LA from Asia in August, I was delighted to have been invited and accepted the invitation. I therefore went directly from Indonesia to the MacDowell Colony, in the tiny village of Peterborough, New Hampshire.

I was certainly a changed person from the woman I was when I left Los Angeles. I was suffused with the imagery, rituals, theologies, behavioral mores, art, languages and music of all the countries I had visited. My perception was wildly changed. That which had previously been interpreted as mundane, had been transformed. The spiritual orientation of the cultures I had visited prompted me to see and experience differently. All phenomena were to be seen as sacred, anthropomorphic, inhabited by spirits and deities, and were to be revered and respected.

I arrived at MacDowell in the scalding heat of mid-June, hay harvest time. Hay bales rolled into arched and rounded forms stood ubiquitously throughout the colony and surrounding farmlands.

I was assigned a large red barn as a studio situated in the colony hay fields. I spent my days there painting and returned to the original two-story farmhouse each evening. This 19th century classic New England building was the hub of the colony with bedrooms for the artists in residence, dining room, offices, and social rooms for concerts, readings and visual presentations of artists and guests. Each artist worked independently in specialized studios for art, music, literature, dance and other creative activities.

As I walked to and from my studio daily, the shapes of the hay bales began to assume spiritually elevated identities. I saw them as shrines, as small temples evoking various feelings and associations. In one, I imagined that there was a female deity inhabiting the hay bale. Others seemed to assume characteristics of relatives, or unusual installations recording secret celestial alignments. The ordinary hay bales had become extraordinary.

This newfound vision has continued to influence me throughout my life. All things can be seen and felt on many levels, as metaphors are the magical currency of humanity.

I produced many paintings in that short time, twelve in the Hay Bale Series, as well as many other large nature-based paintings. I was worried about leaving, not wanting to return to the difficult exigencies of life at home.

I was honored with a farewell party the night before I left. The artists, director and I were happily indulging in food and drink. At one point the director left the table and returned saying I had a phone call, but the line was staticky and it was difficult to understand the language of the speaker.

I went to the phone and was astonished to hear the barely recognizable Tibetan-English of Kuno calling from the Dalai Lama's office in McLeod Ganj, high in the Himalayas of India. I had had no contact with him from the time I left McLeod Ganj. How could he have found me, a spec on the planet, a needle in a haystack? He said, "We will always find you, Green Tara. You have always been with us and always will be. You cannot hide from us." I could barely breathe. I told him when I was going home to Los Angeles, thinking I wouldn't hear from him again. A day after returning to LA, I had a second call from Kuno. By then I realized this was no joke.

My growing connection with Kuno

In September I invited him to come to Los Angeles in October. I prepared a reception for eighty spiritual leaders, influential heads of political and educational foundations and institutions, as well as *lamas*, *geshes* and abbots of Tibetan temples. People came from Santa Barbara, San Diego, San Francisco as well as Los Angeles to meet him and learn about the situation in Tibet, the continuous invasions of the Chinese and news of the Dalai Lama.

Despite the fact that I could not speak Tibetan, I understood him completely and translated his speech into English for the avid and engaged guests. I had prepared projected wall maps for easier understanding of the geography and the history as Kuno explained it.

During Kuno's first visit, I asked him how he had found me at MacDowell. He told me then that the Israeli Intelligence Mossad trained Tibetan intelligence officers – that they could find anyone, anywhere! I was startled to learn that the world's most famous spy organization was employed to find me. I was also told that Tibetan mountain guerrilla fighters were trained by United States guerrilla warriors in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado.

For the next thirty-three years until he passed away in New Delhi in 2017, Kuno-la lived in my house part of every year. (-*La* is the endearment that is attached to names of close friends and relatives.) Although I annually arranged for him to speak at many conferences nationally, his charm, erudition and knowledge incurred more invitations and thus he traveled a good deal during each of his visits to the US. In 1994, we both received our US citizenships. He had wished to attain a US passport so that this would facilitate his longing to travel to Tibet. Tibetans were never allowed to return to Tibet and although he had the US passport, he never achieved that wish.

We spent a great deal of time together over the many years. He called me his "God-given sister" and named me "Shawa Shawa" (deer deer in Tibetan), because both my last names mean deer in Polish and German. This was one of the many "proofs" that I was indeed a Tibetan deity, specifically Green Tara, as wherever Buddha is depicted on or in temples, he is flanked by two deer. Buddha's first teachings were held in the deer park in Varanasi, India. With each visit, Kuno created an altar in my house to Green Tara. I never believed the bewildering story that he presented so fully, and I always reminded him, "This is a belief system, don't take it seriously". But he was persuaded and convinced



that I was Green Tara and the more he discovered about me, the more convinced he was.

I was privileged to meet many Tibetans, scholars, *geshes*, abbots and teachers, holy men and women, as they came to my house to visit with Kuno and myself. And I finally met the Dalai Lama when tasked to find a home for His Holiness and his retinue of sixteen monks who would visit Los Angeles to perform the Kalachakra in 1989 in Pasadena. I was the only person who ever had a private audience with the Dalai Lama who did not come prepared with a camera.

By that time, (1988) I had formulated and was one of the two founders (along with Edward Wortz, PhD) of the *World Treasures Foundation*. We proposed that Tibet would become a world treasure so that the land, people and culture would be protected for the future. I presented this proposal in conferences and institutions internationally, and the proposal was signed by various world leaders. But the Dalai Lama, who affirmed and signed the proposal, suggested that it was too dangerous to move ahead with it at that time as issues with the Chinese had reached yet another point of volatility.

Throughout the many years, Kuno and I traveled together to conferences in various cities where we were both presenters, as well as scholars/artist in residence for the summer of 1989 at the Rim Institute in Northern Arizona.

Kuno had been the mayor of Lhasa in 1958. When the Dalai Lama designated Kuno as general of the Tibetan army against the Chinese invasions of Lhasa in 1959, he was released from his monk vows that included celibacy. He was central to the Tibetan uprising on March 10, 1959 at the Norbulingka, the Dalai Lama's summer palace in Lhasa. Kuno was charged with defending and saving the holiest of temples in Lhasa, the Jokhang. He then strategized the flight of the Dalai Lama and his retinue of one hundred into exile to India, trekking over the Himalayas to freedom.

The former monk had to overcome his abhorrence of violence as he was forced to kill the Chinese enemy who were murdering Tibetans. He often spoke with tears streaming down his face of the horror of killing and how he witnessed dismembered bodies still standing. He also spoke of how he had to recast his boundless hatred of the Chinese.

When the Dalai Lama and his retinue reached McLeod Ganj from Lhasa, Kuno joined the Tibetan government in exile and was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs. He worked on Chinese documents and translated the Universal Declaration of Human Rights into Tibetan. He was secretary general of the first assembly of the Tibetan parliament in exile from 1960 – 1962 and secretary general of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for eight years. During this time he and two colleagues in the foreign ministry wrote the Constitution of Tibet. He also invented the Tibetan typewriter, wrote the first Tibetan dictionary, standardized the Tibetan language, and among so many additional achievements, he received a Master's degree in linguistics and anthropology from the University of Western Michigan as well as an honorary Doctorate degree. From 1984 to 2004 he was the official biographer of the 14th Dalai Lama and since 2005 was the consultant for Tibetan history and Tibetan literature from the Office of the Dalai Lama.

Kuno was regarded as the most important person second only to the Dalai Lama in authority. Once the government in exile was established, he asked the Dalai Lama to restore his sacred vows. Kuno was told that he would be more effective in the world as a lay person, in ordinary clothes, than to have the limitations and expectations of a monk. However, long periods of prayers along with many physically intensive prostrations were his daily regime to achieve the sought after 100,00 in his lifetime. In this way he believed, he was accruing virtue.

I spent more actual time with Kuno than with all the men who have been in my life. Although we were very close, we had decided that it was to be a platonic relationship as most sexual relationships did not end well. I was his confidant, as he was the Dalai Lama's confidant. Kuno related the moment when the young Dalai Lama changed the trajectory of his life. Kuno was two years older than the ten-year-old Tenzin Gyatso when the two boys were being educated as monks in the temple school in Lhasa. At a memorable moment in the temple, the young Dalai Lama handed Kuno an apple and declared that he would be his confidant, amanuensis and biographer. This simple act of ordination brought unusual purpose to Kuno's life.

The biographer often cited the moment when he confessed to the Dalai Lama that he hated the Chinese. His Holiness changed Kuno's perspective by saying that he had been "brain washed" into hating the Chinese, but that he could "wash his brain" and think differently. Kuno's goal in life was

transformed. From then on, he wanted to befriend Chinese people wherever he was. He loved Chinese food, which he had eschewed as the food of the enemy before the Dalai Lama “washed his brain.”

I was privileged to learn the routine of the Official Biographer of His Holiness. They met together every day when both were in McLeod Ganj or as soon as possible after one or the other had returned from a trip. (Kuno was the person in charge when the Dalai Lama was away.) All issues were revealed and discussed in terms of significance and repercussions. He explained to me the disposition of all confidences: The Gold Box was information that could be shared in the biographies and would be made public. The Silver Box was the repository of information that would have to be evaluated again in terms of consequence and historical significance before deciding to make it public. The Lead Box was for information that would never be made public.

There is much more to be said and written about Kuno. But this story is about our unusual relationship that lasted until Kuno’s death.

Since 1986 when we first met in McLeod Ganj, I was invited to return again and again. I was given a room in the Dalai Lama’s Namgyal monastery in the courtyard of the temple and the Residence. I was told that I was the only woman ever to have had that honor. One of the rooms that I lived in had an old tree growing up through the center of the floor and up through the next story. I was often invited to Kuno’s office and apartment, adjacent to those of the Dalai Lama. Once when I stood on the shared balcony between the two apartments, the guards below took rifle aim at this invading female until Kuno clarified the situation – he shouted that I was a visiting incarnation of Green Tara.

I was often invited to dine in the Residency with Kuno-la and other visitors. (I was taken aback when in the early 1990s I was given Kuno’s private email which was the same as that of the Dalai Lama. One of the most memorable meals in the private dining room of the Residence was with the Dalai Lama and Kuno. *Momos* (traditional Tibetan meat and vegetable filled dumplings) were served shaped like leaves in which each vein was articulated precisely as in a living leaf.

My deepening engagement with a way of thought and behavior

In 1988 – 90 I lived alone in a forest at 8,000 feet in the mountains of Northern Arizona. I was determining whether I would wish to live the rest of my life as a recluse. It was a most difficult existence yet I learned a great deal. Living with the large animals I realized that we humans are also herding animals as it is only within the herd that we can be heard. I was transformed by both the enlightening sense of infinite connectedness into nature and the cosmos as well as the extreme difficulty of surviving dire cold for many months. The solitude was never difficult for me; I have always welcomed it. However, in March of 1990 I received an invitation to go to McLeod Ganj to be present when the Dalai Lama would present the ancient Tantric teachings of Bodhicitta (compassion). No other Dalai Lama had ever presented these teachings publicly. I left my snow-covered mountain and arrived to the Himalayan snow-covered mountain. I sat outside the Dalai Lama’s temple on the ground for six weeks with three hundred monks, often during blizzards and subzero Himalayan cold. The only access to the teachings in English translation was with a particular short-wave transistor radio with earphones. As it happened – Tibetans would say karmically – it was the identical radio I had given to a young monk in my first visit to McLeod Ganj. In the interim he had become the amanuensis of the Dalai Lama and returned my radio for the teachings. During the teachings the Dalai Lama intoned specific instructions on how to live and how to die. He often interspersed these serious lessons with humorous commentary. I never felt the extreme cold as the teachings warmed my body through intensive and precise visualization. I was learning to practice *tuomo* in the same way as I had witnessed the monks keeping warm in Ladakh.

The teachings augmented my views about living and dying, and confirmed my interest in the power of visualization. I incorporated many of the tenets in my own developing theories and practices in psychoneuroimmunology and healing which I have presented and published internationally, including MIT’s journal *Leonardo*. In addition to my own healing after a near lethal accident in 1999, I have trained physicians and psychiatrists in the use of visualization techniques for healing. Now this practice is used in many hospitals worldwide.

Kuno, the former general was always gentle toward me, although often demanding. As a handsome

bachelor, so close to the Dalai Lama, the former general, the first Tibetan to be educated abroad both in China and the US, the first Tibetan to receive a US University MA degree, he was considered “prince of the realm”, and was always sought after and served. Rather than the required monk’s clothing he had grown up with, he was exacting about his appearance and always exceptionally well dressed. As a dandy, he favored fashionable clothes which he searched for and found in the thrift shops he combed ubiquitously. He received very little money as a Tibetan government employee, but was supported in his many projects by his friends who were aiding Tibetan causes.

Kuno had an artist’s eye and was gifted as a calligrapher. He designed and calligraphed the well-known Tibetan prayer flags and posters one sees in Tibetan contexts. He loved beauty of all sorts. Whenever he visited he brought gifts of Tibetan clothing and jewelry that he had made for me in McLeod Ganj, as well as jewelry and household objects he found in his ongoing thrift shop searches. He envisioned me as a deity and imagined me in clothing and jewelry of Green Tara.

Kuno was pursued by many women, both Tibetan and foreign wherever he went, but never married. However, while he lived in my house, he expected me to perform the role of a Tibetan wife/hostess in addition to being his secretary, driver, cook along with performing other domestic and social services, such as hosting dinners for his friends, opening my very small home for his many friends and compatriots to stay, etc. He was clearly jealous of any attention paid to me by other males. I learned that as sophisticated as he was, the feminist movement had not reached him (or Tibet) and I was daily confronted with expectations that I had fought against much of my life. I had to continually deal with cultural differences. Yet he respected and admired me and was proud of my work as an artist, professor and activist. Kuno often surprised me as he perceived my images astutely and they affected him profoundly. He wanted to ascertain that my work would last and that I would write about each piece in detail, in addition to my unusual autobiography. As a very busy person myself, full time university professor, internationally exhibiting artist, writer, filmmaker, presenter at conferences worldwide in various disciplines, etc I could barely keep up with my own deadlines and schedule, even as I employed three assistants. I had given up cooking many years earlier, although I had been an accomplished chef making gourmet dinners for twenty almost weekly many years earlier. (Cooking had been sublimated into painting in the late 70’s). There was never enough time. Kuno often invited many Tibetans to visit, dine and stay over, expecting me to provide for all. I could not accede to his many requests. There was dissension. Whether or not I was Shawa Shawa, Green Tara, or his God-given sister, his domestic expectations of me were not realistic in our context. And he never understood that I had another life that did not revolve around him.

Both he and the Dalai Lama were very mischievous, often to the point of extreme irritation. When I first met with the Dalai Lama in Los Angeles, he confused me by continuously turning the lights on and off even though it was midday, and the room was in full daylight. The sound of His Holiness’ laugh remains in my mind. Yet in the same audience, sitting next to him on a couch, he would shift from telling jokes to suddenly seeming to descend into cosmic consciousness and speak with seriousness and great profundity.

Kuno’s impishness was expressed by his constantly inventing new ways to trick me. He would never tell me when he would be arriving from India but would suddenly appear on my doorstep – “Surprise!” - with no warning, most often at inopportune times. Although we were close friends, this was certainly not a marriage and there were other men in my life at various times. He could not grasp that I had a rich life of my own that was scheduled months ahead, hour to hour. Given my many responsibilities and commitments, schedules were necessary.

One of Kuno’s most egregious practical jokes was one year when we were both going to the Council Grove conference in Kansas. We had to leave my house at 5 AM to get to the airport in time for the early flight. I arranged for the taxi and we arrived at LAX with just enough time to check in. We walked up to the check-in wicket and I asked Kuno for his ticket.

“What ticket?” He asked innocently.

“The ticket I left on your desk in your room for you”, I replied, annoyed.

“There was no ticket”, he said sadly.

I was already irritated. I am not someone who argues, I go forward to resolution. There was no time to spare. I said that I would get a taxi, return home and retrieve the ticket. I hailed the cab, got inside

and the cab was already moving, when Kuno ran to the cab yelling “April Fool’s, April Fool’s!” Holy man or not, I could have clobbered him.

During the entire flight to Kansas City on April Fool’s Day, the Holy Man kept stealing the mini liquor bottles off the stewardess’ carts, hiding them in his jacket. He never returned them and I was mortified. Over the years I often expressed my exasperation and tried often to persuade him that not all surprises were positive and that pranks that may have been acceptable in Tibet were not tolerable in America. He never quit this manipulative behavior and I learned to live with it.

Despite the imperfections and cultural difficulties, Kuno was a deeply beloved treasure in my life who widened my world immensely. I was honored that he thought so highly and deeply about me. We both grew in depth and experience through the decades-long friendship. Along with the sometimes terribly inconvenient practical jokes, I was continually being instructed in Tibetan values and mores. While he was in my house, my awareness was accelerated on my many levels. I learned never to place a photograph of a visage of any kind, even a magazine cover, face-down as this was insulting to the soul of the person. I was instructed not to point a foot at a person in front of me as this denoted a hierarchic relationship. Each time I thought of an antelope, I remembered Kuno-la in Arizona calling the animal a cantaloupe. And I could never forget his saying he was “fed up” when he was full. When I had explained the idiomatic meaning and usage, he laughed wholeheartedly. From then on he purposely said he was “fed up” after a large meal, teasing me with his Englishisms.

Each visit to McLeod Ganj was memorable for a unique event, teaching or experience. The former general was adamant that I should learn all I could about Tibetan Buddhism, ritual and history. As Kuno was revered as Tibet’s most prominent scholar, he had been one of the founders of the central cultural institution, the Tibetan Library of Works and Archives. We often met there where he could elucidate my questions about Tibetan language, medicine, Buddhist practice, culture and history and steer me to appropriate sources.

He managed my visits to sacred sites, arranged meetings with the Dalai Lama’s doctors and other significant cultural and spiritual individuals, as well as to monasteries and libraries to further my research. I was not only looking at the power of form in all disciplines and alphabetic morphology but documenting how much of Tibetan Buddhist practice was akin to psychiatric and psychoneurological practice developing in the west. To further my knowledge, Kuno arranged for me to be welcomed to the monasteries in the south of India, to meet the holiest of *lamas* and *rinpoches*, already had definition of rinpoche always insisting that it was important for them to meet me.

During one of my visits to McLeod Ganj, Kuno arranged with several monks to take me by open jeep to a remote mountain monastery. I was to meet the two-year-old baby incarnation of the former senior tutor of the Dalai Lama where he was being cared for by a retinue of elderly monks. We bounced and jostled in the crowded jeep for eight hours of treacherous overland driving sans roads of any sort, and were drenched when winding through coursing waterfalls before continuing through forests to get to the monastery. On arrival I observed the ancient ornately carved wooden monastery ahead, unique that it was grey with weather and age, not colorfully painted as were most monasteries. The baby climbed down from his throne on the long front porch where he was surrounded by several venerable monks and very many western teddy bears. The child, approximately sixteen months old, waddled toward me in his diapers. When he reached me, he gestured for my hand, and that I should place my forehead against his. He signaled that I should open my mouth. He ceremoniously placed *dutzi*, sacred embroidered jacquard wrapped herbal medicine, on my tongue. He then took my hand bidding me to come with him. He led me first toward the monastery and then onto a side path to the right. We walked a goodly distance on the narrow path. To the right, the mountain dropped suddenly into an infinitely deep ravine, and to the left, the mountain ascended steeply.

After a while we reached a tall freestanding concrete structure that was built against the mountain, its opening facing the infinite view to the west. We stopped in front of the enclosure where we could see only a tall, large glass case reflecting the skyscape behind us. As my eyes grew accustomed to the dark and the reflection behind us evanesced, the image in front of us clarified. I could see the fully embalmed, regalia clad, eyes open former senior tutor of the Dalai Lama seated on a throne inside the enclosure. The baby *rinpoche* had me stand with him in front of the shrine as he pointed to his predecessor and back to himself, making me understand that they were one. As I looked further into

the darkened chamber, I could make out the oblivious figure of Richard Gere seated in deep meditation in one of the corners. All was silent.

After some time, the baby led me back to his monastery, and was seated again on his throne on the porch surrounded by his elderly monk caregivers and teddy bears. I was offered yak butter tea and remained in this Shangri-La until it was necessary to leave.

The following day I was again in the Dalai Lama's temple. The baby incarnation was seated on a miniature throne, similarly draped and decorated, adjacent to the Dalai Lama's much larger and taller throne. The baby was dressed in the full regalia of his predecessor which included layers of heavily embroidered maroon and gold robes and a large triangularly pointed yellow hat with ear flaps. He sat absolutely still and quiet through hours of ritual and prayers, watching everything intently. When the ceremony ended the monks and lay worshippers filed by the baby *rinpoche*, venerating him with *khatas*, which he dutifully and carefully placed around the necks of the practitioners. He reverently touched foreheads with everyone.

Although the baby was still in diapers and could not yet talk, it was fully understood that he would reveal himself more clearly later.

This experience as well as many others broadened my growing knowledge that this indeed was no ordinary culture. Could I believe it, yet could I not believe it?

In the early 1990's I experienced a profound dream: I was dressed in a state-of-the-art championship skier's outfit and was standing with poised skis at the top of the Himalayan range. Before me was a slalom course laid out across the endless mountains as far as I could see. Instead of the normal slalom markers, the course was studded with golden chortens, tall anthropomorphic sculptures representing Buddha. My task was to ski this roof-of-the-world slalom course. I have not skied since my teens and was never a champion skier. I was flummoxed and devastated by the impossible task assigned to me. As I stood there, poles digging into the snow and thinking I can never do this, I can never do this, I heard a deep tenor male voice beginning to roll toward me from the ends of the universe. As it grew closer, much like rolling thunder, I could make out the words that were repeated across the mountaintops coming toward me.

"You are protected from the incongruities of life. You are protected from the incongruities of life..." the low-pitched roar rumbled, over and over.

On waking, I wondered what are incongruities of life? And who talks like that?

I soon understood the dream. In my dream state I had found the word *incongruity* that best characterized confusing elements, ideas that did not fit together. It was clear that I was tied to this culture and to helping protect it. And I realized that as long as I stayed on my course, the direction that I was born to follow, to become the person I was meant to be, I would be protected. If I veered from the path, I would lose my way entirely. This extremely vivid dream remained with me. A few years later I began to give workshops in the Four D's – Direction, Diversion, Distraction and Discernment. Direction is what you are born to do, diversion is a holiday, (a useful and necessary relief from the status quo), distraction takes you off your course entirely, and discernment is the ability to differentiate between them all.

In 2007 I organized a daylong Festival of Tibet at California State University Dominguez Hills Los Angeles. Kuno-la, as well as many other prominent Tibetans spoke to a very large crowd about the plight of Tibet. The festival, first of its kind, also featured Tibetan dancers, food, art and crafts.

I was also instrumental in connecting film director Martin Scorsese, writer Melissa Mathison and Kuno-la to make the movie *Kundun* (1997), based on the life of the Dalai Lama. I had first encountered and bought the book, *From the Land of Lost Content* (Noel Barber 1969) with a forward by the Dalai Lama dedicated to "the remarkable Thondup" (Kuno), during my first visit to McLeod Ganj, 1986. Melissa Mathison wrote the script based on the book which I loaned her. The contract was signed between director Scorsese, writer Mathison and Kuno on behalf of the Dalai Lama in my home and I was involved in the movie from start to finish.

From 1987 on, I was the first to invite Kuno-la and other Tibetans to the annual Council Grove Conference in Kansas, dedicated from its first meeting (1968) to the study of consciousness. One hundred international physicians, psychiatrists, physicists, healers and spiritual leaders are invited to gather in an isolated place in the physical center of the US for a week to study the effects of

consciousness on mind, behavior and healing. In subsequent years, I invited the Dalai Lama's doctors who instructed the participants in Tibetan medicine. I also invited Tibetan *lamas*, musicians and artists to augment the knowledge and practice of the scientists gathered in the isolated camp. As a result of their presentations and presence at these conferences, Kuno and other Tibetans were invited widely in the US and elsewhere to present their history and culture.

In one of Kuno's visits, he arrived as usual with no warning when I was wrestling with a deadline and working with my assistant. I welcomed Kuno and we sat opposite each other in the living room after I served him his ever-present boiled water. (He did not drink tea, coffee or alcohol, only boiled water.) As he spoke I noticed that his lower gum appeared infected and that a tooth was wobbling back and forth. I asked him about it and he said he had just been given this tooth in Delhi when the former tooth had been extracted. I immediately called my friend in Memphis, Dr. Herb Blumenthal at the Pankey Institute. I explained that I had a visitor from India who arrived with what looked like a serious tooth problem. With no questions asked, Herb said that he would arrange a ticket for the gentleman and that I should bring him to the airport. Herb called me the next day in a state of awe and wonder – who was this man? The dentist said that Kuno's infection was systemic and had he not operated, Kuno could have died from the infection. He also said that he performed more dentistry on Kuno than he usually performed on a family of six for an entire year – several root canals, extractions, fillings and fittings for implants, etc. Herb was mystified by the fact that Kuno had barely any anesthetic but after a full day of surgery hopped out of the chair and asked that a meeting be arranged in Memphis for the following day where he could talk about Tibet and the Dalai Lama "washing his brain".



Two days later, Kuno returned to my home from Memphis. He had spent both days in dental surgery followed by his presentation to a very large crowd on the second evening. His energy was high and he was most grateful for Herb's help which would insure he could continue to work on behalf of Tibet and Tibetans for years to come. Herb was astonished by the superhuman tolerance, brilliance and mission of his new patient.

The biographer and I sat opposite each other in our customary places in the living room. I told him what Herb had said about the dangerous state of his health, and asked him about the pain that he had endured so blithely with both the infection and the surgery. I stressed the fact that his life had been in jeopardy had he not had the surgery. I asked him how he had endured so much torture. He replied that he was practicing patience.

The penultimate meeting with Kuno-la was in New Delhi, India in 2015. He was frail, could no longer withstand the frigid winters in McLeod Ganj and was spending the cold months in Delhi in his half-brother's house. He was excited to show me his life's work completed at Tibet House - the twelve published volumes of the Biography of His Holiness. We shared a wonderful day together, and even went shopping for new Khadi clothes for the forever-debonair Biographer. The following year, 2016, he visited me in Los Angeles, once again arriving unannounced. Kuno was rail thin, clearly very ill, and could not stand by himself. I immediately took him to the closest hospital emergency department, where he was diagnosed with a virulent strain of shingles that had developed around his body throughout the 17-hour plane trip. He was suffering extreme pain, but never mentioned it, embarrassed to have lost his autonomy. The former general, powerful intellect and savvy politician felt betrayed by his body. He remained in the hospital ICU for close to two weeks. His doctors and hospital staff became aware of the unusual Tibetan who never complained, but always cared for those who attended him. Kuno was deeply depressed that he could no longer rise above the limitations of mortality, which meant that he could no longer serve the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan people. Two months later, when he was medically strong enough to travel, he returned to Delhi where he was in and out of hospital for months.

I kept trying to phone him, write him, wrote his brother many times, inquiring about Kuno. I proposed that I would come to Delhi to help care for this very special man. Months passed with no response.

I was notified by Kuno-la's brother, Sonam, that my dear friend was very ill in a Delhi hospital at the end of January 2017. I received the last photo of Kuno-la in the hospital (February 2, 2017) where he passed away at 86. With a terribly heavy heart I wrote the obituary announcements and various

biographic articles for several publications. Weeks later I found mention of Kuno-la's passing in the *Tibet Sun* which included erroneous information. At Kuno-la's request, in tandem with my own wishes, I had interviewed him deeply about his life over a period of thirty years and collected a trove of information in various media that could contribute to a biography of the biographer, a most extraordinary gentleman in many ways.

Moving forward

Since his death, I have tried unsuccessfully to discover whether there were any memorials, or archives for Kuno.

In September 2019 I was invited to be Visiting Artist at the New Delhi and Chandigarh's College(s) of Art. When I was free of my commitments, I hired a twelve-hour taxi to McCleod Ganj above Dharamshala hoping to discover information about Kuno-la's passing and the disposition of his body and effects. I stayed in the Pride Surya Mountain Resort in McLeod Ganj on H.H. Dalai Lama Temple Road, in a room with a view overlooking the Himalayan valley to the southwest. Each morning I watched the sunrise radiate the Dalai Lama's Temple close by. I could hear the melodious chanting from the temple in my room. The hypnotic melody was etched into my mind and I recall it now as I write.

The weather however, soon was stormy and cold, raining throughout the days, with fog settling into the valley, eliminating all views. I walked down the three-street town toward the temple, following the increased volume of the spiritual chanting. While consciously elevated by the chant, I was simultaneously shocked to see that commercialism had taken over the once spiritual enclave. Shops and multistory shopping centers lined Temple Street as well as every other corner of the tiny town perched on the edge of a Himalaya. Kashmiris had moved in en masse selling rugs and other signature wares in large modern fluorescently lit shops. Precious gem dealers from India and Sri Lanka had moved in to the once only Tibetan shops. I was disheartened to see that the former high quality of Tibetan crafts had dropped significantly since I was there last.

The Temple complex now had a recently built multistory parking lot adjacent to the entrance. Disrespectful hawkers touted loudly everywhere. To my great disappointment I realized that the chanting that had so captivated me and raised my consciousness to a spiritual level came from a CD that was being sold at a disproportionate high price in many shops along the way. The tone was anything but spiritual on the way to the Temple.

I arrived at the Temple in time for the service and stayed for several hours. Here, too, I was appalled by the lack of respect, particularly by the elders who shoved and pushed each other to grab the tea, bread and small denominations of rupees that were distributed during the service. There was no resemblance to the many services I had attended in the past.

Everything had changed.

I arranged for a meeting with Ngawang Yeshe, General Secretary of the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives for the next day. I took a taxi down the winding road and reached the administrative complex and government center, Gangchen Kyishong, half way down the steep mountain toward the bustling town of Dharamshala. I waited in the reading room until Ngawang Yeshe was free to meet me in his office on the second floor. I told him why I had come. He reminisced that the last time he saw Kuno-la, the biographer was sitting in the chair that I occupied at the moment, almost three years earlier. The director had no knowledge or suggestions regarding my quest. He graciously accepted the copy of my film, *Reading the Landscape*, that I had brought for the Library as Kuno had directed. In this film Kuno is featured representing Tibet, Tibetans and the Tibetan language. How was it possible that such an illustrious person such as the "remarkable Thondup" had no designated memorial?

The town, the library, the administration, and the temple were overwhelmingly different than they had been throughout all my previous visits. I had become an ordinary visitor to McLeod Ganj who had written a letter requesting an audience with His Holiness, to present my latest film which featured Kuno to the Dalai Lama and to the Tibetan Library and Archives, and to discover whether there was a memorial or information regarding Kuno's death. The first request was denied with a form letter. I managed to achieve a portion of the second, but my true quest was denied.

Kuno-la's God-given-sister and Green Tara existed no longer. I would never again hear Kuno's mischievous voice calling me Shawa Shawa. Several close friends who know the history call me Shawa Shawa or Deer Deer from time to time. The fantastical life-long chapter had shuttered. I continue to grieve the loss of my dear friend as well as the grand culture with which he had so fully embraced me.

Without reflection there can be no recognition. Without recognition there is no existence.

Gilah Yelin Hirsch is a multidisciplinary artist, whose art, films, papers, books have been exhibited and published internationally. Hirsch's numerous national and international grants and awards include the US National Endowment for the Arts; the Rockefeller Foundation, Bellagio, Italy; the Tyrone Guthrie Center for the Arts, Ireland, as well as the International Society for the Study of Subtle Energies and Energy Medicine award for her "innovative blending of science and art revealing existing relationships between forms in nature, forms in human physiology and the forms that are present in all alphabets". Hirsch's archives are collected by the Smithsonian Archives of American Art. She holds the position of Professor of Art, California State University Dominguez Hills, Los Angeles and resides in Venice, California.



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