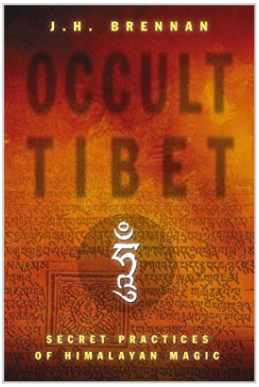

Occult Tibet: Secret Practices of Himalayan Magic

By J. H. Brennan

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A great esoteric tradition developed in the Himalayan fastnesses of the Tibetan plateau. Over centuries of isolation, this unique culture investigated the mysteries of mind and magic to a degree never before attempted.

Today, as Tibetan spirituality spreads across the world, the practices of Tibetan magic have scarcely been investigated by Western occultists. *Occult Tibet* presents this body of techniques, based partly on Tibetan Buddhist practice and partly on shamanic Bön (the aboriginal religion of Tibet).

Learn about authentic Tibetan magical practices, including: tumo, the ability to stave off the cold by stimulating the chakras and energy channels of the body; light trance states to recall past lives; manipulation of energies via sound, rhythm, chanting, and drumming; and the spiritual practice of dream yoga.

J. H. Brennan, respected author of numerous books on the Western Esoteric Tradition, has long been fascinated by Tibetan mysticism and magic. As the result of years of research, Occult Tibet brings the ancient magical techniques of Tibet to the magicians of the West.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly
Intimations of esoteric spiritual practices swirl around Tibet like clouds over Everest. True to form, this book features alluring and moving images of enduring profound cold by raising body temperatures (tumo), extending the dying process into rich realms of visions and reincarnations and lucid dreaming (wherein the dreamer recognizes the dream state and actively manipulates it). These are just a few of the metaphysical realms explored by the well-seasoned Irish author Brennan (The Magical I Ching, Magick for Beginners and Time Travel). He takes pains to give Western parallel documentation to the fantastic forms he describes, but most interested readers will not need this support to explore these topics. The reason for this is Brennan's sound reliance on Tibetan energy theories, such as the chakras and their rtsa (energy courses), rlung (energies themselves) and thig-li (pervading essences). He claims, probably rightly, that "it is the manipulation of the energy system that underlies almost every spiritual and magical marvel Tibet has ever produced." Brennan repeatedly points to the rigorous exercises of breathing, poses, chants and physical challenges that may give rise to such feats in highly disciplined people, but perhaps only over years or lifetimes of study. For adepts of mystical practices or the legions of readers fascinated with all things Tibetan, Brennan provides a highly interesting, accessible, even somewhat practical guide to elusive aspects of a unique culture arising out of a high place of thin, cold air.

About the Author

J. H. Brennan (Ireland) is the acclaimed author of over 90 books, both fiction and non-fiction, including *Forbidden Truth*, *The Alien's Handbook*, and *The Spy's Handbook* (all published by Faber & Faber), *Death: The Great Mystery of Life* (Carroll & Graf), *Martian Genesis* and *The Atlantis Enigma* (both published by Dell), *The Magical I Ching* and *Time Travel* (both published by Llewellyn), and the popular *Book of Wizardry* (Llewellyn) under the alias Cornelius Rumstuckle. His works have appeared in more than fifty countries in Europe, Asia, North and South America, and Australia.

Brennan is best known for his young adult fiction series, Herbie Brennan's *Faerie Wars* (Bloomsbury) with combined sales exceeding 7.5 million. The creator of several role-playing books, his solo fantasy gamebook series *GrailQuest* (Dell) has sold over 6.5 million copies.

He resides in County Carlow, Ireland with his wife and ten cats.

1
The Land That
Time Forgot
According to the most ancient of Tibetan scriptures, the human race did not evolve on Earth. We came from a distant galaxy to colonize this planet, but lost our memories and spacefaring abilities in the process.
In a creation tale unlike any other, the Jigten Chagtsul tells how an alien race evolved in a world at the center of the universe. This race was known as the Lha and their planet was beautiful, with hills, valleys, rivers, streams, trees, and flowers much like our own. On it, the Lha developed astounding powers but remained subject to old age and death. They lived mortal lives and disputed among themselves over possessions and property, much as humans do today.

The Jigten Chagtsul forms part of the Chöjung, a body of historical doctrine that was written down in the thirteenth century but which reflects a much older tradition. This doctrine describes not just the beginnings of our world, but of “all worlds.” In passages oddly reminiscent of modern scientific findings, it speaks of a void before time out of which a foam emerged to form the foundation of matter.1

The planet at the center of the universe was named the Rirab Lhunpo, after a massive mountain on its surface. Our own planet Earth was known as the Dzambu Lying, and began as an empty globe devoid of people, animals, or vegetation. Later it was colonized by members of the Lha who made it their own.

The extraordinary powers of the Lha ensured they lived in comfort. They practiced a form of deep meditation called samten se which enabled them to create matter, including food and useful artifacts, solely by the power of their minds. Their bodies glowed with an inner radiance.

Unfortunately, something in Earth’s environment?the scriptures suggest it was an indigenous foodstuff to which the visitors took a liking?caused a weakening and eventual disappearance of the Lha’s powers. They lost their inner radiance, along with the ability to create matter, and became the progenitors of the human race. The Lha, say these ancient Tibetan records, are our most distant ancestors.

Curiously, this mythic history is reflected in the traditions of the Dzopa, a tribe from the remote mountains of Baian-Kara-Ula on the Tibet-China border. These tiny people, who share none of the racial characteristics of their neighbors, claim they came from Sirius, a binary star in the constellation Canis Major some 8.6 light-years from Earth.

News of the Dzopa first emerged in 1938 when Chinese archaeologists discovered little human bones with disproportionately large skulls in a cave system of the Baian-Kara-Ula mountains. The bones were accompanied by artifacts in the form of stone discs with spiral grooves cut into their surfaces. These discs were subsequently investigated by an Englishman, Dr. Karyl Robin-Evans, who travelled to China in 1947 after being shown one which he claimed lost and gained weight over a 3.5-hour cycle.

From China, Robin-Evans travelled to the Tibetan capital Lhasa, then on to the Baian-Kara-Ula mountainswhere he made contact with the Dzopa and learned their tribal history from a religious leader named Lurgan-La. According to this history, two expeditions had been sent to Earth from the Sirius star system. The first arrived more than twenty thousand years ago, and the second, much more recently, in 1014 c.e. Lurgan-La claimed his tribe originated with the second visit, which ended in disaster when the spaceship crashed.

In 1962, Dr. Tsum Um Nui of the Peking Academy of Prehistory claimed to have decoded the spiral engravings on the stone discs. He maintained they contained records of a spaceship that crashed to Earth twelve thousand years ago,2 but the academic establishment failed to take his paper seriously.3

A more orthodox account of Tibetan prehistory suggests that some twenty million years ago the area that is now Tibet lay at the bottom of the sea.4 Plate tectonics?the gradual movement of the Earth’s surface?caused a slow, massive folding of the seabed into a series of parallel mountains. Alluvial silt eventually filled the valleys between the folds when rain-bearing winds from the Indian Ocean wore down the peaks. The result was the Tibetan plateau which rises to an average height of sixteen thousand feet above sea level.

The great Himalayan range that protects Tibet today was a more recent addition. The mountains certainly rose to their present height within the last half-million years, and current geological investigation suggests they may be far more recent?the result of a massive cataclysmic upheaval dated no more than ten to twelve thousand years ago.

But whenever they rose, the Himalayas created Tibet as it is known today. The mountains form a twenty-four-thousand-foot-high barrier stretching 1,500 miles from east to west. It is a barrier that blocks the monsoon winds and has turned much of Tibet?and indeed central Asia as a whole?into a chill desert. It also put a stop to humanity’s ancient migrations across the central Asian steppes and led to an isolation that has been Tibet’s most dominant cultural characteristic for centuries. Until the Chinese invasion of October 1950, you could generally count the number of foreign residents in Tibet on the fingers of one hand.

A land will always sculpt its people. Isolation has been Tibet’s predominant cultural characteristic; its most obvious physical characteristics are thin air and biting cold, and both have profound implications for those

who live there. When the London Times correspondent Perceval Landon visited Phag Ri, Tibet's highest settlement, in 1904, he found a ramshackle village of listless, unwashed inhabitants. An open sewer in the center of the main street contained excrement, offal, and the corpses of long-dead dogs in a hideous mixture that scarcely maintained its slow, curdled flow.

The characteristic listlessness sprang from oxygen deprivation. At eighteen thousand feet, Phag Ri was not only the highest town in the country, but in the world. Even Tibetans found it difficult to cope with the thin air. The appalling state of public and personal hygiene was compounded by the listlessness, but sprang mainly from the lack of free water, most of which was locked up as ice all year round. The open sewer flowed only due to the latent heat of the excrement it contained. In the barren land, fuel was at a premium. What little there was had to be preserved for essentials like cooking. Water for washing was a luxury. Bathing was unthinkable.

Phag Ri is an extreme example, but remained typical of pre-invasion Tibet in its hygiene standards. Yet despite such conditions, there was comparatively little infectious illness in the country and the great plagues that killed millions in neighboring India and China were unheard of in Tibet. This was partly due to the low population density, but a far more important factor was the cold?bacteria simply do not thrive.

Once attention is focused on the cold, the thin air, the rocky, inhospitable, infertile land, and the lack of natural resources such as oil, coal, or timber, certain developments become predictable. The first is a small population. The land will not support the teeming millions of India or China. The second is long-term cultural stability, possibly declining into stagnation. Once a balance is reached between population and resources, there is little incentive to change old ways of doing things, and no money to spare for major changes anyway.

An examination of Tibetan history shows these factors clearly. Although impoverished by Western standards, Tibet never faced famine. Largely unaware of the world outside, its people saw nothing of which to be envious. There was no incentive to change and the country remained a feudal monarchy, albeit of an unusual type, until change was forced upon it by external intervention.

But contrary to its modern image, Tibet was not always a peace-loving country. For centuries there was a constant ebb and flow

of military campaigns with neighboring China. Tibetan warlords gained the upper hand as often as their Chinese counterparts, but in the twentieth century, China modernized its military machine while Tibet did not. By this time, Tibet had long since initiated an experiment unique in the modern world. As a culture, it had embarked on a spiritual path that precluded the use of violence.

Most scholars attribute the first hesitant steps on this path to the arrival of Buddhism in the seventh century c.e. Tibetan chronicles record the event in a suitably miraculous context. According to these sources, an early century king named Lhato Thori was on the roof of his palace in Tibet when an enormous casket fell from the sky at his feet. Inside were certain religious scriptures, a scale model of a golden tomb, and the six sacred syllables of what became the Tibetan Prayer of Everlasting Truth.

Although the Bönpoba (practitioners of Tibet's aboriginal Bön religion) claim the miraculous scriptures as their own, they are more widely believed to have been the Buddhist Dunkong Shakgyapa. Buddhist or Bön, the illiterate king was unable to read them, but he was able to recognize a good omen when it fell from the sky. Thus he stored the chest away safely and embarked on a daily worship of the books, a practice that doubled his life span to 120 years.

(The idea that Tibetan mystics discovered the secret of longevity has proved remarkably persistent. In James Hilton's popular romance The Lost Horizon, residents of Shangri-La, a Himalayan kingdom based on Tibet, remained youthful for centuries so long as they did not venture from their valley home.)

Shortly after he began his religious discipline, King Lhato Thori was visited by the Buddha in a dream. The Buddha told him that the secret of the books would remain hidden to him, but after five generations a stranger would explain the texts to the people. Here, too, we find an ancient reflection of Tibetan esoteric practice which, as we shall also see later, makes very interesting use of dreams.

Five generations later, the prophecy came true. In the second decade of the seventh century, King Srontsan

Gampo decided the strange scriptures inherited from his predecessor should be translated into Tibetan and dispatched a team of seventeen scholars to India in search of instruction. At the time Tibet had no written language but one of the scholars, a government minister named Thonmi Sambhoto, actually devised one, a monumental achievement loosely based on the Kashmiri Sharada alphabet.

Once this hurdle was crossed, not only was the secret of the ancient Dunkong Shakgyapa revealed, but a great many other scriptures, both Buddhist and Hindu, were translated into Tibetan. Although King Srontsan Gampo was a Bön practitioner, he was strongly attracted to the new religion. When he subsequently married two Buddhist princesses?one from Nepal, the other from China?he decided to convert. In this way, Buddhism was introduced into Tibet, and while for a time it remained confined to the royal family, it eventually spread.

For anyone brought up within the revealed religions of Christianity, Judaism, or Islam, Buddhism is a strange doctrine. It denies not only the existence of God, but of a human soul. It teaches reincarnation?the great wheel of birth, death, and rebirth?but believes an individual's greatest aspiration is to cease to incarnate. Above all, its practitioners follow the Buddha's central precept, "Seek your own salvation with diligence." This precept has given the religion enormous flexibility and led it to adapt to the prevailing conditions of different countries as it spread. Sometimes the adaptation has been extreme. Buddhism as practiced in Japan (under the name of Zen) bears little resemblance to its Indian root. Buddhism as practiced in Tibet was to share the same fate.

In an attempt to explain the emergence of Bön in his country, the Dalai Lama's older brother Abbot Thubten Jigme Norbu had this to say:

Every traveller who has set foot in Tibet has commented on the wild countryside. . . . It is a country that can be so still and quiet and so beautiful that even we who have been born in it . . . are affected strongly. [But] just as it can be quiet, it can also be so tumultuous that it seems as though the world were coming to an end. . . . If the country is powerful in its quiet moments, it is something much more than powerful when it is black. . . . Living in a world like this, it is difficult not be become dominated by it.5

There seems little doubt that Bön emerged in reaction to the country of its birth exactly as the abbot suggests, but so, too, did Buddhism. Indeed there are so many similarities between Buddhism and Bön it is often difficult to tell them apart. Thubten Jigme Norbu again:

There is no way of telling whether a man is a Bönpoba or a Buddhist when you meet him. His clothes, his manner of speech, his behaviour, all are the same as our own. Inside his house the altar might be a little different . . .6

Like Buddhism, the Bön religion had its monasteries. Both types of monasteries were organized in exactly the same way. Monks in each took exactly the same number of vows?253. Itis clear that Bön borrowed from Buddhism. It is equally clear that in Tibet, Buddhism borrowed from Bön. Tibetan occultism drew heavily on both traditions and permeated the entire culture. Until the Chinese invasion, the government was a reincarnatory monarchy whose decisions were guided by spirit voices speaking through a state oracle. A communications system had been developed using entranced runners and, according to some sources at least, telepathy. Prior to 1950, Tibet was arguably the strangest place on Earth. How did all this strangeness come about?

Abbot Norbu struck the right chord when he was speaking about Bön. Tibet is a wilderness of extremes. The beauty of the country is breathtaking. The stillness is profound, the silence almost tangible. It positively calls the human soul to meditate. But Tibet is also wild. It is subject to earthquakes that are capable of swallowing whole villages. Although the monsoons are blocked by the mountains, there are storms of such violence that a hillside?and anyone on it?can be washed away in a matter of minutes. When the wind howls, the noise seems to fill the universe. As the abbot says, it is only human nature that the people who live in such a country will do their best to develop shamanic systems designed to control its natural forces.

But there is another, even more interesting, factor that comes into play. There is a phenomenon well known in the world of high-altitude mountaineering. Those who engage in the sport call it the "unseen companion." Climber after climber, including several engaged in Everest expeditions, has reported the eerie sensation of

being accompanied by something or someone on the final stages of their climb, even though no one was actually there. Rather more controversially, one or two have even claimed that the unseen presence seemed to help them when they got into trouble, and protected them against the worst effects of blizzards by guiding their footsteps back to safety.

The occultist Aleister Crowley, no mean mountaineer himself, learned the unseen companion had a negative side when he tackled Himalayan peak K2, known locally as Kanchenjunga, the second highest mountain in the world. Although Crowley was courageous to the point of stupidity when climbing, he met with something on Kanchenjunga that terrified him. At least one of his biographers, the British author John Symonds, has assumed Crowley was personifying the mountain?a particularly treacherous peak that has killed a number of climbers?when he referred to the "Kanchenjunga Demon," but it is far more likely that he was speaking about an experience of the unseen companion.

The phenomenon manifests when mountaineers venture into high altitudes without oxygen equipment or when their equipment fails. This has led to the assumption that the experience is essentially a hallucination brought on by oxygen deprivation?a variation on the altitude sickness experienced by some tourists visiting destinations like Nepal. The locals take a different view. To them, the unseen companion is exactly what it seems to be: a disembodied entity that attaches itself, for good or ill, to those who enter its domain.

It is tempting to dismiss the local view as superstition, but is perhaps a little rash. Aldous Huxley, the British intellectual, experimented with mescaline (also known as peyote) and subsequently wrote afascinating account of the experience in which he discussed the theory of "mind-at-large." According to this theory, the human mind is not generated by the physical brain as so many Western scientists assume. Rather it is something above and beyond the body which is aware of reality at a far deeper level than most of us experience. The brain acts as a "reducing valve," filtering out those impressions which are not useful for the job of survival. Mystical consciousness is all very well, but you might easily walk under a bus while contemplating the beauties of an expanded universe.

Huxley theorized that psychedelic substances like mescaline and many spiritual pursuits including yoga breathing all reduce the efficiency of the brain as a filter mechanism, allowing more impressions of mind-at-large to flood in. Far from these impressions being hallucinatory, they are intimations of reality levels we cannot normally access.

During the latter part of the 1960s, a series of experiments carried out by the distinguished British neurophysiologist Dr. W. Grey Walter lent indirect support to the theory of mind-at-large. Although his findings have been largely ignored, his work showed conclusively that mind, whatever it may be, cannot be a product of the brain.

Grey Walter's experimental procedure was based on the fact that the human brain generates measurable electrical signals. He attached electrodes to the scalps of volunteers over the area of the frontal cortex. These electrodes amplified electrical activity and sent the signals on to a specially constructed machine. There was a button before the subject which caused an interesting scene to appear on a TV screen whenever it was pressed.

When you decide to take any physical action?including the pressing of a button?there is a twenty-microvolt electrical surge across your frontal cortex. Specialists call this a "readiness wave." Grey Walter amplified this readiness wave so that it could trigger the TV picture a fraction of a second before the button was actually pressed.

Subjects usually figured out what was happening fairly quickly and trained themselves to "will" the pictures onto the screen without touching the button. For this trick to work, the subject had to duplicate his or her mindset in pressing the button. Once the knack was developed, subjects could will pictures onto the screen directly, then dismiss them with the relevant thought when finished.

The appearance of screen pictures was not mind acting directly on matter since the switch was triggered by the amplified electrical surge originating in the subject's brain. But once subjects learned how to produce the pictures without pressing the button, their minds were directly influencing matter?the physical matter of their own brains. A decision of the mind, applied in a particular way, was all it took to change the electrical

potential of the frontal cortex.
Grey Walter’s experiments showed conclusively that it is the mind that controls the brain and not the other way around.7 The implications are far-reaching. Among them is the realization that mind-at-large can no longer be dismissed as a mystical fantasy.
In the Tibetan context, this may mean that the country’s basic geographical features?notably its thin air?created over the generations a people who were constitutionally attuned to levels of reality normally hidden from the rest of us. It was this that led to the national obsession with religion and the development of occult technologies more profound and far-reaching than those of any other country. It was this that made Tibet a land of miracles and mysteries. Many of those miracles and mysteries were very strange indeed.

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