Holy Guardians

By Nicholas Roerich

Thus said the Mongolian Lama:

"The Holy keepers visited also our yurtas. Nobody knows when They shall appear. It is not known from where They come and whither They go, but they are usually in haste. It is told that They lay foundations for monasteries, where these are necessary. Sometimes the place of Their visitation is being marked by suburgans or by ordinary obos. When the news of Their approach passes through the desert, then people rejoice in all yurtas. It is said that there are no illnesses in those places. And all plans and deeds are successful."

We asked: "Perhaps such success is due to mental suggestion? Such beneficial thoughts and ordainments are known."

"We know of this force and we ourselves believe that success is sent. Once the Holy Keeper was asked: 'Is it true that according to His thought many benevolent deeds are done; and how does He suggest them?' It is said that He replied: 'This happens in many ways, but the main thing is that you act as is necessary.' And they hasten in order to give to the people more good thoughts, in order that people everywhere can do the best within the needed time."

We asked: "Are they at once recognized by the people?"
"To say the truth, only a few recognize them. And the others become aware, only after Their departure. And then they again begin to wait. Stupid people! When something is given, they do not agree; and when it is taken away they again begin to wait for it."

We asked: "And when They come, where do they stay?"

"Sometimes in Their tents, but usually they go away somewhere, and no one knows properly, from beyond what mountains they come and where their path lies. But wise people expect them, and expect them very much, especially for the day of the Blessed One. And when the news of Their arrival comes, joy radiates everywhere. From yurta to yurta messengers gallop at full speed. And hardly have the people time to gather, when He has already left. People of course say that They use some subterranean passages, but no one knows anything definite about these. When they suddenly appear amidst the desert, people wonder how such a long waterless path was accomplished. We ponder whether somewhere there are hidden roads. Even very deep and endless caves were found and no one knows whither they lead. And in the darkness of these caverns no one was able to find his way."

We asked: "Do you narrate all this about the ancient past, or does it happen now?"

"It was, and is, and shall be. They guard the people. They keep justice. They send new thoughts. And not long ago, and may be even now there may appear a rider. Either alone, but sometimes two, and no one knows Their ways."

We asked: "And are there any signs of Their coming?"

"No. Never. None! Everything great and wonderful comes unexpected. So sudden that human thought cannot anticipate. But the heart perhaps may feel. When the time of Their approach comes, the heart longs and strives and flies to meet Them. Sometimes, the heart flutters as a bird, and perhaps at that moment They pass nearby. How often does a steed neigh no one knows why; perhaps it sensed Their steeds. Very often dogs appear watchful apparently without reason, but never will a dog bark at Them. Sometimes it happens in a caravan, during night-camping. It seems as if someone rides past, and when they listen—there is nothing to be heard. Sometimes a wonderful fragrance, as if from the best flowers, arises over the desert. It is said that this is due to Their approach. Some have seen an unusual white dog, like a Borsoi. Old people say that this was their dog. And the dog runs alone, but as if with some purpose and does not respond to calls: no doubt it hastens. Others have seen in the desert white birds—like doves, and believe that these were Their messengers. There are many inexplicable signs in our desert. Sometimes we find most remarkable stones. No doubt someone has placed them there. They are carved, sometimes with unknown inscriptions, sometimes round like eggs."

We said: "There, you see many signs in the desert, but for foreigners the desert appears boring and dead."

"That is because they do not know the language of the desert. The foreigners cannot judge the wind, nor do they
smell the fragrance, and even should they meet Them, they will not recognize Their greatness."

We said: "What are They like? Some people must have seen Them."

"As circumstances require, in order not to attract the people's attention unnecessarily. I was told that in one camp They were taken for traders, in another as shepherds and yet in another as warriors, everyone judges by himself. But they are not offended at our remarks. One, who recognized them, tried to find what he should do. And He replied: 'you will do as is necessary, don't worry about it, but always do good deeds, everywhere and in everything.' They always teach to do good."

Again we asked: "But why do They tolerate these dead deserts?" The Lama looked at us very cunningly and said: "And this will come in time. And the rivers will rise, and forests will grow and grass will cover everything. Everything comes in time. As it left us because of human sins, so it will come, thanks to the Keepers' thoughts. They will send, when necessary, when we shall be able to recognize and to accept."

We asked: "And has no one any signs or tokens, from Them?"

"Perhaps some have. No doubt they have. But only, if anyone receives them, he will never say so."

We questioned: "And does any one know their names?"

"They can assume different names, but again, if anyone was lucky to hear Their name, he will never repeat it to anyone else. No one will transgress this law."

Our friend became silent and piercingly followed with his eyes a moving point on the far-off sandy hills. Perhaps he pondered whether his luck had come. In his eyes glimmered the long waited for expectation. We felt that he knows, has heard and seen much more. But much longer must one sit at the bonfire, until the heart opens up. Even if the heart would be ready to reveal, the will knows how far these gates can be opened towards foreigners. To passers-by many mysteries of the desert remain closed. The desert can only entrust them to their own. Only to him whom it can fully trust; to him who thinks quietly about the past and the future; who is content with the little which is incalculable for contemporary luxury.

The desert has assumed that aspect, in which it appears to the passer-by, in order not to show its significance and magnificence. The heart of Asia is hidden with all its wealth, with all deeply buried signs, and the sons of Asia know how to guard the ordained, they guard the Teaching of the Blessed One.

Perhaps tomorrow the Lama will tell us about Shambhala.