

## Interview with Lama Gyen Yeshe by Gerald D'Aoust

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1984: To complete my story, I recently traveled again to Nepal and finally met with Lama Ghen Yeshe, breeder-in-exile of Lhasa Apsos. With the help of Sonam Topgyal, the Lama's secretary acting as translator, I had the opportunity on the 15th of February, 1984, of recording a most interesting conversation. The important content of this interview is expressed in the following:

GD: Lama Gyen Yeshe who are you?

LGY: *I was born in Bas in the province of Kham, eastern Tibet. I come from a large family of over twenty members and most of them were killed by the Chinese. Monastically, I firstly belonged to Bas Chode Gompa (The Secret Cave of the East) and later, I belonged to Drepung Monastery. (Also pronounced Drepung, the largest and most powerful Monastery in Tibet. It is located 5 kilometers from Lhasa and contained between 7,000 and 10,000 Monks prior to the Chinese invasion.) For nearly forty years, I traded, with neighboring countries, for the welfare of these Monasteries.*

GD: In Tibet, who was breeding Apsos?

LGY: *In Tibet, normally, these Apsos were bred by High Lamas and Noblemen, only. So, the common Tibetan people do not have this type of Apso. We never sold dogs, we only used them for presentation. We believe that these Apsos must be very good, because these dogs have maximum chance of taking rebirth as a human next life. When a human dies, before he humanly rebirths, he may enter the life of these Apsos. Not only Lamas, common people also, depending on their previous life can reincarnate in these Apsos.*

Then, I asked the Lama about the other way around. Is it possible from Holy Dog to human form?

GD: Can Apsos reincarnate in people?

LGY: *In Tibet, after a High Lama dies, we look for his Reincarnation. In my Kham side, there was a Rinpoche who had an Apso like this. The Rinpoche died and his Apso died also, not too long after. From the children of the new generation, High Lamas found two boys who could recognize all the personal effects of the previous Rinpoche. It was soon discovered that, while one of the boys was the Reincarnation of the Rinpoche, the other boy was the Reincarnation of the Rinpoche's Apso.*

GD: You always bring Katu your favorite Apso during meditation, is he also meditating?

LGY: *No, but it is good for them to hear the sounds of these prayers. It is good for their future life. We never sold dogs, we only used them for presentation. We believe that these Apsos must be very good, because these dogs have maximum chance of taking into human life. When a human dies, before he humanly rebirths, he may enter the life of these Apsos. Not only Lamas, common people also, depending on their previous life can reincarnate in these Apsos.*

GD: Are these Apsos sacred?

LGY: *Actually, the origin of these Apsos is very sacred. In Tibet, a long time back, there was "Shako," a kind of flying (...gliding...) white-headed, animal goddess, which ate bones and had her nest very high in the cliffs. Every year, she would give birth to two babies; one with wings and the other without wings. This last one was a small Apso. While the flying one could easily go out and fetch for food, the small Apso would stay around the nest and would be fed by the mother.*

*However, her first Apsos eventually fell from the high nest to their deaths. After a few years with similar events, the mother after the Apso baby was big enough, would put him on her back and fly him down to the ground.*

LGY: *This is how Apsos came into Tibet. In Tibet, many people have seen this type of small Apsos, which were brought down by "Shako". There was a Lama, Tson Sa Tulku, who had Apsos, which were just like Sako's Apsos. Sometimes they did not have normal hair, instead they had bird feet feathers (bird's down).*

GD: In Drepung, did you also have other kinds of dogs?

*LGY: No, in Drepung, we were not allowed to bring any other dogs. These Apsos are very special.*

GD: Do you know how long Apsos, have been bred in Monasteries in Tibet?

*LGY: It is a very old tradition. In the Monasteries, some monks were very interested to teach many things to these Apsos which are very good learners.*

GD: Do you know any other Lama breeding Gomba Apsos now?

*LGY: In Lhasa, there used to be many, but the Chinese might have destroyed everything. I have not heard any stories about the possible existence of these Gomba Apsos, now in Tibet. Here, now, I do not know of anyone else.*

GD: Did you teach young Lamas the traditional art of Gomba Apso breeding?

*LGY: No, nobody ever asked. The people here are too negligent. Now, at my age, my only duty is to pray.*

GD: Do you have any other advice to give me?

*LGY: Be careful in breeding and feeding. Also, I would like to express deep thanks, for your deep interest in this breed and your kind efforts to preserve these Gomba Apsos.*

GD: Toudiche to you, Lama. You are the one to be thanked.