

STRAY DOGS IN TIBET, INDIA AND NEPAL

October 20, 2010

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Something that you might not see unless you choose to see or want to see is the massive amount of stray and unwanted dogs in third-world countries, especially around monasteries. People know that the Buddhist monks would never harm an animal and probably would try to feed them if they could.

I have told this story somewhere before: In the very early morning, around dawn, at Samye Monastery in Tibet (said to be the first monastery in Tibet), there was a dog experience to be had. Samye is only accessible by climbing mountains or taking a 1.5 mile boat trip across the Tsangpo River. We had done that and were staying in the tiny village surrounding Samye. We had to bring our own cook as there was nowhere to eat, although "having your own cook" sounds a lot fancier than it was, but that is another story.

I am always up very early, even at home. It was still dark as I made my way through the streets and finally to the massive doors to the main gompa or shrine room to do my morning practice. But they were locked tight. I was too much of an early bird, I guess. And it was raining out. The monastery doors were inset in a large alcove with a stone floor, open on one large side to the outside. And on that stone floor were dozens and dozens of dogs, all trying to get in out of the rain. They filled the floor until there was literally no room

I had no idea when the doors would open, and it would not be good to make my way back to where we were sleeping because it was one big open dormitory with not only my family sleeping in rows of beds, but all kinds of people. I was sure to wake them up feeling my way around in the dark. Anyway, I had managed to feel my way here and was not in the mood to reverse the process until first light. So there I was with all these stray and perhaps somewhat wild dogs, all curled up in little balls around me.

So I very gently ingratiated myself into their midst, moving a hind leg here and bottom there, until I could squeeze down on the floor with them. They were used to making room and they made room for me without a complaint. And there I did my practice. Now it happens that I really love dogs, so I was very happy there.

The photos here, which were taken years ago with a little point-and-shoot camera are not from Samye, but were taken around the Great Boudha Stupa in Kathmandu, Nepal. These dogs were on their own. No one owned them and they multiplied at their own speed. They were not unfriendly, but they also were not the kind of animals you just run up and pet. They had a world of their own, which mostly had to do with managing to stay alive.

At night they would often run the streets in packs, and you could hear them barking, fighting,

and snarling all through the night. No one with a heart for animals could not have compassion for them. And you know, many very poor people there were in about the same boat, but I did not feel it respectful to take their photos. So here are the dogs of Boudha. They are really kind of wonderful. Please forgive the poor photos.

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