

A Self-Levitated Lama*

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The Theosophist August 1882 contains an account, translated from the *Tatwabodhini Patrika* of March 1847, of the self-levitation of a Dekkan Yogi named Sishal. The original article was illustrated with an engraving which represented the ascetic in the act of levitation, “only his right hand touching a deer-skin, rolled up in the form of a tube, and attached to a brazen rod, which was firmly stuck into a board resting upon four legs. I am not sure, but it seems to me I have heard that this Yogi had been subsequently declared an impostor. The brazen rod firmly fixed in a plank, and the rolled deer-skin, which may have concealed a stout steel arm that could be connected with a suspensory jacket hidden under the man’s robe, is at all events suspiciously like the very apparatus with which our modern “Queen of the Air” is suspended in the performances of our modern conjurors. I am in a position to tell a more wonderful story than that — one of a verifiable self-levitation that was free of all questionable concomitants.

For some weeks past there was stopping in my house a Lama from Tibet, a true ascetic who daily practised his Yoga and spent hours, sometimes several days together, in meditative seclusion in the room I had assigned him. At these times neither I nor any member of my family, except one servant, was allowed access to him. I had found him one morning at my door begging his food, after the custom of Buddhist religions mendicants, and liking his appearance, asked him to come in, and gave him food and lodging. My first favorable impression was confirmed by his subsequent good habits, and I became thoroughly satisfied as to his blamelessness and spirituality of life. He spoke only Tibetan, and our intercourse had to be carried on mainly by signs. The phenomenon in question occurred on the very first day of his visit, under the following circumstances. I had just taken him into the house and ordered food to be given him, when my milkman, a Bhootanese who spoke the Tibetan language, happened to call. Through him as interpreter, I asked the Lama if he possessed any *siddhis*, or psychic powers. He enquired what phenomenon should like to witness. I replied that It would be very instructive if I could see him rise into the air. He asked for a private room, called me in alone, shut the door, and drew the curtains before the window, then stripping-off his clothing to the *languti*, or breech-clout, he took his seat upon an *asana*, or small board, that I had placed for him. Crossing his legs upon the thighs, close to the body—the usual posture of *padmasana*, in Yoga—he brought the thumb of each hand into contact with the first joint of the ring-finger and, his hands against the abdomen, sat erect, turned his eyes upwards, all remained for a while motionless. His next action was to work his body with a wriggling motion, at the same time drawing several very deep breaths. After the third or fourth inhalation he seemed to retain the breath in his lungs, and for a half hour was as motionless as a statue of bronze. Then a succession of nervous shiverings ran through his body, lasting perhaps three minutes, after which he resumed his state of immobility for another half hour: his eyes all the while fixed as at first. His skin was free from perspiration and all signs of exhaustion; his chest did not rise and fall in the natural way of one breathing; his body did not seem stiffened but retained its normal suppleness. I did not touch him, so I am unable to testify as to his bodily temperature or rate of pulse-beat. There was no sigh nor sound from him. Suddenly he, still retaining his sitting posture, rose perpendicularly into the air to the height of, I should say, two cubits—one yard, and then floated, without a tremor or motion of a single muscle, like a cork in still water. His expression of face was placid in the extreme, that of a rapt devotee, as described by eye-witnesses in the biographical memoirs of saints. After I had regarded him in

amazement for at least a couple of minutes, I thought to myself that that was quite enough to satisfy my curiosity, and I hoped he would not give himself any more trouble on my account. At once, as though my thought had been read, he gently descended to his place on the *asana*. He then emptied his lungs by three or four strong expirations, opened his eyes, stood up as easily and naturally as though he had done nothing extraordinary, and laughed upon noticing my signs of bewilderment. When he had resumed his clothing, the milkman was called in and the Lama, bade him tell me that this sort of “common-place Siddhi” could be performed by even Lama-pupils in his Guru’s monastery who were not very far advanced!

I got some facts from him in regard to the daily routine in his monastery. The monks rise, take refreshment, and are ready for work before sunrise; then study religious books until called for the principal meal, just before noon. Those who practise Yoga do not touch meat, as it interferes with spiritual development. After this they more study until 5 P.M. when those who are sufficiently advanced in years practice yoga; after which to bed. Boys of eight years may be admitted, but none younger. From their entrance until they arrive at their twentieth year their attention is wholly given to study, the learning of religious ceremonies, and duties in and about the monastery. After this age the master takes them in hand for Yoga practice, which includes *pranáyam* (training of the breath), the various *ásanas* (bodily postures), levitation, etc.— much the same as our Indian *Hathi Yoga* [sic]. In the monastery to which this Lama belongs—the Lindra-povrang Lamasery, near L’hassa—there are thirteen perfect adepts, among whom are some who rise to the height of 15 feet from the ground in their self-levitations. This his Lama’s name is Jamyan Shirap; he is 36 years old, and entered the *goompa*—monastery—at 10 years of age. His complexion is fair, his body well proportioned and athletic, his health excellent, temperament bright and cheerful, and habits very abstemious. He says there is one Lama in his monastery who is 108 years old and who is still practising Yoga! Some of the Lamas are able to retain breath from sunrise to sunset. When I told him that out of the 5,000 Buddhist priests of Ceylon there was not a single one, so far as I had learned, who could levitate his body, he manifested the utmost astonishment and asked what sort of monastic rules they practised.

Your readers may recollect the story told by Father Huc, the Jesuit missionary to Tibet (quoted in *Isis Unveiled*, Vol. ii, page 604) about the Superior of a Lamasery going in the astral body to confer with his Guru, who resided at another monastery distant from his own. With this in mind I asked our Lama if such a thing was known to him as possible. He replied that whenever any Lama-adept desired to converse with another at any distance, he merely threw himself into the interior condition, and would at once see and be able to talk with the other adept as easily as if they were seated beside each other upon the same mat.

SREENATH CHATTERJEE

Postscript —I was fortunate enough to see Lama Jamian Shirap twice during my recent visit to Darjiling. He personally confirmed to me, through Tashi, a Tibetan merchant residing at that station who acted as interpreter, all the particulars given by Srinath Babu in the above narrative, and my own impressions of him tally with my friends. At my urgent request, and after satisfying him that my motive was not idle curiosity, he obligingly showed me a portion of his Yoga practice. I have seen other Yogis do their *ásanas*, but none to equal this Lama in the vital energy of his exercises. Sitting in *padmāsana* he would instantaneously unfold his legs from their crossed position and spring upward to the height of a yard, and then with his legs recrossed let himself drop to the ground with full force, and immediately the feet would be crossed upon the thighs as before. This feat of agility he repeated seven times successively at intervals, varying the performance with a number of

other things equally striking. It was his intention to have shown me the feat of self-levitation, but the day of our interview happened to be *Ekadasi*, the 11th day of the moon and a close fast, and he did not have the strength to do more than what he was kind enough to show me. It is evident from what he said—which was moreover confirmed by the personal testimony of the interpreter—that there are a large number of Lamas in the monasteries of Tibet who are able to exhibit the psychical phenomena peculiar to Yoga, and that, Mr. Edwin Arnold and his nihilistic Sinhalese priest-gossip to the contrary notwithstanding, there is no lack of those higher proficients commonly called “adepts.”

H. S. O.