

ETHNO GRAPHIC NOTES ON THE AKHAS OF BURMA

This section in 2 volumes

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Volume 1

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paul Lewis served as a missionary with the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society in Kengtung State, Burma, from 1947 until the Spring of 1966. He has received the M.A. degree in Anthropology at the University of Colorado. In July of 1968 he returned, with his family, to the Mission field—this time to Chiangmai, North Thailand, where he hopes to continue his work with Akhas and Lahus.

Mr Lewis started learning the 'standard' dialect of Akha (what the Shans call 'Puli', the Akhas call either 'Akha' or 'Jeu g'oe') from informants in Nau haw village in the Loimwe district of central Kengtung State. Loimwe is 20 miles southeast of Kengtung, and the village is about another 8 or 9 miles to the east of Loimwe. He has also worked with many informants (both Christian and non-Christian) from different parts of Kengtung State, and has visited Akha villages, especially in the central and southern part of the state—the longest stay being 10 days in one village.

Most of the data in these notes are from interviews with informants. Data are generalised for all Akha in Kengtung unless otherwise stated. There are, however, many variations, which seem to follow regional or clan differences.

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AKHA PHONOLOGY

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0. The Akha (E Kaw or Kaw) people¹ live in South-eastern Yunnan in China, Kengtung State in Eastern Burma, the North-eastern area of Laos, and Northern Thailand.

Their language is within the Lolo branch of the Tibeto-Burman languages² There are probably between three hundred thousand and half a million speakers of the language.³

During my three terms of service under the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society in Kengtung State, Burma, from 1947 through the spring of 1966, I had constant contact with Akhas. The dialect I learned, and the one they consider to be 'standard', is the Jeu-g'oe (Puli) dialect, as it is spoken in Central and Central eastern Kengtung State.

1. Consonants

There are 26 consonant phonemes in Akha. There are no consonant clusters. Digraphs which are used in the orthography are used for practical reasons only.

1.1 The quality of the 14 voiced consonants is not altered significantly by the quality of the following vowel:

/b/ A voiced bilabial stop. ba_ ba 'cheek', ba_ eu 'to carry'.

/by/ A palatalized voiced bilabial stop. bya_ 'bee', yaw bya_ 'striped'.

/d/ A voiced alveolar stop. da_ kaw_ 'a stick', da_ eu 'to climb'.

/g/ A voiced velar stop. ga_ ma 'a path', ga_ eu 'to graze'.

/dz/ A voiced alveolar affricate. dza_ 'food', dza_ eu 'to drip'.

/z/ A voiced alveolar affricative, with the apex of the tongue pointed slightly upward, and a little further back than in English za_ 'a child', a_ za 'a pig'.

/y/ A voiced alveopalatal fricative, with the apex of the tongue pointing slightly downward. ya_ 'hillfield',
ya_ eu 'to camp'.

/g/ A voiced velar fricative, written g g'a 'strong', baw g'a 'a net bird trap'.

/m/ A bilabial voiced nasal. a_ ma 'mother', ma eu 'to dream'.

¹ LeBar 1964

² Burling 1967

³

CONSONANT PHONEMES	Bi-labial	Alveolar	Alveopalatal	Velar	Glottal
STOP voiceless	p	t		k	
STOP voiced	b	d		g	
AFFRICATE voiceless		ts	c		
AFFRICATE voiced		dz	j		
FRICATIVE voiceless		s	s (sh)	x (k)	
FRICATIVE voiced		z	y	g (g)	
NASAL	m	n		n (ng)	
LATERAL		l			
PALATALIZED voiceless	py				
PALATALIZED voiced	by				
PALATALIZED nasal	my	ny			
VOWEL PHONEMES	FRONT		CENTRAL		BACK
	un-rounded	rounded		unrounded	rounded
HIGH	i	ü		i	u
HIGHER-MID	e	ö		é	o
LOWER-MID	(eh)		a		(aw)
LOW	m			ã	

- /my/ A palatalized bilabial voiced nasal. mya_jaw ‘a year’s cycle’, a mya ‘how much’.
 /n/ A voiced alveolar nasal. na_eu ‘to rest’, yaw na ‘early’.
 /ny/ A palatalized voiced alveolar nasal. yaw nya ‘capable’, a nya ‘they two’.
 /g/ A voiced velar nasal, written ng nga ‘I’ nga nga ‘a fish gill’.
 /l/ A voiced alveolar lateral. la_eu ‘to come’, a la ‘a hand’.
 /ʔ/ An initial glottal stop, represented by zero in the orthography. a da ‘father’, u teh –eu ‘to cover over’.

1.2 The quality of the following 9 consonants is determined by the quality of the following vowel. The consonant is aspirated when followed by an oral vowel, and unaspirated when followed by a laryngealized vowel.

- /p/ A voiceless bilabial stop. Aspirated: pa ‘extended family’. Unaspirated: pa-eu ‘to tie’.
 /py/ A palatalized voiceless bilabial stop. Aspirated: pya eu ‘to have fever’. Unaspirated; pya eu ‘to hack’.
 /t/ A voiceless alveolar stop. Aspirated: ta ‘don’t’. Unaspirated: ta- eu ‘to be related’.
 /k/ A voiceless velar stop. Aspirated: ka-eu ‘to plant’. Unaspirated: ka ‘a crossbow’.
 /ts/ A voiceless alveolar affricate. Aspirated: tsa- eu ‘to be correct’. Unaspirated: tsa –eu ‘to send for’.
 /c/ A voiceless alveopalatal affricate. Aspirated: ca ca ‘little finger’. Unaspirated: ca –eu ‘to boil’.
 /s/ A voiceless alveolar fricative. Aspirated: k’ a sa ‘a shallow wicker or wooden tray’. Unaspirated: k’a sa ‘a large type of rice basket’.
 /ʃ/ A voiceless alveopalatal fricative, written sh. Aspirated: sha gu ‘tendon’. Unaspirated: sha daw eu ‘to be embarrassed’.
 /x/ A voiceless velar fricative, written k. Aspirated: yaw k’a ‘bitter’. Unaspirated: yaw k’a ‘strong’.

1.3 The quality of one voiced consonant is determined by the quality of the following vowel:

- /j/ A voiced alveopalatal affricate. It has no palatalization when followed by an oral vowel: ja-eu ‘to relate’. It is palatalized when followed by a laryngealized vowel: ja eu ‘to have’.

1.4 There is one consonant which occurs only with oral vowels:

- /h/ A voiceless glottal fricative. ha la I eu ‘to go to meet’.

1.5 There is one consonant which occurs in only a very few words borrowed from Shan, and is use mostly by older Akha men who wish to show their linguistic proficiency:

- /v/ A voiced labiodental fricative. sa paw vi ‘airplane’, ceh va ‘Wa’ (Note: most speakers who use these borrowed terms change this consonant to /b/ sa paw bi , etc).

2. Vowels

There are 13 vowels in Akha. Of these, nine occur as either oral or laryngealized vowels, and four occur only as oral vowels. The oral vowels are characterised by an expanded pharyngeal cavity, with no restriction of the passage of air. The laryngealized vowels are characterised by faucalization and laryngealization, with a glottal stop at the end when the syllable occurs in an utterance final position.

2.1 There are 9 vowels which occur both in the oral and laryngeal forms:

- /i/ A high front unrounded vowel. ci-eu 'to lift'. ci nyaw 'tongs'.
- /e/ A lower-mid front unrounded vowel, written eh. ceh 'paddy', ceh-eu 'to run'.
- /o/ A higher-mid front rounded vowel, written oe. coe-eu 'to slash', a coe 'a sprout at the base of a plant'.
- /a/ A low central unrounded vowel. ca-eu 'to sing', ca-eu 'to boil'.
- /u/ A high back rounded vowel. cu-eu 'to rear', cu-eu 'to suck'.
- /o/ A higher-mid back rounded vowel. co-eu 'to fall over', yaw co 'cold'.
- /c/ A lower-mid back rounded vowel, written aw. caw 'a friend', caw I eu 'to break'.
- /i/ A high back unrounded vowel, written ui. da cui 'a small stick', ui cui 'a little'.
- /è/ A higher-mid back unrounded vowel, written eu. ceu 'dew', ceu- eu 'to split'.

2.2 There are 4 vowels which regularly occur only in the oral form:

- /e/ A higher-mid front unrounded vowel. le-eu 'to go up'. (Note there is one instance where it occurs in the laryngeal form: bi le -eu 'to give (down)').
- /m/ A syllabic m, which seems to occupy the low front unrounded category in the Akha pattern. Im bym 'a grave'.
- /ü/ A high front rounded, vowel, written oi. coi doi 'leprosy'.
- /a/ A low back unrounded and slightly nasalized vowel, written ah. cah 'a top'.

2.3 There are three diphthongs that occur in certain words borrowed from Shan. They are usually oral in quality although when the Shan ends with an unrealised stop, some Akhas try to reflect this by pronouncing the vowel with more laryngealized quality. These always occur as level diphthongs. That is, both segments are said on the same level. As far as I can tell, Akhas treat these diphthongs in much the same way they treat vowel enclitics (CVV).

- /ao/ A diphthong with a sequence of /a/ and /o/. bao 'power', leu kao the name of a month (in Shan).
- /ai/ A diphthong with a sequence of /a/ and /i/. sai 'shop'.
- /am/ A diphthong with a sequence of /a/ and syllabic m. a yam 'time', gam-eu 'to offer money or an animal'.

3. Tones

Each syllable is spoken on one of the three level tones if the vowel is oral, or one of the two level tones if the vowel is laryngealized. The tone marks indicate both the nature of the vowel (whether oral or laryngealized) and the pitch (high, mid or low).

- /~/ A high tone. a baw 'tree', a ba 'a shadow'.
- // A mid tone, represented by no tone mark. baw-eu 'to blow'. yaw ba 'white'.
- /_/ A low tone. baw-eu 'to discuss', yaw ba 'thin'

3.3 There is a difference in the frequency of the occurrence of the various tones. I made a tone count in three Akha texts, and got the following results:

	ORAL	VOWELS		LARYNGEAL		TOTAL
	High	Mid	Low	Mid	Low	
A story	214	86	148	23	41	512
A conversation	272	323	324	42	83	1045
Ceremonial language	148	51	104	8	27	338
TOTALS:	634	460	576	73	151	1895

The percentage of the occurrence of the tones:

Oral high	.34	Laryngealized mid	.04
Oral mid	.24	Laryngealized low	.08
Oral low	.30	TOTAL LARYNGEALIZED	.12
TOTAL ORAL	.88		

3.4 There is no restriction within the syllable or syllables where the tones can occur.

One syllable words:

	Nouns		Verbs
High oral	nym house	maw-eu	to see
Mid oral	pu village	haw-eu	to look
Low oral	cu hot spring	daw-eu	to wait
Mid laryngeal	ka crossbow	po-eu	to search
Low laryngeal	neh spirit	ba-eu	to carry

Two syllable words with the same tone on both syllables:

	Nouns		Verbs
a ba	shadow	jaw pa -eu	to move
ba la	moon	teh zaw-eu	to chase and make fly
gaw yoe	staff	di tah-eu	to strike and hit
ba k'o	skin, bark	po da-eu	to roll up onto
ci myeh	goat	ba pu-eu	to throw into

Two syllable words with different tones:

	Nouns		Verbs
da la	a wooden scoop	jaw ji -eu	to move a short distance
da k'eu	a bone ornament	jaw gaw-eu	to live with another
da dza	a measuring stick for a corpse	jaw dzaw-eu	to live in a certain pattern
da kaw	a stick	jaw tsoe-eu	to block the way
ka the	a pineapple	teh do -eu	to chase out
ka pa	a lily	teh k'o-eu	to chase out
ka yah	type of plant	teh mi-eu	to chase and catch
ka ca	type of tree	teh ka-eu	to chase a long way
je caw	an abnormal animal	di pa-eu	to strike and break
ku tsa	a spoon	di seh-eu	to strike and kill
kaw lah	a neck	di gah -eu	to hit and cause to spin
da yah	a guest	di ga-eu	to hit and cause to fall
ca pyeh	a strand of braided hair	po k'o-eu	to find and take back
jeh bym	a pile	po maw-eu	to seek and find
k'a sa	a vegetable tray	po ka-eu	to roll down
deu ha	an ax	po ui -eu	to gather
la mya	a knot in wood	ba byaw-eu	to raise (as raise one's arm)
la ma	a thumb	ba dzeh-eu	to carry & cover something

Three syllable words are formed of:

two syllable words with an extra syllable added to show the color:

tah ceh nyoe green magpie as opposed to: tah ceh red billed magpie

two syllable words where one is reduplicated in some form.

hu nah hu the day before yesterday as opposed to: hu nah yesterday

two syllable words with an extra syllable added to make it more specific:

A ka ma Akha woman A ka za Akha people

A ka daw Akha language A ka Akha

Three syllables that do not represent any of the above:

mah sha law donkey

Four syllable words are formed of:

two pairs of two syllable words in close juncture

mi tsa pu lu a mound of dirt

a couplet

ku pyu ku tsa sweat (especially when flowing profusely)

three syllables with reduplication of ozone of them:

a pa pa ku dry leaves on the ground

four syllables that do not represent any of the above:

tseh ma leh jaw a type of leopard

4. Syllable formation

Syllable structure is CV, except when one or more vowel clitics are added. Then it becomes CVV, or CVVV. There are no glottal stops or other consonants between these vowels. In the orthography hyphens are used between the vowels of the syllable and the vowel or vowels, of the clitic, due to the fact initial glottal stops are indicated by zero.

For example, /yaw^ha/ 'to be wet' is written 'haw a. if the second vowel should be a clitic, therefore, with no glottal stop, it would be written with a hyphen, yaw-a to obviate confusion on the part of the reader.

Not all consonants can occur with all vowels. the possible CV combinations are shown below.

Tone as such is not included in this chart, since it does not seem to be an important factor in the determination of which consonants can occur with which vowels. Whether or not the vowel is oral or laryngealized, however, is a very important feature of the possible combinations.

POSSIBLE CV COMBINATIONS WITH ORAL VOWELS

	i	e	eh	a	oi	oe	ui	eu	u	o	ah
p	pi		peh	pa		poe	pui	peu	pu	po	pah
t	ti	te	teh	ta		toe	(n)	teu	tu	to	tah
k	(b)	(b)	keh	ka	koi		kui	keu	ku		kah
k'			k'eh	k'a		k'oe		k'eu		k'o	k'ah
b	bi	be	beh	ba	boi	boe	bui	beu	bu	bo	bah
d	di	de	deh	da	doi	doe	dui	deu	du	do	dah
g			geh	ga			gui	geu	gu	go	gah
g'			g'eh	g'a		g'oe		g'eu		g'o	g'ah
m	mi		meh	ma		moe	mui	meu	mu	mo	mah
n	ni	ne	neh	na		noe	nui	neu		no	nah
ng			ngeh	nga		ngoe		ngeu		ngo	
l	li	le	leh	la	loi	loe	lui	leu	lu	lo	lah
s	si		seh	sa	soi	soe	sui	seu	su	so	sah
sh	shi	she	sheh	sha	shoi	shoe	shui	sheu	shu	sho	shah
c	ci	ce	ceh	ca	coi	coe	cui	ceu	cu	co	cah
ts	tsi	tse	tseh	tsa		tsoe	tsui	tseu	tsu	tso	tsah
z	zi		zeh	za			zui	zeu	zu	zo	zah
y			yeh	ya		yoe	yui	yeu	yu	yo	yah
j	ji	je	jeh	ja		joe	jui	jeu	ju	jo	jah
dz	dzi	dze	dzeh	dza		dzoe		dzeu	dzu	dzo	dzah
h	hi	(b)	heh	ha		hoe	hui		hu	ho	hah
py			pyeh	pya				(n)	pyu		(n)
by		bye	byeh	bya		byoe			byu		byah
my			myeh	mya							myah
ny	nyi		nyeh	nya	nyoi	nyoe				nyo	
?			eh	a	oi	oe	ui	eu	u	o	ah
cl	-l		-eh	-a				-eu		-o	-ah

POSSIBLE CV COMBINATIONS continued

	Oral		Laryngealized vowels								
	aw	m	i	eh	a	oe	ui	eu	u	o	aw
p	paw			peh	pa		pui		pu	po	paw
t	taw	tm	ti	teh	tabya	toe	tui	teu	tu	to	taw
k	kaw	km			ka			keu	ku	ko	kaw
k'	k'aw	k'm		k'eh	k'a	k'oe		k'eu		k'o	k'aw
b	baw		bi	beh	ba	boe	bui	beu	bu	bo	baw
d	daw	dm	di	deh	da		dui	deu	du	do	daw
g	gaw	gm			ga		gui	geu	gu	(n)	gaw
g'	g'aw	g'm		g'eh	g'a					g'o	g'aw
m	maw		mi	meh	ma			meu	mu	mo	maw
n	naw	nm	ni	neh	na	noe	nui			no	naw
ng	ngaw			ngeh	nga			ngeu		ngo	ngaw
l	law	lm	li	leh	la	loe	lui	leu	lu	lo	law
s	saw	sm	si	seh	sa			seu	su	so	saw
sh	shaw	shm	shi	sheh	sha		shui	sheu	shu	sho	shaw
c	caw	cm	ci	ceh	ca	coe	cui	ceu	cu	co	caw
ts	tsaw	tsm	tsi	tseh	tsa		tsui	tseu	tsu	tso	tsaw
z	zaw	zm	zi		za		zui	zeu	zu	zo	zaw
y	yaw	ym		yeh	ya		yui	yeu	yu	yo	yaw
j	jaw	jm	ji	jeh	ja		jui	jeu	ju	jo	jaw
dz	dzaw	dzm	dzi	dzeh	dza		dzui	dzeu	dzu	dzo	dzaw
h	haw	hm									haw
py	pyaw	pym		pyeh	pya	pyoe		pyeu			pyaw
by	baw	bym		byeh	bya			(n)	byu	byo	byaw
my	myaw	mym		myeh	mya			myeu		myo	myaw
ny	nyaw	nym	nyi	nyeh	nya			nyeu		nyo	nyaw
?	aw	m				oe		eu	u	o	aw
cl	-aw	-m			-a						

The consonants are listed on the left. The last entry under consonants, cl, stands for clitic. That is the vowel can act as a clitic. When (n) occurs in the table of possible combinations, it means that the combinations occur only in Akha names. Where (b) is written it indicates that the pattern occurs only in borrowed words.

There are a few other possible combinations that do not fit into the chart. Under the laryngealized vowels, the following occur in one word each: le bye soi and nm. However, there seems to be some dialectical differentiation with these more marginal sounds, which leads me to believe that they might be on the way out.

There are other possible combinations, which are onomatopoeic. The majority of these are found in either the names for birds, where the name follows the call of the bird, or in the description of a sound, as a wild boar eating (cawm, cawm).

In borrowed words the following combinations are also possible in some speaker's pronunciation: bao, dao, sai, kam, dam, mam, lam, yam, jam, vi, va, and gam, only the last vowel is laryngealized.

In borrowed words Akhas differ widely in both their ability to pronounce certain CV combinations, and in the amount of modification they give it to fit into the Akha pattern better. For example, they borrow the term for agreement from Shan, sa ca (the first tone rises, the second is high level, the consonant c is unaspirated).

Since Akhas have the unaspirated voiceless alveopalatal affricate only before laryngealized vowels, which occur only on mid or low tones, they are left with a difficult choice. For them the easiest way to pronounce it is to change the c to a voiced alveopalatal affricate, and say both syllables on the high tone 'sa ja' which most of them do. Some try to make the Shan consonant, and in the process tend to change the quality of the vowel a bit to something close to a laryngealized quality, and thus produce both a consonant and vowel which are neither Shan nor Akha.

There are two types of ellipsis in Akha. In the first the consonant is dropped, and the vowel that was following that consonant joins the preceding syllable as a clitic:
Naw ma le-a ma la lu-a 'If you don't go, it won't do at all'.

In this example there is an ellipsis of /n/ following /le/. Without the ellipsis it would read: le na ma la
It can also be said without ellipsis.

Also mi neh, becomes mi-eh (because) shaw jeh ni becomes shaw jeh-I (clean), etc. or they can be said in full form, depending on the speaker.

The second kind of ellipsis is not so common. It is for the consonant to be replaced by a glottal stop:
A teh law leh. Said, "Don't get in a rush". This example shows a change of /t/ to /ʔ/ in the first consonant, which would normally read: Ta teh law leh'

5. Phonological Change

In the Jeu g'oe (Puli) dialect of Akha, which is analyzed above, there appears to be phonological change taking place.

5.1 Consonants

5.1.1 There is free variation in the palatalized bilabial stops, so some say pl instead of py, bl instead of by and ml instead of my. This constitutes a pattern, so that if a speaker says one stop a certain way, he will pronounce the others according to the same pattern.

There are some Akhas in Burma and Thailand who have changed /x/ to /h/, so that /xa la/ 'tiger', becomes /ha la/. In fast speech I have noted the tendency of some informants (especially from Jaw seu village) to make this shift. In slow or deliberate speech however they say /x/.

5.12 There is evidently a pattern of change in the affricates and fricatives, especially in the alveolar and alveopalatal areas. For example, those in the south tend to have one phoneme for both /ts/ and /c/, namely /c/. Also both /dz/ and /j/ become /j/, /z/ and /y/ become /y/, and /s/ and /š/ become /š/.

In this last change there tends to be some free fluctuation. This may be due to the fact that s and š are now allophones of a single phoneme.

In the North (China Region), the Na daw villagers have separate phonemes for /ts/ and /c/, /dz/ and /j/, /z/ and /y/, and /s/ and /š/. Also they use the /g/ (g'-) phoneme for some words that the Central area Akhas use /z/ for. For 'pig' they say 'a g'a', whereas the central area says 'a za', and in the South they say 'a ya'. This can be contrasted with Lahu 'va?' and the Burmese we'.

The same basic pattern holds true for the word 'to buy': North- g'eu-eu, Central –zeu-eu, South-yeu-eu, Lahu –vui ve.

The North dialect (Na daw) does not combine the two phonemes /g/ and /z/, since they have many minimal pairs with both /g/ and /z/. However, this may reflect a somewhat older pronunciation. The merging of the phonemes as seen in the south, may be the direction of the future. This theory is reinforced by the fact that the children's speech of the Central area they tend to merge the alveolar affricates and fricatives with the alveopalatals, much in the same way the speakers in the south do.

It thus appears that there is a phonological drift toward simplification, so that someday the consonants /ts/, /dz/, /s/ and /z/ may be lost in Akha. It may also develop that /x/ and /h/ will merge into one consonant, although this will probably take longer.

5.2. Vowels

5.21 There is some free variation between /u/ and /o/ in the Jiu g'oe dialect. For example, for 'mud wasps' some say 'sho ma na baw', and others say 'shu ma na baw'. They have no problem understanding each other, nor do they laugh at the other person when he gives a different pronunciation.

There are a very few instances where there is free variation between oral and laryngealized vowels when following voiced consonants. Some say 'zui –eu' and others say 'zui-eu, for to discipline a child'.

5.22 There may be a pattern of drift developing in the high unrounded front, and in the high unrounded back vowels. The pattern is not as clear as the consonants, however, since here there are no geographical or age restrictions. For 'water' some say 'i cu', while others say 'ui cu'. In Lahu they say 'i-ka', and in Burmese 'ye'. (Note in Burmese there is no high back unrounded vowel.) In one Lahu dialect, Yellow Lahu, they have high unrounded front vowels, but no high unrounded back vowels.

Akhas in the North, when speaking of murky water, say 'g'ui ne'. The first syllable of this, except for the high tone, is the same as the Lahu word for liquid, 'g'ui'. In Central and Southern speech Akhas say either 'ui ne' or 'i'ne'. This may show that the drift was first of all from 'g'ui' to 'ui', and then to 'i'. As far as I can tell the drift occurs only when the vowel in question follows an initial glottal stop.

A type of drift which may be related to the above is this: in the North they say 'zui sha zi tau' for 'very poor person', whereas in the Central and Southern areas they say 'i sha i tau'. In the North and Central areas they say 'zi-eu', 'to be firm', but in the south some say 'i-eu' thus substituting an initial glottal stop for a /z/ before /i/.

5.3 Tones

Comparatively there does not appear to be as much free variation or drift in tone as there is in the consonants and vowels. What difference there is usually from borrowed words. For example, the word 'teacher' borrowed from Shan, is said 'sa la' (low tone) by many, but 'sa la' (high tone) by others, especially in the Eastern Section of Kengtung State, Burma.

If there is a general trend, it might be that the middle tone of the oral vowels is on the way in. In the special language used in repeating the sacred legends and for ceremonial purposes it is almost all on the high or low tones. If this is the direction of time in Akha, on the surface it does not appear to be toward simplification, but it is difficult to determine whether or not it is perhaps leading to a general simplification of the tonal system in the long run.

In the next 40 or 50 years fairly clear indications of phonological drift should be seen. I believe it will be mostly in the consonants, with some change in the vowels, and the least change of all in tone.

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AKHA RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

GENERAL CHARACTER OF RELIGION

To Akhas, religion involves about everything that has to do with ancestors, rice and spirits. they use the term for ancestors (a poe a pi) and 'God' (a poe mi yeh) almost synonymously. When carefully questioned they will differentiate, but in practice there is a thin, if not at times almost invisible line dividing them.

Concerning rice, a baw A eu (K-2's father) told me that when the Akha political organisation was formed, Sala Lah zeh, then as acting head of it, asked him what the most important thing was to Akhas, since they wanted to make an emblem or symbol for their group. The old man thought about it for several days and finally told him that paddy (unhusked rice) was the most important thing to Akhas. So they made an emblem with several paddy ears on it. The matter of getting enough paddy is closely related to the ancestors and the spirits.

As for the spirits, everything in their lives is permeated with the fear of offending spirits. Of course, there are also those spirits which are begged for help, as when the men go hunting, or when one's animal is lost. But for the most part they seek to propitiate the spirits who are causing sickness by offering them certain sacrifices.

The Akha word for religion is zah. To follow a certain religion is zah tau eu. The second part of the word means 'to pack a load', as by horse or oxen, or in a truck. The idea is that you 'carry' the religion by following the various customs, making the proper sacrifices, and observing the proper taboos.

Akhas believe that the idea of the ancestor shrine (a poe paw law) was given by 'God' (a poe mi yeh) through Zeu to and To ma. Others say, however, that the ancestor shrine and all of the 'religion' (zah) were given through Jaw bah. In their proverbs (daw da) they say that Akhas are to keep the Akha 'religion' only until fifty generations after Sm mi o. When I ask Akhas why they do not change their religion now, since more than fifty generations have gone by since Sm mi o, they say, "But we don't know what other religion we can follow- our religion is all we know". Some say that this proverb is the reason why there are so many Akhas who are now becoming Buddhists, Catholics and Baptists. " If it were not for what Jaw bah said, then no one would leave the Akha religion".

Legend about religion

There is a legend they have which says that when 'God' was distributing religions to the various tribes, representatives of each tribe were present, including an Akha man. But the Akha woman was too bashful to come, since she had no clothes. So after the others got their religion and had left, the Akha woman came in. 'God' asked her why she was late, and she said she was bashful about coming with no clothes.

So God took a cloth money bag (paw beh) and cut the end of it off and threw it to her and said, " Here, wear this". (The two have definite similarities). The Akhas go on to say, "Thus Akha women got their skirts, and Akha men got the religion". They believe therefore, that if a woman wants to know anything about religion, she must ask the men, since women cannot know anything about it, and for the most part cannot do anything in it.

Potency of religious belief

In 1965 K-29 told me something an Akha man told him. That man had been in an Akha village (upper Ba li) when a group of Chinese KMT soldiers were camping up at the village gate. They had been on an expedition of pig buying, and had about twenty pigs. There were four soldiers left up near the village gate, and seven went and stayed in the home of Shaw dze pya, the village priest (dzoe ma). Some of the village children came running to the village priest and told him that the soldiers were taking wooden decorations off the village spirit gate and using them in their fire for cooking rice and curry. The village priest hurried up and saw what they were doing, so he told them they would have to quit, and he would fine them 'ti ceh' (20 or 25 pyas – 5 cents). Actually he wanted to fine them more since it meant that the villagers would have to have another ceremony at the gate, and offer a pig, a chicken, etc. But he was afraid to do so.

When he asked the soldiers for the money, however, they beat him and told him he was crazy to ask for money for a silly ceremony. He was angry. He returned to his house, and while spilling a little liquor he recited all of his genealogy, beginning with 'M ma m g'ah' right down to his father. Then he asked all of the ancestors and 'God' (a poe mi yeh) to 'look and help'. He then took up his machete, and he and his son killed all seven men in his home, and then went up and killed the four men at the gate. While killing them, the KMT soldiers were powerless to do anything. Even though some of them were holding guns in their hands they could not shoot. And when they saw their friends being killed right before their eyes they could do nothing to help.

K-29 did not believe this at first, so he asked several different people from that village, and they all substantiated the story. He said that it happened about 1955. Whether this story is true or not, it points up the terrific respect with which they hold their ancestors, and the power they believe they can receive through them.

Those indifferent to the religion

There are those of course, who are indifferent to the religion (zah). Such cannot live in an Akha village, 'since they are no longer Akhas'. The Akhas say such people 'are like bats' (boe ha), neither this nor that. For the most part these are the ones who are opium smokers who want to live near the source of supply, as in Kengtung, Loimwe, etc. Or they may be those who have had enough education to feel they are superior to other Akhas and thus drop the religion. Then too there has been quite a group who has started to 'carry the Shan religion', meaning that they have become Buddhists, though very nominally so. One of them (Li hui) has his ancestor shrine hidden out in the jungle near Ya ka, so that at a moment's notice he can take it and move to an Akha village, where he can again 'carry the Akha religion'.

Akhas for the most part, are afraid of breaking the religion that has been handed down through their ancestors to them. The Akhas feel they have many stories of terrible sicknesses and deaths and other misfortunes that have befallen such people.

COSMOLOGY

To give something of their cosmological view, Akhas believe that first of all the sky (m) was created by 'God' (a poe mi yeh). The earth was created by Ja bi oe lah, a creature, evidently created by God. The sky (m) is more or less the dwelling place of powerful 'owner-spirits' (yah sah). These are supernatural beings of a high order, but still under God. The world is the dwelling place for people. Then the underworld (mi o) is the dwelling place for the spirits. It is to this 'underworld' shamans go when they go into a trance.

Akhas believe there is a place roughly equivalent to 'hell' which they call the 'great lake of boiling blood' (shi bui lah ma), or great lake of fire (mi dza lah ma). They say that this is for all human rejects (tsaw caw), and those who have big sins, such as those who have murdered others. They further say that there is a contraption over it – kind of like their village gate so that a person can pull himself up out of the boiling blood and hang there, but as his arms get tired he falls back into it. When he cannot stand it anymore, he pulls himself back up, and thus it continues for ever. They say it is terrible there. It is not really living, and yet not really dying. Others have told me that this hell is really the same as saying 'below Tah pah' and when speaking of the souls that die and can never get up past Tah pah, either due to twins, parents of twins, or murderers.

MYTHOLOGY

1. The sky

Akhas have a rich mythology. In it they tell how the sky (m) 'appeared' first. The one who created the sky is called either 'God' (a poe mi yeh), or sah pa a g'ah, or m g'ah. There does not seem to be much elaboration as to how it appeared.

From a baw A eu (K-2's father) I got the following, which I have not been able to corroborate from others, although I have not heard anyone say, "That is wrong", but simply, "I don't know enough about it to say".

He said that first of all, before all else, there was a poe mi yeh. he was not in heaven or on earth, since there was neither then. But he thought it was not good to live alone, so he created M g'ah, the second name in the full genealogy of all Akha men. M g'ah is considered to be 'God's child'. Everyone on earth is descended from him.

Actually, God had nine sons, all known as 'children of the sky' (m eu za). But only one of them, M g'ah, from whom both men and spirits are descended, and children that went on having progeny. Since all others are considered 'no-son persons' (shm byeh) they are all considered to be bad, and only M g'ah is good. However, when there is a serious illness in the household, a spirit priest (boe maw) who knows how to do so, will repeat the names of all of them. They are all males as far as I can tell. They are:

1. M sa whose son is Sa tseh is the spirit owner (yaw sah for leprosy. You can often hear him calling a na I at night, and then you don't go back to sleep. When you hear this, it is not just one person who hears it, but the whole village. Since the spirit owner (yah sah is still in pain, leprosy cannot be cured. Sa lah is another son who is the spirit owner (yaw sah) of epilepsy. He still suffers from it.
2. M na, whose sn Na lah is the spirit owner (yah sah) for sores and wounds. he sis still full of sores and wounds himself.
3. M pyu, whose son Pyu km is the spirit owner of those who cannot have children. he never had a child. he is the wind, and he blows trees over. he will twist the branches of the upper part of the tree together. he is know as the spirit owner for all no-son people. (shm byeh).
4. M yeh, whose children Yeh di a deh and Yeh di a tsaw, were the first to live and the first to die. They are the spirit owners of maw dzm wheer two people living under the same ancestor altar die within a cycle of days. He also had a daughter called Yeh bo who is the spirit owner of all werewolves (la pya) and vampires (pi seu).
5. M nah whose son Nah yaw is the spirit owner that is the base of the post (bah zeu) to which the buffalo is tied when they are going to offer it to a dead elder. he keeps the buffalo from pulling the post out of the ground as it thrashes around.
6. M g'ah whose son G'ah zi is the spirit owner who sots on top of the post (bah zeu – see above) and watches the proceedings. Before killing the buffalo, the spirit priest (boe maw) must call this spirit owner to the spot. The other son is G'ah ne, from whom all people and spirits are descended.
7. M dzoe lines above the sky and just below God. he has great power. he is lie the officer in the sky (bo mu which major that is one with very high rank and authority).
8. M pi, whose sons Pi tso and Pi sa (and some say Pi byeh) were the Akha's rulers, and led them in war. They lived at first in the sky. God told them not to go down to earth, but they disobeyed and came down. They could make guns and wonderful things.
9. M dze lives at the edge of the sky, and thus the name (dze=edge). His daughter, Dze hm, is the spirit owner in charge of dying cloth indigo. I have also heard that she watches over paddy and flowers.

2. M ma

The one called M ma does not seem to be a personality, as M g'ah, but seems to be all of creation, including the soil, trees, clouds, animals, etc. M ma is said to have had children, but I am not sure just how many- Akhas differ on this somewhat.

1. Ma dza is a daughter who can only speak in a mumble, so people cannot understand her. They call her mumbler (a ka). The father cannot talk at all. so he is dumb (a dzaw). People don't much about her except God created her. She will never die. Since she has no progeny she is very bad (doe dui dui-eu).
2. Ma deu is the twin sister of Ma dza, and the mother of all human rejects (twins, those with a harelip, extra thumb or toe or the like). It is bad to name a child Sa deu, but some people don't know any better and name their child that.
3. Ma jui is a son who is dumb (a dzaw) like his father, so we cannot know what he says.
4. Ma de is a son who is the spirit owner of all those missing a hand or arm or finger when they are born (la dah).
5. Ma shm is another son. (Note: K-29 and another man felt these last two names were extra and just made up by the informant).

There is another personality, which fits in somewhere here, named Da o mi tsu a ma. She lives in the very bottom of the world. They will call her when someone drowns. Also, they ask her to help them when a village catches fire, and she will help so that the houses will not burn.

There is another personality, which is probably different from the one above, although perhaps related. She is called grandmother of us all (a pi pi ta). In Shan they call her Meh na sam pyu u. She may be Chinese, or perhaps the same as Tah pah a ma or perhaps the daughter of a baw ja deh. her name occurs in proverbs and also in poetic chants (sha zi zi eu). The whole concept may be borrowed from the Shans. Or they may be mixing up something of an Akha background with a particular Shan legend personality. I could not find out.

3. Creation myth

The have a very long and involved proverb or legend. (daw da) concerning the creation of the things on the world, called 'ga zah ga-eu'. It tells in detail how Ja bi oe lah, went about creating things on the earth. First of all three white rocks appeared. Then water came out of the rocks, and below where the water flowed, three stems of grass (da zaw) appeared. Next wild raspberry bushes appeared, and then a plant they call ju do. They use it for medicine, and also eat it with chopped up meat. It is somewhat bitter.

Next the za ka type of bamboo appeared, and after that the za yeh variety of bamboo. Next came a kind of sweet thatch (paw pi) that they use in their curries. There is one long section in this proverb on all the plants.

The next section deals with the animals. It says that first was the house swift (jaw ji jaw g'a). The way the legend goes is that it was first to fall from the sky. The first living beings to come out of the earth were ant-termites (a I a ho). Then it goes on to give the order in which all the other animals and insects appeared (seu le-eu).

How all of this ties in with M g'ah I am not sure. But they say that when M g'ah was first on earth there was nothing her. There was no paddy, and everyone had to eat a law is a (a type of fruit that grows wild). But M g'ah was not satisfied, so he talked to God about it. God told him to sleep three times a day and think about it. "When you wake up, jump up and see what you can see". Here I got different versions. I believe it is a matter of the legend either petering out, or becoming so obscure that they do not interpret it in the same way. What two men (K-28 and 29) said was that "When M g'ah did what God told him to do, he saw the earth and the things on it created- but the earth was still very small. However the earth kept shaking and gradually grew."

4. Ja bi oe lah

How this fits in with Ja bi oe lah is not explained, although he is still the one considered to be the creator of the world and things of the world. They say that although he has disappeared (in the section on death it will be noted that they say, Ja bi oe lah had to die too), his footprints are still here in many areas (meaning Kengtung State). There are also handprints, plus the print where he sat down on a rock. I note that K-29 said the Shans call him Ai heh lo-o, but I do not think he is necessarily borrowed from the Shans.

The Akhas say that Ja bi oe lah first of all lived with God. Then God told him to give his right to rule (dzoe dza) to a Chinese man. Ja bi oe lah did not want to give it to the man God indicated, however, since he personally liked that man's younger brother much more. This eventually led to the brothers arguing over who was going to rule.

Finally they agreed that they would plant flowers, and the one whose plants produced flowers would rule. During the night the older brother's plant came up, and it was golden. There were also flowers on it. The younger brother's plant also came up, and it was silver, but there were no flowers on it. So during the night Ja bi oe lah took the flowers from the older brother's golden plant and put them on the silver plant of the younger brother. Since he lied he eventually had to die. But not just yet.

First of all he went around offering to teach people his wisdom, but since he was a terrific eater, they were afraid that could not feed him. He is said to have eaten at each meal 100 pigs, 100 chickens and 100 buffaloes. When he went to the Akhas and asked them if they wouldn't like to learn his wisdom they were sure they couldn't feed him, so they said "We are too busy planting paddy, and don't have time". So Ja bi oe lah pronounced a curse on them. "All right, always be busy with your work having to do with paddy". And to this day they are.

Next he went to the Mon-Khmer (A boe) and offered to teach his wisdom if they would feed him, but they said they were busy making baskets, so he cursed them. "All right, always be busy making baskets". When he went to the Shans they said, "We're sorry, but we're busy making paddy terraces", so he cursed them by saying, "Always be making and ploughing your terraces". Finally Ja bi oe lah went to the white man's country, and the white man was willing to feed him the number of animals he needed to consume, so he taught white men of his wisdom. "And that is why you white people can make typewriters, cars, planes, radios etc., because Ja bi oe lah taught you."

Although they believe that Ja bi oe lah died while he was in white man's country (for lying about the flowers), they believe his spirit owner (yaw sah) still comes down during the ya ci ci-eu ancestor offering, to see who has been born, who has died, and generally how people are getting along.

5. Akha history

Going back to M g'ah, when people-spirits (since they were not separated yet), began multiplying, they began to live in certain big countries (meu). The first country was called Na ne meu – country of the sun. Below that was Na na meu- country of the moon. Below that was Ba da meu. Originally it was made by the spirits, but eventually both spirits and people lived there. Then came Dzah ja meu, where the Chinese live. The Akhas say that originally their ancestors knew of only two countries: China and Burma. In China there were "twelve times twelve kings and their kingdoms", whereas in Burma, which was much smaller, there were just "twelve kings and their kingdoms". Then below that was Ja deh meu, where Chinese, Akhas, and other groups lived. This is important country in Akha mythology. It is named after their culture hero, a baw Ja deh.

It was during this general period that two sons of M pi, named Pi tso and Pi sa, were appointed by God to rule the Akhas. God told them to stay in the sky and rule, but they felt they knew everything and did not need God, so they came down to China, to the Dzah ja meu (see above). They were extremely powerful. They could make two mountains fight. They could make great fissures in the earth with their arms. God called them to come back, but they said they didn't need to, they were as smart as God and didn't need him.

These two brothers has raised a large army. They had their home in Dzah ja meu, but they also had many troops in Ja deh meu, and it was while they were visiting their troops there, God called them back. Since they would not come back on their won God sent a man to catch them , and bring them back, but he couldn't. So he sent a pig, but neither could the pig catch them and bring them back to God. Nothing he sent worked.

So finally God used a shaft of sunlight and the wind to bring them back. They are the spirit-owners (yaw sah) of lightning bolts (tso) and thunder(m myaw myaw-eu). Since the two ruler-generals were thus taken back by God, Akhas can no longer fight wars. Also all the wonderful things that the brothers and their troops took down to Ja deh meu disappeared- "since our rulers disappeared". Those items include: ploughs, radios (some kind of magical talking device is meant, which they equate with radios today), books written on buffalo skins, and other wonderful things.

When the rulers were called back, the Akhas felt that they should eat the book written on the buffalo skins, "so that we can remember it in our stomachs". This, they believe. is the reason they have no books. Also, they believe quite strongly that since their ancestors had this book, which originally came from God, in their stomachs, their religion must be from God. Of course they also believe that since they lost their two rulers, they are not as advanced as other people, and do not have the material advantages others have.

In trying to understand the Akha's concept of their past and the development of their culture, I find that most of their concepts are based upon individual myths. Often of course, these myths are contradictory, to a westerner at least. But this does not bother them. Each myth is a separate entity to them, and if it holds together within itself, that is sufficient. I mention this to partly explain why I have not been able to give a chronological account of their 'history' of their religion. I should also say that there are often great variations in the myths from area to area, although usually the basic themes are the same.

In the Akha genealogy, Neh beh is the name which appears tenth. He is said to have been the first one who was really able to think. Before he came, nothing had been named, so he gave names to everything. Also he was able tot ell what things were still needed, so he told God to create the things that were needed, and God did. It was during Neh beh's life that people could begin to distinguish between people and spirits.

Sm mi o was Neh beh's grandson, and one of the most important names in the genealogy. As a matter of fact, for all practical purposes they generally start giving their genealogy from him. At first he and his brother (whose name is not known) lived with God. They asked God for some seeds, so God gave them three each. They planted them, and when they came up Sm mi o stole his brother's plants. God cursed him by saying, "All right, be a thief (sm k'oe)", thus the name Sm mi o. he then came to earth to look at people, which he asked for in the first place. He, therefore, became father of all races that are in the world.

Dzoe tsh psh, also called Tah pah, or Tah pah ma, is also extremely important in Akha genealogy. I'm not sure whether the Akhas consider her to be fully female, or bisexual or what. Also, I get different reports on her. That is, some say that her husband was the first to die of smallpox, and thus his name could not be included in the genealogy, so hers was read as in the first case of doing this. However, this does not agree with the fact that her name fits in with the name above it as if it were a man's name. Others say that she had children born to her from her hair, her fingers and toes, everywhere. But they also say that she had a total of seven sons- four spirits, and three humans. She had two breasts on the front for the humans, and nine breasts on the back for the spirits.

When I get to Akha genealogies they do not agree with the statement that she had three human sons. There are the following:

Tah pah mah	The main branch of Akhas are from him.
Tah pah tsoe	Akhui are from him
Tah pah sha	The G'oe lah clan is from him
Tah pah coe	The Byeh tse clan is from him
Tah pah yu	The Leu ceu clan is from him
Tah pah zeu	

I'm not sure about the last son, and have no genealogy for him. A bw A tu of Na daw told me of him. I have also learned (from K-29 and his friend) that the following clans divide after Tah pah: Law bi, Nyi bah, Jeh lui, and Ba k'a. Whether any of these might be under Tah pah zeu or not I do not know. Also, whether some of them might be included with another son of Tah pah already listed above or not, I do not know. I have not been able to get genealogies for these.

6. Humans and spirits divide.

During the period of Tah pah and her children, it was somewhat of a golden age for the Akhas. Everything could speak – a blade of grass, a tree, birds, animals, etc., which explains why in their stories (a poe daw oe) they have animals speaking. They believe that during this time, “before humans and spirits”, animals spoke.

Humans and spirits had a running argument as to just whose mother Tah pah was, both claiming her as their own. It was finally decided that when she died if she died facing the spirits, she would be the mother of the spirits, and they would bury her. If she died facing the humans, she would be their mother, and they would be responsible for burying her.

When she actually died, she was facing the spirits, but since the humans were so clever, they quickly turned her body over to face their direction before the spirits could see what happened. After they turned the body over to face their direction, they called the spirits and pointed it out to them, and the spirits and to admit she was the mother of humans after all. So it devolved upon the humans to bury her, and from the customs started in burying her, Akhas get many of their burial customs to this day, they say.

First of all they offered (ya-eu) a buffalo for her, and that is why people must do this until this day. Then they started the 'nm ka tsah-eu' ceremony (see under death for a description), which they also do to this day. Also, the first great 'spirit priest' named To ma called nine of his 'assistant spirit priests' (pi za) to repeat the spirit incantations (neh to-eu) for Tah pah. So from then on Akhas have spirit priests repeat the spirit incantations when people die. (For the nine men and their jobs, see under religious practitioners). To this day when a spirit priest kills a buffalo and repeat the spirit incantations, when he finishes he divides up twenty-seven small pieces for the nine assistants. Nine pieces from the ear, nine from the snout, and nine from the liver.

But not too long after the mother's death, the golden age began to fall apart. Although humans and spirits lived in the same house, they began to argue. Part of the argument came from the fact that they worked on their fields at different times; humans in the daylight hours, and spirits at night. So at night when the spirits went to their fields, they discovered that humans had stolen a cucumber they were especially saving for seed. When humans went out to their fields in the daytime and the spirits stayed home, humans came home to find the chicken eggs they were saving had disappeared.

Not only was there trouble between humans and spirits. Up to this time tigers and domesticated livestock stayed in the same pen, hawks and chickens slept the night in the same basket, etc. The arguments of the humans and spirits somehow affected the animals so that finally there was a breach. Just as humans and spirits separated, hawks and chickens separated, hawks and chickens separated, etc. Today they are all deadly enemies to the group they separated from.

When the humans and spirits separated, they made an agreement- at least humans consider it to be a kind of agreement, even though I do not think they say that the spirits ever really concurred with it. The idea was that the spirits were never to go where people lived. This is the reason for the 'village gate', to show spirits where people live, so the spirits will stay out.

7. Akha ruler Jaw bah

The last two rulers among the Akhas were Jaw bah and his son Bah jui. Jaw bah was the son of Jeu jaw (father of the A jaw clan), the son of Dzah jeu. They lived in Ja deh meu, in China. All of the A jaw clan reads their genealogy to this day through these two men.

The Akhas felt that these two, and later the grandson, to a limited degree at least, got kind of a special dispensation from God to rule. They fell out rulers (sah pa ga le-eu), which is much the pattern of being called to be a spirit priest (boe maw ga le-eu). According to their legends, Jaw bah was a massive man who never cut his hair, but allowed it to fall down over his face and body as a protective covering. He was an extremely powerful ruler, and the Akhas suffered a great deal from him- and yet they are also very proud of him. He is said to have ruled over the Chinese, Thai, Shan, Mon-Khmer (A boe), Lahus, etc. But he did not rule over the Indians (our legends have nothing about his ruling over the Indians).

He had millions (ti tah) of armed troops. These various races gave him the following tribute yearly: Mon-Khmer- each village gave him a basket full of meat from rodents (ho ca ho ko). If they did not give this, Jaw bah would cause all the rodents to disappear from the jungle around their villages. Each village of the Shans gave nine bamboo containers of sour fish. If they didn't Jaw bah would cause all the fish to disappear in their streams. Each village of the Thai had to give a fluffy blanket (ma sa bui bo) each year. If they did not, he made them sick, and also sent his warriors to kill them.

Each village of the Chinese (Poe nyoe) had to give a Chinese hair blanket each year to Jaw bah. If they did not he would not let the Chinese be sub-rulers under him. Each village of Akhas had to give him a certain amount (ti ga) of silver each year. If they did not give it, he tied them up.

Each village of the Burmese had to give a machete and spear (gah) each year. If they didn't he would kill them, or some say put them in jail. Each village of Lahus had to give a crossbow each year. If they did not, Jaw bah would not let them live. He had such power he could tell a person, 'Die' and the person would die.

The people came to Jah bah once and said, "You make it hard for us, all the things we have to give you". He replied, "There is no sin in what I do (i ba ma na). I have this privilege as your ruler. Even if I told you you had to give me each day nine dishes of ant's tears, nine chickens, nine pots of liquor, nine baskets of a rare type of mushroom, nine baskets of dried meat, 75 ticals of silver, nine water pots full of the brains of flies and other things – you would have to bring them." (At this point, others say that he did actually make them bring these things, and this is when they decided to kill him. There is quite a wide difference in the stories at this point.)

Jaw bah is the one who told everyone what clan they belonged to. He would ask them their name, and then tell them something like, "You are Leh nyi gu", or whatever clan it was. They also say that their religion came about (zah do la -eu) during the rule of Jaw bah, which does not completely harmonize with other things they say.

The Akhas first lived in a walled town called U ji lah (u ji = thatch grass). They used thatch grass to make blankets and clothes when they lived there. Next they lived in Sha g'a lah. They only had a very poor type of corn-like plant (a ceu) and a plant something like sorghum (nah loe) to eat while living there. But when they got Tm lah, which was the name of the walled town in which Jaw bah lived and ruled, they had both sticky rice (haw nyaw), and plain rice (haw ceh) to eat. It is said that it was only when they got to Tm lah that they began to fight battles- under Jaw bah I presume.

When Jaw bah was ruling in this town, he would come out of his house three times a day and stand on his porch (gui ga). This was on direct orders from God. He would come out once in the early morning, once at noon, and once in the evening. When the people felt too oppressed by him, they tried to kill him. There were three men who were leaders in this, but their main reason seems to have been that they wanted to get the 'power to rule' (dzoe dza) and become rulers themselves. They were all three from the nine original village priests. One was Ma zeu a poe. Ma zeu was evidently the leader of the three.

They tried shooting Jaw bah, throwing spears at him etc., but nothing could get through his long hair. So they figured that they would have to trick him into pulling his hair back away from his face so they could shoot him there. So they called out to him, “Oh look, there is a little chicken caught in the door. It can’t get in or out.” Jaw bah immediately replied, “Never mind, when it dies I’ll drink it with my tea” – and he did not pull his hair back to look.

Then they said, “Oh look at the lamb drinking milk from a goat.” Said Jaw bah, “Never mind, they are cousins”, and still he did not part his hair. “Oh”, they said again, “you must look at the colt drinking milk from a buffalo”. “Never mind, they are brothers”, said Jaw bah, and still didn’t look.

So they went off a ways and had a discussion, and came back and said, “Hey a dog is walking on the roof of your house over your head”. Jaw bah could not stand that, so he pulled back his hair to look, saying, “How dare a dog walk over my head”, and immediately they shot their guns, their cross-bows, with metal tipped arrows, and threw their spears. It was real foggy, and he could not see the men there ready to shoot him, so before he could pull his hair back into place, the metal tipped arrow shot Tsa sui tsuck into his Adam’s apple. Tsa sui’s clan disappeared as a punishment for this. Jaw bah turned, went back into the house and died. But they did not know that he had died yet.

Jaw bah had a total of ten wives, but there were just three who were alive at this time. One was called Ka ti a beu, one was called A k’o pyah dui ma, and the third was the daughter of Zeu shaw and was called Shaw zeu. Thus she is the paternal aunt. (a k’o) of all who are in the ma zeu clan today. Those in that clan call her a k’o Shaw ma za zeu.

The last named wife was pregnant when Jaw bah died. This was to be the only child Jaw bah ever had. She was anxious to gain time and keep people from wresting the power to rule (dzoe dza) away from her. so she buried the body of her husband that night (according to some), or put medicine (ja g’a) into his body to preserve it so that it could be buried properly when the child she was carrying was old enough to help. to this day Akhas often pour three bottles of rice liquor plus a little mercury into the corpse of an elder they are not going to bury right away. they say that it helps preserve the body.

Everyone agrees what the wife did next. She caught a humming insect and put it in a pot with liquor in it. Then she went and told the propel that her husband was drunk, but if they would listen carefully, they could hear him repeating poetic chants (sh zi zi-eu). When they listened they heard the insect buzzing around in the liquor pot and thought she must be telling the truth.

But then again the story differs. Some say that she kept her husband’s death secret from everyone for three months. (Three is the magical number in this story). Others say that she kept it a secret until the boy that was born was 13 years old, and could start ruling. A baw A eu said that both the husband and wife were 60 years old when the husband died.

Some of the elders (according to most stories) came to the mother, before the child was born, and asked her to let them know whether the child was a boy or a girl right after the birth. The reason they wanted to know this was to know if the power to rule (dzoe dza) was going to continue with Jaw bah’s offspring, or was going to end with him, as it would if the offspring were a girl. (This version of the story implies that they guessed the husband was dead).

One man said that the elders wanted the wife to give them the power to rule (dzoe dza) right then, but the were afraid that if it were a boy they would be killed, so they did not insist on it. They asked the mother to hang up girl’s clothing on the porch if it was a girl, and boy’s clothing if it was a boy. (K-28 and 29 say that it was to be a boy’s carrying cloth – bui teh, if a boy, or a girl’s carrying cloth –bui ba, if a girl). The wife, after she had a boy, lied by hanging out girl’s clothing (bui ba). The elders then thought that the power to rule had been broken (tseh i-eu) since it was a girl, so there was no rush to get it back.

8. Bah jui rules

The mother after that, always hung baby girl's clothes up to dry when she washed, as if it were a girl. She never let her boy out of the house until he was 13 years old (according to one version). According to another version, three days after the boy named Bah jui was born, he disappeared and went to God who cared for him. But every night he rode magical flying horse (shu mah leh mah, or ya mi mah ma nah ca) back down to the mother who would nurse him. The flying horse was one, which others thought was just a rock formation that looked like a flying horse.

On the seventh day (according to this version), the mother went out on the porch with her child, and while rocking him sang a song of just three lines, which told the elders that it was indeed a boy. They were frightened when they learned it was a boy, so they did not try to take the power to rule.

According to the 13 years old version, when the boy was thirteen the mother went out onto the porch and repeated a poetic chant (sha zi zi-eu). The idea was that her son, Bah jui, was now going to rule the people. Up to this time they had thought that her husband was just sick, and only now did they learn that he was really dead. But it was too late for him to do anything about it, since the son was old enough to start ruling over them, which did. And he ruled them much more fiercely than his father had. The boy flew up to God on his flying horse each night. When he came down to be nursed by his mother, he told her that the new religious customs (zah) that God had told him that the people must follow. The next day, then the mother would tell the people what to do. "That is why our Akha religion multiplied greatly during this period."

After this had been going on for three years, the people were all very unhappy because they had so many religious customs (zah). So they wanted to kill Bah jui. They carried their weapons and surrounded his mother's house. But he was up with God and saw them, so he did not go down for three days. When he did go down, he rode his horse to the gable end of the house, and left it there while he went into the house to tell his mother the new religious customs. God had delivered to him for the people. The grandmother, in the meantime, was on the porch shooing chickens away from some paddy that was drying. Hearing the horse up there on the porch behind her she thought it was a chicken, so she struck up at it with her long stick, and broke one wing.

After Bah jui had told his mother everything God had said, he started to ride back. But when he saw the broken wing on his horse he asked his mother, "How can I ride back to God?" She said "Don't worry. I can rub some medicine on the wing," and so saying she got some beeswax and fixed up the broken wing. Bah jui got on and started riding, but as the horse got up near the sun, the wax melted, and the horse fell down into hell, but Bah jui fell on the earth. Since he could not go back to God's dwelling place to learn new religious customs Akhas just had to get along with the ones they had already learned.

Later the same grandmother was sitting smoking a long pipe on the porch and keeping the chickens off the rice. She was blind. She would use her long pipe to shoo the chickens away. When some chickens got up on the roof behind her, she used her pipe to get them down, and set the house on fire. Everything burned, including the power to rule (dzoe dza). It burned everywhere on earth, so that today when one digs down into the ground the top is black from the fire, and then one gets through to the red clay. Also until now, only those Akhas who have authority (a ya) can smoke long pipes. Those who have authority and in their order of importance are:

1. village priest (dzoe ma)
2. blacksmith (ba ji)
3. military man (gui deu-eu), which includes the headmen
4. spirit priest (boe maw)
5. shamans (nyi pa)

(Note: in some lists, village priest is followed by spirit priest.)

Since everything was burnt up, there was no more rice, not even seed. So Bah jui went to God and asked for some seed. God said that he had given it once, he would not give it again. "Go ask the dragon", he said.

9. Getting rice seed

Now everyone was afraid to go down into the deep pit to ask the dragon for seed. But at the time, there was an extremely poor widow (Yeh sheu was her name) and her daughter who were digging wild yams to eat, since they had no rice. The mother in looking for the daughter that had disappeared while digging wild yams with her, turned up at the dragon's place.

She didn't tell the dragon that she was looking for her daughter, but said that she wanted to beg for some paddy seeds. "What kind do you want?" asked the dragon. "The kind that you can get full on when you eat, and also be fully satisfied when you drink it (as liquor). The dragon said to her, "Now don't lie to me. Are there still people on earth?" She said, "Not even one tenth of the number there used to be. Over nine-tenths burned to death." The dragon replied, "I think you are lying". "If you think I'm lying, just ask the people", the woman replied.

So the dragon shook the earth to see if there were any people on it, and that was when the earthquakes began. So the people called out, "Za nyi boe-oe a nm maw ma", which is what they call to this day when there is an earthquake. The woman then said to the dragon, "Since everyone is capable of lying, don't trust anyone. Always shake the earth like that to see if there are people on it or not".

Then the dragon gave her three seeds of paddy and told her, "Go find a good field, and where your shoulder bag catches, that is the place to plant." She went looking for three days, but could not find anything. On the evening of the third day she climbed up on a termite hill (tsa pu) and called out, "Lah dzoe-o (he is the son of the dragon), where shall I plant?" She said this three times, and then jumped down. As she jumped down her shoulder bag was caught by the piece of bracken on the termite hill, so she planted the three seeds there. To this day Akhas say it is good to plant paddy on a termite hill, provided it is not right on the top, since that would wrong the spirit-owner (yaw sah) of the hill.

When the dragon had given her the three seeds, he had told her that when she harvested it threshed it she was not to just dump it any way into the paddy house. She must first put nine leaves from the si ma tree down in the bottom of the paddy house. Then she must get three sections of a reed (a to) and put fermented rice in one, cooked rice in another, and tea with ginger root in another. She was to pour these out over the leaves, and then put the empty reeds in the shoulder bag of the ancestor shrine. "If you do this when you harvest rice", the dragon had told her, "You will never be hungry". So she said, "Then I don't need to do anything to the paddy?" "Yes each year you must make nine, some say twelve, ancestor offerings. These offerings will be for the paddy, and will insure you getting a good paddy crop," the dragon replied.

So after doing what the dragon had told her to do, she started carrying the paddy into the storehouse. But each time she went back, she had exactly the same amount left there. No matter how many times she carried paddy to the storehouse she had the same amount of paddy left in the field. She had a big paddy house (5x 1m) and it was full, but there was still the same amount of paddy left in the field as when she threshed it. So she went back and asked the dragon and he told her to whistle and clap her hands. So she went back to the field, stood on the termite hill, and whistled and clapped her hands three times. That time she finished carrying all of the paddy in. To this day Akhas do not whistle or clap their hands in a paddy field. If they did, they are afraid they would not have enough rice to eat.

10. Flood

At that time a huge dung beetle went to the dragon and lied to him. "There are no people left on the earth". So the dragon caused water to appear on the earth for the first time. There was a flood for the first time. Then there was flood for seven days and seven nights, and everyone died, except for a small boy and girl, brother and sister. They were riding in a giant gourd, some say, or a large drum, others say. The Akhas revere these two very highly to this day.

When the waters receded the two went all around looking for someone who was alive, but all they saw was dead. They cried bitterly when they saw all the dead people. Finally they came to God and he said, "Didn't you see anyone?" They answered, "No, there is no one alive."

So God gave them the touch-live touch-die wand. (toe deh toe shi gaw yoe), a magical wand which would make dead people alive if touched with the other end. They went around for seven days touching people and bringing them back to life. If the people still had blood in them, they could be brought back to life. Then God divided the land equally among all the different races.

From that day to this, the people followed what they could of the religion (zah) God had taught them, but since they had died and risen from the dead, they forgot many of the old customs. they then added some news ones to the old ones they remembered, so that today there is a mixture of the old and new.

The people felt that the two who brought them to life were the most important beings between heaven and earth. In discussing the matter the people said that since none of them could go to God's place to talk with him, they would make these two their representatives to go and pray to God. So God said, "Do you really trust these two?" Everyone answered, "Yes".

So God said, "I will have one stay in the east, and the other in the west. How do you want me to arrange them?" All the people felt that the girl should be in the west and the boy in the east. When God asked the two about this they said they must do what the people wanted them to. Akhas say that is why, until this day, the village priest, headman, and other rulers must do what the will of the people is.

The boy in the east is commonly called Ha sah sah dui, although in poetic and religious language he is called Da ta ha sah shi pi nyo lo a za. The girl in the west is commonly called Ha sah sah nym, but in poetic and religious language she is called Da o ha sah pya seh jaw mui. She is just a little below their brother. The morning star is like the eye of the one in the east.

These two can do both good and bad. They cannot be seen by people. It is as if they are in mosquito nets. They will not come out until their names are called. The one in the east is said to eat from a silver plate and drink from a golden bowl. He does not come to earth unless he is called, or unless he wants to. When he comes to earth he can walk on sunshine, or walk in other ways. He lives right in the stem of the sky, which I imagine is the eastern horizon.

The girl lives in the stem of the earth (mi tsa -eu la kah), which is probably the western horizon. Whenever something goes wrong in one's home, or someone is sick, you call these two. You tell them what is wrong by saying, "Look my son is sick". Or "Look my sow is sick". Or, "Look, the paddy is not doing well". Then you ask them to fix it up. K-2 said that they are the ones called upon when Akhas have the 'Sha ha da -eu' ceremony, since they are considered as the lords (sah pa) of all terrible deaths. (sha shi-eu).

11. Ja deh culture hero.

Akhas believe that there were Akha rulers for three generations: Jaw bah, Bah jui, and Jui lm, although I have never heard anything in their legends about the last. When Jui lm's son Lm dah was ruling, the Akhas lost their power to rule and fled. That is incorporated in the story of a baw Ja deh.

Ja deh was Chinese (probably) who came to the town of Tm lah where Jaw bah lived, and made the wall around the town for him since he knew how to make and lay bricks. He had two daughters. One was named Deh seu, and was known as terrific drinker (ji daw k'a ma), since she drank nine pots of liquor every day.

The other daughter was known as terrific meat eater (sha dza k'a ma), since she ate nine chickens a day. K-29 felt the spirits helped them eat and drink that much, since they never could have done it by themselves. Actually there was a third daughter too, named Deh ja, but she died on her way to Tm lah. They buried her, and then stuck her walking stick into the ground. It grew up into a giant tree, which is prominent in their legends. Others have it that when Ja deh had to flee, his walking stick fell into the ground and grew up into this mythical tree.

The legend of Ja deh varies in details, but the important part of it is that a Shan man named Gui ba tsm bi a cm cm shui, or Shan men, appeared at Ja deh's place. Since Ja deh's daughter was pregnant Ja deh had to marry her off, or some say he had to marry the two girls off, to the Shan man, or men. Then the Shan man began to get lots of things out of Ja deh by trickery.

the final blow came when the Shan man wrote on chips of wood, some say leaves, to the Shans living downstream saying, "Come on up, this is wonderful country". When the Shans seeing that message, they marched up and there was a war between the Shans and Akhas, with lots of Shans dying, and some Akhas.

Since the Shans were so very smart, the y said, " Instead of fighting and killing each other let's have contest and see who can shoot a crossbow arrow at a rock and make it stick". So the Akhas constructed a tremendous crossbow (pu ka la ka). It took nine men to cock it. Then they shot their arrow with tremendous force, but it fell broken at the bottom of the rock. The Shans smeared beeswax on the end of their arrow, and when they shot it at the same rock, it stuck. So they won that round.

Then they tried to see who could build a fire and get it to go down the steam for nine turns in the stream before going out. So the Akhas got a giant log and set fir to it, and dragged it to the stream- where it immediately went out. The Shans, on the other hand, made a little bamboo framework (ka te te-eu), put dried cow dung on it, and then the fluff from the zaw tree, which they used for tinder for stating a fire with flint. Then they set fire to the tinder, pushed the bamboo framework into the stream, and watched it burn all the way as it went for nine turns in the stream.

12 Akhas flee

When the Akha ruler Lum dah saw that, he and all the Akhas with him were frightened and they fled to the south. They came to Tah la meu, still in China. It is called A boe tah la mi tsa, since many Mon Khmer (A boe) lived there. The Akhas figured that this time they must use their heads and get rid of the A boe, so this is what they did. On a moonlit night the men walked around the village on stilts, with knives held in their mouths to look like tusks. They also put shavings from making bamboo strips (a ne) on their heads and they dropped goat droppings all over the ground. When the dogs barked the people came out, and thought that what they saw must be evil spirits, so they ran away.

Concerning the mythical tree (m to baw ma), at the time it was cut down, there were six million (tah- a very large number) Mon Khmer (A boe) living, and only six hundred Akhas. When the tree fell, the Mon Khmer went running under the tree, and only six of them escaped death, but of the Akhas only six of them were killed. They were caught in a vine and pulled to death. One of the branches of that tree caught in the moon, and it can be seen there to this day.

At that time the whole sky was not very high above the earth. Also there were a total of twelve moons, so the Akhas shot down eleven of them, and as they shot each one down the sky would rise up higher above the ground. There were also twelve suns. The rocks were so hot they were red, and the trees withered up. But they shot eleven of the suns too.

The Akhas say there are four main periods on the earth:

1. A flood, which is past with the two parents of the world in a gourd or drum.
2. A smallpox epidemic, which is also past
3. A awr, which is also past
4. And a great conflagration, which is to come.

ANIMISM

Akhas believe that the 'soul' (sa la) fills the body. Some say there is just one. Others (including P-3) say there are 12, and when they leave the body they leave three at a time. The soul (or souls) is invisible.

If a person is very badly frightened, his soul will often leave his body (la ba ba –eu). This is why when Akhas go to a village where the children don't know them, they will keep saying, 'Don't be afraid' (Ta gu). This is so the children's souls will not become frightened and leave them. If the soul leaves, it must be called back (la ku ku –eu), or the person will die.

Beside a regular ceremony for calling the soul back (see under sickness) there is another ceremony called 'la du beu –eu'. A 'spirit priest' (boe maw) must be called to do this. First he digs a hole under the place where the sick person whose soul has left him is lying. Then he takes a big leaf from the a gah lu ceh bush (related to the wild raspberry, but much bigger), and puts it over the hole. There is a strip of bamboo in the hole that acts as a spring to flip the leaf when the spirit priest wants to.

The spirit priest next puts nine small cowrie shells (hu si) on the leaf. After he has repeated the spirit incantation (neh to –eu) a bit, he releases the bamboo spring, and the leaf with the shells on it flips over. He then carefully looks at the shells and takes away those that have turned over to the open side (pya la –eu). He puts the others back on the leaf, repeats the spirit incantation, and springs the leaf again. He takes away those that have turned over, and keeps doing this until all of them have turned over. If he stops this before they have all turned over, the person will not get well.

Akhas have a 'meal of separation' (g'aw za dza –eu) both at the time of funerals and divorce. The idea is both to keep the soul of those in the house from leaving to follow the person who has died, or in the case of divorce to keep the soul of the woman from staying behind with the husband. When it is a divorce, the woman also brushes off her skirt three times and says, "I'm leaving you". This is so that her soul will follow along after her, and not stay with her former husband.

This is also true when a 'no-son person' (shm byeh) dies. As the widow walks out the woman's end of the house she says, "I'm leaving you." This keeps her soul from following her dead husband's.

It is also believed that the paddy crop has a soul, and it can leave if offended. They must call the soul of the paddy back if this happens (see under agriculture). There is also the belief that the soul of money as well as the soul of domesticated livestock can leave, and a spirit priest, or some elder if he knows how, will call them back.

ESCHATOLOGY

When a person dies, his soul is still in the vicinity of the body. The family 'feeds' the soul quite often before the burial. When the body is taken out of the house and to the burial ground, the soul follows the casket and sees all that they do. If they make a mistake in any of the burial customs, the soul of the person being buried will 'afflict them' (shi pi gu la –eu). K-29 gave an illustration of something related to this. In his village the headman died. Someone went to the blacksmith of the village and asked if he would catch a chicken that they saw there and offer it for the headman. The blacksmith said, "I wouldn't kill a chicken for that old skinflint no matter what", and as he said it, the chicken flopped over dead. "The soul of the headman did it."

On the night of the burial, the soul came back to the house to 'get its goods'. The second night it comes back as far as just inside the village gate. The third night it gets to just outside of the gate. The soul will stay in the body until it decays, and then go to be with the ancestors. "But they come back to see their graves and their bones – some once a year, some once every three years." I'm not sure just how this fits into the 'teaching the path' done by the spirit priest when a person dies (see under death and burial). I had gathered from that ritual that the soul went to the land of the ancestors more quickly.

Those who die a ‘terrible’ (sha) death become bad spirits, and often haunt the members of their family who are left behind. On the other hand, those who die a ‘good’ death, and are buried ‘nicely’, turn into good, helpful spirits. They believe that one’s own mother and father, if they have died ‘well’ and been buried properly, are especially helpful. For example, if I want to ask a favor of the ‘spirit’ (neh) of my father, then I get the offerings ready and call a spirit priest (boe maw). When discussing this, K-15 and a friend started out talking about ‘asking a favor’, and ended up by telling about helping a sick person. I believe this is the main thing they ask specific spirits for help in.

The spirit priest will kill the chicken, cook it, and arrange nine dishes in a winnowing tray, which is put on the floor right under the ancestor shrine. This is more or less the ‘magical headquarters’ for contacting the souls of departed ancestors. Then the head of the household will ask the departed father-spirit to come cure his son or daughter, or whoever is sick. After that the spirit-priest repeats the ‘spirit incantation’ (neh to –eu).

They say that for those who are well off and want to get all the help they can, they can offer up to four chickens and four pigs – but it must always be the same number of each. When the spirit priest repeats the ‘spirit incantation’ he will tell the spirit the number of animals that have been sacrificed for him. Some Akhas say that the chicken goes and tells the spirit, and then the spirit comes.

Usually they do not ask favors of any relatives over ten generations away. They feel that they are not well enough acquainted with them. But they also feel that if they beg a closer relative (as a parent or grandparents) that spirit might in turn beg another relative many generations back for the sick person.

Their ideas about the realm of the dead have been covered in other sections fairly thoroughly. Perhaps a word should be added as to their belief that when a great person dies, many children will be born - kind of through his greatness. In a proverb they have about this they liken it to a giant tree falling. The next year there are lots of little trees in that spot. When a giant person dies, next year there are lots of little babies.

They believe that those who are ‘no-son people’ (shm byeh) or parents of ‘human rejects’ (tsaw caw), or people who have committed terrible sins must always remain under Tah pah. I have also heard that liars have to stay there nine years, so that God can ‘purify’ (shaw neh) them.

I have also heard from P-3 that only those who have ‘no sins’ get to the ‘underworld’ (mi o) to live with the ancestors. He stressed that it was not just Akhas, but “Lahus, Indians, Shans, Chinese, etc.” He went on to say that those who have ‘small sins’ must live ‘on the way’ (ga peh), whereas those with really ‘big sins’ must go to ‘hell’ (shi bui lah ma).

SPIRITS AND GODS

1. A poe mi yeh. Akhas have a concept of a supreme, all powerful being that they call ‘a poe mi yeh’, and can be translated roughly as ‘God’. Literally the first two syllables mean ‘ancestor’, and the last syllable, according to some Akhas, indicates ‘great power’.

In asking Akhas where ‘God’ lives, they say ‘heaven’ (m k’oe ta – literally ‘on the sky’). They believe he has a body, but that no one can see him. They believe that ‘God’ has always existed. He created Ja bi oe lah, who later created the world (see above). However, ‘God’ created everything which is on the earth, including both good and bad things. Not only was Ja bi oe lah under God, but God caused him to die for telling a lie. As the Akhas put it, “Ja bi oe lah is not important – only ‘God’, who delegated the task of creating the world, is important.” The spirit priests, in relating the old legends and traditions, often refer to ‘God’. They seem to differentiate the customs they have now that he gave, and the ones that some of their legendary heroes gave, although many of them they consider to be from ‘God’, and given through the heroes. One Akha told me that all of the Akha ‘religion’ was given by ‘God’, and most Akhas have tended to agree with this statement in a general way. But those who know the ‘religion’ best say it is not a valid statement to make, since there are many customs they can point out that originated with this man or that.

In many of their prayers they will pray to God. They pray to him last, “since he is the final power”. For example, they will pray to the sun and moon for a sick person, but they believe their prayer is not final until, at the very end, they ask God to make the person well too.

There are many things in their daily lives that they attribute to God. For example, a woman feels that it is because of God that she became pregnant. They feel they get the kind of child God wants them to have. They would not think of saying, “This child’s face is not good”, for fear God would take the child back.

If the child is born with a birthmark, this means that God has slapped the child at that spot while saying, “Don’t come back” – in other words, “Have a long life.” When ‘human rejects’ (tsaw caw) are born, it is God sending punishment for the parent’s sin. If, when a child is in its first five months the mother does not ‘feed’ a little of the food she is about to eat to the baby first, “God will not be able to stand the sight of it”. Also, if a child dies before the age when he or she could get married and start raising a family, they say, “God has called the child back.”

As far as I can tell, they do not believe that God has any direct contacts with people, but they have a ‘proverb’ (daw da) concerning God that they seem to feel is true:

Ti nah sm lah bi le na, lah sha lah daw.
Ti nah sm daw sha na, daw sha daw lah.

The meaning is: “In one day when God comes three times and sees that a person is doing ‘good’, he gives him three blessings. When God comes and sees that a person is doing ‘bad things’, he not only does not bless him, but he takes back whatever good he might have bestowed.”

From this, the present day Akhas gather that God comes down to visit earth three times a day, and these three times are when they are eating. So they try to be careful while they are eating not to argue, for fear God will see it. If that happens, they are afraid that later they will not have enough to eat.

I have noted that Akhas seem to form most of their notions about God from their proverbs. For example, they say that God has a big body. If you ask any more about his body they will simply say, “Our proverb does not say anything about that, it just says he has a big body”.

They believe that they must not say anything disrespectful about God, or they will have a ‘short life’ (zi ma baw-a). They believe he helps people, if they ask him to look after them and help them. But when they pray to him, they at the same time pray to their ancestors, although, as mentioned above, they always pray to God last. Even when ‘spirits afflict them’ (neh gu la –eu) they pray to God, since “he is over everything”.

They say, “We don’t give anything to God to eat, as we do our ancestors, but we consider him the really big and important one”. They also consider him to be a ‘male’, but I think this is more or less taken for granted in a culture that feels males are so much more important than females. I don’t believe they have a proverb that states this. But whenever I asked an Akha about this, he first of all looks startled that such a question would be asked, and then replies, “Of course he’s a male!”

There are certain things they are afraid to do or say for fear God will hear and punish them in some way. For example, if they say, “Naw a g’eh yaw doe nga”, then they feel God will hear. The term ‘a g’eh’ is one which people are not supposed to use, especially in a scoldy way. Only the spirit priests are to use it. A free translation of the above sentence might be, “You damn wretch”.

2. The great spirits. Akhas also believe in some great spirits who live under God, and are the ones who carry out his ‘orders’. They use both ‘spirit-owner’ (yaw sah) and ‘spirit’ (neh) when describing them. The four main ones are: sky (m, or m dzoe), earth (mi tsa or mi dzoe), sun (nah ma), and moon (ba la). These are also referred to, in a general way, as u yeh u sa, and, yeh ma sa ma. Note the use of ‘yeh’ in both of these.

3.

Akhas do not fear these 'main spirits' in the same way they fear the 'spirits' (neh). However, they have a certain fear of them. They believe that these 'main spirits' will not 'afflict' (gu la -eu) them, but they also believe that if they say the names of these 'main spirits' in a disrespectful way, they will die.

When a person accuses someone else of doing something, and that person says he is innocent, often one of them will say, "Let the sun and the moon look at the one who did it." They believe this is a very strong statement, since the one who is lying will die ("if he does not die right away, he'll die before too long").

In their proverbs they also speak of three great 'spirit-owners' (yaw sah) with various functions. One is Je yeh, the one who looks after livestock. The second is Ka yeh, the one who looks after paddy. And the third is Bi yeh, the one who looks after people. When one of their animals is sick, or a plague of some kind seems to be breaking out among their animals, they will start their prayer by saying, "Je yeh a ma-o..." They tell Je yeh then about the sick animals, and ask him to cure the sick animals, to keep other animals from getting sick, and to care for the animals so that they will multiply.

If it is something to do with paddy, as a disease, or the paddy not growing properly, he will pray to Ka yeh, saying, "Ka yeh a ma-o..." Then he will ask Ka yeh to take care of whatever is wrong, and watch over the crop so that it will be good, and let his family have plenty to eat. If someone is sick and they repeat the 'spirit incantations', they will often call, "Bi yeh a ma-o...", and then pray for the sick person. After that they pray for the well members of the family too, that they will not get sick.

There is another belief they have, although I have found that the 'younger generation' does not know too much about it. They say that there is a 'spirit-owner' (yaw sah) on each shoulder. The one on the left shoulder is 'bad' (yaw doe). He tempts one to steal, kill, etc. The one on the right shoulder is 'good' (yaw mui). He whispers into the right ear, "Don't listen to that talk about killing, stealing, etc." Whichever side one listens to will determine one's conduct.

4. Spirits (neh). According to Akha legend, originally spirits (neh) and humans lived together (see above). Because they could not get along together they separated, and to this day they still cannot get along together.

According to Akha genealogy, spirits and people have the same ancestry until Tah pah mah. They say that one of her daughters, Beu heu, was the mother of spirits, which is why they call her, "neh maw a ma Beu heu". The other daughter, Beu leu, was the mother of humans, which is why they call her, "tsaw dzoe a ma Beu leu". The reason the daughters had a name beginning with Beu is that their father died a 'terrible' (sha) death, and thus his name was not included in the genealogy, but their mother's name was used. She is said to be the first one to 'pa zaw da-eu' (see under death and burial).

Before the spirits and people divided, spirits led a life much like people now live. Spirits had children and grandchildren. They made fields, and ate rice and curry. One of the main differences is that they worked their fields at night, which is considered the 'time for spirits', whereas humans worked their fields by day.

After dividing, spirits made their headquarters in the underworld (mi o), and people made their headquarters in the 'upper world' (mi ta). But spirits also make forages into the world of man, seeking some 'thin-souled' (sa la ba -eu) person whose soul they can eat. They sometimes hunt people, just like people hunt animals (sha g'a g'a -eu).

If spirits are able to get hold of a human soul, often by frightening it out of the person first, they take it to their 'underworld' dwelling and start to eat it. This is why shamans are called; to discover what spirit is eating the soul, and what meat the spirit would like to eat instead of the soul. The spirit priest can also repeat 'spirit incantations' in such a way as to either prevent a spirit from causing damage to a person's soul, or to get the soul to come back to the body, and thus escape the spirit's evil designs.

Akhas also believe that there are new spirits coming along all the time, for as people die they become spirits. If a person dies a 'terrible' (sha) death, then he will become a vicious spirit – unless those who repeat the spirit incantation know the proper way to keep him from becoming that.

On the other hand, if someone in the home dies a 'good' death (that is, not from a disaster in the jungle), and has all of the burial procedures done properly, that person will become a helpful spirit – especially if it is from one's own home. They especially ask the spirits from the last four generations for help, since those are more closely connected to them. They believe, however, that those spirits will in turn ask some of the ancestor spirits from previous generations.

The Akhas classify spirits into two classes, on the basis of the above. Those who live in the house, that is the spirits of the ancestors, are called 'inside spirits' (k'oe neh). Those who live outside the house, and sometimes even outside the village are called 'outside spirits' (nyi neh). Akhas are much more afraid of the 'outside spirits', since they are the spirits of those who have died a terrible death in the jungle. They do not fear the 'inside spirits' so much. However, they can be 'afflicted' (gu la –eu) by the 'inside' as well as the 'outside' spirits.

The Akhas sometimes hear spirits call out, which scares them very much. Some are the spirits who died a terrible death. They call out the same way they did when they died (see further under death and burial). This is why it is so important to the Akhas to do all that is required to keep the spirit from calling out, since whenever they hear a spirit calling out, they know that it wants to 'afflict' (gu la) them, "otherwise it would not call out". They not only hear the spirits of those who have died a terrible death call out, but all of the spirits of 'unnamed children' (yah k'o neh). They can tell it is not a child crying, however, for they hear it from one direction first, and then from another direction, and can never pinpoint the place it is coming from. Other spirits cry out in other ways too.

P-4 told an experience he had as a young boy. He said that one time he went with his grandfather, who was a highly respected spirit priest, to the family opium field to help weed it. That night, while sleeping in the field, he heard a barking deer, and mentioned it to his grandfather. But the grandfather said, "Wait, listen". As he listened it wasn't like a barking deer, really, or a tiger, or a person. As it came closer they could hear it more plainly, and his grandfather said, "It's a spirit".

So the grandfather burned around their hill hut while he repeated spirit incantations. The reason for the burning was that spirits do not like the odor of burned things, and they are afraid of fire. He told his grandson, A boe, "Don't be afraid". "But I was afraid" the grandson told me. Then his grandfather made three lines around the field hut where they were staying with his machete, again while he repeated spirit incantations. The reason for using the machete is that spirits are afraid of the sharp edge of a machete.

Then he cut a thorn and a thatchgrass stem and put them on the ground, and repeated more spirit incantations. Then the spirit ran away. The next day the grandfather told the boy that there must have been some hunters some time previously who did not know the customs, and thus they wronged the spirit.

They also believe that the spirits can slap and hit them, especially when they are sick and weak. Again P-4 told me how when he was a boy, he and his father were going to their field to perform the k'm pi law –eu ceremony (see under religious practices). P-4 was feeling ill and very weak. He couldn't even carry two chickens, which made his father scold him. But the father realized the boy was sick when the boy would not eat his favorite fruit which they found on the way.

Then suddenly it was as if he, the son, had received a terrific slap, and he fell down unconscious, with blood on his face. "It must have been a spirit", he said. Since the father was going to perform the k'm pi law –eu ceremony he had some 'magic vine' (meh, a type of vine in the ginger family that they believe spirits are very much afraid of) with him. He took this and beat the boy with it until the boy became conscious enough to speak. The father then carried the son on to where he was to make the offering.

The father was busy trying to take care of the offerings and watch his son. Finally he finished the offerings, and the two of them stayed there that night. The father was afraid his son would die, but the next day he was a little bit better, and they went back to the village. A spirit priest and shaman were called for him, and he got better in a few days. In all of their farming the Akhas are constantly worried about wronging the spirits. For example, when an Akha man selects a place to make a field, he will not make it near a cave, for fear the cave spirit will afflict him. Akhas feel that it is generally all right to enter caves, provided they do nothing wrong to the spirits there. Sometimes, however, when they get sick later and call in a shaman, she will tell them that they did something to wrong the cave spirit, and now it is 'afflicting' them.

As mentioned above, there are 'inside' and 'outside' spirits. The main 'inside' spirit is called 'dzah mi'. This household spirit will either help or afflict, depending on how it is treated by the people of the house. It is said to reside in the 'main house post' (jm zeu) during the daytime, and in the fireplace at night. K-2 felt that they should always have enough firewood burning in the fireplace at night, so there would be a place for this spirit. If the house is not built properly this spirit will 'afflict' them. They also believe that if a cow or dog climbs up onto the roof of the house, which is a 'bad omen' (daw), it is really this spirit which tempts the animal to the topmost ridge of the house with food. (See below for what they do when this happens). Most households make an offering once a year called 'dzah mi ca -eu' to this spirit. Those who do this "usually have no trouble from this spirit". Some say, though, that they only make this offering when the spirit has 'afflicted them.'

As to the 'outside' spirits, they are much more numerous, as well as tending to be more vicious. They can be divided into two classes; the kind that afflicts, and the kind that does not afflict.

A. Outside spirits which can afflict.

1. ya mi neh. This spirit resides in swampy places, and will afflict those who trespass on its property. For this reason Akhas will not make their fields in such places. One reason they have been so reluctant to make terraced fields is that they are afraid of this spirit, as well as the 'malaria spirit' (mi hi neh), which causes them to get malaria when they farm such fields. Some Akhas (from Ho la) told me, though, that they do not fear the 'malaria spirit' any more. They say that since airplanes started coming to Kengtung regularly (since about 1950) they have noticed that people don't get malaria any more. So now they are willing to make terraced fields at lower levels. Also, they take anti-malarial drugs. Then too, DDT teams have been actively spraying in the State for several years.
2. tsa pu neh. This spirit lives in a 'living termite hill' (tsa pu pu deh). By 'living' they mean one that has termites in it and is still being built up. They believe that this spirit is very potent. If anyone sticks anything into the top part of the termite hill, which might be considered the important part, or digs in it, or even touches it, he wrongs the 'spirit-owner' (yaw sah) of the hill, and will be afflicted by the spirit (neh). It should be noted here that Akhas never say "yaw sah gu la -eu" for 'spirit affliction', but only 'neh gu la -eu'. In this case the 'yaw sah' and 'neh' are just the same.

Sometimes when a man is quite ill and a shaman has been consulted, she will ask him if there is a 'living termite hill' in his field. If he says yes, often in her 'trance' she finds that he is suffering spirit affliction from the 'spirit-owner' of that hill.

3. neh mui neh ceh (or, jeh bym jeh ceh). This is a particularly vicious spirit, and greatly feared by Akhas. One group (K-23) said that this type comes from babies that die very soon after they are born, and have not been named. They live in the jungle, each having its own place. When Akhas camp at night, they sometimes hear these spirits throwing things around. The things that are thrown never hit them, but it sounds as if great boulders are being thrown, as well as sticks, rocks, etc. One reason they fear this kind of spirit a great deal is that they believe it hunts people. When it gets hold of a person, it eats his heart out, and the person 'dies right away'. A common saying among them is "Whenever a man dies very suddenly, you can be quite sure it was this spirit which ate his soul (or heart - they use the terms fairly interchangeably at this point)." Akhas from Loimwe said that Sah tse's son, and also A sheh of Ta naw died because of this spirit.

4. K-8 told of a man from his clan named Ci do who was attacked by this kind of spirit once while a group of them (including K-8) were out gathering rataan in the jungle. His friends carried the sick man to the hospital in Loimwe, where he stayed for eight days. But nothing could be done to help him there, so his Akha friends took him out of the hospital and consulted a man shaman. The shaman told them to offer a big dog to this spirit. Since the sick man, Ci do, had a big dog, his friends sacrificed it, and he got well. "This is why Akhas believe in shamans."

Some Akhas say that this particular spirit likes to smoke tobacco.

5. ja leh neh. This is literally the 'wind' spirit, which has as its abode the mythical great wind hole. This spirit causes 'terrible' (sha) deaths. Akhas sometimes call it the 'older brother of the maw dza maw yu neh (see number 5 below). I have also heard that it causes the death of those who are 'no-persons' (shm byeh). "That is why there is a strong wind when such a person dies."

I have heard that if this spirit afflicts one, he cannot get well. The example is given of a person going to the field, and before long coming home saying, "I have a headache". Before long he is dead – from this spirit. However, they do try to repeat spirit incantations to this spirit. When they repeat these they refer to this spirit as 'sha leh neh'.

6. maw dza maw yu. This spirit eats people, or some say, "eats the souls of people". If someone goes to the jungle, and shortly after returning home dies, then they say it was this spirit which did it. Also, if they leave a tool in the jungle and it disappears, they say that this spirit took it – although with the younger generation, at least, this last is often not meant literally.
7. tso neh. This is the spirit of the 'lightning bolt' (tso). They fear this spirit very much. If a person is killed by a 'lightning bolt', actually, lightning, they believe that he has done something terrible to deserve death at the hands of this spirit. They will not go near a tree that has been struck by lightning, for they fear they will get sick, especially if they are 'thin-souled'. If they touch such a tree, they believe they get very bad sores on their upper lip that are hard to cure. They further believe that if they have a lightning bolt, it can be used as potent medicine. It should be noted that these are actually bronze age axe heads that have been found in the ground. They think that they "ripped open a tree" when lightning struck the tree.
8. cu neh (hot spring spirit). This spirit lives in and right above a hot spring. It is one of three 'water spirits' (see below for the other two). Akhas will not make a field or even stay over night in the area immediately above a hot springs. They also will not cut trees there. For those who want to hunt there, or in any of the areas where water spirits live, there is a special ceremony which they must perform, described below.
9. lah neh (lake spirit). This spirit lives both in the lake, and in and around the outlet of the lake, so they do not camp, make fields or cut down trees anywhere near the outlet.
10. tsaw neh (waterfall spirit). The waterfall spirit lives both in the waterfall and on both sides of it. Some say there is one spirit on each side, but I cannot get others to confirm or reject this. Akhas do not make fields, camp overnight or cut down trees on either side of the waterfall. They believe that the waterfall spirit can foretell changes in the weather. If they hear the waterfall making a loud 'ah-ah-ah' sound, it means that there will be a change in the weather in two days. The 'spirit knows'.
11. yah k'o neh (or za myah ma o –eu neh). This is the spirit of unnamed children. Their description of this spirit sounds much like number three above, but they differentiate between the two. This is a very powerful spirit. The shamans are afraid of this spirit, as well as the one written below this, since they tend to block the path in the spirit world when the shamans are trying to get through. Also, they shoot sling shots (ca oe) at the shamans, which the shamans don't like. When Akhas hear this spirit crying out, it often sounds like a child crying, but they can never quite locate the spot.

12. Tah pah la o neh (spirits under Tah pah). These are the spirits of women who had twins when they lived on earth. They cannot get higher than Tah pah in the spirit world, and so are massed about in this area, which can also be called 'hell' (shi bui lah ma). This is why shamans are afraid of these spirits – they clamber to go on up, and get in the shaman's way so that sometimes she can hardly get through. There are also said to be others in this place, but only temporarily. Those who have died a 'terrible' (sha) death have to live below the Tah pah for awhile. For example, if he was 50 years old when killed by a leopard, he will have to remain under Tah pah for say 40 years, and then God will take him on up. If, however, it is someone who has killed someone else, his 'sentence' will be nine times the number of years he lived after killing that person. For example, if he lived 20 years after killing someone, he would have to stay below Tah pah 180 years before God would take him on up.
13. hah cah dzeh –eu. This is slightly different, in that it is not referred to be Akhas as 'spirit affliction', but they say that when a crane (hah cah) flies over a person, and the shadow of the crane falls on the person, he or she is 'split open' (dzeh –eu) as a log is split (dm ma dzeh –eu). Then the person develops either partial paralysis, or total paralysis (kui shi la shi shi –eu).

There are many other spirits which afflict. Among them are; neh k'a neh dzeu (or, ga tsm tsm neh), an extremely bad type of spirit which stays at the forks of paths, law gaw neh – the river spirit, k'a lo neh – the rock spirit, gaw jaw neh – the mountain spirit, a baw neh – the tree spirit, etc. Under other subjects various other spirits will also be mentioned.

B. 'Outside' non-afflicting spirits.

1. Neh ci neh ci a ma. This spirit 'lifts' (ci) people up. Sometimes it lifts people up into trees. K-28 told of this happening to one of his villagers. Sometimes this spirit lifts people up and carries them off (ci byo –eu) so that they cannot be found.
2. Mah lah mah lah a ma. This 'spirit' is quite common in Akha legends. I was somewhat surprised when Akhas felt it should be included as one of the spirits. In legends it is always trying to get the best of humans, but humans usually find some way of fooling it.
3. Neh gu a ma. This spirit lives in very heavily wooded areas, and cries out with a terrible sound.

(Note: the above three are not general terms for spirits, but each name is for one spirit. The 'a ma' ending does not necessarily mean 'female' here, but more 'the great one', as 'the great lifter spirit', etc.)

4. neh coi. This is a spirit which chases people when they camp in fields, although as far as I can tell it does not 'afflict' them. They will hear it calling out "Coi, coi, coi", which is the reason for the name.
5. ui tsaw neh. I am not sure this is a spirit, although K-28 and 29 insisted that it should go here. These are 'people' (tsaw) spirits which live near the water (ui). They are said to be quite small, although very much like people. They only live near the rivers in places where people never go. Akhas use their droppings for medicine (see under sickness).

C. Spirits which actually enter people.

1. k'a. This is a spirit which when it enters someone makes them gasp for breath (k'a tah –eu). The person into whom this spirit has entered will then vomit, and feel a little better for a bit, but this spirit will keep on blocking off the air by making the stomach 'come up against the lungs' until the person finally dies – unless they repeat 'spirit incantations'. They also have means of driving this spirit out (k'a teh-eu). K-28 told of doing this once for a young man in his village, Li ja, who was about 20 years of age at the time. Since K-28 was the village priest, the boy's father called him. So he took nine banana leaf packets of ashes, and one leaf with husked rice (ceh gui ceh cu) which also had one old coin in it. While grasping these with both hands, he began to rub the boy's body from the head to the feet, since the spirit must go out in that direction. While he did that he repeated spirit incantations. The gist was, "Oh, k'a spirit, leave him. Go back to the sky where you live."

2 si li ba neh (or, sui lui ba neh). This spirit will enter the bodies of either sick or well persons. When it enters a person, that person will become very loud and boisterous. Often he will become almost hysterical. He will pull off his clothes, and sometimes, if not stopped, will run off. Sometimes he will put his blanket into the fire, "Just like a crazy person". Although they appear to be unconscious, they will speak 'spirit language' ("at least we don't know what they are saying"). Sometimes they will get to singing, or repeating spirit incantation. Sometimes they will get up and hit people.

When this type of spirit enters a person, one of the most frequently used cures is the 'lightning bolt', which they jab repeatedly into the person. They do not do this too hard, since it is not the pressure that does the good, but the potency of the 'spirit-owner' in it. K-29 told his favorite treatment for this. He has 'cured' three people with this treatment. He went around and 'begged' three women and three men to urinate into a pan. Then he took a broom on two of the occasions, a branch on the third, and dipped it into the urine. Then he started at their head, and after brushing the urine in thoroughly there, he brushed down to their feet. He did this three times. While he was doing it he repeated spirit incantations. The gist was, "Leave this person. Don't bother him again." He told me that spirits cannot stand the odor of people's urine. After doing it, each time the possessed persons became 'purified' (shaw la –eu), and quit their tossing and turning. After an hour or two they regained consciousness.

2 jah neh. When this spirit enter a person (jah da –eu), the person's arms and legs will swell up. So the spirit has to be driven out (jah teh-eu). The lightning bolt is again perhaps the favorite remedy. They also make things out of wood to look like a pair of tongs and a machete. They sometimes make a rope out of thatch grass. They use these to 'beat' on the person a bit, while they say, "Ceh -aw" (Run away!). They do not beat hard – just enough to look to the spirit as if they are beating on the person. They also beat on si sa wood with an ordinary hammer while telling the spirit to 'run away'.

3 maw baw neh (epilepsy spirit). If a person is having an epileptic seizure (maw baw co –eu) Akhas are afraid to touch him, for fear the epilepsy spirit will come after them. So they call a spirit priest who will repeat 'spirit incantations' to try to get rid of the spirit. After the seizure is over, or after they have had many such seizures, the elders of the village will take the person into whom this spirit has entered down to a river. They will have him go out into the water until he is about up to his waist. Then they have him take off all of his clothes, and let them float down the stream. He comes out of the water then, and as he comes out, the spirit doctor will hit him with 'magic vine' (meh) three times.

Next the men who have come down with him will cut notches on either side of a very large tree, and then make a hole through it just big enough for the epileptic to go through. After he has gone through it, he goes up to the temporary shelter (seh g'aw) they have prepared, and puts on completely new clothes. Then the spirit priest kills one goat, one pig, and two chickens. He then repeats spirit incantations so that this epilepsy spirit will not come back into the man. After that the epileptic returns home, but the spirit priest and the elders stay down by the river and have a feast. Whatever meat is left over is carried by the spirit priest's helpers to his home. There the spirit priest has another feast, inviting the elders to share it.

- 4 Defenses against spirits. In spite of all the terrible things spirits can do to them, however, there are certain defenses that the Akhas have. One of the major ones is mentioned above, that is, repeating spirit incantations (neh to –eu). Of course they must speak these magical formulae just right, or not only will the spirit maintain his grip on the sick person, but it might even turn on the one who is repeating the spirit incantations.

Another great help when they are in danger of being afflicted by the spirits is to call on the ancestors for help. Often they will repeat their genealogy. However, they are more likely to call upon the last four male ancestors who died. When they call upon their ancestors they will say, ‘haw le’, which literally means ‘look down’. But it also implies that the ancestors will look and take care of their progeny.

There are also certain taboos they will follow so as not to attract the spirits. When walking in the jungle, for example, they will not mention the word ‘spirit’, for fear the spirits might hear this and attack them. This fear may be breaking down some, however. A man who came with K-5, and who is the son of the village priest in Ho Im, said, “We say anything we want to now”. I’m sure there are still those, however, who are careful not to talk about spirits while in the jungle.

Another taboo is to talk about death, especially the ‘terrible death’ which they fear so much. Also, they must not talk about ‘human rejects’. To talk about these things is to invite the spirits to get some kind of hold on them. It is true that when they are very angry they will say to the person they are angry with, “Let such-and-such spirit afflict you!” But the elders will scold them very strongly when they say this.

Other taboos have to do with the village gate, the village water source, the village swing, the village burial ground, etc. There will be certain trees that they must not cut down, although sometimes special rituals can be carried out if they want to cut them down for lumber. All of these taboos have to do with keeping the spirits from getting some kind of hold on them, and thus being able to afflict them – or even eat them.

Another precaution they observe, which is not exactly a taboo, is to turn a stool upside down when no one is sitting on it. If they do not do that, the spirits will feel it is an invitation to them to come and sit on the stool. Whenever non-Christian Akhas left my study or home, they carefully turned the stools upside down.

Another major defence the Akhas have against spirits is the ‘magic vine’ (meh), since the spirits are deathly afraid of it. It is closely related to the ginger plant. It has long stems and red flowers. When twins are born in a village, the elders will completely ring the village with stems of this plant. Also, the parents of twins, when they go out to the jungle after the birth of the twins, must have a copious amount of this plant interwoven into the shelter, to keep the spirits away. When they make ‘bamboo stars’ (da leh) they put a leaf from this plant in the very center. These are star-shaped designs with a crisscross of bamboo strips. There are many holes within this design, which confuses spirits, and thus they cannot get through it.

Sometimes when a certain spirit has been bothering a village, or several houses in the village, those who ‘know how to do it’ will go together and do the following. They will take strips of bamboo and make them into the shape of a tiger, or bull, or dog. Then some elder will make it come alive. The live tiger (or bull, or dog) is sent to kill the spirit which has been giving them trouble. Of course, they cannot see it go, but they are sure that it does. When it has had time to kill the spirit, they will bring the animal back (to po –eu) into the bamboo figure, and then cut it up and burn it. This kills the ‘animal’ so that it will not hurt them.

K-29 says that he has seen this done with two figures. One figure was ‘sent’, and then when it was brought back, it was brought back into the other figure, and then they ‘killed’ that figure. I have wondered if this may be borrowed from the Shans. Then, too, the Akhas believe that they have certain things ‘going for them’. One is that spirits are terribly afraid of the hair on people’s legs (kui da ca hm). When a man walks along this hair makes a terribly loud noise to the spirits, like a “lot of bells ringing”. This is why spirits can never be seen. They hear this noise, and run away before the person gets close enough to see them.

Some Akhas claim that spirits are deathly afraid of saliva, since they are afraid of contracting diseases that people suffer. But some Akhas say this is 'stupid'.

Another thing that helps them in their ceaseless struggle with the spirits is the fact that the spirits are not always too smart. A very common saying is, "If people don't know, the spirits don't know". That is, if a person does something very bad that would ordinarily bring 'spirit affliction', but no one knows anything about it, then the spirits won't know anything about it either.

Then too, Akhas believe there is a certain spirit which stays in the fields and 'guards' the things they have planted (ya lo ya sho a ma). This spirit does not afflict people, but helps them.

There are many precautions Akhas must take when they are camping. One is, they will make sure there is no odor of burning feathers or fur coming from their campfire, especially the first night. This attracts the spirits. Also, if they see a rat or mouse, or sometimes even a cat or dog running around in the firewood and the fire, they will not touch it, for it is probably the 'mi bym mi ceh' spirit. If they strike at it and don't kill it, during the night this spirit will make it sound as if big trees are falling down all around them. Sometimes too these spirits, if provoked, will pull the blankets off the campers, dip the blankets in water, then bring them back and put them on the sleepers while dripping wet.

The Akhas also believe that to be spiritually potent and powerful is the best defense against the spirits, since it is only the 'thin-souled' people that are afflicted by spirits. For example, P-4 told how he and A mui went to 'monkey hot springs' in the Meung Hai area to hunt. The Akhas near there warned them not to sleep or hunt there, "unless you can overcome the powerful spirits that live there". The Christian young men did sleep and hunt there, and got lots of game, but no non-Christian Akha would dare hunt there.

5 Rituals to nullify the spirit's power. There are certain rituals, usually combined with repeating spirit incantations, which are most beneficial in thwarting the designs spirits have on them. If these are done 'properly' they will appease the spirits, or at least nullify their 'affliction' in some way or other.

For example, I mentioned above about the termite hill spirit. If this spirit has been wronged and a man is sick, a shaman will tell his friends what kind of offering to make to the spirit. Usually it is a hen and a rooster. They take the animals to be sacrificed to the termite hill that has been offended. The one who will actually perform the ceremony of 'offering to the termite hill' (tsa pu law -eu) will first of all 'ceremonially sprinkle' (kui la sheh -eu) the offerings. Then he kills and cooks them. While they are cooking, he will lean a bamboo section of fermented rice up against the termite hill.

When the chickens are cooked, he will take some meat from each 'part of the body' (a seh) and drop them on the termite hill. If he is not too sure whether it is that particular hill or not, he may just drop it near the hill. While doing this he prays to the spirits something like this, "Look, I'm offering this three year hen and this three year rooster (actually they are probably closer to three months). Here also is rice and an egg, and liquor to drink. People's body hair is cool, whereas animal's fur (body hair and fur are the same word in Akha - ca hm) is warm. People's flesh is bitter, but animal's flesh (meat) is sweet. (These two sentences encourage the spirit to lay off the man who is sick, and concentrate on the animals being sacrificed.) Here is silver to buy the man back, and gold for his exchange."

After saying this he will chip a little sliver off of a silver bracelet or some silver ornament, and let it fall near the termite hill. They don't actually offer any gold ("We Akhas don't have any gold"), but they say that it will be enough if they just say that they offer it. They can fool the spirits that way.

After they have finished the offering and instructions to the spirit, the ones gathered there eat the rest of the meat from the chickens. They must not take any of the meat back to the village. If any is left, they abandon it there near the termite hill. When they get back to the village, they do not tie strings to the sick man's wrist, since this is an 'outside ceremony' (la nyi m -eu).

Besides this special offering to the termite hill, most Akhas also offer an egg to any termite hills which may be in their paddy fields at the time of their 'k'm pi law -eu' ceremony. That egg is called 'termite hill egg' (tsa pu ya u).

When it is a matter of wronging the 'dzah mi' spirit, which is an 'inside' spirit, they must perform the 'inside ceremony'. If a cow or dog walks up on a roof, for example, they feel this is a 'bad omen' (daw), and that they must appease the spirit very quickly to avert disaster. So they will kill the animal that went on the roof, and the villagers not in the clan of the owner of the animal will eat that meat outside the village, at a spot they have for this type of thing. The whole village must also observe 'ceremonial abstinence' (lah-eu) for a whole day. Then the owner of the house that the animal walked up on must call a spirit priest. Usually the spirit priest will call for two pigs, one dog, and five chickens to be sacrificed. This is what K-17 saw once. Then the spirit priest will repeat 'spirit incantations' to the 'dzah mi' spirit. This is performing the 'inside ceremony' (la k'oe m m -eu).

There is one time a year when they all work together to chase the spirits out of their village. This is during the 'k'a yeh' offering time (see under calendrical offerings).

Akhas sometimes perform the 'feeding of the spirit of the field' (ya sa neh bi dza -eu) offering. For this, if a man's paddy crop should produce at least one hundred loads of paddy, and he gets only 45 or 50, this is because the 'spirits are helping to eat it'. So the man will call a spirit priest and have a feast. The spirit priest will then go to the edge of the field and repeat 'spirit incantations'.

If they find that the harvest in the field is all right, but that when they pound paddy they do not get nearly as much rice as they should, they call the spirit priest again. He repeats 'spirit incantations' in the house, this time, since it is a case of an 'inside spirit' helping to eat the rice. Or it may be that the family has built their house over the place where a Shan or someone of the Mon-Khmer tribes has died a 'terrible death'. If that is the case, they will not have enough food to eat. So they must call the spirit priest and have him feed the spirits and repeat 'spirit incantations'.

6 Rituals for hunters. There are several rituals that hunters must follow in order to avoid spirit affliction. One thing they do is to feed the 'spirit of the fields' (ya sa neh). When they shoot and kill one of the 'big four', they cut out nine very small pieces of meat (some say just three pieces), and throw them on the ground while they say, "You all eat. Don't let us be afflicted by spirits. May that which is good never cease, and that which is bad never be encountered."

If they want to hunt near any of the places where any of the three spirits connected with water live, they must first of all 'so lo da -eu'. To do this, they take three sticks and set them up in a triangular shape near a big tree. The stick nearest the tree is taller than the other two. They then put a leaf in these sticks so that it is in a cupped shape. Then they kill a red rooster, and pluck some of the feathers. As they throw the feathers on the ground they say, "We are going to camp in your living place. We are out hunting. Here, we offer you a red rooster".

Then they cook the chicken, and put a very small piece of meat from each 'part of the body' (a seh) of the chicken into the leaf cup. (Note: they must keep aside one piece of meat that is not cooked.) As they put the cooked meat into the leaf cup they say, "Look carefully. Give us some game. Even if you don't give us a big animal, give us a small animal."

When they get back to their temporary shelters, they make a little crude tray out of bamboo strips (ka te), and cut up the raw piece of meat they still have with them. They cut it into nine pieces. They add some cooked rice to it, take it down below their shelter and say, "Here, 'terrible death' spirit, we offer this to you." (Pi-I hu ta lai -a lu ma de.) This is partially in Shan. The reason for this is that they don't know whether or not a Shan has died a 'terrible death' at this spot. Since it is possible, and since the Shan spirit would not understand Akha too well, they make it mostly in Shan.

- 7 Reaction to spirits. I asked some Akhas once if they never got angry at the spirits. They said they got angry in their hearts, but since they could do nothing about it they just had to be satisfied with that.

Others told me that when they felt the household spirit (dzah mi) did not look after things at home well enough, they would sometimes call it 'nym saw ji neh', which is an angry way of referring to that spirit. For the most part, however, fear seems to be the main reaction Akhas have to the spirits.

- 8 Shan Gods. Akhas have been influenced somewhat by the Shan concept of Gods and spirits. There are several 'gods' that Shans talk about in their legends, and some of these legends have been borrowed by some Akhas, so they will 'know' a little about these 'gods' from the legends. P-3 gave me the names of three of these 'Shan gods'; pya I, pya po, and pya na. But P-1, who is quite well versed in Akha legends, had not heard of these. K-28 and 29 immediately said, when I asked them about them, "Those are characters (they did not use the term 'god') in the Shan legends".
- 9 Shan spirits. As to the spirits the Shans fear, Akhas take a rather cautious view. For example, they do not seem to know whether there are spirits in abandoned Buddhist temples (peh shui dzah za). The Shans say there are very potent spirits in them, and are deathly afraid of them. Some Akhas will walk through them and sleep in them without any concern. Others say that they would not mind sleeping in one if they had first repeated 'spirit incantations' a bit.

However, Akhas will not cut down the trees around them. One of the men from Ba jeh made a terraced field just below an abandoned Buddhist temple. He has been careful not to cut down any trees there. However, people from Kengtung have gone up there and cut down many of the trees for firewood. When I asked him if any of them had been afflicted by spirits he said that he did not know, he had not seen them after they had cut down the trees. But he reiterated that he would not cut down a tree in an area like that.

LUCK AND CHANCE

Akhas have several beliefs concerning luck and chance. They believe that there is 'good luck' (gui lah yaw hui), and 'bad luck' (gui lah yaw doe). They further believe there is a lot of chance involved in [the luck?] which a person will have [sic], but at the same time they feel that a person who keeps the 'religion' well will be much less inclined to have 'bad luck'.

They also believe that a person who is 'spiritually potent' (gui lah sa la hui –eu) has lots of good luck and good fortune. But the 'thin-souled' (sa la ba –eu) person will have misfortune, and be bothered by a lot of spirits. K-2 mentioned especially that such people are bothered by the 'mi bym mi ceh' spirit (see above). K-28 mentioned that he is 'spiritually potent' so is not bothered by spirits and bad luck. In trying to see just how he meant that I gathered that there is something to do with good health involved in it. Also a strict keeping of Akha 'religion' – including the taboos.

Akhas have 'propitious days' (nah mui). They are different for each person, although those in the same household will have the same. Any of the days on which anyone in a particular house was born is not a propitious day. P-2 also felt that a day on which someone in the family dies is also not a propitious day -but K-28 and 29 disagreed with this. If it is not a propitious day for them, they must not start any important project on that day.

For example, in one house (K-28) a child was born on each of the following days: dog, rat, tiger, mule and horse. The father was born on sheep day, and the mother on chicken day. Then all of these days are not propitious for that family. They must not begin any building whatsoever on those days – even driving a stick into the ground. They must not cut down the trees for a field, build a house or a paddy house, or even a hut in their hill field. If it is a time for ancestor offerings, and it is the kind that each household does on its own, they must only do it on a day that is propitious. If it happens that in a family all twelve days become unpropitious, then automatically every day becomes propitious again, and anything can be done on any day.

I asked P-2 what would happen if an Akha were to drive a stake into the ground on a day that was not propitious, and he said that if they did, "they would become deaf, or their back would hurt, or their eyes would hurt". I was interested to hear the old man from Na daw (A tsa's father) say that before they became Christians it certainly was irksome to have to remember and abide by one's propitious days. Women do not keep track of their days separately, but fit into their husbands' and their households' days.

The propitious day for the whole village is the same as the propitious day for the village priest. That is, they will only start a new village, say, on a day which is propitious for him. There are several offerings that [they] have which are also held on the propitious day of the village priest.

SACRED OBJECTS AND PLACES

The Akhas have a concept of sacred objects and places, but the concept is not so much that there is an indwelling spirit, as that the sacred object or spot is a focal point whereby they can contact a spirit or spirits. They must do nothing disrespectful for fear they will bring upon themselves the wrath of the spirits, rather than their blessing. For example, Akhas do not believe that their ancestors' spirits reside in their 'ancestor altar' (a poe paw law), but that the ancestors' spirits come to the shrine when the household has an ancestor offering. When they come, they ride horses, so the horses are also fed. Even though the spirits do not actually reside in the paraphernalia of the shrine, women and girls, with the exception of the woman who has carried out the 'post-menopause ceremony' (ya yeh a ma) must not even touch it.

The altar (law gui) where they have their offerings to the 'lords and rulers of land and water' is a sacred place, and is not to be tampered with. If by any chance animals should knock it down, the elders of the village must have a new offering. If a child accidentally knocks it down they have a new offering, but the child's father must pay for the sow and rooster killed for it.

K-2 told of many years ago when Meu be Akha, not far from Pangwai, had a fire that burned their altar for this offering, but the villagers did not know about it yet. At night they would see a huge tiger prowling around there. Some of the elders went up to have a look in the daytime, and saw that the altar had been burned down. So they had a new ceremony, and the tiger disappeared.

The Akhas believe that there are certain types of animal horns that have special powers. Whether they would consider them 'supernatural powers' or not I do not know. They say that some female samber deer have a single horn right in the middle of their head. Such a horn is highly prized, because they believe that if a person possesses it, and carries it on his person, bullets cannot strike him, and he cannot be cut by a machete. Also, fire cannot touch him. If this horn is left in his house, the house will not burn. They also have this type of belief, generally at least, concerning the 'lightning bolt' (tso), which is described above.

THEOLOGICAL SYSTEMS

Akhas do not seem especially interested in developing any type of integrated 'theological system'. They speak of God, of gods, of spirits and other powerful beings, but say almost nothing of their relationship to each other. The only general statement I got was, "They are all under God and do his bidding".

Actually, in some ways their 'religious beliefs' are not as important to them as their 'religious practices'. If an Akha does not believe just like another, he can still live in the same village with that person. But if his practice of the Akha religion is different from the practice of religion in that village, he will not be able to live there.

AKHA RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

When the Akhas carry out their religious duties, it seems to bring them a certain feeling of security through conformity to the religion handed down to their ancestors. There is a dual benefit in that the carrying out of these religious duties also keeps the spirits from afflicting them. They do not believe that the carrying out of the religious rites and ceremonies gives complete protection from the spirits, but not to carry these out is certainly an open invitation to spirits to do their worst, which is one reason they will not let someone who does not carry them out live with them in the same village.

Akhas will often grumble and complain about the number of complicated things they must do in their religious practices, but I detect a certain amount of pride mixed with it too – especially on the part of the elders.

PROPITIATION

There are many practices they have which reflect a sense of dependence upon some outside force or power. Often I am not sure just what power they have in mind – and I think that often they are not sure either. For example, when a pregnant woman keeps repeating, “Let it be a boy, let it be a boy!”, who is she saying this to? Their general answer to this boils down to ‘God’, but I rather doubt that they actually think of ‘God’ when they say it.

There are some times when they pray when it is very precise to whom they pray. For example, in the offering to the ‘lords and rulers of land and water’ they are praying and offering meat to the ‘spirit-owner’ (yaw sah) of the area in which they live. They call him, or them by name. They tell them what they are offering and what they want from them.

This custom is very clearly borrowed from the Shans, so they kneel like the Shans, hold their hands before them with palms together like the Shans, and even say the final ‘amen’ (sam tu) like the Shans. In the typical Akha ceremonies, none of these things are done. Also, they do not burn wax tapers in their own Akha ceremonies, but in those borrowed from the Shans, such as the above ceremony, and when they are going hunting, they include that with the prayer.

There are many times when Akhas make an ‘offering’ (law –eu, or tu-eu), when it is not so much ‘propitiation’ in their thinking as merely ‘feeding’ an angry spirit some food that it is hungry for. Other times, especially in the ancestor offerings, they are feeding the ancestors. This is aimed at encouraging the ancestors to be on their side and help them in their time of need.

Telford got from some Akhas that different parts of the sacrifice are for different spirits (178). I have yet to find an Akha who agrees with this. Several deny it strongly.

PURIFICATION

Their common term for ‘purification’ is ‘m shaw –eu’. This is a general term which applies to the parents of ‘human rejects’ (tsaw caw) being purified so that they can live in the village again, and to those who die a ‘terrible death’ that is not too serious. If the ceremony of purification is carried out, their bodies can be taken back to the village for burial there. Also, if there has been adultery, they must perform this purification ceremony.

For the purification ceremony when ‘human rejects’ are born, see under Birth. They consider that the parents have ‘wronged the Akha religion’, and that is why ‘human rejects’ have been born. Therefore, it takes the offering of nine pigs, nine dogs and nine chickens, plus a great deal of ‘spirit incantations’ before the parents can be purified and thus live in the village again.

When an Akha has died a ‘terrible death’, but not of the terrible four (see under death and burial), Akha elders must ‘purify’ (m shaw –eu) him before his body can be brought back to the house. If he died at home, of course, it is not a ‘terrible death’, so the ‘purification ceremony’ is not needed.

They believe that the person's 'sin' caused him to die this way. I asked about a train wreck in lower Burma where over 80 people were killed. They felt that all who died at the wreck were 'terrible death' victims, and that they all had some kind of sin. When I asked about baby infants they said, "They must have had 'bad luck'". Those who died later in their homes from injuries had sin, but not as much as the ones who died a 'terrible death'. Their death, at home, would be considered a 'good death' (nm shi shi -eu), so their friends would not have to perform the 'purification' ceremony for them.

When a 'woman commits adultery', which is the way they put it, there must be a 'purification' ceremony performed in her home. Akhas feel that "The woman has done a terrible thing. She just must not do it. What the man involved has done isn't too bad." This particular 'purification' ceremony is sometimes also called 'k'oe za nyi za pya -eu', since pigs are offered both for the 'inside' spirits and for the 'outside' spirits. If they do not have this ceremony, the paddy crop of the woman will be no good. Also, they are afraid that the woman will become sterile. But if they have the purification ceremony performed properly, then everything will be as it was before. As for the man involved, if he wants to have 'spirit incantations' repeated in his house too he can, but this is not done often.

When they have a purification ceremony for a woman who has committed adultery, they must call a spirit priest to the woman's home. The members of the household prepare the 'pre-ceremonial feast' (shi ne ti -eu) for him and the elders of the village. Following that feast, the spirit priest will kill the animals to be sacrificed, and have his helper arrange them in front of the ancestor altar. There will be four pigs. One sow is known as 'ui k'eh', a boar is known as 'ui ga' - these two names being a couplet for 'ditch'. Another sow is known as 'gui jm' (the ceremonial name for the last female to die in the household), and the final boar is known as 'nya jm' (the ceremonial name for the female of the household who died before 'gui jm'). There must also be a chicken of the opposite sex for each pig. That is, when a boar is offered, there must also be a hen, etc.

When the four pigs and four chickens have all been arranged before the ancestor shrine, they also fix a winnowing tray with eight 'dishes' on it. Then the spirit priest, while 'dropping' (la ka-eu) the things on the tray from the eight 'dishes' will repeat spirit incantations. The theme of this is, "Fix up the ditches in God's place". This reference to ditches is the polite way of requesting that this woman will not become sterile through her infidelity. The spirit priest will start his spirit incantations around eight in the morning, and continue until around noon.

When the spirit priest is finished with the spirit incantation, he and the elders go back into the men's side of the house and look at the livers of all four pigs. This will tell them whether it will be 'good' for this woman or not. That is, whether she will become sterile or not, whether she will die a terrible death or not, whether she will have enough food to eat in the future or not, etc.

When this is finished, the young people there will fix up the meat (pi sha) for the spirit priest, which consists of four ribs (la tsm oe nm kah). Then there is a feast of rice and pork curry for the spirit priest and the elders. When that is finished, the spirit priest will go outside the house to perform the 'pu ka -ah to -eu' ceremony. This will be just beyond the spot where the water drips down from the eaves of the house (caw dah ga za). He will supervise the preparation of one pig and one dog, which must be of the opposite sex. Also, there must be a chicken of the opposite sex to go along with the pig, and one of the opposite sex to go along with the dog. There must also be two other chickens (na na zah k'o), which are very important. K-29 feels that these two chickens are offered so that the 'paternal aunts' (a k'o) who have died will not 'afflict' them. (Note the last syllable of both terms.) But others I talked to had never heard of this, and thought it was foolish.

This particular spirit incantation is addressed to the 'outside spirits' and is called, 'nyi za to -eu'. This is to ask the 'outside spirits' to keep the woman and her husband from dying a 'terrible death', and trying to drive away, by means of spirit incantations (to dzeh-eu) all bad and evil things from them. The spirit priest usually does this around sundown, spending around two hours doing it.

When the spirit priest is finished, he must not go back into the house of the 'guilty' woman. He goes to his own home, if he lives in the village, or to the house where he is staying. The meat for him (pi sha) is brought by his helpers.

The next morning they have the 'yah shaw law -eu' offering. For this they kill a chicken (sha shaw seh -eu), and feast the spirit priest and the elders with chicken curry, as well as pork curry from the pork left over from the day before. Both the spirit priest and the village priest will pronounce blessing (daw ngeh g'eh-eu) on the woman and her husband after the meal, as well as 'suck up the ceremonial liquor' (ji si teu da -eu). They must say it is 'very good' when they do this. Often they say, "It is better than honey".

AVOIDANCE AND TABOOS

Information concerning taboos has been included under various categories. There are also these others. When Akhas enter someone else's village, men must not be smoking as they walk through the village gate. When they get to someone's house in the village it is perfectly alright for them to smoke. Also, neither men nor women must be chewing betel when they walk through the gate, and women must not be spinning thread at that time. If they have been spinning thread up to the gate, they must put their spinner (ya ah) into the basket at their waist (ku bah), and then proceed through the gate.

When an Akha man goes to a village on a visit, his wife must not go, and vice versa. If there is something urgent that takes both of them there, they will stay in different houses. The implication is that it would be horrible to think that they might have intercourse in someone else's house.

A pregnant woman must not go to another village. She must not walk through the gate, for one thing. Also, they are afraid that she might have a miscarriage or a birth in that village. If that should happen, she could be fined anywhere from 100 to 200 'old coin', and the village would have to have a ceremony to keep sickness and plagues away (pu k'eh g'eh-eu).

On the day that a woman puts her headdress back on (u coe coe -eu) after having combed or fixed up her hair in some way, her husband must not shave his head. If they each do something special to their heads on the same day, "they will have 'human rejects'".

Almost everything that has to do with death is taboo at other times. That is, women cannot sew or cut out clothes at night, since they only do that at the time of death. Also, no one must tie anyone's thumbs together since they only do this in death. P-2 said that parents warn their children not to do this in play.

Since they beat something metal when a person is in a coma and they are trying to revive him, they will not strike metal in the house at any other time. They must also never whistle in the house if it has an ancestor shrine. Some say this has nothing to do with death, but those in the Loimwe area say that it does. K-28 says that the reason they must not whistle at other times is that they reserve its use for when a woman is having a difficult labor and cannot give birth. Then the husband will whistle, and thus assist the birth of the child.

When men go hunting, the women must stay home. When women are out getting curry things in the jungle, it is taboo for the men of that household to go hunting.

It is taboo for men and women to bathe in the same stream.

It is taboo for a woman to step over her husband's leg, or his sleeping place. Also, she must not spin thread until after the men have eaten their morning meal. Also, a woman must not step over a machete.

Whistling is taboo in a place where paddy has been planted. Also, when they are hunting whistling is taboo. They are afraid that the person whistling will be like an animal (sha mu mu -eu), and someone will shoot him by mistake.

They must not throw either cooked or uncooked rice into a stream or let it spill into a stream, as when they are carrying it home from the fields, or camping near a stream.

They must not ride a horse in another person's village, although they may ride in their own. This taboo probably came from the Shans.

They must not carry an unsheathed machete through a village. One reason for this is that when they carry a body to be buried they carry an unsheathed machete on their shoulder. Another practical reason is that the elders of the village are afraid that if young men carried machetes around like that, if and when they got into arguments there would be bloodshed and maybe even death. This taboo may also have come from the Shans.

Telford (148, 149) tells how Lahus are afraid to wake someone up too fast 'for fear their soul will run away'. This does not seem to be a taboo with Akhas (K-23 and others). They say that if a person won't get up when it is time, they will call him, yell at him, shake him – any way to get him up.

In other categories I have written about one person being taboo to another (zah do ka –eu). If both parties had 'human rejects' they are in this taboo relationship. Also, two men who have been married to the same woman (that is, one man divorced her and another man married her), are also in this taboo relationship. They must not speak directly to each other.

DIVINATION

Akhas have several means of divination. One of the most common ways is by means of a chicken leg (ya yoe ka haw-eu). They take the thigh bone of a chicken, especially one that has been used in a sacrifice, and put a splinter of bamboo into the hole toward the end. They look at the angle, the alignment etc. To decide various things. For example, they do this before they go on a long trip or start a court case. They will not start the case if they find by looking at the thigh that they will lose.

Whenever they make an offering to the 'lords and rulers of land and water' they also do this. It tells them whether or not they will get lots of game during the coming year. They can also find out what kind of rice crop they will have. It not only will tell them how much rice they will get, but also whether they will have to work real hard weeding it or not.

In other sections I have mentioned the 'reading of livers' to divine the future. Akhas say that there are three 'divisions' (pya) to the liver. The first one shows what the future holds for the person who killed the pig. The second shows what the future will be for the village, and the third what the future will be for the area.

There are also those who know how to divine with an egg (ya u neh tsi haw-eu). For the most part this is used for sick people. What they do is take a newly laid egg. The person who knows how to do it will rub the egg three times from the head to the feet of the sick person while saying, "I am divining. Let the egg sicken with whatever sickness and disease this person has. Let the lords of the sky and earth gather here. I also 'gather' here. Let us see what is the sickness and illness."

There is much more that they say to the egg as they do this. They usually say several times, "Don't lie to me", since the spirits sometimes lie to them. For example, the spirits may lie, through the egg that is being used to divine, and make the family think that they should perform the 'dzah mi ca –eu' ceremony for the sick person, which they would do. But the person would not get well, since the spirit had lied to them, and kept hidden the real thing so that the spirits can get the person to die. Evidently the only spirits who lie, however, are the ones under Tah pah.

After the one performing this has instructed the egg, and the divine helpers, and the sickness as well as the spirits, he then takes a machete, or whatever is handy, and breaks the egg. He then pours the yoke [sic] and white of the egg into a dish, and throws the shell away. Then he looks at it one way and another. If the yolk has gone whitish, that means death. If the yolk is red, that means they must give lots of medicine to drink. If one side of it is bad, but the rest good, that means that one side of the person is sick, but the rest all right, etc.

K-29 figures that he has done this over 100 times. He did it just the day before I interviewed him (Dec. 8, 1965), as well as the Saturday before. Even though K-28 is a village priest, he does not know how to 'read' the egg, so he has never done it, but he has seen it done many times, and both men believe in it completely.

They call reading the palm 'du bui gui-eu'. They look not only at the palm but the fingers and joints too. They say that there are not many Akhas now who can do this, though there used to be many who could. There are many Shans, though, who can still do it, which makes me wonder if it may not be borrowed from them.

There is another type of divination (ja maw maw-eu) that they use especially when they want to find out who stole something. They will take a chicken into the middle of a group of people who would be those suspected of the theft. Then one who knows the formula 'talks' to the chicken while turning it around and around. When he is through talking to the chicken he will let it go, and the person it pecks is the guilty one. Similar to this, they take a carrying basket and spin it around while 'teaching' it. Then after they have said the magic formula they let it go, and the one it strikes is the guilty one.

A lu (of Jaw seu village) told me how a 'powerful shaman' (sha ma) takes a dish, puts uncooked rice and money in it, and holds it before his or her eyes. (The money is what he is charging for his service.) With his eyes closed he kind of hums. This is the 'divining' (maw-eu), and pretty soon he will tell the person paying him for divining what it is the person wants to know.

Dreams are very important to Akhas as a means of understanding the future. If the night before a man goes hunting he dreams that there is water in his gun, or if he sees it broken in two, or if he sees the priming mechanism broken, or anything like that, then the next day he will be sure to get one of the 'big four'. "This has happened to me several times." (K-29)

If they have a dream that they kill one of the big four and bring it back, within a few days a person in the village will die, though not the same person that had the dream. If a person gets sick after someone in the village has had such a dream, he is very frightened, and will call someone to help him right away.

If a sick person sees a tiger in his dreams, it means that he will get well. If a well person sees his dead parents in a dream, though, he is likely to get sick. If he sees them several times he will 'feed' them, and ask them not to come back. If the dead parent visits the house, it probably means there is something the parent wants, so the son tries to figure out what it is, and will throw it out in the jungle for the dead parent, so that they will not keep coming back to the house.

A person is likely to get sick if he sees two animals fighting in his dreams, especially buffalo bulls.

If an Akha has a 'bad' dream, he is very frightened. On the other hand, when he has a 'good' dream, he is very happy, since he is sure it foretells something good.

P-4 told of a dream he had while in Pangwai at school. In his dream he and his father and his grandfather were together arguing. They were arguing because the grandfather said he had to 'return' (g'o -I). P-4 was very sad in his dream when he heard this. The next day he got word that the grandfather had died.

OMENS

There are certain 'omens' Akhas believe in. For example, if a blue-throated flycatcher (k'eh mui k'eh la) is seen when they start to make a camp in the jungle, it is a very bad sign. They will move their camp at once.

When they are moving and something bad happens, it is the ancestors trying to stop them from going. For example, when Li sa's son (of Na daw Akha, when they were on their way moving south) fell out of a window of a two story house in Kengtung, in spite of the fact that there was a low framework to prevent this, non-Christian Akhas felt quite strongly that the father and his family should have stayed in Kengtung for at least a year.

Also, when a family from Na bi village left their campsite in Kengtung near our home and left their little boy there when they started out for their new village site, K-28 and 29 felt it was not just 'ordinary for getting' – the spirits made them forget. I believe that their use of 'spirits' here includes the ancestors. If the parents had followed the customs properly, they would not have gone on to the new site.

If they shoot at a barking deer and it 'barks' (hoe) then it is 'sha daw'' (literally, bad omen meat). They must not hunt it any more, or even touch it if it has been shot. The one who shot at it must take off his clothes and take a bath. When he puts his clothes back on again, he must turn them all inside out and return again to his home. K-29 had had this happen to him, and 'since I did that, nothing bad happened to me'. If the barking deer dies, those who did not shoot it can eat the meat. K-28 has done this – and said it was 'delicious'.

I have spoken of 'bad omens' (daw) in other sections. Any time an Akha sees a 'bad omen' he is very frightened. If a person going to his field, for example, sees a tiger, bamboo rat, pangolin or wildcat, that is a 'bad omen', especially when he is carrying out some ceremony. He must 'remedy the bad omen' (daw jaw-eu) as quickly as possible, or some terrible tragedy will befall him.

But seeing these animals is not always a 'bad omen'. For example, if an Akha is going hunting and sees a tiger, bamboo rat, pangolin or wildcat, that is good luck, and he can shoot it. K-28 told of shooting at a pangolin and its not moving. He went up to it, picked it up, and killed it by cutting its throat with a machete. He cooked and ate it, and said it was 'delicious'.

CEREMONIAL MAGIC

The use of magic plays an important part in their agricultural life (see under agriculture). Besides the items mentioned there, they do the following. When a type of darkish caterpillar with a red head (a g'eu a ju) appears in their paddy fields, they are extremely frightened. They say that this kind of caterpillar can eat up a whole paddy field in just one night. The whole village must make an offering of a chicken and pig to the 'spirit-owner' (yaw sah) of this caterpillar, and then observe ceremonial abstinence for one day. They do not do this on a yearly basis, but only when this type of caterpillar 'appears' (ga-eu).

If they make a field in a place where there used to be a Buddhist temple, they must bury a figure of a bull (to no maw kaw) in the field, so that it will scare spirits away. Akhas feel that such old Buddhist temples are 'all over the hills'. K-29 has gotten ten old coins often for making these figures and pronouncing the special incantation (to no to -eu). Sometimes people have to give 100 or 200 old coins for this service.

If it is raining too much, Akhas will sometimes have their village priest perform the 'rain stopping' ceremony (u tsa law tso -eu). Although the village priest does the actual ceremony, the whole village must observe ceremonial abstinence the day he does it. They perform this ceremony especially when it rains at paddy harvest time. When it does not rain, and the opium growers are afraid that their crop will be ruined, they perform the 'rain producing ceremony' (u yeh law yah -eu). The evening before they do it the village priest will take a rock and hold it up to the sun and say, "If you can't split this rock open with heat (tso pa -eu), then rain!"

The next day the whole village will observe ceremonial abstinence. The village priest and the elders of the village will dig a hole, pour some water in it, put a dish with one or three small fish (nga de) in it, and then cover it with a winnowing tray. They will stick a length of thatch grass through a hole in the tray and pull it back and forth, figuring that this will help to 'open the sky' and let the rain fall. Then after that the village priest has an ancestor offering.

K-28 has neither seen nor done these, but K-29 has seen them doing the second. K-28 has heard of it often, and said that if he had had to do it he could have, but he never had to do it. From conversations with other Akhas from the Loimwe area, I believe these ceremonies might be slowly dying out.

CURSING

There is a certain kind of curse they can put on a person who has wronged them. When A meh of Ta naw (now Ho lm) was tied up by the local levies and cruelly questioned for some time because he had been named as a murderer, his relatives were extremely angry at the one who made the false accusation. So they 'placed a curse' (ya k'eh ya -eu) on the man and his family who, out of spite, had pointed his finger at A meh. What they did was to call a spirit priest, who happened to live in their village. They took an uncastrated pig (za pi) for this ceremony, which is why uncastrated pigs cannot be used in most other ceremonies. The ceremony they performed with the pig is called 'calling the ghost of the dead person' (shi pi ku -eu). Before and while stabbing the pig the spirit priest spoke the magic words that would bring sickness and death to those who had falsely accused A meh. (He had to stab the pig through a leaf, but I don't know the significance of this.) He called upon the 'lords and rulers of land and water' to look. He called Bi yeh, Ka yeh and Je yeh to look. He called on the ancestors to look. And finally he called upon 'God' to look.

I was told that not too long after that, every person who had accused A meh of the murder was dead. The Akhas felt (and some of them were Christians) that it was because of the 'placing a curse' that it had happened.

There is another type of curse they can place on a person (called either ya k'eh ya -eu, or ya k'eh k'eh -eu). If B is accused of stealing something belonging to A, but he denies it, and A is certain that B did it, A will sometimes confront B with doing this to prove his innocence, feeling that if he is guilty he will not go through with it. What they do is go out on the porch of A's home with liquor to drink. Elders of the village are also called.

Then while A spills some liquor he will say something like this, "Sun and moon, look. If this man is the thief, wherever he goes may he be bitten by a tiger. If he goes near water may he drown. When he walks under a tree let the tree fall on him. If he did not steal it, then never mind. Let his 'luck-blessing' (gui lah) be great. Let him get food for his labor."

Then the two men drink some more liquor, and the elders drink it too. They do not do this too often any more - at least in the villages that are not too far from Loimwe and Kengtung.

When an Akha is extremely angry at another person, he will often say very strong things, which have a bit of a magical curse about them. The strongest thing he can call someone else is a 'twin' (tsaw peh). He can also call them 'tsaw ha tsaw g'eh', or 'tsaw ha tsaw daw'. It is hard to find english equivalents for these expressions, except to say that they are terrible terms to be used in the eyes of Akhas.

The person who is angry may call the other person a 'child of monkeys', or 'child of dogs', or 'child of lightning bolt'. These too are considered by the Akhas to be very strong. The last term has within it the implication that they hope the person they are scolding will die from lightning.

Sometimes they will also say, "Let me see you going but never coming back" (I za maw-a, la za ma maw-i.) This means they hope the person they are cursing will die a 'terrible death'. Just the repetition of the words they hope will have some magical power in bringing it to pass.

They will also sometimes say, “May you be taken by a tiger” (K’a la bi sheu g’eh-aw.) This is wishing a ‘terrible death’ on a person, as is the statement, “Let a lightning bolt strike you” (Tso –eh bi di.) When A has a ‘bitter grievance’ (nui ma ja –eu) against B, he can do something to ‘revenge the grievance’ (nui ja m-eu). A will make a figure in the shape of a bull (to no maw kaw) from bamboo strips. Then he will repeat special spirit incantations (to no to –eu) to make the figure a ‘spirit’ (neh), which will make B sick. After that he will put it in the ground beneath the house of B, and B will get sick. But a ‘powerful shaman’ (nyi pa sha ma) can tell B where it is hidden, so that he can get rid of it quickly.

K-28 told of having this type of figure buried under the path of the village gate leading to the village where he used to live. This resulted in the death of four people. K-28, as village priest, went to a Shan who told him about the figure. So K-28 returned and dug it up. He and the elders with him broke it up with a machete and threw it into the jungle. No one died after that.

They did not know who had done this, but since that village was the split off from another village, they felt that it must have been someone in that section of the village that had done it. “If I’d known who had done it, I would have killed (beu seh) them”, said K-28.

AKHA RELIGIOUS PRACTITIONERS

Men with 'authority' in an Akha village are the following, ranked in importance according to the Akhas: village priest (dzoe ma), spirit priest (boe maw, or pi ma), blacksmith (ba ji), village headman (na ngeu, or la ja), and shaman (nyi pa).

VILLAGE PRIEST

"You cannot have an Akha village without a village priest" is a very common saying among Akhas. These men (women can never be chosen for this high office) are extremely important in the life of the village. Akhas often refer to them as the 'father' (a da) of the village. They also say, partly in joking, that the village priest is 'next only to God'.

Akhas feel that a village priest is indispensable to the village, since it is through his performance of certain rituals that the village has enough rice to eat, and the livestock will increase. Also, they will get meat from their hunting. This can backfire on the village priest, of course. If the villagers feel, for example, that their village priest has let them down, they may replace him as village priest. Such cases of 'letting down' might be; when the rice supply is inadequate, when the livestock is poor, when many villagers get sick and die, or when they get only a little meat from hunting. Of course, if the villagers realize it is not the fault of the village priest they will remain faithful to him. Also, in actual practice, I do not know of a single village where they have replaced their village priest.

Meaning of the name.

The Akha name for this office is made up of two parts. The first part, 'dzoe', has the idea of 'inherited power'. The second part, 'ma', means either the main one, or great one. Thus the 'dzoe ma' is the 'great one with inherited power'. Akhas believe that this power comes from 'God'.

Legendary origin.

In their legends, Akhas say that there were no village priests before Jaw bah's time. Jaw bah appointed eight men and himself, making a total of nine men, to be village priests. He also explained to them what to do and what not to do, as 'God' had explained it to him. They in turn taught the Akhas what their moral duties (don't kill, don't steal, etc.), and religious duties (observe this day, perform this ceremony, etc.) were. It is these nine men who are 'fed' at the 'ordination' of the new village priest, and also when they have the 'dzoe yah law -eu' (see below). The nine are:

1. Ma zeu a poe I kaw kaw kah. He was very 'fast' (kaw), so fast that he could run after a barking deer and kill it by hitting it over the head with a stick.
2. Je bya a poe k'a tu tu le. He was very 'strong' (k'a), so that he could carry ten logs at once.
3. Tsa sui a poe g'o lo lo dzu. He would 'wait' (lo) around people's houses hoping they would give him rice to eat.
4. G'aw meh a poe meh lu lu dzui. He was a 'bad' one who would go around beating children, but he did it because they would not learn the things he was trying to teach them.
5. A shah a poe za lo g'o pya. He was a liar.
6. Ceh mui ceh gah boe loe. He argued violently with others, and beat them as 'gongs' (boe loe).
7. Byah leh a poe g'ah deh. He would speak strongly when there was a court case, "That's right". But he was also rather 'scoldy' (deh).
8. Law bi a poe la caw dm-eu. This one wore long, narrow pants (la caw dm-eu), and Akhas are supposed to bury people from this clan in that kind of pants when they die.
9. Hui -eu a poe Jaw bah bah mah. This was the one who selected the village priests and was their leader. He was very 'tall' (mah), and his hair went all the way to the ground.

In the above it should be noted that the first two syllables of each are actually the name of the man, except the last. His name is 'Jaw bah'. Also, each of these names are names of clans today. However, these are not all the clans, nor are they the only clans from which village priests come today, though each village priest feels a certain spiritual affinity with these nine men. The present day village priest feels he is carrying on the great tradition started by them. And they also feel that these nine great men are still helping them today.

Choosing a village priest.

When a village has to choose a village priest, the elders, meaning the older men of the village, must all meet together. They first of all look for a 'holy' (yaw shaw) man. By 'holy' they mean someone whose parents, grandparents, and so on for seven generations have had absolutely no 'human rejects' born, or any 'terrible deaths' in the family. They must also not have had any deaths from insanity, epilepsy or gunshot wounds. The man himself must not be a 'no-son person' (shm byeh). That is, he must have at least one living son. Also, he must not have had 'human rejects' himself.

He must not marry a woman who is already pregnant. No village would allow him to be village priest under such circumstances. If his wife is not faithful to him, he will not be chosen. His wife is unfaithful to him after he has become a village priest, either he or his sons, or both, will not have a long life. Furthermore, if the prosperity of the village were affected by such action, the village would almost certainly have to choose a new man. I have not found any village where this has happened, however. Akhas are careful enough in choosing their man, and the man who is village priest and his wife are awed enough by the position that they probably have not had the problem of unfaithful wives arise very often. But if it should, they would select a new one.

The man they choose for this office must have very high standards. He must not say 'evil' (yaw doe) things, or it will affect the whole village. Akhas will usually choose an older man, since he must be mature and not get bigheaded. Not only is he to 'teach' the elders, but the elders of the village must be able to correct him if and when he might make a mistake.

Usually he will be a man who is not interested in hunting, trading, and other pursuits that take him from the village. And he must be a man who is willing to observe ceremonial abstinence (lah-eu), since he has to do so more often than other men in the village. Akhas are a bit leery about making a younger man the village priest, since he may not be able to refrain from sleeping with his wife on nights before days of ceremonial abstinence.

I asked K-28 what would happen if a village priest died a 'terrible death' (sha). He was shocked by the question. "Such a thing is impossible (ma shi k'm)" he said. But if it did happen, the whole village would have to flee. I have never heard of this happening. K-28 and 29 felt that if he should die a terrible death the villagers would flee to another village that had a village priest. This is what the village did where K-28 used to live, although under different circumstances. When K-28, their village priest, fled to Kengtung to live, they left their village and joined another that already had a village priest.

The man Akhas select to be village priest will have to know quite a bit about Akha religious customs. It is permitted for him to consult freely with the elders when unprecedented customs and ceremonies are held which he has only heard about but never seen. But even so, he is still the final word on what will or will not be done.

Also, he must have a fair knowledge of Akha medicine. For instance, he will often be called upon to give help, both medical and magical, to women who are having a difficult and protracted labor. Also, when various sicknesses break out both among the villagers and the livestock, he should be able to cure them – and this too will be by medical and magical means.

When the village elders finally choose a man to be village priest, they must be unanimous in their choice. If there are those who really do not want the person chosen to serve as village priest, they are expected to move out of the village. Often the man chosen to be village priest is reluctant, and he may say he does not want to serve. This may be just coyness in some cases, but I believe from what K-28 said, he was really afraid to take on such a high and important position. However, the elders will usually prevail upon the person if he is reluctant, and make promises of how they will help, etc. When it is a matter of calling a person from another village to serve, they will have to promise paddy, money, and other material benefits to talk them into doing it.

Ordination of the village priest.

After the man is chosen, they must have a kind of 'ordination' service (dzoe ma ka-eu). All of the village elders must be present for it. K-28 related his 'service', which I imagine is basically like others. In 1951 he was asked to serve as village priest in a new village that was being set up by ten houses. They wanted to move into an area where they could make terraced rice fields. They had bought some from the Shans, and had gradually dug more year by year. They first of all built temporary shelters at the site they had chosen. Then they got the wood, bamboo and thatch needed to build K-28's house, since the house for the village priest must be built first. They had also cleared a spot for his house, and leveled it off a bit.

On the day they were going to 'start the new village' by building his house, after their morning rice, about 8 o'clock, K-28 took a boar, 'ceremonially sprinkled' (kui la sheh -eu) it, and killed it with a machete. This was down near his shelter.

The young men of the new village then took over and prepared it for both the service of 'ordination' and the feast to follow that. An old man, K-28's grandfather, showed them how to cut the lower pair of ribs just so. These had to be cut in such a way that the new village priest would have the section of the ribs that joined to the backbone to eat, and he would be able to give the cut off bones (one each) to the two men that the elders had chosen to be his 'assistant village priests' (dzoe za). This pair of ribs, with the two specially cut ribs, were cooked with all of the other meat for the feast, but of course they could recognize them when they later had the feast.

K-28 said that when the meat and rice were cooked, the young men then called out, "We're going to eat". Then everyone gathered at K-28's shelter. There some young men, again instructed by K-28's grandfather, who was not a village priest but who understood the customs and how to do this, set up a 'rice table' (haw jeh) with the following 'dishes' on it: 'holy rice', meat (which included some liver, three pieces from the various 'parts' of the pig, and some from the special ribs cooked for the village priest and his helpers), liquor, and tea. Also, they placed a large bowl with pork curry, which would later be eaten in the feast.

K-28 then sat on a stool on the side of the 'rice table' (haw jeh) that his shelter was on – the 'head side'. He then began the important part of the 'ordination', which is to feed the nine original village priests. To do this, he reached into the 'holy rice' first, holding both hands together. He took a little rice out and dropped it on the table. He did that three times.

While doing it he said something like this, "Today, nine great village priests, come eat this. Today I become a new village priest. Etc." He says quite a bit, and he keeps saying it all the time he is 'feeding' the nine original village priests. One other thing he mentioned was that this was an 'unexpected privilege', and that 'God' had chosen him for this task.

While K-28 was dropping the food and pouring the drink on the 'rice table' and saying the above, all of the elders of the village were gathered nearby, and they were saying, "Nine great village priests of 'God', come eat and drink this. Make this man (here they repeated his name) one of 'God's' village priests too. Etc." All of the elders of the new village were there – "they had to be". This was a public acknowledgment that they were behind this man as their new village priest. If any man of the village had been sick and not able to attend this ceremony, the new village priest would have had to send some liquor to him when the main service was over. When that man had drunk some of that liquor, he too would have acknowledged the new man as village priest.

When K-28 had had dropped some of the cooked rice on the 'rice table' three times, he next took some meat from the 'meat dish' and, again with both hands, reached into the dish three times, and each time dropped the meat on the 'rice table'. Then he poured out liquor three times, and last of all he poured out some tea three times, all on the 'rice table'. Then he reached back into the dish with the 'holy rice', again with both hands, and brought some rice to his mouth which he ate. He did this three times. He did the same with the meat.

Then he drank some of the liquor, and last of all drank some of the tea. As he picked up the dish of liquor and the dish of tea, he was careful to do so with both hands. When he had finished 'feeding' the nine original village priests, and eating some of it himself, the actual 'ordination' part was over.

Next he picked up a pair of chopsticks placed there for him before the 'service', and reaching into the bowl with the curry in it, took some of the pork and ate it. After that, all of the elders gathered around that 'rice table', as well as others that had been set up, and had a feast of rice and pork curry, with plenty of liquor to drink.

Since they were also starting a new village right away, K-28 had to fix up a 'dish' with uncooked rice and a raw egg in it. He then went, with all of the elders, to the site where they had planned to build his house. He first of all threw some rice on the ground, in the area where he would dig the hole for the 'main house post' (jm zeu), while he said, "I'm not asking for lots of places on which to build a village. I'm asking for this place. Let me have this place on which to build my village, even as 'God' has made me the village priest." They consider this to be begging the 'spirit owner' (yaw sah) of the site for permission to build the village there.

Next he took the raw egg, and while holding it up (but he must not hold it higher than his ear), he said, "Let there be three paths – one each for the blacksmith, the spirit priest (boe maw), and the village priest". Then he threw the egg down on the ground, into a little depression they had made where they planned to dig the hole for the 'main house post' of his house. The egg they threw that time broke properly, and they made their new village there. They say that if the egg breaks open and runs out in every direction when they do this, that is a good sign, and they will proceed with the village as planned.

If it breaks, but runs mostly in just one direction, they will move the village priest's house in that direction a little way, which to their way of thinking moves the whole village. If it breaks but does not run, it means that the site is all right, but that there will be lots of sickness in the village.

If the egg does not break, they try throwing it again. Each time they throw it, however, they say that the egg gets 'longer and longer'. K-29 said that his father once saw them throw an egg three times without [it] breaking. After the third time it was about a foot long. When this happens, the spirits of the site are not giving permission to them to build a village there. In the case of K-29's father, they picked everything up and moved to a new site.

Since the egg K-28 threw on his 'ordination' day broke well, his son started digging the hole for the 'main house post', and then the other young men joined him, and the young men started building the house. It should be noted that it had to be K-28 or his son who started digging that hole.

The elders then went with K-28 to the two shelters of the men chosen to be 'assistant village priests' (dzoe za). They went to the shelter of the older man first, whose name was Jeu ba. K-28 carried the pork ribs for him and the other man, in a clay cooking pot.

When K-28 and the elders got to Jeu ba's shelter, Jeu ba caught a chicken and gave it to K-28. K-28 then 'ceremonially sprinkled' it and killed it. He also plucked the feathers, washed it, cut it up and cooked it. When he was done, K-28 arranged a 'rice table', with the same dishes on it he had just had. He and Jeu ba both sat on stools on the 'head' side of the 'rice table'. K-28 then lifted some of the rice out with both hands, and handed it to Jeu ba, who received it in the same way as 'ancestor offering food' – that is, he received it in his two hands cupped together, and brought it to his mouth that way. The same was done with the meat.

For the liquor, K-28 handed it with both hands to Jeu ba, who received it with both hands, and drank some. The same was done with the tea. As K-28 was giving him these things to eat and drink, he said something like this, "May you be a 'village priest' (dzoe) for a long time. May you be blessed and have good health. From now on I will divide the meat with you that I get." The 'meat' that he will give him is from the share he gets from any of the 'big four' animals shot by a villager, namely the right foreleg. He will get other meat as well at special ceremonies, and he promises here to share this with his assistant.

When they had done this, Jeu ba reached in with his chopsticks and took some chicken curry. Then the others joined him, and they had a 'feast' with quite a bit of drinking. They were not hungry, since they had just had a feast. But they must all touch some of the food to their lips, at least. "We must carry out the custom whether we are hungry or not."

K-28's house was finished in two days, and he and his family moved into it. They wanted to get his house finished quickly, since if there had been a death in the 'camp', or serious illness break out among the villagers before his house was built, they would have had to abandon the site and go find another one. After his house was built, it was a 'village', and they would not have to move.

Seven days after the 'ordination', K-28 killed a pig that the villagers had paid for. He then divided the meat in accordance with the amount of money they had put in for the meat. They called this ceremony 'moving into the village' (pu da lah-eu). They would not have done this if there had been anything bad happen within that period of time, as a death in the village, or animals taken by a leopard, or that type of thing.

Then later, when one 'cycle' (13 days) was completed from the day of his 'ordination', since everything was still going 'well' for the village, K-28 killed another pig in his house. On that day he and the villagers also observed 'ceremonial abstinence' (lah-eu). They believe that if everything goes well during this first cycle of days, it means that the village priest is a good one, and because his 'luck-blessing' is 'big', the whole village prospers.

Responsibilities of the village priest.

The village priest is fully responsible for the health, welfare and religious life of the whole village. This includes livestock, the rice crop year by year, the water source not going dry, and everything else that has to do in any way with that village.

I heard of one village where the water source went dry one year. The Akhas living in the area were convinced that it was because of a mistake that the village priest had made. Since his wife was pregnant, the village priest had felt that he should not be present when they had the water source purification. "He should have known that the village priest is always 'holy', even when his wife is pregnant. Since he didn't go, but just let the village elders do it, the water supply dried up", is what several Akhas told me later.

1. Ceremonies. There are certain ceremonies that the village priest must lead. He will call out the day before the ceremony takes place telling the villagers the next day is to be a ceremonial day, and that they must 'observe ceremonial abstinence' (lah-eu). He also tells them what ceremony they will observe the next day. The reason he has chosen that day is that it is his 'propitious day', and therefore the propitious day for the whole village.

Once he has called out what they will do, they must carry it out, even though the village priest might be sick. If he is sick, one of his sons will take the place of the father. If the son is quite young, the father will explain to him what to do, and the elders that accompany him will also guide him through whatever ritual he is to perform. Usually the important part of the ceremony as far as the village priest is concerned is the starting of it. After that "the elders can take over".

There are four village ceremonies which the village priest leads: the purification of the water source (which includes the purification of the rice seed to be planted the same day), the renewal of the village gate, the rebuilding of the village swing, and the offering to the 'lords and rulers of land and water'.

There are also three special ancestor offerings to the 'spirit of the village priest' which he is in charge of, even though the various families in the village also make their own ancestor offerings that day too. These are considered the most important ancestor offerings of the year, and everyone tries to be in the village when they are made. Visitors are not allowed into the village on the day of these offerings. If they come in, the village priest will fine them.

The village priest also leads in two ceremonies that have to do with the burning of the hill fields. The first ceremony is to warn the spirits that the village is going to burn the fields and the spirits should run away, and the second is to instruct the 'spirit of the fire' that the burning is finished for the year, so it must also stop.

While the rice crop is growing there are three ceremonies the village priest leads, which protect the rice through magical means. All of the villagers participate in these, but the village priest is the one that decides the proper time, gives instructions, and instills the potency needed to make the ceremonies effective.

There are certain other ceremonies that the village priest has to carry on from time to time when the need arises. Two of these have to do with weather: a rain producing ceremony, especially when the opium crop needs rain badly, and a rain stopping ceremony, especially when the villagers are harvesting their paddy crop. If a house should burn in the village, he must hold a special ceremony which prevents the same thing from happening to other houses.

If an epidemic were in the region, he would lead a ceremony which would keep it away from his village. If there was sickness in his village of epidemic proportions, he would lead a ceremony which would drive the 'spirit of sickness' out. (These ceremonies are all described in other places.)

There is a special ceremony that the village priest needs to perform for himself, whenever he realizes that the spirits are doing things to make it difficult for him. This is called 'dzoe ha da -eu'. This ceremony will protect him from further trouble.

The reason K-28 performed this ceremony was because when he started to reap a field of paddy, he figured that he would easily get 50 loads of paddy from that field – but he got barely 25 loads. When his household would pound the paddy, the rice that they thought would last 10 days easily, just barely lasted five days. "This was an indication that the spirits were eating the food". So he 'dzoe ha da -eu'.

This is what he did. He sent for a spirit priest and had the pre-ceremonial feast for him. Then the spirit priest had an 'inside ceremony' with two pigs and two chickens. When the sacrifices were made the spirit priest repeated spirit incantations before the ancestor shrine asking that the village priest and his family would have good health, plenty to eat, lots of money, etc.

Then they all went outside for the 'outside ceremony'. For this they killed four chickens, one goat, and one pig. Again the spirit priest repeated 'spirit incantations', saying much the same thing. The first ceremony took care of the spirits in the house, including the ancestors. The outside ceremony took care of all of the spirits that were outside the house and village. K-28 said that after doing this, his rice crop was better, and he did not lose food to the spirits.

2. Sacred places. The village priest must care for the six sacred places of the village: the village gate with the male and female wooden figures outside of it, the secondary village gate, the village swing, the village water source, the village graveyard, and the offering site to the 'lords and rulers of land and water'. If any villager notices anything 'wrong' with these sites, he must inform the village priest at once, who will then take the proper steps to rectify the matter.
3. Birth. If a woman in the village is having a hard time delivering, word will be sent to the village priest, who will send 'medicine' – usually magical – to be given to the woman. If this does not cause the child to be born, he will go himself. There are various things he can do which, by a combination of his spiritual potency and magical ritual, will be 'sure to cause the child to be born'.

If the woman has 'great sin' and it is 'her time to die', then there is nothing he can do to help her. He will have to perform various rituals then to see that there will be no ill effect from this 'bad death' on the village as a whole. If 'human rejects' are born, the village priest must be notified at once (see under birth).

4 Death. When there is a normal death in the village, the village priest is always the first to be told. He will have general charge of the preparation of the body and coffin. This does not mean that he will do the actual work, but he will supervise it to make sure that no mistakes are made.

If the death is a 'terrible death' (sha) he must also be informed at once (see under death).

4. Village matters. When someone moves into the village, or out of the village, there is a ceremony they must perform at the village priest's house. When the men of the village perform service for the village, they notify the village priest, and he makes a mark on their 'stick'. At the end of the year all of the men gather at the village priest's house where they all look at the 'sticks' and determine who still needs to donate something to the village fund. The village priest is also called upon to oversee certain very important event in the village, such as the rice chewing ordeal (see under ordeals).
5. Fines. The village priest will fine his villagers, or even villagers from other villages, for any religious infractions against the sacred places of the village. Also, if someone in his village commits adultery, he is the one who determines the fine and how it will be paid.

There are also various religious taboos that he must enforce. If they are broken, he will fine the person who broke them. Often the first fine will be light, perhaps a bottle of liquor for the elders to drink. But if there is a continual disregard for the taboo the fine will get stiffer, to the point where he can force the person to leave the village. This is a last resort, however, and does not happen often. I only know of two cases.

RELATIONSHIP OF VILLAGE PRIEST TO OTHERS

The villagers look upon him as the most important person in the village. Following the custom of their ancestors, they make him 'first' in the following: he must be the first to take a bite at ceremonial meals, he must be the first to have his house built in a new village, he must be the first to plant his rice, he must be the first to start digging holes for the village gate and village swing, and he must be the first to throw the dominoes in the new year's gambling.

Akha men love to go hunting. But almost never will the village priest go along. There are two basic reasons for this: he must stay near the village in case of problems having to do with birth or death, and there is a certain amount of danger involved in hunting, which the villagers want to protect him from. However, if the men of the village have gone hunting time after time without getting any game, they will ask the village priest to go with them. "We get something every time when he goes", they say.

The Akhas consider the office of headman to be fairly recent. They do not have any mention of headmen in their legends, although there are many mentions of village priests, spirit priests, and blacksmiths. The Akha terms used for headman are borrowed from Shan. I also believe the concept of headman is borrowed from the Shans. Actually, the headman of an Akha village is not important at all. Historically he may have developed as somewhat of a protective guise for the truly important man, the village priest.

There is only one area in which I have discovered any joint action between the village priest and the headman. That is when it is decided where a new house will be built in the village. They will go together to make the decision. The village priest will make sure that the shadow of the house will never touch the village swing, and that the site will not wrong the spirit of the water source. Also, he will see to it that it will not be out of the confines of the village gate, where spirits could attack the dwellers.

The headman, on the other hand, will simply try to make sure that nothing about the location will displease government officials that might visit. But even here, the village priest would have the final say, since his concern is for the total welfare of the entire village.

The function and role of the headmen are quite different from the village priest. For one thing, he gets the tasks which are not 'proper' for the village priest to perform. For example, if a man in the village is beating his wife without cause, and he draws blood, the wife can appeal to her brothers for help. They in turn will make a case to the headman of the village (not the village priest, note), and if the headman feels their case is justified, he will beat and 'teach' the husband. The Akhas would never allow their village priest to engage in such violence.

Also, when there are cases that have to do with divorce, it is the village headman, not the village priest, who handles it. It is usually a time of bickering and bitter recrimination on both sides, with hard feelings resulting in most cases. The Akhas could not think of their village priest having to undergo this, so they have their headman do it. This may also be the reason that the village priest has nothing to do with the wedding ceremony. The elders don't want him to get involved in something that is so fragile and full of potential complication.

An interesting example of how the headman takes the tasks fraught with danger and dissent is found in their gambling on new year's day. The village priest throws the dominoes for the first turn – and then he leaves. If later there is an argument over gambling, and there often is since liquor is flowing freely, the headmen must arbitrate and settle the matter.

There is one area in which the division of their responsibilities follows a rather thin line. If there is a couple guilty of adultery, but they performed the act in the jungle outside the village, the headman would have to fine them. If they performed the act in the village, or in a rice field, or during the daytime anywhere, the village priest would fine them, since they wronged the 'spirit of the village'. Such an infraction of this important taboo would certainly bring tragedy to the whole village unless it was taken care of by the fine of the village priest.

The relationship of the village priest to the spirit priest (boe maw) and the shaman (nyi pa) is normally without conflict. I believe the primary reasons for this are the following:

- a. The spirit priest and shaman are called by, and work for, the spirits. The village priest is called by God and works for him. Thus the former two are recognized only when they give proof that the spirits have 'ordained' them. The village priest, on the other hand, serves only when the village elders have ordained him.
- b. The spirit priest and shaman will be called to assist individuals, and usually for the purpose of curing. The village priest has the responsibility to care for the whole village rather than individuals, and in nothing can his action be construed as 'curing'.
- c. The spirit priest and shaman will engage in divining, whereas the village priest will never do so. He simply carries on the 'religion' that has been handed down from generation to generation by the ancestors, who originally received it from God.
- d. The spirit priest and shaman both have special paraphernalia, whereas the village priest has none. The power that he has inherited is what is important for him.
- e. The spirit priest and shaman both know how to repeat 'spirit incantations' (neh to –eu). The village priest does not need to know these, since his function is not in the realm of the spirits. He must know, however, the genealogy of the people in his village, so that when they are buried he can repeat it if need be. The spirit priest and shaman, on the other hand, do not need to know the genealogy of the person, since their chief concern is with the spirits.
- f. The spirit priest and shaman receive some form of payment for each service, whereas the village priest is given gifts and payment on a more regular basis, and not so much for the individual service, but the total task.
- g. The spirit priest and shaman will often be called to another village, since every village does not have these religious practitioners. Each village has its own village priest, so he serves only in his own village.

Pay of the village priest.

The village priest does not get any salary as such. He does get the right foreleg of any of the 'big four' animals that the villagers get when they go hunting. Also, at wedding he and his helpers get the same from the pigs that are killed. Whenever there is a fine paid to the village for some religious infraction, he and his helpers get one-third of it. After that third has been taken out, the remainder is divided into thirds again. The judges in the case take one-third of that, and the remaining two-thirds is divided up equally among the villagers, or put in the village fund.

It also seems to be a fairly standard practice for the village priest to get four old coins per year when he 'purifies the water source'. Sometimes he has to do it more than once, as when there is a 'human reject' born. Also, they give him thirty pyas (ti peu – roughly six cents) whenever he must hold a 'village protection ceremony' (pu k'eh g'eh-eu).

The villagers also give the 'first fruits' of their paddy, fruit, and vegetables to the village priest. Before a family would think of eating any new rice, they would first of all pound some, and take it to the village priest, saying, "Here, I am offering you some new rice." He would then say, "After this may you have a 'big blessing' and good health. May your crops produce a lot".

Death of village priest.

When the village priest dies, there is nothing special about his burial. It is much like any other respected elder. The villagers then have his son carry on as village priest, since in normal circumstances it is an inherited office. If there is more than one son, the elders usually select the oldest. If for some reason he is not 'holy', however, they will select another one.

If the village priest dies and there is no son, or the son dies shortly after the father, this is called 'no-priest village' (dzoe byeh, or pu byeh – compare shm byeh). If this happens, the village must move. They can either move into a village that already has a village priest, or they can choose a new man to be village priest and build a new village.

K-29 told me about 'Lo gah Aka', a village near Tong Ta where they had a 'no-priest village'. The villagers liked the site of their village and did not want to move. They chose one of the 'assistant village priests' (named A tu) to be the new village priest. So he had all of the households in the village take their ancestor shrines out of their houses, though not their goods. Next, A tu took some uncooked rice and threw it down three times (ceh pyu tsi ka-eu) by the 'main house post' of his house. He then threw an egg, just as if it were a new village. After that he dug in the ground by his main post, and he and the village men moved it just about one inch over from the old site. Then A tu killed a pig, and they all moved their ancestor shrines back in, since it was a 'new village'. The other houses did not need to do anything. This happened in 1955.

When K-28 heard K-29 telling me the above, he could hardly contain himself. He said he would never dare live in a village like that. Why, there would be twins born there, and eventually everyone in the village would die. K-29 assured him that the village was still there and getting along well, but K-28 would not back down. He had never heard of it or seen it, and felt it was awful.

When an assistant village priest dies, the village often just gets along with only one assistant. However, the next time they have a 'dzoe yah law –eu' ceremony for the 'spirit-owner' of their village priest, the village priest can take one of the ribs of the pig sacrificed and give it to a new man elected by the elders (as described above). There are some large villages that have as many as six helpers. There is no limit on the number, evidently, although they feel it is best to have a minimum of two.

Role in the midst of change.

The village priest is a stabilizing agent in the local Akha village, as well as in Akha society as a whole. They tend to be the 'ideal men' among the Akhas, and are greatly respected. Their role and function are such that they are absolutely essential to the well-being and progress of the village.

The only Akha village I have heard about that has no village priest is a small village of only six houses in the Meung Hkawn area. K-15, who is a village priest himself, told me about it. He said that they have not had a village priest for the last five years. "They are getting along fine, though. Whenever a ceremony comes around where the village priest is to do the first thing, all of the elders do it together." K-15 seemed to think that it was because they were such a small village that they could get by without having a village priest.

SPIRIT PRIESTS

Next in importance to the village priests are the spirit priests (boe maw). There is usually one of these for several villages. They are always men. They tend to be small, sickly men, and usually poor. Also, they often speak in a soft voice, and are quiet almost to the point of being bashful. To the Akhas these are all indications that the spirits have truly selected them to be spirit priests.

Legendary origin.

According to Akha legend, the very first spirit priest was To ma. He is said to have called nine assistant spirit priests (pi za) and given each of them their jobs. He also gave them names to go with their jobs:

1. Ba ba a zeu – to look after the people on earth ('ba' from 'ca ba-eu' – to help). If a person is injured and blood is flowing, he will ask this original spirit priest to come and help.
2. Maw oe – a shi – he lives in front of us (a shi), and gives us what we want (maw) when we pray to him.
3. Oe je – the one who guides us along the 'true way', so that we will not go on the wrong path.
4. Oe law – the one who rescues (law-I-eu) people from the affliction of the spirits when they have done something wrong in the death or burial ceremonies – if he is called, that is. He is the one who teaches today's spirit priests what to do when someone dies.
5. Maw oe-a sha – he takes away (sha) bad things. If in their customs they make a mistake in the death ceremonies, he takes it away.
6. Yeh deh (or he can be called Shi deh) – he is the one that keeps sick people from dying. When you want to call this one to come help you, you must prepare some 'holy water' and some rice. Then, staying very close to the sick person, you pray to this original spirit priest.

The gist of the prayer is this: "This person here is created by God. See his hair, head, flesh, arms, legs, etc., created by God. Now he is sick. He says he cannot stand the pain. As it always rains, as the sun always shines, as the earth is always here, as the rivers never stop flowing, you, Yeh deh, make him live again."

Then the person prays to the moon, then to the sun, and last of all to God, since he is the 'final power'. While praying he holds up the dish with the water and rice. He also puts some money in usually. A eu put in one old coin when he prayed for his son, A dzo.

After praying he bows once to the east, and once to the west. Then he places the dish for just a moment on the head of the sick person, then has the sick person drink a little of the water and eat a little of the rice. If he is unconscious, the one praying for him will force his mouth open with a machete. If even a very little gets to the stomach, no matter what, that person will live at least a day. "If it is done correctly, and the person's time has not yet come, he will get well."

7. Sa dzoe – he was the one appointed to help spirit priests when they repeat spirit incantations at the time of death as well as for other customs.
8. Sho dzah – he was a blacksmith. So he was appointed to help in all of the repetition of spirit incantations that have to do with blacksmiths and the offerings they make to their bellows.
9. Sho g'oe (or, Mah pi-eu to sho sho g'oe), is the next in command after To ma. If a spirit priest makes a mistake in his repetition of spirit incantation and other duties, he must tell Sho g'oe. They pray to him only when someone dies.

Receiving the call.

The way in which a man becomes a spirit priest can be illustrated by telling about K-3 (A joe). He was born in 1923. About the year 1955 he developed a peculiar, lingering type of sickness. It was the kind of sickness that “you could not explain to a doctor”, as he put it. It was a special sickness that was to reveal to everyone that he was chosen by the spirits to be a spirit priest, but of course he did not know that right at first.

Finally, when he did not get well, and he realized it might be that the spirits had chosen him to be a spirit priest, he went to a shaman in another village, to ask her to go into a trance and see whether or not he had ‘fallen a spirit priest’ (boe maw ga-eu). He gave her one kyat, one egg, and a dish of rice.

That night she went into a ‘trance’ to see if K-3 was meant to be a spirit priest. The next day the shaman told him to kill a pig. This could have been a chicken, dog or buffalo as well. Then the shaman and the village elders went to his house to eat a feast from the pork. When they finished eating the shaman said, “Last night the spirits revealed to me that this man A joe is to be a spirit priest.” After this, she and the elders tied strings around his wrist, and went home. I believe that the tying of strings here was to show that an important transaction between the spirits and humans has been completed. The special sickness he had then left him, although his asthma, which he still had quite badly in 1965, did not leave. From then on he was known in the area as a ‘spirit priest’ (boe maw).

From that time on he had to be careful what he ate. He felt he must eat by himself, since if he ate what others ate he would vomit. He also had to repeat ‘spirit incantations’ from that time on. When I asked him how he learned them, he said that the spirits had taught him.

Ordination of spirit priest.

After about a year or two it still seemed quite apparent to the elders that A joe truly had the ‘call’ to be a spirit priest. So they called for a day of ‘ceremonial abstinence’ (lah-eu) for the whole village. Then the elders of the village, and some from nearby villages, since A joe was the spirit priest for three or four villages, gathered at his home. He and his relatives killed a pig and a chicken (which had to be of the opposite sex), and feasted the elders.

Following the feast, A joe was given his special paraphernalia. This consisted of: a small ceremonial knife (la yeh jeh ba), a small, ceremonial shoulder bag (la yeh peh tah) in which to carry the knife, a spear with a wooden handle and a metal tip, with which to spear buffalo for offering to important people when they die, and a ‘hat’ made out of a single piece of sheet metal of the same design as Chinese rain-hats. The ceremonial knife was made by his maternal uncle, and the shoulder bag was made by a sister.

Study route to becoming a spirit priest.

There is also a way whereby a man can 'study' and thus become a spirit priest (boe maw tso-eu). However, most Akhas do not consider this type of spirit priest to be as 'powerful' as the one on whom the spirits confer the office. The spirit priest who teaches him is called 'pi ma', and the student is called 'pi za'. But no spirit priest can be regarded as a 'pi ma' unless he can offer at least one buffalo at the time of death.

Also, P-3 says that in actual practice the teaching spirit priest does not teach his pupil everything he knows, since he would lose both prestige and business to the younger man if he did. I also heard from one source that the 'learner' must 'eat' some of the teaching spirit priest's saliva (sha jm dza-eu) before he can be called a true spirit priest. The saliva is mixed in tea or liquor.

Duties of the spirit priest.

Spirit priests engage mainly in divining (ceh si tsi haw-eu) – explained in another section, and repeating spirit incantations. These appear to be their main functions. They plant fields just like other men, although usually they do not make such large fields. Part of the reason for this is that they are pretty much obligated to go anytime anyone calls them. They believe that if they do not go, they will get sick and weak.

Also, from what I saw in Loimwe once, I believe they are quite proud of the fact that someone from a village seven or eight miles away has come to call them. When I asked a spirit priest in Loimwe whether he would accompany some people from a village that was quite distant from his he said, "Of course I'll go. They called me, didn't they? And besides, there is no one else besides me that they can count on (g'oe-eu)."

Failure of spirit priest.

When a spirit priest fails over and over, the people do not call him back. K-8 told of the time Sah tse's son died. The father called a fairly famous spirit priest by the name of Mui kah. Some years previously he had become a Catholic, but then he had reverted to the Akha religion again. For that reason, behind his back they called him A pyeu, 'Mr. Changeable'.

When he arrived in the village he assured the father of the boy who had died that he could repeat spirit incantations in such a way that they would never hear the spirit of the son call out. Also, he would perform the 'village protection ceremony' (pu k'eh g'eh-eu), which is a 'very important ceremony to us Akhas'. So the father, Sah tse, fed him all the things he asked for, and did everything he said to do.

But after it was all done, the villagers heard the soul of the son calling out. "It kind of sounded like a pig squealing". Everyone was so frightened that they fled the village. The informant, K-8, moved to a different village at the time, and became an inquirer in the Baptist group.

When the father realized that the spirit priest had failed, he was extremely angry. K-8 said he had never heard anyone scold another like the father scolded the spirit priest. One thing he called him was 'a pyeu pyeu daw' (the 'daw' meaning 'bad omen').

He said, "You said you could repeat spirit incantations for this kind of death, but you were just hungry for my meat. All right, you have eaten all of my meat – now get out of here. I never want to see you again. Don't you dare set foot in this village again, etc." (The spirit priest is now living in Ngasha Aka, and has again become a Catholic. "See how true the nickname is?" K-8 said.)

A spirit priest can be fined if he does not carry through what he has promised, especially in such an important assignment as the above. But in this case he had absolutely nothing, and the doubly bereaved father was so angry with him that he only wanted to get him out of his sight.

If a spirit priest commits adultery, he is considered 'contaminated' (ma mui ma shaw), and people will not call him as much as before. They figure that he may know the words to say, but he is no longer 'holy' (yaw shaw).

Relation of spirit priest to others.

A spirit priest cannot repeat 'spirit incantations' for himself. He must call another spirit priest to do it for him. That is why K-3 came to the hospital. He said that he could repeat spirit incantations for someone else who had asthma, and cure them. But he could not do it for himself, and there were no spirit priests in the area (Tong Ta) that could do it.

I have not found too many signs of rivalry between spirit priests, although each one is sure that he is the best one in his area, and does not mind saying so, though usually in a somewhat modest way. I believe that they as a group feel that the shamans (nyi pa) are quite beneath them, although many of their functions tend to overlap. There is no organization of spirit priests. However, their basic methods pretty much tend to be the same. There are two divisions among them. In one group they are said to be spirit priests for the 'meu lu' spirit, and in the other group for the 'ba ga' spirit. Each spirit priest functions within one of these two systems.

The 'meu lu' spirit system is said to be easier, since when they repeat the spirit incantations in accordance with this system, it is a simple one, two, three process. The 'ba ga' spirit system is much more complicated and difficult, because it tends to zigzag back and forth. This system is more difficult to learn. But it is more highly respected by most Akhas I have met, and I believe the spirit priests themselves feel it is the best system.

Pay for the spirit priest.

For the most part a spirit priest does not get paid for his service. There are occasional 'clients' who will give him gifts. But one thing they are entitled to is the section of meat in the animal that is sacrificed that is between the point where the knife jabs into the animal (when it is a pig or dog) to the third rib. Therefore, when the spirit priest stabs the animal, he stabs it as high up on the neck as he possibly can, so that he will get more meat.

Death of a spirit priest.

When a spirit priest dies, if he has a son, and the son carries on as a spirit priest, the father leaves his paraphernalia with the son. But when he has no son, or the son does not become a spirit priest for any reason, the paraphernalia is piled up on or near the grave when he is buried.

SHAMANS

Although shamans (nyi pa) occupy the lowest rung of status in the Akha hierarchy, they are still important, especially when it comes to divining. For the most part they are women, although some men also act as shamans. Sometimes, to differentiate which sex the seer is, they will say 'grandmother shaman' (a pi nyi pa) for a woman, and 'grandfather shaman' (a baw nyi pa) for the man.

Historical background of shamans.

The Akhas feel that the shaman is a relatively 'new innovation' in the Akha culture, since there is nothing mentioned of shamans in the original customs, they say. They had village priests and spirit priests when their religion first started, and these two are still considered the most important, and in that order. I have wondered if the shaman may not be a borrowing from the Shans, although the Akhas themselves have never mentioned that as a possibility, and I have never heard it come out in their legends. There is nothing of the 'trance-chant' that is Shan – it is a highly stylized Akha. So if it was borrowed, it may have been quite long ago.

K-29 told me how he once called a Shan woman shaman when his father was quite ill about 1935. He referred to her as 'nyi pa'. I asked if Shan men ever became 'shamans' (nyi pa) and he said that the Shan men only become 'diviners' (ja maw maw-eu). I asked him why he didn't call an Akha shaman. He said that if he had called an Akha shaman it would have meant that after she found out which spirit was being offended, then he still would have had to call a spirit priest, and that would mean killing a pig etc. The Shan shaman said that she could not only find the spirit, but also 'pull the sickness right out of the stomach' – all for only five kyats. As it turned out the father did not get well, and K-29 had to take him to the Civil Hospital in Kengtung, where he got well after about a month.

Becoming a shaman.

The Akha shaman is chosen by one of the three 'pi tso yaw sah', to be a link between the world of people and the world of spirits. If she is chosen by the 'eastern one' (pi tso yaw sah m sa), then she is known as a shaman who 'travels the east' (m sa ga-eu). If she is chosen by the 'middle of the sky-one' (pi tso yaw sah m g'ah) then she is known as a shaman who 'travels the middle of the sky' (m g'ah ga-eu). If she is chosen by the 'western one' (pi tso yaw sah m dze) then she is known as the shaman who 'travels the west' (m dze ga-eu).

Akhas have the idea that the 'spirit-owner' opens up the shaman's stomach and puts his 'medicine' in, and then sews it up again. They do not mean this literally, but they feel that her 'spirit-owner' imparts to her the words to say. I've heard from two sources, "Spirit priests are taught by other spirit priests, but shamans learn directly from 'pi tso'". If she is not faithful to her 'spirit-owner' in particular, or to her calling in general, she will get sick. If her misdemeanor is bad enough, she will die.

O don't know the average age when the 'spirit-owner' 'falls on' (nyi pa galle-eu) the person to become a shaman. I have heard of a very few who have 'gotten the spirit' when they were about 13 years old. For the most part I believe they are usually 30 or so. There are also those, as A du's wife (of Nawhaw), who would love to have had the 'spirit fall' on her, but it never does. They may spend the nights doing the 'trance-chant', but if there are not certain signs, Akhas do not consider them to be real shamans.

One of the main signs people will notice when a person is about to have the spirit 'descend' on her is that she will have a 'special' sickness. To take their description of it, it almost sounds as if some of them might have epilepsy. But they deny this strongly, saying that they can tell the difference between epilepsy and this.

For one thing, they say, there is foam at the mouth when it is epilepsy. They feel quite strongly that 'pi tso' would not choose an epileptic for this task. I would imagine that it is often self-induced (whether consciously or unconsciously I don't know), by the woman who wants to 'get the spirit'. That is perhaps why the 'signs' may be so different in so many people.

K-28 told of a woman who was just 30 years old when she 'got the spirit'. She was not sick, but she noticed that whenever she took some cooked rice in a banana leaf to the field to eat during the middle of the day, it was filled with maggots when she opened it and started to eat it – even though the rice been cooked just that morning. "The strange thing was that when other people were with her, the maggots would not appear." This was one sign. Another sign that 'pi tso' had chosen her was that he would take her shoulder bag and hide it – just in play. After she looked all over and couldn't find it, he brought it back. And then he'd take it away again later, etc. After she became a shaman, 'pi tso' stopped playing these pranks.

Ceremonial for potential shaman.

The Akhas interpret this sickness, sometimes, as the result of two different 'pi tso' both trying to get the same woman to become a shaman in his own group. If this happens, then the Akhas must call a spirit priest to come and perform the 'clear the tragedy' ceremony (u ca shaw-eu, or sha to to-eu). When the spirit priest comes and performs this, the 'sick' woman will really become a shaman in one of the three groups, and there will then be no more arguing over her, and she will get over her sickness.

When the spirit priest comes for this ceremony, this is what he does. He takes three banana leaf 'packages', which have been prepared by his helpers and the members of the family of the prospective shaman. These packages contain the following: fermented rice in one leaf, tea leaves in the second, and some uncooked rice (both broken and unbroken) along with 20 pyas (four cents) in a third. He puts these in his shoulder bag. Then he takes up a live chicken, which the family has provided, and walks to the door of the house. The woman who is sick, due to her not having really 'come through' as a shaman, walks to the door with him. The spirit priest then holds the chicken while the woman rubs it from head to tail three times. While she does that the spirit priest says, "Come through real well. May you really have the spirit fall on you. Let your becoming a shaman mean that people from all of this area will count on you as their shaman."

The sick woman turns around and stays in the house, while the spirit priest and his helper go up to the village gate. There he kills the chicken (it must be a red rooster – ya poe ne), and puts the body down on the ground. Then he takes out the packages, opens them all up and puts them near the chicken on the ground. Then he repeats a ‘spirit incantation’. This incantation is to the woman who is being fought over by the spirits. It is somewhat like what a dead person is ‘taught’, that is, “Don’t go to the upper path, don’t go to the lower path, but take the middle one.”

The gist of what he says is, “Don’t go the paths of ‘terrible death’. Go up the middle path.” (He uses two Akha words here for ‘go’. The first is ‘I’, which means to go down. The second is ‘le’ which means to go up.) Akhas say, “If the spirit priest does not repeat spirit incantations like this, the sick person will either become insane or an epileptic.”

While he is repeating the incantations he is also picking up the offerings in the three leaves, beginning with the rice, then the fermented rice, and last of all the tea. He drops a little from each one onto the ground three times. He last of all pulls some feathers from the chicken (tail, wing, head) and drops each of them on the ground. He then picks up the chicken and goes home. He must not return, at that time, to the home of the woman who is sick.

Evidently there are also those who ‘get the spirit real well’ without this ceremony. If they do that, they do not need to go through the above ceremony. If they do not get well the first time, they do the above mentioned ceremony again, but this time they add an uncastrated boar to the chicken. If she still does not get well, then they must offer the same as above, but this time a ‘brown’ (yaw shui) male goat, is added to the other offerings. After that they must put a ‘bamboo star’ up to block the way of the spirits so that they cannot return to the village.

If after doing all this she does not get well, then they know she is not going to ‘get the spirit’. They will quickly call a spirit priest to ‘purify’ (m shaw-eu) her so that she will not go crazy or become an epileptic. If he does the purification ceremony properly, she will get well.

Often when a woman feels that she is about to ‘get the spirit’, she will be given lots of cucumbers to eat by her family. She in turn will cut them up into little pieces and eat some, and put the rest on the floor of the hill hut when she goes to the field to work, or on the floor of her home when she is there. She can see and hear ‘pi tso’ when he comes and talks with her, but no one else can see or hear him. He likes to eat cucumbers, so that is why she feeds them to him. She is often “like a crazy person” at this time.

Duties of the shaman.

The chief task of the shaman is to go into a ‘trance’ (nyi pa shi-eu) and go into the ‘underworld’ (mi o le-eu). The term for ‘trance’ is literally, ‘shaman dies’, and may be some sort of survival from the ‘death’ Siberian shamans experience. The term ‘underworld’ really indicates the world of the spirits, and to show that they do not necessarily think in terms of going ‘down’, the term for to ‘go’ is ‘le-eu’, which means to go up.

The purpose for her trip to the spirit world is to find out what spirit is either eating or holding down some person’s soul, which is thus causing that person to be sick. She can either go into the trance in her own house, or go to the home of the sick person. I think that since they get fed a chicken curry meal if they go to the sick person’s house, most of them prefer to do that.

The shaman usually goes to the house where she will have the trance in the evening, since they do not ordinarily go into a trance in the daytime. They say that it is all right to continue on after dawn if they need to, though. This is just the opposite of the spirit priest who must start in the daytime, but can continue on into the night if needs be. The one main exception to this is when someone is very ill, the shaman can go into a trance any time. Usually this involves a woman in labor who is about to die. K-29 has seen shamans go into a trance in the daytime several times, although K-28 has never seen it.

The ones calling a shaman will kill a chicken, either a rooster or hen, and have a pre-ceremonial feast (shi ne ti-eu). Whatever elders are in the village will be called to come to this. It is against Akha custom, however, for the shaman's spouse to eat this feast. The spouse can attend the actual trance, but he must not stay in that village overnight.

While the shaman is in her trance, she must not eat or drink anything, with the exception of the liquor that she drinks along with the house spirit (dzh mi) to keep her company. They say that some of the men shamans drink a fair amount, since instead of spilling the liquor on the floor, they drink it.

Preparation for the shaman's trance.

Someone in the house will prepare the following items to put in a 'rice bowl' (haw g'aw) for the trance: one dish with uncooked rice and an egg, one dish with some white string, one bottle of liquor, one gourd of water, and one empty dish for the liquor to be poured into if it is a shaman who can produce the 'bugs'. They also take a basket (k'a pu) and put some paddy in it, along with three bananas, three sections of sugar cane, some horse food (mah dza ui tsui – for the horse that the shaman will ride on her journey), one package of 'holy rice' (haw shaw), 'stuffed chicken' (ya ci maw pu), a banana leaf with a minimum of three 'rice balls' (ja leh), three beeswax tapers, one banana leaf with a little uncooked rice and an egg in it, one six-foot length of cloth, and 20 pyas (four cents). The last two items are for the shaman to keep.

The package of 'holy rice' mentioned above is to feed to 'God's dog', since he chases away the spirits. The 'stuffed chicken' mentioned above is quite important. They kill a chicken, dress it, and then put a stuffing into it which has: salt, ginger, various types of onions and other things to make it taste good. When they cook it just for eating, they will also add chili, but they say that for ceremonial purposes they must not add chili. Then they boil the whole thing, and say that it is delicious. As to the number of 'rice balls' to be included in the basket, it must be an odd number.

The shaman has a 'shaman's helper' (nyi pa pi caw) for each time she goes into a trance. It will often be the woman of the house. Men will usually have men as their helpers, though that is up to them. The helper will see that the 'rice bowl' and 'basket' are arranged on the woman's side of the house in front of the ancestor shrine properly. She also arranges two low stools, one for the shaman and one for herself, in front of the basket and 'rice bowl'.

Shaman's clothing and paraphernalia.

The shaman comes in when everything is ready, and sits down facing the ancestor shrine basket. Her helper sits beside her facing the same direction. For the most part there does not seem to be any special clothing that the shaman wears, although if she is 'ordained' (nyi pa tso-eu), she will have a 'ceremonial knife'. She will carry it in her special shoulder bag (la yeh peh tah). Even if she is not 'ordained', she will wear an ordinary shoulder bag, but of course it will not have a ceremonial knife in it.

Also, the shaman must wear a pair of cloth shoes, usually Chinese. For one thing she would be embarrassed to appear before 'God' and the ancestors without shoes on. Also, they say that there are many holes on the path she has to walk caused by caterpillars and snakes, so she must wear them. She must also have leggings on, to keep from being bitten by caterpillars and snakes.

One special bit of paraphernalia she must have is a fan (baw seu.) This is made by Akhas using Shan paper and a simple frame of bamboo strips. K-29 has made many of them. They sell them usually for one old coin. The shaman must have a 'black' one with 'writing' on it, for which they use black dyes purchased in the market. A white fan is optional, unless she calls the 'bugs' to come into the liquor, when she must have both. They use the fans to fan themselves gently when they are in the 'trance'. I tried to find out what the purpose of it is, but all I got was, "It is our custom". Probably they have forgotten whatever original meaning it may have had.

The night I saw a shaman go into a 'trance' she held a white fan in her right hand, and a 'black' fan in her left, but I found out later that it does not matter which hand they hold which fan in. Also, I noticed that she was fanned only with the right hand, but after questioning K-28 and 29 about this, I am convinced it was simply because she was right handed, and had no special significance.

The night I saw her I thought there were times when there was some increased tempo in her fanning, but I could see no pattern. I wonder if the fanning might be a substitute for the drum beating of the shamans in northern Asia. The fanning motion, on the other hand, may have just been something that would give her something to do with her hands. At times it may have been a help in remembering her 'lines'. Her helper sits down by the shaman when she starts the 'trance' and stays with her throughout. The shaman will always be next to the dividing wall between the two rooms (law ka), with the helper sitting on the other side of her. The helper does not have a lot to do. She takes care of seeing that everything is done to keep the shaman's throat from getting hoarse. She also takes care of the enamel dish that the shaman uses for a spittoon.

Before the shaman goes into a 'trance', she will take some soot and rub it on the sick person's forehead and down to the tip of the nose (na ca ca-eu). She does this so that when she goes into the spirit world looking for this person's lost soul, she can tell God, "It is the one with the 'mark' (na ca) on his forehead and nose". If she did not do this, it would take too long to find the sick person's soul. The idea seems to be that the soul has a body just like the person's body, so that when the black is smeared on the person's body, it will also be in the corresponding position on the soul's 'body'.

The shaman's trance.

When everything is ready, the shaman will take the bottle of liquor, and spill just a few drops of it on the floor near the 'rice bowl'. She is giving the ancestors liquor to drink. While spilling it she says, "Ancestors, you also help look, help us out". This is not spoken in just a normal way with everyday words, however. She has started her 'trance-chant'. The next thing she does is to pour just a little liquor in the cup placed in the 'rice bowl'. She then puts her fingers in the cup, withdraws them and flips some liquor over her right shoulder. She dips in again, and flips some over her left shoulder, and continues doing this until she has done it three times for each shoulder. While she is doing it she is saying in her 'trance-chant', "Oh master 'Pi tso', come stay on my shoulder. You will have to go looking first. Let's go look for the disease." When she speaks of 'looking' she means to look for the soul of the person who is sick. She will have to look in the world of the spirits, and she wants all the help she can get so that she can 'discover it' (maw pyeh pyeh-eu).

Concerning the 'trance-chant', the shaman begins each 'line' on a fairly high note, singing 'Oh', or 'aw', and holding that for about seven or eight seconds. Holding this first syllable gave her time to go over in her mind the lines she was going to say next, I felt. Then she 'trance-chants' the words, usually holding the last syllable, which comes on a low note, a little bit longer than most, but not as long as the first note.

The number of words chanted each time tends to differ, but the general pattern of the 'tune' is about the same. The tune does not necessarily follow the tones of the words used. The words are their poetical words which the elders, for the most part, know, but the young people don't know them very well. Some are the same as their everyday words, but many of them are either different words, or they use symbolic terms that one does not understand without some explanation. For example, in one section I transcribed she says, "Nga nyo I ba, ma maw-a lo. Nga tsaw I ba, ma ga-a lo". (Have you seen my buffalo going? Have you heard my person going?) The term 'buffalo' is merely a poetic expression for the sick person here.

Both above, and in what I will write below, I give the 'free Akha translation' of the poetic expressions. I do not understand the poetic expressions myself. At this point in the 'trance', some of the 'm sa' shamans whistle three times. I cannot find any special reason for this, apart from the fact that it is their 'custom'. With the 'm g'ah' shamans, they seem to whistle after they have ridden on their horse for some time and are real tired. Some say that the shamans do not whistle until 'after they get to China'. The 'm dze' group also whistle, but I don't know when. What the shaman says and does next differs somewhat between shamans, and also in accordance with their purpose for the 'trance'. First of all, I will give the general pattern they follow when they are 'hunting for a lost soul' in the spirit world.

“Oh man of the house (or woman of the house if the shaman is a man), please stay and guard the house. Oh my lord ‘Pi tso’, I hear a dog barking. Please go see what the dog is barking at. I don’t know whether it is someone coming to wage war or not. I don’t know whether it is someone coming to call the village priest or not. I don’t know whether it is someone coming to call the blacksmith or not. I don’t know whether it is someone coming to call the spirit priest or not. I don’t know whether it is someone coming to call the village headman or not.

“Oh, it is not a person coming to fight ‘je’. (Je in Akha, at the end of a sentence, means that it is a direct quote. The shaman is here quoting what she hears from her ‘lord Pi tso’. Each time after this that ‘je’ is used, it means that she is giving the answer to her question.) He is not coming to call the village priest ‘je’. He is not coming to call the blacksmith ‘je’. He is not coming to call the spirit priest ‘je’. He is not coming to call the headman ‘je’. He is coming to call the shaman ‘je’. There is a very sick person about to die ‘je’.

“Oh, village priest, come with me to look for the lost soul. Oh, headman, come with me to look for the lost soul.

“Oh villagers, the three of us are going to look for the lost soul. The three of us have gotten to the village gate. Oh ‘spirit-owner’ of the village gate, the three of us are going to look for the lost soul. The three of us have arrived at the village swing. Oh ‘pirit-owner’ of the village swing, the three of us are going to look for the lost soul. The three of us are now out of the village. The three of us are now on the path to the ‘underworld’ (mi o).”

Their bodies are all still present in the village, of course, it is their souls that have gone.

“Oh, ‘mother of us all’ (a pi pi ta), help us look for the lost soul.

“We have come to Tah pah. We have come to the door. Oh ‘keeper of the door’ Sha yeh, open the door for us. Here, I give you three beeswax tapers. Here, I give you three bananas. Here, I give you three sections of sugar cane.”

She does not take these things out of the basket they have been placed in. They have been placed there ahead of time for Sha yeh to partake of. They are the ‘price’ for having Sha yeh, who is considered female, open the gate for them.

“Oh ant, meet us all up at God’s place. Oh hawk, meet us all up at God’s place. (The same is then said to: wildcat, tiger, bear, dragon and dog, but not necessarily in that order.)

“Here are the animals at God’s place. Here is the ‘stuffed chicken’ (ya ci maw pu) to eat. We all are eating the ‘stuffed chicken’.

“The soul of A lm (or whatever his name is) has disappeared. Oh ant, have you seen or heard this person? I have neither seen nor heard this person ‘je’. Oh hawk, have you seen or heard this person? I have neither seen nor heard this person ‘je’. (And so on through all of the animals that have been asked to come to the feast. No one of them has ever seen the missing person – although everyone present knows that someone must be lying when they say they have not seen or heard him.)

“Oh God (a poe mi yeh), this sick person is only alive in the first place because of you. Oh God, don’t take this person back to yourself yet. Now God, don’t lie to me. Oh God, have you seen A lm?

“I have seen A lm ‘je’. He is being devoured by such-and-such a spirit ‘je’.”

There is another possible development at this point. Sometimes God will say, through the shaman, “I have not seen or heard him ‘je’”. Now if God says that, the shaman will know that it is a lie, since “God sees and hears everything”. So the shaman will say, “When our paddy ripened we offered to you, didn’t we? Also, we offered you meat each time we got any of the ‘big four’ animals (in hunting) didn’t we? Now tell me where A lm is.”

And then God can’t lie, they say, but he must tell the shaman where the soul is. Sometimes he will tell the shaman that the soul is dead. If the shaman hears that, she will usually wait until morning to tell the family. When she tells them, she won’t tell them outright that the person is going to die. She will say something like, “Look, don’t knock yourselves out. Why not rest up a bit.”

Then she will tie the string that was in the dish inside the ‘rice bowl’ around the wrist of the sick person and say, “You’ll get well all right.” I asked K-28 and 29 what they thought of this form of ‘lying’, and they said, “You can’t tell the person he’ll die, can you?”

Sometimes God will tell the shaman, “Over there is the soul.” And when the shaman looks, she will see the soul held down by a forked stick, perhaps. Or she will see the spirit starting to eat the soul. She will then learn from God what the spirit wants to eat. The next morning she will tell the family of the sick person what kind of meat it is they should offer to the spirit ‘in place’ of the sick person.

Recovery of the soul.

Then the shaman sends her ‘spirit slave’ (a dzaw, which literally means ‘dumb’) to argue with the spirit which is holding the soul she is looking for, and wrest it away from the spirit. When the ‘spirit slave’ gets the person away from the spirit, the shaman holds one side of her jacket open a bit and calls the soul to come in. Then after the soul enters she folds her jacket over the soul so that other spirits on the way back will not be tempted to eat this sick, perhaps partially devoured soul.

If the soul has been completely devoured by the spirit, there is no hope for the sick person, and he or she will be sure to die. Even if most of the soul is eaten, but the heart, a little hair, and maybe some bones etc. are left, the shaman can resuscitate the soul and bring it back – “if she is a good shaman”. I have heard from many that even if only the heart is left, a good shaman can bring it back to life – “but it is extremely difficult”.

Some say that she asks the spirit which has been eating that soul what kind of meat it is hungry for. The next morning the shaman tells the family what kind of meat to offer, and if they do, the person will get well – “unless the spirit was lying to her”. If she tells the family the spirit is hungry for dog meat and they offer something else, however, Akhas are convinced that the sick person cannot possibly get well. The shaman must not eat the heart of any animal on the day she is to go looking for a ‘lost soul’, and the main reason seems to be connected with the fact that she may find that only the heart of that person has not been eaten, and will have to bring that person to life again by means of the heart. If the shaman wants to eat the heart of the animal, she can have it put aside for her and eat it the next day, after she has finished with the ‘spirit incantations’. K-24 also said that this was true for ‘anyone who repeats spirit incantations’. (It should be noted that going into a trance like this is considered by the Akhas as one type of ‘spirit incantation’.)

There also seems to be another check that the shamans have as to whether a person will die or not. Everyone on earth has a ‘tree of life’ in the spirit underworld. If the shaman sees that the tree has been cut down, then that proves that the sick person has only a very short time to live, and there is no use making a sacrifice for them.

Shaman’s return.

After the shaman has finished her journey in the spirit world, she comes back to the gate. In order to get the keeper to open up again so that she can leave, she must praise her again. But sometimes, they say, the doorkeeper will not respond to this praise, and will not open the door. If that is the case, the shaman must say terrible things to the doorkeeper so that she will get angry and kick the shaman out. (K-28 and 29 say that they have not heard of this, but I got it from several informants.)

The next morning, the shaman tells the family what offerings to make (unless God has told her the person will die, when she says what I wrote above), and then ties the white string that was in the dish around the right wrist of the sick person while saying, "You'll get well". The shaman's duties are then considered to be finished. She takes the cloth, the money, and one bottle of liquor (a 'fresh' one), and returns home.

The above is the general pattern for when they go into a trance for a sick person. They also sometimes make trips into the spirit world just to 'visit', or to pay their respects. I went with Sala Mose to visit the home of K-28 on the evening of December 14, 1965. K-28 had asked a lady shaman by the name of A mi, formerly of Lo gah village, to come to his home for a 'visit' type of trance. She is an 'm dze' type shaman.

Description of a shaman's trance.

They first of all had a pre-ceremonial feast. The husband did not want to go, since it is contrary to Akha custom, but K-28 said it would be all right. "We are 'carrying the Shan religion' (Buddhism) now." K-28's wife was the 'shaman's helper' (nyi pa pi caw). She was seated to the right of the shaman, but facing away from the fire and the audience, as the shaman was. She has arranged the 'rice bowl' in front of the shaman. In it were: two kyats (this would have been one old coin if she had been going into a trance for a sick person, K-28 told me), one bottle of liquor about one quarter full, an empty Chinese type handleless teacup, and a part of a banana leaf. The banana leaf was a sign that it was something 'special'. If there had been no 'pre-ceremonial feast' before hand, they would not have had the banana leaf.

There was no basket (k'a pu) with the various things described above in it, since this was a 'visit' and not going to look for a lost person. The 'rice bowl' was set before the 'ancestor shrine basket' (pu tu), even though the house no longer had an ancestor shrine. This may have been a coincidence, but I wonder if perhaps it was with the thought in mind of making the setting similar to what they used to have in their 'Akha' home when they did the 'trance' in front of the ancestor shrine basket, with the paraphernalia in it.

As to the things the 'helper' did, at one point she took the dish that the shaman was spitting into and handed it to a man seated near the fireplace and told him to put some ashes into it. I learned later that this was merely so that if the dish got kicked over in the dark it would not get the shaman's saliva all over the sleeping platform. At one time the shaman could not get a cork back into the liquor bottle. I rather think she dropped the cork, but it was so dark I could not see well. She handed the bottle to the helper, who reached up on a nearby shelf and got down some cotton and made a new stopper for the bottle. Then she reached in front of the shaman and put the bottle back into the 'rice bowl'.

At another time the helper told some people sitting near the fireplace to get a broom and sweep the ashes a bit. One woman quickly jumped up saying, "I know how", and swept the ashes around just a little. I learned later that this was to help the shaman 'keep a clear throat'. It is true that she was getting a bit hoarse, but after two hours of this 'trance-chanting' it was not surprising. Akhas say that up to the time she gets to the 'house spirit' (dzah mi) she will have some trouble with hoarseness, but after that she is all right. K-28 told me that after I left, "her throat got perfectly all right, and sounded real good until this morning". She did not finish until just a little before sunrise.

The audience.

I was interested in the 'audience' who came to see the trance. I was surprised there were so many who came and sat, hardly moving at all for over three hours (the length of time I was there). There was a young mother with a nursing infant who sat spell-bound watching the back of the shaman – although taking care of her infant when the need arose. There must have been about six other women there too.

Besides the village priest and the shaman's husband, there were two other men who remained the whole time. There were other men and women who came and went. There were anywhere from six to ten children who were in and out. Toward the time when the shaman was about to 'call out the bugs' there must have been 15 or so, pushing in to see the 'bugs'.

The spectators showed a certain amount of respect for the shaman, I felt. Just their attendance attested to this. Also, they were not loud – for the most part. If some of the children started making too much noise the elders would shush them up. Partly, of course, they wanted to hear what the shaman was chanting, and they had to pay close attention to it.

Sometimes a child outside would call, and then someone in the house would yell out, “Shut up, you brat. Don’t you know a shaman is in the midst of a ‘trance’?” The person shouting made much more noise than the feeble call of the child outside. This didn’t seem to bother anyone – least of all the shaman. I felt she had very good powers of concentration to keep chanting along, although I also think she was very much aware of her audience, and rather jealous if she thought their attention was wandering from what she was doing.

I also discovered that the audience can participate, to a limited extent. The shaman must not talk to them, except by giving a message to her helper who in turn will tell the audience. But if the audience feels she is discouraged about something they will say, “Never mind. Don’t be discouraged – keep looking for the lost person!”

They say that sometimes when a shaman is looking for a lost person she will be extremely tired, and will sometimes say to the helper, “Oh, I’m so very tired from looking for this person.” That is a sign for one or more of the elders present (they are the only ones who can speak to the shaman when she is in a ‘trance’) to say, “Never mind, you must look for the soul until you find it. Apart from you no one can find the soul. Etc.” K-28 said that some elder ‘must’ say this.

The audience was also aware of the shaman having a hard time with her voice. It was K-28 who told them to take some ashes out of the fireplace, although I learned later that he did this when he heard the shaman get to a certain spot. If he had not told them to do it, his wife, the helper, would have. They took the ashes out from three places and threw them on the ground just beyond the ‘three-legged cooking stand’ (shm kui) in three directions (‘for the three legs of the cooking stand’). This was to get rid of any saliva which may have been in the fireplace, since if anyone spits in the fireplace while the shaman is in a trance, it causes her throat to stop up. The fireplace was then ‘holy’ (yaw shaw).

I have also heard that they must not burn any pitchpine when a shaman is in a ‘trance’ – for the same reason. I noticed that one girl did burn a little the night of the trance, and no one said anything to her. But I imagine that if the throat of the shaman got too bad, they would have told the girl not to burn it. Also, the girl did not burn the pitchpine when the shaman was calling the ‘bugs’.

They pay a lot of attention to the ‘throat’. The shaman mentioned two or three times to her helper, “My throat won’t stay open”. K-28 and 29 told me the next day that if she had had too much trouble some elders there could have done the following: taken a cup of water, mixed a little tea and ginger in it, and said, “Throat of the shaman, open”, and after a little more ‘spirit incantation’ it would be given to the shaman to drink. “This opens up the shaman’s throat every time.”

I was surprised at the way some of the audience called out at the shaman to do this or that. K-28 tried to speed her up. When she got to chanting about wanting to go up to the village playground he said, “Skip that and produce the ‘bugs’. The teachers here (meaning Sala Mose and myself) want to see them.”

Also, when she was standing and doing a little ceremonial dance, one of the older women there kept calling her to really ‘swing and sway’. I wondered if maybe she was making fun of her at first, but I don’t think so. She translated quite a bit for me, and was speaking highly of the shaman. I think she wanted me to see how well the shaman could swing and sway in the little dance she did. K-28 and 29 later told me that some shamans ‘jump around something awful’ when they do this dance. “Those are the fake ones – the real ones do it just enough to show respect to ‘dzah mi’”. They felt that the shaman had done it just right.

The shaman's helper.

I was somewhat surprised at how casually the 'helper' took it all. Perhaps it was because the shaman was just going for a 'visit'. If someone were desperately ill she probably would have been much more sober. But she kept talking and laughing at various things, until finally her husband told her, "Quiet. Don't you know that a helper is not supposed to talk?" (meaning not to talk to the audience. It is all right for her and the shaman to talk when they need to.) She laughed and said, "Yes, that's right – I do talk a lot, don't I. But I keep forgetting that I'm the helper and am supposed to keep quiet".

At one point her grandson caused a fair amount of disturbance. He was crying outside the house during the 'trance'. The grandmother heard him, and called him to come to her. (It should be noted that usually neither the shaman or helper goes outside during the trance, especially when it is a sick person involved. The night I saw it they could have, but even for a 'visit' type of trance they do not leave the spot unless it is very urgent).

The grandson came in, crying all the way. The grandmother had him come to her on the opposite side of where the shaman was in her trance. This may be due to the fact that no one is supposed to bump into the shaman while she is in a trance. If they do, "She will become unconscious". The grandmother talked to the boy, and even helped rock him to sleep. Later, when the child's mother came in, the grandmother told her what had happened. All the time the shaman kept on in her 'trance'.

Sala Mose and I both took notes during the trance, but it was difficult to see, because of the poor light. Also, the language used was so different that there was much I did not understand. So the next day I asked K-28 and 29 to reproduce for me, as well as possible, in everyday Akha, what she had said until the time that the 'bugs' appeared.

The shaman's journey.

First of all they said that what she said that night would be different had she been looking for a 'lost soul'. Also, they said that she could change what she said from time to time slightly, although I believe the general pattern is much the same. Then they also said that each shaman seems to have her own 'style'. Following is the rough translation of what she chanted.

"I have fixed up my fireplace and left it. I have left my 'three-legged cooking stand' in the fireplace. My husband is drinking tea there and looking after the house. (Note: this was not true, of course. Her husband was right there.) Oh my daughters and sons, don't 'lend' banana leaves to anyone. (Note: this has to do with the fact that it is a promise she will be coming back, and will be needing to use the banana leaves herself in various customs.)

"Sons and daughters, be careful of your hands and feet. (This is a polite way of telling them they must not have sexual intercourse that night – unless they are unmarried boys, and then it is all right to sleep with an unmarried girl. The reason that the children must obey this taboo is that if they break it, the 'bugs' won't come for their mother, and also she will not be able to find the lost soul.)

"Now I've gone down the steps. Now I've gone down the steps. Now I've gotten to the place under the house where the 'main' sow lives. Now I've gotten past where the dogs are. Now I've opened the door to the house enclosure. Now I've gone past where the male buffalo is tied. Now I'm going through the village. I see them taking out the winnowing tray to weigh out the silver (to give in taxes). The headman is telling them how much to give. The village priest is looking at their 'sticks' to see how much they owe.

"I have arrived at the section within the village gate, where there are trees (law tsah). I have arrived at the village gate. Oh you two figures of the gate, keep the bad things out and let only the good in. Do not let people with missing fingers or toes (this means lepers) come in. Just let great 'wealth' (pyu shui a ma) come in.

“I don’t hear the sound of a rich man. I just hear the sound of bells from cows and horses. (This is a form of praising the head of the house where she was having the ‘trance’. It was not true, of course, since K-28 had just two pigs, and no cows or horses.)

“I hear the sound of dogs barking. Where do these sounds come from? They come from the edge of the village. They come down from the top section of the village. There is a path to the blacksmith (ci kaw). There is a path to the spirit priest (pi kaw). There is a path to the village priest (dzoe kaw). Now I can see the village gate.

“Oh figures of the gate, are you here to keep bad from entering the village, or to keep the shaman from entering? We are here to keep bad out but let the shaman in ‘je’. Now I see the village priest’s house. I have gotten to the spot above the village priest’s house. I see a buffalo tied there. (A very mythical buffalo.) Is it to butt the spirit priest? Is it to butt the village priest? Is it to butt the shaman? No, it is not to butt spirit priests ‘je’. (The same with the village priest and shaman.) It is to butt people with missing fingers and toes ‘je’ (lepers). I have come to the family sow. Oh sow, are you to bite spirit priests? (Same with village priests and shamans.) No, I am not here to bite spirit priests. I am not here to bite village priests. I am not here to bite shamans. I am here to bite robbers and such ‘je’.

“Oh, I see a big dog as I come to the door. Is it to bite shamans? I won’t bite shamans ‘je’. It is not a matter of thieves coming ‘je’.

“I now open the gate to the courtyard. I have now climbed up two steps. I have now climbed up five steps. (This too was purely theoretical. The house where she was in her ‘trance’ was a poor hut built right on the ground.)

“I have come into the house. The head of the house, the ruler, is here. In the other room I see the woman of the house. In the third room I see many children and children-in-law. (There are only two rooms in an Akha house. They don’t seem to know why they say, ‘a third room’ here – ‘just custom’.) I see a ‘rice bowl’ with the things fixed in it.

“I see many chickens under the house. They didn’t kill a small one (for the pre-ceremonial feast) but a big one. They have a lot of new and old fermented rice tubes (small bamboo sections). They didn’t put out a new tube of fermented rice for me, but an old one (a sign of respect).

“It’s time for me to leave the house. I have left the women’s side of the house and come to the men’s side. Fix up the ashes in the fireplace. (It was when she said this that they threw some ashes out in three directions). O head of the house, stay well here as the ruler.

“I’ve gone down the steps. I’ve gone past the dog. I’ve gone past the family sow. I open the gate to the compound. I’m past where the buffalo is tied. I’m going through the middle of the village. I’m climbing up past where they are weighing out money (for taxes). I’m at the jungle area inside the gate (law tsah). I’m now at the village gate. Now I’m past the figures of the village gate. Now I’m past the village swing. Now I’m past the village water source.

“I hear the sound of singing (a ceu gu-eu – more like yodeling) in the fields. (she is now in the spirit world.) There is no one with me. Now I’m at the edge of the jungle. Many barking deer should be here, but I don’t hear them. Since I can’t pluck a leaf (pi pa) and blow for them, I am ashamed.

“I am at the edge of the jungle. There are lots of young girls I see on the road there. They are going to visit in someone else’s village. Oh young girls, go back to your own village afterward. As a rooster crows, without being embarrassed, I must go ‘tell them’ in another village. (The idea seems to be that she had to leave her own village to come to another village to go into a ‘trance’ and ‘tell’ the people what the spirits said.)

“Even though a dog barks, I must not be embarrassed, but must ‘tell them’ in another village. But even as the young girls will return to their village, I will have to return to mine. I will not lead the young girls from my own village, but from another village. I will lead the young girls from this village. (They say that if the shaman does not lead the souls of the girls from that village, she cannot go on the road to God’s place.)

“I don’t know whether there is a tiger here or not. I don’t know whether there is a bear here or not. If there is, don’t stay on my path. Go take animals from someone else’s country.

“It is difficult to go to someone else’s village. I will not look for any new young girls. I will return to the ones in my village. I have nothing to eat with me. I want to return. I will go back and live with the ones I used to live with. I’m tired of talking, and tired of walking. (At this point the shaman’s soul is now back at her home. She will start out from there, and go directly to see the house spirit, dzah mi.)

“I am wearing fancy leggings which look like dog’s teeth. (This may refer to the small triangular pieces of cloth sewn on to her leggings which look a little like ‘dog’s teeth’. It also begins the description of her clothes, which is intended for the benefit of ‘dzah mi’.)

“I am wearing a brownish (meaning old), not very good skirt. I am wearing a sash (dzoe dzah) with lots of buttons on it. My jacket does not have any embroidery on it. The beads and shells I am wearing are as many as ants. My bodice is like a shooting target. (It is true that the big silver piece on the front of the bodice looks very much like a target.) My head is no good – it is like a caladium. But I have put on my headdress (u coe) so that it will look nice.”

Shaman dances to dzah mi.

At this time she stood up. She had come to ‘dzah mi’, and she was going to ‘pay respect’ to her – thus the standing up. She also beat her fans together lightly at times during this section. She would hit them rapidly three times. She also did a kind of curtsie, much like when the Akha girls dance together. She would curtsie to one side, while bringing the fan on the opposite side from which she was curtsying down to her side. The end of the fan reached about to her slightly bending knee. After curtsying to one side, she would curtsy to the other, and bring the fan on the opposite side down in the same way.

“Oh dzah mi, who lives under the world, wear a gold and silver blanket and come out. If it were not for dzah mi we could not raise any animals. Because dzah mi is so talented, everything lives and we have money. There are many dogs because of dzah mi. The reason there is a paddy pounder and so many animals under the house is because of ‘dzah mi’. Because dzah mi is so capable, we bring wood into the house, and she turns it into silver. We bring branches in, and she turns them into gold. She is able to make water turn into liquor. It is impossible to tell all the things dzah mi is capable of.” (She spent quite a long time praising dzah mi, the house spirit.)

The shaman calls the ‘bugs’. After praising the house spirit, she sat down, and continued in her trance-chant for some time. Finally K-28 told her, several times, to get on to ‘calling out the bugs’. So finally she did come to that part. For that she stood again, after pouring some liquor into the cup. I do not have all that she said to get the bugs to come out, but the main theme I will give below. First of all, a word about these ‘bugs’, which are called ‘nyeh lu a maw’, or often just shortened to ‘a maw’, which is a generic term for ‘bugs and insects’. If a shaman cannot bring these ‘bugs’ out in the liquor, she is considered either a poor shaman – or a fake.

Those who can produce them are known as ‘bug producing shamans’ (a maw jaw-eu). Some shamans are also known as ‘two bug’ or ‘three bug’ shamans, depending on the number they can bring out. According to K-29, the ‘m dze’ shamans can sometimes bring out as many as 16 ‘bugs’, the m g’ah shamans as many as 12 bugs, and the m sa shamans as many as eight. K-29 has seen them brought out in the daytime, although I have never met anyone else who has seen them do it then. They say that at first they are very small (when they arrive in the cup of liquor), but they get bigger as they drink the liquor. They also say that the ‘bugs’ are different colors (ne, shui, nyoe na).

A blind shaman I interviewed (described more fully below), said specifically that the bugs would only come out at night, and then only if it was ‘their will to come’. While asking for the bugs to come, the shaman beat her fans together some. This is the jist of what she said,

“I have nothing to eat. Even if I were to open my ancestor shrine basket (pu tu) there would be no cloth in it. If I turn my purse upside down, nothing larger than a small red seed (teh ne) would come out. (In other words, she has no money.)

“Oh guards of the house’s upslope (a spirit named ‘Gaw teh za mi’), and downslope (a spirit called ‘Gaw teh gaw sa’), let the bugs come out from the ‘great house’ (pya seh nym ma). (This house is sometimes referred to by them as ‘God’s house’, and sometimes as the ‘spirit’s house’. They believe that the ‘bugs’ are in a golden box in this house, and that they must be coaxed to come out.)

“If you don’t send the bugs, it will be as if I am not a shaman. If the bugs don’t come, it will be as if a blacksmith is not a blacksmith. It will be the same as if I am lying. The people from 12 villages will not call me ‘shaman’ if the bugs don’t come. (This is true, as mentioned above. If just once or twice a shaman fails to get the bugs to come, of course, the people overlook this. But if time after time they fail, then they no longer consider that person to be a true shaman.) Come out bugs, so that the village priest and headman will be able to see you. Come out bugs, so that the two teachers (Sala Mose and I) will be able to see you.”

She went on like this for some time. She had to tell the bugs not to be embarrassed. At one point she chanted, “The sun is shining too brightly for the bugs”, and so K-28 promptly had a girl who was holding a feeble lamp up for Sala Mose to be able to see, put the lamp down on the floor so as to keep the area around the shaman in almost complete darkness. He explained to me that the bugs did not like light.

And then finally the shaman sang that the ‘bugs’ had come. There was a sudden stir of interest in the audience, but we were not allowed to see them yet. They had to drink some of the liquor first. She kept up her chanting the whole time.

At this time K-28 held up one of the lamps and started to walk up on the sleeping platform toward the shaman and the cup, and his wife (the helper) scolded him soundly, although in good humor. He ‘scolded’ back by saying, “Come on, the teachers want to see.” A moment later he started up again, but again his wife scolded him – and the shaman just kept right on with her chant. Finally she indicated in her ‘lines’ that everyone could look at the bugs.

K-28 held the lamp up so we could see. The shaman kept one fan partially over the cup (which she kept swishing around to make it look as if the bugs were alive). We got quite a good look at two of the ‘bugs’, and discovered that they are nothing but the kind of beetles they use to decorate their jackets and shoulder bags. The two beetles we could see were turned upside down in the liquor, but I’m still quite sure that is what they were. I also shined my flashlight on them. I had checked with K-28 on this before, but although he said it would be perfectly all right to do this, I don’t think the shaman was too happy – nor was she expecting it.

I am astounded that the people can be so fooled by it, but I suppose the combination of poor light (“you must not burn pitchpine or it will hurt the shaman’s voice”, and “the sun is shining too bright”), plus the fact that they have been psychologically prepared for this ‘great event’ for about three hours, plus the fact that they want to see the ‘bugs’, makes them believe it.

After the bugs have been drinking liquor for about 15 or 30 minutes, they are then sent back to the ‘golden box’ in the ‘great house’. If they are not sent back then, they get too drunk, and cannot find the way. I was not present when the shaman ‘sent the bugs back’, but what she said was something like this, according to K-28. “Now, go back to your place. Now go back to the ‘great house’ and the golden box. Stay real well in the box there. Etc.” (I believe that in the darkness she simply took the bugs out and put them in her pocket somewhere.)

I asked once if anyone could touch the ‘bugs’ and they said, “Oh no, if anyone touched them, spirits would ‘afflict’ the shaman.” I also understand that after the ‘bugs’ have left, the elders present drink the liquor, but they say it is not as good as the liquor that has not had ‘bugs’ in it. After the shaman, in her trance, has reached dzah mi, called out the bugs, and sent them back, people can then spit in the fireplace, brew tea and drink it, and burn pitchpine.

General observations concerning the trance.

There are several things I noted about the shaman. One was that she seemed to be quite aware of her audience all the time. When Sala Mose and I went in she turned to look at us – although continuing with her ‘trance-chant’. Also, I noted that when others came in she would turn and look at them. I have a strong feeling she had a pretty good idea who was there just about all the time. Even though her back was to the audience, I felt that she kind of sensed the times when the interest of the audience would lapse, and she would try to bring it back some way.

She took very brief times out to clear her throat, and to spit into the dish provided for that purpose. In the slightly over three hours I was there, I suppose she had about a dozen such ‘breaks’. She also had a filthy old towel that she kept either on the floor in front of her or on her knees, that she used to wipe off her face. She would sometimes do this at a break, sometimes continue to chant while she was doing it. She burped several times, but this seemed not to bother her, the audience, or the spirits. She did not drink much of the liquor. I asked about this. K-28 and 29 said that it would ‘wrong God’ to drink a lot. The main reason she drinks any at all is that her ‘spirit-owner pi tso’ wants her to drink a little when she pours it out for the house spirit, to ‘keep the house spirit company’.

I found from K-28 that the Akha jacket which the shaman wore, which was beautiful, was lent to her by K-28’s wife. The shaman was ashamed of her old jacket and asked to wear that. There is an interesting sequel to the night of the ‘trance’ I just described. The next morning, while working with K-28 and 29, the husband of the shaman came in. He was quite perturbed, and also apologetic. But his wife was showing symptoms of having wronged her spirit, and they needed some money to have a new ‘trance’ that night in her own home. I asked what the symptoms were. One thing, she had a terrible stomach ache – ‘the kind no medicine can cure’. The other one was that she had cooked and cooked the rice that morning, but it just wouldn’t get done.

As to the way in which she had wronged her ‘owner-spirit’, there were several possibilities. One was that when she had just gone on a ‘visit’, as she did the night before, she should have done it in her own home. Also, for her black fan she used one that she had bought in the bazaar rather than one made by an Akha. Then a couple of days later I learned that she had finally come up with the answer. She had failed to pour out the liquor when she started the trance that night. K-28 said that he should have realized it and reminded her, but he was still busy feeding the pigs. I asked then if elders could help the shamans like that, and he told me of a very forgetful old man shaman that he used to have to help with almost everything.

Interviews with shamans.

On June 17, 1965, I visited a female shaman in the new Ya kam village, named Joe dui (K-15). A young man by the name of So sa led me to her home, which was about the same as the other homes located near it. He called out to her, and she came out on the porch. Then, before I had a chance to say anything, he said that this person (pointing to me) wanted to hear and see her go into a ‘trance’.

She was quite offended and started to turn around and go back into the house. But I spoke up and said I merely wanted to ask her questions about shamans, as well as other religious customs. She was a bit suspicious at first, but gradually warmed up until she got to talking so that I didn’t know whether I could ever get away or not. She was a terrific talker, which I think might be one of the general qualifications for a shaman. Akha sentiment tends to back this up.

She said that she became (ga le-eu) a shaman about two years before the interview. She said that at that time she didn't feel like doing anything but repeating 'spirit incantation' all day. She said that everyone thought she had gone crazy, and she herself didn't know what to think because she had never been like that before. Then after about two months of this, there were two days when she didn't even eat, but repeated 'spirit incantations' all the time. It was during this period that her 'spirit-owner' came upon her, and after that she felt all right again, and went back to a more normal life, except that she started accepting 'clients' who wanted her to go into a trance to find out about some sick person.

I asked if she had any dietary restrictions. She said that during the two month period which was the preparation for the coming of the 'owner-spirit'[sic], there were certain things that her 'owner-spirit' told her not to eat, and she didn't. But after the spirit fully came on her, she could eat anything. I should add, however, that others have told me that a shaman will only eat 'holy rice' (haw yaw shaw), and other things that are 'holy'.

What they mean by 'haw yaw shaw' is 'ceremonially pure' rice. That is, it must be the first rice dipped out of the rice steamer. The water it was cooked in must have come from the 'purified water source'. The paddy to be pounded must have been taken from the paddy bin by a non-taboo person, etc. As to the shaman's diet, she will eat with her own family, but not with strangers, except when it is a 'pre-ceremonial feast'.

She went on to say that she was not 'ordained' (nyi pa tso-eu) yet. This is only done for those shamans who can afford it, since there are many sacrifices that the shaman must make for this. Also, the shaman goes into a special type of 'ordination trance'. That trance has something additional in it. The shaman must hold a wooden 'flower' (peh ta). The stem of it is cut from the 'peh ta' tree. The wooden petals are cut out of softer woods and stuck into the end of the 'stem'. Often they dye the petals different colors. She holds this up with one hand, while she fans with the other and goes into a trance. After that night, she is considered a full-fledged 'ordained' shaman, and demands a higher fee for her services.

When I asked her if she was going to be 'ordained' she said that she and her husband did not have the animals required to make the sacrifices to do it. From the looks of the home and all I think she was right about being hard up. She said that when people come to her now and ask her to go into a trance, they give her 10 pyas (2 cents.) If she were 'ordained', they would give her one old coin (\$2), plus 20 pyas (four cents), plus two yards of cloth (usually the kind Akha women weave), plus some uncooked rice and an egg. She said that there was a man shaman in another section of the village (who was out that day) who would not even talk about going into a trance for someone until they brought all of the items mentioned above. But the rate seems to vary from area to area, and from shaman to shaman. In the Naw haw area (near Loimwe) they say that 25 pyas (five cents) and one yard of cloth is the standard fee for the 'ordained shaman'.

Since I had heard that a shaman has a 'husband' in the spirit world, I asked her about this. She verified that she had a husband in the spirit world, but did not seem to want to talk about this too much. I learned later that the shaman's 'spouse' in the spirit world will be a child of the particular 'pi tso' who has chosen them. If they are 'm g'ah' shamans, then their spouse will be a child of 'm g'ah'.

I asked her what the 'underworld' was like. She said that when you look at it, it is like looking at something in a fog. You cannot see things too clearly. It is very big in size, and there are many roads in it. "This is why we must ride horses when looking for the 'lost soul'." In response to my question she said that there are black, white, and brown (yaw shui) horses. Since I heard that often shamans have their own favorite horse I asked her if she had one, and she said that she didn't mind riding any of them. She would ride a different one each time.

I asked her about her 'spirit slave' (a dzaw). She said that the slave went with her when she went hunting the soul, and carried the offering that the family was sending to the spirit which was holding down or eating the 'lost soul'. (This is not quite the same as I have gotten from others, but the basic pattern is the same.) She went on to say that when she actually got the soul back, she had to carry it. The term she used (eu-eu), means literally to carry it on the back, as a child. This also disagrees with the idea of calling it into the jacket of the shaman.

I gathered that the shamans have to use all sorts of stratagems to get the spirits to reveal where the 'lost soul' is. (On the surface this does not agree with what K-28 and 29 told me about the shaman finally asking God, but it does agree with what I have heard in the Loiwmé area.). She also said that the spirits will lie to her, and then there is an argument. Others have verified this. When she thinks the spirit is lying she will sometimes say, "If you saw the soul and say you didn't see it, may you go blind. If you heard it and you say you didn't hear it, may you become deaf." She said that this is extremely strong, and usually the spirit will then tell her what she wants to know.

When we were talking about the spirits lying, I asked her, in all innocence, if people ever said that shamans lied. She flared up with, "Everyone says we shamans lie. We don't lie – we tell the truth. Why, if we were to lie, the spirits would afflict us, etc." She got so worked up about it that I changed the subject, but even so she kept coming back to it.

I asked her about pulling a 'spirit arrow' (neh mya) out of a sick person who has had an arrow shot at him by a spirit. She said that she has done it many times. First, she spits on her right thumb while repeating 'spirit incantations', and then at the proper time reaches down to the person's chest and pulls an arrow (imaginary) out. She said the spirit priests can also do this.

I discovered she is able to repeat spirit incantations for many things. Not all shamans can. The young man who took me to her house said that she was the very best one among the shamans when it came to repeating spirit incantations. In questioning her about this I learned that her father had been a spirit priest, and knew how to repeat the spirit incantations very well. I imagine that she heard him do it a great deal, and either consciously or unconsciously memorized them. She repeated a little for me at a very fast rate.

I also learned that she knows a fair amount about Akha medicine, but I have no idea where she learned it. At this point the young man with me told how he had come to this shaman when he was having a terrible pain in his left arm. He had been up in the jungle above the village cutting firewood and stacking it up. He was putting in posts on either side in which to stack the firewood when his arm started hurting him.

So he told all this to the shaman, and she went into a 'trance' for him, and told him that it was in putting up the posts to hold the firewood that he had wronged a spirit. He must cook a chicken and tear down the posts that held up the firewood. He didn't cook the chicken, but he went up and tore down the posts, and his arm got better. I asked him if his arm got better immediately, and he said, "Oh no, it gradually got better in the next two or three days".

Then the shaman asked him if he hadn't boiled the chicken too. He said no, he had just knocked over the posts. She smiled and said, "Sometimes it is enough just to knock over the posts. It probably would have been better if you had killed and cooked the chicken too."

I wondered how becoming a nominal Buddhist had affected her being a shaman. Evidently it has not affected it at all, except that she does not go into a 'trance' near the ancestor shrine basket as before, since she no longer has one. But she kept reiterating (and others have substantiated it) that "liquor is the important thing anyway. As long as we have liquor, we can go into the trance." She and the young man told me that the Buddhist caretaker of a nearby monastery has come to have her go into a 'trance' for a sick member of his family.

She did mention that this is a 'new' type of shaman 'falling into' (ga le-eu) they now undergo. But in asking her and others I found nothing different about the trance they go into, or anything else. Again I gather it is the fact that they are nominal Buddhists which has made her consider it 'new'.

It is interesting to note that the Akhas who become nominal Buddhists do not retain their village priests, or their spirit priest, but they do retain their shamans. There are five shamans in the complex of villages on the Kengtung. Perhaps the Akha 'Buddhists' rely on the shamans even more now since they no longer have their village priests or spirit priests.

Blind shamans.

After talking with K-15 I went to see an old shaman named A tu. He has been blind since 1958. When the young man with me said I wanted to learn about shamans he immediately said, "I don't know whether I'm a shaman or what. Here with the 'spirit affliction' I'm undergoing I don't know where I stand as a shaman. I'd rather not talk about it." K-28 and 29, who know the man, feel very strongly it is 'spirit affliction' that caused his blindness. They do not know what thing he did wrong, but 'there must have been something pretty bad.' He did tell me some things about shamans, and gave me a very few cultural items of interest. But since he was in no mood for talking I dropped it.

Then I met a 67 year old shaman from Na gui village (near Loimwe) named Yaw je in 1966. He came begging for some cloth for his daughter to have for the new year. (This is the only Akha who has ever come to my house begging. Akhas are proud of the fact that they are not beggars – "only Lahus do that".) K-29 knows him personally, and told me his background.

Formerly he was a spirit priest. But during that time he gradually became blind. He can still see partially out of one eye, but not well enough to walk unaided. Sometime in that interval, he had the shaman spirit 'fall' on him. The elders of the village urged him to go ahead and drop his spirit priest office and take the shaman 'ordination' so that he could get money for that, since he was nearly blind and could not work in his fields.

He didn't want to do that too much, since it is usually women who do it. Also, he didn't want to do the little 'dance' to dzah mi, since he would be 'embarrassed'. Since the spirit-owner for the spirit priest and the shaman is different, he could not be both at the same time. Finally he left his priest work, and became an ordained shaman. He told me himself that he got as much as 40 or 50 kyats (\$10-12) sometimes when he was called to villages of people who had money. K-29 confirmed this, and named some of the villages that had called him.

When talking about him I learned a saying the Akhas have: the 'spirit-owner' of the spirit priests is 'mya beh' (eyeball-less, or blind), whereas the 'spirit-owner' of the shamans, pi tso, is mya coe (has an eyeball, that is, can see).

Characteristics of shamans.

After my contacts with four shamans, and also from interviews with various Akhas, I gather that they are more emotional than the average Akha. They also seem to be more extrovert, especially when compared with some of the spirit priests I have met, who tend to be small, quiet and introverted. Akhas feel that for the most part shamans have the good of their patients at heart. I would judge, with many of them at least, that they are not primarily out to make money. They seem to be impelled by some inner motivation (they would call it their 'owner-spirit') to be a shaman and go into a trance. With many of the women who become shamans, I believe it is one of the few socially acceptable opportunities they have to break out of their humdrum daily cycle.

There are those shamans who have a 'bad heart', of course, and who will actually get the spirits to afflict someone they hate, according to most Akhas. But K-22 felt that this kind of shaman would not have a long life. He said, "You would not hear of such a shaman more than once or twice in a generation." K-29 feels very strongly that probably not more than one in ten are really proficient at discovering diseases, however. And then he began to name off the various ones in the state of Kengtung who he feels are this kind. I feel the shaman is more perceptive about occult things than the average Akha. For example, if anyone tries to hide any human bones or teeth in the village to later use as medicine (especially for the detection and cure of werewolves), the shaman will know about it and tell the villagers. For that reason, villagers must keep such relics out in the jungle in a hidden place (with some exceptions).

Also, if there are any old graves in the village, even though others do not know about them, the shamans will know about them, and can tell who the 'occupants' are. Although they will not know the names of the 'occupants' they will know their nationality, and sometimes what kind of a death they died. When I was lead to see K-15 by the young man So sa, he told me that his house was built over a Chinese grave, but he didn't know it at first. Every night about midnight, one of the windows in his house would open, without anyone being near it. When he asked why this was, the shaman (K-15) told him that it was the soul of that Chinese man leaving the house to walk around. He asked another shaman and got the very same reply. K-28 and 29 believe that the 'spirit-owner' teaches the shamans these things, and that is how they know about them.

Another type of divining.

Besides the trance, there is another way that shamans can divine. It is called 'touching the hand' (a la ah toe haw-eu). For this the shaman, while asking her 'spirit-owner' what is wrong, will first of all hold the sick person's wrist. She holds the wrist in much the same way as a person taking a pulse. I imagine that they often do take the pulse, but of course without any way of timing it. Then they feel the palm of the hand, and just sit there quietly, waiting for their 'spirit-owner' to tell them what spirit is 'afflicting' the sick person. Then suddenly they will speak out, "It is such-and-such spirit". Or perhaps they will say, "Oh, your illness is very serious."

Superior class of shamans.

There is a very superior class of shamans called 'nyi pa sha ma', or often just 'sha ma'. There were only two such 'powerful shamans' living in early 1966 in Kengtung State, that I learned of. One lived in the Naw dao area, and one in the Meu pya area. There used to be a woman of the A jaw clan, named 'nyi pa Sah bu', who was also considered this. She is written up under 'Death and burial', since her unfaithfulness caused her husband to commit suicide.

She was extremely wealthy. "You couldn't count the buffalos under her house." K-28 told me how she was called to his village by a childless couple, who paid her 80 old coins. That couple got two children from her. This fee seemd to be standard. These 'powerful shamans' are endowed with very special powers by their 'spirit-owners' so that they can know if people are saying bad things about them ('the spirits tell them'). Also, they can tell a person where his stolen goods are – and all of this without going into a trance, but simply by 'powerful shaman divining' (sha ma haw-eu). K-28 and 29 said that the woman of the A jaw clan (mentioned above) also performed black magic (ja neh neh-eu on people, by sending metal pieces into them, and then she got the money for taking them out so the people would not die.

ORGANIZED CEREMONY

ANCESTOR OFFERINGS

The Akha year is built around the ‘ancestor offerings’ (a poe law-eu). Although one elder (a baw A eu) felt strongly that these offerings are really offerings to paddy, most Akhas consider them to be for the ancestors. In saying ‘offerings to paddy’ he was probably trying to put the offerings in what he considered to be the proper focus. All Akhas agree that if the offerings are not made, or not made properly, the paddy crop will not be good.

Number of ancestor offerings.

The Akhas differ as to the number of ancestor offerings they should have each year, although basically they are almost the same. The ones in the eastern, central and southern part of Kengtung State observe nine ancestor offerings a year. In the north, north-central (especially Loimi mountain area) and west (Meung Ping), they have twelve offerings a year. They say, “There are twelve months in the year, aren’t there?”

There are some Akhas in the extreme northern part of the State and across in China where they have just three ancestor offerings a year. Several Akhas feel quite strongly that those Akhas have adopted the ‘Chinese religion’, and are no longer ‘true Akhas’. This may have some validity, since the ones I have heard of doing this are the ‘turban Akhas’ (u dzah A ka), who have become quite Sinicized. I understand that the three ancestor offerings they have are: new years, an offering when they plant their rice, and another offering when their corn comes on, called ‘pi myeh law-eu’ (pi myeh is from Chinese).

Preparation of the ancestor offering.

The central part of the ancestor offering is the preparing and eating of the ‘ancestor offering food’ in each home that has an ancestor shrine (a poe paw law). The one who usually prepares this is the ‘man of the house’ (nym sa a da). Women, for the most part, are not allowed to touch the ancestor shrine or any of the articles that have to do with it. The exception to this is when a woman has performed the ‘post-menopause ceremony’ (ya yeh m-eu). She is then considered, for purposes of ancestor offerings and other religious ceremonies, to be the same as a man, so she can prepare the offering, carry the ancestor shrine when moving to a new village, and handle the things that have to do with the shrine.

When the man of the house is sick, or away, or perhaps no longer living, then a son must prepare the offering, if there is no woman who has undergone the post-menopause ceremony present. If the only son is an infant, the mother will carry him on her back, and direct his hands to do the various things that need to be done. If the mother does not know exactly what is to be done, she must ask some elders before the time of the offering. In the case of an emergency, some male relative can stand nearby and tell the mother what to have the infant son do.

While the man of the house prepares everything for the ancestor offering, everyone else must go to the men’s side (baw law) of the house. They are not prevented from looking in, but they must be careful that no one should kick some of the food to be offered. This would be a very serious offense against the ancestors. If that should happen, they would have to start over again and make everything new.

Also, if a dog should lick, for example, the chopping board on which they had cut the meat for the ancestor offering, they would have to start all over again. So they have found it easier just to bar everyone from the women’s side of the house (nym ma) when the various things for the offering are being prepared and offered, especially since young children might do something that would make them have to start all over again.

First of all, the one preparing the offering takes down the little table, stool and bag with the various things in it from the wall on the woman's side of the house. These are a part of the total ancestor shrine, and are used in this offering (see more under Buildings and furnishings).

If it is an offering that requires the offering of a chicken, which most of them do, he will first of all 'ceremonially sprinkle' it, then kill it with a special stick (k'a ba di du, or, pu k'a di du, depending on the type of wood used). The chicken that is chosen for this must be 'perfect' in every way. That is, it must have a good comb, good legs, good eyes, good beak, not have any sickness, etc. After he dresses the chicken he cooks it.

In the meantime, the woman of the house will cook some sticky rice. Whatever rice is used in the ancestor offering must be 'holy', which means that it must be the first rice dipped up from the rice steamer, the water used must be from a 'purified water source', etc. Whatever sticky rice is left over they will often make into rice cakes (haw tah), or just eat it.

After the chicken and rice have been cooked, the person preparing the ancestor offering prepares various dishes, and puts them up on the offering shelf (law gui) of the ancestor altar, in this order: the cooked sticky rice in a small container woven of bamboo strips with a lid that fits down over it (haw gah), a little of the cooked chicken meat in a cup, a rice cake (haw tah) also in a 'haw gah', some rice liquor in a cup, and some tea in a cup.

Concerning the 'liquor' they use, it is simply made of water that has been poured into a 'fermented rice container' (ji ba ji si). To extract this, they insert a small bamboo tube, like a long straw (ji ba ji teu) and suck up the liquid until it gets to their mouth. Then they put their thumb over the end, pull out the tube, and pour the liquid into another section of bamboo which is about one and a half inches across, and one inch high. They do this three times. Some of this 'liquor', now called 'ji ba', is then poured into a dish for the offering. They only have this when they kill a chicken for their ancestor offering. When they speak of 'ji ba' in connection with their offerings, this is what they mean. But in other contexts 'ji ba' refers to the rice liquor which they drink.

Concerning the 'tea' they use in their ceremonies, they must always mix a little ginger root with it. It makes the tea taste quite bad, but 'the ancestors like it that way'. This mixture is actually called 'la peh'. Whenever Akhas speak of 'tea' in their ceremonies they are referring to this ginger-tea combination.

Actual ancestor offering.

After the man of the house has put these items up on the offering altar, he turns around and sits down quietly. He sits there perfectly quietly for perhaps a minute or two, as if he is in meditation, although he does not close his eyes. To the Akhas this is a very significant part of the offering, for they believe that the ancestor spirits are eating and drinking the offering at this time.

He then takes these things down off the offering shelf in the opposite order from which he put them up (That is, tea, liquor, rice cake, chicken meat, cooked rice). Some, however, as K-28 and 29, take them off in the same order they put them up. As the man of the house takes them down he puts them on a miniature 'rice table' (a poe law jeh). He can put them on the table in any pattern he wishes.

Then he takes just a little bit of each item on the table, in the same order in which he put them up on the offering shelf, and 'feeds the gong', which is hanging up with the other items on the wall, and constitutes a part of the ancestor shrine. It should be noted, however, that not everyone has one. Also, it must be a small brass gong. K-28 had a big gong which he lent to the young people of the village when they wanted to beat on it, so he did not 'feed' that one.

The way the man of the house feeds the gong is to take just a little of the food, item by item that is on the small table, and rub it onto the back of the gong, right in the center where it is concave. For the liquor and tea he just dips his fingers into these, and then rubs it onto the back of the gong. After he has 'fed the gong', he strikes it three times, and hangs it back up.

Eating the ancestor offering.

The one who is preparing the ancestor offering food then takes something from each of the dishes on the table, in the same order as before, and eats it. He eats all of the 'holy rice'. For the liquids he dips a finger into the liquid and then brings the wet finger to his mouth. He will treat this food with the greatest respect, since it is 'ancestor offering food' (a poe law dza). He will break off all food with two hands, and bring it to his mouth with two hands, although with the liquids, of course, he will bring those to his mouth with just one finger. However, when handling all of the 'dishes' he will show his respect by using both hands.

Next he will call the family to come in and eat of the offering on the woman's side (nym ma). He will always say, "Come, eat the ancestor offering food" (A poe law dza dza la-aw.) He will then feed the elders first, including the female 'head of house', and last of all the children. He will break off bits of meat and rice cake and drop them in their outstretched, semi-cupped hands, which they then reverently bring to their mouth. Actually, he drops the various things in together, so that they need only bring their hands to their mouth just once. They are very careful that it is the one who made the offering that 'breaks the food off' (a poe law dza tseu neh-eu) and feeds the family. They do not give the liquor and tea to the family.

When he is through feeding the family, he generally has some of the offered food left over, with the exception of the 'holy rice', which he ate. Some Akhas put that extra food into the basket they keep their rice in. Others keep it in a loosely woven basket (k'a lo) up on the rack above the fireplace.

Then as relatives and friends come in during the day, and the next, if that is not a new offering day, they can feed that to them. For this, it does not have to be the person who made the offering who breaks it off and feeds it to the relatives and friends. It can be the woman of the house or one of the sons. They too must show respect for it, however. Also, they must feed visitors in the men's side (baw law) of the house.

Those who eat the left overs of the ancestral offering first of all 'bless' (dam-eu) the food. That is, they call down a blessing upon the house in which they eat it. They also believe that they receive a 'blessing' for eating it. They believe further that if they go visit in someone's house and eat some of this left over offering, they will not be bitten by a tiger or snake during the coming year.

All of the ancestor offering food must be eaten before they have a new offering. I have heard from some that if they should happen to have any extra left over that was not eaten, they would throw it into the fire, but others were shocked when they heard this, not so much because they thought it was 'wrong', but they said there was never anything to throw away, since they, their friends and relatives ate it all.

There are certain people who are not allowed to eat any of the food which has been offered to the ancestors. As a matter of fact, they are not supposed to be in the house when the offering is being made. (This breaks down in practice, although they hold fairly strictly to it for some things.) The ones I have heard that must not eat the food or be present in the house when the offering is made to the ancestors are those who have killed anyone, whether intentionally or not. The Akhas go on to say, "After the ancestors have gone back up, those people can come back into the house", which means that after the offering is all over, the murderer can enter the house again.

Anyone who has ever had 'human rejects' must not be present in the house when the offering is made, but later he (or she) can eat some of the food. Also, they can have the offerings in their own homes. Those who are 'taboo to each other' (zah do) must not be present in the same house when the offering is made, but they too can later eat some of the food. Those who are in the 'zah do' relation are, for example, two men who have married, at different times of course, the same woman. Or if two parents of 'human rejects' are present, they are 'taboo' to each other, and must not speak directly to each other. Also, if a man marries a widow with sons, he is in this taboo relation to the sons, since they should have been given over to the brothers of the deceased and have nothing to do with him. But this is where it breaks down, since K-2 used to stay in the house and even eat the ancestor offering when his step-father, a baw A eu had the offering.

When the eating of the offering is over, the man of the house, or whoever prepared it, must wash all of the utensils that have been used. If there is another day of ancestor offering to follow in two days, he will put the washed items into the underside of the little 'rice table' he used for the offerings, and put it upside down up on the rack over the fireplace on the woman's side of the house. If it is the last day, however, he will put the items that belong in the shoulder bag into it, and hang it and the table and stool up on the wall.

Each day they have an ancestor offering they must prepare all new food. Also, when they get the various dishes etc. out to use for the next offering, they must wash them all first. This 'washing' is fairly superficial from a western point of view.

Days of ancestor offerings.

All of the houses in a village will be having the same type of ancestor offering in their own house on that day. However, the day on which different villages have that particular offering will vary in accordance with which day is 'propitious' for their village priest, which is the day that the whole village observes. These ceremonial days, however, will usually be about the same time of year for all villages. Also, it should be noted that there are some offerings which must start on certain days (see below).

The times of most ancestor offerings is a very important time for Akhas, and they try to be in their village when it is held. For some of the offerings they also invite Akhas from nearby villages to come. For the new year's offering they invite not only Akhas, but Shans, Lahus and anyone else who lives nearby. The new year's offering is considered the most 'open' offering time, especially since it is the time when young men are travelling around looking for wives. It is all right for Akhas to be visiting other villages during the time of the ancestor offering. If they are present the evening before the offering, but plan to leave before the offering is made the next day, however, they must spend the night out on the covered porch. If they stay for the offering, they will stay inside the house with the family.

Offerings for the ancestor's horses.

There is an additional 'ceremony' that everyone performs in conjunction with the ancestor offerings, but evidently in slightly different ways, and for somewhat different purposes. One is called 'ceh law da-eu'. For this they take uncooked rice, salt and a chicken egg, and put them in a dish. This dish is then set on the ancestor shrine basket (pu tu) for the duration of the ancestor offering. Some say that this is to be done three times a year (Loimwe, east and south), while others (K-28, 29) say that it is done for all except: the house building offering, the new rice offering, and the offering of liquor made of new rice. Also, K-28, 29, and others from the north call this 'mah ceh dah-eu'.

They do seem to be agreed that it is to feed a horse, or horses, but they disagree as to whose horse. In the east and south they consider it food for the horses that bring the ancestors to eat the ancestor offering. In the north, however, they seem to feel it is to feed the horse that 'dzoe ma M dah dah lah', the great-grandson of Jaw bah, rides around to see if Akhas are following their religion properly. Those in the north usually use just paddy for this offering.

Important offerings.

There are three offerings that the Akhas consider to be very important, and they will plan to be in their village for these if possible. They are the three 'dzoe yah law-eu' offerings. "Since we call the nine original village priests, these offerings are the most important." Whoever is in the village when these offerings are made must stay there until they are finished, or be fined four old coins and a bottle of liquor.

They also put up the 'bamboo stars' (da leh) symbols at the entrance to the village so that people will go around the village while the ceremony is in progress. K-28 told of a Shan man who came to his villagewhile they were having one of these important offerings. He wanted to enter the village quite badly for some reason,, so he pulled up the 'bamboo star' symbol, and threw it into the jungle. Then when he got into the village he said, "I didn't see any 'bamboo star'". K-28 said that this Shan man is now blind, and all the Akhas feel strongly this is his just punishment for saying, "I didn't see the 'bamboo star'".

Ceremonial abstinence.

During their ancestor offerings, all of the villagers must observe 'ceremonial abstinence'. Usually on the day following an ancestor offering they have a day when they must again observe ceremonial abstinence. On such days they must not: do anything to their hair (u du u ka m-eu) such as comb, cut, shave or braid it, spin thread, gather firewood, pound paddy, dig a hole, go hunting, gather mushrooms, or go to their fields.

They also believe that they must not argue with each other during this time, or something 'bad' will happen. They must also refrain from lying and doing all 'bad' things. Husbands and wives are not to have intercourse on the evening before a day when they have ceremonial abstinence. They are permitted to go to their gardens and get something to eat, however, on days of 'ceremonial abstinence'. When there are four or five days in an ancestor offering time, they can go to the jungle and to rivers on the first and last days of the offering, provided it is never an offering for the original village priests (dzoe yah law-eu), when they must not go.

When they have the agricultural ceremony of catching the grubs and the grasshoppers, they must not even go outside of their village gate. Of course, they say, when it is an emergency they can always break such rules. For example, if there is a fire burning in the jungle near their burial ground on a day of ceremonial abstinence they will go up and put it out, even though they are not to go to the jungle. Or if a person is real sick and they need to carry him to a hospital, they feel it is all right to 'break the sabbath'.

But here again they differ somewhat as to just what they can and cannot do on the day of ceremonial abstinence. K-28 insisted that for opium growers, when they had cut the pods and were ready the next day to collect the raw opium, even if it was a day of ceremonial abstinence, they could go out and collect it. K-29 and K-2 objected strongly to this, saying that even if all of the opium dried up and the whole crop was lost, one must not go out on such a day. When it comes to a matter of protecting the paddy harvest from rain, again K-28 felt that a person could go do it, whereas the other two strongly disagreed.

Calendrical offerings.

The Akhas have 'main ancestor offerings' (a poe poe ma), and 'small ancestor offerings' (a poe poe za). With one exception, the 'main ancestor offerings' are all made on the same day by everyone in the village. The exception is the 'house building' offering, which comes at the same time of the year for everyone, but must be observed on their own 'propitious' day. Some Akhas from Loimwe, Meung Yawng and the souther areas of the State do not perform this last offering every year, or if they do, they do it in a slightly different way. Also, they do not consider it one of the 'main ancestor offerings'.

There are also two 'lesser' ancestor offerings which have to do with the harvest of the paddy crop. Both of these are observed first by the village priest. Then the villagers follow, each on his own 'propitious' day. The Akhas from Loimwe, Meung Yawng and the southern area of the State include the harvest offering in with their 'nine' ancestor offerings.

There are also two important village ceremonies: the yearly renewal of the village gate, and the offering to the 'lords and rulers of land and water', which has been borrowed from the Shans.

1. Main ancestor offerings, in the 12 offerings a year system.

A New year offering (ga tah pa-eu).

This is a time of welcoming in the new year. There is a great deal of visiting back and forth. (The asterisk denotes that an ancestor offering is made on that day.)

- 1) On the first day (ga tah dza beh), which must be on 'buffalo day', everyone kills a hen in their own home and offers it to the ancestors.
- 2) On the second day (ga tah dza g'ah) they all observe ceremonial abstinence.
- 3) On the third day (ga tah a poe law da), they each make the following offering to their ancestors in their own home: a dish with three rice cakes (haw tah), a dish with 'holy rice', and a dish with tea. They make this offering before sunrise.

After sunrise, the whole village kills two or three buffalos, if it is a good sized village, plus at least one pig. They divide this meat up among the villagers, and each cooks lots of meat curry, since there will be visitors coming from other villages. These visitors will be fed in the various homes, and given lots of liquor to drink. They feel it is an important Akha custom to make and drink lots of liquor at new year's time.

On this day the men also go to the village priest's house to figure what each man owes for the past year to the village fund, so that the village can pay whatever debts it might have incurred, and everyone be squared away. This is called 'jaw pa-eu'. Since they are illiterate, this is what they do. Each man prepares a board, or a length of bamboo (ya jaw seh teu). Then he splits it and leaves half of it at the home of the village priest. They keep the other half in their home.

When a man gives a chicken, or travels for the village or donates labor, he takes his half of the 'stick' to the village priest's house. The village priest finds the matching board, and puts them together. Then he cuts a notch so that it is in both boards. On the front of the board he makes a mark for each day the person has travelled for village business, and for each one-tenth of a viss of chicken he has given (a viss is about equal to 3.6 pounds). On the back of the board he makes a notch for each one-half viss of chicken the man gives. Even though they have the boards to guide them, since the men have been drinking pretty heavily they often get into fights and brawls doing this 'checking of sticks'. They ask those who are not drunk to keep such brawls down.

- 4) On the fourth day (ga tah a poe dza sa) they again observe ceremonial abstinence. They put all of the paraphernalia connected with the ancestor altar away that day.

As to their general activities during these four days of the new year, the men and boys love to spin wooden tops. One person will spin his top (cah) in a stationary position (gah da-eu), thus setting it up for another. The other person will come running up with his top and try to hit the spinning top with his (ti-eu). The tops, made of hard wood, are about three inches tall, and about two inches in diameter. About halfway down they cut them so they taper to a point. The Akhas also gamble with domino-like cubes (pa-I di-eu) during the new year season. The village priest must be the first to throw (di daw-eu). After that he does not play with them any more. If there is trouble, as there often is because of drinking, the village headman (bu seh) has to arbitrate. He will ask how much money they started out with, and then try to work out what each owes each other. Sometimes they have to take it all the way to the court.

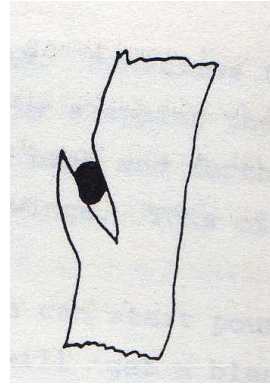
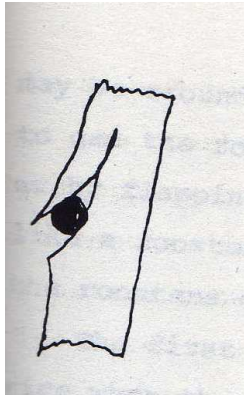
They also have very informal type of 'dances', which I believe they have borrowed from the Shans. One or two men will beat on a drum, while dancing around in a circle, with others, all men and boys, weaving about performing a 'dance' which imitates the Shan dance. They call this type of dancing 'ga nyeh nyeh-eu'. Often they invite the Shans to join them in this. Usually there will be those standing around the edge of the group beating on gongs and cymbals too. Sometimes they also beat long bamboo sections on the bottoms of hollowed out logs or pig troughs turned upside down on the ground (baw tu tu-eu).

B 'K'm shui k'm mi' offering.

This is done to help hunters get the game they are after. It is held two or three months after the new year offering.

1) On the first day (k'm shui a poe beh-eu), which must be either 'monkey' day or 'chicken' day, they offer 'rice cakes' (haw tah) and 'holy rice' to the ancestors, each in his own home. On this day they also build a little 'ladder' for the spirits by the uncovered porch (gui ga) of the house. There are nine 'rungs' in it.

The bottom four rungs are notched from the bottom up (see drawing on the left) and are called 'mo teh'.



The top five rungs are placed in notches in the side bars cut from the top down (see drawing on the right, above), and are called 'seh teh'. Thus the whole ladder is called, 'mo teh seh teh'. Males of the house must make it.

At the top of the ladder they make a small platform of woven bamboo strips. The platform is called 'ja gui'. When the ladder and offering platform are in position, they dig a clump of dirt and put it on the woven bamboo platform. This is so that when 'dzoe ma M dah dah lah' comes riding on his horse, he will have a place to tie it. The clod of dirt is usually four to six inches across.

K-29 told how that in the Meung Hka (meu ka) area they make these little ladders at a large tree. Each household has its own tree. They cut a little notch in the tree to make the 'ja gui'. They must never cut down the trees that they do this to. During the night between the first and second day, all of the young people in the village will put some husked rice in their paddy pounders, and get ready for the very first rooster to crow (k'm shui lo-eu), which may be around two or three AM. Sometimes the boys try to get the roosters to crow by slapping their own legs, or by flapping their jackets back and forth to sound like a rooster flapping his wings. This often starts the roosters crowing.

The first household which can start pounding that rice when the rooster crows will 'get a blessing'. But it actually works out that they start pounding just about the same time. Even those who are not first will pound rice anyway, since they are pounding it into a kind of rice flour out of which they will make 'rice balls' (ja leh) during the day. This pounding is called 'k'm shui tah-eu'.

2) On the second day ((k'm shui law da-eu), they make many 'rice balls' from the pounded rice flour. They leave six of them without sesame seeds, and they are called 'white rice balls' (ja leh leh pyu). Three of these are for the ancestor offering, and three are for another ceremony (see below). All of them, both with and without sesame, are boiled.

After the 'rice balls' are finished, they prepare the ancestor offering. For this they have the following dishes: cooked meat from a rooster, a dish with the three 'white rice balls' in it, a dish with the 'holy rice', a dish with liquor, and a dish with tea. Then they make their own ancestor offerings, each in his own home.

After that, they perform the 'ja g'oe peh-I-eu' ceremony. This is held at the 'ja gui' altar, which they prepared the day before. For the most part the men of the house do not perform this ceremony themselves, but have a son do it, or if there is a woman who has performed the 'post-menopause ceremony' in the house, they will ask her to do it. The reason for this is that the men will go out later in the day to burn the jungle and hunt game. They believe that if they make this offering they will not get any game.

The one who performs this ceremony takes out one boiled egg and nine 'rice balls' to the place they made the 'ja gui' altar the day before (either at the edge of the uncovered porch, or in the notch of a big tree). Three of the 'white rice balls' (without sesame), and six 'black rice balls' (ja leh leh na) are taken to this 'altar' for the ceremony. The one performing the ceremony breaks the egg by hitting it on the uncovered porch, or tree, if he is offering it there. Then he peels off the shell and drops it on the 'ja gui' altar.

Next he breaks off three little bits of egg and drops them onto the altar. Then he takes one of the 'black rice balls' and breaks off three very small pieces and drops them on the altar. Finally, he breaks off three very small pieces from one of the 'white rice balls' and drops them on the altar as well. When this is done, he takes what is left of the egg and rice balls and goes back into the house. Any males, or women who have observed the 'post-menopause ceremony', can eat the egg and rice balls, but those who are going out hunting don't eat any. They say that if they eat it they won't see any game.

They believe that the spirits climb the ladder and eat the offering on the 'ja gui' altar. After this is completed, the women of the house will boil up lots of eggs ('all the eggs we have'). Sometimes there will be as many as 30 or so eggs boiled. Even the poorest families must boil at least two or three. They feel the ideal is to feed at least one egg to each member of the family. If they do not have enough eggs, they make sure that each member of the family gets a little egg to eat, at least. It should be noted that when they eat the eggs, they mix a little salt with it.

They must 'feed an egg' to their pigs, too. They take a boiled egg, peel the shell off, and break off three small pieces into the pig trough. The rest of the egg they usually feed to their children. They also 'feed an egg' to their buffalos, if they have any. Usually they will just rub a little egg onto the mouth of the 'main' female buffalo, but if they have enough eggs they will sometimes rub some egg on the mouth of each of their buffalos, using a different egg for each one.

When they have finished, they 'ja k'ah tso-eu'. Any male can do it. They take two strips of supple bamboo, usually about half or three-quarters of an inch wide, and from 12 to 16 inches long. They then take one of the 'white' and one of the 'black' rice balls left over from the morning's offering. The person doing it will first pinch off a bit of the 'white' rice ball and press it down on the bamboo strip so that it will stick. Then he does the same with a pinch from a 'black' rice ball, next a 'white', etc., sticking on a total of nine pinches on each of the 'strips' (ja k'ah).

Then one strip is taken to the outside of the door on the man's side and 'hung' up among the thatch. That is, they stick the two ends into the thatch, and leave it hanging that way. The other is hung above the door on the woman's side. They are left this way. They are to keep sickness and bad things from entering the house. They never take them out, but let them rot.

3) On the third day (k'm shui je lah-eu), they will observe ceremonial abstinence for 'thunder' (m je). This seems to be an appeal to the thunder and rain not to let the approaching monsoon rains wash away their seeds, and later their paddy crop. There is no special ceremony on this day.

4) On the fourth day (k'm mi beh-eu), they each kill a hen in their own home and make an offering to the ancestors.

5) The fifth day is called 'dzoe yah law-eu' (offering to the original village priests). It is an offering like those mentioned above. I was also told by some men from Ba jeh village that they consider these offerings to the original priests as offerings to the 'spirit-owner' (yaw sah) of the village priest of that village. This is a kind of 'soul of the village', so to speak, which never changes. But they also agreed that the nine original village priests are the special guests whenever they have this type of offering.

I will go into detail concerning this offering, but it should be remembered that it will also be describing the same type of offering that they have during the 'yaw la' and 'ka yeh' offerings, although there are slight differences I will mention when describing those. Just the elders of the village are permitted to eat this offering, and just those who are considered to be 'holy' (yaw shaw). They gather at the village priest's house. The village priest himself will furnish the pig for this offering, although since it is at his house he must not kill the pig. One of the assistants will kill the pig, after first ceremonially sprinkling it. Then the young men appointed by the village priest will cook it up into curry, while the women of the village priest's household are cooking the rice. During this time the village priest will furnish tea to the elders to drink.

When everything is ready for the actual offering, they will take away the 'rice table' (haw jeh) on which the tea was, and place a 'fresh' one there. Then the assistant village priests will arrange five 'dishes' on that 'rice table': one dish of cooked rice, one dish of raw pork that has been chopped up fine, but with no blood mixed with it (byeh pyu), one dish of raw pork that has been chopped up fine and has some blood from the pig mixed with it (byeh ne), one dish of cooked pork (sha ca), and one dish with a little section of broiled intestine (sha teh) from the pig that was sacrificed. They clean the intestine before broiling it.

Then the village priest will reach both of his hands into the dish with cooked rice and take a little out, and while dropping it on the 'rice table' will say, "Come and eat, nine original village priest guests".

Next he takes some of the raw pork that has not been mixed with blood from the dish and while dropping that meat on the table with both hands he says, "Those who eat the 'white meat' (byeh pyu) come and eat it." Then he drops some of the pork mixed with blood and says, "Those who eat the 'red meat' (byeh ne) come and eat it." Then he takes some of the cooked pork and while dropping it on the 'rice table' says, "Those who eat cooked meat come and eat it."

As he drops the bit of broiled intestine on the 'rice table' he says, "Don't let anything bad happen in our village. Let all of the villagers be healthy. Keep us from harm. Let no evil befall us. Don't let any disease appear in the animal pens. Let everything planted produce well and not rot. Etc."

When he is finished with the above, he and the other elders will gather around the tables to eat, with the village priest taking the first bite. A man whose wife is pregnant will not go to this offering and feast at all, for fear his wife will have 'human rejects'. He will not say that that is the reason he is not going, however. He will simply say, "If the elders eat it, that will be enough". But the others know enough not to urge him any more when he says that.

C House building offering. (nym tso a poe law-eu).

They do this so that the house spirit (dzah mi) will stay in their house and guard them against attack by 'outside spirits' (ya sa neh). During the time of year between the second and fourth offerings, they will repair their house a little. Usually this involves putting some more thatch in to keep the rain out during the approaching rains. Before they do any work on their house, they must each observe one day (on the 'propitious day' for the household) when they will kill a rooster and have the ancestor offering. It is just one day long, and will differ from house to house. Akhas in the Loimwe, Meung Yawng and southern area of the State do not consider this to be a 'main offering'.

D Paddy planting offering (ceh ka a poe law-eu).

This offering is to insure a good rice crop.

1) On the first day (ceh ka a poe beh-eu), which must be on 'monkey' day or 'chicken' day, each house kills a hen, and along with rice cakes, 'holy rice', liquor and tea, offers some of the meat to the ancestors. They usually have this offering around one or two in the afternoon. Everyone in the village has it on the same day. Some time during this day, some of the men from the village will go to the village water source and clean it thoroughly. They will take out the leaves and branches that may have fallen into it. They often make a new spout (tsa bi) either from bamboo or wood, for the water to flow out of the spring. If the old spout is good, they may leave it.

However, if before the next year when they fix the spring again something happens to the spout, they cannot put a new one in yet. They can fix the old one enough so that they can get water, but they can only put a new one in during this time. If before next year's time of cleansing there is a landslide which blocks the water supply, then they must offer a pig, and clean the landslide out. K-2 says that if the village is real poor they can just offer a chicken. This seems to be a pattern. The custom actually calls for a certain type of offering, but they can always say, "We're too poor to give that", and then they can offer something not nearly as costly. When the water source is cleansed, the path to the water source is also fixed up.

On the evening of that day, the village priest will call out from his porch that the next day will be a day of ceremonial abstinence, and he will tell them what they will do. This is called 'nah gu gu-eu' (literally 'calling the day'). Before he goes out to 'call', he must drink some liquor, and after he returns he must drink some more. "This is the custom, and we must do it" (K-28). When he goes out onto the porch, he first of all clears his throat (eh heh ka-eu) three times. The first time is heard by the ancestors, the second time is heard by Tah pah, and the third time it reaches all the way to 'God'. This clearing of the throat also scares the spirits away. He first of all calls out to the villagers something like this, "Tomorrow we are going to purify God's water source. Don't carry water. We're going to wash the paddy seed. Don't comb your hair. Refrain from intercourse, etc."

Next the village priest, still out on his uncovered porch, announces to 'God' what they are going to do the next day, and incorporates it in a request that 'God' help out. He says something like this, "Don't let bad water flow. Don't let us meet anything bad (that is, on the way to plant the paddy). Don't let us meet caterpillars or snakes. Don't let us meet up with any 'bad omens'." K-28 pointed out that since they have told God they are going to plant the paddy, God will see to it that nothing happens the next day when they plant their first paddy.

In the Loimwe area they do this a bit differently. On the evening the village priest is to go out on the porch to 'call out the special ceremony', a man of the village who is 'holy', and for whom the following day is a propitious day, will bring some of his paddy seed to the village priest's house. The village priest will leave that seed in his house as he goes out and calls to the villagers, "We don't know what is in the paddy seed – maybe something bad. Let God's river wash it away. Etc." (The rest is much the same as above.)

2) On the second day they 'purify the paddy seeds' (ceh ka si yoe shaw-eu). This is a day of ceremonial abstinence for the villagers, but they do not make an ancestor offering. Early in the morning of this day, the village priest takes a pair of chickens (rooster and hen, called 'poe ma ti dzm'), furnished by the villagers, to the water source. He also has the rice seed that was brought to him the night before (if that is the way they did it), or some of his own (K-28), as well as the things he will need as 'libations' (la ka-eu), which includes a small bamboo section of fermented rice and some tea leaves.

For those in the Loimwe area, they next put the paddy seed into some kind of a small basket, or a dish, and place it below the spout of the spring, so that the water will flow into it. It should be noted that even if it is a well, they are supposed to make a spout at the edge so that they can do this. But K-28, even though recognizing that the 'proverbs' (daw da) told them to do so, said that they dug wells and did not have any spout.

Next the village priest puts some of the fermented rice and a few tea leaves in the spout, and lets the water coming out of the spring wash them down into the container with the rice seed. If it is a well, they dip some water and pour it into the spout so that it will run into the container holding the paddy seed. While doing this the village priest says, "Let the river carry away the bad things. Let the good things come back to us. May we get food for our labor and drink for our drawing. May the animals we raise flourish. Etc." Then he puts the paddy seed out of the way.

Next the village priest kills the pair of chickens. They must be 'holy' (yaw shaw). That is, they must not be white, they must not have feathers on their legs, they must have proper claws, their combs must be standing properly, the feathers must be full, and they must not have any kind of 'goiter-like' growth. The village priest's assistants and others cook the chickens. Then the village priest pinches off a small piece of meat from each 'part' (seh), and puts them at the upper end of the spout (K-2), or to the side of the spout (Hohe village). He also puts some cooked rice there. As he drops the meat on the water spout he says, "I am offering a pair of three year old chickens. With this offering, God, cleanse the water spout." This is the important part of the whole ceremony, although he goes on to say other things as well. The water source is then said to be 'purified'.

While the village priest has been doing the above, the elders from the village have been sitting around talking and doing pretty much whatever they wanted to. One or two would no doubt act as 'coaches' while the village priest was doing various things. The younger men would see to the cooking of the curry and rice, although it would have to be the village priest himself who would actually kill the chickens.

After the village priest offers the meat to the spout and the 'purification' ceremony is over, the men there gather around and eat what is left of the meat, which is most of it, with rice which they have either brought from their homes or cooked there. They eat 'to the full', and leave behind anything they do not finish. They must not take it home. I have heard some say they burn it in the fire, but others say it is all right just to leave it on the ground.

Then the village priest will take just a little of the paddy seed that has been cleansed and plant it above the road to the spring, but quite close to the spring. Then the village priest carries the seed back to his own home. From there the owner of the seed takes the seed that has been purified and mixes it with the rest of the seed that he plans to plant, so that it will all be purified that way. Then he is ready to go out with a friend to plant it.

The above is the way it is done in the Loimwe area, and I presume in the eastern part of the State. K-28 told of differences in the way he did it in his area, although basically it is much the same. For one thing K-28 and his villagers had a well, and did not make a spout for it. So they dropped the meat, rice, liquor and tea directly into the well. Later, when someone got some of the meat or rice that had been dropped in for this purification ceremony, they all felt that that person was greatly blessed.

Also, after they 'purified' the water, they dipped some water out and poured it three times into the type of basket Akha women tie at their waist and carry cotton spinning equipment in (ku bah). Also, they washed the paddy seeds with their hands while saying, "Paddy seeds, get pure!" The rest of the procedure is the same.

There seems to be a dual reason in having this ceremony. First is that it assures their having a water supply. K-2 told me of Naw haw village many years ago, when the village priest's wife was pregnant. The elders, thinking that he was not 'holy' ("since they did not know the customs well") had someone else do this, and as a result their water supply dried up that year. Secondly it means that the rice they have planted is 'holy' and they will have a sufficient supply.

When a village priest and the other elders return home from this dual ceremony, the village priest takes one gourd full of the 'purified' water, and the thigh bones of the chickens that were killed there. When they get back to the village priest's house, he and the elders 'examine the thighbones' (ya yoe ka haw-eu). Then they can tell whether or not the paddy crop will be good that year.

As the village priest and other elders are walking back to the village, they clear their throats loudly. This is a sign to the children of the village to run and start getting water at the 'purified' water source. The first that gets it and gets back home is 'blessed'. Since by this time most of the households in the village are without water, the children are busy for some time carrying water.

Later on that day, the person whose paddy seed was 'purified' in the morning at the water source takes his paddy seed, along with a friend, to his hill field to start planting. He has the friend go ahead of him so that if there is anything that would be a 'bad omen' the friend could warn the man carrying the seed. If the man carrying the seed were to see the 'bad omen', then he would have to return to the village, since his seed would no longer be 'purified'. In that case, the village priest would have to take some of his own seed, which is always considered 'purified', and go plant it.

If the friend going ahead sees a snake he will try to scare it away, or tell the man carrying the paddy seed not to come yet. If the man carrying the paddy seed happens to see it, he will return to his home, and leave that seed on the outside. He will say to his family, "I saw a vine on the ground on the way to plant the paddy", and they will know immediately that he saw a snake, but he does not want to say the word, since it is a 'bad omen'. In the case of K-28, it was usually his wife, or someone else from his family, who went and planted the first paddy. I asked him the reason, and he said that usually by that time of the day he had had too much liquor to drink, and only felt like going home and sleeping it off.

To get back to the case of the two men who were taking the paddy seed that had been 'purified' that morning to the field to plant, when they get to the field they first of all make a 'field spirit hut' (k'm pi). This is made by taking two forked sticks about 18 inches long each, and sticking them into the ground, in the general vicinity of the hill hut, which is usually about in the center of the field. Then they lean several sticks about 18 or 20 inches in length on a cross-piece that they put over the two forked sticks. On those sticks they put thatch grass, but it is not woven into shingles. When they make this for opium fields, they do use thatch shingles.

The open side of the 'field spirit hut' must be down slope. They take some tea leaves and put them, with some fermented rice (which is in a small section of bamboo) just above the thatched roof. Then they take the rice seed, which they have brought in a section of bamboo, and plant some of it in the 'field spirit hut'. In the Loimwe area, they use a dibble stick for planting, whereas in the Loimi and northern area, they use a 'small hand hoe' (la ngeu).

The way they plant it is like this. The man whose seed it is will dig three holes with a dibble stick, and his companion, who is often his wife, will take a small handful of seed and drop it in the three holes. (It is important that it be finished in the three holes.)

Then the man who dug the holes will throw down his dibble stick on the ground on the slope above him. He throws it down three times while calling out, "Co-o, co-o, co-o." This is what they say when they scare animals away from something, very much like "Shoo!" This is to frighten away birds and rodents. It should be noted, however, that not all do this. K-2 has never done it himself, but he has seen it done. Many I have talked with have done it or seen it done.

The man who made the holes then retrieves the dibble stick, makes three more holes, and throws down the stick again (some say a little further up the slope this time), repeating what he said above. After the holes have been made, the helper again plants the holes with just one handful of paddy seed. Then the same is done a third time. Each set of three holes is a little further away from the 'field spirit hut'.

Then next they plant three or four more 'fistfulls' on above that section, but without calling out, and without throwing down the tool he uses – which is often the small hand hoe, at this point. Also, by the time they get to this spot, they don't have to finish up all of the seed in one fistfull in three holes.

Later, after the two have planted the section above the field spirit hut they tie the bamboo section with the remaining paddy seed in it to the under side of the roof of the hut. When they have planted all of their paddy field, they return to the field spirit hut. The wife (or the one who has dropped the seed into the holes) has kept some of the seeds back that were being planted in the field. She gives these seeds to her husband, who mixes them with the original seed that was in the bamboo section inside the field spirit hut. Then he finishes planting all of that up above the field spirit hut where the very first planting was made.

The field spirit hut must be left there all the time that the rice is growing. After the rice has been harvested and taken to the paddy barn, one of the supporting forked branches is pulled out and left leaning so that it soon falls down. They can never use it a second time. Also, they do not need more than one such field spirit hut, even though they have several fields in which they plant paddy. One does for all of them.

K-28 used to build his field spirit hut a day or two before he planted the first paddy, on a 'propitious' day. I think that was probably because he did not want to bother going up there on the day of the planting. K-29, who used to live fairly near him, had never heard of people building the field spirit hut early, and in the Loimwe area I have never heard of anyone building it early either. After this person has first planted his rice above his field spirit hut, the rest of the villagers can plant rice in their fields, whenever a 'propitious' day comes around for them. They do not need to have any purifying ceremony for their seed. All of the seed for the village is now considered 'purified'.

E 'Yeh ku dza-eu' offering.

This offering is to keep the village healthy.

1) On the first day (yeh ku a poe dza beh), which must be on 'buffalo' day, each house kills a hen and makes an offering to the ancestors about the middle of the day.

2) On the second day (la ceu tso nah) they put up the village swing (la ceu). This is what they do. After their morning rice, all of the men congregate at the the upper end of the village where the old swing is. If a man who is not ill fails to come, he must give one old coin or one bottle of liquor. Those whose wives are pregnant, or have been fathers of 'human rejects' within the last twelve months, are automatically excused.

The village priest sends the young men up into the jungle to cut four new poles for the swing, each about twenty feet or so long. I heard from one source that the village priest went and took the first stroke at the tree, but most say this is wrong.

The young men who go for the wood choose a type that will last at least twelve months. Apart from cutting down this wood for the swing, it is taboo for any villager to cut down any other trees or poles that day. When they have cut the four poles, they carry them to the swing site.

For the swinging section of the swing, they cut a large vine (ni ne, or ni nyoe, usually), which is quite thick and very strong. I have yet to meet an Akha who has ever seen one of these break, although almost all of them will say that they have heard of a vine breaking 'in other villages'. Sometimes they use other vines. Meanwhile the elders, who don't go up to get the new poles, cut down the old swing, and pull out the four old posts.

For their new swing, they can either use the old site, or they can change the site slightly. However, on 'side' must be the same as the year before. That is, two holes on either side of the old swing must be retained. Whenever new holes are dug, the village priest must start them.

One reason they have for moving it is that the shadow of a house must not fall on it at any time. Sometimes in the village, when they get crowded for space and build houses closer to the swing, they have to move the swing away a bit so that the house's shadow will not fall on the swing. When they are digging the holes for the swings, they must not allow their shadow to 'fall into' the holes.

When they dig the holes for the first swing, or when they dig new holes at the time that they change the position slightly, the village priest will ‘throw’ three pinches of uncooked egg into each hole. Actually, he just acts as if he is pinching off some egg and throwing it in. He then puts the egg in a dish, and leaves the dish by the hole as long as they are putting the poles in. When he is finished he will take the egg home, and either he or one of his sons will eat it. No one else must eat it, “especially a female”.

The village priest will also scrape three slivers of silver into each hole. This must be ‘holy silver’ (pyu yaw shaw). That is, it must not have the image of a person on it. Therefore they cannot use money, but they can scrape some silver off a silver bracelet, or better yet, from a ‘silver lump’ (pyu k’o) – if they have one.

Then the men present lift the first pole up, and the village priest guides it into the hole fixed for it. The other three posts are put into their holes as well, with the village priest guiding each one in. The two poles on each side are bent a bit to lap over each other, and then a cross bar is put into the two Vs that have been formed, and firmly tied. It is amazingly strong. The vine itself is then hung from the crossbar, with a loop at the bottom into which they can put their foot when they swing.

After the swing is completed, they take three blades of grass, three leaves from a wild raspberry bush, and three very small stones. (K-28 said that he had not seen the stones used, whereas K-29 and many others have.) They first bind these together, and then kind of loop them through the loop in the vine. Then the village priest sends that swinging three times. This is to give ‘dzoe ma M dah dah lah’, the great-grandson of Jaw bah, and the one who originated the Akha swing, a ride.

The first person to swing in the village is the village priest. While he swings, most of the villagers are there, with the exception of married women who are either pregnant or still capable of having children. As he swings he says, “Last year at this time we didn’t know whether we’d see a new year or not, but here we are again happily swinging this year too. This past year we had rice cakes three times (referring to three important ancestor offerings: k’m shui, ka yeh, and ya ci), and here we are now swinging. Last year we didn’t know whether we’d have rice this year or not, but we sure do. Etc.”

After the village priest has swung, other villagers can swing, although no one is forced to. Usually it is the younger ones, as well as the young married men. Girls or women having their period, and women who have just had a baby recently are not permitted to swing on it. Women who are pregnant are not only not allowed to swing on it – they must not even walk between the poles of the swing.

The villagers can only swing as long as the ceremonial abstinence for this offering is in effect. When it is finished, they tie the vine around one of the poles. If someone unties it and swings ‘out of season’, that person is fined a bottle of liquor, which the elders drink. If he does it repeatedly, he could be fined four or five old coin, although K-2 has never seen this happen. K-28 heard of this in a village near where he used to live. The villagers made the offender give a big pig.

If the wood in the swing should start growing after it has been stuck in the ground, the villagers are very frightened. When K-2 was small he saw people in K’m bo village offering a pig when this happened. Both K-28 and 29 have also seen this happen. Sometimes the people who swing fall off. They can be hurt quite seriously. K-28 and 29 have heard of people dying from such a fall. When that happens, the village has to flee.

If an animal from their village or another village comes and knocks the village swing askew or even knocks it down, they are sure that a ‘spirit’ (neh) has sent the animal to do it, since the poles have been put in so solidly. If an animal from their own village does something to the swing that makes them think it has been sent by a spirit, everyone in the village must contribute to the purchase of a pig to offer to the swing. If it is an animal from some other village, the owner of the animal must pay half for the pig, and the villagers from that village must pay the other half, so that the pig can be sacrificed at the swing. I asked them why they swing. “Because our ancestors did. If we don’t swing, our Akha religion will disappear.”

3) On the third day (law da a poe), they offer a rice cake (haw tah) for their ancestor offering, each in his own home, early in the morning. The village also kills a buffalo (anyone can do the actual stabbing) and the meat is divided. People who live nearby are invited, and fed in the various homes.

4) On the fourth day (a poe dza sa) they observe ceremonial abstinence. They put all of the paraphernalia connected with the ancestor shrine away in the evening.

F 'Yaw la la-eu' offering.

This is an offering to make their garden and field crops (everything beside paddy), plentiful and good. They will have it just one cycle of days after the offering above.

1) On the first day (yaw la a poe law-eu), which must be 'buffalo' day, each house will kill either a rooster or hen and have their ancestor offering, about the middle of the day. During the night between the first and the second day, all of the village young people (the unmarried youth from about 15 years and up), gather in the house of one of the assistant village priests. The next day a 'dzoe yah law-eu' ceremony for the original nine village priests will be held at his house.

That night the young people beat gongs, beat large bamboo sections on hollowed out wooden troughs that have been turned upside down (baw tu tu-eu), beat cymbals and drums, and generally make a lot of noise. They do this all night. The man of the house must furnish them plenty of liquor to drink. For the most part it is the young men who drink it, but some of the girls drink it too. During the night there are lots of young couples going out into the jungle to sleep together.

2) On the second day they have an offering for the original nine village priests. After sunrise the village priest and other elders will come to the house of the assistant village priest (where the 'serenade' was held the night before). The village priest will stab the pig (either boar or sow) which the assistant has provided. Then the assistant will cook the meat, and feed the elders a rice and curry meal first, with the village priest taking the first bite.

After that, the assistant village priest will feed the young people who 'serenaded' him all night. It is the custom that when the young people spend the night 'baw tu tu-eu' and generally making noise like this, the household must give them a pork feed the next day.

3) On the next 'pig' day after this ancestor offering, all of the villagers must observe ceremonial abstinence. They do not offer anything.

4) On the next 'sheh' day after this offering, they must observe ceremonial abstinence again. These two days of ceremonial abstinence are designed to keep them from losing livestock to tigers and leopards. There are also some special taboos for these two days, as well as for the two days of ceremonial abstinence for the 'ka yeh' ceremony to be described below. No one must carry a shoulder yoke (paw kui) on these days, nor go get bamboo shoots, nor must women sew on white cloth. If any of these special taboos are broken, the village priest will fine the culprit a bottle of liquor.

G Chicken feather plucking ceremony.

This must be on 'sheep' day after the above ceremony is over. There is only one day for it. They say that ancestors from the last seven generations come down for this. They also say that Ja bi oe lah (the creator of the world) also comes down, to look around to see who has died and who has been born since the last year.

The man of each house will take a rooster, and after ceremonially sprinkling it will pull out some of the feathers. He goes first to the doorway that leads into the men's side of the house and pulls out a tail feather from the live rooster he is holding, and throws it into the doorway. Then he pulls a feather from the wing and throws it into the doorway, and finally a feather from the head and throws it there too. While doing that he says, "I'm pulling the feathers out" (Ya ci ci le de.) They do not seem to know of any meaning this has – "the ancestors said to do it this way".

After that he goes to the end of the dividing wall of the house, but still on the man's side, and repeats the above. Then he goes around the dividing wall to the woman's side and repeats it again. Each time he pulls out the feathers he repeats the statement about pulling the feathers out.

Then he goes in front of the ancestor shrine and kills the rooster, but he does not say anything at that time. He cooks the chicken, and makes the regular offering to the ancestors. Then the others in the household are called in and fed.

H 'Ka yeh yeh-eu' offering.

This takes place seven days after the previous offering. It is done to chase the bad spirits out of their village. They cannot start cutting trees to make new fields until after they have had this ceremony.

1) On the first day (ka yeh a poe dza beh), which must be on 'horse' day, each home kills a rooster and makes an offering to the ancestors.

In some areas (P-1) they go out after that to get the wood to make the planks for tomorrow's 'chasing out the spirits'. Other areas do that on the second day. This is also the day on which they mark out the areas in which they want to make new fields (ya bya-eu). Usually several days ahead of time the elders will meet and talk about where they plan to make new fields. But even so, sometimes there are two households who want to make a field on the same plot of land. When that happens, the elders usually divide the plot into two divisions.

The way they actually 'mark' (bya) the field is to cut off a sapling about in the center of the area where they will make the new field. They will usually cut it off five or six feet above the ground. They then split the top of it in at least two directions, and put sticks in it pointing in different directions (there must be at least two sticks – often they have more). This means that the field has been 'taken', and no one else must plan to make a field at this spot.

When they 'mark' the field they usually say something like this: "If this piece of land will 'feed' me, don't let me dream. If this piece of land won't feed me, let me have a dream." If in their dreams that night they see a Lahu or a Shan, that is a bad sign, and they will abandon that site. If on the other hand they see a tiger, that is a good sign. "The tiger has been sent by the ancestors to tell me it is good." If in their dreams they see buffalos, cows, or monkeys, however, they consider it a bad sign, and will give up the site.

There are other omens that they have to tell them whether the site is good or not. For example, if they should see a barking deer or a wild boar jump up and run from the place they had chosen, they would not think of making a field there since they had 'met a bad omen' (daw pu le-eu).

During the night between the first and second days of this offering, the youth of the village gather in the home of the village priest, and 'serenade' him with 'baw tu tu-eu' until sunrise.

2) On the second day they have the 'ka yeh dzoe yah law-eu' offering for the original nine village priests. After sunrise the village priest kills a boar (either his own or one that he has purchased for the occasion). He has the young people cook it up into curry. Then they have the offering to the original village priests (see above). After that, the elders gather for a feast, and then the young people who 'serenaded' him the night before feast off of the rice and curry. When the elders eat, the village priest takes the first bite.

They take the liver out of the boar very carefully, and then several of the elders gather around to look at it (za pi haw-eu). This will tell them whether the village will be healthy, have enough paddy, etc., as well as the person who killed the pig, what his future holds. Those who help look at the liver are given liquor to drink.

Then the young men and boys go out to the jungle to cut wood from which they will make planks and boards (taw ma) with which to chase out the spirits from the village. They will choose soft woods. The young men will make boards about six feet long, whereas the boys will make shorter ones. The longer ones are about six inches across, and the shorter ones about four inches.

After the boards have been hacked into the desired shape with machetes, they will 'write' on them. These are designs that they put on with black and red dyes. They will make whatever design seems 'nice' to them. There does not seem to be any special pattern that needs to be followed. The reason for 'writing' on the boards is to 'frighten the spirits'. Some of the boards are in the shape of guns, some spears and some machetes.

Then they all take their boards and gather at the home of the village priest. When they are all there he will tell them to go around and scare away all of the spirits in the village. They will stay as a group, with a young married man (tsaw k'a) in the lead, and all of the boys in the village running along behind, each with his own board. The heavier boards are carried on the person's shoulder, while the smaller and lighter ones are carried as if they were guns at the ready.

The group will start with the village priest's house. In his house, as also later in all of the other houses of the village, they enter through the door on the man's side of the house, run through the 'passageway' area, and leave through the door of the woman's side. It is not correct to do this at other times, but this is the proper procedure when chasing the spirits out. While running along the young men and boys shout, "Co-o, co-o" (Shoo, shoo!), which is the same way they have of shooing animals away from food that they should not be eating. This chasing the spirits is called 'co ko co na teh-eu'.

The elders in the houses where they will be running through have placed food for them on the floor. It may be cucumber, melon, rice cakes, or whatever they think the boys will want to eat. They say this food helps the boys to have strength enough to keep scaring all the spirits away. They usually cut it up fairly small, since there will be many boys. Even if the household is too poor to provide any food, though, the boys must go through every household in the village.

As they run through the house, the elders who are there will say, "Yes, chase out poverty, sickness and hunger." They usually run through each house three times, that is 'better', but they can do it just once if that is what the leader decides.

Meanwhile the girls go below their houses and pound the paddy pounders for all they are worth. Since there is no paddy in them, this makes a terrific noise, which adds to the general din and thus helps scare the spirits away. It also means often, though, that they end up by splitting the wooden paddy pounding receptacle. Also, the older men help out by shooting their guns. Some do not put any shot in (K-28). However, many others go up to the edge of the jungle and have kind of a shooting competition (a pya beu-eu). They use the brown shell from the bottom of the bamboo plant (za lo) as the target, often. This shooting serves a dual purpose, in that all the noise serves to further frighten the spirits, and also the men of the village enjoy the shooting competition.

When the young men and boys are finished going through each house to chase the spirits out, they take their boards up to the outside of the village gate and leave them there temporarily. Then they go back down to the village priest's house, and he feeds them and the elders of the village a pork curry feast.

After the feast, they go back up to the village gate, get their boards, and carry them on out to the 'ka yeh law kah'. This is a simply constructed 'secondary' gate a fair distance outside of the main village gate (law kah). There are four poles stuck into the ground, with a rough framework on top of crosspieces joining the posts. These poles are not nearly as large as the main village gate, being only about three or four inches in diameter. When this gate is first constructed, the village priest must go and start digging a hole for the first post. He does not throw rice in, or an egg, however. After that just his son going will be enough.

They do not tear the old one down, but it falls down on its own, especially since it is constructed of soft wood. Each year they start a new one just above the site of the old one (that is, further away from the village). When the young men and boys get to the 'ka yeh law kah' they put all of the boards on top of the framework, with the guns, spears, etc. all pointing away from the village. They just leave them there. When the boards fall down they just let them rot there. This is why they use very soft wood throughout.

2. Lesser ancestor offerings.

A. The new rice offering. (g'o do caw a poe law-eu, or ceh nm a poe).

This is held after the 'ka yeh' offering, when it is a propitious day for the village priest. He does it first, and then after that each household does it on their next propitious day. The night before he is going to do it, the village priest will go out on his porch and call out, "Tomorrow will be a propitious day for the village."

The next day the whole village will observe ceremonial abstinence. The village priest will go to his paddy field with his sickle (yeh k'o). First of all he plucks three ripe heads of paddy with his fingers, in the area above the 'field spirit hut', where he (or his wife) first planted paddy seed. He wraps these up in a type of rataan (k'a ci a ne). It is important that he use this. If he does not have some, he must buy it for the purpose. He puts these in his shoulder bag to take home to his ancestor shrine. When talking to the 'headman' (la ja) of Jaw seu village, he kept reiterating that 'this is the important part of the ancestor altar'.

After the man of the house has this prepared, he puts it in his bamboo section (ju bah) which serves as the central part of the ancestor altar. If the bamboo section is getting too full they may have to take some of the old out. They can only take the old out at the time they are about to put the new in. Also, they must not throw the old away carelessly, but must wad it up and stick it up into the thatch shingles. Later, if it falls down and disappears, they say that is all right. But they would never dream of putting it in a place where someone might walk on it.

For those who do not have the 'bamboo section' but just the shelf, they have a loop of rataan (k'a ci a ca) hanging down below it. They will tie the three heads of paddy over that. This loop of rataan hanging under the offering shelf will often have 15 or so such loops of paddy heads on it.

The 'headman' of Jaw seu also showed me how they next take three other ripe heads of paddy, and put them in a 'star' shape (that is, pointing in three directions) on the ground. They then stamp on them with their foot, stamping them into the ground just a bit. Next they take a leaf, put it on the ground, and stamp on it once too. Then they bind the three heads of paddy into the leaf and put it into a gourd. This is what they will plant first the coming year. In checking with others, K-29 said he had never seen this done. K-28 said that he had seen others do it, but he had never done it. He felt it was the Ceh mui clan that does this.

Next the village priest takes his sickle and reaps three sheafs of paddy, and lays them by the 'field spirit Hut'. This is called 'yeh daw daw-eu', and is considered to be food for the 'spirit-owner' (yaw sah) of the 'field spirit hut'.

Next he pulls off paddy kernels from plants near the field spirit hut. After that he will go on to other parts of the field where the paddy is ripe and pull the paddy off and put it into this shoulder bag. When he returns home, he hands his shoulder bag to his wife. She reaches in with her hands and takes out the loose paddy, as well as the three heads of paddy. She lays the three heads of paddy aside momentarily, since her husband will be putting them into the bamboo section of the ancestor altar, or under the tray (as described above). Usually she will place them on top of the ancestor altar basket (pu tu). She puts the paddy that her husband has pulled off by hand into a winnowing tray. Then she takes the tray out to 'show the sun and moon' (beu ma la ma bi maw-eu). After standing on the porch (gui ga) for a moment 'showing the sun and moon', she returns into the house.

Then she puts the paddy into a pan, and heats it enough to dry it so that she can pound it. When it is dry, she takes it below the house and pounds it. And it should be noted that she must do all of this by herself. Then she 'soaks' it, but for a very short time. This is more or less to go through the motions. Then she cooks the rice, by steaming it in the usual way.

While she is working at that, the village priest has taken a rooster, and after 'ceremonial sprinkling' has killed it. Then he has prepared five dishes for an ancestor offering. The 'dishes' are: 'holy rice', new rice (haw shui), meat, liquor and tea. (New rice only is used for both the 'holy rice' and the 'new rice' dishes.) After he has offered these things to the ancestors, he puts what food is left in the basket they keep their pounded rice in.

Then he calls the young men, and they help him slaughter a buffalo and pig. If the village is small, or quite poor, they will kill just one of these. The young men prepare the meat and cook curry for the village, as well as friends from nearby villages which have been called for the 'new rice feast'. The expenses for the buffalo and pig are shared by the villagers. When everything is ready, the village priest will say, "Come eat the new rice" (Ceh shui dza la-aw.) Then as the people gather in his house, he hands out the 'ancestor offered food' (a poe law dza), which he had put in the basket of pounded rice until now, to the young men who helped him cook the curry. They in turn go around to the elders first, and later the other villagers, and give them all a little bit to eat.

The elders accept it with both hands cupped before them, and bring it to their lips in that way. However, before eating it they do something a bit different. They all say, though not in unison, but when they get the food, something like this, "May you always have food like this. May your food never be lacking and your drink never be insufficient. May your storehouses, both large and small, always be full. Etc." This is said to the village priest, and is called 'dam-eu', which literally means 'offering'. It is borrowed from Burmese through Shan. Only after saying the above do they eat it.

After they have all eaten this offering, they set up four or five 'rice tables' (haw jeh) in the village priest's house. They figure that each table will seat 15 or 16 people. (This is why the village priest's house must be large.) After the feast there is plenty of liquor to drink, and the elders stay around and repeat poetic chants (sha zi zi-eu). Often they will stay there all night long doing this. If they do this until daybreak of the next morning, the village priest must kill another pig (his own this time) and feed them. This is called 'sunrise pig' (bya za).

That day, that is the day after the main feast, is not a day when they must observe ceremonial abstinence. But for the most part the elders will stay around the village priest's house to feed guests who come from other villages to 'eat the new rice'.

On their next propitious day, each household will do what the village priest did, except for the killing of a buffalo and pig to feed the village. They will then have their 'new rice offering' in their own home.

B Liquor made of new rice offering (ceh shui ji ba ci law-eu).

This is done after all of the rice has been harvested, but before it has been put into the paddy barns. This is similar to the one above in that on the first day the village priest does it, and then afterwards each one in the village does it in the same way he did it. They each do it on their own propitious day.

The village priest and his wife (they are the only ones who need to observe ceremonial abstinence on this particular day) take some of the recently harvested paddy, and make fermented rice of it. Then the man of the house pours a little water into the dish that has the fermented rice in it. He next sucks up some 'loiquor' (they use the same term for this and the other liquor they drink) into a small bamboo stem, and then empties that into another dish. He does this three times. Then he places the dish he has just prepared on a 'rice table' in front of the ancestor shrine. He then says, "I'm offering liquor made from the new paddy".

Then he turns his back to the 'rice table' for a moment, in order to give the ancestors time to come and drink the liquor. "The ancestors are very happy to be able to drink the liquor," the Akhas say. After that, the man of the family picks the dish up with both hands, then puts a finger in the 'liquor' and touches it to his lips. As he does so he says, "It's delicious. We're surely blessed. After this may we get a lot of paddy." Then he takes the dish around to each member of the family. They in turn take the dish in both hands, dip a finger in, taste it and say what the man of the house said.

For infants who are too young to take the cup, an elder will dip his or her finger in the cup and touch it to their lips. It is most important that each member of the household have a taste of it. When they are finished, the man of the house puts the dish back into the rice basket. It is now considered to be food offered to the ancestors (a poe law dza), and can be given to people when they come to visit. At this point, on his own, K-29 said, "We are just like children playing when we do our customs."

3 Village ceremonies.

A. Renewing the village gate (law kah m-eu).

This is not an ancestor offering. But it is a very important ceremony for the village. When the day comes that they do it, everyone must stay in the village. If they don't, the village priest fines them. They will place 'bamboo stars' (da leh) at both the main entrances of the village, warning travelers that an important ceremony is in progress in the village, and that they should go around. There are special paths made so that they can go around the village. No one from other villages is invited to this. If a guest came the day before and stayed the night, he can stay in the village during the day while they have the ceremony at the gate, but he must stay in the house. Also, he must give 20 or 25 pyas (ti ceh). I heard from one source that he would not need to give any money if he made a 'bamboo star' for the gate, but most Akhas object to this on the basis that it is not right for a non-villager to do this for the gate.

This ceremony is done after the 'k'm shui' offering, but before paddy is planted. It is usually done on 'tiger day' (k'a la nah), provided that is a propitious day for the village priest. The village priest will announce it the night before (nah gu gu-eu), telling them that it will be a day of ceremonial abstinence the next day, and that they are going to 'renew the village gate'. Though they literally say 'make the village gate' what they actually do is to add a new section to the outside of the gate, made up of a large post on either side of the path, with a cross-piece on the top and bottom.

If during the night or the next day before they start the project, someone in the village should die, they will not do it, even though they have said the night before they would. They will set a new day for it, but it must be a day within that cycle of days. (Note: I would doubt that this would happen very often, but since several informants have mentioned it, I believe they must feel it is important.)

On the day of the ceremony, young men from the village go up into the jungle to get the posts and the crossbar for the gate. There is also a much smaller piece of wood they put across the bottom on the ground (law kah law bah), but it is usually soon kicked out by their animals, and they don't try to repair it.

When the young men get back with the two main posts, the crossbar and the bottom joining piece, the village priest will start digging both holes. Others can help him after he starts them. The holes will be dug as closely as possible to last year's posts, but on the side away from the village. After he has started digging the holes, others will dig them to a depth of about 18-24 inches. They want them deep enough so that animals will not be able to knock the posts over.

After the holes, the village priest will throw rice into each hole three times (ceh law tsi-eu) while saying, "I'm throwing rice in". He next acts as if he is breaking off and throwing in bits of egg, also three times, as he says, "I'm throwing egg in". He next scrapes just a little silver from a silver lump, or other 'holy silver' into each hole three times. While doing this he says, "I'm scraping silver in". They are then ready to put the posts in.

When the young men and elders (the women and girls do not even go to this) put the two posts in, the village priest must guide the bottom of the post into the hole. The men gathered there then tamp the dirt in around the posts, and fix up the crossbar on top, and the joining piece at the bottom. Then they make at least one wooden gun and one wooden crossbow to put on top of the crossbar, facing away from the village. If there are lots of boys, they may make two or three of each. They also make wooden machetes and spears to put on the top, pointing away from the village. All of these are to keep bad things out of the village.

They also make wooden birds to put on the top. They have as a minimum three such birds, but often make more. These are to keep the village from losing lots of chickens to the hawks.

They also have 'chains' of bamboo strips (na tsi na tsa) and hang them on the outside of the gate. They will also make at least three 'giant bamboo stars' (da lah lah law). These are made up of nine 'bamboo stars' placed together, with each star having nine holes in it. These are tied under the crossbar. In large villages they may make many more. They can be placed on the posts as well as under the crossbar, but they all must be facing away from the village.

Then they make a new male and female figure to put outside of the gate. The male figure is placed on the upper side of the path, and the female on the lower side. "Males must not live below females."

When everything about the gate has been completed, the men who have taken part in this go to the village priest's house. There some of the young men kill a white rooster and a hen, which is not white, and cook them into curry. They then have a rice and curry feast, with the village priest taking the first bite. This is called 'law kah meh gu dzah-eu'.

B. Offering to the 'lords and rulers of land and water' (mi sah cu sah law-eu).

This offering must be done before the paddy planting offering, but after the ceremony where they 'renew' the village gate. Often if they choose 'tiger' day for renewing the village gate, they will do this on 'sheep' day (yaw nah), in the same cycle of days.

There is a difference of opinion among Akhas as to which language to perform this offering in. It is certainly borrowed from the Shans. Akhas all recognize this. They even tell me that it used to be they just joined the Shans in this offering, and contributed money and liquor as their share in it. One of the men from Ba jeh village told me that it was during his grandfather's time that the Akhas started doing it on their own.

To this day, however, there are some Akhas who make this offering completely in Shan. There are others who call the 'lords and rulers' in Shan, and then switch to Akha for the actual offering. Still others use Akha throughout. This is an interesting example of a custom being borrowed and assimilated in a fairly short period of time.

This is an offering which is made to the ruling spirits of the area in which they live. By making this offering, they feel that those 'spirit-owners' (yaw sah) will help them to have a good rice crop, and will see that they get plenty of game when they go hunting.

The day before they perform this offering, the village priest will prepare a sow and rooster to offer. Or if they are going to offer a boar, then they must offer a hen, to 'balance it up'.

On the day of the offering they set out for the offering site with the sacrifices and whatever else they will need. They try to remember everything, since once they are at the site, they must not return to their homes for any reason (even if the house catches on fire, or someone is near death), until the offering is over. If they happen to forget something, they can call back to their house and ask a friend to come with it, but then he must remain until the offering is over.

The site must have a good stand of trees, and be not too far from the village. Also, it must be above the village. Only men must attend, and only those who are 'holy' (yaw shaw). That is, their wife must not be pregnant at that time, their wife must not have had 'human rejects', and an older person must not have died in their house during the last 12 month period. If a man attend in spite of the fact that his wife is pregnant, for example, the village will lose pigs, dogs and other livestock to tigers and leopards. Then the village priest will have to look for the offending party. When he finds the man who was not 'holy' but went to the offering anyway, that man will have to pay for the new offering of a sow and rooster, but he will definitely be barred from attendance that time.

Also, no children must attend this offering. Part of the reason for this is that they have a very strict taboo against relieving themselves in the area of the altar, until after the pig has been killed. If small boys went, they are afraid they would not know enough to keep this taboo, so they make them stay home.

The village priest is always considered to be 'holy' even when his wife is pregnant or there has been a death in his home in the last year. Thus he can lead this ceremony. I do not know what would happen if his wife had twins, since I have never heard of any village having twins or any 'human rejects'.

When the men get to the spot where they will make the offering, the village priest starts the erection of the altar by a fruit tree. It must be the kind of fruit that Akhas eat. If the village has been there more than a year, of course, they will simply use the old altar.

The altar is made of crudely woven bamboo strips. The altar part itself is about one cubit (18 inches) square. This is built up on four posts, and put high enough so that animals cannot reach up and get the offerings which have been put on it. The shelf has sides built up about three or four inches on the back and both sides. When a new altar is built, the village priest has to start digging the first hole and guide the first pole in, but apart from that the other elders help him in almost everything. There is also a ladder with nine steps in it which is placed in front of the altar. It is made of either bamboo or wood.

A small bamboo section, like a cup, with some fermented rice in it, is placed by the 'main post'. The 'main post' is the one that was 'planted' by the village priest first. A dish of 'holy water' (I cu shaw) is also placed there. The village priest then dips some of the 'holy water' up in a dish and pours it into the bamboo section. After that he puts a stalk of thatch into the section (ji caw tso-eu).

He then takes some more of the 'holy water', and pours a little on the pig's head, foreleg and rear leg, in this order (kui la sheh-eu). He does this three times. He then stabs the pig, and collects the blood in a bowl, which he puts up on the altar.

Next he takes the chicken and also 'ceremonially sprinkles' it. Then he kills it by hitting it over the head with a stick. He then puts the chicken, the pig, some tea and liquor up on the altar and prays. When he prays he and the elders present all take off their turbans and kneel down facing the altar, with the village priest closest to the altar. He prays loud enough for all to hear.

In his prayer he starts by calling the 'lords of the area' (Cao Naw leh, Cao Loimwe, Cao Naw lo, etc.) When he has listed all of the names he can think of, he makes it even broader by adding, "and all the other lords of this area". (Note: Cao is Shan, and means 'ruler'. The 'c' is unaspirated.)

Then he goes on to invite them to come and eat the offerings. He tells them that they are offering a three year old pig (even though it might be just three months) and a three year old chicken (the same). "Come and eat them. Help that our families will be healthy. Give us good crops. Let our domesticated animals thrive and multiply."

Then the village priest stands up and takes the things down from the altar. He and the elders with him then prepare the pig and chicken for cooking. After they have cooked them they take a small pinch of meat from each 'part' (a seh), and put them on a dish. There is one dish for the pork and one for the chicken.

The village priest then puts the two dishes up on the altar, and he and the elders once more kneel down. He starts out by saying, "Before we gave you raw meat. Now we give you cooked meat." Then he pretty much repeats what he said the first time. When he is finished they all bow their heads in front of the altar, and with hands placed together palm to palm (as the Shans pray) they all say, "Sam tu" three times. This is from Burmese, through Shan, and is what Buddhists say when they have made an offering. It means literally 'Well done', but has become more like our English 'amen'.

Then the village priest empties the meat on the altar and leaves it there, but he takes the dishes back. Those who are there then eat a feast of the remainder of the pork and chicken. None of the food must be taken back to the village. They also divine from the thighbone of the chicken to see if it will be a good year for the village or not.

4. The 'main' ancestor offerings in the 9 offerings a year scheme.

It will be seen that these offerings are almost identical to those of the 12 offerings a year, except that they are looked at from a slightly different view. The nine offerings a year are:

- a. New years
- b. 'K'm shui'
- c. 'K'm mi'
- d. Rice planting.
- e. 'Yeh ku'
- f. 'Yaw la'
- g. 'Ya ci'
- h. 'Ka yeh'
- i. 'Ceh nm' (when they harvest their paddy).