

Prayer Flags

by Blake Bailey

While trekking the mountains of Nepal and Bhutan, I found the people to be the reason for the sacrifice of time and effort. The mountains are beautiful but the culture is the motivation for being there. The sweet, minimalistic people practice a way of life to which Western Christians should aspire. There is no more breath-taking evidence of this than the prayer flags, bearing the Tibetan name of Lung Ta, or Wind Horse. These symbols of spiritual goodwill can be found on the top of stupas or on impressive temples such as the Monkey Temple in Kathmandu. The flags that fill my heart with excitement and warmth are those in remote mountain paths and passes. Many times these flags are placed in precarious locations and let you know, in your moment of truth, that someone before you extends their love and support.

The "Flaming Jewel" is the central image of the Wind Horse which is the wish for enlightenment. Each flag contains mantras of Padmasambhava (Guru Rinpoche), Chenrezi, and Manjushri. The five colors of the flags represent the five elements: blue for space, white for water, red for fire, green for wind, and yellow for earth. Each image is created by a hand-carved, wooden, printer's block. Everything about the flags speaks of innocence, benevolence and spirituality.

The flags bestow goodness and happiness to those who erect them, but also for those who pass by. (therefore the significance for their existence at dangerous, high mountain passes). The fading of the images on the prayer flags evidences the blessings being pulled into the life force surrounding each flag.

The photographs I took of the prayer flags capture only a small percentage of their impact and beauty. Four senses are missing, as well as the tingling excitement born of the adventure.