

# ENGLISH

## CHAPTER 8: SILK ROAD



# SILK ROAD

## ~Summary~

**-by Nick Middleton**

### Departure from Ravu

The author left Ravu along with Daniel, an interpreter, and Tsetan, who was a tourist guide. Before leaving, Lhamo, the lady who had provided them accommodation at Ravu, gave the author a gift of a long-sleeved sheepskin coat, as they were going to Mount Kailash, where it would be very cold. Tsetan knew a short cut to reach the mountain. He said the journey would be smooth if there was no snow.

### They Saw Drokbas on the Way

As they passed through the hills, they saw individual drokbas (nomad shepherds) looking after their flocks. Both men and women were seen. They were wearing thick woollen clothes. They would stop and stare at their car, sometimes waving to them as they passed.

### Encounter with Tibetan Mastiffs

As they passed the nomad's tents, they saw some Tibetan mastiffs, which were dogs used by the shepherds. When the car came close to their tents, they would bark furiously and fearlessly. They would chase the car for some distance and would then go back. In earlier days, Tibetan mastiffs became popular in China's imperial courts as hunting dogs. They were brought along the Silk Road as a tax payment from Tibet.

### Ice Blocks the Road

The turns became sharper and more difficult as they climbed. The author started getting a severe headache. Suddenly snow started falling and soon blocked the route. Daniel and the author got out of the car to reduce its load on sharp bends. The altimeter watch on the author's wrist indicated that they were at a height of 5210 metres above sea level. The icy top layer of the snow was dangerous, as the car could slip off the road. When they reached a height of 5515 metres, which was the top of the pass, the atmospheric pressure became so low that Tsetan had to open the lid of the petrol tank to release the evaporated fuel.

### Back on the Highway

By late afternoon, they had reached the small town of Hor on the shore of Lake Manasarovar, which was on the old trade route between Lhasa and Kashmir. Daniel returned to Lhasa from there. Tsetan got the flat tyre of the car repaired there. Hor was a grim, miserable place. There was no vegetation whatsoever, just dust and rocks. There was accumulated rubbish everywhere. Unlike the past, the place no longer appeared holy.

By 10.30 PM they reached Darchen, where they found a guesthouse to stay in. It was the end of the road. The author had a very troubled night. His nostrils were blocked and he was not able to get enough air into his lungs. Most of the night he sat up, as he was unable to sleep.

### Next Day

The next day Tsetan took the author to the Darchen Medical College. The doctor told him it was just the cold and the altitude which were giving him trouble. The doctor gave him some medicine and that night the author was able to sleep well.

Tsetan left the author in Darchen and went back with the car to Lhasa. He did not mind if the author would die in Darchen. He was a good Buddhist and believed in life after death. However, he was worried that the author's death could affect his business, as he may not get more tourists who required to be accompanied till where the road ended.

### The Author Looks for a Companion and Meets Norbu

Like Hor, Darchen was dusty and a lot of rubbish could be seen all around. The town appeared to be sparsely populated. There were no pilgrims there, as the season had not yet started. He had reached there too early. He actually wanted to reach Mount Kailash to do kora to get a feel of what a pilgrimage was like. But he didn't want to do it alone. He was looking for someone who could speak or understand English.

When he was sitting in the only café at Darchen, Norbu, a plump Tibetan working in Beijing at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, saw him reading an English book. So Norbu introduced himself to the author. He also was there to do kora, although he was not a religious person. So both of them decided to do kora together.

### Conclusion of Silk Road

To sum up the Silk Road summary, we learn about the author's journey through the silk road and the determination of pilgrims and the hardships they face.

## NCERT SOLUTIONS

### Questions (Page No. 82)

### (Understanding The Text)

I. Give reasons for the following statements.

Question 1. The article has been titled 'Silk Road.'

Answer: The article was titled Silk Road because the author was travelling through the mountains where the ancient Silk Road used to pass, connecting Tibet to China.

Question 2. Tibetan mastiffs were popular in China's imperial courts.

Answer: Tibetan mastiffs were ferocious and watchful guard dogs. When the author's vehicle entered the property, they chased it down without fear. As a result, they were presented to the Chinese imperial court as a form of tribute from Tibet.

Question 3. The author's experience at Hor was in stark contrast to earlier accounts of the place.

Answer: The author's experience at Hor contrasted with travel accounts such as those of Kawaguchi and Hedin, who were overcome by the beauty and serenity of the lake and cried. The author observed a neglected Hor with sparse vegetation, a rocky and dusty landscape, and discarded waste in the surrounding area.

Question 4. The author was disappointed with Darchen.

Answer: When they arrived in Darchen, the author couldn't sleep due to a cold, so he sought treatment from a Tibetan doctor. When he looked around the next day, he noticed there were no pilgrims, which was a major disadvantage for his future journey.

Question 5. The author thought that his positive thinking strategy worked well after all.

Answer: When the author discovered no pilgrims in Darchen, he began to doubt his positive thinking. But, by chance, he ran into Norbu, who had also come to do kora. He was a professor in Beijing. When he suggested that they both form a team, the author realised that his positive thinking had paid off after all.

II. Briefly comment on

Question 1. The purpose of the author's journey to Mount Kailash.

Answer: The author's trip to Mount Kailash was part of a self-improvement programme. The author wanted to boost his positive thinking, so he went on a pilgrimage called the kora.

Question 2. The author's physical condition in Darchen.

Answer: At Darchen, one of the author's nostrils became blocked. When he tried to sleep, he got up because his chest felt uneasy, though it was fine once he sat up. When he discovered he couldn't lie down, he tried sleeping by leaning against a wall, but he became afraid of falling asleep due to his breathing problem. He felt better after taking the medication.

Question 3. The author's meeting with Norbu.

Answer: Norbu and the author met by chance in Darchen's cafe. When Norbu noticed the author reading an English novel, he struck up a conversation, and they soon realised they were both headed for Korba. They decided to form a group.

Question 4. Tsetan's support to the author during the journey.

Answer: Tsetan drove the author from Ravu to Darchen in his four-wheel drive vehicle. He manoeuvred his way through the snowy terrain. When the author became ill, he also took him to the Darchen medical college. Throughout, Tsetan was a dependable and approachable companion.

Question 5. "As a Buddhist, he told me, he knew that it didn't really matter if I passed away, but he thought it would be bad for business."

Answer: Tsetan was a devout Buddhist who believed that death was not the end of the world. Kailash is a holy place; going there would be better for him because it would transport him to heaven. Then, if the author died there, it would be bad for his business because his credibility in looking after the tourists would be jeopardised, and he might not get any customers later.

### Questions (Page No. 82-83) (Thinking about language)

Question 1. Notice the kind of English Tsetan uses while talking to the author. How do you think he picked it up?

Answer: Tsetan's English must have been picked up through his travels and interactions with the pilgrims he met.

Question 2. What do the following utterances indicate?

- i. "I told her, through Daniel ..."
- ii. "It's a cold," he said finally through Tsetan.

Answer: The preceding utterances demonstrate the absence of a common language. The author was unable to communicate in the local language and could only communicate in English. As a result, Daniel was the translator, and Tsetan was the one who translated the doctor's words for the author.

Question 3. Guess the meaning of the following words.

kora      drokba      kyang

In which language are these words found?

Answer: These are of Tibetan language.

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