

each wheel. Prayer wheels come in many different forms, from the hand-held wheels (fig. 36) of pilgrims to huge wheels which have their own chapels to house them and which can be pushed simultaneously by several worshippers.

There are other ways of sending prayers up to the heavens besides prayer wheels. Small pieces of paper printed with a design of a horse with precious jewels on its back, known as a "windhorse," are flung into the warm air rising from incense burners (fig. 37). These paper pieces are also thrown from the windows of bases on mountain passes and at auspicious places. From hill-tops and shrines long lines of prayer flags flutter in the breeze, so much so that the hills and towns in Tibet are constantly alive with prayer.

The functions of the two uniquely Tibetan items of the reading desk and the prayer wheel reflect different paths for gaining merit in the Buddhist religion: for the studious there is the path of meditation on religious texts, a severe and demanding course, while for the ordinary lay worshipper there is the path of simple faith,



36 [ABOVE] PILGRIM WITH A HAND-HELD PRAYER WHEEL, LHASA.
37 [LEFT] LHASA RESIDENT THROWING PAPER SLIPS WITH PRINTED PRAYERS ON THEM INTO THE WARM AIR RISING FROM AN INCENSE BURNER.
38 [BELOW] LARGE, FIXED METAL PRAYER WHEEL, ONE IN A ROW OUTSIDE A LHASA TEMPLE.



demonstrated through pilgrimage and the recitation of mantras and prayers. Prayer wheels facilitate the second path and ensure that it is open to all, even to those who lack the education to follow the details of the teachings.

Most Tibetan temples have rows of fixed prayer wheels (fig. 38), which pilgrims turn as they perambulate around the pilgrim's route, or *lhora*. Aside from using the hands, a variety of ingenious ways have been figured out for turning prayer wheels: in some areas water-powered and wind-powered wheels are found. In Tibetan homes you can sometimes see a type of compact prayer wheel that is powered by the hot air rising from a butter lamp.

Larger prayer wheels are fixed into walls or have

their own chapels. Most are very basic in form and have little decoration around them. A few prayer wheels were made individually in free-standing wooden frames (fig. 39). Beautifully painted, most of these were made for use by wealthy families, important lamas or given as gifts to monasteries. Their decoration often includes a variety of deities that are usually specific to the order or temple that the prayer wheel was associated with. The famous group of three protectors consisting of Manjushri, Avalokiteshvara, and Vajrapani (Rigsum Gonpo) is often found on decorated prayer wheel surrounds, in association with other deities, lamas, and historical figures.

OFFERING CABINETS

A third kind of furniture that is unique to Tibet is a cabinet called *torgam*, which is used for housing ritual offerings and found in places where fierce protector deities are worshipped. The cabinets generally have two doors and are quite wide but usually no more than 20 or 30 centimeters (8 to 12 in.) deep, being designed to hold and display butter sculpture offerings and other objects. Most monasteries and some wealthy homes have shrines devoted to fierce deities, who protect the building and its inhabitants. Offerings of butter sculptures were made to these deities, especially during Losar celebrations at Tibetan New Year, and the cabinets were specially designed to receive and store the butter offerings that would generally be kept for a year before being renewed (fig. 40).

The distinguishing feature of offering cabinets is the unique and often macabre imagery of the painted doors. These paintings have specific ritual functions, unlike the paintings found on the majority of Tibetan furniture, which are essentially decorative. The purpose and decoration of these special cabinets is the subject of a separate chapter, Furniture for the Wrathful Gods.

BUTTER LAMP AND OFFERING STANDS

Rows of butter lamps ranged in front of altars are a familiar sight in Tibetan temples. Many butter lamps burn throughout the year, but especially during New Year celebrations the temples seem ablaze with lamps (fig. 41). Butter lamps come in all sizes, though the commonest type by far is a small brass lamp burning yak butter or



39. PRAYER WHEEL MOUNTED IN FREE-STANDING WOODEN CABINET.