

Excerpted from
Peoples on the Move,
the new book by
David J. Phillips



Striking Camp with the Nomads

Nomads have a special place in God's plans. For most of us, the word *nomad* conjures up the idea of self-sufficient people, who are both resourceful and irresponsible, mysterious and dangerous, who are to be envied for being free from the restraints of ordinary society. We envision nomads as both carefree and stubbornly keeping to an uncomfortable life.

The nomads are an important but often ignored part of humankind. The varied estimates of their numbers demonstrate the difficulty of knowing exact figures, but the total of nomads would be large enough (added together) to populate many countries. The significance of nomads is even greater because many peoples who have a history of nomadism are still in contact with it; some may revert to it; or their culture may still be influenced by this history.

Nomadic peoples represent a unique challenge to Christian mission. It has been said that Christianity has had virtually no success in converting nomadic pastoralist peoples, and this could be largely true of other types of nomad. We must examine why this is so and see whether we need to change our approach.

A number of factors are conspiring against the nomadic life—including unsympathetic government policies, repeated droughts, the end of collectivization in Central Asia, the advance of irrigation and cultivation, the pressure to commercialize pastoralism, the competition of industrial goods and transport, population pressure on common lands, and, more simply, prejudice and bureaucracy. Further, the lure of modern life has challenged them to adapt their lifestyle or abandon it.

Now is the hour of the nomads! They have been left until last, and time is short. To evangelize these people, we

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have to serve them spiritually and materially in a way that enhances their identity and maintains a viable nomadism. We set out on what is, for most of us, an unfamiliar journey to understand the nomads and find out how as Christians we can help them. Learning how to reach nomads will challenge many of our well-established ideas. Working with this group of people requires a specialization similar to that required of those working in Christian radio, Bible translation, urban evangelism and among destitute children....

A church is *only* people

It is extraordinary that the first evidence of Christianity that people have today is an institution called a church. Unfortunately, the word "church" carries connotations of elaborate buildings, well-established timetables and rituals, hallowed traditions and unfamiliar structures of leadership—as if they are to last as part of this world forever. Most mission agencies are committed to reproduce the accumulated wisdom in the church structures of their home countries as the ultimate desirable result. This idea is congenial to the workers and entails a ready-made package to overcome the inconvenience of the converts' slow learning.

The Western-style church is time- and property-orientated. Christian activity centered around a building with a weekly timetable is alien to people who live according to where the grass is growing. This structure therefore reinforces the nomads' misconceptions of Christianity. The relationship of the members and leaders can be conveyed, rightly or wrongly, by the seating arrangement—even in an informal camp meeting. Many times the building of a special meeting place or mission "station" (meaning something stationary) can be the death knell to work among nomads; it could either be ignored or distort or destroy the nomadic cycle, and demonstrates the workers' ignorance of the value of nomadism to the people. Christianity could easily become synonymous with disrupting their way of life....

Is our dependence on familiar practices and structures due to a lack of faith? Vincent Donovan expresses this by saying that the gospel may be preached and the church may well result, but it might not be the church the missionary had in mind. However different that church is in its structures, from any church that we might know, it must be recognized as the church of Christ among that people. While this is significant coming from a Catholic, it is also necessary for evangelicals, whose emphasis on the gathered church still smuggles in Western ideas of organization and social structures that have their origins in the seventeenth century....

Disciple development

Our assumptions about the nature of both the church and worship have to be examined. Christians do not *belong* to a church, but the church is derived from the relationship of the disciples to Christ. A conscious attempt to “plant a church” and then make disciples gives priority to an abstract concept with a lot of extraneous content. We then forget that all the New Testament says applies to each individual Christian. The accountability of each disciple is diminished by much that is only tenuously derived from Jesus, and the authority of church structures can also substitute the Lordship of Christ.

We have to recognize that Christ himself is more at home in a nomad camp, with its humble hospitality, its small group fellowship and its storytelling way of exchanging news, than in a Western church. We should not look for the pattern of the church in a separate doctrinal treatment entitled “Ecclesiology,” but we should rather start with the nature of God himself....

As we have already noted, the gospel and the church were first called “the Way.” A church among nomads has to start with individuals practicing the walk of faith. This faith necessitates trusting the Creator alone, who is transcendent and provides the renewable natural resources, and includes wise stewardship and contentment with having what is sufficient for one’s needs. This leads on to teaching that God loves and expects love in return, towards himself and others, and that God judges unbelief and individual and social wrongs. *(continued on page 9)*



Church on the Back of a Camel?

From the Foreword to *Peoples on the Move*

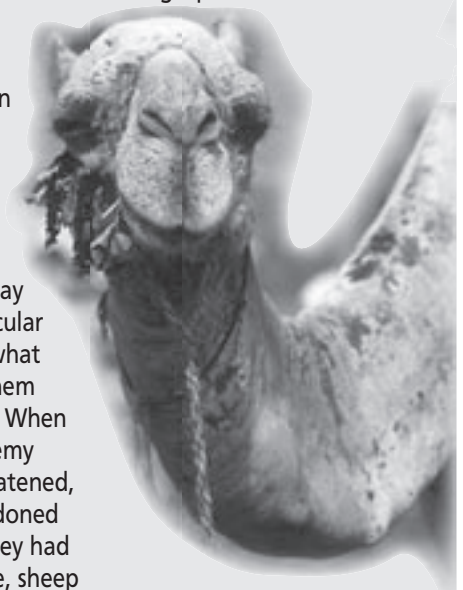
Malcolm Hunter

“When you can put your Church on the back of my camel then I will think that Christianity is meant for us Somalis.”

This statement from a camel herder in northern Kenya really grabbed my attention. For 20 years I had been looking in East Africa for the most marginalized people. Almost invariably they lived in dry and remote areas herding animals and doing little, if any, cultivation. I also found that they were the least likely to have heard the gospel of God’s love for them.

I must have come across half a dozen separate ethnic entities before it dawned on me that these were nomadic pastoralists. They did not lay claim to any particular piece of land, as what was valuable to them was their animals. When drought or an enemy raiding party threatened, they readily abandoned whatever crops they had to save their cattle, sheep or goats. They were usually very colorful and resourceful people, periodically fighting with the neighboring tribes over the diminishing amount of grass and water available to them as farmers and government projects invaded their essential grazing areas.

The more I studied them and read about them, the more they fascinated me. From my engineering point of view they were obviously technologically backward, but socially they were exemplary as they cared for those within their extended family or clans. Their national governments either ignored or sought to annihilate them. What surprised me most of all was that Christian missionaries did not understand them and their unique worldview.... 🌐



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Top-Priority (“T=1”) Nomadic or Semi-Nomadic Peoples

as indicated by the *World Christian Encyclopedia* (Second Edition, 2001)

The January-February issue of *Mission Frontiers* featured a portrayal of 815 country-specific, ethnolinguistic peoples that the editors of the *World Christian Encyclopedia* (WCE) have proposed as top priority (T=1) because these peoples have received so little mission attention to date. The editors of the WCE also indicate that at least 96 of these T=1 peoples are nomadic or semi-nomadic. These 96 are indicated below (country, people group, population 2000), totaling more than 20 million in population. All but three are predominantly Muslim. Note that two-thirds are found in the northern half of Africa, with significant concentrations found in Algeria (14 peoples), Sudan (14), and Chad (10). Further insight can be found in the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, *World Christian Trends*, and *Peoples on the Move*.

Afghanistan	Aimaq-Hazara	159,043	Kuwait	Najdi Bedouin	177,447
Afghanistan	Firozkohi (Char Aimaq)	204,484	Libya	Awjilah Berber	2,242
Afghanistan	Jamshidi (Char Aimaq)	90,882	Libya	Halebi Gypsy (Nawari)	33,628
Afghanistan	Jat (Jatu, Jati, Musali)	1,425	Libya	Jofra Berber	22,979
Afghanistan	Kirghiz	782	Malaysia	Southern Sama (Bajau)	27,478
Afghanistan	Southern Uzbek	1,838,393	Mali	Nimadi	225
Afghanistan	Taimani (Char Aimaq)	408,967	Mali	Saharan Arab	157,273
Afghanistan	Western Baluch (Baloch)	284,896	Mauritania	Berabish Bedouin	40,043
Algeria	Ahaggaren Tuareg (Hoggar)	34,058	Mauritania	Delim Bedouin	120,130
Algeria	Azjer Tuareg (Ajjer)	22,030	Mauritania	Imragen (Aita, Foikat)	534
Algeria	Chaamba Bedouin (Shaanba)	65,775	Mauritania	Nimadi (Ikoku)	267
Algeria	Dui-Menia Bedouin	94,414	Mauritania	Regeibat	106,782
Algeria	Hamyani Bedouin	2,196,695	Mauritania	Tasumsa (Hadj, Hassan)	93,434
Algeria	Ifora Tuareg	15,736	Mauritania	Trarza (Brakna)	226,912
Algeria	Nail Bedouin (Uled Nail)	31,471	Mauritania	White Moor (Bidan)	533,909
Algeria	Ruarha Bedouin	142,754	Mongolia	Khoton (Hui, Dungan)	3,008
Algeria	Sidi Bedouin	109,835	Morocco	Tekna Berber	465,644
Algeria	Suafa Bedouin	98,820	Morocco	Warain Berber	242,699
Algeria	Tajakant Bedouin	1,290,322	Nepal	Raute	282
Algeria	Tougourt Berber	6,757	Niger	Teda (Tubu)	53,758
Algeria	Tuat Berber	22,030	Niger	Udalan Tuareg	21,460
Algeria	Ziban Bedouin	219,670	Niger	Zaghawa	47,039
Chad	Bideyat (Beri)	4,895	Nigeria	Tuareg (Aulliminden)	20,071
Chad	Bulgeda (Kokorda)	22,188	Philippines	Bajau (Sea Gypsy, Laut)	53,177
Chad	Daza	359,344	Sahara	Arosien Bedouin	3,814
Chad	Dekakire (Baggara)	6,886	Sahara	Imragen	11,734
Chad	Hemat (Baggara)	11,476	Sahara	Regeibat	38,136
Chad	Kreda (Karra)	62,180	Sahara	Tajakant Bedouin	2,934
Chad	Mahamid Baggara	11,476	Somalia	Danakil (Afar)	72,645
Chad	Mimi (Amdang, Mututu)	39,849	Somalia	Tunni	36,323
Chad	Sinyar (Shamya)	11,955	Somaliland	Danakil (Afar)	56,654
Chad	Teda (Tubu, Gorane)	36,281	Sudan	Bederia	588,691
China	Kirghiz	157,693	Sudan	Beja (Beni-Amer, Ababda)	905,482
China	Ngolok (Golog)	106,939	Sudan	Bideyat (Beri)	5,898
Egypt	Ababdah	68,470	Sudan	Fezara	206,428
Egypt	Bedouin	1,369,394	Sudan	Husseinat (Husaynat)	100,427
Egypt	Bisharin	68,470	Sudan	Kawahla	606,707
India	Champas (Rong, Rupshu)	10,137	Sudan	Kerarish	28,104
Iran	Bakhtiari	1,136,727	Sudan	Lahawin	99,885
Iran	Qashqai (Kashkai)	947,831	Sudan	Messiria (Baggara)	374,410
Iran	Western Baluch (Baloch)	617,241	Sudan	Selim (Baggara, Beni Seli)	38,434
Iran	Zott Gypsy (Nawar)	1,286,342	Sudan	Sherifi	114,155
Iraq	Zott Gypsy (Nawar)	23,115	Sudan	Sinyar (Shamya)	5,898
Jordan	Bedouin Arab	853,676	Sudan	Teda	5,898
Jordan	Najdi Bedouin	60,024	Sudan	Zaghawa	146,018
Kazakhstan	Dungan (Hui, Huizui)	29,721	Tunisia	Arad Bedouin	46,969
Kazakhstan	Kirghiz	13,904	Turkmenistan	Kirghiz	803
Kirgizstan	Dungan (Hui, Huizui)	40,758	Uzbekistan	Dungan (Hui, Huizui)	1,661

(continued from page 7)

We have to start with the isolated Christian, who needs to develop the ability to nourish his faith for periods independent of others. Most of the problems in the Christian life grow out of an inadequate knowledge of God. We fail to rely on the teaching and reminding role of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:26; 16:13, 14). Do-it-yourself packs of Scripture and instruction, prayer guidance, and even songs, are needed on cassette. In many cases these are also needed in literary and graphic form. Discipleship has to be learned within the herding or peripatetic group, ideally with at least one other sympathetic companion of the same sex....

All we have suggested concerning Christians befriending the nomad, living alongside and demonstrating that the Christian life can be lived within the nomad context, leads to mentoring. Individuals who are pondering the gospel of the pastoralist Creator through the traveler Son need to be mentored. The dispersed and mobile nature of nomadic people will require traveling to regularly visit a number of these individuals.

This was the norm in the New Testament church as leaders and members constantly moved between the local churches, transmitting both oral and written teaching. Most journeys would have been on foot and taken weeks. This is not uncommon for many nomads today. In this way the nomads should be aware that they belong to a universal community of Christ. A judicious use of examples of Christians from biblical and church history should demonstrate that fellow disciples form a long line from the past to the future, just like their own ancestors and tribal history....

"The Way" church again?

The nomad is already used to a social life that may consist of close contact with no more than a few dozen people for most of the time, and long lonely periods with only two or three companions. Developing personal relationships is more important than organization. Nomadic people also have their larger gatherings and celebrations, often only once a year, involving religious observances and extended family rites of passages such as circumcisions, initiation rites and weddings.

A similar social pattern of small groups, with occasional larger gatherings, should be possible for the church among nomadic peoples. We will see small groups meeting with cassette recorders for months at a time and only coming together with other believers a few times a year. These gatherings can take the place of pilgrimage common in Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism. But the local nomad church, consisting of the scattered believers perhaps within a few nearby extended families, will have to learn in time to develop evangelistic and fellowship contacts in the wider nomadic society of clans and tribes. It will then

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January Consultation

Strengthens New Nomadic Institute


Ken Jenkins

A varied group of 20 missionaries specializing in ministry to nomads gathered at the U.S. Center for World Mission (USCWM) January 7-11 for a Nomadic Peoples Ministry Consultation co-sponsored by the USCWM, InterDev, and the *International Journal of Frontier Missions*. The gathering coincided with the establishment of a new Institute for Nomadic Studies at the USCWM and the launch of David Phillips' definitive new book, *Peoples On the Move*, co-published by Piquant and William Carey Library.

Malcolm Hunter was the key instigator of the consultation, and his vision was a vital motivator throughout the consultation. However, other participants also contributed valuable experience and insight as we prayed over and talked about the needs, difficulties, joys and frustrations of reaching this mission frontier.

The establishment of the Institute, under Malcolm Hunter's direction, is a vital step to raising the Church's awareness of nomadic peoples and attracting new resources for work among them. There is a need for suitable personnel and for a vast gathering of information to nurture this fledgling project. The Institute has a web site, found at www.uscwm.org/nomads. A number of action steps were agreed upon by participants at the January consultation:

- To pray for suitable people to support the Institute
- To establish a high-quality and actively-updated web site
- To write and seek to publicize the needs of these peoples through magazine articles
- To produce literature with details of the Institute for use in churches, mission conferences, etc.
- To seek to produce a video highlighting the needs of nomads
- To produce a calendar with photos and prayer needs of nomads
- To make regional consultations, mission conferences and field directors aware of the Institute
- To get prayer guides focusing on the nomads on a regular basis
- To identify the 12 most needy nomadic groups
- To produce material on nomads for possible use in Perspectives classes

All these steps need prayer, people and financial support. If you have questions or would like to help, contact us via the Institute's web site or by E-mail at nomad@sierratel.com. 

Dr. Ken Jenkins is a Zimbabwean doctor who has worked for many years in Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Over the past four years he has developed a burden for prayer ministry and outreach to nomadic peoples.

Profile: the Tuareg (Taureq or Tamajeq) of Africa

They only refer to themselves as Tuareq when outside their own region, and many consider the name derogatory. They call themselves the *Kel Tamajeq*, or the people who speak the Tamahaq language in Niger and *Kel Tamahaq* in Algeria. *Tamasheq* is the French translation of this.

The estimates of their numbers vary considerably, but the following are probably fairly accurate: Mali 800,000; Burkina Faso 100,000; Niger 600,000. North Africa has between 25,000 and 76,000 in Algeria and 17,000 in Libya.

Those that are still nomadic keep herds of camels, cattle, sheep and goats in over a million square miles of the Sahara and Sahel. Many of these are nobles whose wealth has enabled them to survive, because they have the largest herds and flocks while the other castes own a few animals and have suffered greatly. For the nobles the camel has been the “key” or prized animal, but they also keep large herds of cattle and sheep as well as goats and donkeys. The typical herding group consists of five or six family tents with about two dozen persons.

The Tamajeq are made up of a number of confederations of tribes and are not one people. The tribes are called drum groups, because a large kettledrum, one meter in diameter, used to be beaten to call the warriors together and also became the symbol of authority of the chiefs. The term drum group now refers to the leaders, the tribes and the lineages of related families within the tribes. The tribes have grown or waned in power and numbers over the years.

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The International Mission Board (IMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention featured the Tuareg in the January-February 2002 issue of their excellent magazine, *The Commission*. Southern Baptist leaders have also designated May 19, 2002 as a day of prayer and fasting for the Tuareg.

To learn more about the Tuareg and the Southern Baptists' May 19 day of prayer and fasting for them, see *The Commission's* Website at www.tconline.org/Stories/jan02/Tuareg.html. To order a copy of the IMB video on the Tuareg (for \$10 each), indicate code T-WAFRICA/310. You may contact resource.center@imb.org or call 1-800-866-3621.





The *World Christian Encyclopedia* (second edition, 2001) lists the following Tuareg peoples as among the least evangelized peoples on earth.

Algeria	Ahaggaren Tuareg (Hoggar)	34,058
Algeria	Azjer Tuareg (Ajjjer)	22,030
Algeria	Ifora Tuareg	15,736
Burkina Faso	Tuareg (Udalan, Bella)	32,254
Libya	Tuareg (Hoggar, Ghat)	18,888
Mali	Tahoua Tuareg (Aulliminden)	224,511
Mali	Timbuktu Tuareg (Antessar)	295,409
Mali	Udalan Tuareg	269,612
Mauritania	Tuareg	75,281
Niger	Air Tuareg (Air)	198,793
Niger	Arabized Tuareg	214,602
Niger	Asben Tuareg (Kel Air)	150,221
Niger	Hoggar Tuareg (Ahaggaren)	10,730
Niger	Tahoua Tuareg	470,383
Niger	Udalan Tuareg	21,460
Nigeria	Tuareg (Aulliminden)	20,071

have to adjust to the dynamics of both small groups and occasional larger meetings.

A new model of the church, like the cell church, needs to be worked out. But most of the concepts of cell and house group churches have been developed in large urban settings, to make large impersonal congregations more personal and interactive. In the nomad's situation, the entire church may consist of only small groups meeting together occasionally, and requiring greater participation from each member. Jesus used dialogue with small groups (Mt. 16:13, 15; Mk. 14:17-19; Lk. 22:24ff.; Jn. 3:2-14; 4: 5-29; 14:5-8). Full participation works in groups of up to a dozen, the question and answer method with double that number, and monologue from the "expert" takes over in groups of more than 35 people.

What form the church among nomadic peoples will take is one of the crucial questions that still has to be resolved, and we pray that the Holy Spirit will show the answer....

The nomad as missionary

Christians pastoring these small groups may be able to fit partially into some local tradition of religion teacher. Traveling holy men and peddlers visiting the camps are common, and similarly an evangelist or catechist visiting to encourage the tiny groups would be possible. Their authority is not based on constitutional or traditional institutions, but comes from a knowledge and conformity of character to Christ himself, as well as from their ability to meet the practical problems of faith and moral issues. They need to be taught so that they can re-teach others through storytelling and other aids that convey both basic truths and further applications later.

A church that is "nomadic" in its attitudes will be a missionary church. This new nomadic pattern of the church is already taking shape. The Christians of a particular nomadic people meet together at a well, without any church building, and read and pray wherever they travel. No missionary can claim to have started this work. The gospel has spread among them by audiocassettes played over and over. Two brothers, under a God-given conviction of sin, came to a market looking for the Messiah, a man called Jesus, who could forgive their sin. They came across a short-term missionary worker who, with a limited knowledge of their second language, was able to tell them how to find him. The result is that these few Christians have spread the witness not only to their families, but also to many more people than would have been possible if they had been based in one place....

The nomad has learned to live with few personal possessions, is accustomed to being mobile and has experienced poverty, hunger and long periods of hard unpaid work. He or she has also known despair and fatalism and what it is to be despised. Such a Christian would be able to reach the largest sectors of the Two-Thirds world. One

wonders how the modern missionary movement has got so far without a special effort to reach nomadic peoples, and without the participation of Christian nomads!....

Special skills required of workers

A young Kyrgyz stared in horror at a visitor traveling on foot and by bus: "You haven't got a horse?" It was inconceivable to him that someone could not ride a horse. This initial perception of the people can be important. The Fulbe may consider a person who arrives in a Land Rover as someone to be exploited, but a person who rides a horse is someone to be respected. Unfortunately, women do not ride horses in that culture. The reindeer-herding



Koryaks accepted Robin Hanbury-Tenison because he had been a deer farmer in Britain. The nomads are also amazed when an outsider can herd cattle correctly; but it is just as important not to pretend you know how when you do not! It is easy to discredit oneself trying to handle camels without previous experience!

We need some knowledge of animals, or our ministry among pastoral groups will probably be limited.... Knowledge of estate management, dairy farming, shepherding, soil analysis or any other such related skill would be useful. One agency needed to recruit a Livestock Management Specialist, a Community Health Educationalist and a Alcohol Abuse Counselor for Mongolia in one year. The Agricultural Christian Fellowship of the UCCF or related bodies elsewhere could help here, both in finding experienced workers and in giving some orientation to non-specialists.

In most cases, short periods of familiarization with animals would be sufficient for non-specialist workers. Obviously, to gain visas for particular projects professional qualifications are needed for some key workers. Training and skills learned through military service or any experience of camping and hiking are an advantage.

An important way of identifying with the people is to own some animals yourself, using local people to herd them and yet being seen to be involved in the same problems. Often a person accepted as a religious teacher

loses respect if he herds his own animals. It is common practice for wealthier members of a society to hire herders. The full adoption of orphaned or abandoned nomad children can also help in gaining acceptance into the tribe, but it obviously raises much wider issues.

Peripatetics do not necessarily need Christians who have the same skills as themselves, but other skills to help them. But being willing to learn their skills, and perhaps having some previous training in an appropriate craft such as blacksmithery or basket weaving, will help us not only to appreciate the problems of the work, but also to perhaps begin a development project to make their work more viable. The nomads also need someone who is able to do what they cannot do for themselves.

More fundamental still is the ability to incarnate Christian living among the nomads, in a way that they can appreciate. Those who have experience among nomads see a clear need for orientation courses beyond the training provided by most missionary college courses and mission orientation periods. Many feel the need for an internship that tailors the formal missionary training to the nomadic situation, with a testing of the practical commitment to the people.

Suggestions for training include desert camps similar to WBT jungle camps in temperate climate conditions to teach appropriate skills in real-life situations, and "adventure" treks into the Sahara. YWAM organizes Safari Trips. The Christian College Coalition runs a Middle East Studies Program with 13 weeks in Cairo for service projects, lectures and conversational Arabic and visits to Israel. This gives North Americans an experience of Muslim urban life, between academic years at various Christian colleges. A few years ago the Christian College Coalition ran a similar course involving experience of pastoral and nomadic life in Africa and the Middle East....

A sustained Christian commitment

... Many years of contact to overcome the nomads' suspicion and fear, with few or no visible results, is difficult. It has been said that evangelizing an African people takes 50 years. The first 25 years may result in 25 converts, but the harvest only comes in the second 25 years. The assumption that goals can be accomplished in a decade never gives the workers, or the changing of the worldview of the people, a chance. A Tuareq commented that without real commitment and a more explicit presentation of the message, when there is opportunity to do so, we can give the impression that we do not really believe the message ourselves.

This factor of commitment also touches on the greatest fear of the nomads when considering conversion—that Christianity will lead to their being socially isolated, without someone to care for, marry or bury them. But the lesson

from Christ is clear. The incarnation is permanent, the Son remains a man forever. Even his absence in the ascension is a continuation of his commitment, and he has only left temporarily to deal with his adopted people group's best interests as their representative with the divine paramount Chief of all peoples! He will return.

The missionary or, failing that, a team in relays, could be a visible sign of God's commitment to the people. When the worker can no longer live in the country, the people should be assured that the absent worker continues his or her interest in prayer and any other means to promote their spiritual interests, including perhaps contact with expatriate communities of the people.

It would be beneficial to have teams called and trained together. To achieve the best results in sport

and in warfare, teams are trained together before going on an assignment. The bonding between the workers will be more apparent to the people, and the absence of some members of this missionary "family" will be better explained as family business. The arrival of workers who have hardly known each other before that missionary assignment must seem a strange and unconvincing "tribe." A team provides for relays of workers being present as well as meeting the needs of the scattered groups of a nomadic people.

These teams probably require a range of generations to be convincing. Younger women have problems in being accepted as religious teachers among Muslim peoples. Older workers, including women, are often more respected as "holy" or wise. This is illustrated by a Wodaabe man who regarded his thirty-five-year-old daughter as no longer a "woman," but rather as an "old man," because she had arrived at a mature understanding of life through her experiences of suffering.... 🌍

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