

But mental preparation, Sherpas recognize, means developing mindfulness and right motivation. A goal can never be reached through force, former Tengboche monk Phurba Sonam points out, or by aspiration and ambition alone. But if the nature of the motivation is pure, stemming from a compassionate desire to help others, the goal will almost always be reached eventually.

DETERMINATION OF DEATH

Those who set out to rescue the victims and survivors exhibited a large measure of that compassion, and the Sherpas believe the rescuers will earn *sonam*, or merit, for their actions. But victims and rescuers alike have great difficulty in responding "normally" at extreme altitudes, because hypoxia and exhaustion rob them of their judgment.

"I don't think the doctor that looked at me should be faulted for declaring me dead, or close to death," Beck Weathers later said with calm sincerity. "It may not have been the best diagnosis, but we all make mistakes at times, even at sea level. He's an excellent doctor and a great guy, and he was the one climber of many on the South Col who ventured out during a period when there wasn't any great stampede of the cavalry to look for survivors."

Many wonder how Beck could have been identified as dead, when he later stood up and walked away. "Weathers's resurrection complicates the already prickly process of judging a person's medical condition in a harsh environment that only grudgingly gives back life," said Dr. David Shlim.

Unless Weathers's resurrection is explained as

a miracle—and Beck himself doesn't discount an element of the miraculous in his survival and rescue—then surviving as he did must be considered possible for anyone. "The beautiful thing about Beck's recovery is that not all of it can be explained," said Dr. Charles Houston.

What are the implications of Beck's survival in terms of the efforts that should be taken to save others stranded in extreme settings? A present, climbers, medical people, helicopter pilots, and others apply their years of experience and the best of their abilities to rescue the injured and stranded. Should the knowledge that someone may—but more likely may not—be still alive in an isolated, dangerous location inspire already committed rescuers to endanger themselves to an even greater degree?

"The fact that Beck was left for dead and survived is going to haunt rescue decisions for years to come," Shlim said. "But ultimately, those who can be pulled to safety will be, while those who appear lifeless or for whom not enough resources are available, will be left behind."

Yasuko Namba, for example. She died on the South Col near the spot where Beck Weathers lay before he arose. Perhaps Namba—and others in the past—may have had a longer window of survivability than people assumed. She may have been alive on the morning of the 11th, and she was lying only 400 yards across relatively flat terrain from the tents of Camp IV.

The confusion over who should have been caring for Beck Weathers was also unfortunate. Having stunned everyone by surviving the storm and a night alone on the South Col, Beck was then inadvertently neglected in his