

Precious Human Body

A talk by Dr. Tenzin Choedrak, Senior Physician to H.H. The Dalai Lama.

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Auroville

(Claude introduces Dr. Tenzin Choedrak, Dr. Dorjee Rabten, Dr. Lobsang Tsultrim, Ms. Perna Tsomo, Ms. Tandin Sangno and Ms. Phurpu Dolma, the team members from the Tibetan Medical Institute.)

Aurovilian: On behalf of Auroville, I wish Dr. Choedrak a happy and fruitful stay here. I hope that his coming will make stronger the link between Auroville and Tibet. Dr. Dorjee will give us a short biography of Dr. Choedrak as an introduction.

Dr. Dorjee: Dr. Choedrak was born in 1922, in Sneyimo near Lhasa. At the age of 10, he was sent to Choday monastery to begin his studies of Buddhism. After a series of graduation he became a Lama and then started studying medicine. Later he became a Tibetan Physician. Because of his outstanding qualifications, he was promoted as Chief Physician to H.H. the Dalai Lama in 1957.

In 1959, when the Chinese invaded Tibet, he was taken as a prisoner to communist China and he remained in their various prisons for 21 years. During 17 of these years, his survival was daily endangered. Dr. Choedrak lived daily with death and all sorts of threats, but his belief system allowed him to go through all the experiences, and in a way, it helped him to prevent a permanent destabilization of his personality or to commit suicide. Despite all these difficulties, he is with us today.

It may be interesting if I read a brief write-up by Dr. Albert Crum who is a medical Director of Psychiatric Services International, P.C. and Clinical Professor of Behavioral Science at New York University. He also is a good friend of Dr Choedrak.

He wrote in his lengthy interviews with Dr. Choedrak about his special

personality:

What I call the Triumphant Person is an adult who has suffered overwhelming, excruciating, catastrophic experiences or devastating losses, and who goes on to become stronger, more creative, and more contributing than before. They might be expected to be at the highest risk for posttraumatic stress disorder, or to suffer stressrelated illnesses, or simply die or become creatively impaired for life. But the crisis instead of causing chronic illness, death or a permanent impediment in their lives seems to become an enhancement to them. Somehow, the injuries they suffer, the crisis they experience become an opportunity for betterment of their growth and development.

In advance of our first meeting with Dr. Choedrak I was already deeply moved by what I had read. He had faced all manner of uncertainties, including the likelihood of death, on a daily basis. I expected to see evidence of emotional scars imprinted on his personality. The long ordeal he suffered is unique in its magnitude and duration of its cruelty and his ability to endure it appeared near superhuman.

In 1962, Dr. Choedrak returned to Tibet to the notorious Drapchi prison where he remained until 1972 and then to Yidutu prison until 1976. At that time, a Chinese physician needed help for a personal medical matter and Dr. Choedrak helped him, so during the last four years of his prison sentence, he was permitted to resume his duty as a physician for the Tibetans inside Yidutu prison. He was finally released from prison in 1980. A month later, he left Tibet and was reunited with his community in India. He was reinstated as Chief Physician of H.H. the Dalai Lama, and he is also the Chief Medical Officer of the Tibetan Medical Institute in Dharamsala.

Dr. Choedrak travels extensively in India, in the United States and in Western Europe. He has about 3000 patients abroad. Many patients suffering from diabetes, asthma, hypertension and certain cases of cancer have greatly benefited from Dr. Choedrak's treatment. Besides this, he attends many international conferences on medicine.

I hope that our presence here and specially Dr. Choedrak's will help the people of Auroville and also the Indian people in their aspiration for a better world. Dr. Choedrak will now speak briefly about the preciousness of the human body and how we can best utilize our human body and our human mind in our difficulties and our impediments.

Dr. Choedrak: Tibet is the land of many religious persons. Tibet is blessed by Lord Avalokiteshvara, the Lord of Compassion. And under the dynamic guidance of H.H. the Dalai Lama, who is believed to be an emanation of Lord Avalokitesvara, the people of Tibet follow their religion and their traditions deep in their hearts. Buddhist philosophy is a very simple teaching, "one should be a very simple human being, one should serve other people in their needs, one should develop a mind full of love, compassion, forgiveness and tolerance". These are the daily advice and teachings of H.H. the Dalai Lama. Practicing these teachings, the people of Tibet can practically use the Buddhist philosophy for their own betterment as well as for the betterment of all the human beings of the world.

During my studies in the monasteries, the Buddhist scriptures have taught me the art of practicing love, compassion, tolerance, and forgiveness towards human beings. This is the reason why during my imprisonment, I was able to survive and sustain myself from the daily tortures and *thamzings* (public "struggle" session of re-education during which the prisoners are beaten and tortured and are supposed to confess their crimes committed against the communist regime and repudiate the Dalai Lama and the "Old Society"). Through all these difficulties, I practiced the Buddhist teachings in order to survive without having any considerable physical and mental malfunctions. One's human body is very precious, one should be aware of this preciousness. We have the capacity, the power with the human body as well as with the human mind to work for the betterment of all human beings and also animals. I want to emphasize the preciousness of the human body. A human body is very difficult to obtain. one has to accumulate so many merits, year after year,

lives after lives in order to obtain a human life and a human body. Therefore one should never waste this human birth with bad deeds, instead strive to achieve the best out of it.

So, the human body is very precious.

Of course animals and other creatures are also very precious. There are so many hundreds of sorts of animals on Mother Earth, but only the human body has the capacity and the power to reach enlightenment, to practice compassion and forgiveness, to help to relieve oneself from our own sins. And this body can also be used for the sake of other human beings.

In many prisons, I have gone through so many tortures, so many difficulties that I came to believe that whatever the difficulties, whatever the tortures I had to endure, it was the fruit of my own misdeeds in previous lives, the fruit of my own previous karma. It was due to the law of cause and effect: whatever I did in previous lives, I have to bear the fruit in the present life. So, this belief was a sort of consolation that I was getting at that time. The Chinese, my tormentors in torturing me and due to law of cause and effect will bear the fruit of their actions during this life or in the next. They will have to undergo difficulties.

Of course in Tibetan tradition, in Buddhist teachings the main theme is to be simple, to be helpful to benefit other human beings.

Tradition is precious. Tradition is beneficial.

The man who practices should be determined not to harm others, not to inflict tortures, not to hate, to be angered at other people. Yesterday Claude mentioned a snake incident. He said that during the last 20 years nobody has been seriously harmed by a snake in Auroville. He also said that the Mother had said that Aurovilians should not kill snakes and if Aurovilians do not kill snakes, snakes will not harm Aurovilians.

It is very true, not only for snakes, but for other animals. If we let them live happily and peacefully, they in turn will let you live happily and peacefully. This is very, very important.

One is the master of oneself. One can protect oneself and also protect many

other beings from various difficulties.

It is very difficult to believe what the Chinese communists, the Chinese tormentors have done to Tibet: the tortures, the hardship and the genocide inflicted to the people of Tibet. Of course it is due to the law of cause and effect and of course the Chinese will have to bear the fruit of what they have done.

We are an independent nation, we have our own country. It is our right to fight for our independence. And under the dynamic leadership of H.H. the Dalai Lama and through the kind support of the people outside Tibet, I am very optimistic to regain our lost independence. This was also one of my consolations. Probably 1.2 million Tibetans died because of the direct effect of the Chinese invasion.

There was a great destruction of the Tibetan heritage by the Chinese, especially during the cultural revolution and also starvation, suicide, imprisonment.

Approximately 6000 monasteries were completely destroyed. We were forced to take daily so much filthy food, completely indigestible, we had to take such food. It was actually the waste, from the Chinese. It was uneatable food. So many people died because of it or of starvation.

Now I don't recall everything but I had to consume my own leather jacket bit by bit to survive. These are some of the main things that the Chinese were practicing in the way of repression.

Our consolation was that Tibet will be independent and that Tibet has a dynamic religious leader: the Dalai Lama. We have the right on our side, history is on our side. No matter how long it will take. What has happened will be heard all over the world and people will raise their voices against the Chinese. No matter how long it will take. For Tibet, there will be a peaceful sunshine, there will be a liberation from Chinese invasion. I visualized that whatever has happened to me, not only to me but also to the Tibetan people is the fruit of our karmic factors and that Chinese also will have to bear the consequences of their action. It is like the price that you have to pay for your previous misdeeds. In prison, I visualized this and practice many Buddhist teachings.

Aurovilian: Are there any questions from the students?

Dr. Choedrak: I would like to speak to the students gathered here. They have to play a very important role in the development and for the benefit of human society. During one's studies, during one's schooling, the most essential, the most important thing to see is that what one's studies is for the benefit of the mankind, not for the destruction of mankind and its natural environment. One should practice tolerance, forgiveness and compassion. If one can practice this, this can definitively help not only in this life but also in the following ones.

Nowadays with the advancement of science and technology, there is so much material progress, but I would like to emphasize that if a student could do research to improve his mind, his consciousness, then he definitively can help the civilization, the modern society and also help other sentient beings.

I am very critical of the students who after their studies, are losing their relationship with their parents: they do not obey anymore, they don't have maternal or paternal relationship anymore. This is very sad. During one's own childhood, a mother has cared for her own son or daughter. One has also to become one day a father or a mother. So we have to be very obedient and very careful about our behaviour. If one follows the advice of one own's parents, your children may follow the same.

The education is something very important.

The theme of education should be: love and compassion for mankind.

The Chinese have undergone so much education in their own country, but they are not taught to practice love and compassion.

The fruit of the education that the Chinese people have got is the consequence of what the Chinese Government has done to its own students during the pro democracy movement.

It is a very sad event. It shows the role of the mind in daily activities. *If* the Chinese people are taught to respect the life of mankind, definitely they will not cause destruction. One should be careful in one's own education.

I hope that with material progress, there will be also a progress in the mental

attitude.

Any specific questions?

Aurovilian: I would like to know if in the extraordinary life of Dr. Choedrak there is a special moment, a particular moment which remains always present.

Dr. Choedrak: In the scriptures, it is said that the unwelcome sufferings that one undergoes should be visualized as a rain fall pouring on you.

Human beings do not like suffering.

In a particular moment, I visualized that the rainfall falling on my body is the fruit of my previous misdeeds. It is the translations of my misdeeds and now I am experiencing their fruits. You can not escape, you have to bear it. But this particular rain will definitively wash away my misdeeds, my sins, and after washing my sins, I will be pure, clean: a man without defilement once again.

The rain was washing my defilements. That is how I visualized this particular Buddhist teaching, the rain was washing my defilement. Now I am going to be purified again. This is one of the most important visualizations, I have practiced.

Besides this, I went through so many tortures, so many *thamzings*: they bound my hands with a rope behind my back in a way to break the joints of the shoulders, it gives horrible pain. For this also, there is a meditation in order to endure the pain. But it is very difficult unless one has practiced this meditation before.

I want to emphasize the importance of tolerance for the physical body. So many prisoners died of the starvation, due to excessive intake of filthy, undigestable food, malnutrition and the daily tortures, the wind energy of their body got greatly disturbed, they became mad, lunatic, they started shouting, talking nonsense. 97% of the prisoners have not denounced the Dalai Lama and other dignitaries but 2 or 3 people have denounced because of the disturbances in their mental system, they have been talking like lunatics, like mad men. They have lost their own control of tolerance. If one practices

tolerance, one can survive the greatest difficulties. So, tolerance is very important.

There are so many people who know Buddhist philosophy, not only Buddhist but many other systems of belief, there are so many who can speak fluently about these systems, but the speaking from the mouth is like ripples, like bubbles in the ocean. There are too many people like that. The practice, the implementation is like a drop of gold. It is very precious. Therefore one should emphasize the implementation of the teachings rather than speaking too much. There is a quotation of the *Dhammapada* which says: *"Throughout the day and the night, one has to find faults in oneself, do not find faults in others. Throughout day and night search your own mind, and realize happiness and peace. "*

Aurovillian: How did Dr. Choedrak's medical training and his knowledge of the human body help him to survive?

Dr. Choedrak: During the period between 1961 and 1963, many people died of hunger, of starvation. In my prison in China 600 people died. In winter nearly 1215 prisoners died every day from starvation and hunger.

Outside the prison there were green fields where some medicinal flowers grew abundantly. This flower grows also well in the west. I don't know the exact botanical name. It is a yellow flower with leaves like blades (maybe one of the species of dandelion).

This particular flower helps digesting the food, it helps to maintain the harmony in the body system. I know that particular plant and I took it and also I advised my prison mates to take the same which helped them digest uneatable food particularly the waste food: sometimes they had to take even worms of their excretion. This is one thing.

One other thing is the practice of the meditation called *tummo barza*: this is the generation of heat in the body. This generation of heat helps cleansing the impurities produced by a particular food consumed by the body and its helps in

dissolving the impurities and cleaning the toxins from the body. It keeps the body healthy, restores the heat in the body and regulates the body temperature.

Normally, the prisoners were not allowed to pass beyond 20 meters from the cell. If they would pass, they would be shot dead. Many people were meeting me daily for medical help. The Chinese guards became curious. So, they took me and accused me of falsely naming many plants and giving poison to the other prisoners. So I had to undergo *thamzing* and tortures again for this reason.

So, the two important things is the consumption of medicinal flowers and the practice of *tummo barza*. It helped me to survive through the difficulties. Is it clear?

Aurovillian: Many Tibetans had to leave Tibet, they came to India with a new climate, specially in the South. They had to adapt to the new climate, so they were new ailments. In Auroville, we have the same problem, different temperature, different humidity than our countries of origin. Does Dr. Choedrak have any help to offer for this kind of adaptation, are there some remedies (especially food-wise)?

Dr. Choedrak: In order to adapt oneself to new climatic conditions, a new diet habit. Suppose you come from a different country and you come to Auroville which has a different climate (humid and hot), you have to adjust to the climate and the food. For the food, let's take an example: you are not used to take meat, and if in Auroville the daily consumption is meat. So, first do not take a lot of meat. You have to take bit by bit, slowly increasing the intake so that your stomach gets well adjusted to the meat. Finally you will be able to take meat and likewise you will get adjusted to a different food habit. You have to practice this.

Now, if you want to stop something. Suppose you are diabetic and you have to stop taking sugar. Do not stop suddenly. Stop gradually. Suppose you were

taking three spoonfuls of sugar, you take two and a half, the next time two, then one, gradually cut down.

So the body can adjust to the climate also. Each season has its own potentialities to create disturbances in the body system. For example, when there is a lot of heat the heat inside the body is related to the heat outside the body. Inner and outer environment are related. You should adapt yourself. You should not take the food which raises the heat inside the body, instead you should take food which brings down the heat, you should take cold food. Like that, you can adjust to different climates, different conditions, different habits.

Aurovillian: This is the last question. For a good receptivity in the body, Mother insisted on good health. During or after certain deep emotional states, certain intense physical pains, the nervous system has a lingering and excessive receptivity and weakness. Do you have a special treatment to reinforce strength in the nerves?

Dr. Choedrak: One has to understand the cause and effect of the particular incident which brings down the receptivity and nervous system. Since every fruit has its own seed, the breaking down has its own cause. One has to first find the cause and one has to see if one can avoid the cause or not. Of course there are medicines in order to enforce the strength of the nerves, to bring peace in the nervous system. But it is better to eradicate the cause since the elimination of the cause will bring lasting harmony in the brain and the nervous system. Without cause, there will be no effect, without seed there is no fruit. One has to try to understand the cause. One has to practice tolerance and to accept the reality. Tolerance of what causes the disease. One's human body is very precious, it is like *amrit*, like nectar, like a precious gem from which one could get everything one wishes. Through human form, you get enlightenment, Buddhahood. Inside the brain, there are so many positive and negative factors one has to increase the positive factors and decrease the negative ones. This can bring peace inside you.

Consciousness is affected by disturbances. The brain is like an ocean of nerves, canals. The consciousness of the brain is the general consciousness or the gross consciousness. The subtle consciousness, the main consciousness is inside the heart. It can determine the positive and the negative factors. One has to understand this consciousness and definitively you can in this way increase the positive factors and decrease the negative.

Aurovilian: We should thank Dr. Choedrak for his tolerance and for his time. He will stay up to Monday, we hope that not only he will help us, but also enjoy his stay.