

## Robert Thurman on the situation INSIDE TIBET



Amy Goodman and Juan Gonzalez, hosts of the US daily TV/radio news program 'Democracy Now,' (March 20, 2008) asked Robert Thurman, professor of Indo-Tibetan Buddhist Studies in the Department of Religion at Columbia University and President of Tibet House US, what sparked the latest wave of protests<sup>1</sup>. This is an edited version of his response:

I think it's the straw that broke the camel's back, and it took us totally by surprise. And I think it took His Holiness the Dalai Lama very much by surprise. Everyone was focused on the march from Dharamsala, the nonviolent march of young Tibetan activists to Delhi and then to the Tibetan border. His Holiness was quite worried about that. That's something they did on their own initiative. There is an agreement between the Tibetan government in exile and the Indian government not to do political things on Indian territory where they are refugees. So the Chinese claim that this is the work of the Dalai Lama clique is very laughable, but also very [alarming].

<sup>1</sup>[http://www.democracynow.org/2008/3/20/china\\_continues\\_crack\\_down\\_on\\_tibet](http://www.democracynow.org/2008/3/20/china_continues_crack_down_on_tibet)

The main point I'd like to get across is that when Wen Jiabao in his press conference, and also the hard-line officials in Tibet, said that this is the work of the Dalai Lama clique, this is very sinister, because the Dalai Lama clique is all of the Tibetan people, who follow the Dalai Lama and whatever he does and says. They, and the monks, were just protesting about local conditions where they are – some of them were arrested at the last Congressional Gold Medal Award last fall – and they painted the monastery in celebration, because they were forbidden to have a formal celebration, but they [monks of Drepung Monastery] were arrested anyway. They were marching peacefully and non-violently on the March 10 occasion in order to protest those conditions, as well as to celebrate the day, knowing full well that they might bring onto themselves the full force of the Chinese intolerance of any sort of demonstration by Tibetans in Tibet.

And then, when they were shot at and when they were suppressed violently and beaten, then the Tibetan community exploded, because they're a tinderbox. China has been smothering them with immigration because of this train [connecting China with Tibet]. Three or four million people came pouring into Tibet. Also, the Chinese have been pushing them very hard by making them denounce the Dalai Lama and controlling their studies and persecuting them in all kinds of ways. So it's a kind of spontaneous outburst of all the Tibetans all over Tibet, including all the areas where two-thirds of the Tibetans live outside of the Tibet Autonomous Region.

So when the Chinese say that they have a life-and-death struggle with "the Dalai Lama clique," what they're saying is that they have a life-and-death struggle against *all* Tibetans, because there's no clique. In a way, they're openly proclaiming their intention and their practice of trying to commit cultural genocide on the Tibetans, as the Dalai Lama said.

**JUAN GONZALEZ:** *[Do] the Tibetan people see [the approaching Olympics] as a chance to be able to get before the world in a way that they've not been able to do in the past about what is going on in Tibet?*

Well, yes, they do see it as that, but it's not really that calculated. They see the Chinese saying, "We're so great, and we're so nice to everybody, and everyone in Tibet is so happy," and they react emotionally to that, because they are so miserable and they are being so oppressed and they are being completely violated in their identity, and they're supposed to just stop being Tibetan, basically, which is what the Chinese are saying openly.

The emotional feeling of most Tibetans is that the Chinese shouldn't be allowed to host the Olympics, because the Chinese are not behaving in a civilized manner in Tibet. For sure, their genocidal face is absolutely clearly shown to the world in Tibet. But on the other hand the Dalai Lama and the leadership is all for the Chinese to do the Olympics, because they feel that only if the Chinese come out in the world and try to be normal and transparent and let people see what they're really doing, then they will stop doing all these totalitarian and dictatorial things.

**AMY GOODMAN:** *You're very close to the Dalai Lama. You're coming out with a book on the Dalai Lama [see panel this page]. [Can you comment on] what he said about stepping down as political leader of Tibet, if the violence continues?*

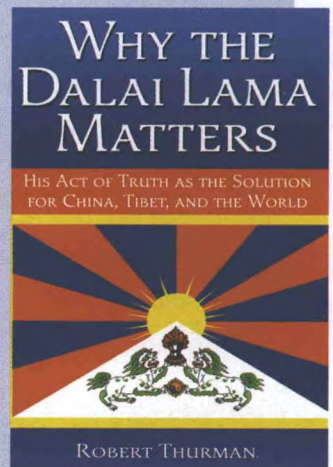
The context of that is like Gandhi. When there would be nonviolent nationwide strikes in India to protest against British domination, some members of Gandhi's movement would flip out, and there would be local violence, they would burn a police station, or things like that. And in those times, immediately Gandhi would call off any sort of strike, and he would say he is not leading this. He would denounce his own followers if they went from nonviolence to violence.

**W**hat the Dalai Lama is merely saying is that if his followers lose the discipline of being nonviolent – which is what they have mainly [maintained] for fifty years under the most extreme oppression – and it becomes a violent movement, young people who are impatient, or the people in Tibet who are really being beaten too hard, then he will not lead the movement, because he will not adopt a violent strategy.

I'm sure that the Tibetans will react to that very strongly, although he's different from Gandhi in that he didn't call for

this movement at the moment. But by saying that if they do violence, that's his reaction to those videos that the Chinese showed, where some Tibetans were taking this chance to burn shops and things, which of course is very oppressive to them. They have no shops of their own in Lhasa. The Chinese have taken over all the commerce in Lhasa. The Tibetans are really impoverished by the so-called development of Tibet, because what the Chinese have been doing is all to colonize it with Chinese, which in itself is futile, because the Chinese can't live at 13,000 feet long term; they get sick. So it's a really sad story. ☸

**T**his new book by Robert Thurman couldn't be more timely. He shows how the wisdom and compassion of the Dalai Lama, this simple monk, whom he has known for more than four decades, and under whom he has studied for many years, can be actively deployed for the benefit of this whole planet. He describes with a wealth of learning and vigor a solution for China and Tibet that would genuinely work; indeed, he calls it a great win, ecologically and economically. This is an inspired and inspiring read which is highly recommended. *Why the Dalai Lama Matters: His Act of Truth as the Solution for China, Tibet and the World* is published this month [June 2008] by Atria Books/Beyond Words. Go to [www.simonsays.com](http://www.simonsays.com) for more information.



From ON FAITH in *Newsweek.com/WashingtonPost.com* March 26, 2008<sup>2</sup>

## China NEEDS the Dalai Lama *By Robert Thurman*

**W**e are at a moment of great significance for humanity, at the beginning of this new century, which could be either a horrendous time of natural and man-made mega-disasters or the greatest century yet of environmental restoration and peaceful global community. Of all world leaders at this time, the Dalai Lama most convincingly provides spiritual, intellectual, and ethical leadership, exemplifying and elucidating the most reasonable path to peace and happiness. This is the secret of his worldwide popularity. His person and teaching really do matter, to the Tibetans, to the Chinese, and to all of us and our future generations.

If there ever was a social and political movement based on faith, on spirituality, it is the 50-year campaign of the Dalai Lama for the freedom of his people, and the present spontaneous uprising of the Tibetan people who want to be free to restore their spiritual life, in the closer presence of their spiritual and political leader. These acts of truth – the Dalai Lama's long insistence on nonviolence and dialogue in responding to the genocidal acts of one of the world's largest military powers, and the Tibetan people's

resistance in the face of overwhelming odds – may yet produce miraculous results, as one of the world's greatest “lost causes” becomes a possible success.

The opportunity the Chinese leaders now have is nothing less than earth-shaking. For sixty years they have sought to dominate and control, in the futile effort to transform Tibet and its Tibetans into China and Chinese, a project the Dalai Lama has called cultural genocide. They have clearly failed. The “Dalai Lama clique” they blame and vow to destroy turns out to be all Tibetans. They now have the chance to look carefully at the facts, seek the truth, and accept that failure by trying something new. They have unnecessarily been trying to make an enemy of their best friend in all the world, the Dalai Lama, not only believed by Buddhists to be the incarnation of the god of compassion but beloved by people of all religions and humanisms as an inspiring thinker, teacher, and spiritual example – the Nobel Laureate, the living Gandhi, and the apostle of nonviolence, intelligent dialogue, and unbending hope. He has all along continued to offer them the open hand of friendship, aiming to find a solution that will be satisfying for China as well as for Tibet. It's time, now, for President Hu Jintao to reach out and welcome his help. ☉

<sup>2</sup> <http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/guestvoices/2008/03/dalai.html>

## Leading Chinese Intellectuals SPEAK Out

In a brave and landmark address to their own government, twenty-nine leading Chinese academics, writers, jurists and human rights activists from Beijing, Shangdong, Sichuan, Gansu, Shanghai, Hangzhou, Hubai and Inner Mongolia have devised a list of suggestions for dealing with the Tibetan situation.

They include stopping all the Chinese propaganda which is aggravating an already-tense situation; supporting the Dalai Lama's appeal for peace; urging the Chinese government to stop the violent suppression; and appealing to the Tibetan people likewise not to engage in violent activities.

They urge the United Nations Commission on Human Rights to independently investigate allegations of a “Dalai Lama clique,” and for the Chinese government to refrain from using Cultural-Revolution-like language such as “the

Dalai Lama is a jackal in Buddhist monk's robes ...,” instead displaying “a style of governing that conforms to the standards of modern civilization”.

They strongly demand that the authorities “not subject every Tibetan to political investigation or revenge” and any trials should be carried out according to open, just judicial procedures.

They also call for international media access and for the Chinese people to be calm and tolerant, noting that the unrest has spread throughout Tibet and is not confined to Lhasa. They are calling for freedom of religious belief and freedom of speech, holding that animosity must be eliminated and appealing to Chinese leaders to hold direct dialogue with the Dalai Lama. ☉

<http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2008/03/twelve-suggestions-for-dealing-with-the-tibetan-situation-by-some-chinese-intellectuals/>