

# Yangsi Rinpoche on the Need for a PLAN

Sara Blumenthal spoke to Yangsi Rinpoche, director of Maitripa Institute (a Buddhist university-in-the-making affiliated with FPMT and located in Portland, Oregon) who is the recognized reincarnation of Geshe Ngawang Gendun and a qualified geshe, about the situation in Tibet.

**Sara Blumenthal:** *From your side, what's your sense of things right now?*

**Yangsi Rinpoche:** When I heard that the Tibetans' frustrations have led to some kind of conflict with ethnic Chinese, I thought that is really unfortunate. But I also understand why they get so frustrated. Where can they turn, when they're pushed from all corners? At the same time we Tibetans need to live side by side with the Chinese. There are just regular Chinese in trouble. I think that this is very sad. Generally speaking, all karmic action creates repercussion. I wish and I hope it will end there.

The media is really paying attention to the immediate situation. After the Olympics, however, the violence from the Chinese authorities may start again. The world will go

on to different issues, looking towards the U.S. presidential elections, etc. As Tibetans, we need to look ahead to the aftermath of the Olympics when the Chinese may say, "OK, now nobody's looking. We close doors." As an individual Tibetan, I'm really hoping and praying that no violence will happen towards Tibetans or anybody, Chinese included, in the aftermath of the Olympics. When there's no voice, when there's no attention, people can do whatever they want. And the Chinese won't need to fear anything if there is no international pressure left. So that's one main concern for me.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama is sending a strong message of non-violence; everybody may be trying to maintain non-violence, and the Chinese may be trying to behave better. That would still be my hope for Tibet. And of course, the Tibetan government wants that to happen.

**SB:** *Is there anything that the international community can do? Is keeping the media attention on China realistic? Will that help?*

**YR:** I think what is really needed is something to stop the violence, and stop the conflict. I think that governments, particularly the United States, should pressure the Chinese government into having a dialogue with His Holiness the Dalai Lama. If it is possible to bring that dialogue to a realistic point, then after the Olympics there will be less fear, because that communication will show that the Chinese are trying to show the world a good face. Tibetan people who live in exile or in Tibet would then be more relaxed, less nervous.



PHOTO: Lynn Miller



Otherwise, if it just stays on this surface level of media attention, the aftermath could be strong repression and violence toward the Tibetans: a kind of revenge – “Now there nobody’s looking; now we’re going to make you slaves.”

The only method the world can use is to help Tibet to have a meeting for this dialogue. Otherwise, China will just bide its time. And we’ll be back to square one.

**SB:** *Do you think that it would be helpful for governments to boycott the Olympics?*

**YR:** In my personal opinion, the more the Chinese are isolated, the more difficult the situation will be. When the world gave the Olympics to China, there were financial, business, political and human rights issues involved. There is a lot at stake from all sides now. I don’t see how boycotting the Games will help. When you look at history, such as when the Olympic Games were boycotted by the United States when Russia was invading Afghanistan, the Afghanistan situation continued. If the issue of human rights, and not just the Games, is the principle of the Olympic committee, then maybe the Games should have been boycotted at the beginning. But now the Games are already allowed and everything is connected, interdependent. If we hurt some party, this also hurts us back. Of course, a lot of Tibetans strongly want to boycott, but the Games themselves are just games.

**SB:** *Do you think that most Tibetans feel that the prior talks with the Chinese and government-in-exile were insincere on the part of the Chinese and is that part of why this boiled up?*

**YR:** What Tibetans feel is that the Chinese are just buying time. It doesn’t feel like sincere dialogue. What is happening right now only represents what is happening in the senate of the exiled government. I think that talks need to be moved to a new level. Perhaps it has to be with His Holiness, and it has to be from the Chinese government. They can meet in any place. The main thing is that they open up dialogue. If it doesn’t move to the next level, that will be very ineffective.

**SB:** *So, on the level of the individual person, myself, or other students, and citizens, what can we do to help the situation? Should we write our congressmen?*

**YR:** Everybody is saying that the Chinese should talk with His Holiness. Everybody needs to sit down and really make some strategy or plan, not just have it as an idea. Of course, we need to write to our congressmen, requesting

ways we can make a plan. For example, in the Middle East, regarding the Palestine issue, there’s a road map for peace, a way it can be achieved. Similarly, the Tibetans and Chinese need to have this road map which could be brought to fruition by a superpower, the United States or other Western countries. I think, even as individuals, Westerners can contribute to the process.

The first time I heard that Western governments were pressuring China, I was so satisfied. Now, looking deeper, this is not really moving. Certainly it’s beautiful, it’s great, and we are very fortunate to have the President of the United States saying positive things, but we need to move to the next level.

As an individual, of course Buddhist practice and dedication are essential, and on top of that there is action – writing to our senators and representatives to tell them that we need not just mere talk, but a road map of the way forward.

**SB:** *Sometimes when citizens start asking the government to do this or that, they get very excited and negative emotions of strong attachment to the outcome, or a negative emotion of anger toward the Chinese, can arise. How can we take positive actions that don’t arouse negative emotions?*

**YR:** The main thing is to make sure our consciousness doesn’t get caught up in the surface manifestation: the Chinese crackdown on Tibetans, and the Tibetan uprising. If our focus just goes there, then I think we will naturally feel this kind of hatred and attachment. What’s the solution for the main problem? Not siding with either the Tibetans or the Chinese. The main problem will be after the Olympics, what will happen then? When I saw a video on YouTube of Tibetans beating Chinese people, I said, “Oh, no! You don’t need to do that!” We Tibetans stand for non-violence, even though ours is an occupied country. Now we’re starting to do these kinds of things, and that brings down our values. So far, for almost fifty years, we have had a stance of non-violence which has got us a lot of sympathy and support. On radio there was a discussion about the Chinese blaming Western media, particularly the BBC, of bias. Several panel members were Chinese, and they were really quite harsh towards what is happening in Tibet. The mostly-Western media seemed to be trying to have direct conflict with the Chinese. They were discussing a media boycott over there. Basically, what is

the truth? “You locked up Tibet and you are saying one thing,” but at the same time the Chinese were blaming the Western media, asking, “How do you know that?” It was an interesting debate, with lots of emotion. It’s very complicated. This world is becoming so small. We are all very strongly codependent. Any move we make, we need to think bigger. The minute we think small, the repercussions come back on ourselves. I still think the worry is what will happen after the Olympics end.

**SB:** *Isn't there a Buddhist saying, that if one side wins and the other side loses, then both sides lose? What would it take if both sides won – for Tibet and for China?*

**YR:** If one wins, and one loses, both lose. That’s today’s world. So, if you want to win, you should both win. That is today’s world, too. I think that is really true. Perhaps, it is better to be both losers than to have one winner. [Laughter].

**SB:** *Do you think that young Tibetans in particular, inside Tibet, are connected to His Holiness’ message of non-violence? Or do you think that message is getting lost somewhere?*

**YR:** I think non-violence is the individual, and non-violence is the community, and non-violence is the country. His Holiness says very strongly that non-violence for Tibet is country to country. As a nation, in exile or in Tibet, we don’t really have the freedom to fight for our liberation, from inside this occupation. At the level of country to country, Tibet stays non-violent. I think that message is really still in the Tibetan mind. However, Lhasa is occupied by Chinese business and Chinese people, and everywhere is taken over. It is neighborhood things: “You took my place, why?” Everything on the surface looks OK, but deep down the pressure is building. In one way or another, it is going to explode.

**SB:** *I've heard that His Holiness has recommended the Hayagriva practice to be done. And Lama Zopa has recommended that students recite the Golden Light Sutra. Do you have any recommendations for specific practices to do?*

**YR:** I feel that Tara practice and Tara mantra would be good. I also think His Holiness recommended this. I heard that in Nepal they have to do several hundred million Tara practice. For me, the first time that I heard about the situation in Tibet, I felt very urgently like doing Tara practice. Tara usually represents liberation and freedom.

**SB:** Thank you for your time.

**YR:** Thank you. ☸



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