



PHOTO: Marilyn Jones

The DHARAMSALA Experience

A woman married to the Tibetan secretary of a high lama in Dharamsala writes about what life is like in Dharamsala these days. She remains anonymous, although this vivid piece has been emailed around the world many times in the last few weeks...

These days, Dharamsala feels alternately like a temple and the seat of revolution. At times it feels like both. Every morning, thousands of Tibetans, young and old, those born in Tibet and those born in exile, march down the hill from the market of McLeod Ganj, shouting in English for justice and human rights, for the help of the UN, for the long life of the Dalai Lama. Today, their shouts are mingled with the moan of long horns blasting out from a nearby monastery.

They have been marching every day since March 10, and they never seem to tire. Each evening around dusk, thousands more walk through McLeod all carrying candles and chanting the bodhisattva prayer: "May I become enlightened to end the suffering of all sentient beings" in Tibetan over and over again. This prayer has become the anthem of Dharamsala. You hear it muttered from old women, belted out by toddlers, and chanted by monks through loud speakers: "May I become enlightened to end the suffering of all sentient beings!"

The evening marchers end up at the *tsuglakhang*, the temple located right in front of the Dalai Lama's private residence, to assemble in what is essentially the Dalai Lama's front yard. They shout freedom slogans

and “Bod Gyalo!!!” (Victory to Tibet) at the top of their lungs for twenty minutes, while young boisterous monks wave giant Tibetan flags to rally the crowd. The red, yellow and blue of Tibetan flags are everywhere, and a feeling that must accompany all revolutions of past times – a feeling of passion, resolve, and the sting of injustice – stirs the air.

And then, suddenly, all you can hear is the sound of a baby crying as the crowd sits and performs silent prayers for their countrymen. The evening ends with everyone singing a song that was composed after the 1959 uprising in Lhasa against the Chinese occupation. It’s stirring and evocative, and even if you don’t speak the language, it’s hard not to feel moved.

One evening at the temple, the monks of Kirti monastery in Amdo, Tibet, the site of huge demonstrations in recent days, brought a CD of photos of the bodies of Tibetans who eyewitnesses say had been shot by Chinese police. The photos were displayed on a large plasma television on the steps in front of the temple. A more placid group of seven robed monks sat in front of the screen and prayed. With hands folded at their chests, the images of bloodied and mangled bodies filled with bullet holes flashing before their eyes, 5,000 people joined in prayer, their faces wet with tears. One young monk told me later that he saw the dead body of his cousin on the screen. He hadn’t known that he’d been killed.

Now these photos and other images coming out of Tibet have been put up on flyers on the outside of the temple wall, directly opposite a tent filled with hunger strikers. On their way back home, people pass candles over the photos of the disfigured and bloody bodies and speak in hushed voices. Opposite, the hunger strikers continue to chant prayers and mantras all day and all through the night.

Tibetans seem to be able to hold, without contradiction, many different ways of expressing their grief, and their concern for and solidarity with the people in Tibet; to wave banners and shout until their throats are sore, and to sit and pray with heartfelt devotion to the buddhas that, one day, may they become like them for the sake of all.

Yesterday, I heard about a different kind of demonstration organized by the monks of the Buddhist Dialectic School. No face paint, no red bandanas, no hand-made placards reading “Shame on China”. They shaved their heads clean, put on the outer yellow robe normally only worn for religious teachings, and walked slowly, heads down, single file through the town, chanting the refuge prayer in Pali: *Buddhamsharanam ghachamay/dhammadham sharanam gacchamsangham sharanangachhanilahimsa ahimsa.*

A reporter asked the monks why they were wearing the yellow robe. The monk replied, “We are monks but we are also human beings. We are not immune to anger. Wearing the yellow robe reminds us to subdue our negative emotions.”

At an intersection, the monks met up with a few thousand demonstrators led by angry young men with Tibetan flags draped around their shoulders, shouting anti-Chinese slogans and punching their fists into the air. The monks kept walking and chanting. At the point where the two groups met, the demonstrators fell silent and stood aside to let the monks pass, forming two lines on either side of the street. They brought their palms together at their hearts and bowed their heads. Many began to cry. The monks kept walking and chanting. *Buddham sharanam ghachamay.* After the monks had passed, the demonstrators picked up their flags and placards and fell in behind them chanting another slogan: “May I become enlightened to end the suffering of all sentient beings.”

I, the six million TIBETANS

Yesterday’s sun was in your hands
But today’s sun is mine
My hands and feet may be in shackles
My head may be held down by force
Generation after generation may have been brutalized
But I, the spirit of the Tibetan people, am not dead
My courage and bravery has only grown stronger

I am the six million Tibetans
Yesterday’s sun was in your hands
But today’s sun, and tomorrow’s, is mine
No matter how much deception you put about
No matter how much wealth you dispense
You cannot buy my spirit, the spirit of the Tibetan people
The white snow mountain may change its color
But my spirit, the spirit of the Tibetan people
cannot change
My awareness and determination has only
grown stronger

I am the six million Tibetans.

[Author: The Six Million Tibetans. This poem was distributed at the Boudhmath Stupa, Kathmandu Nepal during a candlelight vigil on March 26 2008.]

PRAISE TO TARA

Composed by Gedun Chopel (1902-1951)

You are the compassionate mother of all destitute migrators,
The supporting power and friend of all beings who wish to attain liberation,
The embodiment of enlightened activities of all victors of the three times,
To the exalted noble Tara, at your divine feet, I make supplications.

Your divine youthful turquoise colored body is beautiful,
Your pleasing divine speech clears away all the torments of samsara and nirvana,
Your compassionate divine mind purifies the two obscurations,
To the exalted noble Tara, at your divine feet, I make supplications.

In strange lands you acted as my guide,
In fearful situations you served as my rescuer,
When impoverished, you offered me the required necessities,
To the exalted noble Tara, at your divine feet, I make supplications.

Translated by Rinchen Dhondup at Pagoda Lodge, New Zealand, on 4th January, 2008. Dedicated for the swift return of H.H. the Dalai Lama to his birth country and may those who have lost their precious human rebirths in the recent riots in Tibet always be born among the first circle of disciples of His Holiness until they attain enlightenment. May suffering end everywhere on earth.

STAND UP For Tibet

All around the world individuals are 'standing up for Tibet'. Brainchild of the Loving Kindness Peaceful Youth (LKPYP) team, the idea has caught on, and every day thousands of people are simply standing up – just for a moment, a second, a minute ... and many have sent in photos of themselves with posters and flags. You can see the results at www.standupfortibet.org, and here are some examples (pictured). Because, as Mother Teresa once said, "They say my work is just a drop in the ocean. I say the ocean is made up of many drops." And as LKPYP's Shyla Bauer says, "We aim to bring everyone's action from all over the world together to have a larger impact and to prove that peace starts from just one person." ☺

