

Sowa Rigpa and the Connection with Buddhist Inner Sciences

[Robert Thurman]: It is a pleasure to see you again. I am back. I am so happy to be here. This is the fulfillment of a dream of mine—to be here talking about this *Menla*. For those who haven't been here before... how many of you are here for the first time?

[Participant]: I don't think the sound is on.

[Robert Thurman]: Can you hold up your hands? Yes, they are still adjusting it. Many of you have been here already, quite a few times; that's good. So you know all about *Menla*. But for those who don't, let's just say that *Menla* is the Tibetan term for the Medicine Buddha.

When I was a young monk, at the age of 23, my old Mongolian teacher forced me to study Tibetan medicine. I wanted to meditate. He told me, "You'll meditate later. Meanwhile, you'd better learn medicine." He showed up at the little room where I was staying in Dharamsala in 1964 with the Dalai Lama's physician at the time, Dr Yeshi Dhonden, who was a disciple of the famous Dr Tokden Amchi.

He was re-establishing the Tibetan Medical and Astrological Institute (Men-Tsee-Khang), which had been in Lhasa, and was taking care of His Holiness's health. He was an amazing-looking man; his face looked like a Garuda bird, with prominent cheekbones and ears in a perfect line with them. He looked like a symbol of medicine.

I studied for a year or so. He made me examine the pulse and memorize it. However, I never practiced it back then; I wasn't able to really practice in those days. I often wondered why my root teacher made me do that, although I must say it is a fascinating system. It is truly the Buddhist medical system of India, to which the brilliant Tibetans added many things starting in the 8th century, and which was finalized by this great man—represented by the small statue here—Yuthok the Younger, who completed the Four Tantras and their commentaries.

This place was given to Tibet House, whose mission is to preserve Tibetan culture. Medicine is the matrix of the culture: what you eat, how you live, your ethics. It connects to the spiritual goal of seeking enlightenment and becoming a Buddha. It

is marvelous—like a beautiful silk pavilion under which the Tibetan people flourish.

I never had a partner among Tibetan doctors until *Gen-la* (Dr Nida) showed up. He has been living in the West for some time, but he also goes back to Tibet constantly and helps many people there. He is also a *Ngakpa*, a non-sectarian shamanic practitioner dealing with deep energies in the universe. He is the dream partner for the *Menla* project.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama has always said that outer science—developed by both Tibetans and Westerners—has achieved great things but has also brought the planet to a dangerous moment. The inner science of the Buddha, however, has benefited millions of people for thousands of years by teaching them about their minds, their lives, and their happiness. When the tools of outer science are combined with the deep worldview of inner science, we can have a real *Shambhala* on this planet. This is the idea, and medicine is the place where that will happen.

Dr Nida is unique among Tibetan physicians in that he has revived the practice of external therapies—massage, cupping, tapping—things that are in the ancient texts but which many modern doctors had neglected in favor of herbal pills.

Welcome, Dr Nida. Thank you very much for being here. Would you like to speak a little bit before I introduce the inner science?

[Dr Nida]: Thank you so much. I don't know what to say... (laughs). Do you have this book? (*Foundations of Sowa Rigpa*). I would like to start from the section on the origin of imbalances, the origin of pain, suffering, and sickness.

According to the Buddha, there are four types of suffering for human beings: the suffering of birth, the suffering of aging, the suffering of sickness, and the suffering of death. Nobody wants to get sick, get old, or die. Then there is another "strange" suffering: rebirth. Nobody wants to come back, but unfortunately, everyone comes back.

Getting sick, aging, and dying are natural processes, but we don't accept them; we try to refuse and reject them. Sowa Rigpa means "the science of healing." In Sowa Rigpa, we use fundamental Buddhist philosophy. That's why our talks are perfectly connected. The root cause of sickness is the Three Mental Poisons: attachment or desire, anger or hatred, and ignorance or stupidity.

Why do we get sick? Because of our ignorance and stupidity. We get sick because of our anger and our desire. Today, we all know about stress—both physical and

psychological. I call stress the "modern inner monster." It is a powerful monster that gets everyone, from grandchildren to grandparents. Scientific research shows that more than 60% of our sicknesses are stress-related.

Our society is a chemical society, and we believe chemicals are the solutions. But if you look carefully, chemicals are not working. If they were, why would the number of patients be increasing? Chemicals are becoming like food; if you don't eat enough, you have to increase the dosage. That's why it's important to find another solution. The remedy is not only chemical. Of course, surgery and pharmacology are part of modern science, but it's vital to look at natural treatments as well.

Mental poisons are harmful, but they can also be used as medicine. It depends on how we use them. This is what we call "inner alchemy." The *Vajrayana* system explains how we can transform poisons into medicine. It's like food: natural, seasonal food is good, but if you don't know how to cook it or how much to eat, it becomes a poison.

Do you know what "Buddha" means? It means "Awake." Like an alarm clock. The Buddha is telling us that we are lost in desire, anger, and ignorance, and we have to wake up from this dimension of illusion. The Buddha was one of the best human psychologists. Today, Western psychology classifies about 20 or 30 mental diseases; the Buddha found 84,000 mental afflictions (*Nyonmong*). That's why we are in trouble.

The founder of Tibetan medicine, Yuthok Yonten Gonpo, lived to be 125 years old. He believed that the human body has the potential to live for 100 years. If we know special remedies, diets, yoga, and meditation, we can even extend that. At least let's try to live until 100. Are you ready, Professor?

[Robert Thurman]: Yes, I'm going to try. The shock for some of you might be that, from our point of view, the Buddha is more of a scientist than a prophet. It is my life purpose to point this out in this culture.

Modern scholars in universities often don't believe that enlightenment—"waking up"—is possible. They don't believe the Buddha could have been enlightened because he didn't have a PhD from Harvard (laughs). There is a concept that people from thousands of years ago were "backward." These are delusions of our culture.

I had a funny dream when I got my PhD in 1972. I dreamed my professor was handing me my diploma, and I suddenly saw a nuclear cloud in the sky. Nobody else noticed it. It took me years to discover what that dream meant. It meant that

materialism—the worldview of the modern Enlightenment—has made us powerful but has also led us into a delusion. Those who think technology will fix everything are now launching rockets to Mars because they recognize they are wrecking this planet beyond repair.

I've been arguing for years with scientists about the existence of future lives. They claim to be empirical, seeking what can be experienced. I ask them: "What evidence do you have that 'nothingness' is waiting for you? Not only is there no such evidence, but there never will be, because 'nothing' isn't a place; there is no 'there' about nothing."

You are a form of energy, and according to the law of conservation of energy, energy continues. The Buddha discovered relativity thousands of years before Einstein. The famous "emptiness" (*Sunyata*) doesn't mean there is nothing; it means that all relational things are empty of any "non-relational" element. We are all interwoven; there is no essential core to anything.

The Buddha predicted the infinite divisibility of matter. He achieved the Grand Unified Theory that Einstein was looking for. Einstein refused quantum theory because he wanted to find an absolute objectivity out there to control reality. But the Buddha said that reality itself can be fully experienced because we are part of it. We can expand our minds to be aware of all parts of it.

Enlightenment means being capable of awareness at that level—knowing experientially that you are Light made of Light. It is a huge effort to step out of the consensual reality that tells us we are only our bodies and this is our only life. That view—that the mind and soul are "nothing" once the body stops—is actually a psychotic view. It makes people feel they have no purpose and allows them to wreck the planet thinking "worse come to worst, I'll just become nothing."

The Buddha taught the Four Noble Truths. The first is the diagnosis: suffering. The second is the cause: delusion or ignorance. The third is the prognosis: freedom or Nirvana. And the fourth is the treatment: the path. Nirvana is the reality of us all; we are in it right now. The only reason we don't realize it is our beginningless delusions.

Compassion automatically arises when one feels one with others and sees their actual reality as bliss, yet sees their misinterpretation of reality as causing them suffering. Medicine comes out of that.

The Tibetans kept alive the great achievements of the Indian universities. When Nalanda was destroyed, the libraries burned for six months. Luckily, the most

important texts were translated into Tibetan.

Our job is to begin to be critical of the materialist ideology and to commit to understanding the universe as the Buddha did. We must take responsibility for our own health and connect our well-being to our lifestyle, ethics, and diet. Ignorance is not bliss; knowledge is what brings joy.

Tomorrow morning at seven, we will do the Nine-Cycle Breathing purification and *Nejang* Yoga, which is a very simple healing yoga that everyone can do. We will also talk about diet, lifestyle, and how to live correctly in different seasons.

[Dr Nida]: Yes, and in the afternoon, we will do the medical part according to Sowa Rigpa. We will also have a special meditation for longevity and spiritual rejuvenation, which involves fasting. It is the cheapest rejuvenation method: basically, you don't eat anything and you meditate (laughs). We focus on body, energy, and mind.

[Participant]: Does the empowerment you're giving tomorrow have any obligations or commitments?

[Dr Nida]: No obligations. It is a matter of understanding. It's about understanding our own inner dimension and our poisons. When we don't see them, poisons look like darkness; once you see them, there is no darkness, only different kinds of Light. Once you understand it, you can put it into practice.

[Robert Thurman]: Okay. Before we go to bed, would you like a short instruction on Sleep Yoga? We will talk about the Tibetan Book of the Dead—which is actually called "Natural Liberation through Hearing in the Bardo"—in the coming days. We'll discuss how to be conscious in the intermediate state. But that's enough for tonight. Thank you all.