

Chapter 8 – Kindness

After seven days without anything to drink, laying very still under a small pile of leaves in the forest every day to avoid being discovered by Chinese Communists dropping bombs from airplanes on anything that moved on the ground, Garchen Rinpoche finally found a creek to drink from. But he realized that the whole area was filled with Communist soldiers. It was only a matter of time before he and his friends would be discovered.



So he and his dear tulku friend and fellow monastery leader Mingyur Rinpoche, along with Mingyur Rinpoche's brother, uncle, and Konchog Sewang, the monks' assistant, decided to surrender to the Chinese. They walked together with their hands over their heads to the army tents.

(photo of Garchen Rinpoche and Mingyur Rinpoche, taken many years after the events here)

At first, the Chinese soldiers were very kind to them. The officers welcomed them warmly and said,

“You must have been cold. You must have been hungry. You must have been thirsty. Now you can have some food, some drinks, and don't worry, you will get to go home soon.”

Garchen Rinpoche was surprised, and thought, “They seem to be very calm and considerate.”

A few days later, the Chinese set the tulkus' former hiding place - the mountain and forests - on fire.

Then they decided to move the rinpoches and their companions, as well as hundreds of other Tibetan resistance fighters who had surrendered, to another location. There were no roads in the area, so they had to walk for four days until they reached a place where there were newly built roads. All the people who surrendered were now prisoners of the Chinese, and were tied together with rope. A long rope was tied around each person's right hand leaving several feet of rope between each person, and their left hand was used to carry their belongings over their shoulder. Tying up the prisoners this way allowed the Chinese to control them but still enabled the prisoners to move around enough to walk over the rugged terrain, climbing up and down through valleys and mountainous areas.

When they reached the place with the new roads, Chinese officers told them encouraging news:

“Tomorrow, some motor vehicles will come here, and you will sit in those nice vehicles and you will get to go back to your homeland.”

Garchen Rinpoche and his companions had never seen a car or truck or any other motor vehicle before. The thought of sitting in one excited them. But they weren't sure about being able to go home. That seemed too good to be true.

Garchen Rinpoche thought, “The Chinese seem to have a sense of calm assurance when they speak.”

The next day, some small trucks arrived. The Chinese tied the prisoners' hands behind their backs and squeezed about forty people into one truck. There were about thirty trucks full of prisoners packed tightly together like sardines. They had to breathe and cough on each other, as there was no free space. There wasn't enough air to breathe, which caused many prisoners to get severe headaches. And as the trucks bumped up and down over the steep and rough roads, some got carsick. There were no stops for people who had to go to the bathroom.

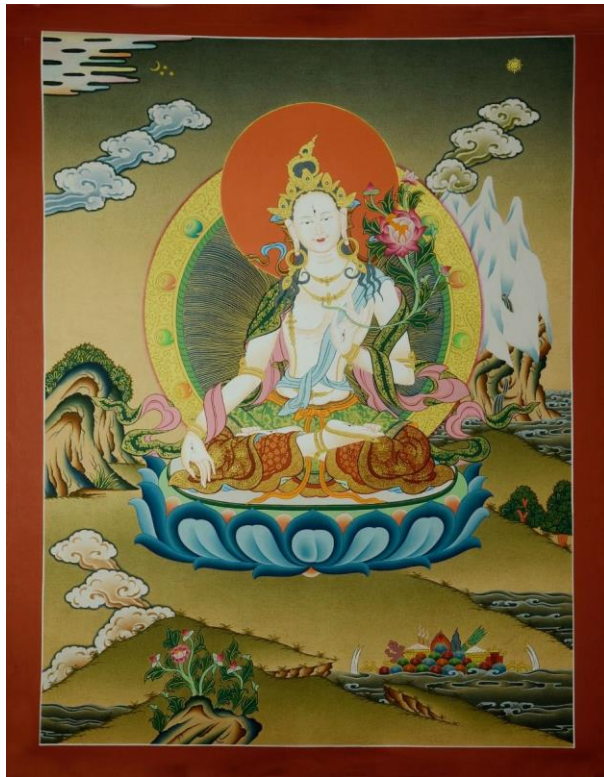
However, there were a few people who didn't get their hands tied. They were allowed to get down from the trucks when they did stop, and collect water in cans to pour into the mouths of the thirsty prisoners in the trucks. Sometimes there was a little food, and these untied prisoners help feed the others, as they couldn't use their tied-up hands to eat. One of the untied prisoners in the same truck as Garchen Rinpoche was his cousin, and he very kindly took care of Garchen Rinpoche and the other prisoners during the trip.

At night, all the prisoners were moved off the trucks and into tents. The Chinese untied the prisoners' hands so they could sleep for the night. At sunrise the next day, their hands were tied again and they were shuffled back into the trucks. For three days the prisoners traveled on the trucks until they reached their destination, a place near Lhasa called Ngakchu, where there was a monastery that had been turned into a temporary holding place for prisoners.

The prisoners were moved into the monastery for interrogation – intense questioning for the Chinese to investigate and decide what to do with each prisoner. Chinese police officers questioned the prisoners with the help of a few Tibetan officers. The prisoners were to be divided into two groups. One group included wealthy people, important lamas, monastery managers, and important officials. The other group included ordinary people. The police officers took careful notes during the questioning, writing down every detail.

Garchen Rinpoche heard that there was one Tibetan officer who was very fierce and irritable. He had been drafted into the army by the Chinese, and quickly moved up the ranks because of his devotion to the Chinese Communist Party. If any of the prisoners weren't perfectly cooperative or if they refused to say what the officer wanted to hear during the questioning, he

instantly would be irritated and violent. Many of the prisoners came back from questioning bruised and horrified. Some were questioned not just once or twice but several times.



Every day, Garchen Rinpoche prayed to the great compassionate deity, Tara. She is his yidam deity, his favorite deity, who protects, heals, and grants long healthy life.

After some days, it was Garchen Rinpoche's turn to be questioned. When he walked into the room, he immediately recognized the fierce Tibetan officer with the cruel expression on his face.

"What's your name?" the officer asked.

"Konchog Gyaltsen," Rinpoche replied. That was his name as a child, not his full name as a monk. A Chinese secretary tried to translate the Tibetan sounds of his name into Chinese characters, and in Chinese it was pronounced very differently.

"Do you believe in the Communist Party?" the officer asked.

"Do I have a choice not to believe?" Rinpoche said in response, suggesting the truth – that he is being forced to believe in the Communist party.

"Do you believe me?" the officer asked.

"Do I have a choice not to believe?" Rinpoche responded.

"Are you a monk?" the officer asked.

"Yes, I am a monk," Rinpoche admitted.

The officer interrupted, "You are a lama, and in fact, I have also been a lama. A long time ago. From Tashi Lunpo."

Feeling that the officer actually sympathized with him, Rinpoche said, "I believe you."

The officer explained how the questioning would proceed, saying, "Now, today we will begin to work together to establish a full documentation of your personal history. What you need to do is answer truthfully to all questions. You need to tell us everything that you know and

everything that you heard. We will take notes and write down all the answers. Basically, you need to confess to all your crimes!”

Then, to Rinpoche’s surprise, the officer looked directly into his eyes and started to give him some advice. He seemed very direct, and there seemed to be no deceitful intention in his voice.

“You must listen to me, and tell me the entire truth now. No matter how many times, you must repeat the exact same story. Whatever you tell me today, you stick with just that story. After today, do not say to anyone things that you didn’t say today. Whatever answers you give today, stick with them throughout the future! Do you hear?”

Rinpoche didn’t know why he was given those tips, but he felt as if his yidam deity Tara had spoken to him due to her kindness. He had prayed to her every day and night for protection, and so he thought Tara must have answered his prayers and wanted to give him some protection through the Tibetan officer’s advice.

Then the questions began. “What monastery are you from? Where is this monastery? Who is the head of your monastery? Is there anyone else from your monastery with you now? Who are they? What are their names? What role do they play? Why did you revolt against the Chinese People’s Army when they are here to help the Tibetan people? What other evil deeds have you done in the past to exploit the people of Tibet? How did you rob them of their wealth and abuse them for your own well-being? You must confess it all!”

Clearly the questions were designed to force him to admit to deeds that were crimes in the eyes of the Communists, such as accepting donations and volunteer work at the monastery.

The questions seemed to go on forever. At one point, Rinpoche said that he said that he alone was the supreme leader of the monastery, and that he alone was responsible for making all the important decisions within his ancient monastery. He added,

“Mingyur Rinpoche, on the other hand, was just a regular monk.”

Rinpoche didn’t say this due to egoism. He said this little fib, this “white lie,” only because he didn’t want any of his statements to harm his dear friend Mingyur Rinpoche. He wanted to protect Mingyur Rinpoche from getting the horribly unfair brutal punishment that the Communists gave to important lamas.

After the answers were all written down, the officer again reminded Rinpoche to repeat the exact same thing to whomever questioned him. Finally, the questioning was complete, and Rinpoche only had to be questioned that one time; he didn’t have to be questioned again like some of the other prisoners.

A decision was made to move all the prisoners who were ordinary people – farmers, workers, shop-owners and traders of goods - to Lhasa to perform labor, building new buildings and roads. Those who were important lamas, monastery managers, high government officials, and wealthy people were to be transported to Zhiling in eastern Tibet, which is now a part of China, in the dry, windy, barren and desolate landscape of the Qinghai province. Although Rinpoche had told the officers that he was the only leader of the monastery, both he and Mingyur Rinpoche were in the group of lamas going to Zhiling.

Each of the prisoners in Garchen Rinpoche’s group was given a letter that said, “You are not going to be executed . . . you are not going to be tortured . . . you are not going to be imprisoned . . . you are now going home.”

On the way to Zhiling, the Chinese officers told Rinpoche and his companions that they should be happy, rejoice and “sing your national anthem.” So, Rinpoche and his companions were compelled to sing and show their delight.



When they finally reached Zhiling, the officers took the letters back from the prisoners, and they were immediately put into the hard labor prison camp, the biggest one in Qinghai province. None of them got to go back to their home village.

QUESTIONS:

1. What kind of attitude did the Chinese army officers seem to have when Garchen Rinpoche and his friends surrendered? (they seemed welcoming, considerate and calm)
2. What encouraging but untrue news did they give the prisoners? (they were told they were going home)

3. How did the prisoners whose hands were not tied help the other prisoners? (they gave them water and food)
4. Who did Garchen Rinpoche pray to every day? (Tara, his yidam deity)
5. What good advice did the cruel looking Tibetan officer give Rinpoche when he was being questioned? (he told Rinpoche to tell the truth and repeat exactly the same story each time he is questioned)
6. Why did Garchen Rinpoche tell the officer that he was the monastery leader and that Mingyur Rinpoche was just a regular monk? (to protect Mingyur Rinpoche from getting a terrible punishment for being an important lama)

DISCUSSION – Kindness:

When Rinpoche surrendered, the Chinese soldiers and officers seemed to be kind.

Do you think the soldiers and officers were genuinely kind? No.

They used kind words so others would think they were being kind, but their jobs were to send Rinpoche and the others who surrendered to prison.

They were lying when they said to the group that they would be going home.

Why do you think they lied about that?

They had to keep the prisoners under control, so telling them they would be taken home would make them want to cooperate with the officers.

Their apparent kindness was a way of manipulating and controlling. It wasn't real kindness.

With what feeling did Rinpoche tell that little fib about Mingyur Rinpoche? He said it out of kindness, to protect Mingyur Rinpoche. So, he said it for a very good reason.

When the officer asked Rinpoche whether he believed in the Communist Party, what do you think would have happened if he said "no"?

The officer might have gotten angry and beaten Rinpoche for not accepting the Communist Party. But that was the truth – Rinpoche didn't believe in Communism.

He could have lied and said "yes." But he carefully avoided telling any lies.

Who were the people who were actually kind and helpful to Rinpoche and the other prisoners when they were traveling? The prisoners whose hands were not tied.

Can you imagine how they felt after all that suffering of being crammed together in the truck, so thirsty and hungry, when finally they were given some water and food?

Those small acts of kindness – being given water and being fed while their hands were tied – meant so much to the prisoners.

So, kindness doesn't mean just nice words, appearing to be nice without genuinely caring.

And we see that small kind efforts to help can make such a difference, can mean so much.

Let's think about what kindness means.

Can you think of some words that describe kindness, that are similar to kindness?

What words come to mind when you think of being kind?

Being considerate, caring, helpful, patient, generous, friendly, loving, nice.

Let's think of some examples.

What would you do to be kind, if you are with your friends but you see another kid who seems lonely, shy or in some way different from you?

Make an effort to be friendly to them, include them, invite them to join you, rather than only paying attention to your friends.

What would you do to be kind if you see someone is being bullied or treated unfairly?

You can speak up to defend the person, and you can say consoling words to them.

Have you ever been in a situation where someone seems to need help and there are others around but no one offers to help?

Some people might think they don't need to help if there are others around who could help.

What would a kind person do? Offer to help!

A kind person doesn't ignore others and avoid helping, but instead has a helpful mind.

What does that mean to you, to have a helpful mind?

It means you look for ways that you can help, and try to be aware of how you can be helpful, wherever you are.

But it's not always so easy to decide what kindness means in different situations.

What if someone asks you to give him something, like money. Does being kind and helpful mean that you must give it to him?

No. You have to decide whether it's appropriate to give, or whether they are trying to take advantage of you.

If they are trying to take advantage of you and you give what they want, then you are encouraging their selfish behavior- they may do it again. Is that kind and helpful? No!

If you agree to do what they want, how might you may feel later? Angry, resentful, or foolish.

So, kindness doesn't mean giving in when someone manipulates you, or tries to coax or pressure you into doing something you think isn't the right thing to do.

We must use our wisdom along with our kindness, to decide whether we should give or help.

What if someone asks you to do something, and you think it's too much for you – for example, it would cost too much, or would take too much time. What would be a kind response?

You can give them limits on what you will do. That's called "setting boundaries."

What about doing something nice just because you want someone to like you, be friends with you, or do something for you in return - is that real kindness? It seems like kindness.

And of course, we like it when people appreciate what we do.

But, if you do so much for someone and then they don't respond as you wanted, how might you feel? Disappointed, angry, or resentful.

That's what is called being a "people pleaser" – doing nice things for others while expecting they will do something nice for you.

Real kindness doesn't mean being a "people pleaser."

Kindness doesn't mean doing something nice just so you can get what you want.

That's more of a trade: if I'm nice to you then you should do something nice for me. Instead, kindness means doing for others without expecting something in return, without thinking about what they may do for you. It means acting and speaking kindly from your heart, genuinely caring, wishing for their happiness.