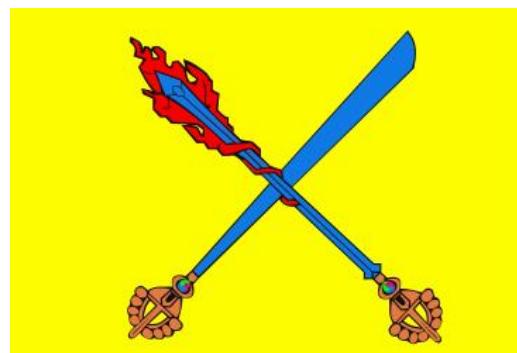


Chapter 6 – Fighting

After the thirteen men had terrorized and robbed the villagers of Yu-Gyi Dewa, and the people from Gar participated in a purification ceremony, they wondered how they were going to survive while eastern Tibet was being invaded by the Chinese Communist army (flag shown below, on left). As the army took control, hundreds of thousands of Tibetans had to leave their homes, becoming refugees, running from place to place, constantly on the move for a safer place to stay. Many of them didn't have any food for days. Even if they started to cook, they often heard someone shouting, "The Chinese are coming! The Chinese are coming!" Then they immediately had to put their fire out, grab their children and escape into the forest to hide.



As fighting between the Chinese and Tibetan armies intensified, the Tibetan people became increasingly desperate. Their culture had been focused on Buddhism, not war, so they didn't have many weapons. The soldiers of the Chushi Gangdruk, the Tibetan resistance army (flag above, at right), attacked Chinese military camps to steal weapons and ammunition, and then ran to the mountains to hide. Even the women took part in the Tibetan resistance – they were informants, giving messages to the resistance fighters hiding in the mountains, and many whose husbands were killed or arrested by the Chinese bravely fought alongside the men.

Groups of refugees were pouring into the crowded Lho Zhong Tibetan military camp, hoping to find a safe place to stay. They shared their experiences of the Communists' horrible attacks on innocent people. The Communists gave money, status, and jobs to the Tibetans who were poor workers, servants, and beggars, but they arrested, abused, imprisoned and killed Tibetans who had a higher social status - the monks, landowners, merchants and farmers. Many refugees saw or experienced the brutal "struggle sessions" where Tibetans were accused of some crime and then beaten, spit on, and humiliated terribly by the Chinese Communists or local beggars.

The Chinese Communists tried to show that religion was useless for making progress in society, so they destroyed everything that was religious. The lamas were called "enemies of the people" by the Communists and thrown into deep pits or murdered. Monks and nuns were tortured, abused and humiliated. Paintings of buddhas and deities were used to clean toilets, and pages of Dharma writings were used as toilet paper. The valuable items from monasteries were stolen by the Communists and sent to China. Chairman Mao Zedong, the Communist leader of China, taught that "religion is poison."

The Tibetans told one another that the Chinese Communists were not only the enemies of the Tibetans but also enemies of the Dharma. They were trying to destroy the religion that was the heart and soul of every Tibetan. For more than a thousand years, Tibetan culture was Buddhism. Tibet's laws, social norms and ways of living are all based on Buddhist ideas, including non-violence, respect for all living beings, and protecting the environment. Even Tibet's spoken and written language is based on Buddhism.

Tibetans therefore thought, "If the Chinese were to destroy our religion, then that would be the end of our Tibetan way of life. We should vow to fight until death and be the defenders of our religion, otherwise, how could there be any future for Tibet without the Buddha Dharma?"



Some Tibetans were even saying, "To kill one Chinese is a good karma just like building a stupa," which is a building filled with holy objects to worship the Buddha (photo at left).

More and more Tibetans began to think this way and really believe it, and they were trying to encourage each and every Tibetan to fight against the Chinese Communist soldiers.

Sometimes, when Garchen Rinpoche thought about karma, cause and effect, he could ease the pain in his mind and just accept bad events as unavoidable - they had to happen in accordance with at karma, some bad deeds done in the past. But now with so much horror being done by the Chinese Communists, sometimes he asked himself,

"Whose fault is this? Isn't it the Chinese who should be blamed? Or is this really just the result of karma that I and all Tibetan people have to face due to some horrible deeds that we all have done through many past lives?"



He took comfort in thinking about the Dalai Lama (photo at left). He thought that since the Dalai Lama, the representative on Earth of Chenrezig, the Lord of Great Compassion, had not been defeated by the Chinese, then things somehow would be okay. The deities would protect this most precious being and wouldn't neglect him or his people. Something would come out right. Something would happen to fix the desperate and disastrous situation.

Yet, in eastern Tibet, Kham and Amdo, terrible, brutal and murderous incidents were happening day by day with no end. The people were experiencing hell on earth.

As he heard about it, Garchen Rinpoche's grief became overwhelming, and his mind became confused. He began to blame the Chinese Communists for everything that was happening in his life and the lives of his people. He thought it was because of the Chinese that he had to be separated from his family. It was because of the terrible Communist policies that his people had to experience this cold spiritual and cultural genocide – the mass killing of the Tibetan religion, culture and people. All the horror was caused by nothing other than the acts of the Chinese, he thought.

Rather than letting the Chinese kill or imprison them for crimes they did not commit, most of the men in Rinpoche's group prepared to fight back. They would not just allow themselves to be killed. They would join the Tibetan resistance army.

At first, Garchen Rinpoche didn't want to officially join the army. But he felt that he had very little choice. There wasn't much difference between surrendering to the Communists and joining the Tibetan resistance army. Especially being a lama, which the Chinese thought were "the enemy of the people," he would be killed if he surrendered. Or he might be killed on the battlefield. He thought,

"If the Chinese Communists catch me, they catch me, and if they kill me, they kill me!"

There appeared to be no way out. It seemed to the people from Gar, as it seemed to so many Tibetans, that either you had to kill, or you would be killed.



So the group from Gar, including Garchen Rinpoche and Mingyur Rinpoche, went to a Tibetan resistance army camp to join the army. There, the Chushi Gangdruk officers gave Garchen Rinpoche and each of the other men a rifle, a badge of their army logo (photo at left), and a tiny photo of the Dalai Lama. They all became fighters – warriors - and officially became members of the Army of Volunteer Protectors of the Teachings of Buddha. Rinpoche's identity as a Khampa warrior now overpowered his identity as a young spiritual teacher. Khampa warriors, the great fighters from eastern Tibet, seldom surrender. They always prove their honor and bravery in an honest fight. Rinpoche, together with thousands of monks from Kham and Amdo, gave up being monks and entered the battlefield.

They had different emotions about becoming fighters. On one hand, their anger and hatred motivated them to fight and punish the enemy, the Chinese Communists, who had caused so much suffering, destruction and death to innocent people. Garchen Rinpoche humbly said many years later,

"At that time, I was thinking of all the people in the world, and I was the one with the most hatred!" He thought that no one could have more anger and hatred than he did.

But on the other hand, they were deeply motivated to fight in order to protect the Dalai Lama. Garchen Rinpoche said, "If we had not fought in the war, His Holiness the Dalai Lama could not have escaped. So, in order to protect him, we fought. Because we protected him, His Holiness was able to escape to India."

It was several months after Garchen Rinpoche joined the Tibetan freedom fighters that the Dalai Lama escaped. His Holiness had been invited by the Chinese to attend an opera, and hundreds of thousands of Tibetans, suspecting that the Chinese might capture him when he goes to the opera, protested against the Chinese just outside the Potala Palace and protected him from going. Given the danger of war between the Chinese army and the protesters, the twenty-three-year-old Dalai Lama, together with two or three guards, silently walked into the massive crowd of protesters. His Holiness was disguised as a soldier, without his eyeglasses and with a rifle on his shoulder.



After crossing a river where Chushi Gangdruk fighters and horses were waiting, His Holiness rode along with them and his family members together on a journey to India.

Tibetan resistance warriors bravely cleared the route for him to escape.



About 400 Tibetan soldiers and fighters assembled to escort him to safety, and hundreds more were on notice, ready to protect him in case of any trouble with the Chinese army.

After two weeks of traveling, the Dalai Lama (in black, photo at left) and his family reached India.

At that point, His Holiness sadly and tearfully said goodbye to the soldiers and freedom fighters who

had escorted him all the way from Lhasa and then would have to turn back and face the Chinese. His Holiness also was extremely sad to see his people have to resort to violence as their only way of defense. He also realized how brave - how lion-hearted - they were, and he said,

"Part of me greatly admired the guerilla fighters. They were brave people, men and women, and they were putting their lives and their children's lives at stake to try to save our religion and country in the only remaining way they could see."

Garchen Rinpoche and the other freedom fighters were stationed at the large Tibetan resistance army camp where they received their weapons. During that time, for many weeks, they had only meat to eat and very little water to drink. They were exhausted and didn't have enough nourishment. Yet they fought and killed many Chinese soldiers for many days. The United States government tried to help by sending airplanes full of weapons, supplies and food that was parachuted down to the ground from the planes, but the fighters still were poorly equipped compared to the Chinese army. In Tibet, building up armies and weapons and preparing for war had not been a priority, because they had a peaceful culture. And now they needed so many supplies in order to fight. When the Chinese soldiers fell during battle, the Tibetans immediately grabbed their guns, bullets, food and medicines.

Garchen Rinpoche and his companions were stationed there with the Tibetan resistance force for almost two years.

QUESTIONS:

1. Were only men fighting in the Tibetan resistance army, or were women fighting too? (women were fighting too)
2. What were the Communists trying to destroy, that was the core of Tibetan culture and way of life? (Buddhist religion)
3. At that time, did Tibetans think that killing a Chinese Communist was good karma or bad karma? (they thought it was good karma)
4. Other than sometimes thinking the Chinese Communists were causing the Tibetan people's suffering, what did Garchen Rinpoche know was the real cause of their suffering? (karma, cause and effect, negative deeds done in past lives)
5. Why did the Tibetans want to fight, other than their anger and hatred against the Chinese Communists? (they wanted to protect the Dalai Lama and their religion)
6. What did the Dalai Lama admire about the freedom fighters? (they were brave, risking their lives to save the religion and the country)

DHARMA DISCUSSION – Fighting:

The Tibetans didn't have a strong army to fight against the huge, well equipped Chinese Communist army, so people who weren't trained as soldiers – including lamas, monks and women – joined the soldiers and were called "freedom fighters."

They wanted to fight so they would have freedom from the Communists.

Why else did they want to fight?

Like Garchen Rinpoche, they felt angry about the horrible abuses.

And they fought because they wanted to protect.

What did they want to protect? Their people, their religion, their country, and the Dalai Lama.

This was a good, virtuous reason to fight.

Like the Dharma protectors, the non-human beings who have weapons and frightening expressions on their faces, they fought to protect Dharma and people who practice Dharma.

Are there other people you can think of who fight for good reasons?

Soldiers, police and security guards may have to fight as part of their job to protect others.

They have a duty to fight.

What about those who practice martial arts?

Some of you may have learned to fight by practicing martial arts, like Karate.

Can you think of other sports that involve fighting? Wrestling, fencing and boxing.

In martial arts, people "spar" or pretend to fight to practice their skills, but they do that with protection and certain rules, so no one gets hurt.

What about actual fights? What is the rule of those sports as to when it's okay to actually fight? You do it only when you have to, in self-defense.

What does it mean, "only when you have to, in self-defense"?

To protect yourself or another person when someone is about to injure you or that person and you can't get away, for example, when you're cornered.

First, you must try to avoid fighting by moving away, blocking them (shielding yourself), or pushing them away.

And then if you must fight, then you only prevent yourself and others from getting hurt.

You are not trying to hurt the other person.

These rules are good guidance if you find yourself being physically attacked by someone.

As Buddhists, we try to avoid getting into a fight.

We know that if we intentionally harm someone, even if they provoked you, it is a negative karma, and we will suffer a negative result.

Garchen Rinpoche says that after he fought against the Chinese Communists, he had to suffer very much later on as a result.

Although he had a virtuous reason to fight – to protect the Dharma – he also felt anger and hatred, and he had to suffer the painful karmic results of the harm that he caused to others.

Also, after we hurt someone in a fight, we feel regret.

A fight might happen very suddenly or unexpectedly, and someone can get badly injured.

Has it ever happened to you?

Has someone ever hit, pushed, or kicked you?
Has a brother or sister ever grabbed something from you and you tried to grab it back and you ended up in a fight?
Has anyone ever said something so insulting to you or a friend or family member, that you wanted to hit them?
How can we avoid getting into fights in these situations?
Use your voice.

There is an ancient story from India about a snake that would bite people, and a holy man told the snake to stop biting and being so aggressive.
So the snake stopped biting people, but then they would step on him and injure him. When he went to the holy man, bruised and bleeding, the holy man said,
“I told you to stop biting, but I didn’t tell you not to hiss!”
So, if someone is hurting you, don’t hurt them in return, but use your voice to warn them.

To avoid getting into a fight, use your voice to try to calm the other person - de-escalate the situation - using words that warn them or explain, not words that insult or upset the person.
And calm yourself.
Remember that people get angry because they are confused and don’t feel good.
It’s not your job to punish someone – karma takes care of that automatically.
Try to see the other person with compassion – he is feeling terrible inside to want to harm you.
When we remember this, then we are fighting our own inner enemies – our anger, our ego.
And that is the good type of fight! It is not weakness!
That is real strength and courage: to control the situation with calming words, rather than losing control of ourselves and our emotions.

Many of us are more likely to have fights with brothers or sisters than with other kids, so practice being able to de-escalate a fight with a brother or sister!
Then it will be easier to do with others.