

Chapter 7 – Loyalty



While Garchen Rinpoche was in the Tibetan resistance army, the Chushi Gangdruk, the fighters battled from their hiding places and killed many Chinese soldiers day after day. They often felt frantic, not only in fighting battles but also in just getting enough food, water, and ammunition – bullets. Some fighters had to rely on swords and daggers when they ran out of bullets.

During the most intense days of fighting, some of the men in the Tibetan resistance army made plans to escape to India or Nepal. Garchen Rinpoche was asked a few times by those men to follow them on an escape route they had planned out. They made all the necessary preparations and were ready to go, asking him to join them. But Garchen Rinpoche refused to go. Many other lamas had already secretly escaped, including lamas who later became famous leaders in other Buddhist lineages. If Garchen Rinpoche wanted a spot on those trips, there would have been room for him. But he thought it would be shameful to leave so many of his companions behind and take off without them. He thought,

“Our goal is to defend our faith (Buddhism) and to win our country back, and I have many companions here with me. It wouldn’t be good for them if I were to flee by myself.”

So, he continued fighting in the army. One day, the Chinese soldiers attacked the resistance fighters’ base from all directions and destroyed it. The defeated Tibetan soldiers escaped like ants driven out of their nests. Now the Chushi Gangdruk army was broken apart and separated into isolated units, small groups of soldiers.



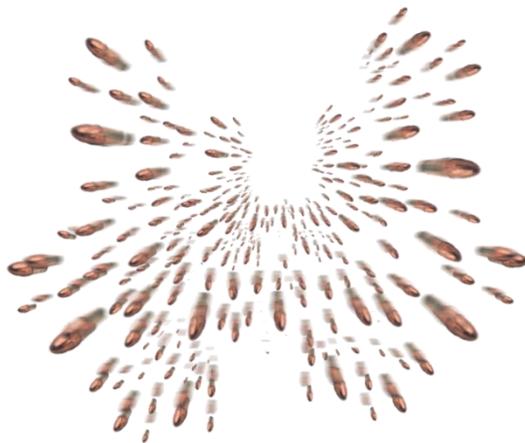
At that time, Garchen Rinpoche’s army unit ended up escaping to a nearby mountain surrounded by dense forests. However, the peak of the mountain was bare rock, with no vegetation at all, and as the Chinese army began to close in on them, they were forced to scatter further and further up the mountain.

Tibetan women, armed with guns and bullets, were shooting just like

the men in this unit. However, more and more of them were getting killed as the Chinese were getting closer. The Tibetan fighters needed to climb faster up the mountain, so they decided to abandon their heavy ammunition pouches, although they kept all the leftover bullets. Garchen Rinpoche also abandoned his ammunition pouch and a blessing bundle from his previous life as the Seventh Garchen Rinpoche that was very dear to him. He made prayers, hid it in a nearby cave and put some bullet cartridges around it. Then he escaped further up the mountain.

Soon afterward, the Tibetan fighters had climbed up to the rocky peak of the mountain and the Chinese surrounded them. They were now in open battle, and some were even fighting with knives. From above, warplanes were dropping bombs, and on the ground, bullets were flying everywhere. The bullets were so fast that they could hear the crack of the bullet exploding from the gun only after they felt the wind from the bullet rushing past.

Garchen Rinpoche felt the wind from the bullets rush by every time the bullets passed by his side, so violent that the winds turned him around - the blast of air that came with the shots was so powerful that he felt as if he had been hit. Each time he felt the winds, the blast of air and the bullets coming, he thought, "Now the bullets hit me . . . now they have hit me."



Sometimes when the bullets passed by one side, he would turn to the other side, and the flying bullets missed him. The bullets kept on racing after him and his companions, one after another without stopping. The clear sound, the sharp crash, the vicious whip cracks as the bullets passed by made them feel like they were drowning in fear. They were in constant fear. At that time, Garchen Rinpoche was sure that this had to be a real hell-world.

But he didn't forget the Three Jewels – the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. He continued to focus on them while he was trying to escape the bullets. And the flying bullets just missed his body as if they decided to change direction at the last second. With each step, a bullet would pass where he had just been. Many people could not escape death in these battles, but somehow he did, so he was convinced that he was under the protection of the Three Jewels.

At around ten o'clock in the morning, the path he was following ended, and he came to the edge of a cliff. He jumped down the cliff into the forest where there was no Chinese Communist army. Having escaped death again, Garchen Rinpoche and some of his companions scattered into the forest, hiding in caves. Slowly, they escaped back down to the lower part of the forest in search of food and water. He had no idea how many men in his unit were still alive and looking for safety, but there were five others from his group who were hiding near him, including Mingyur Rinpoche and Ngawang, his former teacher at the monastery. They didn't dare walk with each other as a group, but on some nights they met together when it was dark so they wouldn't be seen by the Chinese soldiers.

From the first day that the group from Gar joined the Tibetan resistance army, the gentle Mingyur Rinpoche never carried a gun – he remained faithful to his vow of non-violence.

In one of their meetings at night, Mingyur Rinpoche and two others insisted that they should surrender to the Chinese. But Garchen Rinpoche and Ngawang disagreed. Ngawang suggested to Garchen Rinpoche that they leave Mingyur Rinpoche and the others behind so the two of them could continue fighting against the Chinese soldiers until they reach Nepal or India. But Garchen Rinpoche didn't like that idea. He thought about Mingyur Rinpoche and the last instructions that Namdrul Rinpoche had given them before he died. He had said,

“Promise me that you two will not separate! You both must strive to stay together. Do not separate from one another!”

When Garchen Rinpoche remembered Namdrul Rinpoche, he felt a deep sadness. He wished he could explain to his kind Vajra brother Mingyur Rinpoche how he felt, how he wanted to go on combating the Chinese Communists like a fearless mountain lion. But, how could he? He had to obey the instruction from Namdrul Rinpoche that they stay together. Also, the idea of leaving Mingyur Rinpoche alone to fend for himself was terrible. Ever since their childhood, they were close friends. The restless Garchen Rinpoche would always be the leader in their mischievous fun activities, and Mingyur Rinpoche always remained peaceful and detached. He would quietly follow Garchen Rinpoche's lead and share the amusement of their adventure. Now that they were trapped in this dangerous situation, it seemed unthinkable for the two to separate. Garchen Rinpoche's protective instinct toward his spiritual brother allowed no chance for his warrior personality to take over. So, Garchen Rinpoche told Ngawang,

“I can't follow you in trying to escape.” He firmly decided to stay behind in the mountains with Mingyur Rinpoche.

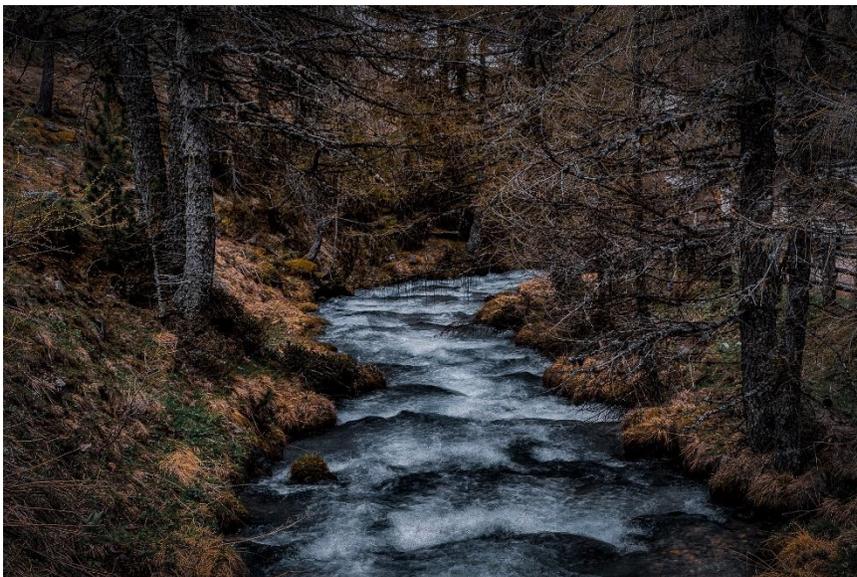


For seven days, they had nothing to drink. During the day, the Chinese tried to search for the Tibetan men in hiding by flying airplanes overhead. The planes flew over Garchen Rinpoche and his companions continually for many days. Bullets were shot from the airplanes at anything that moved on the ground, and bombs were dropped if they saw a person down below. Garchen Rinpoche had to lay flat on the ground and cover his body completely with many branches and leaves. Only his eyes could see out. That is how he disguised himself so no one could see him from above. For one whole day, he stayed as still as possible.

He recited the Tara mantra and prayed to her and the Three Jewels – Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

Then when it was totally dark, he got up and climbed down the mountain to look for water. There were no paths, the forest was thick with vegetation, and there was no moonlight, so it was difficult to walk and easy to get lost. He didn't eat for many days, but he was so extremely thirsty that he was willing to endure anything just to get a few drops of water.

Every night he dragged himself around for many hours. Every night he returned to his hiding place more desperate than the night before. He felt like his throat was on fire and his tongue had a bitter taste. Sometimes it snowed a little and he ate a bit of snow. He felt like he was going to die of thirst. No water for seven days! It was torture.



Finally, on the seventh night, he wandered all the way down the valley, far from his hiding place, and there he heard the gentle sound of flowing water. He found a creek! He drank and drank and drank the water. But he couldn't quench his thirst. He drank until his stomach was too full of water, and he vomited some out. No matter how much he drank, he was still thirsty in

his mind. He had been so focused on being thirsty that he couldn't let go of that idea. He thought,



“This is how a hungry ghost feels! This is the suffering of the hungry ghosts! Hungry ghosts are just like this. Due to their greed and desire to get rich and have a lot of food and drink, their hunger and thirst can't be satisfied. When they are born in the realm of the hungry ghosts, they suffer exactly like they did as a human with their mind. Their stomach can be stuffed, and food and water can fall out of their mouth, but their mind is never satisfied. This must be the true hungry ghosts!” He suddenly understood this, and then he decided to stop drinking. Turning his back on the creek, he quickly climbed back up the mountain.

That night, Garchen Rinpoche and his companions met together. They realized that the whole area was now filled with Chinese Communist soldiers, so they decided to surrender the next day.

So in the beginning of the year of 1960, when Garchen Rinpoche was 22 years old, he and Mingyur Rinpoche and two others in their group surrendered to the Chinese Communists.

There were two men in their group, Konchog Sewang and Ngawang, who was Rinpoche's former teacher. Konchog Sewang didn't want to surrender, but he wanted so much to be together with the two Rinpoches. Ever since they left Gar Gon monastery, he always took over the responsibility of assisting the two young tulkus with their belongings. Being a big and strong man, he always helped carrying some of the heavy loads so that the young tulkus wouldn't have to carry so much. So, he surrendered, too. However, Ngawang refused to follow them, and remained on the mountain to fight his way out.

From far away, Garchen Rinpoche, Mingyur Rinpoche, Konchog Sewang and the two others could see the army tents way down in the valley. They walked down from the mountains, approaching the tents with their hands above their heads, to show that they wanted to surrender. Around noon, when they arrived, they turned in a few of their worst weapons.

QUESTIONS:

1. When Garchen Rinpoche was asked if he wanted to join some other fighters to escape to India or Nepal, did he agree to go with them? (no)
2. Why didn't he want to escape with them? (because he didn't want to leave his companions behind, and he wanted to continue to fight to protect Buddhism and his country)
3. When bullets were being shot at him, with everyone constantly full of fear, what kind of world did Rinpoche feel like he was in? (a hell-world)
4. How did Rinpoche hide from the Chinese planes flying overhead? (he hid under leaves and branches all day)
5. How long did Rinpoche go without anything to drink? (seven days)
6. When Rinpoche was so thirsty that even when he drank water, the thirst didn't go away, what kind of world did Rinpoche feel like he was in? (hungry ghost world)

DHARMA DISCUSSION – Loyalty:

While Garchen Rinpoche was battling against the Chinese Communist army, he was invited to escape to India or Nepal where he could be free from all that horror of war. That was a wonderful opportunity, and other lamas had done it.

But he didn't. Why? He thought it would be shameful to leave his companions behind. He didn't want to abandon them. He was loyal to them.

Plus, he was loyal to Buddhism and Tibet. He wanted to free Tibet from the Communists so Buddhism could thrive there again.

When bullets were flying at him, and when he was hiding from the planes under the leaves, who was he thinking about? The Three Jewels – the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and his favorite deity, Tara. He was chanting her mantra.

He was loyal to them, and that seemed to be what miraculously saved him from being shot.

Mingyur Rinpoche was loyal to the Three Jewels in another way. What vow did he remain faithful to? His vow of non-violence, the Buddha's teaching on non-harming.

In what way was he loyal to his vow? He didn't carry a rifle.

Konchog Sewang, who always helped the young tulkus, was loyal to them. Even though he didn't want to surrender, he did anyway. Why? Because he wanted to be with the tulkus.

These are examples of loyalty.

Not forgetting the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, or a yidam deity, even when you are distracted by danger or something else that grabs your attention.

Not letting a good friend feel left out, even when you would rather do something else.

Has someone ever invited you, but not a friend or brother or sister who is with you, to do something fun, and if you go, your friend, sister or brother would feel left out?

Or have you ever said you would do something with one friend, and another friend invites you, and you can't do both?

How can you still remain loyal to your friend, brother or sister? You can ask whether he or she can come too, or that you'll go if he or she can come too. Or you can decide not to go, and say, "Maybe another time."

Is loyalty always a good thing? No, there is a wrong type of loyalty.

Can you think of an example?

Being loyal to the wrong person - someone who doesn't have good values.

Did you ever have a friend who started behaving disrespectfully?

Or who did something unkind, dangerous, or wrong?

Following along with their behavior "because they are your friend" is the wrong kind of loyalty.

Have you ever felt pressured by a friend to do something you don't think is a good idea, who makes you feel like if you don't do it, they might embarrass you, abandon you, or not be friendly with you anymore? That is pressuring you into the wrong kind of loyalty.