

Introduction

It seems more reasonable for a person to be pro-truth, pro-justice, pro-human rights, than to be “anti-Chinese” or “anti” any nationality or ethnic heritage. But inside Tibet, those who dare to speak the truth in their hearts, dare to demand justice, or dare to advocate human rights, are labeled by the Chinese authorities as “anti-Chinese”, “separatists”, “criminals”, then imprisoned and tortured. Inside Tibet, the freedom of expression is thoroughly crushed.

As I write, the humanitarian crisis in Tibet is an urgent one. It is my hope that in the years following this publication, the Chinese government will have implemented sincere measures to allow greater freedom for the Tibetan people. Doing so is required if the government of China is to gain international legitimacy on the world stage. At present, there has been no movement in this direction and the persecution of Tibetans continues. This local conflict, and the response to it, may have wider ramifications for our global community as a whole. In an interdependent global society, our choices can make a difference for those deprived of human rights even from far away. Our ignorance and our failure to take positive steps to influence such social situations, leave behind those who are dominated, oppressed, or imprisoned.

It was in Dharamsala, India, that I volunteered for the Tibetan Government-in-Exile, at the Department of Information and International Relations (DIIR). I also studied at the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives. I enjoyed a blissful year working on various photography projects, studying Tibetan Buddhist philosophy, traveling across Northern India, and developing artwork. All of these activities contributed to a greater personal understanding and a more informed view of Tibetan life, culture, and the Tibetan political situation. I gained an appreciation of the immense challenges that the Tibetan people are faced with.

The teachings of Siddhartha Guatama, the historical Buddha, introduced to me when I was in college by a teacher and good friend, had a great impact on my thinking even before I ever met a person who was Buddhist. While I am skeptical about religious dogma and metaphysical claims, the reason-centered philosophy of Buddhism, as found in the Four Noble Truths, made clear practical sense to me. It transformed my perspective and in many ways, my life. There is an emphasis placed on testing Buddhist insights with reality through personal experience, detached observation, and critical investigation. The teaching encourages making “a light of oneself” and not to rely on blind faith. In Dharamsala, I deepened my understanding and my confidence directly, listening to real, living teachers who shared a long line of ancient knowledge and great reflective insight. I was introduced to great minds of the past such as Nagarjuna, Shantideva, Milarepa, and Tsongkhapa.

Initially my intention was to concentrate on Tibetan language and Tibetan Buddhism. Unfortunately, I couldn't keep up in the Tibetan language class. I was having too much of a good time at work. In our video and photography section, Lobsang Tsultrim Jeshong, a.k.a. “Uncle”, was the chief. The other staff was a person who had only arrived several months earlier from Lhasa, Kalsang Namgyal. Our work often involved photographing and filming various Tibetan events of political and cultural significance.

Uncle and Kalsang were a lot of fun to be around and work with. They both have a great sense of