

# འགྲོ་གྲུབ་སྐྱེད་པ།

## Preparing to Leave

My father experienced the worst of human nature in war and in prison. He is who he is because of those experiences. His practice of Buddhism is unwavering.

In contrast with the non-violent actions of Tibetan Buddhist people the Chinese Government seems to have sanctioned brutality within the ranks of their army. On the streets of Lhasa the faces of the young soldiers are blank, they are part of a huge machine that has been told to behave in a certain way.

Young Tibetans have been at the butt of rifles for a long time, which may be a reason for the expression of their anguish in the uprising of 2008. Ultimately they are young men set against each other by the decisions of a government. The military dictatorship and the distress of the youth exist side by side. When people tell me that change is not possible because China is too strong, I tell them that the good thing about the Communist Party is that you only have to change the minds of a few hundred people, to change the whole system in Tibet.

On the tenth day Leona and Sophie received their permits. They were given tickets to Lhasa for dawn the next morning. The door to Tibet had been finally opened to them too. We had all made it in. After these initial obstructions our commitment to staying together and going to Sok was much stronger than it had previously been. However, the travel agency had told the women that they had permission to enter the city but to go no further without seeking an extra permit in Lhasa. They had already spent ten extra days obtaining the first permit and knew that they would most likely spend weeks getting permission to travel to Sok and to Samye, if it were given at all. Neither of them wanted to go against the rules but their yearning to travel with Pala and us outside Lhasa, was greater.

I was aware that my father needed to make a quick decision about whether to leave. People offered to take us but rather than put them in danger we decided to hire a taxi in which I would be their Tibetan tour guide, but first they needed to acclimatise. Flying into high altitude is hard on the physical body.

Sophie told me later that she was approached by a young monk in the back streets of Lhasa, thanked for being Australian and taken into the Ramoche Temple. The young monk led her into the meditation hall in which at least 500 hundred men were chanting and then he disappeared. Unsure of what to do she sat with them for a while before following some Chinese tourists to the back of the shrine where the Chinese pilgrims were anointed with sacred water. I had said to her the day before, as we walked around the Jokhang Temple, that deep Buddhist practice might no longer be possible in Tibet. However, she told me that the monks created the most extraordinary force through their chanting. She had not thought that the generation of higher qualities could be made tangible or strong, so the experience was a surprise to her. It is for this reason that many people say success in Tibet will bring success to other places in the world, because it will be an example of the power of non-violence. In Lhasa this debate between those who support guns and military force and those who support love and compassion has been going on for many years.

In the shrine of the Ramoche Monastery is the image of Buddha aged eight in the form of the Mikyo Dorjee, the statue bought with the Nepalese Princess. Unlike the Jowo Sakyamuni, the Mikyo Dorjee was hacked into two pieces in the Cultural Revolution. Half of the statue was left behind but the top half was ultimately found by Rinbhur Tulku in the Gu Kung (Old palace) in Beijing in December 1982. The torso had been transferred from a Chinese foundry in 1972 and lay amongst hundreds of other broken statues. Many of the Chinese people involved were incredibly happy to see some of Tibet's surviving statues and the torso of the true image of Buddha make their return to Tibet.

