

A Diary from Reform Through Re-education Center in Sog County

Part 1

Enjoying my rights within the boundary of law, I went to Qinghai [Province] to study for my fatherland. However in July 1, 2017, I was accused of breaking the law [by studying in Qinghai] and forced to leave the academy and return home. My parents and siblings were warned that if I did not return home voluntarily, they would face imprisonment, their children would be barred from attending schools, and the family would not be allowed to collect *Yartsa Gunbu* (caterpillar fungus, which is the main annual income for Tibetan families in the region.) Under such circumstance, I had no choice but to come back.

Upon returning [to Sog], the officials from National Security Office took me to a newly built prison called Reform Through Re-education Center (*Lobso Yo-srang Tenay Khang*). Besides my clothes, a towel, toothbrush and toothpaste, I was not allowed to bring any other articles, such as food, books and so on. As I entered [the center] some women in military uniform came down. When they saw the National Security official, they all sat down together. When he spoke to them, they all said together, yes sir, yes sir. I thought that was rather strange.

Before I was taken in, the man told me: “You are going to a school, not to a prison.” Then he put his hand on my head and said, “Now you are my student. I am going to give you a supreme tantric initiation” (a sarcastic comment about what Tibetan lamas might do to their students). Saying this, he put me into a police car and took me [to the center]. Later I learned that all those women in military uniform were actually [detained] nuns.

I was then made to stand next to a wall without doing any movement for three hours, facing to a wall. When I slowly looked from the corners of my eyes, I saw some men and women in military uniform walking through the hallway on the first floor. They also looked at me from the corners of their eyes. I was on the second floor. It was a two-story building.

After three hours, I was taken to the director’s office. His name was Nyima Tsering, from Phenpo. He scolded at me. “Stupid, where did you go and what did you learn,” he questioned. I told him the name of the place in Qinghai where I went [to study] and what I learned there. He asked me many other questions, including if I saw His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s photos or audios and that if I had brought any of them with me when I came back. I replied his questions. He was very angry, punched on his desk and cursed me.

Then he told me to leave. A man who led me out gave me a military uniform. He told me I had to pay 150 yuan for it. I gave him the money. Then he led me to a cell. There were six people in it. One of them was a cell watchman. The rest were four monks and one layman. One of the monks was said to be an abbot [of a monastery]. I didn’t know any of them. “Now you stay here” said the man who took me. He was also a prisoner and one of the classroom managers in the prison.

After the man left, the cell watchman asked what my name was and where I had been to, and wrote them down. He then asked me: “Do you trust the Communist Party?” I didn’t give the

answer right away. I saw from the corner of my eyes that the others [in the cell] were signaling me to answer. Then I said, “Yes.” I was told that if I didn’t learn the Chinese national anthem, one Chinese song, and Tseten Dolma’s song called the “Sun and Moon are Brothers who Share the Same Mother,” in three days, I would face severe consequences.

After a few days, I realized that the lives in this place was far from that of a school. This was not a school at all. Aside from a few laypeople, the majority of them were monks and nuns who had been to study in Qinghai. As soon as we got up in the morning, we had to run. It was mandatory for everyone to do. Many sickly and elderly nuns would collapse on the ground. Initially one person was allowed to help them [to stand up], but eventually no one was allowed to help them. If someone tried to help them he/she would be tortured.

If one single person showed an attitude, everyone suffered from the consequences. We were not allowed to eat food [as punishment]. So, even though the anger of fire burned inside, no one would let the smoke of it come out through their mouth (a Tibetan saying of bottling up anger). This eventually caused many people to develop heart diseases. After this [running exercise], we would get some tsampa (roasted barley floor) and black tea. The tsampa was very old. It smelled dusty and contains dust, dead bugs, and pieces of rocks. There was nothing else to eat. So all the monks and nuns would eat the dusty tsampa silently.

After this, we had to attend a class. This class was designed to mainly denounce us, and to denounce His Holiness the Dalai Lama. It taught us some random legal education, too, but nothing useful. They sometimes acted as children. A big nation denouncing behind an old lama living so far away was both cryable and laughable.

After allowing us to stay for a moment in the cell to eat the tsampa right before noon, we again had to go outside and stand under the sun without making a single movement. If one makes a tiny move, a number of soldiers would come and beat him/her. The soldiers seemed to enjoy this and were happy to see someone move his/her body. When that happens, with smiles on their faces, they scrambled on inmates and beat them. It seemed they were waiting for an opportunity to beat people.

In the night, sometimes we had to attend the so-called class, which is similar to the struggle sessions in 1959. Sometimes we had to do military exercises. It was very sad to look at some elderly nuns and monks. Because they didn’t understand the Chinese language and were physically weak, they became subject to torture. Many nuns became unconscious [from torture]. Sometimes when nuns became unconscious, the prison guards took them inside and fondled their breasts and every parts of body. I witnessed this myself.

Part 2

One time an old nun who made a little mistake in turning to the right direction and match the steps with others, the soldiers tortured her. Due to her age and unwell, she was unable to follow their commands. It was really pity. We all wished if we could do something but there was nothing we could do.

It was so painful to see the old nun being torture. Even when they tortured me later, I didn't experience that kind of pain. Why were we unable to say something then? If we had known the situation after being released would be this bad, we would have rebelled then. If they persecuted us all, then let it be. The method they used to suppress us was to persecute everyone when one person showed a small attitude. If they didn't do that, I think many of us would have risen up.

There was a time when nuns became unconscious the prison guards would compete among themselves to get them first and take them away. Who knows what they did to them. I heard that some young officers were seen pressing nuns under them in their bedrooms. It was unbearable to see the way the monks and nuns were tortured. But not everyone was tortured. Those who the officials didn't like would be captured and tortured with electronic devices. When they become unconscious, they would splash water on their faces to regain their consciousness. After doing that for a long time, they would use a black rubber tube as well as electronic button to torture people. The bruised bodies of the prisoners turned into blue and black color and they become half-dead. For some strange reason, their bones were not broken. However, after I was released, I heard that some monks had broken hands from torture.

In the night, when we didn't get up right away after they blew whistle, they would torture us. Following the whistle, we had to carry our bedding on our back and run for a couple hours. As we ran, they would beat us with electronic [button]. Sometimes there would be one whistle blow for a night and other times twice, and sometimes there was no whistle blowing. Eventually most people went to bed with their clothes on, taking only their shoes off.

Sometimes we were allowed to wash clothes. During this time most of the prison guards made the monks and nuns to wash their clothes, too. The guards also let the monks and nuns to cook for them and clean their rooms. They told us that we were animals, not humans.

Interestingly we would asked them [more intellectual] questions that they could never answer. We could read and write better than they did. When they could not answer our questions, they would just tell us, "shut up."

When we ate the tsampa we were given, it made our stomach ache and we had to go to bathroom many times. But we were only allowed to go to bathroom for a limited time. So, we were afraid to eat that tsampa. Yet if we didn't eat it, we would die from starvation. There were times I was so hungry that I picked up their (officials) leftover food from the trashcans. Eventually we got used to that tsampa.

If one person had shown a tiny attitude, they would cut food for everyone. So, we had to do everything they demanded, slithering like a snake, hoping like a frog, and running like water birds. After about four months of imprisonment, I was sent out to the society.

After we were released, some of us have to go to local police station everyday to register our names. Some people have to go every three days and some once in a week. While we go to police station to register our names, we are ordered to clean their offices, outside building, wash their clothes and dishes. We are not allowed to go to monastery to live, neither are we allowed to

visit families to perform rites for them. We are straightly banned to travel to other counties, other prefectures or other cities. Our IDs are kept at the National Security Office.

It has been about one year and three months since we have been under such restriction in which our movement, our freedom to study or to work have been banned. No matter how sweetly the officials talk about things, we received only restriction and not any support. Living under such a racial discrimination, even breathing is a difficulty matter.

This policy of racial discrimination cannot resolve the issues of Chinese and Tibetan people. Instead, it creates a greater conflict between the Chinese and Tibetan people. If unity is sought for, then all the barbaric and shameless policy on Tibet must be reformed, and [they] must trust His Holiness the Dalai Lama's Middle Way Approach, and enter into a dialogue. That is the only path that there is now. If, instead, the policy of racial discrimination that seeks to destroy the Tibetan Buddhism, culture and language continues, the problem will go from worse to worst. Also, occupying the grassland of Tibetan nomads, relocating a massive number of Chinese in Tibet, mining Tibet's minerals that destroys the Tibet's natural environment, the pain and wound in Tibetan people's mind will grow bigger.

Tibetans are human beings and therefore we need freedom for faith, movement, livelihood, business, education and so on. Without this, no matter how much money [Beijing] spends to attempt buying [Tibetan loyalty] they can never buy Tibetan people's hearts. Thus not giving us a freedom to study is undoubtedly an extreme repressive, barbaric and lowly policy.

We were forcefully taken [out of academy] and imprisoned under an accusation of breaking law. But in reality their decision was not based on the nation's law. If we had broken the law, just tell us what article of the law that we have broken.

I wished to write a full account of daily activities while I was still in prison, but I couldn't do that then. I regret that what I wrote now represents only a portion [of what happened in prison], not a full account. I can't even remember the details of what happened everyday [during the detention]. I thought about asking other friends, but I decided not to do that because firstly I wasn't sure if they would agree [to share with me their account] and secondly I had to consider the security and so on. However, what I wrote here cannot be an illegal act because they (the officials) are the ones who conducted the deeds and if they didn't break laws by doing that, then why just writing about what they did would break the law?

VOA has learned that the author was a monk who went to study Buddhism in a Tibetan area outside Tibetan Autonomous Region (presumably in a monastery, although we don't know which monastery).