

BODHI TIMES

FOUNDING PATRON: HIS HOLINESS XIV DALAI LAMA

DECEMBER 1991

P.O. BOX 7000-GRD, REDONDO BEACH, CALIFORNIA 90277

BODHI PROJECTS STRIVE TO IMPROVE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR TIBETANS IN EXILE

In Hunsur, a dry, dusty Tibetan settlement carved from the jungle near Mysore in South India, BODHI conducted an impromptu cooking/nutrition/composting class for Ningo, 40-year-old mother of six and local Tibetan Women's Association representative. We showed Ningo how to prepare, steam and serve pumpkin, which Tibetans consider too sweet for human consumption and feed to their cattle. Pumpkin is rich in betacarotene and excellent for digestive disorders, which the Tibetan Health Department ranks as one of the most urgent health problems facing the community. We adapted a momo steamer, a utensil found in every Tibetan kitchen which is used to make traditional, meat-filled dumplings. We showed Ningo how to mash pumpkin to serve to infants, the infirm and the elderly.

We also taught her about steaming vegetables in general and how to make them palatable. After eating the results of her labors, Ningo wanted to share this new information with other women in the community. Since no long-term, on-site, day-to-day reinforcement has been done, we are not certain about the permanent effects of this class. Tibetans in Hunsur already have an

abundance of pumpkins and the requisite preparation utensils; therefore, learning to eat and enjoy pumpkins requires no financial investment or extra work in harvesting or going to market.

FOOD AND HEALTH

Health education is vital to proper nutrition. In old Tibet, the harsh environment restricted diet. In exile, the range of foods available is much broader, although the kinds of foods consumed is small. Malnutrition appears to be minimal. Few Tibetans are vegetarians, although we met two who are striving for a meatless diet after hearing the Dalai Lama's teaching

that vegetarianism is a desirable goal. They are a mother and son who have converted their popular McLeod Ganj restaurant to vegetarian fare exclusively.

FOOD AND CULTURAL SURVIVAL

As every food-lover knows, food is basic to cultural survival. Tibetans are facing cultural extinction in their own land and cultural dilution in a diaspora. Settlements on the Indian subcontinent seem to be the only pure repositories of Tibetan culture. By keeping the home fires burning, they light the way to cultural survival. How can we ask them to give up their buttered and

salted tea, momos and spicy, fried foods? This is not a rhetorical question. Please let us know your thoughts. The traditional dietary fare of highland Tibet is pathetically inappropriate for the disease-infested lowlands of India.

On the other hand, so what? We met and/or heard of Tibetans not born in India who are extremely depressed about their prolonged exile. Are they Tibet's generation of sacrificial lambs? If so, a life cut short by inappropriate nutritional habits may be the last thing on their minds. . . and a traditional diet one of their comforts.



Ningo cutting pumpkin

THE BIRTH OF BODHI

Benevolent Organisation for Development, Health & Insight (BODHI) sprang from the heart of Dr. Colin Butler during his volunteer medical work in Nepal and Nigeria in 1985. He felt that Western Buddhists spend too much time talking about compassion and not enough time acting upon it. BODHI crystallized in Los Angeles in 1989, during Kalachakra teachings and initiation by His Holiness XIV Dalai Lama. Later that year, His Holiness accepted BODHI's request to become its founding patron. In 1990, Dr. Maurice King of Leeds University, England, one of the fathers of third world medicine, became our public health advisor. We feel doubly blessed.

BODHI provides a framework for altruistic people worldwide who are not comfortable working in traditional religious or secular organizations. No religious affiliation is necessary to work with BODHI. We ask only for a kind heart.

Three things make us different from other aid organizations: 1) our Buddhist orientation; 2) our emphasis on the sustainability of all projects, which need to be ecologically and environmentally considerate. People affected need to participate in defining the problems and their resolutions; and 3) the fact that we are a uniquely structured international organization. Autonomous branches are being established in Australia, India, the UK, Holland, Sweden and other European countries. We encourage the formation of autonomous chapters everywhere. Dr. Butler is Australian. Susan Woldenberg, BODHI's co-founder, is American. BODHI is incorporated in California. BODHI wants to be a tree providing support to its branches and sustenance to those who gather beneath its leaves—all working together to utilize skillful means in helping sentient beings, in the developed as well as the developing world.



His Holiness XIV Dalai Lama discusses BODHI projects with Dr. Colin Butler and Susan Woldenberg in Dharamsala, India.

BODHI'S FOCUS

Our projects focus on health, education and the environment, which we feel are interdependent. The planet faces

interlocked crises of overpopulation, poverty and environmental destruction. BODHI believes that we must take a

Continued BODHI's Focus

stand to face these crises. Humankind has the responsibility and capacity to do so for future generations, for itself and for all the world's inhabitants.

BODHI's first projects are among Tibetan refugees in India and Nepal, not only because the Dalai Lama is our founding patron but also because we feel that "Tibet" symbolizes what the world is in danger of losing culturally, philosophically and environmentally.

Our health objectives are threefold: to support provision of health services, to influence the policy environment and to support research. Our main health objectives of primary health care, health education and tuberculosis control are in the service area. We will focus here initially. We intend to pursue funds to establish cost-effective pilot projects to improve health sustainably. By "sustainably" we mean the eventual transmission of skills sufficient to enable the continuation of a program with minimal or no external expertise and finances. Our goal is to help Tibetans gain knowledge that they can use in exile and when they return to their homeland.

We will discuss educational and environmental objectives in the future newsletters.

INDIA FIELD RESEARCH

Dr. Colin Butler and Susan Woldenberg went to India October-December, 1990 to explore the needs, focussing on health, of Tibetans refugees in India. With Dr. Kathy Holloway's help, BODHI visited 11 of the more than 50 Tibetan refugee settlements scattered throughout India. Findings indicate that tuberculosis (TB) and health education are the two major health problems facing Tibetans in India. We met with many Indian and Tibetan government officials, environmentalists and aid representatives, as well as representatives of the Western benevolent world.

HEALTH EDUCATION IN MONASTERIES AND NUNNERIES

One of Tibet's unique characteristics prior to exile was its high percentage of monks and nuns. They were among the most educated and influential members of the community. In exile, their status continues to be high, although the example of hygiene they set for the community is poor.

Our research uncovered some disquieting facts. Monks and nuns are not particularly healthy. Poor sanitation, hygiene and unhealthy diets combine to make monks old at 60 and elderly at 70. What a tragic loss of a valuable resource! They spend decades studying, only to have their teaching lives cut short by strokes, heart disease, TB, dental disease, cancer and digestive disorders.

In exile, Tibetans continue to support large monastic communities in order to maintain their cultural heritage and the depth of their religious tradition. This places additional constraints upon the community. To maximize use of Tibetan resources, we think that the clergy's role should be broadened.

Unlike their Christian counterparts, few Tibetan clergy serve in the community, except for strictly religious purposes. His Holiness frequently has praised the role which Christian clergy play in their communities.

A monastic advisor writes from India that a large number of monks have just arrived from Tibet. They face health problems due to lack of knowledge about nutrition and disease prevention and different climatic conditions (many, Tibetans contracted and succumbed to tuberculosis when they fled Tibet in the early 1960's. See our next newsletter.). Our advisor writes:

"I suggest that to overcome our health problems, your group could sponsor a monk in health training, who could work as a health worker and give counselling and guidance for better health care and prevention of disease in its initial stage, etc. Moreover, on nutrition we still continue the food system of Tibet which is unsuitable for the hot climate of India."

Our advisor goes on to say that videos on nutrition and hygiene would make effective teaching aids.

Ultimately, we'd like to introduce regular health education classes into the monasteries and nunneries and pilot programs to train clergy to serve practically as well as spiritually in the community. When we told him about our health education ideas, the Dalai Lama broke into a wide smile and said, "Excellent! Excellent!" Not all monks and nuns are studiously inclined. No two snowflakes are the same, as His Holiness told us; neither are all monks and nuns from the Land of Snows. We're excited about this and would love to hear your comments, ideas and suggestions.

Imposing Western values is antithetical to BODHI's philosophy; we would not pursue this course of action had we not the enthusiastic support of His Holiness XIV Dalai Lama and several members of the monastic community.

BODHI IN INDIA

▲ In Hunsur, BODHI funds an educational project in which an elderly yak herder passes along to young people his skill in making the slingshots used in yak herding and the popular yak dance. This preserves one aspect of traditional Tibetan culture as well as providing a dignified income to an elderly person.

▲ We instructed the Tibetan Women's Association representative in Bylakuppe about family planning, especially natural family planning.

▲ Dr. Butler spoke at the Mental Peace and Global Health Conference in Dharamsala about the importance of ecological factors in public health.

▲ Dr. Holloway saw many patients and taught health education, including to the monks at Namgyal Monastery in Dharamsala.

BODHI COMMUNICATIONS

▲ Articles have been published in Sweden, Thailand, Singapore and the United States. Others have been submitted in Australia and Britain.

▲ In ten countries on four continents, we have made contact with many groups and individuals working in social justice, development and the environment, as well as with Tibetan support groups and Buddhist communities.

THANK YOU

Thanks are in order to some BODHI friends: Marty Rubin, for your continuing support and for sponsoring most of this newsletter; anonymous, for your generosity; Helen Mueller, for donating your banking expertise; anonymous for your invaluable accounting advice; Nancy Nason and the Santa Monica School District for children's books and Dorothy Randall at Schering-Plough Laboratory for drugs.

BODHI TIMES is the periodic newsletter of Benevolent Organisation for Development, Health & Insight.

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U.S. donations are tax deductible

*A non-profit organization
Printed on recycled paper*

OTHER BODHI ENDEAVORS

BODHI BOOKS & LIBRARY PROJECT

Five large boxes of used children's books and textbooks have been donated and are ready to be shipped to Bylakuppe and Kollegal in South India. Tibetan children in India need many more books of all kinds.

Settlers in Hunsur and Kollegal have requested our help in setting up adult libraries. Please help us collect new and used books. Arrange to get them to our Los Angeles office and we'll get them to the settlements in India. Among the publications that Tibetans in Hunsur have requested are books on organic gardening and farming, nutrition, crafts, do-it-yourself, carpentry, cottage industry crafts and composting. Consider a magazine subscription. Maybe your favorite bookstore has overstocks or would like to participate in our program.

Please contact Kathy Lechowicz, our Project Director, for further information.

WILD DOG STERILIZATION PROGRAM

In old Tibet, people kept dogs to guard their property. Many travellers' tales recount the ferocity of these animals; superstitions abound concerning their human-like barking and carnivorous behavior. In exile, dogs serve a similar purpose, although with less ferocity. A lap-top Lhasa Apso is hardly as menacing as a man-eating mastiff howling in the moonlight on the wind-swept steppes of central Asia.

Wild dogs are a problem in the southern settlements and indeed in much of India. There are many wild dog bites, each potentially transmitting rabies, but few deaths from rabies. As rabies is endemic in India, there is always uncertainty regarding the administration of the scarce rabies vaccine. As Buddhists, Tibetans don't want to kill these animals, although they are sometimes forced to do so. Consequently, their settlements are overrun with wild dogs,

who present health problems all out of proportion to their numbers. They transmit parasites, distemper and fleas as well as the dreaded rabies. When hungry, they attack humans.

What to do? BODHI will begin by sterilizing the approximately 100 male wild dogs and some domestic animals at Dhonden Ling, a remote settlement near Kollegal in South India. Kollegal is above the relentless light flatlands, in the grayer and greener Nilgiri foothills. Coffee and tea plantations ribbon the horizon, bounded by mountains just visible through the mist.

We are currently investigating the most sustainable way to implement this program. We'll report our findings to you in the next newsletter.



HEALTH REPORT AVAILABLE

A report of our 1990 trip to India is available for US\$7 (cost of production and postage). Please remit in US funds.

COMMUNITY BULLETIN BOARD

Please keep us posted of your activities, needs and desires so that we may share them with other readers in future newsletters.

NEXT EDITION OF BODHI TIMES

Tuberculosis is one of our priorities. We will address it in our next newsletter.

WE NEED

We are looking for volunteers to help with the business and art of running a non-profit organization. Our current needs include:

- An artist to design and make camera-ready a logo
- 2 fax machines
- Attorneys worldwide knowledgeable in non-profit work
- Experienced fundraisers
- Corporate and individual sponsors
- Feedback from you. Your involvement is crucial for us. BODHI's strength lies in committed, action-oriented people.

PLEASE— WE NEED YOUR HELP

BODHI has been able to begin some exciting and innovative programs to benefit Tibetan refugees in India. We need your donations to continue these efforts. We can do so much more if you'll support us with a contribution.

Please send us your check, payable in US dollars to:

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Tsering Dolma and Tenzin Nyiboom, Tibetan mother and child.