

Appendix E:

“The Dali Lama and The Oracle”

In his autobiography, *Freedom in Exile*, His Holiness the Dalai Lama writes:

For hundreds of years now, it has been traditional for the Dalai Lama, and the Government, to consult Nechung during the New Year festivals. In addition, he might well be called upon at other times if either have specific queries. I myself have dealings with him several times a year. This may sound far-fetched to twentieth-century western readers. Even some Tibetans, mostly those who consider themselves 'progressive', have misgivings about my continued use of this ancient method of intelligence gathering.

However, I do so for the simple reason that as I look back over the many occasions when I have asked questions of the oracle, on each one of them time has proved that his answer was correct. This is not to say that I rely solely on the oracle's advice. I do not. I seek his opinion in the same way as I seek the opinion of my Cabinet and just as I seek the opinion of my own conscience. I consider the gods to be my 'upper house'. The Kashag constitutes my lower house. Like any other leader, I consult both before making a decision on affairs of state. Moreover, sometimes, in addition to Nechung's counsel, I also take into consideration certain prophecies.

In one respect, the responsibility of Nechung and the responsibility of the Dalai Lama towards Tibet are the same, though we act in different ways. My task that of leadership, is peaceful. His, in his capacity as protector and defender, is wrathful.

However, although our functions are similar, my relationship with Nechung is that of commander to lieutenant: I never bow down to him. It is for Nechung to bow to the Dalai Lama. Yet we are very close, friends almost. When I was small, it was touching. Nechung liked me a lot and always took great care of me. For example, if he noticed that I had dressed carelessly or improperly, he would come over and rearrange my shirt, adjust my robe and so on.

Nechung has always shown respect for me. Even when his relations with the Government have deteriorated, as they did during the last few years of the Regency, he invariably responds enthusiastically whenever asked anything about me. At the same time, his replies to questions about government policy can be crushing. Sometimes he just responds with a burst of sarcastic laughter. I well

remember a particular incident that occurred when I was about fourteen. Nechung was asked a question about China.

Rather than answer it directly, the Kuten turned towards the East and began bending forward violently. It was frightening to watch, knowing that this movement combined with the weight of the massive helmet he wore on his head would be enough to snap his neck. He did it at least fifteen times, leaving no one in any doubt about where the danger lay.

Dealing with Nechung is by no means easy. It takes time and patience during each encounter before he will open up. He is very reserved and austere, just as you would imagine a grand old man of ancient times to be. Nor does he bother with minor matters: his interest is only in the larger issues, so it pays to frame questions accordingly. He also has definite likes and dislikes, but he does not show them very readily.

Nechung has his own monastery in Dharamsala, but usually he comes to me. On formal occasions, the Kuten is dressed in an elaborate costume consisting of several layers of clothing topped by a highly ornate robe of golden silk brocade, which is covered with ancient designs in red and blue, and green and yellow. On his chest, he wears a circular mirror, which is surrounded by clusters of turquoise and amethyst, its polished steel flashing with the Sanskrit mantra corresponding to Dorje Drakden.

Before the proceedings begin, he also puts on a sort of harness, which supports four flags and three victory banners. Altogether, this outfit weighs more than seventy pounds and the medium, when not in trance, can hardly walk in it.

Video

<http://video.dorjeshugden.com/videos/oracle-dalai.flv>