

About Chülen

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Oliver Leick (left) with Dr Sherab

Oliver Leick interviews Dr. Tenzin Sherab, a doctor of Tibetan medicine, about making chülen for the Dzogchen Community and about his medical practice in Nepal. The interview took place at the Shang Shung Institute in Austria, August 2019.

Shang Shung Institute: Dear Dr. Sherab, welcome here to Yeselling, Shang Shung Institute Austria. I am very happy that you accepted my invitation. Could you tell us a bit about yourself?

Dr. Sherab: Tashi delegs, Oliver. I am very happy to be with you. My name is Sherab Tenzin and I am from Bhutan. I studied in Darjeeling with Dr. Trogawa Rinpoche at the Chagpori Tibetan

Medical Institute. Currently I am living and practicing mainly in Nepal and sometimes in Bhutan, too.

SSI: The International Dzogchen Community has always applied the practice of Mandarava and in this practice we also use the Mandarava chülen pills, but not many people in the Dzogchen Community know that you made all these chülen pills.

Dr. S.: The fact that I met Rinpoche is actually just the blessing of Rinpoche or of Mandarava. It is really so incredible that I can hardly explain it.

In 2000 my teacher Trogawa Rinpoche asked me to research some medical herbs in the nearby mountain areas. At that time, I met one of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu's students holding a book of the Mandarava practice written by Rinpoche. In this book there were seven different kinds of formula for the chülen pills. Rinpoche's student told me about Rinpoche, and finally he asked me if I could make these chülen pills for Rinpoche. That request was like something coming from the sky (laughs). As this person was going trekking, he gave me the book in the meantime, so that I could read it. I read all the instructions for making the chülen pills, but although I read it several times, it was not 100% clear to me and I had many doubts.

I have some knowledge and intellectual background about how to make medicines and also chülen so I chose number six as I understood that while some people may practice and take the chülen pills, others might only take the chülen. Then I sent all my doubts and questions to Rinpoche. For example, in his formula Rinpoche mentions kenda, lishi and so on. He also says that one uses shanbil – but there are three different kinds of shanbil.

After some time I received an answer in which he clarified my doubts and suggested what I should do. Based on that I started to make the chülen pills. First I made only one kilo and sent it to Rinpoche. After that I received more information from Rinpoche about how to make the chülen pills. So at the beginning I did not meet Rinpoche personally, but I received his blessing. This was our first connection starting in 2000. From that time on every year I have made these chülen pills, sometimes one kilo, two kilos, three kilos, and finally it was almost 45 kilos. I finally met Rinpoche in Bhutan in 2014. At that time I was in Nepal and heard that Rinpoche was going to Bhutan so I immediately bought my ticket and flew there.

SSI: Did you have a good time in Bhutan?

Dr. S.: Oh yes, it was really a miraculous time. I knew that Rinpoche was coming to Bhutan, but not exactly when. However when I arrived at the airport, Rinpoche and many of his students arrived from Delhi just 10 minutes later so I did not leave the airport, but waited there. When Rinpoche arrived, nobody was inside to welcome him, as that is not allowed, one can only welcome him outside. As I knew some of the staff there, with the help of my friend Sonam I immediately arranged to meet him. Rinpoche was not wearing fancy clothes; he was dressed very normally and simply. I was able to offer my khatag to him and I introduced myself. Rinpoche was very happy, too. I helped him to go outside where about 20 or 30 Bhutanese people were waiting with khatag to welcome him. This was the first time I met Rinpoche in person, in Bhutan 2014.

I can say that now, especially after having met Rinpoche, I am much more confident. For three weeks I was Rinpoche's assistant doctor or menpa in Bhutan. Every morning we had breakfast together and I always had so many questions. After the first day Rinpoche gave me the transmission of the entire Mandarava text reading very slowly. Other Bhutanese people were also listening because Rinpoche was giving the lung. On that day, a very special day, Rinpoche also gave me the empowerment in his special way.

As I had many questions related to my doubts, I asked Rinpoche and he replied to my questions. Then next day we went to Tiger's Nest, Paro Taktsang. I always carried some tea with me and when Rinpoche rested, I offered tea to him. Our trip was really successful. Rinpoche was singing, dancing, teaching – it was really incredible, and during all that time I was able to clarify all my doubts with Rinpoche.

SSI: Can you explain a bit about chülen pills in general?

Dr. S.: Well, my chülen pills are different sizes, especially after the earthquake in Nepal. Some people are very focused on having them the same size and color, but in our traditional way that is not so important because the plants grow differently and in different places therefore the color can change. And we do not add anything to affect the color.

During the earthquake in Nepal my pharmacy was completely destroyed and I had to go to another place to make the chülen pills, and therefore the size of the pills was not always the same. But I think that these aspects are not so important. What is important is the correct use of the ingredients.

SSI: Where do you get your herbs from?

Dr. S.: We collect them mainly in Tibet, but also in Nepal and in Bhutan. Shanbil, for example, is easier to get in Bhutan, while it is much more difficult to get it in Tibet or in Nepal.

SSI: You mentioned that your pharmacy was completely destroyed during the earthquake. Have you rebuilt it?

Dr. S.: I had a really beautiful, traditional Nepali mud house that was more than 100 years old. I really liked it as it was very natural and that is important because we always connect our inner and our outer dimensions with the five elements. Now we have built a completely new house, again in a natural way, but with bricks. The house has three floors, and now we can work even better than before.

SSI: Could you tell us about your clinic in Parphing, Nepal?

Dr. S.: We have a healing center in Parphing and a kind of spa in Boudhanath near the stupa. I started the healing center based on the feedback of many people coming to my clinic. They told me that either they found good doctors but no nice place to stay, or a good place to stay but with no

doctors or medicine.

Then I thought that I could do something for people – not big, but small and comfortable. I met the parents of one of my students who supported us and in that way my wife and I started the healing center in Parphing in 2007. In our healing center people can come and totally relax. It is small, about 15 people can stay there, there is a Tibetan doctor and we offer traditional Tibetan Ku Nye massage and Tibetan and hot baths with five nectars, dutsi nga. Next to our center we have a beautiful vegetable garden and we cook pure vegetarian food for our patients. Many people from the Dzogchen Community, especially Rinpoche's students from Russia, come and relax in this quiet place.

We also have a company called "Pure Vision Sorig" registered in Nepal with a small branch in Bhutan. In Bhutan we focus more on the planting of medical herbs, as it is easier to get land there and the nature is fresher and cleaner. But also in Parphing, next to our healing center we have a plantation. Our main goal is not only to make medicine for our patients, but also to preserve the herbs and nature for the future. This has always been my main goal and for that reason I am always thinking about plantation work.

Gradually our work has expanded. Based on the feedback of patients, mostly foreigners, we understood that not everybody likes the taste of our natural herbal pills, as they are not sweet. I reflected on that and remembered what His Holiness said in 1996 when I graduated. "Now you have graduated in Tibetan Medicine – I am so happy for you. Have you already passed all the exams?" Of course, everyone had passed and everyone was waiting to receive some blessing and the certificate from His Holiness. But His Holiness continued: "No, your exam is starting from tomorrow. You will work with patients. It will be the patients who examine you. Up to now you have just finished reading and studying books. But from tomorrow on, the patients will give you the real exam." I have always kept that advice in my mind.

Also my medical teacher, Dr. Trogawa told me to develop tang, a medicinal tea for detoxification. So we developed Daknang or extracts, which are based on Tibetan medicine. That actually is not new, as in traditional Tibetan medicine we have eight categories for making medicines: tang, che, rilbu, degu, menmar, telmin, kenda, and menchang. Extracts are included in tang or menchang or decoction.

Sasha and Alar from Riga supported us in our four-year research on how we could use these extracts in the Western medical system and in 2018 we registered our company in Riga, Latvia. We are happy that now we can offer Daknang mainly in our clinic in Nepal and in Riga, and slowly we are growing all over the world.

SSI: On behalf of the Atiyoga Foundation I think that it would be very beneficial for everyone if we could collaborate in some way with you.

Dr.S.: Yes, this is really a very good idea. Our main interest is not doing business, but to help people and collaboration with the Dzogchen Community and Atiyoga Foundation, really important as we really had a good connection with Chögyal Namkhai Norbu. Our planned collaboration is a great help for Tibetan medicine and at the same time people can have many benefits.

We cannot make all Tibetan medicines in as an extract, only a few. Up to now we have medicines

like Chülen, mentshang, and another for the digestive system, all with good benefits and results.

SSI: The Atiyoga Foundation is really looking forward for our collaboration and I am very sure that it will be very beneficial and fruitful. Thank you Dr. Sherab for coming to the Shang Shung Institute Austria and for giving all this information. I wish you and Daknang all the very best.

Transcribed by Oliver Leick

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