

I am a Tokyo-



born woman who has been trying to apply Buddhist philosophy to the challenges of hectic everyday life in New York City. One day, I heard an incredible story about a Tibetan Buddhist monk who was a political prisoner for 33 years, but finally escaped. Later, I read his remarkable

autobiography [The Autobiography of a Tibetan Monk](#) - and was hooked. Palden Gyatso's traumatic life story, intertwined as it is with the tragedy of Tibet, began haunting me. Looking at his gentle face on the book cover, seeing him smile tenderly with hands joined in prayer, I struggled to reconcile this warm presence with the bitter life recounted in the book. I tried to imagine how a return to relative normalcy was even possible after spending more than half his life under nightmare conditions. How could he still smile with such compassion? It put the concerns of my small life in the big city into a completely different perspective.

Inside of three months I was in Dharamsala with my film crew, and I found Palden Gyatso. Palden is now 75 years old and lives alone. His kindness and gentle manner are not some Tantric magic, but spring from simple, daily Buddhist practice cultivated over a lifetime - an insistence on seeing the Buddha-nature of all sentient beings, and working for their liberation unto his last breath. In our conversations, he was very humble regarding his own story, seeming almost removed from the events at times. However, reminiscences about friends starved or tortured to death, driven to suicide or still in prison, caused him to break down into heart-rending sobs: this is a legacy of pain beyond pain.

Today, open international support of Tibet is declining in the face of a gold rush into the ascendant Chinese economy. World leaders do not feel they can "afford" to challenge Beijing on the basis of human rights, for fear of incurring economic retaliation.

However, Palden Gyatso's life story transcends notions of religion or political movements, and speaks to our entire earthbound condition. He accommodated suffering, but did not capitulate to it; this is not only his triumph, it is a story that needs re-telling in every generation. The pain and war of our own times and minds make this all the more evident.

I passionately believe that this film will bring some small measure of hope to those touched by it.

Makoto Sasa, Director