

Speech by Mr. Tashi Tsering Phuri, Director, Men-Tsee-Khang (Sowa-Rigpa) at the 5th International Congress on Sowa-Rigpa, held at Kathmandu, Nepal from March 1 to 3, 2017

Wed, March 1, 2017

To the organizers of the 5th International Congress on Sowa-Rigpa in the capital of this beautiful Himalayan country of Nepal and many participants from more than 30 countries, I convey my warm greetings.

As announced by the organizers, the motto of the 3-day conference is SOWA-RIGPA IN ACTION, and the theme of my talk is “A Centenary and the future of promoting Sowa-Rigpa World-wide”, which is quite appropriate since Men-Tsee-Khang (Sowa-Rigpa) is close to the conclusion of its very successful Centenary Celebration world-wide, including 3 appearances by His Holiness the XIV Dalai Lama, the first on March 23, 2016 when He was the Chief Guest for the Inaugural Day, the second on December 9 at New Delhi’s Thayagraj Stadium for the “Healthy Body Healthy Mind” conference jointly organized with the Tibet House, New Delhi, and the third on December 14 to graciously lay the foundation stone for Men-Tsee-Khang (Sowa-Rigpa) college on the outskirts of Bangalore in the state of Karnataka in south India. Some of the foreign delegates might know, but for those who don’t, I would mention here with appreciation that the Karnataka State has allocated agricultural land to resettle Tibetan refugees in 5 large settlements.

I would like to thank Dr. Nida Chenagtsang and the Congress Organizers for organizing the 3rd and the 5th Congress in Kathmandu. Nepal is very rich in medicinal herbs. Barring a few cities like Kathmandu, most of Nepal’s villages are dispersed in remote areas, and I truly believe that health services from the Sowa-Rigpa practitioners would be more meaningful and affordable, especially dealing with chronic and preventable diseases. Dr. Nida and Sorig Khang International play an effective role, and I urge the concerned to exercise meticulous efforts in this dharmic task. Better late than never, so goes the adage. India has a very rich system of traditional medicines. However, it was only in the seventies that India recognized and started promoting its ancient medical traditions, and that too when the West started taking interest in medicinal herbs. The Nepalese delegates to this congress should take more active role in promoting Sowa-Rigpa rather than airing grievances that Sowa-Rigpa practitioners do not receive the needed funding from the Nepalese government like the practitioners of Ayurveda.

March 1st today is the 3rd day of our Tibetan New Year. These days, most salaried Tibetans celebrate Tibetan New Year only for the first 3 days. The fact that the Director of Men-Tsee-Khang, which is the oldest, largest and most reputable Sowa-Rigpa Institute in India was on the road for the first 2 days of our New Year to address this gathering is a signal to show how important I attach to the laudable tasks of Dr. Nida and his students-friends-volunteers world-wide in the service of Sowa-Rigpa.

When one of our teams concludes Men-Tsee-Khang Centenary Outreach Tours to 5 countries in South America this March and April, we have come to the end of our centenary celebration. Barring 2 countries that we could not tour, for political reasons, all other countries were well-covered as planned. Each team consisted of 1 Sowa-Rigpa doctor, 1 Astro-science Practitioner, and 2 Support staff. With slight variations in the contents of the talks, considering the needs of the sponsors/organizers, Centenary Tour programs covered Exhibition on Sowa-Rigpa and Tibetan Astro-science, Wellness consultation with the Sowa-Rigpa Practitioner, Oral Consultation with our Astro-science Practitioner, Display and sale of our products. One team toured a few cities to the east coast USA and Canada, another team toured a few cities to the west coast, another to a few cities in

Singapore, a few cities in Taiwan, a few cities in Australia, a few cities in Europe, and so on. Men-Tsee-Khang branch clinics in India also did their part with support from the clinic sponsors, well-wishers, and with reinforcement of manpower from the Head Office. Now, that we have gained more experience, more friends, more understandings of the needs of different places, there is certainly no reason to be contented just with the Centenary Celebration, and not carry out Post Centenary Celebrations. For the year 2017, Men-Tsee-Khang will promote 101 Years as “Men-Tsee-Khang Wellness Camps”.

At the Men-Tsee-Khang Centenary Celebration inaugural address on March 23, 2016, I mentioned about an historic event that took place in Tibet in the 8th century. When the Chief Guest, His Holiness the Dalai Lama spoke, he reiterated and said that what I had mentioned was a good thing. Then, He made a point that we often take for granted, and hence lose sight of the opportunities that come our way due to improved communication, willingness of the West to learn ancient and time-tested knowledge of the East, and more willingness from the East to share with the West. For the knowledge of the delegates here and for record, I would like to mention here also. At a time when holistic healing system is receiving more and more appreciation globally, we should be happy that the Sowa-Rigpa tradition stands out as one of the most well-integrated healing systems. During the reign of the 38th Tibetan Emperor Trisong Deutsen in the 8th Century, the first International Medical Conference was held at Samye Monastery, Central Tibet. It was believed to have been participated by many famous physicians from Tibet, India, China, Nepal, Mongolia, Persia, et cetera. Yuthok Yonten Gonpo, the Physician to the Emperor, who is known as the Father of Tibetan Medicine, synthesized the best knowledge of different medical systems, and composed Gyued-Shi or the Four Tantras, the main text studied to this day – in Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, trans-Himalayan states of India, Mongolia, Russia and in other regions. Integration of Buddhist teachings to our medical tradition makes it more significant and truly holistic.

Now, coming to the second part of my talk “The future of promoting Sowa-Rigpa World-wide”, without hesitation, I would like to mention that the future for Sowa-Rigpa is bright and this system is poised well to gather momentum at a fast pace world-wide. For the past 50-60 years, efforts had been taken by a few organizations with the blessing and guidance of a single person, who predicted as early as 1961 a bright future for Sowa-Rigpa. In the recent past, the system Men-Tsee-Khang has been practicing for nearly 60 years in-exile is now being promoted aggressively both by India and China, India as “Sowa-Rigpa” and China as “China’s Tibetan medicine”. Consumer reception for Sowa-Rigpa system world-wide encourages universities and academicians to do research, western pharmaceutical companies come forward for reasons not appreciated in the east and then disappear quickly because they are interested in billions and not in millions. Consumers are willing to pay for herbal treatments, yoga, meditation, et cetera, out of their own pockets, and the Insurance companies cannot afford to lose money because of wise decisions taken by more and more people to become more health conscious.

When His Holiness the Dalai Lama Re-established Men-Tsee-Khang on March 23, 1961, soon after His escape from Tibet, He said, “Right now Men-Tsee-Khang is very small, facing acute problems in terms of finances and man-power. But, some 30-40 years later, Tibetan medicine will speak for itself”. The 3-day International Conference on Tibetan Medicine, held at Dharamsala in 2013 was attended by 230 physicians from 21 countries. During an audience with His Holiness, He said “We saw an opportunity. Therefore, we started Men-Tsee-Khang in 1961”. Since much of future happenings are woven around past, we need to look back, meditate and make statements that are true and fair.

1959 to 1969 had been a dark period in the history of Sowa-Rigpa. In exile, His Holiness the Dalai Lama had just started Men-Tsee-Khang with one doctor, Dr. Yeshe Dhondhen and 4 monks from Namgyal Monastery, to be his students, helpers, and all tasks that one can think of for a small start-up medical college with pharmacy. And, also reaching free herbs to the Tibetan Refugees in the road construction projects in the Kulu Valley and Dalhousie. In Tibet, Sowa-Rigpa and other unique representations of our culture and way of life, were facing massive destructions in the hands of the Communist Chinese. Chagpori Medical College, which was established by the Great 5th Dalai Lama in 1696 was destroyed. Lhasa Men-Tsee-Khang, which was established by the Great 13th Dalai Lama in 1916, which had also been a target was miraculously spared by news coverage of a journalist from Hong Kong. Although Lhasa Men-Tsee-Khang was not destroyed, many of the great doctors were imprisoned for long years, and many died in prisons. Our late doctor, Tenzin Choedrak, Senior Personal Physician to His Holiness the Dalai Lama was imprisoned for 17 years. Also, our late doctor, Lobsang Wangyal, Junior Personal Physician to His Holiness was imprisoned for 14 years. During this period, India did not play any role in the promotion of Sowa-Rigpa. What was prevalent at the time was Men-Tsee-Khang's presence and through the help of Men-Tsee-Khang a few clinics and study for the people of trans-Himalaya.

In the seventies, China stopped destroying the traces of Tibetan medicine in Tibet. At the same time, it took meticulous efforts to discredit Tibetan medicine as nothing but a small sub-sect of the Chinese Traditional Medicine. In India, it was again the Visionary Dalai Lama alone working hard in the promotion of Sowa-Rigpa. When the West took interest in herbal remedies, India started taking interest at snail-pace to promote its rich medical tradition. Genuine Ayurvedic doctors, at the time, were practicing in the villages earning very little to support their families.

In the eighties and nineties, China started promoting Sowa-Rigpa as "China's Tibetan Medicine". There were all round developments nationally and internationally in terms of training, dispensing of herbs, exports, participation in international seminars, et cetera. The steps taken are significant and encouraging, considering that China destroyed a three-century old medical college, imprisoned several doctors for long years, taking efforts to make Tibetan medicine as an insignificant part of the Chinese Traditional medicine, and now, to promoting internationally as "China's Tibetan medicine". During the same period, the Dalai Lama was advising Men-Tsee-Khang for expansion in all directions, emphasizing that our early financial and manpower difficulties have eased. For the past 60 years, Sowa-Rigpa was practiced widely in India banking on the patronage of patients who flock to Men-Tsee-Khang's nearly 60 branch clinics. When recognition for Sowa-Rigpa system was requested by the stake-holders, the matter was quickly brushed aside by big-muscle Ayurvedic doctors, reasoning that Sowa-Rigpa is nothing but an off-shoot of Ayurveda. The Sowa-Rigpa practitioners accept the similarities to Ayurveda and other Indian traditional medicine, but there are more dissimilarities to merit for a separate recognition like the Unani and Siddha systems, which were under Ayurveda until Unani became a distinct Indian medical tradition, followed by Siddha. Today, Siddha practitioners say that Siddha is closer to Sowa-Rigpa than Ayurveda, its mother.

The year 2010 is historic for the Sowa-Rigpa practitioners in India. Sowa-Rigpa system is recognized as a distinct system and different from Ayurveda. The government of India is exercising efforts to assist the concerned State governments and Sowa-Rigpa practitioners for a rapid growth. In the west, this system is popular as Tibetan medicine, because it is the Tibetans, mainly a Visionary Leader, who said in early 1961 that Tibetan medicine will speak for itself some 30-40 years later. Since the government of India is promoting Sowa-Rigpa system in a big way, Men-Tsee-Khang has decided to move its college and hospital to Bangaluru, in the state of Karnataka in south India and expand in a big way. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has graciously made a grant of Rupees

20.0 million, and laid the foundation stone on December 14, 2016. The government of India, AYUSH Ministry and the Karnataka government are together giving a Grant in Aid of Rupees 90.0 million over a time, including Rupees 5.0 million this year. Since the Lead Donors are His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the AYUSH Ministry, and the Karnataka State government, I am sure, more donors will come forward, both from India and Abroad, firmly believing in a noble goal, and Men-Tsee-Khang's ability to see to fruition. For many of the delegates here today, AYUSH is an acronym for the Indian system of medicines, namely, Ayurveda, Yoga, U for Unani, S for Siddha, and Homeopathy. One senior Tibetan doctor with wit and some sense of pride for Sowa-Rigpa said it should be Sayush and not AYUSH, putting Sowa-Rigpa in front.

Regarding to the future of promoting Sowa-Rigpa World-wide, I am not competent and knowledgeable enough to commend at the macro-level, because very little is known from each other. Nonetheless, giving a bird's eye view of the ways Men-Tsee-Khang hopes and plans to expand will shed some light, at the least, gathering some reliable information on the expansion programs of the largest, oldest and most reputable Sowa-Rigpa institute in India.

1. COOPERATION WITH THE ACADEMICIANS ON SOWA-RIGPA

Much of the interest for Sowa-Rigpa from the West, so far, is more of academic than clinical or therapies or manufacturing of herbal formulations or clinical research. None the less, well-written documents presented by these academicians and words of support from the political leaders contribute to the furtherance of Sowa-Rigpa. They converge to designated places and times to present their papers. In the past, many of these academicians gained a lot from Men-Tsee-Khang, both in Lhasa and India, the needed material resources for their presentations in talks or contributing in journals, while the Tibetan experts are quite contented that the West is showing interest in our ancient healing system. For me this is not good enough. These days, we cooperate with the academicians on mutually beneficial terms by signing a Memorandum of Understanding.

2. PRODUCING MORE SOWA-RIGPA PRACTITIONERS OF 5+1 YEAR COURSE

As mentioned above about our expansion at Bangaluru, Men-Tsee-Khang needs to graduate more doctors with the view to cater to its own needs and the needs of other organizations. One advantage for Men-Tsee-Khang is that most of our graduates prefer to work in Men-Tsee-Khang. Even then, we are short of doctors to expand our services.

3. EXPANSION OF MEN-TSEE-KHANG PHARMACY AT NEW LOCATIONS

Since we face shortages of herbs for our 55 branch clinics spread all over India, we have expanded main pharmacy in Dharamsala and at Chauntra, a 2-hour car ride from Dharamsala. Unless the Bangaluru expansion projects come up before long, we are sure to face shortages again.

Most of Men-Tsee-Khang's city-based clinics are sponsored by philanthropists and business men who have been benefitted by Sowa-Rigpa. We receive requests to open more branch clinics with promises of sponsorship. Sadly, we send out a generic response, thanking for the interest and the offer of sponsorships, but now, we are short of doctors and herbs.

4. LOOKING FOR PARTNERS TO DO MORE CLINICAL RESEARCHES

Looking 10-15 years down the line, our expansion projects in south India, WHO standards, et cetera, we need to do more clinical researches to prove scientifically the efficacy of Sowa-Rigpa system. Most of our nearly 300 herbal formulations can be scientifically tested. There

are some formulations that prove very effective on patients, but the scientific community will not get an answer for, at the least, 10-20 years. These can be kept aside for the time being as mysterious. For example, the moonlight prepared calcite medicine (*Chongshi Dhayoe*). (*Blending processed calcite with Dzo/cow's milk thoroughly and make round shaped like small bread and place under the moonlight until dawn to avoid sunlight contact to retain its efficacy*). This preparation is specifically doing under the bright moon light of 15th day of eighth month of lunar calendar to obtain the mysterious moonlight strength. It is believed that the intensity of the coolness of moon light is in balance state and possessing the capability to enrich the potency of mineral (*Chongsi*) on that day. Therefore, the preparation must be performed strictly under the moonlight of the day of the lunar calendar. This preparation is then compounding with various medicines like *Dhadue*, *Dhashel*, *Rinchen Tsodru Dashed*, et cetera. Such kinds of practical application in the process of compounding medicine are the very extraordinary approach in Sowa-Rigpa tradition.

Similarly, spiritual involvement during the compounding of medicine and during medication is taking into great concern to attain the blessing from the medicinal Buddha to enhance its potency to eliminate all sufferings. Spiritual practices include occupying oneself by recitation of mantra while preparing medicines and therapies by generating pure and unstained intention and wish to help others, performing special spiritual session on special day, daily prayers before the day's work are the some of the regular habits as a practitioner of Sowa-Rigpa. Spirituality is endowed with every step of Tibetan physicians while in action.

5. PREVENTION AND TREATMENT OF MENTAL ILLNESSES

Treatment of mental illnesses is not just the role of Lamas and spiritual practitioners. Sowa-Rigpa practitioners also play important roles. In fact, one does not qualify himself or herself to be a Sowa-Rigpa practitioner if he/she does not treat mental illnesses. There are also mental illnesses that even a Lama or a Sowa-Rigpa practitioner refers to an Astro-science practitioner. The establishment of Body, Mind and Life Department at Men-Tsee-Khang in 2013 is a step to expand our services to prevent and treat mental illnesses.

Unhappiness or mental disturbance leading to stress, anxiety and depression is becoming one of the major conditions in this hectic world and these are directly linked with many emerging diseases such as hypertension, heart diseases, diabetes, insane, and early aging, et cetera. Sowa-Rigpa system can contribute immensely in the management of mental health through the concept of Buddhist principle where the theory of maintaining the mind into peace is broadly explained. Mind being the inseparable integrate from the physical body, Sowa-Rigpa concept of understanding the health and disease lies not only to the physical factors but emotional factors as well and keeping in the mind of all physicians about the true facts of mind and body relationship in their practice and focusing on holistic approach to healing. Buddhist concept of compassion, love, joy and equanimity are deeply attached in the practice of Sowa-Rigpa.

Buddhist philosophy of mind concept is very much related with physical wellness. Therefore, health in Sowa-Rigpa system has a slogan "Healthy Mind Healthy Body". The integration of Astro-Science in Sowa-Rigpa system is another unique feature. Basic knowledge of Astro-science is required to be a qualified doctor since so many related things in terms of diagnosis, collection of herbs, formulation of medicine, therapeutic processes relate to Astrological and Astronomical calculations.

6. MORE PARTNER CLINICS TO EXPAND MEN-TSEE-KHANG'S SERVICES

In the Russian Federation, we have 4 Partner Clinics that work well for the partners and above all to the patients. We are exploring to open more. Partner Clinics are those where Men-Tsee-Khang arranges doctors and herbs, and our Russian partners deciding on the administration, including financial decisions. Since Men-Tsee-Khang has a reputation, and since we have the legal and moral responsibility, we ensure that both the doctor and herbs are from Men-Tsee-Khang.

7. DISPENSING CENTERS IN THE USA

Many Tibetans have immigrated to the United States, and more are following that concerns the Central Tibetan Administration as what would become of our agricultural settlements after 10-20 years. Over the last several years, there has been an increased belief by the younger generation of Tibetans in the efficacy of our healing system. If not one-hundred percent, I do not hesitate to state that 99% of the Tibetans are favorable to Sowa-Rigpa treatments. Men-Tsee-Khang would be establishing 3 dispensing centers in the United States for the benefit of many Tibetans settled there.

8. CULTIVATION OF HIGH ALTITUDE MEDICINAL PLANTS (HAMP)

With all round increase in the use of medicinal plants, our pharmacy expansion would be meaningless if we do not exercise meticulous efforts to ensure regular supply of medicinal herbs, especially high altitude herbs. Men-Tsee-Khang will expand its cultivation of medicinal herbs by identifying more suitable lands. Many of our actions taken so far had been in the right direction.

9. STARTING MORE DEGREE COURSES OUTSIDE DHARAMSALA

Men-Tsee-Khang and the Tibet Center in Austria have cooperation in conducting courses in Sowa-Rigpa and awarding degrees. Tibet House in Germany might be the next organization to sign a Memorandum of Understanding for a course like that of Tibet Center Austria. The students come to do their internships in one or more of our branch clinics in and around Dharamsala.

10. STARTING MORE WELLNESS CENTERS IN DIFFERENT CITIES

Men-Tsee-Khang plans to start more Wellness Centers for treatment as well as for wellness. Youngsters are given a 6-month training (3 months textual and 3 months practical). The trainings given are in Ku-Nye or Massage, Medicated Steam Bath, Compress, et cetera. Currently, the therapists are employed in one of the 3 Men-Tsee-Khang Wellness Centers and VANA Retreats, a well-respected Indian Wellness company.

11. MEN-TSEE-KHANG'S SERVICES IN HIGH ALTITUDE REMOTE AREAS

There are many high altitude remote areas in the trans-Himalayas where Men-Tsee-Khang's Sowa-Rigpa services do not reach the Tibetan Refugees. At the same time, it would be impractical to send our post graduate and graduate doctors, not to mention of the shortages of doctors. Men-Tsee-Khang will convene a 3-day Conference of the Barefoot Tibetan doctors in the trans-Himalayas at Dharamsala from October 10, 2017, and then chalk out a plan to assist these doctors, especially reaching our services to the Tibetan Refugees in remote areas. Needless to mention, the non-Tibetan local population will also be covered, as we already do with the nomadic regions in Ladakh.

12. EXPANDING OUR SERVICES IN RESTORATIVE YOGA

Men-Tsee-Khang's expenses each month on charitable Sowa-Rigpa services to the poor and needy, elderly Tibetan refugees, et cetera, is over Rupees 3.0 million. Expansion of our Restorative Yoga services should reduce spending on charitable medications, and enable people to keep healthy.

Finally, since the theme for this 3-day congress is "Sowa-Rigpa in Action", I wish to end with a quote from His Holiness the Dalai Lama, "Humankind needs a healthy mind and a healthy body and we Tibetans can contribute to that need even though we are living as refugees."

Thank you very much!