EMERGENCE magazine is a monthly e-magazine by the Metta Center dedicated to sharing stories about nonviolent movements worldwide.

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Our Mission
Our mission is to promote the transition to a nonviolent future by making the logic, history, and yet-unexplored potential of nonviolence more accessible to activists and agents of cultural change (which ultimately includes all of us). We focus on root causes (sometimes called “upstream” causes) to help people in any walk of life discover their innate capacity for nonviolence and use it more strategically for long-term transformation of themselves and the world. We work to challenge and replace the prevailing worldview with a much higher image of humanity informed by nonviolence and its implications for the meaning of life and value of the person.

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Dear Friends,

The spirit we need to enable us to address effectively the environmental, social, and cultural destruction we are currently facing will not likely be cultivated in the halls of large academic institutions. It will be found when we turn away from our private pursuits of acquisition and power and harness our energies toward the good of the whole, in which our own good is included. You don’t need a college degree—you need daring, the willingness to go beyond the well-trodden path of what’s easy to what is beneficial for everyone.

The most primary education for this path is nonviolence. When we engage in the struggle against our negative impulses toward greed, selfishness and separation, we grow in wisdom. We emerge stronger, more self-confident and even more beautiful, because in this struggle we nurture the seed of our fundamental human nature. Our beauty is reflecting our ennobled humanity—recognizing that not only do we have the capacity for nonviolence and the transformation needed to engage it, but we see others as they truly are, with those same capacities that we like to see in ourselves—including the capacity to respond to nonviolence when it is offered.

To this end, the guiding vision of the Metta Center is to offer ourselves in service of the study and practice of nonviolence principles, and serve as a hub—or alternative educational institution—for the development of nonviolent power. While the cost of higher education, particularly in the United States, is high, nonviolence will cost you more—not in money, but in the higher demand of interior transformation. And while higher education requires study and a certain time commitment, nonviolence will require a lifetime of practice (which is why we recommend starting now). But no education on earth will be more rewarding, more fulfilling and purposeful than mastering this great art and science.

Nonviolence is a compelling force that works in the social field to draw people together, often when we courageously resist injustice on one hand, but refuse to inflict suffering, on the other hand. This force, accessible to each of us by virtue of our human being, is engaged whenever we resist but do not repress a separating drive like fear or anger.
We are excited to share with you this April issue of Emergence, on nonviolence in Tibet. We hope you will share it widely in an effort to build solidarity around the great ideals of a nonviolent world, including the need to support and better understand nonviolent movements in our midst.

As always, we would love to hear from you if you have any suggestions for future issues of Emergence or have any questions about nonviolent power.

In heart unity

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The latest mailer from the International Campaign for Tibet that's sitting on my desk quotes His Holiness the Dalai Lama: “In our struggle for freedom, truth is the only weapon we possess.” Fortunately, as Gandhi showed, it is also the only weapon that we need; but wielding the weapon of truth is not an easy thing to do.

I distinctly remember the eagerness with which Scott Sherman, then a grad student at Berkeley (now a well-known teacher and writer) bought his ticket to join a proposed march into Tibet from India in 1994, along with many around the world who declared their readiness to face whatever the Chinese would do to stop them. At the last minute, His Holiness called off the march, saying that as he was then in negotiation with the Chinese this was not the time to challenge them. This, as far as it goes, was the right call from the point of view of nonviolence; Gandhi would have called it a case of “non-embarrassment.” However, when those negotiations came to naught the Tibet supporters should have had, ideally, another strategy ready to put in motion.

One way to assess a conflict is through what the famed peace researcher Kenneth Boulding called “strengths and strains.” There are some great strengths on the side of the Tibetans wanting freedom: the justness of their cause (always a sine qua non), their strong basis in a deeply spiritual form of Buddhism, and — as I discovered in conversations with Tenzin Gyatso and later with my friend Samdhong Rinpoche — no lack of sophistication in the ways and means of nonviolent resistance. There is also no lack of moral support from the international community, which is often of critical assistance. But the “strain” in this picture is huge: a ruthless, determined regime with overwhelming military power.
As nonviolence scholars are aware, thanks both to the general theory of the science and an important article called “Nonviolence and the case of the extremely ruthless opponent,” by Ralph Summy, ruthless opponents can be overcome. But it is not clear how a people so oppressed and outnumbered, whose very culture is being stripped away from them while the watching world lacks the courage to intervene, can organize, train, and implement the effective strategies that are called for.

Not surprisingly, increasing numbers of Tibetan monks and others have taken to the desperate measure of immolation. Self-sacrifice is not in principle ruled out in Satyagraha (indeed, this is stage three in Metta’s “escalation curve,”) but the rules for taking such a step are strict and the results unpredictable. One could wish that one such sacrifice would trigger a successful uprising, like the self-immolation of Muhammed Bouazizi in 2010 that launched the successful Tunisian uprising and the (very mixed) Arab Spring itself – or, indeed, that the world would wake up to the power of nonviolence and the reality of our interconnectedness soon enough that such sacrifices would not be necessary; but the reality is that most such immolations have no such effect.

Perhaps in a much, much smaller way this issue of Emergence can play its role in awakening the world, not excluding the good people of China herself, to the agony of Tibet.
Betrayal

My father died defending our home,
our village, our country.

I too wanted to fight.

But we are Buddhist.

People say we should be
Peaceful and Nonviolent.

So I forgive our enemy.

But sometimes I feel

I betrayed my father.
When I received the Media fellowship from Metta Center for Nonviolence, my immediate attention went towards the lives of refugees in India. Being a Kashmiri Pandit and a refugee, the interest in the subject was natural for me. The difference was that refugees have always been victims of violence and my job was to bring out stories of nonviolence in the face of extremism. Tibetan freedom struggle appeared to be the best example of the same. This led me to the hills of Dharamshala, which is the sanctuary of the 14th Dalai Lama and Tibetan refugees.

Tibet lies in the realm of the Himalayas in South East Asia and has been a closed entity for centuries. While the world took over the moon, the Buddhists in Tibet studied the mind and practiced nonviolence. For centuries, it was ruled by Mongolian and Chinese dynasties but always held its religious freedom.

But, in 1949, the Chinese troops invaded the mountains of Tibet. The Tibetan rebels, a small army previously created by the 13th Dalai Lama fought the outside forces but lost the war as well as their freedom. The 14th Dalai Lama fled to Dharamshala, India and his followers were scattered as refugees mainly in India, Bhutan and Nepal.

In the following years, the Chinese troops destroyed the monasteries, arrested monks, nuns and laymen who protested against them. Religious practices were banned and His Holiness, the Dalai Lama was denounced as a cheat.
Tibetans became prisoners in their own land. Anyone who got involved in anti-state activities such as making posters or engaging in peaceful protests was arrested and put in prisons like Drapchi prison and several labor camps. The main motive for keeping large number of prisoners was to use them as bonded laborers in construction of roads and railways tracks. The political prisoners - those imprisoned for raising their voices - suffered the most through extreme forms of torture like electrocution, and most of them died of starvation. Even today, several Tibetans are serving indefinite jail term and have been accused of being involved in 'counter-revolutionary activities.'

Tibetan refugees are spread all over the world. Many still have relatives in the Tibetan autonomous region and fear for their safety every day. Youngsters, especially children, are smuggled out of the Tibetan borders into India and Nepal so that they can live in a free country and get proper education. They are raised and educated in Tibetan Children's Villages located in India. Many former political prisoners who were released also manage to flee to India by travelling through the rough and dangerous Himalayan terrain. They enter the country with the hope of seeking His Holiness’s attendance and to tell the stories of pain and hopelessness that today’s Tibet lives in.

I followed the stories about a revolutionary whose medium of protest is poetry. Tenzin Tsundue, a Tibetan writer, poet and freedom fighter holds a fierce momentum
in his words but his ways of protest are nonviolent and his practice of Buddhism has made him wiser than those he wants to confront in Lhasa. He spoke to me about the pain of being a non-confrontational revolutionary, the hopes and dreams for an independent nation and why self-immolations are the only option left for Tibetans as a form of protest.

I also met two former political prisoners at Gu Chu Sum, an organisation that helps political prisoners. While they did not speak English or Hindi and I did not speak Tibetan, when they spoke, their tone was peaceful. The calmness with which they express the accounts of torture signifies how practicing Buddhism helped them sustain the harsh life in prison. They have no anger against their prosecutors.

While Tibetans have tried to adjust to their life in India, they still face racism and alienation. They have become oblivious to being called Chinki, Nepali or Bahadur. They are given the identification of a refugee but they are constantly struggling with the absence of a real identity. This has happened mainly to youngsters specially, those who have never seen Tibet. Although they consider themselves a part of India, the country where they were born, the identification card and the cultural differences keep reminding them that they belong to a distant nation. This has led to a hunger for concrete identity and the demand for nationhood from the Chinese by those belonging to the second and third generation refugees like Tenzin Tsundue, whose idea of the freedom struggle was to confront the enemy and so he did. He slipped across the Indian borders from Ladakh into Tibet to protest only to be arrested and sent back.

Many raise their voices by taking the nonviolent protests to the streets while others resort to the might of the ink. Writers like Buchung D. Sonam, Tsering Wangmo Dhompa and poets like Tenzin Tsundue were born out of exile and the young generation is filled with them. While the Tibetan Government in exile is looking for autonomy with China to deviate the threat of being ousted from India, the young generation is vouching for complete freedom of Tibet in clear words. Their hope for a free nation is translated into life when Tenzin’s poetry echoes in my ears:

“Our tiled roof dripped
And the four walls threatened to fall apart
But we were to go home soon”
Exile House

Our tiled roof dripped
and the four walls threatened to fall apart
but we were to go home soon,

we grew papayas
in front of our house
chillies in our garden
and changmas for our fences,
then pumpkins rolled down the cowshed thatch
calves trotted out of the manger,

grass on the roof,
beans sprouted and
climbed down the vines,
money plants crept in through the window,
our house seems to have grown roots.

The fences have grown into a jungle,
now how can I tell my children
where we came from?

Poetry @ Tenzin Tsundue
Tenzin Tsundue is an activist and writer living in Dharamshala, India. He has vowed to dedicate his life for Tibet’s freedom. He wears a red band over his forehead as a symbol of his pledge and calls himself the campaigner of the Tibetan freedom struggle. He has entered Tibet twice in the last decade and protested in Lhasa. He was jailed for months and was deported back to India. An educated young revolutionary, he was born to construction workers in a roadside make shift tent. Since then, he met his parents only thrice in eleven years.

In this interview, he talks about the life of an activist, the factors that led to Tibet’s occupation by the Chinese, and the tragic and brave self-immolations by Tibetans and shares his vision of a free and democratic Tibet.
Can you briefly explain your association with the movement? How did it begin?

I am an activist and writer. So, when I say activist it means that it is the work of a volunteer who lives within the community with the thought that there is a freedom struggle going on in Tibet. As an activist, my job is to constantly watch over Tibet from outside particularly being here in India, we need to see what is India’s policy and relationship with China. How Europe and America are also watching as outsiders meanwhile maintaining several other relationships with China.

On the outside, we have to see to that and see where are the opportunities; where are the moments of caution that we need to take because the whole Tibetan cause is a very subtle thing and it is involved in so many international relations. If we are blind to that then we’ll only be sorry. On the ground level, it means that we want our people to be politically aware and not just be patriotic and also learn from other movements. In the process, we keep the population educated and have people’s participation on so many different levels, sometimes it is moral support, sometimes being physically present at the protest, sometimes monetarily contributing in the struggle. The work of the activist is to keep people restless, keep them aware and have everybody’s participation.
You mentioned that you need to look at other movements, which other movements have inspired your own?

For us, the immediate and the best example is the Indian Freedom Struggle. I mostly grew up learning about freedom fighters like Lal Bahadur Shastri, Bhagat Singh, Chandra Shekhar Azad and the works of Gandhi.

These are the kind of stories that I and all other Tibetans who are born and brought up in India, have been nurtured with. In the Indian freedom struggle, people were demanding independence and at the same time, there are also examples where without really confronting the British Empire, they tried having the home rule-like autonomy. This is what we’re seeing here in our own struggle, His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the exile government holds this policy and says that they want autonomy. They are saying that we are not seeking independence, happy to remain a part of China at the same time benefit from Chinese economy. Let the foreign policy and the military remain in the hands of Chinese government. But, at the same time, there are people like us; we speak for independence. We will not compromise on this. This kind of autonomy might be a temporary policy for His Holiness and the Government in exile to save us at the moment from any kind of blockages or even the threat from India; otherwise the exile government may be shut down. So in order to avoid any kind of external pressures, we are shielding ourselves with this policy by seeking autonomy but finally, at the end of the day, you cannot remain under someone forever. You have to be an independent country so that the culture, the people can sustain in the long term like fifty, hundred or two hundred years. The Tibetan people must remain and their culture must remain. Only independence can guarantee that.

So this very strong debate is happening in the community: Do we want autonomy or Azaadi (freedom)? The demand to go back to the independence that we used to enjoy is a very strong demand especially among young people. The work of the activist is to further invigorate the debate within different generations and also within different ideologies.

The population in Tibet is sixty lakhs. Altogether, six million Tibetans make nothing compared to 1.3 billion Chinese. So if we ever want a successful story in future, we have to make sure that we do not die in the process. Survival is our key. It is important that we do not spend all our forces, all our energy at once as we’ve seen this in the Sri Lankan struggle and in the Palestinian struggle. It is good that you are willing to die for the struggle but will you kill yourself without getting anything? Will you end up fighting the Israelis every day? We are watching the Basque region, Quebec struggle, Scotland and Ireland. They are relatively free but aren’t they seeking independence?

We are looking at these debates and we are also looking at the situations involving the native people of America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Taking these examples, we are now telling our people in Tibet, the nomads and farmers that they should not give their land to the Chinese. Hold on to it. Be the nomad. Be the farmer. That is the best freedom struggle you can ever do. We are telling our people to hold on to their land and livelihood; do not change; do not use toilet paper; do not be consumers of television; do not be consumers of market economy. Otherwise you will end up being consumers and you will consume everything that the Chinese will give you and then you will remain dependent on them. So seeing so many perspectives and stories, we are trying to lead this struggle.
Don't you think that the difference in opinion of the Government in exile, the Tibetan youth in India and the Tibetans in Tibet is leading to disruption in the movement?

I think this kind of debate, having different policies, a division of political stands actually helps generate healthier debates so that all different viewpoints, merits and demerits of the political stands come forward so that we all can introspect the different policies. I stand for complete freedom of the country but when I hear people speak about autonomy, I look at the reason and it helps me either strengthen my own struggle or look at the merits of the opposite. So these kinds of debates actually help further sharpen the reason. It is healthy and democratic. And we actually need that.

What is your vision for the Tibetan freedom struggle?

For me, the whole idea is to regain the independence of Tibet that was taken away from us. We are unlike other freedom struggles. For example, some of the movements have been called separatists or secessionists. There have been cases of communities that have been a part of a larger country but are now demanding a separate country. In our case, we were an independent nation till the Chinese invasion of 1949. So we are demanding that the legitimate historical independence of Tibet has to be regained. At the same time, it doesn't mean that we go back to the same old situation. There was a time when before Chinese invasion, it was an old society. The old feudal system has a number of demerits. We wouldn’t want all those things to continue. Of course, we can’t go back in time. The new future Tibet will be very different. It will be firstly, a democracy. The vision is to recreate Tibet as an independent country but with good relationships with all other neighbors. We will be interdependent not in the isolation that Tibet used to be. The new Tibet will have the economy that everybody can take part in. We will have to share our resources and at the same time, gain from other countries in terms of science and technology and experience. We need to learn from others also.

Also, Tibet used to be a country only for Tibetans as the people but tomorrow’s Tibet will be different. There will be Indians and Chinese. We can’t just throw out the Chinese out of Tibet. We’ll have to draw a policy according to the time period of the Chinese who have settled down. In the future Tibet, there will be people of different ethnicities, languages, religions. Today, the cosmopolitan multiculturalism is the nature of all the nations around the world. Tomorrow when we say Tibetan, it is not the language or the culture that we refer to, it should be the nature of citizenship. There can be a Caucasian Tibetan or a Muslim Tibetan. We need to look at the vision of creating a free and independent Tibet which has multiculturalism and a free democratic society.

In 1912, the 13th Dalai Lama also had to flee Tibet, which makes the Tibetan Freedom struggle the longest in the history of the world. When do you think the problems between China and Tibet began?

The real problem between the Chinese and the Tibetans started in 1911. At that time, there was a modern day revolution in China which led to the creation of the People’s Republic of China. Till then, China was under Manchu rule. The Manchu dynasty ruled over Chinese.
The Chinese population was beaten, subjugated and occupied not just by the Manchus. The businesses along the eastern coast of China were occupied by western communal powers like the French, Spanish, British and even Americans had control over some of the places. So, China was in an extremely weak situation which led the Chinese to unite and constitute this revolution. They were not just able to overthrow the Manchus but they were able to create this unity in the first modern state, People's Republic of China.

Mr. Sun Yat-sen was the first President. Looking back, it was then that the confusion of China's claim over Tibet was created. Second thing was the inheritance of power where the Manchus overthrew the Mongolian empire and inherited the right to rule over other people and countries that were previously occupied by the Mongolians. Similarly, when the Chinese overthrew the Manchus, they tried to inherit the countries under Manchu rule in the same manner. They believed that they had the right to rule over the Mongolians, the people of East Turkistan and Tibet. That was the time when the 13th Dalai Lama escaped into India. So you are right in pointing out that it was the second time in 1949 when the 14th Dalai Lama had to seek asylum in India because of Chinese invasion. The first Chinese occupation took place in 1912 but they weren't strong enough to maintain a foothold and were defeated by the Tibetans and sent back to China. Until 1949, China couldn't regain its control over Tibet. So this confusion remains in the mind of Chinese that they have a right to rule over Tibet.

The argument that we are making is that if the Chinese overthrew the Manchus and regained their independence and then they claim to rule over the Tibetans and the Mongolians, then because the Indians overthrew the British, should then India get the power to rule over Burma? Is it logical? Should India then have the right to rule over South Africa and other former British colonies? No. That is wrong.
This inheritance of authority is one challenge that we are fighting against. In 1949, the Chinese consolidated authority over Tibet with their first invasion when Mao Zedong consolidated its Communist power and became the first Chairman then he tried to do something that the Chinese in 1911 could not do. He expanded the empire and sent military into Tibet, East Turkistan, Mongolia and Manchuria. These three nations together make 60% of China’s landmass. The secret of China’s success today is draining natural resources from the 60% of the occupied landmass for free. In order to do that, they suppress the population of the natives in those countries. This is from where they make the cheap ‘Made in China’ products. So this is how the Chinese have come to think that they have legitimate right to rule over Tibet.

How have the Tibetans maintained nonviolence in the struggle and how has the nonviolent nature of this struggle been an important factor?

What happened in 1949, the Tibetans who were nomads and farmers, monks and nuns had no idea of Tibet- the country, our military, our borders, our neighbors. They were not aware about what happened in the First World War or the Second World War. All these wars were happening and people were not aware. They were living in complete isolation. When such politically unaware and ignorant groups of people were invaded upon, how would they respond! Especially when the invasion happened in the form of military invasion that involved literally killing people. Tibetans responded to that by physically fighting back. What would you do if you father or mother or your lama is suddenly dragged out of the monastery, humiliated and beaten? You will fight back. That’s what happened. So the initial response by the Tibetans was equally fighting back using whatever weapons they could. They were basically protecting their own lives, the lives of their near and dear ones. There was no immediate state response either. There was this phase from 1949-74 when the Tibetans fought back mainly protecting their dignity and lives. I don’t know whether you call this violent or nonviolent.

The Buddhists have been engaged in the study of nonviolence for thousands of years. Tibetans embraced the practice of Buddhism about 1500 years ago. Buddhism originated in India but it is the Tibetans who are maintaining it. So we actually know what violence is and what nonviolence is. What really matters is the motivation. Sometimes, the mother slapping the child so that the child is not habituated to stealing is right. That kind of slap is needed. That kind of slap is justified and it is definitely not out of anger or hatred. It is out of love. At the same time, when we talk about the national struggle, we are looking at the violence committed against Buddhist culture. We know that the Tibetan Buddhist culture benefits millions of people and has the potential to benefit many more people than it already has. We know its value. It needs to be preserved and promoted. Not just because it is our religion but because it has the wisdom which can make people understand that nonviolence is far more superior to violence. And for this, the whole Tibetan Community has spent all its energies while the world was engaged in scientific experiments, learning what is there on the outer space or in the depth of water, we left all those scopes and went on to study the mind. Into the depth of the mind, we then understand hundred of kinds of love and compassion.
What the Buddha taught almost 2,600 years ago is something that the Tibetans have been learning and so many scholars have gone to its depths. And all that effort is needed to be preserved. Today, in the Tibetan freedom struggle, if there is a lack of violence, it is not because the Tibetans fear violence. It is most importantly because Tibetans see the wisdom of nonviolence in the freedom struggle. It is possible that if the Tibetans took violence today, the Chinese may be able to take much bigger, easier steps to completely finish off the Tibetan people. It is possible. But then, it is not about the end result. It is what the people are deciding today.

We have seen the attempt to eradicate the Tibetan language. Media, education, trade—everything is in Chinese. Even when there are such threats and dangers, Tibetans resort to nonviolence. In 2008, during the Olympic Games opportunity when the international attention was on China, thousands of Tibetans protested. Many of them were killed. Around 400 Tibetans were shot and killed in the streets by the Chinese. More than that, thousands of people were arrested and detained. It completely deprived Tibetans of their right to expression. After 2008, there was no space for any kind of petitioning or protest, international media wasn’t allowed, international tourists were not allowed in Tibet. And if they were at all, they were accompanied by a Chinese tour guide who works for the Chinese government. So there was no space for ordinary Tibetans to speak about the danger that they are in and the pain they are undergoing and you see no hope in justice there.

In such a situation of lack of space, all the recent spates of self-immolations started. Nobody is hearing you out, nobody is allowing you to speak but you don’t want to remain silent. There is dignity in immolating oneself. Tibetans are willing to die but not willing to die silently. It will be such a tragedy if the Tibetans died silently and with them then would die the Tibetan culture. Tibetans are brave people. For them, what they value most is the dignity of life and the culture that they are proud of not money. The culture says do not work with anger. In order to speak to the Chinese and tell them that this is the pain we undergo, they resorted to such means. When everybody is trading with China, when everybody is benefitting from trade with China, which is drawn from natural resources from Tibet; Tibetans are made to pay for the international global trade and even if they die, the world would not care. So all these big terms like human rights, global warming, these are all nonsense. We are just left by ourselves as a small and vulnerable community. So what do we do? We set ourselves on fire. The first self-immolation happened on February 27th, 2009. One year after the 2008 uprising in Tibet. Since then, 126 Tibetans have set themselves on fire and most of them are dead. This is their attempt to speak into the Chinese conscious that we live in fear and danger. We fear that we may be dying as a community and as a whole civilization. So what do we do?
Tensing Sangup

is a Buddhist monk who was imprisoned by the Chinese authorities during the protests in Lhasa in 1994 against the State propaganda Campaign. He spent six years in confinement and torture. He is one of the few political prisoners who have managed to escape into India in recent years.

Why were you involved in the protest in Lhasa?

I was born in the Lhundrup District of Lhasa and lived there as a monk. In 1994, I was involved in a protest in Lhasa fighting against the State Propaganda Campaign that had begun in my district that year. The Campaign was aimed against His Holiness the Dalai Lama and it glorified the political reign of the Chinese Government with the view to inculcate patriotism towards it. They sent officials with the purpose of spreading the propaganda against His Holiness and Buddhism. As a result of the protest, I was arrested on May 10, 1994.

What happened after the arrest? What charges were you interrogated on?

Until September 1994, I was interrogated as well as beaten simultaneously every day since the day of my arrest. They kept torturing us. I was 19 years old, my friend was 18 years old while others where 20 as well as 21 years old. They suspected that since we were young and at an impressionable age, there was someone else working behind the scenes and influencing our actions so their primary question was asking us which particular person or group was influencing our actions. The prison officials tortured us to give information about our “secret-instigator” and kept asking who had supplied us with a Tibetan flag.

How they did treat you?

Along with the physical beatings, they used to starve us, denying us lunch meals or even a full day’s meal so it caused a lot of health problems. We were denied hospital visits during illness and instead were subjected to physical abuse. There was also the practice of draining blood from us at the prison hospital but this treatment was reserved only for political prisoners like us.
They warned us that if we didn’t tell them what they wanted to hear then they would interrogate our family and parents. They tortured us in every way they could think of by using electric instruments as well as physically beating us with anything and everything they could lay their hands on at that moment.

What charges were placed on you? Were you allowed a fair trial?

I was kept in prison for six years for “political crimes” after my initial detention from May to September during which I was not allowed any trials nor was I able get involved in any political activity. My friends were released before me as I was the primary suspect.

How did you escape from Tibet into India?

I was released from prison in the year 2000 and until 2003 I stayed at my home due to my poor health. During this time two patrol officers were assigned to oversee my movements and actions. After 2003, my conditions slightly improved and so I was able to contact people in India who could help me get in the country, as I desired to live in a place which allowed me to have freedom and peace. In March of 2005, I crossed the snowy Himalayas. I hid and slept during the day while moving forward in the darkness of the night. It took me 25 days to complete the journey.

Why did you stop practicing Buddhism as a monk?

They knew that I was monk when I was arrested and even after my release, I was not allowed to go back to my monastery. Since my only contact was then with lay-men (non-monks), I decided to remove myself from the monastic order and remain as one of them.

Image @ Marla Showfer / Creative Commons
How did you get associated with the Tibetan Freedom struggle?

In 1987, I was a monk in Gaden Monastery in Tibet. I was not involved in political activities in the beginning nor did I have any knowledge about what was happening in the political sphere but then the Chinese Military came to reside in the monastery for a month. During this time, they forced themselves on our monastic traditions and rituals. We had to seek special permits to go for circumvallation around the Potala Palace (called Ling-kor in Tibetan) and also seek the same when we had to perform our various rituals, like offering incense and also to collect drinking water from their area. It was then I realised that our country Tibet was without freedom. When the monks used to go to the hills to perform religious rituals their names were written down and such visits in the future were restricted. I was only seventeen years old during this time but even if I had no political knowledge I realised that Tibet was not freed and the Chinese had invaded it for their own purpose. This led to my involvement in the protest in Lhasa. We demanded freedom for Tibet and the return of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The Chinese soldiers stopped us from protesting by arresting everyone.

Was the protest solely for religious freedom?

Our protest wasn’t primarily for religion. We were demanding the return of His Holiness the Dalai Lama to Tibet and were demanding the freedom of Tibet and its people. We wanted the withdrawal of the Chinese Government from Tibet. So the government sought to stop us from raising such slogans.

Were the protests in 1987 as powerful as they were in 2008?

Yes, although from 2008 the protests have attracted attention, we also had the demands of freedom in Tibet and for the return of His Holiness and for his long life while we were protesting in 1987 itself. In 2008, the issue of freedom of religion grabbed attention while the demands for independence for Tibet and the return of His Holiness was long being protested for, even before 1987.

What are your thoughts about the Tibetan freedom struggle today?

I believe in the nonviolent movement and even while I was in Tibet I only protested for my country’s freedom through nonviolent means such as in gatherings and processions. Our struggle can only attain success through nonviolence. I do not use violence nor do I believe in it 🤔.
Here we will explore different strategies for bringing this issue’s discussion of Tibet into the high school or college classroom.

Note: If students have not yet studied nonviolence, consider beginning with activities from the Metta Center’s curriculum on nonviolence for high school students before proceeding with this lesson: http://mettacenter.org/educators/highschool-curriculum/

**Warm-up**

- Write this quote from the 14th Dalai Lama on the board or read it aloud: “Nonviolence does not mean that we remain indifferent to a problem. On the contrary, it is important to be fully engaged. However, we must behave in a way that does not benefit us alone. We must not harm the interests of others. Nonviolence therefore is not merely the absence of violence. It involves a sense of compassion and caring. It is almost a manifestation of compassion. I strongly believe that we must promote such a concept of nonviolence at the level of the family as well as at the national and international levels. Each individual has the ability to contribute to such compassionate nonviolence. How should we go about this? We can start with ourselves.” Ask students to discuss and share their reactions to this quote.

- Have students locate Tibet on a map (note: it will not be immediately apparent on a general world political map, as it is occupied by China).

- Then ask students what they think they already know about Tibet. Brainstorm, keeping a list on the board, and then have students fact-check using the internet to confirm their understanding. In particular, direct students to the Central Tibetan Administration (government in exile) web page: http://tibet.net/

**Reading**

For homework or in class, have students read the In Conversation section of this issue of Emergence (p. 12-20).

Option: Instead of having the whole class read all three interviews, split the class into three groups and have each group read one interview (of Tenzin Tsundue, Lobsang Gyatson and Tensing Tsundup). Have each group teach the class what they learned from the conversation.
Discussion
• What are the main reasons the Tibetans are protesting? What are their goals?
• How has nonviolence been applied in the Tibetan struggle?
• In his interview, Tenzin Tsundue says, “So we actually know what violence is and what nonviolence is. What really matters is the motivation. Sometimes, the mother slapping the child so that the child is not habituated to stealing is right. That kind of slap is needed. That kind of slap is justified and it is definitely not out of anger or hatred. It is out of love.” Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?

Application
• Present students with the Metta Center’s Conflict Escalation Curve, which Michael Nagler discusses in his editorial: http://mettacenter.org/conceptual-models/conflict-escalation-curve/
• Then discuss self-immolation as a tactic in nonviolent resistance. As Michael Nagler writes in the editorial section, “Self-sacrifice is not in principle ruled out in Satyagraha...but the rules for taking such a step are strict and the results unpredictable.” Why do protesters resort to self-immolation? What do they hope to achieve? Why or why not might this be an effective tactic? Where does self-immolation fall on the conflict escalator?
• Consider another conflict (either within the students’ community or at the global level) and use the conflict escalation curve to analyze the conflict. At what stage is the conflict currently? What tactics have been used to resolve it? How might the conflict be resolved more effectively by applying nonviolent strategy?

Extension: Using Photos
Use photos from this issue (for example, on p. 9 & 20) and have students write a caption for the photos, writing 2-3 sentences, imagining the the photo is going to be placed in the local newspaper.

Extension: Poetry as Protest
Have student read the poetry in this issue (p. 7, 11) by Tenzin Tsudue. Discuss the role of poetry in nonviolence movements.
Consider exploring the poetry of other nonviolent movements. Have students research a poem from another movement and have a poetry reading in class.

Extension: Students for a Free Tibet
Watch the video on Students for a Free Tibet to explore how students are taking action for the Tibetan freedom struggle: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZNDiql051ng
As a class, consider how you might take action.

Additional Resources
For a very extensive Resource Packet for Educators on the Question of Tibet, please visit the World Affairs Council:

Stephanie Knox Cubbon is the director of education at Metta Center