

At the Lodge of Wind and Brume

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High on one of the most remote peaks of the Himalayas sits a multi-story stone and mud lodge carved on a narrow ledge halfway up a steep canyon wall. The lodge is actually a *gompa*, a Buddhist monastery run by monks who chant mantras at dawn and dusk against the backdrop of a whistling wind that always blows through the canyon. The monks tend to the lodge. They keep butter lamps burning continuously and make display prayer flags and wondrous masks of gods and demons to be worn at the dances to be conducted during the Tibetan New Year. To a visiting stranger, the lodge is an unreal and forbidding place.

Not that there are many such visitors to the lodge. Reaching it is a test of hardiness that involves long drives over rough unpaved roads and several days of trekking on steep, high-altitude terrain.

At sixty-two years of age, Barus Lloyd barely had the stamina to meet the demands of a trip to the lodge. However, what he lacked in resilience was made



up in determination, for he was not a typical tourist but an afflicted man in need of help. The Khenpo (head abbot) of the gumpa, Tenzin Thubten Rinpoche, was a world-famous sage who offered holistic mind-body healing to those afflicted with deep trauma. Having received unsatisfactory treatment from a number of healers of all sorts, Barus regarded the abbot as his last resort before taking his life in despair.

Barus had compelled Oshan Phillips, the youngest of his assistants, to make the trip with him and shoulder the rigours of the steep hikes. Oshan was in fine physical shape and endured the experience without complaining but resented being treated as a pack animal.

The travellers arrived at the lodge one late afternoon and were directed to their quarters for the night. After eating a simple meal, the travellers wrapped themselves in their sleeping bags. Oshan was soon dead to the world. Barus, however, remained awake and tossed and turned all night.

Early the following morning, a monk rapped on the door of their chamber and, without waiting for a reply, entered and announced that the Khenpo was ready to receive them. He then escorted the pair to a large chamber in the back of the temple. There, sitting behind an unadorned desk, was a man in his mid-fifties, wrapped in the maroon robe customarily worn by Buddhist monks. His head was shaved and his eyes were magnified by round wire-rimmed glasses. He rose slowly and greeted them in perfect English with a British accent:

"From our correspondence I am generally aware of your circumstances, Mr. Lloyd," started the monk. "You are hardly a typical tourist. How about you, young man? Are you a relative of Mr. Lloyd?"

"No, Venerable Khenpo. I am only a business associate of Mr. Lloyd. He is my boss."

"Mr. Lloyd and I will hold confidential conversations. Will you be taking part in them?"

Barus responded: "Oshan is aware of my situation and has signed a nondisclosure agreement. He can witness, and if necessary, take part in our discussions."

"Very well. Let us begin, then."

Barus started his narrative in a matter-of-fact tone, but his manner became more agitated as he went along.

“As I explained in my letter requesting this meeting, I run a major import-export business in Swansea in the UK. My main activities involve the importation, sale, and distribution throughout Wales of meat, dairy products, and other foodstuffs such as rice, herbs and spices, vegetables, and fruits. To circumvent the government’s import regulations, I developed an elaborate system for smuggling foodstuffs into the country, particularly perishable meats and dairy products.”

“Three months ago, I received a large shipment of beef from a supplier in Poland. The meat came from diseased animals that had been infected with the bacteria that causes anthrax and carried their spores. Upon arrival, the meat did not look wholesome and, rather than selling it to restaurants and face complaints from my best customers, I donated it to two hospitals, a local school, and an orphanage to be served to their patients, wards, and students.”

“As a result, over sixty people, including forty-two children, came down with intestinal anthrax and developed fever, chills, severe abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting blood, and bloody diarrhea. Since the doctors in my community were unfamiliar with anthrax poisoning, it took a while for them and the specialists that came from London to diagnose the problem and, by that time, most of the victims had died horribly from blood poisoning and meningitis. The English authorities have not discovered my responsibility, but sooner or later they will find out the truth and come after me.”

There was a momentary pause and the Khenpo inquired: “Is fear of apprehension the reason you have not been able to sleep in more than two months?”

Barus sighed. “No. Fear of heavy fines, business ruin, even a jail sentence, is not what is keeping me from getting any rest. It is overwhelming guilt. I close my eyes and the images of the victims of my misdeeds rise up behind my eyelids. I caused their deaths, and it was done in cold blood, in the course of business. I am a crook, but not a murderer!”

The Khenpo remained silent for a long time and then replied to Barus: "I would very much like to help you, but you carry a heavy burden that is deeply set in your soul. I normally would provide instruction on Buddhist principles and dispense counsel, but your spirit is so impacted that it would take a long time for you to absorb my teachings and heal. I fear you have made this pilgrimage in vain."

There was a disconsolate heaving of Barus' shoulders and the old man was starting to reply when Oshan cut him off by addressing the monk: "Venerable Khenpo, I would like to ask a question."

The Khenpo was startled, but replied: "Certainly, my son. What is it?"

"Does the spiritual support you offer include hypnosis?"

The monk's lips parted in a tight smile: "Our spiritual assistance does not include hypnosis in the sense of inducing a trance state to increase suggestibility or access the mind's memories. I am, however, well versed in Western psychotherapy, counselling, and clinical hypnosis but do not use these tools in assisting those in the community I serve. In addition, it is believed that a hypnotist will seldom be able to eradicate deeply set anxieties such as the ones experienced by your employer."

Oshan thought about it for a few moments and then insisted: "Venerable Khenpo, may I ask another question?" The monk showed a sign of irritation, but motioned Oshan to go on.

"Assume, hypothetically, that you put Mr. Lloyd and I in simultaneous hypnotic trances. Would you then be able to remove his disturbing feelings and recollections and have them transferred to me?"

There was an astonished silence and then the Khenpo reacted with unusual vigour. He struck the arm of his chair and replied in a loud voice: "Young man, I am not aware that such an experiment has ever been conducted and certainly have not tried to carry it out myself. Moreover, it would be contrary to all my beliefs to attempt to cause harm to you deliberately, even if it provided relief to your boss."

Barus revived at the exchange: "Now, wait, I don't know whether what Oshan was asking is possible, but I would give everything I own to recover my peace of mind."

Khenpo, I would donate five million pounds to your monastery and give another million to Oshan if you could transfer my troubles to him!"

The Khenpo rose from his chair and confronted the pair. He faced Oshan reproachfully: "Would you be prepared to saddle yourself with Mr. Lloyd's demons, perhaps for the rest of your life? In exchange for what? Some money?"

"Venerable Khenpo, I am single and unattached. I don't have a penny to my name. My parents are poor farmers, my mother is consumptive and may soon die from inadequate care. I am willing to assume Mr. Lloyd's troubles if by doing so I can provide my family with a fresh lease on life and advance myself!"

The monk turned to Barus and was about to ask him a similar question when he noted the dramatic change in the old man's demeanour. Barus was trembling, a dash of hope relaxing his previously drawn features.

"I take it, Mr. Lloyd, that you would agree to undertake such an experiment, even if it risks further deterioration of your condition? You know, a failed hypnotic procedure could greatly impair your mind . . . "

Barus cut him off: "Yes, yes, yes! Life is hardly worth living for me. I would gladly take my chances, if Oshan is willing and you agree to go forward with it!"

The Khenpo sighed. "Material inducements will not make me change my mind. The experiment you suggest is unnatural and may inflict grave damage on one or both of you, but given the eagerness to try this that both of you manifest, I will consider the possibility of conducting it. I would have to do research and consult with my colleagues in London and San Francisco. You would need to become our guests while I study the matter. I hope you do not mind our simple accommodations."

"We'll be happy to stay here as long as it takes!" urged Barus.

* * *

Three weeks later, the Khenpo summoned the pair and advised: "The experts I consulted confirmed that the procedure you ask me to perform is very unlikely to be successful, but suggested a methodology for carrying it out without raising a

serious risk to the mental health of either of you. On that basis, I am willing to give it a try but I will stop it if there are any signs of things going awry. Do you agree to proceed on that basis?" Both men nodded.

A hypnosis session was then conducted in the monastery's meditation hall, a quiet and sparsely furnished room designed to minimize distractions. Round floor cushions had been set such that Barus and Oshan could sit in close proximity to each other. The Khenpo had his own raised cushion but remained standing in front of his subjects throughout the proceeding.

After a brief introduction, the Khenpo brought the participants into hypnotic trances. The monk then turned to Barus and directed: "Your head contains a large box that holds dozens of poisonous snakes. Open the lock and take out the snakes slowly, one by one, and throw them to me." The old man mimicked pulling the writhing snakes out of his head and tossing them to the monk, who gestured as if catching them. After a few minutes, the Khenpo asked: "Are you finished emptying your head?"

"Yes, I am done," replied Barus.

"Does your head feel relaxed?"

"Yes."

"Now, stay in the same peaceful place that you were before." The Khenpo then turned to Oshan. "Now, Oshan, pay attention to me. I am holding in my hand a large bunch of flowers that Mr. Lloyd has just given me. Open the locked compartment in your head so I can toss them one by one to you. You must grab each flower and place it securely within the compartment. Can you do that?"

Oshan nodded and the monk began gesturing as if throwing flowers, one by one, to the young man, who motioned as if catching them and conveying them to his head. After a while, the Khenpo asked: "Did you catch them all?"

Oshan whispered: "Yes."

"Good," replied the monk. "Then, close and lock that compartment so that the flowers remain safely inside."

Oshan placed his hand on his forehead and made a closing motion.

The Khenpo then turned to both and directed: “Barus and Oshan, I am going to count down from five. When I reach zero, you will wake up, feeling rested and refreshed. You will not remember anything that happened here.”

* * *

It would be nice to be able to report that the hypnotism session resolved all problems to the satisfaction of each participant. However, reality often has a way of dashing one’s expectations.

Barus Lloyd was never able to cast aside his deep-set feelings of guilt over the lives lost due to his actions. He continued to be hounded by an unquenchable remorse, but now he was unable to pinpoint the cause of his regret. In fear of pursuit by the British authorities, he retreated to the only local refuge he knew, the Buddhist lodge near Nepal’s border with Tibet.

Oshan’s mind was also clouded by unbearable feelings of guilt, and he became so addled that he was unable to undertake the new life he had anticipated. Ultimately, he followed the same route as his former boss and joined him in the Buddhist gompas, where both were given shelter.

The Khenpo remained at the head of his monastery and welcomed Barus and Oshan as lay members of the community when they sought refuge. He added to his daily devotions a prayer for greater humility and discrimination in future caregiving endeavours.



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Born in Cuba, Matias Travieso-Diaz migrated to the United States as a young man. He became an engineer and lawyer and practiced for

nearly fifty years. After retirement he took up creative writing. Over two hundred and sixty of his short stories have been published or accepted for publication in anthologies, magazines, blogs, audio books and podcasts. One of his four novels, an autobiography entitled “Cuban Transplant,” and four anthologies of his stories have also been published.

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