SOWA RIGPA

AND THE HEALER'S *Journey*

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by Rinzin Norbu

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Note on Terminology and Sources

Tibetan names, terms and titles throughout this book are rendered in simplified phonetic form rather than in academic transliteration (for example, Sowa Rigpa rather than standard Wylie transliteration *gSo ba Rig pa*), making them accessible to readers unfamiliar with the Tibetan language while preserving their essential meaning and pronunciation.

All the quotations of the *Gyüd Zhi* ("Four Tantras") in English are drawn from *The Root Tantra and the Explanatory Tantra. From the Four Tantras of Tibetan Medicine* published by Men-Tsee-Khang, Tibetan Medical and Astrological Institute of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Dharamsala, 2015.

PROLOGUE

I am neither a scholar nor a skilled writer. I am simply a person who has lived through his share of mistakes, challenges and lessons. Life has not always been easy, but it has been a remarkable teacher. Along the way, I have seen much, heard much and felt much. Some of these experiences were painful, others inspiring, but all of them taught me something about the human heart and the quiet strength that lies within it. Over time, I felt a growing need to put these experiences into words, not as a record of achievement or advice but as a reflection of the journey that has shaped me.

This book is not just a story, it's a journey, the journey of a son, a student and a healer in search of his own path.

The foundation of this path was laid by my late father; a man whose wisdom and compassion continue to guide me even in his absence. He was more than a physician, he was a man of depth and humil-

ity, whose understanding of healing went far beyond medicine. Watching him work, I came to realize that true healing begins in the heart through kindness, empathy and connection. His teachings, both spoken and silent, became the seeds of my own path.

As human beings, we all share a common ground of suffering and struggle. We make mistakes, face losses and endure challenges that test our spirit. Yet, it is through these very experiences that we learn what truly matters. The wisdom born from hardship, the lessons that life teaches us through living cannot be found in books. They are earned through experience, reflection and the courage to grow.

Sowa Rigpa and the Healer's Journey, therefore, is not a tale of perfection or expertise but of discovery and experiences. It is about the people and moments that shaped me, the trials that refined me and how valuable the concept of Sowa Rigpa healing that I learned is. My hope is that these reflections may speak to those who are keen to know more about the traditional system of Sowa Rigpa medicine.

INTRODUCTION

I was born in Dechencholing, in Bhutan's capital city of Thimphu, to a family deeply rooted in Buddhist spiritual practices and the ancient science of healing, Sowa Rigpa, traditional Tibetan and Bhutanese medicine, a holistic approach system to physical and mental well-being. Bhutan is a small Himalayan kingdom nestled between two great Asian giants, yet it has never been conquered or colonized. Guided by visionary Dharma Kings, it has consistently placed the well-being of its people above personal power and material wealth. Rooted in wise leadership and spiritual depth, Bhutan stands as a rare example of a nation shaped by the philosophy of Gross National Happiness — a model that values harmony, sustainability, and the holistic welfare of its people over mere economic gain.

I consider myself truly fortunate to have been born in such a country, where compassion and the well-being of all people are at the heart of national life. I was trained under the traditional education system

of master-disciple and family lineage tradition, in which knowledge is passed down from father to son through the generations. Healing for me was never simply a profession, it was a way of life, a practice of compassion grounded in the wisdom of the Dharma.

At the heart of this lineage was my late father, known to many as Ladakh Amji. The name carried a story of its own. In truth, he was not from Ladakh but from Khunnu or Kinnaur, a remote region tucked away in the Indian Himalayas close to Ladakh. At the time, Khunnu was little known beyond its valleys and when people encountered him, they more easily associated him with Ladakh, a place with a familiar identity on the cultural and geographic map of India. Thus the name "Ladakh Amji" meaning "the physician from Ladakh" became attached to him and eventually defined his public identity.

THE HEALER

Ladakh Amji was born in 1936 into a family deeply rooted in the cultural and spiritual traditions of the Himalayas. Life in Khunnu, a land with rugged mountains and quiet villages, was simple yet deeply connected to the rhythm of nature and the spiritual pulse of Buddhism. It was in this environment that his journey of knowledge first began.

At the age of six, he entered Khunnu school, where he began his formal education. Alongside his curriculum of modern schooling, he immersed himself in the study of Tibetan literature and grammar under the guidance of a great master, Khunnu Lama Tenzin Gyatso Rinpoche. Khunnu Lama Rinpoche, a revered scholar and a great saint, saw in the young boy both aptitude and dedication. Under his mentorship, the seeds of discipline, scholarship and spiritual devotion were firmly planted.

Ladakh Amji, my father

By the age of fourteen, my father's thirst for knowledge and his teacher's foresight led him beyond the borders of his birthplace. Khunnu Lama Rinpoche, recognizing his potential, entrusted him with a letter of recommendation addressed to Khyenrab Norbu, the personal physician of His Holiness the 13th Dalai Lama. With this

letter in hand, the young student journeyed to Tibet, embarking on a path that would define the course of his life.

Kyenrab Norbu. *Photo: wikidata.org*

The journey from Khunnu to Lhasa, Tibet, was not easy with a constant battle against the harsh and unforgiving elements. Arriving in Lhasa, he entered the prestigious Men-Tsee-Khang, the Tibetan Astro-Medical Institute, one of the foremost centers of learning in Tibetan medicine and astrology. According to the prophecy of the eminent great master, Khunnu Lama Rinpoche, his life was destined to be dedicated to the service of humanity through healing. Guided by this vision, he underwent thorough rigorous training

in Sowa Rigpa and astrology under the strict guidance of the great master Khyenrab Norbu.

In those days being accepted into the prestigious institute under the guidance of Khyenrab Norbu was a great honor, as such opportunities were rarely given to ordinary people. He was admitted because Khunnu Lama Rinpoche wrote a letter of recommendation to Khyenrab Norbu. Khunnu Lama Rinpoche was also the teacher of Khyenrab Norbu, which carried great respect and authority. It was here in the very heart of Tibet, that he began his training in the science of healing, Sowa Rigpa, alongside the study of Buddhist philosophy and astrology.

Never content with what he had learnt at the Men-Tsee-Khang, he sought out the wisdom of many great masters of his time. Among them were the revered Drikung Rahor Chodrak Rinpoche, Khen Thubten and numerous other accomplished teachers who generously imparted their teachings, transmissions and practical instructions. His tireless pursuit of knowledge and practice eventually led him to mastery not only of the medicine and astrology but also of the spiritual practices of *Yuthog Nyingthig*, the *Heart Essence of Yuthogpa's teaching* on the complete cycle of the Vajrayana Buddhist spiritual practices of Medicine Buddha connected with Sowa Rigpa, to enhance the intuition, diagnosis and healing abilities.In 1964, at the height of the cultural revolution, he was forced to leave Tibet to

preserve both his life and his knowledge. His journey back via the Silk Route brought him to Kalimpong, India, where he settled and continued his work for a while. Yet, his quest for healing wisdom did not end there. Instead, it opened new doors. From Kalimpong, the river of destiny carried him further to Varanasi, a sacred city resting on the banks of the holy Ganges. It is the ancient seat of learning where Ayurveda is believed to have originated and also the birthplace of the spiritual teachings of the Buddha in India. There, he encountered the ancient wisdom of Vedic medicine and astrology, a tradition deeply rooted in Indian civilization. With the same devotion and openness he had shown to his Tibetan masters, he received all the teachings from his Indian masters as well. He absorbed their knowledge deeply and began to see the profound ways in which the two traditions could complement each other, especially in medicinal formulas and compositions. He lived there with humility dressed up as an Indian Swami and studied the Vedic sciences, especially astrology, known as Jyotish and Ayurvedic medicine.

INSIGHT BEYOND ORDINARY PERCEPTION

He had attained such a profound mastery of both Tibetan and Vedic astrology that his understanding went far beyond the conventional boundaries of calculation and interpretation. His insights frequently unfolded into real life events, leaving even the most skeptical minds with quite a sense of wonder.

In both Tibetan and Vedic traditions, astrology is not only the study of planetary movements but also an exploration of the interdependent relationship between the cosmos and life on earth. When people came to consult him, he didn't simply analyze their astrological charts. He observed their subtle expressions, their tone of speech, their energetic presence. It was as though he could sense the underlying vibes that shaped their health, emotions, and destiny. Many who experienced his reading described it as a kind of

intuitive resonance, he could articulate what they had only vaguely sensed within themselves.

I have never been a strong believer in fortune telling or predicting the future, whether through astrology, divination or oracular practices. To me, such practices always seemed more cultural than factual. I have long believed that life unfolds through countless causes and conditions, far too complex to be explained by the positions of planets, dice, cards or mystical signs. I always thought the future is something we shape through our own actions and intentions. But when I witnessed someone make predictions that turned out to be astonishingly accurate, not vague guesses but clear insights that later came true exactly as described, it shook my certainty. It made me question what I thought I knew about reality and how limited our reasoning might be. Was it just coincidence, intuition or a deeper awareness of patterns that most of us cannot perceive? Experiences like that don't make me abandon logic or fall into blind belief, but they do remind me that reality may be more mysterious than we often assume. Perhaps there are forms of perception, understanding or a sixth sense that science has yet to explain, subtle ways of knowing that exist as naturally as the invisible forces of magnetism or gravity.

One particular incident remains unforgettable in the memories of many who witnessed it.

It was during my father's service to His Holiness the 16th Karmapa at Rumtek Monastery in Sikkim, he was once travelling in a shared taxi, as is common in developing countries. Among the passengers was a young girl, cheerful yet a bit restless in behavior. Midway through the journey he suddenly turned toward her with a quiet and serious expression. In a calm and steady voice, he said, "Girl, be mindful and don't make mistakes." His words startled not only the girl but also the other passengers. They looked at one another in confusion, wondering what he could have possibly meant. The girl caught off guard, blushed and remained silent. A little while later, as if sensing that his first words had not taken root, he spoke again this time with even greater clarity, "You are up to something, be careful and do not make mistakes." His tone carried both compassion and gravity as though he wished to shield her from unknown consequences. The atmosphere inside the taxi became heavy with curiosity but no one dared to ask further questions. The girl maintained her silence, while the others dismissed the incident as a mystery they could not unravel.

Several days had passed and the mystery revealed itself. News had spread that the young girl had eloped with a monk from the monastery, an act considered deeply inappropriate and fraught with consequences for both of them. Only then, did the passengers who had been in that taxi fully grasp the meaning of his warning.

They were left in awe of his ability to perceive events before they unfolded, not through speculation but through uncanny clarity that transcended ordinary vision.

This was not an isolated occurrence. Countless such stories circulated about him, those moments when he would look into a person's face and discern their hidden intentions or the fate that awaited them. These instances left a lasting impression on all who witnessed them, reaffirmed his reputation, not only as a master physician and astrologer, but also as a man gifted with extraordinary foresight and compassion, always using his knowledge to guide others away from error and toward wisdom.

THE ROLE OF THE TRADITIONAL PHYSICIAN

My father played a great role as a physician of Sowa Rigpa during 1960-1990, at a time when modern medicine was not as advanced and widely accessible as it is today in Bhutan and across the Himalayan region. In those days, it was *Amjis* or *Drungtshos* in Bhutanese, the traditional physicians who served as the guardians of health and well-being. Their knowledge was not confined to treating illness, it extended to understanding the influence of nature and the environment, and guiding people to live in harmony with spiritual principles.

In the late twentieth century, as Bhutan began to step on to the path of modernization, my father's work took on a new dimension under the command and guidance of the visionary Fourth Dharma King of Bhutan. He became the founding principle of the

National Institute of Traditional Medicine in Bhutan, establishing an institution with standard training curriculum for the five years Drungtsho or physician training program, reviving the traditional methodology of Sowa Rigpa for generations to come. This was not just an academic or medical achievement, it was a cultural milestone that ensured our traditional wisdom would stand alongside modern advancement, enriching the well-being of people both within Bhutan and beyond.

The healing system he personally practiced was a unique system of healing, a harmonious integration of Sowa Rigpa and Ayurvedic formulas. Rather than seeing them as separate systems, he wove them together into a complementary approach that drew on the strengths of creating an effective path of healing. This synthesis, grounded in experience and skill, was a gift to all beings, offering greater relief from suffering and a deeper restoration of balance to body and mind.

The story of my father's settlement in Bhutan was deeply connected with the life of my mother. She came from a noble family with a spiritual lineage, being the daughter of a Nyingma *Dzogchen* master, known as Dzogchen Rinpoche, a disciple of Khenpo Ngagchung. During the upheaval of the Cultural Revolution in Tibet, her father had sought refuge in Bhutan, carrying with him not only the pro-

found teachings of the Dzogchen tradition but also the spiritual strength to spread them in a new land.

My mother grew up under his close guidance, and from an early age, she displayed exceptional dedication to study and practice. Trained rigorously in Buddhist philosophy, ritual and meditation, she became both a scholar and a practitioner of Longchen Nyingthig, one of the most important cycles of practice within the Nyingma sect of Tibetan Buddhism, respected for her clarity of understanding and devotion to the Dharma.

Yet even the strongest spirit must face the trials of the human body. In her youth, my mother fell seriously ill. Despite receiving every form of treatment available at the time, her condition did not improve. Her father, Dzogchen Rinpoche, deeply concerned, sought a superior answer. He turned to two of the great spiritual masters of the time, His Holiness the 16th Karmapa and His Holiness Dudjom Jigdrel Yeshey Dorji, asking them to perform a divination.

The result of the divination was both unexpected and fateful; it revealed that she must receive treatment from my father. At that time, my father's reputation as a physician was already far-reaching through those who had benefited from his effective treatment. Guided by this karmic instruction, my mother placed her trust in him and began her treatment.

Not only did her health gradually improve under his care, but this meeting also became the beginning of a profound karmic connection between them. Their bond, born first in the realm of healing, blossomed into a life partnership, a union of two lineages, one of healing and one of Dzogchen practice, bound together by destiny.

THE ART OF DIAGNOSIS AND THE AMERICAN VISITOR

One story that had left a lasting impression on many, was that of a foreign tourist from America who had come to Bhutan. This man, curious about the ancient Sowa Rigpa system of medicine, sought a consultation out of curiosity rather than necessity. He had appeared healthy and strong, without any visible signs of illness and perhaps he expected the physician to offer him only general advice about diet and lifestyle. When the foreigner extended his wrist, my father gently placed three fingers on the artery, his face calm but deeply attentive. For a few moments, sat in silence, feeling the subtle movements beneath the skin, each beat, each variation carrying messages invisible to the untrained. Then, looking up with quiet certainty, he said, "Your body is well but remember that you live with only one kidney. Take care of it." The American froze in

disbelief. Years earlier, he had undergone a kidney transplant and, though he was managing well with his single functional kidney, it was not something he commonly shared with others. No visible signs gave away his condition, and he had spoken nothing of it during the consultation. Stunned, he asked, "How could you possibly know this?" My father only smiled, his answer simple and humble, "The pulse tells everything."

For the foreigner, it was a moment of revelation, an encounter with a system of medicine whose precision seemed to surpass the boundaries of conventional science. He had left, not only with a greater respect for Sowa Rigpa, but also with a profound sense of awe for the man whose touch alone could perceive the hidden truths of the body.

Such stories were not rare. Time and again, my father astonished both locals and foreigners with the accuracy of his diagnoses, proving that the ancient methods of pulse reading and urinalysis were not mere relics of the past but living sciences in the hands of a true master.

In recognition of his selfless contributions and the countless lives he had touched through his healing, his work began to draw the attention not only of ordinary people but also that of the Bhutanese royal family. His reputation as a physician of rare skill and

compassion had already spread across the kingdom, and his home at Dechencholing had become a place of refuge for the sick and suffering. Patients flocked there in great numbers and the need for medicines grew beyond what a single household could manage.

Understanding the profound value of his service to the people, Her Royal Highness Ashi Dechen Wangmo Wangchuck extended her gracious support. In 1983, she kindly arranged a separate government budget dedicated to the purchase of medicines for his dispensary at Dechencholing. This act was not merely a financial assistance but also a Royal acknowledgement of the importance of preserving and supporting traditional healing practices as an integral part of Bhutanese society.

With this support, he was able to provide treatment to patients with even greater consistency and reach. Medicines that were once difficult to procure became more readily available, and those who came to him no longer had to worry about the scarcity of supplies. For the countless men, women and children who placed their hope in his care, this royal patronage meant relief and renewed life.

A CENTRE OF HEALING IN DECHENCHOLING

The story of his healing spread across the valleys of Bhutan and into neighboring India. It was said that no matter how distant the village or how arduous the journey, those in need of healing would eventually find their way to Dechencholing, the place where he resided. What awaited them there, was unlike any ordinary household. The quiet compound became a thriving center of hope, surrounded by rows of temporary tents and makeshift huts erected by families who had nowhere else to stay. Each tent held a story, an elderly mother brought by her children after years of illness, a young boy carried on his father's back in search of a cure, a woman who had tried every remedy but had found no relief until she went to my father's place.

From early morning until dusk, he was engaged tirelessly in healing. His patients remembered how he would listen with full attention, his eyes steady, yet kind as if he saw not only their pain but also the deeper causes hidden within. Among his many skills, his gift in pulse reading and urinalysis stood out as extraordinary. To him, the human body was like an open book, its hidden ailments revealed not through machines or laboratories but through the subtle rhythms of the pulse and the color, bubble, texture, and sediment of the urine. What others needed modern technology to detect, he could discern with his bare hands and trained eyes.

Stories of miraculous recovery soon became inseparable from his name. An old farmer, once bed-ridden with chronic illness, returned to his village fully recovered, astonishing his neighbors. A young woman, long believed barren, gave birth to a healthy child following his treatment. A monk, tormented by a mysterious illness that no doctors could explain, regained his strength and vitality and later spoke about how my father's treatment and guidance had restored not only his body but also his faith.

The atmosphere in Dechencholing reflected more than medicine, it carried the energy of compassion and trust. Families cooked simple meals together over open fires, children played freely while waiting for their parents' turns and strangers became friends through the shared hope of recovery. People often said that even before receiv-

ing medicine, they had felt lighter, as if just being in his presence eased their suffering. Dechencholing thus became a living sanctuary of healing, where the ancient sciences of Sowa Rigpa and Indian Ayurveda were woven together in service of humanity.

Life at Dechencholing was never quiet. From early morning until late in the evening, people came in a steady stream, some carried on the backs of relatives, some led by hand, and some barely able to walk on their own. My father, besides teaching at the institute, always made his time available to these patients, no matter how tired he was. For him duty was never something to question, it was simply a part of his life.

I remember clearly how the atmosphere would change whenever he had to go out of station when important patients required his presence and service, which took weeks and sometimes even months. Each time he departed, the responsibility of caring for those who continued to come to our home in Dechencholing quietly fell upon me and my sister, even though we were still very young.

The house never knew silence during those days. From the break of dawn, I could already hear the shuffle of footsteps outside, people murmuring prayers and the low coughs and groans of the sick who waited in our courtyard. Inside, the sharp, earthy fragrance of herbs filled the air, mingling with the faint smoke of the incense

that always burned in the corner altar. The shelves were lined with jars and packets full of medicine.

One morning, as I stepped out to greet the patients, a woman arrived carrying her sick child wrapped in a faded blanket. She looked at me with worry written across her face. "Is Amji Rinpoche here today?", she asked, her voice soft yet trembling. All his patients and students called him Rinpoche, which literally means a "spiritually precious being". I took a slow breath before answering. "No, Ama la, he has gone to attend to an important patient. But do not worry, I will prepare your refill of medicine."

Her eyes studied me for a moment, as though measuring whether I could be trusted or not, then she nodded with relief. I went to the shelves where packets of herbs and powders were neatly stored. My small hands worked as carefully as I could, measuring and wrapping, just as I had watched my father do countless times before. An elderly man who had been waiting nearby, leaned on his walking stick and muttered with a smile, "Even at this young age, you are already carrying your father's work. May you be blessed."

His words gave me strength. Though I felt the weight of responsibility pressing on me, I also felt a quiet pride. Each patient who walked away with medicine in hand seemed to carry not only the remedy but also a piece of my father's compassion that I tried to

uphold in his absence. The day went on in this way, one patient after another, each with their own suffering, each with their trust placed in me. By evening, when the last visitor had gone and the courtyard grew quiet, I finally sat down beside the tools of the day's labor. My fingers ached, stained with the dust of herbs, and the smell of medicine still clung to my clothes.

In that silence, with only the dim glow of the butter lamp flickering across the room, I felt something deeper than exhaustion. Though young and unsure, I had carried forward my father's work, if only in a small way. It was not just the refilling of medicines, it was the carrying of responsibility of trust, and of compassion. And in those moments, I realized that service was not something you waited to grow into. It was something you shouldered the very moment it was needed.

THE LOST TREATIES, A LEGACY INTERRUPTED

My father, besides dedicating his life to teaching and treating countless patients, was also a prolific writer and researcher. Writing came naturally to him, and he composed texts and treatises, including a treatise on pulse diagnosis and urinalysis. Among his writings, there was one particularly important book on Sowa Rigpa medicine and its method of treatment based on his experiences, a comprehensive work that could have become an invaluable reference for students and practitioners today.

Sadly, that precious manuscript was lost under unfortunate circumstances. At the time, we had only one master copy. My father entrusted it to a colleague, a physician and concerned official, who promised to arrange the printing budget and oversee its publication. We waited for months, then years, with hope and excitement, but

the process was endlessly delayed. When we finally followed up, the official regretfully informed us that he had "misplaced" the master copy. By then, my father had already fallen seriously ill, and the book that he had poured his heart and wisdom into was gone forever.

The loss was not just personal; it was a profound loss to Bhutanese Sowa Rigpa literature. My father had spent more than a year composing that book in Tibetan cursive script, writing several pages each night after his long day of clinical and teaching work. The following afternoon, a few of us who were able to read his elegant cursive handwriting would carefully transcribe it into Dzongkha. We did not have the facilities or technology that exist today. Our work began on a blackboard; we would first copy his writing there, then transcribe it neatly onto paper to create what became the master copy.

That entire process was a labor of devotion: a nightly ritual that brought us together in a united purpose. Each page we completed felt like a small offering to the future of Bhutanese traditional medicine. For years, we held on to the hope that the manuscript would be published and reach the hands of students and practitioners. But all that hope turned into deep disappointment when we were told it had been misplaced. Despite repeated assurances that it would be found, nothing ever came of it.

To this day, I feel the loss of that book deeply. It was more than just a manuscript, it was the distilled wisdom of a healer's lifelong study and practice, a treasure that could have illuminated the path for generations to come. Its disappearance remains one of the most painful and irreplaceable losses in the legacy of our Sowa Rigpa tradition.

THE WEIGHT OF DETACHMENT

Growing up in a family deeply rooted in traditional Buddhist beliefs and cultural practices was both enriching and challenging. On the positive side the spiritual and ethical teachings of Buddhism instilled a strong moral foundation in me, nurturing compassion, mindfulness, humility and the ability to find inner peace amid life's uncertainties. These values shape character in profound ways, fostering respect for all living beings and promoting harmony in personal relationships as well as in society at large.

Certain Buddhist teachings, such as impermanence and detachment, can seem to conflict with the values of modern capitalist societies when they are not properly understood through a perspective that is free from the two extreme views of eternalism and nihilism. Some teachers present detachment and impermanence in a very extreme manner, suggesting that true practice means withdrawing

from material pursuits. They argue that wealth, fame, and success are meaningless because everything is transient.

While this interpretation holds some truth, it often overlooks the practical realities of social and economic life. That is why the Middle Path teaching of a balanced approach is a concept of skillful living. In today's world, wealth and recognition are not merely symbols of desire or attachment - they are often essential tools for fulfilling responsibilities, supporting communities, and sustaining meaningful spiritual or humanitarian activities. Unless someone has truly chosen the life of a monk or true ascetic — living in solitude, surviving on alms and renouncing all worldly concerns — completely rejecting material resources can create an unbalanced life and even lead to hypocrisy.

Ironically, many modern spiritual masters who preach detachment and simplicity often accumulate immense wealth and enjoy luxurious lifestyles, contradicting the very principles they promote. Such inconsistency not only confuses followers but also damages the credibility of spiritual institutions. The Middle Path, as taught by the Buddha, was never meant to reject material life but to transcend attachment to it. The essence lies not in the denial of wealth, but in maintaining a balance, using resources ethically without greed, pride or exploitation.

I believe it is important to earn wealth in a balanced and moderate way, so that a person can responsibly fulfil their duties and obligations. My father was a devoted Buddhist practitioner who followed the idea of detachment from material wealth and worldly success to an extreme level. He lived a very simple and selfless life, prioritizing spiritual growth over material accumulation. His devotion and practice of these principles earned him great respect and admiration from his patients and devotees, despite his having the opportunity and means to create wealth.

Whatever was offered to him, including his own monthly salary from the government, he used it all for medicine and dharma purposes rather than investing in his family's future. It was indeed a great virtuous deed that he could do for humanity but not giving due attention to one's own family's future was not a balanced approach in his practices. Even the land he lived on for most of his life was not legally registered in his name at the time he passed away, as he never sought to claim ownership of anything, believing that everything was impermanent. In the modern legal system, who would take the concept of impermanence into account and allow someone to occupy the land that was not legally registered in their name?

While his life was a testament to the Buddhist ideals of non-attachment and generosity, it highlighted the challenges of reconciling such values with the practical demands of day-to-day life. His

ascetic lifestyle might have been perfectly aligned with his spiritual practices if he had had no family to care for. As a father, his total detachment from material and family concern was an imbalanced approach that left his children in challenging circumstances.

It is indeed a great virtue to help one's family succeed in life, so that they may contribute positively to future generations. In modern time it is important to know how to find a balance, leading a life that harmonizes spiritual purpose with the responsibilities of worldly existence.

My father was a man of the old ways rooted in the Dharma, faithful to practices and unwavering in his devotion to the life he had inherited from his forefathers. For him, the world was best understood through scriptures, prayers and the discipline of practice. Modern inventions and new ways of life were, in his eyes, distractions that led the mind astray. When I was young, he often reminded me, "The path is already before you. Why wander into shadows that pull you away from Dharma?"

To him, English lessons and learning to drive a vehicle were such shadows. He believed they would tempt me away from study and practice, weakening the discipline that he had cultivated in me so carefully since childhood. From his perspective, he was right. He

wanted nothing more than for me to carry forward the spiritual practice, untouched by what he saw as the noise of modernization.

But I was young, and the young often look at the world differently. For me, English was a language of opportunities, a bridge to understanding beyond the walls of our valley. Driving, too, seemed essential in a time when the world was moving faster, where mobility meant independence and survival. I respected my father, but within me, there grew a quiet yearning for freedoms he did not recognize.

Evenings were my chance. After sunset, my father would retreat into his room for prayers, the soft murmur of his recitations spilling into the hallway. During those hours, I would sneak outside, heart pounding with guilt and excitement, and whisper to our driver, "Please … just one round. Teach me how to handle the wheel." The driver, nervous yet sympathetic, would nod reluctantly. "Quickly, before Rinpoche finishes his prayers," he would whisper. I would slide into the driver's seat, the leather smelling faintly of dust and oil, my hands trembling on the steering wheel. The engine's rumble thrilled me; it was as if I had stolen a fragment of the future, one my father could not see. Yet the guilt always followed close behind, heavy and cold.

Inevitably, my father found out. His face, usually calm and reserved, burned with anger when he confronted me. "Did I not tell you?" he

thundered, his prayer beads clenched in his hand. "This road you take will lead you away from the Dharma. Why must you disobey me?" His disappointment cut deeper than anger ever could. I tried to explain, stumbling over words, "The times are changing. I only want to be prepared for the life ahead. I need to learn these things…" But he would turn away, shaking his head, as though my words were dust carried off by the wind. My pursuit of English lessons caused an even greater rift. I took tuition in secret, sneaking out in the afternoons. When he discovered it, the silence in our house grew sharp and dangerous. One evening, after a heated quarrel, he pointed to the door and said with finality, "If you will not listen to me, then you cannot live under my roof."

I remember stepping outside, the cold air biting at my face, my heart thudding with a mixture of hurt and defiance. For the first time, I felt like a stranger in my own home, cast out not for lack of love but for refusing to bend my dreams to his will. At that time, I was rebellious, blinded by the fire of youth and the desire to choose my own path. I saw only the unfairness of his rules, not the depth of his fears. But as the years passed, I came to understand. His opposition was not born of cruelty but of concern. He feared that the modern world would sweep me away from the values he had spent a lifetime nurturing. To him, my disobedience felt like betrayal. To me, his restrictions felt like suffocation. It was not lack of love,

it was a clash of vision, the two worlds colliding under the same roof. Looking back, I realize we were both right in our own ways. He stood for the wisdom of the past; I reached for the possibilities of the future. Between us lay the inevitable conflict of generations, a conflict that shaped me into who I am today.

As the saying goes, one only comes to understand the depth of a parent's love when stepping into the role of a parent oneself. With time, I began to see more clearly that what once felt like chains were, in truth, threads of concern woven out of love. My father's outlook was firmly rooted in the soil of tradition. As a staunch Buddhist scholar, he placed unshakable faith in the teachings of the Dharma and regarded modern ideas as passing illusions, unworthy of pursuit. To him, spiritual practice and prayer were the highest wealth a person could carry. And yet, the world around us was shifting. The hum of machines, the spread of new knowledge, the rising tide of global thought, all were shaping lives in ways my father could not accept. Where he saw distractions, I came to see opportunities, where he saw obstacles, I recognized pathways.

But with maturity, I have come to realize that both perspectives held truth. His was the truth of preservation, the safeguarding of wisdom that had guided generations. Mine was the truth of adaptation, embracing change so as not to be left behind in a world evolving faster than ever.

Even as I walked a different road, my respect for him only deepened. He was not only a father, but a man who lived with profound sincerity: a practitioner, who dedicated his entire life to the Dharma and to the practice of Sowa Rigpa, the healing tradition that seeks neither wealth nor recognition, but the welfare of others. His hands, his prayers, his knowledge, all were offered freely, without expectation and without a trace of hypocrisy.

In that quiet devotion lay his true legacy. Though we clashed in vision, I cannot deny that the roots he planted in me — discipline, compassion and the unshakable value of sincerity — continue to nourish my life, even as I walk along a road he had once feared.

What I believe is the differences in views between the younger and older generations need not become a source of conflict. Every generation brings its own wisdom and strength, and when these are combined, they create a meaningful contribution. What truly matters is the purpose behind one's pursuit; if it leads to growth, meaning, and benefit, it deserves encouragement, no matter the age and generation. Instead of letting differences divide, both young and old can choose to stand together, supporting each other's journeys and building a future where experience and innovation walk hand in hand.

THE OLD WAYS OF DISCIPLINE

In the olden days, the upbringing of children often involved methods that today would be considered harsh or even illegal. Physical beatings, verbal scolding and strict punishment were seen as normal tools for discipline. Those who grew up in that era rarely questioned such practices because they were deeply ingrained in the culture and understood as acts of love and concern rather than cruelty. My father was raised under such conditions and naturally he carried those same methods into his way of parenting.

When I was about thirteen years old, I often found myself at the receiving end of his temper. I still remember one particular incident. My father would leave for work and I, being a playful boy, would spend the time with friends lost in the joy of games and laughter. When he returned in the afternoon as I heard his knock at the door, panic would rush through me. My friends and I would scramble to hide all the playthings scattered around the room, our

hearts racing as we tried to make everything appear as if we had been obediently waiting for his return.

But sometimes, in that brief delay, my father's patience would wear thin. The moment I opened the door, his palm would land sharply across my face, a blow so sudden it made me see stars. I can still feel that sting, not just on my cheek but deep inside where fear and shame intertwined with the love I still held for him. Back then, such discipline was seen as normal, even necessary. Parents believed that to mould a child into a responsible and respectful person one had to be firm and even harsh.

Yet as I grew older, I came to see the complexity of it all. My father's anger was not born of hatred but of worry. He wanted me to grow up disciplined not idle or careless. In his mind, a few slaps or scoldings were small sacrifices compared to a lifetime of regret that might follow a child gone astray. It reminds me of a teaching often found in Buddhist thought that even the most compassionate and peaceful buddhas must sometimes manifest in fierce, wrathful forms to liberate types of sentient beings from their ignorance. Compassion does not always wear a gentle face, sometimes, it must roar to awaken those lost in delusion. But times have changed. What was once considered an expression of love and responsibility is now seen as an act of violence. Modern society no longer accepts such forms of discipline and perhaps rightly so. Children today need

understanding more than fear and communication more than punishment. Yet I cannot deny that those early experiences caused low self-esteem and, painful as they were, shaped my resilience and taught me valuable lessons about human imperfection, forgiveness and the evolution of love across generations.

I often look back on my childhood and wonder what life might have been if the circumstances had been kinder. My early years were not filled with the carefree joys that many others recall so fondly. Instead, I was born during a period of profound transition, when old traditions were slowly loosening their grip and modern ideas were beginning to take hold. It was a time of uncertainty, neither fully anchored in the past nor securely stepping into the future. For a child, this in-between space was confusing, and it left me without a solid foundation on which to grow.

The greatest wound of all came when I was only eight years old. I lost my mother, and with her passing, an entire world of tenderness, guidance and warmth disappeared from my life. A child who loses a mother at such a tender age is left with an emptiness that words can hardly capture. There was no gentle hand to soothe my fears, no soft voice to guide me through the storms of adolescence and no maternal presence to anchor me when I needed comfort the most. Her absence created a silence that echoed through every

stage of my growing years, a silence that only deepened as I grew to understand the depth of what I had lost.

My father became the sole guardian of our lives. He was a man of deep conviction and discipline, wholly devoted to his spiritual practice and healing service. In his quiet and steadfast way, he carried the weight of every responsibility, nurturing us, raising us, and ensuring that his duties to others never faltered.

THE UNWRITTEN CERTIFICATE

My first teacher was my late mother. I was six years old when she began teaching me the rhythm and elegance of Tibetan and Dzongkha reading. I can still remember her soft voice reciting verses in the evening light, while her delicate hands pointed at the curves of the letters. Her words carried both tenderness and quiet wisdom, and as a child I absorbed them without knowing that this would become her final legacy to me.

After her passing away, my father became not only my guardian but also my teacher. By the time I was ten, he had already begun shaping my mind with Buddhist philosophy and ritual practice. Day after day, I sat beside him, listening to chants, learning the meanings behind sacred texts, and memorizing practices that went far beyond what my young mind could fully grasp. Yet those moments felt sacred, the closeness of sitting by his side, the calm authority in his voice, and the living weight of the lineage he carried.

From the age of seventeen, my training turned toward Sowa Rigpa along with astrology. For seven years I followed my father's guidance, studying, memorizing, and learning the *Four Tantras*, the Tibetan medical treatises, and other medical texts, followed by a full year of clinical apprenticeship directly under his supervision. By then, I had developed a strong foundation not only in medicine but also in astrology, which complemented the practice. All of this learning was transmitted in the old traditional way, oral and personal. There were no parchment certificates to confirm my efforts, only the word of my teacher, my father, and the weight of the knowledge I carried within me.

My father's vision for me was never tied to certificates or worldly recognition. He believed deeply that the true purpose of life was the practice of Dharma, and he wanted my energy dedicated to spiritual pursuit rather than professional ambition. Over the years, he had seen many monks from various monasteries come to study under him. Once they obtained certificates, many abandoned their vows in search of jobs and worldly security. This disillusioned him deeply.

His conviction was so strong that even when Her Royal Highness Ashi Dechen Wangmo Wangchuk of Bhutan graciously issued a royal letter for my admission to one of the best schools in India, he declined. At the time I was only ten years old, standing on the threshold of a great opportunity, but my father chose the traditional

path over the modern one. It was a decision made with love and unwavering belief.

The irony was that, while many of my peers and fellow students eventually received certificates after years of study under my father, I alone was never permitted to sit for the final examination. Time and again, I pleaded gently, asking for the chance to earn at least that formal recognition. He never directly refused, but his response was always the same, "You do not need external paper certificates if you have complete inner knowledge." His words were full of faith, yet they could not shield me from the reality of the modern world, where qualifications often open doors that inner knowledge alone cannot.

After his passing, I found myself standing in the shadow of his great legacy, trying to follow in his footsteps while being hindered by the absence of formal recognition. What was meant to be a life of service and practice became a path filled with obstacles, misunderstandings, and lost opportunities. While my heart still treasures the immeasurable gift of his teachings, my mind carries the burden of being left without the tools needed to navigate the practical demands of a changing world.

In my youth, I often found myself standing in the shadow of others' successes. I watched my friends graduate from colleges and univer-

sities with pride. Those who chose the monastic path completed their studies and became Khenpos (the equivalent of monastic professor), honored with titles and recognition. Each seemed to move forward in life with clarity and direction.

And I remained at home, spending my days beside my father, assisting him in his medical practice and learning quietly under his guidance. My education came not from classrooms or certificates but from long hours of observation, service, and reflection. Yet in a world that measures worth through documents and degrees, my learning felt invisible. Slowly, I began to feel invisible myself.

That quiet weight sank deep into my heart. I was a young man with dreams and a restless desire to find meaning beyond the walls of my home, but my life felt restrained, held in place by duty and circumstance. Depression crept in, not loudly, but silently and suffocatingly, eating away from within.

Sometimes, neighborhood friends would invite me out to laugh and forget for a while. Before going out, I would change my clothes, feeling it improper to wear my monk's robes in casual gatherings. It was my way of showing respect to the robes themselves. During those moments, I met their friends, carefree youths with open hearts. I shared fragments of my pain with them, the parts I could not share at home. They listened with kindness and offered simple

comfort: "Don't worry, everything will be alright." Though soothing, I knew my struggle ran deeper than words could reach.

One day, a friend suggested softly, "If you want to relax and forget for a while, you should drink some alcohol." Hesitant yet desperate, I gave in. For a brief moment, it felt like relief — the sadness lifted, the world softened. But when the effect faded, the emptiness remained untouched. That was when I learned one of life's harshest truths, nothing can heal what the heart refuses to face.

Those were dark days of my life. My father, deeply devoted to his spiritual practice and patients, was always occupied. My mother was gone, leaving a void no one could fill. Without her warmth and guidance, I drifted between confusion and loneliness. To the outside world, I may have appeared rebellious or undisciplined. Rumors and judgments spread, without understanding the storms that I was weathering inside, creating distance and misunderstanding between my father and me. At my lowest point, despair overtook me so completely that I even contemplated ending my life. What held me back was the thought of my siblings and my father alone, silent, and still dependent on me in his own way.

Eventually, the tension between us reached a breaking point. One day, in anger and frustration, my father told me to leave the house. I stepped outside with tears in my eyes and nowhere to go. My

heart felt hollow, as though the world had shut its doors on me. A kind friend took me in, and for a time I stayed with him. I resolved to find work and live independently. At that time, employment was still possible without formal certificates. While reading the national newspaper one morning, I saw an advertisement from Bhutan Broadcasting Service, then a radio station, seeking part-time translators from English to Dzongkha. I applied, attended the interview, and days later saw my name on the noticeboard among the selected candidates.

For the first time in a long while, I felt genuine happiness. Translating news bulletins and hearing my words broadcast nationwide gave me dignity and hope. I even began planning to rent a small place of my own to settle into my new life. Then one day, a family friend came to see me. Gently, he said, "Your father wants you to come home. Some of his devotees and patients have asked him to forgive you." I shook my head and told him, "I have decided to live my life on my own, whether it's good or bad. Please let me be." The man sighed deeply. He was caught between two hearts, mine and my father's, both wounded, both right in their own ways. He said something that struck me deeply, "Jobs and opportunities will come and go but you will have only one father in this lifetime. You can lose one job and find another but you can never lose a father and find another."

That night, I could not sleep. I thought about my father, his inability to express affection but also his silent love that had always been there, hidden behind harsh words. The next morning, I decided to return home with the man. When my father saw me, no words were needed. His eyes softened, and our bond began to mend. I left my job at the radio station and resumed assisting him, not out of obligation, but out of love and understanding.

During this difficult period, an old nun played a quiet but profound role in my life. She had been a devoted follower of my grandfather, Dzogchen Rinpoche, and cared for our small prayer wheel temple at Dechencholing. Though aged and frail, her heart was vast. She became like a grandmother to me, offering warmth, moral strength, and gentle encouragement.

She understood my pain without many words. She even spoke to my father several times on my behalf, urging him to consider my future. In her sincerity, she once offered me her modest savings so that I might study elsewhere and obtain a formal certificate. I was deeply moved, though her wish could not be fulfilled.

Looking back, I realize how much strength her compassion gave me. Though unnoticed by the world, her kindness sustained me when everything felt lost. Her presence remains one of the most tender and unforgettable memories of my youth.

THE TURNING POINT

There is a Bhutanese proverb that says, "The axe does not always fall where the woodcutter intends, nor does the log split along the line one envisions." This saying deeply reflects the turning point of my own life. Just when I was working under my father, I received an unexpected offer from my maternal uncle, who was a *trulku* (a reincarnated master in Tibetan Buddhism), who invited me to accompany him on his travels to Taiwan and the United States.

It was a rare and precious chance to gain new experiences to broaden my understanding of the outside world beyond the Himalayas. I accepted the invitation with excitement and gratitude.

When I arrived in Taiwan, I shifted my work from healing to conducting religious rituals with my maternal uncle. During my time there, I learned some spoken Chinese and observed that in much of Asian culture, Buddhism is often practiced more for fulfilling

worldly purposes than for inner transformation. Later, I traveled to the United States, where I was offered the opportunity to stay and assist at a Buddhist center in Los Angeles. However, destiny had other plans for me. Life unpredictable as it is, I received news that my father had become gravely ill. Without hesitation, I abandoned the opportunity and returned home to Bhutan. For the next few years, my days and nights revolved around his care. Each moment I spent attending to him was both a duty and a final act of devotion. In 1997, he passed away and the loss was not just of a father, but of a teacher, a guide, and the pillar of my life.

With his passing, the weight of responsibility fell entirely onto my shoulders. As the eldest, I had to manage the household, look after my younger siblings, and provide stability. These duties forced me to walk a difficult path. Traditionally, a monk cannot involve himself in domestic responsibilities and so I chose the way of a lay practitioner instead, an *upasaka*. It was not an easy decision; it meant balancing spiritual commitments with worldly obligations and often the two seemed to pull me in opposite directions. But I had no choice, life demanded that I shoulder both.

While fulfilling my responsibilities, I continued to pursue the spiritual and medical path my father had instilled in me. I traveled to India, where I received teachings and transmissions from great masters of various lineages. Among them was the late Dr. Throgawa

Rinpoche, a highly revered physician whose lineage traced back to the Chagpori Tibetan Medical Institute in Tibet. He re-established the Chagpori Tibetan Medical Institute in India, carrying forward its ancient tradition with sincere dedication.

Late Dr. Throgawa Rinpoche. *Photo author unknown*

Receiving his guidance was a great honor. Through those teachings, I felt a continuation of my father's spirit, a reminder that although my journey had been filled with interruptions and detours, the roots of what he had given me would never be lost.

When I was a child, one of the great masters of the twentieth century recognized me as the reincarnation of a spiritual teacher. It was a moment that could have completely changed the direction of my life. Such recognition carries honor, responsibility, and a fixed role

within Tibetan Buddhism — something many people spend their entire lives striving to attain. Yet my father did not accept it. He sensed that such claims often carry mixed or mistaken intentions.

Unlike many parents who devote all their efforts to shaping their children into somebody, my father allowed us to find our own path and become who we were meant to be. In fact, this was a wise and generous decision — to leave the path open and free, rather than choosing it for us or asking us to follow what others had decided.

With calm clarity and firm conviction, he said, "If my son chooses to practice the Dharma for the benefit of all beings, that is more than enough. He cannot be the reincarnation of someone who has already attained such a high realization."

His words were not spoken out of doubt or disrespect. They came from his own understanding and values. He did not want a title to define my life or place a heavy burden on my human journey. He believed that genuine spiritual practice should arise from inner choice, not from recognition imposed from outside.

Many years before I was born, a Bhutanese man named Lopen Tobgyel from Lamai Gonpa in Bumthang, east of central Bhutan, traveled to Tibet long before the revolution. He was driven by a deep wish to study the Dharma. During his journey, he met a master,

the same master whom I was later said to be the reincarnation of. That meeting changed the course of his life.

Lopen Tobgyel became not only the master's devoted student but also his close attendant. He served him with complete trust, humility, and unwavering dedication. Their bond grew strong over many years and remained unbroken despite political turmoil, personal hardship, and the dramatic changes taking place in the region. During the Tibetan revolution, Lopen Tobgyel helped his master cross the dangerous mountain passes into Bhutan, hoping to offer him safety and peace. It was in Bhutan that the master eventually passed away. He left behind no public fame or visible legacy only quiet devotion preserved in the hearts of a few faithful disciples.

Because of his lifelong spiritual commitment, Lopen Tobgyel had deep and unshakable faith in the recognition of me as the reincarnation of his master. In his old age, when he became ill and sensed that his life was coming to an end, he expressed a heartfelt wish to see me one last time. He hoped to pass on some of the master's belongings, including sacred texts that he had carefully protected and carried across borders for many years. To him, these were not just objects — they were living reminders of his teacher's presence, blessings, and spiritual lineage.

However, life unfolded differently. At that time, I was away in another place. In those days, there were no mobile phones or easy ways to communicate over long distances. We could not reach each other. Before I was able to return, he had passed away. When I finally arrived in Thimphu, his niece informed me of his passing. Her voice carried sadness, but also a sense of responsibility as though she was delivering the final echo of his unfulfilled wish.

I felt a deep heaviness in my heart, not because of the belongings he wanted to give me, but because I could not meet him at the end of his life, even though we had met several times before. Although I missed the chance to see him during his final moments, I was able to attend his forty-ninth day prayer ceremony at his residence in Changzamtok, Thimphu.

In the Vajrayana Buddhist tradition, the forty-ninth day marks the completion of the bardo, the intermediate state between death and rebirth. It is believed that consciousness may remain in this transitional state for up to seven weeks, with the possibility of rebirth occurring at the end of each seven-day cycle. The forty-ninth day represents the final opportunity for rebirth in any realm, according to one's karma. During this period, prayers, merit-making practices, and the recitation of sutras and mantras are performed to guide the deceased's consciousness toward a favorable rebirth in higher realms.

Sitting among the chanting monks during the ceremony, I felt a quiet mixture of gratitude and sorrow, along with a deep awareness of impermanence. The rising and falling rhythm of the prayers felt like waves, carrying the memory of a disciple whose devotion had stretched across generations.

In that moment, I understood how deeply my life was connected to theirs, whether or not I accepted the title of reincarnation. Sometimes destiny does not reveal itself through recognition, names, or formal roles, but through human connections, through people who touch our lives in small or meaningful ways, and leave lasting impressions on our hearts.

THE DAWN OF SOWA RIGPA

The traditional system of medicine practiced in Bhutan is known as Sowa Rigpa. It is revered as one of the five major sciences in Vajrayana Buddhist studies. The Five Major Sciences provide a complete framework for understanding life, the mind, communication, healing, and skilful action. Together, they help a practitioner develop wisdom and compassion, which are essential qualities on the path of a bodhisattva. A person who masters all five sciences traditionally earned the title Mahapandita, meaning "great scholar."

These five sciences that train the mind, refine understanding, and support the ability to benefit others in practical ways.

1. Inner Science
(*Nang Dün Rigpa*, Buddhist Philosophy and Psychology)

Inner Science is the heart of Buddhist study. It explores the nature of the mind, consciousness, and reality. It includes the teachings

of both Sutra and Tantra and explains the path to liberation from suffering. Through this science, practitioners learn how thoughts, emotions, and perceptions arise and how wisdom and compassion can be cultivated.

2. Logic (*Tse Ma Rigpa*)

Logic teaches how to think clearly and reason correctly. It includes debate, critical thinking, and the study of valid knowledge. This science helps practitioners distinguish truth from misunderstanding and avoid blind belief. It sharpens the mind and strengthens confidence in the teachings through direct understanding.

3. Language and Grammar (*Dra Rigpa*)

This science focuses on language, especially Sanskrit and Tibetan grammar, pronunciation, and meaning. It enables accurate reading, translation, and interpretation of sacred texts. Clear language supports precise communication and prevents the misinterpretation of spiritual teachings.

4. Healing science (*Sowa Rigpa*)

This science teaches about holistic healthcare, with an emphasis on balance, and the connection between body, mind, and

environment. This science trains practitioners to heal illnesses, promote well-being, and serve others with compassion.

5. Arts and Crafts (*Zo Rigpa*)

Arts and crafts include skills such as painting, sculpture, metalwork, architecture, and design. These skills are used to create statues, mandalas, temples, ritual objects, and other supports for spiritual practice and community life. They express devotion, beauty, and mindfulness through skilful action.

Together, the Five Major Sciences develop both inner wisdom and practical ability. They guide practitioners not only toward personal awakening but also toward meaningful service to others and society.

Rooted in profound Buddhist spiritual and philosophical foundations, Sowa Rigpa represents not merely a medical system, but a holistic approach to health that integrates body and mind. Originating in ancient Tibet, Sowa Rigpa developed through the synthesis of indigenous Tibetan medicine knowledge with medical wisdom from India, China, and other parts of Asia. Over the centuries, it spread widely across the Himalayan regions, including Bhutan, Nepal, Ladakh, Sikkim and even reached certain parts of Mongolia and Russia.

In Bhutan, Sowa Rigpa has been carefully preserved and officially integrated into the national healthcare system under the visionary direction of our Third King, the Father of Modern Bhutan, and it now functions alongside modern medicine. The word *sowa* in Dzongkha (and Tibetan) literally means healing or nourishing, while *rigpa* means science or knowledge. Hence, Sowa Rigpa translates as "the science of healing".

Sowa Rigpa developed gradually over many centuries through cultural exchange, translation, and careful refinement. It did not arise at one time or from a single source. Instead, it passed through several historical stages beginning with early human understanding of nature and health, continuing through the practices of ancient Tibetans, flourishing under the great Tibetan kings after the unification of Tibet, and finally taking shape as a formal medical system after the decline of the Tibetan Empire. It has a long history, spanning from the time of Bon to the Buddhist era in Tibet.

To understand its early development, we must look to the seventh century, during the reign of King Songtsen Gampo, the founder of the Tibetan Empire and one of Tibet's most respected rulers. He believed that true strength comes from wisdom and therefore encouraged both spiritual and intellectual growth in his newly unified kingdom. Under his vision, the Tibetan script and literature were created — a major cultural achievement that later made it

possible to translate and preserve vast bodies of knowledge, including medical texts.

According to historical records, the king sent his minister Thonmi Sambhota to India to study Sanskrit, grammar, literature, and Buddhist philosophy. After returning, Thonmi developed the Tibetan writing system, partly based on Indian scripts. This became the foundation of Tibet's intellectual and spiritual life. With a written form of language in place, Tibet opened itself to scholars and physicians from neighboring regions. The king invited learned masters from India, China, and Central Asia, who worked with Tibetan scholars to translate many medical texts from their own traditions into Tibetan. Through this process, medical knowledge from different cultures began to blend, forming the early foundation of Sowa Rigpa.

Historical accounts also describe how the Chinese princess Wencheng Kongjo of the Tang dynasty (known in Tibetan as Gyaza), came to Tibet as the bride of King Songtsen Gampo. Along with Buddhist images and scriptures, she brought Chinese medical texts, which were later translated into Tibetan. Her entourage included great physicians from the Chinese imperial court, who shared their knowledge with Tibetan physicians. This marked one of the earliest medical and cultural exchanges between Tibet and China.

In a similar way, according to one of the historical accounts three foreign physicians were invited to Tibet to treat the king's illness: the Indian Vedic physician Bharadhvaja, the Chinese physician Hen Wan Hang De, and the Greek physician Galenos. Each brought medical texts from their own traditions, along with treatment methods and medicinal formulas. All these works were translated into Tibetan. After studying and comparing across their knowledge, the three physicians jointly composed a medical text called *Mi Jig Pai Tshon Cha* ("The Fearless Weapon"), which they presented to the king. The king was very pleased and praised all three physicians for their contribution. However, most of those texts have been lost over time, and only historical accounts remain today. Thus, the seventh century became a turning point in Tibetan history. It marked not only the rise of written language, religion, and art, but also the beginning of a medical tradition that would later be refined into the profound and complete healing system known today as Sowa Rigpa.

THE GOLDEN AGE OF SOWA RIGPA

The eighth century stands as one of the brightest and most influential periods in the history of Tibetan medicine. It was a time of rich cultural exchange, strong intellectual curiosity, and deep spiritual growth. During this remarkable era, scholars and physicians from different civilizations worked together to share knowledge and strengthen the foundations of what later became known as Sowa Rigpa. One of the most important achievements of this period was the composition of a major medical text called *Men Ched Dawai Gyalpo*, commonly translated into English as *The King of the Moon that Dispels Diseases*, which consists of one hundred and thirteen chapters.

This historic work was composed through the collaboration of great Tibetan and Chinese physicians. Later, it was revised and corrected by the renowned physician, scholar, and translator Vairocana together with the eminent Chinese physician Haseng Mahayana. Their joint

effort reflected a meaningful synthesis of Chinese and Tibetan medical traditions. By blending insights from both systems, this work became one of the earliest examples of integrating diverse medical knowledge into the emerging Sowa Rigpa medical tradition. This golden age unfolded under the enlightened reign of King Trisong Detsen, one of Tibet's most visionary rulers. He is widely known for firmly establishing Buddhism in Tibet and for inviting great Indian masters such as Guru Padmasambhava and Shantarakshita. Under his leadership, Tibet experienced a flourishing of Buddhist philosophy, spiritual practice, and scholarly activity.

At the same time, the king strongly supported the study of medicine and astrology, recognizing their importance for the well-being of society. During this period, Tibet developed strong connections with neighboring countries, including India, China, Nepal, and other regions. Scholars, physicians, and translators were invited to Tibet to exchange knowledge and skills. A major center of learning was established at Samye Monastery, which became a hub for translation, study, and spiritual practice. Tibetan scholars, including Vairocana, received royal support to travel abroad, study advanced knowledge, and translate important texts into Tibetan. Through the gathering of eminent physicians and scholars from different cultures, a wide range of medical theories, healing techniques, and philosophical perspectives were studied and practiced. Many important medical

texts were composed and translated during this time, helping to preserve valuable knowledge and adapt it to the Tibetan context.

Vairocana played a particularly significant role in this process. He traveled to India, where he studied medicine, astrology, tantra, and sutra under renowned masters. After returning to Tibet, he composed and translated many important works. Among them were texts on herbs and medicine such as *Ngo Yi Men Ngag* ("Essential Instructions on Herbs") and *Tik Ka Mun Sel Dron Mi* ("The Lamp of Commentary that Dispels Darkness"). These writings contributed greatly to the systematic understanding of medicinal plants and therapeutic practices in Tibet, shaping the early development of Sowa Rigpa. Beyond medicine, Vairocana also made outstanding contributions to the translation of texts on astrology, tantra, Mahayana philosophy, and Buddhist sutras. His influence extended across multiple fields of knowledge, and his contributions remain difficult to fully express in words. Through his dedication, scholarship, and vision, he helped preserve and transmit essential wisdom for future generations.

In summary, the eighth century represents a golden age in the formation of Sowa Rigpa. It was a time when spiritual practice, scientific inquiry, and cross-cultural collaboration flourished together. The efforts of great masters, scholars, and physicians supported by enlightened leadership laid a strong foundation for Sowa Rigpa

medicine. Among them, Vairocana stands out as a central figure whose work continues to inspire and guide the healing tradition today. It was during this remarkable period that the legendary physician Yuthog Nyingma Yonten Gonpo was born, a figure later revered as the Father of Tibetan Medicine.

Yuthog Nyingma
(own collection, statue author unknown)

From an early age, Yuthogpa showed extraordinary intelligence and deep compassion. He had a natural gift for medical knowledge and is regarded as an emanation of the Medicine Buddha. At just three years old, he began studying Tibetan writing, literature, and

medicine under the guidance of his father. He learned quickly and effortlessly, mastering everything he was taught. Even as a child, he began treating patients, showing unusual skill and confidence for his age.

When he was ten years old, he was invited to the royal court by Chögyal Me Aktshom, the father of King Trisong Detsen. There, he debated medical knowledge with other renowned physicians and proved himself to be exceptionally learned and capable. His wisdom impressed everyone at the court, including both the king and his father.

Yuthogpa's thirst for knowledge led him far beyond Tibet. He traveled widely to places such as India, China, and Central Asia, studying with great physicians and scholars of his time. At the age of twenty-five, he made his first journey to India via Nepal, where he received teachings from renowned masters, including Pandita Chandra Deva. He later traveled to India three times in total, and also journeyed to Mount Wutai in China, where he studied with an eminent Chinese physician.

Through these travels, Yuthogpa immersed himself in diverse systems of healing. He studied the Ayurvedic traditions of India and the traditional medicine of China, skillfully integrating their knowledge into the Tibetan medical system. Through years of

study, observation, and practice, he mastered every field of medical science known in his time.

Yuthog Nyingma Yonten Gonpo. *Photo: unknown.*

His reputation as a healer spread widely. It is said that he treated countless patients across Tibet and neighboring regions, offering

his services selflessly, without any desire for reward. Recognizing his compassionate activities and his extraordinary skill, he was appointed as the king's physician and was given the honorific title *Lhajey*, meaning "Lord of the King." From that time on, Lhajey became a respected title for highly skilled and compassionate physicians in Tibetan medical tradition, a usage that continues to this day. He later founded the first monastic medical college, Tanadug, in Kongpo Menlung, southeastern Tibet. There, he taught Sowa Rigpa to more than three hundred students. Living to the age of one hundred and twenty-five, he dedicated his entire life to preserving and spreading the teachings of Sowa Rigpa for the benefit of all beings.

During this golden age, Yuthogpa composed the great medical treatise known as the *Gyud Zhi* ("Four Tantras"), which became the foundation of Sowa Rigpa. This work presents a complete and systematic understanding of medicine, combining indigenous Tibetan knowledge with insights from other traditions, all grounded in Buddhist philosophical principles.

In the 12th century, the text was revised into its present form by Yuthog Sarma Yonten Gonpo, the 13th descendant of the elder Yuthog Nyingma Yonten Gonpo. The *Four Tantras*, consisting of one hundred and fifty-six chapters, offers a comprehensive guide to the science of healing. It is divided into four main sections: the

Root Tantra, the *Explanatory Tantra*, the *Oral Instruction Tantra*, and the *Subsequent Tantra*.

During this period, historical accounts also mentioned nine great physicians of Tibet, each a master of specific medical disciplines and each contributing uniquely to the advancement of Sowa Rigpa healing arts. Their presence reflected the flourishing of intellectual atmosphere at the royal court. The royal palace of King Trisong Detsen is said to have hosted medical conferences that brought together eminent scholars, translators and physicians from across regions. These events were not mere contests of intellect; they symbolized the King's deep respect for medicine as a noble and sacred profession. The honor accorded to physicians during that time demonstrates how highly both the monarchy and the people valued the art of healing. Thus, the eighth century stands as the golden age of Tibetan medicine, when knowledge, faith, and compassion converged to give birth to a profound medical tradition that continues to benefit humanity to this day. From the light of Yuthogpa's wisdom emerged a lineage of healers devoted not merely to curing disease, but to understanding life itself in all its interdependent cycles.

THE HEALER REBORN, YUTHOG SARMA AND THE LIVING TRADITION OF SOWA RIGPA

After the decline of the great Tibetan Empire, Tibet entered a period of political fragmentation and cultural transformation. Yet, even in those uncertain times, the seeds of wisdom sown by the great masters of earlier centuries continued to bear fruit. The spirit of healing, nurtured through generations of great compassionate physicians, found new life in the twelfth century with the birth of Yuthog Sarma Yonten Gonpo. Inheriting both the noble lineage and the profound legacy of his ancestor, the younger Yuthog rose to become one of the most illustrious figures in the history of Sowa Rigpa.

He was revered as the emanation of Medicine Buddha. From a young age, Yuthog demonstrated exceptional intelligence and a remark-

able knowledge of herbs and medicine. It is believed that he began practicing medicine at the age of eight. He traveled widely across the region, including the Golden Isle of Sumatra and Sri Lanka, and especially six times to India, studying there under eminent physicians and scholars. His deep engagement with diverse medical systems, particularly those of India, China and Persia enabled him to acquire a broad and comparative understanding of the healing sciences of his time.

His wisdom was so clear that he perceived everything effortlessly. He expounded the *Kangyur* (the translated words of the Buddha) and the *Tengyur* (the translated treatises) from memory and realization. He even presided over an assembly of hundreds of learned scholars and panditas at Bodhgaya Mahabodhi Temple in India. Among his many contributions, Yuthog composed several influential texts, including the renowned *Cha Lag Chögye* ("The Eighteen Medical Discourses") a work that stands as a testament to his analytical genius and profound clinical insight. This text was the result of his rigorous research and comparative study of earlier sources such as *Men Ched Dawai Gyalpo* ("The King of the Moon that Dispels Diseases") and *Yen Lag Gyepa* ("The Eight Branches of Healing"). The latter is based on an Indian Ayurvedic text composed by Vāgbhaṭa (known in Tibetan as Lopen Pha Khol) and contains

one hundred and twenty chapters. In the late tenth century, the great translator Lotsawa Rinchen Zangpo translated it into Tibetan.

Through meticulous examination of these classical works and his understanding of various other medical traditions, Yuthog sought to harmonize their theories with the existing Sowa Rigpa medical framework, thereby enriching and refining the body of Sowa Rigpa knowledge. Recognizing the need for a more systematic and comprehensive structure, he undertook the great task of revising and expanding the *Gyüd Zhi* ("Four Tantras"), the cornerstone of Sowa Rigpa medicine originally attributed to the elder Yuthog. He made critical additions, corrections, and clarifications to the text, ensuring its internal consistency and practical applicability in medical training and clinical practice.

Beyond his scholarship, Yuthog Yonten Gonpo the Younger was celebrated for his clinical excellence and ethical conduct. His compassionate treatment of the sick, his commitment to serve without bias and his mastery in preparing effective medicinal compounds earned him great respect throughout Tibet. He often emphasized that a true physician must cultivate both wisdom and compassion, for healing is not merely the art of curing the body but of alleviating suffering in its deepest sense.

In addition to his medical contributions, he composed a complete cycle of profound spiritual teachings and practices known as the *Yuthog Nyingthig* ("The Innermost Essence of Yuthog"), a tantric practice tradition specifically intended for physicians and healing. This teaching integrates meditation, visualization, *sadhana* practice and mantra recitation guiding practitioners to cultivate inner realization alongside external healing skills. It expresses his conviction that genuine healing arises from the union of wisdom and compassion. Through his remarkable intellect, unwavering diligence, and compassionate heart, Yuthog Yonten Gonpo the Younger revitalized Sowa Rigpa during a time of great cultural transformation. He preserved the ancient lineage of his forefathers while enriching it with new insights, thereby laying a strong foundation for the development of Sowa Rigpa as a living, evolving tradition. He taught many disciples and among them the most distinguished was Sumton Yeshey Zung.

Sumton continued his master's great legacy by further developing and promoting both Sowa Rigpa and the Yuthog Nyingthig lineage. His legacy continues to inspire generations of physicians and scholars, reminding them that the art of healing is not merely a science of the body, but a sacred path toward the liberation of all beings from suffering.

Over the centuries, the Sowa Rigpa tradition began to flourish and diversify throughout Tibet, with great physicians such as Drubthob Ugyenpa, who composed *Ngülchu Drubpai Tenchö* (a treatise on the processing and preparation of mercury for medicinal use). By the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, it had developed into two distinct lineages or traditions known as the Jang Lug (Northern Tradition) and the Zur Lug (Southern Tradition). This development was not the result of doctrinal divergence but rather of adaptation to distinct geographical, climatic, and socio-cultural environments within Tibet.

The Jang Lug lineage was propagated by the great and renowned physician Jangpa Namgyel Dragsang. It was primarily practiced in the northern and higher altitude regions of Tibet, where the environment is cold, dry, and harsh. Due to these geographical and climatic conditions, people living in these areas had distinct lifestyles, dietary habits, and patterns of disease. The medicinal herbs that grew in such high-altitude terrain also differed in potency, taste, and energetic qualities. Consequently, the Jang Lug system of practice emphasized treatments suitable for cold climates, focusing on warming therapies, metabolic stimulation, and dietary adjustments that balance cold-induced disorders.

In contrast, the Zur Lug lineage was founded by the eminent physician Zurkhar Nyam Nyi Dorje, one of the most respected

medical scholars and commentators in Tibetan history. The Zur Lug tradition was practiced mainly in the southern, lower altitude regions of Tibet, which are comparatively warmer and more humid. The environmental and dietary factors in these areas gave rise to different patterns of disease, and the available medicinal plants possessed different qualities. Therefore, the Zur Lug school developed therapeutic approaches and formulations more suitable for warm climates focusing on cooling treatment, detoxification, and balancing heat-related disorders.

Together, these two traditions demonstrate the adaptive and comprehensive nature of Sowa Rigpa. Rather than being a rigid medical system, Sowa Rigpa evolved dynamically to respond to local conditions, embodying both theoretical depth and practical flexibility. The existence of the Jang Lug and Zur Lug lineages thus reflects the system's capacity to integrate environmental, cultural, physiological diversity and on-going evolution of time into a coherent medical tradition aimed at the well-being of all beings.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the tradition of Sowa Rigpa reached a new height of refinement and institutional development, largely due to the contributions of Desi Sangye Gyatso, one of the most illustrious figures in Tibetan intellectual history. A polymath, statesman and visionary physician, Sangye Gyatso played a pivotal role in consolidating the political, religious,

and philosophical foundations of Tibet during the time of the Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngawang Lobsang Gyatso. In 1679, Desi Sangye Gyatso was officially appointed by the Fifth Dalai Lama with the title "Desi", signifying the Regent of Tibet. In this capacity, he was entrusted with overseeing both secular and spiritual affairs. Despite the immense administrative responsibilities of his position, Sangye Gyatso devoted himself to scholarly pursuits, producing an extensive body of work that encompasses history, astrology, medicine and Buddhist philosophy.

His intellectual legacy remains a cornerstone of Tibetan knowledge systems. Among his many contributions, his most celebrated medical treatise is the *Vaidurya Ngönpo* ("Blue Beryl"), a comprehensive commentary on the *Gyüd Zhi*. In this monumental work, Sangye Gyatso clarified the theoretical and practical aspects of Sowa Rigpa, synthesizing centuries of accumulated medical knowledge into a coherent and systematized framework. The *Blue Beryl* is distinguished by its clarity of exposition, integration of Buddhist philosophical principles, and his famous medical thangka paintings - a series of seventy-nine medical paintings that visually represent all about healing, the human body, diagnostic methods, disease classifications, and treatment procedures through the art of painting. These thangkas not only served as an invaluable pedagogical tool but

also marked the beginning of a sophisticated tradition of medical illustration in Tibet.

Recognizing the need for institutionalized medical education, Desi Sangye Gyatso founded the Chagpori Medical College in 1696, located on the so-called Iron Hill near Lhasa. The establishment of Chagpori represented a major turning point in the history of Sowa Rigpa. It became the foremost center for training physicians (*menpa* or *drungtsho*) and astrologers (*tsipa*), ensuring that the transmission of Sowa Rigpa continued in a structured academic setting. The curriculum combined rigorous theoretical study of the *Four Tantras* with extensive practical training in diagnosis, compounding, and pharmacology, thereby institutionalizing the integration of spiritual ethics and medical science.

During this vibrant period, numerous other eminent physicians made invaluable contributions to the development of Sowa Rigpa healing science. Among them, Dharmo Menrampa stands out as one of the most accomplished clinicians and surgeons of his time. He gained particular fame for his expertise in ophthalmic surgery. Historical accounts suggest that when the Fifth Dalai Lama developed a cataract in his left eye around the age of fifty-nine, which later spread to his right eye leading to near blindness, it was Dharmo Menrampa who successfully performed the delicate surgical operation to restore his vision. This episode not only demonstrates the

advanced level of surgical practice in seventeenth-century Tibet but also highlights the deep trust and knowledge between physicians and spiritual leaders of the period. Dharmo Menrampa authored several significant works on medicine, and pharmacology, such as *Dharmo Ka Gya Ma* ("Profound Instruction of Dharmo"), further enriching the Sowa Rigpa system.

Another distinguished figure of the same era was Deumar Tenzin Phuntsok, a descendant of Biji, one of the nine eminent physicians (*menpa gu*) who served under King Trisong Detsen in the eighth century. Deumar Tenzin Phuntsok was widely revered for his encyclopedic knowledge of plant-based medicine and his skill in identifying and classifying herbs across the Tibetan plateau. His most celebrated work, the *Shelgong Shelthreng* ("Crystal Rosary"), represents a landmark in the development of Tibetan *materia medica*. In this text, he systematically expanded upon the pharmacological sections of the *Four Tantras* by documenting numerous medicinal plants not previously recorded and refining the classification of herbs according to their taste, potency, and therapeutic functions. Through his rigorous study, Deumar Tenzin Phuntsok greatly enriched the botanical and pharmacological foundations of Sowa Rigpa, ensuring that medical practice remained closely attuned to the natural environment and evolving clinical needs.

Since then, many great and eminent physicians have contributed to the growth and spread of Sowa Rigpa. Among them were Situ Choekyi Jungney, Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo, Kongtrul Yonten Gyatsho, Ju Mipham Gelek Namgyal Gyatso and many others. In 1883, a highly revered figure in the history of Tibetan medicine was born, Khyenrab Norbu, the great personal physician of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama. Renowned for his extraordinary intellect and mastery, Khyenrab Norbu distinguished himself as one of the most accomplished scholars and practitioners in both Sowa Rigpa and astrology during his time.

When the Thirteenth Dalai Lama established the Men-Tsee-Khang (Tibetan Medical and Astro Institute) in Lhasa in 1916, he entrusted Khyenrab Norbu with a position of immense responsibility. He was appointed as the Director of both Chagpori Medical College and the newly founded Men-Tsee-Khang, reflecting his unparalleled expertise and leadership in the medicine and astrology. Under his direction, these institutions flourished as centers of intellectual and clinical excellence, producing generations of learned physicians and astrologers. Khyenrab Norbu was also a prolific scholar and author, composing numerous treatises and commentaries that enriched the Sowa Rigpa and astrological literature. His writings synthesized classical teachings with contemporary insights, ensuring the preservation and advancement of the Sowa Rigpa tradition

amidst the changing times. His legacy extended far beyond Lhasa, influencing the practice of Sowa Rigpa across Tibet and the entire Himalayan region. Among his many learned disciples was my late father, who studied under him with great devotion.

GYÜD ZHI,
THE FOUR MEDICAL TANTRAS

The *Gyüd Zhi*, the *Four Tantras* of Sowa Rigpa contains four main texts:

1. *Tsa Gyüd*, the Root Tantra

The *Root Tantra* gives a brief yet profound overview of the essential principles of Sowa Rigpa. Within its six chapters, it outlines the core concepts that the later tantras elaborate upon, such as the nature of health and disease. It acts as the gateway to understanding the entire Sowa Rigpa system.

2. *Shed Gyüd*, Explanatory Tantra

The *Explanatory Tantra* combines both the philosophy and practical principles of Sowa Rigpa medicine, it is considered the most important and valuable among the four tantras. It lays out

the complete theoretical framework of Sowa Rigpa in a clear, structured and systematic way. It begins by explaining how the human body forms from the interplay of the five elements, consciousness and karmic influence. It then explains the body's anatomical structure, its physiological functions, and how the body eventually declines and disintegrates at the end of life.

The second section explains diseases in detail. It describes their causes and conditions, where they arise in the body, their characteristics, and the signs and symptoms that appear. It also explains how different diseases are classified.

The text also discusses the importance of proper diet, behavior and lifestyle for maintaining health and preventing illness. These principles are also used as part of the treatment. Later chapters describe different medicinal substances, their special properties, their taste and post-digestive taste, and how medicines are prepared and compounded. It also explains the use of medical instruments in clinical practices. In addition, the text explains different methods of diagnosis, various therapeutic treatments and the ethical responsibilities of a physician. It has thirty-one chapters.

3. *Men Ngag Gyüd*, Oral Instruction Tantra

The *Oral Instruction Tantra* explains how the theories of traditional medicine are applied in real medical practice. It gives clear guidance on how to understand diseases and how to treat them. In its ninety-two chapters, it describes in detail the causes, types, signs and symptoms, and treatments of many different illnesses.

The text begins with the diagnosis and treatment of the imbalance of three vital energies. It then explains many groups of diseases, including abdominal and febrile disorders, illnesses of the upper part of the body, disorders of the organs, genital diseases, and other complex conditions. It also includes sections on pediatric and gynecological disorders, illnesses believed to be caused by harmful spirits, wounds and injuries, poisoning, geriatric problems, and infertility.

That the *Oral Instruction Tantra* carefully explains both diagnosis and treatment for such a wide range of conditions demonstrates that for almost every health-related problem, a method of understanding and treatment can be found within this system.

4. *Chima Gyüd*, Subsequent Tantra

The *Subsequent Tantra* explains the main practical methods used in Sowa Rigpa. It describes the principles behind important

practices such as preparing medicines, using cleansing therapies, and applying different external healing techniques.

The text begins with a detailed explanation of pulse and urine examination, which are essential diagnostic methods in Sowa Rigpa medicine. It then explains how to prepare different types of medicines, including decoctions, powders, pills, pastes, medicinal butter, calcined powders, concentrated extracts, medicinal drinks, precious medicines, and single-herb remedies. Their uses for various diseases are clearly explained.

The tantra also explains cleansing therapies that remove toxins and imbalances from the body. These include purgation, emesis (therapeutic vomiting), nasal medication, mild and strong enemas, and channel cleansing. After this, it describes external therapies such as compresses, medicinal baths, massage, moxibustion or cauterization, bloodletting, and surgical treatments. The *Subsequent Tantra* consists of twenty-seven chapters and thus all together there are one hundred and fifty-six chapters in the *Four Tantras*.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATION AND THE THREE VITAL ENERGIES

Sowa Rigpa, the traditional system of Tibetan and Bhutanese medicine, is deeply rooted in Buddhist philosophy. Unlike many other religious traditions that center around belief in a creator or god, Buddhism emphasizes the path of self-transformation through personal discovery and inner realization. Its core teaching revolves around the understanding of the mind, as both liberation and suffering arise from the mind itself. Liberation is attained through insight into the true nature of reality such as impermanence, interdependence and emptiness. This true nature of reality states that the nature of all things is empty of inherent existence, while ignorance of these truths perpetuates the cycle of suffering.

In Buddhism, the mind is regarded as the foundation of all experiences. Every joy and sorrow originates in the mind, hence mental

cultivation through mindfulness, meditation, and ethical conduct becomes the gateway to freedom from suffering. This understanding is not only spiritual but also profoundly therapeutic. The intimate connection between mind and body, a principle now widely recognized in modern psychology and medicine, forms the philosophical and practical cornerstone of Sowa Rigpa. The mind influences physiological processes such as nervous, endocrine and immune systems, while the body's condition in turn affects mental clarity, emotional balance, and overall well-being.

Buddhist philosophy teaches that the root of all suffering is ignorance, marigpa in Tibetan. It is our inability to see the true nature of reality. This ignorance gives rise to the three negative emotions or mental poisons — desire or attachment, anger and delusion. Sowa Rigpa parallels this understanding, identifying these same mental defilements as the distant causes, also known as root causes, of disease and disharmony. The three mental poisons disturb the subtle energies of the body, creating imbalances in the three vital energies, which govern all physiological and psychological functions.

Sowa Rigpa is profoundly distinct from other traditional systems of medicine. One of its most remarkable and unique philosophical foundations lies in its recognition of the root consciousness or all ground consciousness, as the essential basis for obtaining a physical body.

Root consciousness, also called ground consciousness, is the foundational and underlying layer of the mind. From this root, all other types of consciousness arise: the consciousnesses of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking. Our senses and thoughts change every moment, but this root consciousness continues quietly in the background, supporting all mental activity.

In Buddhist understanding, this root consciousness stores the impressions of everything we experience. Our actions, thoughts, emotions, and habits leave subtle marks in the mind. These marks are called karmic seeds. Just as a seed carries the potential to grow into a plant, karmic seeds carry the potential to shape our future experiences. They influence our personality, behavior, health, and life conditions. From moment to moment, these karmic seeds continue flowing in the mind stream as long as the cyclic existence of life continues. Our ground consciousness goes through all the stages of cyclic existence even when one's physical life ends. At the time of death, the physical body stops functioning, but the root consciousness continues. It carries these karmic seeds and connects to a new rebirth. In this way, it acts like a bridge between past life and present life, maintaining the continuity of the mind.

Root consciousness is very subtle and stable. It is always present, even during deep sleep, fainting, or when the mind is quiet and not

thinking. We may not directly notice it, just as we do not notice the air around us, yet it supports every experience we have.

This deep integration of Buddhist epistemology into medical theory sets Sowa Rigpa apart, as it views life, health, and disease not merely as physiological phenomena, but as dynamic expressions of consciousness and karmic causation. In the "Embryology" chapter of the *Explanatory Tantra*, this concept is clearly explained. It describes that conception does not occur solely through the union of the parental substances, the semen of the father and the ovum of the mother, but also requires the participation of consciousness.

The text states, "The causes of conception are the union of the non-defective semen of the father and ovum of the mother, the consciousness of the being, the imprint of past karma propelled by afflictive emotions, and the assemblage of the five elements." This passage illustrates that the consciousness acts as the bridge between the past and the present existence, carrying karmic imprints that determine the characteristics of the new physical form. Without this consciousness entering at the moment of conception, no sentient life can manifest, regardless of the perfection of the physical elements. Thus, in Sowa Rigpa, the study of embryology transcends biological explanation, encompassing the interdependence of mind, karma, and matter, a perspective not widely explained in other classical medical systems.

Sowa Rigpa teaches that the human body has deeper levels beyond the ordinary physical form. It describes three layers of embodiment, the gross body, the subtle body and the most subtle body. The gross body is the visible physical body. The subtle body consists of the channels, the inner wind and the drop or essence (*tsa, loong, thigle* in Tibetan, *nadis, prana, bindu* in Sanskrit). The most subtle body is the refined level of consciousness together with its subtle wind energy. Understanding these three levels teaches one how each body must be cared for. It also explains how balanced care leads to well-being and ultimately supports achieving liberation from cyclic existence — an approach unparalleled in other medical traditions.

In Sowa Rigpa, the theory of five elements is the fundamental foundation of all existence, encompassing not only the physical world but also mental and spiritual aspects. In the spiritual dimension, the Five Buddhas and the Five Wisdoms represent the five elements. Each element reflects a different quality of the mind and spiritual awareness. This shows that the same elements, which form the body, also shape the mind and the path to enlightenment. According to Sowa Rigpa, all external and internal phenomena in the universe are made of the five elements (*jungwa nga*) — earth, water, fire, air and space. These elements are not only present in the outer environment but also within the human body forming its physical and energetic structure. Everything in the universe, plants, animals and

human beings is composed of these five elements. In the human body, all tissues, internal organs, skin, bones, fluids, and even our emotions and mental states arise from the five elemental forces.

Each element has its own unique role. Earth provides structure, stability and ground for growth, water supports moisture and cohesion, fire enables warmth and transformation, air governs movement and space allows openness and communication. These elements do not function separately; they continuously interact and combine with one another to form all physical and mental processes.

It is easy to understand how the five elements express themselves in nature. We can see rocks and soil representing the earth element. We can observe water in rivers, lakes, snow, and ice. We feel the warmth of fire from sunlight or flame. We experience the movement of air as wind and breath. We can also gaze into the vast open expanse of space. These five elements form the foundation of the natural world. The human body is also part of nature. Our body, health, disease, and healing all follow the same universal principle of the five elements. However, inside the body, these elements do not appear in a visible or solid form like stones, fire, or water. Instead, they operate as subtle energies and functional forces that regulate how the body grows, moves, digests, repairs itself, and maintains balance.

To understand how the five elements function within the body, Sowa Rigpa Medicine applies a system known as the three *nyepa* (the three vital energies). In living beings, the five elements combine and organize themselves into three functional principles as vital or elemental energies. The three *nyepa* are the essence of human physiology. They maintain the structure of the body and activate all bodily systems. Every physical and mental activity depends on their proper functioning. The three *nyepa* are:

Loong (Air element)

Loong represents movement and circulation in the body. It governs breathing, blood flow, nerve activity, speech, posture, and mental movement such as thinking and alertness. All motion and communication in the body and mind depend on *loong*.

Thipa (Fire element)

Thipa represents heat and transformation. It controls digestion, metabolism, body temperature, appetite, and clarity of perception. *Thipa* helps convert food into energy and supports strength, sharpness, and vitality.

Bedken (Earth and Water elements)

Bedken represents stability, structure, and nourishment. It supports the formation of bones, muscles, tissues, joints, and body fluids. *Bedken* provides lubrication, endurance, immunity, and emotional calmness.

Together, these three *nyepa* maintain the balance between movement, heat, and stability in the body. When they function harmoniously, the body remains strong, flexible, and healthy. Each of the three *nyepa* further divides into five sub-categories, forming a total of fifteen divisions. These fifteen *nyepa* reside in different locations throughout the body. Each is linked with specific organs and anatomical systems and performs particular physiological functions, such as regulating respiration, digestion, circulation, lubrication, elimination, and mental activity. The tantra texts describe these divisions in detail and present them in classical charts for study and clinical application.

The *nyepa* govern both the form and function of all bodily systems. When they remain balanced, the body functions smoothly and adapts well to changes in environment, diet, age, and lifestyle. When the *nyepa* become disturbed or imbalanced, they express pathological signs and symptoms, leading to illness and discomfort. Therefore, in simple terms, the goal of Sowa Rigpa Medicine is to maintain

health and treat disease by restoring and preserving balance among the three *nyepa*.

All methods of diet, behavior, medicine, and therapy are of five elements designed to support this balance according to each individual's constitution and condition. Through the balancing of the five elements, one can attain both physical and mental well-being, which are the two inseparable aims of Sowa Rigpa healing. By understanding how the five elements operate within the body through the three *nyepa,* we gain a clearer insight into the close relationship between nature and human life. Health is not separate from the natural world but reflects the same principles of harmony, balance, and interdependence.

THE ROOT CAUSE OF DISEASE AND HEALING

Another distinguishing feature of Sowa Rigpa is its profound understanding of the distant cause, also known as the root cause of disease, and its attention to the immediate cause as well. While other traditional systems emphasize only the immediate cause, such as dietary, lifestyle or environmental factors, Sowa Rigpa goes deeper into identifying ignorance as the distant or root cause of all disorders. Here ignorance does not simply indicate a lack of knowledge or awareness, but a deep misapprehension of reality, such as failure to perceive the non-self nature and the interdependent nature of phenomena.

The *Explanatory Tantra* states:

> *Since it is impossible to reveal each and every cause for each and every disorder, the fundamental ignorance, which does not*

> *understand the intrinsic reality of the lack of self, is regarded as the general cause of all disorders. Just as the bird is never separated from its own shadow, no matter how high it soars in the sky, likewise sentient beings will never be free from illness because of ever-present fundamental ignorance, even though they may live with joy and happiness.*

This powerful analogy emphasizes that as long as ignorance remains embedded within consciousness, suffering and illness will inevitably accompany our existence.

As explained in the earlier chapter, ignorance is the root that gives rise to the three mental poisons — desire or attachment, anger and delusion. These mental poisons do not remain only at the level of the mind; they become the distant or root causes that disturb the balance of the body's three vital energies.

When **desire** or attachment becomes excessive or uncontrolled, it disturbs the wind energy (*loong*), leading to restlessness, mental instability, anxiety, fear, and forgetfulness. A person may become easily overstimulated by loud noises, bright lights, or even ordinary daily activities. As the imbalance of *loong* increases, it can manifest in various physical symptoms such as digestive disturbances including gas, bloating, and constipation; dryness of the skin, hair, lips, and joints; insomnia or light sleep; sensitivity to cold; and a

persistent feeling of coldness particularly in the hands and feet. It also affects the nervous system, resulting in weakness, fatigue, and general instability of both body and mind.

When **anger** becomes excessive or unchecked, it disturbs the bile or heat energy (*thipa*) leading to a short temper and the tendency to hold oneself and others to impossibly high standards, often resulting in toxic self-criticism. It also gives rise to impatience, argumentativeness, judgmental attitudes, jealousy, and ego-driven behavior. This imbalance can lead to physical problems such as digestive distress, including burning sensation in the stomach, heartburn, acid reflux, hyperacidity, loose stools or diarrhea, heat intolerance, inflammation, and premature graying of the hair.

When **delusion** persists, it disturbs the phlegm or cold energy (*bedken*), leading to lethargy, lack of motivation, mental dullness, depression, melancholy, possessiveness, stubbornness, and emotional overeating. As this imbalance develops, it can cause physical problems such as digestive sluggishness, including heavy feeling after meals, slow bowel movements, a sluggish metabolism, and weight gain. It may also lead to respiratory congestion, excessive sleepiness, and a general sense of physical heaviness.

In this way, the three mental poisons gradually influence both mind and body creating imbalance of the three vital energies. The *Explanatory Tantra* further elaborates:

> *The three proximate causes are loong, thipa, and Bedken. In their balanced states, they are the potential causes of all disorders, whereas in an imbalanced state, they manifest as the nature of disorder and cause harm and suffering to one's body and one's life.*

Thus, health in Sowa Rigpa is the harmony of these three vital energies and disease is the result of their imbalance originating ultimately from the deluded state of mind governed by ignorance.

The treatment system of Sowa Rigpa is holistic and deeply ethical. It looks at the whole person's body, energy, mind, and environment rather than focusing only on symptoms. Healing is guided by clear therapeutic principles that help the physician understand illness and choose the right treatment. The physician first makes a proper diagnosis. This includes careful observation of the patient, listening to their symptoms, and using all diagnostic methods such as pulse and urine examination. Through this process, the physician identifies the nature and immediate cause of the disease, whether it comes from an imbalanced diet, unhealthy lifestyle, emotional disturbance, seasonal influence, long-term habits or

other factors. At the same time, the physician studies the patient's individual constitution, digestion, age, and living environment. Every person is different, so treatment must always be personalized. Only after this clear understanding does the physician apply the appropriate therapeutic methods. Sowa Rigpa basically uses four main approaches to treatment, which support each other and work together to restore balance and health.

1. Dietary Regulation

Food is considered the first and most important medicine. What a person eats directly affects body, energy, and overall health. The physician prescribes food and drink according to the patient's imbalance, body type, digestive strength, and the season. For example, warm and nourishing foods may be recommended for cold or weak conditions, while light and cooling foods may be advised for heat-related disorders. Heavy or oily foods are reduced when digestion is weak. Proper diet helps the body regain balance naturally and prevents further deterioration and recover illness.

2. Behavioral or Lifestyle Modification

Lifestyle or behavior strongly influence health. Irregular sleep, overwork, stress, lack of exercise, and harmful habits can dis-

turb the body and mind. In Sowa Rigpa, the physician guides the patient toward healthy daily routines, proper rest, moderate physical activity, and emotional balance. Mental behavior is equally important. Cultivating calmness, patience, mindfulness, and ethical conduct supports inner stability and healing. Healthy lifestyle habits strengthen the body's natural ability to heal and maintain long-term well-being.

3. Medicinal Treatment

When diet and lifestyle changes are not enough, medicine is prescribed. Medicines are prepared from carefully selected sources, following traditional pharmacological principles. Each ingredient is processed and combined in the correct way to ensure safety and effectiveness. The physician prescribes medicine based on a full understanding of the patient's condition, constitution and the diagnosis. The dosage and timing are carefully adjusted for each individual. Medicine supports the body in correcting imbalance, strengthening weakened systems, and clearing harmful accumulations.

4. Therapies and External Treatments

External therapies are used when needed to support healing more directly. These include venesection, moxibustion, compression, herbal steam and bath, golden needle therapy, massage and

other physical techniques. These methods regulate circulation, reduce pain, clear blockages, relax tension, and stimulate the body's healing response.

These therapies are never applied randomly. The physician carefully examines and diagnoses the patient's condition to understand the nature and cause of the illness. Based on this diagnosis, the physician decides which treatment methods are most suitable for the patient. After the treatment is given, the patient is kept under close observation to monitor changes, responses, and any side effects. The physician regularly checks the patient's condition and adjusts the treatment if necessary. The patient is also advised on further care, such as diet, lifestyle, and follow-up instructions, to support complete recovery.

This reflects the strong ethical responsibility in Sowa Rigpa. Healing is understood as an act of *bodhicitta*, the altruistic wish to relieve the suffering of all beings. The physician with his compassion, wisdom, clinical skill, experience and careful observation guides every action of healing. He treats not only the disease but also cares for the dignity, comfort, and well-being of the patient.

Sowa Rigpa combines medical knowledge with ethical responsibility and spiritual awareness. It recognizes that true healing arises from balance in body and mind, guided by compassion and wisdom.

Through proper diagnosis, personalized treatment, and sincere care, Sowa Rigpa offers not only recovery from illness but also a path toward harmony, awareness, and a healthy way of living.

THE CLASSIFICATION OF DISEASE IN SOWA RIGPA

In Sowa Rigpa, diseases are classified not merely by symptoms or physiological dysfunctions but by the actual causes and conditions that give rise to disorder. This approach reflects the profound integration of medical and spiritual understanding unique to this tradition. According to the Sowa Rigpa Tantra there are four major classifications of disorders, each born from different origins and requiring distinct approaches to healing.

The first type of disorder arises from karmic results accumulated in past lives. Such illnesses are often severe and resistant to medical treatment. Even the best doctors and medicines may fail to bring relief unless the patient undertakes spiritual purification, acts of confession, recitation of mantra and accumulation of merit to transform the underlying karmic cause.

The second category consists of disorders caused by external forces, particularly the influence of malevolent spirits or non-human entities. These illnesses often manifest suddenly, with no clear physical cause, and do not respond to ordinary medicine. They are treated through ritual and spiritual intervention, specific propitiation, ransom offerings or ritual appeasements. Other methods include protective mantra and reconciliation offerings made to restore harmony between the human world and the subtle realms of other beings who share this earth but remain invisible to our eyes.

The third type arises through the imbalance of the three vital energies. When these energies fall out of balance due to improper diet, improper lifestyle, emotional disturbance and environmental factors, disease manifests. These illnesses can become fatal if untreated, but with proper diagnosis and timely treatment through diet correction, behavioral or lifestyle change, medicine and therapies, they can be effectively cured. Finally, there are minor ailments caused by transient circumstances, seasonal change, dietary irregularities, fatigue or exposure to certain elements. Such illnesses tend to subside naturally when balance is restored, sometimes the best medicine is simply rest, warmth and the passage of time.

What makes Sowa Rigpa unique is this vast and inclusive vision; it sees the total landscape of illness, from the subtle to the tangible, from the karmic to the environmental. It recognizes that suffering

can emerge from the mind as much as the body, or from unseen forces as much as visible causes. I remember a particular incident from my youth, one that remains vivid in my mind as a lesson in both the mystery and precision of Sowa Rigpa. It happened when I was assisting my late father.

One day, a family brought a patient to our home. The man had been suffering from multiple complaints for several months: recurrent episodes of semi-consciousness resembling seizures, accompanied by exhaustion and unexplainable anxiety. He had sought treatment from several hospitals and undergone various forms of spiritual healing too, as it is common in Bhutan, but without relief. In their desperation, his family finally decided to consult my father. My father listened carefully, his face calm and attentive. He asked a few questions, then looked into the man's eyes and said softly, "I will examine your urine and pulse tomorrow morning to determine the real cause. Tonight, follow my instructions carefully."

He told them to keep the patient quiet and pure in conduct, no meat, no alcohol, no anger or strong emotion. "At dawn," he said, "collect the first urine in a clean white ceramic cup with the direction of urinating to be marked on the cup. It must be done mindfully. The way it is collected affects what it will reveal." The family nodded and left with gratitude. I remember the soft hush of the evening that followed and my father's quiet focus as he prepared

for the next day. He carried himself with a kind of simplicity that masked great knowledge.

The next morning, they returned with the cup of urine. My father placed it before him in the gentle morning light and began his examination. He studied the color, the bubbles, sediments, texture and the odor of the urine and so on. Then he took out four thin wooden sticks and placed them across the cup, two laid horizontally, two vertically forming nine small sections like a sacred grid. He looked at me and said, "Imagine a tortoise lying within this cup. The tortoise represents the universe, its body divided into nine regions. By observing the signs that appear in each part, one can discern not only the physical imbalance but also the types of spiritual cause behind it." I watched as he concentrated deeply, his gaze still and unblinking. The air in the room grew heavy with silence. Then after a long moment, he looked up and spoke with quiet certainty. "This illness," he said, "is not of the body alone. The man is afflicted by a forest spirit; the spirit was disturbed and attached itself to him."

The family looked at each other, astonished and then confirmed that indeed, the illness had begun soon after the man's trip to the forest to collect wood. My father nodded, his voice calm but firm. "When one enters the dwelling of such beings without awareness, it disturbs their balance. They respond not out of cruelty but out of

confusion. The negative infliction passes into the human's energy channels, and the illness arises." He prescribed a specific ransom ritual, an offering to reconcile with the spirit. The family hesitated; they had already performed several rituals elsewhere. My father smiled gently and said, "Yes, but those rituals were not directed toward the right kind of spirit. There are many classes of spirits, and each requires a distinct method of rituals. As our elders say: If the spirit dwells in the east and you send the ransom to the north, how will it ever reach them?" With his guidance, the correct ritual was performed. Within days, the patient began to improve, his fits grew less frequent, his strength returned, and his spirit seemed lighter. Soon he was well again.

That event became a significant turning point for me. Watching my father that day, I understood that Sowa Rigpa is not just a medical tradition, it's an art of perception. It requires not only technical skill, but also the wisdom to read what lies beyond appearances. To diagnose an illness is to listen to the body, to the mind, to the unseen movements of the invisible beings that thread through all existence. My father's confidence was never arrogant. It came from knowing that healing begins with humility — the healer must first bow to the mystery of life itself. What he practiced that day was not superstition but a profound form of knowing, born of generations who understood that the visible and the invisible are not separate

worlds but two sides of the same breath. To this day, whenever I think of that patient, I remember the white ceramic cup, the quiet morning atmosphere and my father's voice as he said almost to himself, "A true healer must see not only the illness, but the spirit that moves behind it."

A TRUE STORY BETWEEN FAITH AND REASON

I have never been someone who easily believes in miracles, supernatural power, or faith-based phenomena that defy scientific explanation. My inclination has always leaned toward logic and reason, toward what can be measured, tested or proven. Yet, during my younger days, while accompanying my father as he attended to patients from all walks of life, I witnessed events that challenged the boundaries of my understanding. Among them, one incident remains deeply engraved in my memory — an experience that still defies rational explanation even today.

It was sometime in my late childhood when a man in critical condition was brought to consult my father. He was gravely ill, suffering from multiple complications that had left him on the brink of death. His family had already taken him to India for medical treatment,

but the doctors there had reportedly given up hope and sent him home, suggesting that nothing more could be done. Out of desperation, his family brought him to see my father.

After examining the patient, my father said something that startled everyone, "You came to see me just in time. A little later, it might have been too late." Then he asked the man if he had any unresolved disputes or enmity with anyone. The patient nodded, saying yes, he was involved in a serious legal dispute with some people in his village. My father grew quiet for a moment and then said something I didn't expect to hear: "There is a black magic affecting you. It is blocking the effect of medical treatment and draining your life force. Before any medicine can work, this must be released."

In those days, in eastern Bhutan, black magic practice was quite prevalent. Even though I was too young to understand the metaphysical aspects of it, I could sense the seriousness with which my father spoke. He advised the patient to find a powerful *mantrika*, a tantric practitioner, to perform a ritual to release him from the bondage of this dark influence. Only then, he said, could medical treatment truly begin to help.

Following my father's advice, the patient's family invited a renowned mantrika from a nearby village. They set up a temporary tent near our house where the ritual would be conducted. I still remember

the scene very clearly. The mantrika spent an entire day preparing for the ritual. He carefully made a large *torma* using wheat flour and butter. In Vajrayana Buddhism, there are many different types of torma, and they serve many ritual purposes. They can be offered to deities, used as a symbolic representation of a deity to receive blessings, and also act as a ritual support for removing negative forces and obstacles.

The mantrika made a large triangular-shaped torma, with a fierce wrathful deity face sculpted on the front, which is known as *Zor-tor*. It is hurled at the enemy negative forces during the ritual of exorcism in order to get rid of obstructing forces. The torma was surrounded by many symbolic offerings, including an egg. Each item was placed with care, and every object carried its own spiritual meaning. Nothing was random; everything had a purpose and a deeper significance.

The next morning, when the ritual began, my curiosity overcame me. Quietly, I slipped into the gathering to observe. The air was filled with the steady rhythm of the chanting of mantras. The strong scent of burning incense mixed with frankincense. Ritual instruments such as drums echoed through the space, creating a powerful atmosphere. As the ritual continued, something happened that left a deep impression — an experience that has stayed with me for the rest of my life.

The egg placed in front of the torma began to move slowly, deliberately, as if drawn by an unseen force. I rubbed my eyes, thinking it must be an illusion. But no, it continued to move, circling the torma in a steady motion. Everyone was watching in awe. The mantrika paused and declared, "If the egg breaks while moving, the patient's chance of survival is very slim. If it breaks and the yolk contains blood, then there is no hope. But if it completes the circle without breaking, it means the black magic has been neutralized and the patient's life force is freed."

The air was thick with anticipation as the egg continued its mysterious movement. Finally, it came to rest in front of the wrathful face of the torma, unbroken. A wave of relief swept over everyone present. The mantrika smiled and said, "The timing was perfect. Had it been delayed, the black magic would have taken full hold, and no one could have released him."

After the ritual, my father began the medical treatment in earnest. To everyone's astonishment, the patient began to recover gradually, his strength returned, his appetite improved, and within months he was walking again. A man who had been sent home to die, lived on for many more decades, from the age of forty-five when he got sick until eighty, in good health and spirit.

Even now, when I look back on that moment, I find myself torn between reason and wonder. As someone who respects science, I cannot explain what I witnessed that day. Was it the power of ritual, the psychosomatic influence of faith, or something that transcends the reach of human logic? Modern science might attribute it to the placebo effect, or perhaps to the restoration of hope and mental strength that can profoundly influence the body's healing mechanisms. But in that moment, as I watched the egg move, it felt as though the boundary between the seen and unseen worlds had momentarily dissolved.

In today's world, such occurrences are often dismissed as superstition or folklore. Yet, those who have lived through them know that not everything real can be measured, and not everything measurable is real. Perhaps human experience is vast enough to contain both the rational and the mystical, the scientific and the spiritual, each completing the other in ways we do not yet understand.

THE LOST SOUL AND THE HEALING RITUAL

There is another story from my childhood that has never left me, a story that made me question the boundary between science and spirit, reason and mystery. It concerned a ritual my father performed, known in Sowa Rigpa as the recalling of the lost soul or life force.

There was once a lady who had been unwell for a very long time. Her body had grown frail, her face pale, and her energy almost lifeless. She had been suffering from both physical illness and deep emotional exhaustion. A highly revered lama, a Rinpoche whom many regarded as the living embodiment of compassion, asked her to consult my father for treatment.

As usual, my father began with his traditional diagnosis: reading her pulse with deep concentration and carefully examining her urine,

as is the standard procedure in Sowa Rigpa. After his assessment, he told her gently, "Take this medicine for fifteen days and then come back for review."

The woman followed his advice and returned home. But her home environment was far from peaceful. Her brother, who had lost his job, had fallen into despair and alcoholism. His drinking often led to violent outbursts, disturbing the entire family. The woman herself was too weak to help or resist; she depended on her aging parents and siblings even for her daily needs.

Life became increasingly unbearable for her — full of sadness, fear, and anxiety. One day, during a heated quarrel with her brother, he lost control and in a drunken rage, grabbed a knife and threatened to kill her. Terrified, she froze. That moment of sheer panic shook her deeply. She collapsed emotionally and mentally from that day onward; she lost all will to live. Although she had completed her fifteen days of medicine, she didn't return for her next appointment. She withdrew into silence, drifting in a shadow of hopelessness. It was only when a concerned friend visited her and urged her to go back for a checkup that she reluctantly agreed to see my father again.

When she entered the room, my father immediately noticed something different. He looked at her with concern and said softly, "You don't look like before. Something seems wrong." He took her pulse

again, first the radial pulse to read the balance of the vital energies and the organs and then gently pressing the ulnar pulse to check the vital channel connected to the *la*, the life force or soul. After a long moment, he looked up and said in a calm but serious tone, "Your life force has been disturbed. Has anything tragic happened recently?"

Tears welled up in her eyes as she recounted the entire incident, the fight, the threat, the terror and her worsening despair. My father listened quietly, then explained, "In our tradition, there is something called *la*, which means one's soul or life force. It is a subtle, temporary energy-body that supports our life and overall well-being. When a person experiences deep shock, fear, or trauma, this life force can become disturbed and may leave the physical body. It can wander away or, according to traditional belief, even be taken away by harmful spirits. When *la* is disturbed or frightened away, the person becomes sick, weak and tired, mentally confused, unable to sleep properly, and may experience repeated misfortune or lack of stability in life."

He paused, then continued, "Due to the intense shock and fear during the conflict with your brother, your life force appears to have become disturbed and frightened away. There is no need to worry, through ritual practice we will recall the life force and restore harmony in your body."

When I was young, I could not understand how a ritual could heal a person. I only watched quietly with curiosity as my father prepared for a soul recalling ceremony. He first asked the woman for her animal sign according to Tibetan astrology and her birth date. Then he carefully studied his astrological texts and chose the most auspicious day to perform the ritual.

When the chosen day arrived, the patient came early in the morning with her family. My father had already prepared the altar in the prayer room. At the center was a mandala of the Buddha of Long Life, surrounded by flowers, butter lamps, incense, and other offerings. The mandala of the Long-Life Buddha is a sacred diagram used in Vajrayana Buddhism. It shows the spiritual world of the Long-Life Buddha with palace and retinue, who represents long life, healing and vitality. In front of the mandala stood a large copper basin filled with clean water mixed with saffron. Floating on the water was a small sheep made of butter. A tiny piece of turquoise was placed on its head, symbolizing the essence of the soul.

To my young eyes, everything looked mysterious and beautiful, like a sacred play. My father began the ritual by ringing a bell in a steady rhythm. His voice chanted sacred prayers and invocations. The woman sat quietly in front of the basin with her eyes closed, as if surrendering to something beyond words.

After hours of chanting, the ritual reached its most important moment, the calling back of the wandering soul. My father gently stirred the water with the Arrow of Long Life, called *Dadar* in Bhutanese. The arrow was decorated with five pieces of five different colored cloth, a round silver mirror, and precious stones such as dzi, turquoise, and coral. It is traditionally used to invite good fortune, long life, and positive energy in certain ritual practices by swinging around.

He asked us to watch the butter sheep carefully. To our amazement, the small sheep slowly began to move. It circled the basin three times in a clockwise direction and then stopped, facing directly toward the woman. My father's face lit up with joy. Smiling, he said, "We did it. Very auspicious. Your soul has returned to you." He gently removed the turquoise from the sheep's head and gave it to her. "This now represents your *la*," he said. "Always wear it."

In the days that followed, the woman's health improved noticeably. Her face looked brighter, her strength returned, and she regained purpose and happiness in her life. It was as if a light had been rekindled inside her.

That experience left a deep impression on me. Although I was too young to fully understand what had happened, I realized that healing is not limited to what science alone can explain. The con-

nection between body, mind, and soul runs deeper than what we can see or measure.

Today, such ritual practices in Sowa Rigpa are slowly disappearing. Many modern physicians dismiss them as superstition. Yet I cannot forget what I witnessed — healing that came not only from medicine, but from restoring something deeply human and spiritual. Some truths may lie beyond our full understanding, yet they touch the very essence of life itself.

PREVENTION AND LIFESTYLE

Sowa Rigpa is not only a system for treating illness. It is a profound science of maintaining health and preventing disease. It teaches that prevention is always better than cure. Instead of waiting for sickness to appear, one should learn how to live in a way that protects health and supports long life. The classical text of Sowa Rigpa, the *Root Tantra*, clearly emphasizes this idea. It states:

> *Those who wish to remain healthy, those who wish to heal others, those who wish to live long, practice Dharma, gain prosperity, and experience happiness must learn the essential instructions of the Science of Healing.*

This teaching shows that health is the foundation of all human activities. Whether a person seeks spiritual growth, material success, knowledge, or service to others, none of these goals can be achieved fully without a healthy body and a stable mind. When

health is weak, even the strongest intentions become difficult to fulfil. Therefore, caring for health is not only a personal responsibility but a necessary discipline for everyone, not just doctors or sick people.

According to Sowa Rigpa, disease arises when a person lives in disharmony with the natural law of balance. Unhealthy food habits, improper lifestyle, lack of rest, excessive stress, suppressed emotions, and harmful behaviors disturb the balance of the body's three vital energies. When this balance is disturbed, physical illness and mental suffering gradually develop. For this reason, Sowa Rigpa places great importance on maintaining balance through proper diet, healthy daily habits, and ethical, mindful living. Eating suitable food according to one's constitution, the season, and digestive strength, maintaining regular sleep and activity patterns, keeping the mind calm and emotionally balanced, and living in harmony with nature are considered essential practices for good health.

The dietary and behavioral guidelines are described in detail in the classical medical texts of Sowa Rigpa. They are not merely rules, but practical wisdom meant to support the well-being of both body and mind. By following these preventive measures consistently, one can preserve health, prevent many diseases, strengthen vitality, and live a longer, more meaningful life. In this way, Sowa Rigpa teaches that true healing begins not in the clinic, but in how we live each day.

Behavioral Regimen and Lifestyle Guidance

In Sowa Rigpa, behavioral regimen or lifestyle guidance is considered one of the most important methods for both preventing disease and restoring health. It teaches people how to live in harmony with nature and how to maintain balance among the three vital energies that govern both body and mind. When daily behavior is balanced and mindful, health is naturally protected. When behavior becomes careless or extreme, illness gradually develops.

The classical texts describe three main types of behavioral regimen:

1. Daily Behavioral Regimen (Routine Lifestyle)
2. Seasonal Behavioral Regimen
3. Incidental Behavioral Regimen (Special Situations and Circumstances)

Each of these provides practical guidance for different conditions of life, helping a person remain balanced throughout the day, the year, and unexpected situations.

1. Daily Behavioral Regimen

The daily regimen emphasizes regularity, moderation, and consistency in everyday activities such as waking up, sleeping, eating, personal hygiene, working, exercising, relaxing, and meditation.

A stable routine keeps the body-clock balanced, supports digestion, strengthens immunity, and calms the mind. When daily habits are irregular or excessive, the vital energies become disturbed and health weakens. Daily behavioral regimen is further explained in three important aspects:

Activities for Good Health and Longevity:

These practices support physical strength, vitality, and long life. They include:

- Regular physical exercise suited to one's body type, age and strength;
- Maintaining personal cleanliness and hygiene;
- Adequate rest and quality sleep;
- Gentle yoga, stretching, breathing practices, and mindfulness.

These activities improve circulation, digestion, flexibility, and mental clarity. They help prevent premature aging, reduce stress, and keep the body and mind in natural balance.

Worldly Daily Conduct:

This aspect guides a person to cultivate healthy social and ethical habits in daily life. It encourages qualities such as:

- Kindness and compassion toward others;
- Truthfulness and integrity;
- Gratitude and contentment;
- Patience, empathy, and respectful communication;
- Honest and ethical livelihood.

Such virtuous behavior creates mental peace, emotional stability, and harmonious relationships. A calm and positive mind directly supports physical health, while anger, greed, jealousy, and constant conflict weaken the body and disturb the three vital energies.

Spiritual Practice:

Spiritual practice focuses on inner awareness and awakening. It includes meditation, prayer, contemplation, and the cultivation of compassion, patience, humility, and altruism. These practices stabilize the mind, increase clarity and wisdom, and reduce fear, attachment, and mental agitation. A balanced mind supports a healthy nervous system, better sleep, clearer thinking, and stronger immunity. In this way, spiritual discipline directly supports both mental and physical well-being.

The classical texts clearly warn that neglecting the influence of behavior on health can slowly lead to chronic illness and long-

term dependence on medicine. Healing is not only about taking remedies, but also about correcting how one lives.

Interestingly, modern medical science now recognizes the same truth. Many lifestyle-related diseases such as obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, and depression are strongly linked to unhealthy habits, emotional stress, lack of movement, poor sleep, and unhealthy diet. What modern science calls holistic or lifestyle medicine, Sowa Rigpa has taught for centuries as a complete way of life that protects health, prevents disease, and nurtures long-term well-being.

2. Seasonal Behavioral Regimen

Sowa Rigpa teaches that the human body is deeply connected to nature. As the seasons change, the environment influences the body's internal energies. Temperature, sunlight, wind, moisture, food, and drink all affect our bodily systems, emotions, and immunity. Therefore, each season has different weather patterns, and during these seasons people tend to adopt certain diets and lifestyles that can contribute to accumulate, aggravate, or pacify the three vital energies in the body. To remain healthy and balanced, one must know how to adjust diet and lifestyle according to these seasonal changes.

Since the body is constantly influenced by seasonal changes, diet, lifestyle, and body type, the three vital energies naturally go through three stages: accumulation, aggravation, and pacification (neutralization).

Accumulation is the first stage. It occurs when external conditions such as season, food, and behavior have qualities similar to a particular energy. These similar qualities gradually increase that energy in the body, but it remains hidden or dormant and does not yet produce clear symptoms.

Aggravation is the second stage. When the accumulated energy is further stimulated by supporting conditions such as stronger environmental influences, improper diet, or lifestyle, it becomes excessive and active, leading to the manifestation of disease or noticeable symptoms.

Pacification (neutralization) is the third stage. When conditions change and qualities opposite to the aggravated energy appear through seasonal change, appropriate diet, medicine, or lifestyle the excessive energy gradually calms down and returns toward balance.

For example, in the cycle of wind energy (*loong*), the stage of accumulation occurs in spring, the stage of aggravation in summer, and the stage of pacification in autumn. These stages are influenced by

seasonal changes, and the types of food people tend to consume during these periods.

In spring, the environment becomes light, dry, windy, and rough after the cold and heavy winter. People whose body constitution is dominated by wind, and who consume foods and follow lifestyles with similar qualities, such as light, dry, and cool cause the accumulation of wind in the body. However, during this stage the accumulated wind remains suppressed and does not immediately manifest itself as disease because of the warming temperature outside.

As summer arrives, the weather often becomes hot, humid, and rainy. During this season the body experiences strong heat, and people tend to consume foods and drinks that are cooling in nature. Combined with the coolness of the summer rain, these factors can aggravate the previously accumulated loong, allowing it to manifest as various disorders.

When autumn arrives, the environment becomes more stable and moderately warm after the summer rains and before the cold of winter sets in. These conditions provide qualities that are opposite to the nature of wind, which help calm and stabilize loong.

Since the inherent qualities of wind energy are cold, light, and dry, restoring balance requires grounding and nourishing measures. Warm and wholesome meals, healthy oils (for example ghee, clarified

butter) cooked foods, soups, stews, adequate rest, and maintaining bodily warmth are therefore emphasized. Gentle daily routines, regular meals, oil massage, and protection from excessive cold and wind help support the nervous system and promote overall stability.

Similarly, for bile (*thipa*), the stages of accumulation, aggravation, and pacification occur respectively in summer, autumn, and winter. For phlegm (*bedken*), the three stages occur respectively in late winter, spring, and early summer.

Thipa energy, which is connected with the fire element, requires cooling foods and favors foods with sweet, bitter, and astringent taste, along with adequate hydration, calming activities, and protection from excessive heat. Resting during the hottest part of the day, spending time in cool and shaded environments, and maintaining emotional calm help preserve balance.

Bedken energy, associated with the water and earth elements, requires lighter meals, dry and warming foods, and favors foods with bitter, pungent, and astringent taste, along with gentle spices and increased physical activity. Rising earlier, exercising regularly, and avoiding heavy, oily, or cold foods help the body regain lightness and vitality.

This seasonal wisdom reflects what modern science now studies in the field of chronobiology, which explores how the body's biologi-

cal processes respond to daily and seasonal cycles. Sowa Rigpa has long recognized that aligning human behavior with natural rhythms supports stronger immunity, better digestion, emotional balance, and overall well-being. By living in harmony with the seasons, one learns to cooperate with nature rather than struggle against it. This simple yet profound approach helps prevent many illnesses and maintains long-term health.

3. Incidental Behavioral Regimen

The incidental behavioral regimen provides guidance for special situations and changing conditions in life. These include periods of illness, recovery, emotional stress, physical weakness, aging, and natural physiological changes such as digestion problems and monthly cycles. During such times, the body becomes more sensitive and vulnerable to imbalance. Therefore, extra care, moderation, and mindful behavior are essential to support healing and prevent further disturbance.

This regimen teaches how to adjust daily habits according to one's temporary condition. For example, when a person is sick or recovering from illness, heavy work, excessive activity, late nights, and emotional strain should be avoided. Rest, light and nourishing food, gentle movement, mental calmness, and following medical advice help restore strength and balance. Similarly, during emotional dis-

tress, practices that calm the mind such as breathing, meditation, prayer, gentle companionship, and reducing mental stimulation are encouraged to stabilize the vital energies.

The incidental regimen also addresses natural physiological phases such as aging, weakened digestion, fatigue, or hormonal changes. As the body changes with time, lifestyle and diet must be adjusted accordingly. Elderly people, for instance, benefit from warmth, regular routine, nourishing foods, adequate rest, and gentle activity to maintain stability and vitality. An important part of this regimen is respect for the body's natural urges and signals. The classical texts clearly advise against suppressing natural functions such as urination, bowel movement, sneezing, yawning, crying, hunger, thirst, and sleep. Holding back these natural urges disturbs the flow of energy in the body and can gradually lead to discomfort, pain, digestive problems, headaches, emotional tension, and chronic illness. Listening to the body and responding appropriately supports natural balance and healthy circulation of energy.

In essence, incidental behavioral regimen teaches flexibility and awareness. It reminds us that health is not maintained only by fixed routines, but also by wisely adapting to life's changing circumstances. By responding gently and intelligently to special conditions, the body and mind are protected from unnecessary strain, allowing natural healing and long-term well-being to unfold.

Dietary Regimen

In Sowa Rigpa, proper nourishment is regarded as the pillar of life. Food is not only a source of energy, but also a powerful medicine that builds the body, supports the senses, strengthens digestion, and sustains long life. The classical texts teach that when food is of the right quality, taken in the right quantity, in the proper combination, and at the right time, it promotes vitality, mental clarity, stable digestion, and overall well-being. On the other hand, eating too much or too little, eating incompatible food combinations, irregular eating habits, or choosing food that does not suit one's constitution and condition can gradually lead to imbalance and disease. Just as lifestyle guidance is organized systematically, the dietary regimen in Sowa Rigpa is explained through three main aspects:

1. General Knowledge of Dietetics
2. Dietary Compatibility and Restrictions
3. Correct Quantity

Together, these principles help a person make wise and conscious choices about daily nourishment.

1. General Knowledge of Dietetics

Sowa Rigpa describes food according to several qualities, such as:

- Taste (sweet, sour, salty, bitter, pungent, astringent)
- Elemental composition (earth, water, fire, wind, space)
- Potency (heavy or light)
- Nature (warming or cooling effect on the body)

Each food influences the body differently depending on these qualities. Understanding them helps one select food that supports balance rather than creating disturbance.

For example, sweet taste is mainly composed of the water and earth elements. Because of this, it has a heavy potency and a cooling nature. Sweet foods provide strength, nourishment, and energy. They support physical growth, tissue development, and stability in the body. However, when consumed in excess, sweet foods can increase heaviness, sluggish digestion, weight gain, and congestion, which may lead to obesity and related disorders. At the same time, their cooling nature helps reduce excessive heat in the body. In this way, every taste and food type has both benefits and risks depending on how it is used. The classical Tantras describe these relationships in detail, explaining how taste, elements, potency, and nature interact within the body. This traditional understanding closely parallels modern nutrition science, which studies how different foods affect the body through calorie density, nutrients, digestion, metabolism, and energy balance. While the language is

different, the goal is the same - to understand how food influences health and how to eat wisely for long-term well-being.

2. Dietary Restrictions and Food Compatibility

The classical texts of Sowa Rigpa strongly caution against eating unhygienic, stale, spoiled, or improperly prepared food, as well as foods that are incompatible when combined. Such food may disturb digestion, weaken the body's natural balance, and gradually lead to both acute and chronic diseases. Some food combinations are considered harmful because their qualities conflict with each other and confuse the digestive system. For example, the texts explain that fish combined with milk is incompatible, and eggs combined with fish is also considered unsuitable. Although a person may not feel any immediate discomfort after eating such combinations, repeated consumption over time can slowly create toxins in the body, disturb the vital energies, and contribute to long-term health problems.

This teaching highlights an important principle: not all harmful effects appear immediately. Some dietary mistakes accumulate quietly in the body and only show symptoms after months or years. Therefore, awareness and moderation in daily food choices are essential for protecting health. Modern science also supports this understanding. Today, research shows that contaminated food, excessive processed foods, artificial additives, and poor food

handling can cause infections, inflammation, metabolic disorders, and weakened immunity. Scientists also study how certain food combinations may interfere with digestion, absorption of nutrients, and gut health.

Sowa Rigpa's emphasis on food compatibility closely relates to the modern concept of nutrigenomics, which explores how different foods interact with a person's unique biological and metabolic makeup. While the terminology differs, both systems recognize that food affects each individual differently and that wise dietary choices play a powerful role in preventing disease and maintaining long-term well-being.

3. Correct Portion and Mindful Eating

Moderation is a central principle in Sowa Rigpa. Food should be eaten to nourish and sustain the body, not to satisfy craving or habit. When a person overeats, the digestive fire becomes overloaded. This leads to poor digestion, accumulation of toxins, slow metabolism, and diseases such as obesity, diabetes, and fatigue. When a person eats too little, the body becomes weak, depleted, and unable to maintain strength and immunity. Both extremes disturb the natural balance of the vital energies. The classical Tantras teach that the quantity of food eaten is just as important as the quality of food.

For healthy digestion, the stomach should not be completely full. Instead, it should be divided into four parts:

- Two parts should be filled with solid food;
- One part should be filled with liquid, such as water, soup, or tea, to help digestion and circulation;
- One part should be left empty to allow space for digestive movement, heat, and air to work properly.

Leaving this empty space allows the digestive fire to function efficiently. It helps food mix well, break down smoothly, and move easily through the digestive system. When the stomach is overfilled, digestion becomes slow and heavy, leading to gas, bloating, toxin buildup, and weak metabolism. When eaten in proper proportion, digestion remains strong, nutrients are absorbed well, and energy stays balanced.

This guidance teaches moderation and mindful eating. It reminds us to stop eating before feeling overly full and to give the body enough space to digest naturally. Modern medicine also supports this idea, showing that overeating overloads the digestive system and slows metabolic function, while moderate portions improve digestion, energy levels, and overall health. In this way, the *Tantra* offers a simple yet powerful rule for maintaining digestive strength

and long-term well-being through proper portion control. Food is to be respected as a form of medicine that supports life, not as a source of indulgence.

This wisdom was beautifully expressed by the great Buddhist philosopher Ācārya Nāgārjuna in his text *Letter to a Friend* (Skt. *Suhrillekha*):

> *Understand food to be like medicine. Do not eat with hatred or attachment, nor for strength, pride, or beauty, but only for maintaining the body.*

This teaching reminds us to eat for nourishment and balance, not for excess pleasure, emotional comfort, or social display. Modern medical research strongly supports this ancient insight. Studies show that calorie moderation and mindful eating improve digestion, reduce inflammation, stabilize metabolism, and promote longevity. Nutrition science and behavioral medicine also confirm that nearly 80 percent of chronic diseases are related to lifestyle factors and can be prevented through balanced diet, regular physical activity, emotional stability, and healthy daily habits.

Sowa Rigpa offers a truly holistic approach to health. It does not treat the body alone but understands the human being as an integrated system of body, vital energy, and mind. Its preventive methods unite physical regulation, ethical living, mental discipline, and

spiritual awareness into one continuous practice of well-being. Today, modern fields such as epigenetics, mind–body medicine, and psychoneuro-immunology further confirm that lifestyle, emotions, and diet influence gene expression, immunity, and disease resistance. Health is not merely the absence of illness, but the presence of harmony within the body, the mind, and the surrounding environment.

Sowa Rigpa teaches that true healing does not begin in hospitals or treatment rooms, but in the mindful rhythms of daily life in how we eat, move, rest, think, speak, and relate to others and to nature. Diet and lifestyle are both the causes of disease and the keys to healing. When wisely managed, they preserve vitality, balance the energies, and nurture happiness. When neglected, they lead to imbalance, suffering, and illness. The wisdom of prevention, living in harmony with nature and respecting the needs of the body and mind, remains as relevant today as it was centuries ago.

THE INNER HEAT AND LIVER HEALTH, A FOUNDATION OF WELL-BEING IN SOWA RIGPA

The wisdom of Sowa Rigpa is exceptionally profound. It explains the entire journey of human existence, from the moment consciousness enters the embryo, to how the body changes throughout life, how it dissolves at death, and how consciousness continues beyond. Few medical systems integrate physical health and spiritual understanding so completely.

Among its many teachings, one principle stands out as essential for maintaining health and long life, the preservation and strengthening of inner heat, known as *medroe*, the digestive heat. This inner heat is closely related to *thipa* energy, the fire element. Thipa governs digestion, metabolism, transformation, and vitality. Without strong

inner heat, the body cannot properly digest food, generate energy, or maintain balance.

In Sowa Rigpa, the liver plays a central role in supporting this digestive fire. Thipa, which includes bile, is produced and regulated by the liver. In elemental theory, the liver corresponds to the Wood element, while thipa, the source of digestive heat, corresponds to the Fire element. Their relationship is described as mother and child — wood nourishes fire. If the wood is strong, the fire burns steadily. If the wood is weak, the fire becomes weak and unstable. Therefore, for inner heat to remain strong, the liver must be healthy and well-cared for.

From a biological perspective, the human body is made of trillions of cells that constantly require nutrients for energy, repair, and renewal. The quality of nourishment that reaches these cells depends entirely on how well digestion and metabolism function. When digestive heat is balanced:

- Food is properly digested and absorbed;
- Nutrients reach the tissues efficiently;
- Toxins and waste are eliminated;
- Metabolism remains stable;
- Energy, immunity, and mental clarity stay strong.

Both Sowa Rigpa and modern medicine recognize the liver as the main regulator of metabolism. The liver is responsible for:

- Producing bile to digest fat;
- Regulating blood sugar and insulin sensitivity;
- Balancing cholesterol and fats;
- Detoxifying chemicals and metabolic waste;
- Processing hormones;
- Producing proteins and enzymes.

When the liver functions well, digestive heat remains strong and stable. This supports overall vitality and long life.

Modern medical research strongly confirms this connection. Many non-communicable diseases, such as type 2 diabetes, fatty liver disease, high cholesterol, obesity, and high blood pressure begin with metabolic imbalance centered in the liver. When liver function becomes weak or overloaded, digestive heat becomes disturbed, leading to:

- Poor digestion and nutrient absorption;
- Accumulation of toxins and metabolic waste;
- Chronic inflammation and oxidative stress;

- Imbalance of gut bacteria;
- Increased risk of long-term illness.

Modern lifestyle habits further strain the liver. Processed foods, excessive sugar, alcohol, lack of physical activity, chronic stress, and irregular sleep disrupt metabolism and weaken digestive fire. This is one of the main reasons metabolic diseases are increasing worldwide.

To maintain the health of the liver and digestive heat, Sowa Rigpa recommends simple and practical daily care:

- Eat freshly prepared and easily digestible meals;
- Eat cruciferous vegetables high in fiber such as broccoli, sprouts and cabbage to support detoxifying enzymes and aid in the elimination of toxins;
- Limit heavy, oily, overly spicy and processed foods. Take healthy oils, unsaturated fats especially olive oil, and flaxseed oil;
- Avoid overeating, especially late at night and limit refined carbohydrates such as rice and sugary foods;
- Restrict red meat consumption to avoid fat accumulation and inflammation in the liver;

- Include moderate bitter and sour tastes to support liver function (such as leafy greens, bitter gourds and citrus);
- Adjust diet according to season, age, and physical condition;
- Maintain regular sleep, physical activity, proper hydration, emotional balance, and disciplined lifestyle.

Sowa Rigpa teaches that many chronic illnesses, including serious diseases such as cancer, often begin with long-term weakness of digestion and metabolism. When digestion is strong, food is transformed into nourishing energy, tissues are rebuilt properly, and waste is eliminated efficiently. This strengthens immunity and maintains balance among the three vital energies.

When digestion becomes weak, the body cannot extract the nourishing essence of food. At the same time, detoxification becomes inefficient. Undigested residues and toxins slowly accumulate in the body. Over time, this buildup blocks circulation, disturbs the vital energies, weakens tissues, and creates conditions for chronic disease to develop.

Modern medicine reflects a similar understanding. Research shows that poor digestion, impaired liver function, chronic inflammation, toxin overload, gut imbalance, and weakened detoxification systems play major roles in the development of metabolic disorders, autoimmune diseases, and cancer. When the liver cannot process

nutrients and eliminate waste effectively, cellular damage and abnormal growth may occur.

Both traditional and modern perspectives agree that true health begins with strong digestion, balanced metabolism, and efficient detoxification. All of these depend on the inner heat and the health of the liver. When these systems function well, the body repairs itself naturally, resists disease, and maintains vitality. When they weaken, toxins accumulate, immunity declines, and illness gradually arises.

Sowa Rigpa teaches that health is not merely the absence of disease, but the continuous nurturing of the elements and energies that sustain life. When digestive heat remains strong and the liver is protected, the entire system - body, energy, mind, and consciousness - stays resilient and balanced. For anyone who wishes to live with strength, clarity, and longevity, caring for the inner heat and liver is not optional — it is essential.

WHEN THE NIGHT SPEAKS; UNDERSTANDING DREAMS IN SOWA RIGPA

From my childhood, I noticed something unusual about my father's way of knowing things. Sometimes he would ask us to prepare for the arrival of a visitor we had no information about. In those days, there were no mobile phones or easy communication. At other times, he would warn us to be ready for an unexpected event long before anything actually happened. I often wondered how he could possibly know such things.

One day, my father shared his secret with me.

"I analyze my dreams," he said.

I was surprised. To me, dreams were nothing more than random stories created by the sleeping mind, illusions without real meaning. I often told him, "It's just a dream. Why take it seriously?"

He would calmly reply, "Everything arises from causes and conditions. Dreams are no different."

As the years passed, I witnessed many events unfold exactly as he had described through his dreams. What I once dismissed as coincidence slowly transformed my disbelief into curiosity. I began to wonder: Why do dreams matter?

Why Dreams Matter

Dreams can make us laugh, cry, feel fear, or experience deep relief, even though nothing is happening in the outer world. This shows that dreams have real emotional power. Although dreams occur during sleep, their effects often remain after we wake up, influencing our mood, thoughts, and decisions.

From a logical perspective, dreams are not separate from waking life. They arise from our memories, emotions, habits, and mental patterns. Just as our daytime thoughts are shaped by causes and conditions, so are our dreams. When the mind becomes quiet during sleep, these inner patterns appear more clearly. Sometimes

dreams reveal worries, intuitions, or possibilities that we overlook while awake.

For this reason, dreams deserve attention not as blind predictions, but as meaningful reflections of the mind. Understanding dreams helps us understand ourselves better. That is why my father treated dreams with respect rather than dismissing them as meaningless illusions.

Dreams differ from person to person because each mind carries unique experiences. Culture, beliefs, language, fears, memories, and daily impressions all shape dream content. Dreams arise from the mind's storehouse of experience.

At the same time, not all dreams are ordinary. Dreams arise from physical or mental imbalance, strong karmic influence, or external spirit influences — and some may be prophetic or precognitive.

Dreams in Sowa Rigpa

Sowa Rigpa treats dreams as an important and meaningful subject. Dreams are understood not merely as mental images, but as reflections of physical health, emotional state, and subtle energy balance. The *Explanatory Tantra* dedicates an entire chapter to dreams, explaining their causes, types, interpretations, and their relationship to health and disease.

According to Sowa Rigpa, dreams do not arise randomly. They appear due to specific causes and conditions. Six basic types of dreams are described:

- **Dreams based on what we have seen:** visual impressions from daily life reappear during sleep;
- **Dreams based on what we have heard:** sounds, conversations, teachings, or music may surface in dreams;
- **Dreams based on past experiences:** memories, emotions, unresolved events, and deep impressions appear symbolically;
- **Dreams arising from prayer or seeking guidance:** when sincere prayers or intentions are made before sleep, symbolic or meaningful dreams may arise;
- **Dreams reflecting future goals or intuitive insight:** strong focus, clarity, or inner intuition may produce precognitive dreams;
- **Dreams arising from an imbalance of vital energies:** physical or mental imbalance may express itself through dreams and indicate potential illness.

Sowa Rigpa uses dreams to understand the deeper condition of the body, mind, and subtle energies. This knowledge helped my father interpret not only his own dreams but also those of his patients. Drawing from Sowa Rigpa teachings and Pha Dampa Sangay's

healing texts Khyud Ched, which is given as a secret oral instruction of healing, he sometimes used dream analysis as part of his healing practice. He often said, "Dreams reveal what the mind cannot express when we are awake."

Vital Energies and Dreams

In Sowa Rigpa, dreams arise from the interaction between the mind and the body's three vital energies, especially wind energy (*loong*). When these energies become imbalanced, dreams reflect emotional and physical disorder.

- Loong-related dreams are restless, fast-moving, and chaotic.
- Thipa-related dreams are intense, heated, aggressive, or vivid.
- Bedken-related dreams are heavy, dull, slow, or foggy.

Modern neuroscience supports this view in different terminology. Brain chemistry, emotional centers of the brain, stress hormones, illness, and mental health all influence one's dream intensity and content.

The Mind at Night

When we sleep, the body rests, but the mind becomes active. Freed from sensory distractions, the mind retrieves stored memories and

reshapes them into symbolic images, sometimes strange, sometimes deeply meaningful. During sleep, the senses rest, the outer world fades, the inner world awakens. Past experiences, fears, love, ambition, trauma, and illness may surface as dreams.

My father often reminded me that each day we absorb countless impressions, emotions, conversations, shocks, and desires. Even when we forget them consciously, the subconscious mind remembers everything. This is why dreams sometimes show familiar people as strangers or mix unrelated scenes together. Reality has not changed, the mind is simply expressing raw impressions without physical limitation. In this way, dreams reveal truths we often ignore while awake.

Dreams and Subtle Signs

One of the most fascinating teachings in Sowa Rigpa is that dreams may sometimes hint at future events, not as exact predictions, but through symbols.

For example:

- Seeing dirty substances entering the body may suggest future illness;
- A sick person dreaming of flying may indicate recovery;

- Dreaming of someone long absent may indicate meeting them again;
- Seeing red meat may symbolize infection or inflammation.

My father treated such dreams carefully. Sometimes he acted quietly, sometimes he advised caution. Only later did we realize that he had sensed what was coming, like recognizing a tree hidden inside a seed.

Sowa Rigpa also teaches that the meaning of a dream depends on when it occurs during the night. The *Explanatory Tantra* states:

> *Dreams that arise early in the night tend to fade and have little effect. Dreams that appear toward morning are clearly remembered and will bear results.*

To put it in other words:

- Early night — reflections of daily impressions;
- Midnight — confused dreams linked to stress or fear and also harmful spirits;
- Early dawn — clearer dreams that may carry insight or future indications.

Dreams as a Path to Self-Understanding

Near the end of his life, my father told me, "If you want to understand what is happening in your life, pay attention to what your dreams reveal."

He gave me a dream practice text from Pha Dampa Sangay's *Khyud Ched* and said, "You may not value this now, but one day you will understand its true worth."

His words stayed with me. Over time, I realized that dreams carry more than fleeting images. They reveal hidden stress, early signs of illness, unspoken fears and desires, and even guidance for future actions. Dreams help us understand ourselves not from the outside, but from within.

Today, when I wake from a powerful dream, I remember my father's gentle voice: "Dreams are the mirror of your inner world."

Through Sowa Rigpa and my father's guidance, I came to realize that when we listen to our dreams, we learn to listen to our intuition and deeper awareness. Dreams are not merely mental or spiritual events. They are the night-time language of consciousness, quietly connecting past, present, and future, and guiding us toward greater understanding.

MENTAL WELL-BEING

In Sowa Rigpa, mental well-being is understood as the result of a dynamic harmony between the biological and psychological systems of the human being. This harmony is mediated through the interaction of the body's three vital energies and the mind, with particular emphasis on *sogzin loong*, the life-sustaining wind, which supports consciousness. While the brain contributes to sensory processing and cognitive functions, the heart is considered the central seat of consciousness, and the balanced flow of *sogzin loong* through these systems ensures the integration of mind and body.

According to the *Explanatory Tantra*:

> *Specifically the life-sustaining wind resides in the crown of the head and moves through the throat and chest regions. It aids in the swallowing of food and drink, regulates breathing, expels*

saliva, triggers sneezes and burps, sharpens the mind and senses and above all controls the mind.

Because of these functions, the life-sustaining wind is regarded as essential when discussing the nature and health of the mind.

Human beings have many different ways of thinking and countless habits shaped by their own minds. Yet, I believe that all humans share the same fundamental nature of mind without any real difference in their true essence. In Sowa Rigpa teachings the nature of mind is described as naturally clear, bright, aware and open like a cloudless sky. Its basic function is to know and experience whatever appears, whether from the outer world or from within ourselves. Through this mind we remember the past, interpret the present and imagine the future. Although the mind has no physical form, it unmistakably knows what it experiences.

For this reason, Buddhism speaks of the mind as a clear and formless awareness that can recognize both thoughts and sensations inside us as well as everything happening around us. This pure and open nature of the mind is said to be present from the very beginning, primordially. According to Sowa Rigpa's understanding of the mind's origin, the conscious gross mind that each of us carries in this life does not appear suddenly or come from nothing. Rather it arises from a previous stream of subtle consciousness with the

same nature. That earlier stream also came from another one before it, forming an unbroken continuity. In this view, the foundation of the conscious gross mind we have today is the continuity of our subtle mind with subtle wind energy.

This subtle wind-mind has been present since beginningless time and carries the continuity from one life to the next. Many scriptures explain that this clear, knowing awareness continues throughout the cycle of existence. It moves through the four transitional states that encompass the whole continuum of existence — life, death, the intermediate state and rebirth — repeating this cycle again and again, until ultimate liberation from cyclic existence is achieved.

This subtle wind-mind is what maintains the unbroken flow of consciousness across lifetimes. During conception, this subtle consciousness, under the force of karma, merges with the parents' reproductive essences and begins to interact with biological processes in the womb. Sowa Rigpa explains that from the moment of conception, consciousness is linked with the body and begins to accumulate impressions, experiences and tendencies. From this point onward, the naturally clear mind gradually becomes obscured by the arising of gross mental activities.

As we grow, from life in the womb to childhood, adulthood and old age, our experiences shape us. We develop habits, emotional

reactions and patterns of thinking. Sowa Rigpa identifies three main emotions: desire or attachment, anger and delusion. These are the three mental poisons that cloud the mind. These emotions are like clouds forming in a clear sky. If they gather in great strength, they create inner disturbance, confusion and mental suffering much like storm clouds that bring wind, rain and turbulence. Because of this, our mind often feels unsteady. We experience mood swings, stress, anxiety and many kinds of mental challenges.

Sowa Rigpa explains that these difficulties arise not because the mind is bad but because its natural clarity has been covered over by emotional and karmic patterns. Therefore, understanding the mind, its pure nature and the forces that obscure it, is the foundation for mental well-being and spiritual growth.

Mind-body interdependence

Sowa Rigpa explains that the mind and body are inseparable, each constantly influencing and conditioning the other. The life-sustaining wind functions as the connection between the two. The mind is said to ride these subtle wind currents throughout the body. Therefore, disturbances in the mind such as fear, worry, anxiety or emotional stress directly disrupt the balance of wind energy.

This disruption can manifest as both physical ailments and psychological disorders. Conversely, disturbances in the body such as imbalances in *loong, thipa* and *bedken*, (the three vital energies) affects the stability, clarity and vitality of the mind. When the body's three vital energies become imbalanced, they can influence brain chemicals such as serotonin and dopamine, leading to changes in mood, thinking, and behavior. Thus, physical disorders can provoke mental balance, and mental instability can trigger physical disease.

At some point in our lives, all of us experience some form of mental disturbance. What matters most is how we relate to it and how we learn to work with our own mind. According to the teachings of Sowa Rigpa, as long as afflictive emotions such as attachment, anger, ignorance, jealousy, and fear are present, there is a subtle form of mental illness within us.

Sowa Rigpa explains that mental illness can arise from three main conditions. The first is not knowing how to handle the mind properly, allowing negative thoughts and emotions to overwhelm us. The second condition is the imbalance of vital energies in the body, which can affect the mind and lead to mental problems. The third comes from invisible or subtle harmful influences, often described as spirit-related disturbances.

Mental illness can also be related to harmful actions, lack of emotional support, and deep grief that can weaken the strength of the heart and mind. When a person's inner resilience is low, the three mental poisons of desire or attachment, anger, and delusion can easily take hold and disturb mental balance. From a modern point of view, this is similar to chronic stress, trauma, and emotional overload, all of which are known to affect the brain and nervous system. According to Sowa Rigpa, mental disorders rarely come from a single cause. Instead, they arise from a combination of root cause and immediate condition, which are:

1. Root Cause: The Three Mental Poisons.

Desire or attachment, anger, and delusion disturb the natural balance of the body's three vital energies. Desire or attachment affects *loong*, anger disturbs *thipa*, and delusion causes *bedken* imbalance. When these energies are out of balance, both mental clarity and physical health are affected, creating the ground for illness.

2. Immediate Condition: Physical constitution type, Lifestyle, Environmental and Social Factors.

Mental illness can be triggered by factors like physical constitution type or genetics, diet, lifestyle or behavior, emotion, and environmental influences. Physical constitution type or genetics play an

important role. A family history of mental illness may increase a person's vulnerability, but it does not mean that illness is inevitable.

Mental health can also be affected by brain injuries, infections, exposure to toxins, and other harmful substances. Substance abuse and mental illness are closely linked. Substance use can increase the risk of developing mental health problems, and mental illness can in turn increase the likelihood of substance abuse. In addition, parental exposure to alcohol or drugs can affect a child in the womb increasing the risk of mental illness as well as neurological and neurodevelopment difficulties later in a child's life. I have observed many cases in which substance abuse like alcohol and drugs are likely causes of mental disorders and autism in children. This association still requires thorough scientific research to be clearly validated. However, avoiding harmful substances both before conception and during pregnancy is crucial for the child's health and overall well-being.

Adverse childhood experiences such as abuse, neglect, abandonment, or prolonged exposure to fear can leave deep emotional imprints that often persist into adulthood. These early wounds may shape patterns of thinking, emotional responses, and coping mechanisms. Later in life, additional trauma arising from violence, relationship breakdowns, emotional shock, or major life events such as the

loss of a loved one, divorce, financial collapse, or overwhelming responsibility can further destabilize mental well-being.

When individuals lack effective coping skills or struggle to manage stress and regulate emotions, their vulnerability to mental illness increases. From the Sowa Rigpa perspective, such psychological stress aggravates the life-sustaining wind, giving rise to emotional imbalance and mental instability. Sowa Rigpa psychology offers profound and practical methods for addressing mental illness rooted in psychological causes.

Through the cultivation of mindfulness, compassion, and insight into the nature of suffering, these practices help individuals develop greater awareness of their mental processes. They support emotional regulation, strengthen resilience, and foster healthier ways of responding to life's challenges, thereby improving overall mental balance and well-being.

Environmental and social factors also play a crucial role in mental health. Social isolation, loneliness, and the absence of supportive relationships or a caring community can significantly weaken emotional resilience. Economic hardship such as poverty, unemployment, and debt adds further psychological strain. Experiences of racism, discrimination, negative social influences, and prolonged

exposure to harmful or unstable environments can further undermine mental health.

In traditional Sowa Rigpa's understanding, disturbances caused by unseen forces or harmful spirits are also regarded as external influences that may affect the mind. Over time, these factors can erode mental strength and disrupt the natural balance between body and mind. Mental illness, therefore, arises from a complex and dynamic interaction of internal and external conditions. Thus, the approaches highlight the importance of a holistic path to mental health — one that nurtures the body, balances the vital energies, cultivates mental wisdom and ethical awareness, heals emotional wounds, and strengthens the clarity, stability, and resilience of the mind.

BODY CONSTITUTION AND MENTAL HEALTH

In Sowa Rigpa, some people are understood to be more vulnerable to mental health challenges because of their individual body constitution. However, this does not mean that someone is completely destined to develop a mental illness. Mental health conditions can affect anyone, regardless of body type, background, or personality. However, risk arises from a complex interaction between a person's body type constitution, life experiences, lifestyle choices, emotional habits, and external influences.

One of the key frameworks in Sowa Rigpa is the understanding of seven body types, which are formed by different proportions and combinations of the three vital energies: *loong*, *thipa*, and *bedken*. Among these, certain constitutional types are considered more prone to specific kinds of mental imbalance. The body type

with the highest vulnerability to mental disturbance is the *loong*-dominant type.

1. *Loong* Constitutional Type: Prone to Anxiety and Instability

The *loong* constitution is the most prone to mental disorders because *loong* governs movement, the nervous system, communication, and mental activity. In modern terms, it relates to aspects of the autonomic nervous system, neurotransmission, and the regulation of psychological processes.

When loong, especially the *sogzin loong* (life-sustaining wind, becomes imbalanced and causes mental illness, individuals may experience:

- Persistent anxiety and excessive worry;
- Fearfulness or a sense of insecurity;
- Restlessness and inability to relax;
- Mood instability and rapid emotional changes;
- Racing thoughts or overthinking;
- Insomnia or irregular sleep patterns;
- Feeling ungrounded, spaced out, or overwhelmed.

Loong in general is especially important because it acts as the carrier and activator of the other two vital energies. When loong becomes unstable, it can easily disturb the entire body-mind system, making it a major risk factor for mental health vulnerability.

An imbalance of the life-sustaining wind closely resembles anxiety disorders, nervous system hyperarousal, stress-related conditions, and insomnia. Excessive activation of the sympathetic nervous system (the "fight or flight" response) strongly parallels *loong* disturbance, showing a clear connection between traditional understanding and modern neuroscience.

2. *Thipa* Constitutional Type: Prone to Anger and Intensity

Thipa governs metabolism, intelligence, clarity, ambition, and emotional regulation. In modern terms, it corresponds to metabolic processes, hormonal activity, and cognitive–emotional pathways involved in mood regulation.

When *thipa*, especially the drubjed (accomplishing bile), becomes imbalanced and causes mental illness, individuals may show:

- Irritability, anger, and sudden outbursts;
- Frustration over small matters;
- Impatience and intolerance of obstacles;

- Perfectionism and harsh self-criticism;
- Aggressive or dominating behavior;
- Burnout from overwork or intense focus;
- Difficulty forgiving or letting go.

These tendencies resemble stress-related mood disorders, anger dysregulation, and burnout syndrome. High cortisol levels, chronic stress, and aggressive tendencies align closely with thipa imbalance.

3. *Bedken* Constitutional Type: Prone to Depression and Inertia

Bedken provides stability, structure, memory, and emotional grounding. It is associated with physical and emotional resilience. In modern terms, it relates to structural stability, metabolic balance, and neurotransmitters that support calmness and emotional steadiness.

When *bedken*, especially the *tsimjed* (satisfying senses), becomes imbalanced and causes mental illness, individuals may experience:

- Depression or persistent sadness;
- Lethargy, low energy, and fatigue;
- Heaviness in body and mind;
- Difficulty starting tasks or making decisions;
- Emotional attachment or dependency;

- Social withdrawal and avoidance;
- Brain fog and slowed thinking;
- Resistance to change or feeling stuck.

These symptoms parallel major depressive disorders, seasonal affective disorder, slowed metabolism, and reduced cognitive functioning. Low dopamine activity and social withdrawal behaviors resemble bedken disturbances.

Constitution and Severity of Mental Illness

When a person's constitutional body type matches the vital energy that becomes aggravated, mental illness tends to be more severe, and the characteristic symptoms appear more clearly. For example:

A thipa-type person with *thipa drubjed* aggravated mental illness may show intense anger, impatience, aggression, and burnout.

A loong-type person with *sogzin loong* related mental illness may experience severe anxiety, panic, and insomnia.

A bedken-type person with *bedken tsimjed* related imbalance may develop deep depression, lethargy, and emotional dullness.

This principle applies to all other body types. When multiple vital energies are involved, mental illness becomes more complex and

may resemble conditions such as bipolar disorder, psychosis, or schizophrenia in Western medicine. Although the terminology differs, both systems describe disruptions in mood, perception, and reasoning.

Treatment Approach in Sowa Rigpa

Treating mental illness requires more than simply naming a diagnosis. A Sowa Rigpa practitioner carefully studies the person's emotional patterns, involved vital energies, physical signs, lifestyle, and mental state before deciding on treatment. This approach closely aligns with modern clinical practice, which emphasizes individualized and comprehensive assessment.

Severe conditions such as psychosis, deep depression, or emotional collapse often require long-term care. Along with medication, it is essential to stabilize the mind through emotional support, confidence-building, and strengthening inner resilience. Meditation and breathing practices, wind-channel exercises, and yoga help regulate vital energy in general and the nervous system, calm the mind, and support healing from both traditional and scientific perspectives.

One of such practices is Sorig Meditation, also known as *Sorig Zhiney*. It is a holistic and therapeutic meditation practice of mind-

fulness and calm-abiding meditation. It is based on the principle of the traditional healing system of Sowa Rigpa and comes from the spiritual teachings of the *Yuthog Nyingthig*.

This practice supports both physical healing and inner spiritual development. Its ultimate aim is to transform the three negative emotions of the mind (attachment or desire, anger, and delusion), which are considered the root cause of all suffering.

Sorig Meditation includes:

- Breathing practices that cleanse and activate the body's subtle energy channels.
- Yoga or *Lu Jong* that use bodily exercises to regulate the three vital energies, which govern all physical and mental functions. The movements help strengthen the nervous system, improve the functioning of internal organs, and support overall healing and well-being.

These methods come from the *Tsa Lung Thrul Khor* practices of the *Yuthog Nyingthig*. In the past, they were not widely practiced or openly taught because they were considered secret teachings. However, due to their strong benefits for healing and well-being, they are now gaining greater attention.

Treatment does not rely on medicine alone. The patient's own effort, self-awareness, and discipline are equally important. When one learns to rest in the clarity of the observing mind rather than being carried away by disturbing thoughts and emotions, mental stability naturally grows. As the teachings say:

> *When one no longer chases appearances and rests in the one who perceives them, the true nature of mind becomes clear, and the path to freedom is not far.*

However, this is difficult when the three vital energies and biological systems are imbalanced, and as a result the person may lack control over mind and body. Once these energies are regulated through medication and therapy, the patient can meaningfully engage in self-help practices to support recovery. Understanding the roots of mental illness offers a truly holistic approach that can reduce suffering and supports genuine, lasting healing.

SOWA RIGPA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Sowa Rigpa continues to offer significant benefits for holistic healthcare in the 21st century. Its strength lies in treating the person as a whole rather than focusing only on isolated symptoms. In many chronic illnesses, where modern medicine may have limitations or primarily aims to control symptoms, Sowa Rigpa can serve as a valuable complementary therapy. Through my own experience in treating patients with long-term and chronic conditions, I have observed meaningful improvements with Sowa Rigpa medicines. These treatments often work gently and gradually, supporting the body's natural balance and healing processes rather than forcing immediate suppression of symptoms.

People today often seek quick solutions and therefore fail to appreciate the long-term benefits of slower, holistic approaches. Another reason is a lack of understanding of how Sowa Rigpa and other natural medical systems can support and improve overall well-

being. Modern evidence-based medicine has advanced greatly and offers many benefits; however, it also has limitations and cannot cure every condition. The Sowa Rigpa tradition holds deep wisdom and effective treatments that remain highly relevant in modern times when used appropriately. For this, we need faith, belief, and confidence in the system.

This is not about blind faith or superstition. It is about realistic belief, informed confidence, and trust based on understanding and experience. With such confidence, meaningful progress becomes possible. Without it, success in any system of practice is difficult to achieve. It is true that Sowa Rigpa generally lacks large-scale, modern evidence-based clinical trials required in contemporary biomedical research. However, its safety and effectiveness are grounded in well-established classical medical texts, standardized formulas, and continuous clinical practice refined over thousands of years. This long history of application represents a different yet valuable form of evidence.

To ensure both safety and wider acceptance, well-designed regulatory frameworks must be implemented to support traditional medicines and practitioners. These regulations should respect the unique principles and methods of Sowa Rigpa rather than forcing them to fit entirely within the framework of modern biomedicine.

At the same time, they should ensure quality control, ethical practice, and patient safety.

Only a few countries in the world actively practice and preserve Sowa Rigpa today. These countries carry a great responsibility to protect this precious medical heritage from being lost in the rush toward modernity. While honoring tradition, Sowa Rigpa must also evolve through research, innovation, and new ideas without losing its core principles. In the 21st century, Sowa Rigpa can play an important role in preventive medicine, especially in collaboration with modern diagnostic tools. The system offers clear guidance for maintaining physical and mental well-being through diet, lifestyle, seasonal care, and balance of the body's energies.

Unlike modern medicine, Sowa Rigpa does not have large research centers, strong organizations, or pharmaceutical companies to support its development. Due to limited funding, it remains difficult to promote, research, and expand the system on a large scale. No other country or institution will preserve and protect this cultural and medical heritage for us; this responsibility lies mainly with the practitioners themselves.

To ensure that Sowa Rigpa continues to grow and remain relevant, practitioners must unite, cooperate, and support one another. However, I have observed increasing jealousy, competition, and

a sense of rivalry among practitioners, particularly among those who identify themselves as Buddhist. This is deeply concerning. Those who teach others to restrain negative emotions should strive to embody these values in their own conduct. Sadly, some demonstrate the very behaviors they caution against.

If we truly wish to preserve and strengthen Sowa Rigpa, we must cultivate better relationships, mutual respect, and a supportive professional environment. Only through collaboration, humility, and shared responsibility can we validate the true value of Sowa Rigpa and allow it to flourish for future generations. With thoughtful regulation, research, and institutional support, Sowa Rigpa can continue to serve humanity by preserving its ancient wisdom and contributing meaningfully as a preventive and holistic healthcare system in the modern world.

About the author

The author is a dedicated practitioner and lifelong student of Sowa Rigpa, the ancient Tibetan and Bhutanese system of medicine. With years of study and practice under his late father, who was the founding principal of the National Institute of Traditional Medicine (now known as The Faculty of Traditional Medicine) in Bhutan, the author shares insights drawn from his experience

learning under him, the foundational concepts of Sowa Rigpa, and his own journey as a healer.

Through this work, he seeks to bridge ancient wisdom and modern understanding, inspiring readers to reconnect with the importance of living in balance, in both body and mind.

The author continues to guide and teach holistic healing practices, supporting individuals in cultivating well-being, awareness, and inner harmony.

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