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### **Medicine Rooted in Old Tibet**

If this gentle, optimistic film about the wonders of Tibetan medicine, becomes popular, it could drive hordes of the terminally ill to seek the painstakingly concocted herbal remedies for which the physicians and researchers interviewed in the movie make dramatic claims. How valid those assertions are, of course, is anybody's guess. But if what the "The Knowledge of Healing" says about the effectiveness of these cures is true, the Tibetan system, which dates from the 12<sup>th</sup> century, deserves serious consideration as a supplement to Western medical technology.

Instead of being based on biochemistry, Tibetan medical thinking, which is strongly rooted in Buddhist principles, views the human body as governed by an elaborately organised and codified system of energies flowing through a system of channels. Its practice has been taught over last four centuries in Tibetan medical schools, most of which were destroyed by the Chinese in the late 1950's and early 60's. The few Tibetan physicians who weren't executed went into exile. Some of them reestablished themselves in Dharamsala, in northern India. The film introduces Tenzin Choedrak, a leading Tibetan medical authority, and shows him treating the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama for a minor ailment. The Dalai Lama himself appears twice in the film to argue forcefully for the acceptance of Tibetan medicine as a valuable addition to the Western system.

"The Knowledge of Healing", which opens today at the Film Forum, begins with a brief outline of the principles of Tibetan medicine and goes on to show physicians in Dharamasala and in Buryatia (part of Siberian Russia) treating patients with a variety of ailments. Although there are no overnight miracle cures, the Buryat centre claims a remarkably high cure rate for radiation-related ailments associated with the 1986 nuclear accident at Chernobyl.

After visiting these centres and observing diagnosis and treatment of patients suffering from everything from partial paralysis to the traumas of torture, the film moves westward to research centres in Israel and Switzerland where clinical studies are being conducted and several Tibetan medications industrially manufactured. The researchers have discovered that the Tibetan remedies work (the most remarkable testimony comes from a man whose heart disease was so advanced that a bypass operation wouldn't have helped him and whose clogged arteries were unblocked by a Tibetan medication), although the actual chemical processes by which they heal remains largely mysterious.

"The Knowledge of Healing", directed by Franz Reichle, offers much too much information than can be absorbed in one viewing. But from what can be grasped, the movie is not propagandistic mumbo jumbo but an invitation to examine a useful alternative approach to the human body and its mechanisms.

By Stephen Holden