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Ten Days in Tibet: Seeking the True Meaning of "Breaking Self-Attachment" on the Snowy Plateau

Stepping onto the land of Tibet, breathing in the thin yet pure air, I felt as though the ancient chants of Sanskrit were echoing in my ears. A ten-day journey, neither too long nor too short, was enough for my soul, long tainted by the cacophony of urban life, to find a glimpse of transcendent revelation on this land closest to heaven. The vastness of the plateau stretched before me, a canvas of endless skies and rugged mountains, where time seemed to slow, and the weight of the world began to lift.

At the Tashilhunpo Monastery in Shigatse, sunlight filtered through the gaps of prayer flags, casting dappled shadows that danced on the ancient stone steps. The monastery, a sanctuary of wisdom and tranquility, stood as a testament to centuries of spiritual devotion. It was here that I first encountered the profound concept of "breaking self-attachment." Our guide, Mr. Liu, stood beneath the monastery's corridor, his gaze distant, as if piercing through the boundaries of time and space. He said softly, "The difference between humans and Buddha lies perhaps in this: Buddha can break free from attachments, while we are often trapped by the obsessions in our hearts." His words fell like a seed into the soil of my mind, carrying an unresolved depth, waiting to sprout.

I wandered alone through the monastery, trying to digest this sudden revelation. The air of Tashilhunpo was filled with the scent of butter lamps, mingled with the fragrance of time itself. The walls, adorned with intricate murals, seemed to whisper stories of enlightenment and struggle. Around a corner, I met a young monk leaning against a wall, his eyes closed, basking in the caress of sunlight. His face was serene, as if he were one with the world around him. I approached him and gently brought up the concept of "breaking self-attachment." He opened his eyes, their clarity like still water, and smiled softly. "One cannot live without aspirations," he said, "just as a ship cannot sail without a sail. But aspirations are not the same as obsessions. The former is the driving force of progress, while the latter

is a shackle that binds." His words were like a beam of light, instantly dispelling the fog in my mind. I suddenly realized that we often oscillate between "pursuit" and "letting go," treating them as opposing poles, never considering that the two could coexist in harmony. Aspirations are our love and faith in life, the sails that propel us forward; obsessions, however, are the distorted chains of those aspirations, causing us to lose ourselves in the chase.

Standing in the monastery's courtyard, I looked up at the sky, where a few birds soared freely, unbound. In that moment, I felt as though I had touched a truth beyond language: the wisdom of life lies not in completely abandoning aspirations, but in learning to distinguish between aspirations and obsessions, allowing the former to become the lighthouse guiding our journey, rather than the cage that imprisons us.



*Figure 1. Dancing Around the Bonfire with Friends*

One day, we visited the Potala Palace. In the afternoon light, the palace stood majestically, its golden roof shimmering under the sun, as if suspended among the clouds, merging with the heavens. I stood in the square, watching the devout pilgrims prostrate themselves. Their figures stretched long under the slanting sunlight, each bow seeming to measure the distance between themselves and heaven, each

rise redefining their connection to the earthly world. Their movements were slow and solemn, as if time had frozen, leaving only a dialogue between faith and the cosmos.

As I gazed at them, the concept of "breaking self-attachment" surfaced in my mind. Their postures seemed to embody this state—untroubled by external distractions, unburdened by inner turmoil, simply existing in the present. Yet, a ripple of doubt stirred within me: in this era of material excess and information overload, are we not all trapped by various obsessions? The pursuit of fame and fortune, the weighing of gains and losses, the anxiety about the future—these invisible chains have long imprisoned our souls. However, when I looked into the eyes of those pilgrims, I was struck by an indescribable clarity and determination. Their gazes seemed to pierce through the noise of the world, reaching a kind of eternal tranquility. Everything in the world—whether prosperity or desolation, joy or suffering—appeared unable to shake their faith. This state of transcendence filled me with longing.

I stood there quietly, feeling the morning breeze of the plateau brush against my face, carrying a hint of chill but also a cleansing power. Gradually, I felt my heart grow lighter, as if the heavy obsessions were dissipating, replaced by an unprecedented clarity and ease. In that moment, I seemed to touch the edge of "breaking self-attachment"—not through deliberate renunciation, but through a natural awakening, allowing my soul to return to its inherent lightness and freedom.



*Figure 2. The Scenery Witnessed at the Potala Palace*

Recalling the day we reached Everest Base Camp, the towering snow-capped mountains also embodied the philosophy of "breaking self-attachment." It is not about abandoning all pursuits, but about learning to maintain detachment while pursuing. Like these mountains, standing tall through millennia of wind and rain, yet never attached to their own height. The mountain does not pride itself on its elevation, nor does the cloud mourn its wandering—this is the wisdom of nature.



*Figure 3. A Photograph with Mount Everest at Base Camp*

The ten-day journey gave me a new understanding of "breaking self-attachment." It is not an endpoint, but a process; not a renunciation, but a transcendence. We need not force ourselves to completely let go, for a moderate level of aspiration is the driving force of our progress. What we must release are the obsessions that cause us pain and lead us astray. Looking back on this journey, I suddenly understood: life is like walking on the plateau—one must maintain the courage to move forward while learning to let go at the right moments. To move forward with aspirations while releasing the heart's obsessions—this, perhaps, is the true meaning of "breaking self-attachment." On this land closest to heaven, I found my own answer: there is no need to strive for complete detachment, only to maintain a sense of clarity amidst the worldly dust; no need to deliberately pursue letting go, only to remember to look back at one's original intention when gripped by obsession.

The prayer flags of Tibet still flutter in the wind, as if whispering eternal wisdom. And I, carrying this newfound understanding, continue to explore the path of life. For I know that true "breaking self-attachment" is not about distancing ourselves from the world, but about maintaining a sense of transcendence within it; not about abandoning pursuit, but about keeping a clear mind while pursuing. This, perhaps, is the greatest harvest of my ten days in Tibet.

As I left the plateau, the mountains stood silent and eternal, a reminder that the journey of understanding is never truly complete. The lessons of Tibet—its skies, its people, its timeless wisdom—will forever echo in my heart, guiding me as I navigate the complexities of life with a lighter step and a clearer mind.