

Meet Dr. Tsampa Ngawang, of the Mustang district of north-central Nepal. He is the tenth recorded generation in his family of continuous amchis—highly trained traditional Himalayan Tibetan herbal doctors. Dr. Ngawang’s grandfather and father, his first teachers, believed that their family’s medical lineage goes all the way back to Yuthok



Yenteng Gonpo, the great doctor from Padmasambhava’s time twelve centuries ago. Their lineage in the oral tradition is of even greater antiquity, making Dr. Ngawang one of the key embodiments of the whole gamut of traditional Tibetan knowledge. Physician and veterinarian, lama, painter, carver, book-maker, master craftsman, public health expert, historian, agronomist, and community leader—these are the highlights of his many traditional skills. At the same time, Dr. Ngawang has shown a true master’s great gift for translating traditional knowledge and values into contemporary forms as Nepal races into the modern global village. These are fragile, precious traditions that Dr. Ngawang seeks to preserve.

In addition to a boyhood of traditional training at the side of his father and grandfather, Dr. Ngawang also studied at the Medical Center University in Dharamsala, India, and in Darjeeling’s Chagpuri Medical Institute. He has also studied under Dr. Jampa Thinley, Tibet’s Shigatse Medical Institute’s highest doctor; and with highly respected Tibetan teachers Toro Chenham Gotem and Toka Rinpoche at Menzikang. Dr. Ngawang’s own father was one of the rare amchis highly trained in such rare specialties as bom-jeh, the Tibetan herbal practice of controlling circulation.

What Is An Amchi?

Described as a walking encyclopedia of over 1,000 Himalayan herbs, amchis know where these plants grow, when to collect them, and how to prepare them in mixtures sometimes containing dozens of ingredients.

Beyond herbs, amchis also utilize other natural materials for their medicinal properties, including coral, turquoise, mud, and some especially prepared metals. Amchis are the doctors who read your pulses, holding your wrist like a flute and “hearing” which of your organs need re-balancing with the help of certain medicines.

For years, Dr. Ngawang’s high expertise has led to his participation in many international conferences including the Chitwan International Medical Conference (Nepal), the UNESCO Conference on World Medicine in Bangkok (Thailand), the Osaka International Conference of New Western Medical Developments and Old Traditional Systems (Japan), and the Bangalore International Conference on Ethnobotany and Conservation (India), and other conferences at home in Mustang and in Lhasa, Tibet.

*Attendees at
Dr. Ngawang’s talk
in Osaka*

