

Editor's foreword

It was spring. Golden sunrays pierced the sky and a strong wind swept across the barren trans-Himalayan mountains of Ladakh. Dr. Pasang Yonten Arya much enjoyed the pristine beauty of this desolate landscape during his time teaching Tibetan medicine at the Central Institute of Buddhist Studies in Choglamsar (1989-1991). One morning, an old patient arrived at his clinic accompanied by a child, both with a severe nosebleed. It was the first time he witnessed directly how living at high altitude comes with particular health challenges. From that moment, he began to pay more attention to locally prevalent illnesses, gaining experience on the use of simple Tibetan medical cures and learning about the home remedies applied by elderly women. These commonly available cures proved to be vital in remote areas, where there are no hospitals, clinics, or biomedical doctors within reach. Coincidentally, Amchi Tsewang Smanla was planning to train young Ladakhis as community health workers in the context of the Leh Nutrition Project funded by the UK Save The Children Fund. Tsewang Smanla strongly encouraged Pasang Yonten to write this manual because Sowa Rigpa practitioners carry a heavy responsibility in terms of primary healthcare in the Himalayas, and can use all the help they can get.

With the help of his wife Dr. Chungla Yonten Arya, who also collected clinical cases and remedies, the manuscript of *Manual of Common Illnesses and Their Cures in Tibetan Medicine* was first printed in Leh in 1990. In 1995, it was then published with a brief preface in English, which has now been replaced by this foreword.

The main text of this practical handbook starts with a short introduction that lays out how students and less experienced *amchi* should familiarize themselves with the illnesses described through study and an internship in an active clinic. Keeping this in mind, the manual is ideally suited

for where there is no clinic but where plenty of medicinal herbs grow in the surroundings. The table of contents lists the eighty-two illness categories covered, including salient general, local and combined disorders of the three humors, hot and cold diseases affecting the solid, hollow, and sense organs, fevers, and so on. As mentioned above, special attention has been given throughout the text to health issues of high-altitude populations, such as nosebleeds, high blood pressure, and different types of digestive and lung disorders. This manual furthermore uniquely focuses on pediatric medicine, with nine illnesses discussed and one chapter that presents children's ear vein reading as a diagnostic technique.

The more than eighty pathology chapters generally contain the following sections: causative factors, symptoms, external therapies, and treatment by medicine, diet, and behavioral advice. The final part of the book is a supplement with pithy instructions on the suitable dosage and way of prescribing and administering medicines. *Manual of Common Illnesses and Their Cures* ends with a list of more than two hundred formula names, indicating their warming or cooling nature and potential toxicity.

I am confident that this highly practical, experience-based work still has a lot to offer for practitioners around the world, especially due to its strong emphasis on self-sufficiency and reliance on small herbal formulas.

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Bedurya Publications

February 18, 2021