

Julley* from the north India Himalayan region of Ladakh!

My name is Tsering Gyatso. I am a proud officer in the security police force of Ladakh which is located in the high Himalayan region of North India that borders Tibet and Pakistan. I was born 40 years ago in the small farming village of Tia located about 100km from the main city of Leh. Life is very difficult in the village with no electricity, roads, medical facilities or good schools, so my parents encouraged me to travel to the main city of Leh to apply for a position in the police force. I was very lucky to be chosen for training and after my graduation I was posted to many different regions of India. Since 2007 I have been posted in Leh where I serve at the military airport which is the base of flight operations for not only the India air force, but also the civilian population. Because of the high security level of this border region and the fact that Ladakh is cut off from the rest of India during the 4 months of winter when temperatures are well below -30c, the airport is a vital facility and I take my duties very seriously.



Tsering Gyatso on duty in Ladakh

My life changed dramatically in 1995 when I had a relatively minor eye irritation which I thought was caused by the constant blowing dust combined with the intense UV rays of the bright mountain sunlight. I went to a local chemist in the marketplace and the untrained person there recommended that I receive an injection for the swelling in my eyes. I purchased the medication and took it to the small hospital where a nurse gave me the injection. Within a few hours of receiving that injection, my life changed completely from a quiet contentment to a 20 year struggle with severe eye damage caused by a serious allergic reaction to the medication.

The past 20 years have been filled with the greatest joys of my life as well as the never ending torment that my eye condition has caused me and those who depend on me for support and protection. I got married in 2006 to a fellow police officer and three years later we had a beautiful son, but my dry eye syndrome compromised every personal and professional experience and obligation that I had. I sought treatment from the army hospital in Ladakh as well as over 10 different medical facilities in Delhi and other large centers in India. The surgeries and medications only provided temporary relief and the financial drain and disappointments those futilities caused hurt me deeply because I knew they also put an emotional and practical strain on my family. My need for virtually constant self-medication also placed my ability to perform my duties as a police officer in serious jeopardy.



Being examined by Col Bhatla, chief ophthalmologist of the India Army Hospital in Leh

The light at the end of this long, dark tunnel came in 2013 when my friend Bill Kite, who operates a humanitarian medical project in Ladakh contacted the LV Prasad Eye Institute in Hyderabad on my behalf. Several times during my futile treatments I had heard the name Dr Virender Sangwan who was held in the highest esteem by all the other eye doctors as one of the world's most talented and respected cornea specialists. I had mixed feelings when Bill informed me that Dr Sangwan had answered his request for an appointment to examine me at LVPEI in Hyderabad.

Immediately upon arriving at the hospital in Hyderabad, I knew this a sacred place of healing. When Dr Sangwan walked into the small examination room, I knew I was in the capable hands of a compassionate master. He explained that he had to surgically repair some of the damage done by 20 years of abrasion caused by my inability to hydrate my eyes and then he would fit me with what he described as PROSE prosthetic device from the USA. At that time I had no idea what PROSE was, but I trusted Dr Sangwan's advice unconditionally. The next day Dr Sangwan performed the surgery on one eye. During the time that was necessary for that procedure to heal, I went on a pilgrimage to several Tibetan Buddhist monasteries that had been rebuilt in south India to meditate and pray for Dr Sangwan and his team as well as prepare myself emotionally for yet another disappointment.



With Dr Virender Sangwan at LVPEI



After Dr Sangwan perform surgery

When I returned I was assigned to the team at LV Prasad Eye Institute that fits this miraculous PROSE device. I still had no idea exactly what the treatment required, but the technician specialists were all so competent, kind and compassionate that I trusted them with my remaining ability to see. When the technician carefully maneuvered the PROSE prosthetic device into place it literally felt like the fire that had been burning in my eyes for 20 years had finally, mercifully gone out. The specialist advised me to walk around with the PROSE in place for a few hours and while walking over a bridge spanning the highway outside the hospital I looked into the distance and realized that I could see clearly and without pain. I felt the great weight of the past 20 year struggle release it's grip on my heart & mind and I filled that space with thoughts of my young son and the stunning beauty of my homeland that I would now be able to see clearly.

Ravi then showed me how to insert the PROSE myself while cautioning that it might take several days or weeks to be able to navigate the procedure. My determination to actively participate in my own rebirth back into self sufficiency inspired me to master the insertion and removal procedure in just one session. The relief and realization that we were so close to a long term solution to my crisis was one of the happiest, purest moments of my life.



Fitting the PROSE prosthetic device at LVPEI

Ravi and Dr Sangwan then explained that the only place in the world that can supply this wonderful therapeutic device was the Boston Foundation for Sight in the USA. They showed me where Boston was on the map of the world and told me that everyone involved with this miraculous lens was motivated by creating the second chance at light and contentment that now filled my own life. They made a special request to BFS to rush the fabrication and shipment to India of my custom lens set and within a week, one of the two lens had arrived. When I inserted it into my left eye, I not only once again felt the soothing relief the hydration offered, but also the wonderful improvement to my eyesight the optical correction provided.

Dr Sangwan had advised that we wait to place the PROSE device on my surgically repaired eye in order to allow it to completely heal, so I returned home to Ladakh with "the glass half full" but a heart filled to capacity with gratitude and relief. When I landed back in Ladakh I saw the vast Himalayas for the first time in 20 years in sharp and pain free splendor and when my son Jigmet Norboo ran toward me, I realized I had never actually seen him clearly before in my life.



Tsering Gyatso with his son Jigmet Norboo in Leh

The second PROSE device was sent by Boston Foundation for Sight to Hyderabad and they sent it to me in Leh about one month later. By that time I had completely mastered the insertion and removal techniques and so now my vision and life are fully restored. In Buddhist practice, we have a morning ritual called Yongchap where we mindfully fill seven small cups of water as an offering to the teachings of the Buddha. We are instructed to embrace the moment of mindful simplicity of filling up a small container of water to hear the blessings of our life and dedicate our hearts to compassion for all living things. I have extended this ritual to include the cleaning and insertion of my PROSE device. I pour the cleaning solution gently over the lens while feeling heart filling gratitude for the doctors at LVPEI who helped heal my eyes and prescribe this wonderful prosthetic device that has quite literally given me back my life. I also send blessings and gratitude to my brothers and sisters at Boston Foundation for Sight for their brilliance in building this bridge out of the flaming darkness and back toward the light for wounded souls like me. May the long time sun shine upon you all.

Bill Kite has also told me of the great news that LV Prasad Eye Institute is considering a partnership with The Himalayan Vision Project which will mean many great eye doctors from Hyderabad will be coming to Ladakh to work in their clinic. That will certainly mean many more of the good people of Ladakh will have the same opportunity as I did to receive PROSE or other treatments for their vision conditions or injuries. Wonderful!

Julley,

Tsering Gyatso
Leh, Ladakh

"Julley" is one of those magic, all-purpose words in Ladakhi/Tibetan that can mean, hello, goodbye, I'm sorry, thank you, you're welcome, god bless you, I surrender, I forgive you, I understand but disagree, etc. It literally means "bless the divine within everything" so it cuts across all gender, social status, nationality and religion and respectfully greets the divinity in us all rather than specifically the individual.