



VISIONING TIBET

OVERVIEW

Visioning Tibet presents a unique panorama of contemporary Tibet, revealing geographies and lives of Tibet that have rarely been seen by American or international television audiences. Filmed over nearly three years by an award-winning film crew, it tells the remarkable story of a San Francisco doctor who has dedicated his life to ending preventable blindness in this remote part of the world.

The film traces the evolution of Dr. Marc Lieberman's Tibet Vision Project which began in 1995. It includes the vivid and moving footage of the meetings Dr. Lieberman arranged four years earlier, between Jewish teachers and His Holiness the Dalai Lama, where the Dalai Lama explained the dire physical conditions for those Tibetans living in Chinese-occupied Tibet. A deeply spiritual man, Dr. Lieberman vowed to focus his medical and spiritual practice on the eradication of cataract disease – the leading cause of preventable blindness among the Tibetan people. Since 1995, Dr. Lieberman has worked throughout Tibet training local doctors to perform modern cataract and lens implant surgery and his project has restored sight to thousands across the Tibetan high plateau.

However, the survival of this project is constantly threatened by the social-political realities of Tibetan life under Chinese rule. The film documents several stand-offs between Dr. Lieberman and the Chinese authorities, whose lack of cooperation and institutional indifference to the health needs of ordinary Tibetans undermines the potential success of the project.

The film includes the stories of Karma and Lhasang, one a farmer the other a nomad, both blinded by cataracts. We follow these two men and their families as they make the arduous journeys to a remote Tibet Vision Project clinic in northern Tibet where their sight is restored by the project's Tibetan surgeons. The film concludes with a moving ceremony of gratitude where Karma, Lhasang and over one hundred other patients present the Tibetan eye team with silk prayer scarves. We return with Karma and Lhasang to their villages now able to see again and prepared to renew their lives.

CURING THE BLINDNESS OF A FORGOTTEN PEOPLE





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MAKING VISIONING TIBET

What makes Visioning Tibet a unique documentary?

Due to the political circumstances in Chinese-occupied Tibet, foreign production crews are rarely given permission to travel in Tibet— especially in the more remote provinces where the bulk of **Visioning Tibet** was shot. Under the guise of accompanying Dr. Lieberman (who travels to Tibet twice a year as a guest of the Chinese government) for the Project's documentation purposes, the production crew was able to travel freely around the Tibet Autonomous Region and film in rural communities which have been restricted to western travelers for over fifty years. Furthermore, the Tibet Vision Project eye camps represent the first time that Tibetan doctors have undertaken, without foreign surgeons, a health-initiative of this magnitude.

Challenges of Producing Visioning Tibet

Every documentary filmmaker has faced the challenge of making the best film possible within a limited budget. But making **Visioning Tibet** involved the additional challenge of shooting a high-quality documentary while not appearing to be making a documentary. China is deeply suspicious of the foreign media, and nowhere is this more true than in Tibet. Therefore, the crew and equipment had to be limited to the bare minimum – one producer and one camera/sound man. We also benefited enormously from the huge leaps in video technology, allowing us to shoot and capture professional-grade footage and sound on a relatively inconspicuous production kit.

Importance of Visioning Tibet

Dr. Lieberman and the Tibet Vision Project are a wonderful example of what is coming to be known as “medical diplomacy.” At a time when America is assessing its role in the world like never before, **Visioning Tibet** shows the ways in which one American can bring his relative wealth and expertise to bear on a medical crisis afflicting one of the poorest and most isolated populations in the world. In the process, this film demonstrates a model of cross-cultural cooperation and American engagement in the developing world, a model which, if emulated and multiplied, would enormously benefit our country and our world.





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PRODUCER'S BIO

Isaac Solotaroff (Producer/director/editor) has worked as an independent documentary producer and editor in New York and San Francisco since 1997. After graduating from Vassar College in 1993, Isaac spent three years teaching public high school in the Bay Area.

In 1996, he took his one and only film/video production class from Bill Chayes at San Francisco State, and within six months Bill and Isaac were collaborating on their first film together - **Jews and Buddhism: Belief Amended, Faith Revealed**. The film was based loosely on Roger Kammentz's **The Jew in the Lotus**, which chronicled the historic meetings between the Dalai Lama and a group of rabbis and Jewish scholars in the United States and India in 1989 and 1990. Completed in 1999 and screened at over ten international film festivals as well as on PBS, the film was chosen as "one of the outstanding documentaries of 1999" by the Academy of Motion Pictures, Arts and Sciences.

Isaac collaborated again with Bill Chayes (along with co-writer/director John Harris) on **Los Romeros: The Royal Family of the Guitar**, nationally broadcast on PBS in 2001. The film is a biographical account of the Romero family, who have produced three generations of virtuoso guitar players including, perhaps, the two greatest living classical guitar players today. **Los Romeros** was nominated for an Emmy in 2001 for Best Biography.

In addition, Isaac has edited a number of award winning documentaries, including **Freestyle: The Art of Rhyme**, which won the HBO Best Documentary Award at the Urban World Film Festival in 2002; and **Smokestack Lightning**, which won Best Documentary at the Memphis Film Festival in 2001.

Isaac began production on **Visioning Tibet** in 2000 when he joined Dr. Marc Lieberman on one of his twice-a-year trips to Tibet. He made two subsequent trips to Tibet to document Dr. Lieberman's work in 2001 and 2002, with Bay Area cinematographer Kirk Schroeder. For the next two years, Isaac spent whatever time he could spare from his work producing and editing commissioned documentaries, industrials and marketing videos, to edit **Visioning Tibet** in his post-production studio in Manhattan and San Francisco. In January 2005, he completed a fine-cut of **Visioning Tibet**.

