

Bios

Geshe Sopa

by [Roger Jackson](#)

Dear Colleagues,

It is with great sadness that I write to report the passing of Geshe Lhundub Sopa, on August 28, 2014, at the age of 91 (92 by Tibetan reckoning). Geshe-la—as he was well-nigh universally known—was one the last surviving masters to receive most of their scholarly training in Tibet, and one of the first such scholars to teach in a Western university. He was Professor Emeritus of South Asian Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, author of numerous scholarly works on Tibetan Buddhism, founding and emeritus abbot of Deer Park Buddhist Center in Oregon, Wisconsin, and a revered Buddhist teacher, with students in every part of the world.

Born in 1923 to a farming family in the Shang principality of the west-central Tibetan region of Tsang, he entered a local Gelukpa monastery, Ganden Chökhör, at the age of eight. When he was eighteen, he moved to Lhasa to join Je College of the great monastic university of Sera. Studying with some of Tibet's greatest masters, he rose rapidly through the scholarly ranks, and was appointed tutor to an important young tulku, Khamlung Rinpoche. In 1959, shortly before the Lhasa uprising, when H.H. the Fourteenth Dalai Lama stood for his Geshe examination, Geshe-la was chosen to serve as a debate partner, quizzing His Holiness on the Perfection of Wisdom literature. With the Chinese suppression of the uprising, Geshe-la, like the Dalai Lama and tens of thousands of other Tibetans, made the perilous journey to India and exile. He completed his own scholarly studies in Buxaduar, West Bengal in 1962, attaining the very highest rank: Number One Lharampa Geshe.

In the same year, the Dalai Lama requested Geshe-la to accompany three young tulkus to the United States so they could study English. They settled at a small Gelukpa monastery in Freewood Acres, New Jersey, overseen by the pioneer of Tibetan Buddhism in the United States, Geshe Ngawang Wangyal. There, Geshe-la began to learn English and to attract the attention of American students, among them Robert Thurman and Jeffrey Hopkins. In 1967, he was invited by Richard Robinson, founder of the University of Wisconsin's Buddhist Studies program, to move to Madison. At first, he was a teaching assistant for Prof. Robinson's literary Tibetan course (a colleague of his, with only mild exaggeration, likened this to having the Pope helping out with a Latin class), but over the course of time he began to teach courses on his specialty, Indian and Tibetan Buddhist philosophy, and to draw increasing numbers of students. He eventually—not without difficulty, given the uniqueness of his training—won a regular faculty position, gained tenure, and was promoted eventually to full professor, his rank when he retired in 1997. Among those fortunate enough to complete Ph.D.s under Geshe-la over the years (myself included) were Jeffrey Hopkins, James Robinson, Ter Ellingson, Leonard Zwillig, Michael Sweet, Ed Bastian, Jose Cabezon, A.W. Barber, John Makransky, John Epling, John Newman, Beth Newman, David Patt, James Blumenthal, James Apple, and Paul Donnelley.

Over his career, Geshe-la published a number of articles and books, usually in collaboration with one or more of his students. His books include a Tibetan-language study guide, *Lectures in Tibetan Religious Culture*; a translation of a Gelukpa tenet-systems text, *Cutting Through Appearances: the Practice and Theory of Tibetan Buddhism* (with Jeffrey Hopkins); an overview of Kālacakra traditions, *The Wheel of Time: Kalachakra in Context* (with Roger Jackson and John Newman); a translation of two important Kadampa *lojong* texts, *Peacock in*

the Poison Grove: Two Buddhist Texts on Training the Mind (with Michael Sweet and Leonard Zwilling); a translation of Thukten Losang Chökyi Nyima's great work of intellectual history, *The Crystal Mirror of Philosophical Systems: A Tibetan Study of Asian Religious Thought* (with Roger Jackson, Ann Chavez, Michael Sweet, and Leonard Zwilling); his autobiography, *Like a Waking Dream* (with Paul Donnelley); and five volumes (three thus far published) of his teachings on Tsongkhapa's magnum opus, under the title *Steps on the Path to Enlightenment: A Commentary on the Lamrim Chenmo* (with David Patt, Beth Newman, James Blumenthal, and Susan Dechen Rochard). Other works, including his commentary on Tsongkhapa's masterpiece on Buddhist hermeneutics and Mahāyāna philosophy, *The Essence of Eloquence on [Distinguishing] the Provisional from the Definitive (Drang nges legs bshad snying po)*, will be forthcoming.

As successful as Geshe-la was in the Western academic setting, he was even more renowned among Tibetan scholars, especially but not solely in the Geluk tradition. His Tibetan students have included Geshe Jampa Tekchok, Geshe Lobsang Tsering, Geshe Losang Dönyö, all of whom later became abbots of Sera Je monastery in India; two lamas well known to Westerners, Thubten Yeshe and Thubten Zopa Rinpoche; the founder of Maitripa College, Yangsi Rinpoche; and Khensur Lobsang Tenzin, ex-abbot of Gyume Tantric College, who is currently the Jangtse Chöje—directly in line to become Ganden Tripa, holder of the throne of Tsongkhapa. When the Dalai Lama met with the Trappist monk and writer Thomas Merton on Merton's ill-fated trip to Asia in 1968, he told him that if he wanted to understand Madhyamaka philosophy, he should study with Geshe Sopa.

Geshe-la also was an important figure in the introduction of Tibetan Buddhism to the United States. Paralleling his career at the University of Wisconsin was his development of what now is known as Deer Park Buddhist Center, a fully functioning, traditionally-oriented Tibetan-style monastery in Oregon, Wisconsin, that has served both Tibetans and Westerners in important and diverse ways over many years. For decades, Geshe-la himself taught regular Sunday classes on foundational texts and special summer sessions on difficult Buddhist philosophical topics, and at one time or another the monastery has hosted teachings and/or initiations by nearly every luminary of the Geluk tradition. Most notably, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama has visited Deer Park on multiple occasions, including in 1981, when he bestowed there the first Kālacakra initiation ever offered in the West, and 2007, when he consecrated the spectacular new temple at Deer Park that Geshe-la envisioned, then saw tirelessly to completion in his later years. Geshe-la also traveled often to teach, making frequent visits to various parts of the U.S., as well Mexico, Taiwan, Europe, and other locales.

Last, but far from least, Geshe-la was a peacemaker and public servant. He was actively involved in Buddhist dialogue with other religions, and was a trustee of the International Peace Council, an interfaith organization that promotes peaceful resolution of differences. In that capacity, he traveled to Belfast, Jerusalem, and Chiapas, Mexico as part of Peace Council projects working to end violence in those areas.

His many students and admirers will miss Geshe Sopa's warmth, intelligence, modesty, energy, and humor—not to mention his lifelong embodiment of his monastic name: effortless patience (*lhun grub bzod pa*). His legacy lies not just in his scholarly and institutional good works but in the example of a life lived in the pursuit of wisdom and service to others. As Tibetan tradition expresses it at such moments: may he quickly take rebirth so as to continue his work for sentient beings.

Roger Jackson

Geshe Gedün Lodrö

Born in the capital of Tibet, Hla-ša, in 1924, Geshe Gedün Lodrö entered Dre-ḅung Monastic University (Ham-dong House in Go-mang College) on the outskirts of Hla-ša at the age of nine as a novice monk. He took basic examinations in 1940, received full ordination in 1947, and gained the degree of ge-ṣhay in 1961 in exile in India as the first among three scholars who were awarded the number one ranking in the highest class. He was a scholar of prodigious learning, keeping in active memory 1,800 folios of basic texts, which in English would be at least 3,600 pages. He told me that he accomplished this by using all spare time (such as in walking from one place to another!) to recite texts to himself. Even more, he was famed for his ability in debate; by his own account he was the equal of others when taking the position of challenger but was at his best when answering others' challenges. This undoubtedly was why he was chosen to become a faculty member at Go-mang College before graduation.

He told me that when the Chinese began shelling in Hla-ša, he climbed the steep hill above Dre-ḅung and looked down on the unfolding scene, realizing that the type of life and opportunity for study he had had until 1959 would never occur again. He knew he was seeing the end of an era.

In exile in India, he took his ge-ṣhay degree with top honors and later when the Dalai Lama conducted interviews of all the ge-ṣhays who had escaped, Geshe Gedün Lodrö was declared to be the top scholar. The Dalai Lama sent him to teach at the University of Hamburg in 1967, where he learned German fluently and eventually became a tenured member of the faculty. I first met him in 1970 when he visited his main teacher and my mentor, Kensur Ngawang Lekden, in Madison, Wisconsin. Kensur Lekden spoke very highly of his student, and thus I wrote into a Fulbright grant proposal three months of study with him in Hamburg while I was on my way to India at the end of 1971. His fluid treatment of many philosophical issues during my stay in Hamburg led to my inviting him to the University of Virginia in 1979, when I translated the lectures that comprise this book. He returned to Hamburg at the beginning of August of that year, and suddenly passed away in November, slumping to the floor outside the door of his apartment. We had many plans to work on various texts and systems, and indeed the world lost one of its most learned persons.

Denma Locho Rinpoche

http://www.jamyang.co.uk/teachers/denma_locho_rinpoche.html#Ziling

MY LIFE IN THE LAND OF SNOW

By Denma Locho Rinpoche

Tibet, the land of snows has three regions. U in the centre, the land of religion, Kham in the east, the region of men and Amdo in the northeast, the country of horses. I was born in Kham, known as the land of Chushi Gangdruk (four rivers and six



ranges). My area, Gaba (sGa pa), bordering the Drichu (Yangtse) river, was close to the Maza Zalmo Range (rMa rza Zalmo sgang).

Gaba comes under the domain of the Nangchen king of Kham. Under the Nangchen principality there are 18 inner tribes and 25 outer tribes. Gaba falls into the latter category. Within Gaba, I came from the Rongpo tribe, which was ruled by one major chieftain called Rongpo Be-hu. Under him were four lesser chieftains called Be-chang. These were Rongpo Todma Be-chang, Rongpo Medma Be-chang, Wo-dzong Be-chang and finally Lhadra Be-chang. Some controlled nomad areas, while others looked after farmers. This structure had been established long before when these regions were conquered by the kings of Tibet, and it remained so until my time, in spite of overall Chinese control. In the Rongpo district, we had four Be-chang, two of whom controlled nomad areas and were respectively called the Upper Rongpo and the Lower Rongpo. The two others headed farming areas; one was the Rongpo Me-ma (lower farmers) and the other was headed by the Lhadri Be-chang, or head of hundred households.

Family and Childhood

It was my great grandfather, Nyima, who brought prosperity to our family. He was a good trader and married the daughter of the Lower Rongpo and, joining their family, took on their name, Sekhetsang. I remember seeing him as a child, an old man with a wizened face who didn't speak much. My grandfather was a courageous but foolish man who was killed in a battle with another clan called Tridu ('Khri 'du). Convinced his horse made him invincible, he detached himself from his group of companions and charged alone at the enemy, only to be shot down.

Before my birth it so happened that the main leaders of my area, the Be-hu, the Lhadri Be-chang, who was my father's brother, and the Rongpo Me-ma, who was related to me on my mother's side, were all childless. The Be-hu was very close to my uncle, the Lha dri Be-chang, who, though not renowned for his intelligence, was a well-meaning, courageous and outgoing man. The Be-hu thought that since neither of them had any children or any hope of having any, my parents' first child should succeed him in the leadership of the area. They had to wait a long time, for though my mother married at eighteen, she bore no child for seven years. This must have been a constant source of worry for everyone and they apparently made continuous prayers and rituals, even reading the whole Kangyur.

When she was twenty five, in the year of the Earth Dragon, the second year of the 16th cycle (1928), I was finally born and they all felt that their wishes had been fulfilled. Our home lay between two other hamlets, called Thangpoda (Thang po mda'), the closest of the two, and Yeguda. Just below, was a place called Denda (Dran mda') and beyond that came the Drichu river. It was a very beautiful place. In summer, all the pastures would be carpeted with flowers, so that the colour of the mountains changed, and from a distance, they would seem to be red, yellow or white. I remember running through a meadow carpeted in yellow flowers with my boots on, and seeing them turn yellow from the crushed flowers. One day's travel

away, the nomad pasture lands began and from then on there were only nomads. In the opposite direction, there were only farmers. Because we lived on the limits of both, we enjoyed the best of both worlds, with cheese, yoghurt and meat from the nomads and barley and turnips from the farmers.

My family had many fields of their own, and also cultivated those of other families who lived too far away to cultivate them themselves. This was quite profitable, for in addition to half the crop, we could keep the chaff to feed our animals. We had one crop a year, and though the soil was poor and we had to alternate fields every year, it didn't pose any problem for us as the land was fruitful. The fields never required irrigation as rain always fell at the right time though sometimes, maybe once in ten years, it would get a little scarce. There were many yaks in our area, and not so many mules or horses. In my home, we used mostly Dzo and Dzomos, the cross between a cow and a yak. The female gave milk and we used the male for ploughing.

My mother looked after all the fields and farm work and the nomads who worked for us. My father's main occupation was trading. He took butter from our home to sell in Ziling, from where he bought silk, bricks of tea and other products which he later took to Lhasa.

My early memories are a scattered collection of events. The earliest thing I remember was sitting in a box and looking out of the window. I felt constrained and frustrated, unable to talk and unable to understand what people said. I can recall on a later occasion, when I must have been about four, the horror of feeling cold water splashing me in the face. I was huddled inside the folds of my father's chuba and we were sitting in a coracle. I could hear him muttering a prayer to Arya Tara and all around us was an immense expanse of water. We were returning from a visit to my maternal grandparents who lived on the other side of the Driчу river and this incident must have made a deep impression on me, for I have been afraid of crossing rivers ever since.

In another recollection, I can see the glum faces of adults in the fading light of dusk and hear them whispering sadly to each other: 'Gyalwa Rinpochey (the thirteenth Dalai Lama) has passed away'. A short distance away was the soft glow of hundreds of butter lamps coming from the house of one of the big families near us. The atmosphere of gloom and the sense that something terrible had just happened weighed heavily on me.

Not long before that, the Tibetan government had tried to get the region around Jeykundo (skye rgu mdo) back from the Ziling Ambam [\[1\]](#), a Chinese representative, and had sent an army which was defeated. They had sent three battalions, one of which had failed to arrive on time. The other two had nearly reached the city and if the three had been able to join forces, people say the battle could have been won.

When the fighting was over, all but two hundred soldiers fled. They were left behind a mountain, not knowing that the battle was over. The Ziling generals,

hearing of their presence, prepared to send troops to kill them. My uncle, as the Lhadri Be-chang intervened with the Ziling authorities and asked that they be spared. He then took them back to our area and billeted them among the different families as servants. One, called Dadul, from Yangpachen (Yangs pa chen), a large plain in Central Tibet mainly inhabited by nomads, came to work for us. His main job was to fetch water. I don't think he missed his native country or wished to leave us. for life was generally better in Kham, where servants and masters ate the same food. Moreover, he owed his life to my uncle and probably felt an obligation to remain.

When I was about seven, he often took me with him to fetch water. I rode on a small two year old pony, which he led by the bridle. One day, as the pony was trotting rather fast, it tripped and I fell off. I hit my head and cut it on a sharp rock. As I looked up, I could see Dadul staring at me terrified, leaning to one side ready to put down the water he was carrying. Suddenly, I realised he was preparing to flee and leave me alone. I begged him not to go, promising to tell my parents it wasn't his fault that I had fallen, but that the horse had tripped. In the end he wasn't scolded, but I still have the scar.

There were always quantities of sewing to be done in my home, which required the presence of two monk tailors. They made clothes and sewed boots. We wore silk underclothes, and in winter, brocade or felt chubas lined with lambskins. In summer we wore woollen chubas. Winters were very cold and inside the house, the offering bowls on the altar would freeze. I remember taking out the blocks of ice, exactly the same shape as the bowl, and sticking two together back to back to make a toy drum. They were as hard as stones and wouldn't break even when thrown on the ground. It was difficult to heat the houses, as due to the lack of trees, there was no firewood. We lived above the tree line, and had neither apple nor apricot trees. Wildlife was plentiful and marmots could be seen everywhere, as well as musk deer and antelope. Since there were no woods, we had no tigers or leopards, only a few brown bears.

Though hunting was forbidden by law and socially frowned on, poachers were active nearby and no one did much about it unless it caused a scarcity or became too obvious. In our area, though, no one dared kill wild animals. Around the monastery, the laws against killing animals were strictly enforced. As soon as the monks heard the firing of a rifle, they would send out young monks, who would confiscate the hunter's rifle and give him a good beating.

GEN LOCHO

When I was about six, it began to be said that I was the reincarnation of Gen Locho ^[2]. Gen Locho was a famous scholar from Selkar (Zel dkar), a nearby monastery. He had remained there until the age of eighteen and, as was customary if a monk wished to pursue serious studies, had travelled to Central Tibet and entered Drepung Loseling monastery. Being from a modest background and far away from home he had no resources and was looked after by a fighting monk (rdab rdob). Gen Locho was very large in stature and liked to eat enormous quantities of food, which made things difficult both for him and his teacher.

In spite of the privations he must have endured on the meagre diet he received from his guardian, he studied hard, applying himself fully. One summer when he had begun to memorise one of the 'Perfection of Wisdom' texts, he decided to use the ten day break which usually followed the debating period to practise memorisation. His teacher bought him a small bag of tsampa, and with this and his two hundred page text, he went to a cave in the mountains behind the monastery.

After ten days, Gen Locho had memorised the text and finished the tsampa. He came down the mountain and when his teacher asked him how much tsampa was left, he bluntly replied that he had emptied the bag. The teacher was furious, and told him, 'If you can't make a little bag of tsampa last more than ten days, how can we manage around here? You can't stay in a monastery if you need to eat that much'. Until then his teacher had only given him food day by day and hadn't realised the strength of his appetite. Now that he had, he began to see his large student as a burden.

A Geshe living nearby overheard the teacher scolding Gen Locho and asked him if he had memorised the text. Gen Locho replied that he had. The Geshe then made him recite it, and impressed by the faultless recitation of two hundred pages, said to the fighting monk, 'Well, if you don't want him, I'll take him, I don't mind how much he eats if he is this capable'. Gen Locho then went to stay with the Geshe, who taught him and fed him enough to satisfy his needs.

Gen Locho spent all his time studying. He was known for his honesty and his candour. He always told people what he thought and never sought to hide his feelings. He spent fifteen to twenty years studying at Drepung Loseling and then returned to visit his native place. One of his uncles was a local nomad leader and helped him pay the expenses of his Geshe degree, providing him with one hundred loads of butter, which he brought back to Lhasa. Gen Locho passed his Geshe exam as number one Lharampa. He had a prodigious memory in which he stored entire volumes of scripture. He was also gifted with sharp reasoning and the two put together made him an unbeatable debater.

Some time around 1914, Gen Locho travelled to Mongolia, at the request of Loseling College, to raise funds for the construction of the new assembly hall. Since many Mongolians studied in Lhasa in those days, Gen Locho had quite a few acquaintances in Dakural (rDa ku ral) (now Ulan Bator) and among them a very scholarly Geshe by the name of Tamdin. Upon arrival in Mongolia, Gen Locho inquired of his whereabouts, adding in an annoyed tone, 'Why is it that I have to go looking for Geshe Tamdin? He must have heard that I am here and should have come to greet me.' When they finally met, Geshe Tamdin told Gen Locho that some time before, Kangyur Rinpochey (two incarnations back) who was Gen Locho's teacher, had predicted to him that Gen Locho would come to raise funds for the construction of the Loseling temple and that he, Geshe Tamdin would be very helpful to him.

Geshe Tamdin admitted that this revelation had caused him much worry and, not believing he could be of any help, he had stayed quiet when Gen Locho arrived. It so happened that Geshe Tamdin was one of the debating partners of Kalkha Jetsun Dampa. So, he went to see one of his bursars and, explaining the reason for Gen Locho's presence in Mongolia, requested his help. The bursar offered to support Gen Locho and one of his three servants. This enabled him to remain in Mongolia and he taught in two different monasteries which followed the Loseling curriculum. He soon became quite famous and acquired many students.

Some people say that Gen Locho's memory was so prodigious that he had memorised the entire Kangyur. I am not sure that he could have recited it from beginning to end. It seems to me that he had memorised the volumes one at a time and could recite them one by one. Nevertheless, his knowledge of the Kangyur, which was clearly revealed during a debate session, made a great impression on the Mongolians.

One day, Gen Locho debated with a very proud Geshe who supported one of his assertions with an apparent quotation from the Kangyur. Gen Locho replied that there was no such passage in the Kangyur, but a similar verse, which he recited. The Geshe stubbornly stuck to his position until the quotation was checked and Gen Locho proved right.

When the Mongolians realised that Gen Locho had memorised the Kangyur, comparing him to a scholar called Buton Thamche Khyenpa, who had made the original catalogue of the Kangyur and classified all the subjects alphabetically, they called him Buton Lharampa. Some got the name wrong and Buton became Buddha, so he was also called Buddha Lharampa. They remember him under that name to this day. When I went to Mongolia in 1990 and was unable to respond to a particular invitation, they received a message expressing regret that Buddha Lharampa had not been able to come.

The Mongolians were also quite amazed that when Gen Locho gave teachings, he referred to both the root text and commentary from memory, without even glancing at the book. His popularity brought him many donations, which he intended to bring back to Drepung to contribute to building the temple.

Gen Locho remained in Dakural (Ulan Bator) until the communists' arrival in 1921, fleeing before their advancing armies back to the Tibetan border. I was told he had a very difficult time and that he had said that through burning incense he had gained the favour of the gods of war, who enabled him to escape from one place to another, always in the right direction and successfully avoiding the enemy. It was said that offering incense also helped the Mongolians too, bringing them good fortune. I don't remember anything about it, but people have told me about it since.

Gen Locho may have received many donations for Loseling, but unfortunately his servants were unscrupulous and greedy. They changed most of the gold and brocades they had received for Russian paper roubles, which then were

considered the way American dollars are now. By the time the party had made their way back to Tibet, Russia had finally fallen to the communists, and Loseling was left with a trunk full of Tsarist roubles, which I heard, when I was there, were still somewhere in the monastery vaults. Gen Locho remained in Kham, sending the trunk of roubles, what remained of the gold and brocades, and a brick of tea and three silver coins for each Loseling monk, back to Central Tibet.

He had brought two boxes of silver back from Mongolia, but they didn't do him much good. One of his relatives, a Be-chang, talked him into lending him the money in exchange for some cultivable land. Though the plot was large, it was at a high altitude and crops did very poorly on it. Gen Locho got no crops from it and never saw his money again. As for his servants, it is said they had a little gold which they had carefully kept intact. When I came to Drepung, the new assembly hall had been in full use for some time. It was a large and beautifully built stone structure. People say it still looks splendid nowadays, even though it is about seventy years old and went through decades of pillage and neglect.

When the time came to build the temple, it is said that Loseling held a meeting with all its Houses. The administrators declared to the assembled monks that the building of the temple was of great importance to the College and that the Houses should give whatever space was required without complaint. Those who lived some distance from the chosen site were careful to give their enthusiastic approval, loudly offering to give whatever they had, knowing they had nothing to lose. Those who lived nearer blindly followed suit without considering the danger to themselves and without thinking to ask for compensation until it was too late. Some of them, like Rongpo House, were nearly lost to the kitchen of the new temple, Others lost half of their space or one or two rooms. Phara House nearly saw its main assembly hall cut in half until Phara Chsuo went to see the master Mason and the master Carpenter begging them to spare it. That's why you can now see one of the corners of the temple slightly curved to avoid Phara House.

Gen Locho never returned to Lhasa. He gave oral transmissions of the Kangyur and other teachings in his own region until he passed away. He had been corpulent as a young man and with age his weight had increased tremendously. It is said he always sat with a sack of grain on either side to support himself when he rose to his feet.

THE DIFFICULTIES OF MY RECOGNITION

The rumours of my being Gen Locho's reincarnation had been initiated by a lama from Selkhar monastery called Lab Khenchen, who was known for his clairvoyance. The monastery approached the Lhadri Be-chang my uncle, told him of Khenchen Rinpochey's feelings about me and asked that I be given to the monastery to be recognised as Gen Locho's reincarnation. This request did not please my uncle, who was determined to see me as the next Be-hu. The old Be-hu trusted my uncle's judgement, and thought that since he liked me so much, we must be of similar character, which pleased him. The Lower Rongpo had a nephew, whom he tried to put forward, but everyone could see he didn't have the ability and all the hopes for the future Rongpo leadership remained pinned upon me. My uncle told the monastery officials, 'You have Geshes as

numerous as stars in the sky, there can be no end to recognising their reincarnations' and refused their request.

Selkhar monastery was lead by two lamas who were locked in an ongoing power struggle. All the monks of the monastery had agreed that there was going to be no dispute or bickering over the recognition of Gen Locho and they unanimously agreed that I was the right candidate. They tried approaching my uncle a second time, but were again rebuffed. He told them, 'You people don't get along in the first place. If I hand the child over to you, you will fight over him among yourselves and perhaps even kill him.'

In desperation the monks sought the advice of Panchen Rinpochey, who was then returning from China and had set up his temporary residence in Jeykundo. They explained that I was the child they wanted to recognise as Gen Locho's reincarnation. Though Panchen Rinpochey supported their case, his staff remained cautious with regard to my uncle, wary of upsetting a powerful local leader. Finally, my uncle declared that since Panchen Rinpochey had said so, he was convinced that I was a lama, but what remained in question was whether I would be handed over to Selkhar monastery or not. This uncertainty continued for some time, my father neither giving nor refusing his consent and the monastery officials trying all kinds of ploys to resolve the situation.

One day, Gen Locho's former steward, accompanied by other officials of his household came to offer me the monastic robes. I suppose they thought I would be delighted, would insist on putting them on and would want to leave with them for my former monastery. They must have been very disappointed when I not only refused the robes, but showed no sign of liking them. While they were talking to my parents, I quietly left the room and went to the entrance of the courtyard, where a very large and fierce mastiff was tied up and snuggled down next to it. When they had finally left, a woman servant called to me, 'You can come out, they have gone'. Though the monks had not seen where I was, even if they had, they could not have got near me, hidden behind that powerful guardian. My parents laughed, feeling they had won a battle.

Meanwhile I lived like the other farmers' children who lived around me. Our games were not very good, some of the local children being rather rough. Although killing animals was strongly disapproved of in Tibetan society, among Khampas courage was important. Amongst children, this often meant doing things that were disapproved of by our parents without being found out. One of the forbidden things we did was to kill birds with sling shots. I didn't like to do it, but I liked being made fun of and being told I was a coward even less.

ADMINISTERING JUSTICE IN GABA

My uncle, the Lhadri Be-chang was an important man in our area and as a child I had several opportunities to see him administer justice. I clearly remember the visit of a nomad monk from another area who came to our house, selling cheese and butter. He stayed nearby, gradually selling off his stock. There were many monasteries in Kham whose monks stayed there in the

winter, going off in the summer to stay among the nomads. There was one near my home, where there lived a monk called Adzi Tsang.

In the summer, he would lock up his room and set out for the pastures. One year all his possessions were stolen from his room while he was away. The monks who lived nearby had seen some lights there at night, but had paid no attention, assuming they were only ghosts. Lights were often seen in uninhabited places at night, and it didn't seem unusual.

One day, some time after Adzi Tsang had returned and discovered his loss, he came to see my uncle. He told him that the nomad monk staying near us selling cheese was wearing his boots. My uncle questioned him, 'How can you be sure? there are hundreds, thousands of boots that look the same. It would be a serious mistake to accuse someone wrongly.' Adzi Tsang insisted, 'I am sure. I know my boots, the brocade, the felt, the stitching, everything about them is very distinctive.'

He seemed so certain that my uncle finally gave in and the monk wearing the boots was summoned. When questioned, he refused to admit that the boots belonged to anyone else, insisting that he had been wearing them since he left his native place. They argued for a long time until my uncle said, 'A copper wire cannot bend an iron wire. Likewise, it doesn't seem that you want to listen to what I have to say. Tomorrow, I am going to Jyekundo. The Chinese authorities will soon be calling on you and I am sure you have heard about Chinese forms of punishment. This area is under my authority and you may not leave for ten days'. The monk was still unmoved. As he turned to depart, my uncle added, 'Right now, you are not yet a thief, no one has accused you. If you tell me where and how you got those boots, you may go free, but if you simply walk out of here saying nothing, you will be labelled a thief and get what you deserve.'

The monk paused and, looking round, asked my uncle to wait a few minutes while he went out. He returned a few moments later with a scarf and a small knife, which he presented to my uncle saying, 'Please don't be angry, I have something to tell you'. He then explained that he had bought the boots from another monk, who had told him not to wear them around there. The previous night, a dog had taken his own boots and he had had no choice but to put on the new ones. My uncle then asked him if he could identify the man, and when the monk agreed to point him out, my uncle promised he was free to leave.

The next day, they went to the local monastery and as the monks left the assembly hall, the cheese seller pointed out the culprit, a shifty monk called Rinzin. Once found out, he had no qualms about giving away his accomplice, a dull witted neighbour chosen for his greed, the location of his dwelling and the fact that it possessed a large store. Rinzin had proposed that they steal together and share the loot. Later, people remembered that a few months earlier, one of Panchen Rinpochey's higher officials, Wang Khen po and his secretary, Dawei Limpo Se, had come to prepare for his visit and the monks of this monastery had welcomed them on horses, dressed in their best. Rinzin had worn a silk shirt with auspicious

words woven into it. Adzi recognised it as the material, dyed yellow, from which high quality katas were made and of which he had owned not a few.

Suspicious, he had decided to test Rinzin's reaction, and asked him, 'Where did you get this Nyemo Delek (Nyin mo bde legs)?' the words which were prominently woven into the shirt. The monk answered gruffly, 'What Nyemo Delek? I got this material in Jeykundo'. His manner was so self-assured that Adzi wondered if he had been wrong and left it at that. Had he looked more carefully, he would have noticed that Rinzin was also using a saddle and harness stolen from his room. As it was, the whole business went unremarked, except that a few people wondered from where a poor monk had got such fancy trappings.

Both the thief and his accomplice, the dull witted monk were punished by being hung by the shoulders for the time it took to recite the Twenty-one Tara prayer twenty-one times (about half an hour). Though it was painful, it left no permanent damage. The dull witted monk was terrified and screamed the whole time, which made it much worse for him. Lastly, they both had the tips of their noses cut off, which would brand them as thieves for the rest of their lives. There were no prisons in my area and since they had to be set free, this was the way people were warned about them.

The monastery cook had to carry it out and he was more terrified than the victims. The dull witted monk went first, crying and screaming, and the cook, who wanted desperately to do as little damage as possible, aimed the knife with a shaking hand, taking most of the nose off as it fell. When Rinzin's turn came, he looked the cook straight in the eye and muttered 'You had better watch out how you cut my nose. It's my nose, not yours that is being cut'. He stayed perfectly still and managed to dodge at the last minute so that he ended up with only a tiny scar.

FIRST YEARS AS A NOVICE

Eventually, neither Selkhar monastery nor my parents had their way. Tongpon (stong dpon) [L3.1](#) Rinpochey sent a letter from Central Tibet, which said that I must not be left where I was and should be made a monk. By that time, the Lower Rongpo, in yet another attempt to ensure that he could hand on the Rongpo leadership, had taken another, younger wife who had borne him a son. The old Be-hu had passed away, his successor was not so inclined towards my uncle's advice and so all hope was now placed on the Lower Rongpo's new son. I now, had a younger brother, Yeshe Tinley, but I guess it just wasn't his fate to become a leader, People in my area believe that the first child bears all the expectations of a family and the second child receives less attention. With their hopes of my succeeding the Be-hu now dashed, my parents were more eager to see me as a lama, but due to some stubborn quirk on their part, they never gave in to the pleas of Selkhar monastery and decided to remain in charge of my education themselves. This meant that later they would have to bear all the expense of sending me to Lhasa to study.

I feel that the words of the following Tibetan prayer were answered in respect to the events leading up to my becoming a monk:

May it be that my taking up the excellent vows occurs just as I wish, without interference or obstacles arising due to my surroundings, family or possessions and with the provision of all necessary facilities.

I had avoided two major obstacles: my family's wish to keep me at home for worldly purposes and becoming an important but half-educated lama. Had I been handed over to Gen Locho's monastery, I would have been taken around from place to place, giving blessings and initiations so that my entourage could build themselves up into a powerful household. I would probably never have gone to Lhasa and my studies would have been abandoned. Gen Tongpon later told me that had I entered Selkhar monastery I would never have learnt the scriptures well, having overcome that obstacle there was now a chance that I could become learned.

Near where I lived was the small Bamchu ('Bam chu) monastery. Gen Locho had given teachings there and the monks had great faith in him, so that's where my parents sent me to become a monk. The senior lama ordained me as novice and taught me my first letters. He also gave me the initiations of Guhyasamaja, Heruka and Yamantaka, while a monk relative of my mother's taught me how to read and say prayers.

I learned the alphabet several times. In Kham, there was a tradition of learning to recite it from beginning to end without looking at the book. After a while, I found I could recite the whole alphabet, but was unable to read it or recognise the letters individually. I remember the letter 'da' giving me much trouble. I was happy at Bamchu monastery, though I was sometimes homesick. My teachers were kind and understanding, and would occasionally send me home for four or five days with a little cane backpack containing the text I was memorising.

For reading practice, I was given the Yamantaka sadhana. One day, as I was reciting it out loud, some boisterous fifteen or sixteen year old monks challenged me, 'Yamantaka has 34 arms doesn't he?' I said, 'Yes.' 'Well, he doesn't', they crowed, 'he only has thirty-two'. This didn't put me off. I replied coolly, 'The counting starts from the first of the rest, not from the actual first pair, so that only thirty-two are actually counted out while the first pair is mentioned separately.' Since this required some reasoning, which they were unfamiliar with, and never expected from a nine year old boy, the monks were speechless and subsequently left me alone.

I also spent a good part of my time memorising prayers. I particularly remember learning the 'Prayers of Wholesome Conduct'. At first, I didn't respond in any particular way, but one day, when I got to the words, 'May I never forget the Bodhisattva's mind', I felt very strongly that the mind of enlightenment was immensely precious and wished with all my heart that I might never forget it.

One day, Panchen Rinpochey, who was visiting the area, came to the monastery. He was offered the room above the assembly hall and my rooms were given to his secretary, an elderly monk, and his servant. One of the secretary's duties was to keep Panchen Rinpochey's diary. He asked the three or four young monks in their twenties who cooked and collected water, what the name of the monastery was. They replied 'Bamchu monastery', which was what everyone called it, though no one knew what it meant.

The secretary wasn't happy with that, feeling that he couldn't write a meaningless name into the Panchen Rinpochey's memoirs and he kept on muttering 'Bamchu,

Bamchu, what does it mean?' I knew the answer as I had spent most of my time among adults and had overheard the old monks talking about 'Bumdil Tashi Choling ('Bum dil bkrashis chos gling)'. I said nothing at first, but after a while watching the secretary ponder and shake his head, I ventured to say, 'Bhumdil Tashi Choling (Dil was the name of a mountain nearby and Tashi Choling meant the auspicious abode of religion.) It is said that inside that mountain, under the monastery, lie buried the scriptural treasures of Long, Middling and Short Perfection of Wisdom Sutras ('Bum rgyas 'bring bsdus gsum). He was delighted. He dipped his bamboo quill into his inkpot and wrote it into the diary.

During his visit I had an audience with Panchen Rinpochey along with the other monks and also received teachings from him. He gave us the oral transmission of the Shambhala prayer. I remember him as an elderly monk with white hair and not long after that, he returned to Jeykundo, where he passed away. I also received the Kalachakra permission from Panchen Rinpochey at Ranyag monastery.

Since I wasn't a tulku from that monastery, I would not normally have been admitted, but was able to attend with my uncles as a member of the local leaders' party.

At that time, efforts were being made to bring Panchen Rinpochey back to Central Tibet. The Tibetan government had sent two representatives, Doring Sey (rDoring Sras) and the abbot of the Drepung Tantric College, to Jeykundo to escort him back to Tashi Lhunpo. But it was all in vain. My uncle told me, 'There was a disagreement with the central authorities concerning the two thousand Chinese soldiers who formed Panchen Rinpochey's personal guard. The Lhasa authorities didn't want these soldiers coming to Tsang for political reasons, and the officials of the Panchen Labrang, who had squabbled with the Tibetan government, were afraid of reprisals, and fearing for their personal safety, refused to come without the armed escort. In fact, I think this whole misunderstanding was caused by a lack of merit. Had Panchen Rinpochey come back to Tibet, he would have been present at the time of Gyalwa Rinpochey's recognition and it would have been of immense benefit for the Buddhist doctrine and the Tibetan people, like the sun and moon shining together'.

DEPARTURE FOR LHASA

When I was eleven my uncle asked me whether I wished to go to Lhasa in the summer or winter. I had heard that the rivers were swollen in summer and, being much afraid of water, I told him I would prefer to go in the winter. We set off with a caravan of two hundred yaks, who carried provisions for trade and also all the things we needed for the journey like a stove, firewood, butter, cheese, tsampa, carpets and tents. We broke camp every morning just before daybreak, as the yaks were slow to get moving, and travelled until noon, setting up camp wherever we were and letting the yaks graze. Had we gone by horse, we would have taken only twenty days to travel from Gaba to Nagchukha, but with the yaks it took two months.

We arrived in Nagchukha on the 29th of the 12th month. We celebrated Losar there and leaving my father, who was to join us in Lhasa, and the yaks behind, my teacher, my attendant and myself set off for Lhasa. We came over the Phenbo Go Pass on horseback and waited outside the city while my teacher went ahead to the Bakhor where he found an acquaintance with whom we stayed for the first few days. We arrived in the capital around the 20th of the first month, during the spring teachings, which took place right after the Great Prayer Festival.

When I set out for Lhasa, my uncle, who was informed about such things, had told us that Gyalwa Rinpochey had been reborn in Kumbum and that Panchen Rinpochey had sent Tsechok Ling to speak to the Ziling Ambam and another lama from Ngulchu (dngul chu) to speak to the Kumbum authorities. It was also reported that Panchen Rinpochey had given the Ziling Ambam a roomful of furs. By the time I reached Lhasa, the rumours had changed. Now people were saying that Gyalwa Rinpochey had been reborn in the 13th Dalai Lama's family. After a few months, the Prime Minister changed, and once more there was talk of the reincarnation being in Kumbum.

After a few days in Lhasa we moved to the house of an official, Trimon (Krismon), to whom we had been introduced by the steward of a lama from our area. He was a former Cabinet minister who had greatly hoped to become prime minister and had been tremendously disappointed to have missed the opportunity. One morning, there was a great commotion outside and I heard people saying that the Disciplinarian of the Assembly Hall was coming. Having heard much about this famous character, I was curious to see him, but knowing I would be reprimanded for staring, I hid myself behind a screen and peeped out around the side. A few days later, the Abbot of Loseling, Dragchen Lhapa Khenpo (Grags can lha pa mkhan po) came to see me, accompanied by two administrators, bearing a bag of tsampa and dried meat. When they heard that the abbot was coming, the people in my party were very excited. It seems he didn't usually visit young lamas, but was keen to stress that he had been a disciple of Gen Locho. He looked authoritative and important and indeed left a deep impression on Loseling College.

LIFE AT DREPUNG

At last, I left for Drepung, which I had looked forward to since leaving home. Though I missed my family, the separation was not unbearable and I easily settled into the life of the monastery. I began my studies in Loseling College in the first of the fifteen classes that lead to the Geshe degree. Although the syllabus varies slightly from college to college, the topics are basically the same: Collected Topics for one year, Perfection of Wisdom for five years, the philosophy of the Middle Way for two years, Discipline for one year, and Knowledge for two years.

My main teacher was Gen Tongpon Rinpochey, who had been one of Gen Locho's principal disciples. It was he who had written to my parents insisting I become a monk. Gen Tombon Rinpochey was a very scholarly, simple and humble monk. He was small and walked about swiftly and unobtrusively. His bearing and attire were those of an ordinary monk and nothing about his

appearance would lead one to guess who he really was. He was a great grammarian and poet, was well-versed in all the sutras and tantras, knew Sanskrit and preferred to read Indian commentaries to those by Tibetan scholars.

Gen Tongpon was known for his clairvoyance. His chief meditational deity was Heruka, to whom he devoted many long retreats. I once heard a story that he was in retreat in a cave with a monk called Ashing Gampo. One day, he told Ashing Gampo, 'Please take a look outside. I can hear a crow repeatedly saying, "There is gold"'. Glancing outside, Ashing Gampo found a crow pecking at the gold coloured foil from a cigarette packet. The cigarettes, which were being massively imported into Tibet from India and China, must have been brought there by monks making incense offerings. Gen Tongpon was also a talented artist. Able to draw, paint and carve, he was famous for the representations of the Buddha and the sixteen Arhats which he had carved out of an apricot seed. Until 1959, it could still be seen at Bamchu monastery.

It was Gen Tongpon's and my uncle's wish that I obtain the title of Tsokchen Tulku. Since Gen Locho had not carried this title, a petition had to be made to the government on account of my predecessor's immense qualities. It was presented to the secretariat office where the secretaries rejected it on the grounds that only tulkus who were reincarnations of Ganden Throneholders, Regents or Abbots of one the colleges of the three great monasteries were considered suitable, not simple Geshes. My chief patron, an influential and learned monk called Phara Chusor said that we might have a chance if we requested an audience with the Regent, Reting Rinpochey. He arranged for this and we went to Lhasa on the appointed date.

Reting Rinpochey's house was very formal and cold, but he received us in a charming little pavilion with large windows erected in his garden. I remember him, thin and composed, wearing a shimmering yellow brocade robe, with little dragon circle motifs, sitting in his immaculately clean, light and airy room. We offered him the customary pile of fifty silver sang wrapped in a white cloth, with a white scarf. He asked me which texts I was memorising. I told him that in my native place, I had memorised the Eightfold Prayer (smonlam rnam rgyad), the Offering to the Spiritual Master (bla ma mchodpa), Praises of the Names of Manjushri (jam dpal mtshan brjod) and the Hundred Gods of the Land of Joy (dGa' Idan lha rgya ma) and was now working on the Elementary Logic text (ra stod bs dus gra) and the Ornament of Clear Realisation (mngon rtogs rgyan).

He asked me to recite some verses from those texts and while I was reciting, I noticed him tugging at Ku-ngo Phara Chusor's robe. He then told me to stop and said, 'This tulku is very bright, I think he will do well'. We left with Phara Chusor looking satisfied and saying that things had gone well. Six days later a letter signed by the Regent approving of my becoming a Tsokchen Tulku was sent to the Secretariat.

After a few years, Tongpon Rinpochey left for China, invited by the culture minister of the Nationalist government, who had heard of his far reaching

knowledge. I was never to see him again. He remained five years in China and passed away there. Before he left, he placed me in the care of two of his disciples, Gen Nyima and Gen Sonam Gompo.

In Drepung, I lived in a set of rooms in Denma House with my attendant. He was an elderly monk who had come with me from Kham. I hadn't been afraid of him there, but when we arrived in Lhasa and I lived alone with him he became a real tyrant, beating me for the slightest reason. He believed he did this for my own good, but he lacked any discrimination or common sense.

Every morning, I got up in time for the tea offering just before daybreak, at about 5.30 am. First, I recited the Hundred Gods of the Land of Joy, the prayer to Manjushri, and then would begin memorising my texts. As a tulku, I was excused from attending the tea offering, or general assembly, although if there was a money offering, my attendant made me go. Even in my absence I was entitled to the basic offering, but those lamas who actually went received an extra offering and the old monk (who managed all the money of our household) couldn't bear that I miss a penny. Although this bothered me and I felt it was an interruption, I had to comply.

Later, he would check very strictly on the texts I had memorised. He considered memorisation to be the most important aspect of my education and used up all my spare time checking it. Though he could read, he had not a clue of the meaning. There were many synonymous words and sometimes I would unwittingly use one of those instead of the word in the text. Though the meaning remained unchanged, he didn't realise it and my substitution would invariably earn me a huge slap.

Next, I went to the daytime debating yard, to which he insisted on accompanying me. Understanding nothing, he displayed incredible endurance standing for hours in the cold like a watchdog while I debated. If the debate was in the House, he could watch from the window and once this earned me a wholly undeserved beating. My opponents were two Geshes who didn't know their texts at all, and there wasn't much debate, as they had little to say. When I returned to my room, the old man said, 'Why didn't you debate?' I tried to explain, but he was already in a foul mood. He grabbed me by the ankle, making me fall and hit my head on the stone floor, dragged me into the kitchen, tied me to a pillar and beat me up.

Following the debate session I attended teachings with Gen Nyima or Gen Sonam. Gompo, who taught me the meaning of the texts I was memorising. Lastly there was a meal, and only after dark would I finally get time to read, an activity denied me during the day, for the sake of memorisation.

The old man loved money and this was reflected in our spartan diet. In the morning we ate tsampa dough or alternatively a little dried meat or noodles. This was sometimes enlivened with yoghurt. He did everything himself and never turned to anyone else for help. I had little contact with other people because he never let anyone come to our rooms, nor did he allow me to go anywhere but to debate sessions or teachings. I got used to living like that and when he needed to

go out on errands, I closed the door behind him and didn't let anyone come in and disturb me. When I went to my classes, I went straight there and back without stopping.

One day, on my way to Gen Nyima's room I saw a young lama I knew ahead of me. He was carrying a book on his shoulder as if going to a teaching, when suddenly he turned and stepped into Tsethang House. I thought it strange as I could think of no one there who could possibly be teaching him. Later, I found out that he usually told his steward, who wasn't very strict, that he was going to teachings and just visited friends to chat. Because I never did that, I couldn't imagine anyone else doing so.

On another occasion, while my attendant was out, I received a visit from a relative of my father and one of the tailors who used to work in my home, who were both now living in Lhasa. They must have heard elsewhere how we lived and came to make me a proposal. They wanted me to dismiss my old attendant and take them on instead. They promised to do everything he didn't, to be gentle and serve me good food, adding that if I were happier with them it would reflect positively on my studies. I deliberated silently for a while, thinking how much I had already endured from the old man and how it would all have been in vain if I suddenly changed my lifestyle.

Besides, I knew I should be wary of people who talked too sweetly. They must have seen some advantage for themselves in taking care of me. I felt sure they would invite all kinds of people to my room, talk all day long and do little else. Concluding that this would disrupt my studies I turned them down. They were very angry. When I look back on it now, I am surprised at how shrewd I was and how fortunate, for to have given in to them could have greatly affected my future.

LITHANG KYABGON

Tongpon Rinpochey did not believe that a young monk should attend public teachings until he had acquired a sound knowledge of the scriptures, and that to do so could be detrimental and distracting. When I first arrived in Central Tibet, Phabongka Rinpochey was giving a Lam Rim teaching at Sera Mey College and Kyabje Khangsar Rinpochey was teaching the Six Collections of Reasoning Concerning the Middle Way in the Hamdo Assembly Hall. Because of Tongpon Rinpochey's views on the matter, I did not attend the discourses given by these great scholars.

Seven years later, Lithang Kyabgon, a famous lama from Lithang in Eastern Tibet came to Lhasa. On his way to China, Tongpon Rinpochey had stayed with him and requested that he look after my education and spiritual development. When he first arrived, he stayed at Yuthok house, the residence of a high ranking official and due to Tongpon Rinpochey's request I was expected to go and pay him a visit. I went to Lhasa, where I usually stayed with my patron, Phara Chosur. Being cautious and unsure how Phara Chosur felt about Lithang Kyabgon, my attendant told me to keep my visit a secret.

I went to pay my respects and presented a gift of mutton to Lithang Kyabgon, who was also called Shogdrug Rinpochey. When he asked where I had reached in

my studies, I told him and he asked me a question. I knew the answer, but somehow could not express it. Suddenly, I found myself in tears and just couldn't stop crying. Shogdrug Rinpochey asked me the reason for this outburst of emotion and I answered it was because I missed Tongpon Rinpochey so much. This wasn't the only reason, I just couldn't pinpoint the source of my grief.

Tongpon Rinpochey had been gone two years. In Lithang, Shogdrug Rinpochey had treated him with the greatest reverence. When they travelled, he offered him his palanquin and joined the other monks in carrying his teacher. This was profound evidence that Shogdrug Rinpochey considered Tongpon Rinpochey to be a highly realised lama.

Shogdrug Rinpochey gave me a tin of biscuits and some money which he told me to keep for myself, adding that he knew all about the difficulties of young monks whose old attendants handled all the money. In the meantime, my old steward had discovered that Phara Chosur was on excellent terms with Shogdrug Rinpochey and unbeknown to me had told him that I had gone to pay him a visit. When I returned, I found Phara Chosur in his living room chatting with a former abbot of Gyuto. He smiled saying, 'So, you've been to see Lithang Kyabgon, have you?' Remembering my attendant's advice, I answered that I had not. Phara Chosur exclaimed, 'What are you saying? Your steward told me that you went this afternoon, with presents of mutton.' I was tongue-tied with embarrassment.

A few months later, Shogdrug Rinpochey came to Drepung and while I was receiving teachings from Gen Nyima, I overheard him whispering something about my taking teachings to a learned monk called Ngawang Jamphel. When I visited Shogdrug Rinpochey shortly afterwards, he told me he was about to give a Yamantaka initiation and asked if I was coming. Remembering that I wasn't usually allowed to attend such teachings, I prudently replied that I didn't know. He told me that if I took this initiation, I would get somewhere in my studies, and if I didn't I wouldn't gain much progress. He gave me some very pleasing little yellow beads and I left pondering his words and how I could convince my attendant and Gen Nyima to let me go. I had no difficulty. My attendant had heard about Shogdrug Rinpochey since we lived in Kham, where he was famous for his clairvoyance. He firmly believed in his abilities and did not prevent me from going. As for Gen Nyima he was already planning to send me.

I took the initiation. Shogdrug Rinpochey, who knew I had very little time, told me that I need not recite the sadhana every day, but instead could recite the Praises of the Names of Manjushri. My old attendant gave me time to say it every day, though when there was a debating session, he thought too much time had already been taken from his checking my memorisation and flatly refused to give me a minute to keep my daily commitment. Knowing I could not break it, I began to recite it on my way to the debate. I would make a note of where I had reached when I arrived, and would mentally mark it as I put on my cloak. When the debate was over I picked up from where I had left off and finished it on my way home. I had no time to talk to anyone, as every minute was precious.

Shogdrug Rinpochey was a noted practitioner of Yamantaka. During his former incarnation, a Chinese battalion from Dartsedo had waged war on Lithang and the monastery had come under attack. A Chinese soldier had made his way into Shogdrug Rinpochey's room and been met by a wrathful horned creature. It was said that it was because of this that the monastery was left alone. I heard that during the life of the incarnation I knew, a Chinese clairvoyant in Dartsedo told of a Tibetan lama in whose heart he could see something with horns. Puzzled by this vision, he had gone to meet Shogdrug Rinpochey.

Shogdrug Rinpochey passed away in Lithang a few years before the arrival of the communists. Shortly before his death, he had given a Lam Rim teaching at the conclusion of which he had said, 'I feel that the situation is going to take a turn for the worse. In each of the three regions, a great lama will soon depart for the pure lands, and difficult events will follow their demise'. No one at the time asked what he meant, but Shogdrug Rinpochey himself in Kham, Jamyang Shayba in Amdo and Reting Rinpochey in U, all passed away within a few months of each other.

Shogdrug Rinpochey was reincarnated in Lithang, where he had little chance of receiving much education, but all the same, I hear that he has a good and stable character. In the 1980s, he was given an official title and people advised him that as an important lama he should cultivate a grave, dignified demeanour in public. He refused to do this and for seven or eight years after it was allowed even refused to wear monks' robes, arguing that although there was no fault in his vow, he felt that while he bore a big title but had no religious education it was inappropriate to wear the robes. He finally put them on at the request of Gya Geshe, a Lithang lama in whom he had great faith.

In the 1980s, the local Tibetan officials asked Lithang Kyabgon to use his influence to encourage the local people to rebuild the ruined monastery. He asked them if they felt it was so important, why they destroyed it in the first place? Why destroy something, if the same people will later tell you it needs to be rebuilt? Wasn't this all just extra work? Since he rarely spoke out, people didn't really know what to say. Among those present was a woman who at the time of the desecration of the monastery had taken the mummified remains of his previous incarnation and thrown them out into the open. Meeting him on the road one day she offered him some vegetables. He declined to accept them, but she insisted. As the vegetables shuttled back and forth between them, they fell on the ground. Finally, annoyed she said, 'Well if you don't want them, I'll have them', and picking them up swept off.

A few years ago, I heard that Lithang Kyabgon was offered a high post in the communist party, but he turned it down saying that being a religious person it would serve no purpose.

GEN NYIMA

Gen Nyima remained my principal teacher throughout my education. He was a brilliant scholar, with exceptional debating skills. His personal meditational deity was Guhyasamaja. Despite his

own high level of realisation, he remained modest. He also had a fiery temper and though his outbursts were never longlasting, they caused his students to tremble and made him difficult to serve. Though he never struck me physically, I was constantly scolded and rebuked.

Born in Bathang ('Ba'thang) in 1909, as a child he had shown a strong inclination towards the religious life. Although Gen's family lived in the city, in the summer they sometimes went off to join the nomads in their black felt tents. One night, when Gen was about six, and asleep in a tent with his grandmother, he saw the beautiful and peaceful face of a child staring down at him through the smoke hole. He woke his grandmother telling her to look too, but she answered, 'How can I see in the dark?' Still she believed that he had seen something and always considered him a special child.

She was determined he should go to study in Lhasa to become a Geshe and even made him a little cane backpack for the journey, which in those days could take up to three months. At the age of eighteen and already a monk, Gen left for Lhasa. On the way he lost use of one of his eyes in an accident with a flintstone. Once at the monastery, he was so poor that he saved up his fuel to make grease candles to be able to read at night. Soon becoming famous, he could have gathered a circle of wealthier students and begun to live more comfortably, but his eccentricities included a total disregard for money and material possessions.

When I met him he was an imposing figure, but a great debater whom everyone delighted to watch. I always remember him having no money and living in a completely bare room. His students sometimes helped him with chores, but he had no regular servant. He never performed the divinations or rituals for which other lamas received offerings. He used to scoff at the former Kangyur Rinpochey, who performed divinations, telling him, 'You just read peoples' thoughts and tell them what they want to hear. You don't predict the future. What is the big deal about doing that?' Later, someone must have asked Gen for a divination and for some mysterious reason he had made an effort to help them in this way, for one day he said, 'Ordinary beings are strange creatures. In order to help them, you have to tell them just what they want to hear.'

I would go to Gen Nyima's room for instruction every day. He kept his books on a shelf made from a wooden crate, the front of which was covered with a piece of cheap printed cotton. One day, as we began, he suddenly said, 'I can no longer be of any use to you. I've developed leprosy and I'm going to the place where Je Rinpochey did his Sa Chang (bSags sByangs) retreat and I'll stay there until I die. You can have all my books'. I was spellbound with shock. When I think of it now, the printed cloth I was staring at appears before me as if it were engraved in my mind. Finally pulling myself together I asked him how that could be. Gen told me that Draya Chuntsang Rinpochey, whose divinations were renowned for their accuracy, had said so. I told him I would go and ask Chuntsang Rinpochey myself, and with some misgivings he accepted my offer.

Gen had been feeling ill for some time, and having seen two cases of leprosy in his House, had begun to suspect he had it too. He had sent one of his students,

Logya, a learned monk from Nyare (Nyag Re) House, to seek Chuntsang Rinpochey's advice. Rinpochey had replied that Gen's ailments were the result of interference by nagas. Logya interpreted this to mean leprosy and told Gen who was convinced he had the dreaded disease. The following day, I went to see Chuntsang Rinpochey with Logya. Although I didn't know him, I had heard much about his temper and his blunt manner. To begin with he was quite civil and we engaged in polite conversation while he told me how many teachings he had received, including the transmission of the Kangyur, from Gen Locho. Suddenly, he noticed Logya and cried out, 'What is that monk doing here? go away!' I tried to explain that he was with me, but Rinpochey insisted on ordering him out. Logya didn't move, and Chuntsang Rinpochey finally said, 'Who is this monk like an ox that won't listen?' When I told him what Gen was worried about, Chuntsang Rinpochey burst out in surprise, 'I never told Gen Nyima he had leprosy! I said that he had a disease caused by the nagas. It is just like Jetsun Mila. said, "Teacher's delusion, student's delusion!" The great scholars who debate on the impermanence of sounds are the yogis who hold the view of a permanent self'. He fumed away and when he finally calmed down he said that if a few rituals were performed, Gen's illness would clear up. I reported all this to Gen, who recited prayers and performed rituals and his condition gradually improved.

ENCOUNTERS OF ANOTHER KIND

Though many monks had encounters with non-humans in the monastery, I only had one such experience. I was doing a retreat meditating on Thirteen Deity Yamantaka with Gen Nyima in his room. The room was large, and one night, as I settled down to sleep, I heard footsteps. It was pitch dark and I just lay and listened. In front of me was the skullcup containing inner offerings. Suddenly, I heard the clink of its cover being lifted and put down a few moments later and the sound of footsteps going away. Next day I found that there was only a little of the tea which made up the inner offerings left. I never found out what it was, perhaps a hungry ghost or spirit of some kind who haunted the place. Since it was dark, I couldn't see anything, but the sounds and footsteps were so clear that I remember them vividly.

In my room, I could sometimes smell amber, sometimes the smell of chang. These were also manifestations of non-human beings. In Drepung, I had a reputation for helping relieve people who were possessed or being bothered by inhuman creatures. I don't know where this ability came from, whether it came from some deity helping me, or from reciting mantras. It happened once that one of Phara Chosur's bursars asked both Gen Nyima and myself to come and perform a ritual for the achievement of prosperity in Lhasa. When the ritual was over Gen went quickly on his way but I took my time. As I was finally about to leave and had already put on my boots a woman was brought in, supported on either side. The bursar discreetly informed me that she was possessed and asked me to do something to help.

Unlike some people who are possessed, she was quiet, neither screaming nor making a scene. However, her expression was defiant and aggressive and she stared at me with round, threatening eyes as if she were about to punch me. I asked her, or rather the spirit who possessed her, who she was. She continued to

stare but wouldn't reply. It is said that spirits enter and leave human beings by way of their ring finger and tying a string to it prevents them escaping. This is how you trap the spirit and extract a promise from it to leave the person alone.

I tied a piece of string to the woman's finger and taking from my pocket some white mustard, which is a powerful substance when blessed during Tantric rituals, burned it and blew the smoke into the woman's face. She began to shriek that she was standing in a thorn bush. I asked her again who she was and she told me she was a woman from a village nearby Drepung. That morning, she had gone to the market to sell her wares and had met a neighbour who wouldn't speak to her. She had possessed her out of anger.

She was apparently a witch who went about harming and possessing others. I never found out any more about her, but guessed that she either slept while she possessed someone or had the power to emit a double. In any case, she was very frightened and I made her promise by the Palden Lhamo of Drepung Podrang to leave this woman alone.

There were several representations of Palden Lhamo in the fifth Dalai Lama's palace at Drepung, one of which was life size and made of silver, but the one I am referring to contained the preserved remains of a woman from the village below Drepung, who spun wool into very fine cloth and was said to have been an incarnation of Palden Lhamo. She had apparently materialised in the Palace when the Dalai Lama was reciting prayers summoning Palden Lhamo and passed away there. People who have seen the remains, which were removed by the Chinese in the 60s, and later replaced in the Drepung Palace, say they were those of a child, but often the remains of holy beings shrink, which would explain why they are so small when preserved. Anyway, spirits are usually terrified of this relic and mention of it was enough to send this one off. The woman's husband came to see me later out of gratitude and told me his wife was recovered.

Another incident of this sort happened many years later in Ladakh, after coming to India. I was staying in Spituk monastery, at the foot of which lived a woman known as a witch who possessed people. Her neighbours were afraid of her and to avert her ill will often gave her presents and invited her to eat with them. I never went near her, but I noticed she avoided my presence and would keep out of my way. So, it happened that a girl belonging to a family near the monastery became possessed. She remained calm and composed, but her behaviour was quite out of character. She began to sing bawdy songs and cast sidelong glances, two of the witch's own characteristics. The girl was brought to me and the witch possessing her admitted who she was and promised not to bother the girl again. I left it at that. As long as she didn't bother too many people, I didn't want to push things too far and have an outright confrontation with her, as there was always possibility that she was a dakini manifesting herself in this way.

DISCIPLES

I continued to persevere in my studies, working towards my Geshe degree and began to take

students of my own. Though many sought teachings from me, I preferred to accept only those I felt were truly dedicated, regardless of their status or background. Once, I heard murmuring at my door and through the window saw two young lamas famous for their easy-going lifestyle and guessed that they were coming to request me to teach them. I also knew they had no serious wish to learn from me and disapproved of their going from lama to lama, collecting teachings with no serious intent.

I thought I might as well discourage them from the start by embarrassing them in some way and perhaps making them realise why I was rejecting them. My old attendant had by then died of pleurisy and I lived with a monk by the name of Rinzin. I casually said aloud, 'There are some monks outside begging, why don't you give them a little tsampa'. Rinzin was not very sharp. He took a handful of tsampa, opened the door and handed it to one of them, who, of course, wouldn't take it. Then Rinzin threw it at them both and their fine woollen robes were covered with tsampa. One was furious and I heard him protesting and abusing Rinzin, 'Why can't I come here to get teachings? I went to Sera to get teachings from so and so...' Neither of them returned the next day, which was fine by me. I knew what I had done was with the best intentions and felt free of any remorse.

Around 1950, I became the teacher of Dedruk (sde Drug) Rinpochey, the reincarnation of Khyenrab Wangchuk, the Regent at the time of Trinley Gyatso, the 12th Dalai Lama. He had been reborn in the family of the 13th Dalai Lama, Yabshi Langdu (Yab gzhis gLang mdun). His uncle, Langdu, who was the Regent Reting's Prime Minister at the time he was born, had for a while tried to promote his candidacy as the 14th Dalai Lama. He declared that certain signs supported the claim, such as a red glow which was seen coming from the house of Yabshi Langdu soon after the departure of the 13th Dalai Lama for the pure lands, and a horse escaping from the Norbulingka stables to the Yabshi residence. Many people had witnessed these omens, but opinions remained divided, some saying they were a sure sign that Gyalwa Rinpochey's next incarnation would be born in that house, while others insisted that the signs were due to the former connection. Reting Rinpochey however, felt the true indications were to be found in his vision in the lake and he held fast to the candidacy of Lhamo Dondrup, the Amdo child who became our Dalai Lama.

I was the third of Dedruk Rinpochey's three teachers, the first two having left for various reasons, and my appointment had been made on the recommendation of the Gadong oracle. I was not very keen to become the teacher of a lama from a big household, but accepted when urged on by my patron, Phara Chosur. Two or three of Dedruk Rinpochey's former incarnations had died at an early age so great care was being taken to protect him. Reting Rinpochey had given him the name Jamphel Kalsang, but although he had the basic skills for learning his texts, he didn't apply himself very much. He also suffered from hypertension.

He received a special first place in his Geshe exams, a distinction awarded to all reincarnations of former regents, because it was customary for the lamas of this rank to sit on a throne, and it would look awkward for them to be at the top without any scholarly distinction. Of course, a differentiation was made in the

minds of many between those who were actually placed first and those given a special first place. The actual first place at the time of Dedruk Rinpochey's Geshe exam was Gen Yeshe Dondrup, the present Ganden Throneholder. Dedruk Rinpochey remained in Tibet and people in Lhasa were said to have great faith in him. Nowadays, however I hear that his attitude has changed and that he is leaning more towards the Chinese, though I don't know whether to believe it or not. There were four grades of Geshe Degree. In ascending order they were: the Dorampa (rDo Rams pa), Tsorampa (Tsogs Rams pa), Lingsep (gLing gseb), and Lharampa (Lha Rams pa). The abbot decided which examination a Geshe candidate should attempt. When my turn came, the abbot of Loseling was Tsangpa Khenpo (gTsang pa mkhan po) and he proposed that I become a Lharampa Geshe. This title was the only one of the four which opened the way to higher functions within the Gelugpa religious hierarchy, from college abbot to Ganden throneholder. Because I had no wish ever to hold such a public position, I told the abbot that I would prefer to become a Lingsep Geshe. He said that it wouldn't be right for a lama well-versed in the scriptures to hold a lower Geshe degree and that besides, my former incarnation had been a Lharampa Geshe.

At his insistence, I followed his advice. The tradition was that among the sixteen Lharampa candidates, the number of Geshes representing each college varied from year to year. The abbot told me that this year I would be alone in representing Loseling, which was what had happened to him. Something which happened only once in every ten or twelve years.

I was twenty-five when I became eligible to take my Geshe examination. Tulkus didn't have to wait for their turn, but were eligible to stand for their degrees as soon as they finished their fifteen year course of study. Ordinary monks had to wait ten, sometimes fifteen, years at the top of their class studying mainly the Treasury of Knowledge and Monastic Discipline until their turn came. Gen Nyima had waited about ten years and received his degree one year before me, when Gyalwa Rinpochey was in Dromo. At about the same time, he was appointed Shakhor Khenpo (Shag skor mkhanpo), equivalent in rank to the College Abbot, but without his responsibilities. Shakhor college no longer existed but abbots were appointed as a mark of distinction.

The first and most important part of the Geshe examination took place in the summer preceding the final public debate session, when the Geshe candidates went to the Norbulingka to debate before the Dalai Lama's debating partners. This was important because the final judgement was based on the recommendations. I had been preparing for months. I would try to think of all the possible points my opponents might raise and prepare answers to them. This was called 'calculating'. Some debaters calculated, others didn't, but I believe it was very helpful. When I saw a difficult point ahead I would be prepared and could pull the argument into safer territory.

I knew all the other candidates well and spotted the Ganden Shartse Abbot, Gen Kharuwa, Lobsang Chopel, who was Lati Rinpochey's teacher, and Gen Loga (bLo dga') from Sera Je as the biggest potential dangers. Just before the debate,

Gen Loga, who could never keep his mouth shut, asked me, 'Young man, aren't you twenty-five?' I said, 'Yes'. Then he remarked, 'When I first began to study scripture, your former incarnation was still around.' I knew he was trying to make me feel young and inexperienced to intimidate me just before the debate. I replied, 'When I was studying the Middle Way, you were still within the Rakhasha family'. That shut him up and all the other Geshe, tired of his boasting, burst out laughing. Gen Loga had been involved in the dispute between Sera Je monastery and the Tibetan government. As a punishment, he had been handed over in chains to Rakhasha, a government official, who had kept him locked up in his house for some time. It wasn't that I disliked Gen Loga, but if he wanted to be sarcastic, I felt compelled to reply in kind.

I knew that if I had been one of the weaker Geshe, I would not have been able to do the banter so quickly or turn it into an embarrassment for him. It was considered rude to behave like a bully before the Dalai Lama's debating partners, who appreciated an attitude of respect and consideration for a fellow monk in difficulty. This also prevented any embarrassments arising, because it was difficult for them to eliminate a candidate, who had been carefully chosen, but it was also hard to support a candidate who had been publicly ridiculed. A candidate could have a bad day, or could be a great scholar but be lacking skill in debate or the somewhat ambitious and aggressive nature it took to develop this talent. Of course, when facing a skilled debater one could not afford to be generous, but no one minded that.

The five subjects were divided between the Geshe, one subject for three candidates. I knew that the first subject made a fundamental difference to the final outcome of the debate. If the first subject was difficult, one became tired and confused, and even though easier topics might follow, the mind's sharpness had been blunted. If the first topic was easy, one's courage increased and one could deal with whatever tougher questions arose. My topic was ethics and my first opponent was a Mongolian monk from Gomang called Phuntsok. He began with an easy question, which gave me the edge when my turn came to debate with a vain and famous Geshe from Sera. Though he posed a potential danger, he put himself into an awkward position and I was quickly able to point out the faults in his reasoning. After that, things went smoothly. My opponent couldn't find much to say and soon it was all over.

The most significant step after the debate session at Norbulingka took place the following winter in the great hall of Loseling, in which the Geshe and senior monks debated in turn. This was important for a Geshe's prestige, but didn't really affect his placement in the final exam. The final test was the debate during the Great Prayer Festival. My luck held. That morning, Gyalwa Rinpoche had given quite a long teaching, so there was no time for anyone to beat anyone else, and the debating was left to a ceremonial minimum. In any case, a candidate's position had been more or less established during the session at Norbulingka the previous summer, so, unless he performed really poorly at the Great Prayer Festival debate, his position remained largely unaffected. Since I had done well in the

Norbulingka debate, I was awarded the first place. The seven best Geshe were ranked accordingly, while the remainder simply acquired the Lharampa Geshe degree.

FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH THE CHINESE

I first became aware of the potential Chinese danger when Shogdrug Rinpochey mentioned some Chinese names which I had never heard before. They must have been Mao Tse Tung, Chou En Lai, and some others. Seeing my blank expression he added, 'If you haven't heard about these people, you must have heard of Baba Kalsang Tseten'. I had, he was a Tibetan communist from Bathang. 'Well,' he continued, 'if the views and beliefs of those people become too strong, they will create great obstacles to the Dharma in our country. 'I only realised later that he must have been talking about communism, which I had never heard of before. When the Chinese first arrived in Lhasa, I was at Drepung. I remembered Shogdrug Rinpochey's words and knowing of Gen Locho's escape from the communist forces in Mongolia, knew nothing good would come of their presence. But, I told myself, worrying wouldn't help either.

Since I spent all my time studying in the monastery, I didn't see much of the Chinese except when they came to make offerings, distributing one or two silver coins to each monk in the assembly. However, I heard disturbing news from home, although by the time it became really serious there, the situation had already deteriorated in Lhasa itself.

THE TANTRIC COLLEGE

After obtaining my Geshe degree, I attended Gyume Tantric College until 1958. There were two categories of students at the Tantric Colleges, the Geshe like myself, and the Kyerimpas (sKyed Rimpa), who were monks who had done some monastic study and were admitted to the Tantric College on interview. These monks had to take part in such chores as kitchen duty, from which the Geshe were exempt.

At the Tantric College, the Geshe's main course of study was the Four Fold Commentary ('Grel pa bzhi sbrags) taught by the Abbot. This would take three to four months. Firstly, the abbot read from the fundamental text of Guhyasamaja, then the Bright Lamp (sGron gsal), Chandrakirti's commentary to it, followed by Je Rinpochey's commentary to that which is called Additional Notes (mChan). After that we examined the divisions of the chapters and explanation of them. While the abbot read aloud, the Geshe sat with their wooden book cases front of them, which they would tap lightly with a small stick in case the abbot misread anything. Usually, they kept it in the book case, which could give rise to funny incidents.

Sometimes, the book cases were suddenly slammed shut at the abbot's signal to chase away spirits. This had been a custom from the time of Ra Lotsawa, who, when he closed his own book case is said to have caused the goats and sheep on the other side of the river to scatter in all directions as if they had heard a clap of thunder. Usually, the Geshe would be warned in advance when this was about to take place, but in spite of this some were caught unawares. If the stick had not been removed from the book case, the cover would catch on it and go around in

circles. Although discipline in the Tantric Colleges was generally tight and infractions were not tolerated, incidents like this were usually over-looked.

After the Fourfold Commentary, in the Chimig Valley (Phyimig Lung), the abbot would teach the text Illuminating all the Hidden Meanings of Heruka (bDe mchog sbas don kun gsal). Then, in the winter, at Ganden, he would teach the Ocean of Attainments of the Generation Stage (bsKyed rim dngas grub rgya mtso) and the Lamp Illuminating the Five Stages of the Completion Stage (rDzogs rim ln ga gsal sgron). A Geshe attended the Tantric Colleges mainly to receive explanations of these texts from the abbot. For poorer Geshes, whose homes were too far away to receive support from their families, such as the Mongolians, entering the Tantric College improved their conditions. Gyume College had a large estate and its monks received generous allowances of grain.

All these courses took about a year to complete, besides which a Geshe would read many other Tantric texts on his own. When they were over a Geshe only needed to attend the more important tantric assemblies. After that, they were required to spend a minimum of one year at Gyume, performing rituals in different places. Kyerimpas had to do this for at least six years. The year began after the Great Prayer Festival, with twenty days spent in Shog, near Lhasa. The Tantric College owned assembly halls there in which we slept. We would rise early and recite the sadhanas of meditational deities such as Yamantaka, Heruka, or Guhyasamaja. We moved on spending from a few days to a month in various colleges and monasteries in Central Tibet. Included in the year's 'tour' was the one and a half month Yarnay Summer Retreat.

The discipline at Gyume was very harsh. On days when there was to be an assembly, the monks had to sleep in the assembly hall. Since the College didn't provide accommodation, the Geshes had to find their own in Lhasa. In summer, monks were not allowed to wear shoes and in the morning, when I had to attend debate sessions in the Gyume assembly hall my feet got blistered, for the streets of Lhasa were badly paved. Even the better paved streets felt very cold and after a while, the edges of my feet developed a thick skin. Finally, I found a solution to this problem which escaped anyone's notice. I bought skin coloured cloth and stuck it to the soles of my feet. I thought of buying some flesh coloured socks, but they were all ribbed and I thought they would be noticed.

When all his basic requirements had been fulfilled, a Geshe was free to leave the Tantric College. However, those who had been awarded places at their final examination had to obtain special permission from the Dalai Lama's debating partners. After remaining at Gyume for five years, and serving as disciplinarian for six months, as required, I felt it was time I left. If I remained any longer, I would be eligible to become administrative abbot (Lama Umdze), then abbot, and would then be in the line to succeed the Ganden Throneholder, a position for which I had no vocation.

I approached the senior debating partner, Gyatsoling and told him that I wished to leave once I had completed six years in the college. He said, 'Since your departure

means your giving up your progress to the Ganden Throne, this is a serious decision, which you cannot simply take on your own. You must consult an oracle or the divination of a high lama to establish whether it is right that you resign.' He added that if I did things in this way, whatever I did would have the approval of the protectors and this would be good for me.

I consulted the Nechung oracle and asked him what would be best: if I were to stay at Drepung, if I were to go back to my native land or if I were to remain in Gyume. He answered that it would be better if I resigned from Gyume. I asked the Gadong oracle the same question and he gave the same answer, as did Tenma (bStan ma), the female protector of Drepung. I then went with these answers from the three deities and a scarf to Gyatsoling, who accepted my resignation. Had I not resigned at that time, I could have been Ganden Throneholder before both the present incumbent and his predecessor, since I had obtained my Geshe degree before them. I was happy. I felt free to live quietly as I pleased. But it was now 1958 and I had little time to enjoy my freedom.

PILGRIMAGE TO INDIA

I had visited India in 1956 at the same time as Gyalwa Rinpochey and Panchen Rinpochey, on the occasion of the 2500th Buddha Jayanti festival. I had just finished my term as disciplinarian in Gyume and had asked Gyalwa Rinpochey's permission to attend. Accompanying me, were Gen Nyima, Phara Chosur my patron, and Baba Yeshe, a lama from Amdo. We travelled by Chinese army truck, stopping in Yangpachen and Shigatse, finally coming to Kalimpong in West Bengal. At the time, we thought the journey uncomfortable, as the ride was rough and the truck crowded, but compared to the trip we took three years later in the same direction, it was both comfortable and free from worry.

In Kalimpong, we stayed with merchant friends of Phara Chosur. We bought first class tickets, which Ribsel Rinpochey later said was a waste in Baba Yeshe's case, for, throughout our travels, he would place his bedroll on the floor of the compartment and sleep there, while we covered his bunk with our large quantities of baggage. We spent two months travelling to Bodh Gaya, Varanasi, Calcutta, and Ellora. and Ajanta. I didn't think India was a very pleasant place, being so crowded with people, but with the Chinese making things difficult at home, I started to think of remaining there.

THOUGHTS OF DEPARTURE

By the time I resigned from Gyume, the situation in Lhasa was deteriorating rapidly and I began seriously to think of returning to India. I had an acquaintance, a merchant called Shasema Pula, who understood Hindi and was preparing to move there, though his wife was not inclined to follow him. Having made up my mind to go, I set about convincing her and several other wives of Khampa merchants I knew, to come with us. They agreed reluctantly, mainly because I was going and they had strong faith in me. We began to make plans, intending to take plenty of money to live comfortably in India.

However, one day, Gen Nyima called me to his room. As I sat before him he remained quiet, fiddling with his hands and looking about in a nervous way.

Finally, he burst out, 'Are you going around saying you are leaving for India? What are you thinking of? Maybe you just want to enjoy a ride in a train or an airplane'. I tried to explain that the situation with the Chinese was bound to get worse. Gen shrugged his shoulders, 'Well, what about Gyalwa Rinpochey, his two tutors, the Ganden Throneholder, there are many great beings around, they are not talking about going to India, are they? So what's up with you?' Not knowing what to say I remained silent. Finally, Gen said, 'You act as if you didn't believe in cause and effect'. That really shook me up. I went back to my room thinking about what he had said and gave up any thought of departure. I informed the three families who would have accompanied me and they stayed back too since none of the wives had wanted to leave in the first place.

This is what happened to many people. They thought of leaving, had the opportunity to do so along with their possessions, but something held them back. I suppose most of us simply didn't have the karma to live comfortably in India. Gen knew that, and that is probably why he stopped me. It was his remark about cause and effect which struck me deeply enough to make me give up.

The atmosphere in the monastery progressively deteriorated. There were Chinese spies everywhere and I learned to be very careful about what I said and to whom I said it. There was a monk from the Drepung Tantric College who I knew was a spy. He came to see me one day and only spoke critically of the Chinese. I knew he was testing my response and that it would be better not to agree with him. Instead, I said, 'Communism is bad in the sense that it doesn't accept religion, otherwise, it really is quite good. In Kham, soldiers of the People's Liberation Army behaved quite correctly and paid whatever price was demanded by the local population.' He didn't reply.

I had made it a point never to criticise the Chinese publicly. I tried to suggest this to Dedruk Rinpochey, who was always openly abusing the Chinese, referring to them as 'Chinese corpses'. I gave him my opinion, 'None of us like the Chinese, but you don't have to say so out loud. If you are able to leave, it won't matter, but if you are left behind you will have a hard time. We should remain quiet, maintain our commitments and keep our opinions to ourselves.' He would say, 'Yes, yes', but go on talking in the same way.

Many people came to see me at that time to ask for amulets or talismans for protection. I told them I didn't know how to make them and that if I stuck a pin in my own arm, I felt it. Likewise, if a bullet struck me, it would certainly hurt me. Other lamas distributed many such talismans. They kept wooden blocks for printing mantras and images onto clay and the demand was so high that they had no time to dry.

At one point, the Chinese sent me a letter asking me to join a religious committee, offering to pay me 310 dayans a month, in addition to three months backpay to begin with. I drafted a careful reply saying that I didn't need the money as I only had myself and one servant to support and that I received sufficient offerings from the monastery and Dedruk Labrang to do this. I also mentioned that I was very

busy and wouldn't be much use in that position. I ended by thanking them for their offer adding that if I encountered any financial difficulties I would reconsider it.

As the situation deteriorated I became more and more anxious. I had no one to confide in except Gen Nyima and sometimes I would go to his room and we would chew over our worries together. Once I remarked, 'Things are getting very dangerous. I wish Gyalwa Rinpochey would leave.' Gen replied that Gyalwa Rinpochey was planning to visit Lhamo'i Latso and maybe he would leave from there. I thought it would be impossible with so many Chinese bodyguards accompanying him. Finally Gen said, 'When things get really bad, maybe the Americans will land directly in Tibet and do something'.

FLIGHT TO INDIA

On the third of the second month of the Earth Pig year (1959), the abbots went to consult the Gadong oracle, a little way beyond Drepung monastery, as usual. I went with Gen Nyima on horseback, carrying only a bowl and a scarf as an offering. I asked Gadong, 'What would be the best for me to do, to stay around here, go back to the monastery, or head south?' He replied it would be best to stay at Gadong. That night I rode on up the hill to the house of a family I knew, where we spent the night. It was right next to the Yanda Minji Kangsar and during the night, the head of the family died and they called me over to perform the transference of consciousness ritual.

By the following morning, the shelling of the monastery had begun and my brother, Yeshe Tinley came to join me, followed soon by Gen Nyima. They had come over the mountains, as the roads were already blocked. Gen Nyima was in a hurry to move on, saying things were becoming very dangerous, so we set out. We had no provisions and were beginning to feel hungry when we were informed on the road that our presence was re-requested at the home of Chushul Samkhar (Chu shul bsam mkhar), a wealthy family who lived a little way ahead. I asked Gen how we should respond and he accepted.

This family had two young sons whose tutor was Zimey Rinpochey. He went upstairs where Gen joined him. He talked with him so long that I thought we would end up spending the night. Around dusk, someone announced the Chinese had reached Nam (gNam), only a short distance away so we decided to leave. The family gave us one bag of tsampa and another of tea. I wondered how we were going to carry it since I only had the horse I was riding, but as we were setting off they brought out the provisions packed on the back of a black mule. I heard later that only when they saw our haste and anxiety did the danger of staying behind dawn on the Chushul Samkhar and that they too packed some belongings and left soon after us.

We climbed mountains, crossed several passes and descended into valleys until we finally reached the Tsangpo river. We crossed aboard a ferry navigated by a man in a yellow hat, a mark of government public service. He didn't seem to suspect us in any way, only enquiring the whereabouts of Rato Rinpochey and

Kangyur Rinpochey. I told him we didn't know. Also aboard was a pock-marked soldier from Kham carrying a rifle who said out loud, 'The Chinese manifest themselves in all kinds of forms. They may even wear monks' robes and perform the 'cutting off' ritual'. I pretended not to have picked up the hint and continued to converse casually with him.

In a village south of the Tsangpo we were joined by a monk called Jamyang. He was carrying a case of jewellery given to him by one of the women who had been going to leave with me for India with orders to give it to me wherever he found me. Finding I was gone from the monastery he had traced me to this village. He handed me the case saying that the woman, whose husband was a member of the Chushi Gangdruk, had said that if things went well I could return it later, otherwise, if I was hard up and in need, the jewels were for me to keep. The heavy metal box contained gold bracelets, rings and necklaces studded with faultless corals and many dzis. I didn't mention it to anyone and put it into the mule pack.

A few days later, Gen Nyima asked his servant to open up the pack. He pointed to several bundles asking what they were. When he spotted the jewellery case, he asked about that too. I told him it was a woman's jewellery. He was furious, exclaiming, 'A woman's things! Get rid of it, right now, throw it away!' I obeyed and removed the case from the pack. I thought of ways of returning it to the family who owned it, but was aware that their being wealthy made them easy prey for the Chinese and could bring them more harm than good.

Finally I decided to give the case to their mule driver, who no one would suspect and who lived in the village where we were. He told me he slept on the ground floor and that he would dig a hole in the ground under his pillow and hide the box there. I suppose no one ever found the jewellery. For years, no one would have dared to unearth it and now the mule driver is dead. The Khampa woman's husband came to India and when he visited me I had to explain to him why I hadn't brought the jewellery out. I have often thought that had I been able to do so, there would have been enough for Gen, myself and the woman's husband to live comfortably, for it must have been worth ten thousand dollars, even then. This was the second failure to involve myself and that family. I suppose we just didn't have the karma to bring anything out of our country.

Our journey took us to Lhokar in Southern Tibet. When we reached Gongar Shedrup Ling (Gong dkar bshad sGrub gling), we heard that another of Gen's disciples, Changmar (Byang dmar) Rinpochey was nearby. Gen asked me to do a divination to see whether we should go back to join Changmar Rinpochey or go on to Yalokamali. My divination indicated it was better to go on. Nearby, was a small office run by two members of the Chushi Gangdruk, the resistance force started in Kham but which spread throughout Tibet. We had to ask their permission to proceed southwards. One of them told us that they had information that Gyalwa Rinpochey wished all the abbots and lamas to assemble at Riwo Dechen (Ri bo bde chen) and that we should therefore go there.

That was where one of my disciples, Thogme Tulku, came from and I knew that if I went there, everyone would expect him to be with me. I had no idea of his whereabouts and I thought it would be very upsetting to have to tell them that, so we didn't go there. We walked for some time until we came to Dro, where we met a man who gave us noodles and dried meat. By then, we had heard that Gyalwa Rinpochey had left Lhasa. It was difficult to get information from people if we didn't know them, for the Chushi Gangdruk never answered directly, and everyone suspected everyone else. I had also learned to be wary and never reveal my true feelings. Gen was hopeless, he showed his feelings much too easily. And despite relying on me completely to make decisions, he always scolded me and told me I was doing the wrong thing.

We came to the home of some people from Dedruk Labrang. As I was Dedruk Rinpochey's teacher they did their best to treat us well and gave us mutton to eat. While we were talking, a man came into the room. He was rather fat with a large white face and wore a grey chuba. He introduced himself as Lobsang Tsering Chophel, servant of well-known aristocrat, and explained that he had come on business and was unable to return to Lhasa. Finally getting to the point, he asked me to let him join our party for India.

I thought for a moment. There was something about this man in his impeccable grey chuba that I couldn't put my finger on, something in his manner and self-assurance which made me feel uncomfortable. I told him I was sorry, but could do nothing to help him, since I was myself in the dark and not at all sure what the outcome would be. I concluded, 'If something goes wrong on the way and I make it to India but you don't, Tsering Tobgyal will feel that I have failed him. Please try to find your way by yourself.' It turned out that Tsering Tobgyal had never had a servant called Lobsang Tsering Chophel, who was actually a Chinese spy. We heard that later, in Lhasa, he collaborated with the Chinese authorities.

When we arrived in Chubutron, Gen wanted to wait for Changmar Rinpochey. We walked to the river and saw someone riding a mule in the distance coming towards us. It was the abbot of Namgyal monastery, Gen Samten. He talked with Gen and stayed for the night.

The villagers came and told us it looked as if it was going to snow, saying that if I could do anything about it, I should do it now, for poor weather on the morrow would make our journey very difficult. I had an amulet containing a small charm for stopping snow from Sakya Dachen (Sa skya bDag chen). It had been given to me by a Drepung monk whose family were servants in Sakya Dachen's home. He had said it might come in handy one day if I encountered bad weather while travelling from Kham, I pointed the amulet at the sky. The charm was very powerful and the weather cleared.

When I tried it again years later in Ladakh, it was no longer effective, so I opened the cloth it had been wrapped in and found it had rotted, probably due to the heat of the plains. Even in Tibet, it needed to be changed once in a while.

After that, we had to climb very high passes blocked with snow. Some of the monks, who had joined us were now crying out with fatigue and most of them were suffering from snow-blindness. Fortunately, at one stage we met a yak coming from the other direction who had left a passage in the snow which made our walking easier. Climbing over the pass to Jhora (sBbyor ra) we met Changmar Rinpochey and decided to head for Tsona (mTso sna), near the Indian border. Divination indicated we should climb a few more passes so we pressed on, the wind and sand in our eyes.

We were all hungry and tired. Gen walked ahead and meeting some villagers asked if we would reach somewhere this way. The man answered that we wouldn't and seeing the sceptical looks on our faces said that if we did, he was ready to cut off his own head. I couldn't help laughing to myself, wondering who would cut off his head if he were proved wrong. We tried the divination again. It gave the same indication as before so we pressed on. Finally we saw lights ahead and came to a small monastery. The abbot's face was familiar to me and mine must have been familiar to him. We stayed there for about four days. There were hot springs, where Gen bathed and we all had a good rest and healed our saddle and boot sores. When we left we were provisioned with tsampa, dried meat and butter.

After a few hours, we were stopped by the local leader of the Chushi Gangdruk, a merchant called Jamphel, who refused to let us pass, saying that it was too dangerous to send anyone so close behind Gyalwa Rinpochey. The man from the Dzong was more understanding and tried to convince Jamphel to let us go, arguing that we looked reliable and that Gyalwa Rinpochey had already been gone some time, but he wouldn't relent. Finally, two soldiers from Lithang gave their personal guarantee and we were allowed to proceed. We met Jamphel again on arrival in the camp in Misamari. I exclaimed, 'Oh, so you came too!'

When we reached Tsona, we met one of the bursars from Loseling. I felt strangely transported seeing him there in the middle of nowhere with his usual bombastic style unchanged. He said, 'Don't go down to Mon in the valley. It is not at all a nice place. There is only sky above, water below and everywhere the croaking of crows.' He talked as if he were choosing a picnic spot. He suggested we stay in Tsona monastery and perform rituals for the Chushi Gangdruk, seeming totally unaware of the danger and the need to move on. I told him, 'We made it alive this far, and I still hope we can make it alive to the border. Whatever else happens, we are moving on.' We had chosen this route because Gen wanted to follow Gyalwa Rinpochey, otherwise, many people were going through Bhutan which was said to be easier.

When we finally reached the border, we met eleven monks from Namgyal monastery. The border was closed, and more and more people kept coming. By that time, Tsona had fallen to the Chinese and everyone who had been there had fled to the border, including the carefree bursar, who was now lamenting his lost comforts. Gen was becoming more and more anxious and kept asking me if there was anything we could do, if there was any Indian official we could talk to. I was

at a complete loss. There were no Indian officials in sight and we couldn't speak their language even if they were.

There was one translator called Chunsel-la. I took him aside, gave him a precious pill and asked him to do something to prevent Gen getting upset. He told me to tell Gen not to worry, that only a handful of Chinese had moved into Tsona, whereas there was an Indian Border force of several thousands stationed nearby and that the Chinese would not dare attack us where we were. He also told me they were waiting for a man called Dawa, who had accompanied Gyalwa Rinpochey, and that when he arrived, decisions would be made about us. However, the Indians would not decide anything without him.

In spite of these assurances, Gen remained doubtful. He kept shaking his head saying, 'How does he really know?' He hardly slept that night and in the morning remarked to Changmar Rinpochey and myself, 'I just don't understand how you carefree people can sleep as soundly as if you were in your own rooms at the monastery'. Shortly afterwards, Dawa-la arrived and they began sending us across the border, in batches of one hundred. We were in the first batch.

REFUGEES

When we came through Mon on the Indian side of the border, it was a great advantage to be wearing robes, as the Monbas brought offerings of rice, tsampa and silver coins to all of us monks. When we reached Tawang I suggested we stay there, so that I could perform rituals in the local monasteries, support Gen and myself and allow him some rest. He resolutely refused, exclaiming, 'We haven't come all this way to stay here', so we went on to Misamari, at the height of the hot season on the Indian plains.

After a few days in Misamari, we moved to Kalimpong taking our horses with us. Gen had a chestnut horse given to him by Changmar Rinpochey, and I had a very good mule. Gen was entranced by the beauty of his horse and at least once a day would refer to 'My beautiful horse and your ugly mule'. I would nod my head in agreement although later my mule fetched the same price as Gen's horse. That horse became the focus of his regret until Gen passed away. When he left Kalimpong, Gen left it with Changmar Rinpochey to be sold. Suddenly struck by pangs of remorse, he wrote to Changmar Rinpochey asking him to keep it for a while, but it had already been sold to an Indian army officer. Gen was torn with regret, feeling his companion through all these hard times should have been treated better than to be sold for three hundred rupees.

In Kalimpong, a meeting of all the tulkus was organised to discuss the future. I attended, at the urging of a lama from my region and found that Gen Nyima had also come. Gen was visibly upset at meeting me there and scolded me continually over the next few days, saying that I had no business attending meetings. He must have read my thoughts and tried to explain why he had gone, saying that with a title like his, he was obliged to attend, much, against his own better judgement.

I realised how much recent events had shaken Gen, and how much he feared what would happen to the monastic structure, which was like a turtle without its shell.

Over the next few years, a whole generation of young monks and tulkus, those in their twenties and early thirties, no longer within the structure of a monastery and totally disorientated by what had happened, turned away from their studies and the religious life in an attempt to come to terms with a totally new environment. Many disrobed and some of the scholars and high lamas with the greatest potential went abroad to a very different life.

LIFE IN EXILE

Several thousand monks had escaped from Tibet and more were trickling in. At the instigation of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, a camp was set up in Buxa, at a former British prison camp located in the foothills of Assam, for a thousand monks to pursue their studies in a monastic environment. Gyuto Tantric College was resettled in Dalhousie, a hill station now in Himachal Pradesh, and many elderly lamas went there, feeling that the climate would be better suited to their health. Gen was among them, and he continued to teach, but also spent much of his time in retreat.

In Kalimpong, I was approached by Geshe Ngawang Nyima, a Mongolian Geshe from Gomang College who told me that since there had been no monastic confession and restoration ceremony since we left Tibet, it would be a good thing to hold one in India. I agreed and we chose the Tibetan monastery in Sarnath, Varanasi as a suitable site. This small monastery, built while Tibet was still independent, was one of the rare facilities we possessed outside our homeland and we observed the monastic traditions there.

I stayed two years in Sarnath. It was a difficult time. I got used to the heat and learned to adapt by bathing often, but the fears Gen had expressed in the very first days of our exile began to haunt me too. It seemed that my world was falling apart. I could see many of my fellow monk's lives being blown to the winds. I kept thinking of all the things that we had done wrong when we still had a country and went over all the ways we could have avoided the final catastrophe, until I nearly drove myself mad with regret and frustration. Feeling depressed and unable to cope, I went to see Ling Rinpochey and opened my heart to him, hoping he would give me some sound advice.

Rinpochey listened to me, then quoted a verse from the Guide to Bodhisattva's Way of Life, 'If something can be fixed, there's no use worrying about it. If it can't be fixed, what is the use of lamenting.' These words had the effect of cold water being poured into a boiling pot. My anxieties were quelled and I realised that instead of regretting past events, I had better look ahead and lead my life as best I could under the circumstances. There was nothing to do and nothing to fix, so what was the use in worrying?

I began to visit Spituk monastery in Ladakh every summer, teaching the monks there. I stayed two years at Calcutta University on a research fellowship and then became principal of the Buddhist School of Dialectics in Ladakh, where I remained for six years.

I kept thinking that we were soon going back to Tibet and that hope sustained me. People who spoke English and who seemed more aware of the outside world didn't seem to share my hopes and said that there wasn't going to be much to hope for in that direction for some time to come.

In 1967, I went to live in Dharamsala to be nearer His Holiness and his two Tutors. Ling and Trijang Rinpocheys both told me that I should become abbot of a small monastery in Manali, where there had been some internal troubles. I remained there about three years, straightened things out, established sound discipline, and then moved back to Dharamsala.

By then, Gen had moved to Dharamsala from Dalhousie. He lived in a little house below Ling Rinpochey's and spent most of his time in retreat. In 1980, he moved to the house of one of his disciples who had returned from abroad, and often taught at the School of Dialectics. He began to visit Loseling which had been re-established in Karnataka, in South India, every winter and taught for three months every year. I lived a quiet life for some years until 1978 when I made my first trip abroad. I spent a year teaching at the University of Virginia, in the Charlottesville, USA.

In 1986, I became abbot of Namgyal monastery. I spent much of my time in retreat, taught the Namgyal monks and, at the request of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, passed on some rare lineages to interested people. In 1986, Gen's heart grew weaker and that August he insisted on going to Loseling in South India. In October, he passed away, just as His Holiness was giving a Guhyasamaja initiation in Dharamsala. His Holiness broke the news at the end of the teaching before the tsok offering was made.

In 1987, I went to Mundgod and gave teachings in Loseling including a collection of about forty initiations, to monks from all the three monasteries of Drepung, Sera and Ganden. I have now retired from the Namgyal abbotship and live in Dharamsala most of the year, periodically visiting centres abroad, monasteries in Ladakh and Loseling in South India. I still hope to return to Tibet one day, though I hope it will be under happier circumstances.

Rinpoche told his story to Kim Yeshi. Thanks to Tashi Tsering for assiduously reading the text, clarifying historical details and Tibetan spellings.

[Transcripts of teachings on The Three Principal Aspects of the Path](#) given at Jamyang in October 2001

Download Rinpoche's teaching on [Peace and Humanity](#) in MP3 format.

Notes

1. For more detailed information, please refer to Tsepon W.D. Shakabpa, *Bod kyi srid don rgyal rabs*, Kalimpong, 1976, Vol. II, pp.301-7; also see '*Gyur med bsod nams stob rgyal*

shan kha ba, rang go lo rgyus lhai med rang byung zangs', LTWA, Dharamsala, 1990, pp.141-53. [[Back to text](#)]

2. For more detailed information, see *Phu khang rgan blo bzang rgya mtsho, bKa' gdams gsar ma'i dge bshes 'ga' zhig gi rnam thar dang gsung 'thor bu bsgrigs pa bzhugs so*, Vol. Ka, Dharamsala, pp. 9-55, hereafter referred to as *bKa' gdams sar ma*. [[Back to text](#)]
3. For more detailed information, see *bKa' gdams gsar ma*, pp. 57-243. [[Back to text](#)]

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