

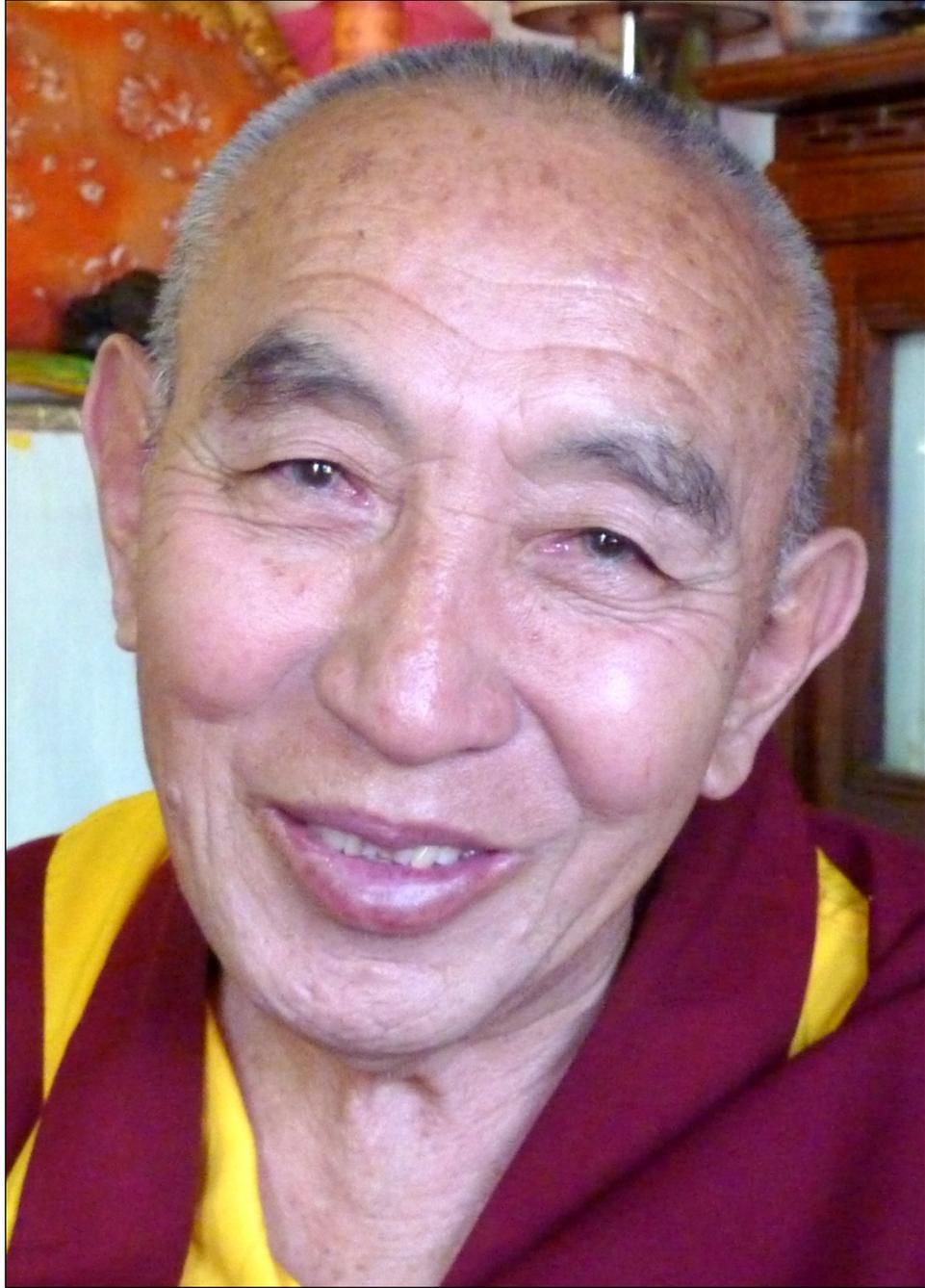
# **Tibet Oral History Project**

**Interview #18B – Chime Dorjee, Geshe  
January 5, 2014**

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# TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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## INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #18B
2. Interviewee: Chime Dorjee, Geshe
3. Age: 78
4. Date of Birth: 1935
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Karze
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: January 5, 2014
10. Place of Interview: Gyurmed Monastery, Gurupura, Hunsur, Mysore District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 38 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Pema Tashi
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

### **Biographical Information:**

Geshe Chime Dorjee was born in Karze in Kham Province. He was the second among six children in a farming family that grew crops like wheat, barley and peas. He remembers that his family visited the nearby Karze Monastery during auspicious days. He became a monk at age 7 or 8, but continued living with his parents and studied during the daytime at the monastery.

Geshe Chime Dorjee witnessed the appearance of the Communist Chinese in his hometown. The fear of sons being drafted into the Chinese army prompted parents to send them to Lhasa. He narrates the month long journey to Lhasa where he joined the Gyumed Monastery.

Geshe Chime Dorjee describes his experience of migrating to different branch monasteries for *choethok* 'dharma sessions,' which was a tradition unique to Gyumed Monastery. The monks travelled every 15 to 45 days for a period of six years. Food was provided by wealthy patrons, but the monks had to sleep in the assembly halls with only their cloaks for blankets.

Geshe Chime Dorjee heard from senior monks about the bombardment of Lhasa which prompted the monks to flee towards the south of Tibet. He talks about the journey, the difficulties they faced, meeting the *Chushi Gangdrug* Defend Tibet Volunteer Force and ultimately escaping to India through Mon Tawang.

### **Topics Discussed:**

Kham, childhood memories, monastic life, first appearance of Chinese, escape experiences.

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## Interview #18B

**Interviewee: Chime Dorjee, Geshe**

**Age: 78, Sex: Male**

**Interviewer: Marcella Adamski**

**Interview Date: January 5, 2014**

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:16

**Interviewee #18B: Chime Dorjee. That is the *kyaming* ‘former layman’s name of a monk.’**

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked us to record your experiences, so that we can share your memories with many generations of Tibetans, the Chinese and the rest of the world. Your memories will help us to document the true history, culture and beliefs of the Tibetan people. Do you give your permission for the Tibet Oral History Project to use this interview?

**#18B: Yes, of course.**

Q: Thank you for offering to share your story with us. During this interview if you wish to take a break or stop at anytime, please let me know. If you do not wish to answer a question or talk about something, please let me know.

**#18B: Okay.**

Q: If this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would this be a problem for you?

**#18B: There may not be. [I] do not [have any problems].**

Q: We’re honored to record your story and appreciate your participation in this project.

**#18B: Okay.**

Q: *Geshe-la* ‘Buddhist monk with philosophy degree,’ can you please tell me how old you are and where you were born?

00:02:18

**#18B: [I] am 78 now.**

Q: The birthplace?

**#18B: The birthplace is Karze in Kham.**

Q: What kind of work did your family do?

**#18B: [They] were farmers, worked as farmers.**

Q: What kind of things did your family grow on the farm?

**#18B: [We] grew wheat, barley and peas in the fields.**

Q: What level of socio-economic income was your family? Were they very poor or middle class or very wealthy?

**#18B: [We] were middle class and not among the wealthy.**

Q: How many people were in your family, *geshe-la*, and where were you in that order?

00:03:50

**#18B: There were six, four daughters and two sons.**

Q: Among the children, you...?

**#18B: I am the second one and there was a sister older to me.**

Q: Was there a monastery near your village and what was the name of it?

**#18B: The Karze Monastery was close by. [We lived] near the Karze Monastery.**

Q: Can you tell me what the monastery was like and how many monks lived there? Was it a large or a small one?

**#18B: In the past, during the period of the old system there were three *datsang* ‘sections in a large monastery.’ The three *datsang* were Tsenyi Datsang, Ngagpa Datsang and Namgyal Datsang. There might have been 2-3,000 monks, perhaps around 3,000. The congregation was large.**

Q: The monks that lived there in Kham in this Karze Monastery were they all from the local area or did they come from regions all over Tibet to this monastery?

**#18B: [The monks came] from different regions from a distance of a day’s journey.**

Q: How often did your family go to the monastery and for what reasons did they go?

00:06:09

**#18B: [They] went from time to time like on the 8<sup>th</sup> day or the 15<sup>th</sup> day [of the lunar months] to the monastery, which is close by. My home is located close to the monastery.**

Q: Can you tell for people who maybe don’t know anything about Tibet, why was the 8<sup>th</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup> day of Tibet so important?

**#18B: Generally, spiritual activities are performed on the 15<sup>th</sup> day, 30<sup>th</sup> day and 8<sup>th</sup> day [of every lunar month] as [these are] considered festive days. In addition, once a year there was a *cham* ‘religious dance performed by monks,’ which one went to witness. Then each monastery held ritual assemblies that [the lay people] went to witness.**

Q: Did you have any relatives at the monastery and who were they if you did?

**#18B: My father’s sibling was there when I was little. Father’s sibling was there when I was 7 or 8 years old.**

Q: How did the monastery get its supplies or it’s food to feed that many monks? There were 3,000 monks. How did they get enough food for those people?

**#18B: The major food in Tibet was *tsampa* ‘flour made from roasted barley’ and butter and nothing else was consumed much. The *tsampa* must be prepared and supplied from your home. The monastery provided during...[not discernible].**

Q: How?

00:08:54

**#18B: The monastery provided food when there were prayer assemblies. The monastery provided tea and *thukpa* ‘noodle soup.’ Mainly it was *pa* ‘dough made from *tsampa* and tea’ that used to be consumed in Tibet. You must use your own *tsampa*, butter and *tsampa*.**

Q: When you said “we ate *tsampa*” was that the monks ate *tsampa*? And it came from home, so did the homes supply food for the monastery?

**#18B: Yes, the monks [ate *tsampa*]. [The *tsampa*] had to come from home.**

Q: Did many children from your village go to the monastery, many young boys?

**#18B: Most [of the young monks] lived in the monastery. Some went elsewhere to study the scriptures but came to the monastery to attend prayer assemblies.**

Q: [You] mean the monastery in the village?

**#18B: Yes, the monastery in the village.**

Q: Lived in the local monastery and...?

**#18B: Most of the boys lived in the monastery. There were others living in the villages, like the villages around here. There were many boys living in villages.**

Q: In the villages?

00:10:40

**#18B: Yes, the younger children lived in villages.**

Q: Although [they] were monks?

**#18B: Although [they] were monks.**

Q: Did you become a monk at anytime in your life?

**#18B: I became a monk at around the age of 7 or 8, became a monk around 7.**

Q: Was that a decision that your parents made for you? Do you have any recollections of how you felt about going to the monastery at 7?

**#18B: [The decision] must have been made by the parents. Being little [I] cannot recollect much. Generally, most of the boys born in the village became monks. Though one cannot take the *getsul* 'novice monks' vows, the name is registered at the monastery that one will become a monk. One lives at home and goes nearby the home to learn to read and write.**

Q: Why did parents want to register that their sons were going to be monks?

00:12:51

**#18B: The main registration to become a monk must be done at the monastery. If one had a paternal uncle or a maternal uncle [in the monastery] the registration was done through them.**

Q: What are your earliest memories of the monastery and did you live there or come home frequently to see your family?

**#18B: The registration was done at the monastery and then [I] stayed home. The monastery and my home were close by. When [I] visited the monastery at times [I] stayed with father's sibling who was a monk at the monastery. One would call [him] paternal uncle.**

Q: Was there ever a time in your development as a monk where you went to live permanently in the monastery and not at home?

**#18B: [I] stayed [in the monastery] a little bit around the age of 12 or 13 and not at any other time. [I] stayed a little bit in the monastery a year or two before leaving for Lhasa. Otherwise, [I] was living at home.**

Q: *Geshe-la*, why do parents want their sons to become monks?

00:15:25

**#18B: As a little child...generally schools were very rare in the village. Like there are in foreign countries, [we] did not have any schools that one could attend. So, as little children, boys were taught to read, write and grammar in the monasteries with a teacher teaching a number of students like in a school. There were never any schools in the villages. It was very poor. Nowadays it is very good. So, since any boy could learn to read and write, and study culture and science in the monasteries, [he] was made [a monk]. Whereas in the case**

of girls, right from the beginning, except for work, there was no plan for teaching [them] to read and write.

Q: And so what happened when...you said “until I was 12 or 13” and you went to Lhasa. What was that about? What took you to Lhasa?

**#18B: The reason for going to Lhasa was to study the Great Treatises of Mahayana Buddhist Philosophy. Generally, among the monks of the local monasteries those that have never been to Lhasa are called *khogey* in our village and have fewer rights, those that have never been to Lhasa. Going to Lhasa and earning a *geshe* degree is excellent. If not, having been to Lhasa and lived for three years in a great monastery, and upon returning to the village one was deemed of great value. That was the reason for sending [me] to Lhasa.**

Q: And so, can you tell us about how you got from Kham to Lhasa? What was that journey like and who went with you?

00:18:39

**#18B: There were no drivable roads at that time. [Roads] had not yet been constructed, so one had to walk. There were many groups of merchants of the village. The monasteries’ main source of revenue came from trade. The profits from trade were used to provide tea and make offerings [to the monks]. Hence, there were numerous merchants travelling [to Lhasa]. There were 400-500 mules and four, five or six groups of merchants. Each merchant owned 60-70 or 10-15 mules. The merchants cooked in groups during the journey.**

**[I] joined one such group of merchants. Generally, during that journey we were many young monks. The Chinese were looking upon the village in bad light and those parents that were able to, readied horses to ride and other preparations for the children and send [them] along with a group of merchants. That’s how [I] left.**

Q: Were the merchants monks?

**#18B: [They] were merchants of the monastery, merchants of the monastery.**

Q: What was your first sighting of the Chinese in your region, *geshe-la*?

**#18B: [I] think I was 12 years old then. Long ago, before I was born the Communist Chinese had come once. [My] parents used to say that [I] was born after the Communist Chinese left. When [they] appeared later [I] was 12 years old, around the end of age 12 and since then lived alongside the Chinese until the age of 18. The Chinese arrived when [I] was 12 years old and lived together with the Chinese for six years as a child. [I] left for Lhasa at the age of 18.**

Q: The Chinese came once before your birth and then when you were about 12. So that would have been like in 1948 when you were about 12.

**#18B: Yes, it must be around that time. I was born in 1936.**

Q: What was your...when you saw...did you have any reactions when you saw the Chinese? I gather you were at home most of the time and what did they look like? How did your parents feel about them being there?

00:22:35

**#18B: The parents considered the Communists extremely bad and believing the monastery to be safer—took all the belongings and provisions to the monastery, took to the monastery. The little quantity of grains at home was hidden underground. It seems when the Communists had come in the past, [they] had robbed and rendered all the people paupers.**

**That is what had happened when the Communists came the first time and [the parents] believed [they] would do the same the next time. The children and aged fathers left for the monastery believing it to be safer. Then [our] food supplies and belongings were taken to the monastery and left with paternal uncle. [The parents] remarked that the grains in the house should be hidden underground else the Communists would take them. However, they didn't act like the earlier time.**

Q: What did they do in your community from the time you were 12?

**#18B: The Chinese did not do anything then. They just set up military bases and taxed the people for firewood and fodder for the numerous cavalry horses that had arrived. Long ago there was the Tibetan Government but I recall as a child that the Nationalists were living there in the region of Karze. When they [the Communist Chinese] arrived the leaders of the Nationalists dispersed and the troops scattered and they [Communist Chinese] took over.**

Q: So this time they took nothing but fuel or...?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: ...grass.

00:25:21

**#18B: Took nothing. There were Tibetan leaders in our village that said that the people must provide fodder and firewood, and levied such taxes on the people. These were given, which the leaders supplied to the Chinese.**

Q: Because you didn't leave...you were in the monastery at this point until you were, I think, you said 18? Did you go home? Did you see any other changes in your village besides the leaders saying to give the Chinese grain and fuel?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Grass...

Q: ...grass and fuel?

**#18B: There were no other changes then. [The Chinese] claimed to be very good and said that [they] would look after the people. Their soldiers were sent to help when we had**

**fieldwork. The soldiers pretended to help. Should the soldiers need anything, they immediately paid for it and did not make any attempt to rob.**

Q: When did your life change? You were in the monastery and studying? What happened next?

**#18B: Yes?**

Q: You were in the monastery and studying. When did things change in your life?

00:27:50

**#18B: Then [I] left for Lhasa and planned to study in Lhasa. That is why [I] left. The Chinese activities in the village were bad and hence, numerous boys were sent to Lhasa to join the great monasteries. There were 20-30 boys with me. Although sent along with the muleteers, [the boys] had to help and make payments. There were numerous boys. Since there were many groups of merchants, there must be over 20-30 boys.**

Q: Was there some reason the parents thought it was better to be in Lhasa?

**#18B: Remarks were passed in the village that the Chinese would not do any good just like in the past and that the younger children would be recruited in the [Chinese] army, and that all the young ones would be taken away. It was commented that at that point [the Chinese] may sweet-talk but would do no good later on. Hence, majority of the boys in the ages of 15-17 were sent to Lhasa. I was 18 and there were those that were 20. Many different [age groups] came to Lhasa along with the muleteers who were transporting tea and merchandise. [We] came along as servants to the merchants.**

Q: We're talking...You set out for Lhasa, what age were you again and what year was that?

**#18B: [I] was 18 years old.**

Q: What year would that be?

**#18B: '53 or '54. Was it '54 when His Holiness the Dalai Lama went to China?**

Q: So 1954.

**#18B: It was a year prior to that.**

Q: Okay. It would've been around 1954.

**#18B: It was '54, 1954.**

Q: ...that you went to Lhasa?

**#18B: Yes, to Lhasa. [I] was 18 then.**

Q: That was the year before His Holiness went to China.

00:31:11

**#18B: Yes, a year earlier. [I] arrived a year before [in Lhasa]. It was not easy to join Gyumed [Monastery] like the great monasteries [of Sera, Drepung and Gaden]. Since there were a fixed number of monks, one could join only when a *lhungsay* ‘alms bowl’ became available. Then [I] joined [Gyumed].**

Q: In the great monasteries...?

**#18B: In the case of the great monasteries, if you arrived today and found a teacher you could register immediately and join the monastery. It was not so in Gyumed. One of my paternal uncles was a senior monk in Gyumed with whom I stayed.**

Q: Before we hear about joining that, how long did it take you to travel from Karze to the capital, Lhasa? What was that journey like for you? That would have been in 1954. What was the roads like, the journey like, what did you see?

**#18B: It took two months and three days from Karze to Lhasa.**

Q: What happened during the journey?

**#18B: There were many muleteers and we did not encounter any bandits. There were many muleteers. One wealthy family was transporting Chinese articles. So, there were five or six Chinese [travelling with the caravan], actual Communist Chinese.**

Q: Chinese?

00:33:13

**#18B: Yes, Chinese with us. At that time the Chinese had already arrived in Lhasa. The family owned 30-40 mules that were laden with machineries for printing Chinese currency notes. The machines used to print Chinese currency notes were packed in square-shaped boxes. “These should not be handled roughly or they will break,” it was said. These were handled with great care. There were 5-6 Chinese.**

Q: Thirty to 40 subjects?

**#18B: Mules, mules to transport things.**

Q: Like a printing press of some kind?

**#18B: Yes, it was said so. There were square-shaped boxes but we did not see [the machines]. At the time of loading and unloading, normally tea packages that [the mules] carried used to be thrown down. “These must not be knocked around. There are many machines in there,” it was said, but we did not see [the machines]. [The wealthy family] was in the same caravan but cooked with a different group.**

Q: The machines were for printing or were they ammunition or guns? Was it something for printing books?

00:35:34

**#18B: [The Chinese] said it was so. It cannot be weapons because the Chinese were armed with a gun each, small guns. There were 5-6 Chinese and they were armed with guns. And the traders were also armed with guns. Everyone carried his own gun. The traders owned guns while the young monks carried nothing. Their [wealthy family's] mules carried numerous boxes of *dhayen* 'Chinese silver coins' along with the Chinese goods. It was said that the *dhayen* boxes were fine but those that contained machines had to be handled gently and that they were to be used for printing [currency notes].**

Q: There was no robbers, no danger from Chinese soldiers. What was it like for you? You were about 19? What was it like for you for the first time to be leaving your home, your small village and going so far away and seeing the mountains of Tibet and the valleys? How did that make you feel to see your country like that?

**#18B: [I] was young then and happy and carefree. [We] were traveling within Tibet and [I] felt the great distance. At the time of leaving, the parents came to see [us] off and such. That was the tradition in our region.**

Q: Do you remember your first sight of Lhasa and what was that like? Can you describe it?

00:38:26

**#18B: The Tsuglakhang 'Central Cathedral'...We came through Phenpo. We arrived in Phenpo from the northerly direction of Nagchuka. When [we] arrived at Wojithang one could view the grand Potala Palace. One had never seen such in the hometown.**

Q: From where could one view the Potala Palace?

**#18B: From Wojithang. One arrives here from Phenpo Gola. It is where the Chinese have constructed the electricity plant of Ngachen presently. One can see the Potala from here. [I] saw the many magnificent *gyaphig* 'copula' of the Tsuglakhang and felt very happy and thought, "Now [I] have reached Lhasa." Once you had arrived, there was no time for tea. There is a saying that one must go to view the Jowo 'statue of Buddha Sakyamuni,' else one would go blind. It is said that soon upon reaching Lhasa, one must go to view the Jowo before having tea. After the packs were unloaded, the traders and everyone went to see the Jowo and completed a circumambulation.**

Q: What would happen if one didn't?

**#18B: It is said that you would go blind.**

Q: ...that one would go blind?

**#18B: ...that one would go blind and not be able to see [the Jowo] later. There is such a saying but [I] do not know if it is true.**

Q: The Jowo, where's that?

00:40:33

**#18B: It is in the Tsuglakhang.**

Q: Right, the Jowo.

00:40:40

**#18B: The Jowo of Lhasa, which was brought by the Chinese wife [of King Songtsen Gampo].**

Q: What happens to you next?

**#18B: [I] could stay with [my] paternal uncle who lived in Gyumed.**

Q: Gyumed Monastery?

**#18B: Gyumed Monastery. [I] could not get admission but stayed in his quarters. [I] consulted a divination from a Mongolian abbot whether it was better [for me] to join [one of the] great monasteries or seek admission in Gyumed Monastery. [The divination] foretold that it was better to join Gyumed. Hence, [I] joined Gyumed. Were [I] to join [one of the] great monasteries, I would have to choose Gaden [Monastery]. [I] did become a member of Gaden later.**

Q: Can you tell us about Gyumed Datsang? What kind of monastery is that?

**#18B: Gyumed Datsang is located right in Lhasa. It is close to the Tsuglakhang.**

Q: What Buddhist sect is that part of?

**#18B: It is part of the Gelug sect. The sect is Gelug.**

Q: Tell me what the requirements were if there were any for entering that monastery?

00:43:04

**#18B: One must memorize many scriptures. One must memorize many scriptures and then seek admission.**

Q: One must have completed the memorization?

**#18B: One must have completed the memorization.**

Q: And had you done that already or is that something you are beginning to have to do?

**#18B: [I] had done the major part in [my] hometown. [I] had done many memorizations in [my] hometown.**

Q: How long...when you got the advice to go to that from the oracle, when you got that advice, was it...did it please you or do you wish you could have gone to Gaden?

**#18B: [I] felt Gyumed was better because my paternal uncle was there while there were no relatives in Gaden except those that hailed from the same region.**

Q: Can you tell me what happens next in your monastic...when you get into the monastery and how does that happen?

00:45:03

**#18B: [I] must have joined at the age of 19. [I] left home at 18 and joined Gyumed at 19. [I] was at Gyumed for around six years, from 19 to 24.**

Q: Can you tell us about what the practices were like in that monastery?

**#18B: One took the required tests in the scriptures and then two years later there is another test until one completed *ladhe*. After the completion of *ladhe* there is another test. And then one became a *gelong* ‘fully-ordained monk observing 253 vows’ in the fourth or fifth year.**

Q: What does *ladhe* mean?

**#18B: It is one that performs *jadhe*, serving tea. As a freshman one must perform the responsibility of serving tea.**

Q: First one took a test...

**#18B: Yes.**

Q: And then one joins and then...?

**#18B: And then a second test must be taken.**

Q: A second test is done.

**#18B: After the second test you have completed *ladhe/jadhe*.**

Q: And then did one start working?

**#18B: And then you are a [ordained] monk once you became a *gelong*. In Gyumed Monastery until the sixth year one had to go on *choethok* ‘dharma sessions.’ We were in the sixth year at the time of leaving [Tibet].**

Q: How many years of *ladhe* did one perform?

00:46:49

**#18B: *Ladhe's* for around a year. It is around two years after completing *ladhe* before you became a *gelong*. One was a *getsul* 'novice monk observing 36 vows' before that.**

Q: Did one take the *gelong* vows at the sixth year?

**#18B: No, one would have taken the *gelong* vows perhaps in the fourth year.**

Q: So if you entered...?

**#18B: One would have taken the *gelong* vows in the fourth year. In the fifth year one would be studying the tantric lessons of Delpashidag 'Commentarial Notes' and Kyayzog 'Generative and Consummate Phases.'**

Q: How, *geshe-la*?

**#18B: One took to studying tantra like Sangwadhuepa 'Exposition Tantra of Guhyasamaja,' Kyayzog and Delpashidag in the fifth year.**

Q: Studying the tantra scriptures?

**#18B: Yes.**

Q: If you were there from 18 to 24...?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Nineteen to 24.

Q: Nineteen to 24 that is five years. Did you start your tantric studies in the fifth year?

**#18B: Yes.**

Q: And after that?

**#18B: And then [I] had to take flight in the six year. [I] was 24 years old.**

Q: If you had to escape, it would have been like 1960. At 24 you had to escape, it would have been right after Lhasa was lost.

00:49:43

**#18B: Yes, [I] was in the 24<sup>th</sup> year. At Gyumed from the time one entered Gyumed and until the sixth year, one had to keep migrating. Gyumed had many [branch] monasteries where one had to go to attend prayer assemblies and study. One could not stay more than a month and 15 days at one place. One had to keep moving every month or 15 days. During the *choethok* after Losar 'Tibetan New Year,' at the beginning of the second month one moved to Shog through Phekhung [?]. All those that have not completed the six years of *choethok* must converge here.**

Q: Was it at Shog?

**#18B: Yes, at Shog. It is in Phenpo, called Phenpo Shog right across Gaden on the other side of the river.**

Q: Before we hear about that, can you go back and explain to me: “you could not stay in one place”? Was that Gyumed Monastery or any monastery for more than...how many days?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: A month and 15 days.

Q: A month and 15 days, so roughly 45 days. What was that rule about? Why was that tradition there?

**#18B: No. This is somewhat similar to both the Gyumed and Gyuto [Monasteries]. For instance, during the *choethok* one stayed 15 days in Hunsur [town near place of interview] for *choenyen* ‘listen to the dharma’ and 15 days in Bylakuppe [town near place of interview] and then at Sera [Monastery] and then moved to Mundgod [another Tibetan settlement]. There were monasteries, monasteries in each of the places to hold prayer assemblies. That was the main reason for *choenyen*.**

**In the olden days it was such that whenever a patron was found you stayed there for 10-15 days being looked after by the patron and conducting *choenyen*. Then another patron was sought and you went there and held prayer assemblies and *choenyen*. That was the reason for moving about in the olden days.**

Q: When you stayed at these other places, were they monasteries of the same sect or any monastery?

00:53:52

**#18B: They were monasteries that belonged to the Gyumed Monastery. There was a kitchen for cooking purposes.**

Q: Yes?

**#18B: There was the kitchen for preparing tea, a main assembly hall and a *choera* ‘debating courtyard’ but nothing large and grand. A caretaker looked after it during the time [monks] did not stay there. They took care of any leakages or so.**

Q: Where did the monks stay?

**#18B: The monks stayed in the village. Except for the first day’s stay [in the village], once one’s *dhinga* ‘sitting mat’ had been set [the monks] must sleep in the assembly hall until the end of the session; there was no other place to stay. One must sleep in the assembly hall. Here we remove the robes [to go to sleep] but there one slept with the clothing on.**

Q: Right in the assembly hall?

**#18B: That was the custom.**

Q: So that when you arrived at another monastery even though it was a small one, you would begin a prayer ceremony and stay in that position, were you chanting or were you reciting texts? What were you doing when you were in that prayer? Were you by yourself or was there somebody with you?

00:56:35

**#18B: During the assembly, those that have not memorized texts must do so. Those that have completed [memorization] could do meditation and such. There were *tsira*, small houses made of stones, for the summer. And in the places we visited during autumn and spring there were *tsira*, small houses constructed but without roofs.**

Q: ...for the monks to stay?

**#18B: Yes. In the evening one clapped and it was time to sleep. The *dhagam* ‘cloak worn at religious services’ is what one wore to the prayer assembly that also served as blanket. We never had the custom of using quilts. While travelling one wore the *dhagam* and carried the *dhinga*. One used the *dhinga* as a floor mat and wore the *dhagam*, while wearing the *zen* ‘monk’s upper garment’ and *shamthap* ‘skirt-like robes of monks’ at all times. There was never any custom of a pillow and such. It was very simple. One did this for around six years.**

Q: *Dhingna* and ...?

**#18B: And something called *dhagam* that one wore.**

Q: *Dhinga* is the floor mat?

**#18B: *Dhinga* is the floor mat.**

Q: And *dhagam*?

**#18B: *Dhagam* is the cloak, something like what the [monastery] disciplinarians wear these days. One would be wearing the *zen* and *shamthap* [at all times]. In Tibet there was no cotton fabric but *nambu* ‘machine-made woolen cloth.’ The *zen*, *shamthap*, *thonga* ‘monk’s vest,’ *meyo* ‘petticoat,’ everything was made of *nambu*, which was warm. Once the *dhinga* is set, one cannot wear any footwear but walk barefoot.**

Q: Where to?

00:58:03

**#18B: If the assembly hall was here and one was staying in the village or was in the tea-making area, one cannot wear any shoes while walking about. One must always go barefoot.**

Q: Between the village and monastery?

**#18B: Yes, between [the village] and monastery.**

Q: It sounds like a very austere life, *geshe-la*.

**#18B: Yes, it was austere for six years. One had to undergo this very difficult journey. As for food, after having lunch there was never anything for the evening...[not discernible]**

Q: When you made these journeys like every 45 days to a different place, did somebody...were you with another monk or by yourself or a group of monks?

**#18B: There were many. Those that went on the *choethok* rounds consisted of over 200 monks, over 200. If you were a freshman [at the Gyumed Monastery], whether a *geshe* from [one of] the great monasteries or a lama, you had walk and observe the same [rules] like carrying [your] effects, not wearing shoes and sleeping in the assembly hall. [Everyone] was equal.**

When we were on *choethok*, Gyalpo Reting, no, not Gyalpo Reting but someone called Kusho Dhetu was there, who was also among the *choethok* and [he] did not have any special privileges but followed the same rules as the common monks. There was never any special treatment. If a newcomer who had completed *geshe lharam* ‘highest of the four education levels of *geshe*’ in the great monasteries and reincarnate lamas joined Gyumed, [he] was obliged to walk for a distance of two days or a day carrying [his] pack. There were no horses or anything.

Q: When you arrived at one of those little houses that belonged to the Gyumed, were you coming with 200 people or with just yourself or one or two other people?

01:02:18

**#18B: Yes, [the 200 monks] arrived together. Here [we] calculate [time] by the hour...if one was travelling from here to Hunsur—perhaps Hunsur is a bit too far—a time frame would be given within which to spread the *dhinga*. The *dhinga* must be spread upon reaching every new monastery.**

Q: The *dhinga*?

**#18B: The mat. The mat must be laid and at the end of the prayer assembly, you took it with you on the back. The next day when the assembly began you laid the *dhinga*. In the case of prayer cushions, every monastery had [their] own cushions, the cushion that is used below [the *dhinga*].**

Q: It was quite a large gathering that would move every 45 days, like almost 200 monks. And then who would feed all these monks?

**#18B: During the journey you ate your own [food]. If 200 monks with *dhinga* had to travel from here to a monastery in Hunsur, [we] walked in a file and along the way prepared tea in groups called *toptsang*. Each [*toptsang*] made its tea. In Tibet *pa* was the main food and**

**there was not the custom of consuming different types of vegetables. After the tea was made...you used your tea leaves. You would request a family [along the way] to make tea that [they will oblige by using their firewood. You added your own butter to the tea and ate *pa*. Then you continued the journey after paying them [the family] a little for the firewood.**

Q: When you reached the next monastery who fed [the monks] during [their] stay at this monastery?

01:04:27

**#18B: The monastery provided. However, you must carry your own supply of *tsampa* wherever you traveled. The monastery provided tea and *thukpa*. [We] ate twice a day, in the morning and at noon. You ate *pa* in the morning at 10 o'clock and then a *thukpa* around 12 o'clock and that was it [for the day]. The monastery provided *thukpa* and tea twice a day.**

Q: And the prayer ceremony, was the prayer ceremony...did many people come to this prayer ceremony?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: You mean lay people?

Q: Yes, lay people. Did many lay people come?

**#18B: No, [they] did not.**

Q: Was it only monks?

**#18B: There was not anyone but monks. When we filed past to the quarters, during such times all the laymen and women stood by the wayside.**

Q: Where were the quarters?

**#18B: At the end of the prayer assembly if [we] had to go to another [monastery, we] filed past. During such time laymen and women came to see [us]. Otherwise, there were not any [lay people] to be seen during the prayer assemblies.**

Q: Did you stay the entire time during this?

01:07:10

**#18B: Yes, until the end of six years one continued to do this. The *geshe* were obliged to do this for only one year. Having spent a number of years at the great monasteries, they engaged in the *choethok* for one year at Gyumed. There was no special treatment whether you were a lama or a *geshe* or anybody.**

Q: [They] did it for only one year?

**#18B: The *geshe* did it for only one year.**

Q: Did you do it for six years?

**#18B: We, the *sheram* had to do it for six years. There were the *karam* and *sheram*. The *karam* are the *geshe* and the *sheram* the freshmen. There were the *karam* and *sheram*. For the *karam* a year of *choethok* was sufficient while the *sheram* had to do it for six years. It was the same [for everyone].**

Q: *Geshe-la*, this form of leaving and going to the next place reminds me of stories of the Buddha and his followers who would go from one place to another, maybe teach people and maybe go to another place and count on donations of food from people who were better off or could support them. Was there...do you think there was any connection between following in the footsteps of the Buddha and what your community did?

**#18B: Yes, it is like that. It was like that in the past. Earlier if a patron, a wealthy family in Hunsur invited [the monks] to teach, [they] traveled to Hunsur where he provided food. Once that was over, [the monks] went in search of another patron. [I] think the idea was like that in the past. Later, in order to make *tsampa*, the monastery had to provide the grains. A lot of barley is required to make *tsampa*. A *choethok* stay of 15 days would require a small amount of grains, a stay of a month would require more grains than that and a stay of a month and half would require around three *bo*. A *bo* is a large [measurement] in Tibet and such was rationed and then ground into *tsampa*.**

Q: Did [you] have to make the *tsampa* yourself?

**#18B: Yes, while the monastery provided tea and *thukpa*. The monastery distributed the grains with which you made *tsampa* and carried it wherever you traveled.**

Q: *Geshe-la*, if you moved every 45 days, in my calculation that's about eight times a year. So were you going to a brand new place each time eight times in a year and then the next year brand new places? Or was there a repetition of some of the places?

01:12:04

**#18B: There are some [*choethok*] which lasted for only 15 days while some may last a month and some just 15 days. Some may last just a week. [We] moved numerous times. [We] visited the monasteries of Sera, Drepung and Gaden, and then a week or two at the Potala Palace. [We] conducted prayer assemblies at the Tsuglakhang for around 15 days. It was always like that.**

Q: [You] visited numerous places. Was there a repetition of a certain place? For instance, if [you] have been to Hunsur, was it visited again during the year?

**#18B: There were just the fixed places [we] visited in a year and none other. [We] visited these places in a year and this was followed the next year.**

Q: Was any place visited twice or three times within a year?

**#18B: There is one place called Dechen that was visited once in summer and again in winter. These days the Chinese call Dechen as Taktshen. It is located near Gaden. After crossing the river of Lhasa you arrived at a large town just before reaching Gaden. The ruins [of the residence] of the leader of Taktse is located there.**

Q: Yes?

**#18B: There is the *zue* [?]. Close by this is a monastery, which was visited both during summer and winter.**

Q: What's the name of the monastery, *geshe-la*?

**#18B: It is called Taktse. We called it Dechen Yarkyi and Dechen Tonkyi and visited this monastery twice, in summer and winter.**

Q: Was this the only one?

01:13:58

**#18B: Yes, only this one, and the rest just once.**

Q: Since you did that for six years, *geshe-la*, what was the hardest part of that required the most commitment and strength to do of that kind of moving instead of having your home in one place? What was the most difficult part of having to journey so frequently?

**#18B: The most difficult part was during winter when [we] went on *choethok* to Gaden [Monastery]. It took two days and you developed blisters on the foot, as one did not possess good shoes. It was the leather shoes of Tibet and there were no Chinese shoes available. The hard surface caused discomfort and not being used to covering great distances, you developed blisters and such.**

Q: Where in Gaden?

**#18B: The Gaden *gunchoe* 'winter dharma session' is held in winter and [we] left after the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> lunar month and spent 15 days there.**

Q: At Gaden [Monastery]?

**#18B: At Gaden.**

Q: I thought that you were not allowed to wear shoes.

01:16:10

**#18B: One can wear shoes on the journeys but once the *dhinga* is placed, wherever one walked one could not wear shoes.**

Q: You said you did that for six years and then what happened to you?

**#18B: And then [I] came to India. It was '59. [I] came on exile to India in '59.**

Q: Can you give us an account of how you escaped? Tell us what happened.

**#18B: We heard the news that Lhasa was lost when we were on *choethok* at Shog in Phenpo. Numerous senior monks of Gyumed Monastery arrived saying that the Chinese bombarded the Potala Palace such that it must have been destroyed and numerous mortar shells were fired on Lhasa killing a great number of people. When many of them arrived, we dare not remain in Shog and crossed the river into Lhoka.**

**There was a monastery belonging to Gyumed at Lhora Sanga Guthok in Lhoka. [We] did not normally visit it on *choethok*. Gyumed [Monastery] took care of this branch monastery and there was the practice of Gyumed deputing an abbot [to this monastery]. [We] wished to go to this monastery ignorant about the intensity of the bombardment in Lhasa. While in Lhoka [we] heard the deteriorating situation in Lhasa and everyone was forced to leave.**

Q: What happened to you? Tell me what happened to you.

01:19:27

**#18B: We were on the way hoping to reach there [monastery] from Lhoka. After crossing the river one reached Lamosisi and then Yarlung Phodang through Gyamaru. [We] had crossed the river and arrived at Yarlung Phodang where the *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force] asked the young [monks] to join the force and the older ones to continue the journey. I was among the younger ones and joined the force.**

Q: What happened to you next?

**#18B: Before Yarlung Phodang one reached Tsethang Gonpori. When we came down the mountain at Gonpori ...The Chinese had established a military base at Tsethang Gonpori by digging bunkers in the mountain and many Chinese were within. The *Chushi Gangdrug* was afraid that the Chinese would fire cannons from there. However, we walked through it. There was time to scamper when shells were fired because they could be seen as they fell.**

**However, when machine guns were fired...There was a monk with us who was carrying a pack on the back that lay in tatters from the firing but nobody was hurt. [We] were told, "Do not go near the cliffs because there could be a landslide brought on by the shelling and kill [you]." But we came down without any hesitation even as the Chinese fired from within the mountain.**

**There were numerous Tibetans then. Not only us but there were [monks] from Gaden and villagers. There was an exodus. Everybody arrived and camped at Yarlung Phodang. Then [I] joined the force but did not get to stay long. [I] was deployed as a sentry but before [I] could go there, the Chinese arrived.**

Q: Where?

01:21:37

**#18B:** At Dag, it was at Dag. Not just us, there were many people from Kham, soldiers. However, very few were armed though there were a large number of people. Those [leaders of] *Chushi Gangdrug* were not there. [They] had deployed [us] as soldiers but without weapons [we] were useless. Before we could leave, soldiers stationed there were fleeing towards [us].

Then without spying even a single Chinese, we fled from there directly. [We] fled directly to Diguthang. However, whether collected from the people [or elsewhere], the *Chushi Gangdrug* had stocks of grains, meat, *tsampa* and wheat flour that they distributed. They were on flight and leaving the stock would mean the Chinese would consume them.

Q: And from Diguthang where did you go? Is that in India?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: No, in Tibet.

**#18B:** During the journey from Diguthang [we] came upon the group of *Chushi Gangdrug* resistance fighters that had escorted His Holiness the Dalai Lama to India. They were around 200 led by Tenpa Dhargyal who hailed from my region and is mentioned in His Holiness' biography. They had been to escort His Holiness to India and had been told by His Holiness to go back to Tibet. So they were returning while the majority of the Tibetans continued to flee. His Holiness had asked them to go back. They possessed cannons and guns and resisted [the Chinese] for short periods letting the Tibetans without arms to pass by, and brought up the rear. Hence, nothing bad happened.

Q: Were you among those people? Were you in the group that the *Chushi Gangdrug* could then help escape?

**#18B:** Yes, we were fleeing because we did not possess weapons. Actually, when [we] reached Yarlung Phodang a large number of guns had been received with external assistance. Some guns had broken while being dropped from planes. These were being mended and were to be distributed to the soldiers. However, the weapons arrived late and Tibet was lost sooner, so [the weapons] could not be put to much use.

Q: The Chinese arrived sooner...?

01:26:49

**#18B:** The Chinese arrived sooner. It seems a large quantity of weapons came from abroad, helped by the United States. There was not enough time to distribute these to the men.

Q: And then what happened, *geshe-la*? What happened to you next?

**#18B:** And then [we] fled through Tsona.

Q: [You] were escaping and was it at night?

**#18B: Yes, [I] was escaping.**

Q: Where did [you] arrive?

**#18B: When we arrived near Tsona...His Holiness the Dalai Lama had left through Shayul in the region of the Monpa. The route there was good. However, the Chinese became aware of this and had captured the whole of Tsona. When we arrived there was no way through Tsona. So [we] took another route.**

**“A small group of Chinese, around 10-20 passed by,” said some nomads. There were many nomads as [we] were traveling through nomadic regions. “There were not many Chinese though they did pass by. [They] were carrying arms.” Then when we passed through this region, it seems the Chinese were up in the mountains.**

**A large number of *Chushi Gangdrug* men were following us. They were at the rear telling [the people], “There are not many Chinese while the Tibetans are many, nearly a thousand including monks from the great monasteries and lay people. None have any weapons. We will stay back. In case [the Chinese] fire, we will retaliate. Then you must run. Otherwise, [we] will not fire now because there will be many casualties. We are a large number while the Chinese are not many. They are up on the mountain pass. They may not fire but if they do, we will resist them.”**

01:29:07

**Then we left. [The *Chushi Gangdrug* men] found all the Chinese sleeping on the pass. [The Chinese] did not fire any cannons or machine guns. Later, they [*Chushi Gangdrug*] arrived [following us] and had not been fired upon. That was because of the small number of Chinese. Had they fired, the *Chushi Gangdrug* men would have destroyed [them].**

**Therefore, numerous people could escape, perhaps several thousand managed to escape. [We] had not yet reached the Mangola pass. Then more and more...later this route was also...Shayul is one route, the second is the one we took and the third is Mangola. There are three routes out of Tibet.**

Q: Shayul...?

**#18B: Shayul is one.**

Q: Mangola.

**#18B: It is Mangola. What is the region we came through? It is called something. Last year when [I] was in Mon Tawang, [I recognized] the route we had taken. [We] had come walking throughout.**

Q: Do you remember the day that you made it from...that you left Tibet and came to India? Do you remember how you felt that day?

01:31:54

**#18B: It was around the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tibetan lunar month. It is the Tibetan month because no one knew the Western calendar then. The Tibetan calendar was being used. It was somewhere in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tibetan lunar month that [we] reached Indian Territory. We arrived near Mon Tawang and found an Indian post. They did not allow [us] through. There were *Chushi Gangdrug* and in general many Tibetans. The Chinese did not come there. Later, it was said that [we] could enter India as refugees through Mon Tawang and that is where [we] arrived.**

**The leader of the *Chushi Gangdrug*, someone called Andrug Jindha [Andrug Gonpo Tashi] and his group went ahead and then all Tibetans could do so. However, all weapons had to be surrendered here. If one carried guns or swords, these had to be surrendered to the Indian Government. [The refugees] were let through without any arms. After His Holiness the Dalai Lama had arrived, the Indian Government treated [the refugees] well. There were not many sentries at the post, perhaps 15-20 but they would not let [us] through.**

Q: *Geshe-la*, there's much more to tell about your life but you've been working very hard to recount a long life story. So maybe we can conclude by just asking you one or two questions.

**#18B: [Nods]**

Q: So *geshe-la*, how did it feel to share your story with us, which we are going to share with the world? And do you think that's a good idea to gather the stories of the old people of Tibet?

01:35:01

**#18B: [I] think it is excellent. It is good. Really the Chinese...Interviewing the elders that have actually witnessed, observed and experienced everything will be very beneficial for the future. Once a person is dead there is nothing left to say. To be able to do this before death is very good, in general for the dharma and politics of Tibet, and in particular it is very good of you to make this effort.**

Q: *Geshe-la*, what would be your prayer for the Tibetan people and for the Chinese people?

**#18B: Generally, His Holiness the Dalai Lama always talks about the entire sentient beings. There is not any great difference between Tibetans and Chinese. In general, because of the power of might, Tibet was forcefully [invaded and Tibetans] driven out at gunpoint. However, His Holiness the Dalai Lama advises [us] not to be angry. Since all sentient beings are the same, so that is it. Otherwise, if one were to dwell over the matter, this is incredible and the foreigners can observe that [the Chinese] drove [the Tibetans] out using utter force.**

Q: I'm going to ask you one more time just to be clear and sure how you still feel about this but if this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would this be a problem for you?

**#18B: There cannot be any problem. There will be no problem. It is best if this can be broadcast to the world. This is a real story about suffering under the Chinese. [I] do not think there will be any problem for me.**

Q: Thank you very much for sharing your story with us.

**#18B: Thank you.**

END OF INTERVIEW