

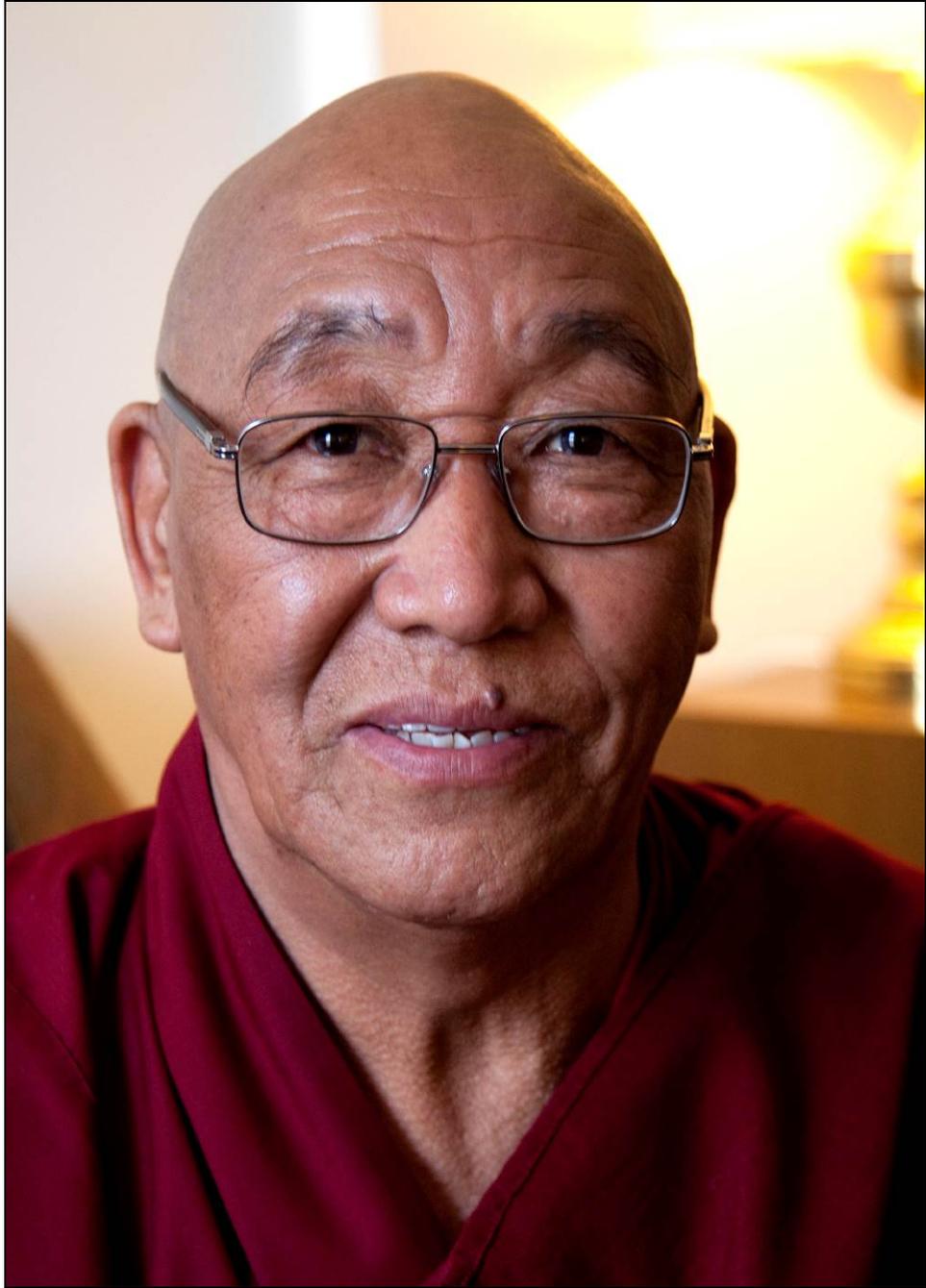
# **Tibet Oral History Project**

**Interview #1C – Ngawang Tsultrim Thepo, Geshe  
February 21, 2012**

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# TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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## INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #1C
2. Interviewee: Ngawang Tsultrim Thepo, Geshe
3. Age: 72
4. Date of Birth: 1940
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Phenpo
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1960
9. Date of Interview: February 21, 2012
10. Place of Interview: Private office, San Leandro, California, USA
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 56 min
12. Interviewer: Martin Newman
13. Interpreter: Tashi Wangchuk
14. Videographer: Tashi Wangchuk
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

### **Biographical Information:**

Geshe Ngawang Tsultrim Thepo was born in a village called Phenpa located near to Lhasa. His family farmed barley, peas, mustard and wheat and never sold the produce because villagers did not use money. He reminisces about how wonderful Tibet was because of the freedom to travel and natural beauty. He joined the monastery at age 15 and remembers his feeling of happiness when he donned a monk's robe for the first time. Monastic life was not easy; there were many chores for novice monks and a lot of scriptures to be memorized. Geshe Ngawang Tsultrim was elected as the private steward of Thepo Rinpoche, whose teacher was Lathi Rinpoche.

Geshe Ngawang Tsultrim had little exposure to the Chinese occupation until a message was sent to his monastery explaining that it was to be bombed by the Chinese and His Holiness the Dalai Lama had fled from Lhasa. Although many monks from the monastery ran into the hills and later returned, Geshe Ngawang Tsultrim continued on the escape to India with Thepo Rinpoche and Lathi Rinpoche. They witnessed many others being captured by the Chinese. After reaching India they were sent to Buxar for a few years, where many died from tuberculosis and suicide.

Geshe Ngawang Tsultrim later became the private secretary for Lathi Rinpoche and stayed with him at Namgyal Monastery in Dharamsala, India. He is now in charge of nearly 20 young monks at Gaden Monastery in Mundgod, India. He describes the daily routine there and also the differences between monasteries in exile and those in Tibet.

### **Topics Discussed:**

Utsang, childhood memories, monastic life, escape experiences, life as a refugee in India.

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## Interview #1C

**Interviewee: Ngawang Tsultrim Thepo, Geshe**

**Age: 72, Sex: Male**

**Interviewer: Martin Newman**

**Interview Date: February 21, 2012**

Question: Before we actually do the interview there's a few questions I have to ask just so that you understand what we are doing here and how this information is going to be used and then we'll get into the interview.

[Discontinuity in recording]

Question: Please tell us your name.

**Interviewee #1C: Ngawang Tsultrim. My name is Ngawang Tsultrim.**

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama has asked us to record your experiences...

[Discontinuity in recording]

Q: ...and the rest of the world.

**#1C: Thank you very much. I whole heartedly appreciate your helping us in accordance with the advice of His Holiness. We cannot do anything from our side due to lack of education and knowledge. I am very happy for your help and request you to continue to do the same.**

**There is nothing we can do but pray—pray to God that Tibet should become independent soon. Besides prayers, there's no other way.**

Q: Your memories will help us to document the true history, culture and beliefs of the Tibetan people.

**#1C: [Nods] Thank you.**

Q: Do you give your permission for the Tibet Oral History Project to use this interview?

00:02:28

**#1C: Yes, of course, as you are doing this work for the cause of Tibet.**

Q: Thank you for offering to share your story with us.

**#1C: Thank you.**

Q: During this interview if you wish to take a break or stop at anytime, please let me know.

**#1C: Okay.**

Q: If you do not wish to answer a question or talk about something, let me know.

00:03:15

**#1C: Okay. [Nods]**

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

**#1C: I have a wish to visit Tibet. If the Chinese see this, there is a chance of certain problems arising these days but that's okay by me. Since this is for the cause of Tibet, I have no objection though my four siblings live there in the village and I have hopes of meeting them. And seeing such footages pose a great danger.**

Q: Okay. That's good to know. [To interpreter] So just to remind him, he doesn't have to talk about anything that he doesn't want to talk.

**#1C: Okay. [Nods]**

Q: We can also do it so that this interview will not be published or shown for...until after 5 years or 10 years or whatever is...[not discernible]

[Interpreter interprets question as]: This film may take about 5, 6 or perhaps 10 years in the making.

00:04:59

**#1C: [Laughs] Okay, that's right and in that case, my life may not last that long. So there's no problem.**

Q: We wish you a long life.

**#1C: Thank you. Thank you.**

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

**#1C: Thank you. From my side I would like to thank you whole heartedly for your coming here today to do this work for the cause of Tibet.**

Q: It's our honor to do so.

00:05:48

**#1C: Thank you. You have a lot of work but despite it, your taking interest and working for the cause of Tibet is highly laudable.**

Q: It's very good use of our time.

**#1C: Thank you.**

Q: Okay, we can begin.

**#1C: Okay. Thank you.**

Q: Can you tell us your name?

**#1C: [I] am called Ngawang Tsultrim. Ngawang Tsultrim.**

Q: Where were you born?

**#1C: [I] was born in Utsang [Province] in Tibet; close to Lhasa. The birthplace is called Phenpo.**

Q: How many people were in your family?

00:07:02

**#1C: Earlier there were seven siblings from the same set of parents. Around 15-16 members, including my parents and older sister used to live together in the same family in the village. [We] lived as one family unit in Tibet. I have seven siblings from the same set of parents. Including older sister and others, there were 15-16 members living together during the time of the old system in Tibet. [We lived] in the village. [We] were farmers.**

**Two of my older siblings are no more. Four are still living in the village in Tibet. They are farmers.**

Q: Do they still live in Phenpo?

**#1C: Yes, in Phenpo. One sister is in Lhasa. Except for this sister, the rest are in Phenpo— younger sister.**

Q: What did your parents do? What kind of work did they do?

00:08:18

**#1C: [They] were farmers. They worked in the fields. Farming was the only work in the village.**

Q: And what kinds of things did they farm?

**#1C: [They] grew barley, peas, mustard and wheat. Barley, peas, mustard and wheat were there in Tibet. They farmed these for consumption and also potatoes and radish during the summer.**

Q: Did they trade them in the town or what did they do with the crop?

**#1C: [The crops] were not for sale. They were stored for our consumption during the entire year and there was no custom of selling grains. Except in Lhasa, we in the villages in Tibet never had any use of money. There was no use of money, except for *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley.' [People] did not go from place to place for trade. It was for [our] own consumption. There were also animals.**

Q: And as a child, did you participate in helping your parents with their farming duties?

00:10:08

**#1C: I did when I was small, like grazing cows, grazing horses, carrying the harvested crops [indicates carrying load on back], cleaning cow dung. [I] did a lot when [I] was small...have done a lot.**

Q: When you weren't working, what kind of games did you play?

**#1C: In our village was the game of *apchu*. *Apchu* is a joint. Is it here? [Points to knees and indicates joints by moving fingers]. A variety of games were played with that like hitting it on the wall and painting it red or yellow-red or blue. This was especially made for the children to play with. [Children] played with it mainly during *Losar* 'Tibetan New Year.' Then there was hacky sack made from birds' feathers. Children played different games, but [I] have forgotten some of the names.**

Q: One was hacky sack and what was the other you said?

00:11:40

**#1C: *Apchu*, the game of *apchu*. You know the bone? A lot of games were played with that.**

00:12:23

**#1C: Then there were wrestling and *nyartsen* 'tug-of-war.' A rope was tied to the neck and tugged from behind. There was also long jump played during the summer season.**

Q: What was the landscape like around where you lived? Was it flat or was it mountains? What was it?

**#1C: It was mountainous. The mountains looked barren without any forest cover. All the mountains were barren. There were bushes but no large trees. The mountains looked red and wood were scarce.**

Q: When you misbehaved, did your parents punish you?

00:14:00

**#1C: [The punishment] was beating. Parents hit with sticks. It was the Tibetan custom to beat a lot, but there was no bad feeling. Even monks were beaten a lot. The teacher beat if one did not study the scriptures well. There was the custom of beating during the prayer**

**assembly but nobody ever said that beating was bad and nor did anyone speak against it. I was a bit naughty.**

Q: Do you feel it was beneficial to you?

**#1C: Very much so and I appreciate it. It was on account of the beatings from my teacher that I do not get angry these days and I appreciate it. [I] offer prayers. Parents molded us for our own benefit and I offer prayers for them. [I] believe that what I am today is because of my parents.**

Q: With such a large family, did you sometimes feel lost in the crowd?

00:15:57

**#1C: Not at all. Everyone was loved. The children were loved and they performed their duties. Everyone lived amicably. My father had my mother, her sibling and another sibling.**

**[To interpreter] Is it okay to speak about this Tibetan thing? Is it fine to speak about father keeping three wives?**

**My father lived with my mother and her siblings. He was the husband of three sisters. And they [mother's sisters] too had children.**

**[To interpreter] If it should not be said, don't say it.**

Q: Would you say that your family was a wealthy family or a poor family or what was its economic situation?

**#1C: Initially when I was born, it was good. After becoming a monk and when I went back home to visit, the family had become poor. The family situation had greatly deteriorated.**

Q: What do you mean "when you went back to your home after..."?

[Interpreter translates question as]: Did you have a hand in the economic decline? Did it deteriorate because of your absence?

00:17:41

**#1C: No, it was not like that. There is this thing called "luck" for the family and bad harvest. There should be good harvest in the village. Heavy decline is also on account of poor rainfall in a certain year. There was water scarcity in our village. It looks like that was the reason. On the other hand, it seems like the father of the family was incapable. Usually it is the father who should be responsible. While the mother of the family took care of the fields and home, the economic onus was on the father in Tibet. Perhaps the father was not competent.**

Q: To come back for a moment to what you said about polygamy, was it common for men in your village to have several wives?

**#1C: It occurred at times thought it wasn't very common. It did happen. When it happened, we considered it good because everyone lived together and there were many hands to work. Many workers were needed to work on the farm in the village throughout the seasons and it was considered good to have many hands. We didn't consider it as bad.**

Q: When did you notice that started to change?

00:20:02

**#1C: [I] hadn't given much attention. I did not give any notice to this. In general I think it is good for everyone to live together in one home. [I] think it is good. [I] did not give it any notice.**

Q: Were there things as a child that you remember being unhappy about or things that you did not like or things that made you sad?

**#1C: There are no saddest moments as such that occurred. [I] feel it was very pleasant. Even now [I] miss my country as [I] realize how wonderful it was because of the surroundings, illnesses rarely occurred and one didn't need permits to travel anywhere. There was a lot of freedom then. Not that there was much reason to travel as one lived in the village or the monastery. [I] did not face any problems. But when '59 happened, we obviously faced problems. Other than that, [I] did not face any problems earlier and it was a happy time. Yes, it was an extremely happy time; the weather was extremely good. Though it was cold it was manageable. I did not face any problems.**

Q: Do you ever dream of your childhood home?

00:22:18

**#1C: [I] do not have dreams. I do not have any dreams and cannot even recall the names of the mountains, streets or fields of my village in Tibet. I have lived longer in India. Though [I] lived for 20 years there, I was in the village until age 8 or 9 before joining the monastery. Then [I] lived in the monastery and might have visited home once or twice and that too only for short durations. [I] do not know the names of the streets and mountains of the village I was born. So I have spent the major part of my life in India—about 52 years.**

Q: You said you went into a monastery, I presume when you were quite young. What age were you when you were sent to the monastery?

**#1C: Me? I think I was about 15 years old when I became a monk.**

Q: Were your brothers and sisters also sent to a monastery or just some of you?

00:23:50

**#1C: My older brother was a monk and so was a younger one. They are no longer monks.**

Q: How did your parents decide who was going to go to the monastery and who was not?

**#1C: There are some parents who ask [of their children], "Would you like to become a monk?" The answer could be, "I wish to become a monk." Some parents speak to a teacher and put the child in the teacher's care at the monastery. Various ways were prevalent. For some it was the wish of the children and in other cases, the parents believed that making [the child] a monk at the monastery benefitted him in this life as well as the next. So, the parents placed him in the right path. That was the Tibetan tradition for putting [the child] in the monastery. It was one's karma if one could sustain his monkhood or not.**

Q: Did your parents see in you any gift or any, I guess, special orientation towards religious life that they said, "Oh, yes, you must go to the monastery. This is something you will benefit from."

00:26:13

**#1C: It doesn't seem so. Mother spoke to the teacher and made me a monk. [The monastery] was at quite a distance away. A day's horse ride and fording a river brought one to the monastery, which was not the small village monastery. [I] was sent to the Tsepel Gonpa. The teacher arrived [home] and took me there on horseback.**

Q: You were 15. What...A lot of children go into the monastery earlier; why do you think your parents waited until you were 15 to send you?

**#1C: [I] lived in the village doing some work at home. Yes, at home.**

Q: And this was before or after the Chinese came?

00:27:55

**#1C: I'd become a monk earlier and the Chinese came after that. [I] cannot recall the year, but the Chinese arrived after [I] became a monk.**

Q: And when you went to the monastery, did you feel like "Oh, I'm so happy to be here!" or "Yes, this is where I belong" or were you saying "What am I doing here? I don't like it here." What was your initial reaction?

**#1C: A monk relative was there. He wasn't my sibling, but mother's brother. Since he was there, I felt happy knowing that my maternal uncle was present. [I] felt happy. And then I was given new clothes, the monk's red robes. The white *chupa* 'traditional coat' was removed and [I] put on the monk's robes and the feeling was one of happiness. A relative was there but he didn't live for long. He passed away within a year or two. I felt sad then. [Earlier] I felt happy to be given new clothes and knowing that [I] had become a monk.**

Q: It sounds like you adapted to monastery life quite easily.

00:29:54

**#1C: [I] faced some problems in memorizing the scriptures. One had to start right from learning the alphabet and there was a lot of memorizing to do in Tibet. Except for memorization, there were no debate lessons in the local monastery. One had to memorize a great deal; there was no *Sangwa Dhuepa* but *Jigjay*, *Ngori*, and texts like that, which had to**

**be memorized. I possessed poor memory power in order to memorize these. So [I] faced problems due to my poor memory power.**

Q: Yes, that's this...

**#1C: Yes, memorize. [Moves hand across to indicate reading the scriptures]**

Q: Did you miss your family when you first went?

00:30:50

**#1C: [Nods] A little bit. [I] missed mother the most. It was far away and the teacher would not allow me back. It was a day's journey. One had to cross the river and go far away.**

Q: And the monastery was near Lhasa or in another direction? Where was it located?

**#1C: It was closer to Gaden [Monastery] near Lhasa. [It was located] beyond Gaden. Usually when we walked on foot, it took two days from Phenpo. One spent a night in Dechen to rest and then one arrived in Lhasa from Dechen. If one started out early at the cock's crow, one could cover the journey even in one day. You know the cock's crow—if one started out then and walked fast, one reached there in the evening. That is, if one was walking on foot.**

Q: And the name of that monastery is again?

00:32:12

**#1C: It's called Tsesep, meaning one that is among the *tsema* 'thorns' because it was located among thorns. It's called Tsesep.**

Q: And is that monastery still in existence?

00:32:23

**#1C: The monastery was slightly damaged [during the Chinese invasion]. The *ladang* 'grand lama's residence' and the assembly hall were completely destroyed. However, the monastery's base structure stands. The assembly hall, the *ladang* and such, you know the residence of the *chanzo* 'treasurer or business manager' who took care of the monks' sustenance was demolished. Our monastery was like a pastoral farmer. It raised animals like yaks and *dri* 'female yak' and the monastery also possessed land as it must feed the monks. Our monastery was somewhat strange.**

**The monastery was very pleasant. There were hills of meadows and on the upper regions were forests and rocky hills. It was extremely lovely if you could visit it. During summer, water flowed very close by though in wintertime one travelled a greater distance to fetch water. It was very pleasant.**

Q: So, you went in the monastery, um, let's see, what happens? Are you assigned first chores to do or you were assigned to a particular lama to study with or you go to a class? What does a new monk...what's the orientation for a new monk? How do they get into monastery life?

**#1C:** Initially there was the *shungtel* 'institution duty' that had to be carried out in the monastery, like sweeping and dusting. Likewise there was the duty of serving as the temple's caretaker and such. There were many such *shungtel* that were assigned from time to time. These were like *sartel* 'newcomer duty' when one joined initially. There were many such assignments in the monastery. Once that was completed, the main objective was to memorize the scriptures. There were many tests that one had to undertake and an annual examination. The examination was not held at our monastery but at Lamo where our leader was the Lamo Tsangpa. The examination was taken in the presence of [monks from] three monasteries. Giving this examination was considered a high point.

Q: What was the script that you were memorizing?

00:36:14

**#1C:** There were many different scriptures and the main was called *Jigjay Lha Chusum* and then the *Kunrig*. There were many chapters in the *Kunrig*. There were numerous scriptures. There were numerous scriptures that needed to be memorized and [I] memorized those. The main scriptures were *Jigjay* and *Kunrig*, but not *Sangwa Dhuepa*. *Sangwa Dhuepa* was not memorized; only *Jigjay* and *Kunrig* which contained many chapters.

Q: And this is part of the...which sect? Is this Geluk or Sakyapa or...which sect did your monastery belong to?

**#1C:** It's Geluk.

Q: When you study this, did it have any meaning more than words or did you feel any spiritual sense or...when did it start having particular...personal meaning for you?

00:37:54

**#1C:** Once in India [I] received many teachings from His Holiness the Dalai Lama. After receiving many teachings, I began to practice, but while in Tibet one was young and did not have that much awareness other than memorization. After arriving in Dharamsala, His Holiness gave many teachings and [I] started to understand the importance of practicing and doing meditation. So [I] went into retreat a few times though not much; meditating on *Neljorma* and *Miktsema* retreats. Other than that I was involved in serving my teacher, like cooking and cleaning. At that time there were two *rinpoche* 'reincarnate lamas' and only me to serve them. So, that was how [I] survived in India. Yes, that is it.

Q: Did you have...when you were in Tibet and in the monastery, did you have any spiritual experiences which perhaps surprised you or just one day you were walking and you had this moment in which you understood something?

**#1C:** [I] experienced nothing like that. No, nothing. Even now I do not have realization. Realization is not something easy [to achieve].

Q: Describe when you met the Dalai Lama or what was transmitted from the Dalai Lama seems to be something similar to what I am talking about?

00:40:02

**#1C: It is fortunate to receive the teachings of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Without accumulating merit, it is very difficult to find realization. One must accumulate a lot of merit right from your previous births. I think it's difficult to achieve realization all of a sudden. In general I maintain a good heart, am cordial to all, humble and give respect. I practice this wholeheartedly all the time and otherwise, I am neither smart in giving teachings to others nor do I possess the proficiency to teach. My main practice is to be a good, just and well-natured human being. That is my main practice.**

Q: Going back to life in the monastery, did everybody get along well or was there ever any conflict in the monastery or was it pretty much a happy group of monks?

**#1C: It was extremely good. Though it contained a group of single men, energetic single men the relation was extremely friendly. Those monks of '59 that initially lived in Buxar [refugee camp for monks in West Bengal] were so cordial. There were monks from the three great monasteries [Sera, Drepung and Gaden Monasteries] and monks from various sects in Buxar and they were truly so cordial. Now their [monks from Buxar] numbers have dwindled. Yes, everyone was so friendly. I used to be amazed at the camaraderie of these single men. It might be due to the spiritual energy. [To interpreter] Please relate this.**

**It is possible for little [frictions] to occur. That did happen.**

Q: And how would that be resolved?

00:42:36

**#1C: In order to resolve...how should I say it? If it was a serious offense, we had our laws. The issue was resolved in keeping with the monastery's laws. [The penalty] meted out could be doing prostrations, performing the task of cooking. These sort of things happened. After arriving in India, these days there is the punishment of serving a long kitchen duty. If one committed a grave crime, one could be expelled from the community, being expelled from the monk community. That is, if one committed a grave crime.**

**If one committed a grave felony, there were serious punishments. If the crime was of a serious nature, like stealing, there could be beatings.**

Q: And who would do that?

00:44:06

**#1C: There were authorities like disciplinarians and their assistants. There were many monks who had the responsibility of maintaining discipline.**

Q: I visited many monasteries in Tibet myself and many times in many places there was no electricity. It was very cold. The life was very, we would say, spartan. Did you ever suffer from

that? Did you ever feel that the cold was too much or the conditions were so harsh it really caused you suffering?

**#1C: Suffering...well, in those days [I] was poor. The clothes were thin. We were poor and the winter was very cold. As soon as one spit, it turned into ice. When water was hauled on the back, it turned into ice where it spilt.**

[Points to clothes]. The clothes were also thin. [I] did face some problems. There were some problems then. However, that was during the winter and summer was better. It was pleasant. There were some problems with clothes and such in the winter-in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Tibetan lunar months. The weather was very cold. It was very cold.

00:46:00

One could not avoid memorizing the scriptures just because it was cold. Even though it was cold, the teachers made [the students] memorize the texts. One must memorize and attend prayer assemblies whenever a session took place. Unlike now, we could not wear shirts or caps, which was the Geluk tradition. The shoes were also not warm. They were somewhat cold. However, one managed and at present [I] do not think that that was bad. That was how it was with the country.

Q: Was the monastery...were there restrictions on eating meat? Was it vegetarian monastery or could you eat anything?

**#1C: In our monasteries in India, it is against the rule to provide meat to the monk assembly. One may use it a little privately. The monastic institution cannot provide meat to the monk assembly. People say that a lot of meat is consumed in Tibet, but when I lived at the local monastery in the village, meat was very scarce. Of course, it was available in Lhasa because it is a city.**

Though my family in the village owned goats and sheep, the parents did not kill. When the nomads arrived in autumn, they [the parents] bought a little fatty meat which was used. Other than that, the goats and sheep at home were not killed. Meat was very rarely eaten. Butter was used because one owned cows. Milk was mainly for churning butter. [Meat] could not be consumed; one might eat it privately but wasn't [provided] by the monastic institution. Even now it remains the same in all the three great monasteries. Meat cannot be consumed [provided] by the institution.

Q: So now it's all vegetarian or has it become less vegetarian?

00:48:37

**#1C: It's not like that. There are people who consume it privately.**

Q: How about in the community kitchen?

**#1C: It is not allowed to be eaten in the prayer assembly. Only vegetarian food is provided.**

Q: Was there any food that when you are in the monastery you couldn't have that you craved or dreamed of—some special treat that you just didn't have?

00:49:09

**#1C: I wasn't aware of any such feeling. After we'd arrived [in India] in '59, initially our food was very poor. The food was poor while in Buxar. However, presently it's very good [in the monastery] in the Mundgod Settlement [south India]. Tibetan tea is served in the morning, which contains butter and is very rich. Likewise for the bread, the standard mixture is a kilogram of oil and a kilogram of sugar for every 10 kilograms of wheat flour, which means that for every 100 kilograms, its 10 kilograms [of oil and sugar]. Such a breakfast is served in the morning. For lunch it's a *powa* 'quarter bread.' A kilogram [of wheat flour] makes four *powa*, along with tea and vegetable. Rice and lentils are served for dinner.**

**Food is very good presently compared to the early days. Earlier [food] was very sub-standard. Food was very poor then and the older monks have had only rice and lentils. If there was work to do that day, there was breakfast, but otherwise there wasn't anything to eat. Lunch was provided but breakfast was just a cup of tea. Now the food that is served [in the monastery] is very fine.**

Q: When did you become aware of the Chinese? You went into the monastery when you were 15 and how long were you there before you became aware of the Chinese presence in some way?

**#1C: [I] wasn't aware of anything until the year '59. When we heard that His Holiness the Dalai Lama had left for India from Norbulinka in '59 and we made our escape in the night, we were terrified during the journey, just by the utterance of [the word] "Chinese." It was terrifying. Earlier to that [I] did not see anything bad as they hadn't inflicted any suffering on me personally, but were offering help and many other things. [I] did not feel anything [untoward].**

**Only in the year '59 when events occurred in Lhasa and His Holiness left and many of us fled, did I finally realize what the Chinese were. [Our] country was invaded and it's been 52-53 years since then. It's sad. Yes, that's it. Earlier the Chinese did not seem bad. More so, they gave goodies to the children and stuffed them with candies up until here [touches mid chest]. The Chinese gave away a lot of candies during *Losar* 'Tibetan New Year.' They were deceiving. They deceived by giving sweets and being very affectionate with the children. They were very loving and that was their policy.**

Q: How old were you when you first became aware of the Chinese?

00:53:06

**#1C: It was understood that the Chinese were outsiders and that they'd come from China. [I] was aware of that. During the flight in '59, I could hear the Chinese gun shots and likewise witnessed people being captured just as we were fleeing. [I] have experienced such things. [I] knew 100 percent that they were bad when we fled but one was helpless. We suffered a lot during the escape journey; suffered immensely during the journey. [We] suffered a great deal when we fled through the tribal lands.**

Q: So initially...I guess I'm just trying to get a timeline in my head. If the Chinese initially came in 1949 and there was a 10-year period in which, as you say, initially they were...they gave sweets and they didn't bother you very much and then it became bad in a certain way, I guess when did you or what did you notice when they stopped...when it turned from giving sweets to something else. What actually were they doing? What was happening?

**#1C: They expressed so much about having come to help the people.**

**Yes, it is heartbreaking as to how the Chinese have invaded our country. [I] continue to be sad. Having invaded the country and despite His Holiness the Dalai Lama making many compromises and putting forth the Middle Way, they still don't heed. They do not heed to anything. This make us feel very sad.**

**The number of people who arrived [in India] in '59 has dwindled and there is a whole new generation coming up. If not for the new generation, those who reached here are no more. There are only 50-odd monks [who arrived in '59] left in the monastery. Some *khangtsen* [a smaller community within a monastery, in which monks of one geographical area live] are empty except for a few new ones. The people of '59 are no more. The Chinese are the root cause for invading Tibet and bringing us to this stage. It is heart rending.**

Q: You personally were pretty much removed from any bad experiences until you decided to leave. Is that what you are saying?

00:56:53

**#1C: I did not think then [that the Chinese were bad prior to '59]. There was no political involvement then and also the Chinese did not do anything bad. Since they hadn't done anything bad, [I] did not feel anything. One lived in the monastery without [hearing] any political news. At the monastery one concentrated on the scriptures. Besides I was young then and did not have much awareness.**

Q: How did that decision come about since you're living fairly quietly in your monastery and events outside are taking place, who made the decision to...that you should leave?

**#1C: It was each one's immediate [decision] once the news that His Holiness had left came about. Initially, the majority [of the monks] planned to hide around Lhoka and then return [to the monastery]. That was my plan. Our plan was to hide up in the hills and then come back. Initially it was never the plan to flee to India.**

**When Lhasa fell to the Chinese and His Holiness left, we planned to hide in the mountains carrying *tsampa*, things to eat and blankets and then return. Subsequently [we] got further and further away and into the tribal region and then India. That was my idea, but each one had his own plan. I thought I'd hide in the mountains and return. We didn't make plans of coming to India: there was nothing to think about then.**

Q: Was there someone in your monastery that said, "The situation is getting bad. We should go into the mountains and wait and see what happens?" or did you decide that on your own or was

there a group of you that...or did the whole monastery decide to do that? How did that come about?

00:59:27

**#1C:** No, no, it was not the monastery. [To interpreter] You know Thepo Rinpoche? He was about 8 years old then and there were his teacher and around 19 monks...in the night, around 18 monks from Gaden came to call us saying, "His Holiness the Dalai Lama has already left. Tomorrow the Chinese will bomb the [Tsesep] monastery and destroy it. Let's go and hide in the mountains." That was how [we] left.

Carrying Thepo Rinpoche on the back and leading a horse, [we] made our way. [We] received a message saying that Chinese planes will come and destroy the monastery and also that His Holiness had left. Hearing that, we escaped in the night. Except for provisions, [we] did not have anything with us. [I] did not even think of taking anything.

In general, I'm the only one from my local monastery of Tsesep to have managed to escape. The rest of the monks were still there. When we fled to Gyama, which was at a day's distance away, 3 or 4 monks from my local monastery arrived there to call on Thepo Rinpoche, my teacher, Lathi Rinpoche, and all of us monks, "Come back. The Chinese are like their usual selves." They came to call us back. Lathi Rinpoche replied that we would not return and that's how we fled towards Lhoka. I am the only monk from my local monastery to have managed to escape. There were about a hundred and everyone remained. Most of the escapees were from Gaden [Monastery], while I am the only one from my local monastery.

Q: The reason you could escape...

**#1C:** Tsesep is my local monastery and later I joined Gaden [Monastery]. I joined Gaden serving Thepo Rinpoche. From my local monastery, I am the only one who could escape though there were many monks.

Q: Panic in the monastery and went up to the mountains to see what would happen. So why don't I ask what created the panic?

01:02:29

**#1C:** When one hears that a bomb is going to be dropped that day, one knows that death is imminent. If a bomb was dropped, the monastery would be completely destroyed. So, [we] quickly fled that night. It was at night that [we] escaped. It must have been around 11 o'clock...around 1 or 2 o'clock at night that we fled. We journeyed the whole night with *tsampa*, provisions and blankets laden on yaks and horses. There wasn't anything else that was carried. We planned to flee towards the rocks, to the caves called Phula.

Q: So the whole monastery ran off to the hills?

**#1C:** From the [Tsesep] monastery it was me and my teacher...my teacher isn't from my local monastery but is from Gaden. Thepo Rinpoche is also from Gaden. I was at [Tsesep] monastery and Thepo Rinpoche normally lived there. I fled and so did Thepo Rinpoche

**and others. However, the rest of the monks scattered in various directions—to various directions like the mountains and their homes. Everyone fled and the monastery was empty...the Tsesep Gonpa and not Gaden.**

**The 19 monks of our group [included those who] came from Gaden to escort Rinpoche. The monks from Gaden came to us with the message that [we] must flee that night as the monastery was going to be destroyed. The monks came from Gaden to escort [Rinpoche] and we fled.**

Q: And then what happened? You were in the hills and you were deciding whether to come back to the monastery or to...or you heard something that the Dalai Lama was fleeing or what was actually the next thing that happened?

01:04:50

**#1C: And then everyone, the *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force] and all the monks were fleeing. Everyone was escaping. That was why we climbed down the mountains and joined them. Everyone was going and it was "Now [we] must go too. It is hopeless." Everyone came away and gradually we reached the tribal regions.**

**It was impossible to hear anything about [my] family because home was far away. They were certain that I was dead. Later [I] learned that believing I'd been killed by the Chinese, they made offerings of butter lamps as is the tradition in the village. [They] were sure that I must be dead.**

Q: How did they find out that you weren't dead?

**#1C: Later when things became relaxed, messages were received. Messages went back and forth. Some people who'd escaped into India went back and through them we were able to establish contact. [It] was much later.**

Q: So they didn't know for a long time and they thought you were dead.

01:07:02

**#1C: [They] didn't know...didn't know it.**

Q: When you saw that you could not go back to your monastery...or you heard from other monks that the Dalai Lama was fleeing, did you make an individual decision to leave and go to India or was it a group decision? How did that come about?

**#1C: My teacher was there and I came along with him. I came with my teacher. I did not make the decision. It was my teacher...a teacher is like your parents and I came along with him. I could not make any decisions as I was young then. There was teacher and many monks and they made the decision and we came away.**

Q: You left immediately or it took a while to do that? You just say, "We are going and let's find a way to go"?

01:08:29

**#1C: [We] decided to leave for good. After leaving Tsesep Gonpa [we] came away for good and did not think of going back. "Let's go away. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has left." And with that [we] left...for India.**

Q: Was there anyone there to lead you?

**#1C: The one who led us was my teacher Lathi Rinpoche. There was Lathi Rinpoche and a *chanzo*—the *chanzo* of Thepo Rinpoche. The name of Thepo Rinpoche's *chanzo* was Monlam Yangnyi. There were also many senior monks and they were the main people. We consulted divinations during the journey to show us the right way and then offered prayers. Every evening everyone recited *Dolma* 'Goddess Tara' prayers. A lot of prayers were offered in this regard. Prayers were offered to the protective deities and this led to success. We just didn't come away like that, but recited a lot of prayers. It was like we escaped from the jaws of the Chinese.**

Q: Someone actually knew the way to guide you?

01:10:20

**#1C: During the time when we were hiding up in the mountains—the Chinese had already arrived then—when we were hiding, there was a nomad nearby. When we approached him, he was terrified, "Please go away immediately. The Chinese came here last night [but] you can leave the child here." Thepo Rinpoche was young then, about 8 years old. "Leave the child here. I will lend him a *chupa* 'traditional coat' but the rest of you, please leave immediately." He was in utter panic. However, we spent the night there.**

The next day we climbed up the mountain. That night we prayed a lot. [We] recited the *Dolma* prayers. The Chinese gave us a very dangerous time. We were in such panic that when the birds in the mountains called *chakar* made a sound, which they did when people were around, we dared speak to each other only in whispers, even though there was no Chinese presence around. One could not make a fire at night and it was just gulping *tsampa* and a little butter. If one made a fire during the day, the smoke would give one away. Making a fire at night meant the flame will alert the Chinese. For many weeks we did not have anything hot. [We] had nothing hot [to eat]. It was just *tsampa* in water. That was how it happened...in reality.

Rinpoche and some of us used to go into a pit which was covered with juniper [branches], just as I told you earlier. We stayed that way for 2 to 3 weeks. The other monks paired and took turns climbing up juniper trees, which were in plenty in that region to watch Chinese movement. In the evening they brought word saying, "Today 50 Chinese passed by or 30 Chinese passed by." That added to the fear.

Q: Who led the way?

01:12:07

**#1C: It was the nomad who led the way. We hired a nomad gentleman. We gave him the guns, which we had with us. He was hired by giving the guns and 100-notes of Tibetan**

**currency. He went back from the tribal region. He cried when he returned. We cried and he cried due to sadness as he had to go back. He took us until the tribal region.**

Q: Ammunition?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Ammunitions. Guns and ammunitions.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: So who was it that was offering this?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: They were; their group.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: So they had a guide, someone who knew how to go. Did they ever have to use the guns?

Q: Did you ever have to use the guns?

01:13:39

**#1C: [We] didn't have to use the guns. We [heard] shots and saw people being captured and led away close by. We were climbing over a pass and it was a day with blue sky. Suddenly clouds gathered. There was thunder and it started to hale. We saw Chinese capturing and leading people away saying, "Ola, ola, ola." We sent two monks [to gather information] and were told that everyone had run away. And then [someone] said, "Chinese, Chinese" and [we] hid. That was the worst experience for us.**

**It was our faith and the regular prayers we had offered to the gods and protective deities that saved us that day. We were on the verge of being captured by the Chinese. Many people were caught and taken away. All of them had hidden but the Chinese found out. Their secret was leaked. We were just close by but we escaped. Yes, that's how it happened.**

Q: If you had had to use the gun, would you have thought that you violated a religious vow in doing so?

**#1C: It never crossed [my] mind about violating religious vows. Not everybody possessed guns. Guns were few. The guns were *Enji* 'English.' You know the guns called *Enji*? There were perhaps, two or three *Enji*. Not all of us possessed guns. [I] carried a knife. One usually carried a knife. [I] had a knife.**

Q: *Enji*?

**#1C: Yes?**

Q: *Enji*?

01:15:40

**#1C: You know the *Enji khadum* 'English-made short barrel [rifle]'? You fired the gun once and then reloaded. Those were thought highly of as they were [issued by the] Tibetan**

government. Many monks had gotten such guns from the Norbulinka. So, such weapons were there but only two or three. [Laughs]

[I] did not think that killing was sinful; one does not [under such circumstances]. One would have certainly fired in times of desperation. It was almost time for us to surrender. Some suggested, "Let's go back and surrender" as the *tsampa* stock was nearly over. [We] were told to surrender. A message was received, "Throw away the guns and surrender." We never surrendered and went further away and in that way reached there. These things really happened.

Q: I see, because you were fighting for your survival at that moment.

**#1C: Yes. Much hair sprouted [moves hand over face] and one was sweaty and looked unrecognizable during the difficult journey. [I] did not have proper shoes. None of the clothes worn were dry because of incessant rain in the tribal region during the 4<sup>th</sup> Tibetan lunar month. Then tribesmen were hired. [We] hired four tribesmen, two on either side of the river. From the three guns, the tribesmen on either side were given a gun each and also paid. Four tribesmen were hired from the money collected from us and officials from Sanga Choeling who were with us. They came along with us.**

A bridge had to be crossed and the river was flooded during the 4<sup>th</sup> Tibetan lunar month. The river had to be crossed and the pathway was incredible [looks high up]. We journeyed across the region of Tsari. That's the region where [pilgrims] went once in 12 years. The pathway from Tsari was really bad. The tribesmen were bad and they did not have any clothes to wear. They were nude and they were very bad. At the bridge when they asked, "How many people?" [We] used hair as example and replied arrogantly, "People are arriving like this" [points to head], otherwise the tribesmen were trying to intimidate us. Saying that [people were arriving] like hair put fear in them. [Puts fingers in line] "They are coming in droves like hair," we said such things.

Q: What people were these?

01:18:57

**#1C: Nagaland. Assam.**

Q: Nagaland?

**#1C: [Speaks in English] Yes. No clothes. No. He junglese.**

Q: The tribal people. Do you feel it was a miracle that you were able to escape? Did you experience a miracle?

**#1C: Before we came to Assam and traveled through the tribal region, [we saw that] the Indian army had reached up to Kyingkhorthang in Tibet where the government used to hold a ceremony once every 12 years. They'd reached close to Chuzosum, but most of them were Nepali troops of the Nepal government. They provided us with rice and oil. [The**

troops] had reached a long way within [Tibet]. The Indians had come a long way. Now all these territories have been lost to the Chinese.

And then [we] were happy to be in Indian territory. [I] felt happy. There were planes at Dhakpo Ranjam where [we] were put into a transport plane and flown to Guwahati. [The place] was called Dhakpo Ranjam. Their headquarters was located there. There was also an interpreter who hailed from Kalimpong. Babu-la was the interpreter who was present there. We stayed there for seven, eight or nine days during which time the Indians gave [us] blankets and provisions. From there [we] were put on the plane and dispatched to Guwahati. After a day or two in Guwahati, we were sent to Assam. Tibetan [camps] had been started in Assam when we reached there. And then we were brought there.

Q: I'd like to go and change gears a little bit and go forward here. So, after you successfully escaped in 1959 and eventually you made your way to Mundgod. Is that correct?

01:21:54

#1C: We were dispatched to Buxar from Assam. Buxar is in West Bengal. [We] were accommodated near a hill. There were monks from the three great monasteries, lay people as well as monks from all the other sects including Nyingma and Sakya, irrespective of the numbers. The region was extremely hot. Now people could not bear the heat. Even in Assam many Tibetans died due to heat and in the same way, many monks suffered from fever and tuberculosis in Buxar. You know the illness called tuberculosis. Likewise some monks suffered from mental illness and committed suicide. Many people died in Assam and in Buxar, too, many monks died out of depression. Perhaps we lived in Buxar for two or three years. [I] cannot tell you the years correctly because it wasn't written down. We never took any notice. Yes, we lived in Buxar.

Q: But eventually you were able to get to Mundgod after that period.

#1C: No. From Buxar my teacher Lathi Rinpoche was asked by His Holiness the Dalai Lama to come to Dharamsala where he lived for many years. So Thepo Rinpoche and I left for Dharamsala. We lived together with [Lathi] Rinpoche as we belonged to the same home [family]. Since [Lathi] Rinpoche was serving His Holiness, we lived for many years in Dharamsala.

Q: How did you meet Lathi Rinpoche? How did he become your teacher?

01:24:18

#1C: [Lathi Rinpoche] was the teacher of Thepo Rinpoche, who taught the scriptures. At an early age, during an election held at the local monastery, I was voted as the *solpon* 'private secretary or steward' of Thepo Rinpoche. Since I was serving Thepo Rinpoche, I came to Gaden [Monastery]. And Thepo Rinpoche's teacher was Lathi Rinpoche and that's how it came about.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Maybe you know him. He lives here.

Q: What's his name?

**#1C: Thepo Rinpoche. [Speaks in English] He my...lama...[for a] long time. He maybe 8 years old [then]. I'm carry. Everything he...he teacher like Rinpoche. Then we were together.**

Q: In India?

**#1C: Yeah, India; Tibet...in beginning.**

Q: You know him for...

01:25:22

**#1C: Long time. Long time together.**

Q: So when you got to Dharamsala, Lathi Rinpoche was already there?

**#1C: Lathi Rinpoche passed away last year in 2010.**

Q: Was he in Dharamsala until then?

**#1C: Yes. And after that Lathi Rinpoche was appointed the abbot of Shartse [College of Gaden Monastery], which [he] served for eight years. His Holiness the Dalai Lama appointed him abbot of Shartse, which [he] served for eight years. [He] served as the Shartse abbot at Mundgod and lived there during winter and spent some of the summers in Dharamsala.**

Q: How was it you became close to him?

01:26:44

**#1C: It happened in Tibet itself. [He] was Thepo Rinpoche's teacher and [I] was Thepo Rinpoche's attendant. Since he was the teacher, [we] came to live in the same home. The teacher was invited to the *ladang* and that's how it came about. [He] was the teacher and one's root guru and it happened like that.**

Q: So you were the attendant of Thepo, who was in your monastery in Tibet?

**#1C: Yes, same. Gaden [Monastery].**

Q: So then when you came to India, then you became the attendant to Lathi Rinpoche?

**#1C: Right.**

Q: What did you...I just want to ask what you brought with you from Tibet in terms of particular cultural life in the monastery, particularly rituals in the monastery that you think are...could you talk a little bit about what you feel is important to preserve for the generations to come of your life in the monastery?

01:28:29

**#1C: It is the Tibetan culture, religion, our traditions, language and script that [I] consider important. It is important that our language and the Tibetan script and religion should not decline. [I] deem religion and culture very important, particularly language and script in the Tibetan society. Nowadays the Tibetan script is not much handwritten while in Tibet everything was written down with hands. Presently the Tibetan script is computerized.**

**One used to spend many years learning Tibetan inscription; even learning the alphabet took a long time in Tibet. Then there are *khyumatsuk* and many other types of calligraphy to study. You know there are the *urik*, *tsamrik* [types of scripts] and many others. Though they are basically the same, yet there are variations in shapes. The aristocrats spent a lot of time learning the art of handwriting in Tibet.**

**Mainly it is our language, script, tradition and religion, which [I] see as very important. Not many elders are left now. Until now the elders have been able to preserve [it].**

[Interviewer to additional participant] Perhaps you have a question to ask. Why don't you ask him directly and therefore you can hear about that?

Q: Ngawang, what is daily life like for you in the monastery?

01:30:53

**#1C: At around 5 o'clock in the morning, we have prayer assembly during which time prayers are recited for the welfare of all beings. Once the prayer assembly gets over, there's the *choera* 'debate session.' *Choera* continues until 11:30 or 12 o'clock during which time debating is practiced. Lunch is around 11:30. After the mid-day meal, one must attend classes.**

Q: [Not discernible]

**#1C: Yes? One must go to the teacher to learn the debates. Then there is a little free time. In the evening, it's *choera* once again. *Choera* sessions go on late into the night. Debating is considered exceedingly important in the three great monasteries; more important than *chokha* [?]. And it should be considered so and even now, it is deemed so [in Sera, Drepung and Gaden Monasteries in India]. Not just in the three great monasteries but many others [deem it important]. As advised by His Holiness the Dalai Lama during "Introduction to Buddhism" in Dharamsala, even women and lay men practice debate. After the "Introduction to Buddhism," women, even older ones, practice debate. These days there is more awareness in the dharma and particularly in debating. His Holiness teaches about it. That is something like a day's routine.**

01:33:16

**This is not the same for everyone as there are different grades one belongs to. Those who have attained *geshe* 'philosophy degree for monks' needn't necessarily attend *choera*. They become teachers and some of them go into retreat. They meditate and not all of them attend [*choera*]. Once one has a *geshe* degree, he need not attend *choera*, but can oversee a *choera* session and become a tutor. He can practice meditation by himself and if one has**

received many teachings, there are a lot of *khelen* 'commitments.' If there are *khelen*, they take a lot of time to complete. Once one has undertaken a *khelen*, one must recite [the prayers] daily without fail. This takes a lot of time with hardly time for anything else. That is how it is for us.

Then some monks are appointed as *chanzo* 'treasurer or business manager' responsible for feeding the monks. Once one is appointed a *chanzo*, he must take care of the cows and likewise the fields. We perform the entire responsibilities like a villager [lay person]. Earlier corn used to be cultivated. Presently during the planting of paddy, Indian coolies are hired as it is a difficult job. With corn, it was the monks who did the work. One had to keep a watch from the day corn was sowed until the time we stored the harvested corn in the storage on account of the many [wild] boars. One worked hard even in the rain. The older monks have struggled a lot. These days during cultivation of paddy, one need not keep guard over it. You [to the interpreter] wouldn't know these things. [We] have struggled a lot.

01:35:12

The older monks had poor food then but now-a-days food is good and every facility is available. Yes, one has struggled a lot, doing all the work of a villager, like rearing cows, milking, performing kitchen duties and splitting wood. Of course, these days there is no need to split wood. Yes, one worked hard there [Mundgod, India]. Many think that monks do nothing, but it isn't so. When I lived among the monks there, every monk had various duties to perform with hardly any free time. Like that, there were a lot of difficulties.

Similarly individual monks maintain many students. I have 18 or 19 students whom I have to look after. It is difficult looking after the children's hygiene. Being children and boys at that, they are naughty. They must be taught the scriptures, sent to school; they soil their clothes; there is lot of difficulties. Though monks, we have to be like parents. You would know if you have children. Similarly we face such things. At times they are not clean and do not do as told. They are somewhat naughty. Those of us who have many students face difficulties and have worries, too. One gets angry and it happens that one tends to beat them at times.

Since you have been to India, you might have seen the situation.

Q: I just want to have a follow-up, but I want to break up the question. So how is life different from your monastery life now compared to India and Tibet? How is that different?

01:38:08

**#1C:** There is a vast difference compared to the situation in Tibet and now. Here [India] accommodation and other facilities are provided by the monastery. The monastery provides lunch and breakfast and one needn't fend for one's food. One just concentrated on study while in Tibet, though the monastery provided an annual food ration—we needn't go into all that—one must fend for himself. Whether it was the weather or any facilities, there were difficulties. While here, except for the heat, there are no worries about clothing in the settlements [in India]. There is a great difference. These days it's really good that the monastery provides everything. It's very good.

Q: I wanted to back up a little bit now after I'd gone forward. [Laughs] When you came to Dharamsala initially, was there already a monastery established or did you and Lathi Rinpoche have to reestablish your monastery?

**#1C: In Dharamsala?**

Q: Yes.

**#1C: His Holiness the Dalai Lama had given a house to [Lathi] Rinpoche in Dharamsala. A room was provided. In those days we used to make a fire in the middle [of the room]. It was right at the beginning that we used to build a wood-fire in the middle. [Lathi] Rinpoche used to go to work at His Holiness' [place] while I and Thepo Rinpoche used to memorize the scriptures. We lived like that in Dharamsala and there was no monastery. However, [Lathi] Rinpoche was part of Namgyal Monastery. His Holiness advised Lathi Rinpoche to join Namgyal Monastery and he was part of Namgyal Monastery. He was then housed in the Chokra House as Private Secretary. That was how we lived. Our monastery is located in Mundgod in the south [of India]. They [interviewers] wouldn't know.**

Q: So then you came to south India and where did you get the funds to establish the monastery? How were you able to do that?

01:41:50

**#1C: As is known these days, it is funds raised in foreign countries like the United States and such that brought about development and establishment of the monasteries. It is the assistance from here [United States] that helped establish most of the monasteries. Initially when [we] lacked knowledge, monasteries sent [monks] to sell sweaters. During wintertime, four, five, six, seven or eight monks were sent to various regions to sell sweaters. [Monasteries] managed on the income from sweater [selling]. The quality of food was poor then. Lately, monks are sent abroad to various countries for a year or two or a few months and the donations they receive are used to build monasteries and such. It is like this in most of the cases.**

Q: But was it difficult to get it reestablished in Mundgod? The monastery, did it take a long time?

**#1C: I was not among the monks who arrived originally [in Mundgod] as I was living in Dharamsala. In those days the monks worked very hard. The older monks cultivated the fields as that was the only work [they knew]. Some of them pulled the wood [plow] and others did the plowing. It was a jungle area and they cleared the wood. These days it is a large area but earlier it was a forest. There were poisonous snakes and many [wild] animals. Two or three children died from being bitten by poisonous snakes. There were a lot of poisonous snakes then. Water was scarce in the forest and [I] heard that people used to lend water, a ladle or two to each other. I didn't see it but heard that it happened. Things were very difficult then.**

01:44:57

**The houses then were not the buildings that are there now. [The walls] were made of bamboo and plastered with mud. They were bamboo huts and when it rained the mud fell off. That was how [the monks] lived. Lately good buildings are being constructed. If not for such constructions, it is not possible to manage with the rains and heat. Mosquitoes are plenty too. The mosquitoes are really bad.**

Q: How many monks are in the monastery now?

**#1C: I belong to Shartse College [of Gaden Monastery]. It is said that there are 1,500 [monks]. Loselling [college of Drepung Monastery] might have around 3,000; perhaps more than 3,000. Similarly other monasteries like Sera Jey [College of Sera Monastery] may have around 4,000. The others have similar figures like 2,000. There are many monks. However, earlier there were many newcomers from Tibet who became monks. Now those wishing to join monkhood have dwindled as newcomers no longer arrive from there. [People] rarely become monks. There are hardly any new monks these days.**

Q: Do you fear that fewer people will go into the monastery and that will affect the survival of your monastery?

01:46:59

**#1C: Such [thoughts] occur. The older monks are coming to an end. [I] do think that if there are no new monks joining [the monastery], there is a danger. Yes, [I] do think.**

Q: We are almost finished—so, just a few more questions.

**#1C: Among the students in my residence, I have a Vietnamese student. His parents live in Los Angeles. Another is a student from Taiwan and one from Israel. They speak good Tibetan and the Israeli is well versed in debate. Earlier he lived in Mundgod and then in Dharamsala. Now he is returning to Mundgod. They are very knowledgeable about the scriptures; much more than me in debates. I do not know the debates well, but they are extremely good and speak good Tibetan. He is an Israeli. There's the student from Vietnam and the one from Taiwan who is also okay. [I] have three such students. [They] were earlier students of Lathi Rinpoche.**

Q: That's one way of ensuring that your traditions continue in this spreading of students from other countries and other cultures.

01:48:57

**#1C: [I] do think and advise them, "In the future you should propagate Buddhism in your country; if not on a large scale, at least the basics of dharma known as *kyabdo lenday*. [You] should teach the *kyabdo lenday* and *lamrin* well. It is not necessary to transmit other empowerments. These will benefit the people in their way of thinking and when they face problems." Understanding and practicing the dharma will help us in facing problems. That's how I advise the students.**

Q: So along those lines what do you think is the most important teaching from the dharma that you would like to transmit to the new generation, whether Tibetan or Western? What in your mind is the most important thing that you'd like to be able to convey?

**#1C: That is the dharma. The Buddha dharma is very important. Long ago Lord Buddha showed us the way, which is important and we have to preserve it well. [I] think it is very important to do so. If it declines, there will be problems for many. The all-knowing Buddha has given us the guidance and we have to preserve it well. [I] feel that we have to do that.**

Q: And in the basic teachings, which would you say most specifically?

01:51:23

**#1C: It is the basic principles of the dharma...what should [I] say...it's difficult to explain...it is the way one practices in everyday life. The way of practicing must be preserved well and there should be no decline, isn't it? [I] feel that way.**

**Moreover, we face a lot of difficulties where foreign students are concerned. It is very difficult to get permission for them to stay in the [Tibetan] settlements in India; more so in Sera [Monastery] and Mundgod in the south, where a special permit has to be applied for. Though they are keen to study, they do not get the permit and face problems in not being allowed to live there. Some wish to extend their stay to complete their studies, but it is very difficult. [I] don't know why, but it is a problem pertaining to the south [Tibetan settlements in India]. [To interpreter] Yes, please convey this.**

Q: They must get a special permit? From whom?

**#1C: From the Indian [authorities]. A special permit must be obtained from the Indian [authorities] to come to the place. It is fine to visit Dharamsala, but unless one has a special [permit] to visit Sera and Mundgod areas, perhaps it is something to do with the intelligence wing that they are not allowed to mix with the Tibetans. This is a great problem that is being faced.**

Q: What are your feelings towards the Chinese at this point?

01:53:33

**#1C: To say outright that they are bad is going against our dharma. One must recognize every individual as a sentient being and that would be going against one's vows. On one side it can be considered as karma but gradually...we can only pray that we get our freedom soon and it is pointless becoming angry. And of course, waging a war is an impossibility. [Not discernible] It is only through peaceful method that we can...His Holiness the Dalai Lama has propagated a peaceful way, but they [the Chinese government] are not accepting it. A lot of effort is being put into it and you too are helping...today you are interviewing me, which is for the cause of the Tibetans. I know that you are helping the cause of Tibet and not doing this for your benefit and [I] thank you for it. The future is unsure...you are doing so much now and [I] would like to request you to support His Holiness.**

**This is very important as the Tibetans are facing a lot of difficulties and it's been many years. Living in India also poses problems with permits. The problems are a reality and you would know about it. And you [to the interpreter] know too, so please tell them clearly. Please thank them whole heartedly for all the help rendered—to the lady and everyone. She is known to me and asked me to do this [interview] and I replied, "Of course." Though I do not have much to say but it is for the cause of Tibet and they have no benefit out of it.**

**And Tashi-*la*, thank you for leaving your work aside and coming to interpret; I know that Americans have much work to do. Thank you.**

Q: Thank you.

**#1C: Thank you.**

Q: That's all. I think that's enough for now. Is there anything that you would like to add that we haven't talked or something you'd like to say?

**#1C: That's about all that [I] have to say. Thank you. You have a lot of work to do and I do not have much experience [in giving interviews]. However, one must speak and I did whatever I knew. Thank you, Michelle; thank you, Ngawang-*la* and everybody and Tashi-*la*.**

END OF INTERVIEW