

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #30M – Zoepa Gyaltso
April 11, 2010

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #30M
2. Interviewee: Zoepa Gyaltso
3. Age: 86
4. Date of Birth: 1924
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Dotsang
7. Province: Dhoday (Amdo)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: April 11, 2010
10. Place of Interview: Drepung Gomang Old Age Home, Doeguling Settlement, Mundgod, Karwar District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 19 min
12. Interviewer: Rebecca Novick
13. Interpreter: Namgyal Tsering
14. Videographer: Pema Tashi
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Zoepa Gyaltso hailed from a small village in Amdo Province. His parents made him a monk at the age of 8 years. He lived in the local monastery until he was 12 years old. When he was 15, he and two of his monk friends spontaneously decided to run away to Lhasa, being lured by its fame as well as fear of receiving a beating from their teacher for loitering. Due to lack of proper planning, they did not have any food and money and faced a lot of problems on the journey. They spent a year with a family on the way to earn their passage. After finally arriving in Lhasa Zoepa Gyaltso joined the Gomang Datsang of Drepung Monastery in Lhasa. He served in various capacities in the monastery like storekeeper, disciplinarian and business manager.

Zoepa Gyaltso was 26 years old when the Chamdo region fell to the Chinese army. He was one among the group of monks of the three great monasteries of Sera, Drepung and Gaden sent by the government of Tibet to defend Chamdo. However, Chamdo was lost during the change of leadership between Cabinet-members Lhalu and Ngabo, and the monks were dissuaded from confronting the Chinese army because there were too few of them. Zoepa Gyaltso also witnessed the occupation of Lhasa by the Chinese in 1959.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, monastic life, first appearance of Chinese, invasion by Chinese army, Norbulingka, resistance fighters.

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Interview #30M

Interviewee: Zoepa Gyaltso

Age: 86, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Rebecca Novick

Interview Date: April 11, 2010

Question: Okay *kusho-la* ‘respectful term for monk,’ could you start by telling us your name?

00.00.25

Interviewee #30M: Zoepa Gyaltso.

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked us to record the experiences of older Tibetans to share with the younger generation of Tibetans, with the Chinese people and people around the world and so your memories are going to help us document the true history, culture and beliefs of the Tibetan people.

#30M: Okay.

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

00:01:29

#30M: [I] cannot hear well. What did you say?

[Question is repeated.]

#30M: Yes.

[Interpreter is asked to move closer to the interviewee]

Q: If you want to take a break at anytime, just let us know.

00:02:03

#30M: Okay.

Q: And if you don’t wish to answer a question, just tell us.

#30M: Okay.

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

00:02:24

#36M: For me?

Q: Yes.

#30M: There will be no problems for me.

Q: Is it okay to use your real name?

00:02:39

#30M: Yes, you can.

Q: We very much appreciate your coming to share your story with us.

#30M: Okay.

Q: Could you tell us a little bit about your early life in Tibet, some of your early memories?

00:03:15

#30M: I became a monk at the age of 8. My parents made me a monk. My village was in a very isolated region. It was the decision of my parents to make me a monk at that time and I did not have any say in it. So [I] became a monk and lived in the local monastery until the age of 12. It was a small monastery with around a hundred monks at the time [I] became a monk. I stayed there and when [I] was 12 years old, the incarnation of the previous Panchen Rinpoche came to the monastery called Labrang Tashiky.

Q: Where?

#30M: At the big monastery called Labrang Tashiky. It is one of the bigger monasteries in Amdo. When he came there, [I] ran away and lived there until the age of 15.

Q: Why did Panchen Rinpoche come to your area?

00:05:21

#30M: [He] was on the way to Lhasa from Amdo. So en route [he] visited the Labrang and gave a Kalachakra initiation and then left towards Kham. However, [he] passed away in Kyikodho and could not proceed.

Q: Do you remember what he taught?

#30M: [I] do not know what he advised because [I] was small at that time and it has escaped my memory.

Q: Did you want to be a monk? Would it have been your choice? If you had the choice, would you have chosen to become a monk?

00:07:06

#30M: At that time once one joined monkhood, [he] mingled with the other [monk] children. There was never the thought of not being a monk or the thought that being a

monk was not good. One just mingled with the other children. One was small and there was never any thought.

Q: Yeah, I was thinking like now. You know once he got older, would he have chosen...

#30M: Now [I] feel that it was good [for me] to have become a monk.

Q: Were there many Chinese in your area when you were growing up?

00:08:10

#30M: No, there were not. In general the Chinese were in Tibet but the Communist Chinese appeared much later. The Communist Chinese appeared much later when I was 26 years old. I was in Tibet [Lhasa] then. I was 16 when I arrived in Lhasa. [I] lived in Lhasa from the age of 16 to 26. [I] lived in the monastery and did not go loitering anywhere else.

I served the *khangtsen* [a smaller community in a monastery, in which monks from one geographical area live]. There were not many people in the *khangtsen*. [I] lived in the monastery in that way. Then when [I] was 26 years old, the Chinese arrived.

Q: Were there no Chinese when you were small?

#30M: There were no Chinese. Though there were Chinese in general, they were not the Communist Chinese that opposed and became [our] enemy.

Q: So they were the Nationalists under Chiang Kai Shek?

00:09:28

#30M: [I] do not know which Chinese they were. We did not have to listen to the Chinese nor did the Chinese say anything to us and nor did we have to ask them anything.

Q: So you said there were some Chinese in your area, but there was no kind of tension between them and the Tibetans?

#30M: No, there was none. I cannot recall the year, but I think it was sometime time between my 24th and 25th year, that the Tibetan government expelled the Chinese that used to live in Lhasa to China. [I] heard that they went back through India on being driven out. [I] was not yet 26, perhaps around 24-25.

Q: From Lhasa?

00:10:26

#30M: Yes, they were driven out from Lhasa.

Q: Where did you go to study in Lhasa?

#30M: To Drepung [Monastery].

Q: To Gomang [Division] in Drepung?

#30M: Gomang.

Q: You said that there were a few Chinese in Lhasa but they were driven out. Who drove them out and how were they driven out?

00:11:49

#30M: [They] used to live there since long ago. [They] were not new ones. [They] were driven out.

Q: Who drove them out?

00:11:56

#30M: [They] were driven out by the Tibetan government.

Q: Describe a little bit what your life was like in Drepung in Lhasa?

#30M: There was a lot of work to do in our *khangtsen* which was a separate unit of Gomang. There were not many monks in it. My region was occupied by the Siling Amba who oppressed the people and everyone became poor. There were not many young monks that arrived [from my region] in Tibet [Lhasa]. One or two that arrived served the *khangtsen* and *mitsen* [a group of monks from a particular region], which was like an obligation for the monks. That's how we lived.

Q: What did you do?

00:13:17

#30M: [I] did whatever work that was needed to be done and went wherever instructed.

Q: Was he not a monk?

#30M: One had to serve as storekeeper for the *khangtsen* and storekeeper for the *mitsen* and various other types of work. Each year there was a work obligation which rotated [among the monks]. That's how we lived.

Q: What kinds of work did you do?

00:14:39

#30M: [I] served as storekeeper for the *khangtsen*, which was for a period of one year. And then there was the duty of *chapri* 'assistant to the disciplinarian,' just like what it is here. Then later as *chanzo* 'business manager' and various other types of work. Since there were very few residents, one requested the other to perform his share of duty. Normally I used to live in the monastery. For example, if you were given a responsibility, but could not stay at the monastery and had to go somewhere, you requested me to take your place. So I stayed at the monastery in that way.

I came to Tibet [Lhasa] when I was young. Unlike these days, [we] had to travel carrying our things right from the village. One begged for *tsampa* ‘flour made from roasted barley’ as one journeyed along. The journey took three to four months. Having arrived as a youth, [I] underwent an exhausting journey and knowing the difficulties involved, did not dare go back. So [I] continued to live at the monastery.

Q: So let’s go back a little bit then to your journey from Dhomay to Lhasa. What kind of problems did you face?

#30M: I was young at that time and there were a few companions. We journeyed one day at a time and did not dwell on thoughts like “Today has been tough, what would happen tomorrow?” I had no thoughts about my village or when I would reach the great monastery. One just embarked on the journey saying that one was going to Lhasa. There were no thoughts in the mind.

Q: Did you walk all the way?

00:18:46

#30M: Yes, one had to walk. Moreover, when leaving the village [we] had nothing—no shoes to wear and not even a cup in the hand. [We] were children and it was summertime. The children were playing and some of them decided to go to Lhasa and that’s how we went away, just like that!

Q: Did nobody prepare you?

#30M: No, [we] just went away all of a sudden from where we were playing! We had nothing. Let alone money, there was no *tsampa* for the next day! The two companions had brought something but I did not have anything. We were three when we first ran away.

Q: The decision to go to Lhasa, was it your decision?

00:20:20

#30M: It was my decision. Fearing that the teacher might give a beating when [I] returned, [I] left when they asked [me] to accompany them.

Q: Why would he beat you?

#30M: The teacher beat only on account of the scriptures. If one did not read the scriptures, he beat a little. So when [I] played and whiled away the time, [I] thought the teacher might beat [me] when I went back. So [I] left along with the two companions.

Q: So you weren’t sent by your teacher?

00:21:15

#30M: No, it was not like that. In my village a person who has been to Lhasa is considered a great name. So the children used to say and mislead each other, “Let’s go to Lhasa. Let’s go to Lhasa.” That’s how [it happened]. The three of us were young in age and did not have

anything, except *tsampa* to last for a few days which the two companions had brought. After journeying for about 15 days, we served as servants to a family for one year.

When [we] left them, the family provided us with clothes, utensils and a *bipa*, which is used in Tibet to blow air while making a fire. The family also gave us a little money for *tsampa* during the journey and sent us along with other travelers. That was how [we] came [to Lhasa].

Q: Did you inform your family?

#30M: No, it was impossible. After reaching Lhasa, I do not know how to put it, whether to call Tibet a poor country because there was no way to send letters. Later if anyone from our village arrived in Tibet [Lhasa], news might reach the village that such and such young monk was in Lhasa. Other than that, there was no way [they] would hear about it.

Q: What were you like as a child? Were you quite a stubborn child?

00:23:58

#30M: Looking back [I] think [I] was naughty [laughs], not taking things lying down from the other children and always confronting them. I returned to my village in '97 and I visited my monastery. There was no one [I] knew at the monastery. There were just 10-11 monks. Earlier there used to be about 100 monks. Two or three people of my age were alive, who were no longer monks. There were none in the monastery.

There was one who was 5-6 years older to me who was living at the monastery. He was the only one and he told me...I could not recollect him but he recognized me and said, “[You] were stubborn as a child. You used to butt the other children with your head. When the knocking of heads went on, there was none whose head was as hard as yours!” He told me like that.

Q: What kind of trouble did you get into as a kid? What kind of mischief did you get up to?

#30M: Nothing bad ever happened. Nothing bad ever happened.

Q: What kind of thing did you do that were...

00:26:17

#30M: [I] might have got into arguments with the other children in the monastery, but did not do anything seriously bad.

Q: Did you ever try to run away from home?

#30M: No, there were no such thoughts while at the monastery. Even if one did have such thoughts, one could just leave and there was no need to run away. In Tibet, one was assigned a teacher. There was the unit you belonged to. For example, I belonged to a particular unit [in the monastery] depending on my region. When I went there, I would be assigned to a teacher.

Once one was assigned to the teacher, he provided you with food for three days. That was it. He would clothe you with a robe that just about covered your flesh so you could move outside among people. The teacher fed you for three days. After the third day, you had to live separately. A few utensils were provided and one had to stay separately. If you had the means, you would have to fend for yourself from the next day. If you were a pauper, that was the end. There was nothing to do but serve someone else. That was how it was initially in the great monastery.

00:27:48

If one had left the village in a proper manner, one could join the great monastery armed with some money, but our situation was not like that. We had absolutely nothing. There was a river near Lhasa. When one arrived from the direction of Kongpo, one had to cross it in a boat. Having no money to pay the boatman, he stopped [us] and [we] cried. Later he let us through.

[We] reached Lhasa when the sun was just setting. Though [we'd] reached Lhasa [we] did not know where to go; the language [we] spoke and the language of Lhasa was different and not being able to follow the language, [we] did not even find food that night. The next day [we] asked the way to Drepung and reached there. At Drepung we made enquiries about our assigned unit. A newcomer could serve for a year sweeping the temple or the assembly hall. As soon as one arrived, they provided one with food which was *pa* 'dough made from *tsampa* and tea or water.' There was nothing but *pa*. After that one was handed over to the teacher.

[Discontinuity in video—part of English translation missing]

Q: How did you know when you were getting close to Lhasa? What indication did you have that you were getting nearer?

00:30:39

#30M: One could ask [anyone] on the journey. There were many people returning to [our] region carrying loads. Everyday one met two or three such people. [We] enquired from them. Those that were going to Lhasa and those that were returning were different. Those that were returning were in a great hurry. If one met them and made enquiries, they did not answer leisurely, but spoke hurriedly and continued their journey. Those that were going to [Lhasa] sat down, rested and asked. Those that were returning did not do that normally. Some of them leaned over their walking sticks and talked about the number of days it would take, the way and where one could beg for food, while others did not give such information. [They] just walked on.

Q: So when you reached Lhasa, what was different about Lhasa to where you were heading from?

#30M: There was nothing different that was noticed. [I] was young and had no thoughts whatsoever. One just came to Lhasa without any thoughts of what one would find there, the pilgrim sites, the great monasteries or the holy places. One did not ask other people nor

did one know about it. Someone suggested “Let’s go to Lhasa” and went right away. There were no thoughts as one was young.

Q: How old were you?

00:32:55

#30M: [I] was 15 years old when I left for Lhasa.

Q: Were you 15 when you reached Lhasa?

#30M: [I] was 16 when I arrived in Lhasa. I ran away at 15 and spent a year on the way.

Q: Did you live in Lhasa until age 25?

00:33:47

#30M: [I] lived there until the age of 35.

Q: You mentioned age 25 earlier.

#30M: The Chinese appeared when [I] was 26 years old.

Q: When you went and you wanted to enroll in Drepung Gomang, didn’t you need some kind of letter of introduction or some kind of papers to show that you had been sort of officially, you know, been given a scholarship or your monastery had suggested that you were a good monk? You were just able to come, just walk in and join so easily?

00:34:54

#30M: That was not necessary. One had an assigned unit in the monastery and if one went there, they immediately accepted you. New monks were not many and at times they could not find anyone to stay in the quarters. There were hardly any monks staying there during summer. There were just three or four monks living at the *khangtsen* or *mitsen*. There were new arrivals in the other bigger *khangtsen*. There was another unit called the *mitsen* within the *khangtsen*. There were very few monks in the *mitsen*. It was very rare that new monks arrived and so it was hard to find anyone to stay at the great monastery.

Those that lived there were like me who had run away from the village. Our region did not send many monks to the great monasteries. They [monks in the village] were not allowed to leave in an appropriate manner. Because of that they ran away. As one had run away, there was lack of food which was why one could not stay much [at the monastery]. Some went in search of *tsampa* in the villages and others took to trading. There were some who lived in the monastery doing the work of others, receiving some food, passing away the time in this way and at times being given a little quantity of *tsampa* by people he knew. That was how one spent one’s life. The great monasteries were very beneficial. Though one was hungry, one never...[not discernible] if one stayed put. One felt satisfied.

Q: Can you describe some of the kinds of work that you were doing for the monastery?

#30M: There was a kind of rotation of job for the monks which was for the duration of one year. The senior-most job was that of *chanzo*. A new monk was given the responsibility of collecting the land tax.

Q: What did he do as a land tax collector?

00:37:34

#30M: He had to give orders for the type of work to be done on any particular day. There were many such types. There were many petty works to do. Then one became the storekeeper for the *mitsen*. He had to sweep and clean [the temple] and make the daily offerings for one year. The rotation of job involved becoming a *chanzo* and in that way, one did all of that [kind of duties]. Once that was done for one's *mitsen*, likewise your turn arrived in the *khangtsen*. One's turn to become the storekeeper of the *khangtsen* came; then a *dhongma*, who is like the storekeeper; one had to cook and work for the *khangtsen*. In that way there was no end to work.

Q: Do you ever remember any illnesses that affected the monks?

#30M: No, [I] have never fallen ill.

Q: Any illnesses that occurred in the monastery?

00:39:29

#30M: It never happened. It never occurred while we were there. No illness occurred. We only had *tsampa* to eat; *tsampa* in the morning and *tsampa* at night and nothing else. For the ordinary monks if the supply of *tsampa* did not break, that was excellent. Having *tsampa* to eat meant one was rich. One did not fall sick at all at that time. The tea was just black tea. A [monk from a] slightly well-off family might add butter and churn his tea. Otherwise, it was *tsampa* and black tea. The slightly better-off drank churned tea and ate dry *tsampa*. When one lived that way, one hardly ever fell ill.

Q: We heard that there was an outbreak of maybe something like small pox that affected all of the monasteries sometime in the 1940s. You never heard about anything like that?

#30M: ...In the 1940s...[I] do not know about the monasteries but it happened in Lhasa. There is this disease called *lhadum*.

Q: What is it?

00:41:24

#30M: *Lhadum* is when one develops pockmarks on the face and boils [touches the body]. It was heard that some people died due to that illness, but it did not happen in our monastery. When new monks arrived at the monastery, they suffered from fever. Our region was very cold and compared to that, Lhasa was warmer. So due to the change in climate, they developed fever. There was no illness other than that. [I] think I was 22-23 when the *lhadum* illness happened.

Q: Did you hear of that?

#30M: Yes, [I] did. There was a child I knew who [I] heard died during the *lhadum* outbreak in Lhasa.

Q: The work that you did in the monastery, you did so much different kinds of work, did it give you a chance to get out of the monastery to see something of the city?

00:43:15

#30M: While working for the monastery, when it was one's turn to take up the *chanzo* responsibility later, then one had to go. One had to go out to the villages. There were farmlands of the *khangtsen* which one had to oversee and also to recover loans and dispense new ones. One must go in the springtime, during the 2nd month to give away the grains as loans and in autumn, during the 7th or 8th month to recover them. That was how one had to do it.

Q: What was your next experience with the Chinese after you'd seen them being expelled in the city in 1959?

#30M: The Chinese did not do anything to us. The Chinese were humble at that time until the attack. If one did something to them, they bore it and did not retaliate. However, there was no need for us to do anything to them and for them to do anything to us. Each went their own way. There was nothing of that sort. We became enemies when the attack happened. After the attack, we left immediately. [We] did not remain in the monastery.

I was in the Samlo *khangtsen* of Drepung. In general there were over 1,000 monks in Samlo *khangtsen*. However, those that took care of the *khangtsen* and *mitsen* were the monks from far off regions. Monks from far away regions consisted of less than a hundred. They were the ones that took care of and worked for [the *khangtsen*]. They were the ones that did everything.

When the uproar began at Norbulingka, initially 50 monks from our *khangtsen* volunteered to go to the Norbulingka. They volunteered to go to serve as guards for His Holiness the Dalai Lama. We were two *chanzo* then, I and Chanzo Jangchup. One of us was asked to accompany the group as their leader. Both of us drew lots and it fell upon him to go and not me. So he went as their leader.

00:46:23

I was told to proceed to the monastery's hill to keep guard. That was the work of uneducated people because protection was not necessary. When people fired from a great distance away, protection was useless. I was asked to go to there and given 15 men. We went to the hill and when Lhasa fell, I left from the hill. [I] went to my quarters from the hill and then left with a companion.

[Discontinuity in video—part of English translation missing]

Q: So your friend was sent to the Norbulingka with 50 monks from Drepung Gomang. Was it 50 monks from Drepung Gomang or 50 monks from your *khangtsen*?

#30M: From the *khangtsen*.

Q: So where were you sent?

#30M: I was sent to the hill top.

Q: To guard Drepung?

00:48:23

#30M: Yes, to protect Drepung from the hill behind it.

Q: Were you given any weapons?

#30M: [Speaks before question is interpreted] For example, [shows the palm of left hand] Drepung is located here [points to center of palm], below that was flat surface area. The plain was full of Chinese and their artilleries were aimed at the monastery. There was no way one could go down that way. Had they blocked the hill tops [points to the fingers of the left hand] we would be left with no way to go. However, we could escape from the hill tops. There were many hills around. Later when we left we crossed the mountain pass [traces finger between thumb and first finger and to the back of the hand] and came away. There was no way to climb down. One of the [Chinese] groups that shelled Norbulingka was placed in the plains.

Q: What kind of weapons did you have?

00:49:54

#30M: [We] were distributed with an English-made short barrel rifle for every three men.

Q: And how many monks were protecting their monastery?

#30M: There might be 200-300 monks circling the whole monastery. In the lower parts were the monks of Loselling and on this side were the monks of Gomang. They were the monks of two bigger *datsang* ‘sections in a monastery.’

Q: Where did you get the weapons from? Were they distributed to you or did you go get them from somewhere?

00:50:55

#30M: The monastery provided them. Each *khangtsen* had to receive them from the *datsang*.

Q: And then what happened?

#30M: Later Norbulingka was conquered. The Ramoche in Lhasa was set on fire. [We] could see it from the hill. Then [we] climbed down but there was no point in staying. Everything was over. Then [we] left the monastery and went away. Those that wanted to leave left but the others remained.

Q: Yes?

00:51:40

#30M: Those that wished to leave left. Those that did not wish to remain went away. Some [monks], who said that there was nowhere to go, stayed back. At that time we learned that His Holiness had left. Those who left said that His Holiness had left and that they wished to leave, too. So [we] left.

Q: What did you do, *kusho-la*?

#30M: We left.

Q: Where to?

#30M: If this was Drepung [points to center of palm], a mountain pass was located here [points between fingers]. We crossed that pass and went down [points to back to palm]. We reached behind Drepung and then continued from there, crossed a river and journeyed towards the direction of Chushul.

Q: Which part of India did you reach?

00:53:02

#30M: We reached Missamari [Assam] in India.

Q: Is that a state?

#30M: Missamari? It is located in the direction between Siliguri [West Bengal] and Guwahati [Assam].

Q: You were never sent to Chamdo in the reinforcement?

#30M: When [I] left my village during my young age, [I] came through Chamdo.

Q: Was it on the way?

00:54:13

#30M: Yes, Chamdo was on the way from our village.

Q: Okay but you were never...

[Interviewer to interpreter]: I have a note here—maybe it’s a mistake. It says that elder was in the reinforcement group sent to Chamdo, but learned the loss of Chamdo en route at Lharigo. Maybe we can check that out with him.

Q: Why did you go to Lharigo through Chamdo?

#30M: Yes?

Q: Have you ever been to Chamdo specifically?

00:55:01

#30M: When we were in Lhasa, we were sent to Chamdo.

Q: For what?

#30M: [We] were sent there as an army of the great monasteries.

Q: Why?

#30M: An army of the great monasteries to confront the Chinese. It was when I was 26 years old. [We] first lost Chamdo to the Chinese.

Q: How old were you then?

00:55:26

#30M: I was 26 years old. The year we lost Chamdo was during the change of leadership between Lhalu and Ngaboe. At that time it was announced that a monk army had to go to Chamdo and the monks of the great monasteries were sent there. They were dispatched by the government. There were 30 monks from Drepung, 25 from Sera and 20 from Gaden. We were 75 monks altogether. We were sent to Chamdo and at Lharigo [we] found that Lhalu had arrived there; he’d escaped from Chamdo.

When we left from Norbulingka, the government had instructed, “[You] must march on until you meet Lhalu. Once you meet him, follow whatever orders he issues. You cannot do anything otherwise. Follow the words of Lhalu.”

Q: What is Lhalu?

#30M: Lhalu was an aristocrat of the government. He was [in] the *Kashag* ‘Cabinet.’ Lhalu, Ngaboe and the likes were the *Kashag*. The instructions for [leaving for] Chamdo came through the cabinet. Lhalu handed over the reigns to Ngaboe. Between them Chamdo was conquered. After Chamdo was defeated, Lhalu had reached Lharigo while Ngaboe was captured by them [the Chinese] at Chamdo. That was the time the monks were told to go to war. We were the poor monks, those that did not have much to eat nor had anyone to think about. [We] were the ones that were sent.

Q: You were 28 years old then?

00:57:25

#30M: I was 26 years old at that time. [We] did not reach Chamdo. [We] reached Lharigo where we met Lhalu. Lhalu had already reached Lharigo. When we met him at Lharigo, we were told, “Do not proceed further. There is no use. This [small] number of monks cannot match them [the Chinese]. For example, the Chinese are like the wide ocean. Once someone enters the ocean, it is impossible to emerge from the other side. It is not possible. Likewise, we cannot win. There is no point in your going there.” When told that, we did not continue but returned.

[Discontinuity in video—part of English translation missing]

Q: So when you found that Chamdo had been captured and you were no longer needed to reinforce the Tibetan forces there, was your feeling one of disappointment or were you relieved?

#30M: There is nothing to talk about the feeling of that time. It was certain that they [the Chinese] would come to Lhasa. The people of Tibet are such that when we were living in Tibet, if there was a battle going on in this region, all the others would watch and not lend assistance. If there was a confrontation with the Chinese on this side, those around would watch and not help. If one heard that there was a war somewhere else, everyone watched and did not help.

Then later they [the Chinese] came to Lhasa. It was a certainty that they would arrive in Lhasa. Once Chamdo fell, that was it. All the soldiers of Chamdo fled. The people revolted against the Tibetan army in Kham and [they] fled. When they fled, it was certain that they [the Chinese] would arrive. After arriving in Lhasa, for a few years they [the Chinese] lived just “so-so.” The government did not do anything nor did the three great monasteries. The monks tried to live normally because there were no instructions forthcoming to do this or that. So that was how it was.

During that year there were some lay people in Lhasa who took the lead saying that all the Tibetans had the same objective, the same religion and published flyers. Though they did that, some people remained silent while others supported the Chinese. The turmoil began when the Monlam ‘Prayer Festival’ was over.

Q: *Kusho-la*, where did you get the scars on your head? What happened?

01:01:59

#30M: [Touches scar over head] This happened during my stay at the monastery where monks cannot remain still.

Q: Did you have a fight?

#30M: Yes.

Q: Where? Here or in Tibet?

#30M: In Tibet.

Q: You fought another monk?

01:02:25

#30M: Yes.

Q: What was the fight about?

#30M: Fights between monks have no reasons. When one is unfortunate fights can occur even while walking on the road. When one is satiated, when one has eaten *pa*, monks cannot be still.

Q: It was a very serious wound, what weapons was he using?

01:03:11

#30M: He used a knife.

Q: How big was the knife?

#30M: It was this big [gestures off camera, perhaps three feet].

Q: Sword.

01:03:26

#30M: He swung it like this [raises arm up and down].

Q: What did you hit back?

#30M: [I] could not hit back because [I] had nothing in the hands.

Q: He was a monk and had a sword?

01:03:33

#30M: There were some monks who loitered in the villages. They did some trading and were not really monks in the real sense. They brought such swords.

Q: You didn't have a sword?

#30M: No. Those that normally lived in the monastery could not carry such swords.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Is he talking about the *dhopdhops* [obstinate monks who misbehaved instead of studying the scriptures]?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Not *dhopdhops*. He is talking about some monks who usually do not stay in the monastery. They dress like a monk but stay with local people of the villages. So this monk and he got [into] a clash.

Q: These kinds of fights were normal in the monastery?

01:04:51

#30M: It was sort of normal. There were some [monks] who did not live at the monastery, loitered in the villages, did not attend any prayer assemblies, nor studied the scriptures and such [monks] indulged in fights when there were slight frictions.

Q: How long did it take to heal?

#30M: It might have taken two to three months.

Q: Did you have any lasting problems?

01:05:50

#30M: No. It just healed by itself.

Q: I think you are a very, very tough monk.

#30M: [Smiles] It just healed by itself. [I have] never suffered any serious ailment in the monastery. [I] was never sick.

Q: You are very hard-headed, literally hard-headed.

01:06:23

#30M: [I] used to be called hard-headed, but the time of death had not arrived. The time to die had not arrived which is why [I] was tough. When the time of death arrives, even a small [wound] is enough; it is not necessary to have a large [injury].

Q: Did you ever receive any *tsetung*, any special protection?

#30M: *Tsonsung* ‘protective amulet?’ There is a *tsonsung* called Jigshay Mahe distributed during the time of the previous Dalai Lama. I have such a one.

Q: Have you seen the previous incarnation?

01:07:43

#30M: [I] have not seen him.

Q: How did you receive the *tsonsung*?

#30M: They were prepared in the monastery in Amdo. The present Dalai Lama was born in Je Kumbum. The Jigshay Mahe was made at Je Kumbum in preparation for His Holiness’ journey [to Lhasa].

Q: The *tsonsung* were made at that time?

#30M: I did not receive it but [I] got it from someone else.

Q: Do you still have it?

01:08:29

#30M: Yes, I do.

Q: Would it be possible to see it?

#30M: One cannot show it. It is believed that revealing it will decrease its power.

Q: I think it must be very powerful because you lived a very long life and gone through many many experiences.

#30M: [Nods]

Q: Can I just ask you what it looks like? Does it have like a deity on it?

01:09:15

#30M: If I do not speak respectfully, its clay. It's [made] of red clay, somewhat reddish clay. Its size is only about so much [gestures off camera]. There is a picture of Jigshay on it. At the back is the letter 'Om.' The Mahe is of bluish clay. It contains a picture of a *mahe* on it. Mahe is the animal buffalo. It has a picture of that. The two images together are called Jigshay Mahe.

Q: Do you believe that this *tsonsung* protected you?

#30M: That depends on your belief. If you believed deep down that it would protect you, it protected you. If you were in doubt then [its power] would also be in doubt. For example, it is akin to human beings. As an example, if I asked you for a favor and if I thought, "I have requested of him but I wonder how he will react?" then the other person also would remain in doubt. If I totally believed in you, you will know that I believe in you and will help me. It is similar to that. It depends on your heart.

Q: Very interesting. Well, thank you so much, *kusho-la*, for talking to us.

01:11:36

#30M: Thank you.

Q: What was it like to share your experiences today? What was it like for you to...

#30M: There is nothing that [I] can think about. [I] wondered how it [the interview] would be. We did not know the actual reason. To speak frankly, we do not know the actual reason that such and such [people] would arrive and...[not discernible]. Had there been others who'd spoken about their past experiences, we could depend on that. But that is not so. When I learned that someone would arrive to ask questions, I wondered what it would be

like. Other than that, there was nothing I thought of. To speak the truth, that is it. If there was something we could depend on, that is good.

Q: How do you feel about it now?

01:12:57

#30M: [I] feel that this will be beneficial. Thanks to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, those of us who live in foreign countries have no problems; one can express anything. There is no problem whether one speaks good or bad. However, for those living in Tibet, even if they speak one bad word, they will be arrested for that. So if this could help them in any way... As for me, my life is over. At the most [I] might live for two or three years. I will not live beyond that. [I] am 86 years old now. At the most [I] might live to be 87 or 88. I will not live more than that.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: He said he went back to Tibet?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: That was around...

[Interviewer to interpreter]: 1997...I think we should ask him about that.

Q: *Kusho-la*, when you went back to Tibet in 1997, what changes did you see?

#30M: The changes that were in Tibet was that, though Lhasa was the Lhasa of old as one could see the Tsuglakhang 'Central Cathedral' and I have knowledge of it, but the people and the houses, in comparison to the old days were like the earth and sky. The population was mostly Chinese though one could not differentiate. One could not differentiate the Tibetans [from the Chinese] because most of them were dressed in pants and shirts with short hair. In the old days men wore the men's dress and women wore women's clothes. If someone spoke, it was different. Now most of them spoke in Chinese. If one recognized someone as Tibetan, one could speak in Tibetan. Otherwise, the situation was such that one could not talk [to anyone].

Q: Well, thank you very, very much and I need to ask you one more time. If this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would it make a problem for you?

01:16:45

#30M: What problem would I face? I am living in this country. They [the Chinese] are in China, what can they do to me?

Q: And it is okay to use your real name?

#30M: Yes, of course. You will not hand me over [to the Chinese] and there is no chance that I will fall into their hands. Even if I did fall into their hands, what can they do to me? There is nothing left to do. I am speaking the truth. Except for the truth, [I] am not speaking badly of the Chinese. [I] have related about the way they did things. I never said that they did that when they appeared in Tibet. It is not necessary to talk about that because everyone knows it.

Take Drepung for example. If this was Drepung Monastery, all the houses located along the front below this were destroyed and none left standing. All the houses above this were destroyed and none were left. That's how it is. I do not have to tell you as everyone who's been to Tibet knows about it. The case is the same with Sera and Gaden [Monasteries]. I heard that earlier there was not a trace left of Gaden but now there is some construction. Even if there is construction, it's useless when they are empty inside. That's how it is.

01:18:24

However, you and your project have worked hard. I am thankful [joins palms] if it would help the Tibetan people. Really, it is very good. Thank you. I feel happy from the depth of my heart. Really, I swear. Even if I cannot return to Tibet—it is not possible that I will get the chance to return and [I] do not have that hope—even if I cannot, at this time of my [nearing] death I feel in my heart that it [Tibet] will be like earlier [times].

As for me I do not have to fear the Chinese. The reason I do not need to fear them is because I live this far away. What can they do? Even if they want to do something, they cannot. Certainly I will not go to them saying that I have related such a story and what would they do about it? So what can they do?

Q: Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW