

# **Tibet Oral History Project**

**Interview #17B – Jampa Gyaltzen, Geshe  
January 2, 2014**

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# TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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## INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #17B
2. Interviewee: Jampa Gyaltzen, Geshe
3. Age: 88
4. Date of Birth: 1925
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Ladakh
7. Province: Jammu & Kashmir, India
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1962
9. Date of Interview: January 2, 2014
10. Place of Interview: Private residence, Old Camp 4, Bylakuppe, Mysore District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 0 hr 46 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Pema Tashi
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

### **Biographical Information:**

Geshe Jampa Gyaltzen was born in Ladakh, India to parents who were farmers. He recalls being the youngest of 10 siblings and herding goats at the age of 7. At age 12 he became a monk and then at the age of 17 he traveled to Tibet. He joined Drepung Monastery to study philosophical debating and lived there for 20 years.

In 1959 Geshe Jampa Gyaltzen was captured by the Chinese and imprisoned for two years for attending a meeting in protest against the Chinese occupation. He was subjected to hard labor for six months and admits that his hardship made him contemplate suicide. He describes the earlier attack on Drepung Monastery and how the Chinese captured the abbots and business managers of the monastery. He witnessed the thamzing ‘struggle session’ that the monastery’s business manager was subjected to. Along with other foreigners, Geshe Jampa Gyaltzen was jailed in Drapchi prison for eight months. Food was limited and religion was banned.

Geshe Jampa Gyaltzen was released from prison after intervention from Indian authorities. He moved to the relocated Drepung Monastery in Mundgod, south India. He recounts taking his geshe ‘Buddhist philosophy’ degree and then moving to Gyumed Monastery in Hunsur for further studies. He describes his providential escape from three nearly fatal accidents.

### **Topics Discussed:**

Childhood memories, monastic life, imprisonment, forced labor, thamzing.

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## Interview #17B

**Interviewee: Jampa Gyaltzen, Geshe**

**Age: 88, Sex: Male**

**Interviewer: Marcella Adamski**

**Interview Date: January 2, 2014**

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:23

**Interviewee #17B: Jampa Gyaltzen, Geshe ‘Buddhist monk with philosophy degree’  
Jampa Gyaltzen. [I am also called] Ladakh Geshe Jampa Gyaltzen.**

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

**#17B: It is not necessary to talk about my life in Ladakh, right?**

Q: First of all, is it okay for us to use this interview we are doing today?

**#17B: Yes, yes, [you] can.**

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

**#17B: [Nods]**

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

**#17B: No.**

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

**#17B: [Nods]**

Q: Geshe-*la*, can you please tell me when you were born and where you were born?

00:03:18

**#17B: It is Ladakh.**

Q: Which year were you born?

**#17B: Yes?**

Q: How old are you now?

**#17B: Eighty-eight.**

Q: So you were born in 1926.

**#17B: Yes, that is right.**

Q: *Geshe-la*, what did your family do for a living in Ladakh? What kind of livelihood?

**#17B: When [I] was a little child, there were 10 siblings in the family. I am the youngest. Now everyone is dead. I am the only survivor.**

Q: When you were living at home in Ladakh what was your parents' livelihood? What did [they] do for a living?

00:04:22

**#17B: The livelihood was similar to Tibet. [We] ate *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley' and wheat flour. *Tsampa*.**

Q: What work did [they] do?

**#17B: I went to herd goats when I was 7 or 8 years old.**

Q: What work did the parents do?

**#17B: Parents did farming, fieldwork.**

Q: Did you stay in Ladakh all your life or when did you leave?

**#17B: [I] became a monk at the age of 12 in Ladakh.**

Q: Twelve years of age?

**#17B: Twelve years of age. I lived [in Ladakh] until the age of 17. At 17 [I] went to Tibet through India. [I] went to Tibet at age 17 and lived in Tibet for 20 years.**

**I lived in Tibet for 20 years studying the scriptures to become a *geshe* and received teachings from His Holiness the Dalai Lama.**

Q: When you were like 27 that would have been like 1953. What happened...Excuse me, you went at age 17 and you stayed for 20 years in Tibet. What happened to you in Tibet?

00:06:44

**#17B: I studied debates in Tibet.**

Q: What else happened?

**#17B: Yes?**

Q: What else happened?

**#17B: There was not anything but to study the debates. One received teachings and studied debates. [I] lived in Loselling Datsang ‘section in a large monastery’ of Drepung [Monastery]. The *khangtsen* [smaller community within a monastery, in which monks of one geographical area live] is Pitu Khangtsen.**

**The 20 years passed happily. [I] was very happy and did not face any problems. Then in the year ’59, the Chinese captured and imprisoned [me].**

Q: Where were you when they captured you? What were you doing?

**#17B: I was in Drepung. [I] was imprisoned in Drepung for five months.**

Q: In Drepung?

**#17B: Yes, kept in jail and forced to construct drivable roads. Five months in Drepung. Food was difficult and [I] did not have *tsampa* or tea and drank just water while at work. [I] constructed roads for five months.**

Q: Were there many monks from Drepung that were sent to prison?

00:09:01

**#17B: [Interrupts] At Nyechen Thangla [I] transported earth and rocks for six months in preparation for the electricity plant. [The prisoners] were made to construct the electricity plant working six months, three months in night [shift] and three months in day [shift].**

**For three months [I] was made to sleep during the day and work at night.**

Q: What was your crime that you were arrested and put in prison that the Chinese accused you of?

**#17B: [I] attended a meeting to protest against the Chinese, a meeting. There was no crime except for attending the meeting at the *khangtsen*. [I] attended it.**

Q: Why were you protesting against the Chinese?

**#17B: Yes?**

Q: There was a meeting to protest against the Chinese...

**#17B: Yes, a meeting. That was the only...**

Q: Why were [you] protesting against the Chinese?

**#17B: It was that year, the year '59.**

Q: Why the protest?

**#17B: The Chinese must go back and that Tibet was independent.**

Q: What happened after when you were working in that last sentence, three months where you had to finish that work?

00:11:18

**#17B: For three months [I] was made to sleep during the day and work at night. [I] worked for six months. [I] transported earth and rocks for six months in carts. [Prisoners] loaded earth and rocks [in a cart] and six men pulled it.**

**I contemplated leaping into the water but could not. There was a river but [I] could not jump into it. It was better to die. [I] could not jump into the river. There would be a soldier there [points to left] and one there [points to right] along with barbed wire fencing. I could not jump into the river. It is a large river. It is the Tsangpo of Lhasa. [I] could not manage to jump.**

Q: Did the Chinese know that you were from Ladakh and not a Tibetan person?

**#17B: [The Chinese said,] “Though you are from Ladakh, you have protested along with the Tibetans. So your [crime is] the same.” Then from Nyechen Thangla [I] was transferred to Drapchi [Prison] and interned for eight months in a room. There was no work. The food was just a cup of *tsampa* and [I] never saw tea and butter for eight months. [I] was locked in a room.**

**[The Chinese] said practicing religion was banned and so also closing the eyes [was banned]. If one shut the eyes it was said, “Why are the eyes closed? Is the rebel praying?” [I] was not permitted to close the eyes. All rosaries and texts were confiscated. There was none left for eight months.**

00:14:16

**After eight months—we were all foreign people from Russia, Ladakh and Bhutan—the 18 of us were jailed in a room, all foreigners, 17 people.**

Q: Was it 17 or 18?

**#17B: It was 17 people. There were Bhutanese, Muslims, [monks] from Ladakh and Mon Tawang. All were foreigners. There was one Geshe Legden, a Mongolian who was the abbot of Gomang Datsang.**

Q: Were all these people religious people, monks or spiritual people or were they lay people as well?

**#17B: [We] were all monks. And then [we] were let out, brought outside from the locked room. [We] were in tents for around two months.**

Q: Where?

**#17B: Tents had been put up outside. [We] were not interned but brought out. [We] were not locked up but brought out.**

00:16:08

**Once outside [the Chinese] said, “You are foreigners. Questions will be asked and you have to give answers as to what you have done so far.” Papers were distributed. [They] said, “Write what you have been doing from the age of 8 until the age of 37.”**

**I have forgotten to talk about the attack, the attack. The attack took place in the evening of the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the 2<sup>nd</sup> lunar month of the year ‘59. Norbulingka was shelled innumerable times. Drepung was also shelled many times. The riot happened in the night of the 10<sup>th</sup> day and on the 12<sup>th</sup> day around this time, Norbulingka was lost. His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s security guards fled away on horseback from the Norbulingka. His Holiness had left on the 7<sup>th</sup> day. We did not know it.**

00:17:48

**Cannon shells were aimed where His Holiness had been and we possessed no weapons. The monks wanted to rush towards those that were aiming the cannons from below our monastery. [We] wanted to go from where [the Chinese] were shelling at His Holiness. Then the abbot said, “You should not go. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has left and is no longer there.” We all sat back relaxed.**

...[not discernible]. It is okay, right?

**On the 14<sup>th</sup> day Drepung was shelled. Most of the monks had already escaped and there were only three of us monks left in our *khangtsen*. The rest had fled. The shelling began and then some people arrived who said, “Are you going to surrender or not? If not, within 30 minutes Drepung will be reduced to ashes.” Forty to 50 artilleries were ready.**

Q: Where?

00:19:43

**#17B: Below Drepung [Monastery]. There were cannons, 40-50. “We will surrender,” [we] replied. “If you surrender, call all the monks of the monastery. If [they] do not return within seven days, [they will] be expelled from the community. You can hold *daja* ‘tea assembly of *datsang*’ and *mangja* ‘tea assembly of the sangha’ like you usually hold.” People were sent out everywhere. Then all the monks returned.**

The Chinese said, “You can hold *daja* and *mangja* until the 24<sup>th</sup>” but did not come there. Being told that the Chinese were coming on the 24<sup>th</sup>, we put up new door curtains, *shambu* ‘door and window fringe’ and drew white lines. [We] were called to attend *daja*. [We] went for *daja* and then were called for *choera* ‘debate session.’ At the place of *choera* there were no monks of our monastery but many thousands of troops having been deployed from Gonpori and entered the monastery.

All the monks were ejected from the monastery [temple] and the doors closed. The monks of Losseling were interned in Losseling Datsang, Gomang monks inside Gomang Datsang and Dheyang and Rakpa monks were put inside Dheyang Datsang. It was around 8 o’clock and until the afternoon of the next day, there was not a drop of water. All were locked up.

00:21:30

That day in the monastery, in front of the *datsang* were our abbots, lama and *chanzoe* ‘business managers.’ Their hands were tied [indicates hands tied behind back] and they were taken away. None were left. Placing guns and machine guns there [the Chinese] said, “What have you got to say?” “[We] have nothing to say.” “We have arrested a few of the monks but you are common monks, so nothing will happen to you.”

Then around noon, tea was served. Three people from each *khangtsen* were sent to get *tsampa*. [We] were left there for three days. Then [we] were told to come to the main prayer hall with enough tea and butter to last for three days. Then at the main prayer hall, five people that had been captured were brought out. They were the chief abbot of our *datsang*; a *chanzo*; two other *chanzo*, one each from Losseling and Gomang, and another abbot.

Q: The five men were captured?

#17B: Five people dressed in monks’ robes. Except for the robes here [indicates lower part of body] the rest was rendered completely naked, completely bare. After rendering [them] naked, [the Chinese] said, “These people are the main culprits of Drepung. These five people are the ones that pushed you under the reducing-to-ashes cannons.” All their robes were given to some monks; some were given *zen* ‘upper garments,’ some *shamthap* ‘skirt-like robes’ and some watches. [The prisoners] were rendered completely naked and each of them was given a white *chupa* ‘traditional coat.’

00:23:22

What [the Chinese] said was, “Now you, the poor shall have power as the situation is similar to that of the sky having moved down and the earth having gone up. These people have assaulted and oppressed you. Come and avenge.” The *chisong* had a servant that used to ride with him and who he had fired. He [former servant] stood up and said, “Hey, do you recognize me?” “Yes, [I] recognize.” “We, the poor have received power from the Communists. You fired me, did you not?” “Yes, [I] did because you stole.” He [former servant] was embarrassed and fisted him [indicates being hit on the face]. He hit him here and here [indicates face], fisted thrice and drew blood. Then Phakpa Thutop who was the Chinese interpreter said, “These people have oppressed you. You, tell the monks what you have done since the age of 8.” Then he spoke.

Q: Who?

**#17B: The *chisong*, the *chisong* of Gomang. His name was Chipa Temay.**

Q: Was [he] an abbot?

**#17B: Yes?**

Q: Was [he] an abbot?

**#17B: [He] was a *chanzo*. This must be documented.**

Q: *Chanzo*?

**#17B: I will only talk about what I have witnessed. If needed, I can even provide evidence.**

[Interpreter to interviewee]: *Geshe-la*, shall I translate this?

**#17B: Yes?**

Interpreter: Shall I translate?

**#17B: Yes, yes, do translate.**

00:28:28

**He was assaulted and all his possessions that included innumerable gold and silver items were confiscated. [He] owned 1,000 yaks and *dri* ‘female yaks.’ Goats and sheep... [He owned] 1,000 yaks and *dri*, and 2 million grains.**

Q: Grains?

**#17B: Two million grains.**

Q: Was it kilograms?

**#17B: You know grains to make *tsampa*?**

Q: Yes.

**#17B: He owned 2 million of it.**

Q: What unit of weight is the 2 million?

**#17B: Yes?**

Q: What unit of weight is the 2 million?

**#17B: The 2 million is grains.**

Q: Grains in what?

**#17B: Grains in *khel*. Two million *khel*. Then money, how much would it be? Two million. Two million units of currency.**

Q: Money?

**#17B: Yes, 2 million currencies. There were 40 horses and mules. The 40 horses and mules were used on trade expeditions to India. All of these and the gold and silver items were removed from his quarters and he was forced to wear a white *chupa*.**

Q: It was the *chanzo*, right?

**#17B: It was the *chanzo*.**

**Finally he was taken to many places to be subjected to *thamzing* ‘struggle sessions’ and assaults. Then [he] passed away at Drapchi [Prison] at the age of 82.**

00:30:37

**Nevermind him, I a common monk but there was nothing left in my quarters. Everything was confiscated. [I] was left with nothing, not even a cup.**

Q: To you, *Geshe-la*?

**#17B: Yes, everything. I was not allowed to step into my room. Everything was confiscated. Some [Chinese] leaders said, “You are foreigners. Bring your things and prepare a list.” [I] handed a list and went to get [my things]. “You fantasize. You are all the same. Whether foreigners or Tibetans [all things] will be confiscated.” [I] was not given any clothes or even a cup.**

**And later Bakula Rinpoche of Ladakh had written to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru [former Indian Prime Minister] giving our names. [I] managed to come here because of it. Having confiscated everything [I] was escorted to Gangtok [Sikkim] with nothing. [I] was escorted to the border of India. Pandit Nehru wrote to Mao Zedong saying that his people were [imprisoned in Tibet]. Bakula Rinpoche approached Pandit Nehru and Pandit Nehru wrote to Mao Zedong and I managed to leave.**

00:33:05

**[I] was imprisoned at the age of 37 and arrived in India at 40. After arriving in India, I later gave my *geshe* ceremony in Mundgod. I had a patron who had accumulated grains in anticipation of [my] *geshe* ceremony in Tibet. The Chinese have consumed all of that.**

Q: And what happens in India?

**#17B: [I] came to India at age 37...**

Q: Forty.

**#17B: Forty. I arrived in India at age 39...arrived here at 40.**

Q: In Mundgod?

**#17B: [I] went to Ladakh before coming here. I took the role of abbot at Likhi Monastery in Ladakh for four years. Then I came down [to Mundgod]. The abbot said, "You are a senior monk and must take the *geshe* examination." I took the *geshe* examination and made the required offerings. Then [I] went to Gyupa [Gyumed Monastery]. I went to Gyupa at the age of 67 and now am 88 years old. How many years has it been?**

Q: Twenty-one.

00:35:12

**#17B: [Nods] I fell under a train when I travelled from Ladakh. [I] fell under the wheels of a train at Bhopal. Nothing happened but [I] heard a voice in the ear. There was not any thought but of death. The voice in the ear said, "You should move to the pathway." [I] fell in front of the first wheel and before the second wheel neared, [I] instantly moved away. The train sped away. Nothing happened to me. The rosary was scratched.**

**Good?**

Q: Good.

**#17B: And then I went on a holiday to Ladakh. [I] flew by plane to go to Ladakh. The tickets were booked from Mysore. We were three from Gyumed Monastery. Including three other Tibetans, we were six and the rest [of the passengers] were foreigners. The plane was full. Nearing Chandigarh the plane burst into flames. The plane was in flames. There was a boom. It burst into flames three times but nothing happened.**

**There was no thought but of death. They said prayers and I said prayers. We wondered what had happened and thought that perhaps [we] had land in Chandigarh. The lady [stewardess] should have served breakfast to us but did not. She came smiling and took away a man. This man happened to be a plane technician. The plane could not be repaired and [we] thought it might land in Chandigarh.**

00:38:07

**The monk from Tiwu performed a divination. There was one monk from Tiwu that lived in Ladakh. He is not that other one. He did a divination and remarked, "Nothing is going to happen." I too perform divinations but it did not cross [my] mind. I could not think about performing a divination, impossible. [We] did not know [the plane] had turned around and then after sometime landed in Delhi.**

**The plane did not have one of the wheels. At the airport were fire extinguishers to put out the fire, men and machines. Nothing happened [to us]. This was due to the grace of God.**

**We had 33 volumes of scriptures in there. [I] think it is due to its benevolence. There were various blessed protective cords. We were three monks. These three monks were there at that time.**

Q: It's...

**#17B: And then I had a motorcycle accident. It is not yet a month since the motorcycle accident. Except for this here [shows right elbow] nothing else happened. Look [shows right elbow] this is the injury due to the motorcycle accident. Nothing else happened. [I] had a motorcycle accident.**

Q: Did the motorcycle crash into you?

00:40:40

**#17B: The motorcycle rider and I were both hurt. The motorcycle rider hurt his hand a little.**

Q: Were you riding on the motorcycle?

00:40:45

**#17B: Yes, [I] was riding on the motorcycle towards Gyumed Monastery. It was a month back. Look [shows right elbow] this is the injury.**

Q: Has a month passed by?

**#17B: It is almost a month. [We] fell like this [moves to right]. Nothing happened.**

Q: Amazing!

**#17B: That is due to the grace of God, the grace of God. [I] have belief in God.**

Q: Yes, you have been...

**#17B: It is said that nobody lives after falling under a train. There is not anyone with just broken legs or hands. There is not anyone fortunate [like me], it is said. [People] in Bhopal were amazed and everybody started clapping. [They] came to see my body but I stood up [claps].**

**These days it is being said in Bhopal, "The Dalai Lama fell under a train but did not die." [They] said "Dalai Lama." [Smiles] "It is said in Bhopal that the Dalai Lama fell under a train but survived."**

Q: You have many close encounters with danger but the Gods have protected you.

00:42:48

**#17B: [Speaks before translation] This is mentioned in the book [authored by interviewee].**

Q: You had many close encounters with danger but the Gods have protected you.

**#17B: [Touches right ear]**

Q: The gods protected you.

**#17B: Yes, the gods protected.**

Q: *Geshe-la* said on the plane he was too scared to do a divination...

**#17B: [Interrupts] Then in the plane...we were provided with food in Delhi and then left by a new plane. During the journey all the foreigners clapped. Most of them were foreigners and only six people [non-foreigners] in the plane. All were foreigners.**

Q: They were so happy to see you.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: ...to reach Ladakh.

Q: ...to reach Ladakh, yes. Do you do divinations for people these days or only on special occasions?

**#17B: Yes?**

Q: Do you do divinations for people?

**#17B: [I] do divinations, do divinations. People say that the predictions come true. People come from different places and some from abroad.**

Q: *Geshe-la*, we've learned a great deal from your story and I'm sorry you had so much suffering, but we're very happy that you survived so many dangerous experiences, including three years of suffering under the Chinese.

00:44:58

**#17B: It was two years [under the Chinese].**

Q: Just to be sure, I'm going to check again by asking you if this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would this be a problem for you?

**#17B: There is no problem. If the Chinese are here, I will tell [them]. If the Chinese are here...I have put [my] signature [on the release form] and there is nothing untrue. It is the truth.**

**If the Chinese were here I would confront and say, "You did this and this." What problem? That is something they [the Chinese] did.**

Q: *Geshe-la*, thank you so much for sharing your story with us.

**#17B: Yes?**

Q: Thank you for telling [your] story today.

**#17B: Okay.**

ENDOF INTERVIEW