

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #1B – Keotsang Tulku Jamphel Yeshi
December 23, 2013

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #1B
2. Interviewee: Keotsang Tulku Jamphel Yeshi
3. Age: 70
4. Date of Birth: 1944
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Lhoka
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1985
9. Date of Interview: December 23, 2013
10. Place of Interview: Hardhong Khangtsen, Sera Jey Monastery, Bylakuppe
Mysore District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 3 hr 15 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Pema Tashi
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Keotsang Tulku Jamphel Yeshi was born in Lhoka in Nethong District of Utsang Province. He describes Lhokha as a very large area with a population of around 10,000. His family engaged in farming as well as raising animals. He was recognized as the reincarnation of the previous Keotsang Rinpoche at the age of 2. He recounts his migration to Lhasa to his own monastery called Keotsang Ritoe and the role of his teacher and the *chanzo* 'business manager.' He spent his time memorizing scriptures and was disciplined by beatings if he did not study well.

As a teenager Keotsang Tulku Jamphel Yeshi went to Sera Monastery near Lhasa to study and practice debating. He witnessed the initial period of the Chinese occupation when they claimed to come to liberate Tibet and develop it. He witnessed the bombing of Sera Monastery and Norbulingka and the uprising in Lhasa. He and his teachers attempted to escape but were eventually arrested by the Chinese.

Keotsang Tulku Jamphel Yeshi suffered tremendously having to undergo *thamzing* 'struggle sessions' and 17 years in prison followed by three years of hard labor. He narrates in detail about the suffering prisoners underwent like starvation, torture, hard labor and political reeducation.

Topics Discussed:

Utsang, monastic life, first appearance of Chinese, Dalai Lama, resistance, brutality/torture, life under Chinese rule, oppression under Chinese, imprisonment, starvation, forced labor, *thamzing*.

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Interviewee: Keotsang Tulku Jamphel Yeshi

Age: 70, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: December 23, 2013

Question: Please tell us your name, *Rinpoche-la* ‘respectful term for respected lama.’

00:00:11

Interviewee #1B: My name is Keotsang Tulku ‘Reincarnate Lama’...

My real name is Keotsang Tulku Jamphel Yeshi. Jamphel Yeshi is the shorter version of the name. The name of the predecessor lama is a bit long. If it is needed, I can give the longer one.

Q: Okay.

#1B: Jamphel Yeshi Thupten Choekyi Nyima Monlam.

And to give a clarification, there are three Keotsang [Tulku], similar. It should be noted that I am Sera Jey Hardhong Khangtsen Keotsang Tulku.

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?

#1B: Yes, of course with great joy and happiness.

Q: Thank you for offering to share your story with us. During this interview if you wish to take a break or stop at anytime, please let me know.

00:02:43

#1B: Okay, okay.

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

#1B: Of course.

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

#1B: I will have no problems.

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

#1B: [Nods]

Q: Rinpoche-*la*, please tell us again your name and where you were born.

#1B: The shorter form of my name is given, right? Keotsang Tulku Jamphel Yeshe. The birthplace is Lhoka in Tibet.

Q: How many people were in your family when you were born?

00:04:09

#1B: I do not have much to say. There were father, mother, a paternal uncle and seven siblings including me. So how many is it? That is seven, eight, nine, 10. It was like that.

Q: How close is Lhoka to Lhasa?

#1B: Lhoka is a very large area. Lhoka is a very large area. [I] do not know if this should be noted here, but earlier when I was in the Chinese prison, [it used to be said that] the whole region of Lhoka is four times the size of England.

However, the part of Lhoka where I was born is Nethong District of Lhoka. The district is Nethong District.

It is Nethong. Nethong District.

Nethong District. Won in Lhoka. The name of the village is Won. Wonba. It is called Won.

Q: How many people were in that village approximately?

00:05:59

#1B: [I] cannot quote a figure as to how many people were there then in Won. Population in those days in Tibet was less. The maximum number might hardly be 10,000. There might have been several thousand including children. That is my guess.

Q: Where was the nearest temple or monastery?

#1B: From Lhoka?

Q: Yes, in the village of Won.

#1B: There are many monasteries in Won. The biggest and nearest monastery in Won is Won Choedhing Ladang, the Choedhing Monastery.

Q: Your parents, can you tell me what they did for a livelihood?

#1B: [They] were farmers. [They] were what is known as *samadok*, farming and raising animals as well. [They] tilled lands and raised animals as well. [They] were village people.

Q: What memories do you have of your childhood and growing up in your family with your brothers and sisters?

00:07:48

#1B: To give a clear picture about me, when I was recognized as a [reincarnate] lama...it was 1944 when I was born. That is the year of [my] birth. I was given the title of a lama. It is mentioned that I was given the title of a lama at the age of 2. I got separated from home at the age of 2 and arrived in Lhasa.

Q: Where were you taken in Lhasa and who became your teachers?

#1B: I have a small monastery in Lhasa [called] Keotsang Ritoe. If Lhasa is here, on the hill [indicates palm]...one could reach it in 3-4 hours on foot. Now that there are vehicles these days, one might reach in around half an hour. It is a small monastery that belongs to me. It is called *ritoe* ‘cavern in the hills’ because it is located on a hill.

Q: During your childhood did you have any visits with your parents again?

00:09:32

#1B: After I arrived [at Keotsang Ritoe] and went to prison in 19...I went [home] after being released from prison in the year 1982. I had never been back home until then after leaving at the age of 2. Father and mother used to visit [me] once a year. That was before '59.

Q: When you mentioned that you were identified as a reincarnate lama, who were you the reincarnation of and who recognized you as such?

#1B: The lama that recognized [me] as a lama was the Regent Reting. [I] am told it was Reting Rinpoche.

Q: And the reincarnation of...?

#1B: ...my predecessor lama, Keotsang. I am the fifth reincarnation. There had been four reincarnations before me.

00:11:02

Perhaps this should be mentioned in the meantime. My predecessor lama was the *tsenshap* ‘qualified attendant’ of His Holiness the 13th Dalai Lama. [He] was the *tsenshap* of His Holiness the present 14th Dalai Lama. He was one of the main people responsible for the search of His Holiness’ reincarnation.

Q: Your predecessor as a reincarnated lama?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: The fourth Keotsang Rinpoche.

Q: Can you tell us what kind of training you had in the monastery as a young boy?

#1B: It was only the dharma, the Buddha dharma.

Q: Were there any special teachers that you remember?

#1B: Yes, there were. When [I] was little, in those days lamas had a *solpon* ‘steward’ that was a servant. The word *solpon* is a polite form. These days we would describe it as a person that serves. He taught me the Tibetan alphabet. Then when I was around 9 years old, there was a special tutor that was a *geshe* ‘monk with Buddhist philosophy degree.’ [Such a person that taught] a lama was called *yongzin*. There was the tutor. If it is required [I] can mention the name of the tutor.

Q: Did we establish where this monastery was and how many monks were in it?

00:13:22

#1B: The standard number of monks in the early days was 27. However, there were around 30.

Q: And the name of the monastery and location?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Keotsang Ritoe near Lhasa.

Q: When did your life begin to change in the monastery from normal everyday routine?

#1B: As far as I can recall...I wonder how old I was...but I do remember the Chinese coming. It was in the year 1951. The Chinese Communist Party arose in China in 1949. So the Chinese arrived in Tibet in 1951. I can recall that a little bit.

Q: Can you describe what happened at that time?

#1B: What used to be said then was that...What I heard was that the Tibetan Government army waged a war against the Chinese in Chamdo which was lost and that the Chinese were coming inwards. Everyone was terrified. The terror was on account that the Chinese would cause a lot of suffering.

Later while we were living there, a huge number of Chinese appeared leading camels—you would know camels, right? [They] came leading camels because there were no drivable roads yet in Lhasa then. A great number of Chinese soldiers arrived leading camels and many people were terrified and I knew it.

Q: You were about 7 years of age at that time? And when they came on camels, what did they do or where did they go?

00:16:11

#1B: Yes, I might have been [around 7 years of age].

Q: Where did they go riding on the camels?

#1B: To Lhasa, Lhasa, Lhasa and then gradually to Shigatse and towards Thoe. Initially [the Chinese soldiers] came to Lhasa.

Q: And what was your individual personal experience with the Chinese? What was the first time you had contact with them, personally?

#1B: At that time we just saw the Chinese but there was no contact with the Chinese. However, Keotsang Ritoe is located in Lhasa. Keotsang Ritoe is atop the hill and the Chinese were carrying out construction. Our ritoe is on a hill. If this is Lhasa [gestures off camera], the hill faces it [indicates an upright palm] on which is the monastery. There were many Chinese involved in breaking rocks below it. We would see such as we walked by but did not speak. [We] saw the Chinese but there was no special contact because we did not know the language. There was hardly any contact.

Q: What was the... You were just a little boy do you have recollection of what kind of feelings you had when you saw these foreign people in your area?

00:18:25

#1B: Initially when the Chinese came, His Holiness the Dalai Lama had to sort of flee to Dromo. His Holiness left for Dromo. I was a child then but heard from my servants and other adults about His Holiness' travails. The Tibetan people have faith and love His Holiness very much and there were talks of His Holiness leaving for India.

[I] was worried that the Chinese would inflict a lot of suffering. Though maybe not like an adult, I was a little worried about what would happen. However, I was not an adult then. That is one thing and secondly... [To interpreter] You can translate that first or it will be too long.

Q: And then what happens next in your story?

#1B: And later His Holiness returned to Tibet, to Lhasa. The Chinese said, "[We] will not do anything. We have come to bring progress to Tibet and will not cause any suffering to you." In today's words [the Chinese said], "We have come to help Tibet as it is lagging behind. After developing Tibet, we will be going back." Those were the statements known to all.

Q: How did you hear these stories? Were there meetings? How did you individually get this information about what the Chinese were planning to do?

00:20:54

#1B: Many people were talking about it. The Chinese said, "We have come to bring progress. Because Tibet is backward, we will construct factories, houses and raise the economic status of the Tibetan people. We have not come to live here." This was heard by all. However, many Tibetans did not believe it and thought, "These must be lies. Eventually the Chinese are bound to do something bad." Everybody was anxious about it.

[To interpreter] Please add this. My *chanzo* ‘business manager’...You know *chanzo*? *Chanzo*? *Chanzo* is the main person in a lama’s residence. He and, you know, the Tibetan government...the government of Tibet in the earlier times. He knew many of the aristocrats there. The aristocrats had a lot of connection with the Chinese, as at that time they were the Tibetan Government. Due to the strong connection with the Chinese, the aristocrats told my *chanzo* and the *chanzo* told me. The main source was this.

Q: And how was it that you had a business manager as a child?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Most incarnate lamas have a business manager.

Q: How does your life begin to change?

00:23:21

#1B: Then the Chinese gradually announced that Tibet would be liberated peacefully. By liberating Tibet peacefully, the Tibetan army would become the liberation army; become the Chinese army. Likewise, there was the 17-Point Agreement for the peaceful liberation of Tibet that had to be signed. Therefore, His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama—Panchen Lama was already in China—were escorted to China in ’56 or ’55. I can recall clearly. Many Tibetans were concerned then thinking, “His Holiness the Dalai Lama has been invited to China and the Chinese will keep [His Holiness] in China and [he] will not be able to return.” Many people were anxious.

I had cried many times then. There was no bridge over the Tsangpo River of Lhasa. You know bridge and the Tsangpo of Lhasa? [His Holiness] had to cross the Tsangpo and used a canoe. There were the people of Lhasa, Chinese troops and Tibetan soldiers that were in procession. It was mandatory for us to go there to see [His Holiness] off, as His Holiness is a great lama. Many of the people were crying and I too cried. I can recall thinking, “His Holiness the Dalai Lama is going to China and the Chinese will do no good.” One was greatly worried, which I can clearly remember.

Q: Please continue.

00:26:16

#1B: That is how it happened. And then His Holiness spent, [I] do not know how many months in China because unlike now one could not hear news clearly then. And then one day His Holiness returned from China and we went to receive [him]. Everybody in Lhasa was incredibly happy. His Holiness returned and there was talk about the 17-Point Agreement having been signed. The 17-Point Agreement was signed which defined that Tibet would be liberated peacefully, that the Tibetan Government would continue for seven years or so and that [the Chinese] would not bring about any changes. The 17-Point Agreement with the Chinese took place then.

Q: What do you remember about His Holiness’ return? Did you go to that event as well?

#1B: Yes, it was mandatory for us to go. I was among the lamas that held a medium title and when His Holiness the Dalai Lama moved from Lhasa to...It was like this in the early times—His Holiness lived in Norbulingka during summer and the Potala Palace in wintertime. It was mandatory for us to be present when [His Holiness] moved from the Potala Palace to the Norbulingka and from the Norbulingka to the Potala Palace. We had to be always present at all major ceremonies as we were lamas of a higher rank. However, lamas of lower ranks did not have to be present. Therefore, we had to be always present.

Q: During those years did you ever have any individual meetings with His Holiness?

00:29:09

#1B: Not then. Just before I left for India...No, no, just before Tibet was lost—Tibet was lost a year later—I received a private audience with His Holiness the Dalai Lama once in the Norbulingka.

At that time His Holiness said—I was around 13 or 14 years old then—“Study the scriptures well. That is the main responsibility of a lama and so study the scriptures well.” [He] told me so. My teacher was with me and [His Holiness] told him, “A lama must study the scriptures well. A lama without learning the scriptures is nothing.” [His Holiness] advised strongly. It was for a short duration. I can remember that.

Q: Do you remember what he seemed like to you? You’re a young boy but you’re meeting the Dalai Lama. What was your experience of that?

00:30:46

#1B: [I] was a child then. To be honest, at that time I did not know much about faith as I was a child and was nervous. His Holiness is the utmost and when [he] said that [I] must study the scriptures well and advised the teacher too, it seemed very fearful.

Q: What were you afraid of?

#1B: That was because normally the teacher would beat a lot saying repeatedly that a lama must study the scriptures. The teacher beat on account of the scriptures and I was a child. When the teacher was not around [I] was like most children. The teacher used to beat [me] a lot and when His Holiness advised thus, [I] feared the teacher might hit [me] more and become stricter. [I] was anxious and fearful of that. [I] was a child then and used to be overjoyed if [I] did not have to study the scriptures.

Q: What kind of a student were you? Was studying, did it come easy to you? Was it difficult to memorize? Were you curious about the scriptures? Can you tell us a little bit about your own learning of the dharma?

00:32:44

#1B: I was like this: I could memorize the scriptures very well. [I] could memorize almost a page in a day. I could recite it in around three hours. That was the memorization part. However, I was not good at the debates. These are different and the beatings from the teacher were on account of this.

Q: Were there any teachings that you learned as a young boy, 13, 14 that made a lasting impression on you, teachings of the dharma?

#1B: I was perhaps around 13, 14 then. For instance one chants prayers. [To interpreter] You know about chanting prayers. [I] received the first Kalachakra empowerment from His Holiness the Dalai Lama and there are mantras connected with it that must be accumulated. Then from His Holiness' tutor, Ling Rinpoche...[to interpreter] you would know Ling Rinpoche. It was from the previous reincarnation of Ling Rinpoche that [I] received the Jigshay empowerment.

After receiving the empowerment, there is the Jigshay mantra to chant that I never discontinued until the Cultural Revolution. [I] was in prison during the Great Cultural Revolution and then discontinued completely. I did not stop until then. That was from my chanting commitment and then there are many scriptures memorized, but apart from some words, you tend to forget the rest.

Q: The way you learned as a young boy, is that same style still being taught today in the monasteries?

00:36:16

#1B: The scriptures studied are the same. However, I must say that there is a great difference between the lamas of our times and the lamas of the present. I will talk about it later.

Q: Okay.

#1B: The difference, for instance is I became a monk at the age of 9...became a monk at the age of 9. From the age of 9 through 12, except for memorization and such there were no debate studies. Though a lot of texts were memorized, there was time for play. One could play for a few hours and study the scriptures. [We] were children and there was a little bit of freedom.

And then from the age of 11 or 12, one attended the *choera* 'debate session' and the debate studies began. For around five years, from the age of 12-16 the rules were very strict with hardly any holidays. One must memorize the texts, participate in debate sessions and chant the texts. To be frank, it was very rigid and one could not venture here and there. If one did not study the scriptures well and went here and there—though there was nowhere to go—and played, the teacher would beat and scold you. Hence, it was extremely strict.

00:38:51

For instance, it has been some years since I arrived in India and there are many young lamas who are like what I used to be. [I] heard that the teachers do not beat. Of course, these days beating is not considered good. And there is not anyone that does it. Likewise, there are not many that study the scriptures—not that there are not any but compared to us [they] live in bliss. There is a lot of freedom. It was not so for us in the old times.

Q: Do you think this is an improvement or a loss in teaching style?

#1B: There are two opinions about it. That is my opinion. For some, freedom is necessary. Beating and such are bad. Beating and imposing strict rules are not good. If one has the desire to study, one will. If one does not have the desire, no amount of rigidity will help. That is one view. There's another thought where it's said that the stricter the rules in a monastery, the better. In my opinion, a little rigidity is better. However, that is just my opinion.

00:40:51

Can I say something here?

Q: Please.

#1B: In the early days children played outdoor games like wrestling or football. There were not many games to play. However, these days there is the telephone, laptop, computer and a host of other things to while away time with. Everyone understands it these days. Little monks are within the quarters; everyone is sitting silently in the quarters.

In the early days towards nightfall, there would be a lot of noise but these days there is not. Why? Because all are ensconced in the quarters. What are [they] doing in the quarters? [I] do not mean everyone, but many of the young ones are busy on the telephones and laptops. There were no such things in those days.

Q: Not activity, more mental.

#1B: Yes. I tell some of the younger ones that looking [at the screens] from morning until night might result in squint eyes. [They] keep staring the whole day.

Q: When things were very difficult for you as a monk around the discipline, did you ever wish that you weren't a monk, that you could go home and be any career or any job you wanted?

00:43:24

#1B: I have written about this in here [indicates book written by interviewee]. I used to feel that way earlier when the teacher scolded me. It happened long ago. "If you lamas do not study the scriptures, it is similar to a dog being called a lion." Lions used to be regarded highly in Tibet. Lions are renowned among animals. "By understanding the scriptures well, you are like a lion. If not, it is similar to a dog being called a lion. What use is a lama without the knowledge of scriptures?" Then there would be scolding and beating and sometimes [I] wished I was not a lama or that [I] could be excused from being a lama. [I] wished I could change my lama status with someone else and go home. I have had such thoughts...used to think like that. This is mentioned in here.

Would [you] know about house arrest? House arrest. It is almost like house arrest for the lamas of the old days—though maybe not all—during the time of childhood. There were the teacher, *chanzo*, *solpon*, many who controlled.

Q: How were the monks, most of all yourself, how were you taught to think about the laity, the average person who was not a monk? Were you told that you were more special or that there was equality? What was the education or the attitude of your teachers that they gave you towards the lay people?

#1B: How?

Q: The average person...

#1B: Monks?

Q: Not monks, the general lay men and women. The laity and the lamas are not similar. So how were [you] taught to look upon the laity?

#1B: By the teacher?

Q: How did the teacher educate?

00:46:39

#1B: Well, what the teacher taught at that time was that the lamas, *tulkus* actually, are believed to be reincarnations. There are two reasons for a lama to come into the world. It is to develop the dharma through both *shepa* ‘commentary’ and *dupa* ‘spiritual practice.’ *Shepa* is to study the scriptures well, learn the scriptures thoroughly, and subsequently to meditate and practice to be able to take many sentient beings to the land of the Buddha. That is the objective of a lama. That is the objective of a *tulku* to come down here.

If a lama does not do well, [he] is a disgrace. People consider [him] a lama and if he does not study well, people will say adverse things and that is a cause for sin. The teacher always said that. [To interpreter] Is the answer appropriate? If it is not appropriate to her [interviewer] question, please tell me. If my answer is not appropriate to the question, I can clarify.

Q: The Dalai Lama has returned as you said and everyone was relieved. Can you tell us were there any changes then that occurred in the monastery or did things stay the same at that time?

#1B: After [His Holiness] returned, gradually in the east the Chinese caused a lot of suffering and many attacks took place. Many people from the east came fleeing to Lhasa. There were riots in the east, in Penpa and Beru. The Chinese attacked in the east, invaded and imprisoned many. Numerous people fled to Lhasa and the riots escalated.

Q: What were you doing at that time?

00:49:56

#1B: I was living in the monastery. And then gradually the *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force], which you would know, was formed somewhere in Lhoka with the main camp in Diguthang. The *Chushi Gangdrug* warriors began what we would presently

call guerrilla warfare against the Chinese. Though not in Lhasa, fighting against the Chinese was taking place in the villages in the east and Kham regions.

Then there were numerous people and also from the monasteries that went to join the *Chushi Gangdrug* to fight the Chinese. Many approached the lamas seeking protective amulets. [To interpreter] Do you know protective amulet? [They] came seeking protective amulets. I was not the only one, as there were many lamas in the monasteries. Monks and Khampa ‘people from Kham Province’ going to join the battle sought protective amulets. [They] sought protective amulets and if unavailable, [pieces of] old clothes of lamas that were considered precious in those days. [They] sought such and day by day the number increased and the mayhem escalated.

Q: For people who may not understand, can you describe the affect of the protective amulets?

00:52:22

#1B: By [wearing] a protective amulet while fighting, it is said that one will not get hit by gunshots. That is the main purpose of a protective amulet.

So at that time what I distributed were small *tsa tsa* ‘miniature conical figures molded of clay and used as offerings’ of Jamphelyang. You would know Jamphelyang known as Manjushri ‘Buddha of Wisdom.’ These were small *tsa tsa* image of Jamphelyang that belonged to the earlier Keotsang Rinpoche and considered sacred.

I was a child then and had *tsa tsa* molded, consecrated and distributed them. [I] was forced to distribute because there was much pleading. Some asked for old clothes that were cut up and dispensed. Quite a large number was distributed. There were many lamas that gave out protective amulets, whether in the form of *tsa tsa* or blessed pills.

00:53:53

Then gradually the situation between the Chinese and Tibetans became more serious. What the Chinese Government claimed was, “The government of China has helped Tibet immensely by liberating Tibet peacefully. China has been so good as to formulate the 17-Point Agreement and stating that reformation process will not be launched for seven years.” [China] had claimed that the democratization of liberation process would be launched. “The Chinese Communist Government has been so generous as to delay the reformation process by seven years, yet Tibet’s senior group of rebels is colluding with foreign powers to separate Tibet from China and are planning a rebellion.” The situation was turning graver and graver.

Q: Rinpoche-*la*, did you ever at that time think of joining the *Chushi Gangdrug* and if not, what did you think your role should be as a reincarnated lama?

#1B: To be frank it was like this for me: I was a child then to think of joining the *Chushi Gangdrug*. I told you earlier about the *chanzo* of Keotsang Ladang ‘high lama’s residence.’ A *chanzo* is the main staff member. He had many aristocrats as friends. I knew two such aristocrats who told my *chanzo*, “China is very powerful. China is very powerful and Tibetans can never overcome them through war.” He [aristocrat] had been to China. “So it

is better to go to India or somewhere to the border now. Otherwise, you will never get the chance later.” Such a conversation took place but the *chanzo* did not have the wish to leave then. He did not have plans to go to India or flee to the border.

Q: Did your manager discuss this with you or was he telling you what to do?

00:57:19

#1B: There was no discussion. I was not old enough then. The *chanzo* decided everything and there was no discussion with me.

Q: And then what happens next in your story?

#1B: And then finally in places around Lhasa like Nyemo--though not exactly in Lhasa—rebellion and secret attacks against the Chinese took place and a great uprising was happening. Finally in the beginning of '59, the Chinese invited His Holiness the Dalai Lama for a banquet at the army camp. Then the people revolted and protested in front of the Norbulingka raising slogans, “Tibet is independent. Tibet is not under China.” The people stopped His Holiness the Dalai Lama from leaving the Norbulingka fearing his arrest by the Chinese should [he] go to the Chinese army camp. The uprising was about to take place but this is well known.

People surrounded the Norbulingka to provide security to His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The Tibetan Army at the Potala Palace stood in readiness to go to war.

00:59:32

It was the time of Losar ‘Tibetan New Year’ and His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s *geshe* ‘Buddhist philosophy degree’ examination. [His Holiness] took the *geshe* test at Sera, Drepung and Gaden [Monasteries].

At that point all the people in Tibet feared that the Chinese would one day do something bad and there was not anyone that believed in what the Chinese spoke earlier about their having come to Tibet to bring development and liberate it.

Then among the aristocrats of the Tibetan government—whatever they might be feeling within—there was a group of aristocrats that received money from the Chinese and colluded with them. However, the majority revolted against the Chinese and followed His Holiness the Dalai Lama and wished to fight the Chinese. There were two groups.

Finally, it was on the 10th or 11th of March that Norbulingka was attacked and the uprising of '59 began. At that time I was in Sera Monastery.

Q: How long had you been at Sera Monastery?

01:01:39

#1B: I was mostly living in Sera then taking part in *choera* ‘debate session.’ [I] had to spend more time at the monastery and visited the *ritoe* only during holidays for a few days. [I] had to spend more time in Sera because that was where [I] was studying the scriptures.

Q: What can you tell us that you saw with your own eyes at Sera Monastery during this important time?

#1B: The first time was during the night that I can remember vividly. I was with my steward who is no more. [We] woke up. The Chinese were shelling the Potala Palace and Norbulingka. It was immeasurable. Shells were being fired from four directions upon Norbulingka and the Potala Palace.

People were filled with anxiety unaware that His Holiness the Dalai Lama had left the Norbulingka for India. With such intense bombardment, the worry was mainly for His Holiness the Dalai Lama and many other people in the Norbulingka. People thought, “Many people are no more,” but were helpless. [They] were filled with anxiety.

01:03:42

If it is not too long...if the attack took place tonight the next day several hundred monks of Sera went to the Potala Palace to fetch guns. The Tibetan government had guns in the Potala Palace. [The monks] went to get guns. They went there, broke open the locks and got the guns. As [they] returned bearing the guns, the Chinese shelled Sera Monastery. Around 100 shells were fired.

Q: Where were you when that was happening and what did you do?

#1B: I was in Sera at Samlo Khangtsen ‘a smaller community within a monastery, in which monks of one geographical area live,’ which is just like this [one in Bylakuppe]. Deep inside its assembly hall Reting Rinpoche and we were hiding. If a shell landed, there was no facility of going under the ground. However, [I] wondered when [I] would die.

To speak honestly, not many shells landed on the monastery, which the Chinese claim as intentional. Perhaps it could be that [the Chinese] really did not target or the protective deities protected because most of it landed on the hills and below [the monastery]. Had cannons been fired upon the monastery...they were very powerful. Nobody was killed on account of shells landing on the monastery. Except for a few houses that were damaged most of the shells were fired on the hill to create panic, a claim made by the Chinese.

Q: What happened next to you?

01:06:24

#1B: There were no telephones in those days. However, news traveled every hour and minute. The *Chushi Gangdrug* was in Lhoka. One message said that 10,000-20,000 *Chushi Gangdrug* troops arrived and demolished most of the Chinese military and became the victors. However, another message stated that the Chinese army destroyed the *Chushi Gangdrug*. One did not know which to believe. News kept coming now and then and one was perplexed. Finally, another message said, “If all the monks do not move out the Sera Monastery tomorrow, it will be destroyed.” So I, Reting Rinpoche and another lama who is now here left Sera Monastery in the night. We were 10-odd people including attendants

and the *chanzo* that fled towards Phenpo in the night from Sera. It was not just us but many monks fled.

In particular there were those that had fled from Norbulingka after it was lost and those that were injured. We met many such people along the way that said, “Lhasa is lost.” Now everybody was fleeing towards Phenpo.

Q: Please continue.

#1B: Is it fine to continue with the story?

Q: Yes.

#1B: [We] fled towards Phenpo. There was an exodus on the way to Phenpo. There were those on horseback and others that did not own horses, monks, soldiers, Khampa and many others taking flight. Later [they] turned out to be Chinese spies pretending to be Khampa from the *Chushi Gangdrug* that said, “You need not flee.” Two or three times we were told so. “Why are you running away? Many soldiers of the *Chushi Gangdrug* from Diguthang has arrived and reclaimed Lhasa. You can return to Lhasa.” Later they turned out to be Chinese spies. We met them two or three times on the way to Phenpo.

If I narrate everything it will be too lengthy. So to put it in brief, most people did not believe [the Chinese spies]. Then Chinese planes arrived. They were not warplanes but passenger planes from which bombs were dropped and there was also firing. Many people were killed but nothing happened to us. There were almost 6-7 planes. They flew over Phenpo and Nyemo and the Chinese soldiers dropped bombs.

Q: Were the people out of doors on the mountainside? Where were they? Where was he? And what was he feeling?

01:11:22

#1B: No, no [they] were walking on the plains.

Q: To Phenpo?

#1B: To Phenpo and there was nowhere to hide or go underground. One just had to remain there [looks up]. However, the number of casualties was low.

Q: Rinpoche-*la*, can you recall what you were feeling as a young boy and what your teacher or your guide was telling you?

#1B: [I] was terrified particularly as the planes flew so low that one could see the letters under the wings. The planes were flying that low.

Q: What were the letters?

#1B: There were Chinese scripts under the planes' wings and the Chinese *wushing*. You would know the *wushing*, the star, star. One could see the letters under the wings of the plane as it flew low.

Q: When the planes were flying low and dropping bombs, did the people hide or did they run? What was the experience like?

01:13:10

#1B: Some of those that were aware said one must lie on the ground and not stand. So [they] lay down. Some said that—it was winter then—one must cover the head with leaves so as not to be spotted by the planes. It was winter and there were no leaves, so we lay on the ground. However, the bombs were aimed at those that were armed with rifles and not at us that were fleeing though some did carry pistols. [We] were not particularly targeted. Some of the escapees, the Khampa soldiers had fired up [at the planes] and they were targeted with bombs and shots. We were not fired at, as we were lying low on the ground.

Q: What happens next?

#1B: There were three types of people that were escaping. One kind fled determinedly directly to India. Another kind remarked that this was just a temporary thing and that ultimately the *Chushi Gangdrug* and Western countries like the United States and others would extend help, as there were a lot of such talks. Believing that the loss was not permanent, one kind hid in foxholes in the mountains. So there were two general kinds. Numerous people had fled earlier through Lhoka. Another type hid in foxholes in the mountains. We hid there for two weeks.

01:15:50

So we remained in hiding. Then Chinese soldiers gradually arrived to launch the liberation. And then the Chinese gave out flyers, flyers. The flyers contained four points. One was to surrender voluntarily, you know surrender? One was to come and surrender and give up the weapons. If one gave up the weapons and surrendered, the first point being one would not be killed. The second point mentioned that one would not be subjected to *thamzing* 'struggle session.' Thirdly, one would not be imprisoned. [The fourth being] that whatever one possessed earlier would remain as it were and that nothing would be done if one returned. Well, such a flyer arrived.

It seems there were many that believed this and returned; it seems [they] returned. We did not believe this and felt running away was better just as innumerable people believed and remarked so. So we tried to flee. We owned an estate in Phenpo. [To interpreter] You know what is an estate? We carried whatever possessions [we] had. There was the *chanzo*, and we had horses and mules. We loaded the things and rode on the 12-13 horses and mules and left in the night. But Chinese troops had surrounded [us] and [we] could not succeed. We could not succeed and returned to the estate. It had become too late to flee.

Q: Did you say that you fled from Phenpo?

01:18:06

#1B: Yes, from Phenpo through Phenpo Yonga. Phenpo is a large place. Actually one reached Lhoka by crossing the river. However, Chinese troops had already arrived and there was no exit. Therefore, [we] returned to the estate.

[We] returned to Phenpo and then one day Chinese troops arrived at our estate. Chinese troops arrived at the estate and ordered everyone to come out into the fields without carrying guns or any such thing. Everyone came out and was surrounded by the soldiers [indicates soldiers aiming guns]. They checked all the rooms and took away weapons like guns and swords.

Then questioned each one, “What weapons are hidden? If so these should be surrendered to us. If not you will go to prison once found out.” There were a few weapons that we surrendered and another bunch remained hidden. I was a child then. I was 16 years old then. So except for me and two other people, the rest like the *chanzo*, teacher, senior attendant, all of them—actually it was arrest but at that point [the Chinese] did not mention it as arrest—were taken away to Lhasa on the pretext of receiving an education. [They] were taken to Lhasa and imprisoned at Norbulingka. I was not interred then on account of being a child.

01:21:03

Perhaps this part is a little bit delayed but a few days after the shelling of the Norbulingka, the news arrived that His Holiness the Dalai Lama had reached the border of Bhutan and India. Everybody felt relieved. [I] forgot to mention this.

Q: May I ask how did [you] come to own this estate in Phenpo?

#1B: That is an estate that has been in the possession of the Keotsang Ladang since generations. It was there since the earlier reincarnation. Most *ladang* ‘high lamas’ owned many estates in the old days. We owned an estate in Phenpo and another in the north where animals were raised. It was not just during my time but it was in possession since the earlier reincarnations.

Q: What happens to you next, Rinpoche-*la*?

01:22:28

#1B: I wish to say something [I] remembered but please decide if it needs to be noted or not. It is in here [interviewee’s book] too. My nature is such that whatever story I narrate, speaking the truth is very important. If it is a story about the Chinese, [I] will talk about the bad things if [they] have done something bad. Then if it is something that [they] have done well, to be honest, that must be told too. When it comes to the Chinese, if one speaks only about the bad things, that is not fair. Therefore, this is mentioned in my [book].

At the time we were in flight, there were monks, lamas and those that were in the *Chushi Gangdrug* who were mainly Khampa. [To interpreter] You would know the *Chushi Gangdrug*? There were many fleeing. Not everyone did it but a few committed really bad deeds. During the escape journey [they] captured weapons and belongings of the people,

abused women, seized every belonging, even removing the good clothes from the sick old ones that lay in bed. [They] did despicable acts. There was even a name...What was it? [They] committed despicable acts.

However, it was really surprising when the Chinese army appeared. Where would one find such! The Chinese army had stated at that time, “We will not demand even a needle from the people. We have come here to liberate the people and to destroy those that revolt and cause riots by imprisonment and arrest but no harm will be done to the people.” They arrived and made purchases. There was never any beating, scolding or snatching from the people then. The discipline of the Chinese army was impeccable.

As for food, [they] even purchased firewood by paying *dhayen* ‘Chinese silver coins.’ If [they] wished to eat meat, sheep were bought. The only vegetables available were radish and potatoes, so [they] purchased radish and such. They pitched tents outside and once everything was settled, treated the sick and helped carry water for the aged. During the time of sowing, [the Chinese soldiers] helped with sowing.

01:24:33

“Oh, really the Chinese army,” remarked one set of people, “...claim to have come to liberate and really they are the Liberation Army. Look at our soldiers of the Defend Tibet Volunteer force! What are [they] doing? Seizing belongings and some of them even involved in killing people!” It was not everyone but at that time one could witness such things.

It seems these days the Chinese army is not like that but in those days [their] discipline was really good. We were surprised to see the deeds of the Chinese army and then to see those fleeing with us. What some of them did was the worst of acts and one felt, “Alas, the Chinese are [being so good] while it is bad what our [people are doing].” I just remembered this but you decide if it is required or not. It is here [in the book] and [I] just remembered.

Please clarify that this does not mean all the Khampa of the *Chushi Gangdrug* were doing this. One might believe otherwise. There were those in the *Chushi Gangdrug* that really struggled and sacrificed their lives for the cause of the dharma. Most of them were like that. There was one group that indulged in it and people would say at that time, “Are you a real Khampa or a Kham *zun* ‘fake Khampa’?” Now I remember. “If you are a Kham *zun* we do not need you.” Such talk was exchanged.

01:27:40

And then a month later it was said that we could not stay there and had to return to the monastery. So [we] returned to the monastery in Lhasa, returned to Sera. However, most of the monks were not there at Sera as [they] had gone. Perhaps there were a little over a thousand monks then. Meetings were called everyday and [we] had to learn [propaganda lessons] about the three oppositions and three *tsi* [?] and decry how bad the old society was, the poor living standard of the people during the old society, the oppression by the three great leadership class, and about how we are liberated. We had to be educated. Every night there were movies to watch, movies.

It was annoying to have to learn the lessons then. Other than that, one could go to watch shows in the night, go to watch movies and there was no reciting the scriptures. Really, I was happy then. [My] teacher was taken away to the Norbulingka and there was nobody scolding [and I felt], “The Chinese have implemented liberation and really [I] have been liberated.” I was 16 years old then and enjoyed a few happy months with no reciting the scriptures, no one scolding and watching shows. Earlier there were no shows or movies, nowhere to watch them. Now one could watch shows and had the freedom to go anywhere. [I] felt really free.

01:30:09

Most of '59 was spent on [propaganda] education. Then when '60 began it was said that monks must fend for themselves, that they must cultivate lands and feed themselves. It was announced that they would no longer get [support] from the people like earlier times through oppression. Monks were given lands and had to start farming, start to work. We had to go to work. Though a child, I carried manure on [my] back to the fields and also irrigated the lands.

Firstly, things became difficult and secondly, the situation grew tighter and tighter. It used to be remarked then, “The policy of the Chinese is similar to a wet leather cap.” If one is wearing a wet leather cap, it covers the head when wet and gradually as it dries, it becomes tighter and tighter. Similar to it, [the Chinese]’s grip became tighter and tighter. One was obliged to work and study. So it grew tighter and tighter.

01:31:44

Those that had titles in the past in the monastery like lamas, abbots and *geshe* were all in prison. Those that had managed to escape were gone. Most of them were in prison.

And then there were physical struggles; the physical assaults began. [The victim] was brought out among the monks and accused, “He has oppressed the monks during the period of the old society. He has oppressed the people” and then was subjected to *thamzing* ‘struggle session.’ By the time I arrived from Phenpo, *thamzing* had already started. Two men had even been killed. The Chinese did not do this but they influenced the monks to beat and kill fellow monks. When I was there, there was not any killing but the beatings were severe. *Thamzing* assemblies took place frequently.

Denouncing His Holiness the Dalai Lama had already begun. How it happened was that initially [the Chinese] did not announce at once that His Holiness should be denounced. What was stated in the beginning was, “The Dalai Lama is very good. The Dalai Lama is very good and has agreed that China liberates Tibet peacefully. [He] has met Mao Zedong on many occasions and established the 17-Point Agreement. [He] is very good but the senior rebels of Tibet has forcefully taken [him] abroad.” His Holiness was young then, 25 years old. “He had no wish to go but was forcefully taken away. The culprits are the senior rebels of Tibet.” [The Chinese] had names of 18 people like Trijang Rinpoche, Surkhang Wangchen and other aristocrats of the Tibetan Government. “These are the main perpetrators that collaborated with foreign rebels and took [His Holiness] abroad forcefully.” Initially [the Chinese] stated, “His Holiness the Dalai Lama is very good. We will escort him back later. He is a very good lama.”

01:34:30

Later what [the Chinese] said was, “You must uncover the root of the offensive old Tibetan system, the root of the offensive old Tibetan system. You are not to be blamed. The main perpetrator is the old society.” For months on end such education was imparted. Our people said, “The root of the offence is our revolting against the Chinese and joining the uprising. We did this voluntarily and the Tibetan Government or His Holiness the Dalai Lama did not order us to fight the Chinese. We did so out of our own free will.” “This is not the case. For instance a tree has roots. The root is the Tibetan Government. That is the local Tibetan Government. That is the one,” [the Chinese] claimed.

Some replied, “If that is so, the source of the Tibetan Government is the Chinese Government’ because the Chinese used to claim, “Tibet is a part of China. [The Chinese Government] has the right to control Tibet for it is the Chinese Government that issued the official seal to the successive Dalai Lamas.” [The Chinese] used to repeat the claim then, “[We] have the right to control Tibet because during the period of the Fifth Dalai Lama or so, the Chinese government was the religious patron and issued a seal to Tibet.” The Chinese stated this as the main reason [of occupying Tibet].

01:35:31

That was what [the Chinese stated] and did not mention the Dalai Lama [as a perpetrator] then. If the root of the offensive old society was the Tibetan Government, then its root was the Chinese Government because it was the Chinese Government that gave the power of authority [to the Tibetan Government]. People stated these when called to give opinions.

Q: Rinpoche, could you continue telling us what happened to you in the story?

#1B: Earlier [we] were talking about the denouncement of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, right?

Q: Yes.

#1B: When such was the case, I and many others in the monastery did not wish to criticize His Holiness the Dalai Lama having belief in [him]. When such things were being told... It could be termed as Chinese influence or a person’s weakness but when pushed for long, some remarked, “The base of the offensive old society of Tibet is the Dalai and Panchen.” The Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama are the two highest lamas in Tibet. The Chinese supported this, “Oh, this is correct. What they speak is right. What you’re saying is not right.” Ultimately [the Chinese] wished to reach this point that it was the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama that were the perpetrators in Tibet. Though in reality [the Chinese] did not use force like beating and imprisonment but the influence pointed to this direction.

01:38:35

Numerous people were obliged to say so and state, “The Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama are the culprits in the old Tibetan society.” However, another section stated, “I have nothing to do with that. I committed my own mistakes.” So such was the situation.

Q: Did Rinpoche...?

#1B: On my part I stated...I was a child then and was advised, “If you do not, you will be put in prison. You must state that the perpetrators in the old Tibetan society are the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama.” Most people said it and I was a child then and knew nothing. If the [Chinese] Government says that the perpetrators in the old Tibetan society were the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama, it must be so. However, to be frank, my main crime, as I spoke earlier, was distributing protective amulets. This was considered the main crime.

There was a lama that had fled abroad called Dhema Tsempe. I knew that he had reached India. We were very good friends. So I told [the Chinese] that he said it was good to grant [protective amulets], which I followed and that otherwise, His Holiness the Dalai Lama did not tell me to do so nor did I have any contact with the Panchen Lama. And then the movement receded. Though not everyone blamed the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama but most were forced to say so. Is the matter clear?

01:41:20

Some people remarked [to the Chinese], “Earlier the Communist Party stated that His Holiness the Dalai Lama was good and that the foreign rebels forcefully took him abroad. Now you say that the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama are to be blamed for the old Tibetan society. Now how is this? One person is giving two different statements that do not match.” “It is not like that,” the Chinese said. “The Tibetan people had not yet woken up from ignorance then. There was belief in the Dalai Lama and likewise in the Panchen Lama. That was why we gave that statement. Now most of the people have woken up from ignorance. You realize that the old society was bad and that the Communist Party is good. Presently we are issuing the correct statement.” That was the reply [the Chinese] gave.

This movement ended and then 1960 began and the Review Committee was formed. This was to reassess the situation in Tibet, a big movement. The aim of the Review Committee was to reexamine those that had revolted against the Chinese in '59, who either joined the war or did not but supported the cause directly or indirectly and had been imprisoned or punished. However, there was still some left [that had not been punished]. [The Review Committee] was to clean this up. That was the main objective of the movement.

01:44:10

During this time people used to be arrested occasionally. One or two people were imprisoned, those that were well known or held titles in the past. There were such people that were imprisoned. We were thus threatened, “There are still wolves in sheepskin among the public and monks.” A wolf wearing sheepskin among the sheep that would eat the sheep, that was the example [the Chinese] gave. “There are still wolves in sheepskin left here. Unless you accept your crimes and come open, one day we will pluck you out like hair from butter. [We] did it in the past when [we] arrested so and so. There is no escape.” This was repeatedly stated. Everybody became more alarmed. Those like us felt that it was just a matter of time before we went to prison. The situation had escalated to such a degree.

And then finally—I can remember the date clearly—it was the 26th or so of September 1960 when a big assembly was held. Then I and perhaps a little over 10 people were jailed.

We were captured, subjected to physical struggle for a whole day amidst the people and then sent to prison.

Yes, imprisoned. According to the Chinese there were many crimes that led to my imprisonment. To put it in brief there were three main offences. The first offence was—genealogically I was a lama and the Chinese consider lamas among the three great leadership class. [The Chinese] claimed that a lama was one that didn't work but lived by oppressing the people. That was the first crime, oppressing the people. That was the first offence.

01:47:05

The second was that I was against the peaceful liberation of Tibet along with the senior rebels of Tibet and that [I] had taken part in the uprising of '59 by distributing protective amulets to those that revolted against the Chinese, as I said earlier. Issuing protective amulets was the most serious crime. The second one...

Q: The third.

#1B: Yes, the third was...after the Review Committee was set up [I] became aware that I would face imprisonment shortly. I and two monks of Keotsang Ritoe—there were several monks at the monastery then—planned to flee to India after the Review movement. We had discussed, “Once the movement is over, let us go home to Lhoka and then secretly [to India].” However they [the two monks] revealed this during interrogation by the Chinese. This became known.

So, these were the three main offences: oppressing the people, issuing protective amulets to the rebels and trying to flee to India. [I] was imprisoned in view of these. Those were the three main crimes. There were many others like hiding things and guns but these are subsidiary.

Q: Rinpoche-*la*, when you were subjected to *thamzing*, was it in a public place? Who was in the audience and was it unusual for someone to be as young as you to be subjected? You were 16 at that time to be subjected to *thamzing* and how severe was the beating? So three questions, where was it, how severe was the beating and what about your age?

01:50:20

#1B: It was like this. What is the first one?

Q: Where did it take place?

#1B: It was at Sera, right in Sera Monastery.

Q: In front of the people?

#1B: In front of the people. There were almost 2-3,000 people including monks and laypeople. We were 17 or 18 people in front of the congregation. We were nine or 10 people that were imprisoned while the rest were not imprisoned but subjected to *thamzing* and

handed over to the people under their supervision. It took place at Sera in the midst of the people. Got it? What is the second [question]?

Q: Your young age...?

#1B: Regarding the young age, I told you about the three offences [I was accused of] like oppressing [the people], joining the revolt and particularly, though having been placed under the people's supervision for more than a year after the liberation, yet [I] was against the Communist Party's policies and instead of welcoming the initiation of Socialism in Tibet and reforming, continued to collude with the foreign rebels and was trying to escape abroad by maintaining the firm stand of the rebels. In view of these factors [I] was arrested.

Q: And then how severe was the beating?

01:51:36

#1B: The beatings...that day [we] were kept like this—I have this thing [microphone] tied here, otherwise [I could have demonstrated]—for almost nine hours with an hour's break for lunch. We were up the whole day and made to stoop like this [bends] with the hands apart. [We] were on [our] feet and stooped like this [bends] in a row. At [our] back were soldiers [indicates holding gun] and police that were the enthusiastic ones from among the monks. It is extremely difficult to remain stooped for long and if you fell, you were kicked. And there were beatings and then twisting of the arms. [We] stooped the entire day. One by one we were taken forward and accused, "You did such and such in the past." All the crimes were listed while he [the accused] stooped nearby.

There was nothing to accuse me of and in the end...This is getting to be too long. In the end...shall I recount this or not? I was charged with—we were lamas—one person remarked, "You lamas used to grant *chawang* 'blessing by placing hand on believer's head' to the people in the past." [To interpreter] You know what is *chawang*? When requested a *chawang*, we placed a hand [on the believer's head]. "These days the three great leadership class has been overturned and the people have risen. Now it's our turn to grant *chawang*." This man was a monk. He came near me while [I] stooped. He removed [his] shoes and hit me on the head two or three times purporting to grant me *chawang*. I fell down and [he] kicked me several times. I could not say anything. I was the last one. Then I was tied with a rope [indicates hands being tied at back] as tightly as possible and led away to Drapchi Prison. Is that enough description about the beating?

Q: It is very painful to remember these kinds of stories, but could you tell us what kind of feelings and thoughts were going through your mind at this time?

01:55:44

#1B: At that time?

Q: Yes.

#1B: I see. It was at the time of being in prison, right?

Q: The day of *thamzing*.

#1B: Yes, [we] were at the day of *thamzing*, right? To be honest, on the day of *thamzing* I was in shock and except for thinking that either [I] would be killed or imprisoned, there was not much thought because I was not alone. There were many others with me. One thought was, “I am not alone. There are many others. So, this is nothing.”

Secondly, when we broke for lunch we [the accused] could sit together though there was a guard present and everybody remarked, “This is our destiny. This is the fate we have accumulated from the past. So, it does not matter.” When the others remarked so, [I] felt it was true and was not particularly grief stricken or angry with those that beat [me]. It was not as if there never was any feeling but it was not particularly intense. [I] wondered how this would end, whether [I] would be killed or the kind of suffering in prison. That remark was passed during lunchtime and it helped much to calm the mind. That is what I remember.

Q: What did happen?

01:57:51

#1B: After that we were interred in Drapchi Prison. Before being jailed in Drapchi [we] were frisked and all things confiscated. [I] carried a few things and a blanket on my back and was led away [to Drapchi Prison] by rope like an animal. These are secondary and just lengthens the story. [I] was imprisoned in Thasukhang, the high security section of Drapchi Prison.

Except for being let out twice a day to answer nature’s call, [I] was shut in the whole day. The food was just about okay then. One spent the whole day reading newspapers and studying [propaganda literature]. [I] was in for a little over a month. For a few days [I] felt very claustrophobic as one could not go out and then gradually became accustomed. We were 10-12 men in a cell that consisted of notable people of the past like lamas and *geshe*. The majority were prominent ones of the monasteries like abbots, *geshe* and lamas.

Q: Was that the room you were in, with the 10 or 12 people? Yes. So continue, please.

#1B: Then a little after a month...Let’s skip what happened within that time. One day [we] were ordered to come carrying the blankets on the back. The names of those of us from Sera [Monastery] were read out and ordered to come out. [We] were once again led to Sera. We believed two things when being taken to Sera. One group said [we] were to be killed while another group remarked, “Perhaps we are to be released.” [We] wondered what was the reason for taking [us] back to Sera.

[We] were led to Sera. And then we were issued the verdict, the verdict for imprisonment in the midst of the people. [I] will not talk about the others but I was sentenced to 20 years, 20 years of imprisonment and without political rights like voting right and such for seven years after release from prison. [I] was awarded 20 years of imprisonment and seven years

without political rights after release from prison which is called *jonyi potho* or some such thing in Chinese language.

Q: Rinpoche, what was your reaction to that kind of sentence, the length of sentence?

02:01:54

#1B: Having spent over a month in prison, [I knew] sustenance was poor in prison and 20 years [is along time]. It was not the worst situation at that time but the prisoners' sustenance was not good at all. So I felt there was no hope of ever coming out of prison after 20 years and [I] was certain of death. [I] thought, "[I] will spent [my] life and die in prison."

Q: When that sentence was given was it at Sera and was there a large crowd as before and were there people in the audience who knew you? What was the atmosphere like? Did people react when they heard the length of these prison terms?

#1B: Yes [it was at Sera]. To be honest, when [I] was taken there that day for the meeting, it was like being dragged with [me] stooped. When the verdict was being read out, [I] had to remain stooped [bows low] and then was dragged away. There was a great number of monks but [I] could not identify anybody. For one, [I] was tied with a rope [indicates hands being tied at back] and secondly [I] remained stooped. There had to be plenty of people [I] would know among [the congregation].

Q: What happens to you next?

02:04:08

#1B: Then once again [I] was taken to Drapchi...left at Drapchi. According to Chinese regulations, generally once one was awarded a sentence, one was obliged to perform hard labor. Now it was work time. Earlier we did not have any responsibilities. [I] was put in a group called Jongdha Rukhak with around 10 people in a cell. There were almost 5-6,000 prisoners at Drapchi then. There were three large groups where we were deployed. The door was shut only at night while it remained open during the day. There was free movement but one had to go to work. Each one had a responsibility except for the aged and sick that could not do any work. To put it in short, one had to attend work and there was no sitting idle.

Q: For people who may not know the history of Tibet, can you help us understand, was Drapchi Prison always there in Tibet or was it built? When was it built and who built it?

#1B: The Drapchi Prison of that time was a military base, where soldiers lived. The section where common soldiers used to live became cells for the prisoners and the houses where the heads of military, the commanders lived was turned into their [Chinese] officials' residence. An additional outer boundary wall was constructed with guardhouses on four sides. Otherwise, there were hardly any new prisons at that time. That was a military base.

Q: Did your parents know that you had been taken or had been sentenced to prison? Did they have any contact with you right afterwards?

02:07:18

#1B: There was no knowing whatsoever. It seems there was a great deal of regulation in their village. During my 17 years in prison, there was no meeting. Later, prisoners that had dear ones living in Lhasa were allowed to bring food and such. At times they were even allowed to meet. During such times, at last [I] learned that mother had passed away and so had father. [I] heard that a paternal uncle was alive and that family members were fine. There was no other contact.

Q: To describe 20 years of prison life would be impossible but perhaps you could give us some idea of how the years went for you and some of the parts that were, maybe painful but memorable and important, painful and memorable and important to relate to Tibetans, the world and next generation of Chinese?

#1B: Okay. To relate briefly, I was a proper prisoner for 17 years, a proper prisoner. [I] did not have to continue as a proper prisoner for three years on account of two factors. The first factor was that Mao Zedong died. You know Mao Zedong, right? The Chinese policy became relaxed. During this period the old prisoners of '59—there were not many left then—were released in advance. That was one reason I did not have to continue [in prison].

The other [reason] was that during my time of 17 years in prison, I had done a lot of work in the latter part. I was a *shiuli*, which means one that repairs motors. Mainly it was repairing sewing machines, bicycles and motorcycles. [I] was a repairer of such. I had done a great deal of such work. Therefore, keeping this achievement in view and the other factor, I was released from prison three years in advance and transferred to the work section. [The workers] were not locked in like prisoners and could move outside a little bit. In total [I] spent 20 years this way. [To interpreter] Can you translate this first?

[Interviewee flips through book as interpreter interprets previous statement.]

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Is there something he wanted to tell us from the book?

02:11:52

#1B: Yes, I have included some drawings here in my book. I draw well. I wanted to show you these drawings. Wait, here is another one, which I was trying to locate. [I] was about to find it. [Flips through pages] Yes, here it is. [I] described about being arrested in the year '59 amidst the people at Sera Jey, Sera [Monastery] in Tibet. These are the people [points to drawing] and here [points to drawing] we remain stooped. Here is the drawing. [Hands book to interviewer]

Q: Are there other drawings we can see?

#1B: Yes, there are 14 drawings or so. You can look at them later. There are 14 drawings.

Q: Okay, we'll see them later.

#1B: I will continue with the story. Is it okay for me to go on?

Q: Yes.

#1B: To recount in brief, it was during the three years of 1960, '61 and '62 that there were great natural changes that led to a severe food crisis in China.

Q: In China?

#1B: There was no harvest in China and help from outside [ceased], in particular Russia and China's relation terminated. Russia was the main one that assisted China in the past. Russia stopped much of the aid and sought back loans from China. So like China, Tibet too faced similar problems. It was not just the prisoners but entire Tibet that faced extensive difficulties. [To interpreter] It would be better to translate this.

02:14:42

Due to such factors, things became extremely difficult in the prisons. It is better to present a clear picture. Everybody had to go to work. During work there were three meals a day, morning, noon [and night] that was a thin gruel in a bowl this size [joins palms] with only a little bit of vegetable. The gruel was just a little better than water. That too, one could not drink as much as one wanted. One got a bowlful of that for the morning, for the noon and for the night. Gruel was the only food. There was no accompaniment like *pa* 'dough made from roasted barley flour and tea' or bread or rice.

Besides one was forced to work strenuously. There were standards set for stonecutters, brick makers, construction workers, and then there were carpenters and stonemasons and even vegetable growers. It was a different matter for the aged and the sick. So the majority of the people died of starvation. First it was the weaker ones that died. In a day—the Drapchi Prison I said earlier housed a population of 4-5,000—it used to be said, "Today there are 17 corpses" or "Today there are 11" and there was a minimum of 6-7 everyday. People died in such numbers.

Let me tell something in relation to that. For instance, at times a few prisoners were deployed to clean the prison officials' homes and sweep yards. The officials raised pigs for their consumption. You know pigs? There were guards but without their knowledge one could steal a little bit of pig feed and getting to eat it was marvelous. I have also eaten it. The drawing is in here [opens book]. This [points to drawing] is the officers' residence and this is the pig feed and here I am stealing pig feed and eating it.

Q: That helped you survive.

02:18:17

#1B: Oh yes, and there was no disgusting feeling. One stole from the vegetable garden but being found out would be disastrous. If one could get a radish, it was not washed. A lot of human manure is used in the Chinese vegetable gardens. If one could steal a radish, you might [action of wiping on clothing] and then eat it secretly either in the toilet or in bed and that was wonderful. Even to get one [radish] is very difficult.

If a Tibetan died, the Tibetan practice at that time was not to bury or cremate but to give [the corpse] to the birds, to the vultures at the cemetery. Prisoners' corpses used to be taken to the cemetery by prisoners under guard. When 12 to 13 corpses arrived at the same time, the vultures could not eat, as there were too many corpses. While on work the next or the following day, there was talk about finding corpses partly eaten by dogs and with recognizable faces! Vultures could not eat and the dogs had bitten parts of the body. There was such talk. If there were 100 people, nearly 70 died from starvation in those three years.

Q: Seventy of the total number or 70 percent?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Seventy percent.

Q: At least 70 percent. What was your own spirit like during this, like 1960, '61, '62? What was your own spirit like, Rinpoche-*la*? What was the spirit of the people like? Were they desperate, hopeful they could survive? What was the attitude?

02:21:34

#1B: Most people used to say then, "May [I] be able to eat a stomach full of *pa* before [I] die." Tibetans like *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley,' and *pa* the most. There was no hope of ever coming out of prison. One prayed, "[I] will have no regrets if [I] can get a stomach full of food." The situation had come to this.

On top of the food scarcity work was measured out. A stonecutter had to cut a certain number of stones, a brick [layer] had a certain number of bricks [to make] and wood [collected] was weighed in a scale. Each work was measured and it was necessary to reach the target. After returning in the evening, one was obliged to study. A prisoner that did not work hard or obey the Chinese [authority] would face *thamzing*. Some committed suicide under such immense suffering. To put it in a gist that was one of the most difficult things in the three years.

Q: How did they manage to commit suicide while in prison?

02:23:31

#1B: Some cut their neck by using cans that may be available. Then there were some who strangled themselves. It was like that.

Q: Hung by the neck?

#1B: No, there was no way of hanging from the ceiling. They strangled themselves to death quietly in bed in the night.

That happened not only with prisoners. Most of those that committed suicide were from among the ones that had titles in the past and thought not actually prisoners were under the supervision of the people. [They] did not have anything to eat and subsisted only on plants and suffered. In the villages, [they] were forced to work harder than prisoners and suffered bloating from [eating] the plants. There were many cases of such deaths, suffering worse than prisoners.

Q: The people that committed suicide, were they primarily lay people or were there monks who also lost hope and thought they could no longer, you know, endure the suffering?

02:25:04

#1B: It was like this. At that time there were many types of people. Generally, there was a lesser number of monks that committed suicide. There were also many Chinese prisoners in our prison. Generally, more Chinese that committed suicide.

Q: The Chinese?

#1B: Chinese prisoners. There were numerous Chinese prisoners.

Q: Why were they in prison?

#1B: Oh, there were plenty. Some were there on political grounds, some on account of marital disputes, some had committed murder, some had killed in car accidents, some were thieves; there were plenty like that. Then there was another case like this and it is good to recount it. It was extremely difficult to keep all the Chinese together in one room. [They] fought a lot and confronted the officials such that should they have weapons in their hands, there was no doubt that they would kill the officials.

Compared to the Chinese, the Tibetan prisoners were more reticent and more obedient. Hence, all the Chinese [prisoners] were dispersed among the Tibetan prisoners. There were two, one or three Chinese in every Tibetan room. It would be impossible to keep all the Chinese together. [They] had the highest number of suicides and the highest number of escapees. It was like that.

Q: Was there any teachings or prayers that you found yourself saying?

02:27:40

#1B: [I] will talk about that. There are many portions pertaining to this in here [indicates his book]. It was not just me but many others. The unique characteristics of the Tibetans, if I were to cite a case in relation to that would be that there were few Tibetans committing suicide. Most of the Tibetans...The whole of Tibet hoped that we would be able to regain our independence and that His Holiness the Dalai Lama would be able to return to Tibet and did not think about seeking revenge and killing the Chinese or wished suffering upon those that caused them suffering. Very few thought on these lines and the main reason is the dharma.

Take me for instance, I had the benefit of having studied the scriptures as a young child and secondly, there were many lamas and *geshe* in the prison and when we had discussions [they said], “It is our destiny from the past. It is the result of our past actions. This is good because the many sufferings we have to undergo in the next lives are washed away now. May [our] suffering help all the sentient beings and may nothing untoward befall His Holiness the Dalai Lama. There is no regret if we die here for this is our destiny.” The

majority felt the same way and very few said, “Once out of here, I will kill or cut up or do whatever to my tormentors.” That is a unique characteristic.

02:29:49

You [interviewer] might have heard His Holiness sometimes say, “In particular, some good ones talk about not being able to chant as much as they did while in prison, having accumulated 100,000 Dolma ‘praises to the 21 Taras,’ 100,000 *mani* ‘the mantra *Om mani padme hung*’. The best practice was achieved while in prison.” His Holiness speaks about it at times that there were some that thought so.

Q: During these 17 years, before those last three when you did the other things, did you always work in the fields albeit on bicycles?

#1B: It was not that [fieldwork] but repair work. Once more there are drawings in here [interviewee’s book] to be shown regarding the repair work. [Picks up book] Listen, I was put in in ’60. After entering [prison] in ’60 for around 2-3 years I worked in brickmaking, in the vegetable farm, cutting rocks and different tasks. The Cultural Revolution began in ’66 and since then I started with the repair work.

Here is the drawing [displays page with drawings]. This is a bicycle but [my] main work pertained to sewing machines, a *shiuli*.

Q: How did Rinpoche-*la* become such an expert in bicycle repair or mechanical repair?

02:32:29

#1B: I was like that as a child. When I lived in Keotsang Ritoe as a little child the Chinese army had already arrived. Using *pa* or *torma* ‘ritual dough offerings’ [I] used to make cannons, Chinese soldiers and vehicles. Even then [I] used to like making things using *pa* as a child. Then while in prison, [I] used to do drawings on paper and such which the officials found out and said, “You know different things.” Then I was deployed at this assignment. Had I remained there mine is a highly regarded job.

Though not vehicles, I [repaired] sewing machines, not the common sewing machines but electric ones. There are 13 different types of machines, electric sewing machines. It was not just the common sewing machine that is used to stitch clothes but those that are used to stitch leather, tarpaulin, paper, buttons, *petu* [?—touches front of collar] and shoes. I repaired all such when they broke down. [I] could repair right from locks and keys to anything I set my eyes on with the help of a sample.

I will give an example. There is the lock on the [door of this] house. I understand Chinese locks and should the key be lost, I can make one immediately. The lock can be dismantled and a new key made instantly. An extra key can be made instantly by placing the [existing] key here [pats left palm with right] and cut with a saw. Not just that, if a sample is available everything can be made. [I] made these for the prison officials, their families, prison guards and doctors. Therefore, they liked me.

Q: Did you ever think of escaping or were you given any special privileges because you were liked and you were talented and you're probably a very nice young man? So were you given special privileges and or did you ever think of trying to escape or get help escaping?

02:36:07

#1B: [I] never had such thoughts [of escaping]. It was very difficult to succeed. [I] never had thoughts about escaping. To be honest, the Chinese policy then was such that if [a prisoner] behaved well and he performed his tasks well and studied hard, he could be released earlier. [The Chinese] reduced a few years. For instance, if one is sentenced to 15 years, three years or five years could be reduced and [the prisoner] released earlier. If one's sentence is just five years and one tried to escape from prison, disobeyed the staff, had arguments or did not work properly, the five years could be increased to 10 and worst, one could get death. So I worked hard.

I was not healthy then. [I] did have hope that [I] could be released a few years early and as hoped [I] got to come out three years early. For one, it was on account of my hard work and secondly, Mao Zedong died. Because of this coincidence [I] could get out.

Q: Rinpoche-*la*, in prison was there anyone who could teach you about the dharma? Were there any Tibetan masters that you had contact with so you could continue some of your learning secretly in prison?

#1B: Yes, there were but this could never be done openly. We spoke to each other secretly, spoke secretly of news and such, though not specifically receiving teachings but [I] sought advice. We might call it advice. I had many that gave such advice, which helped me a lot.

Q: Before we conclude maybe talking about your prison experience, perhaps is there some memory of a time that was especially difficult and a memory, maybe of a time that was very special to you, very important to remember that we could include in this part of your life's story?

02:39:28

#1B: [I] have one thing to say. At that time we were five groups in the prison, five groups of prisoners then. That was later when [I] was transferred to Drapchi. There were five groups, five groups each consisting of a 100 [prisoners]. The five groups were made up of four men's groups and one women's group. I was in the fifth group from among the five groups. The fifth group consisted of lamas, aristocrats and those that were notable in the past and not common people. [To interpreter] Please translate this first.

Q: Which prison was it?

#1B: Drapchi Prison.

And then the Cultural Revolution...[We] have finished with the earlier part and then the great Cultural Revolution...The second problem was the great Cultural Revolution that began in '66. Starting from '66, once again the sustenance in the prison...It was not as poor as it was in Drapchi earlier like drinking gruel but everything was rationed. There was *tsampa* but it was very little, about half of this [gestures off camera] that was not enough to

satiated. If the meal was *tingmomo* ‘steamed bread,’ it was very tiny. And worse than that [we] were told, “The Dalai Lama must be denounced. Religion must be denounced. Religion is poison. The Dalai Lama is bad. The Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama must be denounced.”

Many prisoners said, “His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Rinpoche are our lamas without any relation to politics. We cannot denounce [them]. [We] do not get enough to eat.” Everybody protested. At that time I protested to the Chinese authority, “Please give us enough to eat. Secondly, [I] will not denounce His Holiness the Dalai Lama.”

The Chinese used to say in the prison, “While you are in prison, there will be no freedom to practice religion. Once out of prison and living in the society, you have the freedom to practice religion. One cannot practice in prison.” “There is no rule in the prison that says [we] have to denounce. So [I] can never do this,” I gave a petition to the Chinese authority and protested [verbally] as well and argued many times. [To interpreter] Can you please interpret this first?

Due to such issues some Chinese and Tibetans were sentenced to death.

02:43:40

At that time I had stated, “Even if I am killed over this issue I have no regrets but I can never denounce His Holiness the Dalai Lama. If not provided enough to eat [I] can no longer work. [We] are not getting enough. Secondly, if not permitted to believe in the dharma now [I] shall practice in the future. Please grant me these three demands. If granted permission, I will behave well and if not [I] will not behave well.”

I stopped working but I was subjected to *nyetson tsengul*, which is forced labor. I was the only one in the fifth group to whom this happened. None of the other prisoners did so. I was the only one in the fifth group. [I] just about escaped being driven to death during the seven or eight days.

Q: One demand was that you would not denounce His Holiness the Dalai Lama and then...

#1B: ...and that [we] needed enough to eat.

Q: The third?

#1B: ...to kindly grant permission to believe in the dharma.

02:45:16

To explain clearly the term *nyetson tsengul* it is like this. I will give an example. When applying fertilizer to the fields, you carry it in a basket on the back that you [to the interpreter] would know. A person carries only the amount he is able to. Since I was under *nyetson tsengul*, there were 3-4 enthusiastic prisoners that colluded with the Chinese to keep watch over me. [My] basket was filled to the brim and [I] was driven the whole day, being kicked on and off.

If it was any other kind of work, [I] was driven like an animal and just about escaped being done to death. There is a drawing about it in here [interviewee's book]. I do not know if it is clear. This is me [gestures off camera] working in the vegetable field carrying manure. I am carrying manure on the back with the soldiers following, not soldiers but prison guards, while the soldiers watched from behind. [I] am being kicked and driven, as I could not walk due to exhaustion and the heavy weight.

Q: How long did that treatment last?

02:46:57

#1B: Perhaps it happened for 8-9 days. It was during the great Cultural Revolution. Then there was a Chinese official called Wang who was good. He arrived and said, "Such practice is not allowed. This is against the policy of the Communist Party. This cannot be done." [He] stopped it and I just about escaped with [my] life. Otherwise, I was certain to die. [I] was to be killed.

Just prior to my release Mao Zedong died and the Chinese policy saw a change. It was announced by the Chinese government in the prison, "The policy of subjecting Keotsang Jamphel Yeshe to *nyetson tsengul* is wrong. The Communist Party's policy is wrong." This had happened to one or two people in the other groups, but I was the only one in the fifth group that this happened to. This is one of the worst sufferings I underwent during the period of the great Cultural Revolution.

Q: Rinpoche-*la*, how did you get the courage and the material to even write a letter to the government? In 1966 you were about 22 years of age, so where did you get that impetus, that desire to take such a risk? Who gave you the paper, the pen, and who mailed the letter? How did this come about?

02:49:45

#1B: We were allowed to keep paper and pen, which were distributed. It was not that we could not keep paper and pen, as there was a great deal of studying. The officials distributed paper and pen instructing [us] to study. One had to study very hard everyday during the period of the great Cultural Revolution. There was no problem with paper and pen.

The most important thing is that had [I] been an ordinary prisoner; I would have been sentenced to death for presenting that letter. This is important for you to know that I understood Chinese policy entirely, the policy at that time for I cannot talk about the present. At that time those that held titles like lamas or aristocrats were called political prisoners. They and the ordinary prisoners were not considered the same.

For instance, if I killed a man and an ordinary person killed one, there was a difference in punishment between the two. People like us were not permitted to be killed immediately. We were not permitted to be killed without permission from the highest court of the Communist Chinese Government. However, the ordinary person was sentenced to death by the lower [courts]. That was one of the reasons we were not sentenced to die.

Secondly, as I look at it, His Holiness the Dalai Lama lives in a foreign country and the Tibetan issue is a special one. Should the likes of us be killed, in whatever way, it could become very transparent as it happens these days and they [the Chinese government] were uneasy. [I] became aware of this later. That was the reason I survived. Otherwise, I would have been sentenced to die.

02:52:07

And one little thing I wish to say, this is just an example: When we were in prison... The prisoners in the villages [might have been beaten] by prison officials, for they were not politically aware on account of being villagers; while in the prisons in towns there were very few instances of prison officials assaulting prisoners. However, [they] misled other prisoners saying, “He is a bad man and must be beaten.” Therefore, there were cases of prisoners assaulting prisoners. It happened among fellow prisoners and not by prison officials.

However, it was not so later. You might have heard from many prisoners. The prisoners in the mid-'80s--you might know because it is well publicized—were handcuffed and tortured with electric rods. There were various kinds of penalties. During winter [a prisoner] would be pushed in a freezer with the feet touching ice blocks so that the skin of the feet peeled [when the feet were raised]. Then there were electric rods and different kinds of torture instruments.

When we were there, there were none of those things. However, there were leg shackles and handcuffs. The worst was being handcuffed like this [puts hands behind back] and then there was solitary confinement, one person being confined alone. Other than that there were no electric prods or any of those things then. Those came later. It has been a long while since I came out of prison. This difference must be pointed out. Some people do not like it and say, “It is not like that these days.” However, one must speak truthfully. If one were to say, “Oh, the Chinese beat [me] then” that would be a lie. I always speak the fact and that is how it was.

Q: How would Rinpoche like to bring his story to an end? We've so appreciated his time and we also know it's exhausting for him to continue at such a pace. So is there some way he would like to wrap up the story of the prison and then tell us what happened to him when he got out?

02:55:08

#1B: Okay, I will recount as such. At that time while in prison I was afflicted with a heart ailment. I described earlier that [I] never had hope of coming out of prison after 20 years, but [I] got the chance to come out of prison. This was something that was not in my mind earlier. Once out of prison, it was never even in [my] dream that [I] would reach India. However, [I] arrived in India. Not just arriving in India but it has been 28 years here including this year.

Based on my physical condition there is not any possibility of living so long. To speak briefly, reflecting upon the past and speaking from a religious point of view, it is solely due to the benevolence of His Holiness the Dalai Lama that this happened to me. This is the conclusion that comes to my mind. I am speaking briefly.

Let me add this. Earlier, once out of prison and after having come newly to India, when it was said that there was an earthquake in China or that there was a flood in China or something else in China, [I] felt happy because they were the perpetrators of my suffering. “Wow, that is good what has happened in China.” People would say, “There is good news today. There is trouble in China. It may topple soon. That is true.” After receiving many teachings from His Holiness the Dalai Lama, “All sentient beings are the same. The Chinese are also the same.” You reflect and now I no longer feel like that. [I] have undergone a great transformation.

02:57:22

A few years back...recently there was this news about China regarding some accident where many people died. Those that died are also human beings and [I] feel sympathy for them. [I do not feel,] “The Chinese deserve it. Good that it has happened.” There was the earthquake in Siting earlier. So that is how I feel now. Secondly, the Chinese cannot be blamed because we protest against them and they criticize us.

There are some Tibetans that are worse. Some Tibetans are really worse than the Chinese. First they receive teachings, empowerments, vows and everything from His Holiness the Dalai Lama and then criticize His Holiness the Dalai Lama. [Their] words are worse than the Chinese. The Chinese only say that His Holiness is a wolf in sheepskin and a splitter of the country. That is it. There are some people that criticize His Holiness such that it makes the Chinese’ criticism seem tiny in comparison. You wonder what this is when you hear such words and feel, “How can a Tibetan utter such words?” I feel like that. [To interpreter] Please translate this.

Can I add something more? That is one thing and secondly, earlier when I initially arrived in India I felt a great regret. All my classmates—you might say schoolmates—there are around 17 from the monastery that has come to India. Except for two or three people, the rest studied the scriptures, become *geshe* and turned out very well. I was in prison and when [I] came here, [I] knew nothing about the scriptures having forgotten what [I] had learned in the past. And [I] could not start all over again.

“Alas, what a disaster that [I] could not come here in ’59!” [I] felt immense regret. However, after the passage of time and giving much thought I have no regrets. It was good that I was in prison. For one, it has washed away the transgressions of my negative actions of the past. Secondly, I have remained a monk. This is thanks to the Chinese, I say. Had the Chinese not imprisoned me then and had I been left behind in Tibet, I might be the father of 2-3 children and not remained a monk. [I] would not be what I am now.

03:00:31

It would have been the same had I come here in ’59. I am being honest. I have two classmates or friends who are lamas that have come to India; one lives in the United States and the other in Switzerland. The one in Switzerland is still a monk but worships the [Dolgyal] Shugden and the one in the United States is no longer a monk. [He] has left monkhood. There is one in Tibet who is also [no longer a monk]. From the lamas in our group most of them have left monkhood. My having remained like this is on account of

having been put in prison by the Chinese. That has given me the chance to receive many teachings from His Holiness the Dalai Lama and practice meditation and such. Really this is thanks to the Chinese. [I] was in prison thanks to the Chinese and was at an advanced age and sick when released from prison. [I] thought that not remaining a monk but seeking a woman would bring a bad name for a lama and also that one would not get a good woman with such a body. At this doubtful period I arrived in India.

Initially [I] did not have any plans to remain here but after arriving in India, His Holiness asked [me] to stay back. [I] received many teachings and then I really transformed into a human being. That is one part and I will conclude at the third part.

03:03:06

Later, after coming here I say, “It is partly thanks to the Chinese.” In the past Keotsang Ladang was quite wealthy and owned houses. There was the Ritoe in Lhasa, a *ladang* in Lhasa, an estate in Phenpo, another estate in Tsang and several hundred servants. It was vast. All these toppled within a day. When the Tibetan Government tumbled, Keotsang Ritoe could not remain. [I] became impoverished and went to prison with just a blanket and a cup.

Therefore, firstly this helped [me] and secondly, after coming here [I] heard His Holiness say that mainly one should practice the dharma with the mind and material wealth like houses and grand things are worthless. Having heard it many times, these days [when I see] someone owning a grand house or vehicles I never feel, “That is wonderful. Wish I could also own one.” [Or if someone owns] a grand shrine inside a house I hardly ever feel, “That is good. Wish I could have one.”

What [I] really envy is a healthy body. I do not have a healthy body and have to abstain from many kinds of food. [I] cannot eat anything sweet or anything sour while some people can eat anything. I feel for the healthy ones, “That is good. It is sad that I am so unhealthy.” Other than that, as I said earlier that there have been five Keotsang Rinpoches and I am the 5th one. This is my predecessor [opens book]. The photograph is on the last page. This is His Holiness the Dalai Lama at a young age and this is my predecessor Keotsang Rinpoche, His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s *tsenshap*.

03:06:05

The reason I showed [you] this picture is not because I was involved in searching for His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s reincarnation and aspire a great name. It is not that. This is the fact. For one, it is the fact and secondly, in the past I used to think, “My predecessor is the *tsenshap* of the 13th Dalai Lama and was involved in searching for the reincarnation, the 14th Dalai Lama. How can the reincarnation of the Keotsang Rinpoche be so unfortunate as to undergo such suffering in prison? [I] have been born neither early nor late. Had [I] been younger [I] could have gone to school and not been imprisoned. Had [I] been older, [I] would have enjoyed all the good times. Being [born] neither early nor late, there has been only suffering and I cannot be the reincarnation of the predecessor.”

However, after coming here and in the last 28 years, [I] received all the many teachings of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and though I cannot render much service, [I] live close to His

Holiness and provide advice and guidance to many and I do my practice. In view of these, I realize that due to the previous incarnation of Keotsang Rinpoche's accumulation of virtuous deeds, I have been unlike other people because there were many prisoners like me but most of them are dead. I believe my survival is due to the benevolence of His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

03:07:20

As per His Holiness the Dalai Lama's advice you are—mine is the story of just one person—[recording] many Tibetan stories. This [interview] will be given to a library, is it not? I rejoice in your work; it is wonderful. Thank you.

Q: Thank you. Rinpoche...

#1B: Has what I narrated today been of benefit for you? Please be honest.

Q: Your story is a great contribution to the project and it will be in many libraries, the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, even in big universities in England, Oxford; in California, Stanford; New York, Columbia; and our stories are going to the United States Library of Congress, the largest library in the world.

We also will give you a personal copy of our interview today, so you can share it with your students and friends. We will also put parts of the interview up on the Internet for the world to see and we would hope, as His Holiness requested, that we can translate some parts of these interviews into Chinese to share them with the young people of China who have no idea about what really happened in Tibet.

03:11:17

#1B: I want to say this as an aside. There were [interviewers] like you when I newly arrived from Tibet long ago. [I] came in the year '85. For 2-3 years there were many interviewers including foreigners and Tibetans that interviewed me about what happened in prison and such. There were some that said...I talked about it earlier that while [I] was at Sera Monastery [the Chinese] ordered that the Dalai Lama must be denounced as the cause of the old Tibetan system, right? I also told [you] that during the great Cultural Revolution [we] were forced to denounce the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama in prison. That happened under fear of one's life under the Chinese. One had to denounce under fear. There was no other way, to be honest.

There are some people...I used to confess in bed at night but during the day one was forced to say so at the cost of one's life. However, some combine these two...Presently those that live in a free country consider those that denounced His Holiness the Dalai Lama while in prison...but these are two different matters, to be honest.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama himself told me. When I first received an audience, I informed His Holiness about what actually happened and that, "While in prison during the period of the great Cultural Revolution, a time came when one had to denounce His Holiness and the dharma but I never felt so in my heart." "That is fine. That is a different matter," His Holiness said. "That is a special case. It is nothing. Do not worry about it. That is no

transgression.” However, people do not know about it and combine these two saying, “He has said such things in the past. What is he telling us today?” I said earlier that one has knowing received empowerment, oral transmissions and instructions from His Holiness the Dalai Lama and what one is today, whether a monk or a lay person, His Holiness has brought one up from a young age. One is sent to school or if a monk, was raised in a monastery.

What one is today is due to the grace of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. But one forgets it and turns worse than a Communist Chinese and speaks whatever comes to mind. That is pathetic, really. I am not angry with the Chinese; after all they are our enemy. It is unbelievable what’s happening among us. This is just an aside because earlier there were people that spoke so and this will help people watching [the interview]. It was not to me alone but they remarked, “Oh, while in prison he had said such things and today he says such.” To be honest, that was a different matter.

03:14:32

This will help history but this is the time when money creates truth. I am joking. It was so just recently during the United Nations Organization’s meeting in Geneva. The Tibetans protested so much there but could not succeed because [the Chinese] have money to spend. One must speak the truth, for gradually truth will clarify the issue. However, presently the situation is a bit difficult. I am just telling you as an aside. You might be pressurized by the Chinese but you are individuals. Otherwise, when His Holiness travels abroad, the Chinese puts pressure. This is just something I remembered as an aside.

Q: Rinpoche, you have given a great contribution to our project and we are honored to have your story. We will share far and wide and we ask for your blessings on our work.

#1B: Of course.

END OF INTERVIEW