

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #21M – Lobsang Lungthok
April 10, 2010

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #21M
2. Interviewee: Lobsang Lungthok
3. Age: 87
4. Date of Birth: 1922
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Tunue, Lhasa
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: April 10, 2010
10. Place of Interview: Loselling Old Age Home, Drepung Loselling Monastery, Doeguling Settlement, Mundgod, Karwar District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 2 hr 37 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Pema Tashi
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Lobsang Lungthok was born in Tunuegang, a town very close to Lhasa. His family engaged in farming and he recalls herding the animals. He became a monk at the age of 8 and recounts his life as a monk in the Drepung Monastery in Lhasa. He describes the admittance process and selection of teachers for new monks. As a young man he joined the the *dhopdhop*—a bunch of obstinate monks who indulged in jumping and throwing stones instead of studying the scriptures.

Lobsang Lungthok provides information on the procedure of the Monlam Chenmo 'Great Prayer Festival' in Lhasa and the various ceremonies and officials associated with it. He explains his own role as a *genyok* 'assistant' to the *tsogchen shengo*, who is in charge of discipline during the Monlam Festival where up to 40,000 monks assembled. He shows the tools of the disciplinarian—a sword and a stick, which required that he give up his monk's vows to use.

Lobsang Lungthok speaks about the shelling of the Potala Palace on March 10, 1959 and about witnessing the mass of people fleeing through the swamp near Norbulingka. Fearing the worst, he escaped from Lhasa soon after and relates the difficulties they faced during the journey into exile in India.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, monastic life, religious festivals, invasion by Chinese army, March 10th Uprising, Norbulingka, escape experiences, life as a refugee in India.

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Age: 87, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: April 10, 2010

Question: Please tell us your name.

00.00.16

Interviewee #21M: Lobsang Lungthok.

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?

#21M: Yes, you can use it. We are using the history of our country. We went to use [publicize] the exclusive culture of Tibet, the reason for going to...[not discernible], how they [the Chinese] first appeared and oppressed us, how they deceived for ten years and finally how they attacked. These were enacted there.

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

00:01:44

#21M: [Nods]

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

#21M: Okay.

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

00:02:05

#21M: Okay.

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

#21M: There will be no problems for me. What can they do to me? I told you about it earlier.

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

00:02:35

#21M: [Nods]

Q: Okay.

#21M: [Joins palms] It is the anxiety of His Holiness the Dalai Lama that the story of Tibet is being wiped out. The story cannot be destroyed easily, but they [the Chinese] have forcefully occupied [Tibet] and do not heed anyone in the world. It [China] is a very lawless country.

Q: *Gen-la* 'respectful term for teacher,' could you tell us a little bit about where you were born and where did your family live?

00:03:24

#21M: It is Tunuegang.

Q: What size village is that? How many families?

#21M: There were many members in my family.

Q: How many families were there in the village?

00:03:46

#21M: In the olden days there were only about 20 families in the village. Later when I returned in '87, there were about 50 families.

Q: And how far was it from the central part of Lhasa? How far away?

#21M: It's quite close, only about 8 to 9 kilometers away. We used to go to Lhasa for purchases in the morning and then return home. It's quite close. Our monastery, Drepung was located on the way.

Q: What kind of work did your parents do when you were a very little boy?

00:05:13

#21M: [They] were farmers. There was no other work. My late father passed away when I was small. He expired at the age of 58. My mother was living when I made my escape. I do not know when my mother passed away and I did not enquire of it when I went there.

Q: Do you have any memories of before you joined the monastery until you were 8 years old, any memories as a child?

#21M: When I was small, there was no other work but to graze the cows.

Q: What kind of animals and how many?

00:06:34

#21M: There were horses in my village. [We owned] cows and a few sheep. There were not many sheep because we reared them at home. There were just a few.

Q: Were there other children in the family?

#21M: My parents had six children. Except for three, the rest passed away. Three survived and I am the youngest. The other two were girls, my older sisters. When I went back, the oldest sister was living but the other one was no more. They have sons and [the family has] extended.

Q: If we were going to make a movie about your village, what would we see if we looked around? What would the scenery be like and the houses be like?

00:07:55

#21M: There was a small monastery in my village. It was not a big monastery and there were only eight monks...[?] became the teacher of the present Dalai Lama. After the Reting Rinpoche resigned, he became the King Thanuta. Then the monastery grew and it became similar to the Lingkha where there were 115 monks.

Q: There was a monastery in your village where there were eight monks?

#21M: Long ago it was the cave of a hermit. There were only eight monks when I was small. The [head] lama too was not exceptional though I should not be saying it. I have been there many times along with my parents. We used to take along a circular-shaped block of tea leaves and butter, similar to the Amul butter [a brand of butter in India] that we have here. We made these offerings for the *mangja* 'tea assembly of monks of the monastery ' and I have been there many times. It was very close [to the village]. Other than that there were no monasteries around. Across the river, there was Gathong. In general, Tunue was a long valley. If one continued [in the valley], one would reach the north. From Tunue Tsurpu, the way led towards the north. The opposite direction led to Lhasa, and Chushul was located at an intersection.

Q: Was the Changthang in the northward direction?

00:10:14

#21M: Changthang 'northern desert region' was very far away. It was the northern region once you left Tsurpu. I have not been there.

Q: Are there any memories that you still have of your young childhood before you entered the monastery?

#21M: I cannot recall any other feelings. We lived in a village and engaged in farming and I used to follow my parents in the fields.

Q: When you went with your father to the monastery, did you ever have a wish to join the monastery or how did that come about?

00:11:25

#21M: There was no such feeling of wishing to become a monk. It was understood that I would become a monk. I did not have a particular wish to become a monk. There was absolutely no such feeling.

Q: What was that fact based on?

#21M: My parents had decided that I would become a monk since two sons had already expired. They believed that the last son must be made a monk or he would not survive. That was our belief.

Q: How would becoming a monk prevent you from dying?

00:12:36

#21M: That is difficult to explain, but it is understood that if one practiced the dharma, your obstacles are overcome. That's what we say, "This child is facing many obstacles. It's better to make him a monk." That happens.

Q: *Gen-la*, do you know why your brothers died?

#21M: I would not have any knowledge about them because they had died earlier.

Q: What did they die of?

00:13:24

#21M: How would I know what they died of? I had never seen them as I was the youngest. I was the youngest among the six children and I have never seen them.

Q: At what age do you go to the monastery?

#21M: In the olden days, we did not know the Western calendar. I became a monk in 1930. I was born in '22.

Q: Do you have any memories of the first time you went to the monastery?

00:14:34

#21M: I have no other memories except learning the scriptures. The teacher was gentle and taught me very lovingly. I studied the scriptures and the teacher took good care of me. When I was 11, His Holiness the 13th Dalai Lama passed away.

Q: *Gen-la*, can you please explain to me when you go to the monastery, how do you get a teacher?

#21M: The respective parents looked for a teacher whom they had contact with.

Q: Please explain to me what exactly does the teacher do with the new monk? How does he work with him and help him?

#21M: There were different *khangtsen* [a smaller community within a monastery, in which monks of one geographical area live] and one [a new monk] was obliged to make various expenditures. Each *khangtsen* had their set of rules. There were some *khangtsen* which required one to spend a lot and others where one did not have to spend so much. So whatever the costs, the parents had to take care of it.

Take my case as an example, in order that I did not have to work for the *khangtsen*, *chonzey* offerings in the form of *tso* 'ritual offerings,' *thukpa patsema* 'cooked rice mixed with dry fruits and butter,' money, etc. were made. In those days the money was called *dhotse*. So it would cost about 50-60 *dhotse* even though that was such a long time ago. My parents had to spend that amount for me. After that one did not have to do any kind of petty work [in the *khangtsen*]. However, if one was willing to perform petty work, one did not have to spend so much. It was enough to make the *saja* 'new admission tea' offering and nothing big.

Q: Were your parents well off that they could make substantial offerings, so you didn't have to work? And what would you do if you didn't work?

00:17:53

#21M: Yes, the *chonzey* was made [for me].

Q: What did you do if you didn't have to work?

#21M: I studied the scriptures.

Q: And the 50-60 *dhotse* was that, how frequently was that paid?

00:18:25

#21M: That was done directly [to the monks]. Whether it was food, tea or whatever, it was offered directly.

Q: Did you have to do that again?

#21M: No, you did not have to do that again. Annually, as a form of interest one had to make an offering of *tsomja* 'tea offering to the *khangtsen* monks.'

Q: First of all, what monastery did you go to as a child, first, initially?

00:19:17

#21M: I became a monk of Kongpo Khangtsen in Drepung Monastery. It was in Loselling [one of the sections of Drepung Monastery].

Q: Wasn't it the monastery in your village?

#21M: No, no. It was Drepung. There were no other monasteries in my village except the one I told you about which had 8 monks.

Q: At that time *gen-la*, how many monks do you think were there when you were first entered?

00:19:53

#21M: There might have been 7,000 to 8,000 monks. However, there was not that many in the *khangtsen*. There were about 300 or 400. The Loselling is one *datsang* [section of a monastery]. It consisted of 25 *khangtsen*. All these monks together made up the population of Loselling.

Q: And what is a *khangtsen*?

#21M: *Khangtsen* is a group.

Q: Is this group defined by where their families came from? What made up that group?

00:21:06

#21M: No. There were different regions. Take Kham [Dhotoe Province] for example, their [monks] belonged to many different *khangtsen*. There were Bapa, Tiwu, Markham [different regions in Kham province]; each of these people was assigned to their particular *khangtsen*. That had been decided long ago, where each one belonged to. People like us did not belong to a particular *khangtsen* because we lived near Lhasa. We did not belong to any particular *khangtsen*.

Q: I want to clarify. How many *khangtsens* were there in the monastery?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: In one section of Drepung called Loselling Monastery, there were 25 *khangtsen*.

Q: When you had a teacher, did that teacher teach many monks or just you?

#21M: It was necessary to have a teacher who taught you and another who gave you food. The teacher who taught me did not teach many students. He taught three or four students, teaching them right from the alphabet.

Q: The teacher who takes care of your food, does he cook your food and make sure you eat well and does he help you with clothing and sleeping places?

00:23:23

#21M: Yes, that is right. In our monastery, we did not wash clothes like we do here. For one, the weather was too cold and secondly one did not have time. After the *choera* 'debate session' there was only four days time to wash clothes. The weather was cold and there was scarcity of water. Water had to be fetched on the back. It was like that. This is widely known.

Here bathing is done frequently. In Tibet, some people might not wash for a whole year. It was not that he did not want to wash but there was no time. For one the weather was too cold to take a bath and it was difficult to get water from a long distance. Here one can take a wash immediately.

Q: Was the bathing in the monastery about the same as it was in the family, about two or three times a year or even more or less?

#21M: Water was more abundant in the villages. There were rivers nearby. Since there were rivers close by, water was more readily available in the villages. In the villages, if the sun was hot little children could easily take a swim.

Q: The second teacher, the one who did your cooking, is he the one who got your water and did your laundry? Did he take care of your needs like a mother?

00:26:10

#21M: Yes, that is right. Once [the child] was in the monastery, he had to take the place of the parents. For a regular child, it was his parents and for a monk, it was the teacher who took care of him.

Q: So tell us in your own words some of the ways the teacher took care of you like a parent?

#21M: As I told you, at times after a month or two, we went to the *dugue* [river bank?]. There was a particular time we called *shing-long* 'begging for wood,' which was a day off between the debate sessions. It was actually a day meant to beg for firewood. However, we went to the *dugue* instead, bathed, washed and dried our clothes. We stayed there the whole day and returned in the evening.

Q: Where did you go and what does *shing-long* mean?

00:27:20

#21M: *Shing-long* was the time when we went to swim, bathe and wash clothes. That was the name *shing-long*, which was meant to be a time to go begging for wood. Otherwise the monks supposedly did not have time.

Q: Did the second teacher have many students to look after?

#21M: There were not many. Perhaps there were two or three. There would not be many because the rooms were not [big] enough. Three people would have to live in a room like that [points off camera].

Q: So the second teacher actually shared the same quarters. Where did the teacher live with the students?

00:28:43

#21M: They lived in the same quarters. He taught the scriptures and made [the young monks] recite the mantras when they got up in the morning and went to sleep at night.

That was how it was done. There were no beds and comforts in Tibet like we have here. We say that our country was good but such [comforts] were not there. Houses were also scarce.

Q: The second teachers, were they assigned by the monastery or did the parents pick this person?

#21M: The parents have their friends or connections and they locate one and tell him, "I am going to make my son a monk. Please take care of him." That was it. It was not an obligation from [the monastery]. However, there were cases in some *khangtsen* when many young monks arrived from long distances. Then they were given as charge [to the older monks], "You have to look after this young monk. You have to look after that young monk."

Q: Did you like your teacher that was kind of a parent-teacher and what was he like?

00:30:45

#21M: Yes, he was good to me. He was a very good friend of my parents. Earlier he had worked for the *khangtsen* and over-spent resulting in debts. So my parents had taken care of him. There was a strong relation on account of that.

Q: *Gen-la*, if there were young monks who came and their parents paid so they could study, and the other monks had to work, was there any feelings between these two groups of monks?

#21M: It's hard to talk about the relations. There was relation, but since that was due to the economic constraint, one was obliged to work. If you were not economically sound, you had to do some work. It was like paying one's land tax. However, nobody ever commented, "You are bad as you are economically poor or you are good as you are economically sound."

Q: But these kids from the poor families, they didn't get to study the same as you did?

00:32:53

#21M: They received the same opportunity [to study] because there was not much work a young child could do. If one was older, there was work, but in Tibet it was not as much as it is here. One did not have to work in the fields. There was not much to do except for studying. Here one must look after the fields. There were no officials and [everyone] attended the prayer assemblies.

Q: What kind of a student were you as a little boy, *gen-la*?

#21M: I was very stubborn.

Q: Can you tell me more, how were you stubborn?

00:34:08

#21M: I remained stubborn until I was about 14 with my teacher. And then I studied the debates for about four years; from 14 to 17. Unluckily once again I became obstinate and

the willfulness could not be brought under control. I became very bad and no one could control me.

Q: How did you show you were stubborn? What kind of actions or behaviors did you do?

#21M: There was a group of obstinate people [monks] called *dhopdhop*. In India we have long jump and such things. So they learned such things.

Q: Long jump?

00:35:31

#21M: Long jump. You know, to jump. There were 12 different events like jumping and throwing stones. We learned and practiced them. However, just learning was not enough; finally Sera [Monastery] had to be challenged. Loselling must challenge Sera Jey [Division of Sera Monastery]. Having practiced for 11 or 12 years, after that day [of challenge] was over, [a monk's] *dhopdhop* days ended. He would then do good work. One would have to do any kind of work that was ordered by the higher-ups like breaking *arka* [a type of rock] or collecting *arka*. None could refuse to do it once the message was received from the higher authority.

Q: To break *arka*?

#21M: Here they make square cement-like stone flooring. Similarly in Tibet we made [the flooring] by breaking *arka*. There were different kinds of stones which were beaten onto the ground.

Q: Why did you do that?

00:36:34

#21M: Just like we lay stone flooring in our houses that was the way it was done [in Tibet]. It [*arka*] was broken [and beaten] for the upper and other floors. If one was instructed to do it, one had to do it.

Q: Could you tell us about stone throwing? What did you use to do that? How?

#21M: It was a square stone which resembled Amul butter. It was 5 *nyakha*.

Q: Yes?

00:37:46

#21M: It weighed 5 *nyakha*. You know the Amul butter? We have the Amul butter here. It's [the stone's] shape was like that. [The competition] was to see who could throw it furthest.

Q: What was the purpose of the game, the distance or tell us what?

#21M: It was to see the distance one could throw. The main purpose [of the game], as it used to be said long ago was that it helped prevent war.

Q: Yes?

00:38:34

#21M: It is said to help prevent war to a great extent. That was why it was begun. That was the reason. Who started it? I have not seen, but it is said to have originated during the time of Tsangnyon Unyon and a *duptho* 'hermit with special powers.' Even during my time, the *khenpo* 'abbot' asked many such questions. When the Sera Jey *khenpo* was defeated, such questions were asked, but we did not have any proof of that. It is said to help prevent war. It helped prevent the Chinese war. To us it looked like the Chinese suddenly appeared after it was abolished.

Q: It helped prevent the Chinese from coming?

#21M: It used to be said that it helped prevent war.

Q: So these were almost like training sessions to make the monks strong, to be fighters against the Chinese?

00:40:14

#21M: There was no talk of a war, but that was the reason cited for holding the events. However we have not seen it, but that was what used to be said long ago.

Q: When you said the stones weighed 5 *nyakha*, is this about 5 *nyakha*?

#21M: For example, one kilogram is 10 *nyakha*.

Q: Tell me about the jumping contest. What did you do?

00:41:17

#21M: There was the jumping area. The place where you ran from was this high and the width was only so much. One had to sort of stagger and run quite a long way on this [narrow] path. The height was about so [extends right hand up] if one was standing up. One jumped over that as well as a length of 35 feet.

Q: Do you mean height or length?

#21M: When I said this [extends right hand up] I meant height. One could make a jump of a length of 35 feet. 35 feet is quite a long way. It is about 11 meters.

Q: *Gen-la*, what was your ability in stone throwing and in the jumping?

00:42:24

#21M: [I] was not that good [laughs].

Q: You said you were a very stubborn monk. So I'm trying to understand what made you stubborn. Did you not like the discipline? Was it hard to obey rules? What made you so stubborn?

#21M: Though there were about 8,000 monks in the monastery, only about 3,000 to 4,000 engaged in scripture studies. The rest were like me. There were also many who neither studied the scripture nor took part in the *dhopdhop*. However, most of us hoped to live as monks our entire lives in the monastery. There were some who engaged in trading.

Q: On what basis did some people learned the scriptures and some people do trading work? Who made that decision?

00:44:10

#21M: It was this [touches forehead]. It was one's own this [points to forehead]. No one told anyone, "You have to go to trade. You have to study the scriptures." Whether some engaged in studying the scriptures or worked to make a living, it was the same. There must be someone to strive hard to make a living.

For example, the thousands of monks must survive. The farmers of the villages worked hard and served [the monastery]. The monks did not have to do that. They were supposed to study the scriptures. So we were obliged to the villagers who were fending for us. The monks had their leaders who took care of [the administration], but there were not many officials like we have here.

Q: Tell us, first of all a little bit about what kind scripture study did you have and what was your teacher like?

#21M: He was a Bhutanese. He was called Geshe Shakya Senge. He passed away long ago at the age of 93 or 94. I did not see him [in exile] since the first Kalachakra initiation at Bodh Gaya [Bihar, India]. [My] teacher then left for Bhutan and expired there.

I studied until the *Pharchin Samkyi* '6th year of Buddhist philosophical studies.' I told you earlier about the *dhopdhop* competition between Sera Jey *datsang* and our *datsang*. The class above us was participating in the games and I went to watch it. We lost the competition and wishing to challenge them, I left my studies. That was an obstacle in my scripture studies.

Q: What did you say happened after you lost?

00:46:42

#21M: We lost [the competition]. Though there were no big bets, it was a matter of prestige. When we lost and I was watching the games, I was filled with aggression and thought I must challenge that and then left my studies. Such obstacles appear in the way of the dharma.

Q: Before you left, *gen-la*, how many years did you study scriptures with this teacher, the *Geshe* [a monk who holds a degree in philosophy]?

#21M: Four years.

Q: This was the teacher your parents selected for you?

00:48:08

#21M: No, no. He was one whom I requested to teach me. I lived in his quarters and he taught me the scriptures along with his other good student.

Q: Was there something about this teacher that wanted you to study with him?

#21M: I hoped that I would learn a little bit of the scriptures. Later when the obstacle occurred, the teacher became angry. It was like I was chased by demons and could not concentrate on the scriptures. Due to this I had to move out of the quarters.

Q: What was that like for you to have to stop studying? Were you relieved because it was difficult or did you wish to continue?

00:49:36

#21M: [Speaks before interpretation is complete] At that time there was no regret. In fact, I was happy. That was the time I was besieged by the demons and down on my luck. I carried on like that until I was 25. When I was 25, the *dhopdhop* group closed and then I became a *genyok*, 'assistant to the leader during the *Monlam* 'prayer festival.' [To the interpreter] They might be having the same in Sera Monastery [in Bylakuppe] and you might have seen it—the one called *genyok*. I took that role.

Q: This sounds like a very interesting job. Can you describe what are the duties of the assistant of the *Monlam*?

#21M: Normally there was not much to do for the *genyok*. [The responsibility] was to manage discipline among the monks during the Great *Monlam* Festival and *Tsongchoe*, a 12-day assembly. *Monlam* continues for 21 days. In the old days when I became a monk, it was not 21 but only 14 days and the *Tsongchoe* was held for 10 days. I do not know who formulated it, but later the *Monlam* was increased by seven days and the *Tsongchoe* by two days. *Tsongchoe* became 12 days and the *Monlam* 21 days. The present time is the time of *Tsongchoe* session in Tibet.

Q: Why was there a need for discipline during these two periods? And what kind of discipline was needed?

00:52:18

#21M: We had to oversee how [the monks] behaved during the prayer assemblies and also that they did not roam about or visit the markets during the assembly sessions. In the old days, Drepung [Monastery] held authority during the Great *Monlam* Festival. Nobody else was entitled to oversee it. This was so because the entire authority was given to Drepung [Monastery] during the time of the Great 5th Dalai Lama. However, after coming into exile in India, Gaden and Sera [Monasteries] each claimed that they wanted the authority. His

Holiness the Dalai Lama said, "Actually Drepung is entitled to [conducting] the Great *Monlam* Festival. During the *Monlam* in Dharamsala, I hired monks of Drepung." So likewise, it was truly unlike anyone else when [Drepung monks] conducted it since it was entitled to it.

The entire discipline during that period, whether you were a lay person or a monk came under the control of the *tsokchen shengo* 'head of the great assembly.' And the *genyok* were the assistants to the *tshokchen shengo*. [*Genyok*] were responsible for keeping watch over the assemblies, the offerings and everywhere else during the *Monlam*. They were very powerful during the *Monlam*.

Q: What were the qualities that were needed for someone who was the assistant, the *genyok*? What kind of a quality or ability you have to have?

#21M: The expenses were high and so was the income. In the first place, it was very difficult to get the post. One had to approach the *shengo*. The two *shengo* were appointed by the government. They were appointed by the Tibetan government and His Holiness the Dalai Lama gave it in writing. On the 25th day of the 6th ibetan lunar month, there were 12 *shengo*, which included two outgoing ones and 10 fresh ones that assembled.

The two previous ones would be leaving that day. And from the 10 fresh ones at Norbulingka, two would to be selected depending on their voice, reading ability, dress, etc. Finally His Holiness gave his seal of approval to the two of them. The document was received by the two abbots who brought them in the pocket. All the monks of Drepung would have congregated that day and it was opened there to find out who the *shengo* were. Then the message was passed on to the respective *shengo*. [The selection] process was not casual, but approved by His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

Q: You said there were 12 *shengos*. They were outgoing and then two...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Two were outgoing and from the 10 new ones, His Holiness selected two.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Oh, outgoing. You mean they were leaving the position?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: That's right.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Two were outgoing. From the 10 new ones, His Holiness selected two.

Q: What were the two selected to do?

00:57:31

#21M: They were responsible for the whole of Drepung and whatever work was involved during that year. They had to appoint the officials who would work under them during the *Monlam*. They made the decision regarding the appointment of two *chapthang*, the *nangchen* 'internal assistants,' 19 *genyok* and one *shengo shenyen* 'head of the assistants.'

Once these officials were selected and the others disqualified, they became responsible during the *Monlam*. It was not an easy job during the *Monlam* as they had to leave [the monastery] on the second or third day of *Losar* ‘Tibetan New Year’ and had to do the *kunyang* for the whole of Lhasa.

Q: What is doing *kunyang*?

#21M: *Kunyang* means that they had to inspect the area and maintain law and order. *Kunyang* is like checking the place.

Q: *Gen-la*, we are talking about two important festivals. Maybe you could describe the meaning of the *Monlam* and the *Tsongchoe* festivals?

00:59:47

#21M: *Monlam* is the death anniversary of the Je Rinpoche. Every aspect of the responsibility of [holding] the *Monlam* lay with Drepung [Monastery]. The responsibilities for deities, humans and everyone rested with Drepung. Not even one cup of tea could be missed. For example, it was said that the one who made the fire in Drepung was a deity. Sera [Monastery] could not prepare the tea [for the *Monlam*].

It used to be said that the *Monlam* first began after a meeting of deities. The next evening there was a *gongja* 'evening tea assembly.' It was said that once Sera offered to make it. I have not witnessed it, but I heard that they could not prepare the evening tea. The reason they could not prepare the tea was because our fire maker was said to be the deity Dhampa Shango. So when the tea would not come to a boil, a handful of blessed wheat [of Dhampa Shango] was thrown into the fire and it [the tea] automatically came to a boil. This is something which I have witnessed, the tea for the *Monlam*. That was something very unique.

Q: What's the second festival?

#21M: *Tsongchoe* is the prayer for His Holiness Kalsang Gyatso the 7th [Dalai Lama]. He was extremely beneficial for Tibet and began the system of *Kashag* ‘the Cabinet.’ I think there was the *Kashag* in Tibet earlier. I was told about it by Ngabo Ngawang Jigme at the time Tibet was conquered. He was a *kalon* ‘Cabinet member’ at that time. He said that the *Kashag* was not something ordinary and that it was [given power] by His Holiness Kalsang Gyatso. However, though there used to be the *kalon*, there was no seal in those days. So it was during the time of His Holiness Kalsang Gyatso that the *Kashag* was given power. That's what he [Ngabo Ngawang Jigme] said.

So the responsibility for preparing the tea rested with the [responsible] members down from the *shengo* to the stove assistants, in terms of whether the tea had boiled, whether it was ready, whether the salt was right; every department had to be looked into. It created a big problem even if there a slight slip-up as 30,000-40,000 monks assembled from the three great monasteries [Sera, Drepung and Gaden] and...

Q: For the *Tsongchoe*?

01:03:50

#21M: For the *Monlam*.

Q: Could you please tell us about the *Tsongchoe*?

#21M: *Tsongchoe* occurred after the *Monlam* was over. This is now the period that the *Tsongchoe* would be in progress. These two were quite similar except for certain responsibilities.

Q: What was the significance [of the *Tsongchoe*] to the 8th Dalai Lama?

#21M: It was the *kuchoe* [in memory] of his passing away.

[Brief interruption]

Q: To go back to his duties as an assistant *genyok*, what would you do, *gen-la*, if you saw monks not going to the prayer ceremonies?

01:05:22

#21M: They would get the stick treatment. The stick treatment is the custom of Tibet. For example, though I would not know about Gaden or Sera but in our Monastery, none of the monks could stay back [in the monastery] during the *Monlam* festival. Everyone must hand over their quarters to those who watched them. The houses were locked and [the locks] tied with a string. This was sealed and handed over to the *khangnyer* 'caretaker.' Nobody could open the doors during the period of the *Monlam*. When [the monks] returned [after attending the *Monlam*], they handed them back. They handed [the houses] with the seals in tact.

Until then nobody could open the doors. If someone had something to be done [in his quarters], it was not simple. He had to first obtain permission of the *shengo* saying, "I have such and such work in the monastery. Can I go there?" Only after permission was granted, did the *khangnyer* open the seal. It was very strict. No monk could stay back. In Tibet—never mind the aged—even if you were ill, there was no sick leave. Nobody was awarded any special treatment. However, all the aged and the sick here receive special treatment. There are hospitals and such things, which were not there in Tibet. There were no such facilities.

Q: The rooms that were locked and sealed were they the bedrooms, the usual rooms...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: The dormitories.

Q: The dormitories, and then people had to go to the festival? And how far was the festival from the dormitories?

#21M: The distance was four and half kilometers. You could say five kilometers.

Q: To be able to use a stick and be a disciplinarian were you still allowed to do that as a monk?

01:08:01

#21M: Yes, you could do that. It is said that the *genyok* do not have the monks' vows. The reason for saying that was that there was a sword of this length at our waist and a stick in the hand. When we went to attend the *Monlam*, it was symbolic that we have given up the vows to His Holiness the Dalai Lama. When we came back [to the monastery], it was symbolic of our taking back the vows.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama sat on the throne, while we sat on either side [during the vow-giving up ceremony]. Then tea was offered. After the tea was drunk, His Holiness left and so did we for our respective responsibilities. Giving up the vows and taking back the vows was symbolic as we did not have to utter anything.

Some people say that the *genyok* do not have the vows. That is right because there was the sword in the waist and a stick in the hand. We had to move among all the compassionate beings and [not discernible]. However, that was one's responsibility since ages ago and one must do it.

Q: What was the reason why you could not have your vows while you were taking the role of the *genyok*?

#21M: There was a sword at the waist and a stick in the hand and we had to move among all the Buddhas and compassionate beings. You were going against the vows and one could not do that. For example, a monk cannot carry a sword. He cannot carry a stick. If a monk broke the vows and yet attended the assembly and got beaten and killed for that, that was your loss. There was nothing to do.

Our costume was also different. It was a costume that did not occur in Sakya, Gelug or Nyingma sects [of Tibetan Buddhism]. Do you see this hem here in the *shamthap* [skirt of monk's robes]? That was not present [in the *genyok's* costume]. It was folded this way. This was called *basham* or *barko shamthap*. There are these people known as *barko*, those that are not monks. It was similar to their *shamthap*, the *basham*. [The costume consisted of] *ta-ring* 'long hair' and *te-ring* 'long sword' and *teng-thok* and *thoe-kam*, which are a black rosary with skull symbols.

The actual meaning was that these monks [symbolized] the protective deities. That was the main reason. You might have seen lamas surrounded by the protective deities. It was symbolic of that. There was a leader of the 20 [*genyok*] known as Shengo Shenyen who was said to be the real Dhamchen Choegyial [protective deity of Je Rinpoche]. He carried a thick white stick of about four feet long. The stick was said to be the fire stoker of Dhamchen Choegyial. Such things used to be said.

Q: Can you show how it [the hemline] is turned up?

01:12:57

#21M: [Interviewee turns hemline of robes outwards] It is turned like this and then sewn. This [turning up of the hemline] is known as *balo*. Monks who have the vows have a sort of boundary line sewn [at the hem]. This indicates the demarcation of the rules of the monks. When it was turned like this [shows hem turned outside] it became a *balo* and [the robe] called a *basham* and there were no rules [to follow for the wearer]. So every monk's robes had the stitch like a boundary at the hem. This boundary stitch was very valuable for a monk.

Q: I know the two *shengos* had to give up their vows for that period. Did the assistants also give up their vows?

#21M: All [the *shengo* and *genyok*] gave up their vows. All the officials connected with the *Monlam* attended the private audience [with His Holiness].

Q: We know that the two head *shengos* did, but when was there a ceremony for the other monks to do that?

01:14:48

#21M: That happened when we went to attend the *Monlam*. We had to reach there on the *Monlam Thogya* which took place on the 24th day. One must observe the correct day and check if there were any extra or short days [in the lunar calendar]. The *Thogya* 'burning of pyramid-shaped offerings' took place on the 24th and *Jampa Dhende* [bringing out of the image of Jetsun Jampa Gonpo] was on the 25th. We went there depending upon the occurrence of these days.

There were two *shengo*, two *chapthang*, two *nangma*, two *chapri* 'assistant disciplinarian,' a *shengo shenyen* and 19 *genyok*. All these people must attend [the vow-giving up ceremony].

Q: When did you have the tea [with the Dalai Lama]?

#21M: As soon as everyone assembled there and His Holiness was on the throne, tea was served in a silver pot. There was hardly any time to drink the tea. Just as you took a sip, it was time to leave.

Q: Was that on the 24th?

01:15:36

#21M: No, it was on the day we reached there. The date was not the same [every year] because of the extra or short days between the 2nd and the 25th. However, the gist of the matter is that the *Thogya* ceremony had to take place on the 24th.

Q: Of which Tibetan lunar month?

#21M: Of the first Tibetan lunar month.

Q: For how many days would you be without vows?

01:16:32

#21M: That was during the period of the *Monlam*. After the *Monlam*, we followed the same procedure [of tea with His Holiness] and that was symbolic of giving us the vows.

Q: How long would the period be?

#21M: I told you that it happened on the day we reached there for the *Monlam*. It could either be the 2nd or 3rd day of the 1st lunar month. Irrespective of extra or short days, the *Thogya* must take place on the 24th and the *Jampa Dende* on the 25th.

Q: When you had a temporary dispensation from your vows, was there any interest in doing anything else that would be permissible?

01:17:33

#21M: No, never. [We] would not do that. However, it [the role of *genyok*] was a tradition for the monks. It was just figurative that [they] did not have the vows. Acting as leaders of the monks [during the *Monlam*], there would never be any thought of doing different things.

The costume worn during the *Monlam* is very strange. If you like to see them, I have the sword and rosary in my quarters.

Q: We will take a break in a little bit. Shall we take a break and you will get it?

Q: *Gen-la*, tell us what you are doing?

#21M: [Stands up and shows a long black beaded rosary across the lower front body] It is worn and tied like this. Besides this, there are many other costumes worn during the *Monlam*. In Tibet, the inner clothes and outer robes were all made from brocade. [They] were very grand.

This is just a simple replica I made and had it painted in Sera [Monastery] when I went there to receive a teaching. [Shows a sword-like wooden item with decorative stones studded at one end.]

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Hold it across his lap. That's good.

[Interviewee poses and photographs are taken.]

Q: What would you do with it?

01:19:19

#21M: We had to wear it like this [holds sword replica sideways at waist] and move around during the *Monlam*. And you carried a long stick in your hand.

Q: That is a sword—what he's holding?

#21M: Yes, this is [like the] sword. [I] do not have the real sword. There is a real sword at the Tibetan Museum in Delhi but no one else owns one. I just made this.

Q: What are they?

01:20:04

#21M: This is not required [for the *Monlam* costume].

Q: What is it that you are holding?

#21M: [Holds the black beaded rosary] This is the human skull rosary. You would have seen them in the [pictures] of protective deities. This is like a protector, which is why it is called a human skull rosary. [Holds the rosary over the front of robes in a X]

Q: Pull it up a little bit higher.

01:20:35

#21M: [Stands up holding the rosary in place.]

Q: Oh, like that. We can get a shot of this later.

[Interviewer to videographer]: Can you get the bottom?

[Camera focuses on rosary]

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Could he pull the rosary much higher so the camera can see it?

[Interviewee sits down and holds up the rosary.]

[Videographer]: *Gen-la*, please hold it a little bit higher.

Interviewee holds the rosary higher and the two skulls at the bottom of the rosary are caught in frame.

Q: Okay. Good.

#21M: Many of the older monks have seen this. However, I am the last survivor to have shouldered that responsibility.

Q: So you wore this rosary during the *Monlam*?

01:21:32

#21M: Yes, we wore that only on the day of *Thogya* and *Jampa Dhende*. The sword would be carried always but not the rosary.

Q: *Gen-la*, did you have any occasions when you really had to hit somebody who was misbehaving or beat someone?

#21M: Yes, it happened. There were some strange monks who did not follow the rules. There were many occasions when [I] beat them until they were like dead and had to be carried away.

Q: So did they get very badly injured?

01:22:34

#21M: Yes, they had been beaten badly so as to be carried home.

Q: What were they doing that was so bad?

[Brief interruption]

#21M: The rules and regulations of the monks were very complicated. For example, if someone stood up and made a noise during the assembly session, he would be beaten. The assembly was not a matter of a few monks, but there were 30,000-40,000 monks and there was only one hall. If this [points to center of palm] was the Tsuglakhang 'Central Cathedral' [also known as Jokhang], the monks sat surrounding it. There were monks everywhere. There were some who made noise and they could not be controlled without that.

Q: How many thousands of monks were there?

#21M: There were more than 30,000. Here we think a few thousand monks is a lot.

Q: You need a discipline force. Yes. Were there also people besides monks all around?

01:24:13

#21M: There were no lay people. There were no lay people during the prayer assembly. There might be some sponsors but no other lay people. However, there were a thousand *jadhe* 'tea experts.' They were all lay people. All of them were men.

Q: Where?

#21M: Those who served tea.

Q: Did they offer tea?

01:24:30

#21M: No, they served tea; they were the *jadhe*. There were 1,000 servers; 500 silver and 500 copper [tea-pot?] bearers.

Q: So all together monks and lay people about 31,000? What would be the estimate?

#21M: It was more than 31,000. There were [monks from] the local monasteries and the three great monasteries. Among the three great monasteries, Drepung had 15,000 [monks]. Then there were Sera and Gaden [monasteries]. There must be almost 40,000 [monks]. All the [monks from] the local monasteries arrived and there were many local monasteries. The other sects were not supposed to attend, but those local monasteries whose caretakers were from the Tsuglakhang attended the *Monlam*.

Q: Can you describe a little bit, where is the exact location where this ceremony was happening?

01:26:08

#21M: Tsuglakhang. The Tsuglakhang in Lhasa.

Q: Oh, the Central Cathedral. So everyone from all the monasteries came. Was there anything else he can remember that... Well, I want to go back. You said Drepung Monastery became in-charge of the discipline. How did this happen? How did this get assigned to you?

#21M: That is what Je Rinpoche assigned. This is just a saying and I do not know how far it is the truth. It is said that the actual dharma scripture was allotted to Gaden, the wooden boards covering the scripture was presented to Sera and the rope to tie the scripture was given to Drepung. This is what is said and I do not know clearly if it is true. That is the reason why Drepung conducts the *Monlam*. The rope binds the scripture and the boards together. Without the rope, there are thousands of pages of scripture. Once it is tied, there is only one single unit. That is it.

Q: *Gen-la*, if you were in charge, did you go during the festival to each different monastery and check the rooms that the monks were there or only your monastery?

01:28:40

#21M: It was not necessary. That was carried out by themselves [respective monasteries]. Monks of Gaden did not have time to enjoy Losar because they had to leave on the eve or on the day of the New Year. It took them two days to walk to Lhasa. They hardly had time to enjoy New Year.

Q: *Gen-la*, how did 31,000 or 30,000 people fit into the Central Cathedral or the Jokhang?

#21M: [Smiles] They could not fit inside the Jokhang. There was a huge open space outside the Jokhang called *chamra*. Likewise, there was another area outside called *shingra*. *Shingra* was the site where King Langdharma was killed. All around that area was the Bakor [Central Square]. [Monks of] Sera sat in the east side of the Bakor. In the south were the Gaden [monks]. Drepung [monks] occupied the *chamra* and *shingra*. [Monks] of Sera also occupied the *chamra*. They could sit anywhere. The higher authorities had to be present at their respective positions. The common monks could sit anywhere.

Q: I was curious, with such a wonderful ceremony going on, why would the monks want to stay in their own room and not come?

01:31:13

#21M: All the monks attended the *Monlam* as there were lots of offerings [made to the monks]. Those monks who lived in the villages did not have work at that time and so did not remain there. Those who belonged to the local monasteries that were not allowed to attend had to stay back. There were many monasteries in Tibet.

Q: Oh, really? Why not [allowed to attend the ceremony]?

#21M: They were [from the] Nyingma, Sakya and Kagyu [sects]. However, there were some exceptions. That [included] a Kagyu Monastery—Tsering Chenga of the Karma Kagyu sub-sect. Their monks attended. Then there was a group of Dorjidak monks of the Nyingma sect at Kungagang who joined. Located below were a Gongga Chode group which arrived and Angurshedhe whose monastery was located in Lhasa. Caretakers of nine monasteries arrived at the Tsuglakhang.

Q: Can you tell us a little bit, this went on for how many days?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Twenty-two.

Q: Twenty-two days. Was everyday the same? Give us some idea of what happened during these days? What these ceremonies were like?

#21M: [It went on for] 21 [days]. The prayer assembly was the same. There were three *kamtso* 'dry assembly' and three *lemtso* 'wet assembly'—three assemblies without tea and three with tea.

Q: And who was the tea offered to?

01:33:54

#21M: To the monks.

Q: To all the monks?

#21M: Yes. Besides tea, there was also *thukpa* [*patsema*?]. Tea was offered twice and *thukpa* once. Tea without *thukpa* was given during the third assembly. There was tea but no *thukpa*.

Q: Was there any reciting of prayers or signing or chanting?

01:34:42

#21M: Prayers were recited.

Q: Were there no accompaniments of ritual instruments?

#21M: No, the Gelug sect did not use the ritual instruments.

Q: So if we were making a movie of this ceremony, what would we be seeing? Could you describe...we'd see monks sitting and sometimes chanting, sometimes what?

01:35:27

#21M: Everyone would be sitting and chanting the prayers. If one wished to take photographs, permission would have to be sought earlier from the authorities.

Q: If we looked on, we would see many monks sitting and chanting prayers and having tea at times. If we could see the Great *Monlam* Festival of yore now, would we see something like that?

#21M: Once the chanting started, there was no drinking of tea. Tea must be finished as there was no break during the chant. Once tea was served and the tea prayer offered, there was a break. When the tea prayer was offered, tea must be drunk. For the second serving of tea, there was no elaborate tea prayer. The tea was drunk fast.

Q: Would that go on all day, prayers and tea?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yeah.

Q: Were the prayers for anything? Were there any special kinds of prayers?

01:37:03

#21M: Those were the regular prayers that had to be chanted during the *Monlam*. However, if the sponsors requested for any particular prayer, then that was recited. The prayers would have been mentioned in the list of prayers to be read, which was in the hands of the *umze* 'the chant leader.'

Q: Would His Holiness the Dalai Lama, would he attend any of these or would he be in his palace?

#21M: He arrived on the 15th day without fail. He came from the morning *sojong* [assembly attended by novice and ordained monks to confess any lapse and reiterate their vows].

Q: *Gen-la*, you said you met His Holiness very briefly. Can you remember what that experience was like and what was he like? What did he look like?

01:38:24

#21M: [Smiles] Each person has a different way of seeing His Holiness, depending upon his virtue. A virtuous person will see him as extremely grand and there are others who see him differently. It depends on each person's virtue. It is never the same.

Q: You did a *genyok*, an assistant, at age 25—that was the first time you did it. Did you do it other years and how many years?

#21M: I served as *genyok* from age 31 until 36 when Tibet was occupied.

Q: Isn't it from 25?

01:39:33

#21M: I did it once at the age of 25. That was the first time and I did not do it [again] until the age of 31. I did it regularly for 6 years from the age of 31 to 36. That was because the *shengo* told me that I had good control over my hands and was a good disciplinarian. They appointed me. In general, one had to...[not discernible]. However, they [the *shengo*] observed how one implemented [discipline] and how one used the stick upon the monks. Those that wished to become a *shengo* would observe all these during the prayer assemblies. So there were many such [support] for me.

Q: Was there a reason he didn't do it between age 25 and 31?

#21M: That was because I changed my *khangtsen*. I shifted from Kongpo Khangtsen to Lokay.

Q: Why did they think you were a good *genyok*?

01:41:21

#21M: A good [genyok] was one who could implement discipline and one who looked grand in the costume. Those were the main attributes. If one wore smart clothes, one should look good. It was something like that.

On the 15th day His Holiness arrived at the prayer assembly. He also arrived in the evening during the *chonga choepa* '15th day ritual offering' for the *choesi*. He did not come everyday but when he did, the military conducted a parade. Monks constructed the *choepa* 'ritual offerings' but other monks could not attend the [display] of *choepa*. [The monks who constructed the *choepa*] sat in front of the *choepa* but no monk could be seen in the Bakor. If seen, [they] would be caught.

Q: On the evening of the 15th day?

#21M: Yes, in the night. You know the display of *chonga choepa*, right? Soldiers were not allowed to attend the *Monlam Thogyä*. Perhaps monks and soldiers did not get along right from the beginning.

Q: When were the soldiers not allowed to attend?

01:42:17

#21M: On the day of the *Monlam Thogyä*, on the 24th day.

Q: Was there a reason why they were not allowed?

#21M: It was assumed that they would clash with the monks. Those who conducted the *Thogyä* were [monks] from the Namgyal Monastery and Drepung Ngagpa Datsang. They were responsible for the *Thogyä*. [Monks of] Ngagpa Datsang and Namgyal Monastery

were on either side. Which is the Namgyal Monastery? That is the monastery of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The Drepung Ngagpa was the Ngagpa division of Drepung [Monastery]. There were 500 monks. They were responsible for conducting [the *Thogya*].

It is said that long ago there was a clash between them during a *Thogya*. In the later days, the monks of Namgyal Monastery came armed with silver knives—those who played the *dhung* and the *gyaling* [ritual musical instruments]. Wearing [the knives] was said to be a special concession granted long ago after the clash with the Ngagpa Datsang. I do not know the actual story but they did come wearing [carrying knives].

The *Thogya* was not a small affair. There were about 15-20 *chadha*. Besides that 500 cavalry men and 500 infantry arrived. They were the 500 *Monlam thapa* 'horsemen' and 500 *zimchung* 'Monlam infantry.' The gist of the matter was that it represented Chogyal Norsang [a religious king of Tibet].

Q: So the soldiers were allowed to attend?

01:44:40

#21M: No, these were specially appointed, the 500 cavalymen and 500 infantry. The 500 infantrymen were the *zimchung* that wore a type of headdress.

Q: Where did they arrive?

#21M: They arrived for the *Thogya*. They stood in line and fired their guns.

Q: You mentioned earlier that soldiers were not allowed to attend.

01:45:06

#21M: Those were the common soldiers. There were about 3,000 soldiers in Tibet. Those soldiers who consisted of the *drapchi*, *kusung*, etc. were not allowed to attend. However, the *zimchung* was different. They were not exactly soldiers, but those who were obliged to attend as a form of tax service. It was a service tax assigned only during the *Monlam*. They were supposed to be the soldiers of Chogyal Norsang.

Q: *Gen-la*, you had this important job between 1953 and 1958. Is that correct? What was the monastery's life like from 1953 to 1958?

#21M: I served from 1953 to 1959. The *Tsongchoe* could not be conducted in '59 when the Chinese started the oppression and we had to flee. The *Tsongchoe* assembly could not be held.

Q: Before we talk about that, I heard reports that there was a very bad epidemic in the monasteries around 1951-52. It sounded like small-pox, like fevers and lumps on the face and exhaustion. Do you remember any epidemic like that?

01:48:20

#21M: I do not know about it. I never heard it. What happened to us was this. On the 1st day of the 2nd Tibetan lunar month of 1959, which corresponds to the 10th of March, on this day the people rose up [against the Chinese]. The *khenchung* 'monk official' of the Chamdo Phakpa-*la* came to invite His Holiness the Dalai Lama and at that time he was dragged away by a rope around his neck. That occurred on the 1st day of the 2nd Tibetan lunar month.

We still remained eight or nine days after that. At 2 o'clock in the morning of the 10th, [the Chinese] started shelling. The artilleries were not any ordinary ones. The firing of artilleries resounded and the Potala Palace, which was red in color, reddened the whole sky when shelled. We dare not stay after that and made our escape. I did not return to my quarters. I have not heard about the illness.

Q: Before you fled, did you have any understanding of the Chinese presence or any...With your own eyes, did you see any evidence of their presence in Lhasa?

#21M: When the shelling first started on the...It was on the 1st day of the [2nd] Tibetan lunar calendar that the Chamdo Phakpa-*la*'s...came to the Norbulingka. We had volunteered as security guards but the *genyok* were not given passes. We were told, "You have to work for the monks. You have to discipline the monks." and were refused passes. Only two people [monks] were given passes to act as observers.

Then on the night of the 10th at around 2 o'clock, innumerable shells were fired. We did not remain in the monastery. The reason we did not stay back was that we immediately dashed to the mountain to occupy the *tseri* 'mountain top.' Though we went to occupy the *tseri*, we did not have any weapons. There was nothing to do but stay put atop the *tseri* the whole day hungry. I did not get to go back to my room, but fled through the mountain range. We dare not stay back. That was in the month of March.

Q: The two monks that were allowed to go, did they go to...to where did they go?

01:53:15

#21M: They were the messengers for our group. There were 20 of us *genyok*. They were supposed to be messengers for us. But they could not since the shelling started suddenly on the 10th.

Q: Between whom did they pass messages?

#21M: These men were sent there by us since they had passes.

Q: Where were they sent?

01:53:45

#21M: They had passes as security guards to enter the Norbulingka. They were to make any enquiries there and bring us the message. So they acted as messengers between us. The shelling started suddenly on the 10th and we did not dare stay back. We fled to the

mountains. We went to occupy the *tseri* but the monastery did not give us weapons. There was a stock of weapons and ten people received a gun and five bullets. What was the use of five bullets? We immediately rushed to the hill. We remained atop the hill on the 10th and 11th and climbed down on the 12th and left.

Q: *Gen-la*, before you saw the shelling, did the monks know or were there any fear or concern about Chinese taking over Lhasa and Tibet?

#21M: There were no such feelings in us. Tibet was let down by hope. We kept hoping and hoping that it would be fine. Earlier they [the Chinese] said that they were implementing peaceful liberation and placed red colored pots over the doors of their houses. They said they were implementing the so-called "liberation through peaceful way." They'd done such things.

His Holiness might have left on the night of the 8th of March, but we had no knowledge about it. We did not know it and the Neychung deity...[not discernible]. By then His Holiness had already left. We believed His Holiness was there and when the shelling began we said, "What a disaster at Norbulingka!" We had no knowledge about His Holiness' whereabouts. However, His Holiness was already far away in Lhoka at the time the shelling began.

Q: Before the attack, from like 1953-58 when you worked during the ceremony, the *Monlam* ceremony, what kind of work were you doing at the monastery? What kind of functions or jobs were you performing?

01:57:24

#21M: There was no work in the monastery for us. The discipline committee started in the 10th month and until the 3rd month, there were some responsibilities. On the 8th day of the 3rd month, there was an incense burning ceremony. The [discipline] committee ceased to exist from this day and there was no work for the next 5-6 months.

Q: So what did you do during the day with your time?

#21M: [I] went home to our village. [I] went back to the village and stayed at home and helped them with work if needed. There was not anything else to do. Or one could engage in doing some trade. That was it.

Q: We'll now go back to the attack on the monastery. When you went up to the hill, why were you doing that instead of staying in the monastery?

01:59:02

#21M: We went there to guard the *tseri* and with the intention to fight them [the Chinese]. We were intent to fight them from a higher point to a lower level. However, we did not have the means to do it. We did not have arms. They [the Chinese] had hidden their artilleries in the ground and we were helpless. [We] planned to ambush the men and climbed down to a great extent but we could not.

Q: You said you had very few weapons. So where did these weapons come from?

#21M: They were given by the government.

Q: Which government?

01:59:50

#21M: From Tibet, from the Tibetan government. They divided guns among the three great monasteries but there were not many. Some said there were 300 and some mentioned 200, but I do not know how many there were. We were given a gun each for ten people.

Q: How were you going to use it if there was one gun for ten monks?

#21M: That's how [it was]. It was useless to hurl stones. Also there were just five bullets. What could one do with that?

Q: Did you ever think of getting your sword with you?

02:00:52

#21M: Sword? The sword was there on my body.

Q: It was?

#21M: It was. It was there until I reached Bhutan. It was one with a leather sheath. I had the special one in a trunk in my room [at the monastery] and once I left [for the *tseri*] I did not get the chance to go back to my room. I left once and for all. We never imagined that we would lose like that. [Swears]

Q: When you were on that hill, could you see fires or something burning from up there?

02:01:52:

#21M: There were hosts of Chinese and they were firing shells and guns. We could see people fleeing from Norbulingka in Lhasa and climbing up the hill. There were innumerable people fleeing. There was a large swamp and when a shell fell in it, huge blobs of slush like dead cows rose in the sky and dropped back. It looked like there were people caught under it. Such things occurred. We stayed [atop] on the 11th and came down on the 12th. Then we left from there and did not go back to our quarters.

[We] came down on the 12th and I reached home on the night of the 14th. I stayed at home on the 15th and left on the 16th.

Q: When the decision was made to not go back to the monastery, did all the monks leave or did some go back to the monastery?

#21M: [Some] returned. A notice was issued by the *lachi* 'main office of a monastery.' Once the *lachi* was conquered, the Chinese had free reign. The aristocrats might have slunk in and done something. "The monks must return. One is free to practice religion. Come

back and there will be no harm done."—when such a letter arrived, some went back. I did not return. There were 15 people with me and 14 went back. I was the only one who came away.

Q: Where did the letter come from that said you would be free to practice?

02:04:26

#21M: [I] heard that it bore the seal of the *lachi*. I did not see the letter, but [I] heard it contained the seal of the *lachi*. "Monks, do not run away. Come back. There will be freedom of religion." It was being said that it had the seal.

It [the *lachi*] had fallen into the hands of the Chinese. The abbot and other authorities had already bowed down.

Q: So the Chinese were saying come back. They used the seal of the Drepung.

#21M: Yes, that is right.

I was strange and thought differently. I told [my colleagues who wished to return], "You can go back though actually there is no use returning because His Holiness the Dalai Lama has left. However, if you wish to, go back." I [sent a message for] my student, "I will not return for a year whether I am dead or alive. If you hear that I am alive after that, make your decision. If you do not hear that I am alive, my quarters are for my student. I am definitely dead if you do not hear about me in a year." This was my oral will and then I left.

Q: *Gen-la*, what made you decide to not go back to the monastery and to leave?

02:06:29

#21M: When His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who is our everything, has left, what was the use of our staying back? It was no use.

Q: Is it only 15 monks who returned to the monastery of the entire population of monks?

#21M: I mean the 14 who were with me. The majority of the monks were there already.

Q: Were they at the monastery?

02:07:09

#21M: They had returned earlier. The monks returned when the letter arrived. Those who were with me went back on the 14th.

No, it was on the 15th that they returned [to the monastery] and I went home. I reached home on the night of the 15th. I stayed home on the 16th and left on the 17th.

Q: When you went to your village, did you go alone or with a group of people?

#21M: I met a man who was a new soldier and was fleeing from the Norbulingka. He did not know anything. He told me that he fired many shots but all his bullets were intact! He had not used even one bullet. The gun's trigger was intact. He was a fresh soldier and claimed to have fired many shots. He was a big liar.

Q: What was it like in your heart or in your mind to be leaving Tibet, to be leaving Lhasa, to be leaving your monastery?

02:08:49

#21M: I hoped to meet them [the Chinese] but if we'd met them, we were outnumbered and our weapons unmatched. On the night I left my home, I reached a mountain pass called Nobula, but was not allowed to cross it. I stayed with a relative at the estate and some monks from Lhasa came to seek provisions. I told them that there was no *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley' but if they liked, I could give them grains. However, they did not want grains and there was nothing I could do. There was no *tsampa* left and they did not wish to take grains.

Then a child of my relative and a neighbor's child arrived, each riding on a horse. I scolded them, "You come riding horses. Have not you brought me one to ride?" They said they would go and bring a mule but I said, "Do not go to get the mule. You might get caught by the Chinese." At that time a man came rushing on his horse saying that the Chinese had arrived at... [not discernible]. So we left. I held on to the tail of a horse and the two rode their horses and we crossed the Kyichu River of Lhasa.

That night we stayed at Sherong and the next day went to cross the Nobula. The villagers would not let us through. I was a known face having served as *genyok* for many years. I told them, "You can keep these two children and a horse as surety. Let me take a horse and get a permit." I went to Benzadu, where the airport is located [now] to seek the permit. The leader and the others were ex-monks of Sera Monastery. They recognized me and said, "Come in and sit for sometime. Have some tea." They gave me tea and *pa* 'dough made from tea and *tsampa*.' He asked me what I needed and I said, "I need a permit. I have colleagues left there." He said I would not be allowed back there and I told him, "I do not need to go back. Please send a *genpo* 'village leader' to bring them [the two children and the horse] over." Somebody was sent immediately.

02:10:56

Both of them reached there. The leader told us to go to Chedhashue. He told us, "Do not go to Gongka. It is better to go to Chedhasue where Amdo Lekshay has an armed unit." So he put a seal on my hand and sent us off. [We] then spent two nights at Chedhashue. Next [we] went to Gongka. That was it. We reached Gongka at night and by the next morning the Chinese arrived there. Gongka was destroyed. That whole day we did not have a cup of water. There was a lot of shelling and firing. There was a monastery called Gongka Choedhe and when we returned late at night, the abbot had been killed and his body was thrown in the donkey's barn. I encountered the Chinese five times.

Q: *Gen-la*, you went to receive a pass. What was the pass for?

#21M: That was to enable us to travel on the road. The *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force] was preventing passage. It was not simple to leave.

Q: Whom did you meet to seek the pass?

02:12:16

#21M: The *Chushi Gangdrug*. At that time it was not known as *Chushi Gangdrug*. It used to be called Tensung Dhanglang Maga [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force]. We had to seek [the pass] from their leaders. The name *Chushi Gangdrug* did not exist then. It used to be called the Tensung Maga, force that defended the dharma.

Q: So you had to get the clearance from the Tensung Dhanglang Maga?

#21M: Yes. Since they recognized me, they immediately put a seal here [shows left arm] and let us go. Then we went to Gongka and encountered them [the Chinese]. We stayed for the night and before dawn the next morning, the Chinese arrived there. We fled day and night and once again met them at Chedhashue.

[I] was sleepy and hungry. There was no sleep and no food. It was terrible. Then at the cock's first crow, [we] reached between two hills. There too, the place was filled with Chinese. We stayed for quite a long while here.

Q: How long did it take you, *gen-la*, to get from Tibet to wherever you landed?

02:14:23

#21M: There was a mountain pass like this [gestures off camera]. There was a road on this side and we had to cross over to that side. We camped at this point and made tea. It was a place where shepherds stayed. As we looked on, there was a multitude of people coming. I hoped that it was the villagers who'd had a successful escape. No, it was not.

Initially 11 horsemen arrived. They were going here and there, looking for our footprints. Then they spied us and fired six shells at us. One landed in the campfire and threw up the ashes. However, we'd left by then. We had gone just a short distance; say hardly about that corner over there [points]. They fired artilleries that raised dust in the sky. We had colleagues with us then. We were 22 in number in the group. We traveled together.

Then we crossed a mountain pass near Yamdok. It was at night and we slept there. We could not get even a cup of hot water. Then [we] heard that the Chinese had arrived in the night and were shining their flashlights. So we hurried along. [We] could not find our way in the night, either to go forward or backward. We'd reached an area between snow and pastureland. If we moved up, there was snow and below was the pastureland. So we spent the night there until 10 o'clock the next morning.

Two men [from the group] said that they would go in search of a path. However, they did not return and we left Lhopra Dhuwazong. Just before we reached Lhopra Dhuwazong, [someone] falsely told us that there was no way ahead as the place was filled with Chinese. So we retraced our steps and found a lone house. We prepared tea and spent the night

there. The next day the soldiers of the Tensung Maga said that we had to go with them, which we did. It was on the 7th day of the 3rd month. We spent the night of the 8th there and then on the 9th, the Chinese arrived. They fought at Dhuwazong and it took us nine days and nights there.

02:16:58

We did not have water. The Chinese surrounded us and stopped us from the water source. We did not have a drop of water. Then one night they fired artilleries and we fled. We found a monastery perched atop a high rock. [We] placed a plank like this and jumped from there. One was desperate as falling into the hands of the Chinese meant certain death.

Death was okay if they killed in a good manner. However, they would not do that but make us suffer. They'd cut off our hands and legs and make us suffer. So I thought it was better to die. I did not hope to survive. I jumped blindly but did not die and nor was I injured! Nothing happened to me. We were around 36 of us and we succeeded. After that we did not encounter the Chinese.

Q: Where did you reach?

#21M: Lhopra Dhuwazong.

Q: I mean in India.

#21M: We reached Bhutan.

Q: How many days did it take you?

02:17:58

#21M: Let's say we left Lhasa on the 12th day of the 2nd month and reached on the 8th day of the 4th month. It took nearly two months. [We] reached Buxa [West Bengal] on the 8th day of the 4th month.

Q: Of the 4th Tibetan lunar month?

#21M: Yes. We reached the place called Buxa, where Tibetan monks had gathered.

Q: If the Chinese cut off your water, they must have had you surrounded. And so how did you leap to your freedom? Did you leave the group of 20 and go on your own or did you all escape together?

02:20:16

#21M: [Speaks before interpretation is complete] They did not stop the water supply. There was no way we could go to get water. It was not like they could stop the water supply.

Q: Yes, I know they cannot stop the water because there was no tap then. However, you were surrounded by the Chinese.

#21M: Yes, that is right.

Q: You said that you leaped...

#21M: When I told you that I leaped, that was the morning of our escape when the monastery was set on fire. There were about 70-80 people including the sick who were in the monastery. There 15-20 sick people were left near the gate. When it was set on fire, we went that way—I and my colleague who lives in Dharamsala now. We'd heard that the Chinese cut off the hands and legs of people. The drop was about 12-13 floors from one rock to another. It looked impossible for anyone to survive but we leaped. Then the others leaped after me. I was hit by two shots but not to my flesh.

Q: What was below when you leaped?

02:22:06

#21M: There was a rock. There was a rock below. [I] leaped from a plank. There was a stack of firewood belonging to the district office. I jumped from there onto a rock.

Q: Did anyone make that jump with you?

#21M: I do not know how many of them are living today. Most of them live in Dharamsala. There was a monk called Namsachenmo, who was not a monk then. He was a lay person. He was there. There was *Shengo* Dhondup Gyaltzen and someone called Dhogyal. And there were quite a number of monks from Shang Gaden Chungpura. From the strength of 37 people, we only lost one during that time.

Q: The people that were escaping with you and jumped, were they all monks? And the lay people, did they jump along with you?

02:23:53

#21M: They were not only monks.

Q: It was a mixture of people?

#21M: Yes, it was a mixture. There were not many monks.

Q: *Gen-la*, before we finish—we are almost finished, but is there anything that we forgot to ask you or that you want to tell us about life in Drepung or about your experiences?

02:24:32

#21M: To end [my story] by relating the events here, after I reached Buxa, I went to work on the road gang. Hoping to meet them [the Chinese] I then left for Mustang [Nepal]. I went there with the hope to encounter the Chinese.

Q: You went back into the mouth of the lion.

#21M: Yes. Like one would feel discouraged with a pack of dogs biting at your heels, [we] hoped it would happen likewise for them [the Chinese]. It was very unfortunate and a big mistake to disband that [unit] in Mustang. If there were riots from different directions, if even three people started a riot from there [Mustang], naturally there were people inside [Tibet] to do so, whether they possessed weapons or not. That was the hope [that it would discourage the Chinese].

Q: So did you join the Mustang unit for a while?

02:25:49

#21M: There was no way one could stay. There was nothing to put in here [indicates putting food into mouth]. [I] never got to eat anything solid there, no rice or *pa*. It was just poor kind of *thukpa* 'noodle soup.'

Q: You went to try to participate, but it was not possible because there was no survival for food, etc.?

#21M: Yes. There should be some motivation to stay on whether it was weapons or food or clothes. There was nothing. Before we left there was a lot of noise about it.

Q: You said you worked on road construction, how long did you do that? Was that in India?

02:27:05

#21M: I spent about five years on the road construction. Then I was in the [Indian] army for over 14 years.

Q: I can see you have many more stories.

#21M: [Smiles]

Q: But maybe for now we will take a break. In conclusion, *gen-la*, how was it like for you today to sit here and talk about your experiences with us?

02:27:49

#21M: It's been very good. When events that happened long ago are related, it is difficult [for the listener] to understand. The speaker too cannot relate well. [I] have related whatever I could recall. I was a monk when I joined the army and I have also killed a man during the war against Bangladesh. Though I did not have my vows then, I killed a man. However, he was not a Chinese, he was a Pakistani. [Laughs] It was the reverse.

Q: What do you think about the Chinese now?

#21M: I do not dwell much over the Chinese. I have sort of become used to it. However, seeing them, I feel loathing. When I went to Tibet, as soon as I saw a Chinese, I did not feel like staying there. When I went to Tibet in 1987, my relative in Lhasa asked me to live in Lhasa. But Lhasa was packed with Chinese. There were no Chinese to be seen in the

villages. I felt happy in the village. Though food was poorer in the village, I felt mentally happy there.

Q: What do you think should have been done to help the Tibetan people?

02:30:02

#21M: They [the Chinese] claim to have brought progress in Tibet. Whatever financial aid they offer, it would not reach their [Tibetans'] hands, is that not it? America and other countries of the world are putting a lot of pressure on them [the Chinese] but they do not listen. In fact, it [China] has become the teacher of the world. How did they achieve that? They became rich by devouring Tibet. Other than that what economy did they have? After occupying Tibet, they mined its natural resources and looted the holy images of yore in the monasteries and elsewhere. They became richer due to that.

As for natural resources, there were gold, silver, iron, *tsala* [borax?]; everything was available. They mined and took them away. The fertility of Tibet's soil has diminished. There is nothing to do now. If we get our country back, we will be getting an empty land. There is nothing left.

It [China] became an economic force and has business relations with other countries, but it did not have that initially. When they first arrived they were armed with only one gun for 10-15 people.

[I] heard that the cost of an entrance ticket for tourists to see the Potala Palace is 130 *yuan*. How much are they earning? Tens of thousands of people visit it everyday. That is revenue. It is [helping in their] development. For example, in my village there is a huge painting of Lord Buddha on a rock. It had been engraved a long time ago. [I] heard that a ticket collection house has been constructed there. Also in our region is a water spring called *chusang*. [The Chinese] are exporting this water abroad claiming it to be mineral water. They dam the water and export it, thereby rendering the people waterless. Such is the situation. Naturally their economy will progress.

Q: What do you want the people around the world to know about Tibet and to do about Tibet?

02:33:10

#21M: The most important thing to know about Tibet is the dharma. The hard struggle that the Tibetan people are undergoing is not only for the country, but also for the Buddha dharma. In order to protect the Buddha dharma, His Holiness the Dalai Lama is teaching it in the world. Without the dharma, there will be no happiness in the world, whosoever it may be. When one practices the dharma, there is love and compassion, kind heartedness and sympathy. All these will be present together. That is the Buddha dharma that is being repeated [by His Holiness]. The Buddha dharma is nothing else. If this could flourish, there will naturally be peace. That is what is needed.

We have the three great monasteries for [learning] the dharma. [I told you] that there were about 30,000 monks. Now there are no people left [in the monasteries]. [Swears] What can one do if there are no people? [I] heard they [the Chinese] have locked some of the temples

and no one is allowed in. Perhaps they are carting away all the valuable images and precious religious objects.

Q: *Gen-la*, when you left Tibet, did you stop being a monk or when did you become a monk again?

#21M: I became a monk at the age of 8 and [have been a] monk ever since.

Q: What advice or message would you like to give the next generation of Tibetans living in Tibet or in exile?

02:35:26

#21M: [I would advise them] about the dharma and how the rules were followed in the old days. Everything depends on the rules. The Buddha dharma depends upon rules. So [I would say] "This is the way to observe the rules. You must study the scriptures like this. This is the unique tradition of Tibet." I advise but the listeners do the opposite.

The younger ones who have embraced monkhood and shaved their heads must obey the rules. If they do that the dharma will flourish, otherwise there is no dharma. When studying the scriptures, they leave the text aside and look at books. That is not done. There is the scripture which contains the teachings of the Buddha. I advise that that is the way to study the scriptures. I give a lot of advice.

Q: In conclusion *gen-la*, thank you for your very fine interview.

#21M: [Smiles]

Q: I asked you so many questions, so I want to check again. If this interview were shown in Tibet or China, would this be a problem for you?

02:36:59

#21M: They [the Chinese] are not ones who care about problems. They never care about problems because they are lawless. When the truth is present there, they are still doing that. The world is opposing them, though they cannot become their enemies, which [I] do not blame them because they will have to spend both in terms of money and men and that is difficult.

Q: Would you face any problems?

#21M: Me? There is no time left [for them] to give me problems nor will I face any problems.

Q: Can we use your real name for this project?

#21M: Yes, you can.

Q: Thank you.

#21M: Thank you.

Q: *Gen-la*, we would like to give you this.

[Interviewer presents interviewee with an envelope.]

END OF INTERVIEW