

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #27C – Jigdal Dagchen Sakya, His Holiness
November 15, 2014

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #27C
2. Interviewee: Jigdal Dagchen Sakya, His Holiness
3. Age: 85
4. Date of Birth: 1929
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Sakya
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: November 15, 2014
10. Place of Interview: Sakya Monastery, Seattle, Washington, USA
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 19 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Jamyang D. Sakya
14. Videographer: Tony Sondag
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

His Holiness Jigdal Dagchen Sakya was born in the town of Sakya in Utsang Province. He is a descendant of the Khon lineage called the Phuntsok Phodrang. He was also recognized as the reincarnation of the former abbot of the Yulung Lhagyab Gon monastery in Kham. He grew up studying the Buddhist scriptures with his father and teachers, including *cham* ‘religious dance performance by monks.’ He explains the origin of the Sakya tradition and his lineage.

His Holiness Jigdal Dagchen Sakya recalls his journey to Dzongsar Monastery in Kham to study under the renowned master Jamyang Khyentse Chokyi Lodro from whom he received various spiritual instructions and transmissions. He explains the importance of three different kinds of faith one must have in his teacher. He also recounts his father’s spiritual accomplishments as a *duthop* ‘one with special powers’ and the miracles he had demonstrated.

His Holiness Jigdal Dagchen Sakya made a hasty decision to leave Kham after Chinese intrusion in eastern Tibet. He and his family escaped to India but never expected to remain there for very long. When the Rockefeller Foundation sponsored Tibetan scholars in several countries, he accepted the invitation of the University of Washington in the United States. He taught classes there and established a monastery in Seattle because he believed that Tibetan religion, culture and spiritual activities, especially in the Sakya tradition, should be preserved.

Topics Discussed:

Utsang, childhood memories, Buddhist beliefs, festivals, escape experiences, life as a refugee in India, life as a refugee in the United States.

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Interviewee: Jigdal Dagchen Sakya, His Holiness

Age: 85, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: November 15, 2014

[Interviewee's wife, Jamyang D. Sakya, acts as his interpreter. Her comments are indicated below as "JDS."]

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:12

Interviewee #27C: My name is...Tibetan or English?

Q: Both.

#27C: My name is Jigdal Sakya, Dagchen.

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?

#27C: Yes.

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

#27C: [Nods]

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

[JDS interprets as: During the interview you will be asked questions about Tibet and China. Would you like to talk about that?]

#27C: Yes.

Q: It's okay?

#27C: [I] am happy [to talk about it].

Q: No problem?

#27C: No problem.

Q: Good. So let us begin by again... Your Holiness Dagchen Rinpoche, can you please tell us where you were born? Where in Tibet?

00:02:27

#27C: I was born in Sakya and my lineage is called the Phuntsok Phodrang. [I] am a descendant of that.

Q: Who were your parents?

#27C: My father was a descendant from the Khon lineage of Sakya called Trichen Ngawang Thutop Wangchuk. That was my father. My mother was Dechen Dolma of Mishang Charipa.

JDS: My father is the Khon lineage and Sakya Phuntsok Phodrang Trichen Ngawang Thutop Wangchuk, last throne-holder of Sakya and then my mother is Dechen Dolma, name and she was [from] the family of the Muja, which is one of nobility family from Lhasa.

Q: I see. What year were you born, Your Holiness?

#27C: [To JDS] Which year was it?

JDS: Snake?

#27C: My birth element is earth; earth-snake. Nineteen...

JDS: ...hundred...

#27C: ...hundred...

JDS: ...is it twenty nine?

#27C: It is considered as both '28 and '29.

Q: How many children were in your family?

[JDS to interviewer]: Which means his family? His children?

[Interviewer to JDS]: Children when his parents gave birth to him? How many brothers and sisters?

#27C: There were five daughters and a son.

JDS: Two [sons].

#27C: ...of the same parents.

[JDS]: That will be two including you.

#27C: Right.

Q: Can you tell us what it was like when you were a little boy growing up in your family? Are there any memories you have of your childhood?

00:06:25

#27C: There were the studies. And a saying “When someone grows old, one [remembers] one’s hometown; when a bird grows old, it [remembers] its nest.” That is very true. Now that [I] have grown old, when [I] go to sleep at night I remember how I lived and what [I] did in Sakya. The adage and the matter matches and that is very important.

JDS: The first thing he said—in a Tibetan saying, when people getting old their memories getting back to youth and when birds getting old they try to find nest. So he said he remembers more about youth time and always the experiment and goes back even the dream how he has lots of about Tibet.

Q: Tell us, please.

#27C: The Buddha has spoken about karma and...[not discernible]. Due to [my] karma, firstly [I] was born as a human being and that too as a lineage of Khon. There is a great connection between Nyingma and Sakya. At that time they were called Sangma and the Nyingma. Therefore, I remember all these stories, which are very important. This is good and [I] feel happy.

[JDS to interviewer]: Well, when I say “I” or “he”...?

[Interviewer to JDS]: Say “I.”

[JDS to interviewer]: Okay.

[Interviewer to JDS]: As if you are his voice.

[JDS to interviewer]: Okay.

[Interviewer to JDS]: Thank you for asking.

[JDS to interviewer]: Sorry.

[Interviewer to JDS]: Very good, very good question.

Q: Did you play any...besides studying and religious activities did you play any games? Did you horseback ride or do archery or anything?

#27C: At that time there was not today's technology in Sakya.

JDS: Horse riding?

#27C: [I] have done a little bit of horse riding and yak riding.

JDS: Like performing *cham* 'religious dance performance by monks'?

#27C: And as [I] said earlier there is a deep connection between Nyingma and Sakya. That is because they are called Sangma and Nyingma. You have one that is called Sakya these days and Sakya is the name of a town. That is because when Jowoje Palden Atisha 'Lord Atisha/Kadampa' came from India and reached the border of Sakya there was a mountain called Chatsalgang. Even presently the name of the mountain is Chatsalgang.

[JDS to interviewer]: Sometimes it's too long.

[Interviewer to JDS]: It's not too long. Can you help...?

JDS: Yes, there is a lot of activities and games but we didn't have like today's like, you know technology and all these but of course, there's riding horse and riding yaks, and also, you know religious activities, there's a lot. Like I told you earlier, Sakya and Nyingma are very connected and Sakya also lineage came from the Nyingma, which is the Vajra Khilaya dancing and activities. So I had to follow those too.

Q: Oh...did you say dancing activities?

[JDS to interviewer]: Yes.

Q: Really?

JDS: Religious dance.

Q: Religious...did you learn some religious dancing?

00:12:33

#27C: Oh, yes. [I] performed *cham* and the *cham* is performed based on the *kyerim* 'stage of generation' and *zogram* 'stage of completion' of Lamkye Rimpa and Lamzo Rimpa [practices of the generation and perfection phases]. It is not simply jumping up and down and spinning around. There is the *kyerim* and *zogram*.

JDS interprets: Yes, I did. All the *vajra khyilaya* dancing and other religious dancing I did because this dance is not just for fun. It is the visualization, meditation and completion, so you have to follow the text and then you dance. So he did all complete dancing every year in Sakya.

Q: I see. So you had special dance teachers that trained you?

#27C: I had two teachers, one that taught me the sutra and the other teacher, the Mahayana tantra. There were two teachers and they taught [me] turn by turn.

JDS: And they, yes, they teach me how to dance and this dancing is like as he mentioned earlier, it's not like dancing. It's like walking in step on the mandala. So have to movement, meditation and thinking, praying, you are not like, please other people; it's just to yourself...

Q: It's in the mind?

JDS: Yes.

Q: In the mind you're...

JDS: ...in the mind you are walking on the mandala. Yes, I had two main teachers.

#27C: That is called *zogrim*.

JDS: The completion practice. There's a dancing...um. I remember when he's dancing without mask, with all dressed up and with mask.

Q: Both with mask and without mask?

JDS: Both at different times and different the whole month...it's, you know yearly in Sakya.

Q: What was your favorite holiday, Your Holiness?

00:15:15

#27C: We did not have holidays. There was one called *Nyima Guzom* 'Gathering of Nine Inauspicious Signs' once in a year. That was a holiday. Then there was the Losar 'New Year.' Since Losar is a general holiday in Tibet, it was a holiday.

JDS: We have no really holidays like you do here, weekends, so forth but there are two times a year. One, we have *Nyima Guzom*. We consider it like everything bad luck that day. That day you don't need to study, don't need to do and that he, you know, he likes. *Nyima Guzom* means nine bad things in one day. That's once a year.

Q: Once a year.

JDS: ...follows in...kind of Tibetan calendar.

Q: So you don't do...?

JDS: Don't do anything. No study, no...

Q: ...nothing...

JDS: No...

Q: Holiday.

JDS: That's a holiday...

Q: ...to be quiet and that was your favorite.

JDS: Favorite because didn't have to study.

Q: No studies.

#27C: Right.

JDS: The second one is Tibetan New Year. That's for all the Tibetans. That's the one, the big one, the New Year day. We believe that everything you do that day comes through the year. So if possible do all the positive things, good things. No negative. So enjoying, eating, good...that's the way we do it two times a year.

Q: Sounds like a very happy time. Your Holiness, did you...What kind of a student were you? Did you find study easy, difficult? You know, did you enjoy it? Were you a good student or not so good?

00:17:22

#27C: [I] was among the bad ones. I was among the bad ones.

Q: You were a rascal?

#27C: Right.

Q: What kind of trouble did you get in? What kind of trouble?

#27C: As mentioned earlier there are the Nyingma and Sakya [sects]. Nyingma has a *yidham* 'tutelary deity' called Dorjee Phurpa. There is a certain *cham* for the *yidham* as per the *shung* 'fundamental root text' called *Chiyi dhongdhue dhuela bap, Dawor chakpe dhuela bap*. Since Dorjee Phurpa is a wrathful deity, one must transform into a dog. I possessed a small *chingpa* 'felt material,' which I wore and loved to perform the *cham*. That is it.

JDS: The rascal thing he liked to do was during, especially mentioned earlier in the *vajra khyilaya* dancing, he had a small dog mask. It's a dog mask he wears. Of course, he had to learn all the dancing but if he's wearing this, he doesn't even, not even the teacher told him to jump here and he loved to do...just overdoing the dancing.

Q: A little overdoing...

JDS: That kind of... He was, yes.

Q: Very active.

JDS: Active.

#27C: Active, right.

Q: Active rascal?

#27C: Rascal.

JDS: The last part we do this, you know...first visualize the deity, peacefully and benefit to others. Then the last part is dancing...is subduing all the evils and devils to destroy. So he liked that part. He did it a little bit overdone.

Q: Yes, a little bit with much strength and vigor.

#27C: Yeah. Right.

Q: You are a good...?

JDS: ...with a dog mask.

#27C: Dog mask.

JDS: Very fancy dog mask.

Q: Did you have around your palace...did you have Tibetan dogs, big, Tibetan mastiff dogs?

00:19:55

#27C: Yes, there were mastiffs.

Q: Can you describe them for people who never saw one? Tell us what...?

#27C: [The mastiffs] used to be tied outside the palace.

JDS: Yes, we have two of them tied in the daytime in the palace's each side and nighttime they are loose. They are huge...

Q: How big?

JDS: So big, huge, this big...[gestures off camera]. They are very dangerous once they are loose and has a special yak-hair color, red and sometimes they have bells because then people know they're coming. So they are tied, chained in the daytime.

Q: Were you afraid of these dogs or did you make friends with them?

#27C: I fed meat to the dogs.

Q: They are friends. They were your dogs.

#27C: Oh, yes.

Q: You wanted to be a dog with the mask.

#27C: Right.

Q: Strong one like that. I understand that. When you were born you were considered...because you were the son of a very, very special tradition. Did you...were you trained from the beginning to take on the role of your father when he passed away?

00:21:36

#27C: Father would teach, but there were the teachers. The teachers would teach.

Q: Can you please tell us something about your father? Maybe a little bit about his personality and your relationship with him?

#27C: There were two purposes then. Long ago when I was living in Sakya, the relationship was just as a father and [I] did not have much knowledge about [father's] many special powers and manifestations. Then I left for Kham.

In Derge in Kham [I] studied at Dzongsar [Monastery] from the renowned master Chokyi Lodro. At that time he asked, "Your father is a great *duthop* 'one with special powers' with incredible manifestations. What is [your] relationship like [with him]?" [He] would ask. My teacher was Khenchen Sangay Rinchen who knows everything and told me about it. He stated that my father was a *duthop* with incredible manifestations, miraculous and about everything else.

Q: Can you remember any miracles that your father did now that you think back on it?

00:25:16

#27C: He used to perform *kangso* 'religious service propitiating and pleasing deities and protectors' during which the cymbals are used. At that time [I] wished the *kangso* to end fast so [I] can go outside to play. [I] focused only on that. He [father] also played the drum around which were flames. [I] did not think much of it then as [I] was ignorant. Later [I learned] that the flames were the flames of wisdom and also was a sign of the deity's presence.

There can be nothing more my father as a *duthop* could have [demonstrated]. Jamyang Chokyi Lodro and many other lamas and *tulku* 'reincarnated lamas' have stated that there can be nothing more significant than this as it proves the presence of the deity. Besides that he revealed...[not discernible] in Sakya and then there is a place called Nupri, where [father] changed the course of a river. He channeled the water up hill and then crossed it. There are many such stories.

JDS: As well as...then one when we went to west Tibet visiting on mountainside. There're going to have later, a temple to build and there was no water on the top of the mountain. So there is no way to get water from the river. It's too far many miles away. So he did his cane, put it up and water came and so many of those things...

[Interviewer to JDS]: ...his father did...

JDS: ...his father did. But then during all this time like he said he never even thought, just a loving father. He's kind of, you know mediocre things, not really...but later I found out how a Bodhisattva he was.

Q: Your Holiness, your father passed away when you were in Kham? Is that...?

[JDS to interviewer]: No.

Q: When did he pass away?

00:29:52

JDS: He passed away [when] we were there. He was with him.

[Interviewer to JDS]: He was with him? Was that before you went to Kham?

JDS: Yes.

Interviewer: Before you went on your long journey to Kham the first time?

JDS: Yeah, why...because father passed away...father was still the throne-holder in Sakya and then Rinpoche took over at six months to...because, you know father passed away. During that time his teacher was very, very learned as well as very thinking about, too. His teacher said, since he has to receive so many teachings from Buddhism and many already received but not complete. So he said, "You should go to get that teaching from who has the transmission lineage." So then that's why after father passed away, I think about eight months later we went...

[Interviewer to JDS]: You went.

JDS: ...to east Tibet.

[Interviewer to JDS]: You were married at that point?

JDS: Yes. I was married before father passed away.

[Interviewer to JDS]: Yes, you were married before father passed away.

Q: Do you remember when you met your wife? What was your first thought when you saw her?

00:31:20

#27C: [Laughs] Initially she came along with Desung Tulku. [She] is a Khampa and was dressed in Khampa woman's attire. My elder sisters were there and [she] played with them and then gradually [we] got together.

Q: That's the first time you saw her. Did you think you would like to ask her to marry you at that time or did it take more time?

#27C: Not at that time.

Q: Later...

#27C: Yes.

Q: Later you said maybe I will marry her.

#27C: Yeah.

Q: Do you know...may I ask was there any reason why you thought she would be a good partner for you in your very important role?

00:33:04

#27C: The lineage must go on for which purpose [I] got married.

Q: Something you saw that this would be a good partner, a good wife.

#27C: [Nods]

Q: Is the Sakya tradition the only tradition in Tibetan Buddhism that the lineage is passed through the son?

#27C: It is there in others too. Sakya is the only Khon lineage.

JDS: Yes, there is some other lineage, Nyingma but Sakya is very unique. It's because the Khon lineage is the not human beings but celestial realm, descending from the celestial realm. So it has to have and there is a triple specialty, Sakya is more unique than others.

Q: The Sakya tradition began through a celestial...can you talk about the beginning of the Sakya religion? When was it first manifest on the earth?

#27C: *Ngotsang lhayi dhongyue, Dimay khonkyi dhongyue and one more dhongyue. There are three lineages.*

[JDS to interviewee]: How did it first manifest from the celestial realm?

#27C: *The combination of lha 'deity' and sinpo 'bloodthirsty demon.' Ngotsang lhayi dhongyue...*

[JDS to interviewee]: Isn't it the three brothers?

#27C: Yes, it is.

[JDS to interviewee]: How did it manifest?

#27C: It is all recorded there. He has written it very well. It is in the library.

JDS: It is a long story, but it is descended from three brothers from celestial realm and the younger one remained in earth and married a human and two others left back. From that on...this is like early 5th century or something, you know, early...

Q: Earlier century.

JDS: Earlier, so then one remained and that's the lineage and there is three *tulku*. One lineage is of course, the Sakya, the vision that he earlier mentioned the Jowoje Palden Atisha who came from India...the scenery... There's a long story but if you really want to know, I want you to read Dr. Jeff Schoening who did all detail about Sakya Khon lineage history, in the library; we have a library too. So that one because this is a long story.

Q: Thank you. I appreciate that it's very long and it's complex and very important. This interview could never contain the story, but I wanted to at least mention that the Sakya lineage is transmitted through the first son of each...of the next generation.

JDS continues: Yes. I think those times until 3-4 generations, it's like as he said Nyingmapa tradition. Nyingmapa.

Q: Nyingmapa.

JDS: Nyingma. I think you know the four sects.

Q: Yes.

JDS: And then Sakya Wang Nyingpo, the founder of Sakya, sometime 8th century.

Q: Eighth century.

JDS: Then the Sakya come.

Q: Came from the 8th century.

JDS: Eighth century like...of course earlier he mentioned the Atisha vision and 8th century, you know, first Tibetan Buddhism monastery built in Samye by Padmasambhava, Guru Rinpoche.

Q: Yes.

JDS: And Guru Rinpoche training of the seven monks he ordained. The middle one, I think 4th one is Sakya Khon, Khondhun Luyangpo.

Q: Okay.

JDS: So it's a lineage.

Q: It's a very, very strong and important lineage.

JDS: Very important. Later you know, couple of generations later the Sakya Nyingpo was born, the Sakya founder.

Q: And Sakya was founded. Your Holiness, we wanted to go after your father died, right, and you were now going to be the throne holder. You wanted to go to Kham. Who were the teachers that you knew you wanted to study with? Did you have any in mind or...?

00:38:25

#27C: Jamyang Khyentse Chokyi Lodro.

#27C: Non-sectarian.

Q: Non-sectarian.

JDS: He is one of the most famous who is the transmission holder and everything so...and he is the one holding all the transmission. So that's why we went.

Q: Are any of them in this picture?

JDS: [Holds picture] This one.

Q: Ahh...turn it around for the camera.

JDS: [Holds up picture to camera of four standing and one sitting monk]

Q: Give it to Rinpoche. Can he see which one?

JDS: This one [points to lama standing second from right].

Q: This one. Say the name again.

JDS: Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Chokyi Lodro. Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Chokyi Lodro.

Q: Dzongsar Jamyang...okay.

JDS: Chokyi Lodro.

Q: Chokyi Lodro.

JDS: Chokyi Lodro. There are lots of books, you know, about him.

Q: And you met him in Kham?

JDS: We went there and he stayed with him one year.

Q: One year?

JDS: One year, one whole year.

Q: What city?

JDS: In Dzongsar, Derge.

Q: In Derge?

JDS: Derge. Dzongsar Monastery.

Q: Very far away.

JDS: Jamyang Khyentse Chokyi Lodro heard we are coming. He built a special palace there for us because we had about 30 in our group, servants and all.

Q: Oh!

JDS: So we stayed a whole year.

Q: One year there. I see. Is this a picture of his [Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Chokyi Lodro] reincarnation?

JDS: [Holds up second picture of three monks standing and one sitting and points to central lama] This is his reincarnation. And right now our two grandsons at college with him, those two [gestures off camera].

Q: I see. So this is his reincarnation. Could you hold that picture above...?

JDS: He's written many books.

Q: Okay.

JDS: [Points to particular lama in both pictures] This is the reincarnation of this [Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Chokyi Lodro].

JDS: [Points to far right lama in first picture] And then this is Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche. He is also a Nyingmapa master and he [interviewee] studied a lot and also both he taught them. [Points to far right lama in second picture] And this is his reincarnation.

Q: And that's his reincarnation. Interesting.

JDS: [Points to lama on far left of first picture] This is the one when we were there at that time, there was a Chinese lama who studied with them and later he passed away. He left the message he doesn't want anybody to recognize even if he's Nyingmapa and Dagchen Rinpoche has to. So he [interviewee] recognized and he [points to far left lama in second picture] is the reincarnation.

Q: Oh, okay.

JDS: He [reincarnation of Chinese lama] studies with my grandson. He's a Nyingmapa.

Q: Very good. Thank you. So that's quite a tradition.

JDS: Yes.

Q: Important tradition, isn't it? Thank you. Very important. With the teachings that you learned can you tell us anything that you could share with the ordinary people. What was the essence of some of the important teachings that you learned from you know, from your teachers in Derge?

00:42:07

#27C: *Lamdray lopshay, Gyutoe kundun, dhamngag* 'spiritual instruction' in the presence of Dilgo Khyentse.

JDS: Jamyang Khyentse Chokyi Lodro, I received...Sakya has two special *lamdray*, path and fruit. That's special in Sakya and so he received one set from...I received one set from my father, Ngawang Thutop Wangchuk. These take months, 3-4 months. And then *Lopshay, Lamdray Lopshay*, other *lamdray* I received from Jamyang Chokyi Lodro in Kham and as well as *Duthap Kundun*, collection of all the books *Duthap Kundun*; they call it *Duthap Kundun*. I think 14 volumes and teachings. And also the *Gyuto Kundun*, which usually takes five months.

#27C: Thirty.

JDS: Thirty volumes. All of these I received...and many other sacred teachings from him and then I received from him *dhamngag ze*, which is mainly, you know Nyingmapa tradition that was took I think five months.

Q: Five months. When you're learning...?

JDS: He [points off camera] came to my monastery in east Tibet. It's not Dzongsar. After the one year I stayed with Dzongsar Khyentse Chokyi Lodro and then Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche came to my monastery near in Derge. It's Lhagyab Gon. I invite him to receive there.

Q: Really? When these teachings—for people who do not understand but would like to understand how the teachings are transmitted—are they, you said they take five months or a month, are you reading scriptures or are you being given secret...

JDS: Yeah, transmissions.

Q: ...understandings? Can you tell us something about that?

00:44:44

#27C: The trio *thoepa* ‘hear,’ *sampa* ‘think’ and *gompa* ‘meditate,’ and the trio *chaypa* ‘communicate,’ *tsoepa* ‘debate’ and *tsompa* ‘compose.’ One practiced based on these.

JDS: The teachings are not easy to tell, but most teachings you don’t write down anything. You have to mindfully listen...

Q: Listen.

JDS: ...and listen and then you internalize...

Q: Internalize?

JDS: ...internal, think what you received, “I received teaching” and then meditate on it. So not only just receiving a couple of hours of teaching but you have to go home to homework. Then have to study and thinking the transmission really in. Then many of these teachings, once you receive initiation you have to do daily practice. You cannot just finish. *Thoepa*, *sampa*, *gompa*, which he said, is receiving the oral transmission and then *sampa* means think about what I received and then *gompa* means meditate on that. So these teachings are...then I can give other after you [go on] retreat and so forth. So it’s not really like class.

Q: I understand. Again for people who would like to understand and who may be able to watch this, is there...Can you give us an example of something that could be easily understood—of like one teaching that you would want to reflect on that you may be learned and that you had to meditate on? Can you even describe an example of one teaching?

00:46:43

#27C: One must meditate. One will have contemplation in the mind while meditating, which is a sign of [the presence of] *yidham*. That is how one must practice. One must do the *ngondro* ‘preliminary practice’ to remove defilement from *lue* ‘body,’ *ngag* ‘speech’ and *yi* ‘mind.’ In order to remove the defilement of the body, speech and mind, one must do the *ngondro* during which one should meditate. One should focus on such while meditating.

JDS: For example, we receive so many initiations and transmissions but then one can tell you it’s really...[not discernible] inside you, and then you have to meditate that and then do the foundation practice, *ngondro* they call that; guru yoga, pray for your teacher and do mandala offering, do prostrations. All of these you have to do. Once you do then you will know how connected with the deity, so then you will kind of, feel...[not discernible] comes with the dream

and so forth. You can...transmission is already with you. And then most important is meditation, a lot important.

Q: Yes, very important, meditation.

#27C: One must remove the defilement from body, speech and mind.

JDS: You have to remove all the defilements, body defilement...

#27C: Remove the obscuration of knowledge and obscuration of disturbing emotion.

JDS: ...defilement is...defilement of all; body defilement, do prostrations; remove the speech defilement from doing the mantras and then mind defilement from meditation, which means each of those defilement. For example like body defilement, we do some things, misconduct such things and then of course, you know the speech defilement we say negative things, you know, what you call—bad talking, whatever you call. Then mind defilement thinking something, you know, others [are] wrong, not me, always others. That's the ignorance kind of and that's the one that's worst.

Q: That's the hardest.

JDS: Yeah, that's the hardest; that makes all the others bad. So you have to really practice the *ngondro*. *Ngondro* helps a lot in removing those three poisons.

00:49:41

#27C: Faith is very important, faith.

JDS: Most important is, we are Buddhists. We have to believe from the heart.

Q: From the heart.

JDS: Yeah.

Q: Compassion.

JDS: Yeah, compassion and...

#27C: *Dhangway dhaypa* 'inspired faith,' *dhopay dhaypa* 'aspiring faith' and *yichaykyi dhaypa* 'confident faith.' It is important to have confident faith.

JDS: For example, like if you have a teacher, special teacher, teacher is...you have to have faith from...come from these three kinds of faith. The first faith is 'I like his talk' like and then second is 'You know, maybe I'll practice' and then belief faith is 'I believe hundred percent. Only do no matter what. I have this Bodhisattva like teaching me' and if you have that then you will get blessing.

Q: So you must start with thought, then practice and then belief or faith...

#27C: Correct.

Q: ...for the transmission, for the understanding.

JDS: Yeah, understanding and belief from the heart.

Q: Take a little break.

[Discontinuity in interview]

Q: Dagchen Rinpoche, could you please tell us a little bit about the teacher that you brought with you from home who went with you to Kham from home and who passed away? Can you tell us his name and about him?

#27C: The main [person] is Khenchen Sangay Rinchen and he has a great deal of experience in the dharma and politics. That is why I...[not discernible] I am very happy. And then what is it?

[JDS to interviewee]: About going to Kham.

#27C: I went to Yulung Lhagyab Gon in Kham where my past reincarnation was an abbot. It is said that [I] am his reincarnation. It is the hometown of Khenpo...[not discernible], Yulung Lhagyab Gon. [I] stayed there and then...that was it.

JDS: My teacher who taught me in the beginning in Sakya and when I was studying with my sisters, two sisters and then he became later...my father appointed him the abbot of the Sakya...there are four abbots in Sakya. He's one of them and later he came back and gave a teaching. So he was very, very close to him, loving and this teacher's name is Khenchen Sangay Rinchen. Sangay Rinchen. He is not only the learned all Buddhism but also he is very—what do you call—politics, very learned...

Q: Very learned about politics.

JDS: Yes, because he was administrator in monastery.

Q: Administrator in the monastery?

00:53:32

JDS: Yes, monastery. So he knows everything around. So then he's the one who go to Kham, east Tibet and yet—it's a long story—Dagchen Rinpoche's previous reincarnation is another Ngor abbot. I [interviewee] had a monastery in Kham in Derge Yulung Lhagya Gon. Yulung Lhagya Gon. So I was invited many times to go back and see my monastery but his father not let him go because the Sakya Khon is very special. It's too far to go. You know, it takes months by horse.

Q: Yes.

JDS: So...and then after father passed away Khenchen Sangay Rinchen said we have to go visit your monastery...I have to go visit my monastery as well as receive the teaching. So my teacher urged me, came with me and [after] receiving all these teachings, just before we come back then he passed away.

Q: Really? So Dagchen Rinpoche had a monastery in a prior rebirth.

JDS: Yes, Lhagya Gon. Lhagya Gon.

Q: And he always wanted to go see it.

JDS: Yeah. We stayed there one year, too.

Q: And you stayed there one year?

JDS: Yeah. You probably read it in my book. It's Lhagya Gon.

Q: Dagchen Rinpoche, but for the story that we're trying to understand of your life, how did you know that you had a monastery in another lifetime?

[JDS to interviewer]: Well, another long story. I just explain, right?

[Interviewer to JDS]: See if he can. It's better if it comes from him.

[JDS to interviewee]: How did you know that you were the reincarnation of the Ngor abbot?

00:55:29

#27C: He left his rosary with my mother, "In the event I die..."

[JDS to interviewee]: And a cup.

#27C: ...will be the inheritor.

JDS: This is the Tibetan custom. We have a very special way of doing this, recognize the *tulku* 'reincarnations' because when the Ngor Khenchen, Ludhing Khenchen who was living in Ngor, [was] invited by my father and mother, invited to Sakya to receive some teaching, and my mother didn't have children yet. They were so worried. If Sakya, you don't have children you have to marry second, third wife. So my mother devotedly asked him, this *khenpo* who is very, very learned Bodhisattva, "I need a son to come." Then the *khenpo* said, "Don't worry." And he left his rosary and a cup full with *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley' [saying] "Keep this. I'll come back." The following year she was pregnant.

Q: Wow.

JDS: That's how the recognition.

Q: So then that was...

JDS: Then that was him [points to interviewee].

Q: So he came back...

JDS: He came back...

Q: ...as her son.

JDS: ...her son, the Khon lineage but he's the reincarnation of that *khenpo*. The monastery is in east Tibet.

Q: Okay, I got it. Interesting. So you went there and then your teacher died...

JDS: Teacher died...

Q: And then...

00:56:56

JDS: Teacher died after all the teaching's finished.

Q: All the teachings were finished...

JDS: ...ready to... then it's starting like Chinese problem. So that time then teacher died. Return to...back to home.

Q: Dagchen Rinpoche, were you with your teacher when he died?

#27C: Yeah.

Q: Can you tell us what...Teachers are such a special part of your development? What was that like for you?

#27C: [I] was sad.

Q: Was it very sad? Must have been.

[JDS to interviewer]: If you read my book it tells the teacher...how he was.

Q: Okay. So then you came back to [from] Kham and then you also...many things happened. We will have to compress the story, but at what point were you...did you realize you had to leave Tibet? What was happening?

00:58:26

#27C: How did it happen? I cannot recollect much.

[JDS to interviewee]: [You] conducted spiritual activities and established many *sheta* 'study centers' and *dubta* 'retreat centers.'

#27C: Yes.

[JDS to interviewee]: And then how did [you] come back?

#27C: The Chinese were doing so in Kham. Reincarnate lamas in Kham like Dzongsar Chokyi Lodro and all others were leaving to India. So [I] came to India.

JDS interprets: When I was in Kham and had to go more monasteries, not only just receiving the teachings, but I did lots of teachings for all other monasteries as well as started with *sheta* and *dubta*, colleges and meditations many, many of them. All offerings given back to...I did everything but then I got a note from Jamyang Khyentse Chokyi Lodro who said, "Don't stay too long in Kham. Go back to west." So the messenger came and note said [that]. Then we have to start going back.

At the same time my brother, younger brother who is living in Sakya and he sent a telegram said you better come back soon because starting the...Communist is bothering. We were not quite ready still, not ready. Then my brother came and get me. So those lots of things made had to return.

Q: Came to Kham to get you.

JDS: Came to Kham.

Q: Very worried and wanted you to come back and so you came back to Sakya and then...?

JDS: Came back through Lhasa, Shigatse and then Sakya.

Q: And then to Sakya.

JDS: Going there we went with horses and yaks and it took months to get there. Coming in Chinese truck.

Q: You came in a Chinese truck.

JDS: [Laughs]

Q: Oh, boy! What a different pilgrimage!

#27C: [Laughs]

JDS: Because the only way transportation that way and hurry and so...

Q: ...very anxious.

JDS: It wasn't easy on the road and that time is the, you know, Khampas 'people from Kham' they were starting fighting and road blocking, the Chinese truck. We had lots of problems.

Q: And you had your children with you?

JDS: Yes, I have.

Q: How...?

JDS: Already two.

Q: Two children with you.

JDS: One younger, second one was born in his monastery, Lhagya Gon.

Q: How nice! Your child is born in your monastery and then you had...so you heard the growing danger from the Chinese.

JDS: Yes, very...

Q: You made this trek back to Sakya and Shigatse and then...what city did you leave Tibet from? How did you get out of Tibet?

JDS: We were...he was giving *lamdray* teaching in Minyak.

[Interviewer to JDS]: Let him tell us the story.

Q: How did you leave Tibet?

#27C: Left through Minyak.

[JDS to interviewee]: Then?

#27C: From Minyak to...

JDS: Lhagya Gon.

#27C: Maybe Lhagya Gon. [I] cannot recall much.

JDS: He said little bit not clear. But I was giving *lamdray* in Minyak. During the *lamdray* was very agitated because the monastery where there's the teaching Ba Lhagong is on the main road. So the trucks back and forth and stop because we are gathering like over thousand monks there. And they [the Chinese] don't like that, question and then hurry to finish. I think it took four months and then we hurry back to, come back to Lhagya Gon and then we travel back to Sakya.

Q: You went back to Sakya. What year was that about?

JDS: '56

Q: That was 1956 and so how long did you stay at Sakya before you left Tibet?

#27C: When?

JDS: We stayed at least a year because I remember that when we came back we had a first New Year there and we had a good celebration, specially we had a lot of renovating our...like he said the lama dancing and outfit. We bought lots of silk things and made up. We had an elaborate everything one year. Even so it's very hard to, you know, that time it's...

Q: Very hard.

JDS: Very hard to people and all. That time the Chinese just come and check and question, then goes. That time no Chinese inside Sakya.

Q: No Chinese. Just come and visit...

JDS: Come and visit...

Q: Look around.

JDS: Yeah, look around.

Q: But you were beginning to get very worried.

01:03:51

JDS: Yes, but when we were in Kham Lhagya Gon, we were sitting there and want to stay longer because the beautiful, wonderful, the most beautiful valley is Lhagya Gon. So it's flowers and everything so...during that time there are some Tibetan guerrilla visiting the lama. They will come. The Chinese is very near there and they come nighttime checking us, question. It's really agitating. That's why we left early. I mean fast.

Q: Maybe if we could just ask Dagchen Rinpoche how when he had to leave Tibet, how did he feel about having to leave?

[JDS to interviewee]: [You] left from Lhasa, right?

#27C: Yes, left from Lhasa.

[JDS to interviewee]: How did [you] leave?

#27C: [We] went to Phenpo from Lhasa, from Phenpo to Samye, Samye to Bhutan and reached India from Bhutan.

JDS: When we were in Lhasa from Sakya, [we] had to go to His Holiness the Dalai Lama doing doctorate degree. So all Tibetan Buddhist leaders had to go for special celebration. So we are visiting Lhasa because of that.

Q: Right.

JDS: And so...

Q: Did you see His Holiness receive his degree?

JDS: Yes, we...

#27C: Oh, yeah.

JDS: He went to those things. So, when we were in Lhasa and then this [attack by Chinese army] started, so we... His Holiness [was] in the Norbulingka and left. So we went to move to one of the Sakya monasteries near Lhasa; they call the Nalanda Monastery. We never thought we're going to leave the country. We never thought that. We still leave some of our treasured things in Lhasa.

When we left Lhasa we had breakfast; we left the cups just like that pretending that we're just going to visit. So and then... from Nalanda there's no way; every road is blocked. So we came back to south to Samye Monastery. It's a Sakya monastery also. We stayed there for a while and then there's no way we can get [to] Sakya. Every road is blocked, every road. So then we came through Bhutan and we ended up in India. [Smiles]

#27C: There happened to be a sign from the protectors because we had no idea where to go. One morning just before [we] left, ravens came cawing. We decided to go wherever the ravens guided us. [We] followed the ravens without any knowledge of where the Chinese were. We did not have any means of communication. Then [we] reached the border of Bhutan and then the ravens were not to be seen. That is how we came to India.

JDS: It is guidance from our triple gem and protectors and the only way that we got here because when we started at Nalanda we don't know which direction, just started, which road we take, which way the Chinese stays. But there are two ravens come always in front of us and flies in front. And we just follow the way wherever the ravens went. Next day we don't know which road we go and the ravens come. We just follow the ravens. Every morning we pray for Mahakala and protector and the ravens.... When we reached Bhutan, the ravens are gone.

Q: You had guides with wings.

#27C: Right.

Q: Heavenly guides.

#27C: That is right.

Q: Who is your protector again?

JDS: Mahakala is the Sakya protector. It's generally Tibetan Buddhist protector. It is a wrathful protector of the Chenrezig Avalokitesvara.

Q: Wonderful. Wrathful protector and the ravens led you to safety.

#27C: Right.

JDS: Ravens are one of their...[not discernible]. It is really interesting because sometimes in the morning we have breakfast [but] we can't stay here, have to go. Where we go to? South? North? Where? Which road? And then Dagchen Rinpoche do dice, you know that. What do you call?

Q: Divination.

JDS: Divination. And my uncle, older lama, he's very good with the divination. Sometimes they don't really... Oh now! And then we see the ravens, just follow.

#27C: Just follow the ravens.

[Discontinuity in video]

Q: I'm going to give you some good news. We're going to jump ahead to America because you survived many things in Tibet including riding on a truck and escaping, thanks to the ravens. You arrived in Seattle. How did you get to Seattle? How did that happen?

01:09:28

#27C: How did [we] get to America?

[JDS to interviewee]: Dr. Wylie brought [us].

#27C: Yeah.

[JDS to interviewee]: And then India...

#27C: University of Washington.

[JDS to interviewee]: [You] came to India from Tibet and then how did you get to America?

[#27C to JDS]: You please explain it.

[JDS to interviewee]: First you do it and then I will interpret.

[#27C to JDS]: You do it.

[JDS to interviewer]: He wants me to explain.

Q: Oh, he's getting tired. So you could summarize.

01:10:02

JDS: When we arrived in India with semi-refugee settlements—Dagchen Rinpoche has an aunt, his mother’s sister who’s in Sikkim, you know, the royal king’s... So [she] helped us some, little bit but we stayed in Darjeeling and during that time Rockefeller Foundation wanted to bring Tibetan scholars to eight different places in the world like America, France, Italy, all of these places; Germany. Then we met the professors when they came there searching and question, interview all the scholars and high lamas, learned people. They were interviewed.

Then we really didn’t want to...we still hope we can go back to Tibet, you know, soon. We didn’t really wish to [do] this in the beginning and I even asked...myself asked the professor, “Why you said 3-year contract, 3-year research?” I said, “If Tibet gets free go back can we leave?” He said, “No way. You have to sign it.” Anyway, then again we did some divination to go or not go because we have at that time three children and lots of servants with us. We’re still waiting to go back. We have family in Tibet. So then divination says, “Go to America.” We were invited in France first, in France. France was a smaller group and America has a bigger group. Rockefeller Foundation sponsored the grant. So we ended up in America.

Q: In America. Here in Seattle?

JDS: Seattle, University of Washington.

Q: University of Washington. Were you teaching, Rinpoche?

01:12:18

#27C: Oh, yes.

Q: You were teaching?

[JDS to interviewee]: What did [you] teach?

#27C: Tibetan dharma and history.

Q: Tibetan history?

JDS: Yeah. Tibetan...

Q: Buddhist history.

JDS: ...civilization and not so much Buddhism. Of course, there’s always when they teach, there is...there are some books, principality, they wrote, the University of Washington.

Q: Okay.

JDS: So had to go every day to University of Washington and taught.

Q: Everyday?

JDS: Dagchen Rinpoche and my uncle, my...

#27C: ...my brother.

JDS: Three of them every day. Every day had to go to University of Washington. That time when he goes to bathroom, they said, "No, use that's the one." He was telling this. [Laughs]

Q: Because he had long hair.

JDS: Long hair, earrings all, you know.

Q: Yes.

JDS: So anyway, after three years...after three years and Tibetans, of course, we cannot go back to Tibet and our, the lease is up. We didn't want to go back to the semi-Tibetan refugee camp, and those times in India there's no...except His Holiness the Dalai Lama. When we were chosen to come [to] America and Dagchen Rinpoche went to His Holiness [to] ask whether should we go? What to do? Because our family has now no money, how to survive?

His Holiness says I can help his sister to...Tibetan children with the schooling; Dagchen Rinpoche be with him to go all those [as] representative for Sakya and my uncle and my brother-in-law go to semi-monastery to teach but dividing everything, my two older sons had to go to Switzerland to study, Pestalozzi Village. We didn't know what to do. I thought we came from Tibet [for the] freedom to [be a] family together. Why this separate? There's no way we have to be together.

Q: So sad!

JDS: Then we decided the University of Washington can take the family. That's how we came.

Q: Washington State...who sponsored you?

JDS: Rockefeller Foundation.

Q: ...to come to Washington?

JDS: Yes.

Q: And you could come as a family?

JDS: Yes, eight of us.

Q: eight of you?

JDS: I was pregnant with my fourth one, six months.

Q: Okay. Oh, that's a big story. Because I'm concerned that Rinpoche might be getting tired, this will be my final question. Rinpoche, how did you decide to build this monastery? What was your motivation, your idea? Where did this come from?

01:15:27

#27C: Due to my past karma, I am a Sakya lama and I have to perform spiritual activities. I believed that Tibetan religion; culture and spiritual activities and in particular Sakya should be preserved. With such thoughts and with the benevolence and blessings of the triple gem and one's past karma, this happened.

JDS: It wasn't easy but we became immigrate and had to work. That was my aim.

Q: How do you feel about your beautiful monastery? Do you feel you fulfilled your aim?

#27C: Yes, I feel fulfilled because of the benevolence and blessings of the triple gem.

Q: That sounds like...

#27C: Oh, good. Thank you.

Q: Very good place to end.

JDS: This monastery also has been... His Holiness the Dalai Lama consecrated as well as many lamas. You can see that in our office all the lamas who've been here. And those lamas, most of all are gone now. They passed away.

Q: Almost all gone.

JDS: Yeah, only a few left. Anyway, they all came and they consecrated it.

Q: Did they?

JDS: Of course, you know, we only thinking and wish, like himself, but most it's our very, very devoted members, practitioners, students like Adrian [points off camera]. All her life give to here. So you know, we know that whoever helped the monastery like we wish, and without them we can't do this. But you know, in Tibetan custom we know this is not only doing something positive to sharing our Buddhism as well as our culture, which is unique but all positive. We are hoping this will not only this life happiness in the long journey, but many other life times and that's why we...

Q: That's why you're doing this.

JDS: Even at our age. Dagchen Rinpoche is 86 and I'm 80.

Q: And you're 80. We are so fortunate for you to give us permission to come here...

JDS: Thank you.

Q: ...and record your story together and we'll finish your story. We're going to do...

#27C: Okay.

Q: Thank you.

#27C: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW