

# **Tibet Oral History Project**

Interview #4C – Tashi Sonam  
May 4, 2013

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# TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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## INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #4C
2. Interviewee: Tashi Sonam
3. Age: 81
4. Date of Birth: 1933
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Chusi
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1971
9. Date of Interview: May 4, 2013
10. Place of Interview: TANC Community Center, Richmond, California, USA
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 34 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Tsedup Wangdu
14. Videographer: Jeddadiah Emanuel
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

### **Biographical Information:**

Tashi Sonam was born in Chusi where the villagers were *samadok*, those who engaged in both farming and rearing animals. However, Tashi Sonam was a doctor and practiced in his village in Tibet. He describes that the profession was hereditary and passed from father to son. He talks about the causes and types of illnesses and the different kinds of medicines dispensed for treatment. He recounts the methods he applied and the various herbs that were gathered in the mountains to be used as medicines. Fees were paid if the patient was able to and if not, treatment was still provided without expectation of payment.

Tashi Sonam recalls that the Chinese first appeared in his region around 1966 and life completely changed in his village. He had a bitter experience and recounts how the Chinese inflicted suffering with arrests, imprisonments, torture, and forced the people to demolish their precious monastery at gun-point. The Tibetans were not allowed to practice their religion.

The oppression under Chinese rule and fear of being arrested drove Tashi Sonam to flee to India leaving behind his wife and children. His ordeal continued in India when he was caught by the Indian police, beaten and imprisoned for three years because they believed he was a Chinese spy. After his release he was sent to live at the Tibetan Settlement in Mundgod, Karnataka, India.

### **Topics Discussed:**

Utsang, childhood memories, medical treatment, first appearance of Chinese, destruction of monasteries, life under Chinese rule, oppression under Chinese, escape experiences.

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**Interview #4C**

**Interviewee: Tashi Sonam**

**Age: 81, Sex: Male**

**Interviewer: Marcella Adamski**

**Interview Date: May 4, 2013**

Question: Please tell us your name.

**Interviewee #4C: What?**

Q: What's your name?

00:00:15

**#4C: Tashi.**

[Interpreter to interviewee]: Please look at her [interviewer] and speak.

**#4C: Tashi Sonam.**

Q: Tashi-*la*, how old are you today?

**#4C: 81 years.**

[Interpreter to interviewee]: Please look there and speak.

**#4C: 81 years.**

Q: And what year were you born?

**#4C: What?**

Q: In which year were you born?

**#4C: [I] wonder when [I] was born. When we fled [Tibet, I] was 37 years old. How many [years] has that been? [I] cannot say exactly when [I] was born. It has been a long time.**

Q: Where was your village? Where was your place of birth in Tibet?

**#4C: [I] was born right in Tibet.**

Q: The village?

**#4C: [I] was born right in the village of Chusi.**

Q: What did your family do for a livelihood?

**#4C: For a livelihood?**

Q: Yes.

00:01:36

**#4C: [We] did farming, farming and rearing animals. [We] were what is called *samadok*, doing both farming and rearing animals.**

Q: What was your family life like when you were growing up? Was it happy or difficult or hard? Can you tell us something about when you were a little child?

**#4C: Long ago?**

Q: Yes.

**#4C: [We] were happy in Tibet. Then the Chinese came and inflicted suffering.**

Q: When do you remember the Chinese coming to your village?

**#4C: The Chinese?**

Q: Yes, to your village.

**#4C: From Tibet?**

Q: To your village. When did the Chinese come to your village?

**#4C: It cannot be estimated because they were countless in number.**

Q: When did [they] come? Which year?

00:03:01

**#4C: [They] appeared in the year '66.**

Q: Can you tell us what happened to your village when the Chinese came?

**#4C: The Chinese?**

Q: Yes.

**#4C: [We] farmed and reared animals and their soldiers consumed them. [The Chinese] forced [us] to transport. We did not have vehicles in those days. It used to be said that there**

**were vehicles in Lhasa but not elsewhere. So we were made to transport on horses, yaks and carry on [our] backs. The Chinese needed rations.**

Q: What were you doing in your village when the Chinese came? What activity or what job?

**#4C: [What] I was doing long ago?**

Q: Yes.

00:04:23

**#4C: I was engaged in farming long ago. If there was work to do in the fields [I] did that and during off-season in winter, [I] practiced the dharma and earned merit. They [the Chinese] called His Holiness the Dalai Lama a “reactionary Dalai” and that is how [they] inflicted suffering.**

Q: [You] practiced the dharma.

**#4C: [The Chinese] inflicted suffering and said one could not practice the dharma and that [the practitioners] were reactionaries.**

Q: Did you ever do a treatment of people who were sick as a doctor?

**#4C: I was a doctor since a young age.**

Q: Did you treat the sick in the village then?

**#4C: [I] treated the sick and for us doctors, if they had money, we would be paid and those that did not could not pay. Poor things, one must dispense medicine so that the patient does not die. We must see that the patient does not die. Our lamas used to say, “Is it correct to let him die because he does not have money?” Such were the teachings of the lama and if [they] had money [we] were paid and if not, there was no money for us.**

Q: How did you learn to be a doctor in your village?

**#4C: Doctor?**

Q: The medicine.

00:06:26

**#4C: I studied for many years. Maybe until the age of 20...perhaps until around 30 years of age.**

Q: Did [you] study for around 30 years?

**#4C: [I] practiced as a doctor at around the age of 30. Father was a doctor and there was a medicine book. I have the medicine book currently.**

Q: What was some of the common illnesses that you saw very frequently in treating the people of the village?

**#4C: The illnesses were jaundice, fever and many types of diseases. It is there in the book. What is it called...? [I] still have the medicine book. It is in India and not here. There were illnesses like *tripa* 'bile' and *beken* 'phlegm.' One person could have many types of diseases. It is not possible that a person has only one illness.**

[Interviewer to interpreter]: What's the first one?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Hep B. Hepatitis B.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Hepatitis B.

Q: Hepatitis B was frequent. How did you treat Hepatitis B?

00:08:49

**#4C: There was medicine for jaundice to treat it. The name of the medicine is...The medicine book originated from Chakpori in the early days. My father has been there at the Medical Center at Chakpori in Lhasa; Chakpori, so far away in Lhasa. To treat jaundice there was *dhomtik* 'bile of bear' and *bongkar*. There are many kinds of medicines, different kinds that could be found in the pastures.**

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Actually he meant jaundice.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Jaundice, excuse me.

Q: What was the name of the herbal medicine that you used?

**#4C: There is a medicine for jaundice but it has been so many years. There are the ones called *dhomtik*, *tikdha* and *tikdha*...25 and many other medicines. These are available in our Medical Center. That is about it. [I] cannot remember much.**

Q: When did you start studying medicine, at what age until what age?

**#4C: The practice?**

Q: No, studying medicine.

**#4C: Yeah?**

Q: You have to study medicine.

**#4C: Yes.**

Q: One must study before treating illnesses.

**#4C: Yes.**

Q: From what age until what age did you study medicine, study Tibetan medicine?

00:10:48

**#4C: Practicing Tibetan medicine?**

Q: Studying.

**#4C: For how many years?**

Q: From what age until what age did you study Tibetan medicine?

**#4C: I studied from the age of around 15 until 20. One must be an expert and gradually recognize all the medicines. Now I have forgotten how to dispense medicine. [I] have aged and cannot hear well.**

Q: What were some of the more difficult illnesses to treat in the village?

**#4C: There are illnesses that are difficult.**

Q: What are the illnesses that are difficult to treat?

00:11:58

**#4C: The illnesses are as mentioned earlier like air pressure, breathing problems and jaundice. There are some who are unable to eat, whose esophagus is blocked. There are such very bad illnesses.**

Q: Did the people who came to you, how did they pay for this help that you gave them?

**#4C: The cost of medicine?**

Q: Yes.

**#4C: Some paid a hundred or two hundred but some did not have anything. So it was nothing. If he does not have, you cannot force him [to pay] nor let him die. He must be given medicine and the [payment] was nothing.**

Q: Did [you] say a hundred or two hundred currency units?

**#4C: What?**

Q: A hundred or two hundred currency units?

**#4C: What?**

Q: A hundred or two hundred?



**#4C: Yes.**

Q: Tashi-*la*, how large was your village? About how many families and how often did you see patients like how many in one typical day?

**#4C: What?**

Q: How many families were in the village?

**#4C: What?**

Q: How many families were there in your village?

00:13:54

**#4C: Members in my family?**

Q: Families? Altogether?

**#4C: Altogether?**

Q: Yes.

**#4C: There were not many altogether. [You] mean in one cluster?**

Q: Yes in the cluster.

**#4C: Perhaps there were 50-60 people in the cluster. There were not many as it was a small place.**

Q: How many patients do you treat in a day?

**#4C: What?**

Q: Speaking generally, how many patients do you treat in a day?

**#4C: Patients?**

Q: Yes.

00:14:30

**#4C: There were many families and one or two from each family might visit or none at all.**

Q: It depends. Could be a single person or many people in one day. How were things treated like a broken arm? How would you treat a broken arm or a leg?

**#4C: To treat it?**

Q: A broken leg and arm.

**#4C: If a leg or arm's bone gets broken, of prime importance is a medicine called *druk rue*, that is the bone of dragon. There is one called the *druk rue*, which is not available here. In Tibet it is called the bone of dragon. You hear the *druk* 'dragon' [thunder] in the sky. It used to be said that it was the bone of *druk*. It used to be found in the ground on the mountains. It was not on sale but found on the mountains.**

Q: Isn't this available in India?

**#4C: Not at all.**

Q: What does the bone of dragon medicine do for a broken bone?

00:16:20

**#4C: It acts as a replacement for the broken bone and heals it very fast.**

Q: Is it put on the outside or do you take the medicine inside?

**#4C: It is not to be taken inside but applied.**

Q: You are a doctor. So did you understand there were certain causes that created illnesses that people could prevent if they were more careful?

**#4C: Illnesses...**

Q: Is there anything to prevent illnesses?

**#4C: An illness that cannot be treated?**

Q: To prevent an illness well in time, to prevent an illness.

**#4C: Treatment?**

Q: Is there anything to prevent an illness from striking?

00:17:28

**#4C: That could not be cured?**

Q: To prevent an illness, to prevent an illness from striking.

**#4C: Treatment?**

Q: Is there anything to prevent an illness?

**#4C: That is very difficult. A doctor must be highly intelligent and understand what medicine to dispense for a certain illness and what would provide the best cure. [He] must**

**do that. There is the Medicine Buddha. It is found in that [book] on how to use intelligence and analyze, which medicine to prescribe, how to treat and what will help the illness.**

Q: Did you understand what was wrong by reading the pulses of people or looking at their skin or looking in their mouth? What was the way you determined the diagnoses?

00:19:07

**#4C: One must read the pulse on the hand and decide. There are 360 different arteries to diagnose an illness. One must read that and analyze where and what is the illness. It is very difficult. It must be treated after analyzing and that is very difficult.**

Q: How did the Medicine Buddha teach you about medicine?

**#4C: The treatment?**

Q: Yes.

**#4C: Initially the teacher will teach the medicine to be prescribed for a particular illness. Then you have to analyze and use your sharp intelligence on what medicine will cure a particular illness and what treatment is required. So you have to analyze in that way.**

Q: Where did your father study medicine?

00:20:48

**#4C: Father learned medicine from [his] father. I do not know about my grandfather, only my father. [I] do not know about grandfather. [Father] learned from him. Doctors [profession] were heredity and passed on from generation to generation.**

Q: So, about how many generations did his family practice medicine for the villagers?

**#4C: What?**

Q: How many generations were doctors?

**#C: How?**

Q: Your grandfather taught father. Likewise for how many generations was it taught? For instance, it's two [generations] from grandfather.

**#4C: My father's father's father. I would not know about many generations. I know my father was a doctor and he taught me. There were other accomplished doctors that taught what medicine will cure a certain illness and how to read the pulse.**

Q: Did your father or you ever go to the monastery to study under doctors or were you the more skilled doctor in the village?

00:22:50

**#4C: You studied medicine at home and did not go to a monastery to study medicine. One went to the monastery to practice dharma and earn merit.**

Q: Tashi-*la*, you said that there were many kinds of Tibetan medicine that you had to memorize and understand. What were these medicines made of and where did you get them?

**#4C: [We] could get the herbs for the medicine from the various kinds of flowers during summer in our region. In winter there were the root herbs. And the majority [of herbs] were *aru*, *baru* and *zandu* found at the border of India but not in our region. These were available in Lhasa but I have not been there.**

Q: Why couldn't you go to Lhasa?

**#4C: What?**

Q: Some herbs were said to be available in Lhasa...

**#4C: Yes.**

Q: Why couldn't [you] go to Lhasa?

**#4C: To Lhasa?**

Q: Yes.

**#4C: I have not been to Lhasa but heard that [herbs] are available. [I] have not been [there].**

Q: Why couldn't [you] go?

**#4C: What?**

Q: Why didn't [you] go?

**#4C: Lhasa is far away. The journey would take a month on foot.**

Q: What was the largest monastery in your village or near your village?

**#4C: What?**

Q: What was the largest monastery near your village?

**#4C: Monastery?**

Q: Yes.

00:25:04

**#4C: The largest monastery was Tholing Gonpa.**

Q: When you treated a patient the best you could with medicine, did you also pray for the patient that they would get better?

[Interpreter interprets as: While treating patients, in addition to medicine, from a religious point of view, did you chant *mani* ‘mantras’?]

**#4C: *Mani rilpu* ‘blessed pills.’ *Mani rilpu* are said to contain many different types of medicines.**

Q: No, the medicines...

**#4C: I have never prepared *mani rilpu*. Really, [I] did not.**

Q: No, there were medicines...

**#4C: The *mani rilpu* helps every ailment.**

Q: The question is, when [someone] falls sick and is being treated; do you practice the dharma along with dispensing medicines?

00:26:07

**#4C: From a religious point of view, there is the scripture that has the invocation to the Medicine Buddha, which is chanted.**

Q: Were there certain texts for different illnesses?

**#4C: What?**

Q: There are various scriptures. Are there different texts for different illnesses or is it the same for all types of illnesses?

**#4C: Enough to cover illnesses?**

Q: You do chanting...

**#4C: In the medicine books? The medicine books cover all illnesses. If an illness cannot be cured, the doctor will communicate that. If curable, he will advise what to do.**

Q: You said that you chant prayers along with dispensing medicine, are there different prayers for different illnesses or is it just one prayer for all kinds of illnesses?

**#4C: Each illness has its medicine. There are many types of illnesses like *tripa*, *beken*, fever and each has a medicine that will cure it. A particular medicine could be amalgamated with 5, 6, 10 or 15 different medicines. The strongest drug is given initially and then gradually**

**the ones with less potency until at the very end; it's the least potent. During treatment, it should taper in that way.**

Q: Tashi-*la*, what do you think are the qualities necessary for someone to be a good doctor?

**#4C: What?**

Q: What are the qualities necessary to become a good doctor?

**#4C: To become a good doctor?**

Q: Yes.

00:28:31

**#4C: One should possess sharp intelligence and a compassionate mind. As I told you earlier, a person cannot be left to die for want of money. One should possess compassion and feel sympathy. That is the first thing and then to contemplate and treat with compassion: what will benefit [the patient], what is the illness and study the root cause of illness.**

Q: What do you mean by root cause of the illness?

**#4C: The cause of illness?**

Q: Yes, the seed. One must find out the cause of illness...

**#4C: One must read the scriptures to learn what will help what illness and then analyze. That is how the treatment is carried out.**

Q: Did you have to travel far to see some of the people who are sick or did they come to you or a little bit of both?

**#4C: What?**

Q: Did the patients come to your home for treatment or did you visit the patients at their home?

**#4C: The patients?**

Q: Did [they] come or did [you] go?

00:30:30

**#4C: [I] must go to see patients that are based elsewhere.**

Q: Did [patients] come home?

**#4C: What?**

Q: Did [patients] come home for treatment?

**#4C: What?**

Q: Did [patients] come home for treatment?

**#4C: [The patients] came home for treatment. And [I] visited [the patients] too.**

Q: How far of a journey would you have to go? I guess I wonder what treatment area in?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: He was very remote area in...?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Utsang.

Q: Utsang. How far in Utsang did you have to travel from your village to treat people?

**#4C: What?**

Q: Were you a doctor only in your village or outside as well?

**#4C: One must go wherever there are sick people.**

Q: How far did [you] have to go?

00:31:25

**#4C: There were no automobiles in our village. One walked for a day or two or three.**

Q: Tashi-*la*, when you would sometimes see a person with an illness and you knew because you are experienced that they are going to pass away. Do you tell them that?

**#4C: What?**

Q: If a person is dying, if a patient is close to death...

**#4C: Benefit for the patient?**

Q: If [a patient] is close to death...

**#4C: In that case...**

Q: If the patient is close to death, a serious patient will pass away...

**#4C: What?**

Q: A serious patient is bound to pass away.

**#4C: Right.**

Q: Do you tell the patient before [his] passing away that “you are close to death”?

**#4C: Before the patient passes away?**

Q: Yes, “You are close to death...”

00:32:38

**#4C: Should it be beneficial, one must treat [the patient]. Should it be futile, it must be said, “This is useless.” Because if one’s life span is exhausted, nothing you do can be of help. Each one has his lifespan depending upon the past life. Should that be exhausted nothing can be done.**

Q: Tashi-*la*, did women ever come to you for help delivering babies and did you participate in that?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: I’m sorry...

Q: Did you help women deliver babies or was that a woman’s job?

**#4C: One must help patients...**

Q: During deliveries, when women were delivering?

**#4C: If there is pain one must extend help. Here you have what is called injections. We did not have that in Tibet. One gave medicines to help her and made efforts to prevent death.**

Q: [You] mean during deliveries?

00:34:03

**#4C: Yes, during deliveries.**

Q: Tibetan women often had many children like even 15, 16, 17. Was there ever a wish for them to use any kind of birth control to prevent them from having so many children?

**#4C: [We] never did anything like that. We never did.**

Q: I’m going to move on because Tashi-*la* must leave. So I want to ask Tashi-*la*, when did things begin to change in your village? You mentioned the Communists, the Chinese Communists coming. What happened?

**#4C: Changes? A lot of changes occurred. The Chinese took away one’s rights like eating, drinking. One had no freedom. The Chinese formed the *Kungri* ‘People’s Commune’ and took away everything. Should you fail to obey what they ordered, you would be arrested and imprisoned, if you fail to obey what they ordered.**

Q: What was your experience in the village? How were you treated by the Chinese? How were you personally treated?



00:36:37

**#4C: The Chinese oppressed and rendered us powerless by taking away wealth. The only thing left was serving [the Chinese], which if not done instantly would result in beatings.**

Q: Were you able to still treat patients and keep up your medical practice?

**#4C: When the Chinese came?**

Q: After the Chinese arrived?

**#4C: There were Chinese doctors. We did not [practice].**

Q: Were [you] not allowed to?

**#4C: [We] were not allowed.**

Q: Did you have any experience of the Chinese treating men or women and sterilizing them because there have been many stories of this?

**#4C: It was not there in our region.**

Q: Didn't the Chinese birth...

**#4C: Prevent childbirth?**

Q: Was it there?

**#4C: No, no.**

Q: The Chinese didn't do that?

00:38:01

**#4C: The Chinese might have done.**

Q: In your village?

**#4C: I have no knowledge of such things. My children were grown.**

Q: Tashi-*la*, what happened to the monastery when the Chinese came to your village?

**#4C: The monastery was demolished and they transported the wooden pillars and such to their army camps. There was nothing left of the building.**

Q: How did that feel, Tashi-*la* when you saw that? What did you feel?

**#4C: What?**

Q: When the monasteries were destroyed.

**#4C: Yes?**

Q: How did you feel when the Chinese destroyed the monasteries and everything?

**#4C: Feeling...they destroyed the monastery, destroyed completely and as mentioned earlier, I escaped in the year '70.**

Q: What did you feel [*tsorwa*]?

00:39:32

**#4C: For livelihood [*tsowa*]...the Chinese rationed 10-11 kilograms [of grains] per month to the working group of adults and those that were not working like us were given only 5-6 kilograms.**

Q: No, not *tsowa* as in work but what did you feel when the Chinese army came and destroyed the monastery?

**#4C: We felt desperate but I managed to flee leaving behind all the children, children and mother [wife?].**

Q: How many of your kids and family did you have to leave behind and why did you have to flee?

**#4C: What?**

Q: [You] left behind family members and wife...

**#4C: Yes?**

Q: How many family members were there?

**#4C: What?**

Q: How many family members were there then when you fled from China to Tibet?

**#4C: Chinese?**

Q: No. When you fled to India from China, left Tibet to flee to India leaving behind [your] family members...

**#4C: [I] left all the family members.**

Q: How many members were there?

00:40:57

**#4C: Family members?**

Q: Yes.

**#4C: There was a son who has passed away, three daughters, an older brother who has also passed away. How many is that? That is seven people.**

Q: Tashi-*la*, what made you know you had to leave? What were you afraid was going to happen?

**#4C: What?**

Q: What's the reason for taking flight?

**#4C: Reason to flee?**

Q: The reason for taking flight.

**#4C: What?**

Q: The reason for leaving Tibet and fleeing to India?

**#4C: That was because the Chinese inflicted suffering. There was no freedom to practice the dharma and earn merit and one did not enjoy any rights. Due to desperation [I] fled at around midnight leaving behind mother and all the children. [I] was desperate because of the suffering the Chinese inflicted.**

Q: Tashi-*la*, you mentioned that when the Chinese came many people were...they lost their wealth and some were tortured. Did you see with your own eyes any of this treatment?

**#4C: What?**

Q: Did you witness yourself?

**#4C: What?**

Q: See with your eyes?

**#4C: What?**

Q: The Chinese oppressing...

**#4C: The Chinese?**

Q: Oppressing and beating and...?

00:42:51

**#4C: [I] witnessed some being arrested, some being assaulted and some...but I did not remain for many years.**

Q: Did you ever treat any of these people after they were beaten because you were a doctor?

**#4C: Treatment? I treated according to my capacity, with the little quantity of medicines I possessed. Of course, the Chinese would never provide any medicines.**

Q: [The Chinese] didn't allow [you] to treat?

**#4C: The Chinese did not allow.**

Q: What were some of the injuries that occurred when the people were beaten in these sessions?

**#4C: What?**

Q: What were the injuries that occurred when the Chinese beat the Tibetan people?

**#4C: The Chinese...**

Q: Were there broken bones, wounds or whatever from being beaten?

00:44:11

**#4C: By the Chinese? [I] did not see any treatments being given. There was no treatment and the people were bound to die whether from their assaults or whatever. One would be imprisoned and after some time when the person became useless, [he] was shot dead.**

Q: And then Tashi-la, when you leave Tibet what are you feeling and how do you escape?

**#4C: [I] was very sad because the children were left behind. [I lamented] that mother and all the children were left behind in Tibet. However, [I] could not say that [my] wealth was left behind because the Chinese had already confiscated everything. [I] had nothing and prayed to God and managed to flee. I was the only one [from my family] that managed to escape.**

Q: Where did you go when you escaped?

**#4C: What?**

Q: Where did [you] go after escaping from Tibet?

**#4C: During the escape?**

Q: Where did you come?

00:45:44

**#4C: [I] reached the Indian border, in India, the Indian border. Earlier that was Tibetan territory but now there is the Indian army. [I] arrived at the Indian military camp.**

Q: Reached the military camp?

**#4C: Yes.**

Q: Was there a reason why Tashi-*la* didn't want to bring his family or his wife or anyone with him that he fled so quickly alone?

**#4C: I felt desperate, as there was no freedom to practice religion. We are practitioners of the dharma and sooner or later would certainly face death or imprisonment.**

Q: You yourself?

**#4C: Yes, me. How they [the Chinese] imprisoned someone was that everybody attended a meeting. I and my companion, the two of us were not called to attend the meeting. Not being called to a meeting indicated certain arrest. And once arrested, you are bound to die in prison. You will be imprisoned and after a lapse of time, be killed.**

Q: You knew you were being targeted for destruction.

**#4C: Yes.**

Q: That happened to many people.

**#4C: Yes.**

Q: So when you arrived at the Indian military border, can you tell us your story; what happens to you next?

**#4C: What?**

Q: What did [you] do upon reaching the Indian border?

**#4C: Indian...?**

Q: ...border and then what did [you] do?

00:48:19

**#4C: After reaching the Indian border, the Indians thrashed [me] a great deal because [they] said, "You are a Chinese spy. You must be working for the Chinese." That was their suspicion while I had come in desperation. I had come praying to His Holiness the Dalai Lama with the hope that [I] could practice the dharma. [I] came praying to His Holiness. Accusing me of working for the Chinese, [the Indians] beat [me] a lot.**

Q: If it's not too difficult, could he please tell us how he was tortured?

**#4C: What?**

Q: How did the Indian soldiers beat?

**#4C: [The Indian soldiers] hit with belts and fists. With legs and hands tied, [they] threw [me] into a large water body. The water was cold in the 11<sup>th</sup> [Tibetan lunar] month. Tying the legs and hands, threw [me] in the water and demanded to speak. [I replied], “[I] have nothing to say. Kill [me] if [you] like. Do anything but I have nothing to say. I have come of desperation and with prayers to the Gods.”**

Q: What did it feel like to escape Tibet to avoid torture and then to go to freedom and get tortured again and be falsely accused? Can you tell us what kind of feelings you had about that situation?

**#4C: What?**

Q: What feelings did [you] have?

**#4C: What?**

Q: You fled from Tibet and reached India to be beaten by the Indian soldiers. How did you feel?

00:50:38

**#4C: The soldiers provided something for [my] sustenance. After the beating...**

Q: What did [you] feel when you were beaten even after reaching India?

**#4C: There was nothing to do. “Do whatever [you] like,” [I] said because there was nothing to do.**

Q: Tashi-la, what year was that you left Tibet and how old were you?

**#4C: When [I] left Tibet?**

Q: At what age did you flee Tibet?

**#4C: [I] was 37 years old.**

Q: Can [you] remember what year it was?

**#4C: What?**

Q: Can [you] remember what year it was?

**#4C: Was it 1970? [I] think it was '70 but [I] cannot say for sure because [I] was dazed and had no knowledge.**

Q: Tashi-la, you have lived during the Cultural Revolution in Tibet.

**#4C: What?**

Q: You were in Tibet during the Cultural Revolution?

**#4C: How?**

Q: You were in Tibet during the Cultural Revolution?

00:52:07

**#4C: Yes, I was in Tibet during the Cultural Revolution.**

Q: Can you please continue the story? What happens... You were tortured; was that for a day or a long time and what happened next?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Where? In India?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Yeah.

Q: After arriving in India, how long did the Indian military beat you and for how long were you in prison in India?

**#4C: What? [I] was three years in the Indian prison.**

Q: What did you do for survival at that time and where were you in India?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Three years during the torture time?

Q: You were in prison for three years?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes. Interrogated.

Q: Oh, you were interrogated for three years. Were you detained by the Indian military for three years?

**#4C: What?**

Q: Did the Indian military detain [you] for three years?

**#4C: Yes, [I] was in the prison of the Indian military.**

Q: For three years! What was the town or city in India where that happened?

00:53:15

**#4C: The prison?**

Q: Yes.

**#4C: The prison is at Warsil. It is called Warsil.**

Q: Warsil?

**#4C: Yes, Warsil. There is an army camp there. Indian army.**

Q: Tashi-la, what did you do to help your spirit? How did you survive such terrible treatment?

**#4C: Whatever they did, [I] was helpless. Much later at the border [I] was detained in a large prison for two years. In the large prison only interrogation and no beating was carried out.**

Q: After two years?

**#4C: There were no beatings carried out.**

Q: After two years?

**#4C: Yes, there in India.**

Q: Were there many Tibetans that were arrested because the Indians thought they were spies and who were they spying for, for the Government of China?

**#4C: In the prison?**

Q: Yes.

**#4C: There was just my colleague and none else. Those that had fled earlier might have died because they were not to be seen. [I] heard [they] had been in Indian prisons. The men were not there. Perhaps [they] were dead. [I] had no knowledge on reaching India.**

Q: Was the Indian Government carrying out the many interrogations?

**#4C: What?**

Q: Were the interrogations being carried out for the Indian Government?

00:55:47

**#4C: Yes.**

Q: Right?



**#4C: Right.**

[Interpreter interprets as: They [the interrogators] work for the Indian Government.]

[Interviewer to interpreter]: They thought that they were working for the Chinese Government though.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yeah, Chinese Government.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: They thought they were...

Q: Tashi-*la*, can you tell us when you get out of prison, what happens to you next? Where do you go? What happens?

**#4C: There was nothing to do [in the prison] but pray. [I] was inflicted a great deal of suffering and assaulted for a year at Warsil on the border. Once at the large prison, except for the interrogations, there were no beatings.**

Q: What did [you] do after three years in prison?

**#4C: What?**

Q: Were [you] released after three years of imprisonment? What did [you] do then?

**#4C: [I] was released and taken to Mundgod [Karnataka, India] by a soldier and a *kepen* [?].**

Q: A soldier and a...?

00:56:51

**#4C: They dropped me at Mundgod.**

Q: A soldier and who?

**#4C: An Indian soldier and a *kepen*.**

Q: *Kepoe*?

**#4C: A *kepen*. [He] was not a Tibetan, perhaps a Nepalese. [I] could not follow the language well.**

Q: Was [he] an interpreter?

**#4C: They dropped [me] at Mundgod.**

Q: Was [he] an interpreter?

**#4C: They brought [me].**

Q: Tashi-*la*, were you sent there as a free man and could join the other Tibetans in that settlement or were you put in prison?

**#4C: [I] had arrived in our Tibetan area and was entitled to an area of land and given a small house. That was it. I had nothing with me and borrowed money from some people I knew. They gave me food. [They] were people I knew.**

Q: Did you ever practice medicine again, Tashi-*la*?

00:58:45

**#4C: There was no medicine then. Patients asked me for treatment but there was no medicine! [Laughs]**

Q: Did you read pulse?

**#4C: [I] read pulse but did not have medicine.**

Q: Tashi-*la*, did you ever find out what happened to your family and how were you feeling about being away from Tibet?

**#4C: What?**

Q: [Your] family was left behind...

**#4C: What?**

Q: Did you hear about what happened to the family left behind in Tibet?

**#4C: There was not much news but [my] wife's brother went to Tibet once. He brought some news but that is it. I do not know how to use a phone and there was no news at all. [I] do not know how [they] are.**

Q: You don't know?

**#4C: [I] do not know.**

Q: When you think about Tibet, Tashi-*la*, what do you miss about Tibet?

01:00:35

**#4C: There is nothing one can do and I have reached such an advanced age. There is nothing to be done. [My] hearing is poor and there is nothing to ponder over. One can only pray to the Gods that there are no obstacles in His Holiness the Dalai Lama's life. Except for praying, there is nothing left to do.**

Q: I would like to go back a little bit to Tibet because there are many questions I wanted to understand.

**#4C: Okay.**

Q: Tashi-*la*, when you gathered medicine you went into the mountains very often. Can you please tell us the names of animals that you would see or that lived in those mountains?

**#4C: Animals?**

Q: Yes.

**#4C: There were only yaks and sheep in our region; yaks, sheep and horses. Besides that there were no animals like elephants.**

Q: But did a lot of animals live in those mountains?

**#4C: What?**

Q: Did a lot of animals live in those mountains?

**#4C: Where?**

Q: On those mountains. There are mountains in your region. Did a lot of animals live in the mountains?

**#4C: Yes, [they] did and it was a very nice place.**

Q: Can he remember the kinds of animals that lived there even if he didn't see them?

**#4C: What?**

Q: What are the kinds of animals there even if you hadn't seen them?

**#4C: Animals?**

Q: Yes.

01:03:07

**#4C: There is not much difference...long ago there were animals for our use. These have been confiscated by the Chinese.**

Q: Earlier [you] mentioned yak, sheep and horses. Were there any others?

**#4C: Goats and sheep.**

Q: Goats, sheep and then?

**#4C: What?**

Q: Were there other animals?

**#4C: There were none besides that.**

Q: These animals were there when you were growing up. What happened to these animals, if anything after the Chinese forces came into Tibet?

01:04:01

**#4C: [I] do not know what happened to China...it was used for their soldiers' consumption. There were soldiers and officials too. It was said that they were Chinese officials. [They] said they did not consume for free and paid four or five currency units per sheep. In the early days a sheep cost 100, 50 or 60 [currency units]. They paid two or three currency units saying nothing could be consumed for free and that [they] were paying for it. They rendered a nice name and paid only that.**

Q: Did anything happen...Were there a lot of forest around your village and were there any changes after the Chinese came to those forests?

**#4C: Military camps had been set up on the lands and we could not go there. [We] were not allowed where the military base was. We must work elsewhere. There was brick making and cutting wood, which was very difficult. [They] inflicted great suffering. Skin on the hands came off because of brick making.**

[Interpreter to interviewee]: Her question is this. There were a lot of trees in the region. What happened to the trees when the Chinese arrived?

**#4C: The soldiers constructed houses. The soldiers constructed military camps.**

Q: Were trees cut?

01:05:52

**#4C: Trees were cut and then houses constructed.**

Q: Was it a lot of trees or a few?

**#4C: What?**

Q: Did [the Chinese soldiers] cut a lot of trees?

**#4C: A lot was cut and there is no count.**

Q: Were there camps built near your village, Tashi-la?

**#4C: What?**

Q: Was it close?

**#4C: [We] could not go to the Chinese camp. We were not allowed to go to the military camp.**

Q: Was it close to the village?

**#4C: What?**

Q: Was it close?

**#4C: Bricks. The military camp was new and we were not allowed.**

Q: How far was it from the village?

**#4C: What?**

Q: Was it close to your village?

**#4C: If our village is located where [my] home is, the Chinese military camp is here.**

Q: It was close and in the same village?

**#4C: It was in the village.**

Q: What other changes happened to the village that you can recall after the Chinese came? We didn't talk a lot about in the village. What happened?

**#4C: After the Chinese came?**

Q: Yes. What changes happened?

01:07:18

**#4C: The most important change was forming the military camp and then the animals...Monasteries were demolished. It was like that. [The Chinese] did not do anything else. I cannot recall.**

Q: Did you see with your own eyes any of the destruction of the monasteries?

**#4C: Destroying monasteries?**

Q: Destroying.

**#4C: The Chinese forced us to destroy the monasteries. It was not possible to refuse because if you refused, they were carrying guns.**

Q: Can you describe the day that happened and tell us how they did that because the monasteries are so precious to you? What force was used?

**#4C: [The monasteries] were destroyed.**

Q: How did they force [you] to destroy?

**#4C: What they did?**

Q: What did they do to force [you]?

**#4C: What [they] did? The wood was used to construct military camps.**

Q: You and some Tibetans were forced to destroy the monastery. How did they oppress [you] to destroy the monastery?

01:09:00

**#4C: Tibet had fallen under the control of China and they repressed [us]. They could do as [they] pleased.**

Q: So please tell me, how did you...What did they make you do to destroy the monastery? What did you have to take down or break?

**#4C: There are the images, which the Chinese threw away and rendered [the monastery] empty. They had removed the wood and the building's roof and it was empty. The images were thrown away.**

Q: Did they force you to destroy the images?

**#4C: [We] did not destroy images but were forced to demolish the monastery.**

Q: Who destroyed the images? Did the Chinese destroy [them]?

01:10:02

**#4C: They threw away the images. We cannot use the images. We cannot touch [them]. They threw away or did what they liked.**

Q: What did you use to destroy the monastery walls?

**#4C: What?**

Q: With what tools were you forced to destroy the monastery?

**#4C: Not many tools were required. There were spades to dig the earth and knives to cut. Nothing else was needed. They did not have the tools and told us to [bring].**

Q: Were these farm tools?

**#4C: We did the work.**

Q: To tear down the village monastery. How old was this village, Tashi-*la*?

**#4C: What?**

Q: How old was this monastery?

**#4C: What?**

Q: How old was the monastery [you] were forced to destroy?

**#4C: What was done?**

Q: How long had the monastery been in existence? When was it first built?

**#4C: What?**

Q: When was this monastery first...? Since how long...?

01:11:41

**#4C: For many years...the reason for construction?**

Q: Yes.

**#4C: It was constructed as a base for our Buddhist dharma. Most importantly we have His Holiness the Dalai Lama, then there is the Karmapa and many other lamas; Ogyen Rinpoche [Guru Padmasambhava] and have prayed to them since long ago. Since time immemorial there have been many lamas who have taught about the benefits to this and the next life, which [the people] learned.**

Q: How long has it been?

**#4C: What?**

Q: How long has the monastery existed? How long has the monastery that was destroyed been in existence? How long?

**#4C: They destroyed and used it to construct the military camp.**

Q: Tashi-*la*, how many monks lived in the monastery and what happened to them?

**#4C: What?**

Q: Monks. How many monks were there in the monastery that was destroyed and what happened to the monks?

01:13:08

**#4C: The monks? There were no monks left in the Tholing Gonpa. [They] escaped.**

Q: Were there only 5-6 monks?

**#4C: Five to six monks in our monastery? There might have been 200-300 or 500-600 in Tholing Gonpa.**

Q: What might have happened to them?

**#4C: All fled and have reached India. Some may have survived and some may have passed away.**

Q: Were any of the monks arrested or killed by the Chinese?

**#4C: [I] do not know; perhaps [the Chinese] might have done so earlier. Most of the monks fled and have reached here.**

Q: Were there none that were assaulted or killed?

**#4C: Such things might have been done. There might have been cases of assaults, killing and imprisonment. [I] would not know much because they [the Chinese] did not allow us to move about. They had spies and we would not want to be seen moving about.**

Q: Tashi-*la*, what was it like for the women and the men of the village to have to tear down their monastery? What was their attitude and reaction to that?

**#4C: What?**

Q: One might have felt sad when the monastery was destroyed. What feelings...?

01:15:11

**#4C: There was sadness and difficulties. They would use their guns if [we] did not do it [destroy the monastery]. First it would be imprisonment and then when the person became useless, [he] was shot and killed. I have seen this with my eyes in Tibet.**

Q: Did any people refuse to participate and what happened to them?

**#4C: [I] do not know if such things happened.**

[Interviewer to interpreter]: We will end shortly. Please tell Tashi-*la* that. He's a very special person because he's a doctor and so we want to ask him a little bit about being a doctor in Tibet, a little more.



Q: Were there illnesses that were illnesses of the mind in the village where people would be crying and upset all the time or very nervous and scared; this is before the Chinese came? So, were there emotional illnesses?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: You might say, before the Chinese came when he was a doctor, were there any emotional illnesses that he was called upon to treat and I'll give you some samples if he doesn't...

**#4C: What?**

Q: Feeling sad. [You] understand sadness, right?

**#4C: What?**

Q: Feeling sad. Before the Chinese came when you were a doctor, was there anyone in the village suffering from mental illnesses?

01:17:58

**#4C: Illness? There were such illnesses. And there were treatments. One had the freedom to treat, as there were no Chinese.**

Q: Could you please describe one or two of those kinds of mental illnesses and how did you treat them?

**#4C: In order to treat you must study the illness and locate where to gather the medicinal herb. After gathering the medicine, you treated. That is how you did.**

Q: Tashi-*la*, what would be some of the symptoms, like would people be depressed and sad and cry or would they be nervous and anxious or paranoid, if there's a Tibetan word for that?

**#4C: There are those that are like crazy and there are medicines and treatments available.**

Q: How is it? What are the symptoms whether they are crazy or not mentally stable, for instance, are they depressed and still doing nothing or run about like crazy? What types are there?

01:20:22

**#4C: There are many types, some who are not stable and do various things. There are some cases where air enters the arteries and one feels depressed and do different things. There are cases of madness.**

Q: Could [you] please explain the different types?

**#4C: What?**

Q: If one were to explain specifically what are the types?

**#4C: Illnesses?**

Q: Yes.

**#4C: One may be not be mentally stable and that can be understood by feeling the pulse and studying the face.**

Q: Were there people, this is before the Chinese came—were there people in the village who were considered crazy or very sick, very disturbed in their mind? Were there any cases like that?

**#4C: Before the Chinese arrived?**

Q: Were there crazy people?

01:21:36

**#4C: There were crazy people that had become mentally depressed. There were such cases.**

Q: How would you treat depression?

**#4C: One must understand whether treating with medication is beneficial or prayer reading—in the early days in Tibet prayer reading was the norm—is beneficial. Besides these, there was not anything much to do.**

Q: Did you ever hear when you were a doctor or your father know about, anybody in the village who committed suicide? This is before the Chinese.

**#4C: There are different kinds of people.**

Q: Were there any cases of suicide?

**#4C: There were drunks.**

Q: Were there cases of suicide?

**#4C: Some have everything and drink *chang* ‘home-brewed beer’ and alcohol, waste time and shun work. If one does not work, one becomes unhappy. There were such cases.**

Q: Were there cases of suicide?

**#4C: What?**

Q: Were there cases of suicide?

01:23:15

**#4C: There were drunks.**

Q: [I] don't mean drunks, committing suicide.

**#4C: What?**

Q: Were there cases [of people] committing suicide out of depression?

**#4C: What?**

Q: Were there cases [of people] committing suicide out of depression, committing suicide?

**#4C: No, there were no such cases.**

Q: Were there no cases of suicide?

**#4C: No.**

Q: No?

**#4C: No.**

Q: You have lived in a village and then you went to Mundgod and now you are in America. What would you say was the, like the attitude, the feeling of the Tibetan people compared to people living in Mundgod or living in the United States? I want to know the emotional attitude. What are the spirit or the energy? Could he make us a little comparison?

[Interpreter interprets as: We have come from Tibet. [You] lived in Mundgod after coming from Tibet. [You] came into exile in Mundgod from Tibet and from Mundgod Settlement to the United States. Do you see any difference between the Tibetan people living here and those Tibetans living in Mundgod and Tibet?]

01:24:28

**#4C: [I] do not see. [I] do not know and do not see any [difference].**

Q: Not much difference. Interesting. Okay and then maybe just the last question about medicine. Tashi-*la*, what were some of the kinds of stories or people or cases you can remember that you treated them and it was a pleasure to do it and some that were very difficult, very hard and you weren't sure you could help?

**#4C: There were some cases of illnesses that one could cure and illnesses that were incurable and where nothing could be done. There were some cases that could not be cured even after treating.**

Q: What kinds do [you] remember?

**#4C: What?**

Q: Do [you] remember any? What [they] were like?

**#4C: [I] do not know. [I] did not see any.**

Q: There are illnesses that can be treated and that cannot be treated.

**#4C: That we cured?**

Q: There are those that can be treated and those that cannot be treated. Do [you] remember?

**#4C: That cannot be treated?**

Q: Whether curable or not...can you remember patients in Tibet that were incurable?

01:25:54

**#4C: There were cases that could not be cured with medicines or prayers.**

Q: Can you recall any particular case?

**#4C: What?**

Q: Can you give examples of a few particular cases?

**#4C: No, when there is no cure for an illness the doctor will say, "There is nothing that can be done." Then there is nothing to do.**

[Interpreter to interviewer]: I don't know. He's not hearing enough. Let me ask again.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: All I want to know...What were the easy cases and what were the hard cases that he treated as a doctor in Tibet?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: I'll try again.

Q: [I]'m asking again.

**#4C: What?**

Q: [I]'m asking again.

**#4C: What?**

Q: When you treated illnesses, there were those that could be treated and those that could not be. Can you remember any that could be treated and that could not be?

**#4C: [Silent]**

Q: Those that could be treated and those that could not be.

**#4C: Those that could not be treated?**

Q: Yes. Can [you] remember any?

**#4C: Those that could not be treated?**

Q: Yes.

01:26:53

**#4C: There were such cases and [I] have seen many. If it was an incurable disease the doctor says, "It is incurable. Nothing can be done." There were such instances.**

Q: Tashi-*la*, what are your prayers that you make for the people of Tibet these days? What do you pray for?

**#4C: [I] pray, "May there be no obstacles in the life of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. May there be happiness and no suffering. May one take rebirth in the land of happiness after death." There is nothing else to do. I am at an advanced age and except for praying to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, our work is done.**

Q: You have lived a long life. Are there any thoughts or ideas that you would like to share with the world based on your experiences, any wisdom that you want to pass on?

**#4C: What?**

Q: Anything beneficial?

**#4C: Like what?**

Q: You have reached an advanced age and have gained many experiences in life. Do [you] have any advice based on that for other people?

01:28:52

**#4C: There is nothing.**

Q: Is there anything special to recount?

**#4C: There is nothing to say now. [My] work is over.**

Q: If you could talk to the Chinese, what would you want to tell them?

**#4C: To the Chinese? There is nothing to say but that if possible, everybody must live happily and without obstacles in life. There should be happiness and it is good if things turn out well for everyone, health and happiness. Otherwise, if each one harms and attacks the other, then everything is finished.**

Q: What would be your advice for the next generation of Tibetan children?

**#4C: [I] do not have anything to say. Be good, kind hearted and harmonious. Do not quarrel and harm others. Be kind-hearted, good and help one another. Do not harm others but be helpful and kind-hearted. That is it. It is time for me to depart for I am 81 years old now.**

Q: Tashi-*la*, what would make your dying a very happy one?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: What's that?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: What would make his passing away a happy one?

[Interpreter interprets as: How would [you] be able to pass away peacefully?]

**#4C: What?**

Q: How would [you] be able to pass away peacefully?

**#4C: What we can do is pray to God, "May everyone be well." Do not quarrel and be kind-hearted. Everything is over except for praying to God.**

Q: Thank you.

**#4C: [Joins palms] Thank you. We will pray to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, which is most important, right? His Holiness has presently come in human form for our benefit; otherwise, he is the Chenrezig 'Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, the patron saint of Tibet' with one face and two hands. The right hand holds a rosary and the left a white lotus. One must pray, "May all sentient beings be reborn in the lotus." [I] have nothing else left.**

Q: That's a great deal.

01:32:40

**#4C: [Joins palms] Pray to God, "May everyone be well and happy." We are impermanent beings and have to leave this body and go. One must pray, "May [I] be reborn as a human being."**

Q: We wish you that same blessing.

**#4C: [Silent]**

Q: I have to ask these questions at the end of the interview. So if this interview was shown in Tibet or China, will this be a problem for you?

[Interpreter interprets as: We are concluding. We've filmed you now. It wouldn't be a problem to show this film in Tibet or China, right? Can it be shown?]

**#4C: Yes.**

Q: Tashi-*la*, thank you for sharing your story with us.

[Interviewee and interviewer face each other with folded hands]

01:33:49

**#4C: Thank you. We must all pray to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, “May everyone be happy, everyone be happy.” It is not enough for you alone to be happy but everyone. Poor things. Even animals, one must pray that they find happiness. Even the flies, one must pray that they are reborn as humans and find happiness.**

Q: We will pray for the...Any other good advice, we would like to hear some.

**#4C: [I] do not have. [I] do not have any advice.**

END OF INTERVIEW