

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #51D – Jamphel Dorjee
May 18, 2012

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #51D
2. Interviewee: Jamphel Dorjee
3. Age: 80
4. Date of Birth: 1932
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Derge
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1957
9. Date of Interview: May 18, 2012
10. Place of Interview: Community Hall, Tashi Jong, Himachal Pradesh, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 44 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Pema Tashi
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Jamphel Dorjee hails from Derge in Kham Province. He belonged to a middle-class farming family and spent most of his childhood studying Tibetan under his father, who taught a group of 6-7 boys in his home. Jamphel Dorjee explains the education of lay children at that time and expresses regret at not taking more interest in his studies. After his father's death when he was 13 years old, Jamphel Dorjee spent time working on the farm.

At the age of 20 he was selected to be an attendant to Jamyang Chokyi Lodro, a highly revered reincarnated lama. Jamphel Dorjee accompanied this lama in 1955 on an arduous pilgrimage journey to Lhasa. Upon reaching Lhasa, a special audience with His Holiness the Dalai Lama was granted and His Holiness provided a letter of support for Jamyang Chokyi Lodro. They then visited various pilgrim centers in the Utsang region that included Yiru Bakor, Tandu, Sakya, Yarlung Sheda and Tseringjong. The group was welcomed and supported by aristocrats throughout the journey making this part much easier than the initial travels to Lhasa.

At a large gathering where Jamyang Chokyi Lodro was giving teachings, the Chinese forced the lama to proclaim how great China was in helping Tibet. That event led to their decision to escape to Sikkim in India. Jamphel Dorjee returned to Lhasa to meet his mother and relatives just as the Chinese were occupying the city in 1959 so he led his family to safety in India.

Topics Discussed:

Kham, childhood memories, education, life under Chinese rule, pilgrimage, Dalai Lama, escape experiences.

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Interview #51D

Interviewee: Jamphel Dorjee

Age: 80, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: May 18, 2012

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:12

Interviewee #51D: Jamphel Dorjee.

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?

#51D: Yes, [I] give permission. If that is how it is, it is most beneficial. However, I am not one who can speak on the history of Tibet with clarity, but [I] will speak about my experiences.

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

#51D: [Nods]

Q: During this interview if you wish to take a break or stop at anytime, please let me know. If you do not wish to answer a question or talk about something, let me know.

#51D: Okay, exactly. That is good.

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

00:02:17

#51D: [I] do not think there will be any problems. I will be speaking only about my experiences and not to make trouble between two countries. I will talk only about my experiences, so [I] do not think there will be any problems.

Q: Good. *Aku-la* ‘respectful term for paternal uncle,’ please tell us where you were born and how old you are?

#51D: I am from Derge, Kham Derge.

Q: How many people were in your family?

#51D: We were 12-13 members in the family. We were among the many.

Q: How many of them were children of your parents?

#51D: From the time I can recall as a little child, there were four or five children.

Q: Were you the youngest or oldest or where in the range?

00:03:51

#51D: [I] think I was the middle one. I cannot say for sure, but [I] think I was the middle one.

Q: *Aku-la*, what did your...

#51D: [Interrupts] The five children mentioned are not from the same set of parents, but there 12 members in the family including relatives. There were five children including the relatives' children.

Q: What kind of work did your parents do?

#51D: [They] were farmers and worked in the fields.

Q: Can you tell me what was your life like when you were a child? Can you describe a little bit of what it was like to grow up in Derge in your farming family?

#51D: When I was little...at around the age of 18 or 19, I did a little bit of farm work like plowing and hauling harvests on the back, but spent most of my time studying Tibetan as a little one. As such I have not been able to do much field work, though most of the families were engaged in farming.

Q: Where did your family send you to learn Tibetan reading and writing?

00:06:04

#51D: My father was proficient in Tibetan. He was the knowledgeable one in our region. There were no schools in our region in the past. Hence, it was the tradition for children from wealthy families to study in groups of five, six or seven with a knowledgeable person. So, my father had 7-8 students. [I] have studied a lot with them and have also grazed animals.

Q: How did your father happen to become a teacher?

#51D: Father happened to be a monk of a small monastery long ago. [He] left monkhood at around the age of 34-35, that was why [he] was highly proficient and knowledgeable.

Q: What economic level was your family?

#51D: [Our] economic status was medium. We were not among the wealthy in our village that consisted of many families. There were 60-70 families and we were among the middle. [We] owned good farmlands and though there was not [a large flock of] animals to take to the nomadic sites, [we] owned horses and 15-20 *dzoo* ‘animal bred between a yak and a cow’ and milk animals like *dzomo* ‘female *dzoo*.’

Q: When your father was teaching, did he do that to earn some livelihood and who were the children that came to learn from him?

00:08:52

#51D: We did not have the practice of giving a salary like we do here these days except make some gift offerings in the form of meat, butter and grains. There were no fixed salaries that a receiver would accept nor was it a practice for a giver to give.

The students learned when there was time and did not otherwise. There were no rules as such for the school.

Q: Was that unusual to have someone in the village bring children in and instruct them in their...I guess in the teacher’s home. Was that an unusual occurrence?

#51D: That is rare. For instance, it was understood that monks in the monasteries must be taught as well as the children of wealthy families. Otherwise, there were almost none among the people that were taught. There were almost none during our times.

Q: What do you think inspired your father to want to teach you and the other children that had time to come?

#51D: [I] wonder how it happened, but in general he was a good-natured person. [He] was good-natured and must have thought about doing good to others. However, I cannot say exactly one way or the other.

Q: What kind of a student were you?

#51D: Yes?

Q: What kind of a student were you when father was teaching?

00:11:29

#51D: People used to say that since [I] was father’s son---my father was called Jogo Karma and it was said, “[He] is Jogo Karma’s son and should be good in studies.” Everybody passed such comments, but father used to tell me, “[People] take it for granted that you are good in studies because you are my son but you are not good.” I used to be thus scolded. [I] think I was a naughty child and did not like to study unless given a beating. [Laughs]

Q: So how many years did you say that you actually were learning from your father? This was Tibetan writing and reading, correct?

#51D: [I] studied for three, four or nearly five years and am proficient enough in reading to challenge anyone. [I] could not learn to write well because my father died when I was 13 years old. Father passed away and I did not get to complete my writing lessons.

Q: How did your father die?

#51D: [He] passed away when I was 13 and [I] do not know the exact ailment that caused the death. [He] was ill, but [I] do not know what it was as I was too young to know the type of ailment that caused the death. [He] was ill for a long time, perhaps five or six months to nearly a year and then passed away. [I] suspect it was what we called *beken*, a type of gastritis in our region.

Q: Did you ever understand or hear why your father left the monastery and began a family?

00:14:23

#51D: [Laughs] I cannot say what led to [his] leaving monkhood. It is a misfortune that [he] could not continue as a monk and had to leave it. It is unfortunate but I cannot say what caused father to leave monkhood.

Q: What happens after your father dies? What happens to you in your life?

#51D: I did not face difficulties with my livelihood after the death of father because mother was present. However, [I] dropped my studies completely up until the time I left for India, which was in the year '55. I was 20 years old in the year '55 and then I recalled what [I] had learned earlier.

I never studied between the ages of 13 and 20, as mother could not understand even if letters were written upside-down. I only assisted in field works and never gave a thought to studies. These days such [men] are called wayward and perhaps [I] became wayward then, never doing any studies. [I] even forgot what was learned earlier.

Q: When did that change that helping with the farm? Well, let me backtrack and ask, did you miss studying with your father or did you try to continue on your own a little bit?

#51D: Well, the wish to study...[shakes head to say “no”]. It dawned on me after coming to India and [I] regretted that following father’s passing away, I did not complete what father had taught me and that was a sad affair. I felt regret then, but not when [I] was younger like 15 or 16 years old.

Q: But when you said “until I reached India,” did you after reaching India—you had some regret about not having studied more?

00:17:45

#51D: Yes.

Q: When your father was teaching you, were they primarily scriptures or was it just general knowledge about Tibet?

#51D: There were general studies like it is taught in India, but primarily it was the scriptures that were taught.

Q: Can you give us some idea of what would be the general subjects or studies that your father wanted you to try to understand?

#51D: The initial study in Tibetan was the *choeshay* ‘dharma teaching.’ I told you earlier that my father was a monk at a small monastery called Muksang Gonpa. The initial recitation was the *choeshay* that contained around 300 pages that one had to memorize. And then there were *solka* ‘petition offerings to the protector deities’ and *shido* ‘scriptures on the peaceful and wrathful deities’ that were memorized. *Thecho* was also studied. There were many to learn like Pema Kathang ‘life of Padma Sambhava’ and all. There was a lot to memorize.

Q: These are about the dharma, right?

#51D: They are dharma lessons.

Q: What was taught generally? Wasn’t there anything else in general that was taught?

#51D: What?

Q: Was it only dharma and not others that were taught?

00:19:23

#51D: It was just that in general and different stories of Ling that were taught in our region. However, scripture books were rare and except about the dharma, books were not in plenty like these days. *Choeshay*, *solka*, Kathang and such were studied.

Q: When did your life begin to change after your farming from 13-20? Did anything change?

#51D: My late father’s benefactor was Jamyang Chokyi Lodro. Jamyang Chokyi Lodro was our root guru. I became his attendant. At the age of 20 in 1955, when Jamyang Chokyi Lodro left Derge for India on pilgrimage, I came as his attendant to India.

Q: Did you know the guru before you became...

#51D: [Interrupts] It was in 1955.

Q: Going on pilgrimage to India. So that would have been, you would have been 20 years old if you were... You’re 80 now and you were born in 1932. So this would have been 1952.

#51D: It was 1955 when I left the village.

Q: [You] left in the year '55.

#51D: [I] left in '55.

Q: Oh, 1955. Okay.

#51D: In the year '55 [I] left Kham for Lhasa.

Q: And how old...?

00:22:02

#51D: [Interrupts] It took almost a year between them [Kham and Lhasa]. In the year '56 [we] toured all the pilgrim sites of Tibet, all the pilgrim sites of Tibet.

Q: In the year '56?

#51D: In the year '56. [I] left the village in '55. [I] left the village in '55 and did the rounds of pilgrim sites of Tibet in the year '56.

Q: When you took this...Were you asked by the guru to be his helper and were you the only helper he had or did he have other people?

#51D: There were many helpers. We were around 20 helpers.

Q: Yes?

#51D: There were many attendants. In our region [a lama] had many attendants like *chanzoe* 'treasurer,' *nyepa* 'store keeper' and such. There were around 20 helpers.

Q: Twenty?

#51D: Yes.

Q: Were you invited...You are invited because your father had had him as a guru? Was that the reason you were invited or did you ask to go or volunteer? How did that happen?

00:24:00

#51D: That is it. He was my father's root guru.

Q: Did you ask to be taken?

#51D: [I] did not. My father had passed away and he [Jamyang Chokyi Lodro] sympathized and took me along to see the pilgrim sites.

Q: Were you pleased to be going or worried about it or excited? What was your feeling?

#51D: [I] was very happy to be going on the pilgrimage, extremely happy. Though a young [person] does not have much thought about the dharma, yet [I] felt greatly excited that I was going to other places and see different things. [I] was overjoyed.

Q: It was quite an adventure.

#51D: [Speaks before interpreter] The journey was not a very happy one. Except for Jamyang Chokyi Lodro and 5-6 attendants, the rest of us had to walk. [We] walked for 6-7 months. [I] was young then and faced great problems. [Laughs]

Q: Before I hear about your journey, was it typical for people to go away from home for a year or two on pilgrimage from your community?

00:26:14

#51D: It was uncommon to be able to go on pilgrimage though there were one or two, and a few traders. Long ago when I was small, it was rare to find anyone going on trade or pilgrimage. There were only one or two.

Q: What would be a more typical length of a pilgrimage then for going to India?

#51D: Yes?

Q: Were there people that went on short pilgrimages?

#51D: There were those from our region that went on short pilgrimages like to the sites of Pema Koe, Tsari and Khawa Karpo.

Q: How long would that kind of pilgrimage take?

#51D: Yes?

Q: How long did it take for the pilgrimage to Pema Koe and Tsari?

00:27:37

#51D: I have not been but Khawa Karpo and the Tsari pilgrimage...the Tsari pilgrim site was opened only once in 12 years. [I] believe there was no route, as the tribesmen did not permit it. Perhaps the pilgrimage to Tsari took two or three months.

Q: What do you think is the reason that people like to go on pilgrimages?

#51D: That is because [they] are thinking about the dharma. Just as it is mentioned in the dharma that one earns merit by going on pilgrimages and making prostrations, it is those people that are aware that go [on pilgrimages].

Q: Going on pilgrimage and doing prostrations?

#51D: Yes.

Q: How did the families manage if someone like yourself, you are a young strong man leaves the farm? How does the mother manage to continue to do the work with her animals and her fields?

#51D: It was not possible for a family with few members to go on pilgrimage. One would not be able to go leaving the animals and the regular work. Nobody would go. However, it was those with many members in the family or felt strongly about the dharma that went on pilgrimages.

Q: When this retinue of 20 people set off from Derge, was there any celebration or farewell for your journey?

00:30:38

#51D: That did not happen because it had been many years since the Chinese had appeared in our region. Except a few people in the monastery, Jamyang Chokyi Lodro did not reveal our leaving on a pilgrimage to anyone. He had said, "Times are not good. It's better to embark on a pilgrimage." He told only a very few close people and just mentioned that he was going on a short pilgrimage and not to Tibet [Utsang Province]. We came away in secret.

Q: Did you have to take permission from the Chinese to go on pilgrimage?

#51D: If the pilgrimage trip became known, there was the risk that the Chinese might try to stop it. There was the danger that [they] might stop [us]. Hence, [we] left in secret.

Q: Tell me before we follow your journey on the pilgrimage, can you just tell us briefly what conditions were like around your...right in your community? What was happening that you saw with your eyes?

#51D: At that time the people were engaged in the usual activities like farming or nomadic work, but it had been 5-6 years since the Chinese appeared. The Chinese gave training in farming and opened shops in bigger places. The Chinese were treating [the people] well when we were living in Kham because though it was a strategy to deceive in the future; they were being very good then. When we were in the village the Chinese did not cause any suffering or suppression or conduct *thamzing* 'struggles sessions.' Initially they treated very well and gradually began to constrict.

Q: Tell us when you...Just one last question about the Chinese. Why do you think the Chinese didn't want the lama to go on a pilgrimage? What is your opinion about why?

00:34:02

#51D: The lama was quite famous and it was a suspicion that they might stop [him] from leaving. However, there was not any incident of anyone having been stopped at that time. It was a suspicion and [we] left in secret without informing the Chinese.

Q: What was your lama famous for?

#51D: Jamyang Chokyi Lodro was a most learned lama in dharma teachings in the lower part of Dhokham. He had knowledge in the *lung* ‘oral transmission’ of the teachings of all the sects, whether it was Sakya, Gelug, Kagyu or Nyingma and was held in high esteem. If a Sakya lama came here from Tibet and asked, “Please teach me” he [Jamyang Chokyi Lodro] knew the *lung*. Likewise if a Gelug lama approached, whatever the *lung* that was required [to be taught], he knew it. Therefore, he was famous in Derge, the lower part of Dhokham. His Holiness the Dalai Lama too held him in high esteem.

Q: Can you please tell us his full name, the lama’s full name?

#51D: Jamyang Chokyi Lodro Rigmay Tenphel Gyaltsen. Jamyang Chokyi Lodro Rigmay Tenphel Gyaltsen Pal Sangpo. That is the full name we use while praying but in short [he] was called Jamyang Chokyi Lodro.

Q: What sect was he in?

00:36:48

#51D: He hailed from the place Sakya. However, his leanings were more towards Nyingma. [He] felt stronger for Nyingma, but *rigmay* ‘non-sectarian’ means that he is a lama of Sakya, Gelug, Nyingma and Kagyu. That is what Rigmay [his name] means. Jamyang Chokyi Lodro Rigmay Tenphel Gyaltsen: *rigmay* means not just your sect but encompassing all.

Q: Was [he] actually Nyingma?

#51D: He had stronger leanings toward Nyingma. The monastery that he lived in was a Sakya Gonpa.

Q: So meaning he could marry?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: No, he embraced all four sects of Buddhism.

Q: He embraced all but he was from the Sakya Monastery in Derge?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: He lived in the Sakya Monastery in Derge.

Q: He was a Nyingma originally? What had he studied in originally? What sect?

#51D: I do not know what [he] studied originally or what next. [Laughs]

Q: What he did is he embraced all the sects and he lived at the Sakya Monastery. And so...

#51D: [Interrupts] I have received many teachings from Jamyang Chokyi Lodro when [I] was younger but one did not have interest in the dharma when one is young. I was ignorant about the joy of receiving such teachings. [I] cannot remember when each of the teachings were given.

Q: About how long was Jamyang Chokyi Lodro...About what age when he started on the journey with you?

00:39:10

#51D: [He] was 62 or 63 then. [I] know that [his] birth sign was the sheep. Was it 62 or 63? He left during the *kak* ‘astrological obstacle year;’ [I] think he was 62. The birth sign was the sheep.

Q: When you left Derge, can you tell us what direction did the journey go, take you and what was the next place you stopped?

#51D: There was one route called Shunglam and another called Lhomarong. We had to drive horses and mules and took the route called Jangmarong. The one called Shunglam circled Tibet and another passed through the northern part and was called Jangmarong. There was one called Lholam, but we took the middle one called Jangmarong.

Q: Which means...

#51D: [Interrupts] I told you that it took around seven months.

Q: Towards the northern direction?

#51D: [The route] was called Jangmarong, meaning between the *jang* ‘north’ and *rong* ‘valley.’

Q: From the northern direction?

#51D: Yes, from the northern direction, close to the northern direction. It was called Jangmarong...Jangmarong. It was called Jangmarong; the name of the route was Jangmarong.

Q: Okay, and this was in 1955, we’re just starting out. I forgot to ask how did you get out of the village or the monastery without the Chinese seeing 20 people leaving?

00:41:09

#51D: Initially when [we] left the village it was not mentioned that [we] were going on pilgrimage to Lhasa but to short distance pilgrim sites that were many in Kham. However, as [we] progressed there were numerous merchants and other travellers and the Chinese were not aware.

Q: You took the road to Jangmarong and where did that take you?

#51D: [Speaks before question is interpreted] At the time of our journey the Chinese were present only in bigger towns like Chamdo, Lhasa, Shigatse and Gyangtse. The Chinese had not been able to spread out to the smaller places. In our region of Kham, the Chinese were there in Derge, Gonchen, Jamdha and Yilung and not in the smaller villages.

Q: How many people were on foot and how many people were riding animals? What kind of animals were they riding?

#51D: [I] cannot give you every detail but five or six were riding horses. There were many horses and mules, around 15-20 that carried supplies. The rest of us who were 15 or 13 were on foot.

Q: Did you have to bring all of your supplies or were you hoping to purchase things along the way?

00:44:11

#51D: Unlike in India or elsewhere, there were no shops or hotels where one could purchase things easily in our region. One must carry food supplies to last at least a month at the start of the journey. And then as you progressed, you buy in whichever place you reach.

If one took the Shunglam route, unless one had ready food for the day, it seems there were none to buy along the route. The route we took called the Jangmarong, there were villages one came across along the route from which one could buy stuff. Occasionally there was a day or two without any villages. Otherwise, it was not a very barren route.

Q: Just in general what kind of supplies would you take with you that would last a month? Could you name the kind of foods that you would take?

#51D: In the olden days it was butter, *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley,' meat, cheese, and wheat flour to make bread. That is about it since there were not many different things in the past. [Laughs]

Q: What about for drinking?

#51D: [Silent]

Q: All these are things to eat.

#51D: Yes, yes.

Q: [What about] for drinking?

#51D: The things to carry...

Q: Drinking, for drinking.

#51D: What?

Q: For drinking.

00:46:31

#51D: You drank water whenever you came across it and [sought] from the villages during the day. In the evening one camped wherever there was water and wood available. While making camp in the evening, one needed a good place to rest and grass for the animals. There should be wood and water too. So one looked for such a place along the way. [Laughs] Going on a journey was difficult in [our] region long ago. It was not simple like travelling by vehicles now.

Q: Were you always able to find a place like that at the end of each day?

#51D: At times you had to journey an entire day to come across [such a place] and at times only half a day. [We] would inquire from the villagers. For instance, if one reached Palampur [Himachal Pradesh, India], you asked after how many kilometers—though there were no kilometers then—you asked about the place, the availability of grass and water and if there was a good place to set up camp. If you were informed that there was not one for a long distance, you set up camp there itself. [We] kept making enquiries.

Q: What were your duties for the lama at this point in the journey?

00:48:49

#51D: I was the youngest among all the attendants and did not have any responsibilities. [Laughs] I was taken along for the pilgrimage because my father was considered a valuable attendant. I was young then, about 20 years old. [I] did not have any particular responsibilities.

Q: So what did you...?

#51D: [Interrupts] Being young, [I] was sent on errands saying, “You go. You go and do this.” [Laughs]

Q: What was the altitude like? Was it similar to your own village area or did you start to climb?

#51D: The journey was very difficult at times. Talking about the road makes one sad. At times you were happy and at times it was incredibly difficult.

Q: Did [you] have to climb high?

00:50:08

#51D: If one started to climb a slope like that [points to right] at 7-8 o'clock in the morning, one would still be climbing it at this time. There were many mountain slopes to climb and it was very difficult. One would have to climb two slopes a day but at times it was even ground. The countryside was different and not similar throughout.

Q: Did you always get over the pass or sometimes did you have to camp halfway up?

#51D: [We] camped halfway on passes if there was good grass and water. If there was grass, water and a good space to camp...travelling was very difficult. One must also keep in

mind the robbers while setting camp. There were many things to consider. Some places were said to abound in thieves and robbers and one would have to move on from such places.

Q: Did you ever run into any and what did they do?

#51D: Thank God [we] did not encounter any. [I] think it was thanks to the lama that [we] did not face any such incidents. Along the way, people who knew that the lama was Jamyang Chokyi Lodro gave us water and firewood and extended help. They even escorted us for a day or two along the way.

Q: I forgot to ask, but what time of the year did you start on the journey and did you do any kind of prediction or astrological reading to tell you what was a good day or just pick a day?

00:53:00

#51D: [I] wonder what time [of the year] it was. I am not sure what season it was, whether summer, winter or spring. [Laughs]...Wonder when it was. As is the practice in the region, a prediction must have been sought for a good day. I am not sure about it.

Q: Is it no knowledge because you've forgotten? Is that why?

#51D: [I] cannot recall.

Q: What kind of memories do remain when you think of the beginning or middle of that journey? What pictures can you still describe for us?

#51D: At times it was taking so long to reach Lhasa and the journey was difficult that [I] regretted going. [Laughs] I have thought like that. However, everyone considered Lhasa a holy place and we had no...Only after reaching Tibet [Lhasa] [did we plan to] come to India. Otherwise, initially when [we] set off from our region, [we] were to observe the situation in Tibet [Lhasa] and had no intention of coming to India. [I] was hoping to make a good pilgrimage of the holy sites of Tibet and was happy at times and faced problems occasionally that [I] regretted coming on the journey being young then. [Laughs]

Q: How long did it take you to get to Lhasa?

#51D: Including the pilgrimage of Tibet [we] spent nearly a year in Lhasa. The distance from Lhasa to our region Derge in Kham is as far as from here [Tashi Jong, India] to Lhasa. It is that far. People in our region believed that if one could visit Lhasa once in a lifetime, it was almost like one need not suffer in hell and that a good religious practice had been achieved. It used to be said that one must visit Lhasa once in a lifetime.

It was believed that if one visited Lhasa, saw Lhasa and the Jowo 'statue of Buddha Sakyamuni' one need not suffer in hell.

Q: [Derge is as far from Lhasa as] from here in this town [to Lhasa], right?

00:56:33

#51D: It is far; it is very far. For instance, it is 3-4 days drive from here to Lhasa. It took 3-4 days in a Chinese vehicle from Derge, Kham [to Lhasa].

Q: Three days?

#51D: Yes, the journey was 3-4 days.

Q: *Aku-la*, you said it took 3-4 days to get from Derge to Lhasa and we are now in Tashi Jong, which is about two hours south of Dharamsala. So from here you said it would take 3-4 days by car to get to Lhasa.

#51D: It is something like that.

Q: We have that right. Good.

#51D: It is just an estimate.

Q: I understand. How many of the people in the group of about 20 people, were they lay people, monks, were they old or young? Can you tell us about some of the people who were on this pilgrimage?

00:58:17

#51D: From the 20 people, [I] think five were monks; five or six including Rinpoche were monks. Then there were Rinpoche's niece and [her] mother. We were 8-9 lay people.

Q: Was there a niece of Rinpoche?

#51D: Yes.

Q: How many nieces?

#51D: One niece and one or two children.

Q: How did your feet manage on that long first part of the journey? How were your feet or did you suffer any injuries on your body from that trek?

#51D: Some of the others...I did not suffer much but our colleagues like Rinpoche's niece and her children complained of pain in the feet and being unable to walk at times. [They] faced great problems along the route such that it was difficult to carry on.

Q: And when he couldn't walk, was he able to ride a horse?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: She—niece of the lama.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: The niece? Oh, the niece. I thought you said "knees"! The young niece of the lama, I see. She could hardly walk.

Q: And so did they give her a horse, a ride on a horse?

#51D: Only 5-6 noble people owned horses while...

Q: Did the niece have a horse?

#51D: [She] did not have a horse.

Q: [She] didn't have a horse to ride?

#51D: No, the niece, her two children and we attendants did not own horses.

Q: So everybody walked. Do you remember the first time you saw the Potala Palace? What was your reaction to it?

01:01:20

#51D: The first thing we did after reaching Lhasa was to see the Jowo, the Jowo of Lhasa. [We] went to see the Jowo and then the Potala. One had to submit an application to His Holiness the Dalai Lama seeking an appointment for Jamyang Chokyi Lodro to receive an audience. An application had to be submitted and unless an appointment for the next day or that day was scheduled, one could not see [His Holiness].

Q: Did you get permission?

#51D: Since Jamyang Chokyi Lodro was a revered lama we received permission that very day. Following the permission [we] saw His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The audience of His Holiness the Dalai Lama was held in a huge room with cushions as seating for Jamyang Chokyi Lodro. We were allowed to sit on the wooden floor. As a mark of ceremony, tea and sweetened rice was served. Sweetened rice and tea was served, as His Holiness the Dalai Lama thought highly of Jamyang Chokyi Lodro.

Jamyang Chokyi Lodro was presented with a picture of His Holiness the Dalai Lama of this size [gestures off camera] along with a ceremonial scarf. The [gifts] offered [to His Holiness the Dalai Lama] were various kinds of brocades, gold, silver, etc. as per tradition. Perhaps it was 20-30 minutes that they held a conversation. Jamyang Chokyi Lodro was presented a yellow blessed string while all of us attendants were given red ones. [We] received a good audience.

The conversation went like this: His Holiness said that he had heard that a revered lama from Kham called Jamyang Chokyi Lodro was arriving on pilgrimage. "That is most beneficial and as you go on the pilgrimage to the holy sites of Tibet, please offer consecrations and dedicate prayers at all the pilgrim sites," His Holiness gave this advice to Jamyang Chokyi Lodro.

Q: What was your reaction to seeing His Holiness?

01:06:08

#51D: [I] was incredibly...Without the help of Jamyang Chokyi Lodro, it would have been impossible to receive an audience of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. It was not possible. Thanks to Jamyang Chokyi Lodro, [I] received an exceptional audience. [I] was incredibly happy.

Then His Holiness the Dalai Lama issued a letter stating that Jamyang Chokyi Lodro was on pilgrimage to Tibet and advised each region to receive him warmly. Precious objects were locked and sealed in shrines by the Tibetan Government. The letter permitted Jamyang Chokyi Lodro to open these, take the images out and bless the pilgrims, consecrate and keep them back and put his seal. Such a letter was issued and the entire pilgrimage in Tibet took a year.

Normally one could accomplish pilgrimage to Yiru Bakor, Lhonay Gyepa and Songay in 2-3 months. However, His Holiness the Dalai Lama had advised [Jamyang Chokyi Lodro] to tour and consecrate every pilgrim site and to visit all monasteries irrespective of size. We started on the pilgrimage from Lhasa in the 2nd Tibetan Lunar month of 1956.

Q: Yiru Bakor and where?

#51D: Initially [we went to] Yiru Bakor and from Yiru Bakor to Dhodak Monastery, then to the speaking Dolma of Tandu, Samye, Yarlung Sheda, Dayangzom; all these pilgrim sites like Tseringjong are located in Yarlung. Rinchen Dupuk, Tseringjong are pilgrim spots of Yarlung. One went towards Lhokha for the pilgrim sites of Lhonay.

Q: That's what took a year, visiting all those sites?

01:09:57

#51D: It took a full year. Starting on the pilgrimage from Lhasa in the 2nd Tibetan lunar month [we] arrived in Sakya in Tsang in the 11th Tibetan lunar month.

Q: Please name as many as you can remember.

#51D: As I told you just now the Yiru Bakor pilgrim sites consisted of Samye, the speaking Dolma of Tandu, Tseringjong and Gangri Thokar. Among the important pilgrim spots were Yarlung Sheda, Tseringjong, Zongkamphu, Samye Yamalung, Samye Chinphor, etc. There were numerous pilgrim sites in Yarlung.

There were many pilgrim sites like Zongri Karmo, and Gangri Karmo, which was the holy site of Machi Lapchi Dolma and highly revered. There were numerous pilgrim sites. If you can note them, I have no problem in mentioning. [Laughs]

Q: When you went to these sites, did you stay for a couple of days and can you tell us how you were greeted? How your entourage was greeted?

#51D: [The people] extended a grand reception at the pilgrim sites. There was the letter from His Holiness the Dalai Lama and it was also proclaimed in Tibet that Jamyang

Chokyi Lodro was on a pilgrimage, as he was a very famous lama. We faced problems only during the journey from [our] region to Lhasa while it was most enjoyable during the yearlong pilgrimage. All the aristocrat patrons...For instance, if you [addressing interpreter] were a wealthy aristocrat family, you hosted [Jamyang Chokyi Lodro] for a week and then he [pointing off camera] invited [him] for a week. [We] were not left alone and so it took a long while visiting the aristocrats and doing the rounds of pilgrim sites too. [Laughs]

Q: Would all the people on the pilgrimage be invited or just a few people?

01:13:23

#51D: When each of the aristocrats extended an invitation for a week, it was for the whole entourage. They made preparations for us.

Q: Oh my!

#51D: [Laughs]

Q: What were your duties for the lama? You were his servant and maybe his charge but also a servant, so how did you help him?

#51D: I was a regular attendant and did not have any particular responsibilities because I was young then.

Q: Well, 20.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Twenty.

Q: This was in 1956. You said you left home in 1955; it took a year and so maybe it's even '57 by the time you're going around Lhasa. What were the conditions in Lhasa in terms of the Chinese presence? What did you see?

#51D: [Speaks before translation is complete] [We] left [our] region in the year '55 and reached Lhasa in the 11th or 12th Tibetan lunar month of '55 and stayed in Lhasa for 2-3 months until the 2nd Tibetan lunar month of '56. Then [we] embarked on the pilgrimage in Lhasa in the year '56.

Q: Yes, so what was the situation like in Lhasa in the years '56 and '57?

01:15:29

#51D: [I] told you yesterday [during pre-interview] that after the pilgrimage in Sakya in the 12th Tibetan lunar month of '56, [we] set off towards Thoe and without seeking permission from the Chinese, left for Sikkim in secret. [We] were coming to India through Lachen and Lachung [Sikkim] in the last month of '56.

Q: In the last month of '56 through Thoe?

#51D: Yes, [we] came to Sikkim through Thoe. [We] were able to arrive in India that year.

[I] have left out some parts here. We arrived in Sakya in the 11th Tibetan lunar month after completing the pilgrim sites of Tibet. At Sakya Jamyang Chokyi Lodro gave the empowerment of Chenrezig ‘Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, the patron saint of Tibet’ where around 30,000 people gathered. [They] must have arrived from in and around Sakya. Around 30,000 people gathered. Jamyang Chokyi Lodro gave the Chenrezig empowerment.

01:16:50

At the time of the empowerment, it had been three years since the Chinese’ arrival in Sakya. The Chinese officials had been calling the people to gather to announce the fine customs of the Communists and how Mao Zedong was as loving as a parent and the warm sun. You know they have numerous such statements and that was the time when the announcements were being made.

They [Chinese officials] said that it was three years since their arrival and not more than 300-400 [people] would gather. They were amazed and said, “You are a revered lama and it’s amazing that 30,000 people have gathered for you.” That very day they said, “You, Jamyang Chokyi Lodro have come from Derge in Kham. You are aware that our Chinese customs are incredibly good and that [we] are here to help the people. Please convey this to the people.” A Chinese official offered a ceremonial scarf and made this request while the empowerment was in session in Sakya.

Once the Chinese official had [asked him] to say that the Chinese were good, [he] was obliged to speak a few good words for the Chinese. [He stated] that the Chinese were good and were helpful to poor people and that they [the people] were to listen to the advice given by them [Chinese]. [He] was forced to speak a few lines. The next day we...Our earlier plan was to return to Lhasa after the pilgrimage to Sakya and observe the situation in Lhasa. [We] were to remain in Lhasa and there was no plan to go to India. However, after the Chinese said that we became suspicious and secretly left for Thoe and then to Sikkim without seeking permits from the Chinese. [We] secretly fled to India.

Q: Do you know what your lama...Was he upset that he was put in that position to be a mouthpiece for the Chinese?

01:20:45

#51D: [He] was not comfortable but was forced to say so. Because [he] was not comfortable, the next day 15-20 members of the retinue gathered for *solka* ‘petition offerings to the protector deities’ and then a divination sought for whether to return to Lhasa or go to India. The answer was to proceed to India.

Q: What was it that was sought?

#51D: It was a divination called *thadiphen* that we did.

Q: Was it by using dough balls?

#51D: A prayer assembly was held and petition offerings made to protective deities and then [a divination] sought as to whether to go to India or return to Lhasa and the answer was “Go to India.” And fortunately we managed to escape to India.

Q: Who did the divination?

01:22:07

#51D: The divination was conducted at a monastery where 15-20 members of the retinue held a prayer assembly. Jamyang Chokyi Lodro also attended the prayer assembly and on the last day, the divination was sought.

Q: Who did the divination?

#51D: It was Jamyang Chokyi Lodro himself. He did it.

Q: How was it done?

#51D: Seeking a divination meant that there would be two rolled papers [with the words] “Go to India” and “Remain in Lhasa” written. I think it is like that but am not exactly sure. From the two rolled papers, [he] picked one and opened it and this was the one. This rolled paper contained the words “Go to India.”

Q: How did you feel when you heard that announcement?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: To go to India?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: To go to India.

Q: How did you feel when you heard that you had to go to India?

#51D: I cannot say whether I felt happy or sad. When [we] reached India, reached Gangtok...[I] had never been to India before and then [we] were in Gangtok, in Sikkim. [I] had never seen bamboo earlier and there were huge bamboo plants and mountains covered with mist. The region was very unlike Tibet and there was a strange feeling of joy and fear for a few days.

India was different from Tibet. It was a mixed feeling. We were used to eating from a bowl in Tibet and when served rice in a plate...being served in a plate felt like it was food for animals and not humans when one ate in a big plate. [Laughs]

Q: What other things were very different for you because Tibet is very different than India, right, if you come south? What other things did you see that were shocking or surprising?

01:25:42

#51D: One did not know the language. When one did not know the language...though on one hand it was extremely joyful that [I] was able to escape from the Chinese, yet arriving in a strange country brought on an uneasy feeling for a long time. However, one gets

accustomed to it as time goes by. After arriving in Sikkim, Jamyang Chokyi Lodro being a famous lama was invited by the king of Sikkim to live in a big house close to the palace. All of us lived near the palace with guards surrounding it. It was a most happy period for 2-3 years. At that time the bride of the King of Sikkim was a princess of the Rakatsang.

Q: Whose princess?

#51D: The aristocrats Rakatsang of Tibet.

Q: Rakatsang?

#51D: A daughter of the Rakatsang.

Q: Rakatsang?

#51D: Yes. The wife of the prince was a daughter of the Samdup Phodang. It seems the kings used to take the daughters of aristocrats of Tibet as brides.

Q: Whose wife was the daughter of Samdup Phodang?

#51D: The prince's wife.

Q: When you entered India...I'm not sure I got...What part...?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Sikkim.

Q: Oh, you came through Sikkim. Is that where you stayed for a while in Sikkim? Okay. Did the entire group stay with you or did some people choose to go back to Derge?

01:28:26

#51D: One or two took leave and went back while [the rest remained] in Sikkim from '57-'59. In '59, the year we lost Tibet Jamyang Chokyi Lodro passed away. The Sikkim [royal family] served him exceptionally well for three years.

Q: Did [Jamyang Chokyi Lodro] pass away in the year '59?

#51D: Sikkim is actually [part of] India, but since the princesses were Tibetan aristocrats, [they] followed Tibet's traditions and treated [us] very well.

Q: Did [Jamyang Chokyi Lodro] pass away in the year '59?

#51D: [He] passed away in '59.

Q: Did one or two people return?

#51D: Yes, and I too went back to Lhasa at the end of '58 because I had heard that my mother and a few relatives had reached Lhasa from [our] region. So I took leave and went

there. It was a terrible coincidence that [I] reached Lhasa at the time we lost Tibet. Until then I had been living happily in India. I arrived in Lhasa during the time Tibet was lost.

Q: So when you got permission to go back, did you go all the way to Derge?

01:30:20

#51D: [I] did not go to Derge. My mother and the others arrived in Lhasa and during the uprising of '59, thanks to having gone on the pilgrimage earlier, [I] had a rough idea of the directions and route to India. Hence, all of us including mother and the relatives managed to escape to India.

Q: Out of Lhasa?

#51D: Escaped from Lhasa to India in the year '59 when the riots took place.

Q: How did your mother get from Derge to Lhasa?

#51D: They too seemed to have come like us, journeying for years and months.

Q: If I follow this, in 1958 you went back to Lhasa, got your mother and came back to India?

#51D: Yes, [we] arrived in the year '59 along with the Tibetan escapees of the uprising.

Q: So you were in Lhasa when it was attacked and invaded by the Chinese?

#51D: I was in the direction of Lhoka when the Chinese attacked. Lhoka is near Tsona, Mon Tawang and Shawo. Shawo is close to Mangola. Khata and Jora are parts of Lhoka. I was there, fleeing in that direction.

Q: During the escape?

#51D: Yes.

Q: It's near Bhutan, right?

01:32:43

#51D: It is almost near Bhutan, close to the Monpa region.

Q: And was that because you were on your way back to India?

#51D: [I] was on the flight to India. It took us another two days to reach Indian Territory after we had heard that Lhasa was lost during the journey. One had to walk the whole way through. There were numerous escapees and it was like hell then.

Q: You said that your lama died in 1959. He died in India and were you with him at that time?

#51D: I took the route through Lhoka and then Mon Tawang [Arunachal Pradesh] in India during the escape. The journey of Jamyang Chokyi Lodro and the attendants to India had been in the direction of Sikkim. However, when I brought my mother and relatives, it was through the region of the tribesmen, the Monpa, and arrived in Mon Tawang. The news of Jamyang Chokyi Lodro was broadcast over the radio. I was in Bomdila then.

At that time we had lost our country and [people] were fleeing due to the suffering and killing that were taking place after Tibet was invaded, and then [I] heard the bad news of the passing away of my root guru. That was the saddest time of my life. All these [tragedies] happened at the same time. Following the news of Tibet's invasion, [I] heard the news of Jamyang Chokyi Lodro's passing away over the radio.

Q: Did your beloved lama die after His Holiness had left Tibet or before?

01:35:50

#51D: [I] think His Holiness the Dalai Lama had already arrived in India. [He] had arrived; [he] was able to come. Perhaps there was a disparity of 2-3 months. His Holiness the Dalai Lama also took the route through Lhoka. [He] came through Lhoka.

Q: Do you know what caused the death of your lama?

#51D: He was suffering from the illness called *mukpo* 'gastric bleeding' and had not been well for a year or two. [He] also suffered from the heat of India. During summer [he] moved to Darjeeling [West Bengal], a place that is cool and spent a few months and stayed the winter in Gangtok [Sikkim]. [I] think it was both the heat and the *mukpo*. He was around 65 years old when [he] passed away.

Q: Where was his remains placed? Were they ever taken back to Tibet or did they have a shrine for him in India?

#51D: After the body was consigned to flames in Sikkim, the relics were kept for many years in Gangtok. It was placed in the northern side of a temple constructed close to the palace for many years. It has been 5-6 years that the next reincarnation escorted it here. The reliquary is tall, around five feet.

Q: Is it the actual remains?

01:38:19

#51D: The reliquary may contain the relics and other revered items. In certain cases we have a custom of keeping the entire body but it is not in this case. The body has been consigned to flames.

Q: Consigned to flames already.

#51D: Yes, consigned to flames.

Q: It's now here?

#51D: Yes, it can be seen in Bir [Himachal Pradesh].

Q: In Bir?

#51D: Yes.

Q: Is his reincarnation in Bir right now?

#51D: Yes. The big institution in Chauntara belongs to him. Jamyang Chokyi Lodro's reincarnation was born in Bhutan.

Q: Have you met him?

#51D: [Speaks before question is translated] The mother is pure Bhutanese and the father is the older son of Dudjom Rinpoche. [I] cannot recall the name of the lama but [he] is the older son of Dudjom Rinpoche.

Q: Was he Tibetan?

#51D: Yes, the father.

Q: Father a Tibetan?

#51D: Yes, the father.

Q: Have you met the reincarnation?

01:39:57

#51D: Yes, I have seen the reincarnation and actually it is my duty to remain close to the reincarnation and serve him as an attendant. However, being a Tibetan and without education or fluency in languages, the Bhutanese do not consider us as of value. [Laughs] So I thought it better to be on my own to prevent any misunderstanding and have stayed here.

Q: One last question. I want to understand when you were in India, did you go and visit all of the sites in India where the Buddha was born and enlightened or did you just stay in Sikkim?

#51D: [I] did after coming to Bomdila, but during the earlier trip except for visits to Kalimpong and Darjeeling, [I] could not go on pilgrimage to Bodh Gaya [Bihar], Varanasi [Uttar Pradesh] or other places. When [I] arrived after '59, [I] could visit all the pilgrim sites. [I] have been to Bodh Gaya and Varanasi 3-4 times. [I] have also visited the pilgrim sites in Nepal and except for the Ajanta and Ellora pilgrim spots of India, [I] have seen all the nearby sites.

Q: *Aku-la*, this is a very wonderful story and I thank you so much for sharing it with us.

#51D: Thank you. Thank you. This is the story of only one individual and I am not capable enough to talk about what could benefit our country in the future for which [I] am sorry.

Q: The cause of Tibet is helped by every individual story and together they paint the true history of Tibet.

01:43:28

#51D: Thank you. [I] am very grateful to your doing this to preserve the stories of Tibet. I am extremely happy.

Q: I would very much appreciate if you would pray for us and for this project now and in all of your journeys and pilgrimages.

#51D: Thank you, thank you and thank you. [Laughs] Of course [I] will, though due to old age [I] may not be able to travel to distant pilgrim sites. Mainly it is what one believes and even if [I] cannot go on pilgrimages, I chant prayers regularly. And I shall always pray for success, long life and happiness for those that help the cause of Tibet.

Q: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW