

# **Tibet Oral History Project**

Interview #67D – Thupten Palmo  
May 22, 2012

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# TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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## INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #67D
2. Interviewee: Thupten Palmo
3. Age: 78
4. Date of Birth: 1934
5. Sex: Female
6. Birthplace: Kyirong Magal Thoe Surtso
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet:
9. Date of Interview: May 22, 2012
10. Place of Interview: Hotel Tibet, Mcleod Ganj, Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr
12. Interviewer: Rebecca Novick
13. Interpreter: Thupten Kelsang Dakpa
14. Videographer: Ronny Novick
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

### **Biographical Information:**

Thupten Palmo is from the Utsang region. She recalls living with her mother as a little child and going to graze animals. Later she went to receive teachings from a lama called Napta Rinpoche, who lived in a nearby monastery and mainly in solitary retreat. She became a nun around the age 17 or 18 and served the lama as one of his cooks.

Thupten Palmo gives an account of the lives of nuns and monks in the Napta Monastery and the prayers they performed. She tells how the poorer monks and nuns had to beg for *sonyom* 'alms' and went on *yulong*, 'begging for grains at the time of harvest.' She also compares life and other aspects of activities in the nunnery in Tibet to the nunneries in India.

Napta Rinpoche left his monastery after the Chinese began observing the Tibetans' activities. He retreated to an older, dilapidated monastery but passed away soon after. Thupten Palmo sadly remembers how his death rituals were performed. She explains the sometimes strange phenomenon associated with the death of great lamas, such as remaining conscious after their physical death.

After Napta Rinpoche's death, the monks and nuns dispersed and Thupten Palmo left Tibet with her mother and brother. She lived for three years in Tsum, Nepal and then went to India.

### **Topics Discussed:**

Monastic life, first appearance of Chinese.

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**Interview #67D**

**Interviewee: Thupten Palmo**

**Age: 78, Sex: Female**

**Interviewer: Rebecca Novick**

**Interview Date: May 22, 2012**

Question: *Choe-la* ‘respectful term for nun,’ could you tell us your name please?

00:00:14

**Interviewee #67D: Thupten Palmo.**

Q: Where are you from in Tibet?

**#67D: It is Surtso Deli, close to Dhingri.**

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked us to record your experiences, so that we can share your memories with many generations of Tibetans, Chinese and the rest of the world.

**#67D: [Speaks before translation is complete] He does advise.**

Q: [His Holiness] has advised the Project...

**#67D: How?**

Q: [I]’ll explain.

**#67D: Okay, okay, [I] understand.**

Q: ...to share your memories with many generations of Tibetans, Chinese and the rest of the world.

**#67D: Okay.**

Q: Your memories are going to help us to document the true history, culture and beliefs of the Tibetan people.

**#67D: Okay.**

Q: Do you give permission for the Tibet Oral History Project to use your interview?

**#67D: What does it mean by “giving permission”?**

Q: Is it okay?

00:01:43

**#67D: It should be okay. I do not have much to say since I left Tibet as a child. [I] do not have much experience. [I] worked as a coolie [upon reaching India] and then have been living at the nunnery. [I] do not have much experience [to relate].**

Q: Thank you.

**#67D: Okay.**

Q: During the interview if you want to take a break at any time, just let us know.

**#67D: Okay.**

Q: And if there's any question you'd rather not answer, that's perfectly fine.

**#67D: Okay.**

Q: *Choe-la*, if this interview was shown in Tibet or China or anywhere else in the world, would this create a problem for you?

00:02:36

**#67D: There should not be any problem, as [I] am old and nearing death. You can show it anywhere or do what you like. You can decide since I will not get to go to Tibet. It is like that.**

Q: Thank you so much.

**#67D: [Speaks before translation] Do what you normally do [with the interviews]. [I] do not have much to say, as [I] am normally a little stupid.**

Q: We really appreciate your coming today. We are very interested in what you have to tell us.

**#67D: Okay.**

Q: *Choe-la*, what was the livelihood of your parents?

**#67D: Long ago?**

Q: In Tibet.

**#67D: [They] are no more now.**

Q: Long ago in Tibet.

00:03:35

**#67D: Long ago in Tibet [they] were like nomads rearing sheep and goats.**

Q: What were your earliest memories growing up as a child?

**#67D: As a small child, [I] lived with mother, with the parents. Then [I] went to graze animals in the mountains, herding the sheep. [I] have done such tasks. There was a monastery and a lama. [I] went to receive teachings from the lama and shaved my head.**

Q: What's the name of the monastery?

**#67D: Napta.**

Q: Nipta?

**#67D: Napta. Napta.**

Q: What was the *rinpoche*'s 'reincarnate lama' name?

00:04:35

**#67D: [He] was a Khampa lama and it has been long since [he] passed away.**

Q: Kham lama?

**#67D: He arrived there from Kham and built the monastery. He used to be called Napta Rinpoche. [He] was very old and passed away. He passed away after the Chinese appeared in Tibet and just before we left. Then we fled. My mother had left earlier.**

Q: How did he give teachings? Did you used to go to the *gonpa* 'monastery' or did he come to your home?

**#67D: To the monastery where the lama would give teachings.**

Q: Did he give teachings to the people?

**#67D: If one went [to the monastery], everyone could receive teachings.**

Q: Did many people go and hear him talk?

00:05:49

**#67D: [He] gave a *kawang* 'long life empowerment' on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the 1<sup>st</sup> lunar month during which time many people went. Normally it was the monks of the monastery and nuns [that attended the teachings].**

Q: Did you used to go and ask for the teachings a lot?

**#67D: [I] used to go to receive teachings.**

Q: Along with the parents?

**#67D: Yes, along with my parents. There was the old Khampa lama who my older sister used to serve by cooking for him.**

Q: Older sister?

**#67D: Old sister who is deceased. Later I served for a few years. After the lama's demise everyone fled, as the Chinese had arrived. There were no Chinese earlier. There were a few in Dhingri and Shekar but there were no Chinese in my area.**

Q: Napta Rinpoche, what kind of person was he?

**#67D: He had taken a wife a long time ago. She had passed away and there were no children. The lama had a steward that served [him]. [He] used to be in *tsam* 'solitary meditation.'**

Q: What's *tsam*?

00:07:56

**#67D: *Tsam* meaning that one stays in a room to practice the dharma.**

Q: Meditating?

**#67D: [He] was meditating. He was very old and undertook *tsam*. The attendant served food. Earlier [he] used to come outside sometimes but later he could not. Then the Chinese arrived and times overturned. There was a monastery, sort of a dilapidated house that he used to live in long ago where he went but passed away on the way. Then all the monks and nuns of the monastery left. Some have managed to arrive here.**

Q: Was he a monk?

**#67D: He had taken a wife a long time ago when he was young. The wife had passed away long ago. There was just the lama, a steward and us two nuns that cooked food. [The steward] served the food.**

Q: Did Napta Rinpoche wear monk's robes?

**#67D: What?**

Q: Did [he] wear monk's robes?

**#67D: [He] wore monk's robes. The lama wore monk's robes. He suffered greatly here [indicates knees] and the doctor advised him warm clothing. [He] could not walk due to the illness and was very, very old.**

Q: You mentioned that the nuns left. Was he running a nunnery?

00:10:32

**#67D: A monastery for monks.**

Q: Was it a monastery for monks or a nunnery?

**#67D: There was a separate monastery for monks like the Namgyal Datsang [in Dharamsala], who were celibate and wore monks' robes. A little further away [was a nunnery] like we have Dolma Ling and other nunneries [in Dharamsala] with nuns that dressed in robes and were celibate.**

Q: Were they in separate homes?

**#67D: Yes, separate. For instance, the monks' monastery was at the Tsuglakhang [main temple in Dharamsala] where the lama also resided and a little further away was a nunnery for celibate nuns. And a little distance away was the *khowa* where people that received teachings lived. There were also [lay people] that lived in solitary meditation. There were separate monasteries and the sect [of Buddhism followed] was Nyingma.**

Q: So his students included both monks and nuns, right?

00:11:58

**#67D: Yes, there were both.**

Q: How many nuns were his students?

**#67D: Napta Rinpoche's?**

Q: How many nun students were there?

**#67D: There were around 26 in the congregation of the nunnery. Numerous monks and nuns arrived from outside to receive teachings. The monk assembly was like the Namgyal Datsang with living quarters and an assembly hall.**

Q: How many monks were there?

**#67D: There might have been 30 or 40. I cannot say exactly, as I was small then.**

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Did she mention the word *shedra*? Did she use the word *shedra*?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: I didn't hear it.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: She didn't? Okay.

Q: Tell us how did you become a nun?

00:13:25

**#67D: There was the nunnery and people received teachings like in the Tsuglakhang here. There were many monks and nuns and each one was happy. If one did not have any finance, one could go to beg for alms. We went to the villages to seek *sonyom* ‘alms.’**

Q: Was there a *sayom* ‘earthquake’?

**#67D: *Sonyom* for food to eat. [We] went to beg for food. If one’s parents were rich, they delivered food. If one did not have parents or were poor, one went to beg for alms in the villages. Then with the food, [we] lived in the mountains.**

Q: How old were you when you became a nun?

**#67D: I might have been 17 or 18 years old. Perhaps 16 or 17 [I] cannot say. There were two of us nuns who served the lama by bringing water and cooking. We cooked for the lama and [he] was in solitary meditation. Then there were teachings.**

Q: Do you remember the ceremony when you became a nun? Do you remember that?

00:15:37

**#67D: I did not live in the nunnery but as an attendant at the lama’s residence, which was like the Namgyal Datsang where you would have an abbot or His Holiness the Dalai Lama. There were two nun attendants, one that was older to me. [We] cooked and offered tea and food to those who came to visit [the lama]. There was not much work. [We] read the scriptures.**

Q: Can you describe kind of what you did in a normal day?

**#67D: In the morning the lama took hot water that we drink usually in Tibet and [he] was a Khampa. Then we offered tea along with which he ate *pa* ‘dough made from roasted barley flour and tea/water’ and some vegetable. [He] ate a meal during the day. In the evening [he] drank *thukpa* ‘noodle soup.’ It was *tsamthuk* ‘soup with *tsampa* or flour made from roasted barley.’ That was it.**

Q: Was that all?

**#67D: During the day [he] took a meal of rice or something.**

Q: What did you do? Were there any religious studies you did?

**#67D: Both of us did not go to study. There were people that visited the lama and we had to stay in the house. There were people who came to seek divinations. If the meditation was over, one could see him. One could not get an audience if [he] was in retreat. [People arrived saying,] “We face pain and sickness, please seek a divination.” So we had to be present and stayed there even if there was no work. [We] did some washing and cleaned the kitchen. That was it. The other nun and I chanted our prayers and learned the scriptures.**

Q: The nuns here, were they receiving the same teachings as the monks? Did they have access to the same teachings as the monks?

00:19:02

**#67D: There were people who made offerings. If there were deaths, people requested for prayers to be read. People came to make offerings to the monks and the nuns. There was another [group] called *khowa* that consisted of monks and nuns that were not celibate but practiced dharma. If the offering was made to an individual, he/she read the prayers. If the offering was made to the lama—in Tibet there were no money offerings—it could be clothes or other stuff and these were divided among the groups and prayers performed.**

Q: About the dharma lessons...

**#67D: About the dharma, [we] read the Dolma ‘Goddess Tara’ prayers or whatever the sponsors required.**

Q: When you were younger you used to receive teachings. Did the monks and nuns get the same teachings?

**#67D: Each one cooked for himself.**

Q: [I] mean the teachings.

**#67D: Each one studied [the lessons].**

Q: Did one study by himself?

**#67D: One studied by himself.**

Q: Were there no teachers?

00:20:16

**#67D: There were teachers to teach the monks and teachers to teach the nuns. There were separate [teachers]. You made a small payment or some food to him/her.**

**[The system] was similar to what it is now. If offerings came to the nunnery, [the nuns] ate their food and performed the necessary prayers. Just like the Namgyal Datsang and Tsenyi Datsang, each one performed the necessary prayers for which the offerings are made.**

Q: Were there any teachings that the monks were getting that the nuns were not allowed to attend that you know of?

**#67D: [The teachings] were the same.**

Q: The same?

**#67D:** [We] belonged to the Nyingma sect. Whether the monks were studying the scriptures or memorizing prayers, they appeared for tests to their monk teachers and likewise, there were teachers for the nuns. As for food, the monks ate at their monastery where they had a kitchen. The nunnery also had a kitchen. If there were funds [with the monastery/nunnery], the storekeepers provided [food] and if not, one had to fend for himself/herself. [The system] was similar to what we have now.

The [monks of] Namgyal Datsang cook for themselves and do their studies. They provide for themselves. It is the same with Tsenyi Datsang. [Nuns at] the nunnery also cook for themselves. Whatever the number of monks and nuns, when the bell rings, they go to receive their food. [They receive food] when the time comes. Otherwise, they spent time studying. The nuns at the nunnery [in Dharamsala] are studying *tsenyi* ‘debate’ but the older ones cannot. [We] just attend the prayer congregation and eat our food. [I] do not know [indicates writing].

Q: The people who taught the nuns, were they always monks or were there ever any nuns that taught you?

00:23:47

**#67D:** There were nuns who had completed their studies and also girls that taught.

Q: Were there also girls that taught?

**#67D:** Yes?

Q: Were there girls that taught?

**#67D:** There are accomplished ones that use the computer.

Q: No, no. [I mean] long ago in Tibet.

**#67D:** In Tibet? In Tibet, it was monks that taught the monks and nuns that taught the nuns. It was like that in Tibet. If there were accomplished ones, they visited [other monasteries] to teach. If someone was a highly accomplished monk, then monks/nuns requested him to teach. The system was the same. There are some highly accomplished nuns.

Q: What happened at your nunnery? How did this life change when the Chinese came?

**#67D:** When the Chinese arrived, they did not stay in the nunnery. When the Chinese appeared, they lived in some other place. Several Chinese came on horseback for observation. They arrived two or three times at our place but not more. The Chinese caused a lot of suffering to...[not discernible].

People used to say that [the Chinese] were more vindictive towards Khampa ‘people from Kham’ but the lama was old and could not walk. If [we] could flee a little further...[by traveling too far] the lama might pass away during the journey and there would be

**problems. [We] cried and requested him to move [nearby] and [he] did but did not live more than two or three months. [He] passed away.**

Q: Why did he want to go back to Kham?

00:26:37

**#67D: There was no way he could go to Kham.**

Q: Then where...?

**#67D: He moved to an old monastery nearby. The Chinese might arrive at the bigger monastery and torture the lama, which they were doing to lamas and monks. During my time there was not much suffering forced on the monks and nuns.**

Q: [He] wanted to move to a smaller monastery?

**#67D: What?**

Q: To a smaller monastery?

**#67D: There was a smaller monastery. It was an old one.**

Q: What's the name?

**#67D: It was a dilapidated one located atop a mountain in Bhiyuk.**

Q: Bhiyuk? Is Bhiyuk the name of the monastery?

**#67D: [It] is the region's name. It was an old monastery with a dilapidated structure. [He] fled there but became ill. Then [we] escorted him [back] to the new monastery where he passed away.**

Q: You said that some Chinese came on horseback, what did they want?

00:28:03

**#67D: They came on observation and went back.**

Q: Did they not say anything?

**#67D: They did not say anything but observed the area. There were a few of them that went to the new monastery that was located at Napta. Napta is where the lama's bigger monastery was located against a mountain and where all the monks and nuns lived. [The Chinese] arrived but did not say anything. There was nothing we too said. [They] did not do anything to the monastery.**

**We were fearful as [the Chinese] had observed the place. Then the lama passed away and everyone in the monastery dispersed. The monks and nuns fled. That is what I heard [later]**

since I had fled earlier with Mother and [my] brother to Nepal. The Chinese had mentioned that he [brother] would be taken to school. The lama expired. I reached there [Nepal]. Later I heard that all the monks and nuns fled. The monastery was empty.

[I] heard that presently [the monastery] is in ruins with only the walls left standing. The main assembly hall like the one Namgyal Datsang has in the center, houses sheep and cattle. Cows and other animals have eaten the scriptures. Only the walls remain now.

Q: Was there much involvement between the nuns and the local lay people, much connection, much interaction?

**#67D: There was good connection. The monks and nuns need wood and they have plenty of it.**

Q: Who?

00:30:34

**#67D: The people that lived there. The people came to sell wood at the monastery.**

Q: Did they sell wood?

**#67D: [They] did. We could not gather much while they had yaks [to transport] wood and also dung. [To interpreter] You know round-shaped animal dung? If you are born here you would not know but we do. These were for making fire. They brought them on yaks and received payment. They owned animals and some of them who knew us brought curds and milk. There was a good relationship.**

Q: Did the nuns ever go to their homes to do prayers or anything?

**#67D: [Speaks before translation is complete] At that time there were 25-30 nuns at the main nunnery that ate together like we do here. Besides, there were numerous others who lived in tiny houses practicing dharma.**

Q: Did they go to their homes?

**#67D: They went to their parents. During the harvest time in autumn, they went to their parents. [They] also went to beg, which is called *yulong*. Monks and nuns in Tibet could not live like [we] do here. One must fend for food. If one had good parents, they delivered *tsampa* ‘flour made from roasted barley’ and other things to eat. If not, the monks and nuns must go to beg called *yulong* during the time people gathered their grains.**

Q: Was it called *yulong*?

**#67D: It was called *yulong*.**

Q: *Yulong*.

**#67D: Yes, and the lay people gave good alms.**

Q: The nuns in the hills, were they doing solitary retreat?

00:33:20

**#67D: They lived alone in solitary meditation. They built houses themselves and lived...**

Q: Did they not interact with other people?

**#67D: If [they] did not interact with the villagers, [they] would need food. [They] went to their parents and relatives in the village. [We] went on *yulong* during the time the grains were gathered. [We] went to beg at the time of harvest. Poor things, [the villagers] gave well. If one asked for *tsampa*, we received it in [a part of] our robes.**

**The giving is a very good custom of the Tibetans. If you did not have any *tsampa* today, you approached at someone's door and received plenty of *tsampa* and food to eat. Nobody needed to pay for spending a night at someone's house. If you requested shelter for a night, [the house owner] even provided food. Is not this custom of Tibet good?**

**If you sought shelter, there was no talk about payment. Besides [the owner] even gave you food. Here, even if you spend a night you must pay rent.**

Q: You talked about the nuns going on alms rounds. Did you do this daily or just sometimes?

**#67D: [We] did not do the *yulong* every day. It was only during the time when grains were gathered. You see the Indian villages gathering grain? During the period of gathering grains in autumn, when monks and nuns went to beg during this time, [we] received a lot. That was during the time grains were being brought inside. It was not everyday but once a year.**

[Interviewer to interpreter]: I think we are talking at two different things. One is *yulong* where they're getting some kind of special offerings, right? But she was also talking about going in for alms, you know, which in the Theravada tradition mostly is the only way that actually the monks and nuns get food. So, I'm curious because this is the first time I've heard about this in the Tibetan tradition. So I'm wondering if it's because the nunnery was quite poor. So I guess my question has to do with how did they eat on a daily basis, you know at the nunnery?

00:36:18

**#67D: The assembly [monastery kitchen] would provide tea and *thukpa*, as people made offerings for reading prayers. People made offerings and requested prayers to be read. Each of us must take along our own *tsampa* in a bag.**

Q: One must bring one's own?

**#67D: One must bring one's own in Tibet. Here you are given bread or something. If there were sponsors, it was different but normally the assembly provided the tea or *thukpa*, if it**

was available while we took our own *tsampa* along with us. If there was a sponsor, [he/she] provided.

Q: How often would you go with your alms bowl to the village to ask for food?

**#67D: [We] did not take an alms bowl. Others in foreign countries or India carry the Buddha's alms bowl. We did not take an alms bowl. We took a *tsampa* bag if we did not have *tsampa* on a particular day and went to a village to beg.**

Q: Did you go to beg?

**#67D: [We] went to beg for alms. If there was a prayer session, nobody went [to beg] because there were offerings. [Otherwise we] did go begging.**

Q: How often did you go to beg?

00:38:16

**#67D: If your *tsampa* got exhausted, you approached someone you knew in a village to ask for *tsampa*. [We] went to beg then. If you had *tsampa* stock, you could eat that in your room when there was no prayer session. If there was a prayer session, which was once a year, we took our own *tsampa*.**

**[We] did not use an alms bowl, but each of us owned a *tsampa* bag. If there was no sponsor during an assembly session, we took our bag of *tsampa*.**

Q: When you went to beg to ask for *tsampa*, did you do this? How often would you do that?

**#67D: I did not have to go [to beg] since I was an attendant of the lama. Sponsors regularly made offerings to the lama if there was nothing to eat.**

Q: Those that went to beg for *tsampa*, did [they] do it once a week or how often?

**#67D: No, [they] did not go once a week but only at times. During the gathering of grains in autumn...**

Q: Only once a year?

**#67D: *Yulong* was to beg for grains. That was once a year.**

Q: And to beg for *tsampa*?

00:39:44

**#67D: You went to beg for *tsampa* when your stock got exhausted and you lived in the mountains. There were Khampa that went begging like that. They were similar. When your *tsampa* got exhausted, you came down the mountain to the village. One did not go begging should *tsampa* be available. If you had parents or relatives, they delivered [*tsampa*].**

Q: Napta Rinpoche, you said he passed away. Can you describe the day that he passed away?

**#67D: He was very old. [He] had always sat in solitary meditation and the seat was only so much [moves hands around knees]. [He] was a high lama and did not sit like us on beds where we can stretch our legs. It was a round wooden seat in which he sat cross-legged. [He] sat meditating.**

Q: The day he passed away...Can you describe the day?

**#67D: He suffered pain in the legs from sitting long hours. The Chinese appeared and he said he would go to the old monastery. We requested not to but [he] did. [He] said, "I am going to Zonga Kyirong. If I stay here, the Chinese will kill me." The Chinese were hostile towards the Khampa and more so as he was preaching the dharma. He had preached many times.**

**The villagers came and pleaded, "Please do not go. Stay at the monastery." [He] was escorted on a stretcher since [he] could not walk. Then [he] lived for a few months and passed away.**

Q: What did he die of?

**#67D: The Chinese did not do anything [to the lama]. The Chinese never did anything.**

Q: Did he pass away from an illness?

00:42:15

**#67D: He passed away from illness. [He] was sick and old and passed away. The Chinese had arrived but [they] did not do anything to the lama or the monastery. After the passing away of the lama, my relative and mother came to get me at Zonga Kyirong. [We] reached a place called Tsum. Many Chinese arrived and most [of the monks and nuns] fled to Sha Khumbu. Sha Khumbu is closer, just a mountain pass away. Then all the monks and nuns scattered.**

Q: When Napta Rinpoche died, who found him passed away?

**#67D: There were many attendants.**

Q: It wasn't you?

**#67D: There were me, another nun and a steward. The lama was sick and then passed away. [We] made offerings to other [monasteries]. The lama was cremated.**

Q: The body was cremated?

**#67D: Yes, the body was cremated. There were no Chinese.**

Q: When you found him, *choe-la*, was he sitting in his seat?

00:45:01

**#67D:** He was sitting like this [leans back in chair and rests head to right side]. He was asleep like this. The *jangsem karmar* ‘red and white bodhichitta’ appeared, which does for revered lamas. Milk emerged from one side and...from the other side. It was said that [*jangsem karmar*] appeared from a lama [that passed away] near the nunnery here. [We] held bowls [holds imaginary bowl below face]. Milk emerged from one and blood from the other. Those high lamas who meditated have this thing called *jangsem karmar* that emerged from their nose.

Q: *Jangsem karmar*.

**#67D:** The attendants made [this liquid] into blessed pills and distributed them to the people, who could eat the pills.

Q: Blood in one bowl and...

**#67D:** It appeared from the nose.

Q: Blood from the nose?

**#67D:** Blood seeped from one [nostril] and milk from the other.

Q: I see.

**#67D:** Such [fluid] emerged. A lama near our [nunnery] passed away in a foreign country recently; what is the name? [He] was an old lama. It is said that [*jangsem karmar*] appeared from him.

Q: It was called *jangsem karmar*?

**#67D:** *Jangsem karmar*.

Q: *Jangsem karmar*.

00:46:12

**#67D:** Yes, Jangchup’s *sem* ‘awakened state of mind/bodhichitta.’ It is called *jangsem karmar*.

[We] collected it in a bowl and mixed it with *pa* and rolled into small pills.

Q: Like a *tseril* ‘long life pill’?

**#67D:** Into small blessed pills that could be eaten.

And then I left. My relative and mother came to take me. I reached Tsum and stayed there for three years working for others.

Q: Where did you stay?

**#67D: At Tsum.**

Q: Tsum.

**#67D: At the place called Tsum in Nepalese territory.**

Q: In Nepal?

**#67D: Yes, in Nepalese territory. It was not in Tibet.**

Q: [You] were there for three years.

**#67D: [I] was there for three years. After three years, my mother and relative brought me to India.**

Q: *Choe-la*, just going back a bit to stay on the day that Napta Rinpoche passed. So you said one nostril there was blood and one nostril there was milk. Was this supposed to signify something?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: *Jangsem* means *jangchup sempa*: bodhisatva's [enlightened being] mind.

00:48:04

**#67D: One made blessed pills out of it.**

Q: Does it mean that [he] is a bodhisatva?

**#67D: It must that [he] is a bodhisatva. [We] placed two nice bowls like this [holds imaginary bowls in hands]. Then [we] rolled blessed pills to be distributed to the people.**

Q: Sign of a bodhisatva? The sign that he was a bodhisatva? Is that what you mean?

**#67D: He must be some sort of a bodhisatva. Recently a lama passed away abroad. It occurred in high lamas who were great meditators. That was a sign of bodhisatva.**

Q: Were there any other unusual signs when he died?

**#67D: Blood and...Appeared.**

Q: And then?

**#67D: He was asleep. There is this thing where some lamas [after their passing away] remain in meditation for long while some do not. [Napta Rinpoche] remained for only a day. Then the body was cremated.**

Q: You mean the mind?

**#67D: Yes, they do that.**

Q: Was he praying?

**#67D: The lama was not praying.**

Q: It was only one day?

00:49:32

**#67D: Only for one day. Then [the body] was cremated. Whatever money was there, they were offered.**

Q: To the people?

**#67D: To the monasteries in Kyirong and in other places. All the belongings were offered and only the house was left. There was a caretaker but he too left due to fear of the Chinese.**

Q: When everybody scattered, was one person left there?

**#67D: When I was there, all the monks and nuns were present. At the time of the lama's passing away [everyone was there].**

Q: After the passing away of the lama when everybody scattered, was one person left there?

**#67D: One person had to stay but later he too left.**

**[I] heard the villagers took away all the objects of the monastery. And the building was used to house sheep and presently there is nothing left.**

Q: How long after he passed away did you conduct the funeral?

**#67D: [The body] was left for around three days.**

Q: During the time was his body still warm?

00:51:29

**#67D: Just after passing away it was warm but later it was not. After the appearance [of the red and white bodhichitta], it did not remain warm. The lamas say that even some lay people remain in meditation. Even if there is no breath, the consciousness is still present. Therefore, one should not touch [the body] immediately after death. One should not move [the body] of a lama or monk.**

**A *phowa* 'purification practice in which the consciousness is transferred to a pure land' must be conducted and then it [consciousness] leaves. The lamas teach that the body must**

be left as it is and not touched immediately. The consciousness is present. Even though the external breath has left [the body] the inner breath still lingers; that is in our case. For the lamas, they would have their own power.

In the hospitals, [the bodies] are moved. It should not be done that way.

Q: How did you prepare the body for the funeral?

**#67D: The congregation of monks and nuns carried out the preparation. All the monks and nuns gathered. It was burnt using wood. *Jensay* ‘fire ceremony’ was conducted using a lot of butter.**

Q: What’s *jensay*?

**#67D: *Jensay* is fire like we make fire. For lay people too *jensay* is conducted. Likewise it must be performed for lamas. Everybody assembled, recited prayers and made *tso* ‘offerings.’**

***Jensay* was burnt using wood, liquid butter and other things. *Jensay* is conducted for lay people as also *torma* ‘ritual offerings made of dough’ and it was similar to that. If the body is present, *jensay* is conducted but these days even if the body is not present, *jensay* is conducted for lay people.**

Q: What did you wrap his body in?

00:54:26

**#67D: Bathe?**

Q: What did you wrap...?

**#67D: Cloth. Cloth.**

Q: What type of cloth?

**#67D: White cloth. [The body] was bathed thoroughly.**

Q: White cloth?

00:54:35

**#67D: [The body] was bathed. The body must be bathed.**

Q: The body must be bathed.

**#67D: [The body] was bared naked and bathed. Then various medicines and numerous ingredients were applied to it. [The body] was then wrapped in a clean white cloth. *Dorjee* ‘spiritual thunderbolt and scepter of the gods’ and *dilbu* ‘bell’ were placed [in the hands] and it was taken to the [pyre]. Many ingredients were used.**

[Interviewer to interpreter]: You put some medicines inside the body?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yeah.

Q: The medicines you put inside the body, how do you do that? What part of the body do you put the medicines?

**#67D: Over the body. [The medicine] was applied all over the body. The whole [body] was smeared with medicines and sweet smelling [herbs]. The monks did that and wrapped it in a white cloth. A *dorjee* and a *dilbu* were placed in the hands [crosses hands] and a *ringa* over the head.**

Q: What's a *ringa*?

**#67D: Lamas wear *ringa* like this [indicates headdress]. His Holiness the Dalai Lama also wears it.**

Q: And in the hands?

**#67D: *Dorjee* and *dilbu* [crosses hands]. Wood was piled and then it was lit. Various items and liquid butter was poured [over the funeral pyre].**

Q: Were you involved in all of these arrangements?

00:56:35

**#67D: I was an attendant at the lama's residence at that time. The ones that performed these were the senior monks. Not everybody was allowed in.**

Q: Was it an emotional funeral where people cried or were they very self-contained?

**#67D: People cried. The senior [monks] were engaged in the *jensay*. Of course, they would cry because they have received teachings and [he] was your root guru. In those days one could not see His Holiness the Dalai Lama or other high lamas. Here you can see His Holiness the Dalai Lama and pray to him. Earlier there were no lamas in the villages except for the practitioners. [We] cried and made prayer offerings.**

Q: Were offerings made to the people?

**#67D: People were not allowed in where the offerings were made. They could come later to make their own offerings. The monks and nuns...[not discernible]. That is about it.**

Q: You said you came to Nepal with your mother and your younger brother because your mother was afraid that your younger brother would be sent to China, yeah? Were there many children from your area who were sent to China?

**#67D: None from my village were sent to China. These days they are sending [their children]. At that time [children] were not sent. If there were sons in big families [the Chinese said], “Bring them to school. We will take them to school.”**

Q: To China?

00:58:50

**#67D: It was to Lhasa then. Now they must be being sent to China. At that time it was said to be in Lhasa but [the Chinese] must be taking [the children] to China too. Now [the parents] must be sending all [the children to school]. [I] heard the children are sent to school in Lhasa now. Of course, those who are capable will do so. At that time there were not many [that went to school] due to fear of the Chinese. Just seeing the Chinese instilled fear. [Laughs] Now [we] are used to [them]. When [we] saw a Chinese, [we] fled saying, “There is a Chinese.”**

Q: *Choe-la*, thank you...Sorry.

**#67D: Now that is enough.**

Q: *Choe-la*, sorry. Thank you so much for coming today and for sharing your story with us.

**#67D: Okay. Thank you. [Joins palms] It has been great.**

Q: I just need to ask one more time, if this interview was shown in Tibet, China or anywhere else in the world, would it be a problem for you?

**#67D: There will be no [problem] in China. If I ever go to Tibet, [the Chinese] might say something. If [I] never go there...perhaps [I] will be dead as [I] am old.**

END OF INTERVIEW