

Tibet Oral History Project

**Interview #8C – Lama Lodu Rinpoche
June 17, 2013**

The Tibet Oral History Project serves as a repository for the memories, testimonies and opinions of elderly Tibetan refugees. The oral history process records the words spoken by interviewees in response to questions from an interviewer. The interviewees' statements should not be considered verified or complete accounts of events and the Tibet Oral History Project expressly disclaims any liability for the inaccuracy of any information provided by the interviewees. The interviewees' statements do not necessarily represent the views of the Tibet Oral History Project or any of its officers, contractors or volunteers.

This translation and transcript is provided for individual research purposes only. For all other uses, including publication, reproduction and quotation beyond fair use, permission must be obtained in writing from: Tibet Oral History Project, P.O. Box 6464, Moraga, CA 94570-6464, United States.

Copyright © 2015 Tibet Oral History Project.



TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

www.TibetOralHistory.org

INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #8C
2. Interviewee: Lama Lodu Rinpoche
3. Age: 72
4. Date of Birth: 1942
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Rumtek, Sikkim, India
7. Province:
8. Year of leaving Tibet:
9. Date of Interview: June 17, 2013
10. Place of Interview: Kagyu Drogen Kunchab, San Francisco, California, USA
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 42 min
12. Interviewer: Hilary Kaiser
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Tsedup Wangdu
14. Videographer: Tony Sondag
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Lama Lodu Rinpoche was born in Rumtek, Sikkim in 1942 and currently lives in San Francisco, California in the United States. His father was of Tibetan heritage and his mother was from Sikkim. They earned a livelihood as farmers and nomads, but Rinpoche explains that nomads in Sikkim were different from Tibetan nomads because they did not migrate with their flocks. Lama Lodu Rinpoche expresses his gratitude towards his parents who were devout Buddhist practitioners and instilled in him the importance of such a practice.

Lama Lodu Rinpoche became a monk at the age of 5 and joined the Rumtek Monastery at the age of 8. He gives a detailed account of his life as a dharma practitioner in the monastery. He belongs to the Kagyu sect of Tibetan Buddhism and talks about his education at the monastery and the intensive meditation practice in a cave that he underwent as a 13 year old. At the age of 17 he was sent to a retreat center in Bhutan at the request of the 16th Karmapa Rigpe Dorjee and remained in meditation for three years.

At the request of Kalu Rinpoche and the Karmapa, Lama Lodu Rinpoche went to the United States in 1974 to teach the dharma to Western students. He briefly explains some of the basic concepts in Tibetan Buddhism. He describes how Buddhism can be instrumental in making our life purposeful and how it is spreading around the world. He offers his views on the self-immolations taking place in Tibet, emphasizing the importance of human life.

Topics Discussed:

Sikkim, childhood memories, farm life, monastic life, Karmapa, Buddhist beliefs.

TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

www.TibetOralHistory.org

Interview #8C

Interviewee: Lama Lodu Rinpoche

Age: 72, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Hilary Kaiser

Interview Date: June 17, 2013

Question: Good Morning.

00:00:11

Interviewee #8C: Good Morning.

Q: Please tell us your name.

#8C: My name is Lama Lodu and now-a-days people use Rinpoche ‘Respected Lama’ also.

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?

#8C: Yes, but I do not know about politics and I am not in a position to speak [about it]. It is fine if [the questions are] about general subjects and the dharma.

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

#8C: [Nods]

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

#8C: [Nods] Okay.

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

#8C: [Nods]

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

00:02:28

#8C: You are welcome.

Q: First I would like to ask you just some general questions. Where do you live at the moment?

#8C: Currently I live in the United States.

Q: In which city?

#8C: San Francisco, California.

Q: And what is your current profession? What do you do?

#8C: I teach foreigners about the dharma. I also practice the dharma myself and teach what I know to others. That is my responsibility.

Q: Where were you born?

00:03:26

#8C: I was born in Sikkim; in Rumtek, Sikkim.

Q: In India?

#8C: [Nods]

Q: How old are you? What year were you born?

#8C: I was born in 1942. Now [I am] 72 years old.

Q: What was your father's name?

#8C: My father's name was Penpa.

Q: And your mother's name?

#8C: It is Gyamo.

Q: Are you a monk now?

#8C: I am not a monk.

Q: I believe you were a monk before?

00:04:23

#8C: I took monk vows at the age of 18 and around the age of 27-28 I gave up my monkhood. After arriving in a foreign land, since it is difficult to live alone and remain a monk and it is not nice to pretend to be a monk when you are not, so [I] told [my] lama that I was no longer a monk and received [his] permission.

Q: We will talk about your life in the monastery a little bit later but can you tell me a little bit about your family when you were growing up in Sikkim? Were you brought up in a Tibetan family?

#8C: I grew up in Sikkim where we owned fields and cows. [I] grew up in [a family of] nomads and farmers. However, I did not live much at home but in the monastery from a young age.

Q: Did you have brothers and sisters?

#8C: We are three siblings from the same mother. There were many sisters but all died. There are no sisters. We are three siblings that survive currently. I have an older and a younger sibling.

Q: You say your family were nomads. Did you travel with your family when you were young?

00:06:28

#8C: In Sikkim the nomads are similar to farmers. They do not migrate but stay in one spot. [They] do not migrate. We owned fields that were cultivated and herded cows, besides engaging in fieldwork. We did not move homes like the nomads of Tibet.

Q: When you were growing up with your family, what were your meals like?

#8C: We ate *tsampa* ‘flour made from roasted grains,’ that was made from both barley and wheat. However, [we] mainly ate rice. Dejong [Tibetan name for Sikkim] means land of rice and there was a huge production of rice.

Q: What did your family grow? What kind of...?

#8C: They grew rice and corn in summer and *nay* ‘barley’ in winter.

Q: What’s *nay*?

00:07:47

#8C: *Nay* from which *tsampa* is made. The grain that *tsampa* is made from is called *nay*.

Q: What type of schooling did you have? Did you go to Indian schools or Tibetan schools or...?

#8C: A Tibetan school. There was our monastery. The 9th Karmapa Wangchuk Dorjee established our monastery. Since our family was a patron of the monastery, I was taken to the monastery at a very young age and lived there. [I] spent my life in the monastery.

Q: At what age did you begin studying in the monastery?

#8C: [It was] at a very young age. They named me as a monk around the age of 5. I could not go [to the monastery] until 8 and started [studying] at the age of 8.

[Interpreter interprets as: I was in monastery from the age of 5 years old but started my studies at 8 years old.]

Q: If you were 5 when you went to the monastery and you lived in the monastery, did you see your family?

00:09:33

#8C: They took [me] once to the monastery at the age of 5 and gave [me] a name and then was left with mother until the age of 8.

I went there [to the monastery] at the age of 8.

Q: What do you remember of your life in your family, any of the traditions that you kept up in your family?

#8C: When we were young...my father was a layperson and not a lama or a monk. His father, my grandfather was a lama called Lama Lodhen. Lama Lodhen was a good practitioner and thanks to his influence, my father was pious. [Father] woke up at 3 o'clock and chanted many mantras. He chanted and woke all of us. [He] did not allow us to sleep but woke us and made [us] chant prayers and the *mani* 'mantra of Avalokiteshvara' while he had many chants to intone. Though children then, we had to get up and chant. Hence, the influence of dharma in the home was strong. Mother was a great believer in the dharma and father was good as well. Therefore, I was able to achieve good practice in the dharma at a young age, thanks to the parents, thanks to father.

Q: Were there any holidays or celebrations that you remember or practiced?

#8C: [I] remember *Losar* 'Tibetan New Year' was a very happy event. Otherwise, being farmers most of the time there were not many holidays.

Q: Was life a bit hard where you lived? Did you live on a farm?

00:12:15

#8C: I was young at the time [I] lived on the farm. Being a small child I did not have any responsibilities. I lived in the monastery from the age of 8 and did not visit home often. When [I] did, those at home treated me well and not otherwise during the short period. [I] was very happy. I have run away home from the monastery many times because things were nice at home while in the monastery, as is the Tibetan practice, the teachers observed stringent rules. Whenever there was an opportunity, [I] ran away. My home and monastery were located close by.

Q: Your grandfather lived with you. Did other elders live with you?

#8C: I have never seen my grandfather. However, it was said that grandfather was a lama. Father used to speak about it but I have not seen grandfather. It was father that taught me.

Q: Was there a community in Sikkim of Tibetan refugees?

00:14:05

#8C: There were not many before Tibet was occupied. However, large numbers of pilgrims came from Tibet. There were not many that lived in the country [Sikkim] except for some traders that lived there permanently. After the occupation of Tibet, there were many Tibetans.

Q: What memories...Before we talk about the monastery, do you have any favorite memories of your childhood with your family? You were treated very well.

#8C: Mother treated me very well then. [I] loved mother and felt very happy to see her. It was good. However, my father was very strict. [I] did not go to father very much. When father was home, we would go out.

Q: Was your grandfather, who was the lama, was it your father's father or your mother's father?

00:15:49

#8C: My father's father.

Q: Was your father...He was a layperson but he was religious too? He got up at 3 in the morning.

#8C: When I look back now though he was a layperson, [he] practiced a great deal. He was better than some of the practitioners of today when I look back. [He] was highly diligent in practicing the dharma. [He] loved the dharma.

I am deeply indebted to him. I did not like father then because he was strict. When I look back, had father not been there I would have faced problems and become very bad. It is thanks to father [what I am today].

Q: Is there anything else that you remember from that early childhood that has helped you in your later life?

#8C: [I] did not remain in the monastery and ran away. When I did that father would make me herd the cows. [I] must go to graze cows. The sun was hot or it rained while herding. [I] remember these difficulties. [Laughs]

Q: It was a hard life.

00:17:56

#8C: Having run away from the monastery, I never felt it as hardship because [I] was no longer in the monastery. [I] believed being in the monastery was very difficult.

Q: You say you run away from the monastery. How far away was the monastery from your home?

#8C: It is a distance of three miles.

Q: Your parents then take you back to the monastery when you run away?

#8C: Father would beat [me] and monks from the monastery came to fetch [me] and took [me] back.

Q: Can you describe the monastery? How large it was?

#8C: It is the Rumtek Monastery. There were around 200 monks in the Rumtek Monastery then. Our monks were *ngagpa* ‘shaman’ and there were no *gelong* ‘a fully ordained monk.’ It is a *ngagpa* monastery.

Q: All Tibetans?

00:19:35

#8C: There were Tibetans and Sikkimese and also a type of people called Monpa.

Q: Were you one of the youngest children there?

#8C: When I was 8 years old, there were some younger than me.

Initially, [I] was taken [to the monastery] at the age of 5, which I cannot recall much. I might have been the youngest then.

Q: You were going for schooling between the ages of 5 and 8 but living at home. Is that right?

#8C: [I] was sent to a school but there was nothing much to study. The children went to school, played and came back.

Q: Did you have your own room at the monastery?

#8C: At times there were [our] own rooms and at times no. Sometimes when many monks arrived, the monks stayed together and at times when there were fewer monks, each had his living quarters. There was nothing special.

Q: Did you provide your food and clothing or did the monks provide?

00:21:22

#8C: Our monastery did not receive any funding from the government and the parents had to pay.

The monastery was one that did not have funding from the government and it was a *ngagpa* monastery and there were no *gelong*.

Q: Was that a hardship? Was that hard for your family to pay for your schooling?

#8C: At that time our home was in a good situation. I was better off than many other monks.

Most of our family members were devout and hoped that I would become a good practitioner and treated me well. [They] provided [me] good food and everything else.

Q: Can you describe the teachings, what you remember because you were in the monastery from ...until 28? You began at 5 and at 8 you began full studies.

00:22:58

#8C: I studied from age 8 onwards. By 16-17, I had left the monastery. [I] had left our monastery because when I was 16 years old, His Holiness the Karmapa arrived from Tibet. Then the Karmapa...

Q: Was it the previous reincarnation?

#8C: Yes, the previous reincarnation Rigpe Dorjee [the 16th Karmapa]. He sent me to Bhutan. There is a monastery in Bhutan. [I] went to Bhutan to study and enter a *dupkhang* ‘retreat center’ because at that time there was no *dupkhang* or *sheda* ‘study center’ facilities in India. I was sent there. From 8 until around 17 [I] studied in the monastery. The studies were...[to interpreter] You can translate this first.

There were no *dupkhang* or *sheda* in India then, as we had just arrived. The King of Bhutan had offered a monastery to the Karmapa that had a *dupkhang*. [I] was sent to the *dupkhang* for three years.

Q: Is *dupkhang* a monastery?

00:24:36

#8C: *Dupkhang* is [where you stay in] retreat. You cannot meet anybody and observe retreat for three years undergoing secret tantric practices.

Q: In Bhutan?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Bhutan.

Q: At the age of 17?

#8C: [Nods]

Q: Before we talk about the Bhutan monastery, what do you remember about the monastery you first went to?

#8C: [I] think I was 16 years old when the Karmapa came there. At a young age, between 16 and 17 I stayed in a cave on the mountains.

It was thanks to the parents and lamas that I loved the dharma from a young age and [I] suppose I was a good practitioner.

Q: Can you describe your experience in the cave?

00:26:30

#8C: It was good. Though I was young then, [I] was not like what [I] am today; [I] was better because [I] practiced from a young age and I had a good lama. Thanks to the lama [I] thought of nothing but the dharma and while living in the cave, you could meet no one and you were alone.

There were problems with food. People gave but not on time. Sometimes [the food] was left at the door. When I was in session, it would be left at the door and when my session got over, the food would have been eaten by birds and animals and sullied. However, I have to eat once the session got over. That is a little bit of problem [I] faced. Besides [I] suffered a grave illness.

Q: It was a hard experience.

#8C: I suffered from tuberculosis at a young age.

Because of the tuberculosis I had to leave the cave and enter a hospital.

Q: How long did you stay in the hospital?

#8C: Only for six months. The doctor did not advise discharge but the Karmapa said [I] was fine and that [I] could leave. So [I] left.

Q: The monastery didn't allow [you] to leave?

00:28:25

#8C: No, the hospital. The doctor did not issue discharge orders but the Karmapa said, "You are fine and can leave." So [I] left.

Q: During your stay at the hospital, did you continue to study, to read?

#8C: I had brought [my] scriptures and studied a little but there were many sick people in the hospital and it was not nice like living in the cave. However, [I] was given good food.

I put on weight! So when I looked plump, the Karmapa said, "You have no illness. [You can] go." [Laughs]

Q: Before you went to the cave and you were studying in the monastery in Sikkim, what text did you study or what was the program that you were studying?

#8C: I learned to write, memorize prayers, perform rituals, play *dhung* 'long horn' and *gyaling* 'clarinet,' prepare ritual dough offerings and perform *cham* 'religious dance performance by monks.' All these must be learned. [I] do not know the *cham* in detail but learned a little bit.

Q: Which instruments did you learn to play?

00:30:40

#8C: I played all [the religious musical instruments] when [I] was young.

Q: Bells and other instruments?

#8C: Yes, and then [I] studied the scriptures from teachers.

Q: Which school of Buddhism was this, in this monastery?

#8C: We are followers of the Kagyu sect from the time of [my] parents.

Q: Can you explain to me a little bit what Kagyu practice is, simply?

#8C: *Ka* means the ‘words of the Buddha.’ *Gyu* is ‘through,’ the words being transmitted through one lama to the next without it declining. That is Kagyu.

That is called Kagyu and *dupa* ‘spiritual practice’ is the main principle that is followed in the Kagyu tradition.

Q: *Dupa* is the main principle?

00:32:13

#8C: *Dupa* means practicing the dharma. The stress is not on learning the commentary but more on practice. *Dupa* is the main principle of the Kagyu tradition.

***Shepa* ‘commentary’ is not considered the main principle while the *dupa* is.**

Q: Are there any particular rituals associated with it?

#8C: There are many rituals in our [sect]. What to say? Whether it is *Gyudhay* ‘Higher Tantra’... There is a different ritual for *Gyidhor*, another for *Dhuekhor* ‘Kalachakra, wheel of time,’ a different one for *Dhemchok* and another for *Sangdhue* ‘Exposition Tantra of Guhyasamaja.’ There are different [rituals]. There is a different ritual depending upon the type of deity [one is worshipping].

Q: Is this the tradition you are teaching in your center here in San Francisco?

00:33:46

#8C: Here we are teaching whatever is the Kagyu tradition and the disciples are practicing that. Kagyu is greatly associated with the Nyingma [sect]. We practice most of the Nyingma tradition.

There is also a great connection with Kadhampa. Jetsun Milarepa’s disciple Gonpopa was initially a [follower of] Kadhampa.

Gonpopa was the disciple of Milarepa.

Initially Gonpopa studied Kadhampa.

[Interpreter interprets as: Gonpopa, the student of...]

#8C: Kadhampa.

[Interpreter interprets as: ...is Gonpopa. Gonpopa is the student of, the teacher of Kadhampa.]

#8C: No, [Gonpopa] is a student of Kadhampa. [He] was a follower of Kadhampa.

00:35:15

Gonpopa was the disciple of Milarepa. Since [he] was a disciple of Milarepa, a connection was formed between Kadhampa and Kagyupa during the time of Gonpopa.

Two streams joined to form one and that connecting factor was Gonpopa.

Q: Rinpoche, what throughout your life, what teachings of the Buddha have helped you the most?

#8C: If you can comprehend the initial part of the Buddha's teachings, the initial part will be of help; if you understand the latter part well, the latter part will help you well and if you understand the middle part, it will help you. Every segment is beneficial. If you practice the words of the Buddha sincerely, every segment of the teachings will help.

Q: We live at the moment in a world of conflict and trouble. How do you think the Buddha's teaching can help us?

#8C: The Buddha dharma constitutes of *choepa tsemay* and *thawa thongnyi*, the Buddha dharma.

Q: How do you mean?

00:37:13

#8C: *Choepa tsemay* in the Buddha's teachings is not to cause harm through body, speech and mind to another sentient being. It reveals that main principle. *Thawa thongnyi* is when you cannot comprehend the meaning of emptiness, then one is mired in the vicious cycle of existence and undergoes suffering. The sufferer and the suffering are both emptiness. Hence, the dharma's *thawa* 'philosophy' is *thongnyi* 'emptiness.'

Q: *Thongpanyi* is...

#8C: Emptiness.

00:38:40

That is the philosophy of Buddhism.

Q: Can you explain to me what emptiness means?

#8C: To speak on emptiness without having any knowledge seems simple but to explain about emptiness in detail is very difficult.

We say that all things that originate from *gyukyen then del* ‘dependent origination’ are empty. When you say that all things that originated from *gyukyen then del* are empty, it means everything that originated from *gyu* and *kyen* are empty. For instance, when you say *gyukyen*...

Q: Interdependence.

#8C: Every dependent origination is empty.

Everything is dependent on each other. [Nothing is] independent. Hence, all that are based on the philosophy of *gyukyen then del* are impermanent.

00:40:22

Everything that is here today may not be there tomorrow; all things present tomorrow are not there the day after. Initially we were little children, then became middle-aged and then old and die. We change every day of our life.

That is impermanence. The reason why [we are] impermanent is because of emptiness. If something is not impermanent, then it is not emptiness. It is permanent. Since everything is impermanent, that is emptiness.

According to our dharma there is no one, nothing that is not impermanent; all are impermanent. Therefore, every phenomenon is emptiness.

Q: Can this belief help the Tibetan people today?

#8C: There cannot be many in the Tibetan population who meditate on the principle of emptiness.

Q: Meditating on emptiness?

#8C: Yes.

00:42:19

Most of the practitioners engage in ritual activities and some on the scriptures of reasoning. It is very rare for anyone to meditate exclusively on emptiness.

Therefore, it is very difficult for [the concept of] emptiness to help every Tibetan.

Q: To help?

#8C: To help.

We call emptiness as *dhondham dhenpa*, absolute truth. There is another one called *kuntsap dhenpa*, relative truth. There are two kinds of truth: absolute truth and relative truth.

The relative truth helps us. Relative truth is the words of the Buddha. It is beneficial for the Tibetans and helped has helped the Tibetans until now.

00:43:46

Relative truth comprises of cause and effect. Whatever one's actions, it brings results. It is engrained in every Tibetan's mind that virtuous actions bring happiness and negative actions result in suffering.

The fruit of virtuous action is happiness and negative deeds result in suffering. Some people believe in the *lay gyunday* 'cause and effect' while some do not.

Q: Is *lay gyunday* karma?

#8C: Cause and effect. It is also known as karma.

Q: Is it the same?

#8C: Yes.

Whether they believe or not, we must go according to the cause and effect.

00:45:03

One must take the path of cause and effect. We have the desire to remain young, happy and healthy in our life. Even though we have this desire, we become old due to the power of cause and effect. Then [we] die due to the power of karma.

These happenings are a proof of the existence of cause and effect. Therefore, it is good if one believes in the cause and effect, accepts and practices it accordingly.

We Tibetans believe in cause and effect since long ago and this is helping [us]. Even our little children remark [in compassion], "Poor thing!" or "How sad!" The parents say it and even little children utter such.

A lot is also taught about *jampa*, loving-kindness. *Jampa* is when you wish happiness for others. Compassion is wishing for all sentient beings to be free of suffering, be rid of suffering.

00:47:44

Our parents teach that and even children have the feeling of loving kindness and compassion. It is present in the Tibetan community, be it in the monasteries, young people or old, [people] just talking outside or in schools; the subject of cause and effect, loving kindness and compassion are spoken of greatly.

That is the relative truth, which has helped the Tibetans and is continuing to help.

Q: Getting to today, the Tibetans are living in a very difficult time at the moment. Are some of these beliefs being threatened? Can you explain a little bit about that?

00:48:58

#8C: The Buddha's spiritual activities are endless. We cannot stop the spiritual activities of the Buddha. If we look from a narrow point of view, Tibet was lost and there is no religious freedom in Tibet. So [religion] is being obstructed but that is impossible.

If we look back now, long ago Tibetans did not and could not venture to other countries because of the presence of snow. Foreigners could not come into Tibet much. The pure and complete form of Buddha's teachings was in Tibet but the dharma could not go out of Tibet.

00:50:44

The religion of Tibet is unlike other religions. The dependent origination is that the Chinese forced us out of Tibet. Many Tibetan lamas and learned ones came out and now the religion of Tibet is being spread over the world.

Different countries and races are being taught Tibetan language and learning about Tibet. Take the United States for instance; I know many people who study very well and are far better in teaching the dharma than me!

[They] have very good knowledge about the dharma. If we are to talk in regard to the dharma, comparing earlier times when Tibet was independent and today, the dharma has spread wider. Therefore, we have to say thank you to the Chinese. [Smiles]

00:53:08

Another philosophy of Buddhism is that one must have compassion for the enemy. The Chinese are our enemy; therefore we should feel compassion [for them].

They evicted us out of Tibet not out of the goodness of their hearts. However, because they evicted [us], the Tibetan religion is flourishing wider.

Q: I believe you came into contact with some Tibetan people who were suffering when they left. Can you explain a little bit about that?

#8C: At that time I was around 16 years old. Though I was young, I saw that there was a tremendous amount of difficulties. Some of those having left Tibet were old men and women. The old people were already weak and in addition, were not able to adjust to the change in climate and became seriously ill. The food and water did not agree with [them] and [they] faced a lot of problems. Medicines also did not help and many died. I witnessed many being sick and suffering.

00:55:33

I witnessed some that were sick for a long time and suffering. In addition to physical pain, there was great mental suffering for some had left behind their parents and some their children in the village or land and houses.

[They] had faced great difficulties over the journey being pursued by the might of the army and faced with high snow-covered [mountains] ahead. There was no clothing, no food and many died during the trek. Those that succeeded in escaping arrived as gravely ill.

The monks at that time had no shelter and could not adjust to the food and water. Many monks also faced the same suffering. There were instances where many of the celibate monks lost their vows. This would not happen except under immense difficulties.

00:57:54

The younger ones fared better where food and water was concerned as they could adjust. However, it was the same mental suffering. They had parents and siblings left behind at home. Nobody had come with all the family members together. In some cases, the fathers were gone. The fathers had fled alone and in some cases, the mothers had fled alone and in some cases the children had come alone. Therefore, it was the same mental suffering no matter what their age.

The younger ones told us about their difficult journey and cried. Some of the escapees I knew went back to Tibet. However, they were caught along the way by the soldiers, Indian soldiers and were turned back [to India].

Many such difficulties had ensued and I was a witness at that time. I was among them.

Q: This was when you were in the monastery in Sikkim?

00:59:43

#8C: I was living in Sikkim then. The reason I retreated to the cave was because of witnessing such sad cases. [I] believed we could not escape from suffering but must engage in the practice of the dharma and left.

Q: Could you describe your life in the cave? You were on your own; you were studying with candles, with electricity; how?

#8C: There was no [electricity]. [Smiles]

There was a great revered lama who used to come to the cave to teach. There was not anybody to provide me food everyday. Sometimes people brought food after hearing that I was living there. Sometimes they forget.

Q: What about water? Did you have enough water to drink?

01:01:13

#8C: I used to go and bring a large bucket of water in the night.

Q: What was your daily schedule? What did you do everyday? How did you live?

#8C: There were breaks between [meditation] sessions. One session was between 3-6 in the morning. Starting at 3, you were in session until 6.

Q: Prayers?

#8C: There was a break. From 6 there were many rituals to carry out and then around 7 or 7:30 [I] had tea if it was available. There was a break [for tea]. Then [the next session lasted] from 8 until 12.

01:02:38

If not [any tea], I continued studying. I was alone and studied.

[I] ate at 12 if food was provided and if not [I] continued to study. Then the next session was from 1-3. Then at 3 there was *solka* prayers.

Q: *Solka*?

#8C: Protective deities. You offered prayers to the protective deities. And then the next session was from 6-9.

Q: Spirit, right?

#8C: Mahakala, protector [deity].

Then [I] went to sleep at 9.

Q: My question was also about where the cave was. Was it up in the mountain or was it far from the monastery?

01:03:45

#8C: [Speaks in English] Not far from monastery. Monastery is there and I have to go down a little and then there is a jungle, a big jungle. So I have some caves there.

Q: I wanted to ask you, have you ever visited Tibet? If so, how many times and when?

#8C: Was it the year '86 that [exiled Tibetans] were allowed to go to Tibet? It was '86, right? Since '86 I visited five times in that many years.

I constructed a monastery in Kham. My root guru said that the [existing] monastery belonged to me and that [I] had to take care of it. So taking that advice I went there and built a [new] monastery. It happened like that.

Q: What did you notice about life in Tibet when you went?

01:05:22

#8C: I did not notice much but went and helped the monastery and constructed it. They [the monks] requested for teachings and [I] taught a little. I do not have anything more to say other than that.

There were about 200 monks. That is it.

Q: At the moment we've been hearing in the press about self-immolations among young people, young Tibetans. What do you think about this?

#8C: We are people of the Buddha dharma and according to the Buddhist dharma, one should not waste precious human life. It is taught that one must make proper use of the human life.

01:06:38

It is said that there are three types of human beings: best, middle and worst. The best person, the middle person and the worst person.

The best person, the middle person and the worst person. The lowest level of person forsakes negative actions, accumulates merit and does virtuous activities for [the benefit of] this life. One who does these with the aim [to achieve benefit] in this life is called the lowest person.

[Concentrating on activities] solely for the benefit of oneself in this life, forsaking negative deeds that will lead to the cessation of suffering. Then performing good deeds that will result in happiness. The person will enjoy a longer life without sickness and with all wishes fulfilled. Even the lowest level of person can achieve these. Therefore, in view of this we cannot waste human lives, right?

The middle level [of humans] adapting either the Mahayana or Hinayana paths, forsakes negative deeds for oneself and...doing various practices can achieve *dachompa* 'overcome emotional conflicts.' That is a person of the middle level.

Interpreter to interviewee: The next one?

01:09:25

[Interviewee to interpreter]: The next one is the Mahayana path. The Mahayana path can lead to Buddhahood. I will talk about this later. You can translate now.

#8C: They [the middle level of humans] can conquer *nyomong* 'disturbed mind that agitates and obscures the Buddha nature' and can achieve the state of *dachompa* but not enlightenment. They can conquer their *nyomong* and achieve status of *dachompa* for oneself. That is [a person] of the middle level.

The final and the best [person] feels loving kindness and compassion for sentient beings, *rangdhon la choeku*...[not discernible] and conducting unceasing spiritual activities for the benefit of others by which we can achieve Buddhahood with the human life.

[Interpreter to interviewee]: I'm not able to interpret that.

01:10:44

Rangdhon choeku means achieving Buddhahood for oneself. Then conducting spiritual activities unceasingly for the benefit of all sentient beings with loving kindness and compassion. This can be achieved during this human life. When we can accomplish such things with the human life, it is a great waste to immolate and kill oneself.

Those who have killed themselves are young in age. They can make a success for themselves or accomplish what a middle level human can or even the best and achieve Buddhahood! [They] can accomplish one of these three kinds.

01:12:45

It would be worthwhile if Tibet gets independence through the self-immolations. However, generally it is very difficult to gain independence. Whether [we] gain independence or not, by killing oneself, the person has accumulated bad karma and will not achieve human form in the next life.

Not gaining independence is a loss and not being able to achieve precious human form in the next life is also a loss.

Q: Did you see self-immolation in Sikkim when you were...that didn't exist before?

#8C: Sikkim is a small country. There is hardly a population of 100,000 and I have never heard of such things. However, I do not know currently because news travels through television and various other mediums and someone might copy it. There might be [people] doing such things. Young people cannot think. And by seeing someone on television might think, "Oh, he has become a martyr. I must also become a martyr like him." There might be [people] doing such things.

[Interpreter to interviewee]: Her [interviewer's] question earlier was "Why do [you] think the people self-immolate? Why do [they] sacrifice [their] lives? What do [you] think?"

01:14:12

#8C: Perhaps [they] do not know the dharma.

Q: Not knowing the dharma.

#8C: [Nods]

Q: That is the answer?

#8C: That is right. [They] do not know the dharma, which is why [they] do not understand the precious human life and its benefits. Instead of using it for beneficial causes, [they] did this for temporary reasons and perhaps for fame. Perhaps it must be that there are no good lamas to teach or something. Otherwise, in the dharma that we have studied there is

nothing mentioned about committing suicide. Once having attained human life, one must nurture it carefully and immolating and committing suicide is a big loss.

Q: This is a message you would like the Tibetan people to hear?

01:15:25

#8C: This may make many Tibetans angry. [Smiles] Many Tibetans seek independence. Therefore, protesting and killing oneself for the cause of independence, those seeking independence consider them as very good and as martyrs.

So those seeking independence will not like what I say. However, I am not against them but speaking from a dharma point of view.

Q: Why do you think the young people are doing it?

#8C: There was not anything like this for many years. Much later there was one or two cases and those of our people that live outside [Tibet] praised them as martyrs. Believing them as martyrs, perhaps the young and thoughtless ones did it.

Our [people] living outside praise [them] as martyrs and perhaps the others thought, “We should also be martyrs.”

Q: Are there other things that you like to talk about?

01:17:27

#8C: The Tibetan population is very little and so everyone must heed the words of the All-knowing. Heed the words and believe in them. Tibetans have achieved much so far and will achieve more in the future. That is what I feel.

Q: You mean His Holiness the Dalai Lama?

#8C: His Holiness.

In the past the Tibetans have been content with this and there is no reason why it should not be so now. His Holiness is the human manifestation of Bodhisattva. He has accomplished a great degree of learning in reasoning. Where practice is concerned his foresight is miraculous. He gives advice through both *rigshay* ‘awareness’ and *ngonshay* ‘higher perception.’ So we should believe unwaveringly and it is very important to implement whatever advice His Holiness the Dalai Lama gives.

This will certainly not lead us on the wrong path. For His Holiness to live long, we the disciples and people must be committed. Then His Holiness will live long. If we do not heed his words, there will be great obstacles in his life.

01:19:27

If we do otherwise, many unfortunate things will happen to us. And there will be obstacles in His Holiness' life. Therefore, it is very important that His Holiness lives long and the requirement for that is we should have pure commitment.

***Dhamtsik* 'commitment' *tsangma* 'pure.'**

Q: What's *dhamtsik*?

#8C: *Samaya*. It is *samaya* in Sanskrit. Commitment. Pure commitment.

Q: Have you yourself met the Dalai Lama?

#8C: [I] have received the Kalachakra empowerment 6-7 times and many teachings from His Holiness the Dalai Lama. [He] has visited here. [He] came here and sat there [points back with right hand]. I have pictures.

Earlier I had another dharma center a little distance away from here that His Holiness also visited.

01:21:45

Whenever His Holiness sees me anywhere, [he] recognizes and says [points finger], "He is here." [He] immediately points [his] finger and says, "Oh, he is here. He is here." [Laughs] He says that. His Holiness never forgets once [he] has seen someone.

Q: Yes?

#8C: Once [His Holiness] has seen [someone], [he] never forgets. Once I took along many doctors, lawyers and scientists and went to interview His Holiness.

Q: To Dharamsala?

#8C: Yes.

We got a good interview. My commitment to His Holiness the Dalai Lama is pure but I am an ordinary man, ignorant and I do not know. I personally have faith in His Holiness.

01:23:08

However, I am an ordinary man and I do not know how pure it is.

Q: I believe His Holiness is also a very modest man as well.

#8C: His Holiness is, of course, benevolent to the Tibetans and to the world at large now and is a lama of refuge for all different religions.

I have belief in His Holiness but it is difficult to have faith in everyone.

Q: Yes?

#8C: I have belief in His Holiness the Dalai Lama but it is difficult to have faith in everyone.

I also have faith in His Holiness the Karmapa.

Q: You said you went to Tibet for five times and you have not been back since.

01:24:42

#8C: [I] could not go, as I was busy.

[Interpreter interprets as: I've never been there after last visit.]

Q: Would you like to say why? Why you have not been back?

#8C: I am very busy, and am an old man and cannot go often.

Q: How did Rinpoche come to America? How did you get here?

#8C: The reason I came to America is because at that time I was living in the monastery of the previous Kalu Rinpoche. Many Americans came to receive teachings from the previous Kalu Rinpoche. They that came to receive teachings invited Kalu Rinpoche abroad. He had many disciples and established many dharma centers.

Later Kalu Rinpoche returned and then asked me to accompany [him] to America. I am actually a monk of the Karmapa at Rumtek Monastery. Kalu Rinpoche spoke to the Karmapa and the Karmapa gave me instructions. So I was sent by both Kalu Rinpoche and the Karmapa [to America].

Q: I believe you were also in Europe at one point.

01:26:33

#8C: Initially I was in Europe.

Q: Were you teaching?

#8C: In Denmark, but in those days [I] did not know the language to teach. And there was none that knew Tibetan. So there was not much teaching to do. In Denmark I was like an animal in the zoo. Everyone came to take a look! [Laughs] There was no conversation. They were amazed to see a Tibetan who dressed differently and looked different.

Q: So you feel more at home, maybe in the United States?

#8C: Then I moved to Sweden and lived there. I studied the Swedish language and understood it a little. I had a Tibetan boy from Norway who acted as an interpreter. So I taught the dharma in Tibetan and he interpreted into Swedish.

There were quite a number of good disciples. I was not able to remain a monk at that time.

Q: Yes?

01:28:35

#8C: Monk—I could not maintain my monkhood.

Q: What does that mean?

#8C: [I] gave up monkhood at that time.

Then the Karmapa and Kalu Rinpoche asked me to go to the United States. I came here in '74 and have lived here since.

[Interviewer to others]: Any more questions the team would like to ask?

Did you notice anything after the Chinese takeover?

[Interpreter to others]: He [interviewee] is talking about Sikkim. So any changes in Sikkim?

#8C: Sikkim is not part of Tibet. Sikkim is not a territory of Tibet.

Q: What were the changes within Sikkim?

#8C: I see. In Sikkim...

Q: Did you witness any changes?

01:29:37

#8C: There is the Indian Government's security force in Sikkim. There are Indian Military camps. Many confrontations took place between the Indian Government and the Chinese. After Tibet was occupied, the Chinese... There were many encounters at Nathula, on the border of Sikkim. They were having the confrontations when I was living in the cave.

At that time Sikkim was independent. It was a small country. It was not a part of the Indian territory. There was a king and a queen. The queen is from America, from New York.

Q: From New York?

#8C: She is from New York. India became a bit jittery when the New York queen arrived, fearing that the small nation might be taken over by America. Then India took it over. So in the year '71 Sikkim was lost to India.

01:31:17

Earlier it was the Indians that were there to stop the Chinese from encroaching.

Q: Stopping the Chinese?

#8C: The Indians stopped [them] because Sikkim did not have an army and it was simple [for the Chinese] to intrude. However, the Indians prevented [the Chinese] from coming.

They [Indians] fought the Chinese but left the nation [of Sikkim] alone. Later when [the king] married the American queen, they [Indians] became nervous and gradually occupied it. They took full control in the year '71. It was during the time of Indira Gandhi [former Prime Minister of India].

This is my opinion and I would not know if it was done because of the queen being an American or for some other reason. This is the opinion of a stupid man.

Q: Your father was a farmer, an agricultural person. Did he emigrate from Tibet or he'd always lived in Sikkim?

01:33:07

#8C: We were among those that are called Gyakar Khampa 'Indian Khampa.' My grandfather came [from Tibet] but [I] think father was born in Sikkim. Mother was a Sikkimese.

Q: Even though, you said there were not very many Tibetans in Sikkim at that time but there was a big monastery, of Tibetan...?

#8C: We are similar culturally. It is the Tibetan culture [prevalent in Sikkim]. The script is Tibetan and even the language. There is just a little difference in the dialect like that of between Kham and Lhasa. It is the same language. The food habits are also Tibetan.

01:34:18

It is the same [Tibetan] script.

Q: That's why in the monastery there were Eastern Indians as well, you said.

#8C: There were no Indians allowed in our monastery then. We called the Indians *chipa*.

Q: *Chipa*?

#8C: *Chipa* and *nangpa*. *Nangpa* is Buddhist and *chipa* is non-Buddhist. There were no Indian monks in the monastery. We did not mix. They were not allowed into the town, only along the trade route. [They] were not allowed into the city and villages.

Q: Are there things about the Himalayan region that you miss here in the United States?

#8C: Earlier when [I] was younger [I] did miss a little.

Q: Yes?

#8C: Earlier when [I] was younger.

When [I] reflect now, if you practice the dharma well, you can do it anywhere. When there is a good place to practice, [I] do not miss anything.

The dharma can be called my family and friends and this is what [I] like to practice. [I] am an old man now.

Q: When His Holiness had to flee Tibet and went to India, was there discussion in your monastery about that? What was the reaction? Was there an influx of monks to your monastery? Was there... What happened?

01:36:57

#8C: A few Tibetans did arrive long ago and said that there was fighting in Tibet and that things were difficult. In general many Tibetans arrived but at that time it was different. Many arrived and they seemed to be in difficulty. During conversations they said that there was fighting in Tibet. This continued for a year or six months. His Holiness the Karmapa used to visit our monastery because ours is a Kagyu monastery. The Karmapa used to visit. We wondered about it.

It was during a rainy summer when we heard that the Karmapa was coming. We heard the entire story when the Karmapa arrived, "Tibet has been occupied by the Chinese and His Holiness the Dalai Lama has left for India through Mon Tawang [Arunachal Pradesh, India]." [We] heard that [His Holiness] had left for India. We at the monastery were shocked on hearing this because for our monastery Tibet was where [we] went to receive teachings. Every 2-3 years 5-6 monks from our monastery used to go to Tsurphu [Tibet]. Tibet was where we looked up to and took refuge. It would be difficult for us not to have a refuge. The older monks in the monastery were very sad and worried.

Q: Do you remember the day and how it was announced?

#8C: There were not many [monks] that lived in our monastery during summertime; only a few workers, ritual masters, assistants and caretakers stayed back. Not many stayed in summer but left. I had left. I was not there. We were in the village then. It was said in the village that the Karmapa had arrived, but we were small and they [the monks in the monastery] did not call us. Later we went [to the monastery] upon hearing the news [of the Karmapa's visit]. It is extraordinary that such a great lama was staying in our humble monastery. Then when [I] heard the news it felt unfathomable. Though I was young I felt it is such a tragic turn of events.

It was summertime and a vacation.

Even though I was young I had that feeling. The Buddha Karmapa had visited our humble monastery and it was wonderful! [I] felt a great sadness on hearing the news [about Tibet].

Q: The whole village was sad.

01:41:42

#8C: On one hand they were sad but not many people in Tibet got the chance to see the Karmapa. People used to pray to the Karmapa but it was difficult to see [him]. It was unbelievable for them to learn that the Karmapa had arrived there [but] it happened. And then to learn that the Karmapa had arrived after losing [his] country was very sad for the villagers.

Q: Thank you very much. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW