

A Spiritual Friend

Geshe Khenrab

Topgyal Gajam

Gary Young

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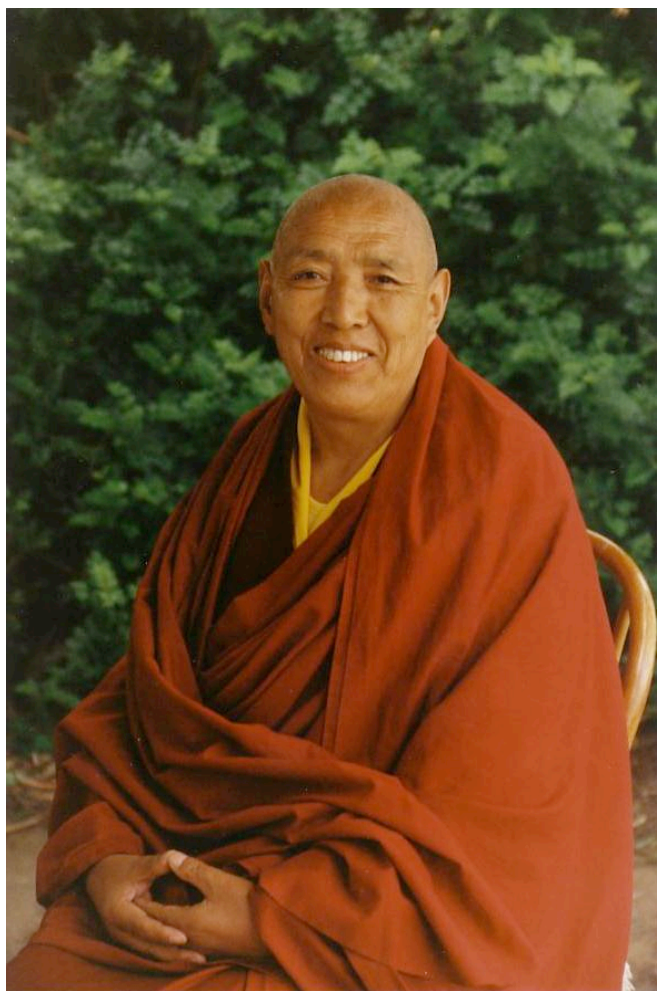
by Gary Young

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INTRODUCTION

As one small way to honor my teacher, I took it upon myself to revise, update and complete the main events of Geshe-la's life. As a base, and with the permission of the author, the original research papers of Penny Hamer were used.

After reading this story, one will understand that Geshe-la was a great pioneer in presenting and furthering the Dharma in the west. Many anecdotes can be related which revealed Geshe-la's activities, both ordinary and extraordinary.

Every action done by our Guru is significant. Usually we emphasize and pay attention to some particular event, teaching, special empowerment, or even the kind of seat upon which a teacher may sit as a measure of his/her spiritual quality.

Perhaps if a teacher is sitting on a high throne, or if is recognized as a highly reincarnated holy being, only then will we respect the person. The kind and patient teacher that guides us when we know nothing or very little and who sits on a

kitchen chair beside us, often that teacher we do not see as being worthy of our veneration.

Everything our Guru does, beginning with his words of advice, teaching and performing Buddhist practices and also mundane activities such as sleeping, walking, eating, chatting, etc, are all equally meaningful.

All his actions have great significance because they are not based on the three poisonous minds of ignorance, attachment, and hatred. And his deeds benefit all beings because they are motivated by compassion and wisdom.

This is the difference between ordinary beings and a true master. In Buddha's teaching it is explained that there is no difference between meditation and action for Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. This was the example that Geshe-la's life demonstrated.

Geshe-la had many disciples. For over twenty years he gave them clear, comprehensive and

illuminating Dharma teachings to help them achieve the state of happiness and eliminate problems and suffering.

He held all students with compassionate equanimity and wore many hats displaying many kinds of emanations for them--a Buddhist monk, a teacher, a parent, a psychologist, sometimes a family counselor, even on occasion a sort of lawyer or advisor on mundane issues. Devotion to the guru is the source of all goodness and the doorway to practicing the Dharma profoundly.

Those persons who encounter such a master in their lives and who receive from him/her teachings and guidance should assiduously cherish and strengthen their respect and faith in the Guru.

Then they should make prayers and generate the aspiration to never be parted from but always come under his/her loving care until they attain buddhahood. For Geshe Khenrab's students, our Guru's presence is always here; just like the

Buddhas and like a vajra.

Because of our strong delusions we do not see his true nature; nevertheless we benefited and received many beneficial imprints from Geshe-la. He has not left us.

Because of his vow to work for all sentient beings until all are free from samsara, we can be sure that we will meet again!

PART ONE

TIBET

Bumting

Although Tibet is a land of many mountains, the majority of Tibetans do not live in the hills, but settle the valleys between them. In 1928, Khenrab Tobgyal was born in one of these numerous valley towns and passed his first eleven years there. Bumting was home for about five hundred families in Kham Province, Eastern Tibet.

Tobgyal's father, Pema Wangyal, was sometime too strict with his family, but he worked hard to ensure their well-being. While he was alive his wife and children enjoyed a stable, settled and prosperous life. Pema was a merchant, skilful in trading, buying and selling. He was also an independent landowner. He managed a house and the surrounding fields as a farm. In the nearby mountains a tent housed family members who looked after the yaks, sheep, mules and horses near the alpine lakes and summer grazing land. After the summer harvest, the animals were brought down from the mountains to graze on the stubble left

where the crops had been picked. Pema organized a co-operative system with his brothers who also had animals. Together they cared for the herds, did the milking and prepared cheese more successfully than they could have done individually.

Pema also supervised a lucrative business: the buying and selling of rock salt. As with many countries in the high mountains, Tibet did not have access to salt from the sea. Salt is essential for human health, so an alternative had to be found. The Tibetans substituted a mined salt that was treated and boiled before use. Pema was involved in the lucrative business of distributing this salt. He bought it from distillers in the valley and then traded it in other parts of the country. This salt was famous in Tibet because of its health-giving properties. Several times a year Pema would leave his valley home to go on trading trips. Sometimes he would return after one or two weeks, but often he would be gone for up to two months. When he came home he always

had gifts for the whole family. There was excitement as he greeted his wife and children and gave them the new clothes and special foods he had brought with him. But along with the excitement was apprehension. The household was more relaxed when he was not home. The mother, Atse, was more lenient with her children who were a little afraid of their stern father.

Atse had a busy day. Together with her two older daughters, Yangdom and Tsering Chödrön, she was responsible for keeping the fire going in the large clay oven, fetching water from the nearby stream, and cooking three meals a day plus the evening soup. She also washed all the clothes and looked after the garden. The younger children, Phuntso', Tobgyal and Adrön, would go out into the fields with their mother. They would gather together small rocks and pebbles with which they created tiny communities complete with miniature houses decorated with floral gardens. They would play

“let's pretend” hour after hour while Atse tended to the barley, wheat and vegetables.

During the day Atse could often be heard quietly repeating the mantric sounds of the meditation on Chenrezi, the Bodhisattva of Compassion, “Om Mani Peme Hum.” Each town had a Lhakang, a temple where people could go to practice in a more concentrated and dedicated way. Atse would do this several times a year. During these retreats she did many prostrations, much chanting and took special vows. Some days she fasted, other days she refrained from ordinary talking, only reciting Buddhist texts. Atse not only contemplated compassion and meditated on it so that it could root deeply in her mind stream; she lived compassion in her daily life. She was a kind and generous woman. Though her husband and older children sometimes complained, she always helped those in need. A poor family who lived on the family land had ten children to look after. Despite

honest efforts they were unable to make ends meet. Seeing their distress and problems, Atse would hide tsampa (ground, cooked barley) and other foods where they could find it. If her family found out they would ask accusingly, “Why do you give away our food?.”

At night the younger children usually slept with their mother. Occasionally, they would stay with their father in his room, but this was not comfortable for the children. Even when he was being affectionate they could not easily forget his quick temper and were always a little nervous in his presence. But Atse was warm and gentle with her children. She was well loved. When she went away from home to see her sister Chotö for one or two days, or when she went into retreat at the local Lhakang for one or two weeks, the house felt empty without her. Sometimes the children would get up on top of the flat-roofed house and look sadly out, hoping to catch sight of their mother returning home.

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Although quick to anger and not as gentle and generous as his wife, Pema had faith in the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and in the practical benefits of virtuous living and spiritual nourishment. As a personal practice he did the meditation of Tara, the female embodiment of compassion. For his family he supported several causes, which helped further their spiritual well-being. Pema often invited groups of monks to come to the home to recite sutras and give blessings. Yet he was most discriminating. He knew which monks were not honest, which monks were not following the teachings. He would not have faith in them. Only the intelligent monks with good morals would have his respect.

Pema knew several chants from memory. After the evening meal, at about nine or nine-thirty, he would lead the family in prayers. Most Tibetan houses have large kitchens. This is where the family gathered for the evening chanting. It was the custom

for the father to sit on the right of the large clay oven, which dominated the room, and the mother customarily sat on the left. The children would take a seat anywhere they chose around their parents. They tended to crowd the area on the mother's side so as to avoid their father's eyes.

Pema was in charge during the chanting and as usual was strict. He told everyone that they must attend. No one was permitted to sleep or do something else instead. The chanting lasted almost one hour every night except when Pema was not home. Then Atse or Yangdom led the chanting and it would be much shorter. The mother or daughter would perform only the Chenrezi meditation whereas the father led the family in several meditations.

He would begin the ceremony with many repetitions of the Refuge Prayer:

Lama-la chap su chio

Sangye-la chap su chio

Chö-la chap su chio

Gendün-la chap su chio

Next he would repeat the Chenrezi mantra: “Om Mani Peme Hum.” Then, the Tara mantra: “Om Tare Tutare Ture Soha....” The service would end with the Mahakala prayer: Lama gönpo yimela. Mahakala is a prayer protecting against negative influences. Tobgyal did not know the words of all the chants, but he knew enough to participate happily. He enjoyed the chanting. Without understanding he felt that it was very special, very beneficial. He had heard stories about the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas from visiting lamas (spiritual masters) and other grown-ups. His mind did not discriminate who Chenrezi was or who Tara was but he sensed that repeating the names of the Bodhisattvas and chanting the musical words would

bring much blessing to his family.

Yeshe Gönpö, the eldest son, was permitted to study at a nearby monastery. Being intelligent and hard working, he excelled in his preliminary studies. When his youngest brother Tobgyal was nine years old, Yeshe Gönpö left to continue his education in Gyüme Tantric Monastery in Lhasa. He rarely saw his family after he entered this more distant place of learning.

The next son, Kelsang Gyaltsen, became the oldest son in the home. It was expected that when he was older he would take a more responsible role in the family business. However his father did not neglect his academic education. Pema could not read himself, but he sent his son to a local teacher and bartered for lessons. Every morning the father told his son that he must go up onto the roof and repeat the sutras he was learning. Sitting on the flat top, he would chant his memorizations as the sun was beginning to rise in the sky above the mountains.

Often this was the first sound the household heard as the day began.

He would begin with the mantra of Manjushri, which is the basic wisdom-increasing exercise for many Tibetan Buddhists. The repetition of the sounds: “Om ah ra pa tsa na di di di...” improves the dexterity of one's tongue and lips and the overall quality of one's speech. The recitation was also said to increase intelligence. In most Tibetan homes the quiet sound of Manjushri's mantra could be heard from the rooftop or from the privacy of the rooms within the house. Kelsang also repeated a good luck prayer many times over. His father told his son that this would bring positive potentials, success and a blessing to the home.

Sometimes Tobgyal would wake up to the sound of this chanting from the rooftop. He would imagine himself, sitting like his big brother, legs crossed underneath him, speaking sutras out into the clear and wide morning sky. But, for the young

Tobgyal, play was the order of the day. He would hurry out into the kitchen, drink down a bowl of cold soup left from the night before, and then out into the new day. He and his small siblings and friends were too young for chores, so play was interrupted only for the three daily meals.

Tobgyal's favourite time of the year was spring when the clay along the streams was loose and moist, ready for his small hands to mould into the shapes his mind imagined or remembered. With Phuntso', Adrön and neighboring cousins and friends, Tobgyal would play "let's pretend." Mimicking adults, they made elaborate offering tables and invited each other into their house with grandiose gestures. Or, they would imitate the monks and make ritual cakes, tormas, from the clay and pretend they were performing ceremonies. The children could hear the sound of the monks practicing the special religious music, rölmo, from the small monastery perched on the nearby slopes.

Imitating the sounds of the horns, bells and drums was another favourite game. Tobgyal loved to listen to this music from the mountains. He thought the life of the lamas who made such sounds must be very wonderful.

The play would go on happily for most of the day unless a child would annoy another in some way and a fight would break out. Unfortunately, to both his parents' distress and his father's anger, often it seemed their son Tobgyal was in the middle of the dispute. "You will grow up wild", they warned him. "Bad things will come if you fight like this." Sometimes when he had been especially naughty, when he had caused trouble with the neighbors by upsetting a child, or when he had forgotten, again, to go home at the time his father had specified, Tobgyal would go to stay at his cousin's house. He was afraid to go home. He might be there for one or two days, but eventually his father would come to bring him home. The

punishment would be no less for its postponement.

Tobgyal often played with his brother Phuntso', who was four years older than him. As they grew up together Tobgyal noticed a gradual but definite change in his brother. Sometimes, after a meal, the two boys would return to their clay toys and Tobgyal would sit in front of his older brother's figures. He hoped to fool him, but did not really expect to. Phuntso' would look briefly confused but then would sit down to play with his younger brother's models. This, and similar instances, led Tobgyal to think that there was something wrong with his brother, that for some reason he was losing his mind.

When Phuntso' was about five years old, he had begun to say strange things to his mother. He had said that where he was living was not his real home. He often described the landscape, the trees and buildings in his true home, which he said was in another place. A lama told the boy's parents that

their son was a tulku, a reincarnation of a previously realized being. He advised them to treat him carefully. Perhaps they were not convinced that their son was different. Perhaps they were a little bit lazy. In any case, they did not take the advice seriously.

Phuntso' became subject to dizzy spells which grew worse and worse as he became older. Often he would lose his memory as a result of them. As they became increasingly severe he was no longer able to talk. Phuntso' died at the age of thirteen. On the day of his death, he briefly regained his speech and called out to his mother three times, "Ama, ama, ama..." By the time Atse reached his side Phuntso' was dead. He had tried to speak one last time but the effort was frustrated. Perhaps a profound frustration had characterized his life. A tulku unable to fulfill his purpose, unable to be successful in his work.

The family chanted the Chenrezi mantra for

Phuntso'. Everyone was sad, especially Atse. She felt she had not taken proper care of her son. The father was not so grief-stricken, but regretted that he had perhaps made a terrible mistake. The monastery was notified as was the Tibetan custom, and lamas came to pray over Phuntso's body. They did a special ritual called pho-wa to direct his consciousness safely to fortunate rebirth. The body of the boy was left untouched in the room where he had died for three days. Then he was covered with cloth, taken outside and cremated. For forty-nine days the lamas continued to pray. On the forty-ninth day many friends and relatives came to witness the ceremony for Phuntso'. After the service, his ashes were scattered on the mountainside.

With Yeshe Gönpo gone to study in Lhasa and Phuntso' dead, Kelsang and Tobgyal were the only sons left at home who could continue their father's work. Atse's daughters, Yangdom and

Tsering Chödrön, were able to carry out most of their mother's duties, but these did not include running the family business. Tobgyal, who was eight years old at the time, had become less reckless, or “wild”, as his parents called him, and more interested in becoming a monk. He respected the monks who came to his home or whom he saw at the monastery during special ceremonies. He was fascinated by the wonderful rölmo, which he heard from the mountainside monastery, Nyagön Tashi Chöling. He asked if he could please go to study with the monks. Although his mother wanted him to go, his father refused the request. Pema wanted Tobgyal to become a merchant.

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Pema had been sick for years with a stomach problem, possibly an ulcer. Sometimes it was better but with each relapse he got progressively worse. Finally he was experiencing pain most of the time,

eating less and had become quite thin. One day, when Tobgyal and Adrön came in from play, the mother and older daughters were crying. They were told that their father was dead. The funeral ceremony for Pema was less elaborate than that of his son Phuntso'. Tobgyal assisted at the cremation of his father. The smoke from the funeral pyre rose straight up into the blue sky, indicating that his rebirth would be fortunate.

With Pema gone the decisions of the family fell on Atse's shoulders. She decided that when Kelsang came of age he would be given the responsibility for the family business. As for Tobgyal, Atse had never disapproved of his aspirations. She began to make arrangements for her son to begin studying with the lamas in the mountainside monastery.

Nyagön
Tashi Chöling

Atse, Kelsang and Tobgyal followed the familiar path up the sloping valley wall to Nyagön Tashi Chöling Monastery. Many times they had made this short pilgrimage up the mountain to take part in the public initiations and celebrations at the Lhakang. This visit would be different. When Atse returned home, she would be returning without her youngest son. Tobgyal's dreams were beginning to unfold. Today he would begin his stay at the monastery. Atse was proud and happy, but she knew that this was Tobgyal's first step away from her. She remembered when Yeshe Gönpo had made this same walk up the mountain. He was away in Lhasa now at Gyüme Tantric Monastery. She did not see him any more. She thought of him becoming a wise tantric lama, and the clouds of sadness, which had momentarily shadowed her bright hopes for her children faded. Sure-footed and with new resolve, she continued the climb up the hillside path.

The rooftops of the monastery temple and

the monk's houses were soon in view. The three travelers stopped when they came to the house where Sönam lived. Sönam was like a son to Atse's sister Chotö. In fact, he was the nephew of Chotö's husband Wangden. When Sonam's parents died, Chotö and Wangden took responsibility for him. They arranged for Sonam's education at Nyagön Tashi Chöling and financed his trip to Lhasa where he stayed at Ganden Monastery (monastic community established by Tsongkhapa) for three years. Now that Sönam was back in Bumting, Chotö still visited her 'son' often, bringing food and helping him in any way she could. Sönam would now be given an opportunity to repay this kindness. Tobgyal was going to live with Sönam and he would be responsible for the boy. This was a common arrangement in Tibetan monasteries. At times up to ten children would live with a monk in his home.

Atse gave money and tsampa to Sönam for Tobgyal's care, even though it was not necessary. It

was not unusual for poor families to send sons to a monastery without any means for their material support, and they would be taken care of. Sometimes this was successful if the children developed a sincere interest, but often they could not adjust, and eventually returned home.

Sönam was responsible for teaching Tobgyal the monastery rules and customs, and taking care of his daily needs, but Tobgyal also required a Dharma teacher to oversee his reading and daily memorization. Atse asked Yeshe Gönpö's former teacher, Lobsang Tenpa, if he would take Tobgyal as one of his students. He agreed to begin the instruction within the next few days.

Sönam showed Tobgyal how to put on the monk's robes which Atse had purchased from the monastery and then took him to see the Abbot. At the end of the morning, Tobgyal attended his first chanting ceremony in the gönpa. The other young children who had been there longer than he were

smiling among themselves at his seriousness and lack of familiarity with the chanting rituals. At the door he could see his mother and older brother peeking into the hall to catch a glimpse of him sitting in his new robes. He felt a little out of place with all these new faces in the large prayer hall. But it was not a big problem for Tobgyal because he had made his decision.

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The first few days at the monastery, especially before he started his studies with Lobsang Tenpa, were lonely and boring for Tobgyal. Aside from the time of formal chanting in the gönpa, Tobgyal was alone or with Sönam. Sönam was kind, but kindness alone did not make up for the loss of his playmates. He passed his free time going for walks around the grounds. If Sönam was not home in the evening Tobgyal would not go out. The main door of the house was on the ground floor and the

living space was on the second floor. An internal ladder joined the two. There were no windows at ground level, which was used for Sonam's horse, but otherwise was empty. Tobgyal was afraid to go down the ladder at night especially if he was alone.

When Tobgyal began to attend classes with his tutor, his days became fuller and more interesting. He had work to do and also a chance to meet some of the boys his own age in a less formal way. It did not take long for him to accustom himself to the daily routine and to make friends with some of the other novices. He would get up at five-thirty each day, splash cold water on his face to wash the sleep away, and then would begin the repetition of the Manjushri mantra. He continued until he heard the conch shell trumpet calling the monks to the first morning chant. In any kind of weather, all the monks gathered on the steps outside the gönpa. There they would chant the prayer of praise to Tsong Khapa, Migtsema.

Sometimes the chanting would be shortened slightly if the weather was particularly bad, but otherwise it would continue for fifteen to twenty minutes out-of-doors. The oldest monks would enter the gönpa first and then the next, according to seniority. Finally two young novices would sound the conch shell again and everyone would go into the hall. The chanting, which followed varied from month to month. Sometimes it was Lama Chöpa (offering ritual to one's spiritual masters), sometimes Yamantaka, Heruka, Medicine Buddha, Tara, Chenrezi or other meditational objects.

When Tobgyal first arrived, in the spring, a Chenrezi retreat was just beginning. This retreat took place at the same time every year during the month of Saga Dawa. When are celebrated the Buddha's birth, enlightenment and parinirvana. When the morning chanting was completed the monks ate breakfast of tsampa, soup and tea in the temple. Afterwards, most of them returned their

wooden bowls to their homes and gathered their books for morning classes.

Tobgyal enjoyed his classes with Lobsang Tenpa. He did not find it difficult to master his assignments and he respected and liked his tutor. Lobsang Tenpa treated Tobgyal with compassion and appreciated his student's patient, diligent and capable mind. He had seen similar qualities years before in Tobgyal's older brother, Yeshe Gönpö.

The novices were taught to read and were helped to learn the words of the chants by heart. Not much emphasis was put on writing. It was considered more important to hold the sutras in the mind and be able to recall them easily. The first two prayers, which Tobgyal memorized, were the Refuges and Lama Chöpa. During the morning class, Lobsang Tenpa would tutor each child one by one, explaining their particular assignments. As he went from student to student he would ask older boys to help those who were having difficulties.

At the end of the morning class Tobgyal returned to Sönam's house and exchanged his book for his monk's bowl. After an hour of chanting, lunch was served in the prayer hall. During the free time, which followed, Tobgyal often studied his memorization assignment for the evening meeting with his tutor. He would also use this time to take care of personal needs or to play with some of the other students on the monastery grounds.

The third and final chanting session of the day began at four o'clock. If there was a good reason for one's absence, one might be excused from this session if it was specially requested. It was not a long ceremony, usually lasting about one hour. Following this, the students went to their tutor's home. Tobgyal and his classmates, about ten to fifteen in all, began to recite the memorization assignments. Lobsang Tenpa watched and listened carefully and was very strict. If one of the boys fooled around or had not honestly tried to do the

required work, he would be disciplined.

After an hour of this memorization testing, Tobgyal returned to Sönam's house for supper. Not all monks ate supper but they would make it for the novices under their care. Sometimes Sönam would eat with Tobgyal and sometimes not. In their own home the monks made their own rules. Similarly, the monks chose whether they would eat meat or not. Most Tibetans do eat meat except during Tara or Chenrezi days of fasting during which special commitments are made. Sönam would often cook a combination, half vegetables and half meat, wrapped in dough, called momos. Another dish was thukpa, a mixture of noodles, cheese and vegetables. Tsampa with cheese or butter was another common meal.

By the time the supper was over it would be almost eight-thirty. Tobgyal would usually go to sleep, anticipating his five o'clock rising the next morning.

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The monastery's daily routine was not the same all year. There were several exceptions. For example at the end of the Saga Dawa retreat, which began at the same time as Tobgyal arrived, the monastery opened its doors to the lay people. There was a ceremony, which included initiations, blessings and the giving of rilbus. Rilbus were specially consecrated pills, which had been prepared during the retreat. Atse and her children came for this celebration. When they went home at the end of the day, Tobgyal went back to Bumting Valley with them. Many monks, especially the younger ones, went home for about two weeks of holiday at the end of Saga Dawa. The regular activities of the monastery were suspended for the vacation.

The summer retreat, Yarne, was another important variation in the monastery schedule. During this retreat no lay people were allowed into Nyagön Tashi Chöling and the monks committed

themselves to staying within one mile of the monastery. Before Yarne began, anything borrowed had to be returned, and any differences settled. This was done to assure that no ill-will arise during the retreat. It would have had very negative effects if vows were broken due to anger or attachment. There was no eating after the midday meal for those who were committed to the retreat. Not all the monks who stayed at the monastery took the vows, which were associated with Yarne, but they did honour the various rules, which would affect those who had. It was important that a peaceful and austere atmosphere be maintained.

Gaye Yarkyi was the summer festival, which followed Yarne, the summer retreat. The monks went higher up the mountain to a spot near a mountain lake. There they put up a large tent and lived in it for the next week. During the summer festival, families from all around the valley came with their tents and camped near the large

monastery tent. What followed was a week of picnicking, contests, and dancing. There were wrestling matches, horse races, archery competitions and running races. Presents were given to the winners and the losers. Some rich lay people offered prizes, but mostly the monastery awarded them.

The monks did not take part in the contests, but this did not seem to spoil the fun for the young novices who watched all the activities. Also it was another chance for them to spend time with their families. Tobgyal would run over to his family's tent between events and visit with them. It was an exciting and colourful time to which Tobgyal looked forward each year during his stay at Nyagön Tashi Chöling.

Losar, the Tibetan New Year, is another big celebration on the Tibetan calendar. Within the monastery the celebration began the day before the new-year. A long Mahakala chant accompanied by the powerful sound of the cymbals and drums ended

with a symbolic destruction of the old year's negativities. On New Year's Day, the monks awoke early and greeted each other. “Tashi Delek” was heard throughout the monastery. A ritual followed during which each monk was given barley tsampa with a torma. This was thrown away and then a second was given. The second was eaten and a prayer offered for a happy and successful year filled with good Dharma practice. Then the monks were given dough cakes, which had been dipped in honey and shaped into various forms. Each monk received five of these delicious cakes. Then they were permitted to go to their families, if they wished, for the New Year holiday.

The two-week holiday at Losar was another opportunity for Tobgyal to spend time with his relatives. Every day his family either had a party or went to one. There was dancing, drinking, feasting; a most festive time. It was especially fun for the children, who played together happily during this

week-long party.

As time went by at Nyagön Tashi Chöling, Tobgyal began to see the monastery more and more as his home. He had been lonely at first. He had missed the busy household, the siblings, cousins and friends. The nights at Sönam's house had been the worst time. Tobgyal would roll out his mat and blanket, sometimes in the shrine-room sometimes in the kitchen, and wish he would have someone to talk with instead of falling asleep in the quiet empty house alone. Sometimes old monks would come to visit Sönam and Tobgyal was happy for their company, but he would have preferred to be with friends his own age. Some of the boys who stayed with another monk would complain that with so many of them living together there was sometimes not very much for supper. But Tobgyal thought it would be better to have less food and more friends than much food and loneliness.

As Tobgyal became well known in the small,

closely-knit monastery, it became more and more natural for him to go home with his friends for supper. Sometimes he would stay overnight. The monks were flexible and this was perfectly acceptable. It made good sense that the boy did not stay alone too often, especially since after the first year Sönam was not at home for much of the time. Sönam did not teach at Nyagön Tashi Chöling and his understanding of Buddhist philosophy was not profound, but he had other qualities, which resulted in his being invited to stay with families and at other monasteries quite frequently. His ritual skills of chanting, playing the horn and making tormas were highly developed. He was artistic and could draw beautifully. These abilities were well respected by the Tibetan people.

Tobgyal stayed at Nyagön Tashi Chöling almost four years. He accepted the strict and demanding life cheerfully. He was inspired by the example of some of the older monks. He respected

their human development, their wisdom and their purity of mind. They were a living testimony to the results of sustained Dharma practice. Tobgyal did not doubt the benefits of his studies and his mind did not waver from his purpose, which was to become like those lamas whom he revered. But this did not prevent him from enjoying his life at Nyagön Tashi Chöling and playing and relaxing with his many friends.

Tobgyal's energy and resolve were translated into accomplishment. His knowledge was increasing; more and more texts were committed to his memory. He had imprinted in his mind the Refuges, Lama Chöpa, the Confession to the Thirty-five Buddhas, the Eight Praises by Tsong Khapa and the Amitabha Pure Land Prayer. Tobgyal had almost completed the memorization of the tenth chapter of Shantideva's Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life (Bodhisattva-caryavatara).

The Abbot and other senior monks tested

the students each year. Tobgyal would take a seat in their presence and they would ask him many questions. He was asked details about the monastery rituals and chants. He was asked to recite the prayers he had memorized. Tobgyal did very well. In his fourteenth year, his results were particularly excellent. He received high praise for his diligence and achievement and was told that he had now completed his basic training and was qualified to begin higher studies.

It was acceptable for a monk to stay in a small monastery for anywhere from three to seven years depending on his progress, but after that, study at a higher institution, a university, was necessary for a minimum of three years. The monk could then return if he wished to the original monastery or go on to higher education. The senior teachers at Nyagön Tashi Chöling encouraged Tobgyal to go. Perhaps Tobgyal would come back to teach at the Bumting monastery as Lobsang

Tenpa and others had done. It was in the best interest of Nyagön Tashi Chöling to send him away and hope for his return, one day, as a highly learned and realized teacher.

Another influence on Tobgyal's decision was the attraction of the fabled city of Lhasa. Lhasa was a source of fascination for the families of Kham province. It was believed to be an exciting, happy and religious place with many opportunities for spiritual and material prosperity. Because of the distance between Kham and Lhasa, there was little evidence to prove or disprove the idealistic vision people had of the legendary capital city.

The adventure of going to Lhasa had captured the imagination of Tobgyal's sister as well. Tsering Chödrön was an independent woman who had never married. She had no family of her own to care for in Kham and she did not need to stay to help her mother. Yangdzom, the oldest daughter, had repeatedly declined any arrangements for her

marriage. She was content to stay with her mother in the family home. Between Yangdom and Kelsang her mother would be well taken care of. Tsering was free to travel. She was interested in working in Lhasa and in meeting wise and realized teachers there. Tsering was an ani-la, a kind of Tibetan nun. She was not attached to any particular monastery or nunnery. She had taken vows with a lama, and lived a celibate life. It was not unusual in Tibet for women to become ani-la like this. She did her practices on her own and worked among the lay people.

When a group of about one hundred people from Kham were planning a trip to Lhasa, Tobgyal and Tsering asked to be able to travel with them. A famous lama, Jazhin Kushu, was one of the principal members of the caravan and a good friend of Tobgyal's extensive family. The lama agreed to take responsibility for Tobgyal and Tsering on the journey; to introduce the boy to the appropriate people at Ganden University and to take Tsering to

Lhasa.

When the time came for leaving, Atse, who had optimistically planned and prepared for the trip, became very sad. She was happy and excited for her children but now that it was time for them to go she realized that she might never see them again. With the busy preparations over she now gave this thought her attention. Tobgyal said he would be coming back to Bumting valley, but would he? And if he did would she still be alive? And what of her daughter Tsering, would Atse ever see her again? Atse cried and cried. Lama Kushu tried to console her by assuring her that he would take good care of Tobgyal and Tsering. But no one could cheer her up as she said good-bye to her two children.

Ganden

It was summertime when the travelers set out from Bumting Valley. They did not want to add the harshness of the Tibetan winter to the difficulty of the long trek to Lhasa. As it was, with only the occasional summer rains to slow them down, the journey would take close to three months. Each day they tried to walk about twenty-five miles. Mules and horses carried their food and tents. They ate mostly tsampa and vegetables and drank buttered tea. At night they slept in the large tents. For Tobgyal the trip was an exciting new experience. He had never journeyed so far from home. He was traveling through lands and meeting people he had never seen before, seeing things he had only heard of. But despite his enthusiasm, he was often hot, tired and hungry. Twenty-five miles a day is a grueling pace to keep up and it sometimes took its toll on the young traveler. But Lama Kushu was kind and supportive. He was a highly respected lama, famous for his siddhis (spiritual

accomplishments) and the miraculous events, which often occurred in his presence. However in his relations with Tobgyal and Tsering, he was more like family, the love between them was more like that of a kindly grandfather and his grandchildren than of a Lama and his students.

After passing through many valleys and crossing over range after range of rugged mountains, the rooftops of Ganden finally became visible in the distance. Tobgyal was amazed at the size of the sprawling university. He anticipated the excitement of Lhasa and reunion with his older brother whom he had not seen for five years. But Tobgyal was to be temporarily disappointed. By the standards of Tibet, whose settlements are spaced so far from one another, the day's walk to Lhasa from Ganden is not very noteworthy. But to a fourteen-year-old boy who had imagined over and over his entrance into the magical city, the distance between Ganden and Lhasa was interminably great. When Tobgyal was

told that he would be remaining in Ganden while the old lama, his sister, and the rest of the caravan went on to Lhasa, he could not help but feel disillusioned and unhappy.

Lama Kushu called together the senior monks of the collegiate section of Ganden College formed from Kham natives. He asked them to make the boy feel at home and to treat him kindly. They were most accommodating with Tobgyal but he still did not want to stay, and was miserable when the party went on towards Lhasa. Tobgyal's first month in the huge complex of colleges, monks' apartments and temples called Ganden Monastery was not happy. The monastery seemed too strict, too impersonal and he could not easily settle into the routine. There was a holiday at the end of the month and some of the monks were planning to go to Lhasa. They had compassion on the lonely new student from Kham and took Tobgyal along with them so that he could visit with his brother.

From what Tobgyal had heard he expected Lhasa to be like the Pure Land of Dewachen. When he finally walked into the legendary city it was not as overwhelming as the legends suggested but it was truly a city of wonders for Tobgyal. He marveled at the quantities of food, colourful materials and other goods being sold or traded in the crowded streets. Such bazaars were not found in Kham. The party of monks did not stop here however; they hurried along the roads towards the sacred temple of Jokhang, the first stop for all pilgrims arriving into the holy city. A long line of worshippers waited outside the temple. Tobgyal took his place in line with the other monks, nuns and lay people. After he had offered his prayers to the representations of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in the ancient shrine, the monks took him to his brother, Yeshe Gönpö. The wonders of Lhasa could be explored later. For now the wonder of the love between the two brothers overshadowed any sightseeing, even in magical

Lhasa. Tobgyal breathed a long sigh of gratefulness as the welcoming arms of his brother surrounded him in a warm embrace.

Tobgyal passed a month in Lhasa with his brother and his sister Tsering Chödrön, who was already there. It was a happy reunion. Yeshe Gönpö was so pleased to have his younger brother with him that he considered enrolling him in Gyüme Tantric Monastery where he was studying. But Thubten Chöpel, Yeshe Gönpö's teacher and cousin, responded negatively to this suggestion. Thubten Chöpel protested that with himself and Yeshe Gönpö already studying at Gyüme, there would be enough tantric lamas for one family. He argued that an education in Buddhist philosophy was important and this kind of knowledge could not be acquired at Gyüme. The tantric monks practice the use of ritual instruments and they work to master their vocal chords for chanting, but although they learn some meanings and some Lam Rim (graduated path to

enlightenment), they are not taught philosophy. Thubten Chöpel urged his cousin Yeshe Gönpö to take Tobgyal back to Ganden, where he could become a wise Buddhist philosopher and scholar.

Encouraged by this advice from Thubten Chöpel and calmer and happier as a result of his stay with his brother, Tobgyal became more positive about his impending return to Ganden. As the end of the holiday approached, Yeshe Gönpö took his brother, in the new robes he had made for him, back to the university. This time there was some sadness but no protest. Tobgyal was satisfied. He had recovered his resolve and was ready to begin his new life in the large Gelugpa monastery.

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At Ganden, Tobgyal moved in with his twenty-nine-year-old cousin, Küncho' Gyaltsen, the son of his father's brother. Küncho' was a senior monk and Chanting Master of Ganden's Jangtse

college and had his own apartment. It had two rooms, a kitchen and a large living room. Geshe Gyaltzen Chöpel, Tobgyal's other cousin at Ganden, was the son of his mother's sister. These three cousins became close friends and formed a little family within Ganden Monastery. Tobgyal's life at Ganden was different from the one he had followed at Nyagön Tashi Chöling. The rituals, chants and customs were not the same. The colourful dress worn during the chanting ceremonies was another change. Tobgyal and the other young monks wore quite simple yellow hats but with seniority the hats became more magnificent. The Gelugpa are often called “Yellow Hats” because of this unique attire. It was a dramatic sight to see the bright yellow against the deep red robes and golden suits of the senior monks as they entered the prayer hall. In the clear morning air, this was a beautiful sight.

Tobgyal's first year of study was devoted to accustoming himself to the rituals and memorizing

the new chants and mudras (hand gestures). It was the responsibility of the regional group to be sure a new monk received all these prerequisite instructions. During Tobgyal's second year at Ganden he was introduced to the first preliminaries in philosophy. These first problems in logic were called Dura. Dura is a unique system, which is considered as a key to open the door to higher learning and to the Buddhist philosophies inaccessible to the unprepared. It consists of basic exercises in logic to open the mind, to strengthen it, and to make it more agile.

Along with the introduction of Dura, Tobgyal participated in his first preliminary debates. For each lesson with a teacher hours were spent debating what had been studied. The concepts were turned inside out, upside down, approached from all angles and split into tiny parts. The ideas became strong and clear in the student's mind and were transformed from superficially acquired

knowledge into personal and profound wisdom.

It is not absolutely necessary to study and debate Dura. Someone who is intelligent can understand Buddhist philosophy without this foundation, but it is more difficult. Certainly Dura can do no harm, and for the young monks it was fun and a challenging pastime. Tobgyal enjoyed debating and quickly became good at this new game of skill. He and some of his young friends were popular with the older geshe and lamas who enjoyed watching the geshe-in-training; so serious-minded, energetic and enthusiastic as they debated for hours, sometimes two or three times a day. The program of study, memorization and debate in the problems of logic lasted for about three years. There were three stages of Dura. After these had been passed through, it was considered that the mind had been opened, and that the roots of understanding were firmly in place. Then the branches of more difficult philosophies were developed. The ideas became

more complicated. Khenpo Yeshe Gawa Rinpoche, the Abbot of Jangtse College of Ganden, was Tobgyal's first philosophy teacher and guided him through these three years.

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The Manjushri meditation was very familiar to Tobgyal. From a very early age he had heard it recited by his brother Kelsang on the roof of the family home in Kham. Then at Nyagön Tashi Chöling he had begun his days with the recitation of the mantra. At Ganden the emphasis on this practice did not diminish. He continued to begin each day with the Manjushri meditation. It was invaluable in making his mind more receptive to memorization. Memorization was an important skill to master for someone studying to become a Geshe.

One time when Tobgyal was sitting in solitary meditation on a rooftop, repeating the Manjushri mantra, he had a clear and powerful

experience. A visualization of Tsong Khapa became tiny like a miniature representation. In every detail it was perfect and lifelike. He felt the sensation of this small image of Tsong Khapa slowly come down and enter into his heart. Tobgyal's ability to memorize, to read and to understand difficult texts became excellent. His mind was clear and strong and it was able to hold and comprehend many ideas. During this time the content of his dreams was new and inspiring. His dream signs showed that he would someday become very helpful in serving the Dharma and very helpful to sentient beings. There were also some troubling signs showing that there would be huge obstacles. But, if the obstacles did not get the better of him, the dreams seemed to indicate that he would do much good and would have a successful life. Tobgyal was sixteen when these new elements entered into his practice and they continued until about his twentieth year. He was becoming calmer, more mature and wiser as a result of the studies

these qualities inspired.

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By the time he was twenty-three, Tobgyal had completed nine years of study at Ganden University. He had mastered the three stages of Dura, the preliminary logic, and had studied the more difficult logic of Dharmakirti. Studying and debating Dharmakirti's logic makes the mind sharp like Manjushri's sword, capable of attacking new problems and uncovering new levels of meaning. Between the ages of eighteen and twenty-three Tobgyal completed a five-year course on the Six Perfections. He studied this with his lama, Geshe Nyima Gyaltzen Rinpoche. This study was aided by a commentary of Tsong Khapa. From the age of seventeen Tobgyal had also begun tantric practices. He received initiations and practiced sadhanas (means for attainment). This was not, strictly speaking, part of the university curriculum, but

more a matter of choice. Different Lamas, some in residence, some visiting Ganden, would offer initiations and supervise retreats for monks of all ages and levels. Tobgyal studied Tantra with several Lamas, but he received his main teachings from His Holiness Yongdzin Trijang Dorje Chang Rinpoche.

In his twenty-third year Tobgyal was asked to begin giving back to others some of the teachings he had received. Tobgyal began to teach his own students, guiding them through the stages of Dura and through the Six Perfections. He continued in his personal studies on the Treatises of Maitreya and to work on Nagarjuna's presentation of Madhyamaka. Two important commentaries, which helped explain Madhyamaka, were Uma Jugpa by Chandrakirti and Uma Gongpa Rabsel by Tsong Khapa. Jampa Lodrö Rinpoche instructed Tobgyal in the Madhyamaka teaching on emptiness or shunyata.

From the age of twenty Tobgyal had lived alone in his own apartment and this is where he met

with his students. The monks whom he taught called him “Gen-la Tobgyal.” At age fourteen when he committed himself to the Getsul vows (novice monk), Tobgyal was given the name “Sönam Gelay.” But the new name never seemed to stick and everyone continued to call him Tobgyal. When Gen-la Tobgyal passed his first level of examination he was assigned to the category of geshe lingtse and became “Geshe Tobgyal”, “Geshe Khenrab”, or simply “Geshe-la.” Tobgyal was twenty-seven years old when he became a geshe lingsey. The year was 1955.

Escape from Tibet

Geshe-la walked down the mountain from Ganden towards Lhasa. The ground was now familiar under his feet. For thirteen years, three times a year, he had traveled back and forth on this same road. He wondered what difference would surface this time, what along the way or at journey's end in Lhasa would evidence again the movement of eternal change.

Five years before, when Geshe-la was twenty years old, he remembered walking to Lhasa along the same route, unprepared for the news that his brother Yeshe Gönpö was going to return to Bumting to become the chanting master at Nyagön Tashi Chöling. Tsering Chödrön had already left to work in Western Tibet. Her cousin, Tana Tenthong, was married to Tsinjigme, the chief secretary to the Panchen Lama. Geshe-la sighed sadly. He missed his brother and sister. Change is the only constant, he thought. But he found comfort in the thought of his old cousin, Thubten Chöpel, who still lived in

Lhasa. Dear Thubten, always ready with his frank and wise advice. Always ready with his almost paternal affection and quick humour. Geshe-la's mood changed as he saw Thubten's face in his mind's eye. His pace quickened a little to match his lifted spirits.

As Geshe-la and the group of monks he was traveling with approached Lhasa a People's Liberation Army car drove up towards them. This was not unusual. Ever since the Chinese Communists invaded Kham in 1950 their numbers in Lhasa had steadily grown. They had made a kind of peace with the Tibetan government, claiming they only wanted to be of help and to protect Tibet from other countries. The car pulled to the side of the road to allow room for the monks to pass. The soldiers' greetings appeared friendly and respectful but Geshe-la did not trust their intentions. He was never able to assure himself that they were not dangerous. Sometimes he would hear older Lamas

foretelling that the communists would bring much suffering upon the Tibetan people. Geshe-la had a strong foreboding that it was their concealed intention to destroy his country.

When he arrived in Lhasa there were many more Chinese than the year before. In speaking with Thubten Chöpel he learned how the Chinese were insinuating themselves into the fabric of Tibetan society. They were becoming involved with the wealthier lamas and nobles and trying to gain power through them. The change that Geshe-la found on this visit to Lhasa was unsettling. When he returned to Ganden he was troubled and worried for his country's future.

Each time Geshe-la returned to Lhasa the situation was worse. As their numbers and power grew, the attitude of Mao's soldiers also changed and they grew bolder. By 1958 the People's Liberation Army was everywhere within the city and on the route leading into it. No longer did they greet the

monks with respect, but openly ridiculed them and made threatening faces. No longer did they move aside on the road for them to pass. Monks and lay people alike who traveled either on foot or with pack animals had to be ready to hurry out of the way as the Liberation Army cars and trucks rolled through. They would mow down anything or anybody who was in the way without even stopping to look.

Each year Geshe-la was accustomed to participating in the Monlam Chenmo. This “Great Prayer Festival”, established by Tsong Khapa, was a large annual meeting held in Lhasa to which the monks from Sera, Drepung and Ganden monasteries were invited. Monks from distant monasteries were also welcome but the majority came from those closest to Lhasa. Up to fifty thousand monks would arrive in the city and assemble together at the Jokhang. Monlam Chenmo continued for twenty-one days. Elections and geshe exams were important

scheduled activities. Also at this time the monks received their annual income for clothes and food.

In the spring of 1959, Geshe-la decided against attending Monlam Chenmo. He did not want to enter Lhasa. Some of the older lamas were having terrible premonitions of suffering for the Tibetan people. Geshe-la listened intently as they spoke, for he too was having dreams night after night, vivid dreams of fighting and oppression at the hands of the Liberation Army.

The decision not to attend the Monlam proved a fortunate choice for Geshe-la. News reached Ganden that there was fighting in the capital city and that the Dalai Lama had been spirited out of Lhasa soon after the Monlam was over. It was too dangerous for him to stay in Tibet. No longer satisfied with the slow-paced corrosion from within of the Tibetan identity and culture, the communist army was beginning to destroy it with outward force. The supreme target was the Tibetan religion

and its representatives because they saw these as their most potent and deep-rooted foe. When Geshe-la heard that the Dalai Lama had left he realized that he must make a decision. Ganden was no longer a sanctuary. No part of Tibet was safe. There was really not much choice. If he were to continue on his path, he would have to leave Tibet. If he stayed, eventually his freedom to practice as he chose would no longer be permitted. Geshe-la decided that there was no time to waste, and quickly made preparations with several other monks to leave Ganden.

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Geshe-la spent his first night as a refugee on a mountain not far south of Ganden. A monk's life is not an easy one, but to be lying on the mountain snow with only a coat to keep out the cold was a big change. The next morning he woke up cold and numb. As he tried to walk stiffly along the slope of

the mountain, the slippery skins on the underside of his boots slid on a slick piece of ice. Without warning Geshe-la's feet were flung out from under him. He crashed down face first on the hard crusty snow and then was sent careening down the slope. For a few moments as he slid towards the edge of a steep mountain cliff Geshe-la was sure he was going to die. Somehow he managed with scraping fingers to break the fall and he slowly edged, finger-hold by finger-hold, back up the incline. When the ground was finally flat underneath him he stood up and quickly raised his hand to his injured face. He expected to find broken teeth, perhaps a broken jaw, but surprisingly there was no serious harm done, a lot of bleeding and bruising, but no major damage. He looked shakily back towards Ganden. Then slowly turning his aching body he nodded to his concerned companions. Yes, they should go on now. The journey would be a long one and they should not linger any longer on this mountain. One last time

Geshe-la looked towards Ganden. The simple truth of impermanence is demonstrating itself to me again, he thought. He tried to transform his sense of loss into gratitude for the profound lesson, and started walking, slowly and carefully, along the slippery side of the mountain.

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A few miles south of Ganden there is a famous monastery, Samye, built by King Trisong Detsen for the noble Padmasambhava. Although it is not far from Ganden Geshe-la had never visited the building before. He stayed there for one day, resting and gathering strength for the next part of the journey. Some Tibetan soldiers were also staying at the ancient monastery. They warned the monks that the people of Southern Tibet were becoming suspicious of the many refugees who were passing through or settling in their lands. Already some had been revealed as Chinese spies. The people were

fearful, afraid to put themselves in danger by helping the fleeing monks. Also, the Chinese were instilling fear and suspicion into their minds. The Tibetan army officials gave the monks special passports, which described who they were so that they would have something to show any Tibetans who might question them as they journeyed southward.

From Samye, Geshe-la traveled to Yarlung. Yarlung is about one week's walking distance from Ganden. Along the way they stayed with families who were not afraid to take them in. Sometimes they were refused and had to keep walking until they found shelter. Many of the refugees from Lhasa and Ganden were staying in Yarlung. They thought that the Tibetan army would be able to protect them and that they were safe. Some of the monks traveling with Geshe-la decided that they too would stay but Geshe-la thought this ill-advised. He tried to convince them to continue on to India or Bhutan with him but they could not be persuaded.

So Geshe-la headed south without them. Geshe Lobsang Tenpa, Küncho' Gyaltzen, Sherab, a young student, and Kundu, another monk from Ganden, accompanied him. During a time of crisis and danger Geshe-la seemed most able to maintain his presence of mind, so he became the natural decision-maker for the group. Geshe Lobsang was a wise lama, but in these difficult conditions the old monk quietly retreated into himself. He silently followed Geshe-la's lead while praying continuously in a whisper. His face became a strange reddish-purple colour and Geshe-la worried that the stress was too much for him. But Geshe Lobsang continued on without ever complaining. Küncho' Gyaltzen was nervous and unsettled, but his health was good so the traveling and harsh conditions were not too difficult for him. Sherab was strong and ever willing to take on an extra load if the older monks became tired. Kundu was a monk from Ganden but not well known to Geshe-la. They never did become close friends but

Kundu caused no problems for the group and always looked to Geshe-la for direction.

When the refugees reached Dikuthang, the next town they were going to rest in, about one thousand Tibetan soldiers were passing through the town at the same time. The soldiers had been unable to hold back Mao's troops and were now being pursued. The soldiers were stopping briefly near the large lake of Dikuthang to have a quick meal and drink some tea. Then they quickly moved on. But Geshe-la could not. Dikuthang is not only near a large lake but is also on a high plateau. The combination of the cold and the wind which was increasing, unhindered across the flatness of the land and open lake, was deadly. The party of monks were on foot and they could not move as swiftly as the soldiers on horseback. Geshe-la said that they would have to spend the night in Dikuthang. What would be the point of eluding the Chinese, only to die in the darkness of a cold Tibetan night?

As they had done many times before the monks began asking for shelter within the houses of the town. They knocked on the door of a small house. An old woman in a simple dark blue chuba (traditional tibetain clothes) answered the door. Her smiling eyes greeted the monks and she urged them to come in saying, “Yes, yes they must stay the night.” Her voice was gentle and soft as she told the monks where they could put their things in the one-room dwelling. The warmth of the tiny home was welcome after the day's walking in the cold. The small shrine in the room was comforting. It was beautifully adorned with tormas, butter lamps and food offerings. Central on the shrine was an exquisite statue of Tara. The woman made soup for the monks and encouraged them to help themselves and make tea or tsampa over her fire.

That night even though Geshe-la was exhausted he was not able to sleep well. The clothes he was wearing had not been changed and he had not

been able to wash thoroughly for a long time. As a result lice were making their home on his body. All night the irritation kept waking him up. Also, each time there was any sudden noise or if the door slammed, his cousin would start up from his sleep anxiously. He thought the communist soldiers were coming to arrest him. Geshe-la began to console his cousin but the old woman intervened telling Küncho' Gyaltsen not to worry. She assured him confidently that the Liberation Army would not reach Dikuthang for another week. She told him to relax and sleep. Geshe-la wondered at the sureness of her voice. How did she know this? He also wondered where she had learned the highly advanced, intelligent prayers she was repeating on and on into the night. Each time he woke up from scratching or from his cousin's startled movements she was praying in front of her shrine. She did the Tara meditation many times; she prayed for the demons to go from Tibet; for the long life of the

Dalai Lama; that the monasteries would be able to make Dharma again; make debates again; and that Tibet could be the same again. It seemed to Geshe-la that every time he woke up the kindly old woman was still praying. In his weary, uncomfortable, half awake State he gazed at her, wondering who she was, this little woman who lived alone and did not sleep.

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The next place they stayed was a small house in the mountains further to the south. After resting one night they circled the mountain downwards only to have to retrace their steps back up at the end of the day. At the foot of the mountain the Chinese army was sleeping in the fields. There was no choice but to return the way they had come. Geshe-la was tired and hungry but he knew these were small problems compared to what he would face if he were captured. Then he

would have no choices, no chances.

The next day they took another route and walked until about nine o'clock at night hoping to put some distance between themselves and the Liberation Army. They saw a big house in the village and asked to stay there with the other refugees who had also stopped for the night. Two Tibetan soldiers said it was safe to stay because there were Tibetan soldiers in the nearby mountains. Geshe-la believed the soldiers and the exhausted monks slept deeply that night despite the irritation of the lice.

Geshe-la woke up the next morning to the sound of a woman yelling outside of the building. She screamed that the house was surrounded and they should get out. Not wanting to alert anyone by lighting a match or candle, the monks groped around in the darkness for their bootlaces and shoes. Geshe-la's cousin was anxious and beginning to panic. Geshe-la calmed him whispering that he should

slowly and quietly get his belongings together.

There was no sense in being quick if the Chinese were outside. Maybe they would go away. They waited a short time before leaving the house after they were dressed. They had heard no more voices; it was silent outside. With nervous apprehension they walked out into the darkness of early morning. They could see no one in any direction. This was strange. Geshe-la did not know what to think. Were the Chinese soldiers on their way or had they left? Or had a spy tricked them out of the house for some reason? He decided that whatever the case this was not a safe place to stay. Quickly they hurried towards the mountain path leading to the road, which would bring them closer to India.

As they were walking in the darkness on the rough pass through the mountains, Geshe-la was having difficulty navigating. He preferred daytime for traveling; as his night vision was poor. He saw a

white space in front of him and stepped into it heavily thinking it was mountain snow. Without warning Geshe-la was suddenly free-falling. For a second he didn't know how far he was going to fall, but then gratefully he felt the hard ground break against his body. Fortunately he had only fallen about fifteen feet. There is a belief in Tibet that if you fall down hard you should immediately get up and walk three steps. You never stay where you fell. Geshe-la dragged his body up and began to move forward. One step, there was a searing pain in his hip; two steps, it was not broken; on the third step he realized he would not have to tell his friends to go on without him. When he realized he would be able to walk even though it was painful he asked his companions to come and help him back up to the path. With the help of Sherab, who insisted on carrying his pack and supporting him with his free hand, Geshe-la painfully resumed the journey.

It was just after dawn when they came

through the mountain pass. The narrow road ahead of them was framed, on one side, by the mountain wall and on the other side by the Dungkar River. Further down the road the river narrowed and there they would be able to cross over to the town of Lhodunga. Perhaps in Lhodunga they could rest. Geshe-la's hip was painful and he needed to stop. They had traveled only a few minutes when Küncho' pointed into the distance and asked Geshe-la to look down the road. Far away he could make out the hazy form of a Tibetan woman in traditional dress, her colourful apron covering a long chuba. She did not speak but was waving her arms frantically to get their attention. She motioned upwards towards a steep cliff, which lined one side of the road. Geshe-la thought this to be most peculiar; what was a woman doing on this lonely road, so early in the morning? His mind suddenly envisioned Palden Lhamo, the Dakini protector of Tibet. He told the monks to do as she indicated. They climbed up the

mountain several yards and hid behind a pile of large boulders.

From their vantage point they surveyed the surrounding land. The woman had vanished. But a short distance from where she had stood they saw the reason for her warning. About five hundred soldiers of the Liberation Army were having tea and food by the side of the road. Had the monks continued walking they would have been trapped between the river and the mountain with no hope of escape. Geshe-la silently thanked his protector.

In about ten minutes Mao's troops started to ride past the monks' hiding place. With them were many Tibetan refugees who had been taken prisoner. After an hour the army was a safe distance away and the monks scrambled down to the road. They walked towards the narrow part of the river where they crossed over into Lhodunga.

The village people were afraid when they saw the monks. The southern Tibetans had been

warned by the Chinese not to trust the rebels, not to take them in. Geshe-la thought this was a strange word: rebel. He had never thought of himself as a rebel. The absurdity of the situation angered him. The Chinese communists were doing to these poor villagers the same thing they had attempted in Lhasa year before, turning Tibetans against each other with lies and threats. The villagers were afraid to help the refugees. Geshe-la decided to speak frankly to the people, his people.

“We are not rebels. We are not criminals. We have done no wrong. We are monks who are being run out of our county, your country. We are here because the Chinese have taken our country, this is why we left.” Now they speak to you nicely, trying to gain your confidence, but in a few months big trouble will come for you as it did for us. If it were not so we would never be leaving our country. If the way of treating us had been fair, why would we be making this difficult journey out of our beloved

Tibet? These people are lying to you, leading you on. They are inhuman in their treatment of us. They have taken our land, our religion, our lives.”

Geshe-la continued to speak for a long time, trying to calm the people. Trying to help clear their minds, recall who they were and what their basic beliefs were. Fear had blurred the memories of the villagers. By the time Geshe-la had finished speaking they were completely changed. Their gentle, friendly nature was no longer cloaked in fear. They brought wood for a fire and began to cook a meal for the monks. There was a festive air as the town folks gathered together. They had not felt so secure and happy for some time.

The villagers brought ordinary clothes so the monks would not be conspicuous in their robes. Geshe-la put his monk's robe in his packsack and replaced it with a plain red chuba. He also changed his shoes and hat. They stayed in Lhodunga for five days. But after the Chinese soldiers returned they

began searching for refugees within the town, so it was necessary to make plans to move on again. However, it was difficult to know how to leave. Geshe-la made a mo, a special divination, to find the best time for departure. He was a bit startled when the mo indicated that the best time to leave would be that very day. He made some inquiries around the village, and found out that the Liberation Army had left to engage in battle at Tsona. They would be there most of the day. It was a good time to leave. Geshe-la gathered his things together and left Lhodunga with his fellow travelers right away. They crossed the narrow bridge over the Tsangpo River and once again headed south, this time towards the jungle, which separated India from Tibet.

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After two days of walking through the steamy and bug-infested jungle they arrived in the Mön country. Geshe-la knew some of the Mönpas

because he had gone to school with them in Ganden. They had returned to Mön as monks but were now living as laymen. Mönpas were respectful of Dharma and treasured their religion but their way of life was not compatible with the precepts of the monks. They are a fun-loving, exuberant people known for their unusually great consumption of chang, the rich and delicious Tibetan beer. They greeted the monks happily and were always hospitable and generous towards them as they traveled through their territory. Even poor families insisted that they stop and shared a meal with them.

Geshe-la felt relaxed and safe among the jungle Mönpas and decided he might stay there longer. But one man came to warn them that he should continue immediately. Chinese soldiers were coming through the jungle. Spies had alerted him to the fact that there were monks and soldiers hiding among the Mönpas. The Indian border was close now. If they could only keep up the quick pace a bit

longer they could soon stop in safety. The monks had some tea and tsampa then moved on again.

They met some people from Tsöna who had managed to escape from the fighting there. They had terrible stories to tell of the killings and losses. They themselves had only the clothes on their backs and a bit of money. They were exhausted and hungry and so did not listen when Geshe-la advised them to push on a little longer. They bought food and began to make a big meal.

Meanwhile two Tibetans soldiers told Geshe-la they would go back to see how far behind the Chinese soldiers were. They said they would shoot their guns when they saw them and try to stall for more time as the monks hurried to the Indian border. At the sound of gunfire the men who had stopped to eat left their meal and were soon running down the road behind Geshe-la. They ran past him yelling, “The Chinese are coming! The Chinese are coming!” Geshe-la walked slowly down

the last stretch of the road to India and freedom. He would have run with them, but could not. He was only able to walk through sheer willpower as the pain in his hip was excruciating. He sent his companions on ahead at a quicker pace and walked alone. He watched the men running and screaming warnings at the others. He wondered at the absurdity of it all.

Even though the bullets sounded like they were being fired almost above his head, Geshe-la felt confident that the Tibetan soldiers would detain the Chinese long enough. He trusted that he had not come this far only to be stopped now. There is some purpose to all this, he thought. Someday he might understand it, but it was difficult to be philosophical at this moment. As he crossed over the border into India he felt a profound relief and joy. Finally, he could stop; he could relax. But he thought, “How strange to be so happy at leaving one's own country.”

PART TWO

INDIA

Northern India

Geshe-la limped out of Tibet and crossed over into India. He shuddered as a wave of tension passed suddenly from his body. The welcoming smiles of the Indian soldiers added to his profound sense of relief. They gave the refugees food and tents for shelter from the rain, which was beginning to fall. They also offered their sympathy for the terrible loss, which the Tibetans were suffering and urged them not to worry and to take India their second home. Geshe-la felt safe with these friendly, willing and compassionate hosts.

The heavily guarded border of India extended into what had once been Tibetan territory, so although many Indian soldiers were temporarily living there, the majority of the civilians were Tibetan Mönpa. These fortunate people were now protected by India but continued to live as they had done when the border passed below their land. But the presence of the Indian army and the ever-increasing population of fleeing Tibetans was a

constant reminder of the changes being forced on their fellow countrymen and women to the north. The Mönpa were kind to Geshe-la and his companions, adding to the warm feeling of being safe and among friends.

The Mönpas practiced the Dharma and had temples and monasteries on Indian land. Geshe-la made his way to one of these temples hoping to find a place to stay, perhaps a familiar face. The temple was crowded with refugees who had arrived before them. Geshe-la spoke with two Mönpa monks with whom he had gone to school in Ganden. They advised him to go to the larger monastery in Tawang. There would be more space there and perhaps a more organized monastic life. This seemed a good plan and Geshe-la decided he and his companions would travel the extra distance. But before continuing, the monks accepted an invitation to go to one of the Mönpa households. They stayed there for several hours. The family was delighted to

have the monks from Ganden lead a small chanting ceremony in their home. After the ceremony a meal was served and there was much to talk about. The Mönpas had endless questions about Tibet, about relatives and friends who might still be there and about the country's future.

Relaxed and rested, the travelers began to walk southward again, but the urgency was gone from their flight. They walked slowly and spoke quietly together as they went. Geshe-la noticed that the strange colour was fading from Lobsang Tenpa's face. After weeks of silence he was beginning to speak again. Geshe-la's response to the relaxation was mixed. With the release from the stress of constant danger his body began to demand attention. His hip was beginning to seize up and he could move only with great pain. He could push his body no further; after a few hours of walking he knew he would have to rest. The rain which had begun, as they were crossing the border was now falling

heavily. With no great need to hurry any longer it seemed sensible to stop.

The Mönpa houses were over-crowded already with refugees, but Geshe-la noticed an empty building under construction whose framework and loose boards would be a crude but effective shelter. He inquired as to the owner's whereabouts but he was nowhere to be found. They would stay there in any case, thought Geshe-la. These were unusual times; he felt confident the unknowing patron would not mind if the monks made their home there for a few days, long enough for the rain to stop and for Geshe-la's hip to heal.

The rough shelter became a cozy home for the monks. Over a small fire they prepared some tea and tsampa the Mönpa had given them. They spoke happily together of their successful escape and laughed easily. While they were drinking their tea the owner of the building suddenly appeared. He was a Tibetan businessman and also a devout

Buddhist. He was not at all displeased that these monk refugees had found shelter on his property. He left them, to return shortly with rice, dry meat, cheese and vegetables, and insisted they eat another meal with him. The man had brought enough to supply their needs for the rest of the journey to Tawang. He said they should stay as long as was necessary to strengthen them after the long ordeal they had experienced. To be amongst such generous and helpful people lifted the spirits of the monks and they were encouraged. After the meal and much talking with the businessman, the monks lay down to sleep in their makeshift camp. Geshe-la found a quiet corner out of the way and closed his eyes in an instant. He slept without moving for two days.

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The chanting of many voices came to the travelers' ears as they approached the monastery of Tawang. How familiar the sound was. It reminded

Geshe-la of Ganden. The sound of the chanting caused many images and questions to rise in his mind. He wondered whom he would meet there, who had survived, escaped and what had happened to those who had not left. But above all he felt an elation imagining he was perhaps finally coming home. Would this be the end of his journey? Would this be the place where he could resume his studies and practices and begin to live a normal life again?

The monks who came to greet the newcomers were overjoyed that they had managed to escape. Their minds, like Geshe-la's, were filled with question. As they sat down to exchange news, Geshe-la's face suddenly lit up and he moved quickly across the room. Nyima Gyaltsen Rinpoche, his lama from Ganden, was coming towards him. It was a joyous and unexpected reunion.

Geshe-la passed twenty days at the monastery in Tawang. It was a healing experience for him to be with his teacher, Nyima Gyaltsen

Rinpoche, and to be able to resume some of his spiritual practices in a more consistent way. Geshe-la calmed down and strengthened himself so he was better able to face the inevitable questions, which entered his thoughts. The pain in his hip had abated, he was safe from danger, but now the emotional pain began to set in at the dawning realization of the terrible thing that had happened. His country was a shambles, his family and friends - who knew what had become of them? The Dharma was being attacked viciously. The loss was difficult to bear. The Indian people were kind, the Mönpas also, but Geshe-la could not get used to the Indian climate. The heat was a constant reminder that this was not his home. He was a refugee from his land, which was lost, possibly forever. Geshe-la became very sad as he began to mourn for his lost country.

Each day the Indian government had a plane flown over the monastery at Tawang and dropped down food for the monks: The Indians were trying

to preserve what they could of the comfort and lifestyle of the Tibetans. But one day they sent officials to relay an unfortunate but necessary decision. The Tibetans could no longer stay this far north. The Chinese had overrun the Mön border. It would no longer be safe for so many refugees to remain there: they would have to move further south into India. Geshe-la was among those instructed to go to Assam in East India.

Geshe-la traveled by train, something he had never done before. The movement, unlike any other motion he had ever experienced, threw his equilibrium completely off. Geshe-la's face turned pale after a short time on the train and stayed that way for the entire trip. Eating was impossible. He tried to sleep to forget his hunger and discomfort.

When he was awake Geshe-la looked in wonder at the India he had seen before only in pictures. This was no longer the country near the border in Mon. At the train stops he watched the

turbaned men. Tibetan men rarely have much facial hair so it was strange to see these faces with thick black moustaches and long wide beards. Instead of chubas and warm skin boots, everywhere he saw the dyed thin cotton worn in the warm climate of India. On their feet the Indians wore airy leather sandals. He watched the women with their children walking along the station platform in their delicate saris and with covered faces. His thoughts went to his mother and his sisters. He remembered them in their colourful aprons, which covered long-sleeved chubas, their wide tanned faces smiled at him in his imagination. A heavy sadness reappeared and passed over him in a wave. He tried to oppose it with positive thoughts of hope for those left behind, of hope for the future in this new life adventure, but the heat, the strangeness and the nauseating rocking of the train all contributed to his terrible homesickness and misery.

It was while he was deep in these reflections

that Geshe-la noticed the arrival of a Hindu saddhu (an ascetic holy man) into his railway car. Whereas the other passengers drew away with respect and some of them expected to see the signs and indications of a prodigy appear before them the saddhu came over and sat near Geshe-la. Never before had he seen so close to him a man devoted like himself to the spiritual service of others but whose convictions differed from his own. After a few minutes of mutual observation, each returned to his own personal preoccupations.

So as to ease the queasiness, which still wouldn't go away, Geshe-la ate one banana every half-hour. Geshe-la offered some of his unlikely medicine to the saddhu. A few moments later the saddhu accepted, and the two men, who could not communicate linguistically, sat quietly side by side.

At the county capital, Geshe-la had to change trains. He waved good-bye to the saddhu, crossed the station and took up his place in the

convoy heading to Assam. How surprised must he have been a few kilometers (and motion sicknesses) down the road when he saw this very same saddhu come on board his railway car and sit near him once again. Upon several seconds' hesitation, the Indian holy man offered him one of his jars of red floral pigments used by many Hindus for marking the centre of the forehead thereby emphasizing the work of opening the Third Eye, to which they are given.

Geshe-la accepted this gift with pleasure even though the Mahayana tradition forbade the use of any product, which shows or emphasizes a specific Tantric practice. The two men parted company at the Assam station and never saw each other again.

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The two months, which Geshe-la passed in the refugee camp in Assam, were like a bad dream. The rapid change in altitude coupled with the heat

was taking its toll on the uprooted Tibetans. The unsanitary conditions of the overcrowded and unprepared camp caused diseases to spread quickly. Each day almost fifty Tibetans died in Assam. The Indian government tried their best to relocate the Tibetans efficiently, but there were too many in too short a space of time. The bureaucratic task of taking down information, screening for skills and then trying to find available and appropriate jobs for all the refugees was overwhelming. The Dalai Lama wrote to the Indian government and requested that the Tibetan geshe be permitted to continue their studies in India. They would be needed as teachers for the many young monks in exile. Also he pointed out that the tradition would perish if it could not be preserved outside of Tibet. Certainly within Tibet the Chinese would not allow any studies to continue. The Indian government accepted this proposal and agreed to help those geshe who had studied for several years already to continue their

courses in India.

Geshe-la was given permission to leave Assam and travel to Dalhousie. Again the train ride was miserable but he considered himself fortunate to be leaving Assam. He hoped other Tibetans would soon be relocated as well. He wondered what his next residence would be like as he sped across the Indian countryside.

Geshe-la's imagination had not even come close to the actuality of Dalhousie. It was a former summer residence for British people. The place he was to stay in was a beautiful, sturdily built, bright yellow building with shining golden wood floors and glass windows. The views from the windows were breathtaking. The lush greenery of India and the beauty of the distant mountains were a welcome change for the uprooted monks. Geshe-la could not believe his good fortune. How could it be that homeless refugees were given such luxurious accommodations?

Some Indian officials arrived later in the day to greet the monks. They explained that many countries were now sending aid to India on behalf of the Tibetan refugees. It was a comfort to know that people of the world were aware of the plight of Tibet, and that they cared. The Indians expressed a wish to do what they could to make the monks comfortable. Then they invited them to adopt India as their new country. Gratefully, the monks accepted the kind offers of their hosts.

Geshe-la stayed in one of the large airy rooms with five other monks. His lama, Nyima Gyaltzen Rinpoche, was one of them. Slowly the monks organized themselves and began chanting, meditation, and debate. Bit by bit they were reassembling their shattered tradition. Geshe-la also began to study the Hindi language. But he found out that he was actually learning a dialect, which is sometimes difficult to understand in other parts of India. He discussed the merit of continuing with his

teacher. Nyima Gyaltsen Rinpoche told him that it would be more beneficial for him to concentrate on his studies, reciting sutras and practicing meditation and to that end gave the transmission of the Fire Ritual of Vajra Daka, a practice of purification to clear the path. Geshe-la did not continue his language studies.

For six months he stayed in idyllic Dalhousie. But he and twenty-four other geshes received new traveling orders. Many young monks who had fled from Tibet had been relocated in the former prison camp at Baxa. They had done what they could to organize themselves but were now requesting help from the more advanced geshes. They needed teachers. Twenty-five of the forty geshes at Dalhousie were asked to go to Baxa. Geshe-la and Nyima Gyaltsen Rinpoche were among those requested to leave Dalhousie and go to the camp to teach the young monks.

Baxa

Geshe-la recognized Baxa. In his imagination he had already seen the camp. Months before he had left Ganden he had heard rumors about a strange rock behind one of the monastery buildings. Monks were perceiving diverse patterns on the face of the boulder. He thought little at the time of the image, which appeared. He could make no sense of the peculiar little huts made from round sticks, with grass roofs and cloth windows. He wondered what karma had produced this vivid mental projection. But Geshe-la did not think about this vision again until he moved to Dalhousie. The vision returned to him there. Night after night his dreams were filled with images of these same buildings, which he had seen on the rock face. Now, in front of him, sprawled clusters and clusters of small yellow-brown bamboo houses with grass roofs. Over the windows pieces of cloth were draped to keep out the heat.

Baxa, in the jungles of Assam, was a former

British internment camp. The Indian people no longer used it for any purpose. It was decided that Baxa would be a good site for the young Tibetan monks who had come down into India. In August of 1959, about one thousand five hundred monks of the four Tibetan Buddhist sects were re-located to the crowded camp. The majority of the monks were from the Gelugpa school, but monks from the other three schools also relocated in Baxa. All four established structures in the camp to house their schools.

The Indian government gave the camp money for food. Unfortunately the monk who was in charge of purchasing bought large quantities of inferior food, rather than smaller amounts of healthy, fresh produce. The conditions in the kitchen were inadequate for so many people. Often the meals were not well prepared. Sometimes the food was so dry, burnt and foul-smelling that it was inedible. Geshe-la would never put anything into his

mouth if it had a bad smell. He cautioned other monks to be careful, to keep food clean and covered, but they did not always listen and some became ill as a result. He knew it was better to be a little hungry than to be ill. As a result of his selective eating, he became very thin. The other monks worried about him, fearing that he had contracted a serious disease. But Geshe-la was not sick. He was merely eating next to nothing. But others did become ill. The lack of good sanitation, the hot humid weather, and the insects caused the spread of germs and parasites. Tuberculosis and other illnesses spread throughout the camp. Many monks died in Baxa.

Surrounding the camp there were some stone houses formerly used by British policemen. He offered thirty rupees in exchange for the use of one of the empty houses. The officers agreed and Geshe-la moved into the stone building with his Abbot, Yeshe Gawa Rinpoche, and his teacher, Nyima

Gyaltsen Rinpoche. The houses were airy, cleaner and cooler than the dry bamboo huts. Within the new house the monks made their own food, bypassing the monastery kitchen. The share of supplies they were given often included unfamiliar Indian food. They would sell this whenever possible to the Bhutanese people. They then used the money to buy something more familiar. Geshe-la would use his portion of the money to buy one egg and some milk each day. He boiled these together and drank it as a soup. He remained thin on this diet but it was a good choice. His body stayed strong and he was able to avoid any serious illness.

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The weakness of Baxa was also its strength. The monks were poor. They had no property to administer. There was a shortage of space, food and comforts, but there were few distractions. Concentrating on a daily routine of memorization

and study made daily life less grim for the monks. Many high lamas were crowded into the camp with their students. The monks had many opportunities to benefit from this accessibility. Baxa was a bad place in many ways but it became an excellent monastery. The concentrated practice of the monks was extremely pure.

Geshe-la began to teach again at Baxa. He also continued his own studies. His final subject before qualifying for the Geshe Lharampa (scholar with a doctorate) examination was the Vinaya. This study was not difficult to understand but it was long. In Tibetan teaching there were twelve books containing the Buddha's instructions on the Vinaya. Each of these twelve volumes contained about one thousand pages. For each book there was a condensed version of about eight pages of verse. These were to be known by heart. The larger volumes did not need to be memorized but it was necessary for the geshe to be familiar with their

contents. A Geshe Lharampa must be able to find the answer to any question upon request within the twelve volumes.

In general terms the Vinaya concerns the vows of a monk. This includes the history of each vow, how to give the vows, and how to practice each vow. It also describes how to make the monk's retreat and various other related rituals and customs. Geshe-la's teacher for the Vinaya was Khen Rinpoche Pema Gyaltsen.

By 1968 Geshe-la had finished the course of study available to Gelugpa monks. He was prepared to take the highest examination, the Geshe Lharampa test. He was forty years old.

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Abbots, high lamas and skilled debaters were all present for the Geshe Lharampa evaluation. Representatives from Ganden, Drepung and Sera monasteries came together for the testing. Also in

attendance was Tsenshab Serkong Rinpoche, the representative of the Dalai Lama. Twenty-one geshes who had come to the end of their formal studies were ready to be judged at this annual event. One geshe was tested on the first day, one on the second and so on. There were four sessions of this testing on each day. Monks masterful in debating were chosen to dialogue with the geshes who were also required to answer diverse questions concerning Dharmakirti's Buddhist Logic, the Abhidharma, the Six Treatises of Maitreya Madhyamaka philosophy, and the Vinaya.

After the twenty-first day and the final testing period, the judges retired to discuss the results. They evaluated and compared until they came up with a number, which corresponded with each geshe's ability. It was an honour to graduate at this level of study, but to rank among the first in the class was considered an excellent achievement. The geshes listened attentively to hear their names and

the position they had earned according to the judges.

The highest honours were given to Geshe Pabongka Rinpoche, a famous monk considered to be a reincarnation of a high lama, Pabongka Rinpoche Dechen Nyingpo. He was chosen as first in the class of twenty-one geshe and was presented with a khata, a large white scarf, from the Dalai Lama. He also received many other gifts of clothing, books and religious objects. Most unfortunately for those present, he was soon afterwards hospitalized for tuberculosis and died.

Geshe-la waited for the announcement of the number two geshe. He was filled with happiness as he heard his name called. To be ranked second in his class was indeed an honour. His Abbot and all the other members of his collegiate section were greatly pleased that one of their monks had completed his formal studies on such a brilliant note.

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After a monk becomes a Geshe Lharampa, he can either concentrate on meditation or on teaching. It was time for Geshe-la to decide where to apply his energies. He was offered a job at Benares University teaching the philosophy of Buddhism but he did not accept it. He did not think it would be beneficial to do this at the time. Partly he was worried about his health. It was extremely hot in Benares and in his weakened condition he thought he would not be able to maintain his strength. But a positive reason for not going to Benares was a unique opportunity to study with good teachers at Baxa. Especially, Geshe-la wanted to study tantra and do retreats under the guidance of Zong Rinpoche, a highly realized and powerful tantric lama.

During his studies towards the Geshe Lharampa degree Geshe-la had been practicing tantra at the same time. Different teachers offered instruction, initiation and conducted retreats.

Anyone within the monastery was permitted to attend these optional sessions. From the age of seventeen Geshe-la had been participating in these initiations and retreats.

With the Venerable Yongdzin Trijang Rinpoche, the Junior Tutor of the Dalai Lama, Geshe-la studied the Thirteen Deities of the Mandala sadhana. He also took the Guhyasamaja Initiation from the Venerable Trijang Rinpoche. The Venerable Yongdzin Ling Rinpoche, the senior tutor of the Dalai Lama, gave Geshe-la the Lam Rim teachings and the Guru Yoga initiations. With the Dalai Lama Geshe-la took the Kalachakra initiation four times and from Tsenshap Serkong Rinpoche, debating teacher of the Dalai Lama, he received the empowerments of Vajra Yogini, Great Wheel of Vajrapani as well as doing a complete retreat.

Despite his many previous opportunities to practice sadhanas and deepen his meditation experiences over the years, this three-year period

following his final graduation was the most fruitful. He was in retreat under Zong Rinpoche's guidance for most of the three years. He studied, memorized and practiced many teachings. Zong Rinpoche taught him the Yamantaka meditation, Green Tara, the Heart Jewel Green Tara, Vajrayogini, Guhyasamaja, Heruka, and Mahakala. Geshe-la treasured this wonderful opportunity to practice in such an intensive and undisturbed way.

Mundgod

In 1970 a decision was made to move the monks out of Baxa. Conditions were not improving. The massive rebuilding program, which would be required to make it more livable, did not seem warranted. The Indian government offered a much larger area of land in pleasant surroundings in Mundgod in Southern India. It was a sensible plan to put work and money into this site, as there would be more long-range benefit in this for re-establishing the monasteries of Ganden, Drepung of the Gelug tradition as well as monasteries of Sakya and Nyingma tradition. As the monks were preparing to leave, Geshe Nyima Gyaltsen made a decision to go to meditate in solitude, saying that this would be more beneficial.

The monks left Baxa and moved to Mundgod. They set up tents and began the enormous task of building a new monastic university. The climate was a great improvement over the heat and humidity of Baxa, but much time

and energy previously devoted to study and meditation was now given to new physical responsibilities. The monks cleared the jungle and prepared the land for planting. Growing their own food would end the practice of living off rations, but the monks had limited agricultural experience. Much time and energy was devoted to new physical responsibilities, and to some extent, the manual labour disrupted study and meditation. However, the sharing of work, and the fruits of their labour, was established at Mundgod.

The funds for the construction came from generous patrons around the world. The preservation of the Tibetan religious tradition had become important to many people in other countries. However, the construction itself was done by the monks.

For a time the monks were required to become administrators, businessmen and construction workers. After the quiet and pure

practice of Baxa this came as a radical change. However, there was optimism as the monks worked to put down roots in their new home. Geshe-la was also asked to forego teaching and meditation for one year so that he could become the Gekü, the disciplinarian, for the college. Normally his job would have been to guide monks into the pure and strict practice of dharma. However, in the conditions of ceaseless physical activity at Mungod this was not appropriate. Geshe-la was gentle with the students. Instead of harsh words of correction, a quiet talk or perhaps a look of disapproval was the strongest discipline Geshe-la administered. Mostly he encouraged the hard-working monks. He felt sorry that they were unable to continue their studies. But on the other hand when the work was finished they would have a beautiful place to live. Geshe-la continued to be supportive as the work went on.

When his year as Gekü came to a close the

monastery again asked him for help in administration, this time as the treasurer. His main concern was to make sure the money was distributed properly for monastery supplies, especially food. This required him to sit at a desk day after day organizing the budget and approving expenditures. This would not have been Geshe-la's choice of work, but he did his best. He was grateful for the many opportunities he had been given to practice undisturbed, and was willing to help provide this opportunity to others. It was the communal willingness to act together towards a goal, which gradually began to show results.

Within the third year at Mundgod the place began to look more like a monastery. The buildings were finished, the surrounding fields had been cultivated and the regular training program had resumed. However, Geshe-la perceived a change in attitude. The roots of practice that had been set down at Buxa were sustaining the traditions

transplanted to Mungod but the practice of the monks could no longer be so concentrated. Now there were fields to be worked, property to be maintained and a more complex life. Geshe-la watched in sadness as the young monks changed from their robes to work clothes, to go out into the fields. Perhaps this was good, but he was not sure. He worried about these young monks. For himself also he began to feel discouraged. After so many years of study and meditation he was now doing business rather than using his time for meditation and teaching. Materialism is insidious. The pressure of circumstance can sometimes lead to an overbalance in its direction. The highest goal one has set for oneself must constantly be reaffirmed.

Geshe-la's mind began to turn away from monastery life. He was beginning to ask himself more and more often why he was staying. The question grew larger in his mind. He thought of moving to a small Himalayan village. He could

perform the rituals of life and death for the villagers, teach those who wanted to learn from him, and most of all he could meditate and pray. He knew that these personal practices also produce beneficial results for all.

But Geshe-la kept these thoughts to himself. His Abbot depended on him for support. It was difficult for the Abbot. In Tibet, when the Abbot spoke everyone listened. There was utmost respect for his obvious learning and wisdom. But in India this was not the case. Discussions went on and on. Often the least intelligent monks were most insistent and stubborn. The Abbot often became frustrated and unhappy and when this turned to anger, Geshe-la did everything he could to make peace and to lighten the Abbot's difficult responsibility.

Sometimes Geshe-la would plead with his Abbot, asking him not to become so angry over details he could not correct and to be gentler with the monks. He wanted his Abbot, whom he

respected as a highly attained lama, to be able to succeed within the new attitude of Mungod monastery. But Yeshe Gawa Rinpoche was not always able to follow his advice. Sometimes Geshe-la was troubled by his Abbot's harsh words, but he continued to support him within the monastery. He did not doubt his attainment.

Geshe-la's belief in his Abbot's spiritual maturity was reaffirmed when Yeshe Gawa Rinpoche died the next year. The Abbot told Geshe-la he was going to die and gave him some final instructions. One of the requests was to prepare a special seat for him so that he could die in the same posture, which Buddha Shakyamuni had assumed at his death. Yeshe Gawa Rinpoche put on a yellow cloth and lay down with his right hand supporting his head in the lion posture of the Buddha. He instructed that no one should touch him for three days. The monks who had been so critical and argumentative with him were finally silenced by

their Abbot's quiet eloquence.

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Geshe Tsultrim Chöpel was elected the Abbot after the death of Yeshe Gawa Rinpoche. He was an intelligent and virtuous monk who had obtained his Geshe Lharampa degree one year before Geshe-la. He was Geshe-la's best friend. They had studied together with Nyima Gyaltsen Rinpoche and with Yeshe Gawa Rinpoche. When they were young monks at Ganden in Tibet they had playfully debated together hour after hour. Now they shared an apartment and in many ways were like brothers. Once again Geshe-la's loyalty forced him to put away any personal plans to leave the monastery. Geshe Tsultrim Chöpel would need his support and friendship to see him through the difficult responsibility.

In horror, Geshe-la watched the same transformation take place in his gentle friend that he

had seen with his former Abbot. Geshe Tsultrim Chöpel tried in vain to be patient and understanding with the monks, but there were always some who would not be reasonable. Geshe-la had never seen his friend angry before but now it was a frequent occurrence. He watched sadly as his friend became more involved in the difficulties of his job.

Geshe-la was not surprised when the new Abbot began to behave in unusual ways. He accredited the change to the increased load of responsibility. One day Geshe-la found his friend burning his personal papers. Geshe-la urged him to stop, saying that he would need those things. Geshe Tsultrim agreed but later sent his personal papers away to be burnt by some of his students. In his few quiet hours alone Geshe Tsultrim was reading often about Milarepa, the great Yogi-Saint of Tibet. Geshe-la began to see that a wave of detachment was passing through his friend's life, a very strong wave. Geshe-la found many of Milarepa's song

written down by Geshe Tsultrim within which Milarepa talked about the ever-present reality of impending death.

One day Geshe Tsultrim recounted a dream to Geshe-la. A large snake had wrapped itself around his body and then turned into fire. He burned with the snake. Geshe-la knew that this dream was a premonition. He felt anxious and worried about his friend. Khen Rinpoche Lobsang Chöpel, the Abbot of the Shartse College was also aware of the problem. He spoke to Geshe-la saying that he sensed danger when he thought of Tsultrim Chöpel. He urged Geshe-la to make a divination, a mo, to try to uncover the difficulty. He also performed five different rituals to try to counter the illness, which threatened his friend's life. But Geshe Tsultrim soon was hospitalized. He had developed large infections on his skin, which would not go away. In the hospital he told the doctors not to bother with needles or medication because it was time for him to

die. He asked Geshe-la to bring some special pills, which had been consecrated, but by the time Geshe-la returned to the hospital with them his friend and Abbot had passed away.

Normally in India the body is taken away immediately because of the heat. But the hospital officials respected the fact that Geshe Tsultrim was a special lama. They allowed Geshe-la to take his friend's body. It was placed carefully in the back of a car and returned to the monastery. When they arrived they put him on the Abbot's throne, which Geshe-la had prepared for the final mediation. He had taken away the mattress and left only the monk's meditation cushion. Geshe-la placed his Abbot's body in vajra position and draped it with the yellow cloth of a monk. He or the students of Geshe Tsultrim watched over the body twenty-four hours a day. They themselves meditated and waited for signs that Tsultrim Chöpel Rinpoche was finished his mediation on the Clear Light and ready

to take rebirth.

One morning as several monks prayed in the room where Geshe Tsultrim was sitting in meditation, they began to notice an unusual aroma. There was no incense being burnt. It became obvious that the wonderful smell was coming from their abbot's body. In Tibet certain people are said to have the smell of pure morality. Geshe Tsultrim Chöpel had been known to have this virtue. He had always had a characteristically pleasant aura about him. But what was being perceived now by the monks, who surrounded his meditating figure was unlike anything they had sensed before. When Geshe-la entered the room he noticed it right away. He was told that no incense was being burnt. He wondered at his friend's profound and wonderful meditation. Geshe-la had known that he was an intelligent monk and a virtuous lama, but he had not realized the richness of his attainment until now.

Another manifestation of the abbot's

realization soon followed. First one, then another, then another small yellow pills the size of mustard seeds began to emerge from the abbot's whole body. It is not unusual to find these pills, or rilbus, after the cremation of a high lama, but for them to appear like this before the consciousness had left was indeed unusual. Once again Geshe-la was amazed. Only a profound mediation could produce such signs. And his abbot was not finished. His meditation continued for two weeks.

Finally one day, Geshe-la noticed a thin liquid come from Geshe Tsultrim's nose and his body slumped slightly. His final meditation was over. But at his cremation he continued to manifest his attainment. The sky was filled with rainbows and the birds, which Tibetans associate with Dakinis flew through the sky.

* * * * *

After the death of Geshe Tsultrim Chöpel,

Geshe-la no longer felt strong ties of responsibility and loyalty were holding him to Ganden monastic life. He felt it was time for a change. Once more, he began to envision life in a small village in the Himalayan mountains but other possibilities also presented themselves. He had taken examinations given by the Indian government, which demonstrated his ability to teach at Benares University. Also, he had been invited by some monks to come and study with them in Gyüme Tantric Monastery. As Geshe-la stood at this crossroad in his life, he wanted to make the best decision. It was at this point that a new and unforeseen opportunity was introduced to him. This new element led to a decision, which Geshe-la had not considered or even imagined before.

In 1972 some Tibetan government officials came to see Geshe-la. They asked him if he would be willing to go to Canada. He had read about Canada's plan in a Tibetan newsletter. Prime

Minister Trudeau had agreed to allow two hundred and fifty Tibetans to immigrate. If there were favorable reports from the Manpower and Immigration Department three thousand more would be accepted. Geshe-la was realistic about this proposed move. Many Tibetans idealized Canada as being rich and prosperous, a land of many opportunities. They perhaps did not want to believe that there would also be many problems. Geshe-la was practical and tried to think of the difficulties involved in such a radical change. He decided that at forty-three years of age he was not prepared to begin anew. He was warned about the difficulty of mastering a new language and assimilating a totally different culture. He said no.

A few months later the officials were back again. They had inquired at other monasteries but with no success. Some monks had been sent to the West already and had given up their monk's vows. The monasteries had a fearful view of Western

civilization. They thought it must be a strange place to have such a powerful effect. However this aspect was not a problem for Geshe-la, his apprehension was concerning the language. When the officials returned a second time, he began to think that he should consider the challenge. Perhaps it was his karma to go. Geshe-la's mind had already turned away from monastic life. At this time he did not want to teach at Benares University. Canada was not a small village in the Himalayan foothills but maybe it would be his new home. Perhaps he was needed there and he could benefit from the experience. Geshe-la agreed to go.

The next months were spent settling the many bureaucratic steps necessary before Geshe-la could leave the country. The Dalai Lama's approval was required. Doctors' reports had to be filled out. The Canadian High Commissioner in India took care of most of the details. It took several months to complete the preparations.

The Commissioner himself took Geshe-la to the airport. They arrived early to allow for the notoriously slow Indian customs. But the customs officer did not even check his bag. He was simply asked where he was going. “Canada”, said Geshe-la. “Good luck”, said the Indian official and waved him through the customs gate.

PART THREE

QUÉBEC, CANADA

Montréal

Essentially Tibetan Buddhists are all Mahayanists. They practice the same Buddha-Dharma. However within the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, there are some variations, which express themselves in four major schools: the Gelug, the Kagyu, the Nyingma and the Sakya. A religious teacher from each of these four traditions accompanied the four groups of Tibetans immigrating to Canada. The Sakya teacher, Tashi Namgyal, was sent to Calgary, Alberta. Nyima Tulku was sent to Belleville, Ontario. Karma Thinley, a Kagyu Lama was sent to Lindsay, Ontario. Geshe-la was sent as a representative of the Gelugpa to Montréal, Québec. As the airplane circled Montréal, looking out of the window, Geshe-la recognized the tall buildings. In a dream, some time ago, he had a vision of a tall strange-looking building. The skyscraper he was seeing was the same he had envisioned in the dream.

At Dorval airport an official from

Manpower and Immigration and a Tibetan man, Mr. Jimpa, waited for Geshe-la. The two men were arranging the immigration papers with customs. One of the officials asked Mr Jimpa if he could anticipate what kind of belongings the Tibetan lama would be bringing with him. Mr Jimpa laughed and said that if he were a good lama then he would bring nothing. Maybe some books, but that is all. When Geshe-la arrived at the inspection station a short time later he had only one bag with him. The bag was opened to reveal several rows of rectangular-shaped, cloth-covered books on which were printed Buddhist sutras. The smile on Mr Jimpa's face grew wider as a brief search revealed more layers of books under the first. The manpower agent laughed, saying that he thought this was a good monk.

Geshe-la was taken to COFI, a special French immersion residence and school for immigrants in Riviere des Prairies. Already in 1971 some Tibetans had already been located there.

Geshe-la arrived in 1972 to be the Tibetan community's religious advisor. The experience of COFI was intended to provide a transition period before the immigrants took a more independent place within Québec society. Geshe-la was given a room with basic furnishings. There was a large cafeteria when the Tibetans ate together, but the combination of jet lag, the new environment, and unusual food was too much for Geshe-la's system to assimilate all at once. He was not able to eat for a day. But the Tibetans made a traditional Tibetan meal for him and insisted he try. Their kindness and that of the Manpower agents made Geshe-la feel welcome.

Adding to his sense of being valued and welcomed were the presence of Mongolians at the school. Newly arrived to Canada, several Mongolians were studying at COFI at the same time as Geshe-la. They were surprised and delighted to see a Buddhist Lama. The Mongolian and Tibetans

have a long history in common, and they were happy that Geshe-la was with them in their newly adopted country.

During Geshe-la's first year in Canada he tried to learn French and English. But this was difficult because he spent little time outside of his classes actually speaking French, and he seldom heard English at all. Most of his time was spent with the Tibetan families in Québec and Ontario. The overwhelming changes in their way of life resulted in much illness. A major cause was that the Tibetans' diet had not yet adjusted to the lifestyle and the climate of Canada. But Geshe-la believed worry was the main reason for the many afflictions. He traveled back and forth between the two provinces of Québec and Ontario. Sometimes he would stay for a few days with a Tibetan family, sometimes for a week or more.

The Tibetans were happy to have a lama to help them adjust and to add some continuity to their

lives. Geshe-la was glad to be of help, but he also felt some discouragement. The Tibetans were hearing French and English spoken when they went to work, but he seldom heard either. Being away so often he could not attend formal classes much of the time. After an absence he would return feeling like he was starting over again. It was more difficult than he had imagined it would be to master a new language. It was discouraging for Geshe-la to think of all the philosophies he had memorized and at the same time to feel so little ability to learn a new tongue.

After a couple of years the need to minister in a very immediate way became less common. The Tibetans are noted for their adaptability and they were beginning to settle into a less troubled daily life. Geshe-la was able to stay in one place for longer periods. He had moved to Longueuil on the south shore of Montréal after leaving COFI and lived with the Musu family on Joliette Street. From there he

moved in 1973 to 801 Crémazie Street nearby. From these two places of residence he traveled by city bus into Montréal to continue his French lessons. This commuting offered many opportunities for Geshe-la to come into contact with French and English Quebecers. His Tibetan monk's robes were the starting point for many conversations.

Sometimes children would come up to him on the bus and insist on sitting near him. The reaction of one child was especially strong when he was not permitted to be close to him. The child cried and clung to Geshe-la's dark red robe. This caused embarrassment to the mother and to Geshe-la. Geshe-la wondered at this extreme reaction and at the reaction of other children whom he encountered. Could it be that these small children were responding to a deep-seated respect for the lamas whom they had looked to for spiritual encouragement in a previous life? Was it possible that his countrymen were being reborn in Canada?

Whatever the cause Geshe-la's thoughts and prayers went out to these young boys and girls. The grace waves of love and compassion are an unspoken, universal language.

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The news that a Tibetan geshe was living in the greater Montréal area spread. Slowly but surely Westerners who were interested in Buddhist philosophy were finding their way to the tiny apartment on Crémazie Street hoping to speak with the teacher from Tibet. Unfortunately, communication was a huge problem. Geshe-la felt the frustration of having so much knowledge locked away in his mind, inaccessible to the people who came to him. Sometimes he did not even understand what they were asking. Several Tibetans tried to act as translators but with little success. However when Tsedor Kashi, a young Tibetan man, began to assist Geshe-la, he felt more able to have coherent

conversations with Westerners.

From the questions Geshe-la was asked he could tell that there were many wrong views. Because advanced books were available in the West people were reading about practices, which were high tantra and not at all suitable for beginners. The practices were being misunderstood and prematurely attempted. Many people were proceeding in a confused and misguided way. He wanted to correct this. He respected the high level of literacy in the West, which made it possible for so many people to be capable of reading advanced texts, but saw the need for a preliminary study. A basic instruction in philosophy was needed to provide a foundation for further practice and accurate understanding. It was with this perspective that Geshe-la answered, to the best of his ability, the questions of those who approached him. Nonzin Kashi, a Tibetan woman who lived close by, offered food to Geshe-la and assisted him in translating into English. Geshe-la

appreciated her help and told her that her actions would be very beneficial.

Many people came and went through the door of the tiny three and a half-room apartment in Longueuil. Geshe-la's home became a small but active cultural and religious centre for the Tibetan immigrants. The various celebrations and ceremonies traditionally held throughout the Tibetan lunar calendar year were observed there. Especially at New Year's, around mid-winter in Canada, the festivities were elaborate. Another activity was a small school for the Tibetan children who met together in the centre for classes. Geshe-la would teach the children the basic concepts such as the law of cause and effect, karma, the preciousness of human life and impermanence.

In 1976, Melvin McLeod, seeing that Geshe-la needed financial assistance, applied for a government grant on his behalf. This grant was requested so that Geshe-la could be more

independent financially and be assured of being able to pay his rent and utilities and eat. This would, at the same time, allow him to devote more energy towards developing the religious and cultural centre that was developing in his home. Geshe-la's Cremazie apartment became the official office of the community.

In the same year the growing group of Westerners who studied with Geshe-la formed the Atisha Dharma Centre. The Westerners who formed the centre asked Geshe-la to begin a regular schedule of lectures in his apartment. The residence became a Dharma Centre. The founding members also asked Geshe-la to lead them in retreats. During these longer periods of teaching the participants would often leave the city. Friends of the members would permit them to use country property for these. Leonard Cohen was a most generous patron, allowing the centre to use his home for frequent retreats.

Geshe-la was pleased with these developments. The Tibetans were being recognized and valued for their culture heritage. The Atisha Dharma Centre provided him with a way of reaching the people who were looking for answers to their life problems and questions within the Tibetan Buddhist philosophy.

Geshe-la chose carefully what his first instructions would be. He decided on the Lam Rim, the teaching on the gradual path to enlightenment. The Lam Rim teaching would take three years to complete. It included the method of establishing good teacher student relationships; meditation on the lower realms of animals, ghosts and hell beings; meditation on the higher realms of human beings, gods and titans; how to take refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha; and the laws of cause and effect and how they relate to karma. When this course of study was completed Geshe-la planned to teach about bodhicitta following the text by Shantideva,

Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life (Bodhisattvacharyavataṛa). He also gave initiations, which could be received as blessings or as commitments.

Towards the end of 1976, Pema Gyaltsen Rinpoche visited the Atisha Dharma Centre and the Tibetan community in Longueuil. Pema Gyaltsen Rinpoche had been Geshe-la's teacher in India for the Abhidharma and the Vinaya. He stayed for almost a month. He taught the Lam Rim teachings to underline their importance. He also gave the White Tara Initiation. Pema Gyaltsen was very kind to Geshe-la and his students. Many people formed a connection with the gentle lama. During his stay, a young boy, Tenzin Sherap, born in Canada in 1972, was presented to Pema Gyaltsen Rinpoche. Based on stories and dreams that the young boy recounted to Rinpoche, Pema Gylatsen perceived and reported later that the boy was a reincarnation of Sera Geshe Jatse, a lama who had lived in a meditative life in a

mountain cave, similar to the Tibetan yogi Milarepa. Sera Geshe Jatse had foretold that he would be reborn in the West.

Lati Rinpoche, a long time friend of Geshe-la's at Ganden University was invited to Montréal in 1976. He taught the Lam Rim during his stay, and offered the Vajrapani Initiation and the White Tara Initiation. Montréal poet Leonard Cohen graciously offered his home so that Lati Rinpoche could lead Geshe-la's students in a Mahayana retreat.

Kalu Rinpoche, a much loved and respected lama of the Shangpa Kagyu lineage came to teach at the Milarepa Centre in Montréal and stayed with Geshe-la and visited the Atisha Dharma Centre during the late seventies. In 1977, Montréal was blessed by a visit of His Holiness the XVI Karmapa, Rangjung Rigpe Dorje. The Milarepa Centre of Montréal and the Atisha Dharma Centre worked together on the visit, during which time, the Black Hat ceremony was given by the Karmapa. Also,

during that year Geshe-la did a retreat of the Yidam Deity Yamantaka. Since this was Geshe-la's 49th year (which is considered a year of danger to the life of that individual according to the Tibetan astrological calendar) he was advised to do a retreat on the Yidam to avert hinderances.

Geshe-la's tantric teacher, Kyabje Zong Rinpoche stayed with Geshe-la in 1978. Zong Rinpoche offered the White Tara Initiation, Nu Son Kron Drol (saving from the three lower realms). Geshe-la was told later that upon returning to India, when asked about the various Western centres Zong Rinpoche said of the Atisha Centre that it was "poor but pure." Zong Rinpoche said that if Geshe-la stayed in Montréal the temple would be small but with strong practitioners. If he were to go to Toronto, the centre would be larger, but the practice would not be as strong.

Seeing his teachers again was a wonderful comfort to Geshe-la. But it also reminded him of the

life he had left behind him in Tibet. He thought of his family. Geshe-la had heard nothing of them since he had left Tibet in 1959. Finally in 1978 the long silence was broken. One of Geshe-la's letters had finally gotten through to his sister in Shigatse, Tibet. Tsering Chödrön wrote back to him immediately. Geshe-la recognized her name on the return address and quickly opened the long-awaited letter. Tsering Chödrön expressed great happiness that her brother was still alive. She had heard that he had tried to escape but did not know if he had survived the journey or the terrible heat of India. How surprised and happy she was to hear that he was well and living so far away in Canada! She explained that Yeshe Gon-po was with her in Shigatse. He had left Bumting in 1980 to live in Lhasa again. From Lhasa he had moved again to be with his sister. He had been in Bumting when Atse, their beloved mother, had died. Kelsang and Yangdom were also with her during her final moments. Tsering Chödrön assured

Geshe-la in the letter that his mother had died peacefully; content to go on. She also assured him that she was proud of her son Tobgyal.

Much of his sister's letter was punctuated with repeated requests that Geshe-la should please come back to Tibet, at least for a visit. In every letter she asked him again, imploring Geshe-la to let them be together again once more before their lives were over. Geshe-la wrote back that he did not feel the time was right for him to return. With his responsibility of the Dharma Centre and the cultural community he did not feel it was wise to leave. Tsering Chödrön wrote back that she understood but continued to make the same request in her monthly letters.

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Tsedor Kashi was unable to continue as translator for Geshe-la because he had to leave. Geshe-la asked his student, Kristyna Paknys to

become his replacement. She had been studying Dharma and Tibetan with Geshe-la for several years but did not feel at all ready to assume the position. But he insisted that she try because he believed in her ability. After a relatively short period of intensive study with Geshe-la, she did in fact become an excellent translator and regularly assisted Geshe-la.

In 1980 Geshe-la's residence, the cultural centre office and the newly named Temple Bouddhiste Tibétain moved into a house at 1589 Verchères Street in Longueuil. The new building was in a more residential section of Longueuil. It was quieter and larger than the apartment on Crémazie Street had been. The students no longer needed to find suitable places for weekend retreats after this move. The house was large enough to accommodate people who stayed at the Temple during retreats. Being closer to the city, it was easier for people to participate.

In the spring of 1980, when Geshe-la gave permission for several of his students to receive highest tantra initiation and teaching from the Venerable Serkong Rinpoche and Khensur Lobsang Wangdu. Geshe-la prepared letters of invitation and these teachers accepted to come. The new temple building was a more pleasant place for visiting lamas to stay. One of the first teachers who stayed in the new building was the Venerable Kyabje Serkong Rinpoche of Ganden Jangtse Monastery. He spent many hours teaching and giving initiations to the many people who came to see him on Verchères Street. He offered the highest yoga tantra of Yamantaka and Vajrayogini, Vajrasattva, Dorje Nanjur (Vajra Vidarana), four-armed Chenrezi and Medicine Buddha initiations. During his visit he blessed the large statue of the Buddha, which he had ordered many years ago from Nepal, the Temple's central image, by placing many mantras and precious objects inside the statue and offering his own Chögö,

a Dharma robe, to clothe Buddha. Among the precious objects were ringsel, small pills ejected by the Svayambhunath Stūpa in Nepal. These pills are now resting in Buddha's palm.

In the autumn of 1980, His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Venerable Yongdzin Ling Rinpoche came to Montréal. Venerable Ling Rinpoche was the senior tutor of the Dalai Lama and the Ninety-seventh Ganden Throne-Holder of Tsong Khapa. Ling Rinpoche stayed at the temple where he offered teachings on the Song of the Four Mindfulnesses and initiation of the guruyoga practice of Lama Tsong Khapa. The community offered a Long-life ceremony to Ling Rinpoche at the conclusion of his stay. Rinpoche expressed how pleased he was at the success of the temple achieved through the efforts of Geshe-la.

While in Montréal the Dalai Lama gave a public service at the Mary Queen of the World Cathedral and for a smaller group of people he

offered the Manjushri and Four-armed Chenrezi transmission. There was also a meeting with the Tibetan Community where He spoke of the present situation in their homeland Tibet. He offered advice to the community and his concerns for the younger generation.

The Dalai Lama visited the Temple Buddhiste Tibétain. He blessed the place and had lunch with Ling Rinpoche. In Tibet it was very difficult to meet with the Dalai Lama. The community felt very fortunate to be able to host their religious leader. During his visit at the temple, he also met with the young boy, Tenzin Sherab, who had been recognized by Pema Gyaltzen Rinpoche as a tulku of Sera Monastery. The Dalai Lama did a Tapeu ceremony and acknowledged him as the Jatse Tulku.

A few months later, in the winter time, Khensur Lobsang Wangdu of Ganden Jangtse stayed with Geshe-la. At the temple he offered the

teachings of the Song of the Four Mindfulnesses and Heart Sutra, concluding the visit with the empowerment of Vajrapani. While he was staying, he wanted to debate with Geshe-la and Lama Zasep Rinpoche. Geshe-la felt that his mind was not as sharp as it had been when he was debating every day in the monastery. Also, this happened to be one of the coldest winters in Montréal. As Khensur Wangdu sat in Geshe-la's room, the brilliant winter sun shone in and his room was equally well heated. He decided to go for a walk. Geshe-la being concerned said "You must dress warm." But from his perception in the room he didn't believe it. But Khensur Wangdu soon returned saying "achoo-achoo, yes yes, your right."

Life was busy for Geshe-la. He was overjoyed that the Temple was so active and that good lamas were coming to teach and form connections with his students and the Tibetans in Québec. But the pressure of his many

responsibilities and the intensity of the activities he was co-ordinating for himself, but for the visiting teachers it began to be too much for him. He did not feel he was adequate to do his job with so many details to take care of. He was becoming both physically and mentally worn down and decided he needed a rest. He left the city and went to stay with Pam and Harry Jouris, two of his students who live in the Eastern Townships. He also stayed with a Tibetan family in Granby. He came home to Longueuil for a few days and then left again to stay with a Tibetan family in Lindsay, Ontario. During these visits he was careful to remain relaxed and to avoid the subject of politics and administrative policies. During this brief respite he began to get his strength back and made some decisions to improve the quality of his life and his ability to do his work effectively.

After this brief sabbatical in the springtime, Geshe-la's tantric lama, the Venerable Kyabje Zong

Rinpoche returned to stay with him again. His return was seen by Geshe-la as a wonderful gift. During this visit Rinpoche spent much more time with Tibetan families on the South Shore in response to many personal requests to give teachings, initiations of long life and Dharma guardians and readings of sacred Buddhist texts. At the temple he offered the Vajrayana initiations of Yamantaka, Vajrayogini, Guhyasamaja, and Demchog. In return the students offered Dharma practice and offerings to him of Long Life.

Geshe-la called together the members of the Tibetan community and announced his resignation as the head of the cultural centre. He explained that his training as a monk was no longer adequate or appropriate for such a position. He urged the Tibetans to find a fellow layman to take the responsibility. Geshe-la hoped that such a person would provide more appropriate and energetic leadership to the group. He also hoped that it would

uncomplicate his life somewhat so that he could concentrate on teaching and study. An excellent new administrator was found in the person of Thubten Samdup, a young Tibetan man. Within the Temple administration Geshe-la also stepped back from as many involvements as he could. He did not want his personal practice to suffer.

With this new attitude Geshe-la began to read his sister's monthly entreaties more seriously. Maybe he could go back to Tibet for a visit after all. He and his siblings were not getting younger. If he did not go soon he would probably never see them again. In 1982 he decided to go home to visit his family. The Chinese were loosening some of their restrictions so it would be possible for him to journey into Tibet. The trip was planned for the summer of 1982.

PART FOUR

TIBET REVISITED

Asia

Geshe-la arrived at the airport near Kathmandu during the month of July 1982. The season of the monsoons had just finished and the roads near the Tibet-Nepal border were washed out from the heavy rainfall. Because of this it was necessary to stay in Kathmandu for a couple of weeks. Kathmandu is a wonderfully interesting city and Geshe-la was not in a hurry, so it was not an unwelcome delay. Geshe-la was traveling with one of his students, Gary Young. They hired a taxi and drove to Serkong Gönpa on the sacred mountain of Swayambu.

Swayambu is a high hill in the Kathmandu valley. Legend has it that the valley was a lake and was formed by a single movement of Manjushri's sword cutting a gorge in the land. The hill arose from the valley floor and many wonderful signs appeared. Manjushri is considered by the Buddhists of the region to be the Protector of the valley and Swayambu is the focus for their love and respect for

the bodhisattva.

The mountain is a bustle of activity. The presence of the monkeys playing and jumping through the trees that cover the hill add to the vitality of the place. As in most holy places in Southeast Asia the roads are lined with beggars. Around the foot of the hill pilgrims circumambulate continuously as they turn the prayer wheels set up around Swayambu. On the top of the hill there are three monasteries. They are Sri Lankan, Nepalese and Tibetan. The Tibetan monastery is called Serkong Gönpa. It was built by the father of Tsenshap Serkong Rinpoche. Lumbum Rinpoche of Ganden was the abbot. Geshe-la stayed here for the first few days in Kathmandu but had to find other lodgings because there was no place for long-term visits.

Geshe-la met an old friend from Ganden, Lobsang Tenzin, who invited him to stay in his Kathmandu apartment. The five and a half room

home was a lovely place. Perhaps its most welcome luxury was an indoor toilet! The walls were three feet thick to keep out the dampness, and the windows looked out over a garden. Lobsang Tenzin not only offered this welcome accommodation for the entire stay, but offered to be a guide so that Geshe-la could make use of his time in Kathmandu to make a pilgrimage to the city's many holy sites.

The entire valley is a sacred place for Buddhists and Hindus who value it as a powerful source of example, inspiration and knowledge. During the two-week stay Geshe-la traveled extensively throughout Kathmandu visiting the various religious shrines and making offerings at the temples, many times climbing the long stairway to the top of Swayambu Stüpa, the Self-Sprung Temple of Wisdom. Circling this hill were several monasteries, and numerous stüpas, some of which contained relics. These stüpas and monasteries were dedicated to Manjushri, to Buddhas of the Past, and

to Buddhist Saints. Sacred places were marked footprints of Manjushri, symbols of Vajrayogini, statues of Tara (reminding us of Bhṛkūṭī, a Nepalese Queen of Tibet), and the sacred flame of Sītālā intertwined with camouflaged lingams.

In Kathmandu, Geshe-la went to the hidden shrine of Dipankara Buddha at Thang Bardhari, and had the fortunate karma of viewing the Prajñā Paramitā text, written in gold on lapis paper, which Nāgārjuna had brought from the Naga realms (a powerful water-spirit and some are regarded as custodians of doctrinal scriptures). This text is only presented to the public once a year.

A temple of the Bodhisattva of Compassion, Maṇḍhārānāth, the White Lord of Jambudvīpa is almost always encircled by many people circumambulating. In the evening, you could hear sounds from the Temple of the Newars, gurus teaching and chanting the Buddha doctrine. Once a year the image of Maṇḍhārānāth is removed and

bathed in milk. Nearby is a small doorway leading into a large hidden courtyard and a temple dedicated to White Tara. In the evening, people are permitted into this tiny temple, but there is room enough for only three or four people at one time. This temple was first found when rainbow lights fell into the courtyard.

Geshe-la visited the Temple of Bo-tang Gampo, which is home for the black stone image of Mahakala, the protector of Swayambu. The eyes of the statue are concealed by silver goggles. As Geshe-la left the temple beggars approached and he offered coins. The beggars started yelling, “I was in the temple with you, I saw the offerings you gave, you gave me nothing in comparison!” Geshe-la stopped deep in thought, reflecting and sounding “HUM.” With his index finger pointing upward as a focus he said, “This is a purification teaching.” Geshe-la felt the difficulties or obstacles were removed for the rest of a journey.

Geshe-la's friend and guide was thorough and took him to many of the local sacred places. One of these was the temple of Annapurna, the Goddess of Plenty, with its well-worn bells. In the middle of the old city, Annapurna's Temple was frequented by both Buddhists and Hindus. Geshe-la paid respect to the Buddhist shrines which were side-by-side with Hindu shrines dedicated to Ganesh, Shiva, and Mother Kali. Geshe-la visited one of the holiest Hindu sites, called Pashpati, the Shrine of Self-Manifesting Lingam of Shiva and the Temple of Varahi. Many yogis are present in these Hindu holy places.

On the opposite side of Kathmandu is Boudhnath the Great Stüpa, a pilgrimage site of butter lamps and walls of prayer wheels. When Geshe-la made his pilgrimage there a ceremony was in progress for the Abbot of Boudhnath, the Chiimi Lama who had recently died.

Outside of Kathmandu, in Bhaktapur,

Geshe-la offered prayers to the images of Tara, Dipankara Buddha and a hidden shrine of Vajra Yogini. At Patan, Geshe-la went to Mahaboudha Stūpa, a replica of the Buddha Gaya Stūpa in India, a stūpa with a thousand images of Buddha. Nearby, he visited the place where the Buddha statue for the Montréal Temple had been constructed.

At the edge of the valley the holy site of Namo Buddha Tay-mo lu-yin, where the Bodhisattva gave his body to the tigress, was another place of pilgrimage for Geshe-la. This area is adorned with stūpas containing hair and bones that mark the spot where the Bodhisattva was eaten. Geshe-la sat on this mountain top, from where he could see Tibet, his next destination.

On another side of the valley is Yang-lu she, a place where Vajra Yogini appeared and where one can see an image of a Self-arising Tara on a stone wall. Geshe-la did a Guru Puja offering ceremony in the shrine where the image of a stone Vajra Yogini

was. This image was there at the time of the Pantingpa brothers who received the transmission of this practice from Naropa and when Serkong Dorje Chang prayed there, red light flowed from the image to his heart.

On the outskirts of the city by Swayambu, nestled on a forested area, is Nagarjuna Hill. At the place marked by a stūpa Buddha taught the Manjushri Sutra. As Buddha stood upon the hill with his attendants and looked over the valley and further over the mountain range into Tibet, he said that the Nepalese people were virtuous and that the land was good. Pointing across the Himalayas towards Tibet, he said that he would not go there but his Dharma would. He predicted that many Tibetans would become sages, arhats and Buddhas. In Nepal also this would happen and many people would establish faith in the path to enlightenment. Geshe-la prayed here and then enjoyed its tranquility and beauty longer by staying for a picnic.

At the foot of this hill lies Balagi Park, filled with gardens, ponds and bathing site. An enchanting water park with an image of a reclining Vishnu. One could sense the area was frequented by Nagas. Geshe-la was grateful to his old friend, Lobsang Tenzin, who led him on this wonderful pilgrimage to the many holy sites around Kathmandu.

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Motor vehicles could only travel three miles out of Kathmandu, so it was necessary to walk the remaining distance to the Tibetan border, following the Sun Kasi River, which curved like a snake out of Tibet. Geshe-la hired people to help him carry his luggage for the day-long trek. He had brought a lot of clothing with him to give to his relatives. However there were many poor people in Nepal who were in need, and by the time Geshe-la arrived at the border he had already given away all the clothing he had brought with him.

At the border Geshe-la was asked many questions before he was permitted entry into Tibet. His student Gary returned to Kathmandu because he had been refused entry by the embassy. Geshe-la waited alone at the border for his cousin Jampa to come pick him up. It was not unusual to wait weeks or even months at the border if you did not have pre-arranged transportation. Even with the proper planning it was possible to wait longer than expected. The road into Tibet from Nepal was treacherous in bad weather and there were often delays along the route. Geshe-la was fortunate in that he only had to wait three days for his cousin.

During the three days that he waited at the border, news of his presence reached the surrounding communities. Geshe-la was to be one of the first lamas to return to Tibet since the Chinese takeover. Tibetans came slowly and fearfully. They were wary of the Chinese guards but they wanted to see the lama who was traveling through their land.

Geshe-la had brought five hundred red blessing ribbons with him. They were all gone before Jampa arrived. Many Tibetans made commitments with Geshe-la and he did Shelnga Jampa, a purification ceremony. Some promised to repeat the Refuges one thousand times a day, others three hundred. Some committed themselves to one hundred or one thousand Chenrezi mantras. Geshe-la was impressed by their strong faith, which had survived the fear and oppression they had endured for so many years.

It was one day's journey by truck from the border to Shigatse by U-Tsang and Nying River where his sister, Tsering Chödrön, lived. This town is the capital of the province of U-Tsang. Tsering Chödrön ran a public house for travelers there. It was eleven-thirty at night by the time the truck drove up to the lodge. Tsering Chödrön woke up at the sound of the motor and came rushing out. At first she saw only Jampa and exclaimed, "Where is my brother? What has happened? Where is he?"

Jampa pretended he did not know as a joke, but when she looked disappointed Geshe-la stepped out of the shadow of the truck saying, “I am here, I am here!”

Tsering Chödrön ran up to him and hugged him, crying over and over how happy she was that he had come, and how glad she was to see him again. By now Yeshe Gönpö had been woken up by the commotion. As he came out of the house to greet his brother the old monk's eyes filled with tears. He held him tightly in his arms for several moments, grateful for the long-awaited reunion.

Geshe-la stayed in Shigatse for a week. Much of the time was passed talking with his relatives. During one private party of about twenty-five people Geshe-la gave Refuge, Purification and White Tara empowerments.

While at Shigatse, Geshe-la took the opportunity to visit and make offerings at the monastery of Tashi Lhunpo. This was built by the

first Dalai Lama and later became the home of the Panchen Lama. Tashi Lhunpo is built on Drölma Ri, Green Tara Mountain. The mountain is actually in the shape of Drölma and the monastery is placed so as to be sitting on Drölma's lap. Inside the monastery building is the great image of Buddha Maitreya and the famous speaking Tara statue.

Geshe-la spoke with some of the old monks still living in Tashi Lhunpo. They cried as they told him of hardship they had suffered. The Chinese had given some money to the very poor, but the majority of Tibetans had been left close to starvation. Many were beaten and interrogated: they lived in fear much of the time.

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The journey to Lhasa took twelve hours by truck from Shigatse, passing Gyantse with it's Palchon Chorten of 100,000 images, the Kumbum Stüpa, and stopping at Lhakang Chemo, the famous

Sakya monastery where Geshe-la did offerings and prayers. Inside is a 35 feet image of Buddha flanked by two close students and many religious articles, which were brought out of hiding after the revolution. This time, Geshe-la and Jampa were accompanied by Tsering Chödrön. She had never been home since she had last seen Geshe-la in 1942. She did not want to miss the opportunity to see her family and friends again, nor the chance to spend some more time with her brother Tobgyal.

When they reached Lhasa they went to their cousin's home as they had done so many years before on their first trip to Lhasa. Thubten Chöpel still lived in the same place. The Gyüme monk looked much older but his eyes revealed a vibrant spirit. He always said he would live until he was eighty-two and few ever contested this claim. He was delighted to see his 'young' cousins and greeted them as if they were his own children.

Thubten Chöpel had many stories to tell

about his life after the Chinese take-over of Tibet. He himself had been assigned to road building along with several other monks. The work was difficult and sometimes he would be forced to work all day with no food or drink at all. One day he felt so faint that he had to stop. He sat on a rock to rest. A woman appeared to him, bringing Tibetan tea and tsampa. She said that the offerings were for Thubten Chöpel. He did not recognize the woman but took the nourishment and shared it with those working with him. The next day, without explanation, he was sent back to Lhasa. He was not called upon to work again. This lama had always been surrounded by unusual occurrences like this. Geshe-la thought that his protectors, Mahakala and Palden Lhamo, must take special care of this intelligent old monk.

The Jokhang Temple in the centre of old Lhasa was still the first place of pilgrimage for the Tibetan Buddhists who entered Lhasa. Just inside the main entrance people were doing puja and

prostrating. Once inside, Geshe-la and his sister made prayers and offerings in front of the Jowo Rinpoche, an image of Buddha made at his time, and Maitreya Buddha. The Temple had been restored enough to permit visits from tourists and pilgrims. Where possible, art work had been repaired. Sometimes the original materials were used in the rebuilding, but if they had originally contained gold or silver they had been melted down and taken away. The precious gems, which had decorated the statues, were usually missing as well. Where permanent objects had not been repaired there was often evidence of brutal pillaging.

The second important place he visited was the Potala where the Dalai Lama had resided. Geshe-la waited for hours in line to climb the steps to the entrance of the Potala, finally entering through the Donang Hall. He went to halls open to the general public passing through a labyrinth of corridors covered with religious murals and landscapes. At the

shrines housing Stūpas of the past Dalai Lama, he gave prayers and offerings. Geshe-la said that if he had stated that he was a Canadian, he would have had the privilege to be led to more private areas of this one-thousand-room, thirty-one-story palace, but he remained quiet. One of the buildings the Chinese could not destroy as he remembered them trying.

In his private times, Geshe-la walked around the city and it appeared unchanged. Houses of the wealthy were undamaged at least on the outside. The sloping walls of private houses and monasteries remained intact, for the most part, but monks' quarters were occupied by families and shrines were desecrated and empty. The large houses were divided into quarters for families. Most houses were in a state of disrepair and Geshe-la felt that this reflected the state of mind of the uprooted people.

Although he had not been there for twenty years and was not expecting to meet people he

knew, at one time Geshe-la was behind an old man who kept looking back and staring at him. Finally he came up to him and asked if he was Geshe Topgyal. “Yes”, answered Geshe-la, “and who are you?” “I’m Geshe Dawa.” They had known each other before. Geshe Dawa gave a gift to Geshe-la, a piece of the “life tree” (tso-shing) from the destroyed image of Gyeltsap Rinpoche. Geshe-la left it with his sister in Shigatse. On still another occasion, Geshe-la met Bha-so Rinpoche, who was the doctor of Ganden Monastery but who now worked for the Chinese.

As Geshe-la walked through Lhasa, he reflected on what he was seeing, once again one could see the full-length prostrators going along the road encircling the Potala. They were dressed in leather aprons and wooden pads. Also on the main street, reciters were doing prayers and receiving donations from passers-by. In Lhasa, Buddhist texts are available at stalls, which were printed from surviving woodblocks.

Geshe-la and Tsering Chödrön held a party for their friends and relatives in Lhasa. They exchanged stories. They were fascinated when Geshe-la described the cities and the life outside Tibet. For most of them Lhasa was the greatest city of the world and they could not envision the technological wonders nor the size of the cities which Geshe-la spoke of. The stories of his countrymen and women were very believable to Geshe-la. He was saddened to hear again the recounting of the terrible sufferings his friends and family had endured. Poor weather conditions had produced crop failure. This, combined with the new farming and storage procedures imposed on them by the Chinese, plus the added burden of feeding so many soldiers, caused conditions close to starvation for many Tibetans. The isolation of the people added to their misery. They were not allowed to assemble together for the traditional ceremonies, which connected them socially and religiously.

Opposition to the Liberation Army's rule led to beatings and sometimes cold-blooded murder. Many suicides were committed by Tibetans who could no longer bear the oppression, desecration and destruction.

The Tibetans had been forced to abuse their sacred religious articles in public. Mani stones were used to surface roads. Religious texts were used for boot soles and toilet paper. Wooden sutra covers were used to make furniture. Religious statues were stripped of their jewels and the gold and silver melted down and taken to China. Even the brass and copper pots and ornaments were taken.

Since 1980 economic conditions had improved somewhat, mostly because the oppression had eased up. The lust to strip Tibet clean of any material or cultural wealth seemed satiated for now, or perhaps the Chinese communists were embarrassed because the world had become aware of what they were doing.

Before leaving Lhasa, Geshe-la went to Drepung Monastery and made offerings in the great chanting hall, which housed the golden image of Manjushri and the white conch that was buried by Buddha and unearthed by Tsong Khapa. From the rooftop one can see the beauty of Lhasa's valley and the self-arising images on the rocks behind.

From Drepung, Geshe-la went to Sera Monastery. On this mountain, which dominates Sera, near the place where Tsong Khapa taught and meditated, is a spring with healing qualities called Sera Chureding. Geshe-la went to drink some water but the bed was dry. The small group visited the surrounding area of Sera and made offerings. As they were leaving and they noticed the spring was abundantly flowing and they partook of the waters. The group felt gratitude that the presence and grace of Geshe-la seemed to have caused the spring to flow. Quietly they returned to Lhasa. Because he was always busy and because he was always

requested to go here and there, he never had a chance to go inside Norbu Lingka, the Dalai Lama's former summer residence, but he saw the park from the inside of a cab of a truck.

After a week in Lhasa the three traveled east towards Kham. The first stop on their journey was at the site of Ganden Monastery, Geshe-la's former home. The huge monastery, which had been built by Tsong Khapa in 1409, had been all but destroyed by Mao's soldiers. It was so large, however, that it could not be totally flattened. From the foundations it was now being reconstructed, and as he stood at its feet his eyes could see it was still magnificent even in ruins. Through these ruins the sounds of monks chanting the Lama Chöpa filled the air. What a waste, thought Geshe-la. He had been told that out of the six thousand monasteries, which once flourished in Tibet only parts of thirteen had not been completely destroyed. The communists said this was done for the benefit of the people.

Geshe-la watched the monks and volunteer carpenters busily engaged in the re-building, and three of Ganden's main shrines had been re-constructed. The work was mostly financed by public donations. Geshe-la approached some of the monks to ask about the welfare of some old friends. The monks became excited and happy when they saw him. As they began to talk Geshe-la realized that he knew them. The difficult life the monks had been forced to lead had prematurely aged them so that they were unrecognizable by Geshe-la. They had known Geshe-la immediately and cried for joy to see him. He heard stories of suffering again. One of Geshe-la's teachers, Geshe Lharampa Bhomay Tulku described the destruction of the sacred stüpa of Tsong Khapa. The Chinese had melted it down to obtain the gold, which they then took along with the jewels. The remains of the body, which the stüpa had contained were secretly retrieved later by Geshe Lharampa Bhomay Tulku from the ashes and

hidden. Geshe-la was told that a new stūpa was being built now, which contained these hidden relics. Geshe-la offered a silver butter lamp for the new temple and the stūpa dedicated to Tsong Khapa.

The trip to Kham was previously a three-month walk or one-and-a-half months on horseback. It now took five days by truck. But the roads were treacherous. They were narrow through the mountain passes. The wind was strong and blew menacingly through the hills, turning the water in the rivers brown from stirred-up mud. The brown of the river contrasted dramatically with the line of green conifers along the mountain passes and the crystal-clear blue skies. The edge of the water was close to the truck wheels. It was a frightening ride, which Geshe-la was glad to be over with.

The first town they stayed in upon entering the province of Kham was Tsawarom. In the village a Tibetan man asked Geshe-la to come and teach in his home. There were more than thirty people

waiting in the large kitchen when Geshe-la arrived. The Tibetans asked him to please teach them 'mongdey'. “Please we need mongdey, we are Tibetan, this is our religion, we need mongdey.”

Geshe-la was shocked. 'Mongdey' means blind faith. These Tibetans had grown up hearing the Chinese call their religion blind faith so many times that they did not know that it was an incorrect word. The proper expression is 'chödey'. Instead of asking Geshe-la to teach them Dharma they were asking him to teach them blind faith. Geshe-la began his teaching by correcting this misconception.

Then he continued: “For two thousand five hundred years many people in many countries have come to the Dharma. They have become intelligent and peace-loving as a result. Many educated people all over the world believe that the Dharma is intelligent, profound and exactly what human beings need. Those who say it is blind faith want to avoid religion. They want to eat and sleep, they believe

material existence is enough for human beings. But it is not enough. Human beings need to develop past this, and the Dharma will help them to do so.”

Geshe-la spoke with the people in Tsawarom for a few hours. He taught them thoroughly the benefit of the Dharma, the benefit of Taking Refuge. He offered the Refuge and Chenrezi initiations.

The next stop for the travelers was Markham-Gatoe, the birthplace of Geshe-la's father, Pema Wangyal Tashi. Geshe-la had many relatives there. He stayed for three days before continuing on to Bumting. During his stay he offered Green Tara practice. Kelsang, his brother, met Geshe-la and Tsering Chödrön in Markham. Jampa had to continue on with his trucking business so Kelsang had brought horses for the remainder of the journey. It was strange at first to be riding a horse again, but after a few hours and some near falls, Geshe-la remembered enough to feel comfortable in the

saddle.

Kelsang was the head of the household in the old family home in Bumting in Markham. According to Tibetan tradition one child must always stay with the family and take responsibility when the parents become too old to do so. If the child marries then the new wife or husband also moves into the family home. So Kalsang's wife, Pema Rolo, became the mother of the household and Atse became the grandmother or ama-la until she died. As ama-la she helped as she could but more or less gave up all her household responsibilities to the younger daughter-in-law. This system most often worked well, but sometimes led to arguments if the grandparents were not ready to give up their control. However Atse and Pema Rolo had gotten along very well. Yangdomalso had taken a position of ama-la and continued to live in the family home after Atse had died. She was well-loved by her nieces and nephews and was a good friend to her sister-in-law. Pema

Rolo and Kelsang had five children. When each of them was old enough to marry the process would be repeated. Pema and Kelsang would become the grandmother and grandfather making way for the younger couple.

Geshe-la was anxious to see his cousin, Geshe Gyaltzen, who had become his close friend at Ganden. He was deeply saddened to hear that Geshe Gyaltzen had committed suicide just a year before. When Geshe-la was about twenty-four his cousin had returned to Bumting where he had become the Abbot of Nyagön Tashi Chöling. Because of his position of authority the Chinese communists had been especially harsh with him. He had been forced to chop wood on the nearby mountain and then carry it on his back across the valley to the town. He had to do this ten times before he was permitted to stop for the day. Then in the evenings he was forced to attend interrogation sessions during which he was told to confess his “crimes” over and over.

He had to apologize and state that he had thought the Dharma was good but that he had been wrong and was sorry. Finally he broke down under the unrelenting pressure and took his own life to escape the torment.

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Geshe-la's stay in Bumting was very busy. When he was not visiting with friends and relatives throughout the valley he was teaching at the invitation of several families. One time, at the home of his cousin Gendon, he offered the teaching and initiation of White Tara. The day before leaving Bumting his relatives planned a picnic at Bon-tso Lake. Hearing this Geshe-la remembered a dream he had a few nights before in Markham that left a strong impression on his mind. In the dream a beautiful woman was pleading to him to come and purify her. When he awoke his cousin said, "When we are at Bumting we will go to the lake." This lake

is a power place of the area and people go there to meditate because it is such a wonderful place. As they approached the lake two crows had taken flight. These birds being associated with Mahakala, this was taken as a good omen. While the picnic was being prepared, Geshe-la was offering food to the crows and led a ceremony of purification. He placed some precious items in the lake, as an offering for the naga, protectors of this land. At this moment, his continuing journey in Kham became evidently simple.

Geshe-la visited the area outside of Bumting for about three weeks. The first place he visited was Trulgoyung where he stayed with Yeshe Tendo who was an ex-monk of this area who requested White Tara teaching and initiation. Geshe-la accepted and this wonderful news resulted in about three hundred people coming to receive the teachings.

Geshe-la visited many relatives and friends in the surrounding area. In each place he stayed he

offered teachings of Green and White Tara and Vajrapani. He also offered the ceremony of saving animals, in which animals destined for slaughter are saved and a red ribbon is tied to their ears. This ceremony is called the Dzomo Tsetar puja.

When people heard that a lama was present they came in great numbers. Young people were staring at him and older folks rejoiced to see the colour of the monks' robes that had not been seen for twenty-five years. They came running to him and his hand would gently try to take away some of their pain as he constantly touched their heads in the way a grandmother might console a child. Time passed quickly, Geshe-la returned to Bumting. More schedules and visiting, both personal and Dharma activities, awaited him. More people came to these Dharma teachings than had when he first arrived.

Many people came to Geshe-la with physical problems. What he had was his power of word, toothpaste and water. And what the people

had was faith. Geshe-la did an exorcism by putting Dharma questions to the possessed person whereupon the ghost left.

Even though Geshe-la was tired he continued his work. While he was returning home one evening a young boy called to him, “Lama, please come my granny is dying!” His cousin said: “We’re late, we’re late.” But Geshe-la said: “This is my job.” He gave her a blessing pill. She said, “I never thought I would see a red robe before I died.” Geshe-la learned the same evening the old woman had died. She had sent everyone out of the room, sat up in the meditation position, and died.

During one quiet moment with his family, after offering a ceremony of purification and removing obstacles, he took the opportunity to climb up onto the flat roof of the family home as he had done many times as a child. From that vantage point he looked around him in all directions. He saw the golden crops of the harvest season. In the calm

light of the approaching night he reflected on what had happened to his country. Each object he saw reminded him of some lost moment. His eyes climbed the valley wall to the spot on the side of the mountain where Nyagön Tashi Chöling had been. The small monastery had been destroyed by the Liberation Army. It was hard to understand this obsession with annihilating his heritage.

He imagined he could hear again the sounds of the conch shells, horns and drums filling the air with their music, the same wonderful music, which had so fascinated him as a boy. The sound of the wind through the grasses and the trees merged with the sounds Geshe-la was hearing in his imagination. He heard the sacred music as clearly as reflections of the austere mountains can be seen on the surface of a small alpine lake. The music of Tibet could not be silenced in his mind. And throughout the world it would be played again and again. But would it ever echo in the same way as it had echoed off the

mountain walls of this valley? Would it ever fill so clear, open and luminous a sky?

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Geshe Khenrab stayed in Tibet for six months. He returned from Bumting traveling through Lhasa where he stayed for two weeks. He gave many teachings, but most of all he offered purifications. He had more time to visit in Lhasa. He visited Ramoche, Muru, Gyüme colleges but now they were abandoned and were used for communist struggle sessions. Struggle sessions were the name given to the public interrogation meetings that the Communist Chinese used to publically humiliate Tibetan people. He saw other temples turned into carpet factories and public toilets. Geshe-la invited many old monks from Gyüme Monastery, where he offered money and food. Together they met socially and reconnected as friends and then together held a prayer session doing Green Tara and Protectors'

ceremonies. Dado Rinpoche was at this gathering in civil clothes, disguised, as were many high lamas, for protection.

Geshe-la returned once again to Ganden Monastery where he offered tea and financial support to the monks. Kelsang Namgyal of Ganden requested teachings on the Six-session Yoga. Once more he visited the Potala and the Jokhang, Sera and Drepung monasteries. He saw that the Chinese had allowed the restoration of these places enough to appear convincing to pilgrims and visitors. Paintings and images were repaired using original materials as much as possible, but the precious objects of gold, silver or jewels had been removed. But evidence of slashing and hacking were everywhere.

Geshe-la crossed the border back into Nepal. Finalizing his journey he visited the Four Great Places of Pilgrimage, power places of the Buddhists. These places commemorate the events of Buddha's life. All these sites have great stūpas and temples of

many countries. Even Buddha himself had circumambulated and told people to go to these power places. At each of these places Geshe-la mindfully did the appropriate meditations and gave offerings. First going to Lumbini, where the Enlightened One was born; then, Bodhgaya where he attained enlightenment; thirdly, Sarnath, where he first turned the wheel of Dharma; and Kushinagar, where Buddha entered Parinirvana offering his final teaching on impermanence.

After this pilgrimage, Geshe-la headed to southern India. He stopped in Dharmasala to offer gifts that Tibetans had asked him to give to the Dalai Lama. Finally he reached Mundgod, where he had lived twenty years before. The monasteries of Ganden, Drepung, and Sera, the “Three Pillars”, had grown in size, buildings and people. He visited teachers who had come to Montréal: at Ganden, Zong Rinpoche and Khensur Lobsang Wangdu Rinpoche; at Drepung, Pema Gyaltzen Rinpoche

and Gen Nyima Gyaltsen; and at Sera, Ling Rinpoche, who was offering what was to be his last teaching of Lam Rim before his death. As Geshe-la was leaving, Ling Rinpoche peered down the long hallway and called after him, “Geshe, Geshe, see you soon, see you soon.” All these lamas, who Geshe-la visited in southern India, have passed on now.

Geshe-la did not return to Tibet, although he received repeated requests to do so. Geshe-la's brother Yeshe Gönpö, and his sister, Tsering Chödrön, both died in 1984. Geshe-la feels fortunate to have seen them one last time.

PART FIVE

LATER YEARS

Montréal

Geshe-la returned to Canada after a year's absence and continued where he had left off, assuming his teaching and pastoral duties at the Temple on Verchères Street and ministering to the Tibetan families and Westerners in Montréal. Geshe-la also continued to travel to other Canadian cities where he was invited to stay with Tibetan families or to teach at Buddhist Temples.

In the spring after Geshe-la's return, the Venerable Zong Rinpoche returned for another visit to Canada. With the help of his translator, he offered the commentary on Vajra Yogini and numerous tantra initiations. He offered the empowerments of Chittamani Tara, Dukkar, and Heruka, and gave explanations on important points of Guhyasamaja and Chöd. Geshe-la accompanied Zong Rinpoche to Toronto and to the homes of other Tibetans where he visited each summer.

On his way home, Zong Rinpoche called Geshe-la from Switzerland at the end of the summer.

His words were odd, as if it were his last phone call, and it was. Zong Rinpoche went into final meditation in November. His passing had a huge impact on his students all over the world.

The last visitor to the Verchères Street Temple was the Ninety-eighth Ganden Tripa Jamphel Shenphen, who visited the temple before as Lobsang Wangdu. He offered teachings on the Wisdom of Emptiness and First Level of Tantra Mudra. It was very difficult for him to teach because he had become run down from the long tour and he was ill. Geshe-la said that it was better that he rest, but the Ganden Tripa declined, saying that he felt very much alive when teaching the Dharma.

While in Montréal he went to the Milarepa Dharma Centre. Jatse Tulku Tenzin Sherab lived there with his family. He was very happy to stay with them. It was one of the places where Geshe-la often taught. There were no boundaries belonging to any particular school. This is how Geshe-la taught

and here the Ganden Tripa offered teachings on the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

Before leaving Montréal, the Ganden Tripa offered Chenrezi, Tsong Khapa and Buddha initiations. He blessed and prepared the relics for the Tsugtor Nampar Gyalma Stüpa, which was being constructed in ceramic by Joan Scott, one of Geshe-la's students. Geshe-la arranged for the Ganden Tripa to visit and offer teachings at the various centres and homes in Ontario. He accompanied him on the Ontario trip and visited with him one last time in New York City before the Ganden Tripa returned to India.

After the visit of Ganden Tri Rinpoche, in the early autumn, the building that housed the temple was sold. This decision to sell the temple building was made because the space and facilities were limited. A temple building on the Island of Montréal would be more accessible to students throughout the city and a larger prayer hall was

needed for teaching and celebrations. A building was purchased on Avenue de l'Église in Côte St-Paul.

While the new building was undergoing renovations, Geshe-la lived like a nomad staying and teaching in students' homes. It took several months to clean and prepare the temple. At the same time as the temple was being completed, the Tsugtor Nampar Gyalma Stüpa was finally finished, a white-coloured five-foot structure of fired clay. All the consecrated relics were placed inside.

The first visitors to the new temple were the Gyüme monks. The temple sponsored a musical exposition entitled "Sacred Music of Tibet." As well as visiting other Buddhist temples, on January 1st, 1986, the monks consecrated the new temple building. The stüpa was placed on the altar and the Tsugtor Nampar Gyalma Puja was offered. The Green Tara Puja purified the environment in the new location.

For the next five months, the final touches of

painting the temple in the colours of the five Dhyani Buddhas were completed. On May 18th, 1986 at 12:30 pm, the ribbon-cutting ceremony officially opened the temple, celebrations began and many people attended. Representatives of religious and secular organizations spoke in praise of the latest historical manifestation of continuity that marked the continuing passage of time. Prayers were offered, greetings of “Tashi Delek” were abundant, food was offered and enjoyed. The place was auspiciously filled with good will and abundance like the horn of plenty.

The opening coincided with the beginning of Saga Dawa, the holiest month in the Buddhist calendar. After the celebrations of the Temple, Geshe-la went to Newfoundland at the request of Buddhists community under the patronage of Doctor Ali, to celebrate with them. Usually Newfoundland is very cloudy, but people remarked that while Geshe-la was there the skies were bright

and clear for two weeks.

Although the temple was his home, Geshe-la continued teaching outside of Montréal, including frequent visits to the Milarepa Centre in Vermont. Geshe-la was asked and agreed to do a tantric retreat in the mountains at Milarepa. He said it was now time to do intensive practice and several students accompanied him to Vermont. The students benefited greatly from the expert supervision of Geshe-la. From that time on, a solid tradition of summer retreat practise was established under Geshe-la's guidance. Each year alternating meditation objects were chosen, focusing on Yamantaka, Vajrayogini as well as Chittamani Tara. A special retreat was also held in Northern Québec. On a regular basis, shorter retreats were also held at the temple. The new location offered a space for practitioners to deepen their understanding through monthly intense retreats. A special Lam Rim retreat was held at Christmas.

During this first year at the new temple, the Piadassi Maha Thera taught the teachings of Twelve Interdependent Links of the Wheel of Life. Other visitors included Tenzin Sherab JatseTulku who came to live in the temple for some time. He was older now, and it was important that he found guidance. Geshe-la was willing to offer his help. Lati Rinpoche came that year and he remained a long time at the temple. He would sit in Geshe-la's room. People wanted to take him out, but he would say, "All that I need is in here. I don't want to go anywhere, no reason." Geshe-la and Rinpoche talked to each other for hours and hours.

Rinpoche offered all teachings on the Lam Rim and compassion as well as introduction into the four levels of Tantra by Pandita Sönam Drapa, concluding the visit with a Manjushri (Lord of Wisdom) empowerment. Many people were fortunate to meet with Lati Rinpoche, as he was one of the greatest living Tantric masters.

The Ganden Tripa blessed us with a return visit. Geshe-la noted that his health was worse and took care of him. Rinpoche explained to us the importance of a spiritual friend and offered the Tsong Khapa and Thousand-Armed Chenrezi practices.

The year's message from Geshe-la reflected his thoughts: "The years, months and days go by quickly. Our life is becoming shorter all the time. If we practice Dharma every day then we are using our human life in a meaningful way. If we do not use this life, then when you are finished with this life, you will have lost a chance."

Geshe-la requested that we remember the laws of cause and effect, that we practice good morality, and that we develop our Dharma practice for the sake of all sentient beings.

Geshe-la worked hard so that his students would become well educated in Buddhist philosophy and establish firm roots in Dharma. The

following was his New Years' message to his students for February 1988:

“Buddha Sakyamuni explained that, that which we experience today is the consequence of our previous actions. Our present joy comes from our good deeds of the past and our misery issues from moments where we have acted destructively. If we seek well-being in our future existences, we should think, speak and act constructively right now and avoid all that is negative and destructive.”

* * * * *

Many tours passed through Montréal, and the Tibetan Buddhist Temple sponsored the Drepung and Gyutö monasteries. These tours helped the situation for refugees living in India as well as making it possible for the world at large to hear the wonderful sounds of the Tibetan musical instruments and chanting of the monks. Hearing this wonderful music in his new home brought a feeling

of continuity to Geshe-la.

The teaching passed to him from his compassionate teachers in Tibet, carried with him as he escaped to India, and brought with him to his new home in Canada, was now being brought in a steady stream throughout the 1980s and 90s through re-visiting teachers and a new wave of younger teachers.

One teacher who visited the Temple for the first time was the Twelfth Dagom Rinpoche of Drepung Monastery, recognized by the Dalai Lama as a reincarnated lama. After completing all his studies and ending his term as Abbot of Gyume Monastery, he was invited to Canada. This new friend to the temple taught clearly and strictly. He offered the Seven Point Mind Training and offered Amitaya's Life and Protector Practice.

The Thirteenth Zasep Tulku was born in Eastern Tibet in 1948 near his monastery of Zuru Gönpa on the mountain above the plains where the

Mekong River runs. From here he went to Sera Monastery on the advice of Trijang Rinpoche and had a strong desire to study. His guru, Geshe Wangyel, told him that after overcoming many physical difficulties and mental hindrances with enthusiasm and calm perseverance that his mind would naturally open revealing its inner radiance just as the Blue Lotus remains closed in the pale light of the Moon and opens as the Sun rises to reveal its natural beauty. Lama Zasep lives in Canada and teaches at the Temple.

A new generation of teachers, some teaching in a traditional style and others contemporary, include teachers of North American descent such as Thubten Chödrön and Thubten Pende. Young Tibetan lamas are also coming to offer teachings in Montréal, such as the Twelfth Geshe Thantog Tulku from Eastern Tibet, who studied at Sera Monastery, and offered Lam Rim and Protector Practice to the Temple. And some teachers are

taking rebirth in Montréal. One such teacher, born on the eighth day of the eighth month of 1988 in room number eight, is the Twenty-third Gomo Tulku, Tenzing Dhonyag. He has now rejoined his monastery, Sera, in India and is progressing in his studies rapidly.

Over the years Geshe-la had kept in contact with his monastery and helped them financially through donations and through finding sponsors for younger monks. He also helped the lay part of refugee camps through material aid such as sending clothing. In the early nineties, the monastery requested that Geshe-la come back and be Abbot. Geshe-la decided that since it had been more than twenty years since he left the monastery, ten years since his last visit, and since both his brother and sister, Yeshe Gönpö and Tsering Chödrön, had died, he felt that his family was now in Québec. The manner of leading a monastery was not the same either. The respect and authority of an Abbot was

not as before and most of the people were new and more aware of the changes. He decided that it made no sense. So he declined the request, thinking it better to continue to help in other ways.

* * * * *

In January 1990, with a new year in front of him, Geshe-la's thoughts focussed on the continual growth of the Dharma and how to accommodate the temple's practitioners. Reflecting on Vasubandu's words, he made the following appeal:

“Buddha Dharma is of two types, one is the practise of Buddha's Teachings, the other is listening, thinking and understanding those Teachings. That is the Dharma. For the teachings to endure, it is important to have a community of monks, nuns and laypractitioners. The welfare and happiness of all sentient beings depends on the Buddha, Dharma, and Spiritual Community. Therefore, I want this to survive for a long time. It's

for this reason I wish to create a retreat and monastery situation, a place for development, living, meditation seeds to grow close to Montréal, named Geden Shedrup Ling. Whoever cares will assist us.”

That year the Temple received an auspicious gift of the Kangyur (Tibetan Buddhist canon which contains a large number of original discourses translated from Indian sources), a good omen for the future Teachings of Buddha at the Temple. The gift was from Mrs. Barshee, who recounted: “When I was young in Lhasa, the communist Red Guards invaded our city, destroying as they marched. In our house they destroyed our Kangyur. I promised when I grew up and saved money that I would purchase a Kangyur and donate it to a Temple. These were my thoughts as I was fleeing to India and later coming to Canada.”

Now the Temple members decided that each year the Kangyur would be carried around the Temple three times in circumambulation. This was

done for the first time in February after the lunar year. The following years, the ceremony was done during the month of Saga Dawa. The ceremony consists of walking around the temple with the text, offering incense and chanting the mantra of Buddha Shakyamuni. Afterwards pages are read from each of the hundred texts and Lama Chöpa Tsog offering is done. To complete the day's celebration a vegetarian meal is carefully prepared and offered to all attending. It has always been a very worthwhile and enjoyable day for all!

In the spring time of the same year when the Kangyur was received, H.E. Amchok Rinpoche of Amdo who studied at Ganden and Tara Tulku of Drepung came to visit us. Both of these Lamas were greatly loved and admired for their wisdom, eloquence and inspiring presence. They offered to us the Teaching of Four Mindfulness and Amitayus, Vajrasattva initiation and explanation on Buddhist topics. These teachings were a good preparation for

our yearly three-week Vajrayana retreat. Soon after the retreat Lati Rinpoche visited us once again, as he had done for so many years. This time he offered us the Three Principal Paths and Vajra initiations of Heruka, Vajra Yogini and White Tara.

An invitation letter had arrived by mail from Ganden in India inviting Geshe-la to attend the opening of a new assembly hall in late December 1990. His Holiness the Dalai Lama would officiate the opening with consecrating ceremonies, teachings and empowerments. As preparations were being made to go to Ganden in India in the middle of September, the fledgling retreat and monastery project received a generous and unexpected donation of 45 acres of land less than one hour from Montréal in the foothills of the Laurentians, from Issac Ary, the director of Milarepa Center. In the autumn of 1990 the papers were signed and the land secured. Then Geshe-la and Gary left for India again.

Ganden, India, 1990

Flying over “the gates to India” the plane landed in Bombay. Before heading south, Geshe-la made a pilgrimage to the Kanheri Caves, north of Bombay. Ancient Buddhist caves that were used as monasteries and temples between the second and ninth centuries are located here. The most impressive cave, the great assembly hall, has a long colonnade of pillars and a large stūpa carved at the back of the space. There are cells for monks done in proper measurement according to Vinaya codes. We took advantage of this time to stop and meditate on the Buddha's Path.

The bus ride to Ganden was fifteen hours, followed by a short drive from the luxurious Goa, upon a plateau. Ganden has two colleges, Jangtse and Shartse. Geshe-la observed the rhythm of the days. The practise of study and debate continued as in Tibet. Improvements were in the monastery since it began, electricity, telephone, washing areas but still more should be done.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama finally arrived for the inauguration and consecration of the new Ganden assembly hall. The dignitaries were in front with the young reincarnations of Serkong Rinpoche, Zong Rinpoche, Trijang Rinpoche, Ling Rinpoche. Geshe-la knew was reminded of the previous incarnations of these lamas who had visited him in Montréal and offered teaching. These young lamas had never been to Tibet. The audience was packed in cross-legged on the floor and His Holiness on an elevated throne. The people flowed out onto the porch of the hall, watching in the windows and courtyard where loud speakers echoed his voice. Many people, monks and lay, filled the Temple and spilled outside. His Holiness the Dalai Lama offered prayers to consecrate the site and also teachings of mind training and numerous secret empowerments including Kalachakra. Along with this, much advice to encourage the young, lay and especially monks, "...buildings are necessary, but don't be caught up in

the samsaric Dharmas; take care of the young, for they are the future....”

Between the meditation sessions, Geshe-la met with many of his old friends, sitting, talking and giving encouragement to the young and old alike. Geshe-la noticed a young monk he had not seen before. He asked where he came from and the monk said that he came from Geshe-la's homeland near Bumting and was here to study. He said that although the Chinese had given consent to the people of the village to reconstruct Nyagön Tashi Chöling, it was difficult to study. The monastery now has many young monks and one old Abbot. Although he was able to practice, he said that he also required teachings. “When I learn more I will return”, he said. Geshe-la learned also in his college of Gowö one of the older monks had gone to his village monastery to assist there for three years.

Geshe-la visited the Labrang of the younger Tulkus, spent time at Drepung and met with Dagom

Rinpoche. As one enters Drepung Monastery, one walks through a garden with a pond in the centre, and an image of Zambala lancing forth streams of water.

As usual, as a guest, Geshe-la was well attended to and on one occasion sat in a formal meeting of the senior monks of the monastery who said, “We have so many monks now and still young country men come here from Tibet. Our resources are minimal, we need help. The land given to us for crops is not sufficient now.” Geshe-la replied, “I began here and I see now the progress of the past thirty years, but it is true I do not live here now.” The monks suggested a tour to gather funds and Geshe-la said that when he returned to Canada he would see what could be done.

After the inauguration, Geshe-la, an old student of Geshe-la's, Tseten Norbu, and Gary went to Bodhgaya for a pilgrimage. At this time it was quiet, as the Dalai Lama was offering Kalachakra at

Sarnath but soon Bodhgaya would be filled with pilgrims. So Geshe-la used this quiet time to contemplate at the site of the Buddha's enlightenment. While there they went to the surrounding Buddha landmarks, the ruins of Nalanda, Vulture Peak Mountain, Ya Bon Chen, Gaya Guri (Honey Monkey), Gompo-Sararipa Cave, Gompo Cemetery and the site where Buddha practised as an ascetic (Lodro-Kawa Nalan Zen). This whole area was once the central land of the Buddha. Geshe-la travelled to these sites with monks of Gowu and offered pujas, meditations proper to the area such as the Heart Sutra at Vulture Peak Mountain. Geshe-la said that if you go to India it is beneficial to go to the Buddhist pilgrimage areas, especially to Bodhgaya, to meditate. For here is the birthplace of Buddhism.

Geshe-la heard that the monks of Gowu had gone to see his teacher Nyima Gyaltzen Rinpoche. Geshe-la decided to go to Bhutan to see his teacher

and went with the monks who knew the way. Some thirty years had passed since Geshe-la had seen the teacher who patiently taught him the Prajnaparamita, the Heart of Perfect Wisdom Sutra.

From Bodhgaya to Bhutan was a long bus ride with many stops on the way to the border town. Nyima Gyaltzen Rinpoche had established himself within the border frontiers of this kingdom, becoming one of the yogis of the Himalaya.

Geshe-la and the entourage climbed the mountainside resting many times, until through the jungle of trees appeared a sloping meadow with a small hut amidst a fence of prayer flags. Each day, for two hours in the afternoon, Geshe-la's teacher would open the door to visitors. It was two o'clock when Geshe-la eagerly entered the tiny mud and tined roof hut. Nyima Gyaltzen greeted them warmly, "Geshe Tobgyal - Gary Young!" he said.

Nyima Gyaltzen recounted how he had come to this place to meditate after he left Baxa. He made

a small box hut with a covering, and with little provisions he began to meditate. Sometimes there was food, sometimes no food. People of the area came to understand his purpose, and began to bring offerings. Some brought more planks or mud, white wash and tin to improve his shelter. He continued to meditate no matter what happened and noticed some development was occurring. His single-pointed concentration was deepening. As his beneficial potentials became more apparent to others, more people came to seek help and he assisted them as best he could. One day, members of the Royal family showed up. They had heard a spiritual master was in Tala. The Queen mother was sick and no one could help her. He examined her and told her son that it was not a big problem and that she should return in a few days and he would be able to cure her. Rinpoche said that people come with their illnesses. He examines the situation and helped if he could, depending on their karma. Geshe-la stayed for

a week visiting him. The month was February, it was cold and each morning the ground was covered with frost.

Nyima Gyaltsen explained his practice, “My main point of meditation is the Lam Rim and Yidam practice. This is my repeated schedule for years. At first I was alone here, but now my cousin stays nearby to help.” Before we left Rinpoche offered some mantra transference and ceremony blessings of the wind. He advised each and every one of his visitors without any need to verbalize any questions or concerns.

It was difficult to leave the wonderful lama, but it was necessary to leave and begin the return to India. While in Delhi we received word from an old student of Geshe-la's in Malaysia inviting him to participate in ceremonies and teachings for the New Year. Geshe-la accepted and arrived at Kuala Lumpur in the morning of the Chinese New Year, February 1991. Immediately Geshe-la was asked to

offer his services for the Buddhists of the region. Most of the people spoke English and he was able to teach philosophy and offer ceremonies of the Bodhisattva as well as a number of New Year predictions.

Malaysia is a country of Chinese influence with Islamic people having a shade of magical ritual. Before leaving Malaysia, Geshe-la prepared and consecrated 130 Enlightenment Stūpas in memory of the deceased Karmapa, His Holiness the Sixteenth Karmapa, Rangjung Rigpe Dorje. Here is an example of Geshe-la's openness by offering services to all traditions.

In his New Years message of that year, 1991, although in Asia, Geshe-la cared for his students in Canada and sent this message: “Although from time to time, it is necessary for me to be absent from the Temple, it is beneficial if you come and have discussions, thinking about what was taught, reminding yourself of the Dharma you have

received. I will be away for some time and although during that time there will be visiting Lamas, it is very constructive to come here. If you stay at home you will forget what you have learnt. I know this for my own experience. I thought I would never forget my studies but after many years in Montréal, I find that I have forgotten a great deal. You benefit from coming to the Temple to practise and work. It increases your merits and virtues. Because of that you benefit others. So you benefit both yourself and others by coming here. Since the Temple is a place for people who are interested in the Dharma and you are free to gather here, it is good if you use the space provided and maintain what you have learnt. If you have to start all over it is a lot more difficult. Dharma means making use of the principles taught, helping one another and so forth, it is very good if we do that. When I first came to Montréal there was no place for Dharma accessible to the public. With the idea of this wished-for place, I tried to create the

suitable conditions. Now this Temple exists for all and I am very happy. Therefore use the Temple and benefit from it, so that it fulfils your needs. Furthermore, you should all cultivate an unselfish attitude, trying to be of benefit to each other. That way there will be some meaning to our work and for us to be here. The most important thing is that we develop a spirit of cooperation that is the source of creating positive potential. And so if you are able to make use of the Dharma and support the idea of keeping Buddha's teachings alive, then it will be of great benefit.”

Last Days in Montréal

Several of Geshe-la's students were at the airport to greet him upon his return to Montréal in late winter of 1991. When Geshe-la returned to the Temple, he was overjoyed to see the newly installed oak wood floor in the meditation room and living quarters. Lati Rinpoche had advised these changes because he was concerned for Geshe-la's health. He thought that a wood floor would be an improvement on the cold tiles from the old bank.

Soon after settling down from the trip Geshe-la commenced with teachings, retreats and celebrations. In early summer he led the Kangyur procession and reading. Later in the summer, for a picnic and to celebrate the Dalai Lama's birthday, Geshe-la invited the congregation to the new retreat land. On this special occasion Geshe-la said, "Now we have this land and we will develop it for Dharma practice."

In order to raise funds to develop the retreat centre, Geshe-la came up with the idea of a teaching

tour. The tour would not only be an opportunity to gather funds for the retreat land, but at the same time, Geshe-la could prepare an itinerary for the monks of Ganden who were planning a future visit. With these plans in mind, Geshe-la concluded the third complete teachings of the Lam Rim. To celebrate this special occasion he gave empowerments for meditation practice and made dedications of merit for the Montréal Dharma students and all other beings.

Before leaving on the teaching tour, Geshe-la welcomed a flurry of visits from other notable teachers, overlapping and coming one after another, - a great wave of Dharma Teaching. First came the visit of Geshe Yeshe Tobden of Sera Mey Monastery, who had spent twenty years in retreat in the mountains of Dharamsala. He offered his experience through teaching and said to us: “Meditate on Lam Rim, -liberation is in your palm.”

Lati Rinpoche was touring North America

and his visit to the Montréal temple coincided with Lama Tsong Khapa Day. He gave teachings from the Lam Rim Mati (a guide for meditating on the graduated path to enlightenment) and bestowed the empowerments of Zambala, and Yang Chenma. Dr. Alexander Berzin, Buddhist scholar and writer, was another visitor during this busy period. He gave teachings on “The Mind and Mental Factors”, “Death, Intermediate State and Rebirth” and led a teaching on the construction of the Yamataka mandala. During his stay at the temple, Thubten Pende offered teachings on “The Fifty Verses of Guru Devotion” and on the subjects of concentration (shinay) and insight meditation (lhaktong).

After this busy autumn and winter, Geshe-la, with the help of Peter Baker and Gary, began his fundraising tour for the retreat land. From January to July of 1992, the tour circled and crisscrossed North America. Geshe-la drove thousands of miles -

-stopping and giving many teachings, participating in ceremonies, meeting many people, and preparing a route for the Ganden monks. On the west coast, he met with Geshe Tselphel, who had offered assistance for the Ganden tour when they had met in India the year before. One of the last stops on the tour was the Milarepa center in Vermont where Geshe-la led a summer retreat. The tour was only moderately successful on a material level, but Geshe-la's teaching of the Dharma brought joy and happiness to many people.

The Ganden Jangtse Monks Tour was to begin in the summer of 1993. The details for the tour were beginning to take form and great efforts were being carried out in terms of paperwork and itinerary. Mentally, Geshe-la was always ready to help but now his body did not follow as easily as before. During the winter Geshe-la spent one month in the hospital with an illness and it took a while to recuperate his strength.

Several other factors put the monks' tour on hold, temporarily. Montréal was to host a visit from the Dalai Lama in June. The temple was invited to participate along with the other interested Dharma centers and ecumenical groups. And, after His Holiness' visit, Geshe-la was called away at the request of his new students from Colorado who asked him to return and offer teaching. After this short teaching engagement, Geshe-la returned to Montréal. Geshe-la told his Montréal students, "They were all crying when I was leaving, they shouldn't do that. It is like the sign or omen that the Lama may soon pass away."

The busy summer of 1993 seemed to pass by very quickly. Geshe-la continued the course of teachings, with the yearly summer retreat at Milarepa, and continued plans for the retreat land. This was a full schedule and as usual his door was always open to others. Incredibly, in the first week of September, the news came that the monks from

Ganden Jangtse were on the plane and would arrive at Mirabel within hours! The paperwork for the tourist travel visas for the monks had been stalled in Canadian and Indian Immigration for some time, so this new development came as a sudden surprise. Geshe-la energetically threw himself into the current project with the cooperation and help of many of his students.

During their stay in Montréal, the monks constructed a mandala and offered a performance of chants and lama dances. They were introduced to many people, visiting their homes and making new friends. After discussions about itinerary and mode of travel, the tour was ready to leave Montréal to raise much-needed funds for the monastery in India. The goal of travelling throughout North America was now a reality. With Gary driving the van, the first stop was Ottawa.

Geshe-la accompanied the monks as far as Ottawa to encourage them and further discuss the

tour. On the evening before returning to Montréal, Geshe-la sat with the former Abbot Lobsang Thinley. Since the abbot was a senior monk, Geshe-la asked him this question: “What does one do at death time? Should shunyata or bodhichitta be the focus of meditation?” The Lama answered: “It should be a good balance of both.” The hustle and bustle of preparations for the tour masked the implications of this question. Standing in the window of the host's home after the Ottawa performance, Geshe-la waved as the touring monks drove off.

The following week was the last week of Geshe-la's nirmanakaya form. There were signs, but no one saw them. There were unusual differences in his customary mannerisms but no one understand their significance. On one occasion, Joan was preparing the promotional materials for the tour and she looked up to see Geshe-la standing, silently looking in her direction, with a very serious

expression. One time Geshe-la said: “Come to my room and sit down for awhile.” Joan had never been asked to do this in all the years she had been around Geshe-la. Having done three prostrations she sat down while Geshe-la received them with a prayer spoken in Tibetan. It seemed a good time to ask Geshe-la a question that had been disturbing her. She told him how she felt that something seemed strange. “Geshe-la have I done anything to cause you to be unhappy with me? If there is anything that I am doing that is wrong or misguided please tell me. I would like to know. Please tell me directly.” Geshe-la replied, “Don't think like that. Think that your Gurus are happy with you. I am very happy, everything is OK.” That is all he said.

During that week Geshe-la went for a long walk with a friend, a Tibetan man named Thupten Champa. As they walked together, Geshe-la recounted to him many stories of his childhood in Tibet. Again Geshe-la was out of his usual

behaviour but the friend did not know its significance. Another friend Mr. Rabgey spoke with Geshe-la on the telephone that week. He remembered how Geshe-la kept talking and talking. It seemed that Geshe-la just didn't want to get off the phone. Mr. Rabgey found this peculiar and out of character for Geshe-la.

Geshe-la gave his students many subtle indications that he would soon be leaving. Louis Cormier was one of Geshe-la's first Canadian students. Geshe-la said, "Goodbye Louis" and hugged him. At the time, Louis had thought and felt something distinct, "Geshe-la never did that before." Out of the blue, that week a stranger came to the Temple and offered Geshe-la a skull cup of human bone, which he accepted. In retrospect, these were obvious signs.

Another student, Renaldo, recounted; "I was dreaming a very lucid dream. In the dream I arrived at the Temple and wanted to speak with Geshe-la. I

was informed he didn't have time to speak with anyone because he was very busy packing his big brown suitcase and was leaving tomorrow. That was my dream. The next day at work, I received a phone call... Geshe-la had passed away.”

Friday evening was the beginning of the monthly Sojong, a time of retreat and meditation. During the Sojong on Saturday, as Geshe-la's students chanted and sang Dena Jetsun Lama, a practice of taking and giving, Geshe-la's voice was extremely beautiful. The periods of shinay meditation were particularly intense. Geshe-la never moved for long periods of time. It was necessary for a senior student to whisper:

“Geshe-la..... Geshe-la, our measured time has passed.” His eyes opened and he smiled widely and compassionately at his students. The sunrise on Sunday brought an end to the Sojong and a puja for the Dharmapala practice was scheduled for later in the day.

Just before the puja was to begin, a woman arrived with her daughter who was ill with an unspecified problem. Geshe-la's told his students to begin the Dharmapala practice, while he went to treat the patient. Beginning with a Medicine Buddha puja for her benefit, abruptly the women went into convulsions and began shrieking in a high-pitched incomprehensible cacophony. It became apparent that she was suffering harm from a malevolent source. Conversing with this spirit, Geshe-la advised it to leave this young woman alone. The spirit refused saying that he had a longtime grudge against this young women and he had nowhere else to go anyway. Geshe-la told the spirit that he would guide him to a safe place and he advised him it was necessary for him to stop such negative actions towards this woman. After spending several hours in prayers and meditation to help these sentient beings, Geshe-la concluded the rituals.

When the mother and daughter left, Geshe-la

was able to rest. Sarah prepared a meal for Geshe-la who ate everything and more than usual. It had been an extremely busy and exhausting day. After supper he asked Sarah to massage his left arm, which had been aching for several days. In spite of the long day, Geshe-la did the Chöd practice. Later as Sarah left to go home, Geshe-la came to the door saying: “Have a good dream.” Joan, who had also been in the Temple preparing posters for the tour, left late that night, in the early hours of the following day. Driving to her father's home she noted, “Mysterious illusions, What a day!” It was about 2 AM. Things seemed to have a surrealistic appearance to her. The winds outside were blowing strongly, and phenomena had a disturbing, disquieting quality.

“In the middle of the night, great winds blew”

The nineteenth day of the eighth month, ironbird
year, Monday, October 4, 1993.

In the early hours of the morning Geshe Khenrab began his journey back to the clear light. That morning, Sara arrived to fill the water bowls. She saw that Geshe-la's door was still closed and did not disturb him. She filled the offering bowls in the main shrine room. As she finished, she saw Tsong Khapa and his two Sons rise out of the water bowls and dissolve into space. What does that signify, she thought? After preparing breakfast for her teacher, she went to see if Geshe-la was awake. She knocked on the door. There was no answer. She entered the room and quietly called, "Geshe-la, Geshe-la." He was lying peacefully on his right side, the Bodhi tree was at the head of the bed and the palm of his right hand rested by his cheek with his index finger pointing upwards. There was complete stillness, and no movement.

Soon after Joan arrived at the Temple. She had noticed Geshe-la's room still had the drapes closed. Sara met her at the front door with the

unbelievable words, “Geshe-la has passed away.” Geshe-la was covered with his saffron zen. Those near at hand sat beside his precious body and recited the Heart Sutra.

As the news spread, the members waited for Gary to return with the monks of Ganden Jangtse. Finally, they arrived from Lindsay. Many students were arriving at the temple, some in disbelief at their great loss. The door to Geshe-la's room was closed behind the Abbot and monks. Time stood still, each person immersed in their own musings on the manifestation of death and impermanence. The door reopened, all the monks left the room and the door was sealed. The Abbot advised us, “Geshe-la is absorbed in clear-light meditation, heat radiates from his heart chakra.” The monks and laity began to offer prayer and supplication in a manner suitable for a truly holy person.

Monday night and all day Tuesday, the rituals of Yamantaka, Guhyasamaja, and Heruka

were done while other preparations were being made. A palanquin was constructed and the cremation room prepared. The day passed quickly. The shrine room was always full and as night fell the crowd remained, but there was a great quiet reverence. Students and friends of Geshe-la filed past the door of his room where he continued to lie in state, making offerings of prostrations and white khatas.

The door was reopened early Wednesday morning. A sweet fragrance issued from the room, no incense or flowers were present. Throughout these days, the appearance of Geshe-la's body remained like a living person. The monks said that Geshe-la was still in meditation. It was not possible to let Geshe-la remain in the clear-light meditation much longer because of the mundane aspects of the tour's schedule and obligations to those who were hosting the monk's tour. At the request of the Abbot and with the sound of chanting voices, cymbals and

gyalings (oriental reed flute) that permeated the Temple, Geshe-la was asked to leave his meditative state. Upon examining the body for definite signs that Geshe-la's consciousness had left, the monks began to prepare the body for cremation.

Now the ritual of washing and preparing the holy body commenced. Geshe-la's body was wrapped seated in meditation posture in golden cloth and silks of the five Buddha colours. He was clothed in tantric costume, with top knot, brocade shawls and apron, and five-petal Bodhisattva crown. Completely surrounded by flowers, seated upon a wooden throne, which had been constructed with great care, skill and speed, the previous night, Geshe-la's body was carried into the Temple's shrine room.

It was filled beyond capacity with students and friends both Buddhist and non-Buddhist. Having respectfully bid farewell, we escorted Geshe-la's body from the Temple. The procession

was led by students holding a statue of the Buddha, a scriptural text and a small stūpa (symbols of the Buddha's body, speech and mind), and accompanied by the music of cymbals and gyalings, as well as by fragrant clouds of incense.

Slowly the funeral procession wound its way to Montréal's south shore. For many this journey evoked memories of the days they received teachings in Geshe-la's tiny apartment on Crémazie Street in Longueuil and later at the Temple when it was located on Verchères Street. There was a feeling of returning to the beginning of the circle, to the memories of wonder and enthusiasm with which we discovered the most precious jewel of Dharma through Geshe-la's outstanding patience, energy and kindness.

At the prayer hall of the cremation house, Lama Zasep offered prayers and expressed the richness of Geshe-la's attainments and gave his support for help in the future. A Guru Puja offering

ceremony was given as Geshe-la's body descended to the fireplace. As the smoke rose from the chimney, some saw it rise, straight up and curl, others saw a rainbow, and still others saw birds circling above.

The morning after the cremation, Geshe-la's students gathered together at the Temple to await the return of the ashes. After carrying the relics back into the shrine room in procession, they performed a Guru Puja offering ceremony. After the prayers were completed, the Abbot offered his encouragement and support. Then unfortunately it was necessary for the Ganden monks to continue their journey.

During the next forty-nine days, the congregation of the Tibetan Buddhist Temple and other individuals in North America offered prayers for Geshe-la's swift return. Likewise, the touring Ganden monks offered their prayers during this period. Similarly, in India, prayers were offered by

the Three Pillars (Ganden, Drepung and Sera monasteries), as well as His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Nyingma MCI Monastery, Geshe Nyima Gyaltsen, Lhubum Rinpoche, and the Gyalchen Dakang Community. Offerings were made and distributed during the forty-nine day period and also offerings were being prepared for the Monlam festival of the coming year.

The ashes remained at the Temple. To house the greater portion of these ashes, a reliquary stüpa was constructed and they were later placed inside along with various other relics and mantras. The rumney (blessing ceremony) for the stüpa was performed by two monks from Gyüme Monastery, Geshe Chöda' and Venerable Yeshe Dorje. A small portion of the ashes was sent to Ganden, in south India, where they were received by Venerable Tsetan Norbu of Gowokhansen. He took them to be left at various holy Buddhist sites and sent some to Tibet. The remaining portions of what was left in

the Temple were used to make small tsa-tsa relics for sincere and devoted students and friends. And some were placed in a silver stūpa for the retreat land Geden Shedrup Ling.

In early December, Lati Rinpoche arrived at the Temple, soon after the students had completed the prayers during the forty-nine days after Geshe-la's passing. At their teacher's request and for their benefit, Lati Rinpoche gave teachings of the Mahamudra and bestowed initiations.

At the end of the series of teachings, deeply saddened by the loss of his old friend and sympathetic to the suffering of Geshe-la's students, Rinpoche compassionately gave the following advice.

“Whatever teachings we have listened to we should practice as much as we can, that is very important. And I understand that those who are here in the West have very busy lives. However, whatever time you find, try to practice as best you

can. Not to earn a living, or to find some basic necessities, or to obtain some kind of status or position in society. Our whole purpose for practicing the Dharma is to have a better life in the future, so that we don't have to face problems, difficulties and suffering, but rather may obtain lasting peace and happiness. That is our whole purpose for practicing Dharma. It's not enough to just listen to teachings, but we must practice. Practice is essential. It's through practice that we can develop or gain experiences and realizations. Then we will be able to find the kind of peace and happiness we are seeking and get rid of the problems that we don't want. Our great teacher Shakyamuni Buddha with skillful means, love and compassion, gave as many as 84,000 bundles of teaching. The goal of all these teachings is to subdue the mind. The great Indian Masters and Pandits wrote many profound treatises, which are called Shastras. Over a period of time a number of Shastras got lost, but in

Tibet, there are over 200 of these profound treatises remaining, and all of them have the same objective, that is, to subdue the mind.

Learning how to subdue the mind is the real practice. But if our mind remains like a piece of charcoal it is not pure. Then, even when you try to get up early in the morning to meditate, if you are basically a very rude and nasty person inside, it really doesn't make any sense. But on the other hand, whatever we practice in our meditation, if our mind is becoming subdued, then we really are in touch with the whole theme of the Dharma and the real practice of the Lam Rim. If we follow the workings of the law of Karma - actions and their results - then we should be able to abandon negative actions. We should try to engage in positive actions. This is the real practice. When we talk about practice, it is said that the beginning part of meditation is cultivating proper motivation. The beginning stage of the Lam Rim is contemplating the

precious human rebirth with its freedoms and endowments. The beginning stage of the meditation of karmic action requires understanding what is to be abandoned (negative actions) and what should be accumulated (positive actions). If our mind is becoming subdued then of course we would be able to do these practices. We can stop negativities and we can generate positive actions. But if our mind is wild and crazy, even if we try to practice, it will not work.

To be able to subdue our mind, to train our mind, we need a spiritual practice or the Dharma. There isn't any other way; no modern technology, however wonderful, can do anything to subdue our mind. There isn't any kind of weapon that we can use to wage war against our negative mind...you can't just fire a gun to subdue the mind. The only way is to practice a spiritual path, the Dharma, and tame our mind. “Chö” is a Tibetan word which is a translation of Sanskrit word Dharma. The word

“Chö” really means to change or to transform. “Chö” or Dharma is in fact the best way that we can ever find to change our mind into a better state or to transform the mind. So that's the purpose of Dharma. If you are able to subdue your mind, then your practice also goes very well. When our mind is subdued, we will be able to fulfill the purposes of both ourselves and others.

Unfortunately, we have lost our beloved Geshe-la. I personally have been his friend for many years and we feel close to each other. When I heard the news I felt really very sad, and I still feel sad. I am sure you all feel sad and it is a great loss, no doubt, but just crying and sinking into depression and sadness doesn't help. Anyway, in order to repay the kindness of Geshe-la, what we all must do is practice Dharma as best we can. Geshe-la remained with you for many years and gave you many wonderful teachings. And the whole purpose behind this is to subdue the mind, to tame your

mind. And if we all do our practice well and subdue our mind, then we are really fulfilling Geshe-la's intention and Geshe-la's wish. That's the best way to repay his kindness.

Crying and feeling sad, although we do, that doesn't really help. Based on the direction and vision of Geshe-la you have also put your efforts together and as a result, today we have this wonderful Temple. So this Temple has this importance in that it benefits many, many people because it is a center of spiritual practice, of Dharma, and it is available for people who are really interested in the study and practice of Dharma. This kind of Temple, this kind of center is essential because we find many people who want to receive Dharma teachings, but they can't really find a place that they can go to. You have followed teachings and practice in the past and you have also co-operated extremely well to help this Dharma Temple flourish today, and in the future. I would like to request you to put all your

heart and efforts together for the flourishing of this Temple. Of course there is a need for understanding, unity and harmony among you. And you should really try to help each other and put all your efforts together in order to keep this Temple running smoothly and progressing. You are able to fulfill one of the great dreams and visions of Geshe-la. That is the whole purpose behind Geshe-la founding this Temple. Its function is to be able to help many people through Dharma and transform their real thinking into the spiritual path of Dharma. So if you could contribute your time and efforts in that direction, you are definitely fulfilling at least a part of Geshe-la's dream.

What's important for the time being is to invite someone here to represent Geshe-la who is not only learned but also kind and diligent. So, find a person who has these three things: great learning, kindness and diligence and you could invite such a person. It would be a benefit not only to you but

also to other people who want to make a connection with this Temple. It's hard to invite such a person immediately, but it takes time. And for the time being you shouldn't stop all the Dharma activities but try to invite other Teachers, such as Geshe Tsulga to come, and who came here recently. Maybe there are some good Lamas visiting Toronto and so on. So your responsibility is to keep this Temple flourishing. You can't invite everybody who says I can teach you. It's very important to keep the pure tradition of Manjushri Lama Tsong Khapa the tradition to which Geshe-la belongs. It's not good to mix up all the traditions with all kinds of teachings. That doesn't help. To give an example here, just by saying food is edible and mixing all kinds of foods together doesn't make a good tasting meal. That doesn't make sense. All the food is edible, but we have to eat in a proper way to enjoy it. In the same way the tradition must be kept pure. And I also mentioned earlier that it is a very important point to

keep the connection you have amongst yourselves. For the time being Geshe-la is not with us, so the flourishing of this Temple is your big responsibility. When Geshe-la was alive this was different, even if you acted in dubious ways with other people, because of Geshe-la's love and compassion, people somehow could come together in the Temple. Now it's your responsibility to keep good connections with everybody outside. Make more connections with people. You can't just act in a way that will upset everybody else or people will turn their back on this Temple. It's very important for you to deal properly with people, to make good connections with people. Someone mentioned about Geshe-la's reincarnation and in connection with this I would like to say that there is really no need to rush with this thing, because back in South India, there is his khansen, there is his monastery college, there is his monastery university and there are his disciples. So if you try to make connections with them, with time

you can take care of that. But for the time being, what is most important, as I already mentioned, is your responsibility to see to it that this Temple flourishes and doesn't stop. The flourishing of this Temple is fulfilling the work of Geshe-la. Manjushri Lama Tsong Khapa has clearly stated that keeping the words of the Lama is the best kind of offering we can make. And practicing what is given through the teachings you have received from Geshe-la is in fact fulfilling his intentions, his dream and his vision. The Great Yogi Milarepa also said, "I don't have material offerings to make to my master, but with this spiritual accomplishment I want to repay the kindness of my Master", so that was very well said. As I mentioned earlier, that takes time.

CONCLUSION

October 4, 1994, the nineteenth day of the eighth month was the first anniversary of Geshe-la's parinirvana. To lovingly commemorate his kindness, the week was dedicated to several activities. First and foremost, the Dungen Jangchub Stüpa containing Geshe-la's relics was completed and consecrated. This was done in the same tradition as the original Enlightenment Stüpa. This ancient stüpa was constructed after Buddha attained enlightenment, to remind people of his deeds and to rejoice in them. As previously explained, Geshe Chöda' and Venerable Yeshe Dorje, of Gyüme Monastery, carried out this work.

The Stüpa was carefully measured and constructed of pine wood indigenous to this area, being a height of five feet plus. It contains many tsatsas with images of stüpas, Je Tsong Khapa, Buddha Shakyamuni, and Vajrayogini made from the medicine clay with relics from the much-loved lama. Heart sutras, rolled mantras from Ganden

Monastery as well as wheel mantras (Tsugtor Nampar Gyälma) were placed in the Stüpa. Geshe-la's monks' robes and Je Tsong Khapa pandit hat, along with his death shroud, were also placed inside.

Blessing pills made by the holy lama, Domo Geshe, as well as medicine, herbs, five dhyani coloured cloth, scented wood, handfuls of Bodhi leaves from Bodhgaya and Zambala vases were put into the base of the Stüpa. And straight through the axis of the Stüpa was the central tsog shing (life-pillar). At completion, the Stüpa was installed on the altar in the Lhakang of the Temple for the anniversary day.

The students offered Lama Chöpa Tsogs and took Mahayana Sojong vows as the special day approached. As well, prayers were offered abroad by Geshe-la's old friends and the monks of his monastery. Finally the week culminated with a Lama Chöpa Tsog led by Geshe Chöda' and Venerable Yeshe Dorje, and with the welcome

presence and participation of Geshe Lobsang Jamyang (now Khen Rinpoche) of Sera Mey Monastery.

Geshe-la's old friend, Mr. Yeshe Jimpa, presented an eloquent address, painting a beautiful image of Geshe-la's first steps in Canada and the ensuing years of his spiritual support of the community.

Geshe Chöda' gave an insightful look into the significance of stūpas. As stated in the Lam Rim Text, to look at an object of refuge (such as a Buddha, or a stūpa, etc.) even with an angry mind leaves beneficial imprints. To look with a mind of faith and devotion imparts limitless benefit. A pig was once chased around a stūpa by a dog and it was reborn as a celestial being after its death. Since we are not stupid animals, let us remember the kindness of our spiritual master as often as possible and dedicate the merits we create towards worthy goals in this and all future lives.

Yet there was a question on many people's minds. Will Geshe-la's reincarnation be found and if so where? One of Geshe-la's teachers, the enlightened sage, Nyima Gyaltsen Rinpoche, presented the Temple with 'A Prayer for the Swift Rebirth'. Based on his meditations, Rinpoche advised, "In order for you to make a reconnection with your spiritual friend you must do some particular things. First a Trung-tag Manjushri statue of medium size should be constructed and housed in the Temple. This will eliminate any obstacles to the life of your teacher and forge your relationship."

When the Manjushri statue arrived in Montréal, a group of monks from Gyüme Monastery did all that was necessary to consecrate it, and it was placed in the shrine room, as the stüpa had been. Rinpoche further advised Geshe-la's students to do a set of four practices which is a series that purifies negative actions (The Thirty-five Buddhas of Confession), accumulates virtue (Lama

Chöpa Tsog), enhances wisdom (Chanting the Names of Manjushri), and affords protection (Dharmapala Practice). With all this in mind, Geshe-la's students began to carry out Rinpoche's advice to the best of their ability.

May any merit produced from the creation of this book be dedicated towards the lessening of suffering and the maturation to perfect wisdom and compassion of all sentient beings.

The cost of this book is a donation to our

Geshe-la's College, Gowu Khansen.

Make the donation payable to Gowu Khansen and

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