

# BORN IN TIBET

*by*  
CHÖGYAM TRUNGPA  
*The eleventh* TRUNGPA TULKU

*as told to*  
ESMÉ CRAMER ROBERTS

*With Forewords by*  
THE SAKYONG MIPHAM RINPOCHE  
*and*  
MARCO PALLIS

*Fourth Edition*



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## *To my Mother and motherland*

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*How to pronounce Tibetan names and words*  
*A simplified guide*

It is obviously impracticable here to aim at the kind of accuracy that would satisfy an expert in phonetics: the use of numerous small additional signs, for instance, such as one finds in serious grammars, would complicate the issue too much for ordinary readers. Therefore one must try to limit oneself to whatever the Latin alphabet, coupled with a few rather rough and ready explanations, will give; in fact, a reasonable approximation can be obtained by this means, as is the case with most foreign languages; the reader should find no trouble in applying the following hints concerning Tibetan pronunciation:-

*Vowel sounds* : these include the five *open vowels*, A, E, I, O, U which should be sounded as in Italian: a final E should never be muted, it is open like the rest; the Tibetan name *Dorje* does *not* rhyme with 'George'; in French it would be written as 'Dorjé'.

To the above five should be added two *modified vowels*, Ö and Ü; these should be pronounced as in German.

These seven sounds give the complete vowel range.

*Consonant sounds* : here the problem of transcription is somewhat more difficult. The prevailing dialects of Central Tibet, where the capital Lhasa is situated, and of Eastern Tibet where the author belongs, contain a number of consonant sounds which, to a European ear, sound almost alike; there are, for instance, two kinds of K, two of T and so on. Short of using an elaborate system of diacritic marks, puzzling to a non-scholar, one is compelled to make do, in many cases, with a single letter where Tibetans would use two. The reader need not be troubled with these fine distinctions.

In the case of aspirated consonants such as KH, TH and so on *both* letters have to be sounded separately; they do not fuse to make an entirely new consonant as in the English word *the* for instance, or the Greek name *Thetis*. SH, CH should, however, be sounded as in English.

*NB.* There is no sound like our F in Tibetan: PH, whenever it occurs, follows the rule as above i.e. both letters are sounded as in *map house*.

Special attention must be drawn to combinations such as TR, DR



## HOW TO PRONOUNCE TIBETAN NAMES AND WORDS

in Tibetan: the author's name TRUNGPA is a case in point. The fact is that the R is not sounded independently; it only affects the preceding T or D by lending to it a slightly 'explosive' character. What one has to do, in these cases, is to press the tongue hard against the palate, while sounding T or D as the case may be; it sometimes helps to *think* of an R while so doing. (In Tibetan quite a number of such letters exist, such as GR, TR, BR, etc. which are all pronounced similarly; but obviously this aspect of the matter will only concern students of Tibetan who, in any case, will use the Tibetan alphabet).

### NOTE ON GLOSSARY

The reader's attention is drawn to the list of Tibetan technical terms etc. at the end of the book, by referring to which he will be able to refresh his memory as to the meaning of any given term in case he has forgotten the explanation given by the author on its first appearance in the text.

For various titles indicating functionaries in a monastery see Appendix I.



## CHAPTER ONE

### FOUND AND ENTHRONED



My birthplace was a small settlement on a high plateau of north eastern Tibet. Above it, the celebrated mountain Pagö-pünsum rises perpendicularly to more than eighteen thousand feet, and is often called 'the pillar of the sky'. It looks like a tall spire; its mighty crest towers under perpetual snows, glittering in the sunshine.

Centuries before Buddhism was brought to Tibet, the followers of the Bön religion believed that Pagö-pünsum was the home of the king of spirits, and the surrounding lesser peaks were the abodes of his ministers. Myths linger on among the country folk, and these mountains have continued to be held in awe and veneration in the district.

The name of the place was Geje; it stands in a bare, treeless country without even bushes, but grass covered, and in the summer months the ground is bright with small flowers and sweet-smelling herbs whose scent in this pure air is thought to be curative; however, for the greater part of the year the whole land is under snow and it is so cold that the ice must be broken to get water. Two sorts of wild animals are peculiar to this province, the *kyang* or wild ass, and a kind of bison called a *drong*; both are found in herds of about five hundred each. The people live in tents made of yak's hair; the more wealthy have larger ones with several partitions, situated in the centre of the encampment, while the poorer peasants live on the fringes. Each village considers itself to be one large family, and in the individual family, the members from the oldest to the youngest live together and own their herds of yaks and sheep in common.

The fire, used for all domestic purposes, is always in the middle of the tent, and the shrine is in the far right hand corner with a butter lamp burning continually before a religious picture, or a set of the scriptures.

This northern area of East Tibet is called *Nyishu-tza-nga*, and



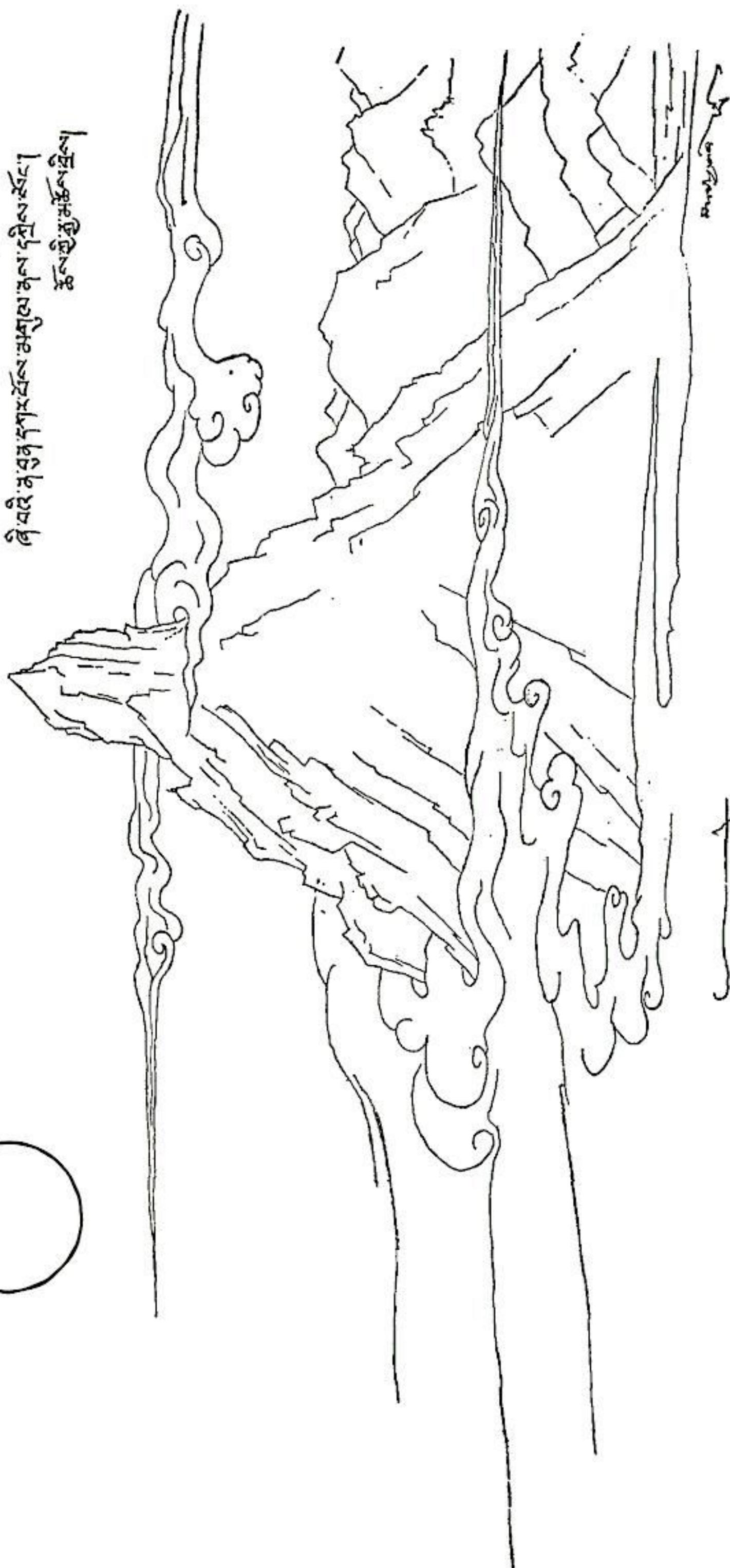
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ཅེ་མཐོ་ཤོད་ཅི་གང།



has twenty-five districts; the name simply means twenty five. At one time it was under a king who gave the district where Geje is situated the special privilege of having its highlanders chosen for his bodyguard on account of their courage.

Geje was a small community of only about five-hundred people. My father, Yeshe-dargye owned a little land there; he met his future wife Tungtso-drölma when she was working for her relations, looking after the yaks and milking the females which are called *dris*. They had one daughter, but when a second child was already in her womb he left her, and she married again, this time a much poorer man who, when the child was born, accepted him as his son.

The night of my conception my mother had a very significant dream that a being had entered her body with a flash of light; that year flowers bloomed in the neighbourhood although it was still winter, to the surprise of the inhabitants.

During the New Year festival on the day of the full moon, in the Earth Hare year according to the Tibetan calendar (February 1939) I was born in the cattle byre; the birth came easily. On that day a rainbow was seen in the village, a pail supposed to contain water was unaccountably found full of milk, while several of my mother's relations dreamt that a lama was visiting their tents. Soon afterwards, a lama from Trashi Lhaphug Monastery came to Geje; as he was giving his blessing to the people, he saw me, who at that time was a few months old; he put his hand over my head to give me a special blessing, saying that he wanted me for his monastery and that I must be kept very clean and always be carefully looked after. Both my parents agreed to this, and decided that when I grew older I should be sent to his monastery, where my mother's uncle was a monk.

After the death in 1938 of the tenth Trungpa Tulku, the supreme abbot of Surmang, the monks at once sent a representative to His Holiness Gyalwa Karmapa, the head of the Karma-ka-gyu school whose monastery lay near Lhasa. Their envoy had to inform him of the death of the last abbot and to ask him if he had had any indication where his reincarnation would be found. They begged him to let them know at once should he obtain a vision.

Some months later Gyalwa Karmapa was visiting Pepung Monastery in the province of Derge in Kham, which is Tibet's eastern region. Jamgön Kongtrül Rinpoche, who had been a devoted disciple of the tenth Trungpa Tulku and lived at Pepung, also asked



him not to defer giving any possible indication, for the monks of Surmang were feeling lost without their abbot and were eager that his reincarnation should be found without delay.

A vision had in fact come to Gyalwa Karmapa, who dictated a letter to his private secretary, saying that the reincarnation of the tenth Trungpa Tulku has been born in a village five days' journey northwards from Surmang. Its name sounds like two words *Ge* and *De*; there is a family there with two children; the son is the reincarnation. It all sounded rather vague; however, the secretary and monks of the Düdtsi-til Monastery at Surmang were preparing to go in search of the new abbot when a second sealed letter was received at the monastery. Rölpa-dorje, the regent abbot of Düdtsi-til, called a meeting, opened the letter and read it to the assembled monks. It said that Gyalwa Karmapa had had a second and much clearer vision: 'The door of the family's dwelling faces south; they own a big red dog. The father's name is Yeshe-dargye and the mother's Chung and Tzo; the son who is nearly a year old is Trungpa Tulku'. One senior monk and two others set off immediately to find me.

After five days' journey they reached the village of Geje, and called on all the more important families; they made a list of the names of those parents who had children of a year old, and returned to Düdtsi-til. The list was sent to Gyalwa Karmapa, who was still at Pepung. He found that the monks had merely taken names belonging to important families and said that they must go again and make further enquiries. On receipt of this message a second party of monks was sent to the village, which in the interval had removed to higher ground and changed its name to Dekyil: this time they called on every family and made a thorough search. In one tent they found a baby boy who had a sister and, as had been written in Gyalwa Karmapa's letter, the entrance faced south and there was a red dog. Also, the mother's name was Bo-chung, though her family called her Tungtso-drölma; thus her name confirmed Gyalwa Karmapa's vision, but the father's name was different from that in the letter, and this caused a great deal of confusion; yet they looked closely at the baby, for as soon as he had seen them in the distance he waved his little hand and broke into smiles as they came in. So the monks felt that this must be the child and gave him the gifts which Gyalwa Karmapa had sent, the sacred protective cord (*sungdü*) and the traditional scarf (*khata*); this latter the baby took and hung round



the monk's neck in the prescribed way, as if he had already been taught what was the right thing to do: delighted, the monks picked me up, for that baby was myself, and I tried to talk.

The following day the monks made a further search in another part of the village, then returned to say goodbye. As they made prostration before me, I placed my hand on their heads as if I knew that I should give them my blessing, then the monks were certain that I was the incarnation of the tenth Trungpa. They spoke to my mother asking her to tell them in confidence who had been my father. She told them that I was the son of her first husband Yeshe-dargye, but that I had always been known as the son of my stepfather. This made everything clear to the monks, who immediately returned to Dödtsi-til. The news was taken to Gyalwa Karmapa who was sure that I, the child of Tungtso-drölma, was the eleventh Trungpa Tulku.

Gyalwa Karmapa was about to leave Pepung Monastery on a tour in which Surmang would be included, and the monks realized that if he was to perform the ceremony of my enthronement it was necessary to bring me there immediately. Kargyen, the senior secretary of Dödtsi-til, with a party of monks came to my native village of Dekyil to fetch me. He had to proclaim his mission to the whole area and to consult all the heads of the villages and the representatives of the people, since ordinarily it was expected that they would demand land or money. However, everyone was co-operative and modest and no-one asked for any gain for himself. Next, my parents had to be asked if they wished to live near Surmang, or would prefer to receive property in their own village. My parents decided that they would like to be given the land on which they lived; however, they told the secretary that at some future time they would be glad of permission to visit me at Surmang.

When these things were settled we set off, with both my parents travelling in the party, for they were anxious to see Surmang. My mother stayed on in a house near Dödtsi-til in order to look after me until I was five years old, but my stepfather returned to his village.

A messenger had been sent ahead to inform Dödtsi-til when we would arrive, and a great welcome was prepared. All the monks from Surmang and many from neighbouring monasteries assembled some five miles distant from Dödtsi-til to form a procession to escort me.



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On that day the valley was misty, and a rainbow appeared in the sky forming an arch over the procession, but as we drew near the monastery the surrounding mists dissolved, and the low clouds spread like a canopy hiding us from distant onlookers.

At the monastery everything was in festival; all the monks were rejoicing. There were special ceremonies and a great feast was arranged. I have been told that, though I was only about thirteen months old at the time, I immediately recognized those monks in whom the tenth Trungpa Tulku had placed confidence, and that I behaved with the greatest decorum throughout the day and did not even cry once.

A few days later I was put through a test; pairs of several objects were put before me, and in each case I picked out the one that had belonged to the tenth Trungpa Tulku; among them were two walking sticks and two rosaries; also, names were written on small pieces of paper and when I was asked which piece had his name on it, I chose the right one. Now the monks were certain that I was the incarnation, so a letter was sent to Gyalwa Karmapa telling him the results of the examination and inviting him to officiate at my enthronement ceremony.

Every morning my mother brought me to the monastery and took me home with her in the evening. My earliest memory is being in a room with several monks who were talking to me, and I was answering them. I was told later that my first words were *Om Mani Padme Hum*; probably, I did not say them very correctly. When lamas came to visit me, I have been told that I used to clutch at their rosaries and try to imitate them. Every day that month, I held an audience and received visits from the friends and disciples of my past incarnation who took a great interest in me, and I always seemed to enjoy meeting people.

At the end of the month my enthronement ceremony was to take place, and so I was taken to the larger monastery of Namgyal-tse. This time, instead of the joyous informality with which I had been welcomed at Düdtsi-til, a procession came to escort me and everything was done with pomp and ceremony.

Gyalwa Karmapa arrived with some senior Lamas from Pepung; other people came from all parts of East Tibet: about one thousand Surmang monks and twelve thousand other monks and laity finally assembled. My monks were delighted, for this enthronement was to



be one of the largest in living memory. There were several incarnate lamas already at Surmang including Garwang Tulku the regent abbot of Namgyal-tse. Rölpa-dorje the regent abbot of Dödtsi-til was appointed to act as my sponsor and give my responses at the enthronement. Both were regent abbots of their respective monasteries in the interregnum after the death of the tenth Trungpa and during my minority, and they remained so later when I was absent from Surmang.

Rölpa-dorje Rinpoche was the fifth incarnation of the great Rölpa-dorje, a contemporary of the fifth Trungpa Tulku, and he had been the teacher of *Taisitu* Chökyi-jungne in the early part of the eighteenth century; the latter was the second most important Lama in the Karma-ka-gyü school; *Taisitu* is a Chinese title. He had written many scholarly works and had revived the pictorial art of the 'Gabri school'. His teaching had been widely disseminated in Tibet, China and India.

My enthronement took place in the large assembly hall. The lion throne (*sengtri*), on which all *tulkus* are traditionally enthroned, stood at the further end of the hall on a dais. It was made of gilt wood, square in shape, with white lions carved on the sides which appeared to be supporting it. On the throne there were three cushions, red, yellow and blue, covered with two strips of brocade. A table was placed in front of it with all my seals of office. I was carried up the hall by the senior secretary of Dödtsi-til, escorted by a procession of the higher dignitaries. Rölpa-dorje Rinpoche stood at the foot of the throne, and my secretary handed me to him; he then mounted the dais and sat down in my place holding me on his lap and gave all the responses which should have come from me.

According to tradition, the service began with the rite of the primary *Upasaka* ordination, the entrance to the Buddhist Congregation. Gyalwa Karmapa cut my hair to symbolize a cutting away from the material, and entering the spiritual, life. Then the regent abbot spoke in my name.

'From today I take refuge in the Buddha.

From today I take refuge in the Dharma, (the Norm, embodied in the Doctrine)

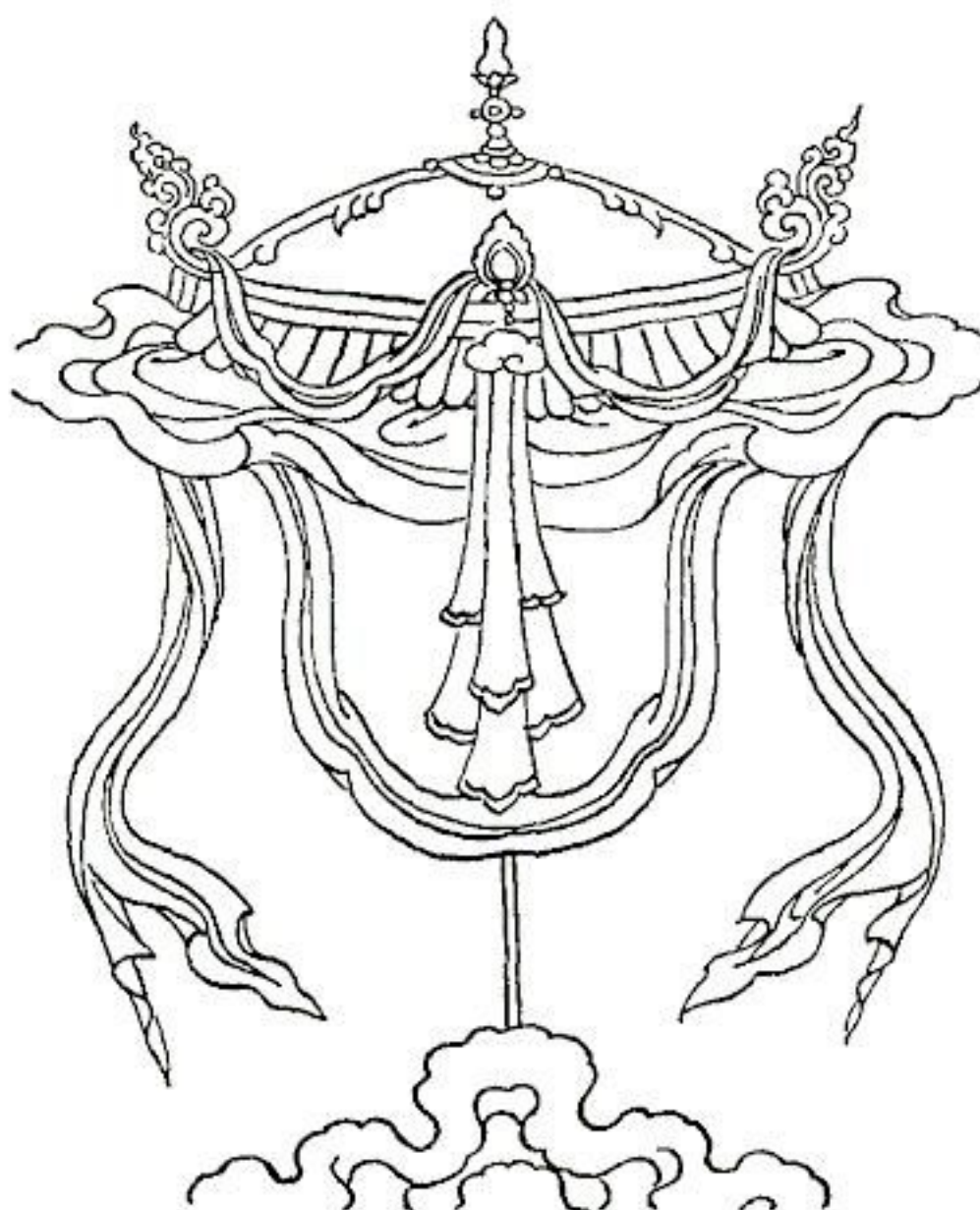
From today I take refuge in the Sangha, (the Assembly or Church both earthly and heavenly).'



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At the moment when he put the scissors to my hair there was a clap of thunder, sudden rain, and a rainbow appeared. This was thought to be very auspicious. After this I was given my personal name *Karma-tendzin-trinle-künkyap-pal-zangpo*: all monks of the Karma-Kagyü school are given the first name *Karma* after their founder; roughly translated the remaining words mean: 'the universal action of the holder of the Doctrine, the gloriously good'. Later that day I was given all the seals and official documents of the tenth Trungpa Tulku. Everyone came to receive my blessing and offered me ceremonial scarves. The incarnate lamas and heads of monasteries led the way, followed by monks and lay people; they presented me with robes and many other gifts.

After a few weeks Gyalwa Karmapa Rinpoche left for his own centre close to Lhasa, and the senior *tulkus* from Pepung, after escorting him half way, likewise returned to their monastery.



*The Umbrella of Protection*



## CHAPTER TWO

# THE FOUNDING OF SURMANG



FOR my life as the eleventh Trungpa Tulku to be understood, it is necessary to know the history of the Ka-gyü school to which the Surmang monasteries belonged. The basic teaching was introduced into Tibet by Marpa the Translator, a great adept. He made three journeys to India under most difficult conditions to study with Naropa and other Indian Buddhist *gurus* and brought back many precious teachings which he translated from the Sanskrit. He was one of the leading scholars of what is known as the New Translation Period. Milarepa, later to become one of Tibet's greatest saints, became his chief disciple to whom he handed over the spiritual authority to carry on his work. Milarepa's poems and the moving story of his life were written down soon after his death by several of his own disciples; there is a good translation into English by Evans-Wentz, and an outstanding one into French by professor Bacot.

The monastic tradition of the Ka-gyü school was founded by Gampopa, a pupil of Milarepa born in 1079. His classical work *The Ornament of Precious Liberation* is still a leading manual in this school and has been translated into English by Dr Herbert Guenther.

Following Gampopa's teaching, separate schools developed under three of his disciples and one of them, Karmapa, founded the Karma-ka-gyü school and established the abbey of Tsurphu near Lhasa which continued to be the principal monastery of the order. Karmapa's first incarnation Karma Pakshi (1203–1282), an eminent teacher, was invited to China by the Emperor Kublai Khan, and the second incarnation became the spiritual teacher of Kublai's successor. He was followed in this function by all the incarnations up to the tenth, who refused to go to China saying he would rather give his blessing to a dog's skull than to the emperor; he evidently disliked court life and did not wish to be connected with it even



## BORN IN TIBET

occasionally! The fifth Karmapa is especially known as the teacher of the Ming emperor Yung-lo and his influence on the spiritual and cultural thought of China was very great.

At the end of the fourteenth century Trung-mase Rinpoche, the son of the king of Me-nyag in East Tibet left his father's palace to seek spiritual guidance. He travelled from place to place and came to the monastery of Tzurphu: there he met the fifth Karmapa Teshin-shepa who became his *guru* and under whom he remained in retreat for ten years, in conditions of the utmost austerity. Karmapa then told him that the time had come for him to go out to found a monastery and to begin teaching himself.

He travelled round Tibet to find somewhere to establish it and when he came to the valley of Yöshung he had the feeling that this was the place his teacher had predicted. He walked round the village with his begging bowl reciting the *sutra* (sacred treatise) *Aryamanjushrinamasamgita* i.e. 'the Perfect Song of the Name of Holy Manjushri' and felt that his search had come to an end when a woman came out of her doorway to put food in his bowl at the very moment that he had reached the words '*chökyi-gyaltzen-legpar-dzug*', which means 'plant well the banner of the victory of Dharma'. This seemed to be such an auspicious sign that he immediately decided to build his monastery on that spot. This was the beginning of Surmang; and when its monks recite this *sutra*, they still pause at these words and repeat them a second time.

At first Trung-mase built a small hut made with reeds: it was very primitive, with many corners. Disciples flocked to him, and some of them suggested that the monastery should now be given an imposing name, but he said that he was proud of his hut and since it was so irregular in shape it should be called Surmang, which means 'many cornered'.

More and more disciples joined the monastery, of whom eleven were especially notable: three of these remained with their *guru* in the hut while the eight others, who were spiritually advanced teachers (*togden*), carried their doctrine round the country. Trungpa Künga-gyaltzen was one of these: he was looked upon as an incarnation of Maitreya Bodhisattva, destined to be the Buddha of the next World Cycle, also of Dombhipa a great Buddhist *siddha* (adept) and of Milarepa.

As his *guru* had also done, Künga-gyaltzen looked for a place for



## THE FOUNDING OF SURMANG

his monastery, and at one of the villages on his travels he was told the story of Dombhipa, who when he came there was holding a cup of *amrita* (symbolically the elixir of immortality) in his hand which he threw into space saying, 'Wherever this cup falls will be the place for my reincarnation'. It fell on a hill in the valley which has since been called Dödtsi-til (Hill of *Amrita*).

This story interested Künga-gyaltzen, and when thinking about it one night he had a dream in which his *guru* said, 'You are an incarnation of Dombhipa, and this is the place for your monastery.' He was deeply moved, and the next day he felt that he must also throw a cup. He said, 'If I am an incarnation of Dombhipa, may my cup fall in the right place.' He was five miles from the village but with the power of his word, the cup fell on the roof of Adro Shelu-bum, a large landowner's castle on the hill of Dödtsi-til. It made a ringing sound and at the same moment there was an earthquake. When he was told about Künga-gyaltzen's miraculous powers Adro Shelu-bum realized that he must be a disciple of Trung-mase, invited him to his palace, and was so deeply impressed by him that he became his devotee. He offered part of his home to his new *guru* to be used as a monastery, and undertook to feed the monks. As Trungpa Künga-gyaltzen intended to continue his own life of travelling and camping with his disciples, he did not want to establish a large monastery; he therefore thankfully accepted Adro Shelu-bum's offer and used it as a house of retreat for his monks. His camps became known as the *Surmang garchentengpa* (the great camps of Surmang); many disciples joined them, and this mode of life was followed by his next three incarnations who were abbots of Dödtsi-til.

In the meantime Trung-mase in his hut monastery had gathered a great many disciples around him. It became over-crowded, and Adro Shelu-bum gave him a second gift. This time it was the entire castle of Namgyal-tse which was much larger than Dödtsi-til and had a spacious assembly hall; much land was included in the endowment, together with rocky mountains where there were several caves suitable for meditation. Trung-mase transferred his hut monastery to Namgyal-tse, but retained the name of Surmang for the entire group.

As death approached he said that he would not re-incarnate, as his teaching was both his incarnation and his portrait. Garwang, one of the eight notable *togdens* of the hut monastery, followed him



as abbot. Surmang now included Namgyal-tse, Düdtsi-til, and several small monasteries, each of which had its own abbot.

The fourth incarnation, Trungpa Künga-namgyal did not follow the camping way of life of his three predecessors, and a descendant of Adro Shelu-bum gave him the entire castle of Düdtsi-til for a separate monastery. Brought up by the disciples of his predecessor and also by the lamas of Namgyal-tse, he became a renowned teacher throughout East Tibet, and was widely known for his ability to continue for a long period in meditation without any bodily movement. Because of his reputation, Düdtsi-til though a smaller monastery and with fewer monks than Namgyal-tse, was considered to be the more important.

However, Trungpa Künga-namgyal wished to devote his life to meditation, and for six years he remained as a hermit in a cave about a mile from Düdtsi-til; then, having reached a high degree of spiritual insight he returned to his monastery. After a year or two he felt that he must travel to give his teaching outside. Asking his brother to take charge of Düdtsi-til he left without any attendant and only a white yak to carry his books and baggage. It was a hornless breed of yak used for riding and easy to control by a single man by means of a ring in its nose. Trungpa Künga-namgyal made a tour of the holy places, traditionally one hundred and eight in number; these included caves where renowned *gurus* had meditated, ruined cities where one could contemplate the impermanence of life and past battlefields and graveyards.

Towards the end of his life he no longer needed to travel, for after he returned to his monastery disciples flocked to him, and he became the teacher of the whole Karma-ka-gyü school. He then wrote some sixteen treatises on various spiritual themes and founded further monasteries.

Following in such footsteps, the fifth Trungpa Tulku was generally recognized as an important abbot. He was honoured by the Chinese Emperor early in the seventeenth century and received the official rank of *Hutukhtu*, the Mongolian equivalent for a great teacher, with its particular seals, hat and robe; the charter conferring the title was written on yellow silk. He became the supreme abbot of all the Surmang monasteries and his authority also extended over the whole province.

At that time Düdtsi-til was extremely flourishing: the third Tulku Chetsang Rinpoche, himself a great artist, had superintended



## THE FOUNDING OF SURMANG

most of the decoration and had painted many of the *tankas* (pictorial scrolls mounted on silk). The walls of the assembly hall were frescoed from floor to ceiling in red and gold with scenes from the life of Gotama Buddha and above them were depicted one thousand Buddhas of the past, present and future, of whom Gotama was the fourth, while Maitreya will be the fifth to guide us towards Enlightenment.

Unfortunately the unusual beauty and wealth of Surmang was a cause of jealousy and the monasteries were attacked (in 1643) by the fanatical followers of Gusri Khan, a Mongol chief whose personal devotion to the then Dalai Lama and to the Gelugpa Order of monks of which he is the head expressed itself in the incongruous form of destroying houses belonging to earlier monastic foundations; such exhibitions of sectarian bigotry have been rare in Buddhist history. This time the seventh Trungpa Tulku was captured together with the artist the fifth Tulku Chetsang and the abbot of Namgyal-tse who was a noted philosopher. Though cast into prison, each continued doing the things he considered to be of most importance: Trungpa meditated and recited on his rosary the *mantra* 'Om mani padme hum' one hundred million times: Tulku Chetsang painted *tankas* and the abbot revised his doctrinal treatises.

During their incarceration there was a prolonged drought in Tibet; many prayers were offered up but no rain fell. Finally, Trungpa Tulku was approached in prison. He handed the messenger the rosary he had used for the hundred million recitations and told him to dip it in a certain spring. When this was done a cloud rose from the spring and came down in rain over all the country. After this the three prisoners were released; Tulku Chetsang needed three mules to transport the *tankas* he had completed.

The eighth Trungpa Tulku formed a very close friendship with Gyalwa Karmapa the supreme abbot of the Order, with its two centres of Tzurphu in Central Tibet and of Karma Monastery in East Tibet. The latter was noted for its superb architecture and the artistry of its interior, as I saw for myself when I visited it in 1953. The centre of the Gabri school of artists was at Karma Geru near the monastery, and the eighth Trungpa Tulku was one of its leading exponents; he himself painted many *tankas* for Surmang and specialized in illuminated manuscripts. He was also the founder of its great libraries.



## CHAPTER THREE

### DÜDTSI-TIL AND NAMGYAL-TSE

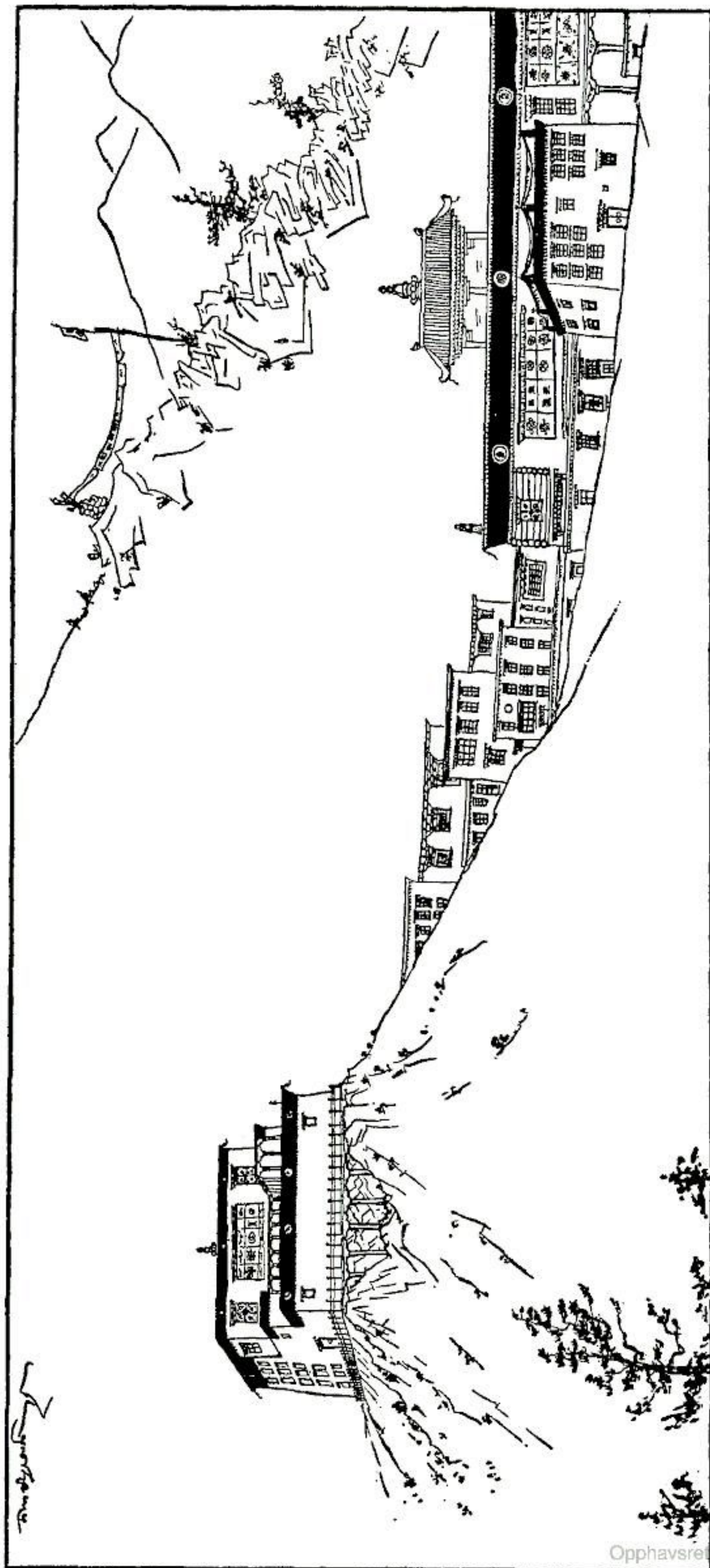


PERHAPS a brief description of the whole monastic domain over which I had to preside will help to illustrate the background of my life.

When Andro Shelu-bum gave his two castles to Surmang, his gifts included many acres of land, so that the property extended some fifty miles in each direction. It lay at a high altitude on the border between the cultivated land and that inhabited by highlanders. The chief commercial products of the district were salt and timber from the excellent firs which grew near the Tzichu and the Kechu rivers to the south of Surmang. Barley and a little wheat were the only grain crops, vegetables being limited to spinach, turnips and a small kind of leek; besides, there was good pasturage for domestic animals such as yaks and sheep, for the slopes of the mountains were covered with short grass. Willows grew by the streams on the lower ground and in drier places another type of short willow was to be found. Higher up, tamarisk shrubs were plentiful, and above these scented junipers grew. In the short summer months the whole place was ablaze with wild flowers.

Adro Shelu-bum's castle on the Hill of Amrita had been protected by a separate fort; both buildings were incorporated into the monastery of Düdtsi-til. The fort was a large building and was used for many purposes. Both the assembly hall and the main library were situated there: some of its rooms served for storing food, others, as a treasure house for the monastery's valuables. The supreme abbot's residence was also above the assembly hall. In my time Düdtsi-til had some three hundred monks: of these one hundred and seventy were *bhikshus* (fully ordained monks), the remainder being *shramaneras* (novices) and young *upsaka* students who had already taken the vow of celibacy. Their quarters in two and three storied buildings stretched down the slope of the mountain





2 Düdtsi-til Monastery



to the river. Another large assembly hall was built on the lower ground; it was divided in two, the smaller part being for younger monks between the ages of eight and fourteen, while the main part was for the communal use of the whole monastery. A throne for the *gekö*, a senior monk in charge of discipline stood in a prominent position at the entrance from where he could keep an eye on everyone. The monks used to sit cross-legged on low benches covered with rugs and cushions, with their tables in front of them; their rows faced the central aisle leading to the abbot's throne on its high dais, while his two chief attendants sat close by on each side of the steps. At this end of the hall there were three more thrones; one on the right was for his deputy should the abbot himself be prevented from officiating. Of the other two, the one was for a senior monk in charge of the time-table for the assemblies and the other for the precentor-monk who conducted the music and led the chanting. Behind the thrones dominating the hall were three large images depicting the past, present and future Buddhas; these were some twelve feet high, gold plated with an aquamarine glittering on their foreheads to indicate the 'third eye' of universal knowledge; each was seated on a throne decorated with precious and semi-precious stones. A second assembly hall built higher up the slope was used for philosophical and other advanced studies and particularly for the 'summer retreats' (*varshka*).

Düdti-til again suffered much damage when it was attacked in a political border dispute during the lifetime of the tenth Trungpa Tulku; the old wall frescoes were in fact all destroyed. They were eventually replaced with the help of eminent artists of the Gabri school from Karma Geru who were employed to cover the walls as before with pictures of scenes from the life of Gotama Buddha and also with various *Buddha-mandalas*, that is to say groupings of celestial figures representing different aspects of Enlightenment. Banners hung from the balconies and hundreds of butter lamps gave light to these lovely halls. The pillars and spreading capitals were lacquered a vermillion red on which designs had been painted in different colours. Several thousands of the ancient *tankas* had fortunately been saved when the monastery was attacked; many of these were the work of Chetsang Rinpoche while in prison with the fifth Trungpa Tulku, others had been painted by the eighth Trungpa, whose illuminated manuscripts were kept in the fort library.





drawn by Sherab Palde: Beru

### 3 Amitayur, Buddha of Limitless Life

Tara  
(Saviour)

Vijaya  
(Victorious One)



## BORN IN TIBET

One old house, built by the fifth Trungpa Tulku on the mountain slope was kept for the very severe retreat which every monk had to observe for the period of one year twice in his lifetime. It was called the *gönkhang* (house of the Guardian Divinities).

The kitchen and food stores were in the east wing of the main assembly hall, and cooking was done on a huge stove made of stone and clay into which the fuel, consisting of dried yak dung and wood, could be shovelled through holes at its sides. The stove was so large that a cooking pot some nine feet in diameter, made of an alloy of copper and iron, fitted over the first opening, and there were other lesser openings. The large pot was used for making both tea and soup; the former was made by boiling some brick-tea in water, after which the liquid was poured into pipe-shaped barrels and churned up with salt and butter using a long-handled pestle. When ready to serve the tea was poured into a number of wooden pails with metal decorations and carried round to the monks who could ladle it into their own bowls and if they liked, mix it with roasted barley (*tsampa*). A big tank of water drawn from the nearby river was always kept in the kitchen.

The extensive store-rooms above the kitchen were divided into sections for such treasures as *tankas*, shrine objects, banners, costumes for religious dances etc., indeed all the things required for performing various traditional rites: the *gekö* was responsible for this department and both his and his subordinates' rooms were in the same wing. The sanitation of the monastery was by large cesspits the contents of which were periodically cleaned out and used to manure the fields; scrupulous cleanliness was observed everywhere. Such was Düdtsi-til when I the eleventh Trungpa Tulku was enthroned supreme abbot of Surmang.

Namgyal-tse lay some forty-five miles or three days' journey from Düdtsi-til and was the larger monastery of the two. Adro Shelubum's castle and its fort stood by themselves on a small hill about a mile and a half from the village; the river, fed from the surrounding mountains, flowed past its base. Trung-mase built a small house for his own use at the bottom of the hill. The monastery soon became overcrowded, and after Trung-mase's death, a building was begun on the mountain to the north east, where there was already a cave which was used as a meditation shrine. The new building was subsequently kept for spiritual retreats. Garwang Rinpoche, the



following abbot, and his successors did not use the small house, but chose part of the fort for their residence, and rooms were later reserved there for the supreme abbot.

So many monks joined Namgyal-tse that three different sections were formed for specific work and teaching. In the lifetime of the fifth Trungpa Tulku a very large assembly hall was built on the lower ground below the hill. This belonged to the whole monastic community: it had very original embroidered hangings festooning its walls, with pictures inset in the spaces. The hall was rather like that of Karma Monastery, having a high chamber at its further end for the images of the past, present, and future Buddhas. These were made of clay and painted gold, while about forty images of saints of the Ka-gyü line were placed at the back of the hall.

A second assembly hall was built on a higher slope of the mountain for the monks of the Dechen-tse *tratsang* (college); it held some four hundred and fifty monks and was intended particularly for those who were interested in the intellectual approach; to start with, it had its own abbot. Another monastic building was erected on the lower part of the slope; it became the Ling-pa *tratsang*, and its three hundred and fifty monks specialized on the administrative side of Surmang. The Lama *tratsang*, with three hundred inmates, stood in a field on the level ground; among other things, it dealt with Namgyal-tse administration, but a wider responsibility fell on some of its senior members, for they had to deal with matters in the district outside Surmang proper. Each *tratsang* had its own hall, library, kitchen and offices. The monks' dwelling-houses were disposed in tiers on the slopes of the mountain, from Dechen-tse *tratsang* at the top down to the large assembly hall. Above it stood the press building in which we printed our scriptures: the *gönkhang* stood near by; Tulku Tendzin Rinpoche, who was an incarnation of one of the eight *togdens* of Trung-mase's time, had sculptured some wonderful images for it early in the present century; these were made of clay and consecrated herbs, and depicted symbolically the guardians of the teaching. The whole building had a tremendous atmosphere of spiritual presence.

Later, in the lifetime of the tenth Trungpa Tulku, the abbots of Surmang built the first seminary on the lower part of the slope.

When I was its supreme abbot, Namgyal-tse held six hundred *bhikshus*, three hundred *shramaneras* and one hundred novices; five incarnate lamas were included in this company.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### MY CHILDHOOD AT DÜDTSI-TIL



WHEN I was three years old, the heads of my mother's village invited her to take me to visit them. I can remember the journey very clearly. This was the first time that I had ridden a horse; it was a white one and had belonged to the tenth Trungpa Rinpoche, and when I was told that it had been his, I refused to change it for any other mount: I was put in a little chair saddle. We passed high mountains on the way, and one day we met a herd of about five hundred wild asses (*kyang*) which trotted around us and this fascinated me. My parents had always loved their own part of the country and its wild animals, so it was a great joy to my mother to get back to her home, and I too thoroughly enjoyed the change.

During the months that we stayed in our family home all our relations were exceedingly kind; they brought me cream and all sorts of gifts. However, I was never allowed to play with the children, but only to watch them at their games. They found curiously shaped stones in a particular gully and these made wonderful toys; I longed to take some back to the monastery, but this too was forbidden.

At the end of our visit, my mother took me back to Dödtsi-til, though my father remained behind; no-one told me why and I was very puzzled; then one day, a monk told me that he was not my father but my stepfather and this comforted me a lot.

All these years I had a very happy time, my mother was with me and I was not expected to do any lessons; sometimes, I was even allowed to play with other children, the sons of the relatives of respected monks.

One day I saw a man, probably a Moslem, being thrashed; he had killed a wild animal on the monastery's protected ground. His hands had been tied behind his back and the monk was accusing him of all



sorts of crimes while he belaboured him with a heavy stick. I felt great pity and asked another monk about it; he replied that this was the way to uphold the law. I said: 'Shall I have to do this when I am grown up and have charge of the monastery?' His answer to this was: 'You will be able to do as you like.' 'Well,' I said, 'I will never use punishment like that.'

The tenth Trungpa Tulku's rooms in the fort at Düdtsi-til had been extremely simple and austere; their only decoration were the *tankas* hung on the silk covered walls. However, after his death my secretary and bursar wanted to change things. They employed some sixteen artists and wood-carvers of the Gabri school to re-design my residence. While this was being done, I had great fun watching the work, especially the artists painting, and the son of one of them and I used to steal their paints and make pictures ourselves, to our own great delight: I have loved painting ever since.

When the work was finished there were cupboards all round the walls; their doors were beautifully painted with ornamental designs of flowers, birds, etc., and the general colouring was gold on a red background. The tops of the cupboards formed a shelf for the many gifts of bowls and offerings which were brought to me. Behind it there were recesses framed in deeply carved and lacquered wood to hold old and valuable images of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and eminent Spiritual Masters. Above these was a second row of niches to house images of smaller size. The walls joined the ceiling with a deep gold painted carved cornice. The wooden ceiling was coloured. The furniture consisted of several long settees with deep piled up mattresses which, in our country, take the place of chairs. My bed was like a long box filled with cushions, so made that in the day time I could sit on it and work at a long table beside it. One side of the room, over the cupboards, was exclusively used for my books; these scriptures were written or printed on separate oblong pages held together between two boards, and tied up with a ribbon; at one end the title of the book was written on a white brocade flap, and the books were arranged so that the title faced outwards.

My bedroom served both for sleeping and for private study and meditation; it opened into a sitting room where meals were served and formal visits received. My raised throne was beside the door and a row of seats ran lengthwise down each side of the room; those nearest the throne had thick cushions for the more important



## BORN IN TIBET

guests but their size gradually diminished until the end of the rows, when they became merely rugs on the floor.

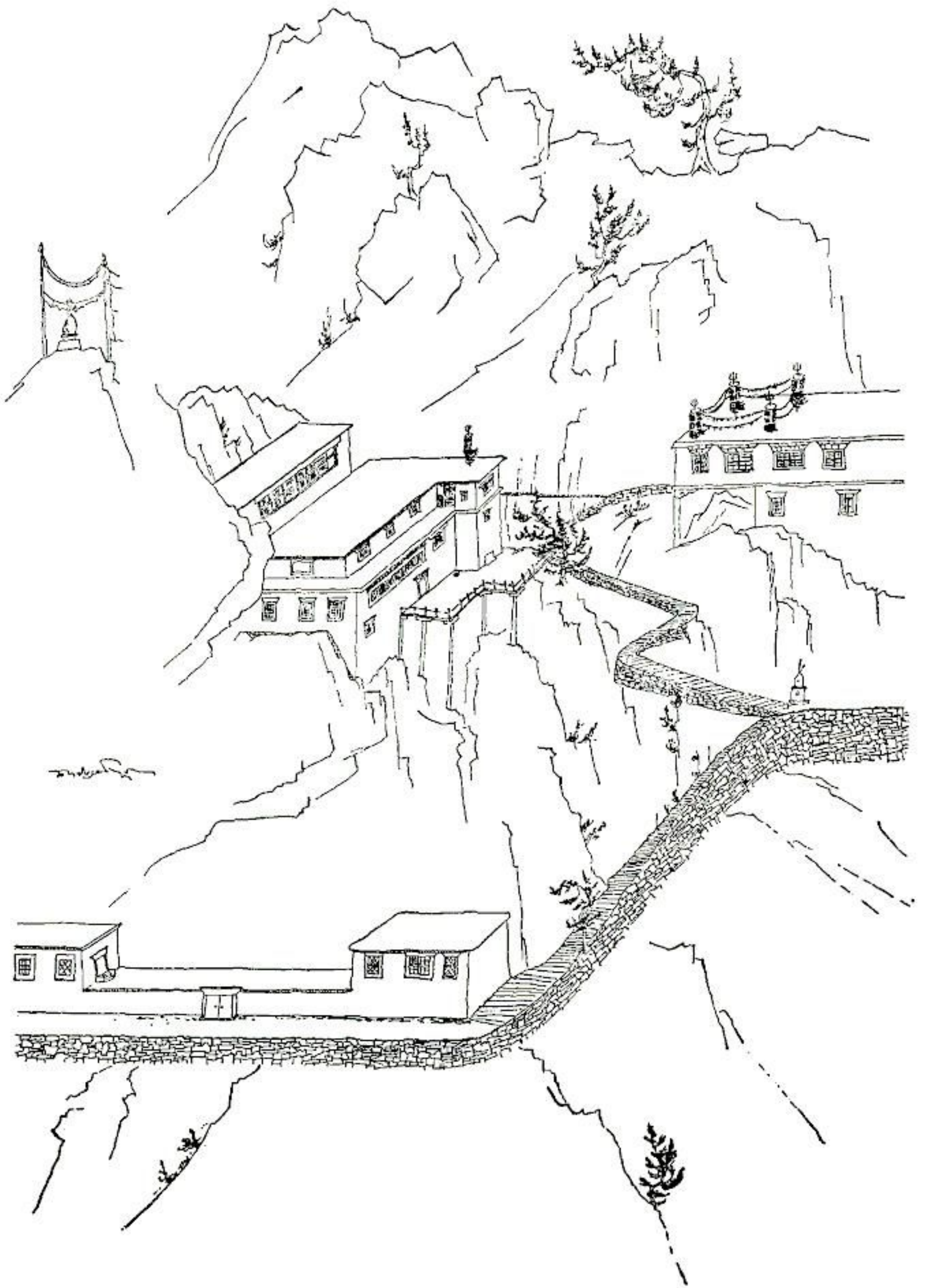
Since I was now five years old, it was decided that it was time for me to begin my studies. It was a great shock to hear that a special teacher was coming to Düdtsi-til to give me lessons. One of the monks told me that he had a scar on his forehead, and I anxiously watched everyone who came for fear that it might be he. One day Asang Lama arrived; though I saw that he had a scar, I said to myself 'this can't be my new teacher', for I had expected him to be a very severe monk, but this man looked so gentle. He held his rosary in his hand and was smiling and talking to my senior secretary.

We began our lessons on the following day in my residence above the assembly hall. It happened to be the first day of the winter and snow was falling. Always before, when the monks came to sweep the snow off the flat roof, we children would play among them throwing snowballs at each other; on that day I could hear my little friends shouting at their play outside, whilst I had to remain indoors to do lessons. Asang Lama was very kind; he gave me a clay panel made in relief depicting Amitabha the Buddha of Infinite Light which delighted me, and he told me how glad he was to be able to be my teacher, for he had been a devotee of the tenth Trungpa Tulku. He began with teaching me the Tibetan alphabet and was surprised that I picked it up in one lesson. I also had to learn to recite a *mantra* or formula of Manjusri, the Bodhisattva of Wisdom. We went on with both reading and writing lessons; this was unusual, for in Tibet reading is usually taught first and writing comes afterwards.

At this time my mother's visits became less frequent; to begin with she only came to see me every other day, then every third, after which her visits became more and more spaced out, until after a fortnight without seeing her, she came to tell me that she was going back to Dekyil; I missed her as only a small boy can.

The life at Düdtsi-til was found to be too full of distractions, so it was arranged to send me to Dorje Kyungdzong, the retreat centre established by the tenth Trungpa Tulku. It was in a remote spot and had been built over the cave where the fourth Trungpa had spent six years in meditation. The centre stood on a ledge of high rock and was approached by a long zig-zag flight of steps. The front of the building was supported by pillars grounded in the rock below; its windows looked over a wonderful spread of mountains with the river





4 *Dorje Kyungdzong, the retreat centre of Düdtsi-til*



## BORN IN TIBET

winding through the valley, and at one place one could see the junction of two valleys; the smoke of Düdtsi-til could also be seen in the distance. There was a large cave under the one in which the fourth Trungpa used to meditate; it was sufficiently big to be used as a byre for over seventy cattle which supplied the needs of the centre; these animals were cared for by the cook's family, who had their house in the cave.

About thirty monks were at the centre; they stayed there for a period of four years to meditate in complete retreat, being neither allowed to pay visits nor to receive them. Their meditation method was based on the teaching of the great Indian adept Naropa which Trung-mase laid down for the Ka-gyü school. An experienced teacher gave the retreatants guidance. Though the thirty monks were expected to stay for four years, there was some accommodation for others intending to spend three to four months only in the place; they had to conform to the same rules of discipline as those in long retreat.

My own time-table was as follows: I rose with my tutor at five for the first morning devotions, then we were given breakfast, after which my reading lesson went on till midday; this was followed by a meal and half an hour's rest. Then I was given a writing lesson for half an hour, and again reading until the evening.

There is not much variety in the staple foodstuffs of Tibet, but much ingenuity was used in the different ways of cooking; vegetables were scarce and in this cold climate really nourishing food such as meat and milk products was a necessity. Our breakfast consisted of especially made strong tea mixed with butter and salt and dry powdered tsampa with cheese and butter rubbed into it. At mid-morning we were given bowls of thick soup made with meat, thickened with barley, rice, oats, noodles or sometimes with vegetables. The big midday meal had *tsampa* dough with large portions of fried or boiled meat; sometimes it was just dried, and for a change we had dumplings filled with meat. An afternoon collation was served with curd (like *yoghurt*) and Tibetan biscuits, and at all times there was tea to drink. The last evening refreshment consisted of bowls of soup. On special afternoons we went for walks and then, in the evening, we practised chanting. I loved going out with Asang Lama; he used to tell me stories about the life of the Buddha and at other times about the tenth Trungpa Tulku. I was fascinated also to find so many wild flowers on the hills as well as sweet scented





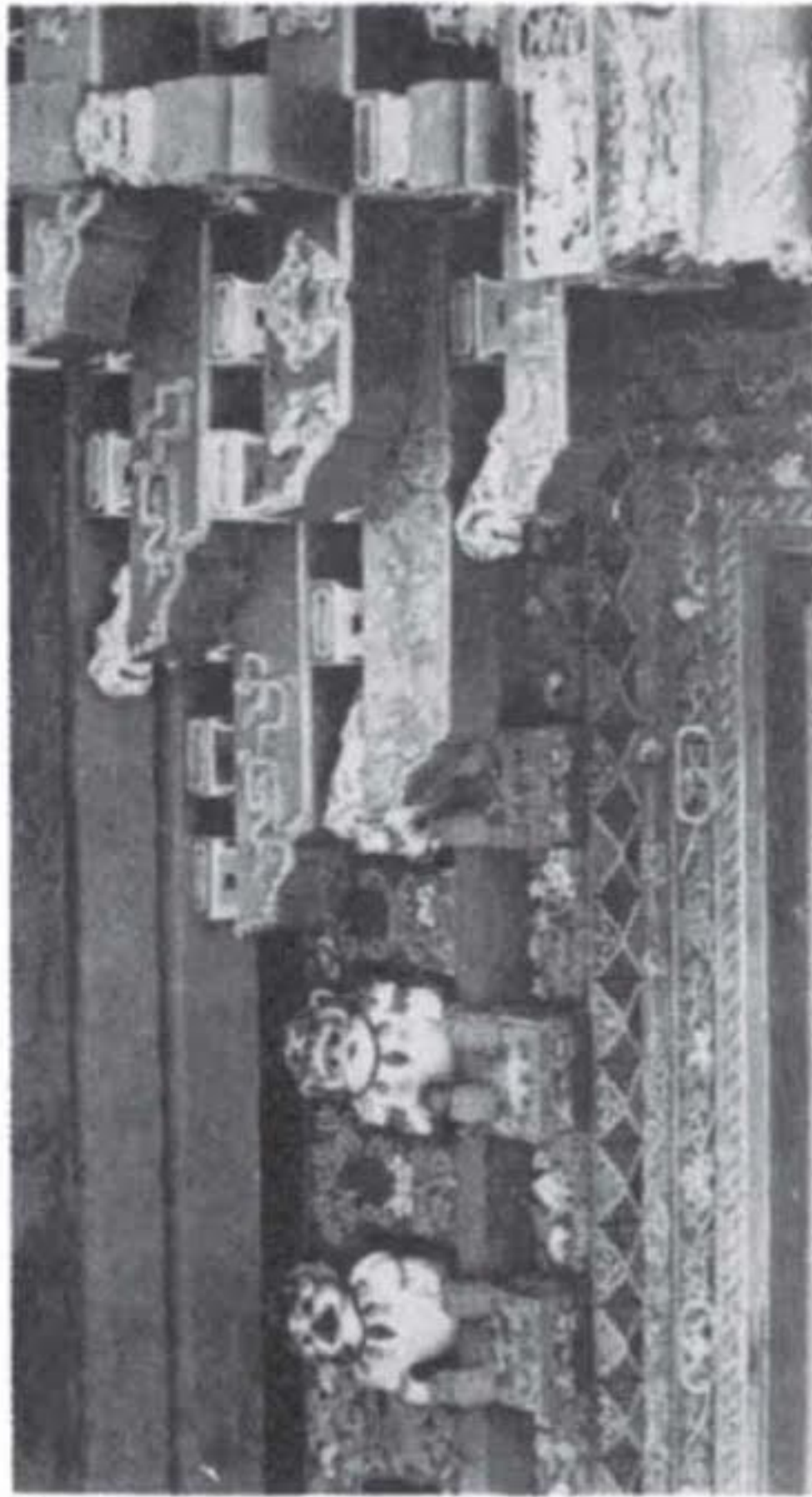
*His Holiness Tenzin-gyamtso, the XIVth Dalai Lama*



*Rigpi-dorje, the XVth Gyalwa Karmapa*

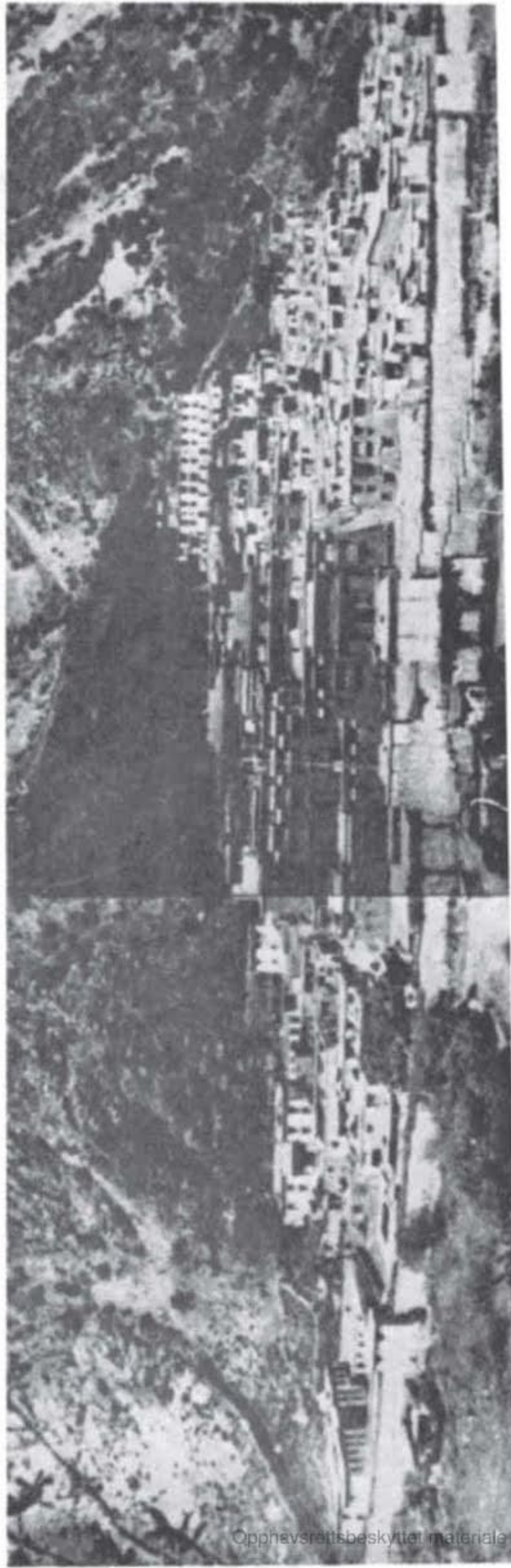


*Lacquered pillar with spreading capital*



*Tsurphu monastery*

(Photo : Paul Popper, Ltd.)





## MY CHILDHOOD AT DÜDTSI-TIL

juniper bushes. There were all sorts of birds and animals, and the blackbirds especially were so tame that their songs could be heard all round the centre and they would come for food to the window-sills. Occasionally some of the retreatants, and particularly my tutor's friends, would come to our room to talk; I enjoyed this, for it gave me a little break from my lessons, while in the summer a group picnic was also sometimes arranged, very welcome after so much hard work.

This life continued until I was seven, when I was taken back to Dödtsi-til where all our monks were assembled, as the Venerable Genchung Lama had been invited to give a *kalung* (ritual authorization) for all the scriptures forming the Kangyür; these are the sayings of the Buddha, translated from Sanskrit and filling one hundred and eight volumes. This *kalung* gives authority to study, practise and explain their meaning and confers upon those who attend the rite the blessing of their truth. Though Genchung Lama managed to read some three volumes each day, it took him three months to complete the whole, during which time my lessons were interrupted. It was all a great experience for me, since this was the first time that I had been at a gathering which lasted for so long. Throughout that time my tutor gave me lessons in the evenings by the light of butter lamps, for though I could work at my writing during the ritual recitation, I could not do any reading.

At this stage the regent abbots of both monasteries and my secretary were not satisfied with my tutor. They thought he was a little too indulgent and spent too much time telling me stories, to the neglect of more serious studies. He was indeed almost a father to me, and we knew that if we parted we should both miss each other a great deal; however, he was over-tired and needed a rest. At the end of the ritual reading another teacher was found, and Asang Lama had to leave me. I found this parting almost harder to bear than when my mother went away.

My new tutor, Apho-karma by name, had previously taught the younger monks at the monastery, so he had had a great deal of experience, but he was more temperamental than Asang Lama. I felt unhappy in never knowing what was expected of me. My time-table was changed, and the studies now became more difficult; the painting lessons, which Asang Lama had encouraged, were stopped, and writing lessons were made shorter; more time was given to reading and much more memorizing had to be done in the evenings by lamp



light, with the lesson having to be repeated correctly the following morning.

We returned to Dorje Kyungdzong, but the retreatants who came to talk to Apho-karma were very different from Asang Lama's friends, and we no longer had our little jokes. There were, however, longer periods for walks and frequent picnics, but my tutor was always very serious and solemn, though he too occasionally told me stories. He was not interested in animals and flowers, and I had neither playmates nor playthings. I discovered, however, that the fireworks for the New Year celebrations were filled with gunpowder, my informant being one of the younger monks who used to clean our rooms. I persuaded him to get some of the gunpowder for me, and I concocted some sort of rockets with rolled paper and managed not to be discovered. These were so successful that I wanted to make a better firework that would go off with a bang. I was in my room working at this, when Apho-karma came in and smelt the gunpowder. He did not punish me at the time, but he never ceased to remind me of how naughty I had been.

I never received corporal punishment after Asang Lama left when I was seven years old. When he had thought that it was necessary to admonish me, it was always done with great ceremony. After a foreword such as 'It is like moulding an image; it has to be hammered into shape', he would prostrate himself three times before me, and then administer the chastisement on the appropriate part.

About this time I had some strange dreams: though even in pictures I had never seen the things that are made in the West, I dreamt I was riding in a mechanized truck somewhat like a small lorry, and a few days' later in another dream I saw aeroplanes parked in a field. Also about that time, in my sleep, I was walking through a shop which was full of boots, shoes, saddles and straps with buckles, but these were not like Tibetan ones and instead of being made of leather they appeared to be of sticky dried blood. Later I realized that they were all the shapes and kinds that are used in western lands. I told Apho-karma about these dreams and he merely said 'Oh it's just nonsense.'

When I was eight I had to learn how to perform various rites, how to intone and how to use drums, bells and various other instruments. I had to improve my reading, and I was taught the practice and history of Buddhism and about the life of the Buddha. I could



## MY CHILDHOOD AT DÜDTSI-TIL

visualize him among his monks in their saffron robes, for one day I had had a vivid moment of recollection. When I read about the death of his mother, seven days after his birth, I seemed to share his feeling of loss. I read the life of Milarepa many times over till I knew it by heart, and also the lives of other great saints. Guru Padmasambhava's story was my favourite, for I loved to read about the way he brought Buddhism to Tibet, established the first monasteries and taught the doctrine, and above all about his great loving kindness to all our people and the moving message he left with us when he was returning to Lankapuri, an island south west of Mt Meru; after giving the Tibetans his blessing he added: 'The people may forget me, but I shall not forget them; my eternal compassion is always with them.'

My tutor and the senior lamas found me very enthusiastic and interested in my studies, always asking a lot of questions. They thought that it would be a good time for me to learn the rules for a novice (*sramanera*), and I began my first instruction in metaphysical doctrines, though at the time it was not known that I was to be ordained.

According to Buddhist scriptures, a boy of eight can be ordained as a novice (*sramanera*), and when the news came that the renowned teacher Jamgön Kongtrül of Pepung was going to Tsurphu Monastery to give his disciple the Gyalwa Karmapa some further spiritual instruction while at the same time visiting his mother at Lhasa, Rölpa-dorje and my secretary decided to ask him to ordain me, since his route would take him near Surmang. Jamgön Kongtrül accepted the suggestion saying 'Thus I can serve and offer help to the incarnation of my own teacher.'

He was warmly welcomed at Dündtsi-til. I remember him as a small man, neat and precise in all he did, with a dry sense of humour. This was the first time that he had visited Surmang since the death of the tenth Trungpa Tulku, and he told me a great deal about him; when he saw things that had belonged to his beloved *guru* he was much moved, and because I was his incarnation, he was particularly friendly to me.

My ordination took place at the full moon. Four *bhikshus* had to take part in the rite; one was Rölpa-dorje Rinpoche and the three others were senior Lamas. I had to make profession of the monastic rules for a *shramanera* (novice) of the Sarvastivadin Order, to which most northern Buddhists, that is to say Tibetans, Chinese and



Japanese belong; whereas Southern Buddhists of Ceylon, Burma and Thailand belong to the Theravada Order. After the ceremony, Jamgön Kongtrül preached me a sermon; he said 'From today you enter the community of the *Sangha*', after which he explained to me the meaning of the life of my predecessor and how he had always kept the rule. He said that my ordination was a very important step in my life, and added, that I was the youngest novice that he had ever ordained. After giving me some further teaching and advice, he continued his journey.

I was now much less afraid of Apho-karma, who had become more understanding, and I looked forward to our walks together.

At eight years old a child is very sensitive, and it is the time to inculcate ideas which must last him his lifetime, so at the end of this year I went into retreat for a simple form of meditation. This was upon the *nyendrup* of Manjusri, the Bodhisattva of Wisdom: that is to say, I was instructed to visualize him with his various symbolical attributes and to contemplate his transcendental Wisdom, to repeat his *mantras* or sonorous embodiments, and to recite the verses which preceded and followed them. I took a vow that I would live in solitude for three months away from all contacts other than my tutor and my cook attendant; no-one might come to see me. My diet was strictly vegetarian, and I was not allowed to go outside the retreat centre. This continued until the New Year.

As my story unfolds it will be seen how the whole line of the teaching was carried to me directly from *guru* to disciple. The great Jamgön Kongtrül taught the tenth Trungpa Tulku who in turn became the *guru* of his own incarnations Jamgön Kongtrül of Pepung and Jamgön Kongtrül of Sechen. The latter, as my spiritual father, was my instructor in meditation, and Jamgön Kongtrül of Pepung was my ordainer and also gave me a great deal of teaching. Though the great Jamgön Kongtrül did in fact have five incarnations, the other three do not come into my story.

I was nine when Jamgön Kongtrül of Sechen was invited to Düdtsi-til to give a *wangkur* (empowerment rite) on the teaching of the Treasury of Spiritual Instructions (*Damngag-dzö*). This was contained in thirteen volumes, and was a selection of the sacred writings of renowned *gurus* of all the various Tibetan schools which had been collected by his predecessor.

So many monks from outside monasteries kept coming, that



## MY CHILDHOOD AT DÜDTSI-TIL

Jamgön Kongtrül found Dödtsi-til too crowded and disturbing, and it was decided to move to Dorje Kyungdzong. The rites began on the day of the full moon; first with offerings at the shrine, followed by chanting and ending with a communal meal. However, since Jamgön Kongtrül was so renowned as a meditation teacher, hundreds of people came to hear him as well as to receive his blessing, and in some cases to put their private troubles before him. They established themselves in the open and in near-by caves, and soon the conditions became as involved and difficult as they had been at Dödtsi-til. Jamgön Kongtrül could get no rest and in consequence fell ill. He was forced to move to a small house a short distance from the retreat centre, and Rölpa-dorje took over the work whilst he was resting. Later, when his health improved, he only undertook to give individual meditation teaching; I remained one of his pupils.

When I first saw him, I was enormously impressed; he was so different from any other teacher that I had met. He was a big jolly man, friendly to all without distinction of rank, very generous and with a great sense of humour combined with deep understanding; he was always sympathetic to the troubles of others. Though he was not well at the time, to be near him was to experience unbelievable peace and joyousness. He used to say that now that we had met again he was my teacher as, the time before, my predecessor had been his. He so clearly remembered all that the tenth Trungpa Tulku had taught him, and all his kindness to him from his earliest childhood. He said how happy he was to give back to me that which he had received from his own *guru*, or as they say in Tibet 'to return the owner's possessions'.

I found later that every word he spoke had significance. I went to him every morning, and one day he told me that he saw me as a grown up man looking like my last incarnation.

He would say, 'Nowadays people are changing and all the world is in darkness and surrounded by suffering. My generation has been fortunate in living in a country which has been so happy; I hope suffering will not come to you. You must indeed come to Sechen to receive the full cup of spiritual milk (*pumpa-gangjö-oma*); young people like you are our hope for the future; you are like a flower in bud which must be properly looked after so that it may bloom both in our monasteries and in the homes of our people. You are very sensitive, and all of us must help you; I in particular have the



privilege of cultivating you with the spiritual water of teaching and practice.'

One morning he sent for me; as I entered the room the first rays of the sun fell upon me, and he remarked that this was a very significant sign. After this, the teaching he gave me was so profound that I felt he was giving me back the spirituality he himself had received from the tenth Trungpa Rinpoche. He was overjoyed when he realized that I could absorb his teaching without any barrier between us. He told me that from now on I must continue to meditate, but must keep things to myself, and not speak about them to other people. A little later he explained that since I was still a child and would not be able to sustain concentration for a long period, I must appoint a special time for meditation and keep to it regularly. He emphasized that I must come to receive various teachings from him and particularly instruction in devotion, compassion, and the way of behaviour in everyday life. He also said that without knowing the other side of the mountain one could not risk taking to a mountain pass. I should have knowledge of both absolute and relative truths, and should realize why it is necessary for one to know more about suffering and impermanence before renouncing the world; he added that there was great meaning when the Lord Buddha turned the wheel of the Doctrine, showing the three stages of the path.

Soon after this Jamgön Kongtrül Rinpoche said he wished to leave; he explained that though he was sorry that he could not continue the *wangkur*, his purpose for being at Surmang had been fulfilled. All, and I in particular, were very sad that he could not remain with us; his visit had meant so much. He was always so full of the joy of living and was a delightful story teller, telling tales of different *gurus* and lamas, but his jokes always could be interpreted as having a second and deeper meaning, so that even while he entertained he taught. I well remember one of the stories he told us.

'Once,' he said, 'there was a great teacher called Petrül Rinpoche. He did not belong to any monastery, but travelled everywhere about the country, without any attendants or baggage. One day he went to visit a certain hermit who had been living alone in a hut for many years: in fact he had become quite famous and many people came to see him there. Some came for advice and some to test how advanced he was in spiritual knowledge. Petrül Rinpoche entered the hut unknown and unannounced.



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“Where have you come from,” said the hermit “and where are you going?”

“I came from behind my back and am going in the direction I am facing.”

The hermit was taken aback, but he asked,

“Where were you born?”

“On earth” was the reply.

“Which school do you follow?”

“The Buddha.”

The hermit was now feeling rather put out, and seeing that his visitor was wearing a white lambskin hat, he asked him,

“If you are a monk, why are you wearing that hat?”

“Now I see your sort,” said Petrül Rinpoche, “look here. If I wear a red hat the Gelugpas will be looking down their noses, and if I wear a yellow one, the others will be at me. So I have a white one; it saves trouble.” He was referring jocularly to the fact that the Gelug Order of monks wear a yellow hat and all the remaining Orders a red one. This was a little joke about inter-monastic rivalries!

The hermit did not understand what he was saying, so Petrül Rinpoche began asking him why on earth he had come to live in such a remote and wild part of the country. He knew the answer to that one, and explained that he had been there for twenty years meditating. “At the moment,” he said, “I am meditating on the perfection of Patience.”

“That’s a good one,” said his visitor, and leaned forward as if confiding something to him: “a couple of frauds like us could never manage anything like that.”

The hermit rose from his seat—

“You’re the liar,” he said, “what made you come here? Why couldn’t you leave a poor hermit like me to practise meditation in peace?”

“And now,” said Petrül Rinpoche, “where is your Perfection of Patience?”

When Jamgön Kongtrül Rinpoche left us we all felt that something very lovely was missing; he had given the whole place such a wonderful atmosphere. We continued to receive the teaching of the ‘Treasury of Spiritual Instruction’ under Rölpa-dorje Rinpoche, and when it was finished I went back to my lessons with Aphokarma.



## BORN IN TIBET

In Tibet, the greatest respect has always been felt for spiritually endowed lamas, who act as priests or teachers without being monks. Such people would have promised to keep to the *Upasaka* discipline and practise the fundamental rules of Virtue as well as to observe the *Bodhisattva's* vow of compassion with the aim of leading all sentient beings to Enlightenment; finally, they would undertake to obey the sacred word of the *Vajrayana* by dedicating themselves to the Supreme Knowledge.

Dingo Chentse Rinpoche was one of these married lamas, a man advanced in spiritual knowledge. He had been an important disciple of the tenth Trungpa Tulku and was a reincarnation of a famous author and teacher called Chentze Rinpoche, who was born in 1817. Because of his profound learning, the monks of Dödtsi-til invited him to give the *wangkur* (initiation) of *Tzochen-düpa* on *Anuyana* which contains advanced *Vajrayana* teaching. The empowerment rite lasted for a month and when it was over, Dingo Chentse undertook to give me special instruction. I felt drawn to him as if he had been my father; and thus I often addressed him without any shyness or doubt. He welcomed me as the incarnation of his own *guru*, and since I was still only a child of ten he brought me toys and sweets. He was very tall and dignified and never seemed in a hurry. Whatever he did was perfection of its kind, even the way he walked into the hall showed this quality; all he said was expressed to perfection, in fact, he surpassed anyone I had ever met; his writings were equally remarkable, and added to this he was a poet and had a gift for telling delightful stories.

All the previous year I had had a great deal to do, meeting lamas from other monasteries and taking part in many rites, so my lessons had been rather neglected, though my general knowledge and understanding had increased. Dingo Chentze gave me private teaching on *Atiyana* (*Ati* means 'the Ultimate') and handed on to me much that he himself had received from the tenth Trungpa Tulku and from *gurus* of other schools. He left after several months, which was so great a sorrow and shock to me that for a few days I could neither study nor eat. I felt this parting more severely than when my early tutor Asang Lama had had to leave me, and to fill the blank I set to work harder than before.

Soon after this Apho-karma took me back to the retreat centre of Dorje Kyungdzong as he had decided that it was now time to change my subjects of study. He wished me to give short sermons



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to the monks and laymen there; among them was the king of Lhathog's son whose father had been instrumental in procuring the tenth Trungpa Tulku's release from his imprisonment during some local troubles.

By the year 1949 conditions in East Tibet were becoming increasingly confused. In China there had been fighting between the Nationalists and Communists resulting in the victory of the latter. However, news travels slowly in Tibet and the Tibetans in Nyishu-tza-nga province, who supported the Nationalists, were still on their way to help their allies, taking with them about a thousand horses and much food, wool, cloth and skins. When they reached Siling they found the Communists in possession and were forced to hand everything over to them. The Communists took this opportunity to make large scale propaganda; they filmed the Tibetans in the act of handing over these things as if this was a voluntary gift; a large banquet was arranged which was also filmed in such a way as to show the friendly feeling existing between Communists and Tibetans.

Three months later we heard that three Communist officials had arrived in Jyekundo the principal trading centre of our province. They had been put in charge of the town as well as the whole district of Nyishu-tza-nga which includes Surmang. Since they were unarmed and did not interfere much at the start, both parties remained seemingly on friendly terms, though the Tibetans were still distrustful. Two months later the senior Communist official started to offer suggestions. He would say 'The offerings at your shrines are a waste of food; you should eat more plentifully and spend what you have, rather than hoard. In future you will not have such freedom. You must realize this.'

It was later discovered that this man was actually in the Nationalist secret service, as was his brother in China, but when he heard that the latter had been caught, he himself escaped to India.

About this time, my mother left her husband at Dekyil and came to live near Dödtsi-til. She helped a sister of the tenth Trungpa Rinpoche with the dairy work; she could not come inside the monastery but I was able to go out to see her, and she brought me milk, cream and curds about once a fortnight. A year or so later her husband died and she never went back to her village.



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Since I was now eleven years old I had to spend my time on more advanced work. I was called back to Dūdtsi-til to take the Bodhisattva vow although I had already taken it informally at the time of the *wangkur*: the vow is as follows:

‘In the presence of all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and of my teacher Rölpa-dorje, I vow to proceed towards Enlightenment. I accept all creatures as my father and mother with infinite compassion. Henceforth for their benefit I will practise the transcendental virtues (*paramitas*) of liberality, discipline, patience, diligence, meditative concentration, wisdom (*prajñā*), skillful means (*upāya*), spiritual power, aspiration, gnosis (*jñāna*). Let my master accept me as a future Buddha, but as remaining a Bodhisattva without entering Nirvana so long as a single blade of grass remains unenlightened.’

Instead of returning to Dorje Kyungdzong, Apho-karma took me to Dechen-Chöling, Rölpa-dorje’s retreat centre, for I was now to study directly under him. His appearance was unusual, for he was quite bald with a trimly pointed beard. He was very strict on keeping all rules and insisted about the need for scholastic accuracy; at rites he officiated with the greatest competence, and he had exceptional knowledge about the art of chanting. But with all this strictness, he was very gentle and understanding and always seemed to be happy in his retreat surrounded by bird and animal life; much of his time he spent in writing.

The centre for retreats stood on the slope of a mountain looking over the valley below and the mountains beyond it. Willows and scented juniper were dotted about the grass-covered hillside. The retreat was at a high altitude, and nearly every morning the mists would wreath the slopes obscuring the valley below; Tulku Rölpa-dorje sometimes called it the Garden of the Mists. I very much enjoyed this change, and so did Apho-karma who had himself studied under the regent abbot.

Rölpa-dorje lived by himself in a beautiful cave with the front walled in to form a cell; he had painted the inside a soft orange colour, and had stuck small pictures cut out of books or small wood-prints on some of the surfaces, and had hewed cupboards in the walls; at one side there was a shrine of sculptured stone. Among his ornaments was a collection of small religious pieces which he would



allow me to play with. The cave was complete with its own little kitchen, for Rölpa-dorje preferred to look after himself. Stone steps led steeply down from the cave to the retreat centre which was some way down.

Usually, only four monks lived in the centre for their four-year period of retreat, but there were houses nearby from which some fifteen other monks could attend the course, while at the back of the mountain, in another small valley, a nunnery had been established, mainly used as a retreat centre for some forty nuns, but also serving a number of lay disciples.

At Dechen-Chöling Apho-karma put me to more advanced general studies and also gave me some lessons in the art of poetry; Rölpa-dorje took over my instruction in primary Buddhist metaphysics. He thought that I should now begin *Ngöndro*, (the 'Prelude') as an introduction for further understanding of *Vajrayana*. This preparation for spiritual development includes:

- (1) 100,000 full prostrations.
- (2) 100,000 recitations of the Triple Refuge.
- (3) 100,000 recitations of the Vajra Sattva *mantra*.
- (4) 100,000 symbolic offerings.
- (5) finally 100,000 recitations of the *mantra* of Guru Yoga, or 'Union with the Teacher'.

At the same time five subjects must be contemplated.

- (1) The rare privilege given to one to receive spiritual teaching in this life.
- (2) The impermanence attaching to life and to everything else.
- (3) The cause and effect of *karma*.
- (4) The understanding of suffering.
- (5) The necessity for devotion.

I was deeply affected by all this; living in this place, studying these teachings and constantly meditating, I began to develop greater depths of understanding, as a preparation for the way of life that lay ahead of me.

One day while I was engrossed in this teaching, and actually in the act of meditation and prostration, my secretary Chandzö Karjen suddenly appeared to tell us that Chinese troops were approaching our monastery. We had heard months before that there were a number of troops in Jyekundo, though until now they had not been seen beyond the town. Chandzö Karjen had had a message that they



were in occupation at Namgyal-tse, but owing to its being three days' journey from Düdtsi-til this news had not been confirmed, nor did he know if the monastery was still standing or not; he had come at once to warn us. This sudden movement of troops might mean that the Chinese were about to use force in order to occupy the whole of Tibet. Since we were already under Chinese control, this new move seemed suspicious; could it mean that they intended to destroy all the monasteries and towns and to capture the important people in every district? We held a consultation; a second messenger arrived to tell us that on the route the Communists had followed no villages or monasteries had been disturbed as the army had only marched through. He brought with him a large poster which the Communists were distributing all over the district. Under the signature of the Commander-in-Chief, it said that the Red army was coming to help the Tibetans; they would do no damage, and would respect the feudal system and the religion of the people.

We decided that though the Communists were apparently not intending to harm us, it would be wise to safeguard the treasures of our monastery by storing them in a more secure place. If it became necessary we could escape ourselves, for transport was ready at hand; after this, my secretary went back to Düdtsi-til. For a couple of days all seemed quiet; only the herdsmen had seen the Chinese troops as a string of lights silently passing the village in single file in the darkness. In the morning when Apho-karma went out to collect firewood, he could see the camp fires all around in the valley. He waited until I had finished my meditation and was having breakfast and then told me what he had seen; when the sun came out we could distinguish the glint on the soldiers' packs as the long file went further afield. Any visitors who came to see us told us how the Chinese had always paid for anything that they had requisitioned, and that the troops looked in very poor condition and seemed to be short of food, but also to have plenty of silver money. They continued to pass through day after day on their way to Chamdo, and though they met with some resistance from the troops under a gallant officer called Muja Depön near Lathog, they brushed it aside. Surmang had been asked to provide them with guides, but managed to evade doing so. It was all very worrying.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### IN THE STEPS OF THE TENTH TRUNGPA



EVER since Jamgön Kongtrül of Sechen had visited Düdtsi-til, when I was nine years old, his presence had been foremost in my mind. He had planted a spiritual seed; I wanted to go to him for extended teaching, and while I was at Rölpa-dorje's centre I had felt more strongly than ever that the time had now come for me to go to my *guru*.

At the end of the year I returned to Düdtsi-til with Apho-karma, the lamas seemed satisfied with my studies and as I was nearly twelve, they encouraged me to be more independent over deciding what I wanted to do. I spoke to Apho-karma about my wish to go to Jamgön Kongtrül, for I knew that the monastic committee was thinking that I should go on the traditional tour to meet people in the district. However, he gave me no direction, and only said that the decision for what I would do must come from myself.

I was invited to the retreat centre of Dorje Kyungdzong for the New Year. It was a very quiet and spiritual atmosphere, but I felt a little disturbed thinking about the decision I would so soon have to make. The venerable Karma-tendzin was the superior (*drupön*) there; he had been a devoted disciple of my predecessor and had known me for many years, as had most of the senior monks at the centre. I asked him to advise me, but he impressed upon me that I was now old enough to think for myself. Just then, the venerable Togden Tsepten was on a visit to the centre, who had not only received teaching from the tenth Trungpa Tulku, but had been his constant companion and server and was with him at his death; so I put my problem before him, and his answer was to tell me in great detail much of the life story of my predecessor.

#### THE STORY OF THE TENTH TRUNGPA TULKU RINPOCHE

The tenth Trungpa Tulku had been given a very strict training



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from boyhood to prepare him for the duties of supreme abbot of Surmang. At nineteen he attained his majority, being considered ready to take full responsibility for the government of the abbey although he would still be under guidance to some extent. He realized that in order to develop his own spirituality, being thereby enabled to lead others, he must have further training in meditation, which he saw was more important than administering his monastery.

He felt a compelling urge to receive teaching from Jamgön Kongtrül Rinpoche, for when he was quite young he had heard the name of this great *guru* mentioned and had been suddenly stirred by a recollection that he had been in a spiritual relationship with him in a former life. The monastic committee, however, had other plans for him; they wanted him first to work for Surmang, it being customary in Tibet that when an abbot reached manhood, he should tour the district and give his blessing to the people; during such a tour he would be invited to preach and to perform rites; he would receive many gifts, and the fame and wealth of his monastery would be increased. Though the tenth Trungpa neither liked nor approved of this procedure, he nevertheless felt obliged to follow the wishes of his senior advisors, so he set off on the tour accompanied by his bursar, whilst his secretary remained in charge of Düdtsi-til.

The tour was very successful and brought in many donations for Surmang. This greatly encouraged the bursar, for since the death of the ninth incarnate abbot twenty years had passed, during which the monastery had received very few offerings, it needed material help. So Trungpa Tulku was persuaded to go on another tour the next year; this should have lasted for three months, but about half way through he felt he could no longer delay going to see his *guru*.

From babyhood he had been told about Jamgön Kongtrül; how he had been brought up by the abbot of Pepung Monastery as his spiritual son. As he grew older he had wanted to obtain wider instruction and had travelled for many years, visiting over one hundred *gurus* of all the schools of Buddhism to be found in Tibet. On his return to Pepung visitors came from all parts of the country to receive instruction from him, for which purpose he established a centre near the monastery where he himself composed over eighty volumes of scholarly and spiritual precepts. Before the abbot of Pepung died, he appointed Jamgön Kongtrül to be the spiritual leader of the line of the Karma-ka-gyü school.