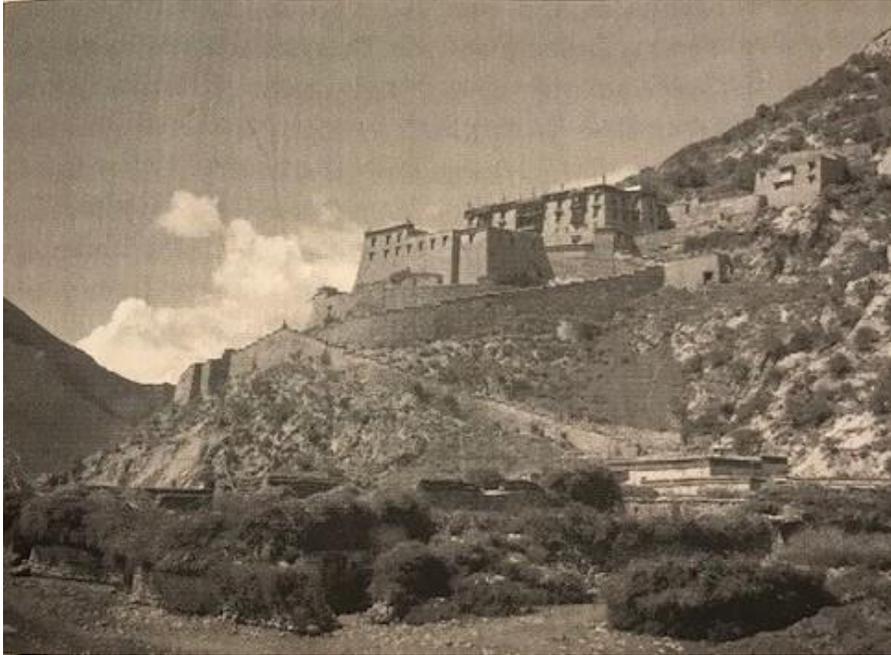


## Part 8 – Impermanence

The Drikung Dzong monastery, where Chetsang Rinpoche and Chungtsang Rinpoche lived during the winter, was gradually being controlled by the Chinese Communists. The Communist soldiers searched through the rooms and locked some of them and used other ones.



One day, a group of Chinese Communists who weren't soldiers, and their Tibetan supporters, arrived at the monastery to begin a "program of patriotic reeducation." They wanted to make the monks patriotic for China rather than Tibet. All the monks had to listen to propaganda speeches, for hours, over and over again, informing them that religion is very bad and

gives the wealthy upper-class people all the power so they abuse the ordinary people, unfairly burdening them with difficulties. How awful it was to hear this, for lamas, tulkus and monks who dedicated their life to studying and practicing the precious Dharma!

For this program, the tulkus, khenpos (teacher monks) and high-ranking lamas stayed at Drikung Dzong and the ordinary monks were taken to a monastery school building, where the Chinese army had set up a regional office. Not only did the monks, lamas and tulkus have to listen to the speeches, they had to read pamphlets of Communist propaganda, and then each of them was asked to explain what he had learned. If the instructors didn't like what they heard, they shouted at him and said,

"You are stubborn! You are backward, old-fashioned! You need to have a revolutionary spirit!"

When it was Chetsang Rinpoche's turn to respond, he was terribly afraid. Everything the instructors said seemed like meaningless ranting to him. He begged Rigyal Rinpoche to help him, but Rigyal Rinpoche didn't understand much of it either.

A young Tibetan woman, who was translating for the Chinese, turned toward Chetsang Rinpoche with a fanatical expression on her face, as if she had just become a huge fan of the Chinese propaganda, expecting him to answer.

Rigyal Rinpoche said, "He is too young, he understands nothing."

The Tibetan woman looked at the frightened 13-year-old Chetsang Rinpoche and tried to make a displeased face, as if with contempt, but she just seemed confused and then turned to the next monk to be questioned. Chetsang Rinpoche was relieved, until he was told he would be questioned again the next day.

He didn't know what to do. There were so many topics they were trying to teach, and he couldn't make sense out of any of them. He decided to memorize one of the texts they gave him, and when he quickly recited it to the instructors, he hoped they wouldn't ask him what it meant. They seemed to be amused by his performance, and chuckled at him. From then on, no one asked him any more questions, although he still had to attend all the speeches and lessons for the next few months of the program.

During the program, many of the monks suffered terribly from the psychological terror the Chinese Communists were putting them through. They expected that soon they would be put in labor camps where they would have to perform hard labor all day and brutally beaten if they didn't do it well enough, or else be put in prison, or killed. Some monks just couldn't bear the hopeless, depressing situation, and committed suicide by throwing themselves in the river and drowning. Other monks managed to sneak away from the monastery. So, every day of the program, there were fewer and fewer monks attending. Originally there were 60 monks and rinpoches, and toward the end of the program, only 30 were in the class. Chetsang Rinpoche's friend Nangse Rinpoche tried to escape with his tutor and another monk, traveling only at night and hiding during the day, but a Chinese military patrol saw them and fired his gun at them. Nangse Rinpoche fell and broke his legs. He was captured by the Chinese and taken to an army hospital for treatment.

One afternoon, a group of soldiers appeared in the monastery assembly hall and made a list of the monks who remained at the monastery. Then they told the monks they would not be returning, and politely said goodbye. The monks didn't know what was going to happen next. The senior monks were sure they would be sent to prison, so they prepared to leave by packing their few belongings and dressing in ordinary Tibetan men's clothing.

The people of the nearby village heard about the soldiers making a list of monks, which made them terribly worried that the monks would be put in prison, so a huge group came to the monastery and pleaded, wailing and crying out, with the Chinese soldiers not to carry off the monks and rinpoches. The soldiers were surprised and troubled by this outburst of courage and promised to leave the remaining monks in peace. But the villagers didn't trust them, and checked with the monastery later that night to see whether all the monks were still there. Everything seemed quiet, so they returned to their homes.

During the night, Chetsang Rinpoche woke from a deep sleep to find Norbu Rinpoche shaking him and shouting “Wake up! Fast! The soldiers have come back. We have to go down right away or they will shoot us! Everyone is downstairs already, only you are still here!”

In the dark, Rinpoche quickly slipped into his robes, but in his hurry he couldn’t find his belt and had to hold his lower robe up with one hand. He groped the wall with the other hand to find the door and stumbled downstairs, where he saw Chungtsang Rinpoche together with the other monks and rinpoches standing in the middle of the assembly hall, crowded together like a herd of timid sheep. All were wearing ordinary Tibetan men’s clothing, not their robes, and some had bundles tied together. Soldiers surrounded them.

As soon as Chetsang Rinpoche and Norbu Rinpoche arrived, the soldiers raised their rifles and barked an order to march. The monks were paralyzed with fear and didn’t move. The soldiers began to shout insults and hit the monks with their rifles. Finally, Chetsang Rinpoche pushed his way to the front and began to walk in the direction the soldiers had indicated. Chungtsang Rinpoche followed him, and then the others. Chetsang Rinpoche thought maybe they all were going to be killed, and wondered if it would hurt when the bullet ripped through his body. He was trembling, but he continued down the three flights of stairs to the ground floor of the monastery.



Outside, a severe storm was raging, as if nature was as agitated as the humans that night.

It thundered again and again, and when lightning bolts flashed, Chetsang Rinpoche could see terrified monks kneeling on the ground with arms raised to defend themselves from the scowling soldiers.

In another flash of lightning, he could see the monastery manager and his assistant with cuts on their heads and arms, cowering in front of a wall, their hands tied behind their backs. Rinpoche could see eight other men standing in front of the wall, all bound in a row with their hands tied. They were the Drikung officials.

Rinpoche struggled to hold up his robe in the violent storm, and he didn’t know whether his body was shaking from cold or from fear. In another flash of light, a Tibetan interpreter for the

Chinese army saw the boy and tried to comfort him, whispering that nothing would happen to him, but Rinpoche didn't know whether to believe him or not.



The commander blurted out a few words, translated by the Tibetan interpreter, "These ten shameless creatures will be imprisoned. The others will work for the benefit of the people in a labor camp. If they confess their faults in the right and proper fashion, they will enjoy better conditions and will be able to return home soon. Otherwise, they will face the same fate as these disobedient ones here."

And then the Tibetan interpreter announced, "The two Drikung tulkus and Norbu Tulku have successfully completed the reeducation program. They may return to their rooms."

The three tulkus ran back into the building, and Chetsang Rinpoche dashed up all five floors to the roof, where he tried to see what was happening down below. When the lightning flashed, he saw the field filled with soldiers ready to fire guns on their captives, some of whom seemed to be rolling helplessly on the ground. At the shrill sound of a whistle, the troops assembled and ordered the monks to line up in a row. With soldiers beside them, the monks were marched down the wide steps and away into the dark valley. In the morning, the concerned villagers who had tried to prevent this would find only three young rinpoches left in the otherwise empty monastery.

The three boys were helpless. Until now, attendants had taken care of everything, and they didn't even know how to cook their food. While they were discussing what to do, two monks appeared who were from the Gelug branch of Tibetan Buddhism, to which the Dalai Lama belongs. The monks were sent by the Chinese to take care of the tulkus, and also to watch what they were doing. The older of the two monks was very good-natured and kind, and when they were alone, he whispered to Chetsang Rinpoche that he could be trusted because he was related to a Drikung rinpoche. Chetsang Rinpoche found that to be reassuring, but he didn't trust the other monk.

The only food they had was barley flour (tsampa) and beans that normally were used to feed horses and mules, plus occasionally they had some small pieces of dried meat and potatoes brought by the villagers.

The boys had nothing to do. They didn't know what to expect next. They passed the time exploring the huge monastery complex, much of which had been off-limits to them before. Chetsang Rinpoche was curious to know what was in the rooms that the Chinese had locked.

Tibetan doors had a big sill underneath them that a person would step over to enter a room, and the boys saw that with a little effort, the sill could be removed from under the locked doors. So they removed the door sills and then wriggled underneath the doors to enter the rooms. But they found the rooms were empty. Everything of value had been removed.

Norbu Rinpoche returned to his nomad family. Chungtsang Rinpoche sank into a gloomy mood. He wasn't interested in anything. But Chetsang Rinpoche had his usual energy and adventurousness. The empty Drikung Dzong monastery had no more mysteries to explore, so he wanted to go outside the monastery. He had always been under the strict supervision of attendants and guards who didn't allow him to talk to ordinary people and see their everyday experiences. Now, only the two Gelug monks were watching over him.

At first, he was shy when he ventured out to the village, as so many people stared at him. The army headquarters, with a few remaining soldiers, was still in the village, so the atmosphere was tense. Many Tibetans wanted to receive Rinpoche's blessing, but they were too intimidated by the soldiers to approach him. Rinpoche soon got used to their behavior and enjoyed his outings with a new sense of freedom.



Every day, he went down to the village, led the monastery's mules to pasture and rode them, and then brought water from a nearby stream. Winter was coming and a layer of ice covered the stream, so he had to break a hole in the ice to get the water. He then loaded two mules with water containers and led them back up to the monastery. This was supposed to be a job for ordinary monks, never for a rinpoche, and certainly not for a throne holder of the lineage. But he thoroughly enjoyed this simple activity. He felt like he had been deprived of the most delightful tasks all these years.

Chungtsang never left the building, but sometimes he watched his friend from the roof terrace. Chetsang Rinpoche roamed alone, exploring all the surrounding areas. Three neighboring families secretly invited him into their kitchen, offered him the place of honor, and served him tea. When he left, they generously gave him a piece of dried meat so large that he could hardly carry it.

Every now and then a tall Chinese army officer came up to the monastery, carrying an air rifle for shooting birds. Rinpoche knew almost no Chinese, and the few words he knew were probably bad words, because he noticed that when Chinese people said those words, they made an angry face. When the army officer said those words to him, Rinpoche made a game of answering, with a straight face and calm voice, using Tibetan words that also were bad. The

officer looked at him with annoyance and confusion. Rinpoche welcomed every change in routine, so he even enjoyed this grumpy bad-tempered man.

One time, Rinpoche wanted to show off his strength and climbed onto a high gate, but it broke apart, so he fell down onto the stone stairs below. Luckily he wasn't hurt, but the officer scolded him using his hands and body language to communicate that if he had hit his head, he would have died.

A man on horseback arrived one day at the monastery with a message from Tritsab Gyabra Rinpoche, the former teacher of Chetsang Rinpoche and the leader of the Drikung lineage until Chetsang Rinpoche and Chungtsang Rinpoche were old enough. The message was to bring Chetsang Rinpoche to Lhasa. Tritsab Gyabra had gotten permission to take the boy in as his adopted son. Rinpoche could hardly believe how lucky he was, but he was sorry, too, because Chungtsang Rinpoche would have to stay behind. He didn't have much to pack, and off he went.

He only learned later that a few days after he left, Chungtsang Rinpoche was taken by the Chinese to the army's main headquarters in the school building, along with all the remaining monks, tulkus and villagers. There, they had to participate in what were called "struggle sessions," in which the Communists manipulated the Tibetan people to try to prove that religion was bad. The high-ranking monks and tulkus were forced to describe in detail everything that others had to do for them, and the Chinese Communists would make it seem that the monks abused the people and took advantage of them. Then the Tibetan villagers were forced to recite statements accusing individual lamas, tulkus, or wealthy people of being abusive in some way.

Chungtsang Rinpoche was forced to bow his head and kneel down to confess faults that they had alleged. The crowd closed in around him, and one of his attendants was forced to attack him viciously, place a pointed dunce cap on his head, and write insulting words on it. The crowd shouted at him,

"You capitalist! You abuser! You exploiter!"

And they spit on him, threw stones at him, and kicked and beat him. Those villagers who weren't cruel enough to Chungtsang Rinpoche were taken aside by a Chinese officer who yelled,

"You are disobedient! We will have to train you again! Or you will go to a labor camp!"

Meanwhile, Chetsang Rinpoche went alone back to his home city in ordinary Tibetan men's clothing, without the attendants that used to accompany him. He arrived where Tritsab Gyabra was staying, in what was formerly a guesthouse of a wealthy family. He saw that Lhasa and the people there looked different. The houses had bullet holes in them from machine guns. People's faces looked very tense with suffering and fear.



Rinpoche was told that his family home had been taken by the Chinese Communists, and his grandfather had been arrested and had died in prison. Neither he nor Tritsab Gyabra dared to ask any questions about it, because they didn't want to draw attention to themselves – that was dangerous, since any wrong word or wrong question could result in harassment, punishment, or worse.

Chetsang Rinpoche didn't get depressed over this tragedy. His concern was to survive without losing his optimism and joy in life, even in the face of catastrophe. He always had a special ability to not dwell on his own suffering. He just recognized it as it crossed his mind and then let it go.

One day, Tritsab Gyabra had to leave to accompany the Chinese army on a trip to Kham (eastern Tibet) since he knew the routes through that wild region and was highly respected by the local people there. He knew that if he refused to go with the army, he would be put in a camp living in horrible conditions to build roads or be thrown into a dark dungeon-like prison.

After he left, only his nephew Geleg and Chetsang Rinpoche lived in the guesthouse. But it was not the nice guesthouse it once was before the Communists came. Now it was dilapidated, with broken windows and the outside peppered with bullet-holes. In the dreary room, the bed sheets were smeared with dried blood. Rinpoche preferred to sleep on the floor with blankets. The kitchen was also a mess, but it was a bit better than his room, so he and Geleg spent most of their time there, although they had hardly anything to eat. Most people living in Lhasa received ration cards that they could show to get a bit of tsampa or maybe other food, but Geleg and Rinpoche didn't have ration cards. There wasn't much food in Lhasa anyway, because the Chinese government controlled the food production and supply, sending a lot of food to China, which was going through an extreme food shortage because Chairman Mao forced Chinese farmers to work in factories.



Every day, Chetsang Rinpoche walked with the neighbor's children a long way to the Chinese army's potato fields that had already been harvested, where they hoped to find a few potatoes to eat. Sometimes they were able to find a cabbage that had fallen off a truck.

One day, he discovered some monks where the Panchen Lama lived, who the Chinese respected at that time. The monks tossed old dried ritual offering cakes called tormas to the birds, and sometimes let the hungry children have them. The tormas didn't taste very good and could only be eaten after being softened in tea. But it was food.

Sometime later, Rinpoche moved in with the family of Nubpa Rinpoche, another Drikung Kagyu tulku. He enjoyed living there, where he played soccer with Nubpa Rinpoche and his three brothers and Chetsang Rinpoche's cousin, who all loved soccer. Every day they went to an abandoned monastery courtyard where they taught Rinpoche how to play real soccer according to the rules of the game. Sometimes after Nubpa Rinpoche and his brothers were tired after playing soccer, the energetic Chetsang Rinpoche continued kicking the ball against the wall while his cousin played goalie.

#### QUESTIONS:

1. What did the Chinese teach the monks and tulkus about religion? (that it was bad, giving wealthy people all the power, who abuse the ordinary people)
2. What were the monks afraid would happen to them? (they would be brutally beaten in labor camps, put in prison, or killed)
3. How did Chungtsang Rinpoche feel when the three tulkus were alone at the monastery? (gloomy, depressed, not interested in anything)
4. What did Chetsang Rinpoche do during that time? (explored area around the monastery, went to the village, rode mules and loaded them with water to take to the monastery)
5. What happened to Chetsang Rinpoche's grandfather? (he was arrested and died in prison)

#### DHARMA DISCUSSION – Impermanence:

In this part of his life, around age 13, Chetsang Rinpoche and the other monks and tulkus experienced shocking, extreme changes in their environment.

Everything was being taken away from them.

Some monks had such a hard time with the terrible changes that they ran away, risking their lives if they got caught by the Chinese army, or they committed suicide.

Chungtsang Rinpoche, like many others, felt depressed.

But Chetsang Rinpoche kept a positive attitude, and made the best of the situation.

He explored, went to the village, found ways to get food when it was very difficult to find, and didn't even mind the old grumpy army officer.

He seemed to have a deep understanding of impermanence, even at a young age.

What do we mean by impermanence?

Everything and anything we can think of changes.

Every day, we experience different things.  
We get things, and we lose things - we don't have them anymore.  
We have a good friend, and then they move away, or they let us down, or they change.  
Friends come and go.  
We are successful in something, and then we are unsuccessful.  
Someone likes what we do, and then someone doesn't like what we do.  
We are lucky, then unlucky.

We can't keep things going just like we want them.  
We – and everyone - will always suffer disappointments, discomforts, and unpleasant experiences in life, again and again.

We try so hard to make things permanent – we try to keep the things that we like just the way they are.  
When we're having fun, we want to keep on having fun, we want more fun, we want different kinds of fun.  
When people are pleased with us, we want them always to be pleased with us.  
When we are successful, we want to keep on being successful.  
But that can't happen, because everything changes.

We get frustrated when we can't keep things just the way we like them, no matter how hard we try, and no matter how much money we have.

We start to think, "There must be a better way. Look how peaceful the lamas are, and people who practice Dharma. They seem to know how to stay happy and peaceful, even when there are difficulties."

We can learn to calm ourselves, and not get too upset, by remembering the Buddha's teaching that bad experiences won't last, they are impermanent.  
And we can learn not to get too excited by the good things we experience, remembering that they too won't last, so we don't get so disappointed when they aren't there anymore.

Just like the weather – bad weather is always followed by good weather, and good weather is always followed by bad weather, eventually. It comes and goes.  
Similarly, pleasure is what we feel between two pains,  
And pain is what we feel between two pleasures.

Usually, pain doesn't last long, and pleasure doesn't last long either. They come and go.

And like Chetsang Rinpoche, when we are going through a difficult situation, we can make the best of it, find ways to stay optimistic, knowing that eventually the situation will change.