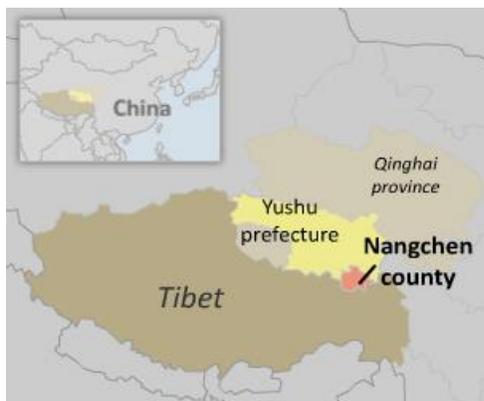


## CHAPTER 1 – LOVE AND DEVOTION

In the Land of Snows, in a very small village of about 50 families in East Tibet,



in Nangchen County, lived a young lady named Dekyi Yangzom, who everyone called Dega. She was known for her lovingkindness and compassion, and people said she had no anger or hatred, not even any dislikes, in her heart.

Her village was called Dong-go drong. She lived with her parents, and like the other families in the village, they were farmers. They grew wheat, turnips, potatoes, and a grain called barley, which they roasted and made into powder to make *tsampa*.

There were not many trees in Dong-go drong, but there were huge fields of wheat and barley all around their village, and mountains surrounding it.



Her house, like all the houses in the village, was small, with no upstairs, and no electricity, and was a brownish yellow color with a flat roof.

(This is a photo of a similar village)

In the morning, her parents would go up onto the roof and make smoke offerings, to purify and bring blessings to the home and family.



Her family, like others in the village, had to work hard to grow the wheat, barley and vegetables. But they always had enough to eat.

Sometimes they could get meat and butter from nomad families who traveled around with their herds of animals, including yaks. The villagers in Dong-go drong would trade their wheat, barley, flour and *tsampa* for butter and meat from the nomads.



In the village, there was a monastery called Kango Gon, with a prayer flag pole, where the prayer flags, called wind horses, were always fluttering in the wind, spreading the holy prayers to the world in all directions, into the earth (yellow flag), the water (green flag), the fire (red flag), the air (white flag), and space (blue flag).

Dega could see the monastery from her house. She liked to visit the kind and wise lama there, named Lama Konchog Tenye. She had deep devotion and love for this great yogi-monk. She and her family, like others in the village, visited him on special occasions to pray and make offerings to the Buddha, and receive blessings and advice from the lamas.



Lama Tenye was a student of the Seventh Garchen Rinpoche, who was a very wise Tantric yogi with supernatural powers, and who lived at the Gar Gon monastery.



The lower part of the Gar Gon monastery was in a green valley where there was a forest of evergreen trees.



The upper part of the Gar Gon monastery, up high on a cliff above the valley, was where the Seventh Garchen Rinpoche lived.

Dega and her family sometimes visited the Seventh Garchen Rinpoche by riding for a whole day on a horse.





They were willing to make the long trip because of their devotion, which made them feel very happy to make offerings at the monastery. It was a very old monastery, with prayer wheels that are more than 700 years old.

Monks at the monastery keep the wheels spinning, spreading blessings in all directions.

One day when she was very young, the Seventh Garchen Rinpoche wrote a very important letter and handed it to Dega, telling her to keep it safe. She put it someplace in her home, but she forgot about it later on. She didn't look at it, because she could not read or write, as was typical for people in small villages in Tibet.

Years later, when she and her family offered a bag of *tsampa* to the very old Seventh Garchen Rinpoche, he refused to accept it, and told them to wait for a great monk who will come to their home one day, and then offer it to him. But no great monk arrived at their door. Instead, a great monk would arrive in their home in another way much later.

A young man named Masei Sengey lived more than an hour's walk away from Dong-go drong in a neighboring village, *Dzong Dza*. He was not a monk, but was a great meditation practitioner, as were his brothers, and they sometimes meditated in a cave, away from the village so they could meditate very deeply without distraction for weeks or months at a time. Masei Sengey went on a meditation retreat in a cave between his village and Dong-go drong, far enough away from the villages to be very peaceful and quiet, but close enough that people from the villages could bring him food.

Dega was a very generous young lady and like many of her friends she knew it was a great merit to offer food to Dharma practitioners, so they have the food they need to meditate for long periods of time and develop their insight and wisdom. When she was asked to attend to the yogic meditator in the cave, she walked about an hour from her house to offer him food, yogurt, and other things he might need. She dutifully went to bring him food every few days. After some time, Masei Sengey and Dega became close, and they knew they loved each other very much.

One day in the early summer, a few months after the Seventh Garchen Rinpoche had passed away, Dega knew a baby was growing in her tummy. Something very strange happened around that time. Some birds that normally live in the forest far away, near the Gar monastery, came to Dong-go drong, and landed on the roof of the house where Dega and her parents lived.



They stayed there for several days. Even when people tried to shoo them away, thinking the birds were lost, the birds would not leave the roof of their house. Because these birds normally would never live away from the forest, the people in the village thought this was a very unusual sign that means something very special might happen.

The baby was born at home, early one morning in the year 1937. The baby's father still lived at home with his brothers, in a very noble family, and Dega did not want to cause trouble for his family because they were not married. So she didn't talk about him to others in her village, and he did not see his baby son. But she had all she needed, and whenever she needed help, her parents were there for her.



Everyone called the baby *Bu*, which means son, or *Abo*, a more loving way to say "son." In those times long ago, children got their names later in childhood, not when they were babies.

Dega was full of joy with her healthy beautiful baby boy. And her little Abo's world was just to enjoy being with his mother, smiling at her, making soft little baby sounds, and gripping her long thick straight black hair in his tiny fingers.

She lovingly protected him from the cold winter winds which blasted down from the mountains, wrapping him up warmly, and shielded him from the sun, which shone so brightly from the clear blue Tibetan skies.

QUESTIONS (answers in parenthesis):

1. What kind of work did Dega and her family and the others in her village do? (they were farmers)
2. What foods did they grow? (wheat, turnips, potatoes, and barley)
3. What are prayer flags for? (to spread prayers to the world in all directions)
4. Who did Dega and her family visit when they rode horses on long trips? (the Seventh Garchen Rinpoche)
5. What happened when the young man Masei Sengey meditated in a cave near Dega's village? (Dega brought him food, and they fell in love)
6. What happened on the roof of Dega's house when she knew a baby was growing in her tummy? (birds from the forest stayed there and would not leave for several days)

DHARMA DISCUSSION – LOVE AND DEVOTION:

***“The Buddha Dharma is love and compassion, and whoever possesses love and compassion upholds the Buddha Dharma.” Garchen Rinpoche, Quote 29***

***“If you love others, you wish for their happiness....Love is the only cause of happiness.” Garchen Rinpoche, Quote 1***

***“Attachment and love can easily be confused. Love means to feel sincere love and a wish for the other's happiness, without any sense of ownership and wish for one's own happiness.” Garchen Rinpoche, Quote 41.***

***“Mogu [Devotion] is when you see the wonderful qualities of your lama and generate a great deal of respect for him or her to such an extent that you will never forget anything the lama teaches you.” Garchen Rinpoche, Quote 78***

***“...depending on devotion one can receive the blessings and qualities of the guru.” Garchen Rinpoche, Quote 65***

***“What does it mean to hold the spiritual teacher dear?...[W]hat we must hold dear are his words or instructions. Holding his words dear means to listen properly and then apply them to one's own mind, put them into practice. First we must understand the teachings, and then we must personally experience what we have learned.” Garchen Rinpoche, Quote 45.***

***“What we call merit is nothing else than love and compassion for sentient beings. If we practice virtue with compassion for all beings, it is called merit.” Garchen Rinpoche, Quote 50***

Dega and her family traveled for a long way to see the Seventh Garchen Rinpoche because of their devotion and love for him.

They liked to make him happy with their offerings, which in turn made them happy when he accepted their offerings.

Sometimes we say that someone is devoted to their temple, or to their favorite activity. Or that a wife is devoted to her husband, or to her baby.

What does “devotion” mean, when people are “devoted” to someone or something?

They give special attention to someone or something they care about, with feeling of love and loyalty.

They may spend a lot of time with whoever or whatever they’re devoted to.

They learn and think a lot about what they are devoted to.

What are some ways that people express their devotion to Buddha? They bow to a Buddha statue, think about his good qualities, make offerings, prayers, come to temple, support the temple, chant mantras, or turn a prayer wheel.

Sometimes we say that we “make merit” by doing these things. By making merit we earn blessings for good luck – for example, health, a peaceful home, and having the things we need - so we are better able to do our Buddhist practices.

How do people show their devotion to a lama?

They visit the lama, bring offerings, provide what he needs, and listen to his teachings.

To have real devotion to the lama, we don’t forget his teachings. And we practice them.

Why is it good to be devoted to a lama? He can teach us, and help us by giving us his blessings. We learn to have the good qualities and virtues that the lama has, like compassion and wisdom.

What if you don’t feel devoted to Buddha or a lama - how can you become more devoted?

We can learn more about his life, be around other people who are devoted, remember the many good things he did, and think about his wonderful qualities, that he makes so many people become more kind and compassionate.

**PRACTICE THIS WEEK:** When you see a statue or picture of Buddha, or a photo of a lama, close your eyes for a moment and think of a good quality about him.

**ACTIVITY (ideas):**

Do a slow, mindful walk around the temple (outside or inside).

Mindfully turn a prayer wheel.

Learn how to do the full prostration.

Learn the offering mudras and mantras.

Make a wrist mala with beads and elastic string.