CHAPTER 8

In Téring Prison

IT WAS ONE of the first days of January 1960, at about six o'clock Beijing time, when our group of east Lhasa people from the Nga-chen work camp prison were loaded into two large trucks with canvas tops and driven away, through the hamlets of Garpa, Shangtap, and Rak, to the Téring (*Phreng ring*) prison. We got there at about ten o'clock that night. The prison was a simple one-story Tibetan-style building. By the electric light bulbs over the cell doors, we could clearly see that each cell had a number and a circular hole in the door, and from the electric bulbs positioned outside each window pointing inward, that each was sealed with iron bars. There were more electric lights on the roof and at the entrance, and fierce-looking guards equipped with machine guns and grenades stood around the perimeter. All else was shrouded in the still darkness of night.

Once we had gotten down from the truck and collected our baggage, there was another roll call, and we and our possessions were thoroughly searched. They didn't take away just the items normally forbidden for prisoners, but even leftover food brought by our relatives that we had been saving and any bits of rope more than a few inches long, from our belts down to the drawstrings of our underwear. Then, with our clothes hanging loose, we were put in cell number 2. This was a Tibetan-style room of six pillars that already contained sixteen prisoners, and with the addition of all the male prisoners from Nga-chen it was extremely crowded. As soon as you came through the door, there was an awful stench of urine and feces from the two large tin chamber pots that were in every cell. Everyone tried their best not to have to stay near those chamber pots, but since I had a leg injury and could barely walk there was no question of my getting a preferable spot, and I had no choice but to sit right next to them. I thought that we would

be relocated the following day, but at that time prisoners were continually being brought to Téring from other prisons, as we had been, so all the cells were as crowded as ours, and I had to sit next to the chamber pots for the next month. However, once we had left Nga-chen power station, we did not have to work at all for a month while we were questioned and given time to reflect on the crimes we had committed during the uprising, and during that time my calf injury gradually healed. And after a few days, I got so used to the stench of urine that I didn't notice it anymore.

The Téring prison was located just beyond the eastern limit of the processional path (*Gling 'khor*) around Lhasa, on the site of the former Téring family house and the house of Samdrup Po-trang the younger, Tendzin Dondrup-la, and their outbuildings. These had been taken over by the Lhasa Public Security office and Public Security prison, which ordinary people referred to as the "Téring prison." There were twenty-five cells in the prison building, but of different sizes, some no more than one pillar and some six pillars in extent. Our cell had six pillars and fifty people crowded into it. Therefore it is hard to say with certainty what the total population was, especially since the time I spent there was during the political campaign called "Reexamination" (*sKyar zhib*), which was going on throughout Tibet, following Democratic Reform, and detainees were continually arriving from all over Lhasa and the surrounding area. In accordance with the superficial exercise of deciding the sentences of those guilty of involvement in the uprising through the "deliberations of the masses," all the prisoners awaiting sentence under the Lhasa municipal government were kept at Téring before being sent on to one of the Reform Through Labor prison camps (*bsGyur bkod kyi rva ba*). So I think there were more inmates at Téring then than at any other time since it had started to be used as a prison.

There were two cells of former government officials in Téring at that time. One held a group sent there from the TMD prison shortly before we arrived, including Khen-chung Késang Ngawang-la, the "Labrang bursar" Khen-chung Tubten Tenpa-la, and Tangpé Puntsok Namgyel-la. In the other cell were Shéling Tsewang Namgyel, the monk officials Lo-tsa Tubten Seng-gé and Tubten Géché, and a group of lamas and senior monks including [Séra-jé] Tsamtrul Rinpoché, the acting chant master of the upper tantric college, [Séra-mé] Chubsang Tulku, and [Séra-jé] Lawa Géshé Jampa Chöpel. Most of the other prisoners were ordinary people. Their crimes were such things as having served as local deputies or household managers or having organized *puja*s at the time of the uprising, but in any case they were mostly political prisoners, and only a very few were petty thieves, vagrants, and the like.

Although most of us were ordinary people, of all the prisons in Lhasa at that time, Téring had the worst conditions and the tightest control. The cell doors were opened only twice a day, morning and evening, for prisoners to be taken to the toilet, and at all other times they had to use the chamber pots in their cells. When they took us to the toilet in the morning and evening, they would not open all the doors at the same time, but one by one. The number of guards was increased and they enforced very strict security. When you went out, you would take your belt, bootstraps, or whatever you had left outside the cell door, since it was not permitted to keep any kind of rope longer than the palm of one's hand, and when you came back in, you would be thoroughly searched once again.

As for the food, when I arrived in January 1960 there were two meals a day, three if you worked. The diet was *tsampa*, and in the evenings we would get either a little boiled cabbage or some black tea in which they had put the acrid-tasting butter residue from the offering lamps in the Tsuklakhang temple, left over since the uprising. Before long, they cut back on the evening serving of cabbage, and the *tsampa* ration dwindled day by day until, by the time I was sent on from there to Drapchi prison, the prisoners' diet consisted of only about 3 ounces (*Srang*) of *tsampa* per day, and once a week or so a very thin gruel, both morning and evening, that may not even have been cooked. It was the color of tea tainted with verdigris, no different from the water we squeezed out of our dirty clothes, but it didn't even taste as good as copper-boiled tea, because the leftover lamp butter residue made it look and taste nauseating. The verdigris from a copper pot that has not been lined with white soda is said to be poisonous; it is very damaging to the stomach and the liver, and many of the prisoners who had spent a long time in Téring had stomach and liver ailments, but medical treatment for them was rarer than gold.

In the six months I spent there, I never saw any of my fellow prisoners being given medical care. An old cook from Drépung right next to me died of dysentery, but for a long time beforehand no one came to give him even a single dose of medicine. As prisoners were not usually given water for washing their hands and faces, there was no way to get water for washing clothes, and since they didn't provide us with prison uniforms and we were not allowed to receive fresh clothes from our relatives outside, the most abundant thing in that prison was fleas and lice. Due to the miserable diet and lack of medical attention, a great number of people suffered from lice infestation (*Shig nad*). There were even several incidents of people having lice come out of their insides.

While we were confined under these miserable conditions, the sentencing of prisoners was going on, supposedly by "the deliberations and decisions of the people," which was a way for the authorities to do their dirty work in the name of the people. Many prisoners were sentenced to fifteen, eighteen, twenty years for offenses lesser than my own, and the words I had heard after being picked out of the TMD prison about being released after a period of labor at Nga-chen vanished into thin air. My stay in Téring prison was the start of living on the edge of death from starvation, hardship, and fear, and all I could hope for was to be sentenced soon, be it light or heavy, so that I could be moved to another prison and at least get something to eat.

Fortunately, as we were sent on to a Reform Through Labor prison after sentencing, we did not have to spend a great length of time there. We had no particular daily work to do; sometimes we were given hard and dangerous jobs, but this might give us a chance to meet our relatives, and sometimes we stayed inside, to reflect on our crimes or study the *Tibet Daily* and other Communist literature. At that time, the three officials in charge of the prisoners were Norbu Dorjé, a former servant of Yabshi Taktsér from Drongtsé in Tsang; Yéshé Tenpa, son of a housekeeper from Lho-ka; and a woman called Purbu Drölma. Every day they opened and closed the doors when we were taken to the toilet or for work or at mealtimes. The names of the prisoners required for questioning were given to them, and it was their job to fetch them, but apart from dealing with those who broke the prison regulations, they had no authority to question prisoners about their crimes.

I will describe one of the incidents I remember most clearly from the six months I had to spend at Téring: the first work I had to do after arriving was at a big canal construction site north of Lhasa, near Drapchi Lingka, where all the Téring prisoners were sent to work for a few days. One day, nine of us healthier-looking prisoners were sent on a work assignment to an army camp occupying the former residence of Amdo Lekshé near Lingka Sarpa on the eastern edge of Lhasa. From there we were sent, pulling three mule carts, three of us for each, to the Drip valley on the other side of the river to collect clay (*Ar ka*) for building, accompanied by two guards. There were several clay pits on the mountainside, but it was a steep climb up to the one with the best quality Arka. There was already a truck there filling up, but since it couldn't get close to the pit, it stayed on the road and ten or so workers were carrying clay down from the pit to the truck in baskets. Our two guards instructed us to take clay from that pit, but since the space at the site was limited, we had to wait until the truck was full before we could

start, and it seemed that we would not get back to Téring in time for the midday meal.

This made the guards nervous, and once the truck had gone, instead of leaving our carts on the main road, they had us push them right up to the pit. Then they told us to be quick about removing the clay and loading up the carts, so that we could get back. One of my two fellow cart pullers, who I think was called Chöpel, had been detained along with other religious people at the Tsukla-khang temple after the suppression of the uprising, and later imprisoned for refusing to denounce Trijang Rinpoché [one of His Holiness's tutors]. He was young and got along easily with his fellows, taking hardships on himself and leaving easier things for others, like a true monk. The other one was a former Tibetan soldier called Pa-wang. We decided that to get the cart back down the hill, I should go in the middle, since it was easier to steer with a taller person in the middle, while Pa-wang held the shaft down. Although smaller in stature, Gen Chöpel was very strong, and he pulled on a rope attached to the back of the cart to keep it from rolling downhill too fast.

We were the first cart to go back down the hill, because we had been the first to load up, and although the two guards shouted at us to hurry up, it was a dangerous enterprise. As prisoners, the only thing we could do was to make prayers to the Three Jewels, so ignoring the guards' coercion, I said a few Refuge and (*dMigs brtse ma*) prayers to Jé Rinpoché in a quiet voice while pretending to fasten my belt and shoelaces, and Gen Chöpel uttered the invocation of Mahakala. Then we carefully started to roll the cart. After about twenty-odd paces the cart broke loose; Gen Chöpel yelled at us to hold it from our end, but the two of us were powerless to stop it. Then Gen Chöpel's restraining rope snapped and the cart hurtled downhill uncontrollably; my companion Pa-wang and I were forced to run as fast as we could, thinking that the moment of death had come, almost up to the road. If we kept going once we hit the road, we would fall into a deep ravine on the far side, with no hope of survival. I called out to Pa-wang to let go of the shaft and get out, and not for his sake alone, because unless we were agreed on which way to turn the cart away from the edge, we would plunge straight into the abyss. As I called out, Pa-wang pulled off the rope around his shoulder and released the shaft, and had gotten free of the cart just as it hit the side of the road. I tried to turn the cart back toward Drip with my own strength, adopting the pose of a weight lifter, but at the same moment, the two cart shafts were wrenched uncontrollably out of my hands, and I lost consciousness. When I awoke, I had been thrown to one side of the

road, and the cart was lying perfectly overturned by the boundary wall of the army camp on the left side. Once our serious accident confirmed the danger, the people pulling the two carts behind us started to come down, saying, "The same thing will surely happen to us," but the guards ordered them to go ahead and roll the other two carts down.

We had no way to refuse, but we could find a better method with the lessons of experience, so we tried to bring the next two carts down using all nine of us, most people pulling on ropes from behind and two on each side holding down the shafts, edging backward down the slope as carefully as possible, and in this way we got one of the carts safely down. But when the second one rolled onto the steep part it broke out of control; some ropes snapped, others were jerked away, the force was too great for the two holding down the cart shafts, and as it approached the road, the poles struck the ground and the team member in the middle of the cart, another Tibetan soldier and a friend of Pa-wang, was killed. He was not able to free himself from the harness of the cart and was crushed under it; they said his back and neck vertebrae were crumpled. Some also said that it was a daggerlike piece of wood on the cart shaft that had stuck in the ground [that killed him]. I was one of those pulling the cart from behind, and whether because of the strain or because of my accident, I was feeling stiff and numb, and when the cart lurched forward, forcing the rope out of my hands, it pulled me down so hard I tore my shoes and trousers.

Pa-wang and the dead man had known each other since childhood, and during the uprising and thereafter as prisoners they had made a pledge to live or die together that had helped them survive. Pa-wang took the body in his arms and let out a full-throated wail, which was echoed by the mountains surrounding that rocky gully, as if adding their voices to his lamentation. The rest of us also felt wretched, but other than embracing Pa-wang and consoling him, there was nothing we could do. The two guards paid less attention to the dead man than they would have to a dead dog and, vexed at being late for lunch, ordered us to pick up the two full carts, put the corpse in the one that had overturned, and head back immediately. We returned hurriedly, as we had been told. That morning, we had come singing a cart-pulling song all together. We sang not as a sign of our happiness but to take our minds off the work, and also to signal that we were coming, since when we were sent to work outside, ordinary city people frequently came forward to offer us small gifts, like tobacco or snuff. But on the way back that day, hanging their heads and with tears in their eyes, the workers were a sorry sight.

I was thinking that although there would be no special team to investigate the causes of this incident, as there had been for the landslide deaths at Nga-chen power station, if there could be, and if I were to be asked about the causes [as I had been then], I would give a forthright explanation of how the situation had arisen after the guards, thinking greedily of their midday meal, had gotten us to pull the carts right up to a clay pit on a precipice that was too steep, and so on. But on our return to Téring, we were put back in our respective cells as usual, there was no inquiry into the causes, and we didn't even find out how they disposed of the dead body. The two guards were completely unaffected and accompanied us on work duty just as before, which shows how little value was put on prisoners' lives in those days.

Another time, a group of us were sent to work at a place southwest of the city near the river, formerly a park used by ordinary monk officials and now an army camp, where "Guest House 1" was being constructed. Our job was to uproot the old willow trees around the new guest house, which were to be distributed to various Chinese offices in the city, including Téring prison, for firewood. Generally when we were sent to work for other departments, they would give us a little of their tea at lunchtime, but some of them required us to return to the prison at midday. Since in this case we were doing the prison's own work, we had to bring our own lunch, and I was sent together with a guard to fetch it. That was a moment of unforgettable hardship. It was more than a mile from the prison back to the camp, and I had to carry two metal urns of tea using a shoulder pole, as the Chinese do, and a cotton bag containing about 15 pounds (*rGya ma*) of *tsampa* for the prisoners as well as food for the officials and guards, all by myself. It seemed like the kind of load I could have carried on my back Tibetan-style without too much difficulty, but carrying a shoulder pole is something one really has to get used to, and even a very strong person will have great difficulty to begin with. By that time I had been put to many different kinds of labor but had not yet carried a shoulder pole, and after going for thirty or forty paces out of the prison gate, I had to stop for rest every four or five paces. Because I didn't know the correct way to walk with a shoulder pole, I jolted the urns of tea and spilled much of it. At first, the Chinese guard "shook his fists and stamped his feet" at me and cursed me for it, but no matter how fiercely he shouted, my staggering got worse and worse, until he became enraged and kicked me and beat me with the butt of his rifle. But just as no amount of beating can get a tired donkey to move, I lay there by the side of the main road. The Tibetan passersby on the road couldn't bear

to see what was happening and called out to the guard asking him not to beat me, but he paid no attention and carried on. That main road ran along the Ling-khor [processional circuit] on the south side of Lhasa, so there were a few old folks walking the circuit, and they cried out from a distance, "That bloody Chinese has killed one of our people," but they couldn't approach any closer. Finally, the guard was obliged to carry the cotton bag of *tsampa* and the officials' food himself. Then I only had to carry the two tea urns, and since most of the tea had been spilled they were very light, and I was just about able to get them to the work site. By the time I got there it was two hours later than the regular eating time, and both the officials and the prisoners were feeling hungry and resentful toward me. But when they saw that I had been made to do something I could not, that my face was soaked in sweat, blood was running from my mouth, and I showed other signs of intense suffering, they sympathized and consoled me, and no one complained about having to wait for his food.

One time when they called out the prisoners in our "cell 2" for work as usual, they brought out us younger ones, and as we took our belts and bootstraps from the door and got ready to go, the prison official Norbu Dorjé told us to gather together first, as he had something to explain. "Today you will not be working with stone and earth as usual," he told us, "but sorting through valuable objects. Now, recently some people from another prison were caught pinching things while doing this work, and they were expelled and are now here in Téring prison. Therefore you all have to be alert. The group leaders (*Tsu'u krang*) will have the responsibility of seeing that no one takes even the smallest thing for himself, but you should all keep an eye on each other and report any incident of this kind at once."

We were handed over to another group of officials carrying guns, and they led us through the city and into the Sha-tra house on the south side of the Parkor, which had been occupied by the offices of the Finance Bureau. The job was to sort through the possessions of noble Lhasa families who had participated in the uprising, which had been seized by the state during Democratic Reform and collected and stored there. One of the officials told us again, "Some of the Drapchi prisoners who came to work here tried to switch the fine clothes and things with poor ones, and some of them hid things. So now it's your turn."

Most of the stuff we had to sort through were the ceremonial costumes worn by lay officials according to their rank (*rGya lu chas, Khal kha gzugs*) and the ceremonial robes worn by monk officials (*rDa gog rtse, 'Phyar gru 'phyar stod*). Then there were gowns made of different kinds of silk brocade

with dragon designs (*rGyan bzhi* and *mDzod gos*), army officers' uniforms in serge and homespun wool, and everyday clothing of excellent quality made of serge and different types of woolen broadcloth (*'Go snam, sPu phrug*). We had to sort them and put them in storage trunks arranged by category. Meanwhile, prisoners at Téring were not given a single thread of clothing, nor were we allowed to receive any from our relatives, and some people who had no relatives around Lhasa were dressed in nothing more than rags, so as well as being obviously short of food we also had desperate need of clothes. In the three days that we spent putting them in order, because of the way we had been threatened, all we could do was imagine how well these clothes would fit us and remark on how lovely the gowns looked, how warm the jackets, how soft the pants, or how comfortable the boots as we handled them.

On the third day, Jampa Tendzin-la of Reteng Labrang and I were taken by an official to clean up one of the Sha-tra family's apartments. There were precious medicines and blessing pills there that an official emptied into a metal pot and told us to throw into the toilet. Not wanting to comply at once, my companion delayed by pretending to clean up another mess before moving on to the next job, then after we had moved on, he told me, "Those are pills blessed by Tromo Géshé Rinpoché and precious pills made in the time of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, which we could scarcely have gotten hold of as free men, and now as prisoners, whatever mortal dangers we may face, or if we die before being released, there is no one to put a precious pill in our mouths at the moment of death." He told me many things about the background of those medicines and blessing pills, as a way of encouraging me to hide a few of them away, but at the time I did not get his point. I had kept a package of priceless sacred blessing pills from the things left behind by my uncle, and managed to conceal it despite all the many searches I had undergone at the TMD prison, the Nga-chen work camp prison, and especially at Téring prison by hiding it at the head of my bed, until the prison official Purbu Drölma made a thorough search of our mattresses and bedding one day while were out at work, found it, and threw the whole thing in the chamber pot. In my disappointment at not being able to use these precious pills that I had taken the risk of keeping with me, and not having found any other way of hiding such things, after thinking carefully, I resolved to swallow one or two of them there and then. We didn't discuss [our plans] openly, but we gave each other the opportunity, as I went out on the pretext of going to the toilet, and then Jampa did the same. After he had gone out, I took three of the cloth-wrapped pills from the metal pot, without being able to tell which was which. That was at about five o'clock Beijing time, and about fifteen

minutes later, I had the feeling of my nerves stiffening and felt worse and worse until my whole body became numb and my legs would no longer hold me up, and I slumped over right there. At that point, we were the responsibility of the Finance Bureau officials who had brought us there, and they started talking about taking me to the hospital. I was afraid that if they did they would find out that I had eaten the pills, but I also feared that my health might be endangered if I stayed where I was. While it was clear to my companion, Jampa, that I had suddenly become ill from the pills, he couldn't ask me about it, and the official who had given us the medicines and pills to throw away obviously became suspicious that I had eaten some of it, but he couldn't actually accuse me because he himself would be suspected of failing to properly supervise us. By this time, the other prisoners had finished their work and gathered around, asking many questions about what had happened. I couldn't tell them that my condition was self-inflicted, and as I didn't know what to say, their questions were most unwanted. Then, to prevent one member bringing disgrace on the group, two of them took turns carrying me on their backs while the others huddled around us now and then, and in that way we got back to Téring prison. That evening I couldn't even drink the thin gruel we were given and became nauseated; my stomach churned and I began to vomit and have diarrhea by turns until sometime after midnight, when I finally fell asleep. When I woke up in the morning with aching eyes and emaciated flesh, my fellow prisoners told me I looked like I had been seriously ill for months, and I was obliged to stop working for a few days.

However, not only did I come to no harm, in the long run I came to believe that those pills had strengthened my body a good deal. As I have already said, the diet and especially the containers we had to use for food affected most people's health very seriously, but during my four years in prison I managed with whatever [food] I was given, whether hot or cold, wet or dry, old or new, and underwent conditions of great deprivation without becoming seriously ill, except for the occasional cold. After I had recovered, my friend Jampa Tendzin-la asked me about what pills I had actually taken. "Following your kind lengthy explanation of the excellent qualities of those pills," I replied, "I ate three of them, which proved excessive."

"I only suggested hiding one or two of them away," he told me. "I didn't think you were going to do something so stupid. For people in such poor physical condition as us, it is impossible to digest more than half a pill," and he showed me the few he had secreted. This is something that still makes me laugh, and remember how not to act.

At that time, when we were taken out to work for other departments, we were under the supervision of Tibetan guards, and they discreetly allowed us to meet our relatives and even receive food and clothing from them. I met with my brothers and sisters on several such occasions. I would always ask how Mother was, and they told me she was fine. My dearest hope at that time was to see my mother, just for a moment. One time, three prisoners including myself were employed pulling horse carts full of river pebbles from the Mön-drong bridge area to the place used as a pigsty by the Téring prison office. On the way, we passed near my house, and the guard who came with us was the traffic policeman called Tsöndru-la. We prisoners used to call him Lama, because when accompanying prisoners to work he would always discreetly allow them to meet their relatives and permit gifts of food, tobacco, snuff, and so on to be given to those who had no relatives whenever they were offered. He oversaw our work in a very tolerant way and warned us when there were dangers to watch out for. What the prisoners liked most was that he always said that the prisoners should not get injured. "Once you are injured," he used to say, "your life is over." He had worked as a construction supervisor when the first [Tibetan] monastery was built in Bodh Gaya, and was said to speak Hindi quite well. That day, it seemed that I had the optimal conditions to meet my mother, and as we were on our way, as soon as I saw the daughter of one of our neighbors, I asked Tsöndru-la for permission to send a message to my family, to which he agreed. I told the girl that today was the best opportunity for me to see my family members, and that she should by all means inform them that I was at work in the neighborhood. It took no more than five minutes to reach the place where we were working from my house, but after we had twice filled our carts, none of my relatives had come. Then one of our neighbors, an old Khampa lady we called Jomo, came carrying something wrapped up in her apron. I didn't suppose that it was me she had come for, and wondered if she was an acquaintance or relative of my two workmates. Tsöndru-la asked her, "Grandma, who have you come to see?" and moving toward me, she replied, "I have come for the son of the Gyatso Tashi house." At once I asked her, "Are my family not there?"

"I don't know if they are there or not," said old Jomo, "but as soon as I heard that you were working nearby I came to give you a little something," and saying nothing more about my family, she brought out the kettle of black tea she had in her apron and some plain *tsampa* dough in an enamel dish. As we sat in a corner drinking the tea and eating the *tsampa*, Ama Trinlé-la, the wife of a carpenter who lived in our neighborhood, also came

carrying a bag of food. She too had come to see me. I asked her right away if my family members were still not back, and handing me a leather bag full of delicious *tsampa* dough and a small cotton bag of molasses, she said, "None of your family members are at home, and since I couldn't bear to see you disappointed, I came myself." In consternation, I thought that my brothers and sisters could not all have gone to work if my mother was lying ill at home, and therefore, since she had been one of the main organizers of the Women's Association and in danger of arrest and imprisonment, I began to fear that she could have been imprisoned.

Then, as we were on our way back to Téring, my younger sister Tendröl caught up with me, all out of breath. I asked her immediately, "Where is Mother?" but without answering, she hung her head, large teardrops falling on her knees, as she undid something she had for me wrapped in cotton. Realizing that something was wrong, I held my sister firmly and shook her a few times. "What has really happened to Mother?" I insisted.

"Mother died a few months ago," she said through her tears, "and we arranged whatever rituals we could for her at that time." When I heard that my mother was dead, sound reverberated in my ears and tears blurred my vision. Not only was I unable to speak, in my anxiety it seemed that my chest was so full that I could not even draw breath. My younger sister held my hand tightly, and said only "Mercy!" Trying to console me, my companions told me, "It's not only you; this has happened to so many people like us. Our sadnesses are the same. If we die in prison, we well know that there will be no one there even to give us a glass of water, so we have to be brave and look after ourselves."

The place where we met was behind the boundary wall of what is now known as the East Lhasa School. Normally when prisoners met their relatives many people would come to watch, and since my meeting with my sister seemed to be an event out of the ordinary, within moments quite a few people had gathered around some distance away and were watching us. Most of them had tears in their eyes and were evidently sympathetic. This scared Tsöndru-la and he said at once to my sister, "If you have given him what you had to give, you had better go back home. If the prison comes to know about an incident like this, I too will have to face an inquiry." And to me he said, "Hide away the food you have been given, we have to go straight back to the prison for the midday meal," and I picked up the cart and walked off.

When we reached the destination of our loads, the prisoners working at the pigsty had already left for the midday break. We stopped there for a moment, and Tsöndru-la instructed me to hide carefully the food I was

carrying, dry my eyes, and act as normal. Usually when I happened to receive gifts from my relatives while out at work, I would find very ingenious ways of concealing them, but that day it was as if my life force had left me and I couldn't focus on anything, so my companions rolled up the remaining dough very thin inside a length of cotton and wrapped it around my waist, put some of the molasses and things in the inner lining of the big back pad I was wearing, and hid the rest about themselves, and off we went. When we reached the gate, the official Yéshé Tenpa briefly searched us and found nothing, and we got safely back to cell 2.

The joy and strong hope I'd had that morning about going outside for work, and going with a good guard, had turned instantly into despair and unfathomable misery, and now I felt as if I didn't have as much as a sesame seed left to live for. *Whenever I die, it will be without remorse*, I thought. As soon as the other prisoners saw my depressed demeanor, they asked what kind of calamity had occurred. After my two work companions whispered to them an explanation of what had happened that day, everyone sympathized, and especially the virtuous ones [among us] gave me a lot of commiseration and encouragement. That was one of the most depressing and miserable times in my life.

Then one evening, after the meal was over and it was time for us to read the *Tibet Daily* newspaper, the prison official Yéshé Tenpa unlocked the door of our cell and told our group leader to make space for three more people, and Norbu Dorjé came in leading three monks. It had been more than a year since we had seen monks, and for us to suddenly encounter people in robes was delightful and astounding. I guessed the elder monk was about forty; he was emaciated and had a sallow complexion; he spoke softly and his gaze fell on the tip of his nose with gentle grace. He was wearing a battered old yellow cap of the kind worn by hermits in retreat. The other two were also of gentle disposition and from their respectful service to the elder, it was clear that they were his dutiful disciples. Our group leader didn't put them together but wherever there was a space, and the youngest monk was put in a space in front of me.

I had a strong inclination to chat with them and ask where they were from, but prisoners were never supposed to ask each other more than their names, and it was forbidden to discuss how they had gotten there, so one had to find the right opportunity. I asked the youngest monk his name; it was Losang Chöden. He spoke in a strong Khampa dialect and from the way he wore his robes, one could tell he was from either Drépung or Séra. At that time our daily work was sometimes breaking up charcoal into little

pieces for the stove in the guards' quarters, and sometimes cleaning up the area. When we went for work as usual the next morning, Norbu Dorjé said that the elder monk did not have to go, and I imagined he would be under tight control. The younger two came to work with us, and doing my best to find the chance to question either of them during work time, I found myself hauling water by shoulder pole together with the youngest one.

"Where have you all come from?" I asked him.

"We were sent here from the prison in Chu-shul Dzong," he replied.

"Which monastery or hermitage are you from?"

"I am a Drépung monk."

"Are the three of you a teacher and his disciples?"

"We younger two are brothers."

"So who is the elder?"

"Our scripture teacher."

"He certainly seems to have the qualities of a senior scholar (*dGe bshes*)."

"He is taking the (*dGe bshes*) degree."

"What's his name?"

"Ngawang Puntsok."

"Which college and house do you belong to?"

"Loséling college. We two are from Pomra house (*sPom ra khang tshan*) and the elder one is from Pu-khang (*Phu khang khang tshan*)."

"One of my elder brothers studies scripture at Drépung Loséling. His name is Yéshé Khédrup. He disappeared during the uprising."

"I know Yéshé Khédrup," he exclaimed, "he is in all our scripture classes," and with that he became more relaxed and started to speak more easily. "That elder teacher is also known as Pu-khang Gen Lam-rim. At the time of the uprising, we fled from Drépung and took refuge at the Longdöl hermitage in Nyétang for a while, but after a few months, the villagers living nearby came to know about it, and the local work team (*Sa gnas las don ru khag*) came there to arrest us. The name of our precious teacher is Lam-rimpa."

As soon as I heard that, I had an indescribable sensation of joy and sorrow arising together. This was because I had often heard Yéshé Khédrup mention Gen Rinpoché's name and the great qualities of his body, speech, and mind, and I really wanted to meet him. But I had never imagined the sudden changes ahead, and to be able to meet him now, as if through the power of karma, at a time when we were under such close control that we were not even free to go to the toilet when we wished, seemed to me extremely fortunate. However, under these terrible conditions, it was not permitted for me to offer him greetings or salutations, and what was worse,

religion was considered to be poison and the guards were hostile to monks and lamas. From the fact that Gen Rinpoché had not been allowed to come to work, it seemed that they regarded his case as serious, and I guessed that he was in for no end of hardship.

Norbu Dorjé, the official who had announced that he was not to go to work, was very cruel and would beat the prisoners for any small thing without asking questions first, even though they had not broken any prison regulation. One time when another prisoner and I were on the way to work we had a small quarrel, and without bothering to ask who had started it, he beat me "until I cried for my mother." However, quite unimaginably, it turned out that he was preventing Gen Rinpoché from going to work not because of the seriousness of Gen Rinpoché's supposed crimes or any particular malice toward him; rather, he was using his power to spare Gen Rinpoché the hardship of physical labor.

At that time, the prisoners were given a gruel for their evening meal that sometimes contained the skin, blood, and offal from the sheep and goats slaughtered for the officials. Gen Rinpoché hadn't eaten meat for years and took nothing more than *tsampa* and boiled water. When they served gruel both morning and evening not just for one or two days at a time, but sometimes for a week or more, he went without food. This ability was plainly evident to all those who shared a cell with him, and it may be that when Norbu Dorjé found out about it he was impressed, but in any case, after that, when gruel was served, the cooks were given orders to provide hot water especially for Gen Rinpoché. Basically, the qualities of Gen Rinpoché's body, speech, and mind were beyond ordinary comprehension; he was naturally gentle and serene, maintained the seven-point meditation posture of Vairocana both day and night, and whichever way you looked at it, he was a saint among us Tibetans who had grown up in our traditional Tibetan society. You could not meet him without being amazed and developing some faith in him. Thus Norbu Dorjé had taken it on himself to protect Gen Rinpoché within the limits of his power, and my resentment at having been beaten by him vanished as a result.

As I was looking for an opportunity to talk to Gen Rinpoché, it happened that one day many of the prisoners in our cell were sentenced and sent off to Drapchi prison, and as there were very few of us left, we got the chance to talk together. When I first asked after Gen Rinpoché's health, he said that he didn't care even one sesame seed for his own well-being but was anguished over the destruction of Buddhism. "We are no more [important] than worms in the ground," he told me. "What matters is that the

Lord's teachings have come to such an end and the noble beings who are the guardians of the teachings have lost their places of residence and had to take on intolerable hardship. For myself, I cannot fret about having been imprisoned. If one is ready to purify the negative karma and obscuration that one has accumulated over many lives, it will ultimately be beneficial."

After delivering this counsel, he asked me, "Where are you actually from? I seem to have seen you before," and after asking me all about myself and my family, he was very pleased. From then on he gave me much invaluable advice when there were incidental opportunities, and without regard for the danger and effort involved, he even wrote out a complete summary of the Lam-rim [gradual path] teaching for me on my prison charge sheet and gave me oral instructions on each point as he did so. He told me to do a recitation every day, and to do the practice whenever I got the chance. I memorized it with great determination and made every effort to find opportunities to continue receiving his commentary. Since Gen Rinpoché did not have to go to work, I would fake illness in order not to have to work either, and then request his teaching, but it wasn't long before I was sentenced and sent on to Drapchi, and it was a great disappointment not to hear the last part of his commentary. Nonetheless, it seemed to me that meeting this real yogi and spiritual guide, whom I had long since heard about and been determined to meet, under such terrible conditions was the result of previously accumulated good karma.

Also, one evening at around that time, Ka-ché Gonam Marma, a man of Kashmiri descent who had formerly had a room in the Tsarong house, was brought into our cell in leg irons. It is customary for Muslims to wash their hands and faces and their clothes very often, and with the smell in that prison of many people deprived of cleanliness and sanitation, the lack of ventilation, and especially the stench of the chamber pots in each cell, he covered his nose with his chained hands as soon as he came through the door, sweating and struggling to draw breath, and looked as if he was about to pass out. Most of the prisoners in the cell were village people who had never seen someone like him with a hairy face, yellow eyes, and a big nose and did not respond to him, and since he had been brought with only the clothes he was wearing and no mattress or bedding, I responded by spreading out my own bedding and making a place for him to sleep. The next morning, when he saw the prison meal of coppery black tea and a small amount of coarse, lumpy *tsampa*, his misery worsened, and he said that he should be put in a clean cell and [be allowed to] bring food from his own home. "Please ask the officials," he requested, not realizing that there is no provision for such

requests in Chinese prisons. For a few days, he didn't take the food and went hungry, but when the prison officials showed no interest whatsoever, he was obliged to eat something, and gradually he got used to the smell.

However, he was questioned repeatedly, and unlike the other prisoners, he was taken for questioning only at night. He was very scared, and each time he was questioned, he got upset, wept, and couldn't sleep. Unlike with the other prisoners, the circumstances of his arrest were very secret, and I wondered whether the Chinese suspected him of having links with foreign countries, because from talking with him it emerged that he had visited many countries in the world, had extensive contacts in [Tibetan] society, and had formerly associated with senior officials of the [Tibetan] government. He was a devout follower of his religion and he solemnly pledged that religious principles could not be abandoned for the sake of one's present life. But his debilitating fear during questioning and inability to control his aversion to the prison food and surroundings were quite pathetic. The two men in my cell with whom I associated, the Buddhist Gen Lam-rimpa of Drépung Pu-khang and this devotee of Islam, believed in and practiced different traditions, and it is not for one of lesser abilities like myself to judge the capacities of different individuals, but I saw in them the difference between great and small minds when faced with adversity.

Once the Chinese had finished questioning him, Marma became a little more relaxed and told many interesting stories from both earlier and more recent times, especially how he had been in China as a trade agent for the Reteng Labrang during the war against Japanese occupation. When the war intensified, the Tibetan government emissaries could no longer stay in China, and on the way back to Tibet, Japanese soldiers were stopping trains and searching the passengers' baggage in every station. He dressed in the costume of a native of Turkey, a country that had been allied with Germany in the [first] world war, and this exempted the Tibetan delegation from being searched. Since he had had strong connections with the great noble families and had often met with them, he spoke of many internal government affairs that had not been public knowledge. Most of all, in confirmation of the Lhasa saying, "Don't look at a Kashmiri's mouth, look at what he eats," and the idea that Kashmiri Muslims are expert in the art of preparing food and eat extremely well, he talked about the preparation, nutritional value, taste, and way of eating different foods, making his listeners' mouths water. During that time I experienced for myself what is called "food for the mind," the power of stories to substitute for physical sustenance.

Since his hands were chained for a long time, I did whatever I could to help him, to change his clothes when he had lice, to eat his food, or to arrange his bedding in the mornings and evenings, and because the two of us were the only people from Lhasa in our cell, he was very fond of me. He always used to say that if we were released, he would prepare a fine Kashmiri feast for me. He was still in Téring prison at the time I was sentenced and sent on to Drapchi, but later I heard that he was among the prisoners of foreign origin who were expelled from the country in accordance with international law, and he went abroad.

I was taken two or three times for questioning about my case by a Chinese woman official of the Higher People's Court whose family name was Wang and her translator, Yéshé Drölma from Kham Ba-tang. I had already given an account of my crimes many times while in the TMD prison and when I arrived at Téring, in written statements and before the subcommittee meetings as well as to the special investigators, and once they were satisfied that I had nothing new to say, it wasn't long before officials of the Higher People's Court and the Military Control Commission came to Téring prison, in June 1960, to take me and four others—Puntsok Wangdü, a coppersmith from Tsédong; the secretary of the Banak-shöl Tsatrul-tsang house; Aku Késang, a relative of the Lamo house; and Chimé, an officer (*lDing dpon*) of the bodyguard regiment—to be sentenced. In the beginning, prisoners had been taken with their hands chained before big public meetings where they had to stand for a long time with their heads bowed while the formal statements of their sentences were read out, but we were simply taken to one side of the prison, where three officials read out the formal statements of our sentences. I was sentenced to four years in prison with two years' deprivation of political rights, and none of the others received less. With the terrible conditions in that prison, I thought desperately that if I had to stay there for four whole years I would not survive to see my release. Each of us received similar [short] sentences, but we had to serve them [in prisons where] there was no provision for maintenance and the inmates were physically exhausted by the time their sentences had been served. As soon as we had our tea the next morning, the five of us were ordered to proceed to the Reform Through Labor prison.