

TIBETAN BUDDHISM:

Shartse College of Ganden Monastery

Umze (chant master)
Ven. Lobsang Tenzin

- 1 Choe khyong Setab pai torbul kagyama
(*The Sealed-for-Secrecy Torma Offering to the
Dharma Protector Setab*) a cappella (26:06)
- 2 Kabsumpa
(*The Three Occasions, tribute to Buddha by Tsongkhapa*)
a cappella (9:02)
- 3 Jigje kyi dagjug chenmo
(*The Grand Self-Empowerment of Yamantaka,*
opening section) with ritual orchestra (31:10)

Recorded by David Lewiston at Shartse Dratsang, Ganden Monastery,
Mundgod, Karnataka, South India, February 1987.

Total Time: 66:32

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The Gelug Order (the Reformed School of Tibetan Buddhism, of which the Dalai Lama is the most prominent member) is celebrated for its great colleges, which date back to the fifteenth century foundation of the Order by the teacher Tsongkhapa (1357-1419) and his disciples. These institutions of advanced religious studies have distinctive vocal styles, so rich in harmonics that unison singing in the bass and tenor registers gives the impression of voices singing high in the treble register.

The rites of one of these institutions, Gyutö Tantric College, are now well-known in the West, but there are several others with equally beautiful and powerful chanting styles. One such is Shartse Dratsang, a college of Ganden Monastery, situated 30 miles north of Lhasa, which was founded by Tsongkhapa early in the fifteenth century.

Before discussing the rituals of Shartse Dratsang presented in this recording, it may be helpful to put them into context.

Tsongkhapa makes a good starting point, since he played a pivotal role in the history of Tibetan Buddhism. It is said that during the lifetime of Gautama Buddha, a previous incarnation of Tsongkhapa was a young boy of Brahmin caste. This boy met the Buddha and gave him a crystal rosary, receiving in return a conch shell (which symbolizes "proclaiming the sound of the dharma").

The Buddha declared to his disciple

Ananda that the boy would be reborn in the Snow Land (Tibet), would found a great monastery between the areas of Dri and Den, would present a crown to the statue of the Buddha in Lhasa, and would be instrumental in the flourishing of the doctrine in Tibet. The Buddha named the coming incarnation Sumati Kirti, or, in Tibetan, Losang Dragpa. All of these predictions came to pass.

His family lived in the Tsongkha region of Amdo Province, eastern Tibet, hence the name Tsongkhapa. His birth in the Year of the Bird, 1357, was attended by many auspicious signs. As a child, he was exceptionally precocious, beginning tantric practice even before he had received ordination as a novice at the age of seven, when he received the name Losang Dragpa. He quickly became an outstanding practitioner of dharma and soon was celebrated as a teacher throughout central Tibet.

In the following decades, he constantly moved from place to place, instructing disciples and seeking out the various lineages of the Buddha's teachings. By 1409, when he was 52, his wandering lifestyle had taken a heavy toll of his health; his disciples asked him to settle down, and they offered to build a monastery for him. He prayed in front of the Shakyamuni statue in Lhasa Cathedral and examined his dreams; he concluded that such a monastery should indeed be built, and chose Nomad Mountain (Drogri) as the site—the

very spot cited in the Buddha's prophecy.

During construction, the conch shell that the Buddha had given the Brahmin boy more than eighteen centuries before was unearthed from the hillside; until 1959, it could still be seen in Drepung, the largest monastery in Tibet. According to legend, it was magically embedded in the hill by Sariputra, another disciple of the Buddha. The monastery was built with remarkable speed, the main temple and over seventy other buildings being completed within a year. Tsongkhapa named the monastery Ganden (in Sanskrit, Tushita) the abode of Maitreya.

Visions and miraculous events abounded in Tsongkhapa's presence. Two typical examples: During a retreat in the mountains near Nyällo Ro, several disciples had a vision of him as Manjushri (the bodhisattva embodying the Buddha's wisdom, with whom Tsongkhapa had a great affinity) surrounded by a concourse of other bodhisattvas, mahasiddhas, and great scholars; at Ganden, as artists and sculptors were making a large Buddha statue and some three-dimensional mandalas, radiant symbols of the deities came out of the molds surrounded by rainbow light.

In the Year of the Hog, 1419, Tsongkhapa prepared for his death. On the morning of the twenty-fifth day of the tenth month, sitting in full lotus posture, he meditated on emptiness, and then at dawn made a series of inner offerings.

His breathing ceased, and his body took on the vibrant appearance of the sixteen-year-old Manjushri, emitting multicolored rays of light.

Tsongkhapa combined many qualities—a burning interest in learning Buddhist traditions and teachings, a natural affinity for meditation, a truly prodigious intellectual capacity for explaining these matters, and a poetic gift which is manifested in his prayers, which are still popular today.

"Kabsumpa" ("The Three Occasions"), the second piece in this program, is a typical prayer of Tsongkhapa's. Its title is an allusion to the Buddha as the knower of the three times—past, present, and future. In poetic language, Tsongkhapa praises the Buddha for his great efforts in becoming the Buddha and creating the dharma, the Buddha's successors who became the patriarchs of Buddhism, the bodhisattvas Maitreya and Manjushri for their deeds of wisdom and compassion, and the pioneers of Buddhism in India who spread the tradition there and kept it alive before it came to Tibet; finally, he praises the masters who brought dharma to Tibet through many trials and tribulations.

Gyatso Tsering, director of the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives in Dharamsala, sums up Tsongkhapa's legacy in these words: "His studies and practice explored the full range of Hinayana,

Mahayana and Vajrayana doctrines as found in all the schools of Buddhism then extant in the land of Snow Mountains. Studying with almost four dozen masters from all traditions of Tibetan Buddhism, the order established by him was in fact the first attempt at combining all Buddhist lineages in Tibet and the first appearance of what might be called 'indigenous Tibetan Buddhism;' for the earlier traditions in existence at the time were mainly rooted in a specific Indian master . . . [whereas Tsongkhapa created] a synthesis of the several dozen most important schools of the early fourteenth century Tibetan Buddhism. [His] eighteen volumes of writings . . . [acted] as a major inspiration in Tibetan cultural history, ushering in a renaissance of religious prose and poetry. His effects upon art, architecture and folk culture were a natural product of his creating festivals such as the Great Prayer Festival of Lhasa; and by the specific artists and craftsmen he used in his building and restoration work." (ed. Prof. R. Thurman, *Life and Teachings of Tsong Khapa*, Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Dharamsala).

Above all, Tsongkhapa emanated compassion impartially towards all, the unmistakable mark of an evolved being. It is the minor things that best convey his quality: For example, people often felt over-awed before meeting him, but once

in his presence they were happy and relaxed; he treated all questions with equal respect.

This then, is the living heritage which has been transmitted by great Gelug colleges such as Ganden Shartse for almost six centuries. Tsongkhapa's example set the tone for the training given by these establishments—deep probing intellectual study, firmly grounded in practice of the dharma.

The practice is predominantly that of Mahayana Buddhism, whose essential theme is the union of wisdom and compassion—compassion in the broadest sense, for the suffering of all sentient beings. Within the Mahayana, there is the way of tantra; it is this which has come to so remarkable a flowering in Tibet. The unique quality of tantra is that it uses the energy of all our passions—without attempting to suppress or condemn them—for spiritual growth.

The tantric practices of Tibetan Buddhism make use of unusual means: Meditations and the chanting of religious texts are combined with visualizations of deities, gestures of the hands called *mudras*, and the recitation of *mantras*, incantations. These rites have a clear purpose. They are designed to mobilize all man's energies, both psychic and physical, so that the practitioner may have the possibility of experiencing that most extraordinary and rare event, the opening into enlight-

nement, in this very lifetime.

Tsongkhapa's pupil Khedrup Gelek Pelzan (1385-1438) was the first abbot of Shartse Dratsang ("the college of the east"; the other dratsang, Jangtse, being "the college of the north").

Over the centuries Ganden became a very great institution, attracting monks from all over Tibet to its courses of higher Buddhist studies. By the 1950s, Ganden had more than 5,000 members. All this came to an end with the brutal Chinese invasion in 1959.

Some Ganden monks fled south to India. They were first resettled at Buxa in Assam, and in 1969 began the work of rebuilding Ganden at Mundgod in Karnataka, south India, where the Indian government had created large settlements for the Tibetan refugees.

Getting to the Tibetan settlement at Mundgod is none too easy. For one thing, it is out of the way, approximately halfway between the city of Bangalore and Goa. While Bangalore is a major metropolitan center with excellent air connections, getting from Bangalore to Mundgod is less convenient. The usual form of transport is a ramshackle, crowded bus; I engage a taxi for the journey. From Bangalore it is a day-long drive of 250 miles along hot, dusty roads through one of India's less populated regions.

At Mundgod, the Indian government has provided the Tibetan refugees with

large tracts of land. In addition to the monasteries—the Gelug institutions of Ganden and Drepung, Nyingma and Sakya gompas, and a Kagyu chapel—there are several villages for Tibetan lay people. Both monks and lay folk support themselves by farming. Not surprisingly Tibetans, accustomed to the high mountains, find it hard to live in this hot, arid lowland.

But when one reaches the settlement, it is a slice of Tibet, albeit a hot and dusty one. Dotted over the countryside there are a number of communities, some of which house lay Tibetans, while others are monasteries. At the center of each monastery there are sizeable temples and chapels, built in traditional Tibetan style, but made of modern materials such as concrete, with electric light and ceiling fans. Above the chapels are the quarters of the abbot and other senior lamas. There are classrooms, large communal kitchens, offices, libraries, and craft workshops. Around this central complex there is a sprawling village of simple cottages, each occupied by a group of monks from one monastery, for Ganden and Drepung are centers of higher religious studies, to which monks come from monasteries throughout the Indian subcontinent and the Himalayan kingdoms.

At the present time, institutions such as Ganden are growing with surprising speed; many young refugees, newly ar-

rived from Tibet, wish to become monks and they join these monasteries. At the time of writing, Shartse Dratsang had nearly 600 members.

The Role of Dharma Protectors

This program begins with "Choe khyong Setab pai torbul kagyama" ("The Sealed-for-Secrecy Torma Offering to the Dharma Protector Setab"). Shartse Dratsang's relationship with this *dharma* protector gives a revealing insight into an unfamiliar aspect of Tibetan Buddhism.

Dharmapalas reflect the divine inspiration of the Buddhas. They have promised the Buddhas to uphold the dharma; they give protection and dispel obstacles created by evil spirits and antagonistic people.

There are conflicting accounts of the origin of Setab. Some say he is an aspect of Amitabha Buddha; others declare he is a mighty demon of Indian origin who was subdued by the tantric master Padmasambhava, who brought Buddhism to Tibet in the eighth century.

The strange story of Setab, and how he came to be connected to Ganden Shartse, dates back nearly nine hundred years. In the eleventh century, the great Indian guru Atisha spent many years teaching dharma in Tibet. At Sampho, near Lhasa, he foretold that a monastery would be built, and it was in fact built by his disciple Lhakpay Sherab in 1073. This lama had in his turn a disciple named Loden Sherab

(1059-1109), who went to Bodhgaya in north India, the place of the Buddha's enlightenment, in search of a dharma protector.

At Bodhgaya, Loden Sherab encountered an old woman and told her his wish. Now the old woman was a manifestation of Lhamo Nankay Goechen (the "Sky-Clad Deity"). She told him to walk around the stupa counter-clockwise, an unusual act for a Buddhist, who normally circumambulates a sacred structure in the clockwise direction. The old woman told Loden Sherab that he would meet an old man, whom he should beseech to become his dharma protector.

While walking around the stupa, Loden Sherab did indeed encounter an old man, who was in fact Setab in human guise. When Loden Sherab begged him to become his protector, Setab at first refused, saying that he was accustomed to living in the forest surrounded by elephants, and Tibet had neither forest nor elephants. But after repeated entreaties, Setab agreed to accompany Loden Sherab to Tibet.

In the year 1092, when he was 35, Loden Sherab returned to Tibet. At first, there was little trust between monk and protector. Loden doubted Setab would fulfill his requests, while Setab didn't think that Loden Sherab would care for him properly. As they drew near to Sampho, Loden Sherab decided to test Setab.

He upended a large box of pearls, scattering them all over the sandy ground, and challenged the protector to retrieve them. Setab emanated a great number of *atsara*, spirits, one for each pearl; they gathered up the pearls and returned them to the box. Suitably impressed, Loden Sherab promised to care properly for the deity and took him to Sampho monastery. Thus Setab became Sampho's protector. The place where Loden Sherab scattered the pearls was named Muthik-thang ("Pearl Ground").

After the foundation of Ganden in the fifteenth century, Nyarong Dratsang, a college of Sampho monastery, merged into Ganden Shartse. Nyarong brought Setab, its *dharmapala*, with it. Thus Setab became an important protector for Shartse.

Setab figures prominently in Shartse Dratsang's rituals, as the Offering heard in this program indicates; the practitioners invite Setab, offer him a tormā, confess their transgression of vows made to him, and request Setab to manifest his divine activity for the long life of the Dalai Lama, and for the benefit of all sentient beings.

Dharma protectors often have a wild, fierce, even demonic appearance. Setab is depicted in just such a manner. In one text, there is a vivid description of this *dharmapala*: "The *yakṣa*, [cannibal] the great wild *btsan* [demon] *bSe'i khrab can* [i.e., Setab] is of a red colour; he has one

face, two hands, and three rolling eyes. His forehead and eyebrows are angrily contorted. Baring his fangs, he gnaws the lower lip with his upper teeth, which are sharp like the ice of a glacier. With his right hand he brandishes a big club, dispersing with it the war-hordes of evil spirits. His left hand, which rests in front of his breast in the *tarjanī-mudrā*, holds a snare with which he ties the heads and bodies of the enemies of religion. In the crook of his left arm rests a lance with a fluttering red banner on top. On his head he wears a helmet adorned with flags and his body is covered with a flowing garment of red silk, on top of which he wears a cuirass. From his girdle are suspended a quiver made of tiger-skin, a bow-case made from the skin of a leopard, and a sword. He rides an excellent horse of a light-brown colour, with a saddle, bridle, and head-ornaments of silk. On his side he leads a vermilion-coloured cock . . ." (Réne de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons of Tibet*, 'S-Gravenhage: Mouton & Co., 1956)

Chanting Style

*Gyu ke*², the remarkable form of voice production used at the great Gelug colleges, has been described as "one-voice chording" by some Westerners. The voice is produced in such a way that each note is unusually rich in harmonics; these partials are so pronounced that each parti-

cipant seems to be singing a chord. The origin of this method of voice production is not known. Peter Crossley-Holland and other scholars have pointed out its similarity to Mongolian and Siberian "throat-singing," which, they speculate, may have been used by shamans.

Apparently, this chordal chanting was first used in Tibetan monasteries in the fifteenth century, when the great Gelug institutions received their chanting and meditation styles from the founder of the Order, Tsongkhapa, and from his immediate disciples. According to one school of thought, the unusual sound of this chanting came from Mahabhairava, Tsongkhapa's *yidam* (protective deity) who has a bull-like form; this school likens the chanting to the bellowing of a bull. Another school of thought holds that Tsongkhapa received his chanting and meditation styles from Lama Guensan of Shalogon Monastery in the province of Tsan; and from *dakinis*—female deities. Chanting like this is composed on the spot, when the guru has a vision, and it is later transmitted to his pupils.

Monks attend formal singing classes to learn this form of voice production, and some make a special study of it. It is not learned at a young age, since only mature adults can produce these sounds. While chordal chanting is used at Sera, Drepung, and Ganden monasteries, it is the specialty of Gyutö and Gyumä Tantric

Universities; since monks from Sera, Drepung and Ganden often visit Gyutö and Gyumä, and vice versa, there is a great deal of cross-fertilization.

The rites of Shartse Dratsang use elements of *gyu ke* that are common to all the great Gelug colleges. Its performance style is varied and eventful. Especially noteworthy are melodies which gradually ascend to higher and higher notes, in a protracted crescendo; as these passages draw to a close, several monks join in with a counterpoint of *gyu ke* in the deep bass, creating striking cadences. There are also memorable soft melodies characterized by great sweetness and spiritual depth.

The Ritual Orchestra

While some of Ganden Shartse's rites are performed *a cappella*, others are accompanied by the ritual orchestra. A complete ritual instrumental ensemble consists of horizontal and vertical cymbals (*rolmo* and *selnyen*), handbells (*driibu*), a pair of shawms (*gyaling*), one or more pairs of very long bass trumpets (*dungchen*), a pair of large conch shells (*dungkar*), a pair of short straight trumpets (*hangling*), and drums (*nga* and *damaru*). However, the composition of the ensemble varies considerably. Cymbals are essential, but the other instruments used vary according to the circumstances.

Holding *dorje* and *driibu* (respectively, the ritual scepter and handbell), the

senior officiant (usually a lama) leads the celebrants in the spiritual aspects of the rite. The *umze* (chant master) conducts the chanting and ritual music with a set of cymbals.

Drums (*nga*) double the rhythmic outline of the cymbals. Two types are in regular use. The most common is approximately 24 inches in diameter and some six inches thick, held by a long handle attached to a circular wooden frame. It looks like an outsize warming pan held vertically, struck by a curved drumstick shaped like a question mark. Larger drums suspended from wooden frames are also used.

The *gyaling* (shawm) is one of the principal melody instruments; it is probably a Tibetan adaptation of the Indian *shahnai*. The *dungchen* (straight trumpets five to eight feet long) play bass melodies; it is believed they were first used to welcome Atisha when he visited central Tibet in 1042. A pair of *dungkar* (conch shells) sound high-pitched undulating notes, or play glissandos ascending from low notes to undulating high notes. *Kangling*, short trumpets made sometimes from human thighbones but more frequently from brass, contribute an exceedingly loud, penetrating wail, as they perform short composed sections with undulating contours.

A unique drum called the *damaru* is used for some tantric rituals. Originally,

it consisted of two *kapalas*—the cup-shaped part of the human skull—joined back-to-back and covered with drumskins; nowadays, gourds are often used instead of skulls. A piece of cloth is tied around the *damaru's* narrow center. Thumb and forefinger grasp this narrow center, while the remaining fingers of the same hand hold the piece of cloth to ensure a secure grip. Attached to the sides of the *damaru* are two cords, each with a pellet at the end. As thumb and forefinger rotate the *damaru* rapidly back and forth, the pellets strike the drumheads, making continuous rattling sounds.

Different combinations of instruments are used, according to the rite being performed. For example, in the extended excerpt of "Jigje kyi dagjug chenmo" ("The Grand Self-Empowerment of Yamantaka") presented here, the instruments are four sets of *rolmo* and one set of *selnyen* (horizontal and vertical cymbals), four *nga* (drums), and two *dungchen* (bass trumpets). The *umze* conducts the ensemble with one set of *rolmo*. (This 31-minute excerpt is the opening section of the Self-Empowerment rite, which in its entirety lasts approximately two hours.)

—DAVID LEWISTON,
Maui, Hawaii, June 1989

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¹ The great Gelug colleges are Ganden Shartse, Ganden Jangtse, Sera Je, Sera Me, and Gomang and Loseling dratsangs of Drepung monastery; Gyutö and Gyumä Tantric Universities; and Tashi Lhunpo. While Namgyal, the Dalai Lama's monastery is sometimes included in this group, it is in fact non-sectarian. Only Tashi Lhunpo and Namgyal make no use of chordal chanting in their rites.

² There are two styles of chordal chanting, one associated with Gyumä, the other, with Gyutö. Tsongkhapa's earlier, gruffer, chanting style called *gshin rje'i ngar shad* (pronounced *shin jei ngar he*) is used at Gyumä; *mdzo shad* (*zo he*), his later, mellifluous style is used at Gyutö; both together are called *rgyud shad* (*gyu he*).

Recorded by David Lewiston at Shartse Dratsang, Ganden Monastery, Mundgod, Karnataka, South India, February 1987.

Cover illustration: Tanka of the Dharma Protector Setab, courtesy Ganden Shartse Khangsar, Dharamsala, photograph © David Lewiston, 1988.

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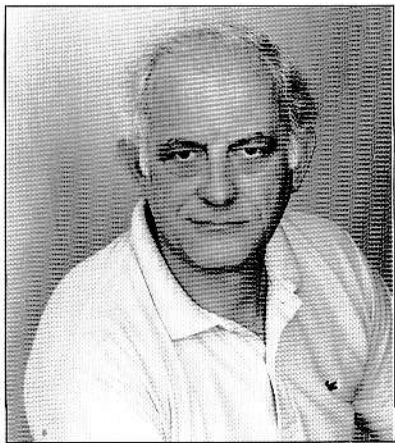
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David Lewiston studied composition first at Trinity College of Music, London (1949-52), and later with the Russian composer Thomas de Hartmann in New York. A musician of broad interests, de Hartmann introduced Lewiston to the music of Central Asia. In the following years, he studied the music of the world, supporting himself by working as a financial editor. In 1966 he travelled in Java and Bali, recording the music of the islands with one of the first portable stereo tape recorders. From this journey came the Nonesuch Explorer records "Music from the Morning of the World," "Golden Rain," and "Jasmine Isle." Lewiston spent much of 1967 and 1968 in South America, recording the Andean music of Peru, and the Black music of Colombia, Ecuador and Brazil. In 1975-76 he visited Central America, documenting the marimba music of Guatemala and the fiestas of Chiapas and Oaxaca in southern Mexico. Since 1972 he has travelled extensively in the Himalayas and Karakoram, documenting the music of the high mountains from Darjeeling and Sikkim in the East, to Gilgit and Hunza in the West. Over the years, Lewiston has made many friends among the Tibetans living in exile in northern India, and much of his time and energy have gone into conserving the rites of Tibetan Buddhism. Since 1987, he has been engaged in a joint

project with the Dalai Lama's Council for Religious and Cultural Affairs, recording the rites of the great colleges of the Gelugpa, the Reformed School of Tibetan Buddhism. These institutions of advanced religious studies have uniquely powerful and beautiful chanting styles which date back to the fifteenth century. In 1976 Lewiston's record "Tibetan Buddhism: Tantras of Gyutö—Mahakala" was awarded the Grand Prix du Disque by the Académie Charles Cros.



David Lewiston