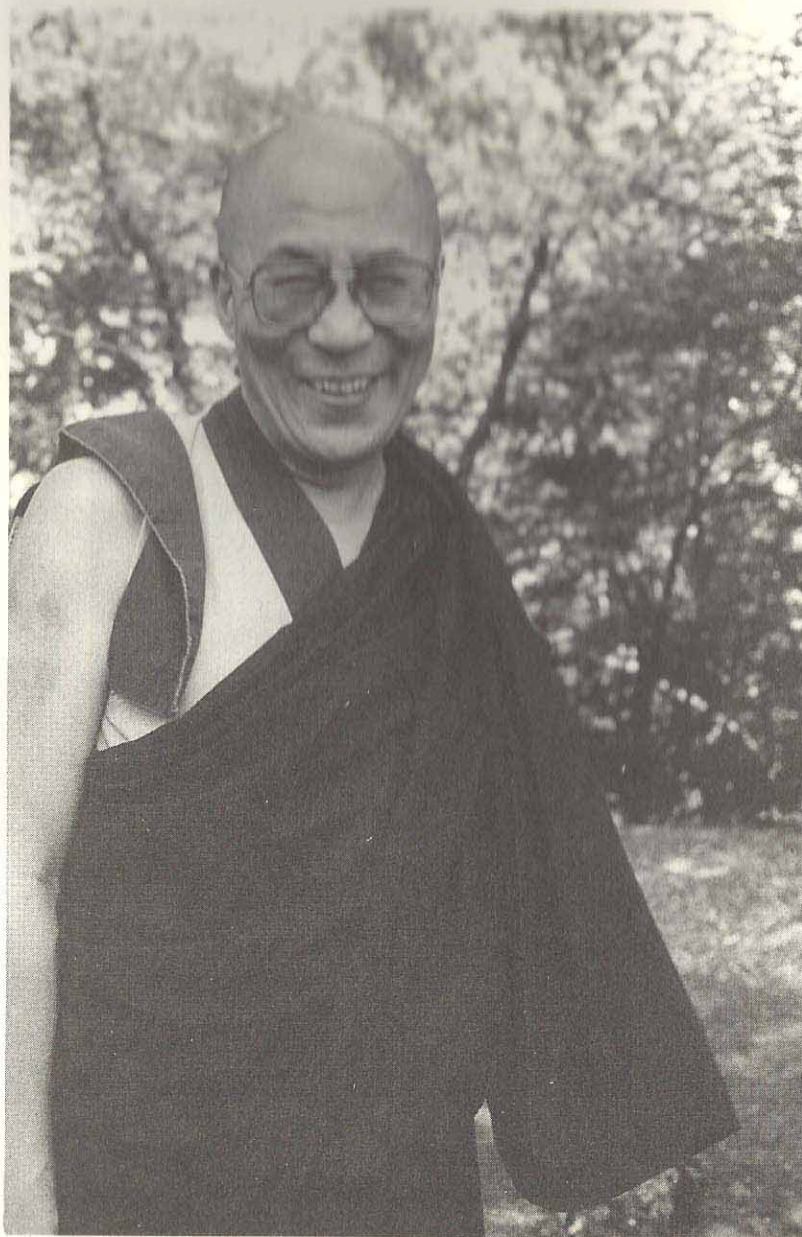




His Holiness the Dalai Lama



THE DALAI LAMA

Foreword

Bon is Tibet's oldest spiritual tradition and, as the indigenous source of Tibetan culture, played a significant role in shaping Tibet's unique identity. Consequently, I have often stressed the importance of preserving this tradition. This book, *Wonders of the Natural Mind*, containing teachings given abroad by the young Bonpo Geshe, Tenzin Wangyal, is ample evidence that this is being done.

With the Chinese invasion of our homeland, like Tibet's other spiritual traditions, Bon also faced irreparable losses. However, due to the efforts of the Bonpo community in exile, a number of Bon monasteries have been reestablished in India and Nepal. Visiting Tashi Menri Ling Monastery at Dolanji in the hills near Solan, Himachal Pradesh, India, I have been encouraged to see that it has become a major centre of Bonpo learning.

This book will be of great help to readers wishing to find a clear explanation of the Bon tradition, especially with regard to its presentation of the teachings of Dzogchen, and I congratulate all those who contributed to bringing it out.

— His Holiness the Dalai Lama

debating until three o'clock in the morning. This was followed by a holiday; but if a day of special practice interrupted the six days, then we lost the day of holiday. Every day we attended classes for eleven hours, with very short breaks. In the morning, Lopon Tenzin Namdak would teach from eight until twelve, and after lunch he would dedicate half an hour to giving transmissions from the *Zhang Zhung Nyan Gyud*, so that in nine years he was able to complete the transmission of the entire teachings. In the afternoon, he taught until around four or five, when he would retire to his room to meditate in the dark while we continued with our evening debating session. As soon as I finished, I would run home and switch on the light in his room, and he would immediately cover his eyes with his arms. Then he would teach me and Abo Tashi Tsering, or we three would practice together, or sometimes simply sit and talk.

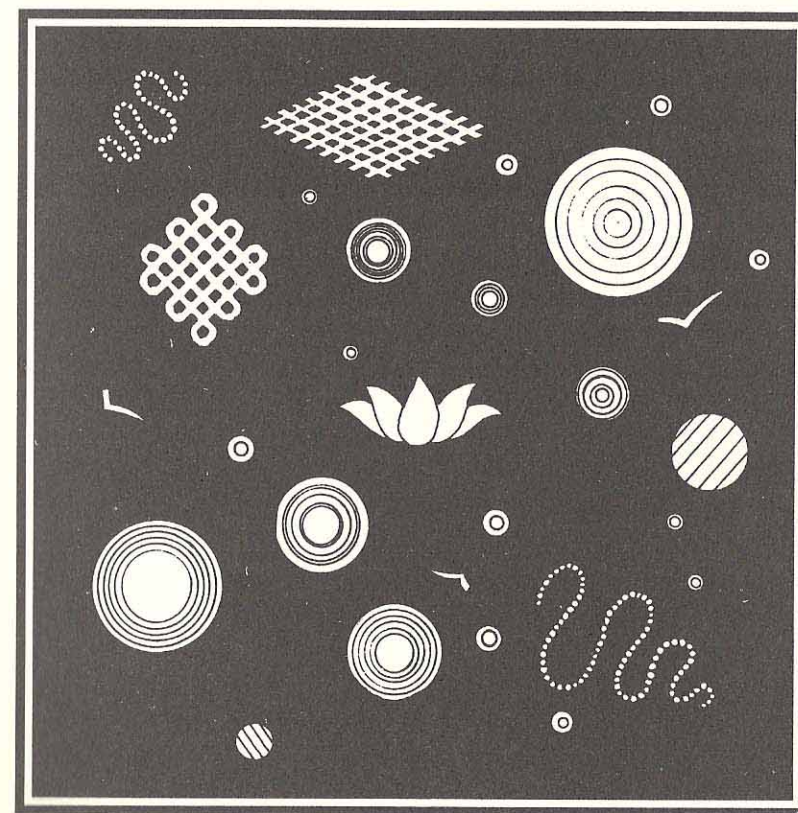
Sometimes after school I would go to visit my mother, who lived nearby in Dolanji. To get there, I had to walk along a road that was supposedly haunted by demons. Lopon Tenzin Namdak would stand outside his house and talk to me continuously as I walked down the road, so I would not be afraid. When I could no longer hear his voice, I would run the rest of the way down to my mother's house in the village. As I did not sleep at her house, when I left, my mother would talk to me as I walked up the hill. As soon as I could no longer hear her voice, I would run the rest of the way back to Lopon's house.

In the morning Lopon would wake me up early (although sometimes I woke up before him) to repeat the texts I had memorized the previous evening and to write poems.

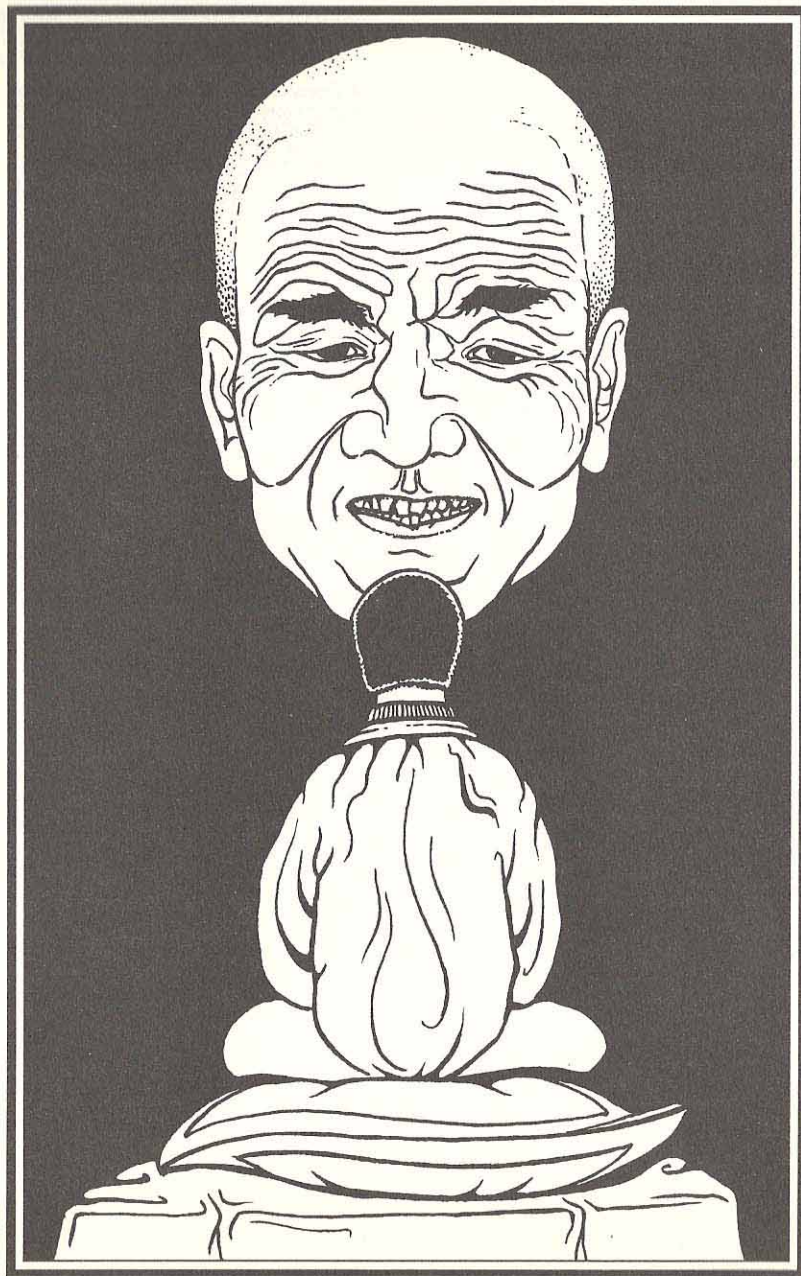
After a few years, the number of students at the dialectics school increased to over sixty and two teachers were no longer sufficient, so I started to teach. One of my first students was the current temporary Lopon at Dolanji, Yangal Tsewang, who is descended from a famous family of *jalupas*.

My Dark Retreat

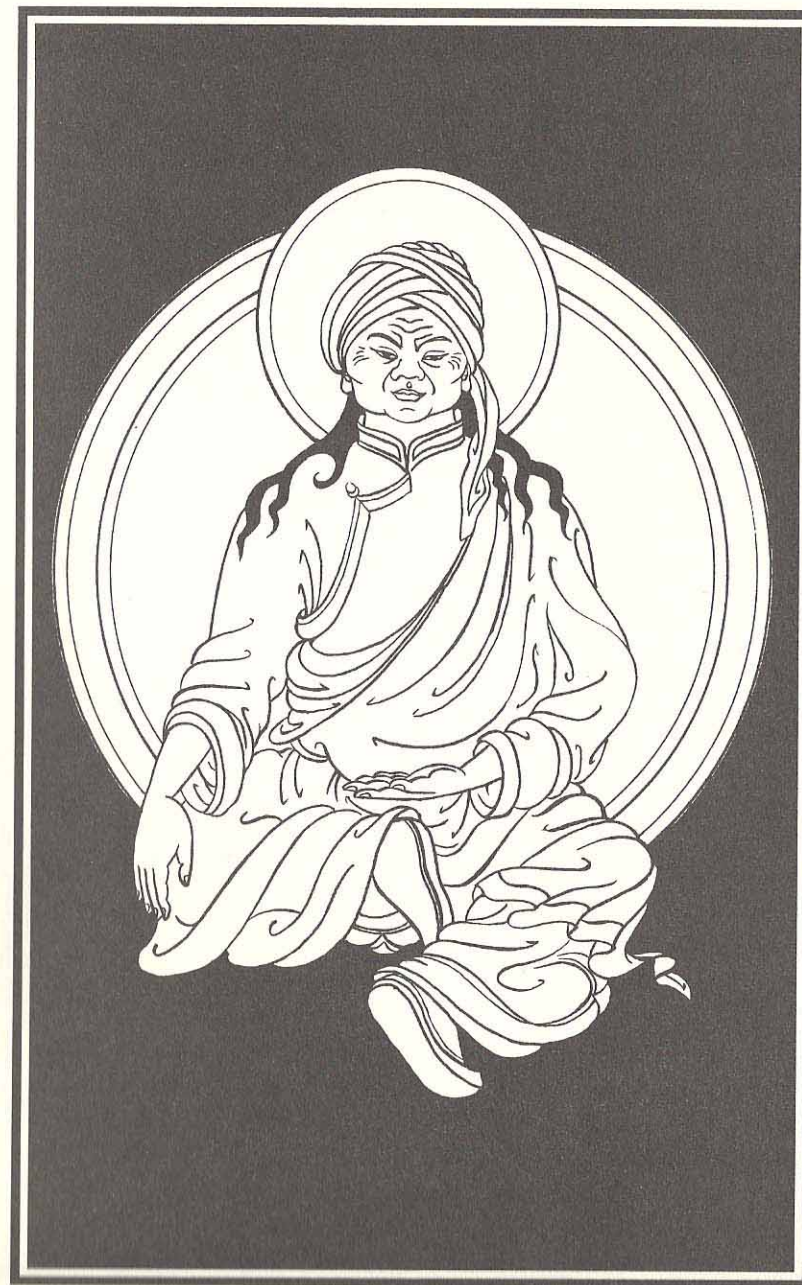
Before he died Lopon Sangye Tenzin did something quite special. One day he called me and told me he had done some practice and written the names of some deities on pieces of paper and thrown them onto his altar. He asked me to pick up one of the pieces of



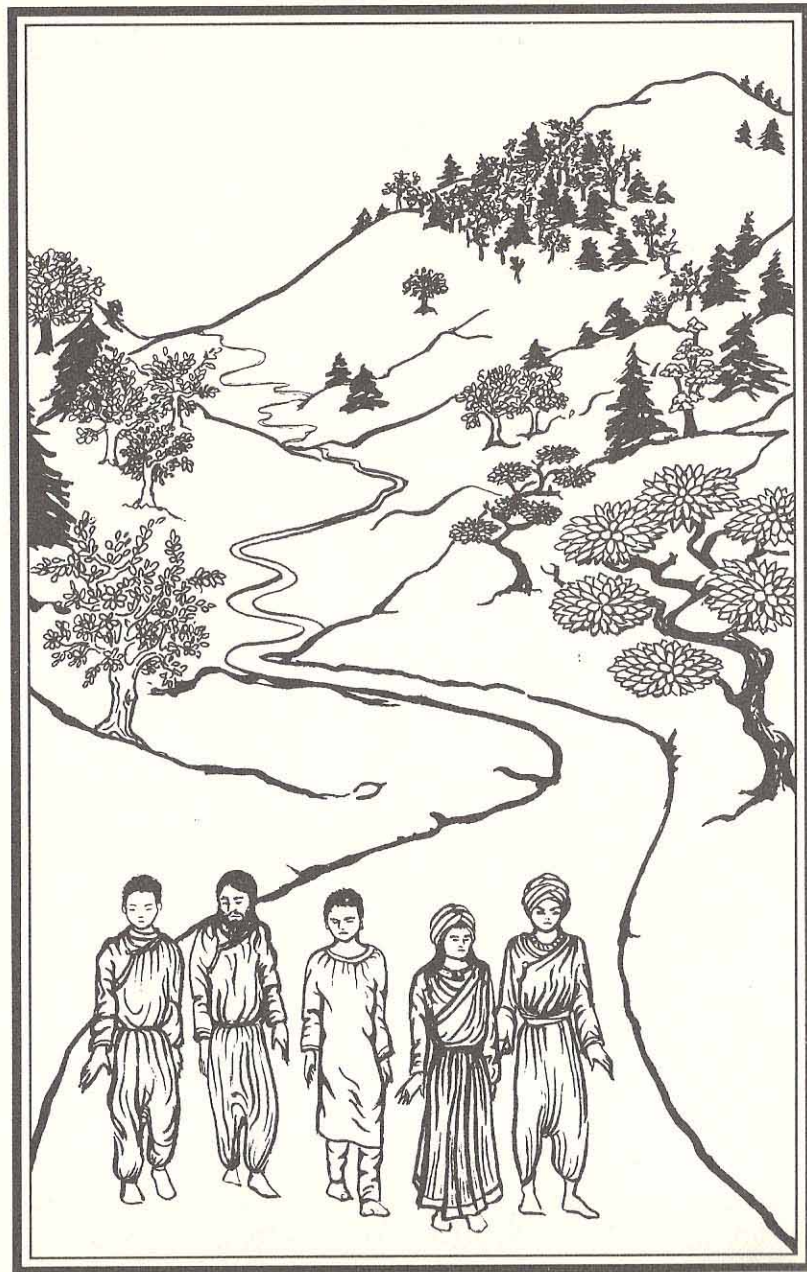
Thogal symbols



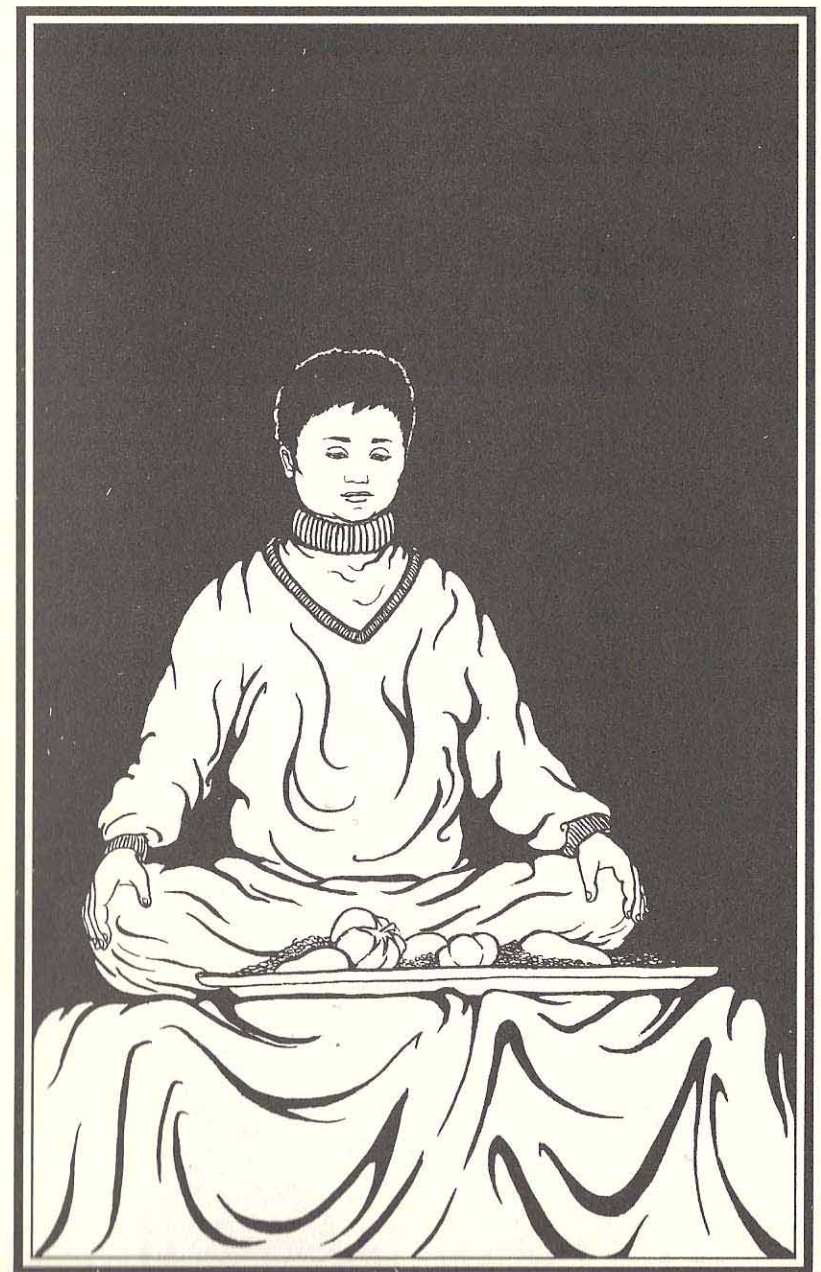
"I saw the huge bodyless head of Tashi Tsering...."



"... a man with his hair in a topknot like a mahasiddha..."

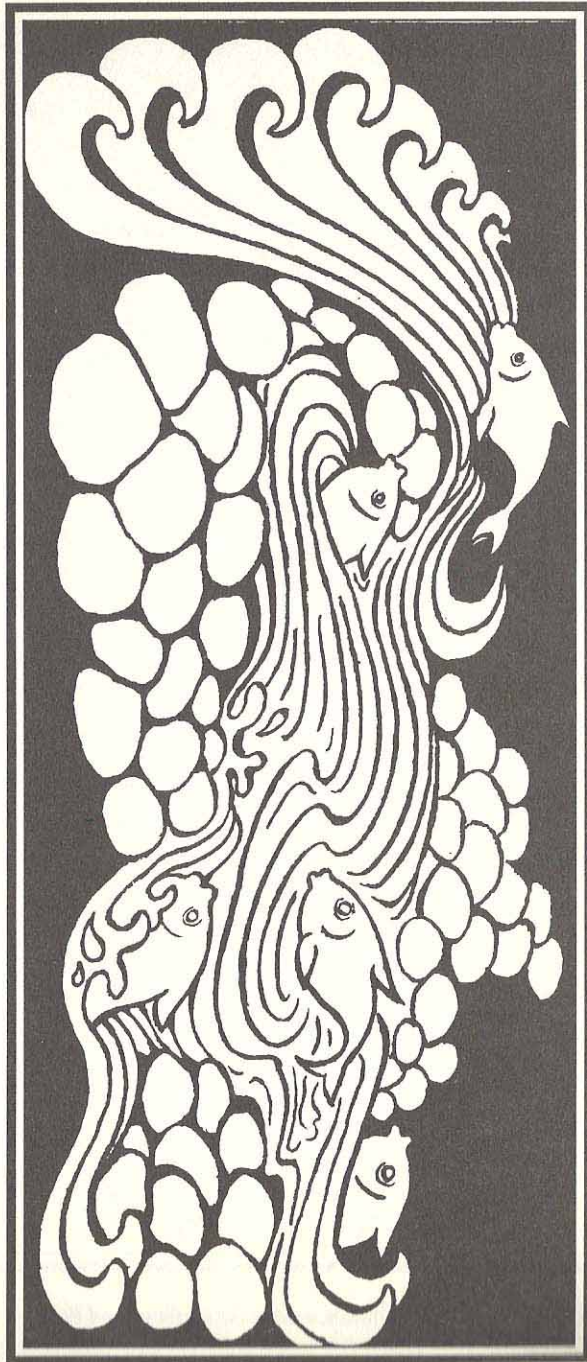


"I found myself in a big valley.... The wind was blowing through the trees and there was a long winding path along which five people were walking towards me."



"... a plate of food with potatoes, tomatoes, and beans appeared and then transformed ..."

"Very clearly I could see fish swimming around in the limpid water."



paper; the name on the paper was the deity I was to practice. The deity I chose was Sherab Gyammo, a kind of Tara who is especially effective for developing the intellectual faculties. He also told me to do a dark retreat. I was very happy. Two years later, I asked for permission from Lopon Tenzin Namdak and my mother to do a dark retreat. They agreed, although my mother said she was worried because it was very unusual for such a young person to do a dark retreat. Some people in the monastery, who were probably envious, even said that I would probably go mad. Anyway, I arranged to do it in Lopon Tenzin Namdak's storeroom, which had been converted into a toilet for visiting guests. It was very small, around two by four meters, with cement walls, so the air circulation was very bad. My mother brought me food three times every day. During the dark retreat, I never spoke to her. Lopon and my mother became worried because I was not eating much at lunch or dinner during the retreat, perhaps because of the bad air, and thought that perhaps I should come out of the retreat early, but I completed the full forty-nine days.

Every day Lopon would come and sit outside the retreat hut and talk with me for half an hour. It was very important for me to be close to the master during this time. I could not remember all the teachings in advance, and as I had to change practices and visualizations every week, he would instruct me on these as appropriate. My mind was very void, empty, and without concepts during the times of practice; my experience was that it was good not to receive external information such as news. News creates a disturbance, giving rise to whole successions of thoughts that distract the mind from the practice. It was better to concentrate entirely on remaining present and developing clarity of mind. It was also very pleasant to think about the constructive way in which I was passing my time.

My dark retreat was very successful and brought about a great change in my personality. During the first few days it was not easy for me as a young boy with a lot of dynamic energy to stay confined and still in such a small, dark room. The first day I slept quite a lot; but already the second day was much better, and every day there was an improvement in my experience of the practice and my capacity to remain in the dark. It was a great experience in terms of being in contact with myself. Losing touch with influential

external stimuli, such as eye sense-consciousness objects, became a way of totally entering into myself. I had heard stories and jokes about the problems people encountered while doing dark retreat, in which practitioners had visions they were sure were real, but I understood the way these could arise. In everyday life external appearances deflect us from our thoughts, but in the dark retreat there are no diversions of this kind, so that it becomes much easier to be disturbed, even to the point of madness, by our own mind-created visions. In the dark retreat, there is a situation of "sensory deprivation," so that when thoughts or visions arise in the absence of external reality-testing devices, we take them to be true and follow them, basing entire chains of thoughts on them. In this case it is very easy to become "submerged" in our own mind-created fantasies, entirely convinced of their "reality."

After the first week, my subjective sensation of time changed, so that seven days felt like two. In this way the last six weeks of the forty-nine day retreat felt like twelve days. Starting from the second week, I started to have many visions of rays of light, flashes of *tiglés*, rainbows, and different symbols. After the second week, the first forms resembling concrete reality started to appear.

The first of these visions came during the second morning session of the second week. While I was in the state of contemplation, I saw the huge, bodiless head of Abo Tashi Tsering before me in space. The head was enormous. The first few seconds I was afraid, and then I resumed my practice. The head remained in front of me for over half an hour; the vision was as clear as that of normal everyday external reality, and at times even clearer.

Gradually I had more experiences. For example, I saw a man with his hair in a topknot like a *mahasiddha*. The feeling was very strong and positive and empowering. Perhaps the most impressive vision was one that was accompanied by a lot of movement. Not all visions have movement; some are like watching a film; in some, you can find yourself inside the vision; in some, the vision is above you in space, or at the same level, or below. In this case I found myself in a big valley with hills covered with red flowers on both sides. The wind was blowing through beautiful trees, and there was a long, winding path along which five people were

walking towards me. At the start they were so far away I could not distinguish their features, but after half an hour they had come so close I recognized them as Indians. Two were wearing Sikh turbans. They came up to me and then turned around and walked back, without saying anything.

Another time, I saw a long-lasting vision of a nude woman with long hair sitting straight ahead of me but turned away so that I couldn't see her face. When I saw these visions, they were not something appearing externally; they were the manifestations of my own mind in the form of light. Even when I closed my eyes I saw the visions in the same way but somehow sensed they were in different directions and locations.

Sometimes the visions changed from one form to another; for example, one vision of a plate of food with potatoes, tomatoes, and beans appeared and then transformed into a beautiful river with fish and stones. I could see fish swimming around in the limpid water very clearly. These were not the only visions I had but were simply the most remarkable ones.

Almost at the end of my retreat, my clarity increased greatly, so that I seemed to see what was going on outside the retreat hut. Once, with my mind's eye, I was aware of my mother bringing me food, "seeing" every step she took coming towards the house until she reached the door and knocked to tell me she had arrived. At the same time, I heard a knock on the door as my "real" mother told me she had come with my meal, so that the movements of my mother in my vision and the movements of my real mother had been synchronous.

There was no sound accompanying any of these visions, nor did I have any idea of trying to talk with the visions. Only after finishing the retreat did my intellectual mind start to think it would have been good to talk to them.

Through the retreat I purified many things in myself and developed my practice and clarity. One of my dreams after the retreat, which Lupon said was a sign of having achieved purification, was that I cut a vein in my left ankle with a knife and insects and blood came out. After my retreat, I became so calm and quiet that my mother said that all my sisters should do a dark retreat!