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## **Harrowing images and last message from Tibet of first lama to self-immolate**

International Campaign for Tibet

***“I am giving away my body as an offering of light to chase away the darkness, to free all beings from suffering”***

**- Lama Sobha, recorded testimony prior to his self-immolation on January 8**

Photographs of the body of Lama Sobha, a respected and popular Tibetan lama who set himself on fire and died on January 8 have emerged from Tibet. The harrowing images show the burned body of Lama Sobha lying beside a shrine in his monastery in Golog (Chinese: Guoluo) in Qinghai, the Tibetan area of Amdo.

Before his self-immolation, Lama Sobha, who was in his early forties, recorded a tape that was later found wrapped in his robe saying that he was offering the sacrifice of his life and body “as a token of long-life offering to our root guru His Holiness the Dalai Lama and all other spiritual teachers and lamas.” The nine-minute long recording, spoken in the Amdo dialect, is interspersed with prayers for the long life of the Dalai Lama, and a moving call to Tibetans for unity and the protection of Tibet’s culture, religion and language “by using all your resources and by involving your body, speech and mind.” In the tape, Lama Sobha expresses respect and admiration for those Tibetans who self-immolated, saying that “until now” he “lacked the courage” to do the same. A full translation into English is enclosed below.

The images of Lama Sobha after his death have emerged at a time of serious unrest and crackdown in eastern Tibet, with new details emerging of peaceful protests last week and their aftermath in Pema (Chinese: Banma) county also in Golog, the Tibetan area of Amdo, in addition to the protests and vigils in Ngaba and Kardze, Sichuan.

### **Images of Lama Sobha after self-immolation**

The graphic images of Lama Sobha (also known as Sonam Wangyal) can be viewed [here](#). They were obtained from sources in exile and depict the blackened body of Lama Sobha at the monastery where he was based, Dungkyob, after his self-immolation on January 8, 2012.

According to a source in exile from Golog Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sonam Wangyal poured kerosene over his body and set himself on fire at around 7 am on January 8 in Darlag (Chinese: Dari) county town. He called for the return of the Dalai Lama to Tibet, and for freedom in Tibet. As he was on fire, Tibetans nearby prayed aloud for the Dalai Lama, with some trying to extinguish the flames. Armed police put out the flames but local people were able to take away Lama Sobha’s body, and to take him back to his monastery.

Lama Sobha is said to have been alive for a short time, possibly around an hour, after the

flames were extinguished. He was the first reincarnate lama to set fire to himself since the self-immolations across Tibet began in February, 2009. The most recent self-immolation – the 17th in Tibet – was carried out by Losang Jamyang in Ngaba on January 14. Losang Jamyang's self-immolation was followed by police firing into a crowd of distressed Tibetans who had gathered around him (ICT, [14 January 2012](#)).

Lama Sobha was born in Gade (Chinese: Gande Xian) in Golog, and he had two brothers and one sister. He studied Tibetan Buddhism at Dungkhyob monastery from an early age. Lama Sobha was well-respected in the local area for his kindness and concern for the welfare of others. He had established a home for the elderly in Darlag county, where he was responsible for the welfare of around 20 old people, and he taught Tibetan Buddhism in the local community.

In 2011, according to the same sources, he established a private local primary school in Darlag, where free education was provided for poorer families from the region. Prior to his death, he had sought to register a document with the local authorities in order to ensure the enrollment of more children at the school, but according to the same sources this had been refused.

Lama Sobha had traveled to India as a pilgrim several times, and attended the Kalachakra, a major religious ceremony given by the Dalai Lama, in south India in 2006. According to one Tibetan source, last year he had sought to renew his Chinese passport in order to travel to a Kalachakra given by the Dalai Lama in Bodh Gaya, India, in January this year. According to the same source, some officials refused to renew his passport, and Lama Sobha was distressed at the prospect of not being able to travel out of Tibet and to attend the Kalachakra.

Lama Sobha's last message to Tibetans, friends and family was given in a taped recording that was found wrapped in his monk's robes after his death. In the tape, Lama Sobha speaks calmly and clearly, expressing his wish that Tibetans should: "Unite and work together to build a strong and prosperous Tibetan nation in the future." Speaking in Amdo Tibetan, he says: "Give love and education to the children, who should study hard to master all the traditional fields of studies. The elders should carry out spiritual practice as well as maintain and protect Tibetan language and culture by using all your resources and by involving your body, speech and mind. It is extremely important to genuinely practice Buddhist principles in order to benefit the Tibetan cause and also to lead all sentient beings towards the path of enlightenment."

The taped message was obtained by the Tibetan language service of Radio Free Asia (RFA, [20 January 2012](#)) and Voice of Tibet ([www.vot.org](http://www.vot.org)), and has been uploaded by the Tibetan writer Woesser ([here](#)).

Hundreds of Tibetans gathered in the Darlag area to mark Lama Sobha's death and to express their sadness. A Tibetan living in Europe, Loedrak Lama, said: "Many Tibetans' hearts were broken." (Video interview posted [here](#)).

A full transcript of Lama Sobha's tape translated by Students for a Free Tibet together with Bhuchung D Sonam follows below ([www.studentsforafreetibet.org](http://www.studentsforafreetibet.org)):

### **Lama Sobha's Last Message**

To all the six million Tibetans, including those living in exile -- I am grateful to Pawo Thupten Ngodup [Tibetan exile Thubten Ngodup self-immolated in Delhi on April 27, 1998] and all other Tibetan heroes, who have sacrificed their lives for Tibet and for the reunification of the Tibetan people; though I am in my forties, until now I have not had the courage like them. But I have tried my best to teach all traditional fields of knowledge to others, including Buddhism.

This is the 21st century, and this is the year in which so many Tibetan heroes have died. I am sacrificing my body both to stand in solidarity with them in flesh and blood, and to seek repentance through this highest tantric honor of offering one's body. This is not to seek personal fame or glory.

I am giving away my body as an offering of light to chase away the darkness, to free all beings from suffering, and to lead them – each of whom has been our mother in the past and yet has been led by ignorance to commit immoral acts – to the Amitabha, the Buddha of infinite light. My offering of light is for all living beings, even as insignificant as lice and nits, to dispel their pain and to guide them to the state of enlightenment.

I offer this sacrifice as a token of long-life offering to our root guru His Holiness the Dalai Lama and all other spiritual teachers and lamas. [Lama Sobha recites prayers of the Mandala Offering.]

/ The universal ground purified with blessed water spread, / This magnificent continent adorned with the sun and moon. / I offer them with pure realm of the enlightened in mind, / May all sentient beings enjoy this pure land! / My mind, body, speech, all my possessions and merits, / And this precious Mandala and all other offerings / I offer all these to the Three Jewels with my fervent prayers / Compassionately accept these and bless me and all other sentient beings. / I send forth this bejewelled Mandala to you, precious teacher!

I am taking this action neither for myself nor to fulfill a personal desire nor to earn an honor. I am sacrificing my body with the firm conviction and a pure heart just as the Buddha bravely gave his body to a hungry tigress [to stop her from eating her cubs]. All the Tibetan heroes too have sacrificed their lives with similar principles. But in practical terms, their lives seemingly ended with some sort of anger. Therefore, to guide their souls on the path to enlightenment, I offer prayers that may lead all of them to Buddhahood.

May all spiritual teachers and lamas inside Tibet and in exile live long. Especially, I pray that His Holiness the Dalai Lama will return to Tibet and remain as Tibet's temporal and spiritual leader. [Lama Sobha recites this long-life prayer for His Holiness.]

Circled by ramparts of snow-mountains, this sacred realm, / This wellspring of all sustenance and happiness. / Tenzin Gyatso, bodhisattva of compassion. / May his reign endure till the end of existence. / May his great deeds spread across the space.

All those who have forms and are formless / Those who bear hostility towards the Buddha dharma / May all of them be found and defeated / By the Three Jewels and the power of truth. [Lama Sobha also recites other prayers.]

To all my spiritual brothers and sisters, and the faithful ones living elsewhere: You must unite and work together to build a strong and prosperous Tibetan nation in the future. This is the sole wish of all the Tibetan heroes. Therefore, you must avoid any quarreling amongst yourselves whether it is land disputes or water disputes. You must maintain unity and strength. Give love and education to the children, who should study hard to master all the traditional fields of studies. The elders should carry out spiritual practice as well as maintain and protect Tibetan language and culture by using all your resources and by involving your body, speech and mind. It is extremely important to genuinely practice Buddhist principles in order to benefit the Tibetan cause and also to lead all sentient beings towards the path of enlightenment. Tashi Delek.

To all my close friends, relatives, students, everyone from my native home and especially xx [name not clear in the audio]; I have not accumulated any wealth in my life. Whatever I had, I spent it on teaching and in pursuit of spiritual matters. This will leave no doubt or talks about

having left behind huge sums of money. Thus, my siblings, relatives and patrons from different places should bear this in mind. As for my personal belongings and other items, I hope they will be given away to needy people or offered to spiritual teachers and lamas.

May all the merits that I have accumulated benefit all sentient beings, especially those who are suffering in lower realms such as hell. I offer these prayers for them to attain higher rebirth. [Recites more prayers.]

To my spiritual friends living in exile: I want to request you not to be sad. If you single-mindedly pray to the spiritual teachers and lamas, we will be inseparable until we all attain Buddhahood. I would like say the same thing to old people and the general public. Remember, whether in times of happiness or in times of sadness, or for that matter, under any circumstances, our only refuge is the Three Jewels. You must never forget this. Tashi Delek.

A Chinese translation of this text can be found [here](#).

This report can be read online at [www.savetibet.org](http://www.savetibet.org).

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