

## Sera Chöding Hermitage (Se ra chos sdings ri khrod)



*The main temple at Se ra chos sdings, which before 1959 used to belong to the Lower Tantric College (rgyud smad grwa tshang)*

### ***Location and Layout***

Se ra chos sdings is the closest of all of the hermitages to Se ra, a mere fifteen-minute walk up the mountain just above the monastery. Like Se ra, it faces south.

There are several important buildings at the site. From west to east, they are as follows:

The [yellow retreat hut](#) was one of Tsong kha pa's (1357-1419) principal retreat spots. According to some oral sources, it was the first real house Tsong kha pa allowed to be built for him. In this house there is a small window through which the local site-spirit (*gzhi bdag*) would enter to visit him, and there is a famous mural of Tsong kha pa on the wall that is said to be an "image that speaks" speaking-stature (*gsung byon ma*).

Just below (and slightly east of) the yellow retreat hut is the [large temple](#) or assembly hall (*'du khang*), which was the place where the Lower Tantric College celebrated one of its most important yearly ritual cycles or *chos thog*. The [murals](#) in the clerestory of this temple date to before 1959. The [second story of the temple](#) contains meeting/reception rooms and the living quarters for administrators and

hierarchs of the Tantric College (*sngags pa grwa tshang*), where they would have stayed while visiting Chos sdings.



*Tsong kha pa's Yellow Retreat Hut at Chos sdings is located just behind the main temple.*

There are two different Dharma enclosures (*chos rwa*): **one** is adjacent to the large temple, **the other** is closer to the spring (see below).

**Tsong kha pa's (1357-1419) throne** was the place where he gave the lectures that resulted in one of his most famous texts, the *Ocean of Reasoning* (*Rigs pa'i rgya mstho*). In 2004, work on a **small structure** to house this throne was almost complete.

A **spring** with waters that have curative powers was discovered as the result of instructions given by the former abbot of Se ra, Dge bshes seng ge (d. 1990s).

Farther from these various buildings, there are **several huts and caves** that are reputed to have served as meditation retreat sites for some of Tsong kha pa's closest disciples.

The **view of Se ra** from the far eastern corner of the Chos sdings complex is one of the best views of the monastery.

## **History'**

Sera Chöding Hermitage (*Se ra chos sdings ri khrod*) was one of Tsong kha pa's principal retreat centers. It was the place where he gave many of his most important teachings,<sup>2</sup> and, as we have said, where he composed one of his most famous works,

<sup>1</sup> See Ser smad spom ra dge bshes ye shes dbang phyug, *Ser smad thos bsam nor gling grwa tshang gi chos 'byung lo rgyus nor bu'i phreng ba* [*A History of the Sermé Tösam Norling College: A Garland of Jewels*] (Bylakuppe: Sermey Printing Press, 1984), 34-35.

<sup>2</sup> For a list of these, see Bshes gnyen tshul khrims, *Lha sa'i dgon tho rin chen spungs rgyan* [*A Catalogue of the Monasteries of Lhasa: A Heap of Jewels*] (Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 2001), 47.

his *Great Commentary on the Prajñāmūla (Rtsa shes t̄ik chen)*.<sup>3</sup> Chos sdings is the place where Tsong kha pa's closest disciple, Mkhas grub rje (1385-1438), first met his master. It is where Tsong kha pa ordered [Byams chen chos rje \(1354-1435\)](#), the founder of Se ra, to go to China as his representative. At Chos sdings, Tsong kha pa tamed the "site-spirit," converting him into a protector of Buddhism. Finally, it is the place where Tsong kha pa entrusted his Tantric teachings to [Rje shes rab seng ge \(1383-1445\)](#), the founder of the Tantric Colleges.

It is perhaps because of this association with Rje shes rab seng ge that at some point in its history the site came under the aegis of the Lower Tantric College. We do not know precisely when this occurred, but from that point on, Chos sdings became the location of one of the Tantric College's annual ritual cycles. Before 1959, Se ra was responsible for sending one monk every year to serve as caretaker of the main Chos sdings temple. This appears to be the vestige of a more formal affiliation to Se ra in the past. However, up to 1959 the hermitage was for all intents and purposes run by monks of the Lower Tantric College.

After liberalization permitted the rebuilding of the smaller monasteries around Lha sa, Se ra formally claimed Chos sdings as its own. Today, it is the property of Se ra and has no formal affiliation with the Tantric College. There is one elder caretaker monk who keeps the hermitage open for visitors and pilgrims.



*Tsong kha pa's throne at Chos sdings – the place where he gave some of his most important teachings.*

<sup>3</sup> The work has been translated by Jay Garfield and Ngawang Samten, *An Ocean of Reasoning* (Ithaca: Snow Lion, 2006).