

MCHIG NGES

Zla ba sgrol ma

Zla ba sgrol ma (b. 1990) is from Mdzo 'dar (Rong da 绒达) Village, Phu ma (Pu ma 普马) Township, Sde dge (Dege 德格) County, Dkar mdzes (Ganzi 甘孜) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan 四川 Province. She writes:

When I was a child, there was no electricity in my village. Every time Grandfather (Dpen zen; b. 1929) visited, he told us stories that often encouraged us to be good people. These two stories are the most unforgettable. From 'Paying a Debt of Gratitude' we learned that we need to be kind to animals, and also that we need to repay our debt to people who have helped us. The story about Mchig nges is altogether different. It is just for amusement.

Ten *A jo*-pilgrims on their way to Lha sa-met Mchig nges one day who asked them, "Where are you going?"

They answered, "We are on pilgrimage to Lha sa to see the holy Buddha image, the *jo bo*. We will also visit all the holy places there."

Mchig nges said, "There are many holy things in my home to see if you'd like to come see them."

They asked, "What kind of holy things are there in your home?"

Mchig nges replied, "I have *sgo gtsig drog*, 'The gate which can sound *zi* once'. There is the *lha khang nyi ma dgur shar* 'the temple with nine shining suns'. And I also have *ra*

ka gtag 'the goat which is tied on a post' in my home."¹

The pilgrims then decided to visit Mchig nges's home. When they arrived, he opened the gate, which was so old it made the sound 'zi'. He introduced this gate as the famous *sgo gtsig drog*. Then they saw a goat tied to a post. Mchig nges said, "This is the *ra ka gtag*."

Next, they entered the house, which was very shabby. The walls were full of holes through which light poured. Mchig nges said, "This is the *lha khang nyi ma dgur shar*."

The pilgrims were very angry and said, "You mocked us. We spent an entire day to come here because you told us that you had holy things. We're not going to let you play tricks on us," and then they tried to beat him.

Later, they took him to the local leader. Mchig nges said, "I showed them every holy thing I had but they tried to beat me. What should I do?"

The pilgrims told the leader about everything that Mchig nges had shown them and how he had cheated them. The leader said, "I know that Mchig nges mocked you. He is always doing such things. However, he is very poor and he has nothing that we can take from him as punishment. The only thing that we can do is this—you can each shit on his roof above the stove to punish him for his mockery. Now, just go back to Mchig nges's house, climb to the roof, and shit above his stove."

The pilgrims said, "OK. Let's go to Mchig nges's house," went to Mchig nges's house, climbed up on the roof, and prepared to shit above his stove.

Mchig nges said, "Now, you can all go ahead and shit above my stove, because that is what the leader ordered. No one can oppose his decision. But when you are shitting above my stove you may not piss, otherwise I'll shove the

¹ These names resemble names of pilgrimage sites in or near Lhasa.

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chimney up your butt."

The pilgrims said one after the other, "I can't shit without pissing," and all left without taking revenge.

REPAYING A DEBT OF GRATITUDE

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Long ago an only son lived with his old mother who wove cloth while the boy tended the family's donkey. The two of them had a happy life.

One day the old woman finished weaving two pieces of cloth. When the boy asked his mother to give him the cloth to sell in the market, she refused on the grounds that he did not know how to do business. However, the boy insisted on taking his donkey and going to sell the cloth. He would not listen no matter what his mother said. Finally she consented. He then tied the cloth to the donkey's back, set off, and eventually reached a place he had never been before.

At the bottom of a valley some boys had caught a monkey and were trying to kill it. The boy went over to them and said, "Please don't kill that monkey."

The boys replied, "We will kill it unless you give us something."

The boy thought for a minute and said, "I can't give you anything except some cloth," and then gave them one of the pieces of cloth. The boys then freed the monkey and he continued on his way until he got to a place where several boys had caught a mouse and were trying to kill it. He said to the boys, "Please don't kill that mouse."

They replied, "We will kill it unless you give us something." So the boy gave them his other piece of cloth, they freed the captive mouse, and then he and his donkey set off together.

Eventually he came to where some men had caught a bear in a trap. He pleaded, "Please don't kill the bear."

The men replied, "We will kill it unless you give us something." The boy gave them the donkey and then they

freed the bear.

The boy was now all alone and walked until he came to a big village where a rich merchant lived. The boy went to the home of the rich merchant where there was a well from which the family's servants fetched water. He sat there and begged food from the rich merchant, who ignored him.

A few days later, the servants said, "That strange boy has been here a long time. He must be a thief. We must not let him stay here any longer. We need to drive him away from the village."

Then the rich merchant grabbed the boy, put him in a big box, sewed up the box in yak leather, and threw it into the river. The boy didn't even have a chance explain to them that he was not a thief! The box floated for many days until it eventually came to a fork in the river, where it stopped, right in the middle. The box's leather cover had some fat on it, which attracted a mouse. The mouse gnawed the fat, chewed through the leather, was surprised to smell a person in the box, looked inside, and saw the boy who had saved his life.

The mouse worriedly ran to his friend, the monkey, and asked for help. When the monkey heard this and realized that it was the boy who had saved his life, he fetched his friend, the bear. The bear, understanding it was the boy who had saved his life, and immediately came to the river to help. The three animals arrived together. The monkey used his claws to tear the leather that covered the box, and the bear broke the box with his paws.

After climbing out of the box, the boy told them his story.

The animals said, "Go to the other side of the river and we can help you live happily. You won't have to beg anymore." The boy went to the other side of the river and then sat and waited for his friends to arrive. After an hour the monkey, the mouse, and the bear arrived carrying a long stone.

They told him to hold it and pray for food, a house, and clothes, and the next morning he would get whatever he had prayed for.

The boy sat in the field that night and prayed for delicious food, beautiful clothes, and a nice house and then went to sleep in the field. When he awoke the next morning he saw a very nice house full of many kinds of delicious foods and beautiful clothes, which made him the richest man in the valley.

The rich merchant heard about him, visited, and asked, "How did you get so rich?"

The boy naively replied, "My friends the monkey, the mouse, and the bear gave me a long stone. If I pray to it, I get what I prayed for the next day."

The merchant said, "Let's do business. If you give me the stone I'll give you whatever you need." Then the rich merchant took the stone, despite the boy's protests, returned home, and prayed to become even richer. The next day he woke up surrounded by riches, and decided to pray that the things the stone had given the boy would come to him.

The next day when the boy woke up, all his possessions had vanished and he was sleeping in a field. He sat and wept in the empty field.

The monkey, the bear, and the mouse came and asked, "What happened to you? We made you the richest man in the valley. Why are you wailing like this?"

The boy said, "The rich merchant took my stone and all my property. Now I have nothing."

The mouse said, "We can't let you remain here like this. We need to find the stone. Tell us where the rich merchant lives."

The boy led them to the rich merchant's house and the mouse said, "You three hide here. I'll go listen to what they are talking about." The mouse then went to every place in the house but no one was talking about the stone. Then he

went to the well near the gate where many women had gathered to fetch water and wash clothes. They were talking about the boy.

One woman said, "Did you hear that a few days ago the rich merchant threw a boy into the river?"

Another woman said, "But no one knows what kind of person that boy really is. He built a big house in one day and became the richest person in this valley overnight."

Another woman asked, "How did he get so rich so quickly?"

The woman replied, "Well, he had a magic stone, but the rich merchant took it from him. That's why the whole village has become much richer."

The women talked, washed clothes, and ate puffed barley. After a few seconds, another woman asked, "What does the stone look like?"

The servant of the rich merchant said, "It's an ordinary-looking long stone."

The same woman asked, "Where did they put it?"

The rich merchant's servant said, "The stone is in the center of a room in the east of the house that is full of grain and colorful cloth. The rich merchant prays to it and the next day he receives whatever he asked for."

The mouse returned to his three friends and happily reported, "The stone is in a storeroom in the east of the house."

The monkey and the mouse went to the east side of the building, but they could not enter the room. The mouse then dug a hole into the room and got inside. He saw the stone in the center of the room, but could not go near it because the rich family had tied a cat near the stone. The mouse ran back to the monkey and said, "There's a cat near the long stone so I can't go near it."

They discussed what they should do to get the stone back. The mouse was the cleverest and suggested that he

would go to the bedroom of the rich merchant and his wife that night, and chew off all their hair.

The next day the mouse went to the well to listen to the women. One woman said, "Last night a mouse chewed off the rich merchant and his wife's hair. Tonight they're going to tie a cat near their bed." The mouse then returned to his friends and happily reported what he had heard.

That night the mouse and monkey again came to the east room. The mouse looked into the hole he had dug the night before, and saw that the cat had gone, but the stone had been put atop a pile of grain. The mouse returned to the monkey and said, "The stone is on top of the grain. I can't reach it."

The monkey said, "Dig out grain from the bottom of the pile. Eventually the stone will fall to the ground and we won't need to climb on top of the grain."

The mouse went back to the room and dug and dug through the middle of the night, until finally the stone fell to the floor. This presented another problem because the stone was too heavy for him to move. He ran back to the monkey and said, "The stone is too heavy. I can't move it. What should we do next?"

The monkey said, "Tie a rope around the stone, give the other end to me, and I'll pull the stone out. You also must make the hole in the wall bigger because the stone is too big to pull out through a small hole."

The mouse widened the hole from inside the room, and the monkey dug at the hole from outside. When they had made the hole big enough, the mouse tied a rope around the stone, took the other end of the rope to the monkey, and the monkey pulled the stone out, picked it up, and ran back to the bear and the boy.

The monkey and the mouse said to the bear and the boy, "Let's go to the other side of the river."

The boy and the bear agreed. When they got to the

river, the mouse was exhausted because he had worked for many nights. He climbed into the bear's ear and fell asleep. The monkey climbed on the bear's back, and held the stone in his mouth, keeping it steady with his two hands. The boy also climbed up on the bear's back and then the bear waded into the river.

When they reached the middle of the river, the bear asked, "Am I very strong?" because he had carried all of them.

No one answered. The mouse was asleep in the bear's ear and had heard nothing. The monkey was using his hands and mouth to hold the stone and could not speak.

The bear angrily said, "Am I strong? If you think so please say, 'Yes'. If you don't think so please say, 'No', otherwise I'll throw you both into the river."

The monkey was afraid so he threw up his arms and said, "Oh yes! You are very strong!" and then the stone fell into the river.

When they got to the other side of the river the mouse woke up. His friends told him what had happened. The mouse then told the others to sit and wait for him, and then he began wailing loudly as he ran upstream to the source of the river. He wailed up and down the river until the animals and fish of the river came and asked, "What happened to you? Why are you crying?"

The mouse said, "The river will dry up in seven days, and all living things in the river will die. This is why I'm so upset and wailing."

The living things in the river were very worried and asked, "What can we do?"

The mouse said, "We need to make a stupa of stones on the side of the river to stop this sad thing from happening."

The living things of the river were very afraid and said, "Of course we will make a stupa if it will stop the river

from drying."

The mouse happily said, "Please bring stones from the river and I'll build the stupa for you." All the living things of the river brought stones from the river. Eventually a very old frog brought the long stone to the mouse.

The mouse built the stupa and said, "Now we have made the stupa and you don't need to be afraid. The river will not dry up."

The mouse gave the stone to the boy, and then the boy's three friends said, "Now we have repaid our debt of gratitude. Go and live a happy life by yourself, take care of your stone, and don't lose it again." And then the three friends left.

NON-ENGLISH TERMS

A jo ཨ་ཇོ

Dkar mdzes དཀར་མཛེས་ 甘孜

Dpen zen དཔེན་ཟེན

jo bo ཇོ་བོ

lha khang nyi ma dgur shar ལྷ་ཁང་ཉི་མ་དགུར་ཤར

Lha sa ལྷ་ས་ 拉萨

Mching nges མཚིང་ངེས

Mdzo 'dar མཛོ་འདར་ 绒达

Phu ma ཕུ་མ་ 普马

ra ka gtag ར་ཀ་གཏག

Sde dge སྡེ་དགེ་ 德格

sgo gtsig drog སློ་གཚིག་རྩོག

Si khron སི་ཁྲོན་ 四川

Zla ba sgrol ma ལྷ་བ་སྐྱོལ་མ