TIBETAN PROVERBS

Compiled by
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DEDICATION

For us, Tibetans
who have every right
to preserve what is ours
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FORWARD

We Tibetans are in the midst of one of the most turbulent and difficult periods of our history. Our very traditions and customs are threatened in our homeland. Therefore it gives me great pleasure to see tradition preserved in this new collection of Tibetan proverbs.

I am confident that Ms Lhamo Pemba’s commendable efforts in compiling and translating this collection will be enjoyed by many readers around the world interested in Tibetan language and culture.

February 9, 1996
PUBLISHER’S NOTE

So much can be learned about a race of people by studying their use of language. Proverbs in particular open the door to the wisdom, traditions, attitudes and humour of a community or nation. The pithy descriptions, often including references to everyday items which evoke a vivid sense of the people’s way of life, may also include poetic phrases and amusing word-plays. Besides being informative, therefore, a collection of proverbs such as this one is most enjoyable to read through.

Ms. Lhamo Pemba’s excellent work in compiling and translating this book of sayings enables not only Tibetans to benefit from the rich folklore contained within its pages, but also offers non-Tibetan readers the opportunity to catch a sense of the spirit of Tibet from the English translations and contextual explanations. We would like to thank Vyvyan Cayley for revising the English language text in the final stages and for her invaluable suggestions and improvements.

Lhamo Pemba’s dedication to her culture and people is much appreciated and I am sure that, as a result of her devoted labour, many people are going to derive interest and satisfaction from this book.

Gyatsho Tshering
Director

March 1996
INTRODUCTION

As is the case with most countries, Tibetan proverbs were preserved in the oral tradition; they were never written down to be assimilated like knowledge, but left to the individual to acquire.

Proverbs added an important and colorful hue to the tapestry of Tibetan folklore especially so in the colloquial world of expression.

Most Tibetans know the proverbs of their own district. At home, among their peers and in social gatherings they quoted and repeated proverbs so often that the sayings seemed to seep into their system without much effort. Every piece of advice, suggestion and statement had a proverb to make it strike home. It gave whatever they did a common threshold, a wavelength that was shared by many. Indeed, proverbs became a source to learn from, pithy lessons passed down through the ages by word of mouth. The old people quoted them like incantations, parents like a staff of discipline and friends and lovers like a book that teaches one how to be a better person. Everyone who went to court in a village or wanted to stress a point in an argument knew that to have the last word one needed to be able to render the appropriate proverb at the appropriate moment. Armed with such a verbal weapon one would get one what sought from one’s adversary—silence and acceptance. This would create a flicker of victory for oneself, especially in front of a judge.

Tibetan proverbs range in subject-matter from the natural elements and the environment to philosophy, rebirth and the samsara Lord Buddha spoke of.

They speak of sages in quest of enlightenment, their lack of funds, their rich patrons and of course of the seductive women who cast their nets of possession as surely as fishermen, and the fate of those who succumbed to their charms.

Some proverbs speak of the origin of places, and why they came to be what they are. Some proverbs offer eulogies about a district’s natural landscape, a local fruit or vegetable, or even an accent. Others are disparaged for their loose morals, their stinginess, the prevalence of duststorms or the total absence of commonsense.
Living alongside our heritage of proverbs, Tibetans have learned to appreciate commonsense values and to differentiate between what is just and what is unjust, good and evil, to accept some things and to fight for others, to give and to take, to find happiness in simple things and to shed tears for genuine losses.

For Tibetans, proverbs provide an opportunity to be able to laugh at oneself, to exhibit a spontaneous sense of humour, making laughter as important as faith.

I am grateful for the opportunity to acquaint myself with these home truths which are old, precious and so far kept alive in an oral tradition, enabling us to gain a valuable insight into the Tibetan psyche.

Every Tibetan should be given an opportunity to know and to love what is theirs.

I hope these proverbs will enlighten those who are interested in Tibet and the world of Tibetans.
The Tibetan World of Expressions

To turn one's back: To express ingratitude where one should behave with sincerity and gratitude.

Black and white: Symbolizes impurity and purity respectively. Expressions like a black dog, a crow and coal personify impurity. On the other hand, a white dzo, a white felicity scarf, a conch shell represent purity.

To be shoved behind the door: In Tibet, things that were unwanted such as brooms were kept behind the door. Refers to persons who were mistreated, given no recognition as a person; an outcaste.

To take to the hills: To give complete unharnessed freedom and enjoyment like cattle get when they graze on hills.

The jewel of the house
And the outside fence that protects: Used for a person who is extremely efficient and indispensable.

To have no intestine: Means one is lacking in honour and consistency.

To be a possessor of long intestine: Refers to a person of good intentions but slow and slothful in getting the deed done.

To be a dog's intestine: A sluggard.

To look upwards or to ascend:
To look downwards or to descend: Tibetans lay great stress on good behaviour. Looking upwards or ascending is righteousness. Looking downwards or descending is following an example of immorality.

To have short sleeves: To be lacking in some essential characteristic.

To have long hands: To take what is not given.

To have a short nose: To be a short-tempered person.

A tail shorter than a sheep's: In Tibet, the length of an animal's tail
was synonymous with the trait of consistency and steadfastness. The sheep is considered the animal with the shortest tail and the horse with the longest tail.

A mind like a monkey’s: A restless mind prone to too many thoughts.

To arrive at a cannibal’s door: To arrive at a place of disaster and death.

Damaru: Refers to a person who is a hypocrite, portraying two different faces.

Donkey’s dung: Refers to a person who is like donkey’s dung—smooth on the outside, coarse and rough on the inside.

The frog in the well: A narrow-minded person or an ignorant person.

Ladle: A trouble-maker, stirring dissension like a ladle in a home, village or town.

Numbers such as Nine kinds of courage, eighteen-fold etc: Expressions of quantity and plurality.

Short handle: A gap between a promise and the deed. Promises that were not carried out were like ladles that possessed short handles which hampered performance and proficiency.

Spherical boulder: An expression referring to a trouble-maker, a misfit. Just like a spherical boulder would upset a wall made of rectangular stones, so did this person.

Cuckoo: The cuckoo is a bird which often features in Tibetan folklore. There are a lot of portents surrounding the cuckoo.

Garuda: A mythical creature with an eagle’s head with two horns, human-bird body, two human-like arms, eagle wings and feet. The garuda hatches fully grown from its egg, symbolizing the birth of the awakened state of mind. The garuda is the destroyer of serpents. Considered the king of all birds. Symbolises freedom from fear and stands for energy and aspiration.

Fox and wolf: Personify cunning and deceit.

Frogs and toads: Symbols of sin, their ugliness a facet of vice.
Meditations on purification include a visualization of ugly creatures such as toads, frogs, reptiles, etc., oozing out of one's pores and dissolving into the earth, all representing sin and evil deeds.

Owl: An ill-omened bird. Especially if it enters one's house and cries. Known as the bird of the devil.

Snake: Represents intense hatred and evil.

Snow lion: Known as a creature exclusive to Tibet and its highland, white with turquoise mane, reputed for its youthfulness, courage and majestic splendour. The national symbol of Tibet.

Sun: A symbol of benevolence, equanimity and radiance. The sun as depicted in Tibetan culture is always adorned by a throne and parasol, the accessories of kings.

Thunder dragon: Turquoise in colour, it abides in the sky in the summer and hibernates in the ground during the winter. When the dragon wants a rainstorm it causes thunder and lightning. In its paw, it holds the wish-fulfilling jewel. Offers the possessor all he/she ever desires. A symbol of power, steadfastness and energy.

CHARACTERS IN THE PROVERB

Aku Tonpa: Was from Dhejen near Yungjuk, north of Lhasa. He taught truth through practical jokes. He lived in the tenth century. He was known for enlightening minds with wit and was affectionately called "Uncle" by the Tibetan people.

King Gesar of Ling: Great warrior king, given supernatural attributes by bards who sing of his feats for days. Tibet's largest epic recounts his trials and tribulations. Lived between the seventh and eighth centuries A.D.

Lama Orgyen Pema: Is one of the several names of the Tantric Buddhist teacher, Guru Rinpoche. He is also called Pema or Padma Sambhava or Orgyen Rinpoche. He was born in Urgyen (modern Swat) in the eighth century. He introduced Buddhism in Tibet and built the first monastery in Samye, two days journey from Lhasa, in the south-east.
If one knows not one’s alphabet
One has lived only half a human life

Insignificance:
A blade of grass
On a pillar
To circumambulate the pillar
And bang against the beam
(To help one and harm another)

Without a tent pole there is no tent
Without society there is no achievement

The Karmapa’s wealth cannot be rivalled
The Drikungpa’s followers cannot be outnumbered
The Drukpa’s curse cannot be annihilated

To live in harmony with all
Is the essence of morality

’Tis happier to be blessed
With purity of body, speech and mind
Than to be owner of horse, sheep and yaks
Double taxation:
To pay for the skin-boat
And yet have to wade through the narrow stream

Glue doesn’t stick on dry hide
Water doesn’t seep into moist millet

When one arrives in ’Lu2 Kongpo
He forgets his own home town

Though the cows of Kongpo look alike
They cannot all carry the same weight of butter

In times of hardship don’t play truant
In times of happiness be contented

The times of struggle
Will sift the good from the bad friends
The mud swamp
Will sift the strength from the horses

Without climbing the cliff of adversity
One cannot arrive at the meadow of happiness

It’s the ladle that does the work
But it’s the spoon that enjoys the fruit

No reward for hard labour
Instead compensation
For killing the dzo

Perseverance comes first
Happiness is the dividend

A great effort
But little fruit

Where is the fruit
That’s borne
Without exertion?

Exertion—one puts in
Dividends—others enjoy

Where white is planted, white will be reaped
Where black is planted, black will be reaped

The bowl may break
But its pattern lives in one’s mind

There’s no choice:
But for one to tread the path fate has decreed
And to accept a child’s control over a dog

If the statue attendant is too zealous in dusting
Why! he’ll transform the gold statue into one of brass
An order that’s useless is sent back to the king
A bride that’s useless is sent back to her mother’s doorstep

First comes the command
And then only, the army

What destiny has decreed
One can’t turn away
The lines upon the forehead
Though wiped will stay

Knowledge that lacks proper instruction is a waste
A field that lacks proper sowing is a waste

At the site where
The dance of auspiciousness is danced
Don’t dance the dance of ill omen

In the abode of auspiciousness
The wicked shout out evil things

To untie a knot that’s superfluous
To advise a man who has no ear for listening

Without getting the feet wet
How can one’s hand catch fish?

Burdensome:
A cargo that’s heavy
For tiny hands and feet

Theft is committed by an acquaintance
Deceit is committed by a stranger

Stupidity:
To house the thief at home
And to lock the door from outside

When one’s mind is set on stealing
There’s no end to finding possessions

If a thief and a bandit have to be captured
Catch the leader
If wild weeds have to be destroyed
Pluck them up by the roots

What a thief wants is a yak
What a lama wants is a corpse

The thief may possess
The miraculous power of stealing
But the owner possesses
The clairvoyant eye of wisdom

It’s an arrogant thief
That sets about
Racing the yak he’s stolen
The thief doesn’t know
Where the Buddha lives

It’s a clever thief who keeps finding things
But finding things too often makes one a thief

A desperate thief kills a man
A defeated dog drinks water

To unsheathe your knife after
The thief has escaped is futile

It’s better to prevent a theft
But once it occurs
It’s better to let the search be called off

Even a thief has his
Own measure of contentment

To credit a thief with courage
And to bestow a wolf with life
(Miscarriage of justice)

A thief accustomed to theft
Isn’t considered a member of human society

It’s an arrogant thief
That steals a man’s life
The anus isn’t considered a mouth
The damaru isn’t considered a drum

Capture a wild kyang
And make it your trustworthy horse
Capture a wild drong
And make it your domestic pet

A single wild ass doesn’t get water
A single man doesn’t live life fully

Although the kyang dies in the south
Its head will always face north

’Tis no use storing tsampa
In a bag that has a hole

A blackbird
Shouldn’t make fun of another blackbird
For both have red beaks

If one indulges in foul behaviour even in secrecy
The day will dawn when the depths of one’s lies will surface

If the fool didn’t flaunt his foolishness
One would mistake
A fool for a prince
A fool who pretends to be clever
Will only highlight his own foolishness

It is easier to fend off an enemy
Than to hold on to a conversation
(Attributed to a Khampa warrior)

The white snow lion may roar louder
But the black guard dog is of more use

A five-karma earring
Who cares who wears it?

Fortunate friends of Dewachen
Keep not flowers upon the ground
But proffer them to the gods

Upon one body
A hundred commands

A single thread doesn’t make a cloth
A single tree doesn’t make a forest

A long thread gets exhausted on its path
A long life gets squandered on its path

To buy a noose
For one’s own neck
A neck longer than this
Will make him a yidag
A depth deeper than this
Will make it a hell

If you want a neck
Accept the goitre that comes with it

One can even backbite
A powerful leader
One can even ingratiate oneself with
A dumb fool to his face

When thirsty, if chang doesn't quench one's thirst
Who cares if the earthen pot breaks?

Settlement:
Should beautify the magpie
And compliment the pine

Though the magpie be beautiful
She can't be your bride
Though one's daughter be beautiful
She can't do without knowledge

Without dawn breaking
The sun's benevolence cannot shine
When dried shit drowns in water
The Deba-shung
Will send no boat to retrieve it

Only when you feel shitty
Do you think of the shit-house

Lies— the lord speaks
Blame—the servant bears

In times of happiness, to ride horses together
In times of sorrow, to carry cargo together

Happiness and sunshine
Have no fixed time for occurring
Sorrow and gloom
Have no fixed time for disappearing

Better than long-lived happiness
Is short-lived sorrow

Man needs to know
The method that ensures longevity in happiness
And the wits to make suffering short-lived
In happiness, don’t be arrogant
In sorrow, don’t be discouraged

In happy times
Riding a horse gives a sore bottom
In sad times
One sings even face down

For the woman who wants happiness
Be an old man’s bride

Songs speak of one’s welfare
Accents speak of one’s home town

When seeking welfare, approach one’s lord
When seeking shelter, approach one’s parents

Whether it be happiness or sorrow
That befalls one
One should know equanimity

In happy times even the birds of the sky flock around you
In sad times even your own son departs

Man hopes for happiness, but he never
Steps out of the passage of suffering
Happiness even the holy faith possesses not
For the lama is a constant trouble-maker

Seek happiness for yourself
Others will heap unhappiness upon you

Happiness is longer than a reindeer’s horn
Sorrows are more numerous than an antelope’s sores

Pleasant conversation
Is no help
During times of sorrow

Happiness isn’t doubled
But suffering is tripled

The unhappiness caused by mental imbalance
Cannot be cured even by the best of medicines

Whether one is happy or not
Depends on one’s mind
Whether one is warm or not
Depends on the sun

If man doesn’t experience
Happiness and sorrow
He will not know the difference between the two
Even if the debt to be repaid
Is water, don’t dilute it

It may nauseate you
But it’s your father’s bowl

Without a taste of tartness
All sweetness will be tasteless

On a tree that sprouts without cause
Lands a bird without purpose
(Lacking in substance)

A babbler does speak
A word of truth

An evil man has more complaints
A polluted stream has more marsh

When a man’s mouth is like kusha grass
However highly born he may be
He’ll only be the broom that’s behind one’s door

A man needs fame
A task needs fulfilment

His noble birth elevates him
His bad behaviour degrades him
It is no help when in poverty
Your companion is worse than a dog
If food sustains not when in hunger
What use is there for nutrition?

To consult an astrologer
After cutting one’s hair

To stretch, an arrow is most obedient
To bend, a bow is most obedient

The hunter aims at the musk-deer
Though his stratagem envelops the hills
A quiet mouth knows no trouble
A mouthful of tsampa is tastier than a quarrel
Eloquence cannot erase a debt
Affluence cannot purify a sin

For the unfortunate:
Where he looks, ill-luck follows
Where he sits, the grass stops growing
Even the dumb can savour sweetness
And even children can discern love and cruelty

One mouth, two tongues
One word, two comprehensions
One mouth but different thoughts
One pillow but different dreams

It's the mouth that makes an argument
It's the hand that sets about to draw

A well:
Small-mouthed
But great in depth
Even a large mouth is under the nose
Even a large river flows under a bridge
(To be under authority)

When a case has to be settled by the mouth
The arse should just shut up!

For a lawsuit
Made obese by money
Truth is not required

One doesn’t want a court case
But it falls like a thunderbolt
One doesn’t want a debt
But past actions make it so

Counsel:
Agreement and compromise are rare jewels
Division and conflict are swords for the heart

A donkey’s dung:
Smooth outside
Coarse inside

Boastfulness
Is louder than the roars of the turquoise dragon
Accomplishment
Is as flimsy as the sky’s rainbow
A felicity scarf’s length is of no importance
But the purity of its intention is

There’s a difference between:
The mouth and the moustache
The property and the children

Words and thoughts should know honesty
Body and hands should know purity

The mouth and the heart should know sincerity
The lungs and the intestine should know health

The talkative can say what he likes
And the gourmet can eat what he likes

A loquacious man will squander the eighteen-fold wealth of his parents
A restless hand will produce soreness in a perfect eye

If one is eloquent in speech
Even the hills nod in agreement
If one is harsh in words
Even the hills grimace in anger

The gift of the gab
Cannot see life through
All eloquence isn’t intelligence
All strength isn’t courage
A sore in the mouth must heal in the mouth
A dispute in the house must be settled within the house
The mouth recites the holy mantra
The hand holds the slaughtering knife
Feelings that are expressed are like medicine
Feelings that are concealed are like poison
A slip of the tongue reaps
Short-handled promises
Every word spoken is not a wise saying
Every waste product of a goat is not manure
A slip of the tongue
And a wrong turn on the road
Are often the basis of a thrashing
While you are gaping open-mouthed at the sky
You will find a crow pecking at your arse
It may snow for 18 days and nights
But it cannot change a lark’s voice
It's snowfall that makes
The sun shine more warmly

If one is wretched in visage
One is shunned by people
If one is wretched in attire
One is chased by dogs

Too much talk—you're the village ladle
Too much work—you're the receptacle of envy

Sores:
The one in the mouth
Takes longer to heal
Than the one on the hand

We, the dwellers of the pure land of Tsang
Are clean in word and clean in hand

For an argument a man needs a broad mind
For a wild horse a man needs a long halter

It's hard for affection and concern
To be of one heart and one mind
If one doesn't clear doubts through discussion

Harsh words hurt the listening ear
Yet harsh words come from a caring heart
A smile is nothing but the stretch of the skin
That which is written in ink never errs

A smiling visage cannot provide security
Drinking buttermilk cannot quench thirst

To feed in the pasture
But to manure the forest

A gentle mouth speaks no harsh words
A good disposition harbours no evil intent

The mouth that refuses with decorum
Often harbours a hand that reaches out for things

The mouth is eloquent
But the behaviour is wicked

Heed not the mouth that speaks in eloquence
Trust not the face that proclaims beauty

The mouth speaks of the holy faith
And the hand sets about committing murder
The boaster:
Kills a tiger with his words
Yet his hands fail to kill a flea

Oh! precious mouth
Do keep this body happy

When a girl stays silent she’s called a dumbo
When a girl tries to explain she’s called a chatterbox

The man who wants to feed himself
Has to set his hands to the task

A mouth without teeth
Makes more space for the tongue

The mouth that sings from habit
Sings, too, at his parent’s funeral

Devotees:
Some meditate upon the lama
Some upon the torma

An utterance is a water-bubble
A deed is a drop of gold

What one says must be practised
As a needle case must house thread
For prattle the sun shines
For application gloom descends

It’s better to plough a fertile field
Than to build a house upon it

After a needle
The thread is ready to follow

When a needle is lost one is agitated
When a dzo is lost one is complacent

To measure the sky
Through the eye of a needle

Lacking appetite for the peach
He blames it for its sourness

It is not the peaches he desires
It is just a branch he wants to break

The Khampa lady certainly won’t eat the maid
But she will eat the maid’s salary

A healthy body is thanks to the lama
And a body not afflicted often is thanks to my nature
A mouth that is like the Tathagatha
Doesn’t purify the sins of the person

To arch one’s back expecting another load
To goad with one’s stirrup a galloping horse
When the donkey bears the load
Can the road complain of backache?

I have the donkey’s ability to carry 60 dres
I have also the skill to assess time like the cock

A secret:
The mouth tells the collar
The collar tells the hem
The hem tells the ground
The ground spreads it out

Incompetent efforts:
The mouth sets about catching birds
And the hands set about catching fish

Promises:
Are made like blazing fires
And fulfilled like broken bows

The task taken upon oneself cannot be excused
Even if one be the Lord Justice himself
Kill a crow and
The raven weeps

Although the crow isn’t musical
Yet he has to caw
Although the rabbit isn’t sturdy
Yet he has to run

A man should learn
To offer others the victory and the profit
To take upon himself the defeat and the loss

Better the crop that feeds one’s stomach
Than the crop that falls to frost
Between one’s tongue and teeth

Let nothing remain in the pot
And let nothing stick to the ladle

If there’s no one to provoke anger
With whom does one practise patience?

There’s no dog that has no love for blood
There’s no man that has no love for wealth

The older a dog the better its behaviour
And the older a man the more stubborn his will
If a dog gets nasty
Strike at its nose

Once a beggar can discern a dog’s nature
He also knows what to do with his stick

A dog doesn’t leave his tail
Where he sleeps

The closer you get to a dog
The closer you get to a bite

Dogs and children
Provoke fights

A pursued dog
Never takes the conventional road

The hoof of the white horse falls off
(To lose an expensive article for a small cause)

Though the dog strays during the day
Yet even he serves as a watchman at night

A dog that’s uncontrollable
Should be kept on the roof
A man that’s uncontrollable
Should be sent away from home

Many dogs together
Can kill a drong

A dog’s compelled to bite
When a thief’s knocking at one’s door

When the female dog doesn’t wag its tail
There is no cause
For the male dog to prick up its ear

Though the dog be mad
Though a man be drunk
His cognition is present

Push a dog into a corner
And he will face you

A dog’s long life
Is but nine years

Although dogs may fight
They will not rend their own fur

A fierce dog is the fence of a house
Too much ferocity
Invites a shower of stones
The dog has a long tail
Only long enough to warm itself
(Affluent relatives have none to spare)

What’s good for the dog is a stick

A dog’s sustenance is its tail

To call a dog a lion

A dog wrapped up in brocade
Will still smell

A dead dog
Is the crow’s feast

The dog at the temple’s door
It’s the thought of tormas

In a family of powerful figures
In a family where the father has debts
It’s the son who suffers

Zealous rivalry amongst neighbours
Brings prosperity to the neighbourhood
To construct a house is easy
To maintain a home is difficult

The sun rising
From a dog’s bottom

A dog is a dog
One cannot stop it
From eating shit

Instead of the hunting dog
Barking at the musk deer
It’s the musk deer barking at the hunting dog

What you cannot find in broad daylight
What hope have I of finding at night?

What he hasn’t seen outnumbers what he has
For the old donkey who says he has trodden all roads
Where he hasn’t been outnumbers where he has

You go ahead and move like a needle
I will follow you like a thread

Wealthy husband with a clever wife
Soft wool of good yarn
As long as that small bead of an eye is flawless
Man sees a grand show here, there and everywhere

Discomfort:
A speck of dust in one’s own eye
A lie in the Dharma’s name

The sinful hawk that kills a single bird is better off
Than the virtuous bird that kills several worms

If there weren’t any swindlers and hypocrites
Why, all men would be of one mind

Unpaid taxes the king doesn’t exempt
Collapsed hills a rope doesn’t bind

When tax is weighed it’s in gold dust
When food is eaten it’s quitch grass

The sun’s magnificent beauty is acclaimed by all
Except for one creature—the owl

In dusk’s tiny fire-fly

When a law binds people it’s in hundreds
When a rope binds people it’s singly
Laws-the swindler scorns  
Meat-the axe cuts  

Laws and precepts  
Are infringed only by oneself  

When the lord indulges in lawlessness  
To whom does one cry out for help?  

In a law-abiding kingdom  
The king should command but once  
Too many commands will only  
Make a king lose his kingdom  

Steadfastness:  
A court’s verdict  
And an ocean’s rock  

Although the crane boasts of pure white feathers  
Alas! the tip of its tail flaunts black feathers  

For the tortoise living in a well  
Just hearing of the ocean’s greatness will kill it  

On the day of gatherings one needs fame  
On the day of warfare one needs bravery
However clever a man may be
Without the aptitude for critical examination
He’s like the lustre of buried gold

When one aspires to sagacity
One must shun pride

The wise are stringent with the wise
The envious are stringent with the envious

Frightened I am not of a hundred wise men
Frightened I am of a single evil man

When the wise make an error
It’s off by six feet
When the fool makes an error
It’s off by one span

The wise learn from the past
The brave learn from the future

For the wise man
Knowledge is his wing
For the layman
A good horse is his wing
It’s the brilliant who recognise
The brilliance in others
It’s the brave who recognise
The bravery in others

A person suffering from jaundice
Sees a white conch-shell as yellow
A person suffering from nervous disorders
Sees the white snow-peaked mountains as blue

If one wants companionship
Even the deer from the hills flock down
If one wants to be alone
Even the mice from one nest disperse

On the tiny piece of ice
Shine nine suns
Quarrels exist even in the land of the gods
And conciliations exist even in the land of the cannibals
When others berate you with slander
To bear it with patience
Is a mark of wisdom

To each man his own manner
To each plant its own growth

When a man is blessed with wealth
Even hardships resolve on their own

It’s only the stupid bear-like black dog
With his black tail
Who tries to out-match the splendour
Of the snow lion’s turquoise mane

Where I know happiness
There is my country
From whomsoever I know care
They are my parents

Wherever one wanders there’s no place
Full of happiness at all times
Wherever one stays there’s no place
Full of sadness at all times
Exertion:
Is needed for the holy Dharma
And for matters of importance

One latch cannot support
A whole clay wall that's collapsing

For the old bull who lacks comprehension
A stick evokes more respect than a king's command

When the lord's honourable head
Is higher than a mountain
Why, the household's lowest lackey
Drags his sleeve around
To ingratiate oneself with the powerful
To bully the weak

Without taking one step
The four continents cannot be traversed
Without saving one drop
An ocean cannot be formed

Without taking three steps, one's found in the king's garden
Without speaking three words, one's found in the lord's court
A duster of brocade
And a door knob of sandalwood
(Misuse of objects)

The brocade is old
But the design is original

Good clothes one should wear
Good food one should share

If one can dress with originality
A new look is always present

Attire should compliment one's form
Conversation should compliment one's friends

A case is compromised by agreements
A torn attire is repaired by darning

A quarrel:
Should have a base steadier than a hill and
A tail that's longer than a river

A defrocked monk for three years
Is a handsome strutting peacock
Who changes into a hungry hunting dog
And then degenerates into a bent, hollowed earring

A defrocked monk for the first three years
Is a handsome strutting peacock
And then he is just an old wastrel

If the head of the queue consumes everything
Then there will be nakedness left for the tail

Bravery thrusts a knife face to face
Cowardice shoots an arrow from a distance

Carry a sword and a bowl wherever you go
For you never know
If you’ll meet a friend or foe

It’s a blunt knife that blames
The meat for being undercooked

Although the storeroom
Is filled with swords long and short
When the enemy appears in one’s cellar
It’s the kitchen ladle one throws

When Drib^14 is under flood
Its folks keep tormas under their armpits

If there’s no sweet potato underground
There’s no way sweet potato leaves
Will sprout above the ground

The ant that wanders too much
Will find its limbs being caught in gum

An ant upon a horse
Is not visible

What fortune the mouth gets
The tongue pushes out

When a man moves in evil company
Evil behaviour will come naturally

To bait a fish
In a dry ravine

To endear yourself to a friend
Point out his flaws

Intimate though you be
Do not open your friend’s letter

When a friend deceives one
He does so with laughter
When a swindler deceives one
He does so with tales of woe
For friends a word of harmony
For all beings a heart of goodness
For a thief it's easier to rob a single house
For a wolf it's easier to grab a single lamb
No matter how intimate your neighbours may be
Separate yourself from them with hedges of thorns
Even if a neighbour's cow dies
One must mourn for three days
Until one feels hunger
One doesn't realise how precious grain is
Until one has to walk
One doesn't realise how precious a horse is
Ask others for opinions
But decide on your own
In the reign of Ling Gesar
Aku Thak-Thung
Can do what he wants
In happy times secrets are exchanged
In sad times enmity is evoked
Too much attachment creates hatred
Too much sweetness creates nausea

Joy must live long
Happiness must be secure

After every happiness
Follows a sorrow

The milky way is the sash of the sky
Without a sash, the sky is an untidy gown
(Without discipline, disorder will reign)

After eating the thukpa on the 29th
If I’m sick, so what!
After eating the thukpa on the 29th
If I’m dead, so what!

Winter comes, leaping like an enemy
Spring comes, melting like fruit juice

To a loquacious Geshe
Just offer a pen

The Geshe who is
Thrown off his horse
Doesn’t have to dismount
(It’s an ill-wind that blows no good)
The honourable Geshe is a garland of flowers
But in essence empty of fruits
Don’t argue with an honourable Geshe
Don’t bang your head against an honourable pillar
A gelong at a lakeside shore
What else is there to do but to fish?
When a man becomes a monk
His hair will turn white
Long evening prayers
Are the cause of arguments
Just as the peacock can digest poison
So can the monastic community digest kor
Beat a monastery’s pet dog
And you hurt the lama’s sentiments
No monastery tea
No Shol thukpa
(To fall between two stools)
What is required is the practice of the holy Dharma
And what is not required is a bride for one’s samsara
Keeping the needy temple empty
But white-washing the carved rock images

When the vulture is needed
It has taken flight to the hills
When a good aim is needed
The gun is off the mark

The man who cannot accept an enemy’s challenge is a fox
The man who cannot answer an opponent’s question is a dumb fool
The man who cannot repay a host’s generosity is a swindler

For a sworn enemy
Distance does not count

For enemies, unsheathe swords together
For friends, place food bowls together
To bellow war cries before the enemy is seen
To shed mourning tears
Before the corpse is seen

An enemy and a fire
Have to be stifled when young

Once a country is rid of her enemies
Her suffering inevitably disappears

When your enemy surrenders
Treat him better than your own son

The blacksmith is killed
By the sword he casts

The blacksmith thinks making butter is difficult
The butter-maker thinks casting iron is difficult

A big head doesn’t harbour big brains
A broad chest doesn’t harbour bravery

An enemy who surrenders
Should not have to suffer defeat

Take an empty head outside
The raw brain will be filled by other folks
When he is given a place to sleep
He wants to stretch his length out

It's the opportunist
Who loses his own hat

No hair on my head
But taxed for a wig
No shoes on my feet
But forced to dance
(To be called to perform beyond one's ability)

To have one's own head broken by a helmet
To have one's own idol broken by the attendant

The ear did not hear
The head rotting
(To be kept in the dark)

Catch him from the head
All you'll get is a handful of hair
Catch him from the buttocks
All you'll get is a handful of patches

The head that boasts of a plait
Must also boast of a knot at the plait's tail-end

The task that's not pursued by a quick worker
Will not be concluded by a slow worker
A guest who’s familiar with the household
Shouldn’t mistake himself for the owner

If it’s a guest it’s one too many
If it’s a soldier it’s one too few

The man who labours

Impoverished of virtue—a leader’s fault
Inability to serve—a servant’s fault

Too much agility makes even
The snow lion fall on its back

To trample on a fallen person

When one is about to fall
When one has a case
One needs the truth

When full-bellied
Don’t forget what hunger feels like
When warm and snug
Don’t forget what the cold feels like

When the male horse challenges a yak
It's the horse who loses his heel's nerve

When a guest arrives at dusk
It's a sign that he will stay the night

When snow falls in the morning
It's a portent of the day bringing warmth

When a man wants to leave
 Darkness descends
When a man wants to cry
 Speechlessness descends

If you want speed
Nurture your horse with fodder
If you want wisdom
Learn from the five sciences\(^2\)

For the man ignorant of
The wish-fulfilling path to tread
His wealth and property become
The messenger of an empty part

Drowo Sangmo\(^2\)\(^3\) may have flown miraculously into the sky
But her dirty linen lingers in Mendal-gang\(^2\)\(^4\)
For the traveller:
His only companion is his shadow
His only remnant is his footprint

For the man who yearns to depart
He hasn’t the heart to linger

You don’t desire to go to hell, but you go
You don’t desire to carry the iron ball, but you do

The itinerant who knows not the way
Makes the upper path a lower one
The speaker who knows not the art
Will hurt those on the top and below

However clever the wolf be at stalking
His long tail will give him away
However still the rabbit be at sitting
His long ears will give him away

If the peacock is one’s travelling companion
Inevitably poison will be one’s fate

Better a determined walker
Than a reluctant horse

The inscribed prayer flag yearns to leave
But the dry flag pole doesn’t let go
An ant cannot obstruct the path
Taken by a galloping horse
When youth indulges in whatever the elder does
He’ll find himself like the young deer upon a precipice
The elder must hold on to his role of being the elder
The younger must hold on to his role of being the younger

An old woman with a gold nugget
Finds travelling the paths easy
The wrinkles upon a man’s forehead
Will tell if he’s old or not
The tears in a man’s eyes
Will tell if he’s crying or not

When an old lady is about to die, she trembles
When a child is about to cry, he laughs

When a vulture is satiated by a feast of meat
Then only does it take to the open skies
A vulture’s nest may be safe
But it’s over black soil
Mount Meru may be high
But it’s under the sun and moon
Deceptions:
To study dancing in Nepal
Instead of studying Buddhism in India

When the Chinese are in power
He is Chinese
When the Tibetans are in power
He is Tibetan

An ocean though vast knows silence
A rivulet though small knows noise

When the ocean’s on fire
There’s no water to put it out
When the stone starts growing hair
There’s no knife to cut it off

Either the Chinese tea is inferior
Or the Tibetan water is inferior

To venture to India, wealth is needed
To fill sausages, blood is needed

It’s better to be the chieftain
Of a confluence of three rivers
Than to be the temple attendant
Of a Chinese temple
There is no doubt that
I am going to strike you (with a sharp weapon)
But whether or not I shall strike home
Depends on your lungta²⁸

A woman without jewellery
Is a plain nun

At an archery contest where there’s no betting
Aku Tonpa’s arrow is the sharpest
(Nothing to win)

The king’s command
Is the minister’s contortion

True, the kingdom is the king’s
But public happiness lies in the minister’s hand

The king lives in unease
Though he be king
The lone spinster sleeps in unease
Though it be sleep
Most kings love blatant flattery  
Rare indeed the king who listens to truth

When the king wants to lose a kingdom  
His laws get hotter than fire
When the subjects want to know dishonour  
Their arrogance gets loftier than a mountain

A benevolent king needs subjects  
And a beautiful woman needs jewellery

The king upon his golden throne  
Can know hunger
The beggar with his begging bag  
Can know fullness

Wealth erodes a king’s law  
Fleas disturb a hermit’s concentration

More rigid than the king’s command  
Is the minister’s stick
When the king cannot afford his morning tea  
From where will the minister get his daily bread?

To desire a large statue  
But to scrounge the provision
Wealth finds its way to a king’s treasury
And a river finds its way to a confluence

In extravagance
No virtue is accumulated

When opulence sits astride a horse
The heart of poverty freezes

A small cause can lead
To a big result

For the man who isn’t affluent
Though his words be as smooth as silk
They’re of no use

On the tips of poverty-stricken tongues
The words of truth are stagnant

To be parted from the wealth
But to still possess the ill-repute

Without wealth
Becoming a swindler is natural
Without employment
Becoming a loafer is natural

A penniless pauper has more thoughts to think
A cloudless sky has more expanse to show
With wealth one becomes an uncle’s nephew
Without wealth one becomes an uncle’s servant

Judge a man for himself
Not for his wealth
Judge a man for his goodness
Not for his eloquence

When the race is upon a cliff face
A goat is faster than a horse
A race horse should possess speed
A friend should possess consistent decency

When the real owner of wealth appears
Even the patch on the iron-pan will be taken away

When inexperience speaks like a veteran
It’s the veterans who enjoy a laugh

A man without experience
Is deceived but once

A door knob cannot be eaten by worms
A running stream cannot be immobilised by stagnation

Although garlic may be eaten in secrecy
Its smell can be sniffed from afar
If one is too attached to illusory wealth
Worry, fear and anxiety—
These three will never cease

An empty sack cannot
Stand on its own

Neither an eloquent parrot
Nor the cock which accurately heralds the dawn

A hermit who roams too far
Will find himself in the land of cannibals
A tailor who roams too much
Will have to sew a rancid hide

A hundred mouths may be stopped from speaking
But a thousand eyes cannot be stopped from seeing

Man may rant a thousand times
But parched barley will yield only tsampa

A mouth that quarrels
Knows no virtue
I am lord and governor of 800 camps in Dam
But my lord and governor is at home
The maker of myself was my mother
The maker of white hills is snow
Don’t burn me
Burn my ear
We, the glorious Sakyas
Need no wooden chopsticks
Our fingers will suffice
Good men cannot be happy
Unless all evil is annihilated
When vice is satiated with wealth
His voice is sweet and clear
When evil is in a position of power
He is cruel to all
For the evil only one man exists—himself
For the old dog only one thing exists—shit
When virtue heeds vice
She loses prestige
However clever one be at the art of weeping
It shouldn’t be mistaken for laughter

The lamb should cry, but it doesn’t
The wolf shouldn’t cry, but it does

If man does not labour
Till he comes to tears
From where will the provisions
That bring laughter come?

He knows only these two—sky and earth
He’s acquainted with these two—fire and water

If you can’t present me with a blessing
At least let go of my hand

Greater wealth, greater suffering
Lesser wealth, lesser suffering

Beat drums and cymbals—there’s sweet melody
Beat mud with a pestle—there’s a strong floor

One must dance
In accordance with the beat of drums

The ears are born first
The horns come later
Before the morning rain has ceased
The evening rain has poured

Morning brings leisure for the holy lama
Evening brings briskness for the attendant

Words before the deed
Shouldn’t be too few
Words after the deed
Shouldn’t be too many

Once frightened to death by a black poisonous snake
Now he doesn’t trust even a striped piece of twine

When the morning sun brings no warmth
Then the noon sun has none to offer

The nest that sheltered the mother bird
Will not be the home of her fledglings

When old friendship knows no honesty
It will be troublesome
For one to find new friends for the future
Even wild beasts refrain from eating their own kind

A single piece of advice can be heeded
A single deed can be accomplished

When a single enemy cannot be defeated
He provokes a thousand
When a single item of knowledge cannot be imparted
He speaks of a hundred

When you aren’t agreeable to one person
It’s the other person’s flaw
When you are not agreeable to all persons
It’s your own flaw

For every sickly person
There’s 100 healthy ones

If by the age of 13
One cannot plan one’s life
Then how can one be the village leader?

Let’s not speak of the festival of the 15th
Better it is if one is self-sufficient
Oh! you offering on the 15th
If you have any guts
Come out and face the noonday sun
Pretensions cannot conceal truth
Paper can’t hold fire
Don’t endorse a metal seal
With a seal of dough
Iron is shaped when hot
Leather is cured when wet
When the willow park is encircled by hawks
From where will the smaller birds take flight?
That a willow tree matures within three years
Is no cause for rejoicing
That a poplar tree withers within three years
Is no cause for sorrow
It’s the proprietor of a willow park
Who faces the scarcity of finding firewood
Alas! I am unable to walk like the noble lady
And at the same time
I have lost my own style of walking
The fly that lives on a dung heap
Thinks he is in heaven
For the man who beckons calamity
His skill and activities
Outnumber any other man’s

When chaos reigns, the leaders must suffer
When famine strikes, the poorest must suffer
What should not break, breaks
The scales of Shinje Chogyal
What should not die, dies
The bull of longevity

Although chang is sipped with one’s lips
It is intelligence that measures out the limit

Intoxication from alcohol knows recovery
But intoxication from greed knows none

To correct your drinking habit
Look at a drunkard’s vice

It’s water that adulterates chang
And it’s chang that adulterates man

If you drink chang
It gives you a headache
If others drink it
It gives you a heartache

Gratitude:
For chang, water
For kindness, insolence

For penalty to be enforced
There has to be
One to uphold the law

What will cure a cold
Will also inflame a sinus

The rain is a friend of water
The sun is a friend of fire

If it rains, the valleys look fresh
If one is purified from one’s sins, one’s bardo is lighter

On the man drenched by rain
Dewdrops have no effect

What is muddied at the source
Will be muddied all the way
It's drain water that doesn't stay in the gutter
And it's the delinquent who doesn't obey the law

Remove your shoes
When you get to the stream
In a place where a vast ocean exists
A small pond swirls around
(Insignificance trying to assert its significance)

Still waters harbour
The lethal crocodile

However wide the blue waters may be
A sound boat crosses to and fro with ease
(To be under authority)

If water brings not the beneficial rain
At least let it not be the harbinger of frost and hail

Without gauging the width of a great river
The swim of a youth is madness

The river that flows with leisure
Is but an itinerant
The flag that flaps vigorously
Stays where it is
It’s rain that makes vast oceans great
Without rain
Why, a river and rivulet are the same
Although the Drichu river may be immense
For the purpose of irrigation it’s no use

Water canals cannot harbour rivers

Water can find a vessel to hold it
Alas! a secret finds none

It’s the Nagas who pollute the water from within its depths
It’s the garuda who carries the snake to a tree’s peak

Cross a river—the bridge is forgotten
Heal a sore—the pain is forgotten

Water drunk too long smells
Grass fed too long stinks

If the waters and the fish are compatible
They find refuge in happiness

Water that’s lukewarm
Can’t boil meat
After crossing a river don’t forget the bridge
After gaining maturity don’t forget your parents

The ocean that basks in pride for its depth and vastness
Is but the total integration of several little rivulets

Teaching a duckling to swim
And white-washing a conch-shell

Before the floods, the dam
Before the obstacles, the precaution

To bait a fish of 18 feet
From a water source of one thumbnail

The shaking of the waters
Shakes the fishes, too

The current of a river
Decides whether one swims or sails
If the river isn’t channelled on one’s own land
Then one’s dam has to be built on another’s land

Gauge the river’s depth and wade
Survey the path’s expanse and traverse
Beating a stick on the water’s surface
Hardly affects the fish below

A river has a source
And a tree has a root

When water is sieved
The sieve holds no water

Although the river possesses no talons
Yet its claws dig into the earth

Chushul, 49 so close to the waters
Has cast karma to the waters

When young, no nutritious milk to drink
When dying, what’s the good of noodle soup?

If in childhood one doesn’t learn the alphabet
From where will the sharpness of intellect arise?

The deceiver pretends he’s swimming
When he’s carried by the current
Pretends the work is done when it’s still undone

Small-mindedness:
Neglects matters of importance
But holds tenaciously to trifles
If one knows contentment
Much or little wealth makes no difference
The holy Dharma led him not to enlightenment
But made him sick with the sound of bells
The chos-kyong
Who cannot protect himself
Yet offers protection to human beings
Although the religious king be blessed with power
It is no compensation for his sins
The holy religion knows no owner
For those who persevere
The holy deities may be beseeched
In any form one wishes
A paradox:
Partiality where faith flourishes
Injustice where opinions are expressed
Before one preaches
One’s own morality should be pure
No religion but pretending to be a lama
No hair but pretending to be leather
No teaching have I
Yet my hair has been cut
No wealth have I
Yet I am my parent’s pet

When religion is not practised in youth
In old age only regret will set in

Where religion flourishes
So does the devil

In a cloister devote yourself to prayers
In a place of songs devote yourself to singing

How wonderful it would be
If no obstacles arose on the path of spirituality
How wonderful it would be
If the honourable lama hadn’t made me cut my hair

When a wild beast pities the jackal
It’s an ill omen for the tamed sheep

Though the chorten be turned upside down
The series of steps at its waist still remain
(Nothing virtuous is ever completely lost)

To defaecate in the shape of a chorten
(Circumstances that occur by sheer chance)
Tea and chang are meant to be drunk together by friends
Tsampa and meat are meant to be eaten together by friends
It's tea and tsampa that fatten man
It's fire and sun that warm him
If he is absent when tea is served
Even the chief trader
Will not get his share of tea
You don't drink hot tea
And mother doesn't serve hot noodles
It's tea without salt
It's talk without a reply
A tasty tea
Is thanks to butter
The man who tarries at his task
Even if he is a rich man's son
Losses will be his lot
For the spoilt:
Fleece is too coarse to sleep upon
The sun follows the rainbow
The bride follows the groom

What the earth cannot do without—water
What the heart cannot do without—friendship

In this world, if one has perseverance
Knowledge is within one’s palm

A man needs a companion for life
Without one, the world truly is a desolate place

Food should be taken
According to one’s digestion
Work should be done
According to one’s ability

If the public doesn’t deceive its benevolent lord
Then how can the lord abandon his loyal public?

Do not take delight in things
Promised for the future
Do not fear beatings
Threatened for the future

It takes 10 years for trees to grow
And it takes 100 years for a virtuous man to develop
It's the lama
Who offers protection for fish
It's the lama
Who collects the tax for fish

If one knows how to boil a fish's head
It'll yield a cupful of fish-oil

When fish and water part
Dead fish lie scattered

For the fish uncouth in speed and movement
The sharp hook will bait its life

It's no charity
To kill a fish
To feed a dog

When there's no listener
It's wearisome for the speaker

If the humble can keep his place
He provokes not the oppression of any tyrant

When a creature in need of help
Is overlooked
What use is one’s compassion?

The oratory of the weak bears no stature
The wealth of the poor contains no splendour

Humility: too much
Makes a man’s back a saddle
And his ears stirrups

Before sleeping
There are some questions to be answered
Before dying
There are some statements to be made

Nothing is more enjoyable than pleasant sleep
Go ahead and cut one dre off my wages

Though the sun shines for all
The attic sunshine is private property

The setting sun is warmest
Old age is the happiest

A cloudless sun sets on the horizon
A cloudless moon shines till dawn

A long acquaintance reveals
The perfections and flaws in a person
As the days get longer and longer
So does tsampa get tastier and tastier

A rebel:
Turns his back on the benevolent sun
And starts a rebellion in his own country

During the day
No cattle to milk and feed
During the night
No wealth to keep the mind attached

The day’s sun can melt snow
But the night’s gloom cannot melt frost

Rarity:
A flower that blooms for 100 days
A friend that’s constant for a lifetime

During the day the whole hillside
Becomes a world of eyes
During the night all creaks and crevices
Become a world of ears

A wastrel:
Sleeps while the sun shines
Picks lice while the moon shines
During the day, a man’s work
And during the night, a dog’s work

For three days a lama’s silken thread
After that a nest for lice

It’s better for close friends to know distance
And for close neighbours to have high walls

Speak without partiality
Distribute without prejudice

A horse is bought
But a bride is invited

Better than sound sleep
Is a serene dream

To speak of one’s dreams
Even before sleeping

Dreams without sleeping
Racing without horses
Relatives, acquaintances and friends—these three I sought
Thinking they’d help me in need
No matter how good relatives may be
They are good only for one meal
No matter how infertile the little field is
It yields a sackful to carry
Pushing your relative away
But seating the enemy on your lap
When compassion degenerates
Hatred enters one’s soul
With perseverance
A man can pierce a stone
A trustworthy donkey
Should be given a trustworthy load

It’s the mouth that lets words slip
It’s the hand that lets pots drop

The start of negotiations is difficult
The completion of tasks is difficult

One can mistake
Boastfulness and idle prattle
Self-control and timidity

Speak 100 times
But the substance should have essence
Stir curd 100 times
But the yield should be butter

It’s far better to go to hell
Blessed with goodness
Than to live in the human realm
Burdened with ill-repute

Words should be spoken to the face
And a plait should be thrown behind one’s back
The word that precedes
Should endorse the word which follows

Advice:
It’s like a pattern on a stone
The stone may break, but the pattern remains

When a message is sent
It should serve the purpose
When a knife is unsheathed
It should have a target

Statements that are short
Are easier to listen to
Stirrups that are short
Are easier to ride with

Alas! words and saliva
Once spat out
Know no retraction

Advice:
It may be unpleasant to the ear
Yet it stirs the heart

Rare gems:
A guest who speaks truthfully
A lord who has good intentions
Direct questions don’t get an answer  
But a question that waits with patience does

The statement and an arrow
Better that these be straight
A road and a bow
Better that these be curved

When pride rides a donkey
Her dainty feet dangle on the ground

A statement without example is hard to follow
Tea without salt is hard to swallow

Too much talk makes comprehension difficult
Too many clothes make walking a hindrance

Messages conveyed by mouth increase
Provisions conveyed by hand decrease

Words are not weapons
But can rend a heart into pieces

No advice to offer when father and son quarrel
No aid to render when a horse is trapped amongst rocks

If there’s another person to speak to, the heart’s happy
If there’s another person to eat with, the mind’s happy
If mother prattles where father should speak
It's like a house dog being controlled by a guest
Wearing an ostentatious hat
But sporting a miserable plait
(Incompetence will show up even if skilfully hidden)
The magic of the torma
Lies at its tip
Tormas that are disfigured
Are repaired by the thumb and forefinger
Rites that are transgressed
Are absolved by the 100-syllable mantra
Once a torma is cast in the right direction
Who cares whether birds, dogs
Or anything else feeds upon it?
He possesses nothing but a dog
But he must tie it with an iron chain
Perfectionist:
When on an errand he flies as straight as an arrow
When kept indoors he stands as steadfast as a hill
When the horse is on the move
Don't goad it with the stirrup
When a man is humility itself
Don’t treat him with arrogance

An old horse, an old dog, an old man
Know much of life but less of gratitude

The old horse being treated for his sore back
Will regard the act as evil
The young pig being fattened in his sty
Will regard the act as kindness

An older horse
Is more experienced in travelling
An older man
Is more benevolent with help

The old horse died last year
But the dust he raised blows this year
(To dig up old injuries)

Burden an old horse with a heavy load
And the sun shines for the old dog

I may not out-run 100 horses
But will certainly not lag behind 100 donkeys

You can’t put two saddles on one horse
You can’t have two founders for one sect

It’s easier to sit astride a small horse
It’s easier to command a humble man

The three ornaments of the meadow are
Horse, cattle and sheep
The three ornaments of the fields are
Barley, wheat and peas

Feed a horse with fodder
For gratitude you get a kick

Although the male horse has long strides
He will still need a night’s rest after a day’s journey

Horse traders set the price for horses
Owners only tether the horses in their stalls

To mate one’s own good stud horse
In ignorance with a licentious-bottomed mare

If the male horse thinks he has speed
The whole of Changthang is an open field

A horse’s direction is changed by the bit
A man’s attitude is changed by gossip

Amongst horses
A donkey can’t stretch out its hand
Amongst horses
A donkey can’t stretch out its neck
A horse is judged by its saddle  
A man is judged by his work  

Before you are astride, caress the horse  
Once you are astride, hold tight to the stirrup  

To want to ride the ugly donkey  
When one’s got the stately horse  
To want to eat coarse, hand-pounded tsampa  
When one’s got the fine, water-mill tsampa  

Just as a horse with a long jaw appears old  
A man of patience may also look a fool  

Before a horse dies  
Its eyes are plucked out by the crows  
Before a man dies  
His possessions are put up for sale  

A donkey blocks a horse’s path  
A boulder blocks a river’s path  

For cattle:  
When loving care is lacking  
What can one bundle of grass do?
A horse with
A dzo’s horns
A togden knows not his death-bed
Nor a home for his strolling staff
A wandering ascetic is one man with one pair of hands
Bandits are several men with several pairs of hands
If you want to see a show
Look at your own body
If you want to receive a blessing
Seek within your heart
A donkey’s labour
For a dog’s crumb
It’s the hen that feeds at home
And lays her eggs outside
An epicurean loves wealth
And a bluebottle (fly) loves dirt
If a man’s small field cannot
Provide him with barley when hungry
Then who cares if the field is
Covered by wild grass at all times?
The tiger for all its large mouth
Has a throat no bigger than a fox’s
Without entering a tiger’s lair
How can one capture its cubs?

A tiger without aggression
Is an old monkey

If the fox jumps
Where the tiger leaps
It will break its back

However hungry a tigress may be
She’ll not feed on herself

Others kill the tiger
But you get the honour

A tiger may leap in 18 different ways
But the wolf can hide in 19 different holes

The misdeeds of the tiger-born
Heaped upon the head of the hare-born

Keep the imp at home, he’ll steal and feed himself on tsampa
Keep the imp on the roof, he’ll be carried off by the wind

Give! Give! Grab! Grab!
These are the gifts of lamas and lords
No gratitude for giving  
No money for selling  
If autumn brings not the gusty wind  
From where will winter get her glow?  
However prosperous one be  
One shouldn’t spoil one’s child  
Caution has betrayed no man  
In him pride sits higher  
Than the monastery’s golden top  
But his birth is lower  
Than Yarlung’s garbage dump  
He’s the eye that sees  
And the heart that beats  
Praise becomes an insult  
When a man lacks the art of eulogy  
An insult becomes praise  
When a man lacks the art of sarcasm
Gossip:
The farther the place, the sooner you will hear the news
The nearer the place, the more rare the news

gdon 'phreng ba ’dus pa'i ’dus pa'i mi de'i
Gossip from a distant place
Is half truth and half untruth

gdon 'phreng ba ’dus pa'i ’dus pa'i mi de'i
To travel afar
One has to start from the nearest point

don ’phreng ba ’dus pa'i ’dus pa'i mi de’i
On the plain of comfort
Man sings, “Ah la tha la”
On the ridge of struggle
Man prays “Lama Orgyen Pema”

On the plain of comfort
Man sings, “Ah la tha la”
On the ridge of struggle
Man prays “Lama Orgyen Pema”

To feel tired in bed
And to feel thirsty in the morning

da’cha’ de’i
A smaller stove
A warmer fire

It’s better to negotiate
Than to put a knife, a spear
And an arrow to the test
Only to prove oneself a fool
Throw ashes into the sky
Half will land on your own head

It’s no fault of the scissors
If the lines drawn are crooked

Drops of water make an ocean
Grains of sand make a hill

If there’s food in the pot
The ladle, too, will get stained

Don’t put two ladles
Into one earthen pot

Auspiciousness—when thukpa overflows its bowl
Inauspiciousness—when tea overflows its cup

Rather than boil thukpa for three years
It’s better to ferment it for three days

A timid soul shouldn’t fret
The wind doesn’t carry off tiny pebbles

The lord’s compassion
May be as long as a hill
But his foresight
Is no bigger than a horse’s single tail-hair
You may desire a beard
But even your cheeks
Cannot grow a single hair
Devoid of the ring of faith
The hook of compassion is useless
Never so hungry as on a day of feasting
Never so cold as on a day of adornment
Thu is rendered tasty by butter
Otherwise it's just a ball of cheese
The thunderbolt fell in Ngalam
The tremor was felt in Lachi
The lines of fate upon one's forehead
With obliteration do not go away
Wiser the man who moves in harmony
In accordance with his fate's decree
Less comprehension, more pride
More comprehension, less pride
Better than 100 rantings
Is one perception
When compatible people live together
There’s happiness
When incompatible people live on their own
There’s unhappiness

If compatible, happiness comes in being together
If incompatible, happiness comes in being apart

Where one handspan has reached
An arm’s length has not

A promotion may usher in happiness
But a subordinate post is steadfast

’Tis better to be low than be high
For the lowly are beloved by all

Above, the sky is wide
But the pathways are narrow
Below, the field is open
But the law is narrow

If one ascends the cliff of the high
One is flung into the abyss of the low

The higher and longer an object is
The easier it is for it to break
The whiter and cleaner an object is
The easier it is for it to be black
To wrap a curtain around the torma
In case someone sees it
To light a butterlamp in front of it
In case someone doesn’t
(Doing nothing right)
When the time draws near for battle
The coward wishes to rush forth
When the war cries ring out, "Kyi-hi! kyi-hi!"
The coward’s trousers fall off

Purity is Buddhahood
Impurity is hell

In a spiritual assembly of great harmony
It’s better not to house a spherical boulder of a devil

Prosperity makes even enemies into friends
Poverty makes even relatives into enemies

A deceiver possesses:
A double-pronged tongue like a poisonous snake
A double-face like a damaru

Grind a white conch-shell
It’s white throughout
Grind black charcoal
It's black throughout

When a man nourishes a baby conch on milk
He hopes to use it to fend off crocodiles

Die today—a short life
Die tomorrow—a long life

With matters of gravity deal carefully
With prayers say repeatedly

To indulge in unnecessary work
Is to create trouble for oneself

When the circumstances are not examined
Before one speaks
Even a clever man is
No better than a blundering fool

When truth is uttered people dislike it
When a stick is carried dogs dislike it

Whoever is just is a leader
Whoever is loving is a parent
Even god fears
A man of truth

It's possible for truth to follow a middle path
It's possible for an egg to bear the weight of a horse

It's the wild, cunning restless one
Who robs himself of his life

Too many ideas
Lead to too many activities

Without one's loving parents one suffers
Without the sun and fire one dies

To stone the hand
That shows kindness

The man without gratitude
Is akin to a dog
Lacking in discerning thought

A bell with two sounds
A man with two tongues

A task is no task
If it means catching marmots
As the yellow bear does
Happier being a spinster
Than marriage to an ugly husband

It’s better to know an enemy who feels shame and modesty
Than to have a relative who is shameless

For us, children of Tsang
A swig of chang and
A bite of barley will
Make hard work not distasteful

The clever servant has 100 goats
And the poor owner has only one

The borrower shouldn’t do
What the owner does

We are 500 soldiers of Tsang
Are there any bandits at Gamba-La?

However strong the devil may be
Truth till now is on Buddha’s side

In a quarrel where two truthful men face each other
Only the highest judge in the land arbitrates

Although the truth be present
There is no place to voice it
Although reason be present
There’s no person to account for it

The truth belongs to you
But the effort is put in by others
(To take credit for work done by others)

An honest man can set up home anywhere
A dishonest man has no place to go

Truth and country know length and breadth
Lies and deceit know none

If you let fly an arrow
Hit the drong of Changthang
If you want an argument
Choose a refined father’s son
(Anything worth doing should be well done)

To kill two deer
With a single arrow

The arrow should
Reach the target

An arrow’s job is to hit the target
When one knows archery
Then only is a bow bought
When one knows medicine
Then only is a medicine bag bought
To the face
Obeisance paid as to a god
At the back
Curses thrown as to a devil

To have an ugly form
But to possess a wonderful flavour

Desire eclipses decorum

Similar things are found in Lhasa’s market
People similar to your father are found in Nang-Tse-Shar

Trust not the man
You are not acquainted with

The dog rule the lion
Intimacy makes
The eye overlook the eyelash

With familiarity, even the tiger engenders
No fear in a girl’s heart

The sound “phat” will
Awaken sleeping ghosts
To cast the torma towards the west
Whilst the devil dwells in the east

When limestone rolls off there's no cause
For a black slate to be broken

A pebble may be small
But it'll break an earthen pot

Snow gathers on stones
According to their size

A child's fist
Cannot smash the thunderbolt

A jewel is a stone that's abraded
A mirror is a metal that's abraded

He can sit more still than a rabbit
He can move more stealthily than a cat

There's no doubt
A sinner will descend to hell
Just as a brazen money-lender
Will get his interest

Before a sinner's descent to hell
His fortune blazes like a fire
(Before disaster, the pinnacle of fortune comes)
When a toad comprehends sin
He aspires to be a god

Just as salt burns a frog’s skin
So does sin spread like a grease spot

Carrying a cauldron of sins
Yet uttering a mouthful of mantras

If the lama commits sins, who will guide?
If the lord judges with partiality, who will mediate?

Whether it be caused by one’s parents or one’s enemy
There exists no difference—’tis the same

Without enduring sorrow
Happiness cannot be savoured
When the time comes to be sick
Even a doctor's mother falls ill
When the time comes to be lost
Even the astrologer's cow gets lost

The man who doesn't dance when young
Sees no purpose in a dance when old

Alas! youth is no guarantor
Against death

Firewood is most scarce in a forest
Water for tea is most scarce by a lake

In the forest where no tiger reigns
It's the monkey
Who will behave as the king of the beasts

If one does not display one's emotions
For the outside world
There is no way an outsider
Can discern your emotion

At home, congeniality with parents
Outside, congeniality with friends
If the inner spirit of the warriors
Faces no division
Then there’s no need to fear
The outer battle wrought by King Gesar

When the inner heart
Knows no seed of knowledge
How can the outside
Sprout leaves of elegant sayings?

Between intimate friends, no business deals
Between lords and lackeys, no game of sho61

Although the home lacks tsampa
The children arouse laughter

To scatter tsampa outside the window
Whilst the house lacks tsampa for sustenance

A hundred ailments but one cure
A hundred pieces of advice but one essence

An old invalid
Is a knowing doctor
On the day of a person’s serious illness
There is no doctor
On the day of an important person’s death
There is no lama

When gripping pain strikes
Any doctor will do
When gripping hunger strikes
Any food will do

Day and night know long and short—
Rivers and banks know high and low

If you wake up along with your neighbours
Who will lend you their bellows?

To stir up trouble for the birds of the sky
And to stir up trouble for the worms of the earth

A cow with a large udder is easier to milk
A man with a truthful nature is easier to like

The parrot for its skill of speech
Is put into a cage
The other birds for their dumbness
Enjoy the freedom of the sky
Once the accused confesses guilt
A case is easier to judge

Wealth horse-size brings horse-size suffering
Wealth dog-size brings dog-size suffering

When the jewel is yours
You don’t realise its value
When the jewel is another’s
You realise its value

The quality of things is discerned by examination
The quality of man’s character is discerned by acquaintanceship

The ability to use wealth constructively
Is a mark of a wealthy man

No rain from the sky
Means no green from the earth

When the sky is angry, it’s hail
When the anus is angry, it’s diarrhoea

To try to kick the sky
Is to make your own knees feel pain

To fly one needs wings
To dig one needs claws
He’s not the Dharma friend
With whom one can journey to holy Tsari
He’s the evil friend of sin
With whom one kills a pheasant

Not only to offer shelter
But, alas! to seduce the hostess

When the “fortunate one” was taken as a bride
She stirred the family with the ladle of dissension

A bride is a servant
A bridegroom is a bull

There is no nirvana
For one whose covenant is broken
There is no hell
For one whose practise is Dharma

Without the ear’s comprehension
The eye is just an ordinary aperture

For the superstitious
An empty house will
Host a houseful of thieves

For the superstitious
Their vision reflects apparitions of ghosts
I possess a pa-truk, so I wear it
I possess no tsampa, so I beg for it

Father goes wherever he pleases
And swings his sword wherever he pleases

For an old man a long life is three years
And if the unexpected happens then just three days

Shame descends when a young daughter
Has an illegitimate child
Happiness flows when a young son
Earns his keep

When the knee is used to knock at the door and
A child is used to control the dog

The old man’s habit
His old woman knows

Bravery and skill
Suppress one’s enemies
Intelligence and tact
Enhance one’s strategy
There’s no need, for example, to travel to India
When comprehension of it lies behind the door

Without an example
He doesn’t understand the meaning

Consecration done for a wonderful chorten
By one having no authority to consecrate

Too many harsh words from the lord
Fail to win his subjects’ hearts
Too many arrows from a hunter’s bow
Frighten off all animals and birds

A harsh lord
Will be ousted by his people
A stupid warrior
Will be killed by his enemy

A lord’s dominating nature
Leaves his servant weary and exhausted

A lord’s eloquence I do possess
But a lord’s power is not mine

A leader’s judgement shouldn’t be swayed by gossip
A servant’s self-respect shouldn’t be swayed by flattery
Even if the lord changes into a dog
You must place the dog's tail on your head

When the lord becomes your enemy, prepare to flee
When cancer invades your insides, prepare to die

Even for an honest leader
Justice is difficult

If this subject has to bow to every lord that passes
For the king of China, I'll have to remove my scalp

The lord is like a good bow
But his injustice is akin to a white straw arrow

A lord's gift is more valuable than a horse

A lord's word:
Whither tugged, thither go

Before the lord's salutation
One has to face the scolding of his servants

All labour is ineffectual
If it pleases not the eye of the lord
The lord of the estate
Has compassion but no foresight
For the lords
It’s the soothing libation of leisure
For the servants
It’s the damned drink of poverty
A lord has no truth to relate
A thief has no path to follow
While the lord indulges in archery
Surely his attendant
May take his arm out of a sleeve
Just as the lord looked back
The servant stood there with arms akimbo
If the servant dislikes the master
He should forfeit his wages and leave
If the master distrusts the servant
He should give him his wages and send him off
When a lord indulges in a single good deed
Why, his servant too must do the same
The lord only desires one instant
For he has all
The servant desires one lifetime
For he has none

I fear not the lord himself
Aye, I do fear his power

In spring, even the king can’t get any fish
In autumn, even the dogs refuse to eat fish

Where will the fruits of autumn be
If in spring there are no flowers in bloom?

In spring sow seeds after a day’s procrastination
In autumn reap a harvest after 10 days of biding

For three springs, no seed sown
For three autumns, no grain grown

Though the pasture be barren
The rabbit still smells of grass

No fame have I for grassy slopes full of wealth
But only a tethered cow
Providing morning tea shimmering with butter

A child’s laughter heralds tears
In a child’s labour
The stench of a fart lingers
(The work has no value)

Relatives and the sun—
Appease them from afar

When grandpa speaks
He says he’s telling the truth
When grandma speaks
She says she’s telling the truth

A wolf always growls
Be he hungry or fed

A wolf may be old
But doesn’t release the fleece

The wolf with an appetite like a horse
Cannot know fullness
Feeding on tiny sheep

A wolf’s howl
Is a shepherd’s warning

A wolf is a wolf
Be he black or white (in nature)
With a tail that’s thin or thick
A sheep won't be released
From a wolf's mouth

The unexpected:
For the wolf to abstain from taking life
For the thief to show valour

I'm clever enough not to be swept by the wind
And not stupid enough to step into a swamp

Possessing neither the alertness of the goat
Nor the foolishness of the sheep

In taking up the task, a clever man
In performing the task, a fool

If a wolf cub is not killed when young
A pen of 100 sheep is in danger of being emptied

The wolf that feeds on 100 sheep
Portends its own death
The arrowhead that's bent upwards
Portends its own breakage

Chenrezig will not gulp tsampa
My pal will not steal tsampa

The man popular with the public
Is a king

Public food but private salt
Public wealth but private use

Without character
Intelligence is of no use

Behaviour is judged
According to one’s deeds
Heat and cold are judged
By the temperature of water

If one is versed in the art of healing
Even poison can be turned to medicine

Tie a stray dog upon one’s roof
It’ll bark even at the stars

When a beggar is invited to dance
He begins three steps ahead of anyone else

A beggar never dies of obesity
Nor a beggar’s child of starvation

A beggar astride a horse
Sees not the ground below
To house the needy beggar at home
And to shower charity outside

A beggar’s thukpa
Spills before it cooks
(An unfortunate event)

A beggar’s dog gets
No fiercer when chained

Thick, black clouds invite hail
Which sets about destroying harvested rice

A cloud the size of a tiny dead bird prevents frost
A relative as flimsily distant as a spider’s web
Stops enemies from all four directions

Better than a monkey’s dance
Is the stretching out of a lion

For the monkey who has not seen
Snow on mountain tops
Butter being churned suffices to please his eye

Do not tease a short-tempered person
Do not challenge those that you cannot confront
An old father becomes the shepherd  
An old mother becomes the nanny  

If the son doesn’t inherit the father’s trait  
From where does the hare get his hare-lip?  

A father’s punishment is the father’s  
A son’s punishment is the son’s  

A wicked father doesn’t mean a wicked son  
The white dzo has a bull for its father  

When relatives turn into enemies  
Their bones (essence) remain unchanged like gold  

Children of the self-same family  
Each have a different destiny  

An orphan living with his uncle  
Doesn’t see good food  

The father is like sandalwood (rare and precious)  
Alas! the son is like a tamarisk shrub (malleable and common)  

A father’s treasure—a good son  
An arrow’s treasure—good feathers
During the good times of good parents
Tea and chang flowed
During the bad times of bad sons
Tea and chang are addictions

For a good father, a good son
For a good mother, a good ancestry

A good father’s death
Can erase the agony of mourning
A bad son’s birth
Can’t erase the agony of his presence

The father killed the tiger
And the son skinned it

Though one parts from one’s fatherland
One doesn’t give up one’s language

One’s fatherland may be under a bridge
But there one is happy

In my fatherland I owned 100 horses
But when I left I had to use my legs

On that hill no cow-dung
On this hill no cane basket
Between here and there
The rope of the basket gave way
Progress:
The son is more dynamic than the father
And the great-grandson is more so than the grandson

The son inherits his father's possessions
The arrow’s backbone holds the feathers

The wild boar
Who wants to forfeit his own life
Enters a king’s garden

To the pig
His pig-sty is heaven

Looking after pigs, I have lost my style of eating
Looking after horses, I have lost my style of walking
Looking after sheep, I have lost my style of sitting

It is not that Phari’s meadow lacks grass
It is not that you, dear girl, lack beauty

In Phenpo, the seat of intelligence
There’s no place for Aku Tonpa

Anything useless has to be discarded
Even if it comes to the teeth in your mouth
The marital happiness of a daughter
Is brought about by much discussion
Between fathers and mothers

If you do not throw a stone there
No mud will fall here

If one doesn’t extend a right hand there
No left hand will be extended here

If one gives him something, he thinks it’s his due
If one gives him some tsampa, he demands the whole box
If one pours tsampa into his right hand, he stretches out his left

To every question asked
There is an answer rendered

It’s strange that folk who travel afar
Bring news about those who live near

One’s motivation is like a pure, white scarf
But the other’s intention is like black hope
(One’s good actions are met with bad intention)

For the hermit meditating in the deep valley
And the patron dwelling on the lower plain
If enlightenment is to be reaped
It will be by the two together

In the upper plains I have
An immutable lama like Guru Orgyen Pema

In the lower plains I have
An immutable patron like King Tri-Song-De-Tsan

(Having powerful connections)

Rather than build a monastery in the uplands
Live without disputes in the lowlands

It is far better to reconcile
Two adversaries of the lower plain
Than to meditate in seclusion in the upper valley

There is no need to describe
The expanse of the uplands
That can be perceived from the force of
The waterfall on the lower plains

The gift preferred
To Lhasa’s Jowo

(Misuse of property and gifts)

A renowned man
Is befriended by folk of six districts
A generous hostess
Is flocked to by feasting guests
However ferocious a warrior may be
A friend of a valour he shall need

However beautiful a housewife may be
A son on her lap she shall need

If a ferocious man be ineffectual
His sharp armaments
Will become the enemy’s weapon

For an inexperienced man to travel to India
A saddle with 18 reins is required

A coward though adorned
With every amulet
Is the first to fall when
The enemy appears

The man who has no heat in his belly
Cannot digest

Once a man knows courage
His physical size is of no importance
But a boy under 10 years of age
Is still a child

The young warrior who wants fame for valour
Must have the ability to split an enemy’s shoulder

Man is destroyed not by gluttony
But by sloth

The man who loves labour
Shares no love for gluttony

How can a man aspire to encounter a beautiful woman
Without the connivance of a brazen friend?

Behaviour reveals the man
Accents reveals his town

When a man wants to do something, he can
When a yak wants to carry salt, he can

A youth who is incapable
Cannot lead others to capability

The best of men speak only when necessary
The mediocre speak only when questioned
The worst speak behind your back

Better than the advice of one brilliant man
Are the deliberations of three average men

The best of men are deluded by talk
The mediocre are deluded by wealth
The worst are deluded by food
The best of men speaks for his community
The mediocre speaks for his own welfare
The worst speaks for his own meal

However greedy the crow be
He'll not eat a poisonous plant

A crow steals meat
And flies to the uplands
A beggar collects gossip
And tramps to the lowlands

For the youth who boasts of possessing strength
Let him make a hole in a cliff

The man lacking in aggression
Is a sacrificial offering for others

The aggression of a youth is akin to a dog's
Just an invitation for sticks and stones

A youth should not display arrogance
A colt should not hanker after speed

Trust the word of a steady man
Trust the strength of a steady dzo

Before prostrating he bangs his head
Before eating he choking in his throat
(An unfortunate person for whom nothing goes right)

At the crucial time of worship
The goddess was without her head

In public, acting separately
In private, of one mind

In public a beggar on account of my clothes
In private a sick man on account of my food

To the outsider, they’re a line of dutiful maidservants
Only the insider knows, each maid is a mother to the lord’s child

Better than a showy exterior
Is a glowing interior

Placing limits:
The hungry, what he eats
The thirsty, what he drinks

True happiness:
Isn’t the outer healthy body
But the inner serene mind
When one sets out
The aim of reaching one's own destination
Should be achieved

The leakage inside
Is worse than the rain outside

The outside wall of stone can be demolished
But not the inner wall of Dharma

Work delayed causes regret

My white chuba was given by my mother
My name “white face” was given by my mother
(Everything good and bad I owe to my mother)

The wealthy are troubled by wealth
The poor are troubled by hunger

The rich man wishing to hoard
Doesn’t eat

The rich man’s hoe is of iron
So is the poor man’s needle

Better the happiness of the contented
Than the gluttony of the rich
Covet not the wealth of the rich

Listen not to the advice of the violent

If the opulent doesn’t curtail his expenditure
All his wealth may be lost to others

Familiarity:
Makes cattle smell sweet
And detects flaws in your fellowmen

Just as moths are decoyed by light
So are deer by sound

Before morning breaks for the questioner
The sun has risen for the answerer

On the cliff of jealousy
The tender shoots of merit will not grow

Even a dumb child
Recognises his parents

Let the child break the cup
If it so desires

A child’s knowledge
Lies on a whip’s tip
A child’s appetite is guided by his parents
An adult’s appetite is guided by his gratification

The rosary is the mouth’s riding crop

A bird flies off into the spacious blue sky
But alights where it is cramped and confined

To fart in the empty expanses
Means notoriety
To everyone in the gathering

Amongst 100 marmots a single hermit
Amongst 100 rabbits a single genius

A marmot for all its short paws
Releases not the grass under its chest
A camel for all its long neck
Cannot reach for the grass behind the hill

News of urgency
Should be stressed
Again and again

A bold insinuator shouldn’t be indulged
A humble suppliant shouldn’t be condescended to
Although the spotted cow has left for the hills
Her spotted calf remains in the pen

To discern between old and young bulls
Is no knowledge
Even for a clever fool

Know the mother cow
And the calf will know you

The way this pregnant cow sleeps
Her calf will be crooked-cheeked

Until the cow dies
She'll excrete loose dung

The cow nurtured in summer
Will give milk in the winter

The miraculous:
Butter without a cow
An egg without a bird

The cow that loves to feed on crops
Creates trouble for herself
If man cannot nurture his cow in patience
He may not live to see her calf

The salt that's fed to the cow
Though it be salt
Enhances not the flavour in food

The worthy father's tea bag
Is the unworthy son's tsampa bag

Even though the cow has milk
The calf without a palate
Will fail to nourish itself

Better to milk a cow
Than to kill it for beef

The bride that changes her mind upon her horse
Flings the turquoise upon her head

A single woollen thread, though it be fine
When wound into a rope will shackle a lion

The ridiculous:
To load a cargo upon a frog
And to get milk from a tadpole

Give your son his name
Only after he is born

An old bird loses his feathers
And an old man loses his hair

Better eyesight
Than 100 youthful men
Better sense of smell
Than 100 hunting dogs

However evil a son may be
He’s still loved by his parents
However useless a dog may be
He’s still a guide for his owner

Though the men be brothers
Their stomachs are not kin

A mature son becomes his father’s friend
A mature daughter becomes her mother’s friend

A child’s face
Will claim his father
Children—one’s own are beautiful
Flowers—one’s neighbour’s are beautiful

When there is no son in the family
The daughter is ready to stay
When there is no lord in the court
The woman is ready to judge

When the daughter is troubled
Her mother is no help

A woman of loose morals
Seeks no virtuous man
But one of loose morals

For the bride who desires to visit her home
There is no need to consult the stars

When a girl reaches womanhood
She strolls in the streets
When a boy reaches manhood
He holds the throne

For a young wife
Her old husband
Is more boring than a corpse

For mother: there’s
Dirty looks from the daughter
Stubbornness from the bride

There are no mothers who weren’t daughters
And there are no daughters who were mothers first

If a son’s not mad
Better he be wild
If a daughter’s not dumb
Better she be docile

A good son can compensate for one brave warrior
A good wine can satiate with one full cup

For a virtuous man, paradise is easy
For a striding horse, crossing a field is easy

No thanks for pulling the donkey to its feet
But blame for breaking the donkey’s tail

The donkey entrusted with responsibility
Will gallop faster than a horse with none

Superfluous knowledge:
Is like a rotten, worm-eaten lion’s carcass

Tether the calves to find
Which has the strongest neck
To burden a calf
With an elephant’s load

To gravel the ice-sheet
After the donkey has slipped

A donkey can’t go everywhere because of the stick
A horse can’t go everywhere because of the bridle

Don’t call me a donkey, I’m father to a mule
Don’t call me a bull, I’m father to a dzo

When a donkey’s load is himself
His gait is faster than a horse’s

A donkey may know 18 ways of lying down
But the muleteer knows 19 ways of making it get up

The command issued by the donkey
Won’t do for the yak
The charcoal that comes from wood
Doesn’t nourish the tree

The white bird although white
Has a black tail
The bear although black
Has a white chest
The raven, crow and jackdaw though black in colour
Have hearts as white as a conch shell

However thirsty the cuckoo may be
He'll wait for the rain water

A bat shows his teeth when birds are taxed
And displays his wings when rats are taxed
(Practising deception by masking one's true identity)

The vulture that spreads his wings without restraint
Will lose his wings to man

When the king of the birds
Faces the eastern sunrise
The bat turns to
Face the western sunset

A hundred birds look to a garuda
A hundred men look to a lord

A hundred birds can be scattered by a single throw
A hundred sheep can be driven by a single shepherd

The reason why the swans migrate to the north
Is to reach the shores of the tiny mirror lake

See the remains of the birds who died in the past
And realise
That the plight of the birds in the future is the same
(Death strikes all)

When a bird drinks water
He looks upwards
When a donkey drinks water
He looks downwards

Daybreak comes
Even if there’s no cock to herald it
Melody exists
Even if there’s no blackbird to sing it

Oddity:
An egg without a hen
A bridegroom without a bride

Where there is no cock
The donkey has to crow
Where there is no dog
The cat has to gnaw

Even if you cannot catch a bird in flight
Catch it you must when it builds its nest

Each work has its structure
Each dress has its measure

All workmanship is set by examples
It's only a question of whose imitation
Is the more cleverly set

Too much activity can break a leg
Too much going to and fro can lose a seat

One needs to get the egg
Without frightening the hen
One needs to get the deed accomplished
Without frightening the man

Public disgrace:
For birds, plucking of feathers
For men, humiliation heaped in front of a crowd

Too many deeds bring ill-luck
Too much talk becomes an enemy’s staff

After stealing a hen, steal a horse
After stealing a horse, kill a man

Instead of looking up on a shelf like a cock
Looking down the stairs like a cat
(Pursuing the wrong path)

A beautiful hen lays no egg
A beautiful lady does no work

Although the peacock’s plumes are beautiful
Its wings lack strength
Although the lady’s hair is long
Her temper is short
An owl never ceases its nocturnal flight
Nor a convicted prisoner his attempts to escape

A crow can age
But it doesn’t sprout white feathers

The ill-omened owl on the rooftop at night is akin
to the grumbling lord on one’s doorstep during the day

To kill the drong of Changthang with an arrow
A youth must possess the skill in his thumb

Changthang is a treasury of salt
Awaiting the one with the longest hand
(One has to be greedy to get it)

If Changthang had no strong winds
How would the sandalwood forests in the south sway?

With children
Keep love in the heart
And a cane in the hand

Even children and dogs
Recognise kindness
With kindness, an enemy becomes a relative
With cruelty, a son loathes his father

If I did, if it was, if it becomes,
These three are the ultimate bounds of a remark

The great garuda cannot be trapped in a net
The Bengal tiger cannot be controlled by a rope

Though a rat be fat
It’s a handful
Though an elephant be lean
It’s one backload

Even when the cat is asleep
It dreams of mice

Although the small bird has a sweet voice
Its body weight is only two sangs
(A worthlessly famous person)

A small bird flying hither and thither
Will destroy the stacks of barley in the field

For the young lad beaten by others
He sheds his tears
Beside his loving parents
The child whose tongue is scalded by milk
Will blow to cool his bowl of curd

Sand, even cooked, doesn't become food
Peas, even fermented, don't become chang

If one indulges oneself too much
The leg that does the work will break

To hear sweet echoes off a cliff
First speak sweet words

What use is there in possessing scales
If one has to guess the weight of butter?

The man who flees may escape
From the jaws of Shinje Chogyal
But the defiant man
Might even defeat the lord of death

When the lama drowns in a sea of misfortune
So do the disciples
When the lama ascends a hill of fortune
So do the disciples

When a lama is met, realisations and experiences are expressed
When a lord is met, problems and circumstances are expressed
What horse the lama desires, he gets
What cow his attendant desires, he gets

Most lamas are rich men’s sons
Most flowers are waterside blossoms

The lama just comes for a while
And rings his drilbu for a while
(Does no real constructive work)

To offer incense
After the lama has left

To seek spiritual guidance
After the lama has departed

When living
Every lama has his teaching
Every lord has his benefaction

When the lama cannot even manage himself
Forget his ability
To lead the dead to heaven

The lama loves offerings
And the lord loves flattery

Situations that give happiness:
For the lama, death
For the lord, disputes
For the togden, corpses

The lama though enlightened
Yet takes the form of a man

Though the lama is a doctor
When it comes to his own health, he needs help

The quotation that cannot be recalled
In the lama’s memory, nor is spoken of
In the scriptures is redundant

A lama’s clothes are squandered in bits and pieces

The lama’s butter
His own dog ate
(Lama’s wealth is squandered by his own relatives)

The lama’s attendants and relatives
Are best at disgracing him

When the lama indulges in disgrace
What can his attendant say but, “Alas! alas!”

Things that shouldn’t part:
A lama and his parasol
A king and his throne
A lady and her jewellery
If the lama takes, let him take
If the thief takes, let him take
The lama places the drilbu wherever he pleases
The drilbu doesn’t place the lama
A lama’s misdeed is an honourable act
His attendant’s misdeed is a dirty crime
If a lama can kill a hen
His attendant can surely steal an egg
If the lama can slaughter a sheep
Why, his attendant can drink broth
Appearance as stately as a mare
Heart as meek as a shuddering lamb
A fool’s like a stream
Following every channel
A fool makes only a single error
The wise make hundreds
Better than a fool’s praise
Is a clever man’s reproach
The fool that in ignorance speaks of his knowledge
Reveals his own defects for others to see

Knowledge without application degenerates within oneself
A fine tree knows rot under its own bark

The attitude of the mind
Can be gauged from conversation
The distance of a land
Can be gauged from its river

The general without a hundred strategies
Is akin to a fox decked in armour

No matter how expansive the plans
The detailed labour
Must be like grains of sand

The difference in intelligence is known when compared
The difference in valour is known when one is trapped

To place one's trust in the snow peaks
Only to find one's small field parched by drought

When one trusts the shepherd with an open meadow
It's his task to see no lamb falls off a cliff

Voice your plans to others
To enrich yourself with ideas
His trust he places in outsiders
His stomach he feeds at home

Ask others for advice
Only to give yourself a headache

Two different thoughts cannot fulfil a goal
A two-pronged needle cannot sew

Without Lobsang Chogyal*5
The Gelugpa sect
Would die of starvation

For every span of intelligence
Six feet of nonsense

A soul to trust
A place to worship

To have trusted the lungs86
Only to find a leak

Justice:
The powerful must not take to the hills
The humble must not lag behind doors
The powerful have power but no tact
The tactful have tact but no power

Father’s the head of the family
But mother’s the foundation

Too many u-zey muddles the prayers
Too many strategist muddles the plans

It’s a law of life
For the poor to help the poor

If the poor become rich
The rich lose sleep

A poor man’s heart is whiter than a conch
A rich man’s heart is blacker than coal

In summer, take care of iron (it rusts)
In winter, take care of pottery (it cracks)
At all times, take care of your tongue

In summer, if no blue waters flow
Where will one mouthful of winter grass sprout?

When the summer sun turns its back
The shepherd’s hat doesn’t dry
(To harm by doing the opposite)
In summer, avoid the river bank
In winter, avoid the hill tops

In summer in the fields, I’m uncle’s servant
In winter making wool, I’m aunty’s servant

If in summer’s prosperity our paths don’t cross
Be assured in winter’s poverty our paths will cross

Without a keen interest in fashion
There’ll be no swaggering style

To don a mask for others
To display ferocity to yourself
(Ingratitude)

Rather than be the leader of a bad public
Be the servant of a good master

If the subjects are wealthy
The king is also bound to be wealthy

Without subjects, not a king
Without wealth, a beggar

Though Balithang87 is the fatherland of beggars
Hush! We had better not whisper such a fact
For it’s the birthplace of Gyalwa Rinpoche88
For the worm that lives underground
The ant is always there to provoke it

Knowing I am able and sagacious
I took up this task
Knowing my skill in archery
I grasped the bow

Sleep:
Easy for the contented
Elusive for the hungry

Scattering grain upon the grass yields no harvest
But there’s a purpose
In planting seeds in a field

The seedless corn has the tallest ears
The ignorant man has the greatest pride

All grains except peas can become chang
All dogs except your pet can become hunting dogs

The jewel in the thunder dragon’s claw
The stone in the yellow bear’s heart
(Possessing essence)

The louder the roar of a thunder dragon
The smaller the raindrops will be
Thunder without a dragon
Bellowing without a dzo

The thunder dragon’s roar may be great
But it’s an empty sound
The rainbow’s hue may be beautiful
But it’s a hollow emptiness

Though the nomad be pursued by a dog
He will still fold his hands behind his back

It’s his dog that pushes
A nomad to the head of the line

However stupid a nomad may be
He will not sit upon a khil-khor

The nomad feels cold in ‘U-tsang
And the ‘Upa feels cold in Changthang

The nomad is friends with grass and water
The farmer is friends with earth, home and people

The wild drong will never carry one’s load
The bloodthirsty tiger will never be one’s guard dog

Just killing the drong wasn’t enough
They even hoisted its tail as a flag
(Adding insult to injury)
Compared to the frog
The tadpole is a Buddha
(To be faultless)

A frog that lacks courage
Will not leap into the ocean

The frog weeping from the depths of the ocean
Is not heard by Gyajen, mighty lord of the heavens

The frog says, “I’m big”
The snake says, “I’m long”

Insignificance:
A finger-breadth’s leap of a frog
A single night’s wailing of a nun

One diseased frog
Can destroy the whole nest

Without wetting one’s chest in water
How can one swim like a fish?

Practice:
Makes one accomplished in all kinds of knowledge
Like the shepherd with his sling

Where the patron is too devoted
The naljorpa doesn’t last long
(He loses his vows)

If unable to fulfil his patron’s desires
An artisan’s skill counts for nothing

The yak-hair tent’s door should face east
Thus one conforms to tradition

The moth is killed by the flame
The greedy are killed by their avarice

A bee by nature
Is not attracted by a flame

For the moth, the flames
Appear like heaven

To apply honey
On the edge of an execution sword

A snake knows
How to uncoil himself

To squeeze a snake
To bring out its limbs
(To torture the culprit to get to the truth)
It is no use cutting out
The ear that cannot hear and
The eyeball that cannot see

If it knows not change, it's not thought
If it knows not the seed of serenity, it's not mind

To tether two incompatibles:
The yak and the horse

A mother’s only son
Is her body’s heart

If you can’t see from where you are
Position yourself to see
If you are inexperienced and ignorant
Consult a wise old man

To speak of things one hasn’t seen
To teach of things one doesn’t know
Will burst the old hermit’s bottom of deceit

When an usurper grabs the property
The real owner is shoved behind the door
Without acquaintance, Changthang is desolate
With acquaintance, Changthang is a fatherland

Ma'gye bu dang phyug bas | chen tshugs 'bras
When things are beyond you, appeal to a lord
When debts are beyond payment, hold on to a horse\(^2\)

Ma'gye bu dang phyug bas | chen tshugs 'bras
There’s none that knows without learning
There’s none that will not know with learning

Ma'gye bu dang phyug bas | chen tshugs 'bras
Without learning, there’s no scholarship
With learning, even a parrot can recite prayers

Ma'gye bu dang phyug bas | chen tshugs 'bras
The cook is surrounded by an ocean of butter-oil
But when dead he’ll suffer in an ocean of hell\(^3\)

Ma'gye bu dang phyug bas | chen tshugs 'bras
Man can be unkind but helpful
Food can be tasteless but harmless

Ma'gye bu dang phyug bas | chen tshugs 'bras
A nanny, nun, a chang-seller three
Are three women
Of three different dispositions

Ma'gye bu dang phyug bas | chen tshugs 'bras
It’s an inexperienced man
Who marries a barren women
When he wants to lament
He will be a laughing stock

Ma'gye bu dang phyug bas | chen tshugs 'bras
Sons are by nature mother’s children
A father’s son is rare and singular
Ignorance that lives in silence
Will not learn even in a hundred years

For the imposter who boasts of knowledge
His own blunders will flaunt his lack

The unspoken word can always be spoken
But once spoken, it is futile to regret it

An unspoken word has freedom
A spoken word has none

Don’t stick out your tongue without thinking
What will befall you, you never know

Too much talk irritates the king’s ears
Too little talk fills the minister with incomprehension

If the public agree on the same issue
Then even the meek
Will have accomplished a great deed

Speak little; whatever
You have to say, examine in your heart

Amongst the crowd, a few good and bad men
Amongst the gold grains, a few sand grains
Amongst the frogs, a few diseased ones
The man who relates to the majority is wise
The man who controls his own diet is a physician
The butter skin-bag doesn’t control the butter
The Dharma doesn’t control its malevolent spirits
The kettle’s spout doesn’t control its wetness

Pampered on bribes of butter
One day a white stone⁹⁴ will splinter his teeth

Just as an ageing bird exhausts its plumes
So does a butterlamp exhaust its oil

To put a black hat upon a white man
And to fasten a black rein on to a white horse

It’s better to beg a little tsampa from the government of Nang⁹⁵
Than to try to sow seeds in a barren field

A man doesn’t stay where he is happy
A goat doesn’t stay where it is comfortable

A man’s defect should be expressed
A tree’s flaw should be pruned

One man can’t read another man’s thoughts
A stick cannot judge a dog’s behaviour
To the man blessed with comprehension, speak one word
To the horse blessed with speed, one whisk of the whip

The time will come when one needs
What one once thought redundant
The time will come
When one’s son will need a bride

Incredible how things change into other things
And how tsampa gruel changes into dough

The man who takes up tasks he cannot fulfil
Will find there’s no peaceful place for him

An old man’s young wife
Is more cherished
Than his only son

An old man’s experience is in his advice
The quality of tea is in its taste

When a man becomes old, he stays at home
When a dog becomes old, he lives on his master’s doorstep

When a man ages
He loses power
When a horse ages
It loses market value
When a man gets old
He longs for his homeland
When a bird gets old
He longs for his tree

A man without wealth is a beggar
And an arrow without feathers is a stick

There's no man with no love for wealth
And there's no dog with no love for blood

Even the wise sometimes
Utter words of inexperience

A hundred men with a hundred minds
A hundred dzo with two hundred horns

A hundred men, one mind
A hundred horses, one pace

Wherever an evil man travels
His ill-repute follows him
Whenever an evil bird flies
He emits his evil sound

An evil man's stomach is full of cunning deceit
A white conch-shell's stomach is full of slugs
It’s an evil man that strikes his benefactor
It’s an evil dog that bites his owner

It is better to rub dry leather
Than to advise a wicked person

After an evil man’s death
His ill-repute lasts three days
After an evil dog’s death
His ill-repute lasts three years

Evil men are ladles of trouble in a country
A spherical boulder is the cause of imbalance in a wall

The evil have more lawsuits
Just as moist wood emits more smoke

An evil man, though advised, doesn’t listen
An evil dog, though controlled, doesn’t behave

An evil man with an evil knife
Will wound an innocent tree

Just as the clay pot depends upon its handle
So must a man depend upon another man
A dwarf cannot travel distances
A small bird cannot traverse the sky’s expanse

Even the lowly can comprehend
Even a pony can wade

There’s hair on a big man’s scalp
There’s grass on a big hill’s slope
(More supporters due to more resources)

The lord should not indulge in small folks’ gossip
An old mare shouldn’t toddle like a foal

An innocent serving the high and mighty excessively
Might find himself confronting litigation
(The powerful cast blame on the innocent)

It’s the love of wealth
Among leaders and nobles
That causes the country’s lawlessness

Others are tamed with gentleness
You yourself are tamed with harshness

It’s an indolent cat that licks the butter-oil
Only to get nine bruises on his head

Better to knead leather
Than to advise a heedless person
The heedless shouldn’t be consulted for advice
The irresponsible shouldn’t be entrusted with tasks
An innocent man is declared guilty by a crime
A free-flowing river is crossed by a bridge
A faultless tree is felled by an axe
Man may sleep
But ghosts knows no sleep
Between two persons there’s a relationship
Between two horses there’s a saddle
If one stands on one’s toes
To reach the unreachable
It’ll only separate the shoe from its sole
A poor man’s shelter is behind the door
A hornless yak’s shelter is the last peg
When a man’s stomach knows burning hunger
The mighty king’s law doesn’t hold for him
The hungry cannot labour
Due to exhaustion
Incompetence:
Imbalancing a donkey by
When you talk of others
Dawn is breaking for you
When others talk of you
Night falls for you

Man must know honesty
Gods must look divine
Yak-hair tents must have weight

If a man be truthful
Make him a leader
If a tree be straight
Make it a scale

What one doesn’t desire falls on one’s roof
What one does desire, even if searched for, isn’t found

Men may look alike but their hearts differ
Horses may look alike but their gait differs

It would be better
For an unhappy guest to depart
And a patient that never recovers to die

All of man’s ailments
Are caused by his eating habits
All of a horse’s ailments
Are caused by its trotting habits
All men like a rich man’s son
All conversation goes to support the ones we love
To commit murder there
And claim compensation here
The lowly praise themselves
As the crow flatters its own feathers
Do all sorts of things
And all sorts of things will happen
A good man depends upon another good man
A cup of tea depends upon good tea leaves

Competence:
Enough makes one the jewel of the house
Too much fills the doorstep with riders

For as long as man lives, his thoughts exist
For as long as a bird lives, his nest exists

Unless he is dead
A man is a tree-trunk of wealth

The public:
Its mouth is poison
Its hand is gold
Genius is found in human society

The gold nugget is found in the earth’s sand

Man doesn’t change but the printed word does

Provisions don’t change but the container does

Man is destroyed by evil companionship

As goats are slaughtered for the fat of their body

Ambition:

Plans for 100 years
Though only one day be lived

When a man’s lifespan knows cessation
He lands on a cannibal’s doorstep
When a sheep’s lifespan knows cessation
It lands on a wolf’s doorstep

After spending a lifetime in the hills
How can one not know the wildlife?

When a man’s life is too long
He sees even a deva’s corpse

In a man’s lifetime
He knows three joys and three sorrows
In a long spring day
There are three cold and three warm times
We Tibetans eat all sorts of things
And suffer from all sorts of ailments

A hundred good men seem too few
An evil man seems one too many

A good man’s heart is akin to gold
And pure gold never knows change of colour

A good man deserves a good name
A good horse deserves a good saddle

A virtuous man gathers virtuous dust
An evil man gathers evil dust

When man despairs
He appeals to the gods
When gods despair
They resort to lies

The monkey who aped man
Found his own hands caught between stones

For as long as man’s spirit doesn’t degenerate
There is no need to fear the degeneration of the physical form

When others look
They think that you have brought a guest
When horses look
They think that they have carried a guest

Attire yourself to be acceptable
In another man’s world
Nourish yourself to be acceptable
In your own world

A foreign land may be heaven
But one’s own country is a happier place

It’s the cunning
Who own up to their faults
And yet show their backs
To the benevolent sun

There’s no man with no vice
There’s no tree with no warts

If men know not 100,000 differences
Then who’ll be the leader of men?

Man’s complexion
Mirrors his joy and his sorrow

Before one can call others a torma
One needs to be a tsok

To others speak no hurtful words
To oneself drink no poisonous draught
A man needs power
But power needs limitation

When a man lacks power
His conversation lacks weight

When man has no butter for himself
From where will he get
An offering of butterlamps for the gods?

Every man to a name
And every weapon to a handle

Before you blame others
Make sure there's no tsampa on your own nose

For the unfortunate
Even gold turns to sand
For the pensive
His mind turns into a monkey's

There is no man that can do without a path
There's no beast that can do without grass

Rebirth:
Just when you're getting a human form
You get a dog's instead
Just when you’re going to hell
You get a lord’s form

A man may be old
But he needs a mentor
A man may be talented
But he needs an assistant

Though his years be many
His maturity is little
Though the plant’s leaves be ripe
Its root is unripe

When a man dies his family lives on
When a horse dies its saddle stays occupied

It’s better to know one subject
With complete thoroughness
Than to mumble about a hundred subjects

A man may take cover underground
But his reputation will remain above ground

If all men unite as one
Mount Meru can be moved

The man from Lhokha is akin to the magpie
For he truly is as miserly as that bird
With one egg he did circumambulate
The whole of Lhasa and home again
The eyes see only a hand span
And the mind thinks only a thumbnail span

Although men possess eyesight
They don’t recognise nobility

Unless one is totally blind
One retains the power of discrimination

Though he be blind
He looks with malevolence
Though he be toothless
He chews with menace

Without eyes
From the knees downwards
Is a desolate valley

Between the size of the right and left eye
Between the taste of the right and left cheek

Better to shut your own mouth
Than to bind the mouths of others
To break your own needle
For someone else’s sewing

The dog who emulated a man
Found his own tail on fire

In another man’s country
You’re a dog’s intestine
On another man’s property
Your dog is his guard dog

Misfortune:
Is no man’s desire
But it spares no man

Man cannot safeguard a secret
And water cannot hoist a stone

What a man cannot digest is promise
What a dog cannot digest is iron

Double misfortune:
An extra month when famine strikes
And a crooked mouth when paralysis strikes

It’s more enjoyable to sing songs in an open space
Than to feast upon tea and chang in an atmosphere of gloom
Even a firebrand can set alight
A mountain of hay

A blossom blessed with perfume
Will naturally invite the honey-seeking bee

The lotus although born in marsh
Adorns the altar

A flower overtaken by frost
Leaves no hope for seeds

The yellow flowers are the meadow's ornament
An amicable leader is the public's ornament

Although the flowers are offered to the god
One holds the stalks in one's hand
(An offering made with attachment)

Where a fire has been lit
Scorched earth remains

Light a fire, the earth is scorched
Dig the earth, the stones are exposed

Fire, water and a prince
However young
Shouldn't be ignored
Fire and water
Are beyond beseeching

One’s mother and a fire
One attends to from close by

Things impossible to do:
To light a fire without smoke
To boil water without vapour

To blow a fire
Only to singe your beard

A fire dies out on its own
And smoke disappears on its own

Play with fire
It’s a portent that
You’ll burn sooner or later

A leather bag for those who haven’t but must boast of it
A cloth bag for those who have but must hide it

Just as ancestry descends in order
So are ladders climbed rung by rung

Cause of trouble:
An evil woman’s tongue
An evil man’s fist
Amorality and virtue
Are hard to distinguish
To declare war
By thrusting one’s spear at one’s waist
(Do as one has promised)
Divorced women
Know no constant companion
When a young lass is haughty
It shows she has a powerful uncle by her side
The man who knows humility
Even in poverty
Is liked and helped by all
Until man sees hell
He will not believe in Buddhahood
A bigger wound is easier to treat
A bigger tear is easier to mend
The peacock and the crow
Can never be friends
The elephant and the bull
Can never share a shelter

When the peacock itself lacks competence
Decorating the queen's gracious fan is out of reach

The peacock's wonder is its feathers
The parrot's wonder is its speech
The monkey's wonder is its arse

If one's sore can be healed
Even a dog's fat will do

Poison in a medicine sachet
And a leopard in a goat's pen

It's rare for the steep cliff to sprout pine
But rarer still
For the pine leaves to turn yellow
(An impossible occurrence)

It's a striped mule that asks
A white kyang to carry his load

It's the loquacious man
Who's the public leader
It's the ponderous man
Who's the dissecting ladle
Here come the Tsangpas
"Upas, do let the shoving crowd pass"

To know if the Tsangpo’s swelling
Look at your own drain

A forceful leader
Will judge with partiality
A wealthy man
Will judge by wealth

The nun who’s an imposter of efficiency
Brews trouble for herself

When your shit is in your arse
You’ve got no ears to listen

Sell something—an object is lost
Buy something—an object is gained

Strange:
How weeds never cease
And evil men never die

A cow shits where
She had laid down to chew
When a tree’s root is medicine
That self-same tree’s branch
Cannot be of poison

Rich meadows invite deer
And clear rivers invite cranes

There is no fame in visiting Tsari
But instead there is the ill-repute
For stealing the gonpa’s yak
To parley with a traveller
Of Tsari’s sanctity
Will only delay his journey

Grass without roots is swept by the wind
Talk without substance is passed off as lies

A man cannot eat tsampa
And at the same time play the flute

To fill a small bag of tsampa
One has to face a bagful of obstacles

An inexperienced rider’s love for riding
Will only break his limbs
A penniless host’s love for feasting
Will only reduce him to beggary
Only the tip has dried
The root hasn’t rotted

It’s a life of labour that ushers in wealth
Alas! Indolence never procreates affluence

Affection that is genuine
Never turns a heart into a stone boulder

Perseverance finds
The path of rich dividends

Without effort
Even the smallest task
Is hard to accomplish
A patternless dye
Leaves no impression

An unkind remark, however short
Kindles hurt in a human heart
However small a needle be
It possesses a sharp point

However unpleasant a remark may be
Don’t make it an insult
The stick one carries
Doesn’t always have to hit a dog

A heart that nurses unkind thoughts
Should not think of
Auspicious dates\textsuperscript{105} for religious practice

Utter foolish prattle
And all will deride you

To kick the calf
For the anger felt against the yak

Words that have essence are worth listening to
A cow that’s nursing is worth milking
The friend that admonishes with harshness
Betokens a soul who cares for you

Harsh words invite enmity

Lies cannot
Accomplish deeds

The man whose first three words ring false
Makes even his loving parents balk at his credibility

If you desire a lifetime of unhappiness
Treat your friend with hypocrisy

A lifetime of meditation
Blown into thin air
In one morning of ill-temper

When young, the beloved of one’s parents
When old, a beggar with a staff

As for Sangdhok Palri
It’s filled with the carcasses of goats

When the monk preceptor
Scolds the monks collectively at assembly
It’s for the guilty monks to comprehend individually
A trader’s loss is contrived by his host
A field’s loss is caused by wild grass
When a trader yearns for misfortune
There is no trade he’ll not indulge in
To buy goods in Lhasa’s market
But to feel regret in Changthang’s expanse
Consult the lama who is most favourable
Pursue the business that is most successful
If the trader consults the stars in the sky
For his ventures
Then surely the bandit consults the stars on the ground
For his adventures
A trader and a gambler:
Two who call forth no trust
Where the trader wants to halt
The donkey wants to sleep
A trader never tells the truth
And a thief never feels stinginess
When a trader is shameless
He’ll even feed others on donkey’s flesh
When man's trade knows no contentment
It's a portent of a great loss
When a man's mouth knows no rest
It's a portent of an arse getting flogged

Wool cannot outweigh salt
Size for size
Wool steeped in water
Will, however, come quite close

When one possesses vermilion
What need is there to beg from others for red ochre?

It's true that occupation knows social status
But happiness and sorrow are an attitude of mind
To have a long arm  
But short sleeves

The five fingers of a hand are brothers  
The hand’s palm inside and outside are of flesh

The face that desires beauty  
Even if washed in milk  
Yields only unwanted pimples

An old dzo may have no strength  
But he knows the road better

When a dzo gets old it’s the slaughterhouse  
When a man gets old it’s the prison cell

The dzo must lift his back more  
The mountain pass must stoop lower

A servant’s appetite is tailored  
According to his master’s generosity  
An itinerant’s pace is set  
According to the terrain

If you fight it’s not goodness  
If you beg it’s not tasty
It’s flowers you plant
But thorns you reap

Break a clay-pot, it’s a public loss
Break a bowl, it’s an individual loss

It’s good profit
To get a metal vessel for an earthen pot

A slate hill has no choice
But to lie under the sky
A running stream has no choice
But to flow under the bridge

A hill of slate and a hill of grass
Are two different entities
But under a blanket of dark fog they are one!

It’s an evil shepherd who hinders an itinerant
And it’s an evil itinerant who breaks a sheep’s leg

A kind shepherd is the flock’s parent
A good horse is the lord’s trust

Dignified deception is a lord’s virtue
But too much of it will only invite lawsuits and thefts
When the fox is made king  
He is hardest on the foxes

The wolf was forced to faint  
By the slap of the ghost
The dawn was compelled to rise  
By the shove of the sun

(Forced to act)
One sleepless night
Makes 10 tiring days

If the brothel’s owned by your mother
There’s no escape for you from prostitution

One may dance in the sky
But one must land on the earth

Look at your shoes
To see if you can dance
Look at your clothes
To see if you are happy

The peaceful want a compromise
And the aggressive want a war

When a field is owned by an unpleasant neighbour
One doesn’t trespass even in harvested summer
So let’s not speak of bare winter

A neighbour’s field is always much better
But one’s daughter is always more beautiful
An infertile field though ploughed several times
Will yield only starvation for the owner

A field should have fertility
And a man should know gentility

If the field and pasture know a good year
Then the beggar, too, knows patience and happiness

For the field there’s no difference in seeds
But the yield makes all the difference

Sugar tastes sweeter
But tsampa lasts longer

If the cat sleeps a sleep of contentment
The rat cannot sleep the sleep of hunger

It’s the cat who hides
His excrement with sand

To nurse hatred in one’s heart
Yet to flaunt love for the enemy

Disgust and pity are felt
By oneself and by others
Gratitude gets fed one morning’s breakfast
And repays it by working the whole day
Not to wake up in time like a pig
Not to sleep in time like an old horse
Like the cock looks for a morning’s breakfast
Like the hen looks for an evening’s meal
In the land where yogurt is abundant
There gruel is still served
A hat looks best on the head
And a flower looks best in the grass
Look to your own faults
Before delving into those of others
Discipline:
Must be endured by oneself
Before one sets others under it
There are none so deaf
As those who never heed advice
Misfortune:
When it strikes others do not rejoice
For there’ll be a time when it will find you
Faults:
Your eyes see them in others
But you need a mirror to see your own

A woman who owns two estates
Is busier than a dog

The bow is fully drawn
But there are no targets to shoot at

If one cares for the general public
One’s own purpose will be achieved simultaneously

Old men leave more prints of their bottoms
Than young men do of their feet

An old man’s ingenuity
Is better than a young man’s brawn

Better than a young man’s strength
Is an old man’s experience

It’s a smiling-faced enemy
Who wreaks permanent danger to one’s life

One needs a light
To search for a light
However bright a lamp may be
It cannot see its own base

It’s a desperate doctrine amongst
The animal kingdom
That they seek nourishment only for themselves
However poor the diet may be
It fills one’s stomach
However coarse the attire may be
It warms one’s body

He has just the musk deer’s head to eat
Yet the effort spent was more than
All the hairs on the skin of the deer

Happiness exists
When there’s food and drink
But more happiness reigns
When there are no disputes and complaints

How one should eat
How one should dress
How one should live
Are the three pieces of advice kind parents give

Hoard food only to feed dogs
Hoard clothes only to feed worms

Food:
That which is grudged lies on the tip of the tongue
That which cannot be swallowed chokes in the throat
If man cannot control his appetite
From his knees upwards all is stomach

If there are no provisions to share
Then there's no cause for complaints

For feasting one stretches out one's neck
For labour one grimaces with disgust

Overindulgence:
Recognises that the food comes from others
But doesn't recognise his own stomach

A tasty morsel lasts just for a day
A bad reputation lasts for 1,000 kalpas

Appetite whetted by continuous eating
Roads familiar by continuous travelling

Those who yearn for peaches
Need to plant peach trees

It's the slow incessant rain shower
That causes hill-tops to collapse
Who wastes the family wealth

Where the provision is god-like
The owner is devil-like

To hide a fist
Under one’s cowl

Until one has a fit
One doesn’t get a crooked jaw

However small an object may be
It’s still a drop of gold
However narrow a thread may be
It’s still wound by three strands

If there’s no form
There’s no shadow

Poverty makes a good man as soft as cotton
Opulence makes an evil man coarser than wood

Just like dried shit shows itself off as gold
So do the evil scorn the good deeds that goodness does

While the good set to work
There the evil look on

When the good want to practise virtue
They heed not the wicked
For the good to repay gratitude  
Takes months and years  
For the wicked to avenge themselves  
Takes one morning’s effort  

For the good, tea and chang follow  
For the wicked, fists and sticks follow  

Good influence is like divine heaven  
Bad influence is like endless samsara  

When a man knows greed  
Even honey impairs his liver  
When a man knows verbosity  
Even a father’s advice endangers the son
However desperate the situation becomes
One must never disgrace one's parents

Unable to say "ham"
Because of the absence of a tongue
(Unable to prove one's innocence because of guilt)

The owl yearns for the dusk of evening
And the cock yearns for the dawn of morning

An owl is happiest on a cliff
A duck is happiest on a lake

A pigeon's anus cannot
Excrete a gold earring
The good argue about the seating arrangement
The bad argue about the food
Amongst the good there are many
Who are destroyed by a sense of shame
Amongst the bad there are many
Who are destroyed by haughtiness

The good excel
At being respectful in speech and behaviour
The wicked excel
At being brazenly bold and greedy

Whether a man be good or bad
His behaviour will disclose
Whatever a man's birthplace
His dialect will disclose

No gratitude for one's mother's gifts
Of tea and chang
But instead beating and expulsion
Heaped on one's poor father

Either nine yaks die
Or we collect Changthang's salt
Some men are discerned at first glance
Some men take three days of acquaintance

If you get up
You bang your head
If you sit down
You crush your bottom

If one stands one doesn’t get any taller
And if one sits one doesn’t get any shorter

For those who live in Yarlung
It's the Yarlung deity
They have to worship

For the illiterate man
His pen is longer
Than an arrow

Root of all knowledge
Poorest tool for a livelihood

Without treading the path of sorrow
Where will the friend of one’s heart be met?

To show he is not without wealth
He wears a black woollen chuba
To show he is not without poverty
He stiches a horizontal patch

Too much companionship
Makes a mother and daughter argue
Too much eating
Makes honey impair the liver

Once one sips the country’s water
One must be ready to abide by the country’s law

To invoke the local deity
The local man is best

Better than the sun that shines with slovenly reluctance
Is the darkness that comes in decisive completeness

A bigger yak doesn’t
Mean bigger dung

By throwing stones in a temple one hits
Those on the right and those on the left
As well as honourable heads and feet
(An utterance that hurts all concerned)

When the coquette flirts with charm
Even the clay idol breaks out in smiles
A goat's kick cannot
Make a pillar fall
With the goats, he bleats
With the sheep, he baas
When the goat is slaughtered
It’s the sheep who tremble
When the dog is beaten
It’s the pigs who flee
To call your own
Good mule a tho-log
The results of your actions are accountable only to yourself
As Lhajin’s burden of sins was borne by himself alone
For oneself to praise oneself
For the shit to lift the arse
It is easy to raise an eyebrow
At other people’s motives
When your own are hidden inside
If you can accomplish your aims
Who cares if you do away with convention?
If you can feast on delicacies
Who cares if you die of a swollen belly?

The greedy know no shame
Without shame man is akin to a beast

Just as a valuable tree is glorified
By its own bark
Bestow praise on one’s own folk

If you desire to blind yourself
Be a mason
If you desire to be healthy and happy
Be a tailor
If you desire to make a small fortune
Be a carpenter
If you desire to go to hell
Be a thanka painter

Unable to stand a pin-prick oneself
Yet threatening others with a sharp pricker

If one can support oneself
It is better than a gift from god
Fear not the retribution of the yidams
If your mind is unblemished
There's no need for the hills to argue about their loftiness
Let them wait for the aureate sun to dawn
The rabbit's constant worry
Is that the sky will fall on him¹¹⁵
(An unnecessary worry)
When the rabbit is the eagle's quarry
His cries are heard only by the sky's expanse
When the spheroid rolled down in pain
The ovoid watched the show in glee
The pass I shall not ascend
Nor turnips shall I eat.:

An artisan becomes the servant of all men
An orator becomes the leader of all men

If one has meat in one’s hand
Even the birds of the sky will swarm

Harsh speech is expressed by the mouth
An ugly gait is created by the feet
An infected eye is caused by a restless hand

If you lack the art of speaking, others get mad
If you lack the art of listening, you get mad

Not all utterances are wisdom
Not all food is meat

When early morning brings in sloth
The dusk of evening ushers in
Regret of work undone
When the whole country is flooded
A pebble cannot remain dry

The distance of a valley can be gauged
By the messenger sent off on foot

Every district has its own dialect and customs
Every lama has his own sect

If you have no physical illness
Then stamp a dog's tail
If you have no mental suffering
Then stand as a financial guarantor

For the man who possesses the nine kinds of courage and skill
His size need be no bigger than a goat

Stupidity:
A septuagenarian planning his future
A defeated king scrutinising his documents

The good years are
When shoots are green
When daughters sit on mothers' laps
It’s the lama who says
Don’t eat meat
It’s the lama who partakes of
The largest piece

Words of flattery never flow
From an affectionate heart

The best meat is found in the fissures of a bone
And is partaken of by servants not by the lords

The tasty morsel is eaten by uncle wolf
The misdeed is blamed on sister fox

A louse feels he has surmounted a mountain pass
But it is only the edge of a collar

When wood supports wood
Pillars and beams are created
When man supports man
Leaders and subjects are created

Wood though moist burns
Stone though dry does not
If the trunk of the sandalwood tree knows sleep
Then the roots will know rot
If the head of the lineage knows indolence
Then the lineage will know redundance
It's easier to climb a tree with branches
And to explain to a man with comprehension
When a mother rails at her daughter
It's time for the daughter-in-law to understand
The lama preaches that which
He doesn't comprehend
Though the distance be far
Yet for news all distance is close

If you wish to gain enlightenment
This is the way
If you wish to be featherless
This is the way

The dog who imitated the snow lion
Had his ears filled with snow

Although the snow lion may feel cold
He will not abandon the snow

Better to drink chang with a heart of good intention
Than to go on a pilgrimage with a heart of evil intent

The tiger’s stripes are on the outside
A man’s stripes lie on the inside

The heart’s wishes are like a horse
Galloping in the open space of the sky
But alas! if one lacks the resources
One cannot even bite the palm of one’s own hand
The man who is toothless
Is separated from the act of eating
The man who is blind
Is separated from the act of seeing

No teeth—separation from feasting
No wealth—separation from relatives

One is apt to harbour one's own secret
Others are apt to disclose it

Where will you insert the handles
In an immaculate white hen’s egg?
(Innocence can’t be made a scapegoat)

Better than the fickle love of a newly-acquired friend
Is the steady animosity of an old enemy

When gold lies under the earth
Its glitter shines in the sky

Cared for and nurtured by one’s parents
But body and soul owned by the lord

You don’t have to support him
So you find he has a small appetite
You don’t have to live with him
So you find him most amiable
Murder is murder
No matter how gentle
The murderer may be
If a man ill-treats others
A worse retribution awaits him
To fulfil every desire
Good fortune must be limitless
In the mortar of ill-fortune
Pounding fat will leave no grease
Good fortune and a (drinking) bowl:
It's good to possess these
When the confirmed liar tells his tale
The truthful are reduced to tears

When falsehood is a hill
Truth is only a yak

If the Horpas are conquerors, let them be
If the Ling are conquerors, let them be

Immense though the wealth of Namsey may be
As treasurer he has a stingy yidag

Where the holy sites are more blessed
The attendant gets fatter and fatter

Although Lhalung Paldor has fled to the hills
His horse's hoofmarks lie in the plain below

The native old lady of Lhasa
Has not beheld the Jowo of Lhasa

The man who is sincere in his efforts
Will certainly be favoured by fortune
If Uncle Tonpa falls off the ground
He feels no regret
For where will he fall?
But on the same low ground?
(A simple man has nothing to lose)

On the bridge built by the nun
The nun herself must tread

The Apohor knows no honour
For he has no intestine under his belt

When a person lacks capability
To seek refuge in others is the last resort

Meat and tsampa fatten the old Khampa
Gold and silver fatten the young Khampa

Everyone sees the nomads eating their thu
But no one sees them trudging the pass

What dance father does and
What the professional dancer does are different
If one obtains the mother
Thither the daughter comes
Happier it would be if my stepmother died
Then the unhappy destiny thrust upon me would be over

If a mother’s son
Has perseverance
Ganden’s throne has
No real owner

The mother who really wants to feed her child
Will even use water to make a tsampa dough

Mother thought her younger son was
Practising religion in the monastery
But instead he was
Collecting dung in Kyang-da-nagar

For the sake of beauty
One must bear pain

Infatuation:
It’s faster than a horse
With a tail shorter than a sheep’s
1. These three are prominent sub-sects of the Kargyupa sect, one of the four main schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

2. A place in Kongpo, southern Tibet.

3. In Tibet most brass statues were gilded with pure gold making them valuable. The proverb states that there’s always the possibility of the gilded statue being removed and replaced by a brass one and the excuse rendered for such an occurrence being given as “too much dusting” rubbing off the gold.

4. The kyang (wild ass) dies facing its homeland, Changthang, the northern plain.

5. Sukhavati, the pure realm, where the Buddha Amitabha resides.

6. The central government of Tibet.

7. According to Tibetan superstition, cutting one’s hair affects the luck of the person, so certain auspicious dates are selected for hair-cutting. This is especially so when it is a child’s first hair-cut.

8. A khada is usually made of white cotton or silk, used on all occasions to signify the offerer’s pure intention and concern.

9. This is the six-syllable mantra of Chenrezig, which invokes compassion.

10. The Tibetan Apso, a special breed of dog unique to Tibet, looks similar to the Tibetan snow lion but is diminutive in size. But the proverb states that the comparison is only superficial.

11. This quotation is attributed to Milarepa, the famous poet and mystic saint of Tibet. He spoke these words to a thief who had come to rob his cave, while the saint was in meditation. The saint possessed nothing that the thief could rob.
12. Tibetan chubas are sometimes worn with one arm free, leaving the sleeve to hang loosely by the side. This style gives the person a swagger and a certain air of arrogance. In the proverb it refers to a household full of pride and haughtiness due to power.

13. These are the four continents that surround Mount Meru. They are Lu Phag, Dzambu Ling, Balang Cho and Dra Minyen.

14. Drib is a village on the south bank of the Tsangpo River of Lhasa. The people living there are very poor and have an inordinate love for tormas.

15. Aku Thak-Thung was the most powerful minister in King Gesar of Ling’s ministry.

16. The 29th day of the last Tibetan month of the year is in essence the last day of the year. Every household and family has a special thukpa together. This day signifies the end of the passing year and the coming of a new year. The old and infirm feel they have seen a new year in after partaking of this thukpa.

17. Monks aspiring to be Geshes found themselves so involved in studying the texts that the skill of calligraphy was not emphasised. Thus, most Geshes ended up speaking a lot of facts but lacking the art of calligraphy and of correct spelling.

18. Tibetan religious ceremonies and prayers sometimes continued for several days without much of a break, so meals and tea were served in the prayer hall. This caused rifts between the presenters, cooks and monks.

19. Refers to any possession or article offered to the monastic community by devotees for prayers at death rites and for the enhancement of health, wealth and happiness. Misuse of such offerings is a grievous sin.

20. The monastery referred to is the Namgyal Dratsang at the Potala, the Dalai Lama’s personal monastery, in Lhasa.

21. Shol is a small village at the foot of the Potala Palace.

22. The five sciences are the science of language, dialectics, spiritual science, medicine and the mechanical arts.
23. Drowa Sangmo, a queen with celestial attributes, is a character in a popular Tibetan opera.

24. Mendal-gang is the capital of Monyul. The dirty linen she left behind were her two children who had to face obstacles before they were reunited with their father.

25. Used in hell to punish the sinful through physical pain.

26. Long prayer flags are attached to a straight wooden or bamboo pole and pinned down on one side to allow the prayer flag to flap. This helps to spread the inscribed prayers in the 10 directions.

27. Subsequent to the introduction of Buddhism in Tibet around the 8th century A.D., Tibetan scholars travelled to India to study Buddhism, spending time in Nepal to acclimatise themselves to the heat.

28. Literally means the "Wind Horse" which in Tibetan astrology signifies the status of luck and fortune in a person's life. Prayers are recited and prayer flags are hoisted when one's "wind horse" is on the descent.

29. Tibetans attached a great deal of importance to seals; no order was valid without a seal.

30. 'Dam' is a place north of Lhasa, now an airport.

31. In this saying the Sakyapas are proud of their ancestry, but at the same time they lacked any civilized etiquette to be able to justify such haughtiness. Sakya lies south-west of Lhasa.

32. Usually used when one attempts to get things done by bribing officials for a favour. The official accepts the gift but neglects the deed. Sometimes things can get even worse when the official not only accepts the gift but also gets you into trouble.

33. In the morning, the attendant sees to the morning rituals of offering. In the evening, the lama attends to his own prayers, so this leaves the attendant free.

34. The offerings of the 15th are butter sculptures made for the festival of Cho-nga Chod-pa, the 15th day of the first Tibetan month. These offerings were made in secrecy in Tibet as it
was a competition amongst monasteries, so the monks who created these sculptures were highly skilled, creative and artistic. The test required consistency, concentration and imagination. The proverb refers to one who is very efficient.

35. On the 15th day of the first Tibetan month, the Festival of Butter Sculptures takes place. In Tibet, the butter sculptures were paraded in the evening as the noonday sun would melt them.

36. In Tibet all government orders were ineffective without the endorsement of the official seal. The proverb states that an inferior order should not supersede a higher authority.

37. The weight of sin and virtue is measured out on these scales. Shinje-Chogyal carries these scales as a symbolic representation of justice and truth.

38. The bull is considered an animal with a longer lifespan than other domestic animals.

39. A river in Kham, which flows in a ravine so the water cannot be pumped up to irrigate the fields.

40. Chushul is a village about 45 km away from Lhasa and lies on the banks of the Tsangpo River. The literal meaning of Chushul is “the remnant of the water”. This proverb accuses the people of Chushul of ingratitude.

41. The ceremony in which the hair is cut to signify acceptance of a monk’s precepts.

42. Tibetans drink tea in which salt is used instead of sugar.

43. In Tibet wages were paid in kind; clothes, food and shelter were given. In addition to this usually 10 dres of tsampa were given.

44. A specially blessed silk thread given to a devotee by an incarnate lama for protection.

45. The 100-syllable mantra is a mantra for purification from one’s sins and transgressions; the deity meditated upon is Dorjee Semba (Vajrasattva).

46. Horses set the pace for a caravan, so whatever pace was set
the dogs had to follow suit. Therefore, an old horse with a heavy cargo could only move slowly which meant the old dog had a field day.

47. In some parts of Tibet, after the demise of a person all his/her belongings were auctioned off and the money offered to a lama on behalf of the deceased. If a possession could not be auctioned off the article was offered.

48. The Tiger and the Hare are two of the 12 animals in the Tibetan horoscope. The former denotes aggression and the latter meekness. The proverb refers to a miscarriage of justice.

49. Offerings and gifts are made to lamas and lords; sometimes these gifts become a compulsory gesture for the caller.

50. This is the chorus in a song epic about a Tibetan king, Gesar, whose trials and tribulations can be recited for days. This epic is very popular and is the chief source of entertainment for nomads and farmers.

51. When thukpa overflows it’s a symbol of prosperity. When tea overflows it’s a sign of rudeness and bad luck.

52. A place in Tsang, Tibet.


54. Tibetans believe that carrying a baby conch on a boat wards off crocodiles.

55. The yellow bear is an inhabitant of the Amdo region of Tibet. The bear catches a marmot and places it under his bottom, then proceeds to catch the second one, the first one escaping when he places the second under his bottom. Finally he has no marmot to show for all his efforts.

56. This is a joke made by Lhasans about the Tsangpas, to show they lack courage. A regiment of 500 soldiers ask some travellers coming down the pass whether there are any bandits about. The Lhasans are laughing at a whole regiment being scared of a handful of bandits.

57. A medicine bag was a cloth bag in which doctors of Tibetan
medicine carried their medicines. The medicines are usually in the form of small pills or globules and are wrapped neatly in small paper sachets for easy distribution. Medicines are made of precious stones, herbs, plants and minerals.

58. Nang-Tse-Shar was the prison below the Potala Palace, in the village of Shol.

59. The sound “Phat” is a very powerful and efficacious Tantric mantra to pacify evil spirits.

60. Astrologers were consulted when things were lost or stolen, to ascertain their whereabouts and to retrieve them.

61. Sho is a Tibetan game played with conch shells and counters, which are moved by throwing dice. The game is made interesting by reciting rhythmic sayings called Sho-Shay, which are dirty little ditties based around different numbers. It is because of these Sho-Shay that lords and servants do not play together.

62. Traders and travellers had to spend the night in an inn or rest-house along their route and most of them did seek out the hostess.

63. Pun on the bride’s name which in Tibetan is Kalsang.

64. Pa-truk is a headdress decorated with precious stones, worn in Lhasa and Central Tibet. Each province had its own distinctive design and style.

65. Without the rite of consecration, a chorten lacks sanctity and if this rite is performed by one unqualified to do so, the chorten is not sacred.

66. When working or at archery, people slip one or both arms out of the sleeves of their chuba. In reference to the proverb it means that since the lord can get away with so much, then surely his attendant can get away with a little less.

67. An incident concerning the Tibetan folk-hero Agu Tonpa, when a bag of tsampa offered to a statue of Chenrezig was lost.

68. Phari was an important trade centre in South Tibet. It lies close to Bhutan.
69. Phenpo, a place close to Lhasa. Its inhabitants were known for their intelligence.

70. King Tri-Song-De-Tsan (755-797 A.D.) consolidated Tibet’s supremacy in Central Asia. He built Tibet’s first monastery, Samye, and introduced Buddhism to Tibet.

71. The holiest image in Tibet, it depicts the Sakyamuni Buddha at the age of 12, sitting cross-legged in the lotus position. It is housed in the Jokhang Temple in Lhasa.

72. In front of the Jokhang, within the enclosure stands a stone pillar called “Do-ring” (tall stone) upon which is inscribed the terms of the Sino-Tibetan Treaty of 822 A.D. enforced by Emperor Repachen.

73. Sacred relics such as the clothes of lamas, holy images and sacred pills are worn as amulets. Tibetans believe that the sacredness of the amulet and faith can help to save a warrior from accidents and hindrances, and can ward off evil spirits.

74. Deer can be trapped by the sound of flutes.

75. This proverb is attributed to Padma Karpo, the fourth Drukchen Rinpoche of the Drukpa Kargyud sect.

76. In Tibet, each community organised a watchman to check that loose cattle did not get into the fields. Members took this task in rotation. In Lhasa, a tall post was erected as the lookout. In villages a hill from where one could get a good view was selected. Cows that entered the fields were beaten.

77. Traditionally, the bag to hold tea leaves while travelling was usually a stitched cloth bag, while the bag to hold tsampa was a sheepskin bag, to which tea was added and a tsampa dough was kneaded. The sheepskin tsampa bag was used by the poorer section of society such as nomads and mendicants. The rich and the nobility used Chinese porcelain bowls.

78. The turquoise usually worn on the bride's head was presented to the bride by her husband’s family and was a token of fidelity.

79. This is the first Buddhist ceremony for the child. A tuft of hair is cut off by the lama and a name given to the infant.
80. Tibetans are obsessed with the auspiciousness of days in their daily lives. Activities like travelling, ceremonies, business and matrimony are all actualized after consulting the astrologers, for fear that ill-luck may mar their actions.

81. The cuckoo has a special place in Tibetan folklore.

82. After the death of a person, the relatives offer money to a lama to recite prayers and deliver the deceased person’s consciousness to a better rebirth.

83. The lama gets his fee for performing the death rites. The lord gets his bribe from living off disputes. The togden spoken of in this proverb are the Ragyapas, a community of people who earn their living by disposing of corpses for a fee.

84. A holy lama’s clothes are sometimes given away to followers to be treasured as sacred relics. This proverb refers to spendthrifts.

85. Lobsang Choekyi Gyalsten was born in 1570 A.D. and died in 1662 A.D. He was the teacher of the Fourth and Fifth Dalai Lamas, was appointed the First Panchen Rinpoche by the Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngawang Lobsang Gyatso. The First Panchen Rinpoche reintroduced the practice of the two rituals without which Tibetan households could not be assured of their daily welfare. He incorporated these two rituals into the Gelugpa school of thought.

   The first is Klutor, the propitiation of Nagas, who are responsible for water and weather. The second is Chasum, the propitiation of household gods, for the well-being of the family and its fortune. The proverb refers to the fact that Gelugpa monks could earn a living by performing these rituals for the people.

86. In Tibet, the lungs of an animal were used as containers for water and chang. The chang contained in the lungs was of the very good quality and was called Lo-chang.

87. Balithang is the shortened version of Bathang and Lithang, parts of Kham, close to the Chinese border.

88. Gyalwa Rinpoche is used as an epithet for the Dalai Lama. It means the Victorious and Precious One. The Seventh Dalai Lama, Kalsang Gyatso, was born in Lithang.
89. According to Tibetan folklore, the thunder dragon possesses a jewel which, if procured, fulfils all desires. Similarly, the bear possesses a stone near its heart which, if procured, fulfils all desires.

90. According to Tibetan belief the most auspicious direction for a door to face is towards the east, the direction from which the sun rises.

91. This proverb is quoted in a biography of the Tibetan mystic-saint Milarepa (1052-1136 A.D.).

92. Horses are considered a part of one’s property and wealth.

93. Monasteries in Tibet levied a butter tax on estates under their lease or authority, thereby accumulating a huge amount of butter for lighting butter-oil lamps and for making Tibetan tea. The cook usually put excess butter into the tea being prepared for the monks and then spooned off the melting butter, which was then cooled, hardened and sold. This action of his, considered a great sin, could make him very rich as the pots were huge and thousands of monks were served tea.

94. White crushed stones were mixed with butter by shopkeepers to make butter weigh more.

95. Nang is a district of Tsang of which Gyantse is one chief town.

96. Animals like cattle, horses and yaks are tethered to pegs in the ground. A hornless yak is tethered to the last peg so that the other yaks cannot butt him with their horns.

97. In Tibet the murderer had to pay money to the family of the victim as compensation.

98. One of the six realms of sentient beings, with the longest lifespan amongst them.

99. Saddles are an expensive necessity for owners. Expensive saddles are engraved with designs in silver and gold. Tibetans are very fond of horses and believe that good horses deserve good quality saddles.
100. One of the six realms of sentient beings, considered the most precious form for a sentient being to possess. To be reborn as a dog means that one is degraded into the animal realm.

101. To be reborn as a lord means that instead of undergoing expiation for one’s sins in hell, one is instead thrust into a rebirth where more sins are accumulated.

102. Lhoka lies south of Lhasa.

103. The Tibetan calendar is a lunar one, which is made up of 12 months but sometimes has two months of the same number and sometimes omits one month.

104. The 'Upas consider the Tsangpas uncouth and lacking in etiquette.

105. The 8th, 10th, 15th, 25th, and 30th days of the Tibetan month, besides other sacred days, are considered auspicious days when merit is multiplied several times due to the sacredness of the day and occasion.

106. The 10th day of every Tibetan month is considered an auspicious day, as these are the days chosen by Guru Padma Sambhava for the manifestation of his birth and life activities. Meat and chang are part of the Tantric offering made.

107. The copper-coloured hill paradise of Guru Padma Sambhava.

108. In Tibet, the quickest form of travel was on horseback, which resulted in resthouses and inns clustering the travel routes. Traders found an accessible outlet for their trade when the hosts at the inns or resthouses “helped” them to find customers. This transaction usually ended up with the poor trader making a loss and the host making a profit.

109. Donkey’s meat is considered very inferior, so to slaughter a donkey and to sell its meat to others is a disgrace.

110. Vermilion was imported from China to Tibet and was valued more than red ochre. Vermilion was used as red ink for writing and for rituals.

111. Tibetan decorum demands that seniority in social position, learning and age always be respected. Even incarnate lamas
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have a fixed set of seating rules to be followed; to transgress
that is considered a severe breach of etiquette.

112. Salt was brought by traders and nomads from Chang Namtso
in Changthang to be sold elsewhere. Salt was transported on
the backs of yaks in yak-hair bags very compactly packed.
Some traders even brought the salt to India.

113. Devadatta (Sanskrit) was the cousin of Buddha Sakyamuni
and was his main antagonist.

114. Thanka painters paint religious icons on canvas scrolls which
are sold for the purpose of prayer and meditation. If the holy
images are disfigured this hampers the meditation and re­
results in demerit for the painter.

115. According to Tibetan folklore, whenever the rabbit sees dark
clouds gathering on the horizon he fears that the sky will fall
on his head. This fear is so persistent that the rabbit always
sleeps with his eyes open, looking skywards.

116. Tibetans also suffer from high altitude sickness, which they
call “La-duk” (poison of the pass). The remedy is to eat
turnips. Fresh turnips are dried for use during the winter.

117. A pigeon wishing to get enlightenment did so by
circumambulating a monastery. Passers-by threw ash on him
which rendered him featherless during the pursuit of his
goal. This was his comment.

118. Refers to the intense battle fought between Gesar of Ling and
Kurkar of Hor, following the abduction of Gesar’s wife,
Sechang Dagmo, and the invasion of Ling by the latter in
Gesar’s absence.

119. Namsey is the god of wealth.

120. Holy places are visited by the devout who offer money,
butterlamps, etc., which the attendants use for themselves.

121. Lhalung Palgyi Dorji was the monk assassin who killed the
anti-Buddhist King Lang Darma (reigned 838-842 A.D.). The
soldiers who followed the hermit Lhalung Palgyi Dorji’s trail
found themselves in his cave. The story relates that a soldier
saw him there sitting like a statue, and left him to escape to Kham.

The proverb tells us for all Lhalung Palgyi Dorji’s cleverness, he could do nothing to erase the hoofprints of his horse which led the search party to his hideout.

122. The Ganden Monastery has a unique method of selection of its throneholder, or Tripa, which is on merit; he is selected from the two main Ganden Colleges, Jangtse (Northern College) and Shartse (Eastern College). To qualify for the post one has to be a monk with a Geshe degree with the highest honours (Lharampa) and have progressed up the hierarchy of responsibilities to have become one of the two colleges’ Senior Dharma Masters. This takes several years of study and service, but if one is prepared for that one can gain the throne of Ganden. The Ganden Tripa is the official head of the Gelugpa Sect.

123. Kyang-da-nagar was an open field on the outskirts of Lhasa.
GLOSSARY

APOHOR OR HORPAS: Nomads of the northern plateau, Changthang. They keep yaks and barter dairy products for barley. They trade salt with the rest of Tibet and other places. They are known for their simplicity and naivety.

BARDO: Tibetan term for an “intermediate state”. There are six types of bardo but the one usually referred to is the state after death and the next rebirth. Believed to last for 49 days.

BUDDHA: Refers to the principle of enlightenment or to any enlightened being, in particular to Sakyamuni Buddha, the historical Buddha.

CHANG: Beer made from fermented barley. A popular drink amongst field labourers as it quenches thirst effectively.

CHANGTHANG: Means “the northern plain”. It is an arid, rocky desert that stretches for 1,300 kilometers, occupying nearly half the country.

CHENREZIG: The Tibetan name for Arya Avalokiteshvara, “the Bodhisattva of Compassion”, the patron deity of Tibet.

CHORTEN: A reliquary of religious objects with a series of steps in the middle. Represents the stages of Buddhahood.

CHOS-SKYONG: Protectors who guard the practitioner from deception and diversion. They are oath-bound to serve and protect the integrity of the teachings and practice.

CHUBA: National costume of Tibet. It is a long robe with sleeves, fastened with a sash and worn by both men and women.

DAMARU: A small ritual hand-drum, which has two faces and is made of wood or skull-bones.

DHARMA: The Sanskrit term for the teachings of the Buddha.

DRE: A measurement used in Tibet for dry goods, corn and grain. One dre is about 20 handfuls.
DRLBU: A ritual bell which symbolizes wisdom, the female principle. Held in the left hand.

DRONG: A wild yak native to Tibet. They are the ancestors of the domestic yak.

DZO: A cross between a yak and a cow or a dri (female gender of yak) and a bull. A white dzo is more highly prized than any other colour.

GANDEN: The monastery is about 40 kilometers east of Lhasa. Founded by Je Tsong Khapa, the throne holder of Ganden is the official head of the Gelugpa sect. The Tripa is selected on the basis of merit. Considered one of the three main monasteries of Tibet.

GELONG: Bhikshu, a fully ordained monk observing 253 vows. Literally means “one striving towards virtue”.

GELUGPA: Meaning “the Virtuous Ones”, this sect was founded by Je Tsong Khapa. It was a reformation of the existing schools. This sect emphasizes discipline, logic and has fewer ritual practices.

GESHE: Means “a spiritual friend”. It is a degree awarded at the end of the successful completion of a course of study that spans Buddhist philosophy, logic, dialectics and other subjects.

GONPA: Buddhist temple.

HELL: There are 18 different kinds of hells—eight hot hells, eight cold hells, the Occasional Hell and the Neighbouring Hell.

JOWO: The most sacred statue in Tibet, it depicts the Sakyamuni Buddha at the age of 12 sitting cross-legged. It is housed in the Jokhang.

KALPA: An extremely long aeon, sometimes reckoned to be 4,320 million years.

KARMA: One of the lower denominations of Tibetan currency.

KARMA: The law of Karma is the doctrine of action and result. This view holds that all experiences are the result of previous
actions and all future conditions are determined by what is done in the present.

**Khampa:** Inhabitant of Kham, the eastern province of Tibet. Khampas are renowned for their valour.

**Khil-khor:** A mandala, symbolizing the celestial abode of a tantric meditational deity.

**Kongpo:** Lies to the south-east of Lhasa. It is famed for its lush vegetation and healthy cattle. Kongpo horses are prized for their speed and its menfolk are renowned for their horsemanship.

**Kyang:** A wild ass, which looks like the zebra without its stripes. Inhabits the Changthang.

**Lama:** Means the one who has none beyond him in knowledge and spiritual accomplishments. The lama is considered one’s guide and teacher in whom one sees perfection.

**Lhakhang:** The temple or chapel of a monastery.

**Lhasa:** The capital city of Tibet.

**Mantra:** Usually Sanskrit syllables repeated as invocations; the words possess the power of sounds. The most popular mantra is “Om Mani Padma Hung”, a six-syllable mantra which helps one to gain liberation from the cycle of rebirth. The deity meditated upon is Chenrezig, the Bodhisattva of compassion.

**Mount Meru:** Also called Sumeru, known in Tibetan as Rirab Chenpo, the king of the mountains. Considered to be the central axis of Buddhist cosmology.

**Nagas:** Beings which are half-human and half-serpent, who live in subterranean realms and are the guardians of great treasures. They control water in all its forms.

**Naljorpa:** A male adept.

**Nirvana:** The state of enlightenment.

**Pure realm/Heaven:** A non-samsaric realm of existence created by the wisdom and compassion of a Buddha or Bodhisattva, in which one can be reborn through meditation and prayer.
Sang: Banknotes issued in denominations of 5, 10, 25 and 100. Previously, five sang were equal to one Indian rupee.

Samsara: The cycle of existence, which expresses itself in the birth and death of beings, with their incidental suffering. It arises out of ignorance.

Shinje Chogyal: The judge of the dead and the ruler of all beings who are reborn in hell. Affectionately called “Uncle in Hell” by the Tibetans.

Tathagatha: Means “one thus gone far beyond”, an epithet for a Buddha.

Tካlog: A very short-legged mule, considered inferior amongst mules.

Thu: A Tibetan dish of butter and crushed, dried cheese, popular amongst nomads.

Thukpa: Basically a soup with different ingredients such as tsampa, meat, turnips, flour dough and rice. In the proverbs, the thukpa referred to is a tsampa gruel taken by poor folks.

Togden: An adept who has actually experienced reality in a high degree.

Torma: A component of an offering, made of barley flour and butter. Tormas are thrown away after specific rituals in the direction from where the negativity originated. Tormas invite stray dogs to the place of offering.

Tsang: One of the three main divisions of Tibet. It comprises Shigatse, Gyantse, Sakya and Lachi. It was the ‘food bowl’ for Tibet. The capital city is Shigatse.

Tsangpas: The people who live in Tsang. Literally means “pure”.

Tsangpo: Tibetan term for river but used generally for the Tsangpo River which runs through Lhasa. The Tsangpo later becomes the Brahmaputra River of India.

Tsari: Considered one of the most sacred pilgrim sites, it lies to the south-east of Dakpo. Known as the dwelling-place of Dorje Phagmo (Vajra Yogini), Tsari is densely populated
by the Lopas (a wild tribe), whom the Tibetan government had to appease with annual gifts so as not to harm the devout.

TSOK: Made of tsampa and butter; other ingredients such as raisins, coconut and cheese may be added. It is a component of an offering where desire and sense perceptions are part of the offering. Tsok is edible and considered sacred.

‘U: The Lhasa Valley which lies in Central Tibet, with its capital in Lhasa city.

‘U-Pa: Person from the ‘U province.

‘U-Tsang: The two provinces of ‘U and Tsang together.

‘U-Zey: The chanting master who leads the prayers.

Yak: A species of ox that is domesticated and has a long coat of hair. The male is called ‘yak’ and the female ‘dri’.

Yarlung: The Yarlung Valley in Lhokha, southern Tibet, was the cradle of Tibetan civilization.

Yidag: Inhabitants of one of the six realms of sentient beings. These beings possess huge bellies but long narrow necks and they suffer from incessant hunger and craving.

Yidam: Meditational deities having a special relationship with the devotee. These deities guide and protect proper practice. The yidam deities send retribution if and when one’s covenant is broken.
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