

THE KING GOES TO STEAL

Once in a land with all the ten virtues, called Medokdze, there was an old man named Lopsang. He had two sons. The elder was named Lodrö and the younger Losay. Once, when the two sons had grown up, since they were very intelligent the old man thought it would be right to send them to be educated. He said to them, "Since you two are thoughtful and smart, go get an education in separate places; see how worthwhile benefitting other beings will be!" The two sons agreed, and, taking a few provisions for the road, each went their separate ways.

After three years had passed, both sons returned together to their homeland and the old man asked them, "What have you learned?" They said, "We've learned astrology." The old man said, "Well, our yak cow with the white forehead has a calf inside. You two do astrology and see who can tell whether it's male or female and what color it is!" The two sons immediately did astrology and the elder said, "It's a male calf with a white spot about the size of a pea on its forehead." The younger said, "It's a male calf with a white spot about the size of a pea at the tip of its tail." The old man nodded his head happily in agreement.

After a few months had elapsed, the yak cow gave birth to a male calf with a white spot about the size of a pea at the tip of its tail, so the younger son settled the question more wisely. Thereupon the old man said, "There is no difference in your educations, but because you did not direct your consciousness, you did not arrive at the same explanation. When the calf was inside the mother its body twisted in a circle and the tip of the tail touched the forehead, that's why. From then on the fame of the son Losay filled the ends of the earth and it became a land which everyone talked about and envied.

At the time there was in that land a maharaja whose power and riches were very great. At the end of each year, he invited many famous diviners and astrologers; they told him whatever obstacles and calamities there would be the next year and he did extensive rituals to avert them.

The king heard that Losay was an expert astrologer. He immediately sent someone to summon him before the king. The king said, "You must do astrology to tell about the welfare of all the subjects, what obstacles and misfortunes will befall me—the king, and my retinue, and what rituals should be done." Losay stood up immediately from among the many astrologers and emphatically told the king, "Precious King, Next year there will be a great misfortune to your life, and people are also certain to undergo miseries. There is no ritual other than this: On the evening of the thirtieth day before the New Year, you yourself, the king, must go and steal. If you don't, there will be a great obstacle to your life. If I am lying, you can punish me later." The king thought that this young boy was an expert astrologer and it was probably true, so he agreed to do that.

On New Year's Eve, the king, fearing others would know him, donned ragged clothes. When he got to the side of the palace, he saw a man sneaking around. The king thought that he was a thief also and went up to him. When he asked, "Where are you going?" the man answered in a fright, "A poor family with many children cannot even celebrate New Year tomorrow. So I'm looking for some food tonight." The king said, "Oh, if that's the case, let's go together. I'm a thief too." The two of them entered the palace. The king asked, "What should we go and steal?" The man said, "It's best if we go to the great minister Guru Tsang. He's the richest in the palace and has whatever he needs."

When they sneaked into the Minister Guru Tsang's corral, the family was still not asleep and they were having a conversation. The two of them listened carefully. The Minister Guru was standing in the midst of his whole family, saying "Tomorrow at sunrise, I'll go take a golden flask full of wine and offer it as a New Year congratulation to the king. If the king is offered the wine, he will certainly die instantly, so from tomorrow, the beginning of the New Year, I'll be king and the master of all the power too. Wife, you'll be queen. You should know, sons, you'll be great ministers. So you must keep it a secret!" He left the golden flask on a stand and happily went to sleep.

Then the two of them stole the golden flask and later came to the king's bedroom. The king gave his fellow thief food and drink to satisfaction. They poured wine into a golden flask similar to the one of Minister Guru Tsang, went out and left it on Minister Guru Tsang's stand.

The next day as soon as the sun struck the earth, the great minister Guru brought the flask the king had left the night before and appeared before the king. Respectfully he offered it with elegant words:

Master of the earth, single ornament of this land!
I offer this excellent libation as congratulations to you.
May you, until Mt. Meru falls apart,
Abide as lord over all beings.
O lord please accept it gladly!

The king accepted the clear wine without a care. Then the king took up the flask that had been stolen from the minister's house, and said:

O you, most lofty among my ministers,
Wise great minister Guru!
For the health of your glorious body, on the New Year
I give you this excellent libation.

The minister stared wide-eyed at the absolutely identical flask and hesitatingly drank a mouthful of the wine the king had given him; he gagged and fell to the ground, twitched and breathed his last. Then the king gained great respect for Losay's intrepidity and learning, and appointed him great minister in Minister Guru's place. He also placed his fellow thief among the ministers and lived happily ever after.

—Rig ldan rgya mtsho, *Qinghai Folk Literature* 3, 1992