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## A HEROIC DOG'S LOYALTY

G.yang skyabs rdo rje གཡང་སྐྱའབས་རྩོམ་པའི་

In summer of 2007, I was a student in Rwa rgya at Snowland Sherig Norbling School. The students in Rwa rgya, and in most other places in Mgo log Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, had a break for almost one month to collect caterpillar fungus and thus be able to better meet their schooling expenses.

Caterpillar fungus sales are a key income source for herdsmen in most of Mgo log, especially for poor families with few livestock.

People from my home area of Mgo mang and many other places go to Mgo log to collect caterpillar fungus in summer to earn extra income. I had decided to go to Yag cha because my father was already there in Yid bzhing's home. Father was collecting caterpillar fungus while herding the family's yaks consequently, he was not charged a collection fee.

Father met Nor bu there and they became good friends. Father told Nor bu that I was studying in Rwa rgya and would have a break in order to collect caterpillar fungus. Nor bu then agreed that I could stay in his home and, as compensation, only requested that I drive his yaks and sheep back to their enclosures at his home after I concluded collecting fungus each day.

Uncle Nor bu had a huge, lion-like mastiff that Aunt Sgrol tho, Uncle Nor bu's wife, released before we went to bed after supper. The dog barked fiercely at unusual sounds regardless of who or what made them. The dog ran barking here and there. It seemed he did not rest the whole night. Sometime he barked near the tent entrance and at other times, ran barking crazily into the mountains.

At first, I was so timid that I did not go out of the tent to the toilet when the dog was near the tent. It took about two and a half weeks before he began to accept me.

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One afternoon after I had finished collecting fungus for the day, I drove the sheep and yaks to Uncle Nor bu's home, which was located on a grassy slope on the middle of a mountain near a valley with a lake.

The dog barked at me because I was still strange to him. I was sure he would have devoured me in a few seconds if his master had not tied him to a thick wooden pole. However, he was seriously injured on this day with many wounds on his head, but he was still very aggressive, baring his fangs at me and other strangers, though he was gentle with his owners.

After I returned to the tent, we all began talking together. My hosts described how the dog had fought wolves the previous night, which explained his injuries. Uncle Nor bu and Aunt Sgrol then applied marmot oil and other medicines to his wounds. I felt very sorry for the dog, but also admired his courage and loyalty.

After the family cooked dinner, they cooked some meat, fat and wheat flour for the dog. Such attention encouraged the dog to be more loyal to the family and work harder to protect the family's livestock from wolf attack.

On another day, there was heavy rain and hail. Everyone on the mountains collecting caterpillar fungus ran for shelter, either to their homes or under cliffs. I was far from the home I was staying in and no cliffs were near. The hailstones painfully stung my head, hands, and feet, which were in a pair of cheap shoes. I would have crawled into a marmot den if my body had been small enough.

I felt great sympathy for the dogs tied to poles outside their masters' homes, but the dogs watched me, seemingly filled with pity.

The fifteenth day of the fourth lunar month is a special day for Tibetans because it is the anniversary of the Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and passing away. Most Tibetans believe that collecting caterpillar fungus is fundamentally sinful, and collecting it on that day is even more sinful. Consequently, we stayed in the tent and chatted.

Uncle Nor bu then began making jokes and we almost laughed to death. "What would happen if people could defecate caterpillar fungus?" he asked.

I said, "They would eat all the time hoping to defecate all the time."

We all burst into laughter. My belly ached from laughing so much.

Aunt Sgrol tho went out while we were all enjoying ourselves, but then suddenly rushed back and reported that vultures were hovering above a spot in their pasture.

Guessing that an animal had died, we ran outside and found two lambs that had been killed by wolves. We all felt regretful that the family's dog was tied up, but we understood this was necessary to keep him from attacking people.

Families such as Uncle Nor bu's areas truly need such dogs.

Eventually the dog and I became friends and, after leaving the family, that dog is the sentient being from this experience that I remember the most vividly.

#### NON-ENGLISH TERMS

g.yang skyabs rdo rje གཡང་སྐྱལ་སེང་རྗེ།

mgo log མགོ་ལོག།

mgo mang མགོ་མང།

nor bu རོར་བུ།

rwa rgya རྩུ།

sgrol tho སྐྱེལ་ཐོ།

Sherig Norbling, shes rig nor bu'i gling ཤེས་རིག་རོར་བུའི་གླིང།

yag cha ཡག་ཆ།

yid bzhing ཡིད་བཞིན།