
 THE BUDDHA IMAGE EATS *RTSAM BA*

 Pad+ma skyabs བུ་མ་སྐྱལ་པོ།¹

I was born in 1990 in Rin chen Village, Rgan gya Township, Bla brang County - one of seven counties in Mdo lho (Gannan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu Province.

My paternal grandfather (b. 1940) told me that my grandmother's grandparents moved to Rina chena in about 1902 from Rdo dbus Village, Mtsho sngon Province.

As a child, I herded yaks and sheep with others and often heard Uncle Ston pa stories, jokes, and other folklore.

The last half-century has seen many changes in people's lives. Today, villagers cultivate rape and barley.

Many years ago, Uncle Ston pa was so poor that he had nothing of value except a donkey. When spring's lengthening days arrived, he was quickly running out of food. He then asked his rich but miserly neighbor, Stobs rgyal, for some *rtsam ba* 'barley flour'. As he expected, Stobs rgyal refused.

Faced with starvation, Uncle Ston pa thought about how he might be able to change his situation. The next day, Uncle Ston pa filled two bags with sand, loaded them on his donkey, then slowly drove his donkey near Stobs rgyal's courtyard gate.

Stobs rgyal asked in surprise, "Where are you going?"

"I'm going to sell my barley flour," Uncle Dun pa replied

Stobs rgyal asked curiously, "Who will buy your old barley flour? And if someone is foolish enough to buy it, what will you eat?"

"Didn't you hear that a rich businessman from Nepal has come to Lha sa and is paying a high price for barley flour? I guess he would give an even higher price for your fresh barley flour," Uncle Ston pa said.

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Stobs rgyal thought for a moment and then said, "A lot of money could be made, right?"

"Surely," Uncle Ston pa encouraged.

Stobs rgyal went inside his courtyard and soon returned with two donkeys, each loaded with bags of fresh barley flour. The two men then set off, driving their donkeys along a path that led to Lha sa.

Time passed and the sun slowly went behind a mountain. At dusk, they neared an old, abandoned temple and decided to spend the night there. The temple was full of dust, the walls were broken, and half of the roof was gone, revealing a boundless sky shimmering with countless stars. The temple also had an upright Buddha image with a merciful face.

The two men collected dried branches, lit a fire, and boiled tea. Stobs rgyal had never traveled like this before, was tired from hours of walking, and thus slept as soundly as a pig.

At midnight, Uncle Ston pa silently got up, went outside, opened his bags, and scattered the sand everywhere. Then he returned to where Stobs rgyal was sleeping, took the barley flour from Stobs rgyal's bags and poured it into his own empty bags. Finally, he took a handful of barley flour and scattered some on the ground near the Buddha image and also put some on the Buddha's chest and mouth. Finally, he hung the empty bags on the deity's right hand.

As sunlight struck their faces early the next morning, Stobs rgyal's eyes suddenly became bigger when he noticed his bags of barley flour that he had carefully put near his head were gone. He was even more shocked when he saw the empty bags hanging from the deity's right hand.

Uncle Ston pa exclaimed, "How lucky you are! Buddha ate your barley flour. Nothing bad will happen to you in the future. What a wonderful blessing!"

Stobs rgyal's face turned pale. He took a deep breath and sighed, "Ston pa I can't go with you to sell barley flour in Lha sa."

Uncle Ston pa pretended to be sad and said, "I won't go alone without you. I'll return to our village with you."

NON-ENGLISH TERMS

bla brang ལྷ་བང་།

Gannan 甘南

Gansu 甘肅

kan su'u ཀའ་སུའུ།

mdo lho མདོ་ལྷོ།

mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྔོན།

pad+ma skyabs པདྨ་སྐྱམས།

rdo dbus རོ་དབུས།

rgan gya ཀོང་གྲ།

rin chen རིན་ཆེན།

rtsam ba རྩམ་པ།

stobs rgyal སྐོབས་རྒྱལ།

ston pa སྟོན་པ།