
 A ROYAL GAMBLE

Rnam rgyal རྣམ་རྒྱལ།

Once upon a very sunny time, there was a small kingdom with a lush grassland that produced livestock and horses that were much sought after.

In this kingdom, there lived a herdsman, famous for his honesty and for never having lied. The king trusted this herdsman completely.

The herdsman tended the king's horses and paid special attention to Rta khra shel gyi nyi ma, which was the king's favorite horse. It had the most attractive gait, was the fleetest of foot, and had a mane as shiny as a looking glass that sparkled in the sunlight. The people called the horse Looking Glass and believed it knew what people were thinking and that it had helped the king win his many wars and make wise decisions at court.

A neighboring king came to visit the small kingdom one day and the two kings talked about many things, including their herdsmen and livestock. When the conversation moved on to human nature and honesty, the visiting king said, "There isn't a man alive in this world who does not lie when he has to."

"I disagree," said the host. "There is one man living here who has never in his life had the need to tell a lie."

"I don't believe it. There can be nobody alive who has never told a lie. And if there were such a person, who would it be?" said the visitor.

"Why, my herdsman, of course," said the host king in all honesty.

"Well, I cannot believe it, but if you think he does not lie, let's have a wager and put him to the test."

Rnam rgyal. 2017. A Royal Gamble. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 47:139-141.

Both kings agreed and promised not to speak about their wager. If the herdsman lied, his king would give away one of his provinces, and if he did not lie, he would win a province from the visiting king.

The neighboring king then sent one of his best maids to the small kingdom to try and become intimate with the herdsman. As time went by they fell in love. One night, the maid got sick and the herdsman looked after her with love and compassion.

"Can I do anything for you?" asked the herdsman.

"Bring me some soup made of the heart of Looking Glass, and my problems will be over. Without it I will die," said the maid.

The herdsman pondered, sitting awake the whole night. Realizing finally that he had no choice, he killed the horse, and then made a soup and gave it to his lover.

"Oh, my dear, I am already getting better after drinking this soup, but the king will be very angry and may kill you when he finds out what you have done to his favorite horse," the herdsman's wife said.

"I had no choice, and I have to face what lies ahead," the herdsman said.

"Say the horse died suddenly of a disease. Maybe that will work," the herdsman's wife suggested.

After a couple of days, the herdsman began his journey to the palace feeling deeply conflicted. As he got near the castle, he stopped at a stone cairn and said, "I will say an illness killed the horse."

As soon as he said this, the cairn stones crumbled.

"No. I will not lie. It is a sign, I must tell the king the truth about the horse's death," he decided and the cairn reformed and stood complete.

It is a sign!" thought the herdsman.

When he reached the palace, he respectfully presented a white scarf to the king who was sitting on his throne next to the neighboring king, who was visiting once again. All the people in the palace were watching the herdsman intently.

"My distinguished king, forgive me, for I have done a terrible thing. I killed your precious horse, Looking Glass, to make a soup that would cure my wife's illness," the herdsman announced.

The two kings sat dumbstruck for a moment until the herdsman's king laughed and proudly said to the neighboring king, "You see, I told you there is someone who never lies. My herdsman has just proven it."

The neighboring king was annoyed at losing the wager, but he was also moved by the herdsman's honesty, and willingly gave up one of his provinces to the king who had won the wager.

The king of the small kingdom rose and said, "There are honest people who tell no lies in the world, and my herdsman is one of them. To reward his honesty, he will be the head of my new province."

Everybody in the palace congratulated the herdsman.

The king then added, "A father's best achievement is the effort made by his son - they share success together. A bow's success in killing a deer is its arrow's contribution - the kill belongs to both."

NON-ENGLISH TERMS

rnam rgyal རྣམ་རྒྱལ།
rta khra shel gyi nyi ma རྩ་ཁ་ཤེལ་གྱི་ཉི་མ།