Three Good Princes

In the four cardinal directions were four kings: King Nangka Wa in the east, King Bada Hor in the south, King Nangsi Lha in the west, and King Shingling Tsa in the north. Of these, King Nangka Wa was the most powerful and wealthy. He had 7,700 sheep, 5,500 yaks, and 3,300 horses.

Nangka Wa has a son named Nangka Dsi, whose mother died when he was three years old. The king raised the child by himself and had a very hard time of it. One day, he thought, ‘It will be very difficult for my son to grow up alone. I must find playmates for him.’ So he took his son, a bag of gold and another of silver, and set off to buy a friend for his son.

The king and his footman Koryu Senge Rabdhan reached a place called Chisha Gyamo. There, they met an old woman with two boys.

‘Can you please sell your boys to me? I have a son who has no brothers. I can pay you one bag of gold and one bag of silver, and the three boys can look after each other for the rest of their lives,’ the king said.

The old woman replied, ‘I cannot sell you these children. But please look away, and then turn back again.’

The king looked away, and turned back again. The old woman had vanished, but the two boys remained. Although the old woman wasn’t there, the king left behind the bags of gold and silver and brought the two boys home.
The king now had three sons: his prince, and the two boys. One boy was named Chibun Dayu Tribung, and the other was named Luphun Norbu Tsenba.

The king treated the two boys as his own children, and they also loved him like their own father. He taught them to be loyal, brave and kind. When the prince was seven years old, the king passed away. Overcome with grief, the prince dedicated himself to the Buddha.

Soon, the king’s wealth decreased. Of the 7,700 sheep, only seven remained; of the 5,500 yaks, only five remained, and of the 3,300 horses, only three remained. Luphun Norbu Tsenba became very worried. He said to his brother and the footman, ‘Our father left us 7,700 sheep, but now only seven remain. I will find a fertile pasture where I can increase the flock. Take good care of the prince.’

Sometime later, Chibun Dayu Tribung said to the prince, ‘Our father left us 3,300 horses, of which only three remain. I will find a place with plenty of water and grass to increase their number.’ He asked the footman to take good care of the prince, and left on his quest.

The prince stayed home with his footman and the five yaks. He took care of the yaks and worked hard. After a few years, the five yaks increased to over 5,000. The footman said, ‘Prince, this is a good sign. Good people are always rewarded.’

The Prince replied, ‘We have plenty of livestock. But I miss my brothers. I want to know how they are. Please find them and bring them home regardless of how many sheep and horses they have now.’

Koryu Senge Rabdhan, the footman, obeyed the prince and left to find the other two brothers. When he reached Chisha Gyamo, at just the spot where the old king had found playmates for the prince, he found a flock of sheep
numbering far more than 7,700. He wondered whose flock of sheep they were, and, thus wondering, lay down to rest.

Just at that moment, a ewe gave birth to a lamb covered with spots all over its body and wearing a conch necklace. The little lamb asked his mother, ‘There are so many other little lambs in the East Kingdom, but I am the only one born with a conch necklace. Why is that so?’

The ewe replied, ‘Soon, many fairies will gather to bathe in the lake near Chisha Gyamo. Of them, the fairest is named Lhamo Tongduo Ma. She can be caught only with your conch necklace. And if she marries the Prince, it will be the greatest luck and brightest joy for all of the East Kingdom.’

Then, suddenly, she became alert and said softly, ‘But son, there is a man here who understands our tongue. We must run away.’

Indeed, the footman Koryu Senge Rabdhan understood the language of the sheep. He jumped at the newborn lamb and captured the conch necklace and hid it in his felt hat and set off before the hooves of 7,000 sheep could trample him into the dust.

Very soon, the footman ran into Luphun Norbu Tsenba and gave him the prince’s message. Luphun Norbu Tsenba said, ‘Alright. I am coming home. But you should find Chibun Dayu Tribung and bring him home.’

The footman walked further on and tracked down Chibun Dayu Tribung, who was sitting inside a tent of black wool, but with just one horse lazily grazing outside the tent. Disguising his disappointment with the utmost good sense, Koryu Senge Rabdhan said to him, ‘The prince now has over 5,000 yak, and Luphun Norbu Tsenba now herds over 7,000 sheep. The wealth of your father is sufficiently restored. Come, let’s go home.’
Chibun Dayu Tribung sprang up, as if he had been waiting for just this news, and said, ‘Yes! Let’s go home right now.’ He raced off on his only horse towards a rock that shimmered as if covered all over with feathers. Koryu Senge Rabdhan hurriedly followed. When they reached the feathery rock, Chibun Dayu Tribung said, ‘Goddess Pacha! Please open the door for me.’ He then clapped three times.

The rock opened up slowly. Inside the rock were more than 3,300 fine horses. Chibun Dayu Tribung led his father’s horses out of the cave and said to the footman, ‘Let’s go now. The other horses will follow.’

After traveling some distance, riding the horse Chibun Dayu Tribung had given him, Koryu Senge Rabdhan turned back to look at the cave. All the horses were following them at a respectable distance. And what splendid colors they were! From the black of a midnight in the forest, to the white of mare’s milk, there were horses of every color. What a wonderful sight it was!

Each of them was received warmly by the prince, and they lived together in their father’s kingdom. The prince sat on a golden throne, Chinbun Dayu Tribung sat on a silver throne and Luphun Norbu Tseba sat on a copper throne. They ruled the kingdom together. But the court didn’t have a queen to increase its beauty. And the prince wasn’t yet a king because other kings hadn’t seen his wealth and power.

Koryu Senge Rabdhan, the trusted footman, remembered the conversation between the ewe and her young lamb. ‘Take this conch necklace and catch yourself a fairy for a bride!’ he suggested.

Although his brothers laughed at Koryu Senge Rabdhan, the prince said, ‘Koryu Senge Rabdhan has always been loyal to us. He has never told a lie. If he says so, I will
travel with the conch necklace to the land he describes, and see what happens.’

The prince set off with the conch necklace. When he reached the lake described to him, the prince saw many fairies swimming in the lake. Because the prince was a mortal, the smell of his body scared the fairies playing in the water. They suddenly flew away. But the fairest fairy of them all, Lhamo Tongduo Ma, remained behind, half in the lake, and half out of the water.

For half a moment, the prince forgot why he had traveled to the lake. He was blinded by Lhamo Tongduo Ma’s beauty. But, like a flash of lightning, the prince regained his wit and threw the magical necklace around the fairy and caught her. Lhamo Tongduo Ma agreed to marry him and return with him to the palace. Her beauty and her virtues brought glory to the court.

Having regained the wealth of his father, and having found the fairest of the heavenly fairies as a wife, Nagka Dsi thought, ‘My kingdom is more prosperous than it was in my father’s times. I must celebrate this achievement.’

With the help of his footman and his brothers, the prince sent out invitations to all known corners of the world, inviting kings and princes to come to a tournament. ‘Bring your best horses,’ the invitation said in polite language, ‘Bring horses which can fly like a bird in the sky, or which can swim like a fish in the river, or which gallop like the wind sweeping over the grassland. If your horse wins the race, I will reward you with a hundred more horses that are just as magnificent.’

Kings and princes from across Tibet gathered within a few days to win a hundred horses from the prince’s stable. After welcoming the guests and serving them a feast, the prince announced that the race would start early in the morning.
Out of respect, the young prince’s brothers did not participate in the race. Only the four kings of the four directions would compete. King Bada Hor, King Nangsi Lha, and King Shingling Tsa would race against the prince. The prince rode Zagar Lheqin, the old king’s favorite horse. When the race began, the horses flew from start to finish in the time it takes for the eyes to blink. But it was the horse belonging to the King of the South which won the prize. Because a guest had won the competition, nobody could accuse Nagka Dsi of being ungracious. The laughter of guests enjoying his hospitality brought much honor to the house of the prince.

At the feasts held in honor of the guests, the host and his guests sang and danced and ate to their heart’s desire. Everybody was very happy with their lives. The prince remembered what his footman had said – ‘Good people are always rewarded.’ He had devoted himself to the Buddha, treated his adopted brothers fairly, and shown respect and love to his queen. He was being rewarded for his good conduct. The prince vowed to always be virtuous so that the Buddha would always bless him.