"Song of Lhasa Memories" by Shelkar Lingpa (রিন্স্ন্স্ন্স্র্মন্স্)

Translated by Geshe N. L. Nornang and Lawrence Epstein

Note from the Editors: Geshe N. L. Nornang and Lawrence Epstein originally translated "Song of Lhasa Memories" by Shelkar Lingpa (Shel dkar gling pa, 1876–1913) in the mid-1980s, likely based on the third revised edition of the Tibetan text published by Tibet Mirror Publications in 1965. The Tibetan text has been added mainly from that source. The translator's notes below were part of Nornang and Epstein's original translation. See the introductory essay "Notes on the 'Song of Lhasa Memories'" in this issue of the *Journal of Tibetan Literature* (Volume 2.1, 2023, 73–84).

Things produced by any proximate cause are naturally emptiness.

But you, O lamas, who teach the truth of cause and effect,

Omniscient ones, please regard this humble one with compassion! [1]

त्राष्ट्रेष्ठ-अष्ट्रिष्ठ-अष्ट्रित्र-याः स्वायः स्वयः स्वायः स्वायः स्वयः स्

I am confused; I know and have achieved nothing. The straightforward heart of the matter is that I miss Lhasa too much; this song records whatever comes to mind. [2]

 I miss Lhasa: The rippling sounds of the great stream Kyi, slowly circling to the right, where many cranes and geese disport; its garlands of glittering waves soaring to the sky. [3]

I miss Lhasa: its warm and glittering sheen, its foundations in a broad and level basin adorned with garlands of verdant grass and trees; the sun and moon pursue each other across its pleasant path. [4]

मुन्द्रम् वर्षे स्वर्ध्यः वर्षे स्वर्धः वर्षः वर्षे स्वर्धः स्वर्यः स्वर्धः स्वर्यः स्वर्धः स्वर्धः स्वर्धः स्वर्धः स्वर्यः स्वर्धः स्वर्धः स्वर्धः स्वर्धः स्वर्धः स्वर्यः स्वर्यः स्वर्यः स्वर्धः स्वर्यः स्वर्धः स्वर्यः स्वर्यः स्वर्यः स्वर्यः स्वर्यः स्वर्यः स्व

I miss Lhasa, embellished with the ornaments that follow one another: unlike here, where gloomy darkness never clears away, never without a swirling overcast;

Lhasa's warm when it should be cool in winter, and it is cool in summer. [5]

I miss Lhasa, beautiful, fortunate place: on the bare ground the eight-petal lotus, the flanks of the hefty hills replete with the eight signs of good fortune, the heavens round like the shape of the wheel. [6] ब्रस्तिरः स्वाप्तिः स्वाप्तिः स्वाप्तिः स्वाप्तः स्वापतः स्वाप्तः स्वापतः स्व

I miss Lhasa: its women showing off their smiling faces in the crowded streets of the roiling marketplace; delighting in the thousand actions of their supple forms, their collective beauty, none omitted. [7]

I miss Lhasa: going around the middle circuit again and again, bargaining while looking in the shops; here and there the uncountable wealth of elegant goods, that vie with Vaiśravana's treasury. [8]

लट्टां त्रः भूरः विद्रः त्रिः सुः सः त्र्या [8] त्राच्याः त्राच्याः चात्रः स्त्रः स्त

I miss Lhasa: its careful and dependable ways, not awhirl with busyness like here; its casual folks' calm dispositions, mulling over their meals and doing honest work. [9]

 I miss Lhasa, with its sound of whistling arrows: When the flowers free their abundant blooms, to picnic we go and enjoy ourselves; the music of the transverse flute and other instruments, trala, tralee. [10]

I miss Lhasa: the crunching sounds of mealtimes, the formal settings of tasty preparations of Chinese food, raised on high and respectfully offered before one; and then taking up whatever one wishes to eat. [11]

ख्या.ख्या.झ्र.चठय.चास्या.चतु.ख्र.य.ट्या। [11] चान:चान:चान्यःचर.पट्ट्रायःच्यःझ्र.चट्यःचया। चान्यःचान्यःचयःच्यायःचयःझ्र.चट्यःच्या। विष्यःविष्यःक्षःचयःझ्रच्यायःच्याःच्याः

I miss Lhasa, where one is served with respect: those flower-like beauties, the wine-serving girls as beautiful as goddesses, their fluttering eyes flying darts of sidelong glances, saying drink, drink the alcoholic drink. [12]

ह्नैतःह्नैतः से 'र्नेग' क्षे' सहिषा त्यात्ता है त्यात्ती है त्याती है त्यात्ती है त्याती है त्यात

I miss Lhasa, where offerings and charity are given: ah, the economy and power of the righteous kingdom seems as if it filled every place under the blue sky; a place where charity is given even to mice and tiny creatures. [13]

I miss Lhasa, where things are done immediately and perfectly: the officials dressed in long brocades choosing the best ideas, discussing them in detail, and quickly writing them down for both governance and religion. [14]

पर्त्यातस्यायम्यायरम् भ्रुतायर्थः स्वाप्तातस्य स्वाप्तात

I miss Lhasa: the governmental law, yoking strictness and kindness, like Brahma's ruler, is without crookedness; officials, unable to accuse just anyone, left or right, Looking at the way they have executed the law. [15]

रट.रट.ग्रेट्-जियोथ.जय.यक्षेथ.कैं.थ.टेरी [12] योलय.योलय.योल्य.योल्य.योल्य.प्यं.श्रुच.प्रटी पश्चित.पश्चित.श्रुट्-त.क्ष्ट्य.तपु.श्रुच.श्रुट-तर्टी क्.क्.पट्य.पट्य.चेट्-तप्रीज.योज्य.प्रीयथ.थी।

I miss Lhasa, where nobles' servants gather here and there in great numbers to enjoy themselves:

their cup-sheaths hanging down with silken tassels, their heads covered by the shaking fringe of the Mongol hat, their long earrings hanging down. [16]

पश्चरःपश्चरःश्चेरःवाल्याःस्वयःतीयःश्चेःयःदेगी [16] सीयःसीयःश्वयःश्वयःसीयःपश्चरःपयःप्व्यत्रःयःपी पश्चपयःपश्चपयःश्वयःश्वरःश्वरःपयःप्वयःपःयी क्ष्यःक्षयःसूरःभीयःश्वेरःश्चेरःसूरःपर्द्रःपरःयी क्ष्यःक्षयःसूरःभीयःश्वेरःश्चेरःसूरःपर्द्रःपर्दा I miss Lhasa, where young girls gather: their beautiful songs of a thousand tones, their long-toned voices that steal away one's thoughts, the touches of their soft hands giving happiness. [17]

चालूच.चालूच.ची.झूचु.पटी.चाचचा.कै.चालूच.ची [12] पष्टशापष्टशापचा.ता.सूचा.लूट.पक्टच.ता.पर्सूचाना क्षेत्र.क्षेत्र.प्रची.पिचा.कूट.कच.मी.चाचना क्षेत्र.क्षेत्र.पक्षेत्र.पिचा.कूट.कच.मी.चाचना

I miss Lhasa's many festivals: sometimes religious dances, sometimes pageants, the many shows of graceful dancing motions; each making one's eyes redden or droop with looking. [18]

दैयान्यात्रक्रान्ताः स्ति स्वास्त्राच्याः [18] द्रान्ताः स्वास्त्राच्याः स्वास्त्राचः स्वास्त्राचः स्वास्त्राच्याः स्वास्त्राच्याः स्वास्त्राचः स्वास्त्राचः स्वास्त्राच्याः

I miss Lhasa, where down any street or shortcut one might go, even the beggars—poor, crippled, blind or old—get drunk on wine, sweet or dry, and go reeling, or they sleep. [19]

O fathers, listen! There's more to tell! I miss Lhasa, where dwells my doctor who looks after this dear body of mine, my dearest friends who love me, my kind parents. [20]

I miss Lhasa, where one murmurs prayers: midst such offerings as butter lamps, The two Buddha statues—the glory of their Buddha's marks aflame with one's friends who piously go to make offerings. [21]

I miss Lhasa, where in the temples of the peaceful and wrathful Śrīdevi the roars of ki and so make even Mt. Meru shake; the votary flags wave, the incense smoke is sent aloft. [22]

त्रधुरःत्रधुरःत्रवस्यःतुर्गःत्रधुरःत्रधुरःत्रह्मःत्रह्मः। भीःगीःश्रुंःश्रृतिःसःस्यःसःस्यःग्रसः॥ त्रात्रःत्रवाःभुःत्रवाःग्रसः॥

I miss Lhasa: 'tis there! Look! The House of the Infinite Ship! As soon as one sees the living statues that fill it, the tears of faith that fall from one's eyes trickle down involuntarily. [23]

ऍन्-ऍन्-ॡॅब्य-विवा-त्यु-तहेंब्र-वाब्य-अेन्-विनः॥ अर-अेर-हेब्-ग्रीकावित्वा-धा-अहत्य-अन्वा। देवा-देवा-अवा-ब्वा-दिन्-धित-अक्त-अन्ता। वेत्य-वेत्य-न्या-अन्-दिन्-धान्य-धान्य-अन्-द्व॥ [23] I miss Lhasa: great and good lamas sit on their thrones, and when the rain of the profound Mahāyāna falls, many people join their hands in prayer and quietly listen in the monastery courts. [24]

के.के.पत्रम.पत्रम.यी.श्री.पत्र्वणयात्रया त्रपात्रपात्रीण केत्र केत्राक्षम.पत्रयाप्ते कें।। यमा अमा अक्षेत्र केत्राम्यम् पत्र्यात्र पत्रित्र प्रमा स्रीया क्षेत्र स्वराह्म स्वराह्म स्वराह्य विकास

I miss Lhasa: filled with crowds of many old men and women going bent-backed, prostrating and circumambulating, on the Outer Circuit, even though their trembling legs are scarcely able to support their bodies. [25]

I miss Lhasa: the tantric services play with crash of drum and cymbal, the smoke quavers, rising, the sundry grains dispersed; the *hum* and *phat* of mantras defeat the feral demons' army; cringing, they are banished far away. [26]

तिव्यः तिव्यः मिटः स्वाः न्यूतः तिवः स्वः यः द्वाः । द्वैः द्वैः पत्रः स्वाः स्वाः स्वाः स्वः स्वः त्वः स्वः स्वः । तिव्यः तिवः गोतः द्वैनः तिवः स्वः स्वः त्वः स्वयः । तिव्यः तिव्यः गोतः स्वाः स्वाः स्वः स्वः स्वयः । तिव्यः तिव्यः स्वाः स्वाः स्वाः स्वः स्वः स्वयः ।

I miss Lhasa, where many people spin their prayer wheels: where the round prayer wheels, great and small, and the voices of the tinkling bells exhort, "Come, come" for the benefit of beings. [27]

I miss Lhasa, where sundry clergy and laymen with faith and the other exalted jewels,

do prostrations upon flat stones and planks, whenever they have time, before the gorgeous gates of the Cathedral; the rubbing sound of their full-length prostrations accumulating. [28]

I miss Lhasa, where, to increase the offering-libations from all directions, the lake of merit of the people that gather, though it is shaken, does not overflow, all swirling into one. [29]

I miss Lhasa, the place where excellent liberation is achieved: where one recognizes that the human form is difficult to get once in a kalpa, one's short lifetime is unsteady, suffering and going to a bad rebirth. [30]

यन्त्रायक्ष्याः स्त्रायक्ष्यः स्वायः स्वायः स्वायः स्वायः स्वायः स्वयः स्वयः स्वयः स्वयः स्वयः स्वयः स्वयः स्व स्वयः स I miss Lhasa: lamas and dākinīs assemble—it's not just talk—living in that land, like a heap of clouds that shades; little creatures like me as well they lead quickly on the path of liberation. [31]

I miss Lhasa, where from the houses of those sincere in doing virtue, are novices who don't malinger.

They shave their black hair, put on saffron robes, wear red and yellow robes. [32]

न्गर-न्गर-स्वा-त्ययास्त्र-इयया-र्माध्याः व्या-त्य्य-स्वा-त्ययाः स्वा-त्ययाः स्वा-त्ययः स्वा-त्ययाः स्वा-त्ययः स्वा-त्ययः स्व-त्ययः स्व-त्यः स्व-त्ययः स्व-त्यः स्व-त्यः स्व-त्यः स्व-त्यः स्व-त्यः स्व-त्यः स्व-त्यः स्व-त्यः

I miss Lhasa: the monastery courts where thinking on the meaning of dharma is heard, when in the midst of assemblies monks and *geshés* debate,

when in the midst of assemblies monks and *geshés* debate, the sound of their clapping hands clears away all doubts. [33]

I miss Lhasa, where the clergy, expert in governance and religion, arrange themselves in rows and in one voice if one just hears them pronounce the sounds of dharma, One will not fall into fearsome bad rebirths. [34]

I miss Lhasa: here and there in solitary retreats, which make them happy, straight-bodied meditation masters' delight.
Without the faults of obscuring ignorance or wild rage they meditate harmoniously. [35]

त्य्यात्य्यायात्रीत्रात्त्र्यात्र्यात्र्याः विद्यात्र्याः विद्यात्र्याः विद्यात्र्याः विद्यात्र्याः विद्यात्र् विद्यात्रात्र्यात्र्यात्र्यात्र्यात्र्यात्र्यात्र्याः विद्यात्र्याः विद्यात्र्यात्र्याः विद्यात्र्यात्र्यात्र्याः विद्यात्र्

I miss Lhasa: midst the hectic tumult of widespread things of sensuous pleasure, even if one has but little to do with religion, one automatically has thoughts of such things as deliverance, despair, and compassion, that come directly to one. [36]

Eआ.स्या.सेच्या.ग्रीया.चश्चीट्रासपु.क्षे.या.ट्रेया। [36] स्य.प्र्य.प्रयात्ययाःक्षे.क्ष्याःयात्र्ययाःग्रीटः।। च्य.च्यात्ययाःक्षे.क्ष्याःयात्र्ययाःग्रीटः।।

I miss Lhasa, where, not barring unclear visions and doubts, all the different kinds of foggy thought into the vale of emptiness, the dharma itself, will later disappear, liberated to their own place. [37]

 I miss Lhasa, where those who believe in duality, saying "I" and "mine," will go into the emptiness of the unconditioned sphere; unclear, unreal appearance and the form of emptiness proclaim emptiness' echo clearly. [38]

सटास्टर्गान्य हुटा हु । च्याय स्था स्वाप्त स्वाप्त स्वाप्त स्वाप्त स्वाप्त स्वाप्त स्वाप्त स्वाप्त स्वाप्त स्व स्वाप्त स्वाप्

I miss Lhasa: even stupid roosters like me mount their roosts on high and puff up the feathers of the two goals fluttering, they crow their praises in their outstretched throats. [39]

त्र्यात्र्यात्र्याः भ्राप्त्रात्र्याः म्याप्त्रात्र्याः म्याप्त्रात्रात्र्याः म्याप्त्रात्र्याः स्याप्त्रात्र्याः स्याप्त्रात्र्याः स्याप्त्रात्र्याः स्याप्त्रात्र्याः स्याप्त्रात्र्याः स्याप

I miss Lhasa in Central Tibet, that happy land replete with the ten virtues, where though this ignorant one was not born, was cast by previously accumulated karma; clearly it comes into my mind. [40]

पत्रात्वयाः धीन् त्याः नृतुत्राः कूष्ट्राः स्वाः त्या। स्वरः स्वरः त्यवावाः पत्ते त्यवः ग्रीवाः स्वरः त्या। स्वरः स्वरः त्यवावाः पत्ते त्यवः ग्रीवाः स्वरः त्या। स्वरः स्वरः त्याः त्युः स्वरः त्याः स्वरः त्या। [40]

Look here how I sound, choked up from the poem in my throat! And watch, wide-eyed, moving your gaze to the heavens in that direction, to see what life in Lhasa was like! [41]

Yes, but nowadays the Lhasa where the one god, Avalokita, dwells is here; because nothing is certain except one thing, O friends, rely on here! [42]

रेट्-रेट्-रेंब्-गुट-क्ष-गर्डम-ड्युब-र्य-गर्थम्था टेट-टेट-त्टी-ब्-च्लुग्य-ध्ते-झ्य-य-प्य-॥ ठट-ठट-विग-त्यय-छेट्-धर-ड्या-ळ्य-ध्य॥ ग्रे-ग्रे-ग्रॅग्य-ट्य-त्टी-गर-र्ह्य-ग्रिय॥ [42]

We were surrounded by the Chinese army.
The body, taxed by running, torments the mind.
Since the Chinese kill for voicing even a little criticism,
now, even for the region of the gods, my longing is little. [43]

टर.टर.में. शुपु.जय.जयट.क्यय.ख्य.यं.चर्सूर॥ व्य.जय.क्र्य.क्र्य.श्रम्था.व्यर.ख्य.पर्ट्र.पथा। व्य.जय.क्र्य.क्र्य.बर्घ.पयर.ख्य.पर्ट्र.पथा। टर.टर.में. शुपु.क्र्य.जयट्र.पथा.व्यर.क्र्य.व्यर्थ.व्यर्थ.

At the end of this short life, in solitude, I have gradually abandoned worldly deeds to their own place and the continuous, uncontrolled practice of falling to bad rebirths. I've prepared the way of looking peacefully with soft eyes. [44]

पविज्ञातिकाः स्ट्रियाः प्रदेश्वा त्यात्रे स्वर्णाः विद्याः स्वर्णाः स्वर्णाः स्वर्णाः स्वर्णाः स्वरं स्वरं

May I become one who swiftly leads to nirvāṇa, without leftovers or traces, all the beings equal to the limits of the sky, the mothers, who, for many *kalpas*, give us our bodies time and again. [45]

द्रैट-द्रैट-ङ्गल-धर-धट-धट-ध्रुश-ङ्गीव-ध्रीत्र-ध्रित्र-ध्रित्र-ध्रित्र-ध्रित्र-ध्रित्र-ध्रित्र-ध्रित्य-ध्रित्र-ध्रित्र-ध्रित्र-ध्रित्र-ध्रित्र-ध्रित्र-ध्रित्र-ध्रित्र

I, old man, who relates this in the language of the street, have neither innate skill nor the fruits of learning; to gauge this, see these writings: ha, there will be some who laugh. [46]

दे.देते.बॅट.क्र्याञ्चा प्रति श्वास्त्र स्त्र स्तर्य । भुट्य.भुट्य.भुट्य.द्वय.भुय.क्र्यंत्र महेय्य.मा.भेट्य। के.के.प्रत्र क्र्यं.भूर.प्राच्य स्त्र स्त्र

The Song of Lhasa Memories, composed by Miwang Shelling, is done. बै.२२२:वेल.बीट.वर्ष.चड्डबर्ग.बर्स.चड्डबर्ग.वर्षा ॥बर्ज्ज.वर्षा ॥बर्ज्ज.वर्षा

Translators' Notes

The following is a sample (verse 3) with a close translation.

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Place of happy playing (for) many cranes and geese
The garland of flowing, glittering waves soars to the sky
I miss Lhasa [where] the great river, the Kyichu, calls out [the sound of ripples]
"lhung, lhung,"

leisurely, leisurely circling to the right.

Verse 5. The ornaments . . . , to wit, the sun and the moon.

Verse 5. "Here," refers to Darjeeling throughout the song.

Verse 6. The lotus and the wheel are two of the eight signs of good fortune.

Verse 10. "Whistling arrows" (ই: প্রা) are used at picnics, etc., in archery contests.

Verse 21. This refers to the statues of Shakyamuni brought by the Chinese and Nepalese princesses housed in the Ramoché (ক্রেট্র) temple and the Tsuklakhang (মার্মান্মন্য) respectively.

Verse 22. Kwi and swo are syllables used to mark the end of certain prayers.

Verse 23, line 1. To wit, the Potala.

Verse 28. That is, the major characteristics of belief in Tibetan Buddhism.

Verse 28, line 3. To wit, the Lhasa Jokhang.

Verse 33. Debate, of course, is an important part of monastic training for advanced degrees. It is carried out with stylized gestures, amongst which is hand clapping.

Verse 42. Which is to say, Darjeeling, where the Dalai Lama presently resides.