

## 4. Milarepa Sings Again: Tsangnyön Heruka's 'Songs with Parting Instructions'

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### Abstract

Although Tibetan Buddhism is often associated with monks and canonical texts, other types of Buddhist practitioners and other kinds of texts are also of importance. Before the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama came to power in 1642 and Tibetan Buddhism became increasingly systematized and monastically oriented, Tibetan charismatic *yogins* composed and printed religious poetry (*mgur*) and hagiographies (*rnam thar*) to promote a non-monastic ideal with remarkable success. They modelled their lifestyle upon Indian Tantric *siddhas* and on the Tibetan poet-saint Milarepa (c. 1040–1123). Like them, they adopted a wandering lifestyle and used religious poetry as a means for spreading their message. By expressing themselves through poetry, which they also composed, these yogins could present Buddhism in an innovative way, adapted to the needs of their audience. Taking the 'songs with parting instructions' ('*gro chos kyi mgur*') of the 'crazy yogin' (*rnal 'byor smyon pa*) Tsangnyön Heruka (1452–1507) as the point of departure, this chapter explores how these colourful figures attempted to

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vitalize Buddhism in Tibet by creating an alternative religious infrastructure outside of the monastery.

## I. The songs of a wandering *yogin*

*mGur* (pronounced *gur*) denotes a specific type of religious poetry that has played an important role in the expression and transmission of Buddhism across the Tibetan cultural world.<sup>193</sup> The term *mgur* is usually translated as ‘song’ and it has been used to refer to a wide variety of oral and literary creations. However, the most common use of the term came to be that which referred to a more Buddhist type of song, associated with wandering *yogins* and distinguished by a simple style, an emphasis on the experiential and the spontaneous, and a performative function. In this sense, *mgur* has commonly been contrasted with *snyan ngag* (Sanskrit *kāvya*), which denotes an ornamented, written, Indian-inspired form of poetry. There are several Tibetan terms that have been used as synonyms for *mgur*, such as *glu* and *dbyangs*. Milarepa (Mi la ras pa) was probably the most famous Tibetan composer of *mgur*.<sup>194</sup> There are, nevertheless, many other famous and popular *mgur*-composers and the tradition of composing and performing *mgur* remains popular throughout the Tibetan cultural region. The roots of these songs go back both to Indian *siddha*-songs and to Tibetan folk-songs.<sup>195</sup>

<sup>193</sup> This paragraph is a slightly revised version of an abstract for a panel about songs of realization in Tibetan culture that I organized together with Carl Yamamoto at the IATS Seminar in Paris 2019. The paragraph was co-written with Yamamoto. For studies of songs in the Tibetan tradition, see Ardussi 1977; Jackson 1996; Larsson & Quintman 2015; Sørensen 1990; Sujata 2005; Yamamoto 2015. For English translations of such songs, see for example Jinpa & Elsner 2000; Nālandā Translation Committee 1986 and 1989; Stearns 2000 and 2012; Sujata 2005 and 2012.

<sup>194</sup> When Tibetan names occur in the running text of the article they are given as they are pronounced, with their spelling provided in parenthesis the first time the name occurs. When Tibetan terms and names occur in parentheses they are provided according to spelling. Specific terms, such as *mgur*, are spelled out also in the running text.

<sup>195</sup> For studies of *siddha*-songs, see for example Braitstein 2014; Guenther 1969; Jackson 2004; Kapstein 2006; Kværne 1977; Schaeffer 2005; Templeman 1994. For an overview of religious poetry and Buddhist songs in

In 1488 the crazy yogin Tsangnyön Heruka compiled and printed two texts that became enormously popular and influential in Tibetan cultural areas and beyond: a hagiography of Milarepa (*Mi la'i rnam thar*) and a collection of songs attributed to Milarepa (*Mi la'i mgur 'bum*).<sup>196</sup> These two texts are regarded as classics of world literature. The texts have been reprinted again and again, and translated into numerous languages. In these texts Milarepa's constant wanderings are described in a dramatic, captivating, beautiful, and oftentimes humorous way. The two texts complement each other and are sometimes printed together. Both texts contain many religious songs (*mgur*) that are attributed to Milarepa. It is said in the hagiography that Milarepa had an exceptionally beautiful voice, which he made use of when explaining what he believed to be important and helpful to people he encountered. Milarepa never became a monk but preferred to live outside of the confines of monasteries, wandering between isolated caves in the wilderness where he practiced meditation under austere and harsh circumstances. Both in the hagiography and in the song-collection, learned monks are often portrayed in a negative way, as jealous and greedy antagonists of Milarepa. The life of Milarepa ends when a covetous monk poisons him to death. Tsangnyön based his version of the life and songs upon a large body of stories and religious poems about the cotton-clad yogin, stories that had been existing for centuries. He did,

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the Tibetan tradition, see Jackson 1996; Larsson & Quintman 2015:87–97; Stein 1988 [1972]:248–276. For a study about *mgur* written by a Tibetan scholar, see Don grub rgyal 1997.

<sup>196</sup> For more information about Tsangnyön Heruka, see for example Larsson 2012 and 2019b; for more information about crazy yogins in Tibet, see for example Larsson 2019a. The collected songs (*mgur 'bum*) of Milarepa which Tsangnyön compiled and printed is available in English translation in Chang 1989 and in Tsangnyön 2017. Tsangnyön's disciple Lhatsun Rinchen Namgyel compiled and printed Milarepa songs that were not include in Tsangnyön's collection. These have been translated to English by Kunga & Cutillo (1986; 1995 [1978]). For a study of Tsangnyön's version of Milarepa's hagiography (*rnam thar*), which also situates the text within the wider biographical tradition of Milarepa, see Quintman 2014. For English translations of Tsangnyön's version of Milarepa's life story, see Evans-Wentz 2000 [1928]; Lhalungpa 1979 [1977]; Tsangnyön 2010. For a critical edition of the text, see Jong 1959.

however, present the material in an, at the time, novel fashion, thus making the story and songs more accessible and concordant than many of the older versions. He also made certain innovations, the *bonpo*-priest that poisons Milarepa to death in some of the older version becomes a learned monk, a so-called *geshe* (*dge bshes*), for example.<sup>197</sup>

Twenty years after Tsangnyön had compiled and printed the two works on Milarepa, in 1508, one year after his passing, some of Tsangnyön Heruka's disciples gathered in Southern Latö (La stod lho) where they collected and printed their beloved master's songs and biography along with two other texts that are related to Tsangnyön.<sup>198</sup> Tsangnyön's songs are a testimony of his mastery of composing *mgur*, and given his importance for Tibetan literature, it is somewhat surprising that his songs have remained relatively unknown, both among Tibetans and in Western Tibetological scholarship. Tsangnyön's songs provide us with insight to the way in which he taught Dharma to his disciples. They also offer fascinating glimpses of the wandering yogic lifestyle that he and many of his disciples followed and propagated. As might be expected, Tsangnyön's songs resembles those of Milarepa, both in style and contents.

It is noteworthy that Tsangnyön's song-collection is similar to a life-story in some ways, beginning with the first song that he sang in his late twenties in Lachi (La phyi), the collection covers his adult life and ends with his last words, words that he uttered before passing away in Rechungpuk (Ras chung phug) at age 55. The songs are ordered chronologically, and each song is surrounded by a narrative frame providing the context around the song. The song-collection is 28 folios long and contains 27 songs of varying length; six of the songs are called major songs

<sup>197</sup> *Bon* is a religion that existed in Tibet before Buddhism. *Bonpo* the name of a follower of the *Bon* religion.

<sup>198</sup> This printing endeavour has been described by Ehrhard 2010; Sernesi 2011a. The four texts are described in Larsson 2016. The title of the song-collection that they produced at that time is *The Collection of the Songs of the Master Heruka from Tsang: The Wish-fulfilling Jewel Showing the Path of the All-Knowing One* (*rje btsun gtsang pa he ru ka'i mgur 'bum rin po che dbang gi rgyal po thams cad mkhyen pa'i lam ston*). The text is also available in some private collections. I recently published a Swedish translation of the text (Larsson 2018).

(*mgur chen*), a term that indicates that these songs were regarded as particularly important or perhaps that they were especially popular and well-known at the time.<sup>199</sup>

Tsangnyön's songs were later (in 1512 and 1543) incorporated in two hagiographies, authored by his disciples Götsangrepa (rGod tshang ras pa, 1482–1559) and Lhatsun Rinchen Namgyel (lHa btsun Rin chen rnam rgyal, 1473–1557), respectively.<sup>200</sup> Ngödrub Pembar (dNgos grub dpal 'bar, 1456–1527), whose hagiography about Tsangnyön was printed along with the song-collection, do not include the songs.<sup>201</sup> Götsangrepa categorizes Tsangnyön's songs into four main types in a short catalogue of the song-collection that likely was printed alongside with the song-collection itself, and thus constitutes one of the above mentioned four texts that were printed in 1508:<sup>202</sup>

- Instructional songs (*gdams pa'i mgur*)
- Songs that introduces [the mind] (*ngo sprod kyi mgur*)
- Question-and-answer songs (*zhus lan gi mgur*)
- Songs with parting instructions (*'gro chos kyi mgur*)

<sup>199</sup> The actual number of songs is larger: some songs that are counted as one actually contain several related songs, and two songs are attributed to other persons. The term *mgur chen* is also used for some of Marpa's songs in the hagiography that Tsangnyön printed in 1505. Nālandā Translation Committee translates the term as “grand song” (Nālandā 1986:43).

<sup>200</sup> rGod tshang ras pa, *Nyi ma'i snying po*; lHa btsun Rin chen rnam rgyal, *Dad pa'i spu slong g.yo ba*. Götsangrepa includes all the songs in his version, and besides some peculiar spellings, he renders the songs almost as the song-collection does, and in a similar order. Lhatsun leaves out several songs and sometimes provides verses that are not found in the other texts. He also divides one song and makes two separate songs out of it, which seem logical when looking at the song in question. It is notable that Lhatsun was not involved in printing the song-collection, so it is not surprising that his version of the songs differs. However, the differences indicate that the songs could have been available in different versions and that Lhatsun might had access to other versions of the same songs. David DiValerio (2015) writes about the connection between these texts. When rendering variant spellings in the Tibetan sources in the notes, L indicate Lhatsun's and G indicate Götsangrepa's hagiographies of Tsangnyön.

<sup>201</sup> dNgos grub dpal 'bar, *Dad pa'i seng ge*.

<sup>202</sup> *The Illuminating Sunbeam Catalogue* (dKar chags nyi 'od snang ba). For a Swedish translation of this text, see Larsson 2018:201–203.

These different categories are not clearly distinguishable. For example, most of the songs are instructional songs, in some sense, and many of the songs are question-and-answer songs in so far that they are performed in response to questions from disciples. There are also some other types of songs included in the collection, for example a song about how to interpret a dream (*rmi lam brda 'grol kyi mgur*).

## II. Tsangnyön's 'songs with parting instructions'

The present chapter will explore the 'songs with parting instructions' (*'gro chos kyi mgur*) that are found in the song-collection. A song with parting instructions is a song that Tsangnyön sings to a disciple who is about to leave for a longer journey. Such a song contains instructions and advise that the disciple needs to keep in mind while being away from his or her teacher.<sup>203</sup> This type of song is especially relevant for the present discussion, since it often describes the non-monastic and wandering lifestyle that Tsangnyön advocated and followed.

The first song with parting instructions appears on the front-side of folio 12 of the song-collection.<sup>204</sup> In the prose introduction that is given before the song begins, the context of the song is provided. According to this narrative frame surrounding the song, the song was written down in a letter, which Tsangnyön sent in response to a letter that he had received from the female ruler of Tenkheb (*gTeng khebs*),<sup>205</sup> Sönam Sangmo (*bSod rnam bzang mo*). Sönam Sangmo was one of many dignitaries who had a teacher–patron relationship (*yon mchod*) with Tsangnyön.<sup>206</sup> In

<sup>203</sup> The term is somewhat difficult to translate. Feedback from Tibetan scholars that I received at IATS seminar 2019 and discussions with Khenpo Chödrak Tenpel in August 2019 have, along with the contents of the songs and the contexts around them, helped me to get an idea of what the term means. Khenpo Chödrak also said that the term can be used when the *lama* is leaving for a journey and his disciples remain.

<sup>204</sup> This song is rendered in *gTsang smyon*, *gTsang pa he ru ka'i mgur 'bum*:12a–13a. Cf. *rGod tshang ras pa*, *Nyi ma'i snying po*:92–93; lHa btsun Rin chen rnam rgyal, *Dad pa'i spu slong g.yo ba*:87–89.

<sup>205</sup> Tenkheb probably refers to Tingkheb (*gTing khebs*), a place situated 83 km from Sakya (thanks to Hildegard Diemberger for this suggestion).

<sup>206</sup> See Ruegg 1997, for more information about teacher–patron relationships.

her letter Sönam Sangmo had written that she was in a difficult situation since her planned wedding with the ruler of Tsamda (Tshwa mda') had been cancelled, due to the Tsamda ruler's sudden death. Now she did not know what to do and was on her way back to her former homeland. As noted above this song is said to have been written down in a letter, and not provided spontaneously on the spot like Tsangnyön's songs generally were according to his song-collection. This raises questions about how these songs were performed, composed, and disseminated.

In the song Tsangnyön gives the following instructions to Sönam Sangmo:

See how death follows birth,  
since no one knows when death occurs,  
realize that it is urgent,  
and devote yourself to Dharma, day and night!

See how that which has been constructed falls apart,  
abandon houses made of earth and stone,  
give up attachment to cities and farmland,  
and wander in remote mountains!<sup>207</sup>

As seen in the excerpt, Tsangnyön encourages the noble lady to realize the impermanent nature of all phenomena and become a wandering *yoginī*. "If you want lasting happiness, escape the dungeons of *samsāra*! [...] If you want to leave the battle-fields of *samsāra*, defeat the armies of the enemy, self-clinging!"<sup>208</sup> he continues.

In this song, like in many of his other songs, the four thoughts that turn the mind [toward Dharma] (*blo zlog rnam bzhi*) figure prominently.<sup>209</sup> It is by realizing the value of the human life, the unfailing truth of impermanence, cause and result, and the

<sup>207</sup> |skyes nas 'chi ba mthong zhing || nam 'chi cha med yin pas || long med rgyud la bkal nas || nyin mtshan chos la 'bungs cig (L: shig) || rtsigs nas 'jig pa mthong bas || sa mkhar pe'u'i (G: spe'u'i) las dang || grong yul zhen pa bor la (L: spongs la) || gnyan sa ri khrod 'grims cig (L: shig)|

<sup>208</sup> rgyun tu (G; L: du) bde zhing skyid par 'dod na || 'khor ba'i btson (G: rtson) dong 'di las (L: la) bros cig (G: gcig) | [...] |'khor ba'i g.yul ngo zlog par 'dod na || bdag 'dzin dgra bo (L: dgra'o) dmangs su phob cig (L: shig)|.

<sup>209</sup> Many of Milarepa's songs also emphasizes the four thoughts.

shortcomings of cyclic existence, that the yogin realizes that the eight worldly concerns – striving for victory, fame, praise, and happiness, and avoiding defeat, obscurity, blame, and suffering – are utterly meaningless and should not concern the Buddhist yogin. Thus, the yogin ideally has a totally different way of thinking and acting, compared with a person concerned with worldly matters.

The second song with parting instructions appears on the front-side of page 13 of the song-collection.<sup>210</sup> There it is said that Tsangnyön, while staying in Gungtang (Gung thang), sent away his disciple Möndze Togden (Mon rdze rtogs ldan) to Kailash (Ti se), to “raise the victory banner of practice” (*sgrub pa'i rgyal mtshan 'dzugs*).

Before leaving, Möndze Togden requests instructions that would benefit him during his travelling and while practicing in Kailash. Tsangnyön then sang a song with parting instructions, containing advice for his yogin-disciple:

Not abandoning worldly thoughts and deeds,  
while you have removed the outer signs of a worldly life  
and taken on the outer appearance of a monk  
– this is a fault that should be given up.

Not being free from craving after wealth,  
even after having left behind one's homeland,  
and roaming the kingdoms aimlessly  
– this is a fault that should be given up.

Being overpowered by desire for the eight worldly concerns,  
when you wander in remote mountains without companions,  
practicing asceticism and sustaining on water  
– this is a fault that should be given up.<sup>211</sup>

<sup>210</sup> This song is rendered in gTsang smyon, *gTsang pa he ru ka'i mgur 'bum*:13a–14b; G:101–104; L:60–63.

<sup>211</sup> |'jig rten pa yi rtags (G: brags) bor nas || lus ser mo tsam du zhugs gyur kyang || bsam sbyor 'jig rten mi 'bor na || spang bar bya ba'i skyon mtshang (G, L: 'tshang) yin || pha yul rgyab tu skyur nas ni (G: kyang) || rgyal khams phyogs med bskor lags kyang || zang zing gi 'dod pa ma bral (G: gral) na || 'di yang spang bya'i [±] 'dra'o (L: [...] spang bya'i skyona'atshang yin) || grogs (G: grags) med ri kbrod 'grim (L: 'grims) bzhin (G: gzhin) du || dka' thub chu 'thung bgyis lags kyang || chos brgyad 'dod pas kun slang na || 'di yang [±]



Later in the same song, Tsangnyön provides Möndze Togden with several examples, showing him how to practice and how to live his life:

When raising the victory-banner of practice,  
take the iron-peg, firmly driven into the ground, as an example,  
and practice with unshakable concentration!

When roaming desolate mountains all alone,  
take the rhinoceros as an example,  
and practice without ever being tired or sad!

When roaming the kingdoms aimlessly,  
take the feather, which is carried by the wind, as an example,  
and practice without clinging!

When meeting with wealth and riches,  
take the food of a person who feels sick as an example,  
and practice without any desire or attachments!<sup>212</sup>

These short excerpts demonstrate the ascetic and homeless ideal that Tsangnyön propagated, an ideal that had been upheld by Milarepa before him and effectively preached in Milarepa's songs. The same ascetic ideal also figures prominently in early Indian Buddhism. In the *Rhinoceros-Sūtra*, which is a very old Buddhist text preserved in Pali, Sanskrit, and Gandhari, it is mentioned that one should wander alone like the rhinoceros, for example.<sup>213</sup>

The third example of a song with parting instructions appears on the back-side of folio 20 of the song-collection.<sup>214</sup> When Tsangnyön was staying in the Crystal Cave in Nedum (Nas zlum shel phug), printing the collected works of Venerable Milarepa, he sang a song with parting instructions to his disciple Rinchen

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<sup>212</sup> *sgrub pa'i rgyal mtshan 'dzugs pa'i tshe || lcags phur spang la btab pa ltos || g.yo mgul (G, L: 'gul) med pa nyams su long || gcig pur ri kbrod 'grim pa'i tshe || ri dgas bse ru'i dpe la ltos || skyo ngal med par nyams su long || phyogs med rgyal khams bskor ba'i tshe || bya sgro rlung khyer dpe la ltos || zhen pa med par nyams su long || zang zing nor dang phrad pa'i (G: 'phrad pa'i) tshe || skyug nad pa yi (G: pa'i) zas srid ltos || zhen chags med par nyams su long*

<sup>213</sup> Salomon 2000. See also Chapter 3 in this book.

<sup>214</sup> This song is rendered in *gTsang smyon, gTsang pa he ru ka'i mgrur 'bum:20b-21a*. The song is also rendered in G:143; L:99-100.

Palsangpo (Rin chen dpal bzang po), who was departing for Tsari (rTsa ri).<sup>215</sup> In this song, which I will render in full, Tsangnyön gives the following advice to his beloved disciple:

Filled with devotion in body, speech, and mind,  
all the faithful sons in the knowledge-bearer's tradition  
bow down and praise,  
at the feet of the holy Kagyu (*bka' brgyud*) *lamas*.

O Rinchenpal, you are like my heart!  
These are my heartfelt parting instructions.  
Do not forget them, keep them in your heart,  
think about them again and again!

When you wander from place to place, aimlessly,  
transform the five objects that delight the senses to offerings.  
See through that which leads you astray,  
and let it, with caution, become the path!

When Māra causes contrived respect to arise  
and your pride and selfishness increase,  
revert desire with determination in thoughts and actions!

When you wander terrifying cemeteries  
and are haunted by the lord of the cemetery,  
realize that he is nothing else than your own mind!

When you wander alone in isolated mountains  
and excellent experiences, good qualities,  
and the sign of warmth arise,  
realize this to be the kindness of the *lama*!

When fortunate disciples gather around you,  
this is certainly due to karmic connections from before.  
Give them liberation and maturation  
by means of empowerments and instructions!

When adverse circumstances and hindrances arise,  
these are my exhortations, urging you to engage in virtue.  
Be aware of this and pray to me again and again!

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<sup>215</sup> Rinchen Palsangpo figures prominently in the song-collection and he is also depicted in it. The collection begins with a series of songs containing “pointing-out instructions” to Rinchen Palsangpo.

O son, you who are like my own heart!  
 Because of my great love for you,  
 I, your spiritual father, will always protect you.  
 Go now, meditate in the holy place Tsari!

May you meet with accomplishment, in thoughts and deeds,  
 in this and in your future lives!

*Lamas, yidams, and protectors,*  
*guard, and never be separated from, Rinchen Palsang!*  
 May the teachings of the Kagyu spread!

*Evam!*<sup>216</sup>

This relatively short song enables us to get an idea of how Tsangnyön's songs are usually structured. Each song begins with an invocation to the *lama* and ends with the word *evam*.<sup>217</sup> In-between there are instructions often directed to certain disciples,

<sup>216</sup> |pha bka' rgyud bla ma dam pa'i zhabs la || dad ldan rigs 'dzin bu rgyud thams cad || sgo gsum gus pas phyag 'tshal bstod do || snying dang 'dra ba'i rin chen dpal la || 'gro chos snying gtam 'di skad smra bas || ma rjed snying la (G, L: sems la) yang yang bsoms cig (L: chongs cig) || phyogs med rgyal khams 'grim pa'i tshe na || dbang po'i yul du 'dod yon rnam lngas || mchod par rdzus nas slu bar (G: glu bar) nges pas || khong zon drag pos lam du khyer cig || bdud kyis bzos pa'i (L: zos pa'i) bkur bsti (G: skur ti) byung tshe || nga rgyal rang 'dod je cher (L: che) 'gro bas || zhen zlog (G, L: log) bsam sbyor drag po 'tshal lo || 'jigs rung dur khrod nyul ba'i tshe na || dur khrod bdag pos (G: bdag po'i) cho 'phrul yod bas (G, L: yong bas) || rang gi sems su shes par gyis shig || gcig pur dben pa'i ri khrod 'grim tshe || nyams rtogs yon tan drod rtags skye bas || bla ma'i drin du shes par gyis cig (L: shig) || skal ba ldan pa'i (G: skal bar ldan pa'i) bu slob 'dus na || sngon nas las 'brel yod par (L: yong bar) nges pas || dbang dang gdams pas (L: gdams pa) smin grol gyis cig || mi mthun rkyen ngan bar chad byung rung (G: tshe) || kho bos dge sbyor bskul ba (G: skul ba) (L: kho bo dge la sbyor ba) yin pas || dran pas gsol ba yang yang thob cig || pha nga'i snying dang 'dra ba'i bu la || brtse ba chen pos 'bral med skyong gis || rtsa ri'i (L: tsa ri'i) gnas la (G; L: gangs la) sgom du song cig || skye dang tshe rabs 'di nyid du'ang (L: yang) || bsam sbyor mthar phyin 'phrad par (L: phrad par) smon no || bla ma yi dam mkha' 'gro rnams kyis || rin chen dpal bzang 'bral med skyongs (G: skyong) shig (G: gcig) || bka' rgyud bstan pa dar bar shog cig || e va||

<sup>217</sup> This Indo-Aryan word, meaning something like 'this is how it is', marks the end of a song. According to Tibetan exegeses the two syllables express the final goal in Buddhism, the inseparability between emptiness (*e*) and method (*vam*).

who usually are named in the narrative frame, which surrounds the song, and sometimes also in the song itself.

Let us now scrutinize the fourth song with parting instructions. This song begins on the front-side of folio 22 of the song-collection. It is rather long, spanning over several folios.<sup>218</sup> The song was performed/composed in Chuwar (Chu bar), a place situated not far from Lachi. Along with Kailash (Ti se) and Tsari, these were favoured places where Tsangnyön and his disciples spent much time practicing meditation. Chuwar is known as the place where Milarepa finally parted from this world and Tsangnyön spent much time in Chuwar during his later years. While Tsangnyön and his disciples were staying there, his disciple Chöchok Palsang (Chos mchog dpal bzang) decided to travel to Central Tibet to “practice for the benefit of others”. Before he left, Tsangnyön sang a song with parting instructions, explaining how a person, who wants to achieve accomplishment, can get rid of the real enemy, namely ego-clinging (*bdag ’dzin*). Having introduced himself as a lazy person who wanders the cemeteries (*dur khrod nyul ba’i snyoms las pa*), Tsangnyön provides an exceptionally detailed account of how ego-clinging must be completely uprooted. Tsangnyön ends his song in the following manner:

With perseverance and without fear,  
guard your *samaya*-commitments.  
Refute and destroy the worldly way  
and punish the enemy [– self-clinging –] according to the law  
as follows:

Catch it with the lasso of weariness and renunciation!  
Fetter it with the iron chains of calm abiding and special insight!

Bring it to the court of justice of remote hermitages!  
Sentence it by the truth of cause and effect!

Imprison it in the dungeon of stable meditation!  
Flog it with the stick of post-meditation!

Cut off its feet that go after sense-pleasures!  
Sever its hands that commit negative actions!

<sup>218</sup> This song is rendered in gTsang smyon, *gTsang pa he ru ka’i mgur ’bum*:22a–23b. Cf. G:166–169, not in L.

Put out its eyes that look after others' faults!  
Detach its ears that listen to the impure mind!

Cut off its nose that smells the wind of unwholesome thoughts!  
Pull out its tongue that praises oneself and disparages others!

Strip the skin off its body, which is hypocrisy!  
Cut its life-vein, which is self-grasping!

[At the end,] when you have executed  
your notorious mortal enemy in this way,  
after having spent your former lives in beginningless *samsāra*,  
discard also the rotten remains of the enemy  
– self-grasping –  
in the vast abyss, which is free from extremes!

Bury it in the earth, which is the fundamental likeness of *samsāra*  
and *nirvāṇa*!

Purify it in the water, which is to regard others as dearer than yourself!

Burn it in the fire of wisdom and knowledge!  
Cast its ashes to the wind of *dharmatā*!

This is how you subdue the hated enemy – self-clinging.<sup>219</sup>

<sup>219</sup> |'tsher med (G: 'tshor med) dam tshig btson du (G: rtson du, my reading: brtson) zung (G: bzung) || phyi lam khegs pa'i (G: mkhag pa'i) rtso ra dang || dgra lan khrims lugs 'di ltar gyis || skyo shas nges 'byung zhags pa khyigs || zhi lhag zung 'brel lcags sgrog chug || ri khrod dben pa'i khrims ra (G: pas) skor || rgyu 'bras bden pa'i khrims gam thong || mnyam bzhas (G: gzhas) brtan po'i (G: btan po'i) brtson dong chug || rjes thob sgyu ma'i (G: rgyu ma'i) ber kas brdungs (G: bsdungs) || 'dod yon rjes 'gro'i rkang pa bregs (G: grogs) || sdig las byed pa'i lag pa chod (G: grogs) || gzhan skyon lta ba'i mig 'bras thon || nyon mongs sgra (G: sbra [?]) nyan rna ba chod || ngan rtog rlung rgyu'i sna rtse bzhor || bdag bstod (G: stod) gzhan smod smra lce phyung || tshul 'chos (G: ches [?]) lus kyi lpags pa shus (G: gshus) || bdag tu 'dzin pa'i srog rtso chod || de ltar gsad par gyur nas kyang || tshe rabs 'khor ba thog med nas || sha 'khon (G: khon) ha cang ches grags pas || bdag 'dzin dgra bo'i thed ro yang || mtha' bral chen po'i g.yang la skyur || srid zhi mnyam nyid sa la skungs || bdag pas gzhan gces chu la sbyongs || shes rab ye shes me la bsregs || thal ba chos nyid rlung la bskur (G: skur) || de bdag 'dzin sdang dgra'i (G: ... 'dzin dgra bo'i) 'dul thabs yin|

These four songs with parting instructions give us an idea about what Tsangnyön regarded to be important for travelling Buddhist yogins who wanted to attain the liberation from *samsāra*. The songs also illuminate the itinerant lifestyle that Tsangnyön followed and propagated.

### III. Opening the Eyes of Faith

In 1503 Tsangnyön composed a catalogue about the history and function of songs. The catalogue is called *Opening the Eyes of Faith* and it was printed together with the song-collection and the above-mentioned catalogue listing its contents.<sup>220</sup> This text is particularly relevant to the present discussion because it contains Tsangnyön's own reflections about songs and their use. *Opening the Eyes of Faith* details the suitable forms such songs can take, their necessary elements, potential flaws, and beneficial effects. The text gives advice about how one should sing songs, to whom, and for what reasons.<sup>221</sup> Tsangnyön explains how the great *siddhas* of the past

... gave up clothes, food, and renown, and became the sons of mist and clouds. Wearing empty and secluded caves as their crowns [/hats], they cut the cord of happiness and abundance as aims of this life. They continuously remembered the difficulty of obtaining freedoms and advantages. For pillows they used mindfulness of the uncertainty of the time of death; for clothes they wore awareness of the infallibility of cause and effect; for mats they laid out mindfulness of *samsāra*'s shortcomings. Then, modelling themselves upon the downward descent of a river and the upward blaze of a lamp, they practiced the two stages of *yoga* continuously, day and night, without interruption. This resulted in the actualization of unmistakable experience and realization, which they then expressed in *vajra*-songs.<sup>222</sup>

<sup>220</sup> The full title of this work is *A Catalogue of Songs Dispelling the Darkness of Ignorance and Opening the Eyes of Faith* (*mGur gyi dkar chags ma rig mun sel dad pa'i mig 'byed*). The text is translated and analyzed in Larsson & Quintman 2015.

<sup>221</sup> Larsson and Quintman 2015:89.

<sup>222</sup> Larsson and Quintman 2015:97–98. gTsang smyon Heruka, *mGur gyi dkar chags*:1b: *sngon gyi rgyal ba grub thob gong ma rnam kyis dka' ba*

The catalogue is relatively short, spanning just 9 folios, and in it Tsangnyön encourages the catalogue's readers to sing songs and adopt the wandering and contemplative lifestyle of the early Kagyu yogins. If the singer of *mgur*

is a yogin of the three sacred snow mountains, the outskirts of bustling towns, the middle reaches of slate and snow mountains, along the foothills of mist-shrouded woods, assembly halls where *vīras* and *dākinīs* gather, the dwellings of noble sages, [such places are] the central mast of the great ship of the bKa' brgyud teachings, the cornerstone of the mansion of the Practice Lineage teaching, a great sacred site where meditation naturally increases.<sup>223</sup>

Tsangnyön is here speaking to those yogins who wander among "the three sacred snow-mountains", a reference to the great pilgrimage mountains of Kailash, Lachi, and Tsari, each of which had become an important Kagyu retreat-site by the late 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>224</sup>

Tsangnyön concludes his catalogue about songs with a short reflection on the value of *mgur* and how wandering yogins like himself and his followers might employ Buddhist songs of experience in a practical way. The songs are

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*dang du blangs | theg pa khur du khur | dman pa'i sa bzung | hrul po'i gos gyon | rgyan cha sems la btags | gyong lto gos gtam gsum la btang | sprin dang na bun gyi bu byas | mi med kyi brag phug stong pa rnams zhwa ltar du gyon nas | tshe 'di'i 'dun ma bde skyid phun tshogs la re thag gcad te | dal 'byor rnyed par dka' ba rgyun chags su yid la bsams | nam 'chi nges med dran pa rngas su bcug | rgyu 'bras blu (bslu) med dran pa gos su gyon | 'khor ba'i nyes dmigs dran pa gdan du bting nas | chu bo thur du 'bab pa'am | mar me gyen du 'bar ba dper bzhag ste | nyin mtshan khor yug tu rgyun chad med par rim gnyis kyi rnal 'byor nyams su blangs pa'i don 'bras | nyams dang rtogs pa phyin ci ma log pa sngon (mngon) du gyur nas rdo rje'i mgur gsungs pa rnams lags shing l.*

<sup>223</sup> Larsson & Quintman 2015:107. gTsang smyon Heruka, *mGu*r gyi dkar chags:8b: *gnas gsum gangs ri'i rnal 'byor pa yin na | 'du 'dzi grong gi pha rol | g.ya' dang gangs kyi nang khongs | nags dang na bun 'khrigs pa'i 'dabs rol | dpa' bo mkha' 'gro 'du ba'i tshogs khang | drang srong 'phags pa bzhuks pa'i sti gnas | bka' rgyud bstan pa'i gru chen gzhuṅg shing || sgrub rgyud bstan pa'i khang bzangs (bzang) rmangs brdo (rmang rdo) | bsam gtan ngang gis 'phel ba'i gnas chen l.*

<sup>224</sup> Larsson and Quintman 2015:107.

provisions when wandering in charnel grounds and holy places, necessities when roaming savage lands and mountain retreats, offerings when meeting *lamas*, gifts when encountering *dharma* brothers, offering articles when visiting temples and *stūpas*, goods when travelling around the countryside, ferry-fees when crossing rivers, offering gifts for requests to kings, an axe for chipping away [alms from] the wealthy and a file for scraping away [alms] from the poor. Even when meeting bandits we reply in song, and on such occasions the advice should be an exhortation to practice virtue.<sup>225</sup>

In Tsangnyön's view, *mgur* thus serve not just as spontaneous records of awakened experience attained by great masters of the past; rather, they retain a material relevance in the world that lies beyond their soteriological value. For the yogin with few material possessions, *mgur* function as transactional objects of great practical value. Songs become a form of religious capital that may be given as gifts to *lamas* and fellow practitioners. They may serve as fees for ferrymen when crossing rivers, they may be presented as tribute to kings, they may be used to garner offerings from the rich and the poor alike. Songs may even be exploited to save one's own skin in the event of attack by bandits.<sup>226</sup>

#### IV. Concluding remarks

Let us leave Tsangnyön's catalogue about songs and return to his collected songs. The song-collection ends with Tsangnyön's final words. These words were obviously seen as especially important, since they are cited in two of the three extant hagiographies about him, as well as in a hagiography about his biographer Ngödrub Pembar (dNgos grub dpal 'bar).<sup>227</sup>

<sup>225</sup> Larsson & Quintman 2015:127. gTsang smyon Heruka, *mGur gyi dkar chags*:8b: *gnas chen dang dur khrod myul ba'i 'tsho chas | snyan sa (gnyan sa) ri khrod 'grim pa'i yo byad | bla ma la 'jal (mjal) ba'i phyag rten | mched grogs dang 'jal ba'i skyes ka (kha) | lha khang mchod rten 'jal ba'i mchod rdzas | rgyal khams skor ba'i yang zong | chu rab sgrol ba'i gru rdzas | rgyal po la zhu ba'i zhu sten (rten) | phyug po la bzhog pa'i sta gri | dbul po la 'brad pa'i se gdar | ar ba (pa) phyag (jag) pa dang 'phrad kyang dbyangs su tsher re len pa lags pas | da lan 'dir yang gsung sgros la dge ba'i bskul ma |*.

<sup>226</sup> Larsson and Quintman 2015:106.

<sup>227</sup> dNgos grub dpal 'bar (1456–1527), *Dad pa'i seng ge*: 26b; rGod tshang



Before he passed away, Tsangnyön said:

Monks, disciples, and patrons, since you have met Milarepa himself in these degenerate times, you have fortunate *karma*. Continue to study the liberation story of Mila and devote your entire life to practice! Then you will hear [my] real speech, and you will be taken care of.<sup>228</sup>

These words are often cited by Tsangnyön's disciples as one of several indications proving that Tsangnyön was Milarepa incarnate; Tsangnyön here reveals his true identity. The yogin *par excellence* had reappeared after some four hundred years for the sake of continuing his previous mission. This time Milarepa appeared in disguise of a crazy yogin, who devoted his life to re-establish the wandering yogic lifestyle of Milarepa, a lifestyle that had become increasingly rare, even in the very lineage that Milarepa followed – the Kagyu lineage.<sup>229</sup>

According to the sources that portray Tsangnyön and his disciples, they practiced the same teachings and lived the same lifestyle as Milarepa had done, alternating between meditation-practice in isolated places and homeless wandering. Moreover, they collected the aural teachings (*snyan brgyud*), the liberation-accounts (*rnam thar*), and the songs (*mgur*) of the early Kagyu masters, including Milarepa's, which they printed and spread.<sup>230</sup> Besides making the songs and hagiographies of the previous masters in their tradition available, they also composed and printed hagiographies and songs about their personal masters and composed their own songs, which they also printed and spread. In this way, by various means, they effectively presented a yogic alternative to the monastic lifestyle that had increasingly become favoured

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ras pa, *Nyi ma'i snying po*:273; Byams pa lha btsun grags pa, *Pañ chen gzhung brgya pa'i rnam thar*:11.

<sup>228</sup> gTsang smyon, *gTsang pa he ru ka'i mgur 'bum*:27a: *grwa pa bu slob yon bdag dang bcas pa rnam* | *snyigs dus mi la ras pa dang dngos su 'jal ba yin pas* | *las dang skal pa bzang* | *da dung mi la'i rnam thar la ltos la* | *tshe dang sgrub pa snyoms* | *dngos su gsung thos par 'gyur zhing rjes su 'dzin no* | For alternative English translations, see Quintman 2006:260; Larsson 2012:187; Stearns [Kalnins] 1985:81.

<sup>229</sup> Cf. Smith 2001: 60.

<sup>230</sup> Cf. Schaeffer 2009; Schaeffer 2011; Sernesi 2011a; Sernesi 2011b.

for a person who wanted to engage seriously in Buddhist practice in 15<sup>th</sup> century Tibet. Tsangnyön and his disciples claimed that it was still possible to wander alone like a rhinoceros, just like Milarepa and the early Kagyu yogins supposedly had done some hundreds of years earlier. At the same time, they were following the ancient path of some of the early, ascetically inclined Buddhist monks of India,<sup>231</sup> trying to bring new life into a very old lifestyle. Tsangnyön and his disciples proved that this way of life was not merely an ancient ideal to read and hear about, but a lifestyle to be emulated by apt yogins. They showed this both by personal example and by textual production, thus making their message extraordinarily trustworthy and powerful.

These wandering yogins and *yoginīs*<sup>232</sup> apparently identified so thoroughly with masters who had lived earlier, that subject and object sometimes fused and became one. According to the hagiographies written about them, the statues and preserved block-print illustrations that depict them – and, indeed, according to their songs as well – they literally lived in the footsteps of their forebears, dressed like them, practiced the same religious practices, meditated in the same caves, walked the same paths, and so forth. Thus, they seem to have led their lives in accordance with biographical patterns, which they themselves actively promoted and sometimes even created.<sup>233</sup> By expressing themselves through religious poetry (*mgur*), which they created themselves, instead of via translated canonical texts, these yogins could present Buddhism in an innovative way that was adapted to their audience's needs. In doing so they skilfully presented an alternative way of practicing Buddhism, outside of the monasteries. They claimed that it was not necessary to be a monk and live in a monastery in order to attain insight and awakening. The path of the wandering yogin was open to men and women, monks and lay-people, but the

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<sup>231</sup> See Chapter 3 in this book.

<sup>232</sup> Tsangnyön had many female followers and by appointing Kuntu Sangmo (Kun tu bzang mo, 1464–1549) as his successor, just before his death, he showed that it was possible for a woman to attain the highest possible position in his lineage.

<sup>233</sup> There are some interesting parallels with the way in which Tsangnyön and his disciples followed in the footsteps of their forebears and Thomas Mann's notion "a life in quotation". Cf. Jan Assmann (2006:155–177).

path required a great deal of fortitude and devotion. The path of the wandering yogin that they outlined was not a novel innovation, but an ancient ideal that existed in early Buddhism, and indeed, also before Buddhism arose in various contexts and times.

It is noteworthy that various layers of textual interactions are demonstrated in these songs. Julia Kristeva writes about three dimensions of dialogue that needs to be considered when studying a text: the writing subject, addressee, and the exterior text itself.<sup>234</sup> The meaning of a text can only be fully understood in relation to other texts and contexts. Therefore, the intertextual relationships within the textual *corpus* in which the songs are found, and the specific Buddhist tradition to which they belong, as well as the historical, political, and social contexts, need to be taken into consideration when trying to understand these songs. It is important to widen the contexts around the songs, to involve other than merely intertextual aspects: we should reconsider the way in which texts and lives interplay, and recognize the people who created the texts and sang the songs, as well as the people who listened to them and used them in different ways. When it comes to understanding the role and function of these figures and traditions, literary and otherwise, the concept of “liminality” and “communitas”, as outlined by the anthropologist Victor Turner, could be utilized.<sup>235</sup> The Tibetan yogins who sang the songs and compiled and printed the texts containing the songs appears to have lived in what Turner calls a state of “liminality”, and in “communitas of withdrawal and retreat”.<sup>236</sup>

I also believe that the Russian philosopher and literary theorist Michail Bakhtin’s ground-breaking study of humour and culture in the European Middle Ages and the Renaissance can help us comprehend the Tibetan texts and contexts more accurately. Bakhtin explores how the carnival, as depicted in the novels of François Rabelais – a contemporary of Tsangnyön and his disciples – with its emphasis on the earthy and the grotesque, signified the symbolic destruction of authority and official culture and the

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<sup>234</sup> Kristeva 1980:66.

<sup>235</sup> Turner 1995 [1969].

<sup>236</sup> Turner 1995 [1969]:154.

assertion of popular renewal.<sup>237</sup> The official and non-official are in constant dialogue with one another. To fully understand the official (institutionalized) monastic forms of Buddhism in Tibet, one must consider the non-official (non-monastic) forms of Buddhism. The work of both Bakhtin and Rabelais springs from an age of revolution, and each reflects a particularly open sense of the literary text.

It is noteworthy that Tibet in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries experienced rapid transitions and change. It is also striking that the creators of the songs, which this chapter focuses on, were closer to the popular tradition of Tibet than the learned monks and the more scholastic texts. In general, the creators of the songs lived outside of the monasteries and their songs and hagiographies are “distinguished from many other, quite boring and pedantic, works by their near-colloquial language, their lively style, and above all the interest they take in countless details of real life.”<sup>238</sup> According to Rolf Stein it is their creators’ communion “with popular sources of inspiration that made them the greatest creators of Tibetan literature”.<sup>239</sup> I believe that it is crucial for our understanding of these songs and their compilers to examine the full contexts around them, popular as well as learned. People and texts were in a dialogic and intertextual relationship with other people and other texts. There is also a reciprocal relationship between celibate monks, who live in monasteries, and non-celibate yogins, who live in caves and wander, as well as between hagiographies and songs, on one hand, and the scholastic works, on the other.

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<sup>237</sup> Bakhtin 1984 [1965].

<sup>238</sup> Stein 1995 [1972]:276.

<sup>239</sup> Stein 1995 [1972]:276.

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