

The Early Years of Khyung sprul rin po che: Hor (1897-1919)*

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Introduction

Khyung sprul rin po che (1897-1955), who spent more than fifty years of his life traveling in Tibet, India, Bhutan and Nepal, was one of the most renowned Bon po pilgrims of his time. Born into a family of Amdo Ga rgya aristocratic lineage, in the nomadic Bon po kingdom of Hor, he showed a great will to devote his entire life to religious activities from a very early age.

The whole of his spiritual life was inspired by the *ris med* movement, making no distinction between Bon and Buddhism, as he constantly asserted in his poems.¹ Thus, he received his full *drang srong* vows in the Bon po scholastic tradition of sMan ri monastery (gTsang), but later he had no objections in joining the Buddhist community of *rdzogs chen* practitioners

* This article is the starting point of a series of publications about the life and works of Khyung sprul rin po che. Many people from different academic and religious institutions have encouraged this research work for a long time and I am indebted to all of them. In the first place, I wish to thank Dr. Helmut Tauscher for his extraordinary help, insight and guidance; without his continuous intellectual assistance this work would have never been realized. I also owe thanks to many Tibetans and Kinnauris who have participated in a greater or lesser degree in this research project. Sonam Drolkar gave me invaluable advises and insightful suggestions for the translation job. For his part, Geshe Kalsang Norbu (Tengchen) shared his knowledge with me and provided a superb contribution to the whole project. A few people who had personally met Khyung sprul rin po che were very kind to describe their personal experiences with the Bon po lama: the abbot dGe slong bsTan 'dzin dbang grags in Gur gyam Monastery, mKhas mchog rdo rje in sMan ri Monastery (Dolanji), the Kinnauri nun bSod nams dpal skyid from Lippa and the former monk bsTan 'dzin rnam rgyal established in Wombu. Sadly two of them have already passed away while I write these lines. I also want to thank Samdrup (Lhasa) for his advice which has been of enormous importance for the completion of this work. I deeply appreciate the descriptions given by Geshe Tenzin Drukdak (Bachen) about the local traditions of Hor. My gratitude also goes to Amdo Tsogyal for facilitating my work in Lhasa as much as circumstances permitted. Finally, I am most thankful to H.H. Lung rtogs bstan pa'i nyi ma, the Thirty-third Menri Trizin, for his kind assistance, provided whenever needed. Any mistakes in what follows remain my responsibility alone.

¹ On his birth in 1897 he was named bSod nams bstan 'dzin by his parents. Later, in 1911, on receiving his first monk's vows, he was renamed g.Yun drung rgyal mtshan. In 1919, when he received the *drang srong* vows in sMan ri, he also received a new Bon po name: g.Yung drung rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po. After joining the bDe ba'i rgyal po, in 1924 he received a Buddhist name: 'Jigs med nam mkha'i rdo rje. Eventually, he was to be known as Khyung sprul 'Jigs med nam mkha'i rdo rje or just Khyung sprul rin po che without any sectarian connotation.

established in Nam mkha' khyung rdzong (mNga' ris) under the guidance of bDe chen rgyal po. He spent a large part of his time in India as a Buddhist pilgrim visiting most of the sacred sites of northern India², - but at the same time he was the instigator of the return of Bon po traditions to the ancient land of Zhang chung in mNga' ris. Very significantly, he showed a particular interest for the remote Kinnaur valley, where he was to spend long periods of his life undertaking the difficult task of eliminating the deeply rooted, ancient traditions of offering blood sacrifices to the local deities (*yul lha*). In the heart of the Lippa woods, his exceptional knowledge attracted a large group of Buddhist Kinnauri followers and eventually, after returning to mNga' ris, he founded a permanent Bon po monastery on the barren plain of Gur gyam. After establishing his permanent seat there, he and his followers continued to cross the Western Himalayan borders through Kinnaur and Garhwal — in present-day Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, respectively — until the end of his life. These journeys to India combined extensive pilgrimages to Buddhist sites with visits to Delhi in order to publish several treatises. Khyung sprul rin po che also had a considerable impact on a number of Westerners that he met during his life. This was the case of Giuseppe Tucci who had several occasions to meet the pilgrim in Tibet. Thanks to these meetings we have interesting descriptions of him (together with a few pictures) that help us understand his rich biography from a variety of different angles and viewpoints. Tucci provides us with the following somewhat bewildering description of Khyung sprul rin po che dated to 1935:

*(Gigmmèdorgè) non è solamente una delle persone più dotte che vivano oggi nel Tibet, medico ed astrologo a cui si attribuiscono cure e profezie miracolose, ma è anche da tutti venerato come uno degli stregoni più potenti che vivano sull'altipiano. Al suo cenno ubbidisce un disordinato mondo di forze, ora benefiche, ora malvagie, che sconvolgono, turbano, placano uomini e cose.*³

Most of his religious and medical activities were concentrated around the banks of the Upper Sutlej river, where he had earlier founded Gur gyam mDo sngags grags rgyas gling Monastery next to g.Yung drung rin chen 'bar ba'i brag phug, the eighth century meditation cave of Dran pa nam mkha' according to the Bon po tradition. Khyung sprul rin po che identified the area surrounding Gur gyam as Khyung lung dngul mkhar, the capital city of the ancient Zhang chung kingdom⁴. After dedicating some twenty years of his life to his teachings and pilgrimages throughout the region, he died in 1955 in Dran pa nam mkha's cave, and with his death, a chapter in the

² As far as Sāncī Stūpa.

³ Tucci (1987), p. 102. The French translation renders the paragraph as follows: (*Djigmé Dordjé*) non seulement, il est un des plus grands hommes de science du Tibet d'aujourd'hui, un médecin et un astrologue à qui on attribue de miraculeuses guérisons et prophéties, mais il est aussi vénéré par tous comme un des plus puissants magiciens de tout le haut plateau himalayen. Un seul geste de lui suffit pour que lui obéisse tout un monde anarchique de forces mystérieuses, bienveillantes ou néfastes qui trouble l'âme humaine ou se manifeste dans l'univers. Tucci (1989), P. 183. I am unaware of the existence of any English translation.

⁴ For a discussion on the precise location of Khyung lung dngul mkhar based on Khyung sprul rin po che's biography see Blezer (2007) and Vitali (2008).

history of Tibet was closed. In accordance with his last wishes, after his death two disciples were entrusted with the mammoth task of composing his *rnam thar*. dPal Idan tshul khriims (1902-1972), who had accompanied the lama since 1930, oversaw the project and took particular care to review the metrics in all the poetry written by Khyung sprul rin po che and to provide a summary, in verse form, at the end of each chapter of the key episodes narrated in that chapter. Meanwhile, the Kinnauri monk mKhas mchog rdo rje (b. 1933), who had joined his teacher in 1942, was responsible for narrating events throughout the biography. At least two versions were compiled and dGe slong bsTan 'dzin dbang grags (1922-2007), Khyung sprul rin po che's main disciple and successor in Gur gyam Monastery, took one of them to Delhi for publication in 1957. Three hundred lithographic prints were issued in that same year entitled *sKyabs rje mkhas grub 'Jigs med nam mkha'i rnam thar dad brgya'i rma bya rnam par rtse ba*. Fifteen years later, sMan ri Monastery in Dolanji (India) published a copy of that same version.⁵ This is the edition that has served as the basis for most of the published studies in the West about the life and works of Khyung sprul rin po che.

However, in the twenty-first century a new manuscript of the biography surfaced in Khyung lung (mNga' ris). The text had managed to survive the Cultural Revolution hidden away in the home of its owner, Khyung lung Mes tshe dbang.⁶ It was edited and published in 2004 by the Zhang zhung rig gnas dar rgyas tshogs pa of Lhasa.⁷ Although this new edition did not include any significant changes with respect to the 1957 and 1972 editions, the fact that the 2004 edition was supervised by dGe slong bsTan 'dzin dbang grags and edited by his disciple Zhung Karma rgyal mtshan provided some new insights into the last days of Khyung sprul rin po che and amended a number of errata present in the first edition. For these reasons, this is the text the author has used here as the main source for his translation of Khyung sprul rin po che's *rnam thar*.

Listed below are the thirteen chapters and epilogue in which the biography is divided together with their summarized titles. The list also includes the place names where the particular events described in each chapter took place and their approximate dates. The corresponding page numbers from the 2004 edition are also given.

First chapter

On his birth and early infancy.

Hor (1897-1907)

[pp. 24-63]⁸

⁵ On the cover of the 1972 edition we find: The biography of Khyung sprul 'Jigs med nam mkha'i rdo rje. Being the text of *Khyab bdag 'khor lo'i mgon po mkhas grub 'Jigs med nam mkha'i rnam thar dad brgya'i rma bya rnam par rtse ba*. Written by the late Dpal-Idan-tshul-khriims together with the *Zal gdams* and *Nams mgur* of Khyung sprul. Reproduced by Sonam Dakpa from a lithographic print published in Delhi in 1957. Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre, New Thobgyal, P.O. Ochghat (Via Solan), H.P., 1972.

⁶ dPal Idan tshul khriims (2004), p. 9 in the introduction.

⁷ The Western-styled book was printed in Hong Kong by Ling Editions, as the first volume of the series called *Zhang zhung rig gnas dpe rnying dpe tshogs*.

⁸ The narrative of events starts on page 28.

Second chapter

Hor (1909-1916)

On how he received religious teachings from Bon po lamas and his decision to abandon worldly affairs.

[63-102]

Third chapter

On his virtuous acts in Hor and travels to the sacred places of dBus and gTsang.

Hor and Central Tibet (1919)

[102-129]

Fourth chapter

On the teachings received from dGe slong Nyi ma grags pa and g.Yung drung tshul khrims.

Central Tibet (1919-1920)

[129-150]

Fifth chapter

On his practices in Gangs can Phyug mo dpal ri leaving behind the monastic centres and his home country.

Central Tibet (1920-1921)

[150-171]

Sixth chapter

On his religious practice in the southern sacred sites of 'Brig mtshams, mTsho rNga brag dkar and Bhutan.

Central Tibet - Bhutan (1921-1922)

[171-188]

Seventh chapter

On his pilgrimages to lHa ri nyi phug, lHo gro mo and India.

Bhutan - Central Tibet - India - Nepal (1922)

[188-205]

Eighth chapter

On his practices in sacred and secret A su ra yi brag phug cave after visiting the other sacred sites of Nepal.

Nepal (1923-1924)

[205-235]

Ninth chapter⁹

On his pilgrimage to Gangs ri mtsho gsum¹⁰ and how he received the deep teachings of rdzogs chen from his lama in Nam mkha' khyung rdzong after visiting Za hor, Kinnaur and Zhang chung in mNga' ris.

Nepal - India - Western Tibet (1924-1925)

[235-262]

⁹ Full translation of the ninth and eleventh chapters, corresponding to the Kinnauri period, is planned to be published in Wiener Studien zur Tibetologie und Buddhismuskunde (2012).

¹⁰ This term is open to many interpretations in the text and is discussed more fully in the second part of this work.

Tenth chapter

On his retreat in Khyung lung dngul mkhar rgyal ba mnyes pa.
Western Tibet (1925-1929)
[262-320]

Eleventh chapter¹¹

On how he wandered around Zhang zhung, India, O rgyan, Za hor and Kinnaur.
Western Tibet- India - Western Tibet (1930-1934)
[320-381]

Twelfth Chapter

On how he founded a new monastery in Khyung lung dngul mkhar of Inner Zhang-zhung.
Western Tibet- India - Western Tibet (1935-1947)
[381-426]

Thirteenth chapter

On how he composed and published several treatises to spread religion for the welfare of all living beings.
Western Tibet - India - Western Tibet (1948-1955)
[426-466]

Epilogue

On his last wills and his death.
Western Tibet (1955-1958)
[466-483]

Over the last fourteen years, several studies have been published examining the many cultural implications of Khyung sprul rin po che, including his medical and linguistic works. Insightful summaries of his biography have also been published, but no full account of his life and travels is yet available, perhaps because of the enormity of the task and the difficulties inherent within the original text. The lengthy 1957 lithographic edition consists of 883 pages, divided into two volumes in 1972, while the 2004 edition consists of 490 pages.

In 1996 the abbot of Gur gyam Monastery, dGe slong bsTan 'dzin dbang grags, wrote a book on the History of mNga' ris in which he highlighted the relevance of Khyung sprul rin po che in the reintroduction of Bon in mNga' ris.¹² Nevertheless, the first article to explain in detail the biography of Khyung sprul rin po che was published in Tibetan in *Bon sgo* in 1997 under the title *Khyung sprul 'jigs med nam mkha'i rdo rje'i mdzad rnam rags bsdu*,¹³ but unfortunately it went largely unnoticed outside Dolanji (India). Its author was the aforementioned Kinnauri mKhas mchog rdo rje who can undoubtedly be considered the pioneer in the field of Khyung sprul rin po

¹¹ Full translation of the ninth and eleventh chapters, corresponding to the Kinnauri period, is planned to be published in *Wiener Studien zur Tibetologie und Buddhismuskunde* (2012).

¹² bsTan 'dzin dbang grags (1996), pp. 289-293.

¹³ mKhas mchog rdo rje (1997).

che research. A year later Per Kvaerne published *Khyung-sprul 'Jigs-med nam-mkha'i rdo-rje (1897-1995): An Early Twentieth-century Tibetan Pilgrim in India* in English as a chapter in *Pilgrimage in Tibet*.¹⁴ This was considered the starting point for Khyung sprul rin po che's biographical studies and gave rise later in 2001 to an unpublished master's dissertation by Sonam Chogyal about the Bon po lama's foundation of his own monastery in mNga' ris.¹⁵ More recently, a few studies have been published examining a number of more specific aspects of Khyung sprul rin po che's life and works.¹⁶

Whatever approach is taken to the study of Khyung sprul rin po che's life and works, his biography, undoubtedly provides a very rich account of the first half of the 20th century in Tibet and in its neighboring countries; in other words, it offers a portrait of the cultural history of these Himalayan regions. The Bon po lama met some of the most powerful men of religion (both Bon and Buddhism) and politics of his time. The list is long and includes the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, the Twenty-eighth and the Thirtieth sMan ri Khri 'dzin, the Ninth Panchen Lama, the Sixteenth Karmapa, the First bDe chen rgyal po, the first Bhutanese king, the last king of the Princely State of Bushahr and several provincial governors of mNga' ris, among many others.

At the same time, his biography also provides a unique, and therefore highly valuable, source of information regarding the traditional toponymy and onomastics of remote and isolated regions including Hor, Kinnaur and mNga' ris.

What follows in this article is an abridged edition of the first, second, and (a part of the) third chapters of Khyung sprul rin po che's biography, corresponding by and large to the period of time that extends from his infancy and early youth in Hor¹⁷ (1897-1919), prior to his joining the Bon po centres of sMan ri and mKhar sna and taking the full vows of *drang srong*. This English edition is a translation as literal as possible of the Tibetan original and includes the whole succession of events described therein and all personal and geographical names. However, no attempt is made to translate the long poems, which anyway do not provide any new details. All additional information from the author of this article is supplied in footnotes to the text so as not to interfere in the retelling of the events described in the original text. The aim, therefore, is to offer a detailed account of Khyung sprul rin po che's *rnam thar*, and one that is as faithful as possible to the original description of events that took place in Hor. In the near future a second article corresponding to the period that extends from 1920 to 1955 will be published.

¹⁴ Kvaerne (1998).

¹⁵ Chogyal (2001).

¹⁶ On Zhang zhung History: Blezer (2007). On Tibetan Medicine: Millard (2009). On the origin of Tibetan scripts: Alay (2010).

¹⁷ For a brief history of this Bon po nomad enclave see Karmay (2005), pp. 181-210; bKra ba (1985, 1990); and Shes rab rgya mtsho (1994).

Khyung sprul rin po che in Hor¹⁸*Place of birth*

[First chapter][28-29] Khyung sprul rin po che was born in a place called sPa ba lung nang¹⁹ at the foot of Mount sPa ba brag nag,²⁰ within one of the ten divisions of the country of 'Brog shog phyed drug brgya. This region was a beautiful combination of gorges, rocks and meadows with waterfalls, plants, trees and a large variety of flowers as well as plenty of livestock such as yaks, sheep and horses. In the midst of this stunning scenery there was the monastery of Klu phug g.Yung drung bde chen gling,²¹ seat of the Dam pa Hor bla bsTan 'dzin dbang grags,²² supreme emanation of lHa bla bsTan pa phun tshogs.²³ The latter had arrived from Shar lHa thog at the foot of Zo dor zhi nag smug po mched brgyad and it is believed that he was led to full spiritual realization by the three *Khro*, *Phur* and *Zhang* tutelary deities,²⁴ as well as by the *gShed dmar nag* deities.²⁵

Khyung sprul rin po che's home country was inhabited by people of outstanding intelligence, fortune, courage and bravery, skilled in the arts and medicine, learned in the Bon of cause and effect, and devoted to practicing virtue. His home was in Khyung po dkar nag gser Hor sde stod smad,²⁶ the realm of the Second Victorious Blo ldan snying po.²⁷ He was a member of the so-called Thirty-nine Tribes of Ji ghir Hor gyi rje bo²⁸ from the

¹⁸ In the 1972 edition the first nine pages include the following Zhang zhung-Tibetan lines:

(4) *a kyo ti ga tig smar gyer no tho ye / kho spyod kun du smar di phyog cu tse //*
rnam dag bde chen zhing du bon gyi skur / / brnyes te kun tu bzang po phyogs bcu yi //
 (5) *ti ta wer ya de cod min mung nam / mu min gyer tsakra lgyu(m) khor dun gu hrin //*
bder gshegs rgyal ba grangs med 'khor rnam la / / bla med bon 'khor bskor la phyag 'tshal lo //
 (8) *wer ya te la sum sad nam mtsho ro khung / gyag min da dod wang shel u tha sho //*
rnam rgyal rtsa gsum lha gnas g.yu lung du / / 'chi med sprul pa'i skur bstan gsang 'dus dang //
 (9) *la he sad na ga ni gyer dzi ra sam / u hrin gyer tsakra lgyum khor pa ta ya //*
stag la lha klu mi'i gshen rig 'dzin tshogs / / gsang sngags bon 'khor bskor la phyag 'tshal lo //

Pages 1, 2, 3, 6 and 7 include Sanskrit-Tibetan lines. From pages 1 to 9 the author wrote the text in the following Bon po scripts (see: Alay, 2010): *sTags gzigs spung so che ba*, *sTags gzigs spungs so chung ba* and *Zhang zhung gi rmad yig che ba*. From page 10, the text is only written in Tibetan.

¹⁹ In present sBra chen county (Nag chu prefecture, TAR).

²⁰ Local deity and back- (or rear-) mountain: *yul lha rgyab ri*.

²¹ The first hermitage was founded in 1626. It was not until 1827 that the hermit became a monastery. For a complete history of Klu phug g.Yung drung bde chen gling (sBra chen county) and for biographies of the throne holders, see g.Yung drung gtsug phud (2007).

²² The Dam pa Hor bla was considered the highest incarnate lama in Hor under the protection of the royal house. bsTan 'dzin dbang grags was the son of Be hu lHa mkar bstan rgyal. He was born in 1791 and after taking monastic orders he transformed the tantric hermitage of mKhar dmar bla brang into the full monastery of Klu phug g.Yung drung bde chen gling. On the Second Dam pa Hor bla bsTan 'dzin dbang grags' biography, see: Karmay and Nagano (2003), p. 145.

²³ Founder of the *sprul sku* lineage known as the Dam pa Hor bla. He was considered a manifestation of Bla chen Dran pa nam mkha'.

²⁴ *Khro bo*, *Phur pa* and *Zhang zhung* (me ri).

²⁵ *gShed dmar* and *gShed nag* deities.

²⁶ Upper and Lower Hor including the three divisions of Khyung po, i.e. *dkar nag gser*.

²⁷ Blo ldan snying po (b. 1360), revealer of sTon pa gshen rab's twelve volume biography known as the *gZi brjid*.

²⁸ Geshe bsTan 'dzin 'brug grags has recounted several stories to me regarding the term *Ji ghir*. In one, the first Mongol to arrive in Hor heard a bird singing a melody like *ji hir*;

lineage of the Mongolian Se chen rgyal po,²⁹ who in turn was an emanation of the three brother gods called *gnam the'u*, who reside on top of the Three golden fishes³⁰ on Sog chu river, which in turn originates as a necklace of flowing nectar just in front of Mount Sog rje rGyal ba thod dkar in the Zil mo'i sngang stod³¹ range between the dNgul chu and rDza chu rivers, on the western side of Chu bzhi sngang brgyad³² in the region of Rong bzhi shod brgyad. The entire territory belongs to lower mDo Khams, which together with middle Tibet and high Zhang zhung is part of Greater Tibet.³³ This Great Snowland is located north of the noble nation of India where the blessed and victorious Śākyamuni turned the wheel of Dharma; east of 'Gro lding,³⁴ O rgyan, Bru sha³⁵ and Kha che,³⁶ in the direction of A bri ka and Yo rob;³⁷ south of Su len,³⁸ Grug,³⁹ Phrom,⁴⁰ Ge sar Hor;⁴¹ and west of the Eighteen Provinces of Great China.⁴² All of them surround the sacred land of rTag gzigs 'Ol mo gling where Bon was taught by sTon pa gshen rab.

His parents' lineages

Khyung sprul rin po che's family was linked to both the Hor and A mdo regions. His father belonged to the A mdo Ga rgya ru tribe, one of the eight A mdo tribes. Among four Snow Mountains called gNyan chen sde, one for each cardinal point, the northern one called Byang gi sNyan chen thang lha is linked to the eight A mdo tribes by means of the following eight local deities/mountains: A mdo'i sGro bgad smug mo, Byang gi Jam la ri dmar, Nam ra btsan rgyal smug po,⁴³ sKyung gi sMug gu mthon po, gSang phu'i bSam gtan gangs gzang, Brung gi rDza rgan yol po, [30] Go ra'i Bag chen khor po, and Byang gi Tsig gi bya khyung.

whereas in another this first Mongol heard a *ji ghir* sound from a stone. The term "Ji ghir Hor" is also mentioned in Achard (2004), pp. 71 and 96; and as the "land of *Gyi ghir*" is mentioned in Karmay and Nagano (2003), p. 139.

²⁹ Khubilai Khan.

³⁰ *Sog gser nya spun gsum*. Geshe bsTan 'dzin 'brug grags describes three rocks located in the midst of the Sog chu river and known as the "Three golden fish." According to the Geshe, there are up to eighteen *pho nya* installed in this area of Sog chu river, but the text only mentions the three *gnam the'u* that are known by their colours: *dkar po*, *nag po*, *khra po*. The same term appears as *Sog gi gser nya spun gsum* in g.Yung drung gtsug phud (2007), p. 5.

³¹ More commonly known as *Zal mo'i sngang stod*. See g.Yung drung gtsug phud (2007), p. 5.

³² More commonly known as *Chu bzhi sngang drug*. See g.Yung drung gtsug phud (2007), p. 5.

³³ *Bod chen*.

³⁴ This might be a reference to South India according to Sarat Chandra Das Dictionary, where the entry '*gro lding*' indicates "n. of a country in the south of India, i.e., Dravira." Jäschke Dictionary has a similar entry: "Dramila, country in the south of India; another reading gives Dravida (Coast of Coromandel)."

³⁵ Burusho valleys of Gilgit (Pakistan).

³⁶ Kashmir.

³⁷ Africa and Europe.

³⁸ Russia.

³⁹ Turkestan.

⁴⁰ Byzantium.

⁴¹ Hor understood as the mythical land of Gling Ge sar.

⁴² *Ma ha Tsi na rGya nag zhing chen mo bco brgyad*.

⁴³ This is the Ga rgya tribe's protector deity.

According to a local legend, gods and warriors would appear every three generations in the Ga rgya tribe⁴⁴ as sons of the local deity Byang btsan Nam ra ban rgan. This had been the case of the Ga rgya Ra bzhi and Ga rgya Thod 'bur families. As a result of this agreement between god and men, Khyung sprul rin po che's great-grandfather, who was called Ga rgya bsTan pa rgyal po, became a wealthy and courageous man in A mdo, an owner of many livestock. He decided to leave his home country and move to sPa ba lung⁴⁵ where he increased his wealth significantly under the protection of the local deity there. His son Ga rgya Tshe brtan grags pa was a very intelligent man and well versed in both religious and worldly affairs, who became the chief minister of the *Hor spyi khyab rgyal po*,⁴⁶ and had three sons and two daughters. The eldest son was Ga rgya bSod nams bstan dar, Khyung sprul rin po che's father, a powerful and wealthy man of exceptional bravery who was appointed minister and treasurer of the kingdom of Hor.

In ancient times,⁴⁷ while king Hor Se chen sa gad⁴⁸ was sitting on the throne of Eastern China, seven ministers of his own lineage known as the La rgyal of Hor [31] left China and departed for a place called Gru khug in Sog, where they were known as the *Hor thor ba skya bdun*. Their chieftain had three sons, the middle brother being the brightest of them. His body was of an extreme reddish color which is why he was called the Red King.⁴⁹ The new sovereign seized territories in all directions from upper Mount Kailash⁵⁰ to lower Mount Glang chen 'gying ri⁵¹ and his descendants became kings of Hor as was the case of Hor spyi khyab Be hu Khri rgyal rje chen.⁵² One of the lesser princes left the household and eventually became treasurer of the kingdom. His family was known as the "treasurers of rTa rdza mda' in Sog" or just as "the family of ministers living near the river," since they lived near the shore of Sog chu river. Treasurer bSod nams ngang ril had many children and among them was Khyung sprul rin po che's mother whose name was bSod nams gnam mtsho. She was regarded by everybody as an exceptionally religious and virtuous woman.

His parents' dreams

[32] Before Khyung sprul rin po che was born, his parents had many dreams. Once, his mother had a dream in which a Bon po adept with long hair was playing a drum, a *gshang* and a white conch in front of a richly ornamented golden *stupa* which was placed inside a cavity in the house. The man gave

⁴⁴ From this page, the author uses Ga rgya as the name of the tribe/clan or just as Khyung sprul rin po che's family.

⁴⁵ sPa ba lung nang.

⁴⁶ The title for the king of Hor.

⁴⁷ This very accurate description of Khyung sprul rin po che's mother's lineage provides a valuable source of information about the remote (and often confusing) origins of the Hor pa royal family and can be contrasted, for instance, with the description given in Karmay (2005).

⁴⁸ Khubilai Khan.

⁴⁹ rGyal po dmar po. Third in the lineage according to Karmay (2005), p. 205.

⁵⁰ Gangs dkar Ti se. Mt. Kailash is named in rather different manners throughout the text.

⁵¹ Mount Emei or Emeishan (Sichuan). The text includes rGod ngang ma'i nyin lam bco brgyad, gShog 'gyur gcig dang bcu dgu and Yang 'gyur gcig dang nyi shu.

⁵² Twelfth in the lineage according to Karmay (2005), p. 205.

her a *tsakli* with a *g.yung drung* drawn on it and said: "Keep it for some time." She hesitated as she thought that she was too young to take care of such an important sacred object and might involuntarily damage it, but finally she felt obliged to keep it. [33] In a different dream, she found a few flowers and jewels with which she made an ornament for her head; then a ray of light, brighter than the rising sun and moon, suddenly shone. On one particular night, a ray of light this time emanated from a small golden statue of a lama, the size of a thumb, lighting up the crown on her head. After this dream she felt an incomparable happiness and that excellent qualities were growing inside her womb. Khyung sprul rin po che's father also had many dreams during this period. In one of them, a lama gave him a white conch; in another he was buying precious jewels; and in yet another, a bright seed syllable appeared in his heart. All of these were considered auspicious signs.

Birth and early childhood

Khyung sprul ri po che's was born in the beginning of the after midnight ox-period⁵³ of the twelfth day of the eighth month of the male fire cock year,⁵⁴ known as the *gser 'phyang*⁵⁵ year (1897). His mother did not suffer any labor pains and the delivery was without any complications. When he was born, his eyes were open, his body rather large, and the umbilical cord was coiled around the upper part of his back as a mark of virtue and good luck. Lama rGyal ba tshul khrim⁵⁶ cleaned the newborn baby's tongue and drew the syllable *hri:* on it with saffron juice. [34] He was given the name bSod nams bstan 'dzin, the first part of his name being in recognition of his father and forefathers.

As a baby he never cried and all the time a smile was drawn on his face. The astrologers' calculations predicted a man with a lucid brilliant mind devoted entirely to religion, a wealthy man of handsome appearance and a big heart, and free of any danger caused by illness if he did not look after himself. He had been born under a good star and in the year of his birth it rained generously in the region ensuring abundant crops in summer as well as in winter. [35] As a little child he neither lied nor used rude words, but rather he dedicated himself to playing virtuous games. He used to play a drum, read scriptures and recite religious melodies while sitting in the meditation position with his back straight. His favorite games consisted of making offerings and piling up stones in representation of newly founded monasteries. Other games consisted of going into retreat caves and conferring initiations. He was honest by nature and showed compassion towards his playmates and people in general. He adopted this attitude at home with servants and visitors as well as with shepherds and travelers, to whom he used to bring food as a gift. He was so close to other people that he would even fall asleep in the lap of his hosts.

While still but a child, he saw on more than one occasion bright religious images similar to those found in *thangkas* and when shrouded in darkness he

⁵³ *Phyed yol glang*. Between 1:00 and 2:00 am.

⁵⁴ Early hours of 8th September 1897.

⁵⁵ *Hemalamba* (skt.): 31st year of a *rab byung* cycle.

⁵⁶ His first teacher. He died in 1911 according to the biography.

could point out rainbows to his mother. He could also hear sounds emanating from the sky, some of which were terrifying while others were melodious, scaring him or bringing him happiness by turns. His mother could neither see nor hear anything, but she knew that her son could and believed them to be bad omens. Finally, she decided to visit the lama, rGyal ba tshul khrim, who told her that in his past life her son might have been a lama or an excellent being devoted to the cultivation of virtue and so she had no cause for worry. However, for these reasons, she should prevent him from coming into contact with dirt and she should keep him clean at all times, so that in the future he would contribute to the benefit of both himself and others.⁵⁷

His siblings

[36] Khyung sprul rin po che was the eldest of seven brothers and one sister. When he was about five years old, in the iron ox year (1901), his brother Karma bsod nams was born. In the water hare year (1905) sTag la skyabs was born. In the fire sheep year (1907) dKon mchog rgyal mtshan was born.⁵⁸ There existed a prophecy about the family lineage which established that every three generations the personification of the local god sPa ba brag nag rDo rje dgra 'dul would appear in a member of the family. People believed that dKon mchog rgyal mtshan was this personification. He behaved strangely and bore the physical mark of a black mole that spread across his right cheek. He was fearless, brave, courageous and skilful as the great heroes of Hor Gling. In the battlefield, he could not be wounded by either arrow, knife or sword.⁵⁹

[37] In the iron dog year (1910) his only sister was born. She married sPa ston Ye shes g.yung drung from the sPa tshang lama's family and was considered to be his *dākinī* consort. His youngest brothers were rJes rgyal tshe ring born in the water rat year (1912) and bSod nams kun grags born in the iron tiger year (1914).

Meeting his first teacher

In the years that followed, Khyung sprul rin po che listened carefully to all the religious teachings imparted by several lamas staying at the family residence. When he was only four years old (around 1900), he was already able to receive the oral instructions of Zhu rGyal mtshan nyi ma, 'Gro mgon Shes rab g.yung drung⁶⁰ and Bla khri rGyal ba g.yung drung.⁶¹ He learnt the meaning of the karma law of cause and effect, the meaning of virtue and sin,

⁵⁷ An indication that the lama considered Khyung sprul rin po che a possible *sprul sku*.

⁵⁸ The biography provides some details about Khyung sprul rin po che's famous brother as he played a remarkable role in the history of the Hor state.

⁵⁹ For further details of the life and early death of dKon mchog rgyal mtshan, see Karmay (2005) and sKal bzang bkra shis (1990).

⁶⁰ Born in 1838. Founder of mKhar sna. Karmay (1972), p. xl.

⁶¹ Lama from Bla khri Monastery in 'Jom mda' county. This monastery was founded in 1754 (Karmay and Nagano, 2003, p. 204). He was also known also by his Zhang zhung name: Bla khri Wer ya drung mu (see Achard, 2004, p. xxii).

as well as the benefits of certain rituals such as performing circumambulations.

[38] From that point on he avoided committing any sins and devoted himself solely to virtuous actions. During the summer harvest he protected the worms and in winter he worried about the animals that were to be slaughtered. For these reasons, he would pray and recite the three most important mantras as the *ma tri* mantra.⁶² He used to watch his mother prostrating herself and tried to imitate her. He also burnt incense and lighted butter lamps at home.

One day his father took him to meet his teacher rGyal ba tshul khriṃs for the first time. He was staying in retreat inside a meditation house. Khyung sprul rin po che felt very happy and imagined a future in which he would also become a yogi wandering from cave to cave. [39] The lama told his father that it was essential to teach his son how to read and write and to bring him back on an auspicious day. On that day, A myes Tshul khriṃs rgyal ba, who was also called Ga rgya dBu dkar, took Khyung sprul rin po che to meet the lama. He learnt the Tibetan characters from the lama and later he studied with A myes Tshul khriṃs rgyal ba. He paid a lot of attention to his lessons and learnt very quickly, so that he became their best student. The lama considered the boy to be very intelligent and established that there was a karmic connection between them. He insisted once again on the need to educate the boy and not to give him any polluted food or clothes but to keep him clean at all times.

[40] At that time, Ye shes bzang po, a close attendant of Khyung sprul rin po che since he had been born, fell seriously ill and was unable to leave his room, being forced to keep to his bed. During those difficult days, Khyung sprul rin po che would bring him food and climb onto his bed, but on one occasion when he was trying to do just that, many people rushed into the room and sent the boy away. They told him that Ye shes bzang po had passed away and they needed to prepare the cremation ceremony. Just the thought that his friend would never come back caused him great sadness. He understood the meaning of impermanence and made an offering of money to his teacher to pray for the deceased. Many years later, he still felt very sad when thinking about that man.

[41] At the age of seven or eight (1903-1904), he already knew all the various writing styles and could recite scriptures. When he was three or four years old (1899-1901), sPa ston Nyi ma 'bum gsal,⁶³ sublime lama of Ye tha Sog in Lower Hor, visited Upper Hor and was invited to Khyung sprul rin po che's home, [42] where he gave all kind of initiations to the boy. Similarly, when still very young, he received more initiations and instructions from gTer sras Tshe dbang 'gyur med⁶⁴ and sKam bla Zla ba rgyal mtshan⁶⁵ from sDe dge.

⁶² *sNying po rnam gsum*.

⁶³ Member of the sPa family, he was born in 1854 and became the abbot of sPa tshang Monastery in Ye tha, Hor (Karmay, 1972, p. 136; Lhagyal, 2000, p. 460). He was one of the three "sun" (Nyi ma) root-lamas of Khyung sprul rin po che. Although the biography does not mention explicitly the date of his death, it can be derived from one of Khyung sprul rin po che's visions in the seventh chapter [190] to have occurred in 1922. In the chapter colophon the lama is referred to by his Tibetan-Sanskrit-Zhang zhung name: sPa ston Surya kha ri [101].

⁶⁴ He was gTer ston bDe chen gling pa's son. See Achard (2004), p. xxii, n. 45.

The eruption of violence

His father used to go on regular business trips to Upper A mdo to sell tea and purchase wool.⁶⁶ A powerful gang of local bandits tried to get away without paying for the merchandise and a fight broke out between their chief and Khyung sprul rin po che's father. The latter stabbed the chief to death with a knife but he could not avoid being badly injured. He was rushed back home, where he received all kinds of attention and medical treatment. [43] rGyal ba tshul khirms stayed with the family for a long time and took the opportunity to explain to them his travels and pilgrimages to the sacred sites of Upper Tibet as well as his methods to pacify *gnyan* spirits. A myes dBu dkar⁶⁷ for his part described his frequent business trips to Upper Tibet which included visits to the sacred sites of Mount Kailash, Lake Manasarovar,⁶⁸ rGya nyi ma, Pretapuri⁶⁹ and Khyung lung dngul mkhar. Khyung sprul rin po che was inspired by these stories of the sacred places in the west and expressed his wish to visit them in the future. It was during this time that the family residence received the visit and teachings of sMon rgyal bla ma Nam mkha' dbang rgyal.⁷⁰

When Khyung sprul rin po che was seven or eight years old (1903-1904), sGo rgyal Nyi ma rgyal mtshan rin po che,⁷¹ root lama of the entire region, visited the place and [44] gave teachings and empowerments. After this meeting, a fresh episode of violence broke out around Khyung sprul rin po che's household when a family feud erupted with a neighboring clan.⁷² The feud concerned Ne ne Chos skyid, Khyung sprul rin po che's aunt, who was married to Tsha thang Be kyang dpon 'Od rdil, also known as the Tsha dpon, one of the three minor chiefs called dPon phran Be kyang. He was answerable only to the chief minister of the royal 'Brog shog tribe. One day, after a family argument had broken out, he decided to repudiate his wife. The two clans entered into negotiations trying to find a solution that was satisfactory to both sides, but this did not work out since the Be kyang clan was under the protection of the Hor pa king and Ne ne Chos skyid was forced to leave her husband's house.

Later on, a large gathering was organized in Hor rDza dmar, where a public horse race and archery contest took place. Tsha thang was there to

⁶⁵ From the same sKam family as Khyung sprul rin po che's root lama sGo ston Nyi ma rgyal mtshan.

⁶⁶ In contrast to the peaceful atmosphere described above, the biography goes on to narrate several violent episodes that were played out involving Khyung sprul rin po che's family.

⁶⁷ The aforementioned A myes Tshul khirms rgyal ba.

⁶⁸ Gangs rin po che / mTsho Ma pang.

⁶⁹ Tirthapuri.

⁷⁰ Abbot of sMon rgyal dga' ldan dar rgyas gling Monastery in rDza khog (sDe dge), founded by Kun grol grags pa (b. 1700). See Karmay and Nagano (2003), p. 363.

⁷¹ Born in 1837 and according to one of Khyung sprul rin po che's visions described in the biography he passed away in 1919 [123]. This is the first appearance of the second "sun" and Khyung sprul rin po che's root lama. Also known as sGo ston Nyi ma rgyal mtshan, he was the seventh Bla rabs of Klu phug Monastery (g.Yung drung gtsug phud, 2007, p. 63-68).

⁷² This event probably took place around 1905, the year in which Hor entered a brief, but intense, period of chaos leading to the killing of king Tshe dbang lha rgyal and his entire family. The eventual disappearance of the Bon po nomadic Hor monarchy was approaching. See Karmay (2005), p. 187.

investigate a judiciary case involving the Tsho pa stod shog Inga tribe. One night, while he was sleeping in his tent, Khyung sprul rin po che's father, the uncle-monk and six or seven servants appeared inside the nomad camp looking for revenge. They sneaked inside and brought down one of the tents. Tsha thang came out from his tent, but upon seeing his enemies he rushed back inside. Khyung sprul rin po che's father called him, shouting: [45] "I am Ga rgya bsTan dar. Where are you going?" Tsha thang was determined to confront him and rapidly threw a spear at him but he managed only to hit the sheath of the knife which Ga rgya bsTan dar wore at his waist. However, Tsha thang's second spear was more accurate and injured his father's leg, but Khyung sprul rin po che's father whipped out his left hand and held fast his attacker's spear and with his right hand he stabbed Tsha thang with his knife. The latter ran away but Ga rgya bsTan dar's party of men pursued him and stabbed him to death. They went back home where the badly injured father was treated by his physicians. The king of Hor was furious about the tragic outcome of events and as he still had another unsettled dispute with the Ga rgya clan, caused by the treasurer Zhang po phyag mdzod tshang, who was Khyung sprul rin po che's maternal uncle, the king mustered an army of three hundred troops and sent them against the Ga rgya clan to drive them out from Hor. However, before the army could reach the place, the entire Ga rgya clan — including Khyung sprul rin po che, his family and his maternal uncle's family — gathered all their horses and set off to 'Dam zhung region. The party consisted of about fifty riders in total.

During this brief period of exile, Khyung sprul rin po che accompanied his teacher to several *gnyan* sites. The child won the admiration of all as he did not manifest any signs of fear of them. [46] At the same time he and his teacher had several dreams which portended that if the family did not wander too far from home, their land and wealth would not suffer too much damage. Since a relative of theirs called A myes Tshe brtan grags pa had remained back home, it was thought he would probably be able to reconcile the Ga rgya family with the king. [47] After some time, they decided to go back home, initially without their women, except for Khyung sprul rin po che's mother who was still treating her husband's injuries. However, it seems that this decision did not meet with the approval of the maternal uncle. Moreover, the paternal uncle, A khu Ga rgya dPa' co, provoked an incident while they were trying to cross a river by refusing to follow the maternal uncle to the opposite shore. This led to a fight between the two men and only the intervention of a certain The las grwa pa avoided a bloodbath.

[48] Khyung sprul rin po che's family went first to Upper A mdo and stayed there until the royal pardon was issued in exchange for monetary compensation being paid to Tsha thang's family. Then they went back home without encountering any further problems. Meanwhile, the maternal uncle's family crossed Hor Drug cu and awaited the royal pardon in 'Brong pa dge rgyas. Eventually they were allowed to return, but their property had suffered much damage and this gave rise to another confrontation with the king, but this time the sovereign solved the new dispute by mercilessly crushing the uncle's family.

Pilgrimages to Khyung po and rKong po

One winter Khyung sprul rin po che, his parents and servants started out on a pilgrimage to Khyung po. First they visited Gyim shod⁷³ shel le rgya skar⁷⁴ that had been opened by Blo ldan snying po, as well as the three monasteries of the white, golden and black tribes of Khyung po where they made many offerings. They circumambulated Ri rtse drug Monastery⁷⁵ more than a hundred times. [49] Here Khyung sprul rin po che had a vision in which he appeared on top of the highest pinnacle of Ri rtse drug, after which they decided to move on to sTeng chen where they visited all the temples belonging to sTeng chen ri khrod monastery established under the protection of Mount sNa brag dmar ri. [50] Here they met Grub pa'i dbang po Tsha be sMon lam rgyal mtshan rin po che⁷⁶ who did not eat any kind of solid food, surviving only by drinking pure water. On the way back home they visited Bla ma Shel zhig rin po che from dKar legs Monastery,⁷⁷ Gar shel bla ma from gSer tsha khog⁷⁸ and Bla ma Sangs rgyas from sGang ru.⁷⁹ Then they received a long life empowerment from lama sPa ston Nyi ma 'bum gsal in Ye gzhung sPa dgon g.Yung drung rab brtan gling Monastery⁸⁰ and Khyung sprul rin po che's father confessed to his sins of having killed two men. In order to make amends for these wicked acts he made many offerings, recited prayers and circumambulated the monastery for a period of fifteen days. After returning home the family received the visit of many Bon po lamas who gave many teachings to them: [51] Bla ma rGyal mtshan rin po che from Bon ri rTag rtse, (Bon ri) sTag bro sa'i bla ma, (Bon ri) sGyel ri sprul sku, many lamas from Khyung po, Zhu ri zhing bla ma,⁸¹ as well as the abbots of sMan ri, mKhar sna and g.Yung drung gling monasteries.

After some time had elapsed, Khyung sprul rin po che joined his teacher rGyal ba tshul khirms on a pilgrimage to rKong po. People entrusted them with so many kinds of offerings to be made in Bon ri at various monasteries and temples that yaks and horses were needed to carry them all. They crossed Shag gzhung and took the opportunity to visit Rong po and Lo 'brong monasteries. Next they crossed Nag chu river and from Byang mir hri gong they went through Mer gzhung ending up in rKong po rGya mda'.

⁷³ See Martin (2010), p. 20, n. 39.

⁷⁴ C. Ramble describes Langgi Gyimshö in Sumpa as the location of the cemetery that is the "six-fold exalted place of Shel le rgya skar." (Ramble 1999, p. 22).

⁷⁵ Founded in Khyung po by Blo ldan snying po in 1383. See Karmay and Nagano (2003), pp.181-189.

⁷⁶ His relics are in a *stupa* located at sTeng chen hermitage near sTeng chen Monastery. See Karmay and Nagano (2003), p. 168 and 139.

⁷⁷ Ka legs g.Yung drung gling dgon pa is located west of sTeng chen and is the seat of the Shel lineage. See Karmay and Nagano (2003), p. 173-175. Bla ma Shel zhig rin po che could be Shel zhig g.Yung drung rnam rgyal, a personal disciple of Grub dbang Shar rdza. See Karmay and Nagano (2003), p. 124.

⁷⁸ Present-day Ser tsha, about 50 km northwest of sTeng chen. The monastery might be that of Ga shel in Gwa tha. See Karmay and Nagano (2003), p. 160.

⁷⁹ sGang ru dgon Dar rgyas monastery. Founded in 1310 and located in Khri do (sTeng chen). See Karmay and Nagano (2003), p. 178.

⁸⁰ Founded in 1847 by a member of the sPa family. Also known simply as sPa tshang Monastery (sBra chen county). See Karmay and Nagano (2003), pp. 131-136.

⁸¹ In the vicinity of rGyal rtse.

From there they descended to the foot of Mount rKong po Bon ri.⁸² The party was received by the lamas of the three monasteries of rKong po and they performed the ritual of the vase consecration in sTag rtse hermitage⁸³ just as the people back home had instructed them to. In the great monastery of Srid rgyal⁸⁴ they saw the sacred image of dKar mo Srid rgyal, as well as various religious masks and the tombs of rTogs ldan Ri pa 'brug gsas⁸⁵ and Rag shi Nyi ma rgyal mtshan.⁸⁶ From sTag bro sa⁸⁷ they visited many places including the following retreat sites:⁸⁸ dBus phug gSang ba yongs rdzong, Shar gTer lung sgrub phug, [52] Byang Srin mo mtha' rtsa, Nub Bya khri sgrub phug, lHo Nyi ma sgrub phug,⁸⁹ rDzong chung steng,⁹⁰ dGon pa steng, Shel sku sbug and gNyan khri kha. Khyung sprul rin po che circumambulated Bon ri thirteen times and one day he had a series of fantastic visions. In one of them he saw an assembly of gShen lha 'od dkar deities of different colors gathered inside tents made of rainbows. The deities appeared in groups of five or three, and once he saw just a single deity. Later he saw *dākinīs* talking to him but he could not recall their exact words. Once they finished the circumambulations they headed back home to Hor.

Religious games

Khyung sprul rin po che was already absorbed by his religious life when he was just ten years of age (1906). [53] At that time, he received the visit of his root lama who came asking local families to send half of their children to the monastery. According to the lama, their virtuous practices would benefit them and the whole community. He advised people to follow the path of sTon pa sangs rgyas⁹¹ and once again Khyung sprul rin po che heard the call to become a monk. [54] When he was only ten or eleven years old, (1906-1907), his teacher dGe 'dun grags pa taught him the old and new secret mantras and various rituals, such as making *gtor ma*, reciting scriptures, making *mudrās*, *maṇḍalas* and so forth. It was during this period that he started building a meditation house in the mountains with the help of a few children from his village. His parents warned him against doing it since it was too dangerous for children to play games of this nature, but he did not listen to them. He collected stones and wood and eventually built the house.

⁸² For a full and detailed description of this paramount Bon po sacred site, see: *gSang ba'i gnas mchog thugs sprul bon ri'i dkar chag yid bzhin ljon pa'i phrang ba* (*Bon ri'i dkar chag*), in Zhang zhung ring gnas 2003 (Lhasa), pp. 72-122.

⁸³ Known as sTag rtse dgon or sTag rtse g.Yung drung gling. See *Bon ri'i dkar chag*, pp. 97-99; Karmay and Nagano (2003), pp. 231-233.

⁸⁴ Srid rgyal dgon chen. Founded in 1330. See *Bon ri'i dkar chag*, pp. 92-49; Karmay and Nagano (2003), pp. 228-231.

⁸⁵ Born in 1270. First abbot of the monastery. He is believed to be the emanation of sTag la med 'bar and to come back to the monastery every year in the form of a bird.

⁸⁶ Second abbot of the monastery.

⁸⁷ sTag bro sa dgon (*Bon ri'i dkar chag*, pp. 99-100).

⁸⁸ The complete list can be found in Karmay and Nagano (2003), p. 227.

⁸⁹ Located in the five cardinal points: center, east, north, west and south, respectively (*Bon ri'i dkar chag*, pp. 89-90, 101-106).

⁹⁰ rDzong chung steng dgon (*Bon ri'i dkar chag*, pp. 96-97).

⁹¹ sTon pa gshen rab.

[55] Not unexpectedly the meditation house collapsed and a child was injured. Khyung sprul rin po che's father was very angry and went to look for his son who ran away to hide in the mountain. His father left no trace of the meditation house standing, smashing all *gtor ma* made by the children. He eventually caught up with his son and rebuked him for the bad example he had set to the rest of the children as they had been unable to work on their daily duties while distracted by these games. He ran after his son, throwing stones at him, until they faced each other exhausted and Khyung sprul rin po che asked his father to stop or he would feel obliged to throw stones back at him. His father could not believe his son's words and started laughing on seeing his son's determination. He dropped his stone and walked away. That evening Khyung sprul rin po che did not dare go back home and [56] it was not until the day after that his mother went to look for him.

[57-58] On one occasion, Khyung sprul rin po che, accompanied by an attendant, visited an office of the Tibetan government and on their way home they described the various places they saw in a song they composed. After reciting the poem, both of them started laughing and Khyung sprul rin po che asked his attendant not to tell anybody, not even his parents, that he had composed a song.⁹²

Visit to Lhasa

[Second chapter] [63-64] At the age of thirteen (1909), Khyung sprul rin po che engaged in several conversations with his root lama sGo ston Nyi ma rgyal mtshan. His lama asked him if he had any intentions of marrying a pretty, intelligent girl, to which Khyung sprul rin po che replied that his decision to become a monk was immutable and that he would drink from the nectar of the *g.yung drung bon*, and that although he knew he would never attain full liberation, still he preferred to wander around remote mountain retreats, without knowing the place of his death. [64-65] His lama was very happy with these words and recited a poem about the reality of *samsāra*. [66] Khyung sprul rin po che understood that the lama was testing his determination and convictions and his answers were sufficient to convince the lama. His teacher asked Khyung sprul rin po che to discuss the matter with his parents without delay, since he feared they might already be looking for a spouse for him so that he could become the next head of the Ga rgya family, as tradition dictated for the eldest son.

[67] About a year later, his father was by now aware of Khyung sprul rin po che's intentions and for this reason he organized a visit to Lhasa together with his son. They were received in audience by Blo bzang thub bstan chos kyi rgya mtsho⁹³ to whom they made many offerings.⁹⁴ Khyung sprul rin po

⁹² [59-63]: First chapter colophon.

⁹³ The Thirteenth Dalai Lama. In the text: *Gangs can lha gcig rgyal ba'i dbang po pad dkar 'chang mgon thams cad mkhyen pa skyabs mgon Blo bzang thub bstan chos kyi rgya mtsho*.

⁹⁴ The exact date, not even the year, of this crucial meeting is given in the biography. Nevertheless, this audience could only have taken place between the first and second exiles of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama. This short period of time ran between 25th December 1909 and 12th February 1910.

che's father registered his son in the *Yid tshang* office and introduced him to bsTan pa yon tan, a nephew of the most famous governor of the northern regions called Be ri 'Jam dbyangs rgya mtsho. This social activity in Lhasa made him realize that his father's intention was to involve him in more worldly affairs rather than religious ones. [68-69] Indeed, the Lhasa visit only hastened Khyung sprul rin po che's decision to become a monk. One day he entered his parents' room to announce his decision to abandon *saṃsāra* and to solemnly seek their permission to join the monastic life. His father did not utter a single word, whereas his mother advised him to follow his father's lineage, because this would be the most effective way for him to practice virtue. Finally his father spoke to remind him that according to their tradition the first obligation of a child was to follow his parents' decisions and to listen to them carefully. He said that this was "the tradition of people with black heads" and that if it was necessary to give a monk from within the family this honor it would correspond to the youngest son. However, his father understood that Khyung sprul rin po che had no intention of abandoning his plans. In the months that followed, Khyung sprul rin po che continued his studies of the arts and medicine and [70-72] composed a poem in remembrance of the sacred site of Mount Bon ri.

The Assembly of 'Brog shog and Ye tha Tribes

[72] At that time a large meeting of Upper and Lower Hor tribes was called in sBra chen. A few ministers and all the chiefs of the 'Brog shog and Ye tha tribes⁹⁵ responded to the assembly call and at some point a discussion was begun regarding the future of the Ga rgya family and the role to be played in it by Khyung sprul rin po che, the eldest son. Among others, gZhu mkhan⁹⁶ Tshe dbang lhun grub, Bra'o A dkar po, gTsang tsha rab brtan and Bra'o rGya mtsho expressed their concern and told Khyung sprul rin po che's father that he should begin looking for a good wife for his son since he was now old enough. His father replied that his son was only concerned about worthless matters such as becoming a wanderer with no fixed destination, although he was then no more than thirteen or fourteen years old. He added that if his son continued to act in that way, he would never grow to be a real man. [73] The other chiefs considered Khyung sprul rin po che's attitude not to be positive and thought that action should be taken quickly regarding his somewhat strange behavior. They suggested finding a beautiful patient woman from a noble lineage of ministers, with whom he could be married and so continue the lineage of his forefathers, those who from their positions as tribal chiefs had practiced virtuous acts. Eventually, he would probably reach the rank of minister and this would be a remarkable achievement for all the tribes of Hor. Khyung sprul rin po che, present at the meeting, decided to intervene. He replied that pure virtue could only be encountered in the practice of religion and recited a poem for the occasion.

[74] After this episode, Khyung sprul rin po che's family received a new visit from the root lama sGo ston Nyi ma rgyal mtshan, who came to

⁹⁵ The two most important nomadic tribes in Hor.

⁹⁶ The archer.

perform some rites in the house. Khyung sprul rin po che took the opportunity to seek his parents' approval for becoming a monk and in a poem he insisted he was ready to renounce having a family and added that "woman was like a demon who cuts the root of virtue." [75] In the end, his parents conceded to their son's wishes, but they asked him that if he should decide to take on the monk's habit that he should never abandon them. They also asked him to practice only in the caves close to the house without leaving for far off lands, so that he could still help them in the house. He accepted and rushed to meet his lama announcing that an agreement had been reached with his parents. Only then did they decide to organize the formal ceremony of taking the vows of monkhood.

Taking the vows and receiving the teachings

The morning of the seventh day of the *sa ga zla ba* month of the female iron pig year (1911), Khyung sprul rin po che received the vows of monkhood in the presence of his root lama sGo ston Nyi ma rgyal mtshan and his teacher rGyal ba tshul khriims. He received the name of g.Yung drung rgyal mtshan. [76] He started to meditate in solitary hermitages and his root lama taught him the preliminary practices of *Zhang zhung snyan brgyud* in the *rdzogs chen* tradition. [77] Later, Rab bla Sems nyid gling pa, a visiting lama from mDo Khams, who was staying in a place called Khrag zi nang, gave the empowerment and instructions of Nyag gter gSang sngags gling pa's *gter ma* to him and his teacher. His teachers rGyal ba tshul khriims, dGe 'dun grags pa, Shes rab nyi ma, Wer ya tshul mi, Phywa btsun pradnya and Wang ya khi khar taught him the knowledge of the arts, medicine, astrology, grammar and the meaning of tantras and mantras.⁹⁷

[78] The death of his teacher rGyal ba tshul khriims had a great impact on Khyung sprul rin po che.⁹⁸ Before he passed away, they had time to exchange poems, but when the lama died, Khyung sprul rin po che felt extreme sadness and only his mother could comfort him. His father made plenty of offerings and rituals were performed in remembrance of the lama. During the cremation ceremony, a white cloud shaped like a rainbow arched over the lama's house of meditation on top of the mountain and everybody present felt a sense of devotion and faith. They interpreted this to mean that the teacher had departed for the land of rTag gziigs 'Ol gling.

Khyung sprul rin po che continued his religious studies with his new teacher rGyal rong dge rgan dBang ldan 'od zer, devoting himself particularly to the study of astrology. But unfortunately he too passed away shortly after and Khyung sprul rin po che once again felt extreme sadness. His father thought it to be a good idea that in the winter his son should accompany him collecting taxes and debts in the regions of Yul sde shog lnga and Yul sde shog dgu. Khyung sprul rin po che agreed and helped his father in this task for a few years, although he took every opportunity to

⁹⁷ The colophon to this chapter gives the additional name of Rab bla Rin chen nam rgyal, who taught him *gcod* [100].

⁹⁸ Around 1911. From 1912 the Tibetan Government took full control of Hor and expelled all Manchu officials from the region. The Bon po nomadic monarchy of Hor was eventually abolished.

visit lamas and monasteries during these trips [81] and he derived great pleasure from burning the debt documents of the poor. [82-84] He was to compose many poems during this time and for this reason various monks intimated that Khyung sprul rin po che might be the reincarnation of Mi la ras pa.

In Klu phug g.Yung drung bde chen gling Monastery

[84] He made tea offerings in the Hor sde 'Brog shog monastery of Klu phug g.Yung drung bde chen gling and the mKhar dmar bla brang regent Hor Sangs rgyas btsan 'dzin⁹⁹ asked his father to let his son stay on as the sacred compound treasurer for a period of one year. Khyung sprul rin po che took this opportunity to further his studies of the Bon scriptures and to enhance his spiritual practice. [85-87] He composed a poem for his lama, Nyi ma rgyal mtshan, in which he described his personal experiences in the various religious practices and reiterated his intention to eventually abandon his home and seek a retreat in the mountain where he might concentrate on his spiritual practice. Since he was by now twenty years old (1916), he believed that it was time to leave home. His lama understood his decision but asked him first to discuss it very carefully with his parents so that they would agree and a secret escape could be avoided. [88-90] The lama, therefore, composed a poem containing advice for Khyung sprul rin po che. [90] They bent forward and touched foreheads and Khyung sprul rin po che went back home.

[91] A memorable event took place during this period when gTer chen Tshe dbang 'gyur med's son was recognized as the reincarnation of bsTan pa rgyal mtshan,¹⁰⁰ *sprul sku* of Klu phug mkhar dmar monastery.¹⁰¹ On the occasion of his enthronement, Khyung sprul rin po che accompanied several teachers from the monastery, and together with the most important 'Brog shog tribe chiefs, they visited Ye tha sPa tshang Monastery in order to invite sKam bla g.Yung drung 'gyur med rin po che and other teachers. The root lama, sPa ston Nyi ma 'bum gsal, and the parents of the reincarnated child were also invited to the enthronement. After the ceremony, Khyung sprul rin po che received *rdzogs chen* and *bya ri ma* teachings as well as empowerments from his lama Nyi ma 'bum gsal. He also asked the lama to compose a poem as a prayer and protection for his wish to find a solitary retreat.

Plans for a pilgrimage

[92] Khyung sprul rin po che had in mind a prolonged pilgrimage in Tibet and proposed three possible itineraries to his lama in order to receive his wise counsel.

⁹⁹ He was the the sixth Bla rabs of Klu phug Monastery (g.Yung drung gtsug phud 2007, pp. 60-63).

¹⁰⁰ As such, he was the fourth Dam pa Hor bla and the eighth Bla rabs and his name (not mentioned in the biography) was sKal bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan. He was born in 1912 into the rMe'u lineage from sDe dge (g.Yung drung gtsug phud 2007, pp. 68-70).

¹⁰¹ Klu phug g.Yung drung bde chen gling Monastery.

The first itinerary would take him southwards. In Khyung po he would receive the teachings of the lamas of rGyab ri sna and g.Yung drung dpal ri, after which he would meditate in the famous monastery of Ri rtse drug. He would then continue his meditation in Kha ba dkar po and rKong po Bon ri. He would end his pilgrimage in rTsa ri tra.

The second route would take him to the west. First, he would spend some time in sMan ri Monastery receiving the teachings of the famous lamas and then he would practice meditation in Nepal. Finally he would visit Mount Kailash, Lake Manasarovar¹⁰² and Khyung lung dngul mkhar.

The last itinerary was to the east. He would travel to sDe dge and receive the teachings of Shar rdza rin po che¹⁰³ and [93] Nyag gter gSang sngags gling pa. Afterwards, he would go and meditate in rGyam rDo ti gangs dkar, rMa chen pom ra,¹⁰⁴ mTsho Khri shog,¹⁰⁵ and finally rGya nag Glang chen.¹⁰⁶

Khyung sprul rin po che sought a divination from his lama that he might discover the best itinerary, but his teacher just contemplated the sky without uttering a word and smiling, his face as round as the full moon on the fifteenth day. Without performing any divination, the lama told him that his intention of setting out on a pilgrimage was very positive and he was convinced that by abandoning the village and his family he would achieve great results. There was no difference in this present life between any of the three itineraries, since all were equally good. If Khyung sprul rin po che chose the excellent route to the south, he would be purified in the Clear Light and travel through the land of Kun tu bzang po; if he headed eastwards to sDe dge, rMa chen pom ra and Glang chen 'gying ri, there would be benefits for all sentient beings; and there would also be great results too, if he chose to travel to the great monasteries and the highlands of Mount Kailash¹⁰⁷ and Khyung lung dngul mkhar,

The lama concluded by saying: [94] "I will only add that in the opinion of this elderly man, despite the fact that in ancient times Bon originated in the land of high Zhang zhung in mNga' ris, today the teachings of Bon are so weak up there that not even the name of Bon is to be found; what's more, I have heard that Bon po pilgrims face great difficulties in that region. For this reason I would be most pleased if they were to receive some support."

Nyi ma 'bum gsal further advised him to visit 'Gro mgon Nyi ma grags pa,¹⁰⁸ a Hor pa lama who lived in gTsang at that time. Khyung sprul rin po che was most impressed by his response and a strong devotion towards Nyi ma grags pa arose within him. [94-96] Straight away he asked his uncle, A khu grwa pa bsTan 'dzin phun tshogs, who was about to depart on a trade expedition to gTsang, to deliver a letter to Nyi ma grags pa in which he sought permission to take refuge with him. [96-98] By way of reply, Nyi ma

¹⁰² Gangs ri mTsho ma pang.

¹⁰³ The famous Bon po teacher Shar rdza bKra shis rgyal mtshan (1859-1934).

¹⁰⁴ A myes rMa chen.

¹⁰⁵ mTsho sngon po.

¹⁰⁶ Mt. Emei.

¹⁰⁷ Gangs Ti se.

¹⁰⁸ He would become third "sun" root-lama of Khyung sprul rin po che. He was the third rGyal tshabs or Bla rabs of mKhar sna. Nyi ma grags pa was born in 1854 according to *Bon 'jug*, p. 146; and passed away in 1923 according to the tenth chapter of Khyung sprul rin po che's biography [265].

grags pa sent a few blessed amulets to Khyung sprul rin po che. Before Khyung sprul rin po che was about to set out for gTsang, Nyi ma 'bum gsal composed a poem of advice for him.¹⁰⁹

Departure

[Third chapter] [102] Khyung sprul rin po che finally decided to begin his pilgrimage to the western monasteries. His first destination was to be sMan ri Monastery, where he could meet Nyi ma grags pa. When he was twenty-three years old, in the ninth month of the earth female sheep year (1919), he bade farewell to his parents. They had prepared for him a bag with all kinds of provisions and a horse. In reply to the sadness caused by his departure, [102-108] he composed a long poem in which he explained the reasons for his decision to abandon *samsāra*. [108] His mother felt very sad to see her son leaving home but respected his decision. His father expressed his understanding of his son's wishes, since his pilgrimage would be to the benefit of all sentient beings and Bon religion in general. His father added that if he wished to send back home any remaining provisions and his horses on his arrival at sMan ri Monastery, he should feel free to do so.

[109] Khyung sprul rin po che attended a day's teaching from his root lama sGo ston Nyi ma rgyal mtshan at which he offered him a *maṅḍala*. The lama told him: "We cannot know whether we will meet again in this life or even when we will die, but this year I have often felt the wish to abandon this realm and to depart for rTags gzigz lHo shar bdud 'dul sngags gling; I will pray for you." The lama smiled and Khyung sprul rin po che was very sad to hear these words, but he did not manifest openly his deep feelings and left. [110-117] Three days later Khyung sprul rin po che composed a long poem containing advice for his family. This made it easier for his mother to accept her son's departure.

Farewell to the local deities

[117] On the seventeenth day of the nine month of the earth female sheep year (1919), Khyung sprul rin po che began his journey to gTsang accompanied by a young relative, a monk and a number of other people. When they reached the top of the hill from which it was still possible to glimpse his village one last time, [117-118] he composed a poem and burned incense for the local deity sPa ba brag nag. At night, while Khyung sprul rin po che was resting in a meadow, [119] he had a dream in which rDo rje dgra 'dul, lord of sPa ba brag nag, appeared on horseback wearing his ornaments and weapons, followed by a multitudinous entourage.

He bade farewell to all those deities who told him that they would accompany him on his journey to gNam mtsho Lake. Nevertheless, Khyung sprul rin po che begged them to stay and protect the local people and their religion. The deities replied claiming that they would always be ready to help him if he was in need. They wished him a safe journey and gave him

¹⁰⁹ [99-102]: Colophon to the second chapter.

some advice as to how to avoid any future obstacles. After circumambulating his tent several times, the deities vanished and the dream ended.

Visions along the way to gTsang

Khyung sprul rin po che continued his journey through Nag shod, crossed the lands south of rDza dmar and from Nag chu arrived in Nam skyung. After a day's journey they reached mount Byang Nam ra. A white cloud appeared on the mountain, shaped like a rainbow, and pointing at Khyung sprul rin po che himself. Light snow started to fall and some of the monks, members of the party, said that this was Nam ra's way of welcoming him, since this was the deity of his ancestors.

[120] The next day, while resting in Nam skyung, he had a dream in which he saw a shining, brown man holding a prayer wheel bearing *gzi* designs. He addressed Khyung sprul rin po che with the following words: "Where are you going? The caves in this mountain are best suited for meditation. This prayer wheel was given to me by a Bonpo lama who told me that if somebody ever wished to turn it, then I should give it to him; however, to this date I have found nobody." Then, people began to arrive, one by one, from the north until they formed a multitude. Each of them said a few words to Khyung sprul rin po che or asked questions: "I take refuge in you"; "I bow with devotion"; "Will you stay near?"; "Body of clarity", "Support the religious practice!"; "How wonderful!"; or "*E ma ho!*". On awaking he eventually took the decision to continue his journey westwards.¹¹⁰

Around gNam mtsho Lake

They continued on their journey to mDung mtsho and 'Bum mtsho lakes and from there they headed southwards until they came to rest at a place full of pasture and water called "The horse of Thang lha." Khyung sprul rin po che climbed a white rock seeking a quiet spot. He cast a glance to his left and then to his right and only then did he become aware of the immensity of the place extending out in front of him. gNyan chen thang lha and gNam mtsho Lake could both be partially contemplated and [121-123] he composed a laudatory poem dedicated to the beauty of the scenery.

[123] They continued their journey along the northern shores of the lake and at one of the stops, Khyung sprul rin po che had another dream in which a reddish man appeared to him riding a dark yellow horse. As the horseman rode across the horizon, the sun bathed Upper Hor in light, but few rays fell on Lower Hor. The red man told Khyung sprul rin po che to hurry up, as many people suddenly appeared on galloping horses. He woke up in a state of anxiety unable to understand fully the meaning of the dream, though he suspected it might be a premonition of the death of his root lama,

¹¹⁰ The colophon to this chapter sheds light on the whole episode: [127-128] the dream was not considered auspicious and the turning of the prayer wheel was a symbol of spreading Bon in that region. Therefore, Khyung sprul rin po che decided to leave.

sGo rgyal Nyi ma rin po che.¹¹¹ Khyung sprul rin po che was overcome by sorrow for a number of days until he finally reached bKra shis sMan ri Monastery.

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