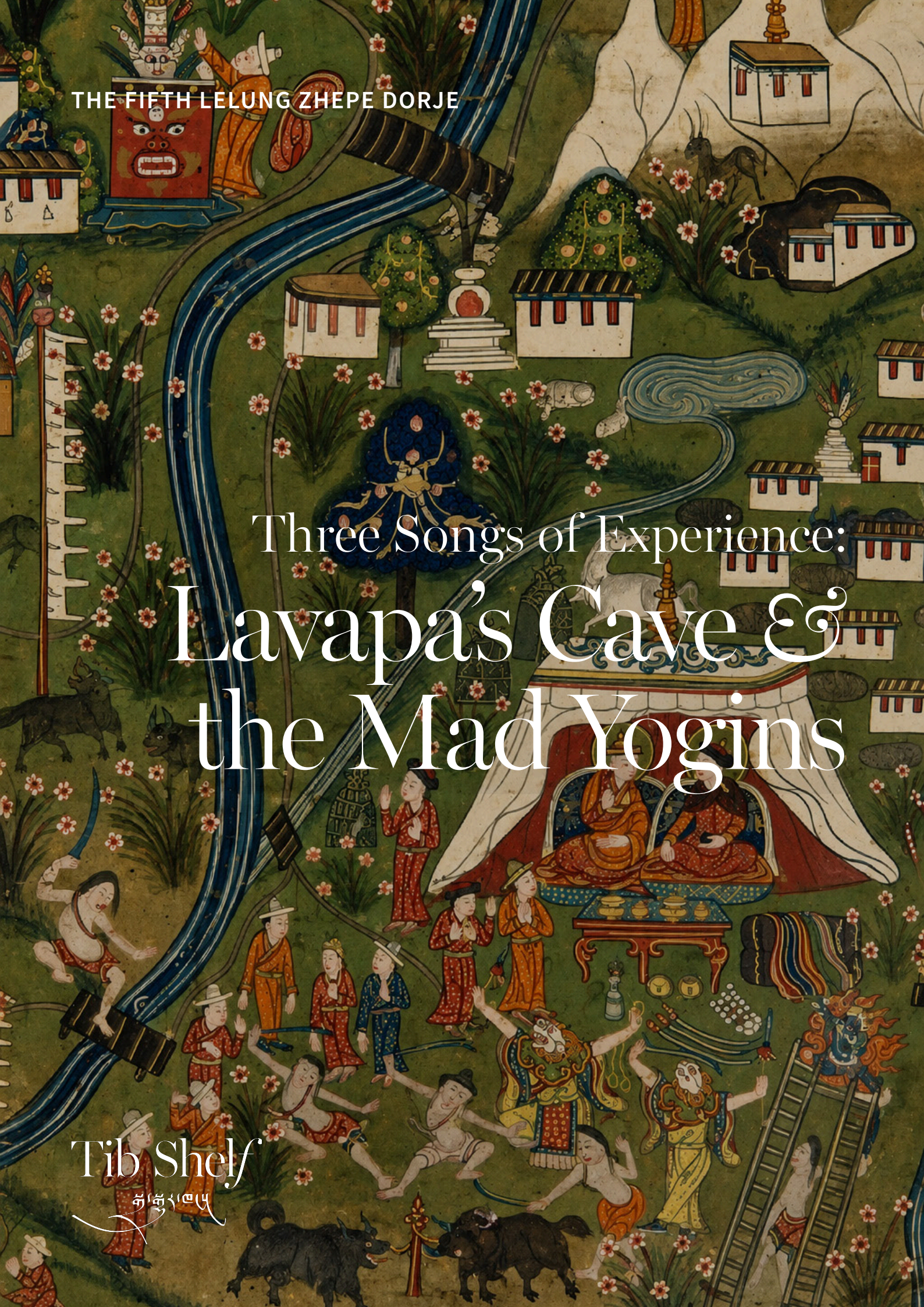




THE FIFTH LELUNG ZHEPE DORJE

Three Songs of Experience:
Lavapa's Cave &
the Mad Yogins

Tib Shelf

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These three songs occur in Lelung Zhepe Dorje's account of the identification of a group of sacred caves and other sites in the Earth Bird Year, 1729. They are taken from *A Mirror of Memory: An Account of Identifying Lavapa's¹ Meditation Cave, the Secret Caves of Pal Lha and Jakme, and Other Sites (Lwa ba pa'i gzims phug dang dpal lha dang jag me'i gsang phug sogs ngo 'phrod pa'i lo rgyus dran pa'i me long)*.

The events took place shortly after Lelung returned from his expedition to Pemakö. Guided by dreams, visionary instructions and declarations delivered through spirit mediums, Lelung and his companions sought to identify caves associated with the Mahāsiddha Lavapa (*Lwa ba pa*), the protectress Pal Lha (*dpal lha*),² and Jakme (*jag me*),³ together with natural images and other signs appearing in the surrounding rocks. They made offerings, planted prayer flags, performed vajra dances and conducted rituals intended to establish an auspicious connection with each place. Within the account, their efforts are repeatedly confirmed as successful by deities speaking through their mediums. The expedition was physically demanding. At Pal Lha's secret cave, a party of approximately fifty people proceeded in single file along a steep rock path, "like pearls threaded on a string." Water flowed across a smooth section of rock, making it so slippery that some feared they could not cross. Ropes were lowered from above, allowing the party to negotiate the passage.

Lelung first sang a playful song portraying his close companion Ragpa Zhabdrung, who was walking ahead of the group. They were then received by the people of Khangmo, along with Ragpa and former teachers and students associated with Dari Monastic College (*mda' ris grwa tshang*), who provided everyone assembled with a lavish feast of many kinds of food and drink. At the feast offering, Lelung continued to sing numerous spontaneous songs of meditative experience, moving many of those present to tears and loud cries. The account says that their experience blazed so intensely that they passed the day without noticing weariness, hunger or thirst. When they reached Khandro Ling, called E Lam Ling, "Joyful Grove of the Dākinīs," Lelung sang "Song of the Mad Yogins" amid the assembled vajra brothers and sisters. As his meditative experience flared up once more, he immediately followed it with "My Name Is Zhepe Dorje," playfully unfolding the different meanings of the word *bzhad* contained in his name.

¹ The Indian mahāsiddha Lavapa, (*grub chen lwa ba pa*), is commonly identified with Kambala or Kambalapāda, one of the eighty-four great tantric adepts and a figure associated with the Hevajra tradition. Lelung's account does not narrate his life but identifies his former meditation cave and a difficult passage through the rocks believed to have been formed by his miraculous footsteps.

² Pal Lha, (*dpal lha*), also called Pal Lhamo, (*dpal lha mo*), appears here as a local female protectress associated with the cave and its surrounding sacred landscape. Following the third song, she descends into a female medium in Lelung's dream and delivers prophecies and ritual instructions. Not to be misidentified as Palden Lhamo, (*dpal ldan lha mo*).

³ The identity of Jakme, (*jag me*), is not explained in the surviving account. The text associates Jakme with a secret cave, (*jag me'i gsang phug*), situated on an upper mountain slope near a place connected with Bönpo wealth-summoning rites. Jakme appears to have been a local sacred or numinous figure whose presence was preserved principally through the cave and the ritual landscape bearing the name.



1 | My Friend Ragpa Zhabdrung

On the way down, after singing a succession of spontaneous songs, Lelung noticed his companion Ragpa Zhabdrung walking ahead of the group. He responded with this teasing portrait, moving from Ragpa's unappealing outward appearance to the weight and warmth he possessed within.⁴

As Ragpa Zhabdrung walked ahead of us, [I sang:]

My friend, Ragpa Zhabdrung—

Viewed from the outside,
He's enough to make you vomit.

Viewed from within,
He certainly carries some weight.

Viewed on the secret level,
There's a pleasing warmth about him.

When he climbs up the mountain,
He's like a frog leaping to the sky.

When he comes down the mountain,
He's like a boulder tumbling down.

When set down on the level plain,
He's like a lump of butter wrapped in tsampa dough.

If you're going to call anyone a friend,
Let it be this one!

Thus I sang!

⁴ The contextual introductions preceding the songs have been supplied by the translators on the basis of the surrounding narrative; they are not direct translations of discrete passages in the Tibetan text.



2 | Song of the Mad Yogins

Afterwards, Ragpa Zhabdrung and several others hosted the entire gathering in the house of Khangmochepa, laying on a feast of innumerable kinds of food and drink. Lelung sang many more spontaneous songs. Most of those present were moved to tears and cried out loudly; their meditative experience blazed so intensely that they passed the day without noticing weariness, hunger or thirst. When the party reached Khandro Ling, Lelung sang the following vajra song amid the assembled brothers and sisters.

Upon reaching E Lam Ling, the supreme sacred site, The Joyful Grove of the Dākinīs:

Behold the spectacle of Zhepe Dorje,
The mad yogin born at Zang Ri—
O fortunate brothers and sisters!

Though our mouths and eyes, our hands and feet,
Are alike in number and form,
We vajra brothers and sisters
Do not all go mad the same way.

Outwardly, we've gone mad—
Whatever arises, we embrace as yogic conduct.

Inwardly, we've gone mad—
Drunk on the wine of eloquent teachings,
Nectar profound and vast.

Secretly, we've gone mad—
Training in the natural state,
Wide open, free from all grasping.

How happy are we, the mad yogins—
Outer, inner, and secret all in accord!

When fortunate men and women look at us,
Admiration arises.⁵

When those with wrong views look at us,
They cannot help but vomit.

⁵ Translation note: Each of these three lines ends with *rang bzhin*, literally “nature” or “character.” It functions here as a noun referring to the character of the experience arising in those who look upon the yogins, rather than to the yogins’ own nature. Since an explicit translation would be cumbersome and repetitive in English, as such, its sense has been absorbed into the construction of each line.



When those with equanimity look at us,
Appearances and mind are at ease.

With all appearance and existence in the state of HŪṂ,
Having sung the far-reaching song of HŪṂ,
And stamped the vajra dance of HŪṂ,
Rest completely in the state of HŪṂ!

HŪṂ HŪṂ HŪṂ

Thus I sang!



3 | My Name Is Zhepe Dorje⁶

The account says only that Lelung's meditative experience flared up once more. In the same charged atmosphere, and immediately after 'Song of the Mad Yogins', he turned to a playful reinterpretation of his own name.

When those with pure perception look at me
I am Dorje, who makes devotion bloom.

When those with wrong views look at me,
I am Dorje, who makes scornful laughter erupt.

When those with indifference look at me,
I am Dorje, who makes meditative experience dawn.

When the lamas look upon me,
I am Dorje, upon whom blessings stream forth.

When the yidam deities look upon me,
I am Dorje, upon whom accomplishments ripen.

When the ḍākinīs look upon me,
I am Dorje, with whom great bliss surges.

When the oath-bound protectors look upon me, I am
Dorje, who attracts delighted smiles.

Thus I also sang.

⁶ A play on words runs through this song that English cannot reproduce directly. Every stanza turns on the Tibetan verb *bzhad*, the same word repeated throughout and the central element of Lelung's own name, Zhepe Dorje (*bzhad pa'i rdo rje*). Depending on what precedes it, The Tibetan verb *bzhad* has two principal senses: to open or blossom, as a flower does, and, honorifically, to laugh or smile. As the song moves through seven different groups of viewers, Lelung repeatedly reinterprets his own name: for those with pure perception, devotion blooms; among those with wrong views, scornful laughter erupts; for the indifferent, meditative experience dawns; and with the ḍākinīs, great bliss surges. To produce natural and meaningful English, the translation renders the line-ending verb somewhat freely according to each context. It is therefore worth remembering that, where the English uses several different expressions, the Tibetan repeats the same verb, *bzhad*, throughout.



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Leh: T. Sonam and D. L. Tashigang. BDRC MW22130_68F4B4.



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