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མགིན་པའི་རོལ་མོ།

**The Cuckoo's Song:
A Spontaneous Vajra Song
Linking Symbols with Meanings**

Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo



KHYENTSE VISION
PROJECT

dpe don dang 'brel ba'i rdo rje'i thol glu gzhan gsos mgrin pa'i rol mo

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Khyentse Vision Project: Translating the Works of
Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo

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CONTENTS

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION	1
THE CUCKOO'S SONG	3
NOTES	5
GLOSSARY	7

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

The Cuckoo's Song is one of Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo's numerous poems referred to as the "vajra songs." Khyentse Wangpo structures the song around a series of observations in the natural world—for instance, clouds in the sky or a glint of sunlight off a river—which he interprets as signs reminding him of specific Dharma instructions. Within this short text, he weaves together a range of spiritual teachings, from fundamental Buddhist reflections on impermanence to insights of Buddhist philosophy and advanced meditation. All the while, Khyentse Wangpo's poetic structure allows him to maintain a highly personal and confessional tone, laced with a deep melancholic realization that so much has been forgotten. The reader is invited into this same state of mind.

གཞན་གསེས་མགྲིན་པའི་རྣམ་མཉམས་

The Cuckoo's Song

Namo guru jñānāya!

When I look up and see the canopy of the sun
Circling in the center of the bright sky over the four lands,
I remember, now during the daylight of freedoms and endowments,
I must tread the pathway to unexcelled liberation!

When I look away and see the well-plowed field,
With each crop ripening in its own way,
I remember I should work hard at deeds conducive to liberation
Since good and bad actions bear fruit without fail.

When I look nearby and see hunters stalking innocent wild animals
In the verdant valley like a playground for them,
I remember, while I postpone applying the means to sublime liberation,
The relentless Lord of Death swiftly catches me in his rope.

When I look down and see the rushing waterfall
Shimmering with an endless array of patterns,
I remember, no matter where I am born in saṃsāra,
The cycle of dissatisfaction is overwhelming and unending.

When I see a rainbow halo in the southwestern sky,
Adorned by the molten white light of the moon,
I remember the sole refuge, Tsokye Dorje,¹
Upon the peak of the glorious, emanated mountain in Cāmara.

When I see the mist, gathered like a resplendent silk scarf
Around the slope of an immaculate, majestic, white snow mountain, [512]
I am reminded how intellectual talk obscures the natural face
Of the Middle Way view of luminosity free of all constructs.

When I see how the stifling present-day drought
Snatches away from clouds in mid-air the steadily pattering stream of rain,
I am reminded how, without effort and as a matter of course, delusion creeps in
During nonconceptual Mahāmudrā meditation free of mental engagement.

When I see how the melody of a cuckoo perched on a berry-laden juniper branch
Sounds beautiful and yet superficial,
I think how bodhisattva practice intensely focused on helping others
Can belie hollow, self-serving pretense.

When I see dense storm clouds temporarily obscure
The radiant, stainless face of the moon,
I think how conceptual side tracks of ambitions
Obscure the spontaneously present bodies and wisdoms, the fruition of the Great
Perfection.

When I felt the messages of these various appearances hit home,
I looked at my mind stream bereft of renunciation and compassion
And felt overwhelming sadness, so from the treasury of vajra songs,
I let out this spontaneous, uncontrived song.

*Working for the liberation of myself and all other beings,
May we attain the supreme state within one lifetime.*

NOTES

1. This refers to Padmasambhava, also known as Guru Rinpoche.

GLOSSARY

body

ལྗོངས་ • *sku* • *kāya*

A reference to one of the manifestations of awakening; commonly classified as being of two types, i.e. dharma body and form body; three types, i.e. dharma body, enjoyment body, and emanation body; or occasionally as four types, in which case the emanation body is added to the latter.

Cāmara

རྩ་ཡལ། • *rnga yab* • *cāmara*

In traditional Buddhist geography, a subcontinent inhabited by *rākṣasa* demons located to the west of Jambudvīpa; also said to be where Padmasambhava’s Copper-Colored Mountain pure land is located.

compassion

སྙིང་རྩེ། • *snying rje* • *karuṇā*

Commonly defined in Buddhism as the wish that others are free of suffering; also, one of the four immeasurables, known in early Buddhism as “pure abodes” (*brahmavihāra*).

constructs

སྒྲུབ་པ། • *spros pa* • *prapañca*

An etymologically obscure term, which can mean elaboration, diffusion, or expansion; in Buddhist thought it denotes the presence of discursive, conceptual thought processes.

dissatisfaction

སྡུག་བསྔལ། • *sdug bsngal* • *duḥkha*

In Buddhism, the basic feature of conditioned existence, including all of the types of mental discomfort and physical pain that result from mental afflictions.

freedoms and endowments

དལ་འབྱོར། • *dal 'byor* • *kṣaṇasampad*

The positive features associated with a precious human life, typically enumerated as eight freedoms (*dal ba*) and ten endowments (*'byor ba*).

Great Perfection

རྫོགས་ཆེན། • *rdzogs chen*

A tradition of meditation and practice associated with the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism.

Lord of Death

འཆི་བདག ་ *'chi bdag* • *mṛtyu*

Another name for King Yama (*yamarāja*; *gsbin rje rgyal po*), the deity who judges the dead and rules over the hell realms of the underworld.

luminosity

འོད་གསལ། • *'od gsal* • *ābhāsvara*, *prabhāsvara*

A metaphorical term used in many Buddhist traditions to describe the cognizant, aware quality of the subjective mind.

Mahāmudrā

ཕྱག་ཆེན། • *phyag chen* • *mahāmudrā*

Literally, the “great seal.” The name of a meditative tradition that originated in India and flourished especially within the Kagyu schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

mental engagement

ཡིད་བྱེད། • *yid byed* • *manasikāra*

The mental process of attention to an object; in the Mahāmudrā tradition it is commonly highlighted as something to be relinquished.

middle way

དབུ་མ། • *dbu ma* • *madhyamaka*

Derived from the Sanskrit expression *madhyamapratipad*, meaning the “middle way” between the extremes of eternalism and nihilism, Madhyamaka is one of the most influential among the schools of Indian Buddhist philosophy since it emphasizes the deconstruction of all conceptual elaboration and the realization of emptiness.

renunciation

ངེས་འབྱུང། • *nges 'byung* • *niḥsaraṇa*

A term denoting emancipation from saṃsāra but more commonly implying the wish to become free from saṃsāra.

saṃsāra

འཁོར་བ། • *'khor ba* • *saṃsāra*

The cycle of transmigrations through which sentient beings revolve and suffer.

spontaneously present

ལྷན་སྐྱབ། • *lhun grub* • *anābhoga*, *nirābhoga*

Effortless and natural; used in certain traditions of Buddhism especially to describe the aspects of awakening that are present even while seemingly obscured.

Tsokye Dorje

མཚོ་སྐྱེ་རྡོ་རྗེ། • *mtsbo skyes rdo rje* • *padmavajra*

An epithet of Padmasambhava, the legendary progenitor of tantric Buddhism in Tibet.

wisdom

ཡེ་ཤེས། ▪ *ye shes* ▪ jñāna

A term usually reserved to describe the awakened understanding associated with buddhas and bodhisattvas; in tantra often classified as being of five types: (1) mirror-like wisdom; (2) wisdom of discernment; (3) wisdom of equality; (4) wisdom of accomplishment; and (5) wisdom of reality.