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དོ་རྗེའི་ཐོལ་སྒྲུ་སྒྲུང་སྟོང་བྱུང་འཇུག

**The Unity of Appearance and Emptiness:
A Spontaneous Vajra Song Connected to the
Path Practice of the Vase Empowerment**

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KHYENTSE VISION
PROJECT

This text includes Vajrayāna content. Please be aware that some Vajrayāna texts may only be fully understood and appreciated through receiving the necessary empowerments, transmissions, or practice instructions from a qualified teacher.

bum dbang gi lam khyer dang rjes su 'brel ba'i rdo rje'i thol glu snang stong zung 'jug

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TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

The Unity of Appearance and Emptiness is the first of four spontaneous vajra songs¹ that arose in Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo's mind during a feast gathering held on the holy tenth day of the waxing moon, the monthly tantric festival of Guru Padmasambhava. Each of the four songs corresponds to one of the four Vajrayāna empowerments granted to practitioners of the inner tantras. The four empowerments correspond respectively to the four levels of practice on the Vajrayāna path, which culminate in the four realizations of unity specified in the song titles. When we receive the four empowerments from a vajra master during a ritual ceremony, they are called *ground* empowerments; when we take them individually during daily sādhana practice, they are called *path* empowerments; and when they manifest as complete realization, they are called *fruition* empowerments. Generally speaking, empowerments purify, grant blessings, authorize the disciple to engage in particular practices, and sow the seeds of liberation into the four kāyas or dimensions of awakening.

The first empowerment is the Vase Empowerment, which introduces the disciple to generation stage practice, the yoga of form. This empowerment purifies and blesses the body and subtle channels, authorizes the disciple to undertake deity visualization, and sows the seed of the nirmāṇakāya. Generation stage practice destroys belief in solidly existing appearances and culminates in the realization of the unity of appearance and emptiness.

The second empowerment is the Secret Empowerment, which introduces the disciple to the completion stage practice with concepts. This empowerment purifies and blesses the speech and subtle winds, authorizes the disciple to engage in mantra recitation and practices to transform the subtle winds, channels, and essences, and sows the seed of the saṃbhogakāya. Completion stage practice with concepts destroys attachment to ordinary speech and energy and culminates in the realization of the unity of luminosity and emptiness.

The third empowerment is the Wisdom Empowerment, which introduces the disciple to the path of skillful means. This empowerment purifies and blesses the mind and subtle essences, authorizes the disciple to engage in the three types of *mudrā* (*karmamudrā*, *amayamudrā*, and *jñānamudrā*), and sows the seed of the dharmakāya. The path of skillful means destroys attachment to impure perceptions and culminates in the realization of the unity of bliss and emptiness.

The fourth empowerment is the Precious Word Empowerment, which introduces the disciple to completion stage practice without concepts and sows the seed of the svābhāvikakāya. This empowerment purifies the body, speech, and mind of all karmic and cognitive obscurations. The introduction to the nature of mind enables the disciple to practice the Great Perfection, based on the unity of awareness and emptiness.

In these joyous vajra songs, Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo supplicates the four kāyas of the Guru and celebrates the path and realization of each of their corresponding four empowerments, ending each song with an aspiration to reach their ultimate realizations.

སྒྲུང་སྒྲུང་བྱང་འཇུག

The Unity of Appearance and Emptiness

O joy!

From the inseparable three seats, the expanse of the magical net,
Your peaceful and wrathful dance, bound within the four mudrās,
Ripens the aggregates and elements into the wisdom of great bliss:
Nirmāṇakāya guru, unity of appearance and emptiness, think of me!
Grant your blessings that the universe and its inhabitants may be perfected as deity
forms!

From the state of true reality, the purity and equality of inseparable saṃsāra and
nirvāṇa,
Comes the generation stage wheel² to purify the four modes of birth.
By awakening what is actually present³ through the means-and-knowledge ritual of
manifest enlightenment,
All the amassed delusion of the three realms⁴ is purified within its own true nature.
As the progression of meditative experiences—movement, attainment, familiarity,
stability, and consummation⁵—
Which are the play of meditative absorption, actively engages the mind,
Appearances ripen into the great maṇḍala of deities,
And all dualistic phenomena and phenomena with characteristics arise as empty
appearance.

Saṃsāra's delusory phenomena are all purified within meditative absorption,
And the state of abiding in nirvāṇa, the fruition, is perfected in the basic space of the
ground.

By going through the ripening that plants the seeds for the higher stage,⁶
We grasp the essence, the supreme path endowed with the four special qualities.

Train in seeing the infinite outer universe as the citadel⁷ of great liberation,
The inner inhabitants, all living beings, as the peaceful and wrathful display of means
and knowledge,
Resounding sounds as the union of the spontaneous resonance of *āli kālī*,
And thoughts as infinite purity free of conceptual elaboration.

By symbolically making loving offerings and praises,
And partaking of feast-offerings endowed with sixfold satisfaction,
The hook of attachment to objects disintegrates into nonconceptuality,
And the perceiving subject self-liberates in the great abiding nature of reality.

By playing in the illusory maṇḍala of attachment to relative truth,
And dissolving into the ultimate luminosity, free of change and destruction,
May I perfect the natural expression of the inseparable three kāyas
In the space of the joyful heruka, the unity of the two truths.

May virtue prevail!

NOTES

1. The titles of the four songs are *The Unity of Appearance and Emptiness*, *The Unity of Luminosity and Emptiness*, *The Unity of Bliss and Emptiness*, and *The Unity of Awareness and Emptiness*.
2. Here, “wheel” has the profound meaning of an all-pervasive continuous sphere, with nothing beyond or outside of it (oral communication, Lama Gyaltzen).
3. The visualizations of the generation stage do not produce something that was not already there; they enable us to see how things actually are.
4. Here, *rigs* is synonymous with *kham*s and refers to the habitual propensities of the three realms of existence (desire realm, form realm, and formless realm), which manifest respectively as the coarse appearance of the body, the blissful appearance of speech, and the intangible appearance of the mind. These further correspond to the white, red, and wind elements of the subtle body (oral communication, Lama Gyaltzen).
5. Five meditative experiences (*nyams lnga*) that accompany śamatha meditation practice: (1) at the beginning, thoughts arrive one on top of the other without interruption, like a steep mountain waterfall, which is the experience of movement (*gyo ba'i nyams*); (2) gradually, with sustained practice, thoughts become like the water in a deep, narrow gorge, which is the experience of attainment (*thob pa'i nyams*); (3) then the mind becomes like a great river slowly winding its way to the sea, which is the experience of familiarity (*goms pa'i nyams*); (4) eventually, the mind becomes still, like a placid lake, ruffled only by an occasional ripple, which is the experience of stability (*brtan pa'i nyams*); and (5) finally, the mind becomes like the flame of a butter lamp untouched by the wind, resting bright and clear, unmoved by anything, which is the experience of consummation (*mtshar phyin pa'i nyams*).
6. The completion stage, which follows the generation stage.
7. *grong khyer*. Here, this is a poetic way of saying maṇḍala (oral communication, Lama Gyaltzen).

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GLOSSARY

āli kālī

ཨ་ལི་ཀ་ལི། • *a li ka li* • ālikālī

The Sanskrit vowels and consonants, of which the vowels embody sublime knowledge (*prajñā*) and the consonants embody skillful means (*upāya*). All of the letters are deities.

four modes of birth

སྐྱེ་གནས་རྣམ་བཞི། • *skye gnas rnam bzhi*

The four modes through which living beings are born: birth from a womb, birth from an egg, miraculous birth, and birth through heat and moisture.

four mudrās

ཕྱག་རྒྱ་རྣམ་བཞི། • *phyag rgya rnam bzhi*

Four aspects of tantric practice: mahāmudrā, dharmamudrā, samayamudrā, and karmamudrā.

four special qualities

ཁྱད་པར་བཞི། • *khyad par bzhi*

These are four ways in which the Vajrayāna, or secret mantra vehicle, is distinct from the approach of the sūtra vehicle of characteristics: its application is free from obscuration, it is not difficult, it has many methods; and it is for those of sharp faculties.

inseparable saṃsāra and nirvāṇa

འཁོར་འདས་དབྱེར་མེད། • *'khor 'das dbyer med*

The indivisibility or equality of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa within dharmatā, true reality.

magical net

སྐུ་འཕྲུལ་བྲུང། • *sgyu 'phrul drwa ba* • māyājāla

(1) The maṇḍala of peaceful and wrathful deities. (2) The unity of appearance and emptiness. (3) The name of an important tantra.

manifest enlightenment

མངོན་བྱང་། • *mngon byang*

Abbreviation of *mngon par rdzogs par byang chub pa lnga*, “the five aspects of manifestly complete enlightenment.” These are the five aspects of deity visualization in generation stage practice: (1) the ground (emptiness), (2) seat (lotus and moon), (3) mind (hand attributes), (4) speech (seed-syllable), and (5) body (the complete form of the deity).

purity and equality

དག་མཉམ། • *dag mnyam*

The union of purity and equality, sometimes referred to as “great purity and equality” (*dag mnyam chen po*), is a central principle of the view of the Mahāyoga, expounded in the *Magical Net Tantra* (*sgyu 'phrul drwa ba*). All appearances, in their purity, are the maṇḍala of the kāyas and wisdoms; this comprises the superior relative truth. Being pure, all appearances are equal as the union of wisdom and emptiness; this is the superior ultimate truth. The purity of appearances and the equality of ultimate reality are present indivisibly in all phenomena; this is referred to as the great dharmakāya.

sixfold satisfaction

ཚེས་པ་བྱུག་ལྷན། • *tshim pa drug ldan*

The six kinds of satisfaction experienced during feast-offering practice: (1) the satisfaction of the gathered deities as a result of the offerings, (2) the satisfaction of the practitioners as a result of the vajra food and drink, (3) the satisfaction of wisdom beings as a result of the refined essence of nectar, (4) the satisfaction of the deities of the body maṇḍala as a result of pure awareness, (5) the satisfaction of the outer and inner ḍākinīs as a result of melodic song, and (6) the satisfaction of haughty spirits as a result of the tormā offerings.

svābhāvīkākāya

ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་སྐུ། • *ngo bo nyid sku* • svābhāvīkākāya

The svābhāvīkākāya is the ultimate buddhakāya, the union of the three other kāyas. Its wisdom aspect is called the wisdom dharmakāya, its luminous appearance in the perception of pure beings is the saṃbhogakāya, and its physical appearance in the perception of impure beings is the nirmāṇakāya.

three kāyas

སྐུ་གསུམ། • *sku gsum* • *trikāya*

The three dimensions or bodies of awakening: dharmakāya (*chos sku*) is the truth body; saṃbhogakāya (*longs sku*) is the enjoyment body; and nirmāṇakāya (*sprul sku*) is the emanation body.

three seats

གདན་གསུམ། • *gdan gsum*

The three seats are (1) the aggregates (*skandha*) and elements (*dhātu*), which are the seats of the five male and five female buddhas, called the “seat of the buddhas”; (2) the sense faculties and their objects, which are the seats of the eight male and eight female bodhisattvas and the six munis, called the “seat of the bodhisattvas”; and (3) the four limbs, which are the seats of the four male and four female gatekeepers, called the “seat of the wrathful deities.”

true reality

ཚུལ་ཉིད། • *chos nyid* • *dharmatā*

The intrinsic nature of everything. The essence of phenomena just as they are, the true nature of reality.

two truths

བདེན་གཉིས། • *bden gnyis*

Relative truth and ultimate truth.