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ཐོལ་སྐྱུ་གཞན་གསོས་མགོན་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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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.

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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.