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The Yolmo Snowy Range

NAMO GURU

To fulfill the command of his guru, the lord of yogis, the Jetsun Milarepa, went from Kyangpen to the Yolmo Snowy Range, where he stayed at Tiger Cave Lion Fortress*¹ in the forest of Singa Ling. At that time, the local protector goddess of Yolmo appeared, manifesting peacefully from the start, with beautiful form. Accepted as a subject, the spirit gave abundant service and respect to Milarepa.

While the Jetsun's practice was greatly flourishing, five young nuns from Mönyul*² came to request teachings from Milarepa. They said to him, "Because there are many fearsome conditions here, this is a place where experience and realization greatly flourish and practice is enhanced. Guru, have you also found this to be so?"

In reply, he sang this song of praise of that place and of how his experience and realization arose:*³

I bow at the feet of the noble guru.

By gathering merit, I've met such a lord.

Because of the guru's prophecy I have come here,

This blissful castle in the wooded mountains of Mönyul.

It's a land of grassy mountains with radiant flowers

In the midst of many dancing trees;

A land where langurs and monkeys play;

A place where birds sing myriads of songs;

A land where bees fly gently about;

Where rainbows shine both day and night;

Where light rain falls in both summer and winter;

Where the mist billows in fall and spring.

Within such a solitary place,
For me, the yogi Milarepa,
The luminous experience of meditation
On the emptiness of mind feels so good.
However many negative manifestations arise, it feels extremely good.
When the highs and lows are intense, it feels even better still.
My body free of negative karma feels good.
When there's a myriad of disturbances, it feels extremely good.
When fearsome appearances are intense, that feels even better still.
Being free of afflictions, birth, and death feels good.
When the [demons'] savagery gets worse, it feels extremely good.
When there's no sickness, it feels even better still.
Suffering arising as bliss feels good.
*Trulkhor**4 coming from meditative experience feels extremely good.
The dancing of running and jumping feels even better still.
This treasury of spontaneous song feels good.
Such words that are like the melodies of bees feel extremely good.
When that sound becomes merit, it feels even better still.
The confidence of strength of mind feels good in the expanse.
Mind's self-arising by its own strength feels extremely good.
Its dawning as a variety feels even better still.
This yogi who has blissful experience and is happy
Makes this parting gift for a child with faith.

Once he sang this, he gave the abhishekas and instructions, then had them meditate. They developed excellent experience and realization, at which the Jetsun was very pleased. Then he sang this song of realization, "The Song of Experience of the Amrita of Advice":

Guru, buddha, dharmakaya,
Unerring teacher of the path of liberation,
Your compassionate activity is the glory of beings;
You sit, never separate from me, as the ornament of my crown.

You practitioners of dharma who are residing here,
Though there are many ways to practice genuine dharma,
You are so fortunate to be practicing the profound path.

When accomplishing buddhahood in a single life,
Do not let your desires in this life be great.
If you do, you'll engage much in virtue and negativity.
If that happens, you'll fall to the lower realms.

When offering service to the guru,
Don't complain about all you've done to help.
If you do, there'll be resentment for both master and student.
If that happens, you'll not accomplish your wishes.

When you are keeping the samaya vows,
Don't sleep in the cities of ordinary people.
If you do, you'll be influenced by negative examples.
If this happens, your samaya vows will be broken.

When you are engaging in study,
Do not have great pride in conventional knowledge.
If you do, the five poisons' embers will flare.
If they flare, your intention toward virtuous activity will be disturbed.

When meditating together with friends,
Do not engage in many endeavors.
If you do, you'll be distracted from profound virtuous activity.
If distracted, you'll miss out on the fortune of sacred dharma.

When practicing the whispered lineage's path of means,
Don't get involved in blessing or taming ghosts.
If you do, your own mind-stream will rise up as a ghost.
If that happens, you'll strive in the dharma of townsmen.*5

When experience and realization are beginning to dawn,

Don't speak of your prowess or higher perceptions.
If you do, you'll corrupt the secret code language.
If that happens, the path's good qualities and signs will be obscured.
When you see these faults, abandon them.

Eating the food of deceit, negative conduct;
Taking offerings intended for the deceased;
Striving in pleasing others: engage in none of these.
Act with humility, and be self-sufficient.

Then they asked, "What is the way in which one should be self-sufficient?"¹⁷ When they had requested the Jetsun to say more, he sang this song of realization in reply:

I supplicate the lord who is so kind:
Grant your blessing that this beggar's practice may go well.

You young, new students,
In the deceitful city of virtue and negativity,
Don't extinguish your good fortune; listen to the genuine dharma.
You've not gone down the wrong path, for you have met me.

Gathering the accumulations again and again, practice meditation.
The mist of blessings gives rise to experience and realization.
Rousing that alone won't help; you must be self-sufficient!
This upadesha of being self-sufficient
I will explain with love; listen carefully.

When keeping to isolated mountain retreats,
Don't reminisce about the entertainment of the city.
If you do, you'll be distracted by the demons of your own mind.
Keep the mind turned inward, and be self-sufficient!

When penetrating the key point with perseverance in meditation,
Contemplate the uncertainty of the time of death,
And remember the faults of samsara.

Without mulling over the pleasures of this life,
Cultivate endurance in hardship, and be self-sufficient!

When receiving instructions on profound meditation,
Don't have great desire for conceptual knowledge.
If you do, then you'll strive in worldly conduct.
If that happens, this human life will be empty and wasted.
Act with humility, and be self-sufficient!

When bits of experience and realization arise,
Don't regard yourself highly with compulsion to speak of them.
If you speak of them, it will upset the *mamos**⁶ and *dakinis*.
Meditate without distraction, and be self-sufficient!

When spending time around the guru,
Don't examine his good qualities or faults.
If you do, you'll just see a heap of faults.
Have pure vision, and be self-sufficient!

When in harmony with dharma friends and in the abhisheka rows,
Don't wish for seniority or the head of that row.
If you do, attachment and anger will upset your samaya.
Remain harmonious, and be self-sufficient!

When begging for alms in the midst of the town,
Don't deceive others with false dharma.
If you do, you'll fall to the lower realms yourself.
Act honestly, and be self-sufficient!

Always and in all that you do,
Be without high self-regard or strong desires.
If you have them, you'll just become jaded while looking dharmic.
Abandon deception and lies, and be self-sufficient!

Then, someone who is able to be self-sufficient

Should pass on the instructions that are so kind
In order to benefit self and others.
Hold generosity in the core of your heart!

When Milarepa had sung that, they all developed perseverance in their meditation and great enthusiasm for letting go of this life. With unwavering faith in the Jetsun, they offered a gold mandala and requested a practice that condenses to their essence the key points of view, meditation, and conduct.

The Jetsun said, “Take this gold and use it for your retreat provisions. As for the key points of view and meditation, they are like this.” Then he sang this song of realization, “The Nails of View, Meditation, and Conduct”:¹⁸

Grant your blessing that I may naturally abide
In accord with the lord guru’s view, meditation, and conduct.

For this view there are three nails to drive.
For this meditation there are three nails to drive.
For this conduct there are three nails to drive.
For this fruition there are three nails to drive.

To explain the three nails of the view:
All phenomenal existence is subsumed in mind;
Mind itself is of the nature of luminosity;
Yet it cannot be identified.

To explain the three nails of meditation:
Concepts are liberated as dharmakaya;
Clear awareness is of the nature of bliss.
Resting, uncontrived, is equipoise.

To explain the three nails of conduct:
The ten virtues are the natural expression of conduct;
The ten nonvirtues are naturally pure in their own place;
The antidote doesn’t fix luminosity-emptiness.*⁷

To explain the three nails of fruition:

Nirvana is not established as being somewhere else.
Samsara is not to be abandoned for somewhere else.
I've determined that my own mind is buddha.

From among three nails, there's a single nail to drive:
That nail is the nail of dharmata's emptiness.
The nailing is done by a noble guru.
If you analyze too much, it won't be driven in.
Coemergent realization will drive it in.
This wealth that is shared by dharma practitioners
Arose in the mind of this yogi here:
May all of you students be pleased.

Then the disciples said, "Besides ardently supplicating the root guru who guides one on the unerring path of practice, is there anything more to practice?"

The Jetsun, with delight, said, "The root guide on the path has these aspects." He then sang this song of realization:

The guru, instructions, and student, these three;
Perseverance, endurance, and faith, these three;
Prajña, compassion, and character, these three;
These are ever the guides on the path.

This solitary place that is free of busyness
Is the guide on the path that protects meditative concentration.

The revered siddha guru
Is the guide on the path who clears away darkness.

Faith that is free of any weariness
Is the guide on the path to the higher states.

Thoughts about the five sense faculties
Is the guide on the path of liberating whatever's encountered.

The instructions of the Kagyu gurus
Are the guide on the path that shows the three kayas.

The objects of refuge, the three precious jewels,
Are the guide on the path that's without any error.

Once these six guides have shown the way,
The yogi will go to the field of great bliss
And remain in the state free of elaboration and concepts.
How happy is the homeland of self-recognition and self-liberation!
I take the seat of certainty in understanding reality.

In this empty uninhabited land
This happy yogi's song was let out like a dragon's roar.
The rain of renown falls in all ten directions,
The petals of compassion's bloom unfurl,
Bodhichitta's result purely ripens,
And enlightenment's activity pervades everything!

Then the nuns thought, "Since it is fine for the guru to stay anywhere, we should invite him to our own land," and said to Milarepa, "Lama, since the guru's practice is flawless and he doesn't need to meditate, come to our land and allow the benefactors there to accumulate merit, turn the wheel of dharma, and accomplish the benefit of sentient beings."

The Jetsun said, "My meditation right here in these mountain retreats is how I benefit sentient beings. Although my meditation is flawless, to stay in mountain retreats is the meditator's pride." Then he sang this song of realization:

The guru's kindness I repay with my practice;
Grant your blessings that my mind-stream be ripened and liberated.

For you fortunate dharma practitioners who are here
I'll sing a song of upadesha on the profound meaning.
Listen with focus, and be without distraction.

The white snow lioness of the snows on high

Majestically stands upon the mountain's white face.
It's not for fear of any others:
This majestic stance is the snow lion's heroic pride.

The vulture of the red rocks, king of birds,
Spreads his wings in the expanse of the sky.
It's not for fear of falling upon the cliff:
To fly in the sky is the vulture's heroic pride.

Within the ocean, the mother of waters,
The queen of fish further trains her skill.
It's not for fear that she will drown:
To move and dart is her heroic pride.

In the branches of trees of the mountains of Mön,
Monkeys and langurs further train their skill.
There is no worry that the monkeys will fall:
It's their nature to play in all kinds of ways.

In the depths of the wooded forest,
The striped tigress further trains her skill.
It's not because the tigress has fear:
It's her nature to be haughty with such skill.

In the forest of Singala,
Milarepa meditates on emptiness.
It's not for fear that my meditation will deviate:
Prolonging meditation is my heroic pride.

With the practice that is free of distraction
Toward the mandala of dharmata that's perfectly pure,
It's not for fear of mistaking the meaning:
To seize the key point in its place is the yogi's heroic pride.

Any hindrances, deviations, or confusion
In the practice of the inner nadi, prana, and bindu

Are not a fault of the dharma:
These are the boasting of quick production of signs.

With the powerful gait of spontaneous conduct,
The many expressions of highs and lows,
These are not the concepts of dualistic mind's appearances:
They're the *tendrel* of the myriad signs.

In the ripening of the power of karma, cause and effect,
The very forms of virtue and negativity are seen.
But they're not a point of deviation for meditation:
They're the clear words of truth of one's individual type.

A meditator who can maintain his seat in meditation
Has very little craving for worldly things.
It's not that he desires any fame or renown:
It's the inner sign of revulsion toward the world.

I, a yogi who meditates on the profound path,
Keep only to mountains and to rock caves.
I'm not a phony nor do I engage in inappropriate conduct;
One-pointed meditation is what I desire.
The many melodies of this *repa*
Are not deceitful or a wish to distract.
They are profound heart advice to help
This gathering of faithful disciples here.

When he had sung this they said, "Even though you only stay in mountain retreats, you need to have conducive conditions, such as a good meditation cabin. We will provide them for you."

The Jetsun replied, "I already have conducive conditions, like my meditation castle. This is what they are like." Then he sang this song of realization:

I bow at the feet of my father, the wish-fulfilling jewel.
Grant your blessing that your son meet with conducive conditions.

Please guide me in coming to the certainty
That my own body is the deity's palace.

Because of fear, I was worried and built a castle;
This castle is the castle of dharmata's emptiness.
Now, I've no worry over it collapsing.

Because of the cold, I was worried and searched for some clothes;
Those clothes were the clothes of chandali's ashé.*8
Now, I've no worry over any cold.

Because of poverty, I was worried and searched for riches;
Those riches were the inexhaustible seven noble riches.*9
Now I have no worry over poverty.

Because of hunger I was worried and searched for some food;
That food was the food of the samadhi of dharmata.
Now I have no worry over hunger.

Because of thirst I was worried and searched for drink;
That drink was mindfulness and awareness's beer of amrita.
Now I have no worry over thirst.

Because of sadness I was worried and searched for a companion;
That companion was the companion of the continuity of bliss-emptiness.
Now I have no worry over sadness.

Because of being mistaken I was worried and searched for a path;
That path was the open and spacious path of union.
Now I have no worry over mistakes.

This yogi, who has everything desired,
Wherever I stay, I am happy.

At Yolmo Tiger Lion Fortress,

One's hairs stand on end at the tiger's roar;
With that, one can't help but strictly keep to retreat.

Compassion is roused at the tiger cub's play;
With that, one can't help but cultivate bodhichitta.

The howl of monkeys makes one feel uneasy;
With that, one can't help but become disillusioned.

The clamor of young monkeys makes one laugh;
With that, one can't help but cultivate altruistic intention.

The cuckoo's melody makes one feel sad;
With that, tears cannot help but fall.

The changing, melodious voice of the lark;*¹⁰
With that, the ear cannot help but be pleased.

Large black ravens with their copious caws
Are the companions of yogis and help their minds.

Staying in a place like this, I'm naturally happy.
When I have no companions, I'm happier still.

May this yogi's song of happy experience
Clear away the suffering of wandering beings.

When he had sung this, disillusionment and revulsion toward worldly things arose strongly for the disciples¹⁹ there. They offered the commitment never to come down from the mountains, and through meditation they all gained final attainment in their virtuous activity.

Then the yidam said to the Jetsun, "Go again to Tibet and while meditating in remote mountain retreats, benefit sentient beings. There you will benefit the teachings and beings." With that prophecy, the Jetsun resolved to go to Tibet.

This is the cycle of the Yolmo Snowy Range.

*1 In Tibetan, Takpuk Senge Dzong (T: *stag phug seng ge rdzong*).

*2 “Most accounts note the toponym Mön or Mönnyul, which can refer to regions of Arunachal Pradesh in northeast India, southern Tibet, and Bhutan. In the context of Milarepa’s biographical tradition, however, Mön is commonly used to describe the border region south of the Himalayan slope and is applied ‘to all kinds of groups throughout the Himalayas with whom the Tibetans came into contact.’ It is thus a general term, meaning ‘little more than “southern or western mountain-dwelling non-Indian non-Tibetan barbarians” ’ ” (Quintman 2014b: 78, quoting Michael Aris, *Bhutan: The Early History of a Himalayan Kingdom*. [Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips, 1979]).

*3 Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche’s commentary on this song is also available in *Stars of Wisdom*.

*4 T: *'khrul 'khor*, a set of physical yogic exercises. “When meditative experiences occur, then implicitly, trulkhor naturally comes from that. All movement becomes trulkhor” (DPR).

*5 This is referring to doing ritual practice for worldly ends, rather than having a spiritual goal. (KSP)

*6 Mamos (T: *ma dang mkha' 'gro*) are a type of rakshasa spirit; the word is also used to refer to a class of wrathful or semiwrathful dakinis.

*7 Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche explains this line in his song “The Essence of Clear Light Sunshine: A Commentary on the Meaning of the Three Nails”: “The remedy, prajña that realizes selflessness/ Doesn’t fix up luminous empty mind one bit/ And the remedy itself is naturally pure and free/ So it doesn’t create emptiness or clarity.” Translated by Ari Goldfield (*Songs of Realization*: 214).

*8 T: *a shad*. This refers to the shape of the Tibetan letter that is visualized during chandali practice in order to generate yogic heat.

*9 The seven noble riches, or seven riches of the aryas, are faith, discipline, learning/study, generosity, modesty, decorum/shame, and prajña.

*10 T: *co ga*. Probably the Oriental skylark (*Alauda gulgula*).

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