

The Vajra Song of Jamgon Kongtrul

The Self-Arising Innate Song Upon Acquiring a Mere Glimpse of Certainty in the View and Meditation of the Incomparable Takpo Kagyu

The illustrious one, Vajradhara,
Who is said to possess the eight good qualities,¹
Is seen in human form by ordinary men like us.
You are the refuge called Padma,² endowed with blessings.³
From the eight-petaled lotus dome of my heart,
I supplicated you not to be separate even for an instant.
Though I did not have the good fortune of realization and liberation at once,
I was blessed with just recognizing my own nature.

Therefore, concern for the eight worldly dharmas diminished,⁴
And I clearly saw the famous luminous dharmakaya⁵
By mixing my mind with the guru's.
I discovered nonthought in the middle of discursive thought,
And within nonconcept, wisdom dawned.
Now, with the joyous appreciation of a lineage son of the Takpo buddha,⁶
I am inspired to speak out.

In the west, in Uddiyana, the secret treasure ground of the dakinis,⁷
The great siddha Tilo⁸
Opened the treasure of the three gems.⁹

In the north, in the hermitage of Ravishing Beautiful Flowers,
The learned Mahapandita Naro¹⁰
Showed the mark of a siddha, indivisible prana and mind.¹¹

¹ The primordial Buddha Vajradhara's body is the unity of emptiness and luminosity. His nature, though empty, manifests unobstructedly in his form, with all its attributes. He possesses the 32 Buddha qualities and 80 special attributes. He pervades all of samsara and nirvana. His body does not cast a shadow. He is independent of light and darkness and free from stains. His body is the deep blue of the autumn sky. His eyes are unchangeable, omniscient with regard to the past, present, and future.

² Padma is Situ Pema Nyinje Wangpo, Jamgon Kongtrul's teacher.

³ Blessings (Tib. *jin lop*, Skt. *adhithana*) is a wave or stream that inspires and transforms (*lap*) potential (*jin*) into virtuous qualities.

⁴ The eight worldly dharmas are gain and loss, joy and pain, fame and obscurity, praise and blame.

⁵ *Dharmakaya*: emptiness; the nature of mind; buddhahood itself.

⁶ The Takpo (Dakpo) is one of the Kagyu lineages.

⁷ Uddiyana or Orgyen is the pure land of the dakinis.

⁸ Tilo is Tilopa (988-1069), forefather of the Kagyu lineage and teacher of Naropa.

⁹ The three gems are the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.

¹⁰ Naropa (1016-1100), student of Tilopa and teacher of Marpa.

¹¹ Wind energy (Tibetan *lung*, Sanskrit *prana*).

In the south, in the land of herbs, the valley of Trowo,
The translator,¹² emanated from Hevajra,
Established the source of the river of all siddhas.

In the west, in the Lachi snow range,
The supreme being, Shepa Dorje,¹³
Attained the state of unity in one lifetime.

In the east, in heavenly Taklha Gampo¹⁴
The honorable physician, the second victorious one,
Realized the samadhi of the tenth bhumi.

In the chakras of body, speech, and mind,
The host of siddhas of the four great and eight lesser lineages¹⁵
Obtained the life-force of mahamudra
And could not help but attain enlightenment.
Skilled in magnetizing through bodhichitta,
They could not help but benefit beings.
Having obtained the profound wealth, the perfection of the two accumulations¹⁶
They could not help but become prosperous.
Fully understanding that knowing one liberates all,
They could not help but fulfill the great prophecy.¹⁷

Lineage sons of these wealthy fathers
Possess the great self-existing riches of this previous karma.
They are the children of snow lionesses and great garudas.¹⁸
By the power of their family bloodline, they are completely mature at once.
As followers of the lineage of Kagyu siddhas,
Their meditation is naturally born through the power of these blessings.

Bragging of their pain in many years of practice,
Proud of dwelling in indolence,
Boasting of having endured such pain,
Undermining others and haughty,

¹² The translator is Marpa Lotsawa (1012–1097), the guru of Milarepa.

¹³ Shepa Dorje (Laughing Vajra) is the name given to Milarepa (1040–1123) by his teacher Marpa.

¹⁴ Gampopa (1079–1153), student of Milarepa and teacher of the first Karmapa Dusum Khyenpa. Gampopa blended the monastic Kadampa lineage of Atisha with the mahamudra lineage of Milarepa, and founded the first Kagyu monastery in Tibet. All the Kagyu lineages descend from Gampopa.

¹⁵ The four great Kagyu lineages are the Karma, Phakdru, Tsalpa, and Barom. The eight lesser Kagyu lineages are the Drikung, Taklung, Yamtseng, Thropu, Shuksep, Yelpa, Martsang, and Drukpa. The only surviving schools of the 12 are the Karma, Drukpa, Drikung, and Taklung.

¹⁶ The two accumulations are merit (positive impressions in the mind) and wisdom (insight into the nature of things).

¹⁷ Realization of buddhahood, as was prophesied by the teacher.

¹⁸ A garuda hatches full-grown from the egg, so symbolizes the awakened state of mind.

Keeping score with discursive thoughts of self and others
In counting up the realizations of the *bhumis* and the paths,¹⁹
These are the qualities of the ignorant meditators in this dark age.
We do not possess these, and although I do not have the title of a *siddha*,
Nevertheless, through excellent oral instructions of the example lineage,²⁰
I have seen the wisdom of ultimate mahamudra.

Ground mahamudra is the view, understanding things as they are.
Path mahamudra is the experience of meditation.
Fruition mahamudra is the realization of one's mind as buddha.
I am unworthy, but my guru is good.
Though born in the dark age, I am very fortunate.
Though I have little perseverance, the oral instructions are profound.

As for ground mahamudra,
There are both things as they are and the way of confusion.
It does not incline toward either *samsara* or *nirvana*,²¹
And is free from the extremes of exaggeration and denigration.
Not produced by causes, not changed by conditions,
It is not spoiled by confusion
Nor exalted by realization.
It does not know either confusion or liberation.

Since no essence exists anywhere,
Its expression is completely unobstructed and manifests everything.
Pervading all of *samsara* and *nirvana* like space,
It is the ground of all confusion and liberation,
With its self-luminous consciousness
And its *alaya-vijnana*.²²
As for the cognitive aspect of this neutral state,
Its essence is empty and its nature is luminous.
These two are inseparable and are the quintessence of insight.
It is space, ungraspable as a thing.
It is a spotless precious clear crystal.
It is the glow of the lamp of self-luminous mind.
It is inexpressible, the experience of a mute.
It is unobscured, transparent wisdom,
The luminous *dharmakaya*, *sugatagarbha*,²³
Primordially pure and spontaneous.

¹⁹ The *bhumis* are the ten stages of the bodhisattva path. The five paths are the Mahayana stages of accumulation, union, meditation, insight, and no more learning.

²⁰ The mahamudra teachings of the Kagyu transmission.

²¹ Does not incline toward a *samsara* to be abandoned or a *nirvana* to be achieved.

²² *Alaya-vijnana*: the base consciousness where positive, negative, and neutral seed-implications are stored.

²³ *Sugatagarbha*: buddha nature, the essence (*garbha*) of a sugata (one who has gone).

It cannot be shown through analogy by anyone,
And it cannot be expressed in words.
It is the dharmadhatu, which overwhelms mind's inspection.²⁴

Established in this to begin with,
One should cut all doubts.
When one practices meditation with the view,
It is like a garuda fathoming space. There is no fear and no doubt.
The one who meditates without the view
Is like a blind man wandering the plains.
There is no reference point for where the true path is.
The one who does not meditate, but merely holds the view
Is like a rich man tethered by stinginess.
He is unable to bring appropriate fruition to himself and others.
Joining the view and meditation is the holy tradition.

As for the ignorant aspect of this neutral state,
One does not know one's nature because of the five causes.²⁵
In the ocean of coemergent ignorance,
The waves of ego-fixation's confusion roll.
Cognition becomes a self, and projections become objects,
And so the habitual patterns of grasping and fixation solidify.
Thus, karma accumulates and then fully ripens.
The rim of the waterwheel of samsara turns,
But even while it turns, its essence is unstained.
Even while it appears, it is empty of reality.
Mere appearance is the vividness of the trikaya.
Unborn is the nature of birth;
That unborn is unceasing.
On the threshold of nonduality, there is nowhere to dwell.

From this mind, difficult to express,
Various magical displays of samsara and nirvana arise.
Recognizing these as self-liberated²⁶ is the supreme view.
When this is realized, everything is suchness.
When there are no obstructions or attainments, this is the innate nature.
When conceptual mind is transcended, this is the ultimate.

²⁴ *Dharmadhatu* (Tib. *choying*), the realm of ultimate reality, is beyond the conceptual mind.

²⁵ The five causes are that (1) one does not understand that buddha nature is inherent in all beings; (2) having a dualistic view of samsara and nirvana as two distinct states; (3) holding on to the concept that buddhahood is far away and the path is long and arduous, even though it is a matter of recognizing the nature of mind and this can be done in an instant; (4) not realizing that the world of experiences only arises on the basis of impressions stored away in mind, which leads to establishing a distinction between subject and object; and (5) not understanding that mind, itself buddha nature, already contains all buddha qualities.

²⁶ Self-liberated: the Tibetan term *rangdrol*: *rang* means by itself or naturally; *drol* means to be free. Experiences arise like magic and disappear like magic.

As for path mahamudra:
Mind and the phenomenal world are mahamudra.
Coemergent mind is dharmakaya.
Coemergent appearance is the light of the dharmakaya.²⁷
When the blessings of the glorious guru
And one's karma come together,
One realizes one's nature like meeting an old friend.

There is no point in much talk,
But the beginner needs various things.
One should abandon either welcoming or sending off thoughts of past and future.
The instantaneous mind of nowness
Is the unfabricated innate nature.
In meditation, there should be no trace of deliberateness.
One should not stray for an instant in confusion.
Nonwandering, nonmeditation, nonfabrication are the point.
With freshness, looseness, and clarity,
In the space of the three gates of liberation,²⁸
One is mindful, establishing proper watchfulness.
Always keeping the mind balanced between tight and relaxed,
One pacifies the accumulation of subtle, tangible, and gross thoughts.
Rest in the state of the natural, unfabricated mind.

The four levels of experiences²⁹ rise in succession,
And the sun of luminosity continually dawns.
The root of mahamudra meditation is established.
Without it, one's talk of higher realization
Is like building a house without a foundation.
However, excessive desire for this is the work of Mara.³⁰
Those who persevere but have little learning
Are deceived by superficial virtues
And lead themselves and others along the way to the lower realms.
Even the good experiences of bliss, luminosity, and nonthought
Are the cause of samsara if one fixates on them.

When you intensify devotion in your heart,
Rock meets bone in insight,
And the ultimate lineage blessing is received.

²⁷ Coemergent (Skt. *sahaja*, Tib. *lhen chik kye pa*): qualities that arise together; in this case, mind and appearances arise and simultaneously are empty.

²⁸ The three gates of liberation are ground (phenomena have no beginning or end, so are free from arising), path (nothing to meditate on, simply dwelling in the original nature of mind characteristics), and fruition (nothing to attain, so free from desire and struggle).

²⁹ One-pointedness, simplicity, one-taste, and nonmeditation.

³⁰ Mara (Tib. *dü*) is the embodiment of the three poisons of delusion, greed, and hatred.

Not straying into the three misunderstandings,³¹
Transcending the four joys,³² free from the three conditions,³³
Realizing through the three stages of birth,³⁴
Untouched by the mind of the three great ones,³⁵
This is the self-existing nature, undefiled by experience.

Like the center of a cloudless sky,
The self-luminous mind is impossible to express.
It is wisdom of nonthought beyond analogy,
Naked ordinary mind.
Not keeping to dogmatism or arrogance,
It is clearly seen as dharmakaya.
The appearance of the six sense objects,³⁶ like the moon in water,
Shines in the state of wisdom.
Whatever arises is the unfabricated innate state.
Whatever appears is the nature of mahamudra.
The phenomenal world is dharmakaya great bliss.

Both shamatha meditation of natural resting
And vipashyana, which sees the unseeable,
Should not be separated but unified
In stillness, occurrence, and awareness.
Beyond abandoning discursive confusion,

Beyond applying antidotes,
There will be a time when you spontaneously reach this.

When you have achieved realization,
There is nothing other than the meditative state.
At the threshold of freedom from loss and gain,
Even meditation does not exist.
But for those beginners who are unable to dissolve the hairline of conceptualization,
Meditation is important.

³¹ Three misunderstandings: clinging to the experience of bliss leads to rebirth in the realm of the senses; clinging to the experience of luminosity leads to rebirth in the form realm; clinging to the experience of nonthought leads to rebirth in the formless realm.

³² The four levels are joy, great joy, extraordinary joy, and inherent joy.

³³ The three conditions are bliss, clarity, and nonthought. Bliss, the standard translation of the Sanskrit term *sukha* (Tib. *de wa nyam*), is deep well-being and peace beyond ordinary happiness and unhappiness; *sukha* is the opposite of *dukha*, the dissatisfaction of the first noble truth. Clarity or luminosity (Skt. *prabhasvara*, Tib. *sel wa nyam*) is the radiant quality of awareness. Nonthought (Skt. *nirvikalpa*, Tib. *mi tok pe nyam*) is the stillness underlying the arising of thoughts and appearances. These three signs of deep meditation are ultimately mere experiences or conditions to be gone beyond because they are not genuine awakenings.

³⁴ The speed with which practitioners with low, medium, or high capabilities develop.

³⁵ Ultimate nature does not occur through the knowledge gained from hearing, contemplation, or meditation.

³⁶ The six sense objects are sights, sounds, sensations, tastes, smells, and thoughts.

When one practices meditation, there is experience.
This experience arises as adornment of thought.

This path is divided into the four yogas:
One-pointedness means recognizing the nature of mind;
Divided into the less, medium, and greater stages:
One sees the alternation of bliss and luminosity,
One masters resting in samadhi,
And experience continuously appears as luminosity.

Simplicity means realizing the mind is without root;
Divided into the less, medium, and greater stages:
One realizes that the arising, ceasing, and dwelling are empty,
One is free from the ground and root of fixating on appearance or emptiness,
And one resolves the complexity of all dharmas.

One taste means dissolving appearance and mind into each other;
Divided into the less, medium, and greater stages:
All dharmas of samsara and nirvana are dissolved into equal taste,
Appearance and mind become like water poured into water,
And from one taste, the various wisdoms arise.

Nonmeditation means the utter exhaustion of conceptual mind;
Divided into the less, medium, and greater stages:
One is free from meditation and meditator,
The habitual patterns of primitive beliefs about reality are gradually cleared away,
And the mother and son luminosity dissolve together.³⁷
The wisdom of dharmadhatu extends throughout space.

In short, in meditation:
One-pointedness means that mind is still as long as one wishes,
Seeing the very nature of ordinary mind.
Simplicity means the realization of groundlessness.
One taste means liberating
All possible dualistic fixations through insight.
Nonmeditation means transcending all sophistries of meditation and nonmeditation,
The exhaustion of habitual patterns.

In this way, from the great lord of yogins,
Naropa and Maitripa,³⁸
Down to the lord guru Padma Wangchen,³⁹
The golden garland of the Kagyus

³⁷ The son is each individual's experience on the path. The mother is true reality.

³⁸ Maitripa (1007-1085), who was a student of Savari, transmitted mahamudra to Marpa.

³⁹ Padma Wangchen is another name for Situ Pema Nyinje Wangpo, Kongtrul's teacher.

Reached the dharmakaya kingdom of nonmeditation,
Spontaneously cleared away the darkness of the two obscurations,⁴⁰
Expanded the great power of the two knowledges,⁴¹
Opened the treasury of benefit for the sake of others pervading space,
And remained in the refuge of mind free from doubt.
The Kagyu lineage is known to be passed from one to another.
It is known not by words alone, but by their meaning.
Please guide even such a lowborn savage as myself,
Who possesses the merest mark of your noble lineage,
Quickly to the kingdom of nonmeditation.
Kind one, please utterly exhaust my conceptual mind.

The fruition of mahamudra is spoken of like this:
The ground is receiving the transmission of the innate trikaya;
The path is applying the key points of the view and meditation;
The fruition is the actualization of the stainless trikaya.
Therefore, its essence is emptiness, simplicity, dharmakaya.
Its manifestation is the luminous nature of sambhogakaya.
Its strength, manifold and unceasing, is nirmanakaya.
This is the sovereign of all reality.
The nature of mahamudra is unity,
The realm of dharmas free from accepting or rejecting.
Possessing the beauty of unconditional bliss,
It is the great and vast wealth of wisdom.
It is the natural form of kindness transcending thought.
Through prajna,⁴² it does not dwell in samsara.
Through karuna,⁴³ it does not dwell in nirvana.
Through effortlessness, buddha activity is spontaneously accomplished.
The luminosity of ground and path, mother and son, dissolve together.
The ground and fruition embrace one another.
Buddha is discovered in one's mind.

The wish-fulfilling treasure overflows within.
E ma! How wonderful and marvelous!

Since in the view of mahamudra
Analysis does not apply,
Cast mind-made knowledge far away.
Since in the meditation of mahamudra
There is no way of fixating on a thought,
Abandon deliberate meditation.

⁴⁰ Emotional obscurations and conceptual obscurations.

⁴¹ The wisdom of depth recognizes emptiness, the actual nature of all phenomena. The wisdom of vastness simultaneously sees the luminous unobstructed manifestation of all phenomena.

⁴² *Prajna* (Tib. *shes rab*): the wisdom that realizes the nature of reality.

⁴³ *Karuna* (Tib. *nying je*): compassion toward all beings without distinction.

Since in the action of mahamudra
There is no reference point for any action,
Be free from the intention to act or not.
Since in the fruition of mahamudra
There is no attainment to newly acquire,
Cast hopes, fears, and desires far away.

This is the depth of the mind of all Kagyus.
It is the only path on which the victorious ones and their sons journey.
Theirs is the upaya⁴⁴ that reverses the vicious circle of existence
And the dharma that brings enlightenment to one life.
Here is the essence of all the teachings, sutras, and tantras.
May I and all sentient beings pervading space
Together attain the simultaneity of realization and liberation,
And attain supreme mahamudra.

Colophon: In order not to transgress the command seal of emptiness endowed with all the supreme aspects, the one who knowledge is transcendent and who manifested in the form of the vajraholder, I, the subject of Padma, the Yonten Gyatso Lodro Thaye, composed this at Kunzang Dechen Osal Ling on the left slope of the third Devikoti, Tsari-like Jewel Rock. SHUBHAM⁴⁵

The endnotes were compiled from various sources by George Draffan, especially the Third Jamgon Kongtrul's commentary *Cloudless Sky: The Mahamudra Path of the Tibetan Buddhist Kagyu School*, and Thrangu Rinpoche's *King of Samadhi: Commentaries on the Samadhi Raja Sutra and The Song of Lodro Thaye*. Jamgon Kongtrul's vajra song was included in the *Kagyu Gurtso (Ocean of Kagyu Songs)* first compiled in the sixteenth century by the Eighth Karmapa Mikyö Dorje. It was translated into English in 1980 by the Nalanda Translation Committee and published as *The Rain of Wisdom: The Essence of the Ocean of True Meaning*.

⁴⁴ Upaya (Tib. *thabs*): skillful means or methods that liberate.

⁴⁵ *Shubham* means auspicious, fortunate, good, bright: "May all be well."