

Tsedrön Kyi's "Lonely Soul"

Translated by Somtso Bhum

Chapter One: Miracles at Dzokchen Hermitage

1. My Retreat Partner

On a snowy spring day, my younger brother accompanied me to a sacred site called Dzokchen valley. All the retreatants lived in caves on the rocky slopes. By the time I arrived, the nun Jangchup Drölma had been on retreat for a year. She had red cheeks, wide eyes, and big upper eyelids. A nomadic woman in her youth, she had a clear and melodious voice. She became my retreat partner because I stayed at the same cave where she resided.

Jangchup Drölma's food, clothes and other supplies were running out. So, I offered her my food, mattress and my favorite *tögak* (maroon or yellow wrap shirt with cap sleeves) which cost seventy yuan. I didn't know what meditation she was practicing. But she told me she had received a mind-to-mind transmission. Two more hermits resided in Dzokchen valley: a Tantric practitioner named Gephel and a nun called Dedröl.

Everyone called them Pöngan, the old practitioner, and Joganma, the old nun.

2. The Versatile Jangchup Drölma

It was the season of wild chives in my hometown when people made chive momos. Jangchup Drölma and I craved chive momos to the point that we were salivating. Unable to satiate our craving, we skipped our daily practice to collect wild chives.

We saw a big snake while picking the chives. Jangchup Drölma grabbed the snake by its tail and tossed it towards me. I was so petrified I nearly lost my *la* (vital spirit) and met *chögyal* (the god of death)! I ran away from the snake and yelled at her with all sorts of curses. I said, "You are the demoness with an iron beak!" Jangchup Drölma held her stomach and rolled on the ground, unable to restrain her laughter.

Jangchup Drölma was a real heroine.

We spent many nights meditating under the light of a single candle in that narrow cave. As soon as we blew the candle out, an odor always filled the cave. Curious, I switched my torch on in the middle of the night and saw many black beetles stuck on the *tsampa* (roasted barley) bag.

Right after we put out the water offering, a pika rushed in to take a sip. That was always the case. And Jangchup Drölma would always chase the pika away.

One day, Jangchup Drölma hit the pika with a white pebble and bloodied one of its eyes. Since that day, the blind one-eyed pika disappeared. Furthermore, a small reddish pika always gathered grasses and stored them in its burrow near the cave. This smart and charming pika was always in a hurry and worked hard.

A mouse was also busy, day and night, stealing our white flour. Its droppings filled the cave and its surroundings. Filled with rage, Jangchup Drölma chased the mouse around until it jumped off the cliff in front of our hermitage. “Demoness, we came here to meditate, not to chase the mouse off the cliff,” I shouted at Jangchup Drölma. She cried for a long time, and I felt sorry after seeing her in that state.

I didn’t know what the inner and outer conditions were. If it was not my illusion, Jangchup Drölma liked to wear makeup whenever she had leisure time and didn’t chant her prayers on time. One night when it was pitch dark, a light moved at the end of the valley. Scared, I asked Jangchup Drölma what it was. “Dzokchen valley is not pure. I have seen a ball of fire moving at night many times,” she replied. When I observed it closely, the light disappeared as it gradually approached our hermitage. I was frightened and reached out to block the window with a pillow.

“Don’t be afraid! Let me check out what inauspicious thing that is,” she said and stepped out of the hermitage with a torch. She took a long time before she returned.

“There is nothing at the end of the valley,” she said. She flashed the torch in my face and warned disdainfully, “A small-hearted coward cannot become a real nun.”

I couldn’t fall asleep that night.

I didn’t see that light for many days. Jangchup Drölma sat with one leg folded over the other, intoxicated with delight, as she sang popular *dunglen* songs. My mind was contaminated with unutterable doubt and hesitation.

Jangchup Drölma was used to traveling around. I missed my lama too much, so Jangchup Drölma and I agreed to visit Shingtri monastery. On our way back, I was so hungry that my legs started to shake, and my footsteps became clumsy. But Jangchup Drölma was neither hungry nor tired. She walked like a mad elephant leaving me far behind. I got so thirsty that my tongue was parched. As Jangchup Drölma approached a nomad family, a woman appeared and invited her over for a cup of tea.

Just as I arrived, Jangchup Drölma declined the invitation. “We are good. We don’t need to drink tea.”

I nearly died of anger. She was probably bullying me; it might also be that she was challenging me. She continued walking with her head down, not even looking back at me.

“That inauspicious one has an evil heart!” I yelled after her. At the same time, a sense of admiration for her strength arose from the depth of my heart.

After that, I didn’t want to live with Jangchup Drölma anymore. Pöngan invited me to live with him and Joganma asked me to stay with her. After thinking it over, I moved to Joganma’s place

because if I decided to live with Pöngan, then Joganma would be upset. Joganma was practicing yogic exercises involving the channels and winds at the time. The practice was done on the upper part of Dzokchen valley where there was no direct sunlight. It is said that this site has been the place for practicing these yogic practices for a long time. So, I went to visit it. It was inconceivable that the pika that was blinded by Jangchup Drölma was dead there. I buried the rotten pika in a hole and chanted a full *mālā* of Maṇi mantras on my prayer beads.

One night, I saw the light again. When I asked Joganma about it she told me it was in fact a person. The torch vanished as it reached Jangchup Drölma's hermitage. Joganma stared at me with a different look.

3. Since Traphap Arrived

Days passed like shooting stars. On a summer day when greenery covered the surroundings, a man with a rucksack was coming from the end of the valley. I thought he was a hermit but soon learned that he was a reincarnated lama. He went straight to Pöngan Gephel's hermitage. This young man in his thirties who had a gold tooth was not just a lama. He was also a specialist in mirror divination. Anyhow, people called him Alak Traphap, the Mirror Diviner Rinpoché. Pöngan assigned Alak Traphap to Jangchup Drölma's hermitage. Jangchup Drölma carried Traphap's belongings and walked toward her hermitage. Alak Traphap followed her in a manner appropriate to religion and custom.

"The he-goat Pöngan has put meat in front of the cat. It's not right!" Joganma said before taking a deep breath.

The next day, Alak Traphap visited Joganma's hermitage with a *khadak* (silk scarf) and fifty yuan. From the conversation, they found out that he was a disciple of Joganma's uncle. Since he was a specialist in mirror divination, Joganma asked him about the whereabouts of her son Dawa who had been lost for over ten years. Alak Traphap told her he needed a bottle of *chang* (barley beer) to perform the divination. He drank the *chang* that was offered and proceeded to light a butter lamp. He planted the corner of a mirror into a heap of barley on a clean plate. He chanted many prayers and instructed Joganma to prostrate to the Three Jewels. Looking into the mirror from the corner of his eyes, and without blinking, he said, "Your son is going through hardship and suffering, like an ant stuck to pine sap. But he will come back."

Having developed faith in him, I requested a mirror divination about my brother who hadn't returned from his trip to Lhasa.

"Your brother doesn't have any problems; a rainbow appeared on a meadow," he responded. My faith even grew stronger in that very moment.

That night, Jangchup Drölma and I made wild chive momos at Joganma's hermitage and brought a full plate to Pöngan's place. On our way, a momo fell off and went down the cliff like a rolling stone. I felt it was inauspicious and suddenly became unhappy.

After seven days, Jangchup Drölma left to visit a reincarnate lama who had arrived at a certain monastery. Alak Traphap, who was wearing Jangchup Drölma's favorite *tögak*, held her precious lotus seed *mālā* with turquoise and red coral spacer beads, put up an umbrella and looked to the distance from the top of the mountain behind the hermitage. When Jangchup Drölma returned, they locked arms and entered the hermitage together.

On the thirteenth day of the fourth month of the lunar calendar, Joganma and I went to the county town to prepare food offerings for the monks at Shingtri monastery. We made five thousand pieces of deep-fried bread and bought the meat of three sheep, more than thirty pounds of butter, and ten packs of inexpensive tea. On the full moon day, we made food offerings to the monks and offered five yuan to each monk. Alak Khenpo gifted us a *khadak*, his portrait, silk clothes and much more. We had to spend a night in the county town on our way back. There was thunder, lightning, and heavy rainfall throughout the night.

The next day, our path to the hermitage was muddy. Two fresh pairs of footprints stretched toward the end of the valley. I recognized them to be the footprints of Jangchup Drölma and Alak Traphap.

"They probably went to the county town," Joganma commented. At that very moment, the sound of Pöngan Gephel's drum reverberated across the sky above the valley. As we approached our hermitages, we saw that Jangchup Drölma's cave was dark and missing its curtain covering.

Inside the dark cave, there was a heap of barley on a flat rock and a *khadak* and book of prayers on the top. Except for a worn-out sitting mat, there was nothing left behind. I felt empty and tears poured uncontrollably down my eyes. When I asked the nomad girl at the end of the valley, she said Jangchup Drölma and Alak Traphap left for somewhere in Golok.

In reality, Jangchup Drölma is a free woman.

4. The Tall and Dark Nomad Woman

Around that time, a small conflict occurred regarding the county governor's wife.

A woman was coming up from the end of the valley. Observing from afar, Pöngan claimed her to be his guest while Joganma asserted that she was coming to see her. It turned out that the woman was the county governor's wife, Tsono, coming to visit Joganma. Pöngan became upset and stopped talking to Joganma.

On a different day, a tall and dark nomad woman came from the end of the valley. She was Pöngan's guest. Reportedly, she was a patient and stayed at Pöngan's hermitage in a manner appropriate to the custom.

A week or so later, Pöngan invited me to eat boiled meat. When I arrived, I encountered a strange game that Pöngan and the nomad woman were playing. Pöngan caressed the nomad woman's eyes with his tongue because she told him that her eyes felt uncomfortable. The nomad woman displayed a strange behavior as she laughed with "ha ha ho ho" sounds. Pöngan was also not normal.

The next day, Joganma and I went to collect firewood on the other side of the valley. When we returned, Pöngan was washing his hair. The nomad woman was also washing her hair, her face lit up with smiles.

While I was fetching drinking water, Pöngan called me and scolded us: “You two greedy nuns! You should pile your firewood like a mountain in a visible place. You two wicked women, wicked nuns, you are only greedy! It’s not proper for a renunciant to be that greedy with your things.” I said nothing. But upon thinking twice, I found his words apt.

The day after, Pöngan and the nomad woman couldn’t resist from collecting firewood. Due to a combination of carelessness and old age, Pöngan slipped on a rocky slope and fell into a crack. “*A hawo na hawo*,” shouted the nomad woman as she tried to pull him up. Pöngan’s face was bleeding, and his hips were hurting too much for him to walk. So, the nomad woman helped him to his hermitage.

As I watched them leave, I laughed out so loudly that I nearly lost my consciousness. It is an act of harmful intention to be delighted by the downfall of adversaries from their negative karma. Yet the image is forever etched on my memory like a painting.

The nomad woman nursed Pöngan well for two months. When he fully recovered, the nomad woman left Dzokchen valley as her mission was completed.

Not long after the nomad woman had left, I had a funny dream. I was singing love songs and herding livestock on the mountain behind my home. An unfamiliar shepherd was singing love songs back to me from the mountain slopes. A warm and gentle sunlight hit my face. I was delighted. I am not sure if it was a positive sign or a bad omen. Nevertheless, it was a strange dream that was beyond my comprehension.

5. A Fragment of Impermanence

One day, Pöngan took me to Serlak monastery soon after hearing that there would be a *chöd* (severance) empowerment ceremony. When we returned to our hermitage after receiving the empowerment, we left to practice *chöd* in the wild for seven nights. One night, in the upper part of the valley, I saw someone making fire inside a white tent—its flames were shooting up into the air. When I checked the spot in the morning, I couldn’t find any traces. I witnessed sparks at the end of the valley again while practicing *chöd* on the seventh night.

We came back to our hermitage the day after. A nomad woman from the other side of Machu River had also arrived. She was short and plump. She came to see Pöngan because she was ill. She looked smart and adept at work. On the third day of her time there, she asked me to help with making *thenthuk* noodles because she didn’t know how to make them herself. When I went over, I noticed that a strange relationship had developed between Pöngan and the nomad woman.

After the nomad woman left, Pöngan brought carpenters and nomads to remodel his hermitage, create more space, decorate the window fascia with various carvings including *khyung* and *druk*

(garuḍas and dragons) and shield the front porch with glass walls. The hermitage became beautiful and spacious. Magnificent new statues of Padmasambhava and Tārā were constructed inside it. I was assigned as the cook for the workers.

Pöngan went back to retreat in the radiant, newly built half-cave and half-greenhouse.

In the middle of a late summer night, thunder rumbled, and rain poured as if the sky had cracked. The next morning, it was beyond the realm of thought that Pöngan's newly remodeled hermitage had turned into rubble like the aftermath of an earthquake. Although Joganma hadn't talked to Pöngan for days, that day, she took refuge in the Three Jewels and stumbled forward towards Pöngan's hermitage. Perplexed, I hurried after her. Pöngan was seriously injured. Nomads from the end of the valley were in tears as they rushed Pöngan to the county town.

Since that day, all the disciples and patients from the area belonged to Joganma. Our cave filled with all sorts of food and drink, and the yuan notes increased. I couldn't properly practice my daily rituals because I had to receive guests, prepare good meals, and see them off.

It's funny that there are people who are also afraid of snakes like me. On a sunny day, a nomad woman who was accompanied by her son came to visit Joganma to treat her illness. However, when they were just about to arrive at the hermitage, a snake frightened her son and took his *la* away.

"He will be fine. We need to restore his *la*," Joganma assured her. The boy was silent and bewildered.

Joganma filled a pan with water above the half line and added three red dates into it. Two of the dates floated together but the third headed away in a different direction. She explained that the behavior of the third date represents the boy's *la* which had wandered off. Then she wrapped a red cotton thread around a rolling pin and tied its other end to a mirror that was placed on a wooden pole hoisted outside the hermitage. Joganma stirred the pan with the rolling pin while calling out the boy's name. She put some fruits, candies, bread, etc. on the boy's lap. Joganma advised me to respond with "*O ya ya*, I am coming" each time she called out the boy's name. Instead of following her instructions, I laughed so madly that tears rolled down my eyes. Eventually, the boy started to respond with a mumble. We continued the ritual for three nights and the boy became more lucid.

Normally the boy was a talkative kid. Truly Joganma was a skillful woman.

6. These Worldly Human Beings

With an increase in the number of patients and improved living conditions, Joganma became fond of those who offered yuan notes but was not as pleased with those who offered bread and *tsampa*.

As her patrons increased, Joganma frequently asked her disciples to bring whatever she needed and wanted to eat. Moreover, she summoned her patients to prepare five hundred deep fried breads per household for her food offering on the full moon of the fourth month of the lunar calendar.

The hermitage resembled a warehouse or a grocery store. It was filled with lamb skin, brown sugar, wool, and other necessities. Seizing every opportunity, Joganma made a long dress with the lamb skin and sent it to her eldest daughter, Tashitso. She packed the brown sugar into many bags and sent them to her daughters and sons. Of course, I understand that all mothers are the same in that they are mothers. Yet I had also become someone who consumed *kor* (unreciprocated food) offerings with her. I could not sleep!

Insatiable desire for food, clothing, and wealth leads people towards a non-virtuous path. Just like the mist atop a rocky mountain, it's an established truth that worldly wealth has no essence. Yet it is difficult to practice authentic dharma if one is unable to completely abandon one's *phayul* (homeland): failing to do so increases one's desire and lack of contentment.

Joganma gave away our leftover food and surplus cloth to the poor nomadic family who lived at the end of the valley. The family's snotty kids enjoyed our leftovers, but we ate the best offerings from the devoted disciples. At the time, I turned solely into a caretaker of the offerings rather than an actual hermit. I gradually became lonely. Where could I find someone to share my feelings with? There was no way I could find anyone! In that way, it was my fate to work as a cook in the Dzokchen valley and my suffering to pass days eating *kor* offerings. I was confused, disappointed, and scared. I laughed and cried, and eventually left my retreat.

What I wanted was a solitary valley for meditative concentration;
what I gained was a demonic prison of afflictive emotions.
The dream I had imagined for a hundred years
was swept away by a broom made of a thousand magical illusions.

Chapter Two: Life in Padma Dzong

1. Travel Companion by Karma

In June 1999, Lamo Yongzin Rinpoché bestowed the Kālachakra empowerment at Khagang monastery. Joganma's attendants saw me as I was there to receive the empowerment. By karma, Joganma and I reunited again in the middle of a crowd.

Joganma was thrilled to see me and exclaimed: "Excellent! Everything is due to our accumulated karma." After Rinpoché concluded the empowerment, Joganma and I headed towards Padma Dzong.

The path wound through a precipitous cliff like a white thread pulled without any purpose. As I looked down from the cliff, which could well be the gorge to hell, I saw the murky water of the Machu River. My heart pounded like leapfrogging lambs. Even though the clattering noise of the

tractor and the loud voice of the driver's mother added some excitement on that road, they also sent chills down my spine.

At the end of the drive, which vigorously shook our intestines, we finally arrived at Kyalpuk Rabgo village which is located at the bank of the Machu River. Kyalpuk is a fertile land where a variety of fruits and grains grow in abundance. The weather there is as hot as a pan on fire. The kind and virtuous householder Dorjé sent his son to accompany us to the marvelous hermitage of Jé Shabkar Tsokdruk Rangdröl in Padma Dzong. We arrived at our destination at 6pm. Folios of texts were scattered everywhere on the middle and lower parts of the hill. There was nothing left in the hermitage except for a worn-out sitting mat, a bowl and a pan, and traces of burglary. I went to fetch some water from the Machu which had already turned murky because it was summer. I couldn't help but make tea from the water that hurt our teeth. Dirt filled the cup halfway. Joganma instantly initiated her retreat. I collected the pieces of text scattered on the base of the mountain and buried them under a rock in a cliff.

The next day, when I was about to make a fire to prepare breakfast, a mother and a daughter from Kyalpuk village arrived. The daughter, Chomotso, carried drinking water in a twenty-five-liter plastic container. Her mother, Druktsö, brought a basket-load of firewood and a tray of warm bread. After enjoying the delicious breakfast, Chomotso and I went to the Machu River to wash the dirty plastic that was on the altar. We also cleaned the rocky face of the hermitage until colors and the painting of a lotus became visible. There were handprints on the mud ceiling. The handprints were so wide and deep that they were probably the handprints of Shabkar Tsokdruk Rangdröl. They must be! There is no doubt.

The mother and daughter returned to their home near Padma Dzong after cleaning the hermitage.

The shape of the rocky mountain on the left of the hermitage resembled a blossoming lotus. A prominent rock in the middle of that mountain looked like the head of a deer. It gives one the impression that this rocky mountain was carefully crafted by an artist. A doe and its kid were trapped right at the mouth of the deer-like rock. They seemed terrified and were bleating in desperation. But what could I do apart from just watching them?

If I were a noble being who had a hundred manifestations, I would obliterate the sufferings of all sentient beings and lead them onto the path of bliss. However, I am just me. A wanderer in the human world, a powerless woman. *Könchok sum khyen no*— prayers to the Three Jewels!

2. The Devout People

The scorching heat made me dizzy and my vision blurry. I carried red earth in big plastic bags from the base of the rocky mountain to the hermitage and transported water from the Machu River. I built a *bhumkhang* by imprinting an image of Tārā on reddish-yellow mud mixes. I assembled many white pebbles to create a *deubhum*, a hundred thousand white stones. At the time, the most difficult task at the hermitage was fetching water. One day when I was planning to get some water, a set of twin boys

appeared. The boys were six years old and had beautiful yellow hair. I went to Machu River with the two boys, gave them a lot of food from the feast-offerings, and sent them home.

One day, three people from Kyalpuk village came to receive blessings from Joganma. They said, “We have heard of you before, Ani Jomo! You are a yoginī who has mastered yogic exercises of the winds and channels. We are here to request you to prevent heavy rain. Our grains are still in the field. Please consider this request, the compassionate Ani!” They offered fruits, breads, and Chinese tea to Joganma. She also recounted each story of her previous retreats with pride and dignity. Their faith and admiration toward Joganma grew. They left the hermitage with joy; they left as if all their desires were fulfilled.

The following day, we saw an old, white-headed Hui man and three young men coming from the base of the rocky mountain. Joganma was frantic and spoke to me with a trembling voice: “Salé Drölma, Salé Drölma! It’s not good. White hats (Hui) don’t believe in karma and the law of causality. I am old so I will be fine. But they might harm you because you are young. Hurry up and hide somewhere!” I also got frightened. So, I hid my shoes under the mat and covered myself with a blanket. I took gentle breaths and stayed silent. Moments after, the four white hats arrived at the hermitage. Joganma mumbled some chants and acted dumb.

“I came here to see you because my legs hurt. People say you are a great healer,” I heard them saying these words in Chinese. In response, Joganma raised her hands to show her *mālā* but remained silent.

“She is chanting prayers, so we shouldn’t interrupt her. Let’s go,” said the old man as he limped down the mountain. One of the young men sported a rifle on his shoulder.

Joganma and I laughed out loud over our unfounded fear. Jé Shabkar obtained realization through his great efforts in this great place of solitude. He performed incredible acts of benefit to all beings. Yet I couldn’t even practice my daily rituals without interruption and meditate with pure concentration.

3. All Kinds of Discursive Thoughts

On the 22nd of July, I went to the Machu River to fetch water. Some farmers were harvesting crops on the other side of the river. A few women and children were washing clothes. So I was not as scared. Just as I was lifting my fully filled barrel on a stand, I heard an unbearable cry from the other side of the river. A woman was sobbing and running madly towards the river. There were many people moving around her in circles. I became despondent.

After lunch, I squatted in front of the hermitage and drew the lotus-shaped rocky mountain on the ground with the tip of a stone. I thought of erasing the drawing with a frayed broom. When I was just about to pick up the broom, I saw a poisonous snake with black and white stripes coiled around it. I stumbled over it as I ran towards the hermitage. Joganma asked me what happened. I told her about the snake. Frightened, she screamed and ran towards the innermost part of the cave.

Moments later, that little dark snake showed up at our front door. Slightly lifting its head, it closely surveyed the hermitage gawking around for a long time. I held a stick and threw pebbles to try to scare the snake. After a while the snake turned back and slithered towards a rock. The snake was cunning. It took me a long time to chase it away. I couldn't continue my practice that afternoon due to fear.

At night, Joganma started to scream out of fear when the plastic window cover fluttered from the wind. She thought the snake was coming back. "Don't be afraid! Snakes are like humans. They sleep at night," I assured her by pretending to be knowledgeable. She trusted me and went into a deep sleep. Joganma prepared breakfast after finishing her practice in the morning. After breakfast, she requested me to visit Kyalpuk village on the other side of the *gyabri* (the posterior mountain) to collect some beetroots. When I reached the village, the villagers had nearly finished harvesting. There were many beetroots that grew between the bright flowers of potato plants.

The village is very pleasant and consisted of eight families. The mother and daughter who brought bread and water to the hermitage the other day also lived in that village. They offered generous amounts of beetroots without any greed. Her son wanted to go to Thangnak, so we left together. He was very talkative. He shared that the other day, a woman was washing clothes by the river with her son. When the son tried to catch one of his mother's shoes that fell into the river, he also fell into the water. The mother called after him in distress, but his body never floated to the surface of the water.

I sincerely felt sympathy towards the woman I saw the other day who was running and crying.

Back at the hermitage, Joganma and I arranged the beetroots on the edge of a cliff. At night, we erected two beetroots on either side of the door as protectors. I do not know if it's true, but it is commonly believed that beetroots can deter snakes.

As the saying "the mind points to the rock and the rock to asceticism" goes, I thought I could practice authentic meditation with a clear mind if I lived in solitude. However, my mind wouldn't stay calm, and I couldn't cut all kinds of discursive thoughts. Even though I have a solitary environment, because my mind is distracted, I couldn't generate certainty in the dharma. Unable to tame my own mind, I had no mental peace.

4. An Irrevocable Disaster

One early morning, it was so hot that even fetching water was difficult. In the afternoon, heavy and dark clouds blanketed the sky. Thunder constantly rumbled producing a frightening image of the sky cracking. Hailstorms clattered against the earth. Harvesting wasn't finished yet, so I pleaded to Joganma: "Ani, it's timely to chant whatever prayers you have. Otherwise, the farmers' good harvest will be destroyed." Joganma made *sang* (juniper smoke) offerings and conducted rituals to the eight powerful worldly deities and nāgas, as well as other nonhumans.

When the hailstorm stopped, the sky reverberated with a dreadful sound. Like rolling stones,

a deluge surged from the sky and swept away the fine local farms towards the Machu River. An older couple from a household in Takyugthang (the land of galloping horses) managed to run afar with their three-year-old son. But they witnessed the vicious flood engulfing their house and farm in shock. The huge flood eventually turned into dark mud. In a flash the flood transformed the beauty of the season into an unbearable realm of hell.

In the narrow precipice of an irrevocable disaster,
I saw dramatic dances of illusion and impermanence.
The true, eternal protector of present and future lives,
I take refuge in the unfailing Three Jewels.

5. Companion in Joy and Sorrow

At noon on a sunny July day, Samdup from the village behind us came with a big bag of beans. The three of us boiled the green beans and ate until we satisfied our craving. Samdup, who just turned thirteen, shared with us a sad story. An astrologer named Pöngan Jamyang from Dartso county prophesized that Samdup should become a monk when he grew up; otherwise, he would turn into a murderer. This made Samdup extremely anxious. He asked for Joganma's advice. She told him that Pöngan Jamyang is not an ordinary person. So, it is better to listen to him and become a monk in the future. Samdup promised to do so accordingly, and his worries were slightly relieved.

When I was about to take the remaining beans out of the pan, a dragon-like black snake slowly wriggled out of the rock wall and coiled around the tip of our furnace. I was very scared and couldn't even breathe. Samdup immediately chased the snake away using a long rod. The snake eventually went down a crack and I threw the remaining beans after it. "Our obstacles are wild. So, it's okay to end our retreat tonight although we originally planned to conclude it tomorrow," Joganma said. We ended our retreat and Samdup left for home the same day.

It was dark when we reached Rabgo village. We spent the night at Dorjé's home. They made comfortable beds for us in the courtyard after dinner. At midnight, the two daughters of the house made deep fried breads, milk tea and a dish of stir-fried pepper and meat. We had a fulfilling breakfast. On top of that they offered us a bag of apples they picked. The younger daughter also accompanied us until Gyarak village. I will not forget these generous people for *kalpas* (eons).

Joy provides company to sorrow;
and sorrow to joy.
Pure attitude, like the nature of milk,
is the companion of both joy and sorrow.

