

Red Boat: Song as Teacher, Listening as Path

An Inseparable Union of Integral Artistry, Integral Buddhism, Integral Spirituality and
the Integral Feminine

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Recognizing *song as teacher* and *listening as path* are inseparable. Both aspects of recognition are essential for the yoga of music. The first aspect, recognizing song as teacher, is about consciously engaging the two vital dimensions of any true teacher – wisdom and compassion – through the song. When we do this, composing, practicing, recording, producing and offering music (publishing, performing and the like) all arise as avenues for deepening one's recognition of song as teacher.

For me the songs that come through invariably weave wisdom and compassion (as I look for those qualities), and the challenge is for me to be receptive to being taught directly by the songs. As David Whyte (Whyte, 2012b) puts it when he discusses the path of poetry, poetry as teacher in that case, the discipline is about getting outside of your personality enough that you can eavesdrop on that part of yourself that hears the poem, or in my case invokes the song. So the first job of listening as a path is to suspend the need to relate to the music – to the song, to the poem – as *either* inside the self *or* outside the self.

Paradoxically the application of Ken Wilber's mapping of the eight zones of consciousness (Schwartz, 2010; Wilber, 2007) helps us to do just that: through the gateway of complexity of thought we hone our attentiveness to what is, to the relatedness of things, and, as students, we arrive at a direct regard for the apparent truth of inseparability through the practice of differentiation.

The listener has to suspend the dualistic habit and desire to relate to the song as either 'me' or 'not me' and come to relate to the song simply as a welcome visitor. As well, the listener has to recognize oneself as a capable host who is receiving a treasured guest – a guest who may well only stay for a little while and who most likely won't come to call at all unless the conditions are sufficient for extending a welcoming environment for the visitor. Now, it could be a guest arrival you have been patiently waiting for, for months at a time, where you have created what you hoped would be a welcoming environment, and yet the guest just hasn't yet come to call. This yoga of receptive anticipating requires the patience of openness, of not ruling out the possibility that the guest will some day arrive, and also not getting down on yourself – or the guest – that the visit has not yet come about.

On the other end of the spectrum, there are the times when the guest comes to call at the least opportune moment, or so it appears to us as the somewhat begrudging, otherwise engaged host. The visit announces itself very quickly in the midst of everything else you are doing – like preparing for an exam, or working very hard on some income generating aspect of your life, or otherwise being generally responsible to that which you've already created agreements and arrangements for.

To receive an unexpected guest who comes quite unannounced, you have to clear the deck in a moment. The surprise visit requires you to turn about, let go of devoting your attention to all those other things, in order to receive the message upon delivery – the song, the gift.

Whereas you may have prepared for the anticipated visitor by laying out your notebook, your favorite journal, your recording device, your ipad, your computer or whatever instruments you use to attend to the visitor, to attend to the music, to attend to the song, with the unanticipated guest you might have to scurry and do what you can in a flash to try to make yourself available to receive. Maybe you're lucky if you can pull the car over on the side of the road to find an eyeliner pencil and a grocery store receipt and begin to catch fragments of a fleeting song-in-flight visitation. You do what you can to receive. You attend to spontaneous presence.

The commitment to respect this honored guest requires that you have already tread the path of coming to revere this very special guest of creativity, in this instance in the form of music, or whatever other form the creative presence may take for you. This respect for the creative presence requires your undivided attention and your willingness to suspend knowing what the visit is all about. In fact, you might not – and in so many ways you cannot by design – know what the visit is all about even after the visit is seemingly complete. The visit itself evolves within you, afterwords¹. It may take quite some time to digest and metabolize the visit. In any event, at this stage the visitor cannot be received unless you recognize the guest immediately upon arrival. So that work is a pre-requisite.

¹ This ongoing reverberation and evolution of the visit in the afterwords is unfolded in the psychoanalytic literature as (the evolution of Freud's concept of) *nachträglichkeit*, and through Lacan's articulation of *après coups*. See Rosine Jozef Perelberg's work, *Time, Space and Phantasy in Psychoanalysis* (Routledge 2008) and *Murdered Father/Dead Father in Psychoanalysis and Legend* (forthcoming) as well as Adam Phillips' forthcoming biography of Freud.

The other work that is a pre-requisite to relating to song as teacher, as treasured guest, and relating to listening as spiritual path, is recognizing yourself as a host, both your *capacity* to serve as host and your *willingness* to serve as host. The capacity to serve as host, as I alluded to earlier, is the capacity to navigate the ego's desire to claim the guest as self. In truth, you can't say that the guest isn't the self but neither can you say that the guest is the self². And so there must always be an interaction between these two not disconnected aspects of being. To repeat, the capacity to engage listening as a path requires not only that you must have established a reverence for the guest, however and whenever the guest appears and the visit takes place, but also to engage listening as path one must recognize oneself as a capable and a willing host.

I might also say that there are those beautiful, treasured times where one creates a space and arranges a time to receive a guest, and the guest arrives just at that appointed time; the host is prepared, receptive and the guest is likewise prepared, available. Those can be lovely times. But I'm not speaking about those kinds of visits because those are the times we're perhaps a bit more familiar and at ease with. I'm talking about the less suspected visits and how in the life of the integral artist, in the life of the integral musician, we must be awake to these surprise visits when they occur. As integral artists, we have to summon both great patience *and* anticipation. This requires a certain kind of faith that the visit will take place at some point. Yet, it may be days, months or even years before the guest comes again. We may have all kinds of desire for the guest to make an appearance, when it is not to be at that moment.

² See Michael Eigen's *The Electrified Tightrope* (2004, Karnac) for a psychoanalytic reflection on this path of discernment.

When I was in semi-retreat for three years I didn't do any songwriting, but I did spend a great deal of time listening to and singing treasured songs. How to manage those times when the visitor is unavailable and how to maintain that openness and continue to make a place in the listening heart to receive the guest is its own practice. One of the ways that I found to attend to song as teacher and to listening as path during semi-retreat was to deepen my relationship to some of the Tibetan Buddhist dohas or songs of realization (Rinpoche, 2012; Pearson, 2013), handed down by some of the meditation masters. That was my way of maintaining that connection to listening as path and to song as teacher. Just to keep singing what spoke to me on the innermost.

So let's go back to the second part of being a host, which is the very *willingness* to serve as host. You know as well as I do that when you have long awaited someone's arrival, you can be a little pesky when they finally show up! So we have to practice good manners in those moments in order to receive!³ We also have to know, in our marrow, that we are able to be good hosts; that's what will help make us willing.

³ More to say on this practice of receiving, of attending the Divine Feminine (sometimes seen as the antecedent self, as O, as prajnaparamita), in my forthcoming contribution. See Luce Irigaray's *In the Beginning, She Was* (2013, Bloomsbury), Sally Kempton's *Awakening Shakthi* (2013, Sounds True), Judith Simmer Brown's *Dakini's Warm Breath* (2001, Shambhala), Sarah Nicholson's forthcoming work (2013, Integral Books), Bonnie Bostrom's *Quicksilver Dreams* (2012, Canelo Project), Elizabeth Debold and Mary Adams' forthcoming *The Ten Agreements for Evolving Women*, Miranda Shaw's *Buddhist Goddesses of India* (2006, Princeton University Press) and Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche's *Glimpses of Space* (1999, Diana Mukpo) for enlightening windows into/as/from Her original face.

When we honor a guest too much, when we make them too special, we don't feel able to host them properly. So, paradoxically right in the midst of treasuring this honored and anticipated guest we have to make a place for seeing the equality of that guest and ourselves. We don't necessarily see ourselves as the same. We don't necessarily see ourselves as different either. Yet we must recognize a kind of genuine ultimate equality between us, the *essential* equality of guest and host. I think that goes with not holding a particular visit too tightly. If the visit doesn't go so well, if you didn't really understand the message – at least at first pass – it's okay. It's all right. It is evolving within you, the song is taking refuge within you.⁴

So, some of the concrete ways that we take up listening as the path as integral artists and as integral musicians is that we *recognize* listening as a path. We are willing to attune to that great unknown that is the path, the yet unformed. We practice the attentiveness to space itself, from which things seemingly arise and to which they seemingly dissolve and are seemingly composed of. We appreciate the deliverance; we appreciate the message that the messenger creativity brings – before judging, before understanding, before interpreting. We just appreciate that we have received a visit, and then we practice. Then we practice that music or we practice that painting or we practice that writing, as we learn to listen to what flows forth as we listen or as we play or as we write or as we paint or as we edit video.

⁴ See James. S. Grotstein's work *The Dreamer Who Dreams the Dream* (2000, Routledge) for a reflection on psychoanalytic perspective on evolutions is/as/from O – the antecedent self in integral terms, by any other name.

In this way, we recognize directly the inseparability of song as teacher and listening as path. We recognize song as teacher through the union of wisdom and compassion that flows through the song. We are available to that original teaching, from the great unknown. We receive that which is neither apart from us, nor the same as who we are. We attend to that which is simply inseparable from us.

We don't quite understand – how could we ever? – the borders and the boundaries between the antecedent self (Forman, 2010), the all encompassing, empty-apparent, luminous self, and the smaller, egoic self, but we treasure all of those facets of being and how they are nevertheless in an interesting ongoing dynamic of intrasubjective communication⁵. We can engage in the dynamic of that communication, beyond understanding, because more important than any fixed understanding is a dynamic recognition of the space and the interplay that composes the whole practice. By recognizing song as teacher, by treading the path of listening, we learn to honor and to receive the visit of the creative guest, and we learn to recognize ourselves as both capable and willing hosts. We recognize the song, we attune to it, we appreciate its gifts and we practice it. We let it be a living artifact. We let it be a living, changeable, breathing, empty-yet-appearing, luminous display of radiant spirit. One time that we sing something, wisdom (when we listen for it) takes shape in one way, and we receive and release that message. Sometimes in the very next iteration of the song we find that something different altogether lights up in awareness. Other times the same awareness presents itself, becoming ever brighter, having more dimensionality, for its repetition.

⁵ See James S. Grotstein's work *The Dreamer Who Dreams the Dream* (2000, Routledge) for a reflection on the Dream Ensemble.

Whatever the channel of wisdom and compassion, as hosts we are available to it. As students of song, we have a certainty that others too share this capacity to relate to song as teacher and listening as path. We release ourselves to that truth of the human spirit. Never quite knowing how the song may serve as teacher for another, never quite knowing how listening serves as path for another, we make our offering – perhaps in the acts of publishing or distributing or playing or speaking. We just simply make our offering, however that takes form. We try to do it in the best way that we can, given the conditions of our situation. The practice becomes complete both in the letting go and in the offering of the song, the releasing of the artifact. Again, somewhat paradoxically, there is a claiming right within that releasing. We claim the honoring of that guest, even as we offer freely the fruits of our visitation.

Here in the last two sections of this paper, I will offer two songs that I recently wrote with my music partner Eric Ramstad, from our new CD, Red Boat (The Watermoons, 2012), according to the practice of recognizing song as teacher and listening as path.

Tara's Promise (The Watermoons, 2012)

Om tare tutare ture soha
Om tare tutare ture soha
Om tare tutare ture soha
Om tare tutare ture soha

I will travel with you
until you get by
Prajnaparamita
into the night

rest in the openness
and lend your sight
to every being
in this delight

steady your gaze
kiss the sky
unfurl the waves
and ride...
and ride...

Om tare tutare ture soha
Om tare tutare ture soha

look into the mirror
nothing shall arise
pray beyond hope and fear
this is how to fly

give your love
give your love away
and so discover
that it wears another face

steady your gaze
kiss the sky
unfurl the waves
and ride...
and ride...

Om tare tutare ture soha
Om tare tutare ture soha

in your emerald sky palace
light streams in from all sides
and in the openness
the searching heart will oblige

the three jewels
adorn your heart
as peace beyond suffering
you make your mark

with your eyes of moon and sun
in your celestial home
there's room for everyone

steady your gaze
 kiss the sky
 unfurl the waves
 and ride...
 and ride...

Om tare tutare ture soha
Om tare tutare ture soha
Om tare tutare ture soha
Om tare tutare ture soha

Om Tare Tutare Ture Soha

The song begins with a fourfold prayer to Lady Tara, the diety of great compassion, the mother of all Buddhas, the feminine divine in her immanent and transcendent myriad forms. In this way, the traditional homage, supplication, aspiration and request that open all Buddhist teachings are contained within and invoked by Tara's mantra. Om Tare Tutare Ture Soha. Tara, we pay homage to you, our Liberator, our saviouress. Om Tare Tutare Ture Soha. Tara, we supplicate you, to bless us with your presence at this very moment and to be with us always. Om Tare Tutare Ture Soha. Tara, we aspire to follow your example and to realize your teachings of great compassion. Om Tare Tutare Ture Soha. Tara, we request you to turn the wheel of dharma and teach us in this very moment, right here, on the spot.

I will travel with you
 until you get by
 Prajnaparamita
 into the night

Tara is saying "I will never leave you. I will always be here for you." And

"Prajnaparamita into the night" is perhaps the most potent, pith phrase in the entire Red Boat (The Watermoons, 2012) song cycle. Prajnaparamita is the great Yum Chenmo, the

origin point of no origin, the void that is always pregnant, the original face of emergence that is paradoxically ‘before’ and yet also contiguous with any appearance. She may be designated as O in psychoanalytic streams, or a twin sister perhaps⁶. Prajnaparamita is that essential drop from which all forms, all appearances in their sacred and profane guises – within, between, and among us – take shape. So Prajnaparamita as Tara manifests as the birthplace of the movement of consciousness in gross, subtle, causal and AQAL ways, as we might say in integral terms. Or Prajnaparamita as Tara manifests in nirmanakaya, sambogakaya, dharmakaya, and svavaikakaya embodiments, as we might say in the Buddhist lineage. She wears all of these appearances.

“Prajnaparamita into the night”: In the darkest place of the unknown and the unknowable, Tara *is* with us. She is that benevolent force. Tara demonstrates that the Good is never not present.

rest in the openness
and lend your sight
through every being
in this delight

Rest in the openness. “Rest” is the pith instruction. Rest in the openness. Rest in the awareness. Relax and let go. And lend your sight. What does that mean? It is a supplication to Tara, a request for Tara to lend her guidance to this wandering being, this listener, this supplicator. It is also a request *from* Tara. “You, my student, my devotee, that one who I protect, lend your sight. Open your eyes. Bring your unique self, your unique perspective, to this occasion. Summon your clarity and bring it forth.” This line

⁶ See Wilfred R. Bion’s *Transformations* (1984, Karnac Books, Ltd.) and his body of work to connect with the psychoanalytic designation and contemplation of O.

carries these twin injunctions. Furthermore, to underscore, “in this delight.” “Rest in the openness/ and lend your sight/ through every being/ in this delight.” Lend your sight to every being. Involve as many perspectives as you possibly can in the expanse of your heart/mind. And do come through with your unique perspective, right within that expanse. Don’t fail to come through with your voice. At the right moment. At the right time. With your right speech. In this delight. This way in which you are both a participant in the whole, a manifestation of the whole, and a vessel for the whole. You are receiver; you are conduit; you are witness. And you are That. All of it. Nothing at all is quite something.

steady your gaze
kiss the sky
unfurl the waves
and ride...
and ride...

“Steady your gaze” the song exhorts in the chorus. “Kiss the sky.” So in the yogic traditions, drishti, or the gaze, is so very important. On the level of physical practice, of asana, how we steady our self-understanding of what we are doing, of why we are here. How we give our attention to what is of importance. This line underscores the need for concentration, the need for focus. And in that steadying of the gaze, the simultaneous instruction contained in the song is “kiss the sky.” So right within that focus of selected attention is the yogic exhortation of awareness to be available for the expanse, to be aware of both figure and ground, however we continue to practice that in our endeavors. “Unfurl the wave. In this delight...” There is instruction here on navigating the karmic kink, whatever the difficulty is that we are facing in the moment, whatever ripple we are riding that can take us off balance if we fight against it trying to stay still. How do we

move with that wave? “Unfurl the wave...in this delight.” This karmic activity is ceaseless, is without end. And so, if you are not delighting now, when? Enjoy as you go!

Second stanza...

look into the mirror
nothing shall arise
pray beyond hope and fear
this is how to fly

“Look into the mirror/ nothing shall arise.” These lines are embracing that paradox, that simplicity on the other side of complexity. “Look into the mirror.” See everything as sacred mirror. Behold everything as Self/no self. The within, the between, and the among. First, second and third person. The within, the I. The between, I-thou. And among, the third person. And around, the third person. See everything as a reflection of the mirror mind. Mind that contains body, mind, spirit. Dharmakaya. That which contains everything. “Look into the mirror/ nothing shall arise.” There is a uniformity, a union, a sameness, an every-ness, an all-ness. In a sense, nothing shall arise. There is nothing to arise. There is no other. And nothing *shall* arise. That emptiness shall appear. That emptiness is not merely empty. That appearance-emptiness will shine as luminosity.

Second half of the stanza...“Pray beyond hope and fear/ this is how to fly.” Here the traditional instruction, teaching, and wisdom that is impossible to miss in the Buddhist lineage is invoked: be available for that which is beyond hope and fear.

The song points us towards the great middle way. The song is serving as a reminder of that pointing out. The mind is habitually caught in thoughts and wishes, fantasies and

projections of hope and of fear, of attraction and aversion. Still, what else is available to awareness when we pull back from, or just look straight into, those facets of mind? This is how to fly. The other traditional teaching that is hard to miss is invoked through the song by flight. The song here points to the dakas and dakinis, the spiritual beings we can hold in awareness as self and other, and also as the transcendent, ethereal, communications from the sky beings that visit us on the top of our head, that visit us straight like an arrow into the heart, that visit us in every bodily center and energy channel that runs through us. Every nadi, every movement of mind, every delusion. Everything. The song entreats us to pray beyond hope and fear. Pray, the song pleads, that you will touch awareness that is beyond hope and fear. Mind you that awareness doesn't have to exclude hope and fear, but it also contacts that dimension of mind that is beyond hope and fear and not trapped by them, not reduced to them. This is how to fly. This is how Tara flies. This is how she moves through the three times. This is how she moves through the inseparability of past, present and future. This is how the dakas and dakinis move. This is how the deities move. This is how they move. Adyashanti (2011) always asks, "how does It move?" I might elaborate on this query by adding, "how does spirit move in you, as you, through you? How does spirit move?" The song is teaching us if we are paying attention: *this* is how it moves. *This* is how Tara flies.

give your love
give your love away
and so discover that it
wears another face

There is a wonderful line in a poem, in a new book of poetry by David Whyte called *Pilgrim* (Whyte, 2012a), that says "the ultimate purification is to love and to let go." And

these song lines are, to my heart, another way of saying just that. “Give your love/ give your love away/ and so discover that it wears another face.” By loving and letting go, we discover the essence of love. We learn something about the nature of love. We learn that in the act of loving we are expanded (in spite of and in response to our contractions).

These lines are an expression of the core Buddhist teaching on non-attachment. They cut through the confusion about that teaching...hopefully, by clarifying that non-attachment is not about isolation, it's not about withholding, it's not about defending – although we certainly do all of those things, and we need not castigate ourselves for that⁷. Yet, love is something that we give away because we cannot ever know its effect really. Even on ourselves we scarcely know love's effect, really.

So, give your love. Do give your love. Give it away. Don't be attached to the outcome of that loving. And so discover that it wears another face. And what face is that? We discover that we are Tara, that we wear her face, in the act of loving and letting go, of giving that love away. That she is truly, as we suspected, inseparable from us. That truly we are that, when we catch a glimpse of her in action through us. We discover first hand that we do love bigger than ourselves. That actually, that is the nature of love. What other face do we discover that love wears? We discover of course that it is the beloved, it is the one that we give our love to. Tara is that one as well, that beloved.

This album was conceived at the onset of a beautiful and challenging relationship between myself and Eric Ramstad, my co-writer – a gifted guitar player, producer and

⁷ More to say on the appearance of, and keeping an eye on, the moralistic superego in a forthcoming contribution.

arranger. The life of the creation of this song cycle and its production also marks the beginning, middle, and indeed the end, the after-end, and the continuation of our musical relationship and the continuity of our friendship. Through this project both of us were called to the mat again and again, called to our seat again and again, to give our love away and discovered that it wears another face. That love, that Tara, wears the face of ourselves, surprisingly at moments. We discovered, in glances and glimpses, how love, how Tara, wears the face of the other, quite beautifully. Ultimately we discover/ed how love, how Tara, appears in the music itself. We learn/ed that the music itself is a sambogakaya appearance of Tara, distinct from and yet not other than who we actually are.

steady your gaze
kiss the sky
unfurl the waves
and ride...
and ride...

Here again, the chorus is teaching us how to do that, how to pray beyond hope and fear. How to fly? Steady your gaze. On the mat. On the yoga mat. In asana practice. Literally on the cushion in meditation. Formally. Literally in post meditation, in daily life. In the dream time. Steady your gaze, kiss the sky. Focus, and release. Discipline, and freedom. Engage, expansively. Look at what's right here and now and the context in which that is happening. Center, and edge.

Unfurl the waves; in this delight. When you're bunched up, smooth it out as best you can. Know that the wave is the water, inseparable, as best you can. And touch bliss in this. Realize that the delight is not tomorrow. Or yesterday. Don't wait for the delight. Let it

be right here, right now. In *this* delight.

*in your emerald sky palace
light streams in from all sides
and in the openness
the searching heart will oblige*

This very place we are in is none other than Tara's emerald sky palace. Wherever we are.

It is not 'up there.' It is not 'out there.' It is just exactly here, now: the light of consciousness that shines in from every perspective in our immediate apprehension (and beyond) – in nirmanakaya, sambogakaya, dharmakaya and svavaikakaya appearances. This light of consciousness is Tara's dwelling place. Here in this space of all pervading awareness, the heart that searches out compassion, that looks for Tara's face, will definitely find her. The true searching heart will definitely encounter Tara, on the spot.

There is certainty. There is no doubt. There is recognition of the definitive meaning of the deity's mandalic palace.

the three jewels
adorn your heart
as peace beyond suffering
you make your mark

with your eyes of moon and sun
in your celestial home
there's room for everyone

And the last stanza... "the three jewels/ adorn your heart/ as peace beyond suffering/ you make your mark." Buddha, dharma, sangha. I, thou/we, it. The within, the between, the among, the around. These faces of the integral spirit. These faces of Tara. These aspects indeed of your very self, your own mind, inseparable from Tara, adorn your heart. This whole display of appearance-emptiness, of sacred space. Wear them as the jewels that

they are within your heart. That is the core teaching of compassionate wisdom. “As peace beyond suffering/ you make your mark.”

To inquire, what is the peace beyond suffering? Of samsara, nirvana inseparable.

Milarepa (Rinpoche, 2012) sings “samsara is not deported to somewhere else, nirvana is not imported from somewhere else (Milarepa, 2012a).” So this is the sound emptiness sound echo of that understanding, of that teaching, of that awareness. “With your eyes of moon and sun/ In your celestial home there’s room for everyone.” So in the traditional depictions of Tara she literally has the eyes of moon and sun and she contains literally night and day, she includes and transcends this world.

Tara is none other than the great Mother of all Buddhas. She is right here in this world. We don’t have to go anywhere else to find her. The Buddha of this earth is none other than Tara’s body, Tara’s dwelling place, Tara’s palace. And in Tara’s celestial palace, there is room for everyone. Without a single one left out, including you and me. All sentient beings are in her care. No sentient being is beyond her embrace. Whether you are anonymous or infamous. Whether you are burdened by debt or buoyed by capital. Whether you are living alone or living in partnership. Whether you are enjoying work, suffering through your work, suffering from lack of work, or enjoying not working. Whether you recognize yourself in all of these guises or many of them or just a select few. In our coming and going, no matter what hardships we have grappled with on this earth, the divine Mother, Lady Tara, is an inexhaustible source of refuge. And that is perhaps the essence of our faith. We experience that direct realization that truly, and in

actuality, we are not beyond love. What's more, we are in fact the ground of that pure love. Tara is not beyond us. In truth, she is who we are in our essential nature. The three jewels of I, I-thou, and it, Buddha, Sangha, Dharma, are adornments, or facets, of that basic truth.

Guru Bodhicitta (The Watermoons, 2012)

I am offering this song reflection simply as a disciple on the path, as an artist, and – in a different light – as a listener, in my work as an integral relational psychotherapist and music therapist. I offer this song reflection to the benefit of others, in acknowledgement of my teachers, foremost among them Mahasiddha Khenpo Tsültrim Gyamtso Rinpoche (2012). At the same time, I remain true to my own unique contribution, my own essential drop in the ocean of dharma, in the spirit of genuine equality and vajra pride.

Guru Bodhicitta is my favorite song on Red Boat (The Watermoons, 2012). In part because of its great simplicity, and the insistence on simple, reverent repetition. The song is built around, stems from, and originates as an homage to the definitive Guru, Bodhicitta, wisdom and compassion inseparable. And the song is simply an unfolding, a simple recognition, of just that. That life itself, we could say, is an homage to the great unsurpassable Guru Bodhicitta. So Guru Bodhicitta Namami. The traditional homage. I pay homage to the Guru. To Mahasiddha Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche, inseparable from all my teachers, who shines as all appearances, without a single one left out.

This song marks the birth of a direct knowing that my teacher is wisdom and compassion inseparable. A very obvious thing to say and an obvious thing to understand also, and yet it strangely takes, for some of us, and at least for me, quite some time to see.

The teaching came as song inseparable from touch, inseparable from communion of the heart with the person I felt most safe with in that moment, my dharma brother. In that moment the 'storehouse' if you will, of blessings, of experiences in daily life, of empowerments, of teachings, of formal practices about Bodhicitta...perhaps you could say they came to a point of self-recognizing awareness. Nothing new under the sun, and yet we call it a revelation because every time it occurs it is just that. No less extraordinary. And very ordinary at once.

So the song says, "Still your mind like a river that runs through. Still your mind like a river that runs true. Look behind and beneath the river bed, there you'll find all the things that need be said." In this verse the petitioner, the composer, the singer, the aspirant, the seeker, has a deep question about right speech. And there is guidance in this verse about just that.

Still your mind. Shamatha. First basis of meditation practice in the mahamudra tradition. Still your mind like a river that runs through. A paradox. On the one hand we're stilling our mind because the gushing river, the torrent of thoughts that we identify with, needs to come into calmness, into peaceful abiding. But non-dual recognition is right there at the onset of the song in that line. Still your mind like the river that runs through. Your mind

is that stillness inseparable from the river, that stream of thought that runs through. So right within that very first shamatha instruction contained in the song is mahamudra. That's how it is.

Second line. "Still your mind like a river that runs true." So this deepens, echoes, penetrates that non-dual clarity, right within the first principle of calm abiding, of stillness, of taking one's seat, of finding one's feet.

Next line. "Look behind and beneath the river bed. There you'll find all the things that need be said." Look behind and beneath the river bed. At first pass, the song exhorts us to look for what is essential. Look for that which is core. Don't be simply swept or carried along by first thoughts, impulsiveness. There is a call here to discriminating wisdom. There is a call here to look behind and beneath the riverbed of discursive mind. A call to ethical conduct through right speech. Also, at once, there is a play and a laughter here; there is no behind, no beneath. Nothing there. There is only the looking. And, also, at once, not even that, when you look directly. Mahamudra.

Next line. "There you'll find all the things that need be said." So there's a play and a laughter that echoes here as well. This song is pointing out that there's nothing to find. And finding that is a great joy. There you'll find all the things that need be said. It's a paradoxical exhortation to silence: there's nothing to find. There's nothing there. What could possibly need to be said? There is no riverbed, ultimately. So, in this way, this verse is about the wisdom of silence. Of containment. Of right speech as no speech. And

in the same breath, there you'll find all the things that need be said. There you will find the words that this situation calls for. In this way, simply by practicing meditation and by joining it, by joining calm abiding with the beginning movement towards vipassana, or insight about the nature of mind, that clarity is touched with the line “look behind and beneath the river bed.” So the first two lines are about shamatha practice and the third line is a about vipassana practice and the last line is about conduct, about ethics, in the form of right speech. There you'll find all the things that need be said. Join stillness, calm abiding, with insight about the nature of mind, and in that you'll find the oars for the red boat: living passionately with your full expression, that choicefull capability to be silent, to not speak, or, equally, to spontaneously meet the moment with your expressive mark of existence.

Then the chorus...

Guru Bodhicitta Namami

Guru Bodhicitta Namami

Guru Bodhicitta Namami

All of this is homage to the unsurpassable Guru of Bodhicitta, of the union, the indivisible union of wisdom and compassion. The song carries the understanding that these very instructions of meditation come from the kindness of our teachers, their devotion to truth. Their understanding that if you too can practice meditation, in meditation and post-meditation, you can be of even greater benefit to others, including

yourself.

So when Milarepa (2012b) sings that “those who inspire others to take up this call/ Their kindness stretches far to great to tell,” that is exactly the case. Every teacher who has inspired you to work with your mind has touched you with Bodhicitta. Has demonstrated the nature of a bodhisattva, in that commitment, in that service. Those teachers who have practiced and studied and coalesced a dharma center, an institute, a foundation, a studio, in order to offer you instruction in meditation and yoga, offer you an even greater gift. Those teachers who have accomplished mahamudra in view, meditation, conduct and fruition inseparable are the true masters we pay the deepest homage to, praying that they will remain in this world to guide wandering beings such as ourselves through their transmission, their blessing, their teaching, their enlightened activity, their supreme example. We pray that we will be just like them down the line, in our own way. One practice session and post-meditation experience at a time. We discover our own personal expression of dharma, of truth, just as it is, in this very moment, and in this unique offering we discover how our mind is inseparable from the Guru, Bodhicitta.

Next verse. "Still your mind in the light that comes through you. There you'll find the love you always knew. Everyone here is waking in the now. Listen close, let the guru show you how. " Here again the song is returning our attention to the first principle in mahamudra meditation, to shamatha. "Still your mind in the light that comes through you." There is something in this line about not getting carried away in the ecstasy, when bliss-emptiness appears as ecstasy. When bliss shows its face as the *preferred* radiance.

Not the all-pervading radiance of genuine equality but the preferred radiance of relative reality where we source inspiration, and goodness, and beauty. Still your mind. Right within that let go. Right within that passion for this life, find the emptiness within that appearance. Having recognized all appearances as emptiness, touch the emptiness within that appearance, seeing that emptiness is also empty of being empty.

"Still your mind in the light that comes through you. There you'll find the love you always knew. " So we have sought out, we have been touched by, and we have been inspired by, given our devotion to the Guru, because we thought that she or he possessed something that we did not possess. And on a certain level that is quite true, that is the case. They possess a certain understanding that we did not yet recognize in ourselves, that we do not yet recognize. But when, in accordance with our teacher's blessing, our joining with our teacher's mindstream, we awaken to the nature of mind, as every teacher on the path has ever shown us, continuously out of their great kindness, this is none other than who we've always been, what we've always known, what we've never been separate from, what we're not separate from now nor will we ever be. Even if we forget this! Amazing! That it is the indestructible truth. The adamant vehicle.

"There you'll find the love you always knew." You were right to recognize, the song teaches, the awakened mind of your Guru, in second person, in the transmission of his or her pure presence and in third person, through her or his enlightened activities of building dharma centers and institutes and foundation and nunneries and studios and publishing dharma texts and recording audio files and mentoring translators and providing teaching

environments and retreats and intensives and practice weeks and such. And he or she is teaching you the awakened mind in the first person, and the indivisibility of that mind that is the third person, the environment, the world that we inhabit that inhabits us.

"Everyone here is waking in the now." Everyone, whether they have taken up a spiritual practice in a self-aware way or not, is on the path of this life, and life wakes us up if we're paying attention. It's impossible not to because we all come into this existence taking on a body, and we all have to release the body when we leave. None of us will escape the letting go of loved ones who cross the unknown sea before our time. None of us will escape the awareness that others will cross the unknown sea after our time. And we all have to find ways to work with this. So, however quickly or slowly we might see progress in ourselves and others, the song is saying we can rest assured that we are all awakening together, moment by moment, in the now.

Last line of this stanza, "Listen close, let the Guru show you how." Again the exhortation to the yoga of listening. Nada yoga. The yoga of sound. Listen. In the balance of silence and expression, to return to the inquiry of right speech, the first principle is listen. And of course that in and of itself is inseparable from that which one listens to. Listen close.

Listen to the innermost. Find ways to quiet all the other layers of cacophonous sound that clamor for your attention, and turn that attention inward. Listen close. Let the guru show you how. On the levels of outer, inner, secret, and innermost, and their ultimate equality, do find a way to go within. Be so deeply acquainted with the innermost that you are inseparable from that, which is the union of your mind with the Guru, Bodhicitta. In the

land of equality, this is of supreme importance.

Guru Bodhichitta Namami.

Guru Bodhichitta Namami.

Guru Bodhichitta Namami.

If no other mantra, if no other prayer, if no other teaching, return to this one:

Guru Bodhichitta Namami. I pay homage to the Guru of the inseparability of wisdom and compassion on the outer, the inner, the secret and the innermost⁸.

⁸ For those who are called to and/or continue on the path of Buddhist Tantra, I highly recommend the works by Rob Preece (2006, 2009, 2010 and 2011, Snow Lion): *Preparing for Tantra: Creating the Psychological Ground for Practice*, *The Psychology of Buddhist Tantra*, *The Courage to Feel: Buddhist Practices for Opening to Others* and *The Wisdom of Imperfection*.

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