

## **TSE GO LA (At the threshold of this life)**

### **Libretto**

#### **I. Kye (Birth)**

*Bare threshold of this life,  
pass over, pass through*

Our body, this vessel,  
begins and ends anew.  
In these mountains of our soul  
we are willed into being, elemental:

Earth, water, fire, wind, space.  
*(Sa, lung, chu, mé, nam kha)*  
Gifted presence, this human form  
Made of mother's blood, father's bone,  
And that hidden inner spring.  
This laboring night  
Breathe into the hearth-bound  
Burnishing of time.  
Outside, an owl calls.  
Come morning, the whole village will know:  
A woman's spent silence  
A child's crystal cry.

*Bare threshold of this life,  
pass over, pass through*

– Sienna Craig

#### **II. Shar Ki Ri (The mountain to the east)**

*(sung in the Mustang dialect of Tibetan)*

Do not look toward the mountain toward the east  
Look, instead, to the mountain in the west  
Look up to the heights, and down to the depths of the mountain  
Toward the places of wealth, the pure treasure of the *dharma*  
Do not look toward the mountain toward the east  
Look, instead, to the mountain in the west.  
For this is the root place, the copper-colored paradise of Guru Rinpoche,  
The place of pure treasure and excellent perception,  
A place of future accomplishment for sentient beings  
Do not look toward the hills of India,  
Where beautiful cultures like peacocks abound  
Do not disturb them  
May we be prosperous!

– traditional

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**III. Tse Go La** (At the threshold of this life)  
(sung in the Mustang dialect of Tibetan)

*Sweet threshold of this life,  
Pass over, pass through*

At the threshold of this life  
A vast lake appeared before me  
The lake unfurled like a flower I desired [*a young woman*]  
It was as if the true Buddha appeared threefold, for me to behold  
The right side [*the father's side*] inspired purity  
As there is with an ordained monk, whose knowledge is as vast as the sky  
The left side [*the mother's side*] is a place of dakini [*female deity*]  
In the tradition of the great consorts  
From the high land of the rock strewn hills  
I look down upon a beautiful valley  
This high mountain pasture nurtures luscious grass,  
Just as this is so, it is my karma to wed this beautiful bride

-traditional

**IV. Kusum** (When Queen Kusum goes as a bride to Ladakh)  
(sung in the Mustang dialect of Tibetan)

The Monthang palace rooftop  
Is where the girl's house gods reside.  
But from the girl's own homeland Monthang,  
Would they dare to send her away?  
To the eastern region of Ladakh  
Do you dare send Kusum away?

The four-cornered square room,  
Is where the girl's parents reign.  
But from the girl's own homeland Monthang,  
Would they dare to send her away?  
To the eastern region of Ladakh  
Do you dare send Kusum away?

Past the curtains of the prayer room,  
Is where the nobility sit in rows.  
But from the girl's own homeland Monthang,  
Would they dare to send her away?  
To the eastern region of Ladakh  
Do you dare send Kusum away?

The courtyard before the palace  
Is where a pair of drummers drum,  
But from the girl's own homeland Monthang,  
Would they dare to send her away?  
To the eastern region of Ladakh

Do you dare send Kusum away?

Inside the main gate of Monthang,  
Is where the girl's subjects reside,  
But from the girl's own homeland Monthang,  
Would they dare to send her away?  
To the eastern region of Ladakh  
Do you dare send Kusum away?

The area around the stupa,  
Is where the girl's friends congregate,  
But from the girl's own homeland Monthang,  
Would they dare to send her away?  
To the eastern region of Ladakh  
Do you dare send Kusum away?

Like the fast patter of youthful footsteps,  
In only a window of time could you see her leave  
But from the girl's own homeland Monthang,  
Would they dare to send her away?  
To the eastern region of Ladakh  
Do you dare send Kusum away?

Even the officers of near-by Tingri,  
Bow their hats in respect to the Queen.  
But from the girl's own homeland Monthang,  
Would they dare to send her away?  
To the eastern region of Ladakh  
Do you dare send Kusum away?

- traditional

**V. Re Chung Tso** (The performers)  
*(sung in the Mustang dialect of Tibetan)*

The playing party, all the musicians and dancers,  
The playing party has joined the stage  
Come! Turn out to watch the performers,  
Performing in honor of Tara (Dolma)  
*[The Mother who takes us across the ocean of samsara]*  
Do not be distracted!  
Come! Turn out to watch the performers  
This performance for Tara, for wealth, prosperity, wellbeing  
Come! Turn out to watch the performers,  
In this place where the Lhamo *[Tibetan opera]* is performed  
Be generous, as the performers move amongst you  
*[a request for donations from the audience]*  
You might say, "I am old," as you gather for the performance  
But turning out to watch the performance –  
Oh, these times make you feel young!

The king of the golden hill, he also dances,  
Performing in honor of Tara,  
Here, on the spacious plain  
The king and commoners alike,  
They dance on the golden hill,  
Requesting good fortune and blessings,  
In honor of Tara,  
Dance, dance, dance around.

- traditional

## VI. Shi (Death)

*Worn threshold of this life,  
Pass over, pass through*

In this land of many stones  
A fossil unearthed by river's course  
Mirrors our own tumblings,  
In the waning hours of our time  
You whose name I do not know -  
Old woman: faded apron, weathered hands  
Old man: not seeing but to dream -  
I meet you here, grateful  
For this most true of destinations.  
Start for this place, O gnarled soul,  
Released from certainty  
Along the journey of becoming.  
What is nascent here,  
In this transcendence, this in between,  
Is nothing short of miracle:  
Dried seed, green shoot, pressing  
Toward the surface  
Craving rain and stars and sun.

*Bare threshold of this life  
Pass over, pass through*

- Sienna Craig

*Gate gate paragate parasamgate bodhi svaha.*

Gone, gone, gone beyond, gone utterly beyond, O what an awakening!

- Heart Sutra mantra  
(*chanted in Sanskrit*)

literal translations provided by Karma Wangyal Gurung  
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transliterations by Katey Blumenthal and Andrea Clearfield

traditional songs recorded by Katey Blumenthal and Andrea Clearfield in Lo Monthang,  
Nepal from 2008 – 2010 with help and permission from the community