



DRUKPA KUNLE

I Must Have
Been...

Tib Shelf
ཨ་ཁུ་ཤེལ་

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By Drukpa Kunle

Translated by Tib Shelf

English Editing by Libby Hogg



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In the biography, this song follows one of Drukpa Kunle's (*'brug pa kun legs*) most extravagant miracle tales. At Shelkar Gyantse in Tsang (*gtsang shel dkar rgyang rtse*), he is summoned before Depa Morongne (*sde pa mo rong gnas*), the fortress governor, after being found in the house of the prostitute A-dzom (*a 'dzom*), where he was drinking, embracing her and behaving provocatively. The governor accuses Kunle of killing wild animals belonging to the hermitage of Ganden (*ri khrod dga' ldan*) and, despite the reduction in taxes owed by the people of Ralung (*rwa lung*), he cites other offences too, committed against its community. He demands one hundred carcasses as a meat tax.

Kunle replies that the law of King Yama, the King of Dharma (*gshin rje chos kyi rgyal po*), and the consequences of karma should come before any such demand. Nevertheless, the following morning he drives one hundred and fifty wild animals through Gyantse to the governor's gates. When the governor insists that he requires meat rather than live animals, Kunle kills and butchers them on the spot. Appalled, the governor renounces the tax and promises that Kunle's Drukpa (*'brug pa*) descendants will never again have to pay the Tsang meat tax. Kunle then snaps his fingers and commands the animals to return to Ganden. They rise, put on their skins and hastily seize their heads, some taking the wrong one, so that some of the smaller creatures are left with oversized heads. Faith overwhelms the governor and his attendants. Offering a confession, the governor touches his head to Kunle's feet, cuts his hair and becomes a lay bodhisattva.

Soon afterwards, Kunle is back among the prostitutes, singing. Having witnessed, or heard of, his killing and revival of living beings, the women ask him to recount his former lives, convinced that he must be an emanation of a Buddha. His reply is this mock-confessional song. Each of his present habits, from bodhicitta and lust to miserliness, fastidiousness and thieving, becomes evidence of a suitably absurd former birth. The women recognise that, under the pretence of speaking about himself, he is exposing their own faults, but they acknowledge that whatever he says never departs from the Dharma.



Once again, I went to the whorehouse and was hanging around with the prostitutes and singing songs. The women said, "Drukpa Kunley, you have just performed the killing and reviving of sentient beings. We've had quite the show! You must surely be an emanation of a Buddha from a former birth. Please tell us the history of your past lives." With which I replied as follows:

I remember many of my former lives.

This way that bodhicitta arises in my mindstream—
I must have been a Buddha in a former life.

This taste for food from the faithful and offerings for the dead—
I must have been a petty lama in a former life.

This hoarding, this piling up of riches—
I must have been a steward in a former life.

This great lust of mine—
I must have been a bee in a former life.

These yellow, jealous eyes of mine—
I must have been a cock in a former life.

This vigour, this energy I bring to whoring—
I must have been a realised yogi in a former life.

This sheer stinginess of mine—
I must have been a rich man in a former life.

This way I clamp the openings of my containers so tight—
I must have been a nun in a former life.

This fussy, fastidious¹ way of mine—
I must have been childless in a former life.

¹ The printed text reads ཞིབ་ཚག་ (*zhim tshag*), which does not yield a clear sense here. We tentatively read it as ཞིབ་ཚག་ (*zhib tshag*), “fastidious” or “overly particular,” which fits both the syntax and the sense of the verse.



This way I covet everything that meets my eye—
I must have been a Khampa in a former life.

This way my zeal for thievery burns so hot—
I must have been a young maiden in a former life.

This way I boast and brag, flaunting my own wares—
I must have been a merchant in a former life.



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Tib Shelf
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