

A SPONTANEOUS SONG:
Departing for Pemokö

BY LELUNG ZHEPE DORJE



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Published October 2026 by

TIB SHELF

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ISSN 2754–1495

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By Lelung Zhepe Dorje

This spontaneous song (mgur) was sung by Lelung Zhepe Dorje in 1729 and is preserved in his travel account, "Pleasant and Truthful Words: Directions to the Supreme Pilgrimage Site of Pemokö".¹ Commanded in a vision by Gesar Gyalpo, Lelung had set out on an expedition to open the sacred sites of this hidden land. Pemokö was no gentle paradise. In his own words, it was a terrain beset by venomous snakes, flies and insects, fanged and clawed beasts of prey, "wild savages" and "hateful barbarians", a place of fevers, disease, oedema and gout, blisters, tumours and pustules, and malicious demons and spirits displaying all manner of magical emanations. By this point Lelung had reached Gyala in Kongpo, a rugged mountain site on the threshold of Pemokö, leading a party of some 130 people carrying provisions through vertiginous jungle and mountain terrain. He had just given a mass empowerment and hosted a large feast for the pilgrims and local patrons who had gathered there. This spontaneous song was sung at the moment of parting: the patrons would remain behind while the party pressed on, into the hidden land.

¹ The more familiar name for this region is Pemakö (*pad+ma bkod*). Throughout his travel account, however, Lelung writes *pad+mo bkod*, using the variant form *pad+mo* for "lotus." Both spellings refer to the same place, and in this translation we follow Lelung's own spelling and render the name "Pemokö."



Above, in the depths of the blue sky,
 Amidst swirling, five-coloured rainbow light,
 A great palace spontaneously rises.
 There dwells great Orgyen, our sole father,
 With his ḍākinī consorts.
 May you bestow the supreme and common siddhis
 Upon the fortunate men and women gathered here.

To Pemokö in the east,
 The second pure Khecara—²
 We yogis set out,
 Casting our homeland behind,
 Without attachment or clinging,
 To fulfil³ the instructions of the lamas and ḍākinīs.

May all the patrons gathered here
 Remain in good health.
 We, vajra brothers and sisters,
 With our words and hearts as one,⁴
 Entrust our minds to the Three Root deities
 And set out with delight.

² Khecara (*mkha' spyod*) is first and foremost a highly purified experience connected with spiritual accomplishment (*dnagos grub*, siddhi) in Buddhist tantra, in which one's realisation manifests as a completely pure realm. In its higher sense it is an utterly pure realm endowed with eight qualities, such as subtlety of form, where one can train further on the path. In a lesser sense, associated with the form realm, the god realm and the human realm, it can be reached through meditative ability or with the help of *yakṣī* or siddha guides. In calling Pemokö "the second pure Khecara," Lelung presents the hidden land as an earthly counterpart of that realm.

³ "Fulfil" renders *gtan la 'bebs par* (lit. to establish). In the context of their departure for Pemokö, we understand this to mean carrying out the instructions received from the lamas and ḍākinīs. "Fulfil" conveys this contextual reading more naturally in English.

⁴ The Tibetan reads *kha zhe med par gtad nas*, an abbreviated form of the classical expression *kha zhe gnyis med*, "mouth and mind not two." *Kha* (mouth) stands for what one says and *zhe* for one's inner mind or intention, so the phrase describes a sincerity in which speech and heart do not diverge, with no gap between what is said and what is meant. Since *gtad* conveys committing or entrusting oneself, the line describes devoting oneself with complete sincerity. We have rendered it "with our words and hearts as one" to keep both halves of the pairing, and the warmth of *zhe*, rather than flattening it to "sincerely or wholeheartedly."



Since we're happy when ill and joyful when dying,
 We have neither the slightest hope nor fear.
 The need for lords and lamas,
 The petty hope of protection,
 The binding ropes of kin, friends, and monastery—
 The fetters of this life and the next—
 We yogis have none of these.
 So we live as we please,
 Happy and joyful!

If we happen to return, we'll be happy.
 If we should die on the road, we'll be glad.
 If we stay, there is nothing to desire.
 If we go, there is nothing to cling to.
 If you think you can challenge us,
 Come and do as we do!
 At the very least, we make this prayer
 To behold your fine faces once again.

With that, I sang songs of whatever arose, and beat out the dance. Amid the buzzing of the melodic recitation of the three syllables HŪṂ PHATṬ BHYOH, whistling songs, flute, hand-drum, and damaru, I went forth in the tantric conduct of rigpa, with leaping, running, and gazes.



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