

The background of the entire image is a traditional Tibetan-style painting. It features a deep blue sky filled with stylized, layered clouds in shades of grey, white, and light blue. In the lower portion, there are jagged, stylized mountain peaks or clouds in vibrant red, green, and blue, outlined with black. A small, dark, conical mountain peak is visible in the lower right quadrant.

SERA KHANDRO

My Only Companion *is the* Blue Sky

Tib Shelf
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My Only Companion Is the Blue Sky

By Sera Khandro

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BY SERA KHANDRO

Written at Bennak Monastery in 1913, *My Only Companion Is the Blue Sky*, a title supplied by the translators, gives voice to Sera Khandro's profound isolation during her troubled relationship with *Gyalse* Pema Namgyel (gyal sras pad+ma rnam rgyal).¹ Earlier that year, she had presented him with chests containing Treasure texts she had revealed. Gyalse dismissed the possibility that a woman in the present age could be a genuine treasure revealer, and from then on she recorded her revelations in secret.

One day, Sera Khandro went to gather firewood on the nearby mountain of Solung Drakar, a sacred place associated with her own Treasures. There she encountered a demonic female apparition and subdued it. Consequently, she was late returning home and delayed serving Gyalse his tea. He struck her and threw her outside.

¹ Gyalse Pema Namgyel (mgar ra rgyal sras padma rnam rgyal), the son of the treasure revealer Gara Tertön Pema Dündul Wangchuk Lingpa, was Sera Khandro's consort during her years at Bennak. Their relationship was deeply troubled: he opposed her activities as a treasure revealer and attempted to prevent her from writing and teaching. See Jacoby, Sarah H. *Love and Liberation: Autobiographical Writings of the Tibetan Buddhist Visionary Sera Khandro* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 54–61.



Overwhelmed with sorrow, I sang this bewildered song:

Here in Bennak,² sorrow's grove,
Wretched company circles round.
As I sing this foolish song of woe,
A crow caws, 'A-Qiu.'³

My cruel companion's face—
Like a shifting shadow on a rocky mountain.
Our home, a dark hollow cave—
A breeding ground for sickness, cold, and blight.

For me, a beggar woman far from home,
My sole companion is the blue sky.

Never mind practising the true Dharma,
Even these daily quarrels never cease.
Now I am neither servant nor master.
Leaving such ignoble work behind,
I'll go wandering through the land.

² Bennak (Wylie: *pan nag*; here spelled *ban nag*) is a Nyingma monastery of the Pelyul tradition in present-day Pema County, Golok, founded in 1824 (Jacoby, "Bennak"). The spelling *pan nag* also permits a pun meaning 'bad' or 'negative monk.' We have retained Bennak as a place-name in our translation while noting the wordplay here.

³ The crow's cry is written ཤིའུ (*a Shi'u*). The letter ཤ (Sha) is usually used in the transcription of Sanskrit words. Here it takes the sound of ཁ (kha), so ཤིའུ is read as 'A-Qiu'. This unusual spelling represents the crow's non-human cry, which we have rendered onomatopoeically.



At my singing, Gyalse demanded gruffly, ‘What are you on about? Go boil the tea!’ When I went back into the house, his anger had subsided, and he simply asked, ‘What kind of song were you just singing?’ I replied, ‘I sang this’.

Here in Benyak’s joyful grove,⁴
 The man who holds the fine steed—⁵
 His mood is fickle as the three summer⁶ months,
 Ever shifting between light and dark.

Though the turquoise dragon⁷ from the south
 Is wild and deft in all her arts,
 At times [even she] is powerless to act—

For when the driving wind of karma has spent its force,
 Whatever one may do,
 Karma alone will steer the course.

At that time, the local people too were extremely hostile toward me, calling me a demoness. For my part, I kept a humble, low profile and maintained strict secrecy while transcribing the profound treasure teachings.

⁴ Benyag (*pan yag*) deliberately alters the earlier spelling *pan nag*. *Pan yag* suggests ‘good or virtuous monk’. Repeating the song in Gyalse’s presence, Sera Khandro thus disguises her earlier criticism as praise. ‘Sorrow’s grove’ becomes ‘joyful grove’. Although we have not translated ‘good monk’ separately, this sense should be understood as part of the wordplay.

⁵ The horse imagery is a veiled reference to Gyalse, who was born in the horse year.

⁶ The text reads *sos gsum*, taken here as ‘the three summer months’ (from *sos ka*, the warm season). The metaphor of unsettled, ever-changing weather holds whether one reads spring or summer.

⁷ The ‘turquoise dragon’ (*gyu ’brug*) refers covertly to Sera Khandro herself, who was born in the dragon year.



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