

Song of the Vulture

BY SERA KANDRO



Tib Shelf



Published April 2026 by

TIB SHELF

www.tibshelf.org

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-
NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

ISSN 2754–1495

Song of the Vulture

By Sera Khandro

Translated by Tib Shelf



Song of the Vulture

BY SERA KHANDRO

*Seated on the roof of her house, one month after her mother's death, Sera Khandro sees a white vulture and recognises it as the soul-bird of the *ḍākinī*. The sight of it calls her mother to mind, and she sings.*

From the womb of the vast sky's expanse,
You, soul-bird of the karmically pure *ḍākinī*—
Settle your mind and listen to my words.

Where are you going, and from where do you come?
I am a motherless child, an orphan.
A month has passed since I lost my mother.
Not knowing where she has gone, my suffering is great.

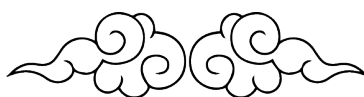
O mighty white vulture!
Have you seen where my mother has gone?
Do you know where she now abides?

I, a daughter without a kind mother,
Am like a blind person abandoned on a plain,
Wingless, as if fallen into the abyss.
Now, with thoughts like these, I long for my mother.

This body, these lovely faculties—my mother's kindness.
These ornaments and belongings—my mother's kindness.
This food, these enjoyments, this wealth—my mother's kindness.
My eloquent speech—my mother's kindness.
My harmony with everyone—my mother's kindness.
Knowing the six-syllable mantra—my mother's kindness.
Meeting lamas—my mother's kindness.

Such a mother, so great in kindness—
Please help me so that in this life, I may meet my dear companion again.
O white divine bird, hold me in your heart.

After the song, her brother Phuntsok Chöphel arrived and challenged her for singing in grief. She replied that it was not a happy song but the confused cry of a fledgling longing for its mother—not a human song, but a bird's. Her brother dismissed her, saying she sounded possessed. She sang in reply:



Listen, elder brother, Phuntsok Chöphel,
 The nature of my mind is beyond elaboration; it is free of delusion.
 Its unobstructed radiance displays itself in the manner of mother and child.
 Its indeterminate energy arises as joy, as sorrow—as anything at all.

My kind mother, like a rainbow in the sky,
 A magical display dissolved into the expanse.

I, the daughter, am just like a Mon cuckoo.¹
 When the gentle autumn breeze draws in, I seek my own path.

You father and son are like an unchanging swastika,²
 Fixed in one place, endowed with abundance.

The vulture, like a female bodhisattva,
 Has skilfully lured my grieving mind.³

This place is like a nest of poisonous snakes.
 Not for a single moment have I known happiness here.

The happy place is the peaceful mountainside of blissful seclusion.
 The happy path is the blissful, divine dharma, joyous and sublime.
 Now, without delay, I will go on the path of great bliss!

Her brother believed she was unstable and reported her behaviour to their father, who dismissed the concern, attributing it instead to her karma and independent nature rather than any spiritual harm. Refusing to conform or bring trouble to the family, Sera Khandro vowed she would not go to the headman but would instead wander freely according to her own path.

¹ The cuckoo (*khu byug*) migrates south to the warm lowlands of Mon as the seasons turn. In identifying herself as a “Mon cuckoo” who seeks her own path when the autumn breeze arises, Sera Khandro makes her intention clear: like the bird, she too will depart.

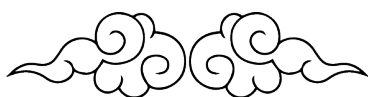
² *g.yung drung*, rendered here as “swastika,” is an ancient symbol of permanence and immutability in both Bön and Buddhist tradition, representing the unchanging, unoriginated nature of reality. Her father and brother, settled contentedly in worldly prosperity and unmoved by any impulse toward renunciation, stand as figures of worldly permanence—precisely what the lines that follow demonstrate her leaving behind.

³ *brid* carries a sense of strategic concealment: the one being led is not fully aware of where they are being taken, or by what means. More neutral alternatives such as “drawn” or “guided” would lose this, so we render it as “lured.” The framework within which this concealment operates, however, is that of *thabs* (skilful means, Skt. *upāya*)—the method by which bodhisattvas meet beings within their own experience and lead them gradually toward liberation.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

Kunzang Dekyong Wangmo (kun bzang bde skyong dbang mo). *Dbus mo bde ba'i rdo rje'i rnam thar*. In *Gsung 'bum*, vol. 1 (pod dang po), pp. 95–96. BDRC W1PD108254.



Tib Shelf
ཀོ་ལོ་ཤེལ་