

# Five Aphoristic Couplets

*from* Experiential Songs of a Carefree Man of Courage

BY NYAGLA PEMA DUDUL



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By Nyagla Pema Dudul

Translated Dr. Joseph McClellan



FIVE APHORISTIC COUPLETS:  
*from*  
Experiential Songs of a Carefree Man of Courage

By Nyagla Pema Dudul

1. Just as the mind of the splenetic serpent knows nothing of freedom,  
consciousness stuffed with pride finds no opportunity for liberation.
2. Just as the sun never shines into a north-facing cave,  
pure perception has no chance to dawn where mistaken cognitions reign.<sup>1</sup>
3. The bee of meditation will not come away with the honey,  
for the frost of distraction has blighted the flowers of study and reflection.
4. If your study and reflection do not liberate your mindstream,  
no matter how immense your knowledge, you'll become a rudra.<sup>2</sup>
5. If erudition in the words of study and contemplation sufficed for awakening,  
then why didn't this work for those unrivaled rivals, Devadatta and Sunakṣatra?<sup>3</sup>

Those who are puffed up by their profuse knowledge of scholastic verbiage<sup>4</sup>  
should keep these five aphoristic couplets in mind.  
They contain a vital point of instruction.

*These were the Lhangdrakpa's instructions for himself.*

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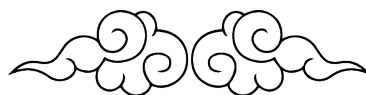
<sup>1</sup> This line loosely renders what would be, more literally, "In those with wrong cognition/understanding." The implication is that the pure perception of reality's primordial purity is thwarted by mistaken cognitions assuming appearances are good or bad.

<sup>2</sup> The text says rūdra, though the common form is rudra. Khenpo Namdrol explains the sense of rudra relevant here:

The third type of rudra is essentially negative, and is a tangible being, reborn in a malignant form as a result of broken tantric commitments in previous lives. Such a rudra is usually accompanied by a retinue of other malignant beings, and as a group their main activity is to cause obstacles to the propagation of the teachings of the secret mantrayana. (Khenpo Namdrol, *The Practice of Vajrakīlaya*, 32).

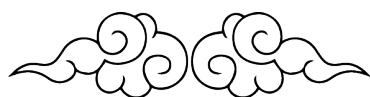
<sup>3</sup> This line is rendered loosely for naturalness in English. It reads, more literally, "[Then] look at those unrivaled rivals...." Devadatta was the Buddha's cousin who was extremely learned but remained mired throughout his life in his jealousy, hostility, and egoism, which led him into calumny and disgrace. Sunakṣatra was another of the Buddha's cousins who served him as an attendant for decades and learned all his teachings by heart. However, he was never able to overcome his wrong views and was reborn as a preta.

<sup>4</sup> "Scholastic verbiage" here translates thos bsam tshig, the same phrase that was translated above as "the words of study and contemplation." Where Tibetan generally relishes repeating phrases in different contexts to inspire the reader to interpretively engage, English invites translators and readers to take advantage of its rich synonymics. In the previous instance of the phrase, the emphasis was on how the words that structure religious education are not enough to bring liberation, and how they can become obstacles when focused on too much. In this second instance, the emphasis is on those who have gone wrong in overemphasizing words, so the pejorative English "scholastic verbiage" is appropriate.



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