

HOMMAGE TO THE DHARMA

The towering Golden Hill of the mind, the stupa of enlightenment, was built from stones, an ornament of precious words, through ancient prayer.

A POEM OF HOMAGE TO YANGCHEN LHAMO

*Like the rising of the white lantern of the moon,
In the depths of night, enfolding the world,
Heavenly Lady, perfect in every way,
Please remain forever in my heart!*

*As new shoots are generated, in the future
The branch of desire will bloom in the glory of youth.
As you fill the world with the scent of flowers,
Please purify the cloudless sky of mind!*

*The melody of the beryllium zither, so lovely and tender,
Expresses the words which flow from my heart.
Always mindful of the Dharma 's golden calm,
Please grant me what I need!*

*With the seas of a hundred thousand confluences,
From the undulating song of heavenly melody,
When we receive it, our thirsty minds are quenched.
May the best of sacred waters flow magically forever!*

*Crossing the borderless world in the mind,
Its pleasant form gives pleasure to pure eyes.
Roaming through different times, in far away lands,
May I travel with the strength of infinite mind!*

*Shining like the full moon, perfect in upright purity,
You move like a lotus in the heart.
Such riches, like the pool of the immeasurable world,
Please grant the body, speech and wisdom of Yangchenlhamo!*

THIS IS HOW THE STORY GOES....

A stone from Golden Hill stood in the place of honor at the rear of the ger. My ancestors had in fact been worshipping it for five generations. This stone from Golden Hill rose amid the mighty flames, which promised eternal peace, the light of the world had dominion over the interplay of shadows, called upon a moment of time from a thousand years ago.

As my family wove their gilded stories about how Golden Hill had at a particular moment come into being, my ancestors were happily looking down upon us.

In the entire world, although regular and insignificant things are not given so much attention, it seems to be the custom to make a big deal of unusual size. We could

say that the body of Golden Hill was the broad expanse where the hill meets the plain, the high mountainous peaks, the fertile southern slopes, but all in miniature. Golden Hill is the world on a reduced scale.

And, on reflection, is it not a long and arduous journey for the mind to view the construction of the primary mountain from stones as to view the construction of just one world from a single mountain?

At the heart of this stone, then, dwelt the most utterly precious features of my homeland. Was not to hear the heartbeat of that secret magic to comprehend the language of the land and water?

When will we get there? Will the flame of my ancestors' wisdom not illuminate us as we discuss the landscape? I shall light the flame and receive illumination!

I light the flame - my towering Golden Hill is revealed.

I light the flame - the flickering distant path is revealed.

I light the flame - the years, obscured by mist, are revealed.

I light the flame - the unobscured mind is revealed.

I light the flame - the heart, previously forgotten, is revealed.

I light the flame - the children, who mock what we hold dear, are revealed.

I light the flame - the instruction spoken by the wise is revealed.

I light the flame - the form of the peaceful Buddhas is revealed.

I was young. I set out for the years, following the distant path, the lining of ideas revealed in the cloak that was the stone from Golden Hill. The years flew by and, though they flew by, I summoned up my youth, the lining of solid thought focussed upon escaping from the eternal cycle. I was young.

"Get up, son!" My father's melodious voice woke me from my reverie. In the paradise of inescapable and vivid dreams, I found amidst these nighttime dreams the form of the mountain, the golden stupa reaching to the skies. And as I saw and moved up the lofty mountain, my father would wake me on the high pass. I would close my eyes to bring the mountain, the golden stupa, back to me and listen to my mother's song in my ears:

"Get up, son! You're going - dad's saddling the horse."

Mother's kind and direct language completely drew aside the rosy world of sleep. I had awoken so gently that there still remained the form of the golden stupa, and as the outer world appeared, I stopped seeing in my mind the mountain, the golden stupa on the other side of the sky, emanating red rays. But all that I had seen had been imprinted upon my mind so that I would never forget it. Mother had revealed to me what I had perceived in my imagination. My mind had been introduced to the paradise of which mother spoke in her stories. I understood everything in its own fashion. My horse's saddle had stiffened up, but in a moment his stirrups were rattling, his hooves were shining, blazing as we readied him for the long journey, in flight with the larks who sang the morning.

The first rays of sunlight wove themselves with the light of my mind and arranged themselves in slanting rows.

I spoke to my parents, as they were filling the cups with clotted cream, about how the golden mountain, as high as the sky, had appeared in my dream. They looked at me fondly, their eyes like stars of pure joy. My father said,

"Gracious Golden Hill came into my son's dream!" He brought his hands together at his heart in prayer. I smiled. For the first time in my dreams I had made out Golden Hill, in the far distance.

I had seen it in the distance of my dreams, the golden stupa of Golden Hill had appeared to me, as high as the sky.

I was unaware that there was an unusual light, a morning light, in the world. It was simply that the mind of the noble ones shone and that the landscape was made thereby exquisite. The rays of the sun shone upon the small winged birds and an exultation of larks sung the praises of the morning's splendor. The brightness shimmered on the ropes which tethered the cows, pied magpies flocked together in the feathergrass and shrubs in the eastern part of the city and the droppings of sheep and horses was scattered in piles. As I left on my journey, I watched the passing files of horses away to the east and you could say that I was entranced by how the voices in the skies agitated the tethered horses, how their lovely distant whinnying was like a melody from far away, the voices in the skies being broad and wide, and how the birds whirled in circles in the boundless blue.

With some urgency now, my father said,

"Get up, son!" And so Dad set off with his elder son on a long journey. This man, who was from nowhere, spoke with feeling to me, that we should travel everywhere. The sunrays rippled on the coats of the two powerful chestnuts as they trotted off, their four ears bouncing like the clappers of a bell. When we were beyond the low mountain-pass, Dad said,

"Look round, son". Looking round, I saw my mother making milk offerings outside the ger. Mother had invited the dense yellow morning light to my village; there she stood in her deep blue deel, its edges splashed with milk. The dark smoke from the chimney barely moved in the sky. I hitched myself upon the atmosphere of the ger, the flaking cones of dried dung tapering like hats, the cowshit piled up this side of the tethering rope, the sheep and goats standing, stretching themselves, the shrubs and the feathergrass - all these things remained, in their usual configuration, it was as though they were bound to me, as though there was a string unravelling from the ger into my hand.

Gently, gently we moved out over four low-lying hills, and reached Khamaat, a mountain which we could make out to the west of the mountains. There was a tinge of blue smoke there and, on the high ground, the wind blew at a small flag in the early light. Our eight eyes were filled by the four directions, our gaze was exhausted and as we looked further our tears flowed.

"This is my son's Golden Hill", said father, stretching his hands out as though he was offering a khatag and indicating the vast blue mountain, which was like a flame of fire rising up in the middle of the plain. Golden Hill, in my father's hands, blue in the morning mists. To my mind, it appeared warm and lovely, like the soft outline at the base of a blue flame, smaller than the golden mountain which I had seen in my dream the previous night. I couldn't really understand how I was physically to express my love for Golden Hill, whose peaceful form my mind perceived as my own body. How, in the eternity of my soul, and at so young an age, could I consider taking upon myself in the centuries to come both the activities of the mountain's physical form and its internal and invisible power, this little banner placed upon my heart?

Seeing the blue outline of Golden Hill in the distance, it appeared to be spreading upwards like an ignited flame. It came into view as we rode on, but we were tired, how much further was it to the mountain? The wind gusted chill as we rode upwards. Resting or moving, we craved respite from the burning heat which surrounded us, it was as though the sun were tethered in the sky. But we moved on and the mountain remained where it was. From the high land, our mountain

appeared to be ignited like a blue flame; as we grew closer, it occurred to me that my father and I were standing on the peak of Golden Hill. From the distance of my dream, it had seemed to be as high as the sky, and its form had appeared as a blossom when I had actually seen it in the distance; but, now that I had come to it, my Golden Hill was a regular, brown-grey mountain. The horses shook themselves and father was happy as he recited blessings.

"Shiliin Bogd...the White Hill of Gangi, Dösh...Ganga Nuur, Bayan Duulan...the Tufted Sands...Paradise...Duut Nuur, Lung Khaikhan...Kharaat...the Trio...the Khörög Tableland...". And so he named everything which appeared to his eyes, the mountains and the waters of the landscape, and he said,

"From here, my Golden Hill looks down, over the wide landscape of our homeland. Throughout the wide expanses of the world, I feel that there is nothing like this most precious mountain."

Father intoned the names of mountains and water, and the forty-first was Golden Hill. Our eyes and our hearts grew used to the mountains which surrounded us there and, from in the blue distant haze, they shone brighter. Father raised his eyes and, looking at me gravely, asked:

"From the thousands of mountains and waters which I have named, which do you feel is your own?" I couldn't answer. None of them appeared to be my own. Father continued:

"The fire in your father's eyes is dying, he can't look at things which are far away. But from Golden Hill, he can see things which are far away. Beyond our numerous mountains and waters there are innumerable stories. From the summit of our life there appear many things beyond this world, just as many things appear to us from the peak of this mountain! Beyond the mountains and waters which come into being as you look out, there are great things to be perceived at the very edges of your heart. And beyond the years and years to come there will surely be tales and stories and songs to be sung and words to be spoken. I have yet to go out into these distant mountains...".

Father did not stay looking into the far blue distance. He wrinkled his brow, he moved on, crossing the frontier of years, near and far he travelled, into the past and into our yesterdays, looking upon what a single body and mind might contain, and the hem of his deel flapped in the wind and brushed against my face.

When the stars came out, father and I sat down on the grass near the Dagshin spring and enjoyed tea by the fire we had built upon three stones. But, on the other side of the fire, my Golden Hill rose up where there was nothing more, flaming like a living jewel. Right above Golden Hill, the Big Dipper spread in an arc like a golden spoon and in the sky were countless stars, in a dancing glimmer as though milk had been scattered by a thurible. Desire looped back on itself, it carried away my childlike thoughts, transported them into the manifold space of fantasy.

I was wandering, drunk in this world of fantasy, my wishes shining like stars, when father said,

"It's the protector of Golden Hill. Our ovoo is connected with you. They say that he is bound by oath, if I can show him respect, then he will follow. Golden Hill will follow my son wherever he goes...".

Father's talk ranged far and wide, as though he were right beside me one moment and far away the next. And as he talked, I tried to identify what it was which bound me to Golden Hill....

My body felt the flashes of heat from the fire and my eyes grew heavy. Far away, and maybe on the other side of the story, the horses were neighing, and their nearby

song seeped gradually like a spring from the slopes of Golden Hill. It seemed to me that the horses' legs were all licked by fire, that their manes and fringes swayed loosely like decorative golden tassels, that they were somehow imperceptible. Impatient, I jerked around.

"The horses are neighing, the horses of Golden Hill!" I spoke loudly, but father gently asked,

"How do the horses seem to you?" How did father feel the imperceptible nature of the horses? This was clearly the implication of his question. But while I was unable to form the image of the eternal horses in my mind, he said,

"My son, however the horses appear in your mind is fine." As though he had said to me, "Let's go", the vague image of a grey horse appeared in my mind, light as a feather and seemingly created from cloud, unbridled it was and almost flying.

"I can see a grey horse in my mind", I said happily. My father said,

"That's the horse of Golden Hill!"

In this way Golden Hill took its place in my mind and remained there always. On Golden Hill, turning through the distance of landscape and the length of the waters, everything grew indistinct. We heard the horses' hooves in the ancient stories, the souls of the old ones who were sleeping upon the land had come from the heavenly state of the Buddhas. And the tale was told, how from the farthest distance, something came to me, unseen, like the flowing of water. The power of stories and of history slowly slowly woke me from my sleep.

time comes flying by
time goes flying by

My Golden Hill was always present to me and, in the thirty years which have already flown by, it has come back to me several times. My father showed me the way through the world and now destiny has placed my dull and uneducated body cross-legged upon a cushion in the place of honor at the rear of the ger.

Just like my father thirty years earlier, there I was, and my son was climbing on the stone.

Watching my father from Golden Hill, from the distance of years, the roots of the grasses on the steppes, the tales of long ago, the stirring universe of stories, like a dream my childhood passed by. I stood there thinking about the two old people who could not cope with their large family, wondering how to probe the depths of their kindness.

How to get the measure of my father? He wasn't over there, but still I kept coming up against his glance, knocking against my son's questions.

Our thoughts are of the eternal skies, of what traces they leave, whether they encompass each thing without exception, all things explicit within implicit boundaries, turning insideout and so revealing blue.

What in fact is the difference in this world between the animate and inanimate, where is the boundary between past and present? This mystery has taken hold of me, whether a human might come to understand such things.

Why is it that each idea and every reason are as if threaded together, just as the rivers of the world join together the countries of the world by flowing through them?

And when we discuss within ourselves when it might be that lackluster humanity might join together the extremes of time which are like the ends of this thread, we feel inwardly that all these ideas, which are all so alike, are in fact all totally dissimilar!

But what should I say to my son? I am exhausted by my amazement at the world. I miss my father, who took care of all my questions without fail. Is not a man weak without his father?

time comes flying by
time goes flying by

I give honor to Golden Hill. "Father, please dwell eternally in the reflection of my heart, in the mirror of my thoughts, in the precious Golden Hill of my homeland!"

I stood there, praying like this in my heart. Closing my eyes, an orange glow behind my eyelids lit up my thoughts and gazed in my mind upon the many tracks through the years. And for me you are missing, please don't stand in my way! I shall look and look, on the highground of my heart, and oh, never will my father fail to come!

time comes flying by
time goes flying by

I call to mind something mother said to me, it was soon after I had begun to walk, father had gone on a journey, as part of a caravan. The bell above the doorjamb had frozen and could barely ring. I looked towards the northwest, it seemed there was something there. Mother looked but said she could make nothing out. I pointed - "Over there" - and mother looked, movement over the stiff pasture grass. We struggled to see what it might be, still there was nothing. To the eyes of my young mind, something did in fact appear, I didn't know what it was that I had heard, as I ran I imagined music in the ringing bells ringing upon my shoes, the force of my words resounding across my homeland.

But I screamed from the depths of my misery, and mother lifted me up. "Dad's coming, my love, he's further up the pass. You're so silly, you children," she added with a smile. I really hope I can remember this episode from my childhood!

time comes flying by
time goes flying by

Buddha, the one desire of my life upon which I cannot renege, pushes me as I head out over the landscape of my thoughts. Buddha has no physical form, but the mind does not turn back upon itself, it crosses over the next pass, "this one this one". The more I think about it, little by little the hazy dust of time vanishes, it is as if the skies over there are clearing. Father, as I get deeper and deeper into the very center of my thoughts, may I see your brightness!

The symbol comes to life. My father has found eternity, is coming to my son! Like in the dull light of daybreak drinking tea, like the moon gradually increasing in size, his shining body has come to life before me.

There were things which set my father apart from the sullen old men of my country. He would put his grey hat on top of our crumbling brazier, pull his loose deel firmly together with a belt, and place his snuff-bottle inside. The short skirt of his deel, of a faded dark blue silk and the pictures worked upon his boots had almost been worn away by the stirrup leathers. His scratchy, upturned moustache, which he was always fiddling with, blew in the wind like the wormwood on Golden Hill. But from beneath his wide forehead, where wrinkles flowed like waterdroplets, my father's

eyes would stare right through me, as striking as the stars of heaven. And now my body was caught in my father's glance.

"Oh father, are you tired from your long journey?" It was my heart which asked this, my mouth not yet ready to open, I was not yet ready to welcome him, I was not yet ready to go to him, it was only my heart came to speak to him.

Although my father's form appeared only a few steps away, we were separated by the wall of years. Amazed, stunned at the insubstance of body and mind, from beyond infinity my father's song spoke to me, he said,

"My son thinks of his father through a thousand days, dreams of him through a thousand nights, and his song affords him entry onto Golden Hill. Welcome, my son...".

But I was not yet ready to speak. There was a knot in my throat, my mouth held its peace. From beyond infinity my father's voice spoke to me, he said,

"Your father has told his son everything there is to tell. Nothing now remains for him to explain. What I have known is insignificant. Other people know what your father does not know. All that is human is a single volume sutra. All that we know, everything we have heard and seen, is written in the sutra of the mind. My son, please recite from your own sutra! Father will listen. In the future, will you be able to look upon and cherish my homeland?" And he was gone in a moment, and it was sacred. Speak, speak, my son, speak of everything you know! Father will listen....

I was scared. What was he saying? Inside I was utterly empty! My ancestors had taken everything, what had been left...? If we think about the people in the time of utter darkness, how can we possibly imagine how to free ourselves from the rejection of spiritual truth? This is just what had happened to me. When had I ever thought about how I had reached here, because of what I had seen and heard, both in the stories which my own ancestors had at one time created, and in the landscape which we protected and held so dear?

And now I feel that I can give an answer, both to my father in the past and to my son in the future. But I don't know where to begin. I don't even know where it will end. Face to face with myself, I'm looking at my father's face, and it is not clear. I see my father standing in front of me, but this time father says nothing to me.

At this moment, above the banner official of understanding, in the two hands of my father appeared the Golden Sutra in a light red cover, preserved by smoke. I'm not sure in fact why father called this book Golden Sutra. It didn't have golden lettering, but was written in ink with a writing-brush by one of the ancients. This Golden Sutra is of great significance. I was not yet ready to stretch my hands out to take it. My father had sung this sutra to me several times. So are the words clear to you, verse after verse, folio after folio, all of them in the same precious color of yellow beryllium? As I sow the eight chapters, chance may at any time obscure the seeds. The eight sections of the book are sown in the soil of thought. May its thousand meanings shine!

The suffering mind and the returning soul both die into the infinite eternity of years. My people rise up and leave, a solitary bird flaps its wings, feathery like the brush of cropped hair. Which of these, circling on the earth or in the sky, is mind and soul, the bird or the desire?

And father's presence was absent.

...the path of thought is vague,

the ways of books are clear...

...the lights in the canopy of heaven were human stars. Travelling in a pyramid, they journeyed through space and landed on an unknown mountain. At that time, there was total darkness. Light came from the pyramids and it could be seen that there was no water flowing nor grass growing, that in fact everything was empty. The human stars went searching for whatever they could find, but they could find nothing and returned by the light of the pyramid on the mountain peak. But, for no apparent reason, they went off again and as they roamed about they discovered a path through the world...

*...the ways of books are vague,
the path of thought is clear...*