



Tantra

Vol. III

The Path of Awakening

Pema Gitama

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Pema Gitama

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*To my Masters past, present and future,
To all the Ancestors,
To the Kaula Heart of all,
To Sahido and Arjun,
And to you reading this book...*

With love and gratitude,

Pema



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*“Mystery is not a word or a concept
to put upon something we can’t explain.*

It is a space.

*For the ones ready to enter it,
all the secrets of existence are revealed...”*

Momo-La

What is Reality?

Is there a way to answer this question?
Well, yes, but there is a price to pay for the answer:
to give up totally, utterly and unconditionally the ego!
Expensive. isn’t it!?
Who is willing to pay this price?
Very few actually...

Unless you come to realise the suffering the ego generates in you and others, there is no reason to give it up. It takes great courage to acknowledge your inner suffering and to walk out of it. At first, it is not such a pretty scene, and then to step out of it seems impossible to achieve. Yet it is not impossible! Many have done it, so why not you? Many Tantric Masters have done so and have offered powerful understandings and methods to liberate us from our ego. Now, this liberation does not happen magically. It needs practice and discipline.

In this book, which is the follow-up to *Tantra, The Hidden Mysteries*, I share a story of an encounter with a Tantric lineage that has developed very specific practices. In this lineage, the ego is constantly shattered through various meditation and healing methods. The approach is radical! There is no beating around the bush. It is direct and to the point. The ego is not viewed as an enemy or entity to be fought, but instead more as a limitation which is to be overcome. The ego is a barrier, a filter, standing between the perception and experience of reality: it is like having a blindfold and dreaming of reality instead of seeing it directly with your own eyes. You believe the dream to be true. You indulge in it and, of course, suffer within it, with great pleasure and pain. The suffering is the distance, the separation that stands between you and reality. You and me, you and the tree, you and the beloved... you and always something, someone, impossible to fully meet. This sense of separation called the ego, is exposed and demolished or maybe simply offered to the Path of Tantra shared in this book.

Before you embark on this book-journey, it is important that you understand the writing style that I use. It belongs to the ancient Tantric scriptures, where inner and outer are never separated. For example, if you read: *Pema is sitting, and the Moon is rising*. This can be understood in a down-to-earth way as an outer experience. But it

can also be understood that the Moon is rising inside Pema, which then refers to a spiritual experience. It can also simultaneously refer to both experiences. This writing style is not to confuse and create mystery or enigma but to provoke the remembrance of your 'Buddha nature' and to illustrate and explain, various inner experiences that occur on the Path of Tantra. You have a choice in how you read the story. It depends on how open you are to receive it. You can choose to take it as a nice spiritual fairy tale and then you will have a good trip, a good dream and actually nourish your ego with this story. You are free, my friend! You can also choose to read this book as a spiritual inner journey supporting you to find your sword of awareness and cut your head off with it! Up to you! My intention while writing this book has been to seduce the reader to step onto the Path of Tantra and to enquire into the true nature of reality. How to meet reality, how to bow down and let go of our limitations, beliefs, conditionings, fears and ultimately our ego, at the feet of the inner and outer Master.

In the story you are about to read, I have intentionally added a capital letter to Earth, Water, Fire, Air, Moon, Sun and sometimes Sky. It is for you to relate with them as conscious beings. In this way, you can hopefully relate to all of them on a deeper level.

The first part of the story recounts meetings with the Masters of a special Tantra lineage. The second part of the book is a compilation of various methods which are practised by the characters in the story. They are beautifully illustrated by the artwork of Tashi Manno. The third part is a silent journey, illustrated with breathtaking photographs of Arjun Roodink. The fourth part is hidden in an envelope on the inside cover at the end of the book. It contains some beautiful surprises from various artists.

I wish this content can touch your heart and awaken the longing to wake up from your dream into reality!

I bow down with love and gratitude to your inner flame,

Pema







The Puma

Chapter 1

I am still wondering where the Other Sky is. I have observed the sky burial so many times, and I still don't know where the King Vulture takes the hearts," Sonam says to the Lama as they are eating.

"Do you really want to know?" questions the Lama.

"Yes, of course," Sonam replies sincerely, not expecting the consequences of his answer.

"Fine!" exclaims the Lama, looking out at the luminous sky.

"There is a Puma out there waiting to be eaten by you. You must go and find him!" he says, staring through the window as if he can actually see the Puma.

Sonam is speechless. He doesn't question the Lama because he can see he really means what he just said. Sonam stands up, bows to the Lama and leaves the room with his heart beating fast and his eyes full of tears.

Once outside, he runs from the monastery to his little hiding place near the fresh stream. He sits between the two giant rocks, close to the path that leads to Pema's favourite mountain. He can only cry. Many thoughts run through his mind. The Lama's proposal makes no sense. What does killing a Puma have to do with the Other Sky? The Lama's command seems so cruel and impossible to fulfil. He stays there until the stars appear, sparkling their eternal wisdom on mankind. He feels their words softening him. "It is just a play..." he hears emanating from the sky. That makes him smile. He finally decides to go back to his room in the monastery. Sitting on his bed, he looks down at his hands. "Could these hands kill?" he wonders. He closes his eyes and feels deeply into his hands, his body. He senses only fear. "It is because of fear that I don't kill, that I don't eat animals..." he thinks to himself. In this moment, he knows he will have to find this Puma because only then can he face his fear and hopefully let go of it. He can sense that this fear has been there for a long time and is paralysing him on some level. How can one truly taste love if one

is afraid? It takes him no time to organise his trip to the mountain in search of the Puma. He decides not to take any food. “My hunger will force me to find food,” he says to himself. Before leaving the monastery, he goes to the monk in charge of sky burials, the practice of cutting the corpses into pieces and feeding their limbs to the vultures. He asks the monk for a good knife. The monk is a bit surprised.

“What do you need it for?” he asks.

“I want to kill a Puma,” Sonam answers sincerely.

“Then I shall give you my most precious knife, the one I use to remove the heart from the bodies of the dead. Take good care of the Puma and of yourself so that nobody dies, but everyone is reborn through the knife,” says the monk solemnly, as he hands the knife to Sonam.

Sonam bows down and silently leaves. The Sun’s light is gently tickling the stars, which vanish into the vastness of the shy blue sky. Sonam’s footsteps are firm and determined. He walks the path to Pema’s cherished mountain peak, guessing that the Puma must roam around there. After an hour, he stops at the little cave where he and Pema used to come at night to sing and observe the stars and eventually sleep if their singing would stop before sunrise. It feels good to be in this place.

He speaks silently to the Lama: “I will fulfil your request. Please show me the strength to face the Puma, to ask for his body to nourish mine and to ask his spirit to enlighten me with his courage...” He repeats this prayer several times. He knows the Lama is listening from afar and can feel his heart smiling at him. From the smile come some gentle words: “Go to the yak mother. She will offer you what you need.” Though the words are enigmatic, he trusts what he hears. Although the Lama often seems to speak in riddles, in the end, his words always make sense. This Sonam has learnt.

“Yak mother!” he shouts, standing outside the cave. “Where are you?”

In reply, he hears the scream of a baby yak, and to his surprise, he can’t hold back his laughter and thinks: “This is too easy!”

From deep inside the cave comes the echo of his laughter, as if the Lama is laughing back at him and saying: “Everything is easy if you surrender.”

Sonam scours the landscape in front of him, all eyes and ears. To find a Puma, you need a Puma, so that is what he will become! A Puma hungry for a baby yak! He moves slowly, carefully. He has no idea where to go. He follows the Puma within him. No interference, no judgment, only his intuition guiding him. Sonam the Puma roams around the whole day, stopping occasionally to rest or drink fresh water from a stream. How delightful to be a Puma! What a free life!

Near the end of the day, before the Sun summons back the stars to shine their

ancestral light on the Land of Snow, Sonam the Puma spots a baby yak alone. While Sonam the human wonders if he is hallucinating, Sonam the Puma is already crawling silently closer to the baby yak, itching to feel the tender meat between his teeth. The baby yak seems totally lost and is calling in despair for his mother. He must have lost his way and can’t find his herd any more. Sonam the human is touched and would like to rescue him, but Sonam the Puma sees only a gift from Mother Nature to feed his belly. He comes closer and closer. The baby yak is in such deep despair that he can’t smell the danger approaching him from behind. As Sonam the Puma is about to pounce, Sonam the human remembers it is the mother yak he is looking for, not the baby. He calms the Puma in him and patiently waits. Before long, the mother yak appears from nowhere and walks slowly towards her little one. Just at this moment, from behind a big rock no more than a meter from the baby yak, a Puma leaps. Sonam is so astonished he stops breathing, his mouth falls open, and his eyes widen as big as the full Moon. The whole scene is so improbable that Sonam rubs his eyes to be sure he is really awake and that what he is witnessing before him is happening. Everything happens all at once: the Puma (the real one!) grabs onto one calf of the baby yak, who falls to the ground in total terror. Simultaneously, the mother yak runs towards them and kicks the Puma’s head with her rear hooves. The blow is so violent and precise that the Puma lets go of his prey and flies backwards, landing heavily on the rock from where he appeared. While he is lying there, the baby yak gets back on his feet and runs far and fast with his mother. Everything falls silent. All that remains is a rock with a Puma slumped on it, blood flowing from his head like an offering onto the grey rock. Sonam the human doesn’t know whether to laugh or cry. His whole body is trembling in pain, in joy, in an unknown energy that feels like water and fire merging together. He stands up, though his legs have difficulty holding him. Sonam the Puma, however, is full of strength and, without hesitation, walks toward the rock where the Puma is lying motionless. He comes close, sniffs, and licks the wound on the Puma’s head. Sonam the human cries; the blood tastes like a mother’s milk imbued with courage and vivacity. His tears flow onto the Puma’s head and mix with the warm blood. Sonam the human bows down, as does Sonam the Puma. With their hands and paws, they lay the Puma on the ground and caress him. Sonam the human sings, Sonam the Puma dances. The stars rain their light on them. The night, the rock, the mountains, and some invisible spirits of nature join in the celebration in a mysterious silence.

“She must have been looking for food for her babies,” says Tashi, the monk of the sky burial, inspecting the Puma that Sonam is holding lovingly in his arms.

“It is a female, you see,” he says, pointing to her teats still full of milk.

Sonam is speechless but full of light. His eyes shine like stars that he seems to have stolen from the night sky.

“What you want me to do, Sonam?” asks Tashi in a whisper.

“The same work you do for a human; you must do for her,” says Sonam softly.

“We have to wait for daytime for the vultures to come. The Sun is almost up. Can you wait?” asks Tashi respectfully.

“I will wait for you at the burial place,” answers Sonam with a smile of satisfaction.

He leaves as silently as a Puma. Tashi bows and rushes to the Lama’s room. The Lama has not slept or eaten since Sonam left. He has stayed sitting in a kind of trance connected to Sonam. Tashi enters the room carefully and approaches the Lama. He gently touches his hands to bring him back. The Lama responds with a deep out-breath and opens his eyes to Tashi’s sweet, smiling face.

“The Mother Puma and her son are here,” says Tashi.

“Hmmm, what a blessing... Let him drink her milk and eat her heart. I will take care of the skin. Thank you, Tashi. You protected him well,” says the Lama.

“I think he protected himself. I didn’t expect he would pass the Initiation so fast or so easily,” replies Tashi.

“The Mother in him is stronger than all his fears. Now, he can go through the Fire without being burnt. His journey to the Other Sky has started!” says the Lama, with happiness in his voice.

Tashi smiles. He feels proud of his little Sonam. He has been taking care of him since he came to the monastery one night to learn Jhator, the sky burial. He was only about ten years old, and Tashi refused to teach him. “You are too young for that. It is not such a pleasant sight handling corpses, opening them up...” said Tashi lovingly to this little boy.

“But you see, my parents died. So I want to offer them a flight to the Other Sky. I want them to go high,” he said with a clear, sharp voice.

Tashi could hardly believe him and asked: “What are you saying? Your parents died? Where are they? Where did you come from?”

“Come with me!” insisted Sonam, taking Tashi by the hand.

It was a dark night with no Moon, but Sonam had no trouble finding his way to the place. It was as if he had cat’s eyes.

“You are a real little Puma!” Tashi laughed as he tried to follow his nimble footsteps in the dark.

They walked for an hour. Tashi was surprised that they were not walking down to the village but up toward the mountains. To his knowledge, only hermits lived up there. They arrived at a little shelter hidden partly by rocks. One part was a cave, and the other was built from rocks. This was an old shelter that had been used by a famous lama from the monastery. It had lain empty since the lama passed away, as he had ordered that no one should live here after him. “Let it be the shelter for the roaming Pumas,” he said before leaving his body.

A butter lamp was shining its light on two bodies: one of a man and one of a woman. They must have been around fifty years old.

“They are Weavers!” Tashi exclaimed respectfully as he entered with Sonam.

“We had a long pilgrimage before we got here a week ago,” said Sonam as he sat next to his parents. “They were already sick before we arrived, and it got worse. They told me not to worry, that they were learning to fly into the Other Sky. And they did. They left for the Other Sky,” Sonam concludes with profound silence.

“I can perform the sky burial tomorrow morning at sunrise. Stay here, I will come back with my knives. Pray for them,” instructed Tashi before leaving with tears in his eyes. He usually didn’t cry for the dead; he had seen so many, opened so many of them, and given their flesh and organs to the vultures. He knew that the Spirit was vaster than the body and always survived the death of the body. It keeps travelling. But that night, something had touched him deeply, as if it were his parents lying there. And yet he had never known his parents. He was an orphan who had been rescued by the head lama of the monastery, the very same lama who once lived and died in this cave.

Tashi came back as promised in the early morning. The Sun was about to emerge from the mountain peaks, careful not to melt their eternal snow. He found Sonam singing a song from an unknown language. Tashi waited for the song to finish before entering the cave.

“Let’s perform the burial,” he said in a peaceful voice.

With some difficulty, they carried the bodies a short distance from the shelter. They placed them so as to be open to the sky. Tashi went back to the cave and searched for a particular rock. He returned with it and pulled two knives out of the large sleeves of his chuba. He and Sonam undressed the two bodies, then Tashi asked Sonam to watch carefully and sing if he felt like it. “Sing to them, to the vultures, to the Other Sky,” he said while making an incision in a special place in the father’s body. From there, he extracted a nerve and pulled on it. Immediately, the skin opened all the way down to the belly. He took out the heart and raised it to the sky. He remained in this posture for some time. Sonam started singing. He looked up at the sky and prayed for his father’s spirit to fly, be free, and merge with the sky. Very soon, some vultures

appeared, attracted by his song. They stayed at a distance from the dead body. Tashi turned to them.

“Who among you is the King Vulture?” he shouted to the birds, his hand holding the heart aloft to the sky.

A massive vulture took a step toward him. He and Tashi seemed to conduct a silent discussion for a while before Tashi handed him the heart. The King Vulture took it and flew off. Sonam and Tashi looked at him silently. Sonam smiled and whispered a sweet, prayerful song. The other vultures kept quiet. It seemed they all knew Tashi and the steps of the burial ritual. They just waited their turn for the holy food. By and by, Tashi threw them the various organs. Once it was empty, he picked up the unique rock and broke open the skull. The King Vulture, who had come back in the meantime, started calmly eating the brain out of the skull, as well as the eyes and tongue. Eventually, he flew over to a nearby rock, whereupon all the other vultures jumped on the dead body. It was as if he gave them permission to eat. Tashi pushed Sonam away. “They don’t know you. They might hurt you, sit here with me,” he said with authority. They sat down at some distance away from the vultures’ feast.

“They are the cleaners; the King Vulture is the healer. We have to let them do their work without interfering,” explained Tashi.

Sonam watched the scene intently before asking with some curiosity: “How come they don’t jump on my mother’s body?”

“Because they know the ritual and respect the steps, but most of all, they know me. They listen to me. I am speaking to them right now. Don’t you hear?” he asked Sonam, who wasn’t surprised by such a conversation.

“No, I don’t know the language of the vultures,” he said very innocently, making Tashi laugh.

“Bright boy, you don’t need to know the language of the vultures to speak to them. The language of the heart suffices,” he said, placing his hand on Sonam’s shoulder.

“My heart is listening to my father right now, so it is a bit difficult to listen to the vultures simultaneously,” said Sonam, closing his eyes to listen more carefully.

Tashi was already busy with Sonam’s mother when Sonam opened his eyes.

“Can I offer her heart to the King Vulture?” he asked, stepping towards Tashi.

Tashi made no reply, but with his sacred knife, he cut out the heart and gave it to Sonam.

“Now, look towards the vultures. Look deeply without fearing them. They are friends. You respect them, and they respect you. If you don’t show respect, you will be in trouble. Put your hand out. Show them the heart and ask clearly: Who is the King Vulture amongst you?” whispered Tashi before stepping back.

Sonam swallowed hard and took a deep breath. The vultures looked quite terrifying. He raised his hand. Some blood trickled down his wrist.

“Who is the King Vulture amongst you?” he exclaimed.

The vultures became agitated and started to move chaotically.

“Louder! Ask louder and clearer!” screamed Tashi.

“Who is the King Vulture amongst you?” screamed Sonam.

In response, the whole pack of vultures descended on him in a frenzy. Two of them flew at his hand, trying to rob the heart. Tashi just had time to pull Sonam close to him while screaming some strange words at the vultures. All the excited cleaners calmed down and returned to their places.

Tashi pulled Sonam in front of him. “You have to offer the heart of your mother to the King Vulture. He is the only one who can bring your mother’s spirit to the Other Sky. For that, you need to let go of her. If you don’t, these nasty rascals will eat the heart. Then your mother will stay here roaming around totally lost without a body. She will haunt you day and night. This will be great sorrow for you and her. Do you understand?”

Sonam started to cry softly, looking down at the heart.

“Your mother’s heart cannot die. Your mother’s heart loves you,” said Tashi holding his tears.

“Please let her fly...” he said tenderly.

Sonam turned to face the vultures again. Standing calmly in position, he asked: “Who is the King Vulture amongst you?”

Nobody moved. There was a profound stillness before the King Vulture came and landed in front of Sonam. They looked at each other for a while. Tashi stopped breathing and secretly sent a protective energy field around Sonam. You never know with these wild beasts what kind of unexpected move they might make.

The King Vulture came closer. Sonam crouched down to the ground and presented the heart to the King Vulture, who took it peacefully and respectfully. From there, he flew off to the Other Sky, leaving behind a feather that fell right on Sonam’s head. Tashi looked at the scene with complete marvel.