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Green Tara  
Pre-Practice Commentary



## Introduction

Tara is accessible even to those who have not received the initiation of Tara. She is simply present. The reemergence of Tara's energy, her feminine wisdom and her compassion are essential for the earth and all people right now. We are out of balance, and feminine wisdom is lacking. Decisions are being made without the voice of half of humanity, decisions that affect us all. One problem for those who know this is that they are not sure how to find feminine wisdom. They ask, "How do I access it in myself and then bring it into the world?" Entering a practice like Green Tara creates the template for the development of that wisdom. In other words, it begins to help you access the wisdom of the feminine through the process of identification. This is important not only for women but for everyone.

Tara was the first liberated woman in a spiritual sense. The story goes that in time without beginning, she was a princess called *Yeshe Dawa*, Moon of Primordial Wisdom. When she was about to reach enlightenment, some monks approached her and said that she must pray to change into a male form so that she might reach full enlightenment. As a practitioner of Mahayana Buddhism she understood the nature of emptiness, and she replied, "In this life there is no distinction as 'male' and 'female', neither that of 'self-identity', a 'person', nor any perception, and therefore attachment to ideas of 'male' and 'female' is quite worthless. The weak-minded are always deluded by this." Then she made her famous vow: "There are many who wish to gain enlightenment in a man's form and there are few beings who wish to work for the benefit of living beings in a female form. Therefore may I, in a female body, work for the welfare of beings until Samsara has been emptied."

Shortly afterwards, Tara achieved enlightenment and became a female Buddha. Since then her vow has always served as an inspiration to understand the absolute truth of the irrelevance of gender identity as well as the relative truth of gender inequality.

She took that vow, reached enlightenment in the female body, and then was no longer in the cycles of compulsion that lead us from life to life. She entered into the *Sambhogakaya*, the dimension of luminosity. It is not the dimension we normally see, but it exists. She then manifested all of her twenty-one forms, some of which are fierce and wrathful, some blissful, and some peaceful - representing the transformation of hatred, desire, and bewilderment. Each form of Tara embodies a particular aspect of compassion. For example, Green Tara represents the active, energetic aspect of compassion. She is also the national protectress of Tibet. White Tara embodies a long life and the accomplishment of meditation. In all of those forms she has made herself available to help sentient beings in all dimensions and all realms.

They say that during the night of the Buddha's final practice, before he reached enlightenment at dawn and when the *maras* (illusory thoughts and demons) were most intensely attacking him, Tara appeared. She laughed the eight laughs, and the demons disappeared. The eight laughs confronted the eight great fears, which I will talk about

later. It was from the Buddha's experience of Tara that he found the depths of practice. One of Tara's epithets is "mother of all the Buddhas," and she symbolizes the forces that have the power to gain victory over negative events of this life as well as over our obscurations.

In these times, I feel an urgent need for the reemergence of the divine feminine, and not only in women. The emergence of the sacred feminine will not happen until it is understood to be important for everybody. Tara, especially Green Tara, is very appropriate for this moment in time because she is a contemplative activist. If you look at a statue or picture of Green Tara, she has one foot in and one foot out of meditation. The foot in meditation is in nirvana, and the foot that is out is in samsara and active in the world. She is able to keep her meditative awareness as she steps out to confront suffering. She is green - she has her own Green Party! Actually, one of the leaders of the Green Party came for a Tara retreat, and now he does Tara practice to help support him in his Green Party activities. It is important for activists to have spiritual resources in order to do the hard work they do and not get burned out. Also, all of us are working with the ever-increasing speed of the world. Green Tara meets that speed. She is green, representing the air element, and one of her qualities is swiftness. She can work with this speed and transform it into the quality of all-accomplishing wisdom.

Green Tara is from the forest. There are two forests that she is particularly associated with. One is the Khadira Forest, and one is Potala. The great palace of the Dalai Lama in Lhasa is named after Potala, which is also a pure land of Avalokitesvara (of whom the Dalai Lama is an incarnation). So she is Tara of the trees, of the wind and of green energy. She is a representation of nature; the wisdom of nature and the compassion of nature in the forest. In the poetry of Tara's praises, the Khadira forest is described as very lush and beautiful, with wild animals playing and many medicinal herbs growing.

## The History of the Three Turnings of the Wheel

Before explaining the practice, I think it is important to tell a little about the history of Buddhism, so that you get a sense of where Tantric practice and the Tara practice in particular sit in the historical development of Buddhism.

### The First Turning of the Wheel

There have been three turnings of the wheel in the history of Buddhism. The first was, of course, at the time of the Buddha who lived around 500 B.C. He actually predated Christ by about 500 years, something many people are unaware of. You may already be familiar with the story of the Buddha. After a very protected childhood, the Prince Siddhartha had shocking encounters with old age, sickness, death, and a mendicant. He was thereafter disillusioned by the world, and left his princely life to become a mendicant. For six years he looked for truth. On the full moon, in the spring, on his birthday, he reached full and



complete enlightenment. He understood the nature of the interdependent process which leads to suffering, the causes of suffering, the possibility of liberation and the path to that liberation. These are the Four Noble Truths. He taught these truths for the next forty-five years. His teachings reached across social and religious boundaries.

In some ways, he was more of a scientist or a humanist than a founder of a religion, for he did not teach about God. He was one of the few world teachers who taught about the potential of human beings to “wake up” without dependence on an external God or a particular set of beliefs. He said something like, “Try to look as deeply as you can into the nature of your own being and you will see the functioning of everything.” What he discovered in his lifetime has never been disproved by science. And the more advanced science becomes, the more we recognize that what he said is true. This is very different from the majority of religious traditions, which have a hard time bringing science and religion together.

Buddhism talks about the basic emptiness - or lack of solid, inherent existence - in all beings and objects. If you really go into yourself and keep asking, “What am I?” you may first think, “Well, I have this body. I have this mind. But what are they? They contain elements - the components of the body and mind and so on, but what are they?” As you go deeper and deeper, you finally discover there is no solid ‘I’ there, and no inherent existence in objects either. We are a coagulation of lots of different factors that are operating as if there was something “real.” We think of our selves and our world as real, solid things, but when we actually unpack this idea of a self through meditation, what we discover is that there is really no central self or ‘thingness’ that is unchanging and discrete unto itself. This teaching of *anatman*, or non-self, was and is a very revolutionary teaching. In fact, the Buddha said, “My teaching goes against the current.” All of the teachings before his were based on God and a self.

This teaching of no-self came from the Buddha’s direct experience. He also taught that everything is interdependent, which we are discovering today with the study of deep ecology. It is not just nature that is interdependent; everything is interdependent, including our mental states. When I have a thought I affect the fabric of the whole, interconnected universe. That is why when someone “wakes up,” sees the nature of the universe, that realization spreads out and affects the fabric of everything.

Once when I was teaching in Germany, somebody said that they felt they were not doing enough for others. They felt a need to do more to help the world. I responded that the Buddha did not actually *do* very much. He sat and he walked and he taught. He answered questions and he asked a lot of questions. Questioning was one of his main ways of teaching. The first turning of the wheel came out of the Buddha’s understanding of the nature of reality. He said, “Look, this is what I have seen. You look and see what you see, and then we will talk about it.” That was how he related to his students. He would ask them questions and then tell them to go and check things out for themselves. They would come back with an answer, and he would just keep questioning. Then they would go and meditate and eventually have a direct insight into the nature of reality. Most of the Buddha’s discourses were actually conversations. He would also enter into profound

states of meditation, like he did at the time the *Heart Sutra* was taught. The depth of his meditation would trigger a conversation among his students. Or, in the case of the *Heart Sutra*, the conversation took place between the *bodhisattva* Avalokiteshvara and his student Shariputra.

So that was the way the Buddha taught. He taught what is known as the Four Noble Truths and the law of interdependence. He also taught that human beings are the five *skandhas* - also called the five aggregates or the five heaps. First, we are made up of form. Second, we have basic feelings of good, bad, and neutral. The third is the skandha of having conceptions about these feelings. The fourth skandha is volitional action, and the fifth skandha is consciousness. These are the five aggregates or heaps which the Buddha said we are made of. However, when we look deeply into all of these aggregates, their nature is empty. You cannot find a “self.” These teachings from Buddha Shakyamuni are called the First Turning of the Wheel.

## The Second Turning of the Wheel: Mahayana

The *arhats* - people who became enlightened under the Buddha - developed various streams of Buddhism after Buddha Shakyamuni’s parinirvana. The first monk to take the Buddha's mantle was Mahakashyapa. He invoked a congress during the first rainy season after the Buddha's death, an assembly of 500 arhats. Here the Tripitaka, or the three baskets were reviewed. The Three baskets were: Discourses (Sutras), Discipline (Vinaya), and Abhidharma (Special Teachings). This established the Tripitaka which created the basis for the Buddha's teachings. Eventually, differences in interpretation of the *Vinaya* emerged and about a hundred years later another large council convened to deal with questions of lax conduct.

Various schools developed. The *Sthavirada* (way of the elders) was oriented toward the actual words of the Buddha (the *Sutras*) and the rules he laid down (the *Vinaya*). This school traveled south to Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma, and Cambodia. The form of Buddhism they practiced became what we know today as the *Theravadin* tradition.

The origins of the Mahayana (Great Vehicle) tradition are debatable. According to preeminent scholar Edward Conze, possible forerunners to Mahayana Buddhism, a group called the *Mahasanghikas*, developed in southeast India around Amaravati and Nagarjunikonda, and between the Godavari and Krishna Rivers. They developed in the first century B.C., about 400 years after the time of the Buddha. They believed in the fallibility of the Arhats, and were a voice for the non-monastic forest tradition and the lay community.

Others believe that Mahayana originated somewhat later in northwest India in the great Kusana Empire, where the *Sarvastavadin* doctrine arose. It began here as a non-monastic, forest-dwelling tradition. The Sarvastavadins believed that past, present and future all exist (*sarvasta* means all, and *asti* means exists, so the Sarvastavadins believed that everything exists.)

The Mahasanghikas and Sarvastavadins were liberal philosophical schools, less strict in their interpretation of monastic disciplinary rules and less exclusive about the divide between monastics and the lay community. Theirs was a forest tradition, at first completely non-monastic and advocating the wandering life. Mahasanghika and Sarvastadin were the schools of Buddhism that traveled north into Afghanistan, Pakistan, China, and eventually into Tibet, Japan and Korea. In the 3rd century B.C., King Ashoka organized a council which declared that the Sthaviravadin tradition was the standard. After this, a clearer division took place between the Theravadin and Mahayana schools. These and several other streams eventually became known as Mahayana Buddhism. The Mahayana ideal was of the bodhisattva, not the arhat. It emphasized the middle way between affirming and negating existence.

Mahayana Buddhism incorporated the original teachings of the Buddha but emphasized the teachings on emptiness and compassion. Motivation was more important than rules. From the teachings of interdependence the Buddha taught that everything is mutually conditioned. Since everything is mutually conditioned, nothing is truly separate and there are no independent entities: neither humans, other beings nor inanimate objects. The Sutrayana had applied the understanding of lack of inherent separate existence to the self, but Mahayana applied it to all phenomena as well. In Mahayana, everything is seen as a changing matrix of causes and conditions. The emphasis in practice is a naked, concept-free experience. In the very letting go of self, there is letting go of all definitions and all concepts. Through that, the egocentric self dissolves and suddenly we are aware of everything in an open heartfelt way. Compassion is born at the same moment as the perception of two-fold lack of inherent existence of self and other.

From this comes a relaxation of the focus on rigid rules and vows, and emphasis on intention. For example, let's say you are living in Europe during World War II. A Jewish family comes to your door seeking refuge and you hide them. A Nazi comes to your door and asks if you have any Jews in your house, you lie and say no. According to the Vinaya, you have broken a rule – you lied. But your motivation was one of compassion, which Mahayana Buddhism considers to be the superior motivation. Positive motivation is more important than vows.

Always be aware of your motivation. Ask yourself, “What am I doing and why?” Lama Yeshe always used to say, “Check up on yourself.” Check. Because no one else can tell you what your motivation is; you are the only one who can know that. Mahayana Buddhism says to generate the heart of compassion called bodhicitta. *Bodhi* means awake, and *citta* means heart-mind, which is said to center itself in our heart *chakra*. We must develop that bodhicitta - which is the essence of enlightenment - for the benefit of all beings.

Out of this belief in Bodhicitta came the ideal of the bodhisattva. The bodhisattva commits to practicing and living for the benefit of all beings, renouncing his or her own enlightenment for the benefit of others. Here we move from the ideal of the arhat's individual liberation to the ideal of the bodhisattva who is willing to delay enlightenment until all beings are awakened from delusion.

In the Mahayana tradition, there exist both relative bodhicitta and absolute bodhicitta. Relative bodhicitta is the development of qualities within yourself that cultivate the heart, love, and compassion. That, then is divided into two parts: the wish for bodhicitta and the action coming out of the wish. The main practice for this wish-based, relative bodhicitta is called the Four Immeasurables: the development of loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. The *tonglen* practice that many of you may know from Pema Chödrön's books comes out of the Four Immeasurables. Tonglen is mainly connected to the second Immeasurable - the development of compassion.

The second part of relative bodhicitta is the bodhicitta of action; that not only do I wish to do something, I am going to do it. It is the difference between hoping to go to Tibet and actually going. The practices most connected with this relate to the Six *Paramitas*: the practices of generosity, patience, ethical conduct, meditation, effort-diligence, and finally *prajna* which means profound knowing. It is prajna that takes us into absolute bodhicitta, which is the discovery of the nature of reality.

The main emphasis in Mahayana is the union of emptiness and compassion. In Mahayana, when you actually experience emptiness in the sense of lack of solid self or solid world, compassion wells up naturally. It just bubbles up because you are experiencing total interconnectedness. There is no longer a "me" and an "it." All is without solidity. What we call "I" is interconnected with everything and does not exist as a separate discrete entity.

Mahayana Buddhism says that since we have lived countless lives, everyone has been your mother. So there is incredible intimacy with all beings and all life. This comes out of the understanding of emptiness. Sometimes when we hear about emptiness it sounds kind of cold, like a black hole in space, but actually it is about the melting of our fears and our feeling of separation into the realization of how completely connected we are. We realize that if one of us is unhappy no one can be truly happy. Because of interconnectedness there cannot be a happy ruling class and an unhappy poor class. They affect each other all the time.

In Mahayana Buddhism there is also the Buddha Nature doctrine which teaches that every being contains the intrinsic, effulgent Buddha-like nature which is the fundamental true state of their being like the ever-present sun covered by clouds. It is called "Tathagata-garbha," which means "Buddha Womb-Buddha Matrix" or "Buddha Embryo." This is the unconditioned, boundless, nurturing, sustaining, true nature which is indiscernible to worldly beings as a result of their negative mental states, and the general mental obscurations which hide it.

It is in the Mahayana tradition that we first hear about the sacred feminine in the form of *Prajnaparamita*. Prajnaparamita is the teaching on the discovery of the nature of emptiness, which at some point became connected to the feminine. The name itself has a feminine ending, but the connection to the feminine is deeper than that. Early on, Prajnaparamita was associated with wisdom and the epithet, "mother of all the Buddhas."

The first evidence for this is in inscriptions made around 400 A.D. It really is not until about 800 A.D. that we see the embodiment of the feminine wisdom principle in statues and images of Prajnaparamita. Prajnaparamita is known as the first female Buddha, but actually Prajnaparamita is not really male or female. She is hermaphroditic, or the feminine before its split into masculine and feminine. However, she is identified with the feminine because Prajnaparamita is the state that gives birth to enlightenment. In this sense she is the mother of all the Buddhas simply because without the experience of Prajnaparamita you cannot and will not become enlightened. One who understands Prajnaparamita cannot be harmed by fire, poison, wind, or water and is safe from the attacks of maras. Thus, in her we see the first shadow of Tara's protective qualities.

### Third Turning of the Wheel

The third turning of the wheel happened well after the second turning and became known as the *Vajrayana* (as well as *Mantrayana* and *Tantra*). Vajrayana includes the teachings from the first two periods, but we also hear that enlightenment is inherent and already fully present within us; we just need to change our views and perceptions to recognize what is already here. Therefore, the essence of Vajrayana is changing one's perception. In the Tantric teachings there are three basic elements: the base or the ground, the path, and the fruit or fruition.

The Ground of Being is the Tathagata-garbha - our true nature - which is the vast luminous-cognizance that penetrates everything. The Ground of Being has two parts: relative and absolute truth. The relative truth is the conventional truth - things like the laws of nature, gravity, and the fact that we need air to breathe. The absolute truth is the ultimate nature of everything. There is a truth connected to the relative world, but if we look deeper at that conventional truth, what is under it? What we find is the absolute truth. The two truths are not in conflict; they are each part of each other, and they comprise the ground.

The path concerns the development and the completion stages of Tantric practice. The development stage consists of visualization, *mantra*, offerings, praises - everything that we do to change our perception of reality. Working with a deity is the path or method in Tantra for discovering the ground. *Jongwa* is a key word in Tibetan Tantra that can mean many things: purify, train, or transform. You may have heard of *jong* in Mahayana when we talk about *lojong* or mind training practices; in that case, the word *jong* means training. In Tantra, *jong* relates to how we identify with a figure like Tara in order to change our perceptions. Our identification with Tara includes entering the vibrational field of her sound or *mantra* and actually seeing with her eyes. This change in perception is the essence of the development stage. This change in perception transforms, trains, and purifies us.

The completion stage of the path is when everything we have developed dissolves, and we rest in the experience of emptiness that comes out of no longer trying to create our sacred world. The completion stage is where the natural luminosity and the natural

perfection, of everything arises. Those are the two parts of the path, which are connected to relative and absolute truth.

The fruit is the discovery of the ground. To help visualize this, get a glass of water and a piece of paper. The glass is the ground of perfect, primordial, awakened wisdom which operates in everything. This is our Tathagata-garbha or Buddha Nature. If we cover the glass with the paper, it is still there but we cannot see it, just as we normally do not see the ground which is always there. We are deluded and do not recognize our true nature, but that does not mean that it is not there, just that we are not seeing it. When we practice the path, for example with Tara practice, there are little moments when we see beyond our delusion. These temporary experiences or flashes are called *nyams* in Tibetan. To illustrate the effect of the path, very slowly uncover the paper from the glass. Gradually through the path we see more and more, until finally we see the ground which was always there; gradually, we become stable in the recognition of it. That is the fruit. You are not actually getting anywhere new, but you are recognizing what already is.

There are two aspects of the fruit, called the two *kayas*. For just as the ground has the relative and absolute truths, and the path has the creation and completion stages, so the fruit has the two *kayas*: *Rupakaya* and *Dharmakaya*. *Rupakaya* means the form body, the recognition in this very body of illumination. *Rupakaya* includes *Nirmanakaya* and *Sambhogakaya*. *Nirmanakaya* is the wisdom nature of the embodiment of Buddhahood in a form that human beings can perceive, such as the Buddha, Padmasambhava, and other great teachers. *Sambhogakaya* is the dimension of luminosity which has form such as Tara, Vajrapani, and Chenrezig. You could compare it to an angelic dimension. We would not use those words in Buddhism, but the *Sambhogakaya* is like a luminous energy which we cannot see in this world, yet which still operates in form. The *Dharmakaya* is the formless dimension of enlightened totality.

In Tantra we are working with the ground, the path and the fruit. When you learn the Tara teachings you will learn about the ground and the path. Hopefully, over time you will realize the fruit.

## Roots of Tantra

Tantra refers to a kind of literature that came into Buddhism as early as 500 A.D. but flowered between 700 and 1200 A.D. Around 1200 it was mostly eliminated in India as a result of the Muslim invasions. At that time Buddhism almost entirely disappeared from India, but it had already spread to surrounding countries.

Tantra has a strong link to the sacred feminine. Scholars believe that its roots come from the very early Indus Valley traditions. These same traditions are also linked to Neolithic Europe. Both cultures were matrifocal, and they saw the supreme energy as feminine.

The ancient races of people who lived in the Indus Valley had very dark-colored skin. When invading Aryans brought the caste system into India, these dark-skinned people

became the low-caste. A lot of the Indus Valley people then migrated into Bengal, Orisa, and southern India. As Buddhism developed between 500 and 700 A.D., Mahayana Buddhism interfaced with these pre-patriarchal traditions that came from the Indus Valley. The early Buddhist tradition emphasized monasticism, while the matriarchal societies emphasized the idea of sacred sexuality and a sacred worldview in which all the senses were seen to be potential vehicles for enlightenment. As the two traditions interfaced, Buddhism began to integrate color, sound, visualization, deities, mantras, feasting, sacred sexuality, and the idea that this body, this life, and our senses are vehicles for illumination rather than something we need to renounce. There was the belief that if we could truly change our perception into a state of non-grasping and emptiness, we could become enlightened in this world.

That was a revolutionary shift, and a lot of stories from that time are emblematic of the encounters between the male-dominated monastic tradition and the wilder, life-embracing Indus Valley tradition. We start to see a whole body of literature with stories about these meetings. Oftentimes monks encountered low caste women teachers. Early scholarship of Tantric Buddhism interprets these low caste women as being “loose women,” and the only kind of women available to use as Tantric partners. But later research shows that these women were not “loose,” but enlightened. They were *yoginis* who were low caste because it was the low caste people who held the ancient teachings. So there were many encounters between low caste yoginis and great Mahayana monks.

Of course, there were also meetings between women teachers and women, and male Tantric teachers and Buddhist men. Marpa had several male teachers as well as some female teachers in India. But most classic stories have the set up of a logos-dominated monk who meets an intuitively incisive female teacher who brings all of the elements together. So the precision and depth of intellectual understanding that were developed in Mahayana philosophy were not thrown out; they were integrated with the intuitive, worldly insight-tradition, and that combination constituted early Tantric Buddhism.

## Two Stories of Monks and Yoginis

### Naropa and the Hag

There is a classic yogini/monk story about Naropa. One day, a hag let her shadow fall across the book Naropa was reading. He turned to see who cast the shadow, and the hag asked Naropa if he understood the words or the sense of what he was reading. When he answered that he understood the words, the old woman became very happy and danced a little jig. Naropa thought that since that had made her so happy, he would tell her that he understood the meaning too. But when he uttered those words the hag became absolutely furious. She threw down her cane and started foaming at the mouth. When Naropa asked what was wrong, the old woman answered that she had been happy when he had told the truth - he did understand the words, but he had lied when he said that he had understood the meaning.

That encounter threw Naropa into a profound upheaval about his life. He realized that he had to leave his comfortable seat as the head of Nalanda University, a prestigious post, in order to go off and try to understand the meaning of what he had read. That process took him through twelve years of searching during which his whole understanding had to be deconstructed. He had to eventually reach the point where he was ready to kill himself before he could meet his teacher. Many times he came close to really seeing, but somehow he overlooked each opportunity. For example, once, as he was walking along, he saw a dog in the middle of the road that was injured and sick. Naropa saw the dog but thought, “Boy, I really need to find my guru; I don’t have time for this.” So he jumped over the dog. At that moment the dog disappeared into a rainbow, and Naropa heard a voice say, “Without developing compassion you will never find the guru. Look into the mirror of the mind, the mysterious home of the dakini. Look into the mirror of the mind, the mysterious home of the dakini.” That refrain came back to Naropa again and again during his search for his teacher. He eventually realized that the dakini was the feminine wisdom. Stories like this are at the base of Tantric literature.

### Saraha and the Arrowsmith Woman

There is another yogini-monk story about Saraha, a great monk and a young and upcoming Buddhist scholar-star. As he walked through a marketplace two maidens approached him with glasses of beer. As a monk he was not supposed to drink, but for some reason he decided to drink the beer offered to him – both glasses. Of course, he was not used to drinking and he got completely drunk. Perhaps something was in the beer, who knows. But after Saraha drank the potion he went into an altered state in which he was told he needed to leave his life as it had been and seek a female who worked as an arrowsmith in a marketplace.

When Saraha came to the marketplace, he began his search and eventually came across a female arrowsmith. He could tell by the way she made her arrows that she was very sharp and present, so he decided to make small talk with her. She just looked at him and said, “Look - the Buddha’s teachings are not understood through words; they are understood through symbols.” Then she held up an arrow, and Saraha was able to interpret it symbolically. He intuitively understood the meanings of its straightness as well as the joinery in the bamboo, the point, and the feathers. At that point he recognized the arrowsmith as his teacher. They started living together, and it was in the living together that the teaching took place.

Saraha was eventually confronted by the monastic community, by the king and queen who had had great hopes for him, and by the common people. They all wanted to know how he could leave his monk’s vows to go off and live with a low caste woman when they had all counted on him to be a successful monk-scholar. The literature of Saraha, called Saraha’s *Dohas*, is his response to them. Saraha’s *Dohas* are mystical poem-like riddles. There are the Queen *Dohas*, the King *Dohas*, and the People *Dohas*. Saraha eventually became a primary founder of the Kagyu Lineage.



# The History of Tibetan Buddhism

The *siddha* tradition or ideal is what developed from early Tantrism, or Vajrayana. The arhat was the ideal of the first turning of the wheel, the bodhisattva of the second, and the siddha of the third turning. Siddhas were usually non-monastics who had mundane jobs like clothes-washer, pig-herder, or like Tilopa, a pounder of sesame seeds. (Tila means sesame.) Tilopa was Naropa's teacher. Tilopa was also known for living on river banks and eating fish guts. The siddhas led these kinds of lives, and it was by staying in the world that they became enlightened, often through their simple, manual work.

At this time the female Buddhas start to appear in practices, stories and religious art, and we begin to see images of Tara, the second female Buddha after Prajnaparamita to become mainstream. Finally, there is the notion of female Buddhas - not just bodhisattvas, but Buddhas. This came out of lay tradition more than monasticism, although it eventually penetrated and integrated with the monastic tradition. It was a big leap to incorporate female Buddhas (and Tantric *sadhanas* where one visualizes the palace of the deity) into the traditional practices like meditation on the breath. This is the kind of Buddhism that went into Tibet.

## The First Wave

Retracing our steps several hundred years, big Buddhist councils holding various referenda periodically took place. Buddhists gathered from all over to decide what Buddhists should believe and teach. Since not everyone could agree, different schools of Buddhism emerged from these councils.

The third council took place at the time of King Ashoka who lived from 276 – 232 B.C. During that council the king declared *Sthaviravadin*, which eventually became Theravadin Buddhism, to be the standard form of Buddhism and that other schools were deviations of that. According to him, the southern schools taught the truth and the schools that developed into Mahayana were deviations. The *Mahasanghikas* joined with the *Sarvastavadins*, who were from a school which developed after the third council. The Sarvastavadins and the Mahasanghikas migrated west, and north into Tibet.

The first Buddhist king of Tibet, called the Dharma King, was Songtsen Gampo who lived from 617-698 A.D. As king he united Tibet and created the Tibetan alphabet modeled on Sanskrit, a Buddhist code of law, and a network of Buddhist shrines. His two queens, Bhrikuti from Nepal and Wengchen of China, were Buddhist and seen as emanations of Tara.

At the time of Songtsen Gampo's rule, communication increased between India and Tibet. Many scholars from Tibet were sent to India to bring back teachings. Tibetans began to see India as the source of Buddhism, similar to how we in the West think of Asia as the source of Buddhism. The Tibetans did not yet see Buddhism as theirs, which

is similar to the attitude in the West now. The various streams of teachings that scholars brought back to Tibet were the basis of the various traditions in Tibetan Buddhism.

## Second Wave

The second wave of Buddhism arrived with King Trisong Detsen, who lived from 742-798 A.D. and was said to be an incarnation of Manjushri. The first wave had not gone over well in Tibet. The Tibetans were very magic-oriented. They had all kinds of superstitions, believed in teachings connected to nature, and had very profound teachings of their own. They never connected with monasticism. When Trisong Detsen came to power in 755, he invited a monk called Shantarakshita from India who synthesized *Madhyamika* and *Yogachara* - the two main Mahayana philosophies - and tried to establish a monastic order in Tibet. Buddhism and particularly monasticism still could not take hold, so Shantarakshita suggested that the king invite Guru Rinpoche, also known as Padmasambhava, from Oddiyana to Tibet. Oddiyana, known as “the land of the Dakinis,” is believed to have been in present-day northeastern Afghanistan and northwestern Pakistan. Many, many great female teachers lived there. The famous *Seven-Line Supplication* describes Padmasambhava as *khor du khandro* - surrounded by Dakinis.

Padmasambhava related well to the Tibetans. He was a great magician and knew what people would respond to. He met them and impressed them on their own ground, but he came into conflict with those at court.

At first even the king was disrespectful to Padmasambhava, but he was eventually won over. However, the ministers felt threatened and rose up, kicking Padmasambhava out of court. Padmasambhava went to an area in Tibet called Shoto Terdrom until he was invited back to court. But life was still not easy. There are many idealized versions of what happened, but in reality there was a lot of intrigue. People were afraid of losing power to Padmasambhava. Many wondered, “Who is this guy from Oddiyana? He’s taking over. Look, the king is totally deluded by him.” There was a lot of conflict, but eventually Padmasambhava reached the people through his magical powers and started teaching them Buddhism.

He was even able to teach ethics and all of the “boring stuff” that Tibetans did not want to know about. They were so impressed and had such faith in him that they were willing to listen. Thus Padmasambhava was able to instill the idea of a peaceful society. Tibetans had been very militaristic and had conquered large parts of Asia, but during the second wave Tibet became dedicated to peace. It had no army or wheels; the king outlawed wheels because of prophecies that said once there were wheels, the good days would end. That was the beginning of what became an extraordinary social experiment.

## Third Wave

In 842 A.D., a man named Langdharma decided that Buddhism was weakening the military fiber of the nation and would be the ruin of Tibet. Through his military power, he destroyed the monasteries and did a lot of general damage, but Buddhism persisted among the laity because Langdharma could not attack people who were practicing quietly with their families. It was during this time that the Nyingma Tradition (or Old Ones Tradition) began, and most of what we practice at Tara Mandala is from the Nyingma School. It is a tradition largely held by lay people; thus it survived Langdharma's big attack. When Langdharma was eventually killed, the attacks stopped and Buddhist masters who had retreated to eastern Tibet returned to central Tibet. Gradually, Buddhism was revived.

In the eleventh century there was a renaissance of Buddhism in Tibet. This was the time of amazing teachers like Machig Labdrön and Milarepa. A great teacher named Rinchen Zongpo went to Kashmir and brought back new teachings. Marpa established the Kagyu Lineage after going to India and studying with Naropa. The Khon family established the Sakya Lineage, and Atisha came to Tibet from India guided by Tara. (He is considered the root of what became the Gelugpa Lineage, which came into its own by the fifteenth century.)

Tibet was a theocracy where religious leaders truly were the government, and each main sect grew dominant in turn. The Nyingma governed originally. There were times when the Kagyu ruled and times when the Sakya ruled. Finally, the Gelugpa came into power. The Gelugpa remained in power until 1959, when the Chinese invaded Tibet. The first of the great Dalai Lamas was coronated in 1642. The present Dalai Lama was head of the Gelugpas at the time of the Chinese invasion. So a modern, nationalistic Tibet had spanned from 1642 to 1959.

As students of Tibetan Buddhism in the West, we receive the Tantric tradition which first migrated to and was digested by Tibet. Over time, a lot of the siddha tradition disappeared into the great monastic institutions. The feminine became more idealized than embodied physically in the form of female teachers. Sexual practices became more symbolic than literal, and women became devalued in the tradition. Tara, Vajrayogini, and other female figures were still a part of the tradition, but the power of their role became minor and repressed. There were still incredible women practitioners, but they were often discounted by the huge monastic institutions, many of which had thousands of monks and no women - or only a tiny nunnery in a corner somewhere.

The full ordination of nuns died out in Tibet mostly for lack of sponsorship. People thought it was more meritorious to support a fully ordained monk than a fully ordained nun. When I was ordained by the Karmapa in 1970, one thing he said to me was that he hoped I would help bring back the fully ordained female tradition which had survived in China and existed mainly in Taiwan. There were no fully ordained nuns in the southern Buddhist countries or Tibet. For now, nuns still have to go to Taiwan to receive full

ordination, but both Tibetans and Westerners have received it. I mention all of this so you can see the kind of stream that is coming down to you.

## Tibetan Buddhism in the West

Tibetan Buddhism has come to the West. It is a very exciting moment in the sense that Tibetan Buddhism has not truly stabilized here yet; everything is still in conversation. What will it be like here? Will we take the institutions of Tibet and try to transplant them here exactly as they existed there? Or will we try to take the essence of the teachings and find our own way of relating to it? And how is it relevant today? Is it relevant? These teachings are very old; some of them twenty-five hundred years old. How will we personally digest and integrate them into something that is truly useful? How long will Tibetan Buddhism still be Tibetan Buddhism?

Each one of us will do this in our own way. What we set up now is very important because, like the early times in Tibet, the teachings are just arriving and the decisions we make will set the template for the development of Tibetan Buddhism. In the West, we have a reemergence of the feminine in Buddhism. You see many more women teachers, and dharma centers run by women. We will probably have more of a partnership model of working together in community – an ideal union like in ancient Tantric times.

## The Background of the *Ösel Dorje Sang Dzöd Tara*

Tara, at one time a minor Tantric deity, gradually emerged into a Buddha in her own right as she grew into a popular and widely practiced deity in the Tantric tradition. This particular Green Tara practice comes from Adzom Drukpa Pawo Dorje and to us through Adzom Rinpoche. Adzom is also the name of a famous monastery in eastern Tibet that emerged with the coming of Adzom Drukpa, a great *Dzogchen* master. He was also a *terton*, a treasure revealer. He revealed some ancient teachings that had been hidden, and his main cycle of revealed teachings is called the Luminous Secret Vajra Treasury or the *Ösel Dorje Sang Dzöd* in Tibetan. This Tara practice comes from that. It is an *Anuyoga* teaching, which means it is right before *Dzogchen* or *Ati*, according to the levels of the nine *yanas*.

## The Nine Yanas

The Tantras in the Nyingma tradition are divided into nine *yanas* or vehicles. The first are the *Shravaka*, the *Pratyekabuddha*, and the *Bodhisattva Yanas*. Those are all connected to the Theravada and Mahayana teachings. The *Kriya*, *Charya* (or *Upa*), and *Yoga* Tantras are the outer or lower Tantras, and *Maha*, *Anu*, and *Ati* are the inner Tantras or highest Tantras.

The way the process of Tantra progresses is that in the lower Tantras, such as Kriya, we see the deity as external - as other. In Kriyayoga you look toward the deity, such as Tara, as a subject would toward a queen or king. She is higher than we are and we make offerings to her as an external being. The lower Tantras are oriented toward ritual and astrology. The rituals have to be carried out exactly and with cleanliness.

In Anuyoga we do not invoke something external; we recognize something present within us, so it is simply a matter of shifting our attention from confusion to this illuminated being, Tara, who is already part of us. You will find very little ritual in the higher Tantras. You will know if you are doing a lower Tantric practice because it will take five or six hours to get to the core. In Anuyoga it is like a snap of the fingers and you are there; you are in it.

There is heated debate in Western Tantric Buddhism at the moment. There are schools and teachers – Trungpa Rinpoche was one of them - who believe you need to progress slowly through the yanas, do a lot of sitting for years and years, do Ngondro (the preliminary practices) and then gradually be introduced to a deity practice. Then there are teachers at the opposite extreme, like Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche, who believe that you never know where your students are starting from, so you start at the top with Dzogchen or Ati teachings at the ninth yana. You teach at that level, and if people need to do lower practices, you give those to them according to their needs. This is something that I think is debatable.

Many teachers believe that time is short and the situation in the world today makes it necessary to move more quickly through these levels. Many believe that we need to get to the essential understanding quickly and that it is possible for us to do that without going in-depth at each level. There were prophecies that this current time would be the fruition of Dzogchen (Atiyoga) and that Dzogchen would enter the public realm. Until very recently, Dzogchen was actually very secret. You had to do lots and lots of preliminary practices for years and years before you would be introduced to it. But the current feeling of urgency is why the Dalai Lama is teaching Dzogchen now. It is like putting all of your cards on the table at the last moment.

I stand in the middle. I think people come into what they are supposed to come into. People who come to Tara Mandala have a karmic connection to be here. Just because somebody in this life has not studied each level in depth does not mean he or she has not done a level before in another life; therefore, they are karmically stepping into the right place. You have karmic links, and when you know that you are home you are home. That does not mean that the other homes are less good, but you just feel an interdependent link and a connection to a place. It all feels very familiar.

I find that Westerners can understand these things. When I first met the teachings, I was nineteen, and I went much more deeply into them when I was ordained at twenty-two. I had a natural grasp of the teachings, and I felt it was due to some kind of karmic situation. But then I was told by other Western nuns that this could not be true, and therefore they said I needed to do this, and I needed to do that. I did not really know

much about procedure, so I went and did all of the practices they said I needed to do, but then I found that I had just come back to where I had been originally. I am not saying that those practices were not valuable to do, but I am not sure that they were all necessary.

I will teach Anuyoga to people who are new to Buddhism, but for students who seriously want to study with me, there is a month-long retreat in the summer in which I take people through the three yantras (the three major divisions of the nine yantras) and help everyone develop a sitting practice. I teach a lot about the history of Buddhism because this is something that you do not get from Tibetans. Many people never learn the history of Buddhism and how intimately linked it is with these three yantras. If you look at early Tantric teachings and at early Buddhist teachings, they look very different, and yet they have both been incorporated into this three-yantra system. We need to know how that happened.

As far as whether a student needs to practice each yantra, it is an interesting question, and every lama that I know of who has come to the West has done it in different ways, often starting in one way and then shifting halfway through into something else. We are part of a big experiment. In a hundred years, this will all be crystallized and established in various ways. In the tradition of Trungpa Rinpoche, the nature of the path is already pretty stratified and crystallized. That was very difficult for me in that tradition because I felt like it often did not apply or respond to the individual.

I feel it is important to give you a historical context for this practice, but we also need to find the personal relevance in the practice. Ask yourself, is the practice actually a part of you? I do not think we are learning something that is outside of ourselves. I think Tara is actually a part of us that we are recognizing and drawing forth through the practice.

## What is Unique about Tantra

There is a book about Tantrism called *Creation and Completion*, by Jamgon Kongtrul, which Sarah Harding translated. She said that if she were stranded on a desert island with only one book, it would be this one. It is an amazing book, not big but very compact.

Tantric Buddhism is brilliant because of the discovery that dissolving yourself, being reborn, living, and then dissolving again gradually leads to realization through transformation and identification with the luminous form of the deity. In most religions we are supposed to relate to the divine as external. We see the divine as external, and we are supposed to relate to it in that way. In Tibetan Buddhism, Kriyayoga - the lowest level of Tantra - is like this. At the higher levels, the divine is seen as immanent, meaning in-born or innate, rather than external. This was also of the ancient goddess traditions.

The other thing that I think is brilliant about Tantra is that we do not work exclusively with peaceful deities, nor exclusively with either the feminine or masculine. There are the peaceful deities that work with the transformation of ignorance into wisdom, and joyful deities that work with the transformation of desire and craving into wisdom, and wrathful

deities that work with the transformation of anger into wisdom. We are working with all these archetypes.

There is also the concept of *yab yum*, the deities pictured in union. In visualization you actually embody the union of the masculine and feminine. If we look at the *yab yum* from a Jungian point of view, it is the *anima* and the *animus* which meet inside of us, and we experience that self-seeding, the self in union with itself rather than with an external lover.

So in Tantra, we transform rather than renounce. Tara contains the elements of sacred embodiment, sacred sexuality, feasting, mandalas, mudras, mantras, and music, plus all the wisdom of the developments of the Mahayana and Theravadin teachings. Vajrayana is very rich and psychologically profound. If you really do the practice, you will experience how transformative it is. If you just go to a retreat and then go home and think, “I don’t know if I can do this, and I don’t really have time,” you will still have a seed connection; karmically, it will always be there, but you will not really experience the fruits of what Tantric practice is. This explanation is just an introduction; it is really up to you where you go with it.

## Making the Practice Yours

As I mentioned earlier, I believe Tara is actually a part of us, but at first the practice may feel unfamiliar. You need to learn how to take the practice and make it your own. You might actually start by taking the position of Tara and saying, “Ok, what does it actually feel like to be her? What would it be like if my color were actually green light? What does the mantra mean?” Well, mantra is sound, and sound is actually a vibration, a vibrational field. So rather than feeling like you have to believe the visualization and somehow fit yourself into it, let it come into you. Find your own relationship to it.

If you do the practice enough, you will start having experiences that truly make the practice yours, and everyone’s Tara experience will be different. By taking the template and really understanding the process and why you are doing it and then holding that container, you start to have your own experience, and practice does not feel foreign anymore. It feels like you are home. When you really understand the nature of mind or the base or the Ground of Being, you understand that it does not matter where we are from or where we live. The Ground of Being is our true home. These practices are vehicles to get us home.

Entering into the practice is called “the approach,” *nyenpa* in Tibetan. You are building a relationship with Tara. You have to have a connection with Tara karmically to have a deep experience with the practice, but you have this connection because you are learning about Tara now. Sometimes your initial connection may seem completely random. You may think, “Oh, I just looked in the catalog, and I happened to have the days of the Tara Retreat free.” But according to karmic laws, your connection with Tara is not random. You have a karmic link with her and with Tara Mandala.

As we make the practice our own, experiences arise. Occasionally, you may experience resistance or fear. If you do, do not feel like you have to force yourself to practice, but do not stop either. Just allow things to happen gradually. Find your way into the practice. What often happens is that you may go along for a while thinking that you are not sure if you can really get into the practice, but then you will have an experience, something will click, and you connect completely with it. Or you may have little flashes of connection along the way. But if you do not try, you never get the opportunity to fully connect with the practice. Remember, you are getting used to a very different way of seeing reality. It is kind of like when you put your toe in the ocean to test out the water, and then you put your whole foot in, and then gradually you ease in and are able to swim freely.

A sense of being “boundary-less” is also an important aspect of this practice. In Western psychology, being boundary-less is considered problematic, yet this is ultimately the state we are talking about. You need to understand that there is an unhealthy state of being boundary-less and a healthy state of being boundary-less. In the relative sense, you have to have boundaries; you have to have the psychological clarity of knowing, “This is where I am, and this is where you begin.” Then you can break that boundary down in practice. But if you cannot make the relative distinctions, you will not have the kind of strength necessary to hold the vastness that will come through your practice.

The most important thing is the depth of your practice. One of the dangers of the process of feeling our way in the dark is that we do just a little of this and a little of that. Longchenpa said that in the beginning, we need to be like bees and collect the pollen from many flowers, but at some point, we need to make honey. So with this practice we need to really go into it and reach the depths of it, because otherwise we end up being just like the bee going around and around but not making honey. It is very important to take a tradition or practice like Tara and commit to learning everything you can about it. Do all of the accumulations. Do a retreat if you can, and go deeper and deeper into the practice - then you make honey.

You can do this with another tradition or practice, but at some point you need to make honey. For some people, making honey may be a combination of things. A person could be deeply steeped in both Catholicism and Buddhism. Your way is not going to be like anyone else’s. I think it is a matter of trusting yourself. But also distrusting yourself in the sense that there is a part of each of us that does not want to be disciplined. We often do just enough practice to cope with samsara but never go beyond the level of taking an aspirin every day. In such a situation, we never really wake up.

Finally, as we make this practice our own it is important to remember to use the teachings as best we can to help the world, rather than to rigidly preserve Tibetan Buddhism. Ask yourself, “How can I contribute to the world with these teachings?”



## Christ and the Buddhas

Although I lived in Italy for seven years, I really had no relationship to the Christian tradition there. I was much more interested in the Pagan tradition that preceded Christianity. However, years later, after a year-long retreat, my husband Dave and I decided to go to Italy to re-bond and reconnect. We were mainly thinking about wine, art, and food when we visited Assisi on that trip, but we also found a church where, right outside the door, St. Chiara had been born. Chiara was the name of my daughter who died of SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome). So we found ourselves at the place where St. Chiara had lived. She was the companion of St. Francis and founded a sister order to his.

We went into the church and found where St. Francis had had a vision of Christ on the cross. We were just there as tourists, but as we sat down to look at the cross, it suddenly started morphing into what in my experience was Christ. Christ came out of the cross. His heart was red, and red light came out of his heart and flowed into mine. It was like a very vivid experience of Guru Yoga.

Dave was having his own powerful experience next to me, and there were teenagers on their Easter holiday from France making a lot of noise and running all over the place, but they would come into this room and become completely silent. I could see with one part of my mind that Christ was there, and at the same time I was aware that people were coming and going. I was having this experience and then at a certain point Christ merged with me like in Guru Yoga. Christ came into my heart, and I was just there with that experience. This went on for several hours. I was transformed during this experience. After a while it was over. I turned, started looking around, and looked up. Right above the door in that chapel was a fresco of Christ with red light coming out of his heart.

On another trip to Italy I had a similar experience with the Madonna, and again it was completely unexpected. I was not making distinctions like, “This is Christian, and I am Buddhist. I can’t experience anything here.” I was just open to the energy of that place at that moment. So I think that if we are in that openness, we do not have to worry about names, or right and wrong, or that this is the real thing and that is an unreal thing. The more we develop, I think the less we compartmentalize. The more we trust of our own experience and the less we feel like, “I am this, and I am not that.”

That does not mean that I am not going to continue to follow what I am doing, but I have a deeper understanding that Christ and Buddha or Tara and Christ, wherever they are, are not in names or the separations we create. They are all benefiting sentient beings. I feel that Christ is completely available. That is why when somebody invites Christ into their heart, they have an experience. It is real because Christ is a bodhisattva and has made himself available to anyone who opens to him in the same way that Tara and Adzom Rinpoche have. That is what Guru Yoga is all about. These beings are available to whoever is open to them. They expand your heart and you rest in that experience, and that becomes more and more what you are.

## The History and Manifestations of Tara

Tara is connected to the idea of compassion and she has twenty-one manifestations. She is also a mother goddess and many aspects of her are borrowed from forms of the Mother Goddess like Durga who is a rescuer from danger. This mother goddess imagery is universal in the sense that it is present in both the West and Asia. Tara's function is usually one of containing and protecting. She is also the goddess of the underworld; she appears in the hell realms and to the dead. She controls the *nagas*, who are the water spirits, the *pretas*, who are the hungry ghosts, and the guardians of the hells. At the secret level Tara is one of the five female Buddhas. In that context, she is called Samaya Tara, representing the Karma Family and the element of air. When you feel the wind, that is Tara.

The word Tara means "star," "savior," and "she who leads across." In the *108 Names of Tara*, which is one of her praises or prayers, Tara says, "I shall lead beings across the great flood of their diverse fears; therefore, the eminent seers sing of me and the world by the name Tara." She acquired this name from the numerous beings that she "led across," releasing them from samsara.

In ancient times Tara was connected to the merchants who traveled trade routes full of many dangers. It could be these very trade routes that spread Tara to the West. It seems that Tara was present in former Yugoslavia where a sacred mountain is connected with her. And of course the ancient capital of Ireland was called Tara. We do not know exactly how far she traveled, but in the Pagan-European tradition there existed the idea of the green goddess. I mentioned earlier how as Westerners we need to find a way to relate to Tibetan traditions. It may be that we can see the tradition of Tara as Western as well as Asian.

In Tibet, Tara was present in the Nyingma School but she was not well known until around 1000 A.D. when Atisha arrived with Tara teachings.

One of the great Indian teachers, Atisha, was invited to Tibet but at first refused the invitation because he had heard that Tibetans were very uncouth. Also, he was afraid that he would freeze in the high altitude. One day he received a prophesy from Tara telling him that in the Land of Snows he would be like the sun in darkness, and that he would meet his main disciple there. So Atisha finally went to Tibet where he met his disciple Dromtonpa. Together, they founded the Kadampa School, which became the source of inspiration for the Gelug School now headed by the Dalai Lama. They also popularized Tara, especially the practice of the *Twenty-one Taras*.

Archeological evidence supports the fact that merchants related to Tara very closely. On the edge of the Taklamakan Desert, right before the Silk Road sets off into a huge, empty expanse which ends up in Kashgar, there is a series of caves about two miles long called the Caves of Tun-Huang that contain many different artistic styles. Merchants from the fifth to the thirteenth centuries would sponsor frescos in these caves as a way of gaining

merit and protection on their journeys. The merchants would often bring artists from their own countries so one can find Khotanese, Chinese Buddhist, Tibetan, and many other cave painting styles, and many others. The two miles of Tun-Huang caves are an incredible distillation of Asian art which was only rediscovered in the 1970's.

In one of the caves archeologists broke through a wall and found many scrolls. On one of the scrolls they found a kind of Rosetta Stone of Asian languages. Linguists and historians were finally able to read some of the ancient lettering systems, especially those of central Asia. Through those scrolls, it was discovered that the Dzogchen teachings did not come out of India but out of central Asia somewhere around Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, northern Pakistan, and Afghanistan. This area had been the western part of Tibet at one time called Shang-Shung - the original capital of Tibet. According to the scrolls, Dzogchen originated in this area from the pre-Buddhist Bön tradition. I bring all of this up because many of these caves have Tara paintings in styles from all over Asia.

Through art we can see the historical emergence of Tara. In the sixth century A.D., the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara appeared alone, but by the end of that century, he was accompanied by Tara and Bhrikuti, two goddesses who were considered beneath him. Then in the seventh century Tara took over the role of *Savior from the Eight Fears* which I will talk about more when I explain the Tara practice. As I mentioned earlier, it was at this point that the whole cult of Tara really started developing.

Tara is also goddess of the earth. On the outer level she is closely connected with the earth, plants (especially medicinal plants), animals, and humans. She dwells in wild places like the Khadira and Potala Forests full of sweet smelling trees and flowers, medicinal plants, and of course the utpala flower or blue lotus which is her symbol. Tara has flowers in her hair, and of course a green body. She is known to tame wild animals, making them harmless. In addition to the hell realms she is goddess of Heaven, and she wears a crescent moon tiara in her hair. If you look at early Madonna images you will see this same crescent moon on the Madonna's tiaras. Tara is also known as the boat or ferry woman. So if you feel like your boat is sinking, call out to Tara and with swift action she will be there. Concentration on Tara is complete protection.

Tara is also the goddess of spiritual transformation and is connected to Sophia, who is best known in the West and Middle East. They both emerged around the same time period. Tara is generating, nurturing, protective and transformative. She has maternal wisdom and an always-accessible quality. People relate to her as they do to the Madonna. If you look at roadside shrines in Italy, almost all of them are for the Madonna. In churches, people often go to the Madonna and pray before going to Christ because of their feeling that she will understand and nurture them.

Green Tara is a peaceful manifestation of Tara, which is why she sits on a lunar disc. In Tantra, the lunar power is connected to peaceful deities, and the solar power to the wrathful deities. In the Lion-Headed Dakini Practice of Simhamukha the mantra sits on a solar disc and Simhamukha stands on a solar disc. But Green Tara, like all peaceful deities, is associated with the moon.

As I have mentioned there are twenty-one Tara emanations. In the Tara Temple being built at Tara Mandala, twenty-one large Taras will encircle the first floor, each one depicting a different emanation. This will be the first Tara Temple in the West!

Each of the twenty-one Taras has a special mantra and a special kind of action. In the Longchen Nyintig Lineage the Taras also have very different looks and postures representing all aspects of the wrathful, joyful, and peaceful feminine.

The White Tara has eyes on her hands and on her feet. She is in full lotus position and is connected to meditation and long life. The Vajra Tara is golden, with four faces and eight arms. She was popular in India for repelling and subjugating enemies. Then there is a red form of Tara called Kurukulle who is also known for subjugating enemies. There are eight Taras for each of the eight fears. There is also a red lion-faced Tara with yellow eyes and yellow hair. She protects beings from lions and pride. But the form of Green Tara is the culmination of all the Taras; she is the feminine model of enlightenment. If you are interested there are some practices for each of the twenty-one Taras and for all of the Taras together.

### *Karma Family*

There are five Buddha Families and Tara is the female Buddha of the Karma Family. If you are interested you can do "Five Family" practices and learn to transform encumbered emotions into wisdom. The encumbered patterns of the Karma Family are speed, workaholic tendencies, envy-jealousy, and ambition. Those can be transformed into the All-Accomplishing Wisdom of the Karma Family. Each of the five families has an encumbered pattern and a wisdom.

Green Tara and the green Karma Family are appropriate for this time in the world because there is so much speed. We go faster and faster, yet we never feel like we are getting everything done. Even our relaxation time seems to involve a lot of doing. So we have got to learn to work with the emotions and transform them into a feeling of flow rather than force. That is what Tara is about. Tara is represented by the wind. Wind goes everywhere and it can be very forceful, but you cannot see it directly. That is the energy of All-Accomplishing Wisdom.

### *The Story of Kalu Rinpoche and Tara*

There is a wonderful story about Kalu Rinpoche. He had just entered a three-year retreat and, as you may know, once you enter a three-year retreat you are not supposed to leave for any reason. Well, shortly after Kalu Rinpoche had begun his retreat he got a major tooth infection. The whole side of his face swelled up and he knew he could die if the infection continued to get worse. He was in incredible pain and did not know what to do; he just knew he was not going to leave, which meant that he might actually die in retreat. Kalu Rinpoche had never been a practitioner of Tara but one night he had a dream in

which Tara appeared to him and said, “Even though you have never had faith in me and you have never done my practice, if you do ten thousand of my mantras I will heal you.” So of course Kalu Rinpoche did this. Tara kept her end of the bargain and from then on Kalu Rinpoche was a great devotee of Tara, and all of his monasteries now do Tara practice. So it is an interesting idea to think that Tara is an actual being upon whom we can call from the depths of our hearts. At the same time, we must remember that Tara represents an innate capacity that we have within ourselves.

## Blessings of the Teachings

The teachings can bring many experiences and blessings. I will talk more about the power of Tara and the benefits of accomplishing the mantra as I explain the practice. Practitioners all have their own experiences, one of which may be tears which come to you as a result of the practice. Some teachers say that those kinds of tears are amrita. I heard a lama once say that ordinary tears are like peeing. When we cry for the teachings or have a kind of recognition or a feeling of homecoming or a strong devotion to the teachings, there is often a welling up of appreciation or gratitude or relief to finally find we have come home. Those tears are the tears of nectar. Those are the kind of tears that come when you have a karmic link with a practice or a teacher. When you finally meet up with them there is almost a feeling of relief and, “Where have you been for so long?”

We live in a dream. We live in illusion. We do not live in reality. We live in our own dream, and we are all having different dreams and experiences. We think these dreams are real and solid and that they are something we should worry about. But Dzogchen teachings repeat again and again that this is all a dream. Experiences are illusory. Kilung Rinpoche visited Tara Mandala and gave a month-long teaching on the *Treasury of Basic Space* (*Choying Dzöd* in Tibetan) which is one of the *Seven Treasures of Longchenpa* (seven Dzogchen teachings). The text was substantial and the illusory nature of everything kept coming up again and again. I had of course heard that insight before in connection with non-attachment and the non-solidity of everything, but what this text kept emphasizing was that we are actually in a dream. This is a magic show.

When we really wake up to our true nature we will realize that we have been dreaming. We will see things as they actually are, not as solid things like we do now. Out of our dream state, if we saw a table we would not see it as solid. We would see its true nature, which is empty yet apparent. The same thing would be true about how we saw our own bodies. Right now, we think that we *are* our bodies, but when we wake up we will realize that we actually do not exist, and that what is manifesting as us actually has no limits, no edges, no time, and is not conditioned. Until that happens we are in illusion.

For almost everyone, waking up fully is incremental. You will have *nyams*, a Tibetan word I have mentioned before, meaning temporary experiences. Remember the analogy with the glass and paper that I mentioned during the talk on the Third Turning of the Wheel? You might have little moments where the paper begins to come off the glass, but then the glass is covered again. Later more of the paper is removed, but then the glass is

partially or fully covered again. There may even be long periods of time when it feels like a stone is on top of the paper and there is no movement. But then something happens and you get another glimpse, and then more and longer glimpses. If you practice intensively, the cover comes off faster. If you do not practice very much, then you may only get a little glimpse. But karma is also involved. We have our daily karmic dream, but we also have karmic connections with the teachings from past lives. Often we have practiced in past lives, and when we come into contact with the teachings there is a big movement of the paper off the glass. Either way, we need to practice.

Nyala Pema Duddul, the amazing Dzogchen master to whom our stupa is dedicated, had an incredibly difficult childhood. When his father died his relatives took almost all of the money, and the remaining money went for offerings for the father's funeral. He became destitute with his mother and siblings. Life was so difficult that at least one of his brothers starved to death. That was Nyala Pema Duddul's childhood. But when he was eight or nine years old he received a series of initiations given by a great lama. By being in that environment and receiving all of the empowerments, Nyala Pema Duddul not only started remembering the dharma learned from past lives, he also remembered actual skills like metal-working, painting and statue-making. He had never studied these crafts, but suddenly could do all of them well because of the blessings of that environment, his karmic situation, and the teachings. Until the right events happen you may never know what karmic connections you have.

I was not a spiritual child. Some people are really spiritual as children and have lots of experiences and dreams, but I was just having fun. Then when I was 19 I met Tibetans. As soon as I got close to Tibetan culture I had an incredible welling-up of longing. I knew that I had to try to get closer to it and I was afraid of somehow getting separated from it again. I had never had an experience like that before in my life. That was my first experience with a karmic connection.

Buddhists say that there are primary and secondary karmic conditions. We have the primary conditions, called *gyu* in Tibetan, which are like good and bad seeds in us. We might have some negative karmic seeds from things we did in the past and then we might come into contact with secondary causes, or *khyen* in Tibetan, like getting involved with the wrong people. The secondary causes act as fertilizer and ripen the negative seeds. Secondary causes also ripen our good seeds. For example, you have had the positive karma and secondary causes to come into contact with Tara, and doing Tara practice will increase that positive karma. *Gyu* and *khyen* also explain why sometimes it seems like there are people who do terrible things in the world and get away with it for years and years. Their good karma may have come into contact with secondary causes, but they are also accumulating negative karma which will ripen with secondary causes in this lifetime or another.

I know you have just been given a lot of information and a lot of history, and you may feel a bit overwhelmed, especially those new to all of this. But I want you to have a context for what you are doing so that, if somebody asks you what are you doing and why, you have some idea of the background for all of this.

Green Tara  
Practice Explanation &  
Commentary





## Preliminary Comments

### Tibetan or English

Before we begin the practice let me answer two common questions. One is about which language you should do the practice in. If you want to, it is fine to do the practice all in English; the current Green Tara practice book has a good English translation. If you want to do the practice in Tibetan, just connect with the sounds. If you do not know the tunes or rhythms that we use during group practice, just chant in a regular, rhythmic tone that feels comfortable to you.

I like to do at least some of the practice in Tibetan because there is a transmission of sound. There are some practices, like Chöd, which are sung to a melody, so you really cannot do them in English. But a sadhana, like this Green Tara, basically gives you directions about the practice, so there is no magical reason to keep it in Tibetan. When we practice as a community at Tara Mandala, we generally use both English and Tibetan.

We might do Refuge in Tibetan and then do the description of becoming Tara in English. With the ending prayers, we do some in Tibetan and some in English. In each section of the practice I will tell you what language we usually do it in during group practice, but that is not set in stone. I think everyone should experiment and find what is most comfortable and meaningful.

### Eyes Open or Closed

Another question most people have is whether they should do the practice with their eyes open or closed. For some people, in the beginning, it can be easier to practice and visualize with the eyes closed, but it is actually good to try to practice with your eyes open, especially while being Tara. See the world as Tara does - Tara's mandala, Tara's mansion, the dimension of Tara. Especially at the beginning, it is really up to each person to decide what works best for them.

## The Practice

### Meaning of the Title

As I mentioned earlier, this teaching is from the Adzom Drukpa Terma Cycle called the *Ösel Dorje Sang Dzö*, which has a long lineage. Terma means hidden treasure. Padmasambhava, for example, hid many teachings to keep them safe, fresh, and relevant throughout time. When the time is right for a teaching to be revealed, a tertön or treasure-revealer finds it. In this case, this text was revealed by Adzom Drukpa.

There is a biographic poem written about Adzom Drukpa by Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche's sister or grandmother. We know that Adzom Drukpa lived for 84 years, mostly in a tent, and he received spontaneous knowledge. From the late 1800's to the early 1900's Adzom Drukpa helped found Rimé, a nonsectarian tradition that helped save many teachings by collecting them from all lineages.

This Green Tara title is *Ösel Dorje Sang Dzö Ley Pagma Drölma Jangmo Shug So*. *Ösel* means "luminous radiance." *Dorje* means "indestructible" or "beyond conditioning." *Sang* means "secret" (as in true nature is innate, but we are clueless about it). *Dzö* is "treasury." *Ley* means "from." *Pagma* means "sublime" and *Drölma* is "Tara." *Jangmo* is "green," and *Shug So* means "here within." In English this would be, "The Sublime Green Tara from the Luminous Indestructible Secret Treasury."

## Purification Breaths

We begin every practice with purification breathing. Sit with your back straight and your hands in your lap. Raise both arms above your head while inhaling, and then exhale while bringing your arms back to your lap. Next, make vajra fists by placing your thumb against your ring finger on each hand and then closing your hand into a fist. Place the fists, back of the hands down, in the crease on each side where your thigh and groin meet. Straighten your arms as much as possible, bringing your shoulders back and opening your chest. If your arms are too long to straighten, move your hands further down your thighs. Straight arms pressing into your thighs are important because you are pressing channels in your thighs with the backs of your hands and on the sides of your body with your elbows.

Slowly inhale and raise your left arm, bringing your index finger to your left nostril while keeping the rest of the hand in a fist. Close your left nostril with your left index finger. Make sure the whole finger (not just the tip) rests along the whole length of your nose. Exhale through your right nostril while lowering your left elbow towards your rib cage. Open your left nostril without fully removing your finger and inhale mostly through the right nostril, with some air coming through your mouth. Close the left nostril again and exhale. Perform the inhale and exhale a total of three times. While doing the three exhalations through the right nostril, visualize that the air you are exhaling is blue/black smoke and that you are releasing all anger, hatred, and aversion. Replace the left vajra fist in your leg crease, making sure the elbow is straight.

Repeat the same process with the right side (do not include the first breath when you raised both arms together). Close the right nostril and exhale through the left three times. Visualize that you are exhaling dark red smoke this time, clearing all craving, attachment, and desire. Replace the right vajra fist in your leg crease, making sure the elbow is straight.

Keeping your arms straight and in the leg creases close to your groin, inhale and exhale three times with both nostrils. Visualize that you are exhaling ash colored, grayish-white

smoke and releasing delusion, ignorance, depression, and disassociation - all the qualities of spaciness. After the final exhalation, release your arms and rest in the open, blissful feeling of wisdom prana.

## Dechen Barwa

*Dechen Barwa* means “Great Blazing Bliss”. Though not part of the Green Tara practice, it is a prayer to magnetize the energy of the universe. It is good to chant it before beginning any activity. This prayer is connected to the Nyingma School and to Padmasambhava, and it calls on all of the Padma Family, which is one of the five Buddha families. Padma means lotus and symbolizes red, fire, and the energy of magnetism. The wisdom of the Padma Family transforms the energy of desire while staying unattached.

Chant this prayer with real energy and feel the magnetism of the Padma Family. There is a melody that we use when we sing this in Tibetan as a group, but if you do not know the tune, just chant the words in Tibetan with hands folded in prayer.

## Arya Tare Section

### **NAMO ARYA TARE**

#### **Homage to Sublime Tara**

The introduction to the practice begins with ARYA TARE. This first section is read silently and is the introduction to the practice. It tells what this practice offers and what its purpose is in the relative and absolute sense. NAMO ARYA TARE means “Homage to the Sublime Tara.” This states that Tara is beyond cyclic existence and nirvana. That is what ARYA means. Sometimes ARYA is translated as noble, but I like to translate it as sublime. Tara is not someone in our fantasy world. She is actually a realized being, and we are beginning to realize that we have that capacity in ourselves too, so that is what we are paying homage to.

### **MI TUN JIG LEY KYÖB PA DANG**

In order to have protection from fears and **disharmonious circumstances**

MI TUN is “disharmonious.” JIG means “fear.” KYÖB PA is “protection from.” So Tara offers protection from fear and disharmonious circumstances, like court cases or situations that are in some way challenging and bring up different fears. Tara is really connected to fear and getting through fear. There are a lot of stories about Tara appearing when someone is afraid. Tara really does manifest. We can think of her as an archetype, but we can also think of her as a being who really exists outside of us.

### **CHOG TUN NGÖDRUB TOB DÖ NAM**

**To attain relative and absolute siddhis and fulfill wishes**

CHOG means “highest.” TUN means “ordinary.” NGÖDRUB is “siddhis” or “powers.” TOB is “to attain.” DÖ means “wishes,” and NAM is “all.”

### **GYEL KUN KYED YUM JETSUNMA**

#### **The precious mother who gives birth to all the Victorious Ones**

GYEL means “victorious.” KUN is “all.” KYED is “to give birth to.” YUM means “the feminine, the mother,” or it could even be “consort.” JETSUNMA means “Noble Feminine One.” So this relates to what I said about Prajnaparamita giving birth to all the Buddhas. The same epithet is being used here for Tara. It is this state of Tara, of primordial wisdom nature, that gives birth to all the Buddhas. We are not using the word mother in the literal sense, but more in the sense that this feminine matrix energy is what gives birth to all the Buddhas. GYEL KUN are the “Buddhas” or the “Victorious Ones.”

### **DRÖLMA NYURMA PAMO DRUB**

#### **Accomplish (the Sadhana of) heroic, swift Tara**

DRÖLMA is the Tibetan name for “Tara.” NYURMA means “quick.” PAMO means “heroic and female.” DRUB is “to accomplish.” So the idea being expressed here is that we want to attain the accomplishment of Tara who is swift. She shows up quickly, an attribute connected to the Karma Family. As I mentioned earlier, the Karma Family is connected to air and it transforms jealousy into wisdom. So Tara has that swift quality, like the wind. That is what this line is talking about.

### **SAMAYA**

SAMAYA is the link, the pledge, between us and Tara.

## **Refuge and Bodhicitta**

### **NAMO**

#### **Homage**

NAMO. We begin the practice by visualizing Tara in front of us. She is only in front of us for Refuge and Bodhicitta. We feel that we can actually see her as we say NAMO, meaning “homage.”

### **JIG DANG DUGNAL DU KA LAY DRÖL CHYIR**

#### **She who liberates fear and suffering**

JIG is “fear.” DANG means “and.” DUGNAL is “suffering.” And then LAY means “from.” DRÖL means to “liberate.” CHYIR means “in order that” - in order that fear and suffering be liberated.

### **PAGMA DRÖLMA KYABKYI NYING POR TEN**

#### **I rely on the heart of refuge, Arya Tara**

PAGMA is “noble,” “sublime.” DRÖLMA means “Tara.” KYABKYI NYING POR means “the essence of enlightenment” or “the essence of enlightened heart.” TEN means “to trust.” I put my trust in the heart of refuge, who is noble Tara. These lines are the refuge part of the practice. NYING means “heart-essence” or “core” of all wisdom beings, so when we take refuge in Tara, we take refuge in all of the refuges: the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha, the Three Roots, and so on.

**MÖN DANG JUGPAI CHANGCHUB SEM KYE DE**  
**Raising the Bodhicitta of wish and action**

The next two lines are the raising of bodhicitta. The bodhicitta of action is part of the Six Paramitas. MÖN is “the bodhicitta of wish.” DANG means “and.” JUGPAI is “action.” I talked about the wish and action levels of bodhicitta in the section on the Second Turning of the Wheel. This line is invoking both of those levels. MÖN is connected to the Four Immeasurables, and JUG to the Six Paramitas. CHANGCHUB SEM KYE means “I raise the bodhicitta” - I raise the two kinds of bodhicitta of wish and action.

**YICHEN DROKUN KYOBPAR DAMJA O**  
**I vow to protect all wandering sentient beings**

YICHEN means “beings,” literally “those with minds.” DROKUN means “all beings.” KYOBPAR is “to protect.” DAMJA O means “wandering.” That O at the end makes it imperative or strengthens it; it makes it double. In Tibetan, it is actually a repetition. If you look at the Tibetan script of this line in your text, you will see a little thing that looks like a 2. That is an AH, and then next to it there is an AH with something on top of it that turns it into an emphasis. So the line really emphasizes that I vow to protect all wandering sentient beings.

Chant this verse three times with hands folded in prayer, pausing after each time to really connect with the Refuge and Bodhicitta. In group practice, we generally chant this once in Tibetan, then in English, and then a final time in Tibetan. At the end, we feel Tara dissolve into us, and then we rest in primordial purity.

This practice is non-theistic. Everything comes from emptiness and is not separate from that. Form exists indivisibly from emptiness, like in the lines from the *Heart Sutra*, “Form is emptiness; emptiness is form.”

Anuyoga practices are partly defined by the three *samadhis*, which I will begin to explain now and continue with in the T M section. The first is the Samadhi of Suchness - the experience of the nature of emptiness. It is called *Deshin Nyid* in Tibetan. The universe and its contents, including all of our emotions, are all based on emptiness. So at the end of the Refuge and Bodhicitta, we want to try to feel suchness (or emptiness) and then really feel Tara dissolving into us. Then we dissolve into emptiness.

We do not become Tara yet, just emptiness. We just get a glimpse of emptiness, Dharmakaya, space. We use all of these words to try to explain something that is really beyond words. So we rest in emptiness. This is a little meditation time. When you are

doing the practice by yourself, you can decide how long you want the meditation time to be; it could be a few minutes, a half hour, or more - whatever feels right - but there always needs to be pause at this point in the practice where you actually try to experience emptiness.

## Refuge and the Eight Fears

Looking at the text a little more, the first line of Refuge and Bodhicitta mentions fear. There are eight great fears associated with Tara, and each of them has both a literal and a symbolic meaning. Some of the literal meanings do not really relate to us since we do not live in India, but overcoming the fear of wild animals really symbolizes positive spiritual forces overcoming instinctual drives and nonviolently turning them into compassion. One of Tara's powers is actually to disperse armies without anyone being killed.

Of the eight fears, the first is of elephants, which symbolically represents the fear of blindness. Second is the fear of lions, which symbolizes the fear of pride. The third fear is of fire, which symbolizes the fear of anger. The fourth is of poisonous snakes, symbolic of the fear of jealousy. The fifth fear is of thieves, which represents the fear of erroneous views. The sixth is the fear of imprisonment. That symbolizes the fear of greed. The seventh fear is of water or drowning, which symbolizes the fear of desire and attachment. If you have ever been in the grip of desire, you understand that it is sort of like drowning. The eighth fear is the fear of demons, which represents the fear of doubt. Those are the eight great fears associated with Tara and their symbolic meanings. You can call on Tara any time you feel afraid.

## Story of Tara Releasing a Prisoner

Tara is also known for liberating people from imprisonment, another thing many people fear. There was a woman who was imprisoned in Tibet by the Chinese. Because they were imprisoning so many people, the Chinese ran out of space in the jails, so they started using houses. This woman, who was a Tara practitioner, was imprisoned in one of these houses. One night after all the guards had gone to sleep, she was practicing Tara as usual. That night she had an especially powerful practice, during which she had a feeling that the outside door was open. After she finished her practice, she went down to find that the door had actually popped open during her practice. So the woman walked out. She just kept walking, and then she started running. She kept going over the Himalayas and finally escaped to India.

## The Creation Stage: Becoming Tara

Tantra, the path of transformation, has four aspects. The first is the ground, our Buddha Nature. The second is that which needs to be transformed, like our problems and our sense of separation from our true nature. The third aspect is that which does the

purification; in this case, it is the deity, Tara. And the fourth aspect is the fruition, that which is inseparable from the Ground of Being, our true nature. So in this practice, we transform into Tara in order that we may bring our Buddha Nature to the fore.

## **T M**

At the beginning of this next section, we sound the seed syllable T M. Sound is emptiness and emptiness is sound. With the sound of T M, we become Tara.

### **CHÖ KUN NGOWO KA NEY DAG**

#### **The essence of all dharmas is primordial purity**

CHÖ means “dharmas,” all phenomena. KUN is “all.” NGOWO is “essence.” KA NEY DAG means “primordial purity.” So this is not dharma in the sense of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. It is the definition of dharma which means everything- all of our emotions, all of our physical things- everything is dharma. So this is saying all dharmas are in essence KA NEY DAG (the short form is KA DAG) which means “primordial purity.” KA is the first letter of the Tibetan alphabet. And DAG means “pure.” So sometimes this is translated as alpha purity; pure from the beginning and pure from the first letter. This line and the next describe the first samadhi, which you just meditated on if you were doing the practice.

### **ZUNG DZIN TRÖPA LEY DEYPAI**

#### **Beyond the illusions of seizing and holding**

ZUNG DZIN means “seizing and holding.” TRÖPA is “illusions.” DEYPAI is “beyond.” LEY is a grammatical connector. So this means “beyond the illusions of seizing and holding is this experience that all dharmas are KA DAG, primordial purity.” Then from that primordial purity is the next samadhi which is called the All-Illuminating Samadhi or the Samadhi of Compassion (*Kun sNang* in Tibetan) in which compassion naturally emerges from emptiness.

### **SHAL YE KHANG U PE DA’I TENG**

#### **In the center of the divine mansion on a lotus on a moon is T M**

SHAL YE KHANG is “a divine mansion” or “palace” or “super house.” All mandalas are three-dimensional and have a mansion. Each mansion has different qualities, but they are used for giving the psyche a home where home equals the “Self.” Tara’s mansion has four doors. Imagine it all around yourself. It is like a forest. Remember, Tara’s dimension is the Khadira Forest. It is jungle-like and green with beautiful flowers and animals. The mansion is inseparable from the forest.

If you ever learn an extensive Tara practice, sometimes the description of the mansion will go into depth describing how the cornices, the eaves, and everything are made, and how everything has a symbolic meaning. If you go to a big initiation like the Kalachakra, monks actually build the palace so that you can see it. In the same way that our houses

reflect us and become our containers, Tara's palace or mansion is her container. It is where she dwells. The house in Jungian psychology represents the self, so here we are creating a transformation space for the psyche, through giving it this archetypal structure as a center. Really feeling this mansion intertwined with vines, and flowers with four open doors in the four directions is an important piece of the visualization.

So there is a divine mansion and then U PE DA'I TENG. U means "in the center." PE is for "Pema" or "lotus." DA'I is "moon," and TENG means "on top of." So on top, in the center, there is a flat moon disk on a lotus.

### **T M: YIG JANG GU YONG GYUR PE**

#### **The green letter T m becomes**

On top of that is T M, the seed syllable of Tara. There is a drawing of it in the practice book. YIG means "letter." JANG GU is "green." YONG GYUR PE means "now becomes." So the third samadhi is the seed syllable. It is called the Seed Samadhi or Samadhi of Cause, *Gyu* in Tibetan. Every deity has a sound that it comes out of. Just as we come out of a sperm and an egg, the deities come out of a sound. So Tara's sound is T M, and it is green. When T M is sounded, Tara immediately emerges out of that green T M.

### **JETSUN DRÖLMA KU DOG JANG**

#### **The green body of Arya Tara**

JETSUN DRÖLMA means "noble or sublime Tara." KU is "body." DOG is "color." JANG is "green" - the green body of Arya Tara. Until this point, we have not existed since taking refuge. Tara dissolved into us, and we dissolved into and rested in the experience of emptiness. So up until now, there has been nothing in place of our body. But then we visualize the mansion, the lotus, the moon, the letter, and now Tara. So now where we sit is Tara; we have become her. This is very quick because this is an Anuyoga practice. We become Tara very quickly.

### **SHAL CHIG CHAG NYI SHI DZUM SHE**

#### **She has one face, two hands, and a peaceful smile**

Next, we have a description of her. This line literally this means one face, two arms, peaceful smile.

### **LONG KU'I CHE DZOG YE KYANG RÖL**

#### **Wearing Sambhogakaya ornaments, with the right leg in the curved posture**

LONG KU'I is "Sambhogakaya." CHE DZOG means "the perfect ornaments," and YE KYANG RÖL describes the posture with the right leg extended and the left leg in. So Tara wears the Sambhogakaya ornaments, LONG KU'I CHE. She is perfected with these ornaments. Traditionally there are six different ornaments symbolizing the luminosity of Sambhogakaya. Each ornament also has its own meaning. The crown symbolizes concentration and represents the Vajra Family. The earrings mean patience, a characteristic of the Padma Family. A choker (or a short necklace) symbolizes generosity



and represents the Ratna Family. Bracelets and anklets represent the discipline of the Buddha Family, and a belt symbolizes diligence, a characteristic of the Karma Family.

Tara is also wearing the five silk garments of Sambhogakaya deities, signifying that she is emanating the Five Wisdoms. The five silk garments are the shawl, the skirt, the jacket, the sash, and ribbons.

### **CHAG YEY CHOG JYIN CHAG GYA YI**

#### **And her right hand in the supreme giving mudra**

CHAG YEY means her right hand while CHOG JYIN means supreme giving. CHAG GYA is “mudra.” So she has her right hand in the supreme giving mudra, which means the palm is facing out, and the fingers are angled down towards the ground. If you were doing a healing practice with Tara, you would visualize healing light coming from this hand.

### **JIG DANG DUGNAL UG JYIN DZE**

#### **She takes the wind out of fear and suffering**

JIG is “fear.” DUGNAL means “suffering.” UG JYIN DZE means “to take the wind out of it.” It is the same expression that we have when we say we got the wind knocked out of us. So Tara knocks the wind out of fear and suffering with that mudra, described in the previous line.

### **CHAG YÖN TUGKAR CHOG SUM GYE**

#### **The left hand at her pure heart in the mudra of the Three Jewels**

CHAG YÖN is “the left hand.” TUGKAR means “pure heart.” CHOG SUM means “the Three Jewels.” GYE is an abbreviation for “mudra.” So she holds her left hand in the mudra of the Three Jewels. The ring finger and thumb are together forming a circle, representing the union of samsara and nirvana. The other three fingers are spread and facing up, representing Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.

### **NYEN TE UTPAL LANG TSO ZHEY**

#### **She is youthful, smiling, with the utpala at her ear**

NYEN TE is at the level of the ear UTPAL is the utpala, the blue lotus that symbolizes Green Tara LANG TSO is youthful, the prime of life and ZHEY is smiling. This means that she is also holding the utpala flower, or blue lotus, in her left hand. The utpala may be the same blue water lily that was used in Egypt and was seen as the origin of life in Egyptian mythology. They say that in the beginning there were the waters of chaos, and out of chaos came a blue lily. In the blue lily was a divine child who had come to banish universal darkness. This child was linked to beautification and healing in Egypt. There may be no connection at all with the utpala, but I did some research and found out that the blue lotus was also used as a psychotropic drug. It was used that way in Egypt, often combined with wine. Also, King Tutankhamen’s innermost golden casket was covered with blue lotus petals. The Utpala may also be unrelated to the Egyptian water lily. In the Buddhist sense, the utpala is considered to be extremely rare and beautiful,

symbolizing Tara and her compassion. Some say this very rare lotus blooms only once in a thousand years. So if there were to be any symbol for Tara, it would be the blue lotus - the utpala. The text says, "She is youthful, smiling, with the Utpala at her ear." Tara's smile signifies that she sees the suffering of the world and is responsive to it, but she never loses her joyful state. You might also try smiling to bring the presence of this energy into your body.

### **MUME ÖZER DANG CHE TSER**

#### **And shimmering with boundless light rays**

MUME means "shimmering" or "glowing." ÖZER means "light rays". CHE TSER is "beyond limits" or "boundless." This is the luminous quality of the Sambhogakaya, the dimension of boundless luminosity. It is important not to think of Tara as opaque and solid like your normal body, because the point of visualization is to desolidify or illuminate your normal obscured energy field through identifying with Tara's luminous energy. Here that radiance emanates out to all beings.

### **Ö TRÖ YING NEY YESHE PA**

#### **Light extends into space inviting the limitless Jnanasattva**

Ö TRÖ means "light going out." YING is "into space." So now we are shifting activity. Light is going out from Tara into space to the YESHE PA. YESHE PA are "the Jnanasattvas." This is a very important concept to understand. In Tantra, there are two types of sattvas or beings. One is the Samayasattva or Pledge Being, and the other is the Jnanasattva or Wisdom Being.

The Samayasattva or Pledge Being, *Damzigpa* in Tibetan, is the being that we created through visualization after we said T M. So we have just built the Tara Samayasattva, which is linked to our own commitments. But the Samayasattva is, in a sense, still just a shell of the deity. It has all the attributes of Tara, but we still need to bring it to life. So we make a connection with the Jnanasattvas or Wisdom Beings, *Yeshepa* in Tibetan.

The Jnanasattva is the actual, living, wisdom aspect of Tara, which will bring the Samayasattva to life. So we send light out from our Tara Samayasattva, which is the visualization that we have created. This light flows out from our whole body as we offer it as a gift to the Jnanasattvas. We are offering light and asking Tara and all Wisdom Beings (limitless Jnanasattvas) to come bring our practice to life.

Instead of just sending out light to invoke the energy of the wisdom beings to invite the wisdom to come into you on the light rays, you can also imagine that the light rays have hooks on the ends of them that hook the Jnanasattvas, or that there are beautiful Offering Goddesses carrying offerings representing the six senses to the Jnanasattvas. If you want to do an even more precise and elaborate visualization, you can picture six goddesses going out to the Jnanasattvas with offerings. With this method, it is as if you sent invitations to everybody saying, "Please come to my house. Here are some gifts for my guests. I would really like for you to come." The Jnanasattvas accept the invitation, come

into the Samayasattva, and bring it to life. But the simpler way is to just connect by sending out green light rays.

In any case, after invoking them, the Wisdom Beings send their wisdom energy back in light rays and they merge into you. At that point, the Samayasattva and Jnanasattva join and you are fully functioning as Tara.

### **PAGME GYEN DRANG YERME GYUR** **Who become inseparable from the Samayasattva**

PAGME is "boundless." GYEN DRANG means "invite." YERME GYUR is "to become inseparable." So we are sending out light to the boundless Wisdom Beings of the universe, the Jnanasattvas, asking them to become inseparable from our Samayasattva, the visualization we have created. The word Samayasattva is not actually in this line, but it is implied.

I suggest you pause at this point so that you actually have time to feel this experience. Really feel the wisdom energy entering you - the Samayasattva. It is a feeling like water being poured into water, if it actually happens you will feel an intangible shift as the blessings enter. There is also a feeling of energy entering; as Tara's energy pours into you, and you are embodying Tara. This is a very key moment in the practice. There is always a moment in any Tantric practice of unification of Jnanasattva and Samayasattva. In the biography of Machig Lapdrön at this moment in her initiation from Lama Sonam she rose up several feet in the air, spoke in Sanskrit and danced the Dakini dances, and passed through the wall of the temple.

### *The Three Aspects of the Creation Stage*

In Tantric practices, we have both the creation or development stage, *Kye Rim* in Tibetan, (that is when the visualization happens) and the completion or perfecting stage, *Dzog Rim* in Tibetan, (that is when the visualization is dissolved and we rest in our true nature). Now that we have just experienced the creation stage, I would like to go into a little more depth by talking about its three aspects.

The first aspect is the Clarity of Form. The form should be steady and clear, clear but empty, rainbow-like. During practice, if you are not experiencing this steady, rainbow-like clarity, you will know it. You will realize you are distracted and you no longer feel that you are Tara. Clarity of form is a relaxed condition. This quality is important because we can get really tense and start criticizing ourselves for not doing the practice perfectly. It is very important to allow yourself to have clarity without tension.

One very helpful teaching that I received about this was to just assume that you are the deity. Assume that you are Tara rather than feeling like you have to invent something. If you assume you are Tara, then you do not have to struggle to keep up the visualization.

At this point, you already know that your body is green and that you are wearing rainbow-colored robes. Normally you do not have to struggle to remember what you look like; you just assume you are you. Do the same with Tara, and trust that you really are her. In Anuyoga, as opposed to lower Tantras, you focus much more on *feeling* than on the details of the visualization. Focus on the sensations that you have when you become her and really develop those feelings.

The second aspect of the creation stage is Recollecting the Purity, knowing and remembering the symbolic meaning of all the aspects of the visualization without fussing too much with the details. Focus the mind on projecting a clear, radiant deity. You really want that feeling and assumption of being the deity. Recollecting the Purity means remembering that you are Tara. You keep shifting back to Tara whenever your mind goes into ordinary consciousness, and you will get distracted because it is the nature of our minds to wander around. When you remember that you are Tara, you recollect the feeling of being her and the purity of that experience.

And then the third aspect of the creation stage is the Pride of the Deity. That is the deep confidence in actually being the deity. You know that, at your core, there is this Tathagata-garbha or innate Buddha Nature; you are not making this up. You know that as Tara your true nature is being revealed. So the third aspect is really primordial self-esteem. You are pure and perfect and not just dressing up as Tara; you are not in Tara drag. You trust in your Buddha Nature and have confidence in your capacity as an innate wisdom being. This is not egoic pride.

One of the ways that you will know that you have had success in the practice is that the deity will constantly arise in your mind and the mantra will constantly arise in your voice. Sometimes a person with vision can *see* your yidam as well. There is a story about Tilopa seeing a green woman in Oddiyana, recognizing her as Tara, and asking her for teachings. The woman may not have looked green to others, but Tilopa could see her as Tara.

I actually had an experience like this once; it was a very strange situation. I was in Bali to teach a retreat of Simhamukha, the dark blue, lion-faced dakini. The people I was with and I had jet lag, so we were wandering around Bali at three or four in the morning. We came upon some people in the middle of the road who were madly chopping wood. We soon discovered that they were preparing for a funeral. There was nothing else going on, so we hung out at this event for several hours, at which point they invited us to the funeral.

So the next day we went to the funeral, but just hung around the edges and viewed the little box that contained the ashes of the grandmother who had died. An Austrian woman suddenly came up to me and asked, “Why are you blue?” At that point in time, I had been doing Simhamukha practice intensely for eight years. When I told the woman why I was in Bali, she told me that she had just received the Simhamukha initiation in Austria and was there to do a personal Simhamukha retreat in the warmth and sunshine of Bali. She ended up joining our retreat.

The main point of practicing is to become so imbued with the practice that it becomes part of you.

So, we have become Tara. Tara was born, in a sense, during the creation stage, so now we are going to make offerings, as Tara, to Tara, in celebration of the birth of Tara. If we look at this in the modern psychological sense, a deity practice is a practice of sublime pride. It is transcendental self-esteem, in the sense that, as we become the deity, we develop an experience of ourselves that is beyond our normal conception. This, as I said earlier, is called pride of the deity, as well as vajra pride, divine pride, or Iha kyi ngagyel.

We often hear about the need for self-esteem. If we really feel that we have become Tara and practice diligently, we will be working on the depths of self-esteem. This is not egoic self-esteem where we think, "I am good at this, and I am valued because of this other thing." Vajra pride - divine pride - is the recognition of our true nature. Becoming Tara, really having the feeling of embodying her, is a wonderful cure for lack of self-esteem. It is in this state that we make offerings to her.

## Offerings

**OM RYA TARE SAPARIV RA VAJRASAMAYA DZA TISTHA VAJRA T M**  
**Om Sublime Tara & Retinue, Indestructible Samaya Dza, Vajra stabilize Tam**

This means "Homage to the Sublime Tara." SAPARIV RA means "retinue." VAJRASAMAYA DZA means "remember your samaya." So we are calling on Tara to remember her vow, her commitment, to come when called. DZA means "do it." Once this has happened, the next line says TISTHA VAJRA T M; that is the "stabilization of the unification of the Jnanasattvas and Samayasattva." The union is stabilized in the T M indestructibly.

ATI PU HO: PRATI TSA HO

**Non-dual homage, Homage received**

ATI PU HO means that the real Tara is non-dual, inseparable from us, so ATI PU HO is "non-dual homage." We have gone through the process of creating the Samayasattva and invoking the Jnanasattvas. The Jnanasattvas have become one with us, and the Samayasattva has been brought to life and stabilized. Now we are reaffirming that we did that, but that in fact there had never really been any separation. This state of Tara is innate; that is what ATI PU HO means. PRATI TSA HO means "homage received." Pause for a moment to really experience yourself as Tara.

During group practice, we chant the first part, from the T M through the description of Tara once in English and chant the mantra beginning with OM RYA TARE once in Sanskrit.

**ARGHAM P DYAM PUSHPE DHUPE ALOKE GHANDHE NAIVIDYA SHABDA**  
**Drinking Water, Washing Water, Flowers, Incense, Lights, Perfume, Sweet Food, Music**

There are three levels of offerings. The first eight offerings are the tangible outer offerings. The first is ARGHAM, which means “drinking water.” The second is P DYAM, or “washing water.” PUSHPE means “flowers.” DHUPE is “incense,” ALOKE is “the offering of lights.” GHANDHE means “perfume.” NAIVIDYA means “sweet food,” and SHABDA is “music.” These were the physical offerings given to the Buddha.

**RUPA SHABDA GHANDHE R SA SPARSHE DHARMA PRATITSA HO**  
**Form, Sound, Smell, Taste, Touch, All things offered with respect in oneness**

The next offerings are the inner offerings which represent the sense experiences. RUPA literally means “form,” but here it symbolizes “sight.” SHABDA was one of the physical offerings, but this time it represents “sound.” GHANDHE was also mentioned before, but as an inner offering it represents “smell.” R SA means “taste,” and SPARSHE is “touch.” DHARMA PRATITSA HO means that “all things are offered with respect in oneness.” Remember that we are making these offerings to ourselves as Tara.

**PANCA BALINGTA RAKTA K HI**  
**Nectar, Torma, Blood, Enjoy**

The last set of offerings are the Tantric offerings. Tantra is about taking sense experience to the path. These offerings are about the union of sense experiences. PANCA means “five,” but here it is an abbreviation for Panca Amrita - the five nectars which are the transformed versions of impure, male, white “fluids” like excrement, urine, blood, semen, brains,. BALINGTA means “offering cakes” represented by a *torma*. RAKTA is “blood,” specifically menstrual blood, which is considered sacred in Tantra. K HI means “eat” or “enjoy.” So we have given the tangible outer offerings, the sense-related inner offerings, the Tantric offerings, and then told our guests to eat and enjoy. And in this case, one of the guests is oneself as Tara.

It is actually very interesting when you do the practice to have the experience of this non-dual offering. At first you may wonder how you can offer something to someone who is not separate from yourself, but then you begin to have a kind of non-dual experience of offering and receiving as one thing. It is similar to when you make love. If the experience is really good, then there is this feeling that there are not two beings anymore, just one, non-dual. There is no giver or receiver; it is just oneness.

We should have that experience with the offerings. At first, you may not really be able to get your mind around this idea, but when you get into the practice, it is a very profound feeling. In Tantra, the fundamental state is Great Bliss, *Mahasukha*, the union of the phenomenal world and emptiness. The main point when making the offerings is what is happening inside. Really try to feel openness, generosity, and bodhicitta. And if we look at the offerings from the view of self-esteem, to make offerings to oneself is something we hardly ever do, especially if we have no self-esteem. It is often hard to give to oneself. But here we are, making all these offerings to ourselves as Tara.

In group practice, we chant from OM RYA TARE to K HI one time in Sanskrit, and while chanting we do mudras, which are explained in the Appendix.

In your practice book, you will see double music notes after PRATITSA HO and K HI. At those points we play instruments like bells, drums, and horns to add music to the offering and as an additional connection to the Jnanasattvas. We invite them and then make sound offerings.

## Praises of Tara

### **GYELWA KUN YUM DUGNAL KUN DRÖLMA**

**Mother of all the victorious ones; liberator of all suffering**

Now that we have made offerings, we sing the praises of Tara. GYELWA KUN YUM means “mother of the Victorious Ones.” DRÖLMA literally means “female liberator,” and it is the Tibetan name for Tara. KUN is “all,” and DUGNAL is “suffering,” so DUGNAL KUN DRÖLMA means “liberator of all suffering.”

### **NYURMA PAMO JANG NGÖN MAR GED DANG**

**Swift-acting heroine of glowing, green-blue emerald complexion**

NYURMA means “swift.” PAMO here means “heroine.” Pawo are the “dakas” and pamo are the “dakinis,” but sometimes these beings are also known as heroes and heroines. JANG is “green” and NGÖN is “blue,” so we have the color green-blue. MAR GED is “emerald” and DANG is “complexion,” so MAR GED DANG describes Tara’s complexion as emerald green/green-blue. Tara’s green is not flat, but luminous like trees in early summer or like an emerald. Tantric deities are not opaque like we are. They are made out of light, almost like a light glowing through alabaster. You can imagine Tara as an emerald lamp glowing and shimmering.

### **LONG KU’I GYEN DEN DUD GEG DRA LEY GYEL**

**Wearing the Sambhogakaya ornaments, victorious over maras, hindrances, and enemies**

LONG KU’I GYEN refers to the “Sambhogakaya ornaments” which I talked about during the creation stage. GYEL means “victorious.” Victorious over what? DUD means “demons,” GEG is “hindrances,” and DRA means “enemies.”

### **PAGMA TUGJE JEN LA CHAG TSAL THÖ**

**Sublime Ma, Compassionate one, praise & homage to you**

PAGMA is “noble.” TUGJE is “compassionate.” THÖ means “praise.” CHAG literally is “hand,” so when we put our hands together that is CHAG TSAL which in this case means “homage and praise.” So the line means “praise and homage to sublime, compassionate Tara.”

Tantric practices always have a phase of praises and offerings. When you actually praise someone and make offerings to them, it really opens your heart; you feel good inside. In this practice, the praises and offerings are really to open you more to Tara, who is not separate from you.

As a group, we usually sing the praises to a specific tune once in Tibetan, with hands folded in prayer. If you do not know the tune, continue to chant rhythmically.

## The Heart and Action Mantras

Now that we have done the offerings and praises, it is time to do the heart and action mantras which are the core of the practice. Many sadhanas include a heart mantra to first generate the power of the deity and then an action mantra to perform the actions of the deity, such as healing or removing obstacles. The next four lines set up the visualization for the mantras.

### **TUG KAR DA TENG TAM: YIG JANG**

**In her heart on a white moon is the green letter T M**

The line means “in our pure hearts, on top of the moon, is the green letter T M.” The heart is very important; it's the center of the energetic body.

### **NAG KYI TRENGWAI KORWA LAY**

**The mantra mala circles around that**

NAG is “mantra.” TRENGWAI means “mala.” A mala is a string of beads used to keep count of the number of mantras one says, but in this case the mala is made up of the mantra as if each syllable were a bead. KORWA LAY means “to circle around.” So NAG KYI TRENGWAI KORWA LAY means “the mantra circles around.”

So we are Tara, green and glowing. We are ornamented and rainbow-clad, and in our heart is a lotus with a moon disk on top, crowned by the green letter T M. The mantra mala circles around that to the left, or counter-clockwise, as it does in all female deities. A male deity's mantra circles clockwise.

### **ÖZER TRO DÜ DÖN NYI JEY**

**Light rays expand and reabsorb, accomplishing the two benefits**

ÖZER TRO DÜ DÖN NYI JEY means “light rays expand and absorb, accomplishing the two benefits.” So the light rays go out and again they connect to the Jnanasattvas. TRO is “Jnanasattvas.” The DÜ means that they are reabsorbed. This sending and receiving accomplishes the two benefits: to oneself and to others.



## **NYAM NYI DEWA CHENPOR GYUR**

### **Becoming the great bliss of equanimity**

NYAM NYI means “equanimity.” DEWA CHEN is “great bliss.” POR GYUR is “becoming.” So together it means “becoming the great bliss of equanimity.” Even though there is a lot of suffering in the world, you as Tara do not get caught up in the emotions and drama. You see the suffering but remain in equipoise, non-reactively dispensing relief.

## The Heart Mantra

### **OM T RE T M SW H**

OM T RE T M SW H is the first mantra to circle, counter-clockwise, around the TAM in your heart. To visualize this, picture a green T M in the center of your heart chakra with the mantra surrounding it; each syllable is green and standing upright. The mantra looks like a train, with OM as the engine and H as the caboose. The mantra, moon disk, and T M are all small enough to fit into your human-sized heart chakra. In some practices, you make yourself very large, but in this one you are a human-sized Tara.

OM T RE T M SW H is the general mantra for all twenty-one Tara emanations. When we chant this, we are not chanting to Tara or to ourselves as Tara. We are chanting Tara’s essence sound. It would be as if you had a sound that was your primordial essence, and I wanted to be you. I would visualize you and chant your essence sound.

As we are chanting, we visualize that green light from the glowing, green mantra goes out to contact the Jnanasattvas. Then you, as Tara, act as a transfer station or a solar panel. The green light from the Jnanasattvas comes back into you; you store up their energy in your “solar cells,” and then you send the healing, green light out to all beings. You see all beings become Tara and see everything as Tara’s pure dimension. This sending and receiving, or *trondii* in Tibetan, is another important concept that is used a lot in Tantra. By sending and receiving during the heart mantra, you gather the power of the practice. You cannot give energy away that you do not have.

While chanting the mantra, continue to draw on the energy of the Wisdom Beings, especially the twenty-one Taras. Their energy flows into the mantra, and the mantra spins the energy out through you to all beings who are also Tara. This is a form of Guru Yoga. Open your field of energy to the primordial energy, which is always there. If the primordial mind stream can flow into our mind stream, then there is no separation. That is the true meaning of the practice.

You do the mantra and visualization for as long you can, but watch your state of mind. Do not let the practice become mechanical.

## The Action Mantra

### **OM T RE TUT T RE TURE SW H**

The second mantra, OM T RE TUT T RE TURE SW H , is the action mantra specific to Green Tara. Each of the twenty-one Taras has her own action mantra. After you have finished the heart mantra, by simply shifting your focus, you dissolve the visualization. After a moment, recreate the visualization, this time with the green action mantra circling the T M counter-clockwise. Continue offering light to the Jnanasattvas, collecting merit and wisdom from them and then sending that out to all beings. Keep that connection with the Jnanasattvas so that it grows and deepens. After the heart mantra, however, Tara already has the energy of the practice, so the focus is less on gathering energy and more on letting it flow to all beings. The green light-energy is all-healing. It turns all beings into Tara, and everything becomes the dimension of Tara.

Send the light out to the whole universe and to all dimensions. You can also send the light to specific troubled spots in the world, like the Middle East or Africa, or to the government or the disenfranchised in this country. The energy can also be sent to individuals who are in fear or are in need of healing. If you have been hurt, shocked, abused, or broken-hearted, do this mantra with a focus on your heart chakra. Tara's is a very strong healing energy, so work with that. Using the action mantra, focus mostly on sending Tara's healing out into the world until all is healed and all know the dimension of Tara.

The number of each mantra that you do during practice may vary, but before you have accomplished the heart mantra (which I will talk about in a moment) and during group practice, do about one third the number of action mantras as you did heart mantras. For example if you said one thousand heart mantras, say three hundred action mantras. After completing the two mantras, you may insert the "Praises to the Twenty-One Taras" if you know it.

### Mantra Accumulation

As I mentioned before, you must gather the power of the practice before you can use it. It is difficult to really know when you have accomplished the mantra, so for most practices there is a specific number of times you must say the heart mantra before you can say that you have accomplished, "drub," it. If you have not accomplished the mantra, you do not have the power of the practice, so the practice will not be transformative. That is why, at the beginning, we do many more heart mantras during each practice session than action mantras. To "drub" Tara's heart mantra, we need to recite it at least seven hundred thousand times (700,000).

Once you have "drubed" the heart mantra, you might do more of the action mantra during practice when you are trying to perform specific actions like overcoming obstacles or helping someone with an illness.

There are three ways to “drub” a mantra. The first and most common way is through counting. If you have a mala, use it along with a “drub clip,” and a set of two counters (each counter is a little cord with ten small metal or wooden rings that slide snugly up and down the cord. Each cord usually has a tiny bell or a dorje at the end). You can get these through the Tara Mandala bookstore or other dharma-related stores or websites. For this explanation, I am assuming that you have a mala with one hundred and eight beads.

Hold your mala in your left hand, with your thumb over the guru bead (or main bead), which usually has a tassel coming off of it. As you say each mantra, move one bead towards yourself with your thumb. Longer malas often have three spacer beads which divide the mala into sections, making it easier to keep your place. If you have these beads, you do not have to count them.

After you have counted each bead on your mala once, pull down one ring from one side of your counter set. This signifies that you have counted one hundred mantras. Actually, you have counted one hundred and eight, but the extra eight are to make up for any time you spent in distraction. Each time you finish counting a mala, pull down another ring on your counter until all ten rings on one side are down. This means that you have done one thousand mantras. Now, pull one ring down from the other counter. This side signifies every thousand mantras you do up to ten thousand. Push the rings from the first counter up and begin again. Use the “drub clip” to signify each set of ten thousand mantras. After the first ten thousand, move the clip from near the guru bead to just after the first bead on the mala. For each additional ten thousand mantras, move the clip one more bead. When you finish “drubing” Tara, the clip will be on the seventieth bead of your mala. So your mala becomes a portable, little counter. You could also count the number of mantras you can do in an hour. If you can say five thousand of Tara’s heart mantra in an hour, then you would need to say mantras for one hundred and forty hours of practice, in addition to doing the rest of the Tara practice.

The second way to accomplish a mantra is through time, like doing a practice in retreat for a certain number of days or months or even years. Also if you have a problem with using the mala, some kind of physical problem like Carpal Tunnel Syndrome, you can figure out by counting once how long it takes to finish 100 mantras and then keep track of your practice by noting the time.

The third way to know that you have accomplished the mantra or deity is through dreams. You may have dreams about Tara which you would then take to your teacher to see if he or she thinks the dream indicates that you have “drubed” the mantra. Some practices actually list the types of dreams you need to have. Something I remember from learning the Mandarava practice is that the dream indicating that one had accomplished the Mandarava mantra would include peacocks dancing on mountain-tops.

It actually does not take as long as you might think to accomplish this Tara practice. It only takes about three weeks in retreat to do seven hundred thousand because the mantra is very short, and you can say it quickly and silently in your mind. At the same time, you

want to make sure that you are not so caught up in your counting goals that your practice becomes superficial. Remember, you are Tara helping all beings.

In retreat, you would usually do four practice sessions a day, two to four hours each. During each session you would go through the whole practice, reciting however many heart and action mantras you need to do at the appropriate place, then finishing the practice.

Even if you are not in retreat but are doing accumulations, you cannot just walk around a shopping mall with your mala in hand counting mantras. You must do accumulations within the context of a practice session, ideally in the same place at the same time, but that is not essential. Of course, it is wonderful to do the Tara mantra anytime, day or night, but in terms of accomplishing the mantra it is a much different experience when you are sitting and visualizing.

Some teachers say that if you have the power of one mantra, you have the power of all mantras, but that does not mean that you should not “drub” other practices. After accomplishing Tara’s heart mantra, you may continue with a daily sitting practice and practice out in the world with the abbreviated Tara practice that is in your practice book. Some people commit to seven hundred thousand more mantras. Some make a commitment to practice Tara every day for the rest of their lives. Sometimes, people make Tara their principle daily practice but do another practice once in awhile instead, like Shitro after the death of someone they knew. Still other people have a commitment to another Tantric practice but still practice Tara once a month on Tara Day. So your practice is up to you and your teacher, if you have one. But to “drub” any practice means that you have gone deeply into the practice and realized its benefit.

## Tara Day

Tara Day is the eighth day of the lunar cycle. The new moon is the first day, and Tara Day is seven more days after that. Many people like to use a Tibetan/Standard calendar combination to keep track of special practice days. These are fine, but you will find that sometimes on Tibetan calendars the days are slightly off of what a regular calendar might say because the creators may have based the new moon on a time zone in India or somewhere else. The Tibetan calendars also sometimes give a month two first days or just drop a day because they believe it is unlucky, so you might also want to use a Western astrological calendar.

## Remember to Call in Tara

I accomplished Tara’s heart mantra in a one-year retreat. In that same retreat, I was struggling with the idea of the feminine, its importance for me and others, and how practice should be informed by that. It was a very difficult time and topic for me.

Towards the end of the retreat, I finally realized that I could call on Tara for help. I did, and she was instantly in my cabin, luminous gold, with green clothes. I started crying as Tara gazed at me. When I asked her where she had been, she said, “You never called.”

We often do not think to call on Tara because a lot of our practice focuses on the non-dual aspects, but we live in duality. We can see Tara as an archetype, but she really exists, yet she is also non-dual, so she does not have to come from anywhere or go anywhere. She can appear whenever we need her, but we have to ask. Both asking and doing practice with visualization, mudra, and mantra are like dialing Tara’s hotline. Tara is famous for responding when called, so remember you can call on her when you are in need or afraid of something.

## Purification

After saying the heart and action mantras we recite three mantras three times: the Sanskrit vowels, the Sanskrit consonants, and the “One Hundred Syllable Mantra” as purification. Sanskrit is considered a sacred language that did not originate in our dimension, so even saying the alphabet is considered to have a liberating power- in this case the power to purify. The “One Hundred Syllable Mantra,” also known as the “Vajrasattva Mantra,” is one of the most powerful purification mantras in Tibetan Buddhism and is part of the Ngöndro, or Preliminary Practices. Vajrasattva was the being who brought the Dzogchen teachings into this dimension through Garab Dorje. He is also known for his ability to purify all karma, no matter what someone has done. We say all three of these mantras in a row and then repeat them all two additional times. After that, we say the YEDHARMA mantra three times. This is another purification mantra that I will talk more about in a moment. We chant these mantras in order to correct any mistakes that we have made during the practice, such as letting our mind wander or doing the practice improperly.

The single music notes in the text indicate that only the bell is played. As you chant these mantras, hold the vajra (dorje in Tibetan) at your heart with your right hand (the vajra is tilted so that the top angles away from you). Hold the bell in your left hand and ring it without any particular rhythm throughout the purification section. Adzom Rinpoche says you should always carry a bell and dorje - if you do not, then you are not really a Vajrayana practitioner. The bell and dorje symbolize so much that they could serve as your traveling altar.

## The Story of the Yedharma Mantra

The story of the Yedharma mantra is very interesting. Before Shariputra was a disciple of the Buddha, he was a wanderer. It seemed like everyone was just walking around India in those days, and people on the spiritual path would just run into each other, kind of like we do today. So Shariputra was walking around looking for a place to spend the night when he ended up sharing a place with one of the Buddha’s disciples, Ashvajit. Shariputra checked the guy out and thought, “Wow, he looks pretty cool, radiant even. I

am going to ask him about his teacher.” So Shariputra went up to Ashvajit and asked him who his teacher was and what he taught. Ashvajit said that his teacher was Shakyamuni Gautama. Then the disciple said the now famous Yedharma lines to describe the essence of the Buddha’s teaching: “Of things which originate from causes, the Buddha has stated the causes and their cessation. This is what the great monk, the Mahashramana, teaches. So be it!”

Merely hearing these words, and seeing the radiance of Ashvajit, made the pure vision of the Dharma arise for Shariputra. He saw that a sense of self, created from a cause, was subject to cessation. This meant that there were no obstacles to liberation. Shariputra told all of this to his friend Maudagalyayana, who, like Shariputra, was a highly educated Brahmin. Together they went to the Buddha. As they approached the Buddha said, “That auspicious pair has already recognized the truth and will be my chief disciples.” Shariputra and Maudagalyayana took refuge and were respected as great scholars by the Buddha. Shariputra excelled in wisdom and insight, while Maudagalyayana was known for his supernatural abilities.

## The Benefits of Tara

The next part, beginning with “Read Silently,” describes the benefits of Tara practice such as pacifying previous karma and avoiding sudden accidents, difficulties, sickness and negative forces. The practice also helps you to increase your life, abundance, accomplishments, and wisdom. Finally, it brings prana-mind and appearances under control. LUNG SEM is prana-mind, and NANG WA is appearances. We become deluded by appearances, but Tara will help us overcome that.

DÖN CHEN CHU GYED NGANG GI TUL. The DÖN CHEN CHU are the eighteen great DÖNs or hindrances. NGANG GI TUL means that these hindrances are tamed by Tara.

## Offerings and Praises Again

Once again we make offerings and say praises, this time in celebration of all of the mantras that have been said and all of the compassion brought to sentient beings. In Tantra it is very important to have clear visualization, clear meaning of the symbols, and pride of the deity, meaning confidence in our own wisdom nature. The offerings and praises also re-acknowledge the self and deity as non-dual. Really feel yourself as Tara, see the offerings as non-dual, and feel openness, generosity, and bodhicitta.

Follow the same instructions for the mantras, mudras, and instruments as in the first set of offerings and praises. Note though that during the second offerings, the lines TISTHA VAJRA T M: ATI PU HO: PRATI TSA HO have been omitted because this time Tara already exists. The instruments are only played after KAH1.

## The Dissolution/Completion Stage

Now we have reached the completion stage, or *Dzog Rim* in Tibetan. This is the dissolution of Tara. If you are doing a *tsog* (feast), do not dissolve at this point; go to the feast as Tara and then dissolve at the end of the feast after chanting HA HI GATSA. The way you do the dissolution is the same regardless of when you dissolve.

During the creation stage the Jnanasattvas and Samayasattva came together, and in a sense gave birth to Tara. During her lifetime we recited her mantras and made offerings and praises. Now the dissolution corresponds to her death. Each time we enter a practice, we actually get reborn as Tara, live, die, and then come back again.

There are two main ways to go about the dissolution. The first involves visualizing the mansion dissolving into Tara. Then Tara dissolves into the T M in her heart. If you look at the Tibetan letter T M on one of the pages in your practice book, you will see that the letter is divided into three parts. There is a little circle on top, and then something that looks like a 5, and then something that looks like a 2. The thing that looks like a 5 is the sound TA. The thing that looks like a 2 is the sound AH. Together they make the sound TAAH. The little circle on top is the sound MMM. So the sound of the whole letter is T M. This is important to the dissolution. Tara dissolves into T M. The TA part of T M dissolves into the AH part, and then the AH part dissolves into the MMM part. In other words, the 5 dissolves into the 2, and then the 2 dissolves into the circle. The circle dissolves into emptiness. Rest in the nature of mind until thoughts start distracting you again.

The second way is to not do any specific dissolution; just drop the visualization and rest in the nature of mind until you become distracted.

This is the end of the main part of the practice.

## Re-emergence as Tara

Whenever you do a dissolution in the higher Tantras, reemerge again instantly as the deity; this symbolizes the cycles of life: birth, death, and rebirth, and helps you realize that you are not separate from the deity. You are again Tara.

Before beginning the Nyingtig Protectors' Prayer, instantly transform into Tara again because you must be a deity in order to interact with the protectors. But even in sessions when you do not do the Nyingtig Protectors' Prayer, reemerge as Tara until the next practice session.

This is Anuyoga so things happen quickly, and there is not the concept of having to get Tara from somewhere else; you just have to shift your perception and you are Tara. After you have re-emerged as Tara, you will not dissolve again. You will go out into the world as the green, female Buddha, seeing all other beings as Tara too.

If you are doing a *tsog*, then reemerge right after you have dissolved at the end of the *tsog* and before beginning the Nyingtig Protectors' Prayer.

## Tantric Life Cycle

We have just finished a Tantric life cycle. There are five stages in the Tantric life cycle, three of which are the samadhis that I mentioned in the NAMO and TAM sections of the practice. Each stage is connected to one of the five Buddha Families.

The first stage in the life cycle happens right after we have taken refuge. Tara dissolves into us, and we rest in emptiness. This is the Samadhi of Suchness, *Deshin Nyid* in Tibetan. It is the experience after the death of our previous life. It is the pure, empty, open Ground of Being. This first samadhi is connected with the Wisdom of Dharmadhatu of the Buddha Family.

The second stage comes just before we sound the seed syllable. It is the All-Illuminating, All-Appearing Samadhi of Compassion, *Kun sNang* in Tibetan. Radiant compassion naturally emerges from emptiness. This samadhi relates to the Mirror-Like Wisdom of the Vajra Family.

At the sounding of the seed syllable we have the Samadhi of Cause, *Gyu* in Tibetan. It is form coming out of the union of emptiness and luminosity. This stage includes the moon, the lotus seat, and the seed syllable T M and is the physical basis for our future body. The seed syllable is like the consciousness entering the womb at the union of a sperm and ovum. Just as our lives began with a seed, the seed syllable is the vibrational field from which the deity comes. This stage is linked to the Wisdom of Equanimity of the Ratna Family.

The fourth stage in the Tantric life cycle is often called Special Implements, meaning the mudras and instruments that we use during practice. This stage is like a fetus in the womb. As the fetus grows and articulates itself, it develops various characteristics. This stage is connected to the Discriminating Awareness Wisdom of the Padma Family.

The final stage of the cycle is the Complete Body. We are born, live, and then die. This stage corresponds to birth and it purifies birth. This relates to the All-Accomplishing Wisdom of the Karma Family.

Going through the Tantric life cycle during practice purifies our lives. Normally, we live a life of confusion. We do not have thoughts and emotions – they have us! But as we do



transformation work, we start to see the clear mandala of our lives. We begin to have a centered awareness and see the play of wisdom.

So, at this point, if you are not going to do the *tsog* skip to the Nyingtig Protectors' Prayer.

## Tsog: The Feast Offering

### Introduction

We have already briefly discussed the idea of Tantric feasts. *Tsog* is Tibetan for feast, and it literally means gathering, both because you gather as a group and also because you gather a lot of food, wine, and so on, for the feast. So it is a gathering in several ways.

Traditionally, feasts were done in a circle; that is why they are called *ganachakra* in Sanskrit - *chakra* means wheel or circle. All the old reports of feasts in India say they were done in a circle and staged by women. Sometimes it was all women, and sometimes it was men and women, but there is no historical evidence of feasts that were all men.

Sacred sexuality was also often part of the feasts. The participants actually "got together" at these feasts in those early days. Not always, but in many texts you actually see instructions for "songs, dances, and love-making" listed as what you are supposed to do next in the feast, because this is a tradition that embraces embodiment. It is about transforming what is normally considered poisonous into wisdom. Embodiment and the senses can be liberating factors rather than problematic issues.

If you look at the path of renunciation, the monastic path, you see that the senses are considered problematic, as is the body. Practitioners on this path do contemplations on the body: on its decay and its putridness. They do extensive practices in charnel grounds, sitting with corpses and remembering that their bodies are going to decay. These meditations on impermanence create the experience of renunciation that spurs one on to practice and to become enlightened more quickly.

In Tantrism, however, the body is considered a sacred mandala. To denigrate the body in any way is to denigrate the deity, so any kind of impure vision is unacceptable. As you can see, this is an extremely different approach.

### Feast Days

The feast days were, and are, based on the lunar calendar. The Green Tara practice book lists as feast days: the first day of the lunar month which is the new moon, the eighth day which is Tara Day, the tenth day which is Heruka or Guru Rinpoche Day, and the twenty-fifth day which is Dakini Day. There are other sacred days, but these are the traditional

ones. Monasteries hold feasts at least twice a month as a forum for the monks' obligatory confessions. At Tara Mandala we generally have four feasts a month but usually on the same day each week, like Wednesday, to make it easier for the local sangha to attend. Feasts are also done at the beginning and ending of retreats and other auspicious occasions.

## Confession

In feast offerings there is always a section for confession because monks and nuns traditionally do a feast at least twice a month to publicly confess all the breakages of their vows.

In the West we have a Catholic idea about confession, but in Tantrism and as the Buddha taught, confession is a way of clearing the community. If somebody in a community gets up in front of everyone and apologizes for something or says, "I made a mistake," it clears the air for that person and the community.

I think we have seen how well this works in the aftermath of scandals and atrocities. During the Peace and Reconciliation Movement in South Africa after the end of apartheid, people apologized for atrocities so that the community was able to move on rather than resort to bloodbath. That was an interesting, revolutionary thing – to attain peace and reconciliation through full confession and apology.

Confession in a relationship can also be very powerful. If you can really admit something and apologize, most things will be forgiven. What is difficult is when something happens and there is no apology, or when somebody blows up at you, acts as if nothing happened, and then moves on without apologizing. That leaves the issue hanging.

Even in non-monastic communities, confession is a part of the feast. The confession repairs all the levels of vows and especially repairs any conflicts between the teacher and student or within the sangha.

## Feast Substances

When you gather the feast substances, you should collect a lot of different foods with different tastes: sweet, sour, hot and bitter. It is not necessary to have all these flavors every time; our feasts are not that strict, but it is good to have a combination of tastes.

When you bring food to a feast, always bring things that have not been used before. Food and drink must be freshly bought specifically for the feast or grown and harvested for it. So you would not offer an already-open box of cookies or leftovers.

Unless it is a Kriyayoga practice, meat and wine are always served at a feast. Meat and wine are considered poisons and would normally be avoided, but the idea is that during a feast you work with the poisons to transmute them into wisdom.

The meat represents the masculine and the wine or alcohol represents the feminine. The meat is skillful means and the wine is wisdom. Eating meat at a feast is called “eating meat with compassion.” The idea is that you try to connect with the spirit of the animal who has ended up being eaten in the feast, and then liberate it through your meditation. So it is actually considered better for that animal to end up in the feast rather than to have died a natural death or have been eaten by a non-practitioner. Of course, people have more or less ability to actually connect with the animal that they are eating, and the animal is probably already in its next life or maybe its fourth life by the time we buy its meat from the store, but you do your best to connect with it and to eat with awareness. So you gather the feast substances, and you prepare yourself by bathing and dressing in nice, or at least clean, clothes. Traditionally, in India, you would dress up and put flowers in your hair and wear rainbow garments.

### Gotsangpa's Story

There is a wonderful story of a Tibetan who was on pilgrimage in India; Gotsangpa Gonpo Dorje was his name. I love this story because the image is so evocative.

Gotsangpa was wandering in India. It was twilight and the birds were singing, the sun was going down, and walking by were women wearing rainbow garments and carrying offerings. He saw the women disappear into the forest in Jvalamukhi, so he followed them to a yogini temple - a round building with no roof. Gotsangpa saw the women enter the temple, but there was a guardian yogini at the door. It says in the story that he had to "evade the blows" of the guardian yogini, but he eventually got past her and was able to ask the presiding yogini for permission to stay, which she gave. We do not know exactly what happened in the temple, but based on later writings it was the highlight of Gotsangpa's trip to India.

These feast gatherings in roofless temples were often in natural, wild places like the forest. According to legend, the yoginis' bodies produced nectar during the feast which would allow those who drank it to fly, so it was not practical to have roofs on their temples.

There is also a whole body of poetic songs that came out of the feasts. Some of the songs can be found in the book *Passionate Enlightenment*, by Miranda Shaw.

### The Prepared Plates

Before the feast, set up three or four pre-made special plates. One plate is called the Buddha Plate, for all the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. The second is called the Confession

Plate because one of the main functions of Tsog is to confess one's wrong-doing which derives from the monastic confession that occurs twice a month in the sutric tradition. The third plate is the *Lhaktor*, which contains the leftovers or the pure-remainders. Adzom Rinpoche recommends reserving pure remainders as opposed to offering a bit from everyone's plates at the end of the feast as is commonly done. In this case the remainders are put aside first and remain uncontaminated by any impurities from the practitioners. A fourth plate can be made if a teacher is present or it can be offered to the seat of the teacher if they are absent. If a teacher's consort or family is present, prepare plates for each of them or any other special guests or teachers. Traditionally the family or consort of a Tantric teacher is treated with great respect as they are part of the teacher's mandala. Put some food from each of the offering dishes on these plates, and then put these plates on the shrine table with the rest of the feast offerings. If you are doing the feast by yourself, prepare just the three plates and then at the appropriate time in the feast make a plate for yourself.

### More Preparations

In addition to the special plates you should have a skull cup of wine, symbolizing wisdom. Or you could use a glass of wine to symbolize this. At Tara Mandala we have a skull cup of wine and we pour a glass of wine for each of the plates we prepare. All of this is placed on the shrine table.

Everything should be opened and displayed nicely and abundantly when the feast begins—you should not have anything in closed packages or bottles. You will offer everything to your guests who will partake before you do, so you want everything to be open, available, and beautiful. As I mentioned earlier, all of the food should have been bought specifically for the Tsog – do not use leftovers or packages that have already been open.

You should also have a glass of water and a juniper twig. Juniper is considered very pure, which is why it is often burned as a smoke offering. Dip the green part of the twig into the water at the beginning of the feast, and at the line RAM YAM KHAM OM AH HUM use the twig to sprinkle water on the offerings. If you are not the one doing the sprinkling, form the mudra of the Garuda. To do this, face the palms of your hands away from you. Make a cross with your index fingers, and stack your thumbs and middle fingers together (there should now be a sideways 8 formed by the thumbs and middle fingers). Spread your last two fingers out, and then make your hands slowly “fly” around in front of you in a figure eight pattern. There are no photos of most of the Tsog mudras, so do the best you can.

### The Initial Part of the Tsog Practice

#### **RAM YAM KHAM OM AH HUM**

Say this line three times. It purifies, expands, and transforms the offering substances. The three purifying elements are RAM, which is fire, YAM, which is air, and KHAM, which is water. Visualize that the ordinary food substances transform into a feast offering. They

become what are called samaya substances. This food is never thrown away in the garbage, not even the leftovers. Any leftovers are put outside for the animals. If you live in the city, this might be a little more difficult, but never just throw the food away. Adzom Rinpoche told me that my first introduction to the dharma was as a bird eating blessed Tsog food.

OM AH HUM purifies, expands, and transforms the substances so that they become pure vision. This symbolizes the whole process in Tantra of taking something impure and making it pure.

RANG GI TUG K'I ÖZER GYI JETSUN DRÖLMA JANG MO LA  
Light rays from our own hearts, Inviting Sublime Tara, Green Lady

This line means “light rays from our own hearts go out, inviting the sublime Tara, the Green Lady.” Here we are sending light out to invite Green Tara to the feast. Really feel you are inviting her and she will come.

### **TSA SUM GYAMTSO'I TSOG KYI KOR**

**The wheel of the gathering of the ocean of the 3 roots**

TSA SUM means “the Three Roots.” GYAMTSO'I is “the ocean.” TSOG KYI KOR is “the ganachakra” - remember that I said *chakra* means a wheel or a circle. So it is the wheel of the ocean of the Three Roots: the lama, the *yidam* (meaning male deities), and the *dakini* (meaning female deities).

### **CHEN DRANG PE DA'I DEN LA ZHUG**

**And may this assembly sit on lotus moon seats at the wheel of tsog**

At this point you are still Tara, but you are seeing the Jnanasattva level of Tara being invited. The gurus, the yidams, and the dakinis are also all coming, and you offer all of them seats. CHEN DRANG PE DA'I DEN LA ZHUG means that you are “offering them lotus-moon seats in the wheel of the tsog.”

Really try to feel that these beings are coming and surrounding the circle. It can be quite powerful to sense the presence of these beings and to then make an offering to them.

### **NYIMED GUPEY CHAG CHÖD PUL**

**With non-dual devotion make the homage and offering**

So everybody comes, and then NYIMED GU PEY CHAG CHÖD PUL – “with non-dual devotion, make homage and offering.”

### **AH LA LA HO**

AH LA LA HO is a Tantric expression of joy. It means, "Ah, isn't it wonderful." So this is a joyful event. It is happy and blissful - it is a celebration! Everything in the ganapuja is always about bliss and joy.

**RGHAM P DYAM PUSPHE DUPHE LOKE GHANDHE NAVEDYE SHABHA  
R PA SHABDA GHANDHE RASA SPARSHE DHARMA  
GANACHAKRA KHAHI PUJA KHA KHA KHAHI**

Next are the outer and inner offerings that I explained during the main part of the Tara practice. The offering chant and mudras are the same up through SPARSHE. Then for DHARMA GANACHAKRA KHAHI PUJA, do the “basket” mudra (the photo for the mudra PANCA will show you how to do this). At KHA KHA KHAHI, starting with your left hand, roll your hands toward your body once, ending with your left wrist crossed over your right without having them actually touch. On HI, snap up. This snapping means that you are offering everything.

**OM TARE TAM SWA HA  
GANA CHAKRA PUJA KHA KHA KHA HI**

Now place your hands near each other, palms up as if you had plates of food to offer. For OM TARE TAM SWA HA, move your hands toward your right side as if offering food to the guests on your right. Then, at GANA CHAKRA PUJA, move your hands toward your left side. For KHA KHA KHA, your hands come to the center again and roll towards your body and out until palms face out, then roll back. On HI, roll your hands and then snap your fingers up.

While doing these mudras, repeat the lines from OM TARE TAM SWA HA to KHAHI many times. Feel that each snap is an offering.

What I do when I do this section is imagine that all of my teachers are present. I snap and offer to that one, and then to that one. Then I imagine the twenty-one Taras and all the different deities that I am connected to, and I offer to them. So each snap is an offering moment. Snapping inwards is saying, “please come,” and snapping up or out means, “please take it.” KHAHI is eat!

### *The Jigme Lingpa Feast*

The Jigme Lingpa feast is a mini-feast that is inserted into the larger feast. It is not technically part of the Tara practice, but it is a very popular chant because the whole feast is here. So, if you eat meat you should always do the Jigme Lingpa feast first because then you are at least offering some prayers and transforming the food. It is better not to eat meat, but if you do then you should do this short feast first.

The Jigme Lingpa feast is also good to do before any meal even if there is no meat because the feast is not very long, and you can do it quite easily before you eat. We always do it at my house at every meal.

**RAM YAM KHAM OM AH HUM**

Start by doing the lotus mudra for RAM YAM KHAM OM AH HUM. I explained what this line means when I talked about the initial part of the tsog practice, and I will describe the lotus mudra when I explain the offering mudras.

## TSOGDZE DÖ YÖN YESHE RÖLPAI GYEN

The feast substances, desirable ornaments of wisdom's play

TSOGDZE means “the feast substances.” DÖ YÖN means “desirable objects.” YESHE is “wisdom,” RÖLPAI is “play,” and GYEN is “ornament.” So the feast substances are the desirable ornaments of wisdom's play. That is a beautiful line. We have talked a lot about how the world is the play of emptiness, so here we have the feast offerings as the play of wisdom in emptiness.

For this line, move from the lotus mudra into the mudra that looks like you are offering plates to your guests. Slowly move your hands, palms up, towards your right side. With this motion, you are inviting the guests.

## TSOGJE TSOGDAG RIGDZIN LAMA DANG

To the Leader of the Feast, Sponsor of the Feast, Knowledge-holder Lamas

Now we enumerate the beings we are offering to. TSOGJE is “the leader of the feast,” and TSOGDAG is “the sponsor of the feast.” If you organized a feast, made the preparations and bought all of the food, you would be the sponsor, and whomever you asked to perform the feast would be the leader. RIGDZIN LAMA means “the knowledge-holding teachers.”

The mudra for this line is a continuation of the mudra you did for the previous line. Slowly move your hands, palms up, from your right side to your left side.

## DEN SUM KYILKHOR NEY YUL NYERSHYI DAG

To the three realms of mandalas & the rulers of 24 sacred places

DEN SUM means “the three realms.” DEN SUM KYILKHOR are “the mandalas of the three realms.” The three mandalas are the Mandala of the Nature, the Mandala of the Contemplation, and the Mandala of Images. That is one way to divide it. Another way to divide the mandalas starts with the Ground Mandala, which is the self-perfected mandala of the base. This is called *zhi lungdrub kyi kyilkhor* in Tibetan. *Zhi* is “the base,” *lungdrub* is “the spontaneously-perfected,” and *kyilkhor* simply means “mandala.” What this means is that the Ground of Being, which is the root of everything, is spontaneously perfect and a mandala unto itself.

Then you have what is called the Path Mandala, which is a representation of the Ground Mandala. It could be a painting or one of the sand mandalas made of sindura (a red powder) which monks are making all over America now. This mandala would be something that you use on the path.

And then the third kind is the Fruit Mandala, which is the nature of purity. It is called *drebu namdag rang shin kyi kyilkhor* in Tibetan. The Fruit Mandala is the understanding that the nature of everything is purity. The fruit is really the realization of the Mandala of the Ground. So those are the three mandalas mentioned in this line.

NEY YUL are “sacred places.” NERSHYI is “twenty-four.” Every one of the twenty-four power places has a protector who is like the owner/protector of that place. These twenty-four places are mentioned in the Chakrasamvara Tantra. Only some are located in India, so the rest could be all over the world.

The mudra for this fourth line is a continuation of the one you have been doing. Move your hands back to your right side.

PAWO KHANDRO DAMCHEN CHÖSUNG NAM

Dakas, Dakinis, Samaya Bound Dharma Protectors, all

The fifth line, PAWO KHANDRO DAMCHEN CHÖSUNG NAM invites more guests.

PAWO means “dakas,” the masculine heroes. KHANDRO means “the dakinis,” the feminine sky-goers. DAMCHEN CHÖSUNG are “the oath-bound dharma protectors.” NAM means “all.”

Continue the mudra you have been doing for the last few lines, this time returning your hands to the left side.

DIRSHEG LONG CHÖ TSOG KYI CHÖPA SHE

Come here! Enjoy! These offerings are for you!

DIRSHEG means, "Come here." LONG JYÖ is “enjoy.” TSOG KYI CHÖPA ZHYE means, "These offerings are for you."

As you say this line, move your hands toward your right side for the final time. Then at SHE, roll your hands toward yourself once and end in “prayer hands” held at the center of your chest.

So lines two through four are like preparations for a party: there is the guest-list and the sending out of invitations.

GÄLTRUL NONG DANG DAMTSIG NYAM CHAG SHAG

I confess transgressions, mistakes and samaya corruptions

Once you have made the offerings, there is the confession which I talked about earlier:

GÄLTRUL NONG DANG DAMTSIG NAYM CHAG SHAG. It means, “I confess transgressions, mistakes, and samaya corruptions.” You are saying, "I'm sorry," and admitting the "oopses" in your life particularly in connection with your Dharma teachers, Sangha, and tantric vows. This is your confession.

Keep your hands in prayer position for this whole line.

JI NANG BARCHED CHÖ KYI YING SU DRÖL

Outer, inner obstacles, liberate into the Dharmadhatu!

The seventh line means “liberate all outer and inner obstacles into the Dharmadhatu (the Space of Totality).” Clap at the end of this line. It is said that clapping is the power of the sun and moon coming together and exploding. So with that energy, all the obstacles - both inner and outer - are dispersed.



Continue with prayer hands through the word SU. At the last word, DRÖL, clap to send away all obstacles; then keep your hands in prayer position.

LHAKTOR ZHE LA THRINLEY DRUBPAR DZÖ  
Accept the torma of the remainders & accomplish activities!

This line refers to “the leftover offering,” one of the plates you set up at the beginning.

Your hands remain in prayer position for this line.

OM GURU DEVA DAKINI GANACHAKRA PUDZA HO UTSITA BALINGTA KHAHI

Finally, this line is a mantra that sums the whole feast up.

Guru, deva, and dakini are the Three Roots. The guru is the lama; the deva is the yidam, and the dakini is the dakini.

Do the lotus mudra for GURU DEVA DAKINI. Then cross your wrists, left over right, without touching and hold your hands in a snap position until the KHA part of KHAHI. Snap on HI. You can also do the lotus mudra and then for GANACHAKRA make the basket-like mudra that you do for PANCA. Then continue by making and holding the snap position and snapping on HI.

That is the end of the Jigme Lingpa feast. It is a good thing to memorize; it is a complete “tsog on the run.”

## The Continuation of the Tara Feast Practice

So now you are back to the Tara practice. During this next section, in a group practice only the leader of the chant rings the bell or beats the drum while everyone chants.

**HO! GONG SHIG JETSUN PAGMA YUM**  
**HO! Think of me, sublime Yum**

HO is kind of like, "Oh, dear." Then the line reads, “Think of me, sublime Yum.” You are asking Tara to turn her mind to you.

**DAG NI MA RIG WANG DU SONG**  
**I came under the power of ignorance**

“I fell under the power of ignorance.” In other words, my awareness was lost and I made some stupid or unaware actions.

**DAM TSIG NYAM CHAG GEL TRUL SHOR**  
**My samayas have degenerated and broken into transgression**

“My samayas have degenerated and broken into transgression,” means the tantric vows and commitments you’ve made to your guru have been broken or damaged. There are 14

root downfalls, and the fourteenth is to disparage women and not see them as the embodiment of wisdom. The samaya is the luminous threads of intimate spiritual energy that link Vajrayana practitioners to each other and the guru who gives initiation. Sometimes these vows are used as threats to silence any criticism of unethical behavior like sexual misconduct by gurus, but the real meaning is to realize and honor the depth of the connection that happens in Vajrayana mandalas.

### **NONG NGO GYÖ DO LÄN CHED DOM**

**I am contrite and remorseful; restore my vows**

“I am contrite and remorseful; restore my vows,” is important because if we make a mistake and don't regret it, then we will likely do it again. The point isn't guilt, but a commitment to change.

### **DÖ YÖN DÜ TSI' I TSOG CHÖD DI**

**With offering the tsog of desirable substances & dutsi**

This means, “With offering the tsog of the desirable substances and nectar...” Here you are saying how you are going to restore the vows by making this offering. It's like inviting those you've offended to a delicious feast to heal any breaches.

### **TSOG NYI DZOG SHING NYAM CHAG SHAG**

**The two accumulations are completed and failings confessed**

TSOG NYI means “the two accumulations of merit and wisdom.” DZOG is “to be complete.” SHING NYAM CHAG SHAG means that “failings are confessed.” So, by making the offerings, the accumulations of merit and wisdom are complete and all of your failings have been confessed.

### **DAG SANG CHOG TUN NGÖ DRUB TSÖL**

**Having been purified, grant the two siddhis**

This means “having been purified, grant the two siddhis, relative and absolute.” The relative siddhis are powers such as being able to fly, walk through walls, walking on water, appearing in multiple places at once. The absolute siddhis are omniscience and enlightenment. Siddhis are a manifestation of understanding the nature of reality, not magic in the ordinary sense. They are byproducts of the spiritual path.

SAMAYA SHUDDHE AH: TSOG KHYI CHÖPA GYEN DU RÖL: AH LA LA HO  
Accept the tsog offering, the ornament of the play

After SAMAYA SHUDDHE AH, instruments are played, and the plate and wine intended for the leader of the feast are presented to him or her with the words, “TSOG SHE CHOPA JEN DU ROL.” The leader replies, “AH LA LA HO.” What the presenter is saying is, “Accept the tsog offering, the ornament of the play.” The leader replies, “Isn't it wonderful!”

In Tantric practice, there is a lot of symbolism of wisdom and skillful means, masculine and feminine, and the union of that. This comes into play with which hands the wine and food are held in. Women hold the wine in their right hand, and men hold the wine in their left hand - the food is in the free hand. Traditionally, a male offers the plate if the leader is female and vice versa. But at Tara Mandala we also do female to female and male to male.

So if you are the presenter, you cross your arms as you offer the food and wine to the leader of the feast. If a male is offering to a female leader, the man has the wine in his left hand and the food in his right. He crosses one arm over the other while offering. The teacher receives the wine and food with crossed arms herself so that she ends up with the wine in her right hand and the food in her left. If a female is offering to a female teacher, the presenter does not cross her arms while she offers the food and wine. The teacher still crosses her arms and ends up with the wine in the right hand. But concentrating too much on this can be confusing.

After the leader of the feast has been served, any other teachers and consorts are served. The food and wine are then passed around to everyone else. Anybody who wants to can get up, take a plate of food, and offer it to the human guests at the feast (if you are serving, ask someone next to you to put food on your plate).

OM AH HUM MAHASUKHA SIDDHI AH LA LA HO

Everyone including the servers sings, “OM AH HUM MAHASUKHA SIDDHI AH LA LA HO,” and performs the same mudra that you did for OM TARE TAM SWA HA GANACHAKRA PUJA KHA KHA KHA HI. Move your hands, palms up, to your right for OM AH HUM. Move your hands to the left for MAHASUKHA SIDDHI. Roll your hands toward yourself once for AH LA. Roll your hands away from yourself one half turn and end with wrists crossed, left over right, in snap position for LA. Snap on HO. Repeat the mantra and mudra until all of the food has been served.

At a feast, you try to go beyond any of your normal dietary preferences. Take some of everything, unless you have a physical allergy or you have a problem with alcohol. Wait to eat or drink until all of the food has been served and the leader has begun to partake.

When all or most of the food has been served, the leader rings a bell, and the servers return to their places. Women pick up their wine with the right hand and men with the left. The plate goes in the free hand. Everyone sings, “OM AH HUM MAHASUKHA SIDDHI AH LA LA HO” a few more times; then, the leader begins the eating part of the feast. For the first sip or bite, all the women begin with the wine, symbolizing the feminine, and the men begin with food, symbolizing the masculine.

It is not important for the wine to always be in a particular hand while you are eating; it is just what happens at the beginning so that you have a moment of realization of masculine and feminine. Sometimes people cross their arms for a moment right before they begin to eat or drink, symbolizing the union of wisdom and skillful means.

As the feast continues, just eat and drink with awareness. At some point, the leader will ask if anyone wants to offer something else. Traditionally, people would sing Vajra Songs. You could also bring a poem, or spontaneously create one that has some spiritual significance. Sometimes people dance or play instruments. This is also the point at which, in ancient times (or some people still do it today), you would have sacred sexual union.

So offerings are made, but the main thing is to eat and drink with awareness, in the experience of one taste. Try to stay in the moment of the first taste. Taste it, and then try to not go into concepts. Just be in union with the substance. For example, if you take a bite of apple, be completely in union with the apple. There is not the apple and you; there is just the experience of one taste. Non-dual. This is really a practice of sense enjoyment.

## Remainders

After offerings have been made and everyone has eaten for a while, the leader rings a bell and the lhaktor - or remainder plate - which was made in advance is offered. In some traditions, everybody puts something from their plate onto the remainder plate, but in Adzom Rinpoche's tradition, which is what we are doing at Tara Mandala, the remainder plate is a pure offering that is prepared before the feast.

**RAM YAM KAM: OM AH HUM HA HO HRI SARVA DAKINI PHEM PHEM**  
**Bless and transform offerings, All Dakinis come, come!**

To offer the remainders, someone holds up the lhaktor plate and sprinkles it with the juniper branch and water while everyone chants RAM YAM KAM while doing the lotus mudra, and then OM AH HUM HA HO HRI SARVA DAKINI PHEM while doing the garuda mudra, which I explained earlier when I described the very beginning of the tsog. On the second PHEM, roll your hands toward yourself once, cross your wrists, left over right, and snap up. The garuda mudra symbolizes beings, like dakinis, flying in to eat. They actually enter on the snap.

**UTSITA BHAKADHI BALINGTA KHA KHA KHA HI KHA HI**

Do the lotus mudra for the next line - UTSITA BHAKADHI BALINGTA. At KHA KHA HI roll your hands toward yourself once, cross your wrists, left over right, without letting them touch, and snap up on HI.

**YA HI GATSA**

At YA HI GATSA, hold the left hand out flat, palm facing the ground. Hold the right hand up in snap position with the fingers pointed away from your body. At SA, snap with the right hand.

At this point, the person holding the lhaktor plate takes the plate outside and places it on a stump or rock or some respectful place off of the ground, then returns to the feast.

Everyone else plays instruments to celebrate, then continues on to the Nyingtig Protector's Prayer.

### After the Feast

After the feast, the buddha and confessor plates and glasses are left on the shrine for two days if possible. After that, take the food and wine outside and leave them in a respectful place off the ground like on a stump, rock, or crook of a tree. Sometimes the food is put into a river where the fish will eat it. It is considered very good karma for animals if they eat feast offerings. As I said earlier, in this way, they can make a karmic link with the teachings.

### Doing Tsog at Home

You can also do a feast at home; it is actually kind of interesting to do it by yourself. For the most part, all of the preparations are the same, such as making the three plates and glasses of wine. Then you prepare a plate and glass of wine from the rest of the feast food during the appropriate section of the tsog.

When you are by yourself, however, you do not have to hold the lhaktor plate up. Leave it on the table until the feast is over; then, take it out along with the serkyem (I'll talk about the serkyem when I explain the Nyingtig Protector's Prayer). Offer them both respectfully.

As I said before, for daily practice at every meal, you can say the Jigme Lingpa feast before eating, but if you do not have time, you can simply say the first and last lines: RAM YAM KHAM OM AH HUM OM GURU DEVA DAKINI GANACHAKRA PUDZA HO UTSITA BALINGTA KHAHI. Visualize that the food is transformed and the guests have arrived; then, snap. If you are in a public place and do not want to draw attention to yourself, you could say these lines silently while visualizing everything.

### One Taste

This whole feast practice is really about "one taste" - being at one with the wine, at one with the food. We, as Americans, have so many food trips and concepts of what is good and what is bad. During the feast, try to get out of all these concepts and just really be in the moment with the food. Of course, as I said, if you have an allergy to a certain food or alcohol, do not eat or drink that item, but you can symbolically throw a little over your left shoulder. Generally though, try to taste at least a little bit of everything and stay in the moment before judgments take hold.

Some places push the one-taste idea by including substances that most people would not usually want to eat in order to make people go beyond concepts of clean and unclean, like

and dislike - all those limits that we have, like the earthworm limit, the shit limit, and so on. At Tara Mandala, we do not do that though. We tend to have delicious tsogs.

But this is all part of what I have been talking about - transforming perception. In a tsog, we are transforming our perceptions of food and drink. We try to have a pure experience, a non-dual, blissful experience of union with the material world. That is why sexual practice was also part of the feasts. In sexual practice, all the senses are being activated. There is taste; there is touch; there is sound; there is smell, everything, so in the same way that you are in union with the food, you are in union with your partner, with no separation – a non-dual experience.

## Nyingtig Protectors' Prayer

Do the Protectors' Prayer once a day. If you are only doing one practice session, say the Protectors' Prayer at this time. If you are doing several practice sessions a day, do it at the session closest to sunset.

During the Nyingtig Protectors' Prayer, we ask the protectors to do their job. They protect us as practitioners, but they also let us know when we are off-track, breaking promises, or being sloppy in our practice. Protectors are specific to Vajrayana. They are forces linked to currents and lineages, and they help hold together the fabric of this world. I will describe the protectors mentioned in this prayer in a moment, but first I want to describe this part of the practice.

The protectors are, in a sense, the owners and guardians of the teachings and, as I have said, they also protect and help the practitioner. Every lineage and every practitioner has protectors. In Tibetan Buddhism, we always relate to the protectors through offerings of tea and torma. There is a special offering cup and plate called a *serkyem*. The cup part is filled almost to overflowing with black tea or some other dark drink, symbolizing amrita or nectar. Traditionally in Tibet, one would make a torma for the plate section of the serkyem. The torma originated from pre-Buddhist sacrifices and is symbolic of animal sacrifice, the magical, and working with the material, physical world. A traditional torma looks a little like a large Hershey's Kiss and is made from barley flour, butter, sugar and water, but you can use a ready-made cookie instead. A butter cookie is fine – this being a Tibetan tradition, when in doubt, use something with butter in it. If you do not have a cookie, you can just use tea. If you do not even have tea, at least offer incense and a candle to the protectors.

If you are practicing just once a day, prepare the serkyem, incense, and candles before you begin the practice. If you are doing two or more practice sessions or are in retreat, prepare everything in the morning, making sure there is still burning incense and a lit candle at the time of the Protectors' Prayer. Nyingtig Protectors' Prayer is chanted in Tibetan at least three times, but more often five, seven, nine, or twelve times - or until you feel a connection with the protectors.

If you are practicing in a group, one person stands and holds the serkyem up during the prayer and then takes the serkyem outside while the others continue with the practice. Outside, the offerings are taken to a clean place and respectfully offered by throwing them into the air. Feel the offerings being received. After the tea and torma have been offered, the offerer comes back to rejoin the group and finish the practice.

If you are practicing by yourself, you do not need to hold up the serkyem. Play the bell and/or the drum during the practice. If you are only playing the bell, hold a vajra at your heart with your right hand (the vajra is tilted so that the top angles away from you) and play the bell with your left hand to match the forceful, quick rhythm of the chanting. When the whole practice is finished, take the serkyem outside to a clean place and respectfully make the offering by throwing the tea and torma into the air and feel the offerings being received.

## The Protectors

The three main protectors mentioned in this prayer are Ekajati, Rahula, and Dorje Legpa (or Vajra Saddhu in Sanskrit).

### **HUM: PÄLDEN EKATSATI DANG**

#### **HUM To glorious Ekajati and**

The prayer begins HUM: PÄLDEN EKATSATI DANG. Ekajati is the main protector of Dzogchen. Our breast-shaped mountain at Tara Mandala is named for her because she has a single breast. Ekajati also has only one tooth, one eye, and one hair coming out of an iron mole on her forehead. She has two feet, two hands, and dark, red-brown skin. Sometimes she also has two regular eyes, but they are depicted as being just slits or tightly shut. Ekajati always appears to the tertöns before they discover a terma or treasure. She is feminine because the Dzogchen teachings are very connected to energy, which is symbolically feminine.

### **DRANGSONG KYABJUG RAHULA**

#### **Holy ascetic all-pervading Rahula**

The second protector is Rahula. DRANGSONG KYABJUG RAHULA. Rahula is probably the fiercest of all the protectors. He has a mouth in his stomach and eyes all over his body. The base of his body is like a serpent, and he is very, very wrathful; you do not want to get on the bad side of Rahula. He controls the elementals, mountains, valleys, watercourses, planets, and the eight classes of beings.

### **DAMCHEN DORJE LEGPA SOG**

#### **Commitment holder Vajra Saddhu and all**

The third main protector in this prayer is Dorje Legpa, or Vajra Saddhu in Sanskrit. DAMCHEN DORJE LEGPA SOG. Dorje Legpa rides on a lion and wears a flat hat. He was one of the original protectors in Tibetan Bön, a pre-Buddhist tradition, but he was enlisted by Padmasambhava as a dharma protector. He is connected to metal-works,

smelting, blacksmithing, bears, and goats. Dorje Legpa is invoked for worldly things like business, sporting events, and job hunting, but he is also very deeply linked with Dzogchen in Tibetan teachings as well.

### **NYING TIG NYEN PO'I TEN SUNG TSOG**

#### **Nyingtig friends the gathering of the protectors of the teaching**

The line NYING TIG NYEN PO'I TEN SUNG TSOG means “the friends of the Nyingtig (or those close to the Nyingtig) and the gathering of the protectors of the teaching.” There are many, many protectors, so this line includes all of them.

### **DAMDZE DÜTSI TORMA PÜL**

#### **I offer (to you) torma of pledge substances and amrita**

I talked about torma earlier. PÜL means, “to offer.” So we are offering the pledge substances to all the protectors.

### **NELJOR DAG LA GÖN KYOB DZÖ**

#### **Please protect me the yogin**

This means, “Please protect me, the yogin/the yogini, the practitioner.”

### **JÖLWAI THRINLAY MAYEL DRUB**

#### **Make the activities entrusted to you continually take place**

Each one of the protectors has certain activities or areas that they are protecting, so you are invoking all of that; it is a little bit like having a guard dog. In order to do your practice and do the stripping down and becoming naked that happens as we practice, we need to feel protected. In a lot of Tantric practices, practitioners actually visualize a vajra tent made out of interlinking, rainbow-light vajras, representing the five wisdoms. The protectors act kind of like that tent. They protect the practitioner as the practitioner develops on his or her path. The protectors also protect the teachings themselves. As the teachings make their way to the West, the protectors are coming with them. So we create a positive relationship with the protectors through our offerings and prayers.

## **Dedication of Merit**

And now we have the dedication of merit, which we usually say once in Tibetan with hands folded in prayer. We have gained a lot of merit through doing this practice. In Buddhist traditions, we do not hoard and stockpile our merit; we give it away to all sentient beings so that they may have enough merit to attain Buddhahood. The dedication of merit may also include the bodhisattva-like wish that through the merit we attain Buddhahood in order to help all beings realize their true nature. This dedication says, “Through this virtue, having accomplished the sublime Tara, may I establish all beings, without one exception, on that level.”



## Praises Again

We say praises one more time, this time because we are going out into the world as Tara. We became Tara again just before we started the Protectors' Prayer, and now we do praises to ourselves as Tara. Then, after the practice, we actually get up from our cushions as Tara and walk around experiencing everybody as Tara. We go into the post office and buy stamps as Tara. Tara is our boss. Tara is everyone. That is this idea of changing perception to pure perception. We stop seeing the world in the normal way; instead we see a vajra world, a sacred world. This is post-meditation practice.

As a group, we usually sing this to a specific tune once, in Tibetan. If you do not know the tune, continue to chant rhythmically, with hands folded in prayer. There is a double music note at the end of the praises. In group practice, sometimes we play the instruments here and sometimes we do not.

## Long Life Prayers

The idea of a long life prayer is to ask that the teacher, or the teacher's energy, stay with us and continue to help all beings.

When the Buddha was dying, Ananda asked the Buddha why he had to go. The Buddha replied, "Because you never asked me to stay, so I am going." Poor Ananda. But ever since then, we pray that our teachers have a long life so that they can continue to teach us.

### Long Life Prayer for Adzom Paylo Rinpoche

After the final praises, we say the long life prayer for Adzom Rinpoche, the teacher with whom Tara Mandala is very closely linked, and who gave us this Tara practice. As a group, we say this prayer once in Tibetan with hands folded in prayer.

### Long Life Prayer for His Holiness the Dalai Lama

We then chant the Dalai Lama's long life prayer because the Dalai Lama is so important to the whole world now. Everybody knows of the Dalai Lama; it is amazing. There is a very remote island three hours off the coast of Italy, and even the fishermen there knew about the Dalai Lama. He is such a world figure now, and because of what he represents, it is very important that he stay alive as long as possible. As a group, we chant this prayer once in Tibetan with hands folded in prayer.

## Long Life Prayer for Tsultrim Chödrön

[Editor's Note: At this point, chant the *Long-life Prayer for Tsultrim Chödrön*, which may not be in your practice text. As a group, we chant this once, in Tibetan, with hands folded in prayer.]

### **KYABNEY LUME KÖNCHOG NAM SUM DANG**

Through the infallible refuge of the Three Jewels,

### **LEY DRE LUME GYÄLWA'I DEN TOB KYI**

And the unerring fruit of the karma, and by the power of the truth of the Victorious Ones,

### **TSÜLTRIM CHÖDRÖN ZHAB PE TENPAY DANG**

May the lotus feet of Tsultrim Chödrön remain stable.

### **GYEL TEN DAR ZHING GYEPÄ'I TASHI TSÖL**

Grant us that the doctrine of the Victors spread and flourish auspiciously.

*This prayer was composed, at the behest of the disciple Chönyi Wangmo, by the one whose Nirmanakaya name is Gyalse Pema Wangyal (Adzom Paylo Rinpoche). Virtue be!*

## Prayer for All the Lamas

The *Prayer for All the Lamas* is a wish that teachers from all traditions have a long life so that their activities may flourish. This prayer is optional. If we say it as a group, we say this once either in Tibetan or English with hands folded in prayer.

## Prayer for All the People of the Earth

The *Prayer for All the People of the Earth* is a prayer, by Dudjom Rinpoche, that the people of the earth will not suffer and a wish for them to accumulate merit and wisdom. This prayer is optional. If we say it as a group, we say this once either in Tibetan or English with hands folded in prayer.

## Prayer for the Post Meditation

The *Prayer for the Post Meditation* reminds us of how to view the world as we come out of our meditation. It was written by the great tertön Terdag Lingpa at the time of his death, just before he passed into nirvana. It describes how a true yogi or yogini sees the world: everything is inseparable in a state of one taste.

**NANG DRAK RIG SUM LHA NGAG CHÖ KU'I NGANG**

**Visions, sounds, awareness all three are deities, mantras, the state of Dharmakaya**

NANG DRAK RIG SUM are, “vision, sound and awareness.” LHA NGAG CHÖ KU'I are, “the deity, the mantra, and the Dharmakaya.” All visions are seen as the deity, all sound is mantra, and everything that we are thinking is Dharmakaya.

**KU DANG YESHE RÖLPAR JAM LEY PAR**

**Kayas and primordial wisdom, the play of that vastness**

This means “the kayas and the profound, vast, primordial wisdom play.”

**ZAB SANG NELJOR CHENPO'I NYAM LEN LA**

**May through the practice of the great yogi/yogini which is deep and secret**

**YERME THUG KYI TIGLER ROCHIG SHOG:**

**The state of one taste in the inseparable heart-essence be established**

YERME means “inseparable.” THUG is “heart-mind.” TIGLER are “the luminous spheres that make up everything.” They are also the light and energy generated and circulating in our bodies. ROCHIG means “one taste” and SHOG means “become.” So the line translates as inseparable heart-mind ticle of one taste may it be.

These lines are very profound. See the play of Dharmakaya as you say them. Adzom Rinpoche did not even teach the meaning of these lines for the first three years he came; he would only say, “Just recite this, and I will explain it later.”

After reciting the *Prayer for the Post Meditation* once (in group practice, we usually say it in Tibetan, with hands folded in prayer), recite the *One Hundred Syllable Mantra* once.

## Abbreviated Practice to be Said Between Sessions

The abbreviated practice is a little prayer that you may memorize and recite as you are going about your day. It incorporates the Tara mantra and will connect you to Tara anytime and anywhere.

**OM CHAG TSÄL JETSÜN TARE**

**OM Homage to sublime TARE Goddess**

The first line OM CHAG TSÄL JETSÜN TARE means “homage to sublime TARE, Goddess.”

**TU TA RE YI DUNG WA KÜN KYOB**

**TU TA RE Save from all suffering**

TU TA RE YI DUNG WA KÜN KYOB means “save from all suffering.”

**TUGJE TOGME TURE PÄLMO**  
**Unimpeded compassion TURE Glorious one**

TUGJE TOGME means “unimpeded compassion,” and TURE PÄLMO means “Glorious One.”

**DAK LA DRUBCHOG TSÖL CHIG SWA HA**  
**Grant me the ultimate siddhi SWA HA**

DAK LA DRUBCHOG TSÖL CHIG means “grant me the ultimate siddhi,” and SWA HA is “so be it.”

So, if you look, Tara’s action mantra OM TARE TUT TARE TURE SWA HA is imbedded in that prayer.

## Final Songs and Prayers

### Faithful Student Song

The Faithful Student Song is a whole, profound teaching in itself. It was written at the time that Adzom Rinpoche was rebuilding Shawai Lhakhang, which is, after Samye, the most important temple in central Tibet, in the area of Drigung. Adzom Rinpoche got a three-year permit to rebuild the huge, three-story temple. It was amazing that he got permission from the Chinese to rebuild, but three years was barely enough time. So the Faithful Student’s Song is essentially a work song. The people sang this song as they worked with rocks and their hands eighteen hours a day; plus they did two hours of prostrations daily!

If you look at the meaning of the song, it is about the Four Thoughts That Turn the Mind to the Dharma: the precious human body, impermanence, karma, and suffering as well as devotion.

It starts with an invocation of the Three Jewels:

KÖNCHOG RINCHEN NAM SUM  
To the three precious jewels  
DUNGWAI NYING NAY BÖ NA  
I call with heart felt longing  
TUGJE CHEN GYI ZIG RÖL  
Please turn your compassionate gaze upon me!  
RESA SHENA ME DO  
I have no other hope.

Then, the next section is about the precious human body and impermanence. It says that we have a precious human body which is difficult to attain but easy to lose. In this context, not just any human body is considered precious. It must have eighteen freedoms

and conditions to practice the dharma. So first, you have to be in a country where dharma is practiced. Then, you have to be attracted to the dharma. You also have to have the freedom and leisure to practice, and so on. Getting all of these freedoms and conditions at the same time is precious and rare. When you get a precious human body, you not only have to realize that you have it; you really need to use it and not just think, “Oh well, I’ll practice later or maybe in the next life. In this life, I’ll just hang out.” You need to really appreciate what you have.

It also talks about the imminence of death. We have five elements and five aggregates that have come together with our consciousness, but our consciousness is not reliably here in our body; it could leave at any moment. So it is important to think about death. Will you be confident in the face of death? You want to get to the place where you will be confident, and you will know what to do.

THOB KA MI YI LÜ TEN

The human body difficult to obtain.

MITOG THOG BEB LEB TSE

When impermanence suddenly descends

CHI DÖ DING CHEN EYÖ

Will you be confident in the face of death?

DEYDEN KÄLSANG LOBMA

Faithful fortunate student

NGA DÜ PUNGNGAY TSOGPA

(Since it’s) a collection of five elements (and) the five aggregates

NAMZHIG LO TE MIDUG

Your consciousness isn’t reliably there (in your body)

NYING NEY CHIWAR SAM SHIG

So from the depths of your heart think about death

DEYDEN KÄLSANG LOBMA

Faithful fortunate student

The next sections are about karma and samsara. We become ensnared in samsara, so, as the song says, “Let your mind be without attachment. Escape right now onto the path of liberation.”

LEY DREY LUME YIN PEY

Actions never fail to bear fruit

MIGEY TOGPA PANG ZHING

Give up thoughts of nonvirtue

LHA CHÖ GEWA TSÖN ROG

Make efforts in the holy Dharma

DEYDEN KÄLSANG LOBMA

Faithful fortunate student

KHORWA GYUMAI LUDRI

Samsara’s illusions ensnare

YI SEM CHAGPA MEPAR

Let your mind be without attachment

DARE THAR LAM DRÖL SHOG  
Escape right now onto the path of liberation  
DEYDEN KÄLSANG LOBMA  
Faithful fortunate student

The next section is about the preciousness of finding a teacher and about not splitting your worldly life from your spiritual life. Be one-pointed in your devotion so that you and your teacher go together toward liberation.

LOTSE NYI SU MEYPAI  
When your mind is not two-pointed  
TOGME MÖGÜ YÖ NA  
Your devotion is irreversible  
CHIMA LA LOB NYAM DRO  
Together the Lama and disciple go  
DEYDEN KÄLSANG LOBMA  
Faithful fortunate student

The last part of the song is about longing for your lama and having devotion for your teacher. Keep your teacher's advice in your heart, and do not go around talking about it to everyone.

GYURME THUPTEN GYAMTZO  
NYING NEY LAMAR DÖ NA  
To long for the Lama from the depths of one's heart  
DAMNGAG DE LHAG MEDO  
There are no pith instructions higher than that!  
NYING DAM NYING LA CHUG ROG  
Please keep this heart advice in your heart

It ends with, "I offer this song with joy and delight!"

AH HO AH LA LA HO!  
AH TSAR TSAR LU BÜL YÖ  
I offer this song with joy and delight!

It is a nice song, but it has a deep meaning. In group practice, with hands folded in prayer, we sing this once in Tibetan to a specific tune, but if you do not know the tune, you can chant it or say it in English.

### Request to Turn the Wheel of the Dharma

Chant this request only when requesting a teaching. Buddha said that he would not teach without being asked. To this day, Buddhism is not evangelical. Most teachers will not teach if they are not formally asked. This request is chanted once, in Tibetan, with hands folded in prayer.

## Prayers after the Teaching

This prayer spreads the merit of a teaching and is said only after a teaching has been given. Chant it once, in Tibetan, with hands folded in prayer.

## Transmission for Green Tara

As I said at the beginning of this explanation, Tara is accessible even to those who have not received the teachings, transmission, or initiation. She is just present. However, if you have received the Tara teachings through me, you have received the *lung*, which is the hearing transmission, the *tri*, which is the explanation of the practice, and the *dön wang* (meaning empowerment) which is a transmission through explanation followed by a practice session with the students. When a *dön wang* is given, that particular practice session is slightly different at certain points from a regular one. Generally there are three things you receive for a Tantric practice: you get the *wang*, which is the formal initiation; the *lung*, which is the hearing transmission and is usually read very rapidly; and then the *tri*, which is the explanation of the practice. Though, sometimes you will just get the *wang*, and sometimes you will just get the *lung* and the *tri* depending on the teacher and the situation.

## Conclusion: Tara at Tara Mandala

Even though Tara is ancient in origin, her qualities make her very contemporary and perfect for this time. Learning about Tara practice at Tara Mandala is wonderful because this is Tara's Land. When Adzom Rinpoche first came to the West, he had prophetic visions that told him to begin by teaching Tara to Westerners. He first started doing that in 1999 at Tara Mandala.

Adzom Rinpoche said that Tara Mandala is the sacred place of Tara. He had a luminous, blissful vision at dawn on the full moon of December 2002 in which he saw this land as the body of Green Tara. He said that if you really looked at the land, you would see her body. The Tara shrine on the hill is her knee. He had seen many beings in *tigles* (luminous rainbow spheres, the pure form of all phenomena) and he saw many people in the rainbow colored *tigles* and said this indicated that, in the future it was certain that many beings would reach the rainbow body at Tara Mandala.

Adzom Rinpoche then opened a text from the terma treasury of Nyala Pema Duddul and turned right to a page that said, 'sacred place of Tara;' this was the final indication that this is a sacred place of Tara. Thus practicing Tara at Tara Mandala is stronger than if we were to do it in an ordinary place. It is a power place for Tara.

There is a little poem I would like to end with. It is from the “Ritual of Tara”. It is a beautiful little piece.

*From the single essence of timeless wisdom,  
Natural unimpededness displays everything.  
Marvelous is compassion’s activity.*

## Editor’s Conclusion

This booklet on the Green Tara practice is compiled from recordings of teachings by Tsultrim Allione from 2004 through 2006. This Green Tara practice is from the *Ösel Dorje Sang Dzöd*, the Luminous Secret Vajra Treasury, one of four cycles transmitted by Adzom Drukpa. It came from Longchenpa to Jigme Lingpa to Adzom Drukpa directly, and thus to Adzom Rinpoche, incarnation of Adzom Drukpa’s son Pema Wangyal. As is traditional in many Tantric texts, it is necessary to receive transmission for this text before engaging in the practice. This commentary is meant as a supplement and not a replacement for receiving transmission from a qualified teacher.

We give much gratitude to Daphna McKnight who spent long hours transcribing all these teachings, compiling them and beginning the long task of editing. Also, gratitude to all the editors of this text: Heather Roberts-McEvoy, Miranda Smith, Beth Lee-Herbert, Charlotte Rotterdam and Claudia Webinger.

May All Beings Benefit!

Ah La La Ho!



# APPENDIX

## Offering Mudras

### Lotus Mudra

A mudra is a small dance. It is a way to bring your body into relationship with what you are saying. There is a whole tradition of Vajra Dance connected to the Vajrayana tradition. There are some wonderful old forms of it from Nepal, and there is actually someone in Portland, Oregon who is a Nepalese dancer from a lineage of Tantric dance. In terms of this practice, we do offering mudras just with our hands to symbolize what we are saying. I will try to explain them, and there is a photo illustrating each one, but of course it would be easiest and clearest if you could watch somebody performing them.

The basic mudra, or dance step of our hands, is called the lotus mudra or pekhor. It begins with the left hand raised to heart level, palm down, and with the right hand around the level of your navel, palm up. The fingers of both of your hands are slightly spread, relaxed, and graceful looking.

Slowly and gracefully bring the left down on the inside, close to your body. Just before your left hand reaches your right hand, gracefully turn your left so that it is palm up. At the same time, raise your right hand past the outer side of your left hand up to heart level. Without pausing, turn your right palm down, and then lower your right hand close to your body until it almost touches your left hand. As your right palm turns up, your left hand begins to rise. Continue to alternate your hands slowly and gracefully.

You can imagine that you are taking a lotus from your heart with one hand and offering it up with the other hand, which then plucks another lotus from your heart to be offered up. You can also picture your fingers as delicate lotus petals.

As you become more comfortable and practiced, you can add an additional hand movement. As you lower the raised hand, tuck your thumb in by your ring finger; then in a fan-like motion, bring your fingers down over your thumb one by one starting with your pinky. The last finger comes down just as you are ready to turn your hand over. When your palm is up, open and relax your fingers. Raise your other hand and then also lower it in a fan-like motion. Keep repeating this motion, imagining that each finger is a delicate lotus petal.

This mudra takes some practice to do smoothly and comfortably. As you do it, you may notice that it activates and balances both sides of the brain. It works best not to think about what you are doing; just do it again and again. One of the things that helped me to learn this mudra was to just worry about the hand that was up. All it has to do is come

down and turn over, while the other hand gets out of the way. This might help you in the beginning.

Once you have the hang of the lotus mudra, do it just after the Jnanasattvas become inseparable from the Samayasattva. Use it with the line OM RYA TARE SAPARIV RA VAJRASAMAYA DZA. Right before DZA, gently cross your wrists, left over right, without letting them touch, fingers up; then, snap your fingers on DZA.

For TISTHA VAJRA T M, in one smooth movement start rolling your right hand away from you, followed closely by the left. When your hands come out of making one circle, face the palms up toward the ceiling with the outsides of your hands together as if you were making an offering a seat to the Jnanasattvas.

For ATI PU HO, first start rolling the right hand toward you, followed closely by the left. Circle your hands around once until you can put your hands together in a loose prayer position with your thumbs slightly tucked in between your palms.

For PRATI TSA HO, from prayer hands, start rolling the right hand away from you, followed closely by the left. Circle your hands around once, until you can gently cross your wrists, left over right, without letting them touch, fingers in snap position with your palms facing your body. Snap your fingers on HO. The snap signifies that this is the moment when the Jnanasattvas become one with the Samayasattva and non-dual homage is received.

## Outer Offerings

Now I will show you the offering mudras. You may refer to the photos to get a visual understanding, but the photos will not show you the flow. Go from one mudra to the next with a relaxed flow.

ARGHAM – Argham represents drinking water. Make fists with the thumbs inside. Place the fists together so that the fingernails touch. Straighten the middle fingers, press them together, and point them away from the body.

P DYAM – Padyam symbolizes washing water. From Argham, bring the thumbs up on top of the index fingers, and straighten the ring and little fingers. The index finger is still curled under; the other fingers are each touching their corresponding finger.

PUSHPE – Pushpe represents flowers. From Padyam, turn the hands so that the palms are facing up and the hands are no longer touching. Tuck the thumbs in and curl the fingers of each hand around the thumb. Imagine that you are making a lotus blossom, not a fist. Keep the fingers a little loose.

DHUPE - Dhupe symbolizes incense. All you have to do is turn Pushpe over so that the lotus blossom faces downward. This represents sprinkling incense on a fire.

ALOKE – Alope represents lights. From Dhupe, turn the fists so that the fingers face each other without touching. Point the thumbs straight up towards the ceiling to symbolize candles with flames. The pinky fingers are relaxed and slightly out.

GHANDHE – Ghandhe symbolizes perfume. From Alope, open your hands with palms facing out. Gently bring your hands down as if you were smoothing perfumed lotion on someone’s back.

NAIVIDYA – Naividya symbolizes the food offering. From Ghandhe, turn your hands so that the palms are facing the ceiling. On each hand, place the thumb at the base of the ring finger and gently point the ring finger towards the ceiling. The other fingers are relaxed.

SHABDA – Shabda represents music. From Naividya, face your palms toward each other without touching. On each hand, hold your thumb down with your ring and little finger. Press the index and middle fingers of each hand together; then straighten them and point them away from you. Raise and lower each hand in opposite directions as if slowly beating a drum. It does not matter which hand rises first or how many times you “beat the drum”, just do it slowly and rhythmically.

### Inner Offerings

RUPA - Rupa symbolizes sight. From Shabda, raise your right palm so that it is flat and facing out, with fingers pointed towards the ceiling. With your left hand, curl the fingers into a loose fist, but leave the thumb out resting on the index finger and pointing towards the ceiling. Place the left thumb at the base of the right palm so that the thumb nail is facing in. The right hand represents a mirror. The left hand represents the mirror’s handle.

SHABDA – Shabda represents sound and looks like two finger cymbals. From Rupa, on each hand bring the index finger and thumb together to form a ring. Raise the other three fingers like you are making an OK sign. Face the “ring” of the left hand up. Face the “ring” of the right hand down and place it over the left hand.

GHANDHE - Ghandhe as an inner offering uses the same mudra as in the outer offerings, but here it symbolizes smell rather than the perfume that creates smell.

R SA – Rasa means taste and uses the same mudra used for Naividya or food.

SPARSHE - Sparshe represents touch and looks like you are gently touching silk between your index fingers and your thumbs. With each hand, bring the index finger and thumb together to form a ring. Raise the other three fingers like you are making an OK sign. Both hands are facing out. Slowly move your hands away from each other as if the silk is slipping between your fingers.

DHARMA PRATITSA HO – Dharma Prastitsa Ho means that all things are offered with respect in oneness. Put your thumb tips together and your middle fingers together to form a triangle. Rest your other fingers against each other in a relaxed way. Raise the triangle up to eye level and look through it.

### Tantric Offering Mudras

PANCA – Panca means five and represents the offering of five amritas. Make a little basket or bowl for the nectar by interlacing the fingers of your hands, palms up; then, bring the outsides of your hands together to form a bowl. The thumbs rest near the index fingers.

BALINGTA – Balingta is the same mudra as Rasa and Naividya. It represents the torma – a representation of all physical offerings.

RAKTA – Rakta symbolizes blood, specifically menstrual blood. Put the palms of your hands together, fingers pointing away from you. Touch each index finger to the tip of the corresponding thumb so that each index finger and thumb form a little triangle.

K HI – Kahi means eat or enjoy. From Rakta, start circling your right hand away from you, followed closely by the left hand. As the left hand comes up past the body and toward the ceiling, it goes into snapping formation with the fingers facing the ceiling. At the same time the right hand also goes into snapping position, fingers facing the ceiling. In this position, the left wrist should end up over the right wrist. Both hands should be facing up and ready to snap. Snap as you say the “T” part of K HI.



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