

~ Three Candles Birthday Ceremony ~

The tradition of the Three Candles dates back to the 1980's, when Lama Tsultrim added this to her own family's birthday celebrations, noticing the normal birthday parties and celebrations with many material gifts and an overload of sugary food, often left her children feeling unfulfilled. So she created this ceremony to give birthday celebrations a more meaningful focus. Over the years her children have continued the tradition and it has spread to Tara Mandala residents, visitors and beyond. Many times Lama Tsultrim has been asked to explain how to do it, yet it's never been written down until now. A birthday is a solar return, a time to review your journey around the sun, and to set your sails for the next solar cycle.

You will need:

- Three unlit new candles. You might choose candles of different colors according to the feelings you have about the past, present or future or even different kinds of candles. The candles don't have to all be the same. And you can just use the typical birthday cake candles, though since you talk for a while with each candle each they are usually too small.
- Matches or a lighter.
- A place to put the candles once they are lit, it could be candlesticks, a plate, a cake or anything that holds them. You can use any kind of candle. The candles are not blown out, if possible let them keep burning, at least for a while. If you have to move them or leave your location, it's ok to put them out.
- You can do the ceremony alone, with just one person, at a restaurant with a small group or in the middle of a party. If it's at a birthday party just ask everyone to pause for the birthday cake, and then someone explains the ritual briefly and after the cake is distributed and people are seated eating it and the birthday person begins the Three Candles ceremony guided by someone who knows it. The Three Candles ritual gives the party a focus and creates a more meaningful experience for everyone.

Candle One

This candle is for the past year. Begin by taking a moment to think about your past year. The important events, the triumphs, the challenges, the joys and the losses. What was important and meaningful inwardly as well as outwardly in this year? What were the significant events that shaped your life in the past year? Share your reflections beginning, "In the past year...." When you have finished, light the first candle.

Candle Two

The second candle represents the present moment. What is happening for you right now now as you sit in the glow of the first candle, share what this moment means to you, what happened on your birthday, what you are feeling. When you are complete, light the second candle.

Candle Three

The third candle is for the year ahead. As you think about what you want to bring into your life, how you want to live in the next year, you speak about it as if it is already happening. For example, instead of saying *I want to meditate every day*, you would say, *I meditate every day*. When your affirmations are finished, you light the third candle. As you bask in the glow of the candles, notice how you feel in your body. Later you might write in your journal what you said during the three candles, especially the affirmations from the third candle. It imprints the affirmations in the unconscious mind and is interesting to review at the end of the next year.