



## ***Wisdom Rising: Journey into the Mandala of the Empowered Feminine***

by Lama Tsultrim Allione

# **Reader's Group Guide**

## **Six Week Syllabus**

This reading group guide for Lama Tsultrim Allione's book, *Wisdom Rising: Journey into the Mandala of the Empowered Feminine*, includes discussion questions, ideas for enhancing your discussion group (practices), and how to facilitate a *Wisdom Rising Circle* (see ***Wisdom Rising Council Circle / Reading Group Guidelines***, included). The suggested questions are intended to help your group find new and interesting angles for your discussion and to facilitate your personal journey into the mandala. We hope that these ideas will enrich your conversation, deepen your connection to the empowered feminine, and benefit you and your community.

## **CIRCLE INTRODUCTION**

These topics and discussion questions can be used to inspire a single book club discussion, meeting or to facilitate a multi-week *Wisdom Rising Circle*. Please reference the *Wisdom Rising Council Circle / Reading Group Guidelines* to inform the structure of your meetings.

## **SECTIONS & QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

1. **Week One:** Introduction to *Wisdom Rising*
2. **Week Two:** Meeting the Mandala & The Ground of Being
3. **Week Three & Four:** Meeting the Dakini
4. **Week Five & Six:** Meeting the Five Buddha Families and the Wisdom Dakinis
5. Enhance Your Circle (Practices, *incorporate as you see fit and per the feel of your circle*)

**For more information about *Wisdom Rising* retreats, online programs, and to get your copy of the book, visit [www.taramandala.org](http://www.taramandala.org) and [www.wisdomrisingbook.com](http://www.wisdomrisingbook.com).**

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## MEETING ONE

### INTRODUCTION TO WISDOM RISING

*“In [patriarchal] religions, we see story lines, beliefs, and rules that control women and their bodies. There are sexual taboos, with the frequent addition of celibacy and chastity for priests or monks, so male clerics avoid physical contact with women and may consider them a dangerous threat to their relationship with the divine. Women are also forbidden equal and empowered roles, especially leadership positions. Women are certainly present in religion. However, these religions have idealized the masculine and largely disempowered women, who remain under the control of men. Likewise, nature is seen as something to dominate, to use, to abuse as desired.” (pg. 2)*

1. In what ways have patriarchal religions and/or attitudes shaped your view of women, the feminine, spirituality, sexuality, and nature?
  - What messages did you receive as a child about women, the feminine, spirituality, sexuality, and the earth?
  - What messages do you receive now?
  - What messages would support a healthier relationship in your life with women, the feminine, nature, sexuality, and yourself?
2. How would you characterize your current relationship to the feminine?
  - What is currently nurturing / feeding you about the feminine?
  - What is a current fear, edge, wound, or challenge you have connected to the feminine? What is bringing you to your knees?
  - How is wisdom rising in you around the feminine? What positive shifts or transformation are you experiencing now?
3. In the introduction, Lama Tsultrim shares the story of Tara, the female Buddha of compassion, and how as the Princess Wisdom Moon, she was told she could not attain enlightenment in a woman’s body. Tara responds stating that at an absolute level, we are beyond gender, and goes on to attain enlightenment in a woman’s body. How have the messages you have received about your body, race, gender identity, sexual orientation or socioeconomic status shaped your life? How have these messages shaped what you believe to be possible in your life? How have they shaped the “roles” you think you should play in your life, family, society? How have you engaged with spirituality or religion? What inspirational examples do you have to draw upon, like Tara, who transcended dictated norms? Where do you see privilege in your own life?
4. Feminine Models of Strength and the Primal Feminine

*“Feminine models of strength have been largely lost, repressed, or hidden from view, particularly images that are not acceptable or are not safe in a patriarchal society.”*  
(pg. 12)

*“The primal feminine experience that has not been present and that both men and women long for and this is an experience that comes from the intuitive sacred feminine, a place where language may be paradoxical and prophetic, where the emphasis is on the symbolic meaning, not the words; a place where women sit in circles naked wearing mud, bones, and feathers, women who turn into divine goddesses and old hags— who turn into the fierce dakinis.”*

*(pg. 12)*

- Where have you seen examples of feminine models of strength in your life? How has this energy been repressed or nurtured in you?
- How has the primal feminine shown up, or not, in your life? How is this energy emerging in your life? How could you further cultivate this energy in your life?
- How do you currently honor the sacredness of the earth and the feminine, if at all? How could you make this more of a part of your daily life?

## MEETING TWO

### MEETING THE MANDALA

1. Lama Tsultrim writes about finding the book *Man and His Symbols* edited by Carl G. Jung and reading the book of Zen haiku and calligraphy, *Zen Telegrams* by Paul Reps, that her maternal grandmother gave her. These small moments in her life led her on a journey to India, Nepal and to finding the Tibetans, Tibetan Buddhism, Swayambhu stupa, the mandala, and the dakinis. What have been similar moments in your life that have initiated you and supported you on your personal journey to wholeness? What have been the moments that have drawn you into your own journey to wholeness?

2. Exploring the Mandala.

“The Tibetan term for mandala is *kyil khor*. *Kyil* means “center” and *khor* means “that which surrounds the center, or the swirl surrounding the center.” (pg.52). Generally a mandala is defined as, 1) a circle; a center with a circumference, usually divided into four quadrants, 2) a universal template of wholeness that reflects the structure of the universe, from the smallest microcosm to the vast macrocosm, and 3) the supreme (sanskrit: manda) completion (sanskrit: la) (pg. 51).

Lama Tsultrim writes, “Our spiritual intelligence searches for wholeness, coherence, and attunement to the universe. The mandala is a tool to accomplish this, and thus has continually appeared throughout human history in diverse forms and cultures” (pg. 47).

- Discuss examples of how mandalas have appeared in various cultures, religions, architecture, city planning, art, design, gardens, food, human and animal bodies, in nature, throughout history, and other areas?
  - Discuss examples of mandalas at “the smallest microcosm” and “the vast macrocosm.”
3. The mandala principle in Tibetan Buddhism has three aspects; the outer mandala, inner mandala, and secret mandala. The outer mandala is the “mandala of the phenomenal world... our country, our province, our district, our immediate household, our friends and colleagues, and so on” (pg. 52)
    - What makes up your outer mandala? What people, places, animals, and objects? Reflect and then share with the group. In what ways do you see the outer world as a mandala?
    - How do we define the inner mandala? What makes up the inner mandala and how can we work with this? Discuss the patterns you see manifesting as your inner mandala. (pg. 53-54)
    - What is the secret mandala? (pg. 53-54)
  4. Mandalas have been used therapeutically to heal the psyche. “A sense of order is reflected back to the person drawing the mandala, transmitting to the brain an orderly pattern of thought that facilitates psychological recovery.” (pg. 51)
    - What examples does Lama Tsultrim site of how mandalas have been used in different contexts to heal the fragmented psyche?

- Have you ever participated in any collective or individual mandala based rituals, ceremonies, or practices? What was this experience like?
- Optional Activity: Go to pg. 282 and engage in a session of drawing a mandala as described. Give a set time of 15-30 min. Return to the group and share your experience of drawing the mandala with a partner.

5. One Ground, Two Paths, Two Results.

- How does Lama Tsultrim define “one ground, two paths, two results” (pg. 59)? What is the “basic split” (pg. 60-61)? How do you experience this in your own life?

6. The Basic Split

*“This split is extremely painful, and so there’s a great longing to overcome it; unfortunately, the way we normally attempt to overcome it—through the five poisons—only increases our suffering. The process of failing to recognize our inseparability from the one ground creates a self-perpetuating condition, like a kaleidoscopic hall of mirrors, in which we seek to resolve our inherent alienation from the one ground through further projections outward.” (pg. 62)*

- What are the five poisons (pg. 61)? How do you see them showing up in your own life?
- Can you think of or share a personal story / example of different ways you seek happiness or relief from a basic anxiety (basic split from the ground of being) by searching for an antidote outside of yourself? Where do you go or what do you do when you are emotionally triggered and/or what are the patterns in your life to find happiness and create a sense of safety, love and/or peace?

7. Discuss the quotes below. What do these mean to you? What do the quotes inspire in you when you read them?

*“The key to awakening, then, is recognizing the appearances in the world as the radiance of the one ground, and our true nature as the vast awakened universe itself.” (pg. 63)*

*“Meditating on the mandala is a tool or template for reintegration and provides a re-centering experience that unites the fragmented psyche and transmutes the five poisons into wisdom. In meditation, the mandala becomes a transformative psychogram rather than a cosmogram. The psyche that has moved into dualistic fragmentation experiences reunion, a return to the ground of being, and is able to shine forth once more from the depths of its true essence.” (pg. 63-64)*

## MEETING THREE & FOUR

### MEETING THE DAKINI

1. Lama Tsultrim writes about how following the death of her daughter, Chiara, came what she called a descent. “I was filled with confusion, loss, and grief. Buffeted by raw, intense emotions, I felt more than ever that i desperately needed some female guidance. I needed to turn somewhere: to women’s stories, to women teachers, to anything that would guide me as a mother, living this life of motherhood—to connect me to my own experience as a woman and as a serious Buddhist practitioner on the path. I needed the stories of dakinis. But i really didn’t know where to turn.” (pg. 86)
  - What have been the “moments of descent” in your own life?
  - What did you call upon as a guide during in this time/these times? Did you have the stories of women or others who had been through a similar journey? How did these stories, or the lack thereof, shape your journey?
2. Lama Tsultrim writes, *“If I could find the dakinis, I would find my spiritual role models—I could see how they did it. I could see how they made the connections between mother, wife, and woman . . . how they integrated spirituality with everyday life challenges.”* (pg. 86)
  - How do you integrate spirituality and the challenges of everyday life? What nourishes you and what is your greatest challenge?
  - How do you integrate spirituality with being a mother or father?
  - Who are your spiritual role models?
3. Lama Tsultrim writes at different points in the book about the fierce, feminine describing the dakini in various ways:

*“Being a dynamic principle, the dakini is energy itself, a positive contact with her brings about a sense of freshness and magic. She becomes a guide and consort who activates intuitive understanding and profound awareness, but this energy can turn suddenly and pull the rug out from under you, if you become too attached and fixated. This can be painful. When energy becomes blocked and we feel the pain caused by our fixation, this is the wrathful dakini. Her anger pushes us to let go of clinging and enter her mysterious home.”* (p. xii)

*“A dakini can be the consort of a high lama, but she can also be a deity, a wild and wrathful manifestation of wisdom, fierce but without aggression...she can simultaneously pull the rug out from under you and encourage you”* (pg. 33)

*“The word for dakini in Tibetan is khandro, which means “she who moves through space,” sometimes called a “sky dancer” or a “sky goer”; this refers to the energy that integrates itself with emptiness—not emptiness in the sense of an empty pocket or empty cup, but the emptiness of self or emptiness of ego. It’s the feminine energy that penetrates into emptiness, moving through it, a messenger of it. The dakinis thus became messengers of wisdom, embodiments of wisdom, and energies that practitioners could invoke and with whom they could create a positive relationship.”* (pg. 95)

*“When the Tantric Buddhist ideas of the dakinis migrated to Tibet in the eighth century, the energy of the feminine was firmly embedded in the wisdom dakini principle, becoming a prominent sacred manifestation of the feminine. Their powers as guides, protectors, messengers, and enhancers of spiritual experience increased in Tibet, where a relationship with the dakini became key for both male and female practitioners.” (pg. 96)*

*The fierce dancing dakinis...embody and activate the powerful and transformative energy of the feminine. When you think about it, we really don't have that kind of image of spiritual enlightenment in our world. We have a figure like the Holy Virgin Mother, who is peaceful and non threatening, but we don't have many reflections of female divinity that are active, dancing, fierce, free, and wild. So by activating the dakini power within us, we will have an inner resource that should never be underestimated. What we're doing is really taking a part of the psyche that's been relegated to the unconscious, the fierce powerful feminine who has become repressed, and we are bringing that energy forward and exploring that energy's potential for enlightenment.” (pg. 105)*

*The dakinis tend to push us through blockages. They appear during challenging, crucial moments when we might be stymied in our lives; perhaps we don't know what to do next and we are in transition. Maybe an obstacle has arisen and we can't figure out how to get around or get through—then the dakinis will guide us. If in some way we're stuck, the dakinis will appear and open the way, push us through; sometimes the energy needs to be forceful, and that's when the wrathful manifestation of a dakini appears. (pg. 106)*

- How have you experienced or seen the dakini energy manifest in your own life? In yourself? In others? In nature or the world?
  - Have there been experiences when you feel the dakinis have entered your life to inspire transformation?
  - Have you ever experience the dakini energy “pulling the rug out” in your life? Has she ever appeared to push you through a blockage or help you cut through stagnation and move into something new? What did this reveal or bring forward for you?
  - Have there been moments in your life when you “understood the words” but not “the sense or meaning” (pg. 113)? How has intuition and symbolic meaning shown up in your life?
4. Lama Tsultrim writes, “The climate change crisis is actually a crisis of relationship; we have been in an abusive relationship with the rest of life on earth...However, as [the story of Milarepa's student] also illustrates, it is possible to come back into right relationship with the earth through the dakinis, and if we do so, we will be healed.” (pg. 97)
- In what ways are you in right relationship with the earth and nature? In what ways are you in an unbalanced relationship?
  - How do you think you can further heal your relationship with the earth?
  - What practices from this book, or elsewhere, that involve integrating with nature do you plan to do in your life?

5. “The Tantric Buddhist movement shows powerful partnerships between men and women as co-practitioners on the spiritual path, with intimacy as one key component on the path to enlightenment.” Read the passage from the Candamaharosana Tantra on page 94, in which Vajra Yogini describes how she should be worshipped in the context of a yogi and yogini practicing together that reflects a gynocentric-erotic experience written from the female point of view. In this yogini teaching, the text alternates between the third person and the first person, indicating the shift from the personal to the transpersonal experience that they both are having.
  - Discuss this passage. What does the passage bring up for you?
  - How does it differ from societal views of sex and sexuality?
  - What is censored or viewed as taboo in your current view of sexuality?
  
6. The wisdom dakini is depicted naked, dancing, and blazing with wisdom fire. In her raised right hand, she holds a *trigug*, the hooked knife. In her left hand, at her heart, she holds a skull cup. In the crook of her left arm rests the *khatvanga* staff, her inner consort.
  - What is the symbolic meaning of the trigug, the hooked knife? (pg. 99) In what areas of your life could you use the energy of the trigug that “cuts what needs to be cut through,” and severs that which is no longer serving you in your life? How could you use the energy or symbol of the trigug in your life?
  - What is the symbolic meaning of the kapala, the skull cup? (pg. 99-100)
    - i. Do you feel you notice impermanence in your daily life? How can contemplating impermanence and death inspire gratitude and awareness of the present moment?
    - ii. The Kapala is the cauldron of transformation, specifically of transforming our “blood karma” or genetic karma. What patterns in your family lineage would you like to transform through the practice of the Five Wisdom Dakinis?
  - The dakini holds a staff in the crook of her left arm. The symbolic staff is called the *khatvanga*. Its essential meaning is that of “hidden consort” or “inner consort” and it represents the dakini's inner masculine. With the khatvanga staff she has the power to stand alone; she has internalized the masculine (pg. 102)<sup>1</sup>
    - i. What is your relationship with your inner masculine or inner consort? Is this an integrated part of you? In what ways is it integrated? In what ways is it not integrated?
    - ii. In what ways do you show up for yourself in your life? How do you support yourself (or not) with the energy of inner support or inner consort/partner?
    - iii. In what ways or areas of your life would you like to develop an integrated sense of inner masculine, inner consort, or inner support? How would this help you in your life, with a particular situation, or persistent emotional challenge?
    - iv. What would it mean for you in your life to, “have the power to stand alone”?
    - v. Discuss the symbolism of the different elements of the khatvanga. The vajra a top the staff, the three heads, the double vajra, the two scarves, and so on. (pg.102-103)

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<sup>1</sup> For individuals that identify as men or male, the “inner consort” is the inner feminine. Dakas, the male equivalent of dakinis, hold a *khatvanga* staff that is topped with a trident.

- Lama Tsultrim writes, *“I find the khatvanga a really important and potent symbol for women: it shows the integration of a woman who can give and receive in relationship, because she is coming from a stance of wholeness. She does not need to find the masculine outside of herself; she holds it within. She’s not Sleeping Beauty waiting to be awakened by Prince Charming. She’s already awake, she’s dancing, she is empowered, and she has her staff.”* (pg. 103)
    - i. Are there ways in which you seek the masculine, security, or wholeness outside of yourself?
    - ii. Are there times you have felt connected to the inner consort or masculine within? What were the times in your life when you felt awake, dancing, empowered, and free?
    - iii. Are there ways in relationship that your “giving and receiving” is out of balance? Are you able to fully “receive” in relationship? Are you able to give? Do you over or under give? How does this relate to feeling a sense integrated wholeness alone, just as you are?
  - Dakinis are depicted as dancing, an expression of inner ecstasy, and “when all bodily movements become the expression of enlightened mind.” They are also depicted as naked, wearing bone ornaments, and emanating wisdom so intensely that it becomes wisdom flames that pour out of her body.
    - i. Discuss the symbolic meaning of the dakinis raised right leg and extend left leg, naked body, corpse (ego), crown, and bone ornaments. Explore these themes in our own life
    - ii. In the practice of the Mandala of the Five Dakinis, Lama Tsultrim describes how we embody the dakini emanating wisdom flames (pg. 256, 258, 260, 262). She writes, “wisdom [is] emanating out of you as the dakini with such intensity that it becomes flames. From every pore of your body comes wisdom flames: feel the embodiment...” (pg. 260). Do the Mandala Practice together as a group or at home before you meet. Discuss your experience of embodying wisdom so intensely that it becomes flames.
  - *“The bone ornaments remind us of renunciation and impermanence. She’s going beyond convention: fear of death has become an ornament to wear. We think of jewels as gold, silver, or something pretty, but she’s taken that which is considered repulsive and turned into an ornament”*(pg. 104). Is there something you fear in your life you can imagine expressing as an ornament? How does this concept impact you? Are there ways you go beyond convention or areas of your life where you feel called to do so?
7. “Another important aspect of the dakini’s feminine energy...is how they cut through notions of pure and impure, clean and unclean, what you should do and shouldn’t do, and breaking open the shell of those conventional structures into an embrace of all life, all experience is seen as sacred. If we look at the early stories of Tantric Buddhism, there are all kinds of examples of situations where people are presented with something they perceive to be impure and then a dakini appears and cuts through that and says, ‘If you’re seeing this as pure or impure, you’re clearly not understanding the point.’” (pg. 107)
- Discuss the quote above. Talk about the notions of pure and impure. What would be the point in being pushed to cut through that dualism? How might this shift a current situation or perception in your life? What would happen if you saw all experience as “sacred”?
  - Are there areas in your life where you might be stuck in extremes of “pure” and “impure,” good and bad? How do these labels influence your life, actions, and behaviors?

- At what moments might the dakinis come into our lives and try to move us beyond the dualities of pure and impure? Is there an area of your life where you'd like to call in this energy to shift something? Are there times in your life when this has occurred?
8. What are some of the qualities of the undomesticated female energy? Is this energy present in your life? How and to what degree?
- What is your personal relationship to the wild, free, dancing, empowered dakini energy? What emotions and feelings does this notion bring up? Empowered, scared, nervous, invigorated, inspired, intimidated, etc.?
  - What is your experience with the wild, empowered dakini energy in your life? Is this alive in your life? Repressed? Talk about your experience of this as a vibrant energy, a shadow energy, or something that is emerging in you.

## MEETING FIVE & SIX

### MEETING THE FIVE BUDDHA FAMILIES & WISDOM DAKINIS

*It is important to remember when working with the five families that there isn't any value judgment about which family is good or bad; they each have amazing qualities. It's about recognizing your own energy and learning to work with it.*

1. Explore the **Buddha Family** in your life.
  - a. How do you see the **encumbered** pattern of Buddha showing up in your life? In your family? Friends, neighbors, and/or coworkers? In our society and world? Famous people? Companies, organizations, corporations, and governments?
  - b. How do you see the **wisdom** of Buddha Family showing up in your life? In your family? In our society and world? Famous people? Companies, organizations, corporations, and governments?
2. Explore the **Vajra Family** in your life.
  - a. How do you see the **encumbered** pattern of Vajra showing up in your life? In your family? Friends, neighbors, and/or coworkers? In our society and world? Famous people? Companies, organizations, corporations, and governments?
  - b. How do you see the **wisdom** of Vajra Family showing up in your life? In your family? In our society and world? Famous people? Companies, organizations, corporations, and governments?
3. Explore the **Ratna Family** in your life.
  - a. How do you see the **encumbered** pattern of Ratna showing up in your life? In your family? Friends, neighbors, and/or coworkers? In our society and world? Famous people? Companies, organizations, corporations, and governments?
  - b. How do you see the **wisdom** of Ratna Family showing up in your life? In your family? In our society and world? Famous people? Companies, organizations, corporations, and governments?
4. Explore the **Padma Family** in your life.
  - a. How do you see the **encumbered** pattern of Padma showing up in your life? In your family? Friends, neighbors, and/or coworkers? In our society and world? Famous people? Companies, organizations, corporations, and governments?
  - b. How do you see the **wisdom** of Padma Family showing up in your life? In your family? In our society and world? Famous people? Companies, organizations, corporations, and governments?
5. Explore the **Karma Family** in your life.
  - a. How do you see the **encumbered** pattern of Karma showing up in your life? In your family? Friends, neighbors, and/or coworkers? In our society and world? Famous people? Companies, organizations, corporations, and governments?
  - b. How do you see the **wisdom** of Karma Family showing up in your life? In your family? In our society and world? Famous people? Companies, organizations, corporations, and governments?
6. As Lama Tsultrim writes, “all of us belong predominantly to one or more of the five buddha families.” The families might seem like another system of categorizing ourselves and others, similar to astrology or the enneagram, but they are actually ways to see the world and to work with our own energies and those

of others. They are guidelines to our perception (p. 132). Discuss embodying the five families (pg. 137-138).

- a. Which family do you resonate with most? Is there more than one? Why?
    - i. Do you dress like a particular family? Is your home a particular family type?
    - ii. Which family types do you notice in the people closest to you?
  - b. Which encumbered pattern or poison is strongest in you?
  - c. Which family do you least identify with? Why?
7. In addition to the five families, each mandala is associated with three types of deities: peaceful, wrathful, and joyful. These deities may be female, male, or in union (yab yum) (pg. 132). Discuss moments or experiences in your life that called for embodied peaceful, wrathful (fierce compassion), and/or joyful energy in order to transform the situation. Where might have these energies been useful in the past? In a present situation? How do you experience these wisdom energies making up the complexity of your human experience?
8. Discuss this quote from pg. 135

*As we learned about the teaching of “one ground, two paths, two results” in Chapter 3, the process of straying from the one ground creates a self-perpetuating condition of suffering, and we seek to resolve our inherent alienation through further projections and grasping at “other.” This cyclical process is always unsuccessful because we are attempting to resolve the situation of dualistic clinging by moving further into dualism, away from the source, instead of returning to the source and entering into union with the one ground. This unsuccessful resolution creates a pervasive condition of dissatisfaction and anxiety, and continues to build chaotic layer upon layer, a wild variety of fragmented impulses and subconscious currents leading us from one situation to the next, and one life to the next.*

*The process of working with the mandala principle directly addresses this issue by returning awareness to the pure, luminous energy of the mandala, which radiates directly from the ground. The good news is that we have never been separated from the ground—we are simply failing to recognize its all-pervasive presence, somewhat like a fly buzzing itself to death against a window when an open door is right next to it.*

- a. How does this quote make you feel? What does this open in you?
9. The Exit Family describes how you get out of a situation (pg 135-136). The exit can mask your primary family or may be the same family. You might be of one family, but your way of exiting a situation may be through a different family. With a partner, discuss the ways you get out of difficult situations.
- a. What do you do to get out of situations or feelings that make you uncomfortable? Do you gravitate to a certain substance (food, alcohol, drugs, other)? Do you gravitate toward a particular type of situation, person, or behavior (shopping, partying, seduction, cleaning)? Do you check out in some way (phone, TV, facebook, procrastination, depression)?

## ENHANCE YOUR CIRCLE

### WISDOM RISING PRACTICES

*You can decide to add one, or more, of the following practices to the beginning or end of your circle time. You may also decide to extend your circle after the initial six-weeks to become a practice group and move through these practices together or focus on one particular practice such as weekly practice of the Mandala of the Five Dakini meditation.*

- **Mandala of the Five Wisdom Dakinis Meditation (pg. 251)**
  - Do the practice as a group at the beginning or end of your meeting. You can download the practice text here: <http://bit.ly/DakiniText>. You can also use the abbreviated practice text on pg. 314. Begin with the Nin Relaxation Breaths (pg. 155) and heartfelt Motivation (p. 156). Read the italicized text out loud as a group, sounding the seed syllables for each dakini aloud three times as indicated. Read the dedication of merit aloud as a group to close the practice. Share your experiences as a group.
  - Commit to do a daily or weekly practice at home individually while your group is meeting (and after!). Share your experiences of incorporating the practice into your life.
- **Journey with the Dakini Meditation (pg. 267)**
  - Do the practice as a group after your check-in (20-30 min). Share your experience with a partner (5-min each, 10-min total) and then share any themes as a group (5-10 min).
  - Do the practice at home before your group meets and discuss your experiences as part of your weekly meeting.
- **Dakini Mandala Altar (pg. 272)**
  - Create a Dakini Mandala Altar as a group in your meeting space. Group members can also bring something meaningful item to add to Dakini Altar creating a collective altar in the space (people will get their special items back at the end of the meeting or circle series).
- **Creating Altars with Children (pg. 279)**
  - Decide to create altars with your family at home or plan a day to do so together. Share the experience in your group.
- **Mandala Work with Your Hands (pg. 282)**
  - **Drawing a Dakini Mandala (pg. 282)**
    - Do the practice as a group (20-30 min). Share your experience with a partner (5-min each, 10-min total) and then share any themes as a group (5-10 min).
    - Commit to do a daily or weekly practice of drawing mandalas at home while your group is meeting. Share your experiences of incorporating the practice into your life during a group meeting.
  - **Creating a Dakini Mandala in Nature (pg. 285)**
    - Plan to do this as a group or individually during your circle series. Share the experience in the group.
  - **Sandplay Dakini Mandala (pg. 286)**
    - Plan to do this as a group or individually during your circle series. Share the experience in the group.

- **Wearing the Dakini Color (pg. 288)**
  - As a group decide to wear the dakini colors throughout the week. For a five-day period, pick a different Buddha Family per day and wear that color (or a few articles of clothing). Discuss the experience at your next group meeting.
  - If you know you're working with a certain family, try experimenting and wearing at least some articles of clothing in that color. It can be very transformative, because when you look down you'll see that color and it impacts your mind. Decide as a group to do this for a couple of days or a week and then discuss the experience at your next meeting.
- **Regression Practice with the Five Families (pg. 289)**
  - During the weekly meetings on the Five Buddha Families, decide to do the practice as a group (20-30 min). Share your experience with a partner (5-min each, 10-min total) and then share any themes as a group (5-10 min).
  - Do the practice at home before your group meets and discuss your experiences as part of your weekly meeting.
- **Buddha Family Meditation Practices** *(these are good practices to incorporate during weeks five and six as your group discusses the Five Buddha Families)*
  - **Unblocking the Encumbered Energy** *(listed at the end of each Buddha Family Chapter)*
    - Choose a family (emotion or encumbered pattern) that you would like to work with. Do the practice individually at home or as a break-out practice during one of your meetings. Share your experiences as a group, or with partners (5-min each, 10-min total).
  - **Element Practice with the Five Families** *(listed at the end of each Buddha Family Chapter)*
    - Do the practice as a group (15-30 min) as you discuss the different Buddha families. Share your experience with a partner (5-min each, 10-min total) and then share any themes as a group (5-10 min).
    - Do the practice at home before your group meets and discuss your experiences as part of your weekly meeting. Choose a family that you would like to work with (an emotion or pattern you'd like to transform) and do the practice with that element.

# Wisdom Rising Council Circle / Reading Group Guidelines

## *Introduction & How to Get Started*

**Wisdom Rising Circles** are community gatherings where women (and men) can create the space to have conversations about their experience with the feminine in society using *Wisdom Rising: A Journey Into the Mandala of the Empowered Feminine* by Lama Tsultrim Allione. Council is an age-old practice that brings community together to be heard, bear witness, share authentically, and be inspired. Participants agree to share personal experiences and stories, rather than opinions, to speak one-at-a-time, and to listen without judgement. The practice of council recognizes everyone as equals and asks for attentive listening and authentic expression.

**Starting a Circle:** Find 4-8 people in your community who are interested in talking about their experience of the feminine and using the book as a guide, learning about the empowered feminine and the mandala meditation that is presented. The group can be larger, but this could require longer meeting times. Please use the *Wisdom Rising* Reading Group Guide to structure the discussions of your circles.

**The Circle Experience:** Your circle should decide how long they will meet each week. Once the length of time is decided, it should be kept consistent throughout. The recommended time is 2-hours per meeting but more time may be needed depending on the group size and how much of the material your group would like to cover. The first part (~12-30 min) of the 2-hour circle will be a brief check where each participant will speak for 3-4 min (decide on a time depending on your group size). During this time each participant will share how they are arriving at the circle on this day (ex. How are you feeling coming into this circle? What is currently up for you? How was your day?). The remaining time of the meeting (~1 hour 30-min) of the meeting will consist of a group discussion around the suggested topics and questions. You may wish to begin the circle with the Nine Relaxation Breaths (pg. 155) or include this after the check-ins and before discussion. The relaxation breaths may be followed by 1-5 min of sitting in silence, resting in the experience that is present after the relaxation breaths.

- I. **Week One:** The feminine in religion, spirituality, and society (Introduction to Wisdom Rising)
- II. **Week Two:** Meeting the Mandala & The Ground of Being
- III. **Week Three & Week Four:** Meeting the Dakini
- IV. **Week Five & Week Six:** Meeting the Five Buddha Families and the Wisdom Dakinis

**Circle Space:** It is up to you where you meet. The circle can take place in one member's home or rotate between the homes of circle members. A space that is cozy and creates a confidential atmosphere is always welcome. The group can decide to create a dakini altar (pg. 272) and/or a shared altar where each person brings something special or meaningful item to offer to a collective altar in the space (people will get their special items back at the end of the meeting or circle series). The host can seed the collective altar with a scarf and candle. It can also be nice to serve tea, wine, snacks and/or have a potluck at the beginning/end of your circle. Make it your own!

**Circle Flow:** Each circle will meet six times on the days and times you set. It is highly recommended that the group sets all dates and times at the beginning and does not reschedule if a member is unable to attend the particular meeting.

### Circle Feel:

- **Share Feelings & Personal Experiences:** Encourage members to share their own experiences and feelings. The full range of emotions are welcome, e.g. joy, sadness, anger, sorrow, hopelessness, love.
- **Confidential:** Create a boundary of confidentiality and remind circle members not to share names or stories outside of the group. Anything shared in the circle, stays in the circle. Do not bring up events shared in the circle later unless that person brings them up to you. This ensures privacy and safety of all.
- **Equal Time:** Decide how long each person will share for each discussion topic. Use a timing device (Example: Each person speaks on a certain subject for four or five minutes. The alarm goes off and you switch). Creating time sharing ensures that everyone gets a chance to share and that no one person dominates the conversation. Time sharing in council neutralizes hierarchical dynamics formed by the inequality of status, race, gender or other social factors. You may decide to have a time for open discussion after going around the circle.
- **Just Listen. No Feedback or Advice:** Encourage members to refrain from offering help, guidance, interpretation, solutions or advice from their point of view. Dialogue and feedback should not be giving during a sharing council session.

### Frequently Asked Questions:

#### **Q: Is it ok to start a group if I, or my circle members, have not attended a retreat, talk or transmission with Lama Tsultrim Allione?**

A: Yes. People are invited to start and/or attend a *Wisdom Rising* circle even if they have not attended a talk, retreat or received transmission from Lama Tsultrim.

#### **Q: Can I do the practices in the book if I have not attended a retreat, talk or transmission with Lama Tsultrim Allione?**

A: Yes. You are able to do the practices in the book with your circle, or individually, based on the practice instructions that are outlined. There is a *Wisdom Rising* online course available for individuals who would like to dive more deeply into the practices presented in *Wisdom Rising*. When possible, it is encouraged to eventually seek out a retreat with Lama Tsultrim, or one of her authorized teachers, to receive in-person instruction and transmission of the Mandala of the Five Wisdom Dakinis and other practices.

#### **Q: Can I teach these practices to others?**

No. Unless authorized specifically by Lama Tsultrim, you should not engage in teaching any of these practices to others. For people new to this work or interested in learning, it is recommended they read the book and take the online course to get started. Join the Tara Mandala mailing list to get updates and more information on the Mandala Training Series, a program to train facilitators to lead Mandala work in their professional practices.

#### **Q: It is ok to let circle members continue if they miss one or more sessions?**

A: We encourage people not to miss any sessions and that members commit to come to all sessions. Of course “life happens,” and if people have an emergency or need to miss a day, they can still be included going forward.

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