

THE PRACTICE OF GREEN TARA

VEN. BARDOR TULKU RINPOCHE



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Contents

Introduction & Background	<i>page 1</i>
Performing the Practice	<i>page 7</i>
Illustration: Photos of mudras	<i>page 13</i>
The Visualization of Tara	<i>page 16</i>
Illustration: Line drawing of the 21 Taras:	
<i>Folding page between pages 18-19</i>	
The 21 Praises of Tara	<i>page 25</i>
Questions and Answers	<i>page 41</i>
Continuing the Practice	<i>page 45</i>
Concluding the Practice	<i>page 55</i>
Special Section: A short biography of Terchen Barway Dorje, the first Bardor Tulku; written by Lama Yeshe Gyamtso.	<i>page 59</i>

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The Practice of Green Tara

by Ven. Bardor Tulku Rinpoche

As an introduction to this teaching on the practice of Tara, we should keep in mind the general point that all things—including ourselves—are of the nature of impermanence.

It is also important to remember that there are differences between the vehicles (or *yanas*) of Buddhist practice based on the commitments connected with them. From the point of view of the *hinayana*, the commitment is the *pratimoksha* or the individual liberation discipline. This is connected with, for example, the vows of a Buddhist monk or nun in which one has to observe a certain conduct of body and speech, to be peaceful and disciplined in one's behavior, to wear the three robes, and so forth. That is the external discipline of the *hinayana*. The internal discipline of the *mahayana* is to maintain an attitude or thought that one is practicing *dharma* for the benefit of all sentient beings—all of whom have been one's mother in some lifetime—in order that they obtain buddhahood. Then, secretly there is the *samaya* of the *vajrayana* which is primarily dependent upon the guru or lama. In this context, it is said: "The lama is the Buddha, the lama is the *dharma*, the lama is *Vajradhara*. It is the lama who performs all." Thus, from the *vajrayana* point of view, everything depends on the lama.

From our point of view as Karma Kagyu practitioners, what is meant by lama in this case is the lineage which starts with *Vajradhara*. From *Vajradhara* comes an uninterrupted lineage down through the lamas of the lineage, especially the *Gyalwa Karmapas*, and down to our own root guru. As Kagyu practitioners, our root guru is the *Gyalwa Karmapa* who is the lord of all mandalas. The word "Kagyu" literally means "command lineage." The teachings have been transmitted orally, from mouth to ear, from the primordial Buddha, *Dorje Chang*,¹ all the way down to our root guru, without interruption and with no mistake. The teachings which are transmitted in this manner are the essence of all *dharma*—the *mahamudra* teachings. Having received these instructions from this lineage, one then puts them into practice.

For Kagyu practitioners, the main teacher is the *Gyalwa Karmapa*. But it is also necessary that there be other lamas who perform the function of teaching in order to implement the activity of the *Gyalwa Karmapa*. This is why, under the *Karmapa*, there are many teachers. In each *dharma* center there are lamas who give instruction to practitioners. It is just as important to maintain our *samaya* with respect to our root gurus—those who actually, personally give us instruction—as it is to keep *samaya* with respect to our main lineage teacher, the *Gyalwa Karmapa*.

¹ Sanskrit: *Vajradhara*

A lama such as the Gyalwa Karmapa has five aspects: body, speech, mind, qualities, and activity. If we are able to directly encounter the body and speech of such a lama by, for example, meeting His Holiness and receiving his blessing and hearing him teach directly, this is excellent. Even if we do not meet His Holiness directly, but encounter his teaching through, for example, coming to KTD Monastery and receiving teachings from the lamas, this is the activity of His Holiness. It is necessary to understand that the source of all the activity performed by the Kagyu lamas is His Holiness the Gyalwa Karmapa.

Traditionally, it is said that when listening to the mahayana dharma, one needs to abandon what are called the three faults. The three faults are as follows: first, to listen or to hear the dharma in the manner of an overturned cup, which means that you are not listening and therefore nothing gets inside. The second fault is to listen in the manner of a leaky cup. This refers to listening in a distracted way, where what you hear leaves your mind as soon as it enters. The third fault is to listen in the manner of a cup with poison in it, which means that, through emotionality, you distort the dharma that you receive.

When studying the meaning of the dharma, the traditional approach is to first proceed from word to word, learning the precise meaning of each word. This thorough method of study is compared to the gait of a tortoise, because a tortoise proceeds slowly, gradually, from one step to the next, and never misses a step. In this way we should examine each word and learn the meaning of it separately. Following that, our understanding of sections of the text, of the larger grouping of subject matter, should be like the leaping of the tigress. We should be able to grasp a whole area of the text as a cohesive unit very quickly. Following that, our understanding of the meaning of a text as a whole should be like the flight of a garuda,² surveying the entire landscape from the air.

Then, when practicing the mahayana dharma, the most important thing is the attitude with which we practice. Whatever kind of dharma practice we undertake, we need to have an altruistic intent. We need to consider that among the countless sentient beings that exist, there is not one who has not at some point been our mother. Not one of them wishes to suffer. All beings wish to have happiness and to avoid suffering. But through not knowing the means by which happiness is attained and suffering is avoided, all sentient beings experience suffering, without finding happiness. Based on this understanding, we should think that we are practicing dharma in order to bring them happiness and freedom from suffering. If, for example, you are practicing the meditation on Arya Tara, you should think, "I am practicing this in order to establish myself in this state, at the level of Arya Tara, and thereafter to establish all sentient beings at this state." The important thing is that your motivation be to practice for the benefit of others. Then it will work. If you practice only for the benefit of yourself, it will not work.

But along with the altruistic attitude of practicing dharma for the benefit of sentient beings, we also need to have renunciation for samsara. We must understand that samsara is an ocean of suffering, and on the basis of that understanding, desire to obtain

² A magical bird of Indian mythology

buddhahood. If we do not have renunciation for samsara while practicing dharma, we will be practicing what is known as the dharma of samsara and not the dharma of nirvana. The dharma of samsara is what experienced when someone actually does dharma practice but without a disgust for samsara. It is when practice of dharma is mixed with delight in samsara, i.e. without understanding the deceptive nature of cyclic existence. When we develop disgust with samsara, and practice dharma on that basis, that will enable us to obtain nirvana.

In connection with this, it is important to understand the two kinds of bodhicitta—the attitude of wanting to benefit all beings. These are the bodhicitta of aspiration and the bodhicitta of implementation. The bodhicitta of aspiration is the thought, “I will practice dharma for the benefit of all sentient beings in order that they obtain enlightenment.” Then, following that, it is necessary to actually implement this and perform the practices, especially the practice of the six paramitas. If you do not implement bodhicitta through actual practice, then even though you think, “I would like to benefit beings; I would like to liberate them from suffering,” you will not be able to do so. It is the actual enactment of our intention of bodhicitta which requires renunciation of samsara.

Practicing the dharma of samsara is when one engages in practice without an attitude of bodhicitta. For example, if someone practices dharma diligently, but with an attitude of great pride, he or she would be reborn as a samsaric god. If the practice was done with an attitude of aggressiveness or competition, one would be reborn as an asura. This kind of practice is dharma because any virtuous action is said to be dharma. However, because it is not accompanied by an attitude of bodhicitta, it will not lead one to buddhahood but only produce the temporary benefits associated with better rebirths within samsara. It is very important when practicing dharma that our aspirations be for what is most important—the attainment of buddhahood. We should not aspire toward the happiness of human and god realm existence, or happiness in future lives and so forth. These mundane temporary benefits will come from dharma practice, but if we aspire for them only we receive no ultimate benefit. Consider the example of a tree, which has a root, trunk, branches, and leaves. Through the cultivation of the root and trunk, the branches and leaves will flourish automatically. In this example, the root and trunk of the tree correspond to the aspiration to obtain full enlightenment, and the branches and leaves are the automatic or accompanying attainment of happiness in future lifetimes. This is the attitude with which we should listen to the dharma. I ask that you maintain such an attitude as you study this text.

This teaching is on the deity called Arya Tara. If we examine the nature of Arya Tara from the point of view of what is called the definitive meaning, the true meaning, then she is Yum Chen Mo, the Great Mother.³ Arya Tara is called the Great Mother because she embodies the ultimate meaning of the dharma, the ultimate meaning of emptiness—the dharmakaya. The ultimate meaning of dharma is like a mother in the sense that it is

³ Sanskrit: Prajnaparamita

the source from which buddhas obtain enlightenment and bodhisattvas obtain realization. The dharmakaya is what gives rise to, or gives birth to all buddhas and bodhisattvas. Therefore, this ultimate meaning of the dharma, which is the dharmakaya, is called Yum Chen Mo, the Great Mother.

We can also consider the meaning or nature of Tara from the point of view of the indicative meaning. At the time of the Buddha Amoghasiddhi, there was a human princess by the name of Yeshe Dawa ("Moon of Wisdom"). In the presence of the Buddha Amoghasiddhi she engendered bodhicitta and gave rise to the aspiration and the commitment to benefit and liberate all sentient beings, to conquer all maras or demons.

The commitment she made was truly unique. She committed herself, from the moment when she first engendered bodhicitta until the time of obtaining complete buddhahood, to be reborn only as a woman, never as a male, for the benefit of sentient beings. The strength and special nature of this vow has never arisen in the past among all buddhas, does not arise in the present, and will never arise again in the future. Her diligence, courage, and zeal in her commitment are unrivaled. For these reasons she was especially praised by all buddhas, and Buddha Amoghasiddhi bestowed on her the name *Drolma Nyurma Pamo*. *Drolma* means Tara, "she who liberates." *Nyurma* means "she who acts swiftly," and *Pamo* means "she who is strong and powerful." When her name was pronounced by the Buddha Amoghasiddhi it was simultaneously proclaimed and heard in all realms.

There are many origins for the practice of Tara and these practices can be found in all the four levels of tantra: kriya, charya, yoga, and anuttarayoga. Liturgies from these various origins were widely practiced both in India and Tibet and the number of Tara practitioners who obtained siddhi and attained her state of realization through performing her sadhana were as many as the stars in the sky.

These teachings on Tara practice are based on a particular practice text known as the *Zap Tik Drolma Mandal Choga*, and we will be referring to the actual text of this liturgy throughout.

The sadhana comes from the older of the two main traditions of dharma which were propagated in Tibet, which is called Ngagyur or Nyingma. Of these older, or Nyingma, teachings there are again two kinds—those transmitted through an oral succession, kama, and those transmitted through discovery, called terma. This sadhana is of the second group, that of terma practice.⁴

Terma teachings originate with Guru Rinpoche, Padmasambhava, who concealed many sacred teachings in such a manner that they would be discovered at appropriate times in the future, when beings would be ready to receive and understand those particular teachings. The hidden teachings themselves are called terma, and the individuals foretold

⁴ *Terma* means "treasure"

by Guru Rinpoche's prophesies who discover these hidden teachings are known as *tertons*. There are many different kinds of *terma*, such as earth treasures, water treasures, and so forth. This *sadhana* is what is called "thought *terma*," or *gong ter*.

Among the 1,002 *tertons*, there are 108 individuals who are said to be great *tertons*, or *Ter Chen*. And supreme among all of these was Orgyen Dechen Chokjur Lingpa. It was he who discovered this practice. The *sadhana* arose from the expanse of his mind in the way that water can suddenly spring from a rock where there was no water before. This mind treasure arose in a cave called *Peme Shelpuk*, the "Crystal Cave of Pema." It actually combines three different lineages in one coming through Chokjur Lingpa.

Terton Chokjur Lingpa was renowned as an extremely accomplished being. He discovered many *terma* teachings in the late 19th century in Tibet. My own previous incarnations were strongly connected with Chokjur Lingpa. In connection with *terma* teachings, in addition to the *terton*, the one who discovers the sacred teaching, there is another person who is known as *terdak*, the one who is in charge of, literally "lord" or holder of what is discovered. In this case, the *terdak* who protected and preserved these Tara teachings was the 15th Gyalwa Karmapa. As well, the Second Jamgön Kongtrül Rinpoche was responsible for putting the text together in the form of a written liturgy. Through his wisdom, this previous incarnation of Jamgön Rinpoche was able to put these sacred *terma* teachings into a sequence that is both beneficial and easy to follow. Thus with respect to this particular Tara *terma* there were three main teachers involved: the one who discovered it, the one who organized them and put the text together for us, and the one who was spiritually the main holder of the teachings. My previous incarnation had very strong dharmic connections and pure *samaya* bonds with all three—Terchen Chokjur Lingpa, the Second Jamgön Rinpoche, and Terdak Khakyap Dorje, the 15th Karmapa. Not only did my previous incarnation have a very pure and strong connection with those teachers, but in my present life the 16th Gyalwa Karmapa was my personal teacher. I have learned everything that I know of the *sutrayana* and *tantrayana* from His Holiness. Since His Holiness was the holder of this Kagyu lineage and this sacred *terma* teaching, and having obtained every teaching I have obtained in my present life from His Holiness, I hope and believe that whatever I reveal here will be of some help to all of you.

It is not only that His Holiness the 16th Karmapa was my personal root guru. You should also know that in the tradition of the ocean-like *sutrayana* and *tantrayana* teaching it is predicted that His Holiness Karmapa will in the future take birth as the 6th buddha of this eon to reveal the dharma and guide the beings of that time. In the present time His Holiness is the supreme leader of Karma Kamtsang⁵ tradition which many of you are following, and which dates back to the first Karmapa, Dusum Khyenpa. Understanding this, it should be very clear to us that His Holiness is not only a holder of

⁵ another name for the Karma Kagyu

this particular terma practice or the teachings on Tara in general, but that he is the Lord of Dharma in every respect.

This is important to understand, because although this teaching is concerned with the practice and visualization of Tara, in general, whatever meditation practice you do it is necessary to feel the presence of and to visualize your root guru, who is devotedly regarded as an enlightened being. His Holiness, who is the holder of this lineage and the Lord of Dharma, is unquestionably such a being. Additionally, in many teachings it is explained that His Holiness is the emanation of Chenrezik,⁶ who embodies the compassion of all enlightened beings. In the teachings on Tara, it is said that she was emanated from the tears of Chenrezik. Thus there is a very strong connection between Tara and Chenrezik. Understanding that connection, we feel devotion towards our guru, the holder of this lineage, His Holiness, because he is the emanation of Chenrezik. This understanding of the relationship between His Holiness and Chenrezik is the basis of all our meditation visualizations and practices.

In undertaking meditation practices, such as this Tara practice, there are three necessities or imperatives. The first is gratitude towards our root guru, and particularly one who is the holder of such a profound and unbroken dharma lineage. If the lineage were not unbroken we would be unable to receive it. The second necessity is recognizing the importance of establishing one's formal connection with the unbroken lineage of such a practice through receiving empowerment, transmission, and practical instructions which in Tibetan are known as *wang*, *lung*, and *tri*. *Wang* is empowerment, *lung* is the oral transmission of the text of the liturgy itself, and *tri* is the explanation of how to actually do the practice. It is necessary to obtain these from someone who is a qualified teacher, who has obtained and practiced them properly. That is known as unbroken transmission. The third necessity is, for example, in the practice of the Tara, that when visualizing Tara you must feel that Tara in essence is inseparable from the essence of your root guru, His Holiness the Gyalwa Karmapa. In form you are visualizing Tara, but in essence your root guru, Karmapa, and Tara are inseparable. If you are able to visualize with such a trust and understanding in the inseparability of your guru and Tara, then because of the unbroken transmission, the blessing needed to foster experience in yourself will be most potent and the experience that will lead you to realization can come about quite quickly. Those are the three necessities in the practice.

There is another reason that it is important for us to visualize Tara as inseparable from the guru. In any practice of visualization of a deity, which is known as the developing stage of the meditation, the details of the visualization of the deity should be as clear and precise as possible, like the reflection of the moon appearing on calm water. However, though there may be some people who have developed a capacity to visualize the deity perfectly and precisely, in most cases the ability to visualize the deity fully and precisely is quite minimal. One reason for this is that Tara, and all the other deities, are of a form that we have never experienced through physical sight. And actually the nature of a deity

⁶ Sanskrit: Avalokiteshvara

itself, which is the sambhogakaya aspect of enlightened mind, is presently beyond our ordinary ability to fully experience.

However our teacher or guru—I am particularly referring to His Holiness Karmapa in this context—have in their kindness emanated in human form, like ourselves. Thus, since we have the chance to see them as human beings, it is not hard to imagine them and how they look because they are very much like ourselves, in contrast to the sambhogakaya deities. Since it is easier for us to imagine them, if we feel that the being who we can visualize is truly inseparable from the deity, this greatly facilitates the effectiveness and blessing of the practice.

It would be mistaken, however, to visualize the root guru above your head in a solid or concrete form. The visualization of the root guru is inseparable from Tara, in this case, or any other deity you may be visualizing, and it is beyond any substantiality. Although it is clear and vivid, it is not solid.

Performing the Practice of Tara

It is not necessary to make extensive preparations or set out elaborate offerings for the actual practice of this sadhana. If you have extensive offerings that is excellent, but for doing the practice on a daily basis it is not necessary. The only requirements are that the ritual be performed at a time of day in which you have not yet eaten meat or consumed alcohol, and you should also be clean. You should at least wash your face and hands before beginning practice. If you are doing it as an intensive practice for many days, then as an additional discipline, you would eat only what are called the three white and three sweet foods. If you are simply doing it as a morning practice, though, the only necessity is that you not have consumed meat or alcohol on that day before performing the practice.

The Tara sadhana itself is divided into three parts. First is the refuge prayer, in which we take refuge in the Three Jewels and engender bodhicitta, the altruistic mind of enlightenment. Next comes the actual practice, which includes the step-by-step process of the developing the visualization of Tara and her retinue and the practice of benefiting. Third is the dedication of merit.

At the beginning of the practice you should place your body in the excellent meditation posture known as the “Seven Dharmas of Vairocana,” which refers to seven aspects of physical meditation posture. Then you proceed with an attitude of bodhicitta to begin the taking of refuge, for which you need to visualize the deity Tara in front of yourself in space and think that she is actually present. You should regard Tara as the embodiment of the qualities of the enlightened beings of the three times and the ten directions, and as inseparable from your guru. That is the visualization of the deity for taking refuge.

Then the actual taking of refuge begins with the word NAMO, which is Sanskrit and means "I pay homage."⁷ Then, the liturgy continues with KÖN CHOK KUN NGÖ JE TSUN MAR. KÖN CHOK means the rare and precious ones, or jewels, referring to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. KUN NGÖ means actually to be all of these. Thus it is saying that Tara is authentic embodiment of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.

With the following phrase, DAK SOK DRO KÜN KYAB SU CHI, you are saying that you yourself and all sentient beings take refuge in Tara, who is the embodiment of all the rare and precious ones. The verses up to this point are the taking of refuge. The attitude you should have here is that the reason or purpose of taking refuge with Tara is to liberate yourself and all other sentient beings from samsara and bring them to the omniscient state of enlightenment.

The next two lines are the engendering of bodhicitta and this is again divided into two parts, the bodhicitta of aspiration and the bodhicitta of implementation. The phrase JANG CHUB MÖN PAY SEM KYE NE literally means "having given rise to the bodhicitta of aspiration," which is the intention that you are practicing in order to liberate all sentient beings. The text continues with ZAB MÖ LAM LA JUK PAR GYI, meaning "I will enter the profound path." This refers to the bodhicitta of implementation. The words for "enter" and "implementation" are the same in Tibetan. Thus with these two lines you are actually stating the two kinds of bodhicitta. At this point in the liturgy you are saying that, although you have the intention, you do not have the ability to liberate all sentient beings. In order to actually liberate all sentient beings you must enter the path of practice. Thereafter you will be able to do it. Thus in order to do this, you are going to have to put the teachings into practice.

It is said that the cause of the attainment of the state of a bodhisattva is the bodhicitta of aspiration. The further condition, or contributory cause, is the bodhicitta of implementation. Additionally, it is said that there is no way to please buddhas other than by pleasing or benefiting sentient beings. Therefore in order to attain the level of a bodhisattva you need to bring about benefit and joy to sentient beings.

Traditionally, it is also said that there are three kinds of offering. The best kind of offering is the offering of practice, and the best example of this is Jetsun Milarepa. Engaging in the instructions of the guru—putting them into practice and obtaining the realization of mahamudra—is the supreme offering we can make to our guru and to buddhas. The second kind of offering is the offering of our body or our services. This means performing work on behalf of our guru and the sangha. An example of this is building the KTD Monastery for His Holiness the Gyalwa Karmapa. We need to understand that we built the monastery not simply because the Gyalwa Karmapa is pleased by a monastery, but because we are helping His Holiness help sentient beings. The reason His Holiness wants to build monasteries is because monasteries are places where sentient beings will come in contact with the teachings and enter the door of the

⁷ Tibetan: *Chak Tsal*

dharma. The only thing that pleases enlightened beings such as the Karmapa is the benefit of sentient beings. Thus the only reason to build a monastery—the only reason why he needs it, and the only reason we work on it—is in order to benefit sentient beings by bringing them into contact with the dharma. That is the second kind of offering. The third kind of offering is the offering of wealth or other material things.

These offerings of material things and of work are known as the conceptual accumulation of merit. It is conceptual because we have the notion, “I am doing this work” or “I have made this offering.” We need to engage in our endeavors with the aim that the accumulated merit which in its nature is based on conceptuality gives rise to the fruition, the attainment of the non-conceptual accumulation of wisdom, which is primordial awareness. It is necessary to have that attitude of trying to accumulate merit in order to attain the state of wisdom which is full buddhahood. This accumulation of wisdom is also defined as that which is non-conceptual with respect to the three spheres.⁸

After establishing the motivation of bodhicitta, the next step in the practice is the recitation of the Seven Branch Prayer, which is a method for gathering the conceptual accumulation of merit. The seven branches of the prayer are (1) paying homage, (2) offering, (3) confession, (4) rejoicing in merit, (5) requesting the turning of the Wheel of Dharma, (6) beseeching enlightened beings not to pass into nirvana, and (7) dedicating the merit to all sentient beings.

In the first branch of homage and prostration, you are expressing respect and devotion to Tara and all the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions and the three times that are surrounding Tara.

The second branch is making offerings of actual material objects (such as those set out on the shrine) and mentally emanated or visualized offerings. Sometimes offerings are described in lengthy detail; they may also be described in a more general or condensed fashion. Generally speaking, though, while you are doing this, you visualize that you offer everything that is in this cosmic universe. You offer all that belongs to you personally as well as all that does not—flowers, lamps, food, music, this earth, and all the other planets and stars. If your capacity to visualize and your knowledge of Buddhism is more extensive, then you could also visualize the offering of Mt. Meru, the four continents, eight subcontinents, the sun and moon, and so forth. In brief, you imagine that you are offering all this to Tara and the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions and three times. As you complete that offering think that they accept it with great joy.

Confession is the third branch. Here again you visualize Arya Tara in front of you, surrounded by her retinue of buddhas and bodhisattvas. In her presence you are confessing all the negative actions you have performed with your body, speech, and mind. These are summed up in the listing of the “ten unwholesome actions”—three of

⁸ Three spheres: (1) subject of action, (2) object or recipient of action, (3) the action itself

body, four of speech, and three of mind. There are five “immeasurable” crimes as well, the “crimes of immediate consequence.” As you do this part of the prayer, you confess all your negative actions and express your repentance and regret to Tara and all the buddhas and bodhisattvas.

The fourth branch of the prayer is rejoicing in the merit of beings. You are rejoicing in the positive karmic accumulations of shravakas, pratyekabuddhas, bodhisattvas and ordinary beings. You are rejoicing in this merit that is gathered in the “three times,” which means the past, present, and future. Thus actually you are rejoicing in the merit of all beings at all times.

The fifth part is the request to turn the Wheel of Dharma, which means asking enlightened beings to reveal the teachings. Again, you are requesting this of the enlightened beings you have visualized here—Tara, surrounded by the buddhas and bodhisattvas. You are requesting them to reveal teachings in accordance with individual beings’ capacity to understand them. This is because various beings’ capacities to understand spiritual teaching are not the same. Shravakas have a certain capacity to understand; pratyekabuddhas have their own potential level of understanding, and bodhisattvas have a greater capacity. Thus you are requesting a variety of teachings to be revealed, such that each individual can be benefited properly.

The sixth branch is requesting enlightened beings not to pass away into nirvana. This refers here to Tara and other enlightened beings, as well as your personal teachers. You are requesting them not to pass into nirvana but rather to look after and guide all beings until samsara is totally emptied.

The seventh branch of the prayer is dedication. You are dedicating whatever virtue you have accumulated in previous lives as well as this present lifetime. You are dedicating it with the aim that such merit may rapidly lead you to accomplish the realization of a buddha, a state of enlightenment equal to that of Tara. Thus you will have the ability to guide and lead others to the same goal.

At the conclusion of the Seven Branch Prayer you should think that the objects of refuge, Tara and her retinue, visualized in front in the sky, melt into light and dissolve into yourself. At this point you should abandon your conception of yourself in terms of your ordinary body and conceive of your form as pure, such that your body, speech, and mind are inseparable with the body, speech, and mind of Tara and the buddhas and bodhisattvas. At this point you have obtained the three empowerments: the physical empowerment—to visualize yourself as the deity (in this case, Tara); the verbal empowerment or permission to recite the mantra of Tara; and the mind empowerment—to rest your mind in meditation inseparable with the meditative state of Tara.

Next comes the mantra OM BENZA AMRITA KUNDALI HANA HANA HUNG P’HE. This is a purification mantra, by which you mentally purify everything there is, and particularly the offerings you have placed on the shrine. When you say this you

should think that Jambudvīpa (this entire world) and everything which is impure is entirely cleansed and becomes completely pure. Then recite the SWABAWA mantra. You should think that everything dissolves into emptiness. Ordinarily, we think of ourselves as existing and we consider that our world of outer phenomenon also exists in a very concrete way. We think that the mind that conceives of all this is an entity as well. At this point in the practice, when reciting OM SWABAWA SHUDDA SARWA DHARMA and so on, you meditate on emptiness or shunyata. This means there are no truly existent outer phenomena—no world, or objects in it. There is also no mind that conceives of the existence of objects—or their non-existence either—so there is no clinging whatsoever. In that way you rest in the state of emptiness or shunyata.

When you have transformed your awareness into the recognition of emptiness, you should think that out of emptiness all appearances arise as the realm of Tara, which is called Lotus Shape or Lotus Design. It is extremely beautiful in its design and arrangement and also in its ornamentation. Imagine that this realm is filled with sacred substances which are completely pure and magnificent. It is possible to give a very extensive and detailed explanation of the buddha field of Tara. In fact, each and every buddha field has its own characteristics and qualities, and each can be described in a very extensive way. For the purposes of the practice, though, it is sufficient just to maintain the understanding while practicing that, as you come out of the meditation on emptiness, the world that you are in is not the ordinary human world. It is the pure realm of Tara.

Next you consecrate the offerings with the offering mantras starting with OM BENZA ARGHAM AH HUNG, and so on, while performing the offering mudras.

You can get an idea of the seven offering mudras from the photos included in the text, though it is best to learn them in person from someone who knows them correctly.

One thing I want would like to stress, for your sake and for the sake of the tradition in the future, is that there are many different sorts of mudras according to the various specific traditions, some which are quite different from the others. In Tibet it was a very strict policy, so to speak, that the different systems of mudras should not be mixed together. But as Tibetan Buddhism came to the West, it was inevitable that there was quite a bit of mixing of the traditions as people learned them. Now that these mudra traditions have become confused in practice, it is hard to undo that, but this is something to keep in mind. In any case, the mudras demonstrated here are of the category known as “new terma” because they are associated with the specific text we are using, which is one of the terma texts discovered in more recent times.

There are a few practical points about mudras as well. In any hand mudra, regardless of the tradition, it is necessary to keep your two elbows close against your body. Then, when the mudra is performed, it becomes very smooth. I’ve seen many people trying to do the

mudras, and not having learned this, their elbows and arms jut out from their bodies. That is incorrect and quite awkward as well.

One common mudra used to denote respect is called the pema (lotus) mudra. In this mudra, the two hands are placed together at the heart level. It is similar to the gesture of prayer here in the West. With this mudra you always keep your two elbows against your body, and the hands should not be flat together, but are slightly cupped as if holding something. You may have seen this mudra in thanka paintings of Chenrezik in which he holds a wish-fulfilling gem in his hands. This is the symbolic meaning of the open space you leave between the hands. Additionally, this mudra is always done holding your hands at heart level. If you were to do the same mudra with your hands up at your lips, this is known as the mudra of sadness or grief. That is something you might do at a moment of great sadness, for example when someone very important to you passes away, such as your teacher.

You may already be familiar with the offerings that correspond with the offering mudras. They are the ones traditionally put out every day on Buddhist shrines in seven bowls. The first and second bowls contain water. The first water bowl is drinking water, the second is water for washing the feet. The third bowl contains flowers, the fourth incense, and the fifth one holds a lamp. The sixth bowl contains scented water and one places a food offering in the seventh bowl. (An additional bowl with a small musical instrument, like the small tingsha cymbals, may also be placed along with the offerings.)

These offerings on the altar are actual and visible things, but the most important aspect of making the offerings is having purity of mind while you are doing the practice. Making the tangible offerings may be very easy for someone who has plenty of material things, but maintaining the proper and genuine attitude of mind is more significant than simply placing things on the shrine.

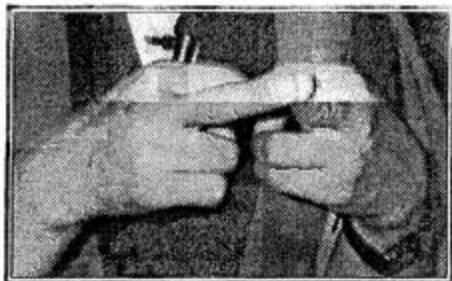
The mantra for the first of the seven offerings is ARGAM which is water for the mouth. Then PADYAM is water for washing the feet. PUPE is flowers, and as you say the mantra and do the mudra you try to imagine tossing up flowers in offering, and make a slight motion of doing that. DHUPE is incense, and the two fingers in the mudra resemble two sticks of incense. You go through the seven offerings doing the mudras and saying the mantra starting with OM BENZA and ending with AH HUNG for each one⁹.

After the recitation of the offering mantras, then there is the short mantra OM BENZA SAPHA RANA KHAM. With this mantra you are transforming your finite material offerings into an infinite abundance of sublime offerings.

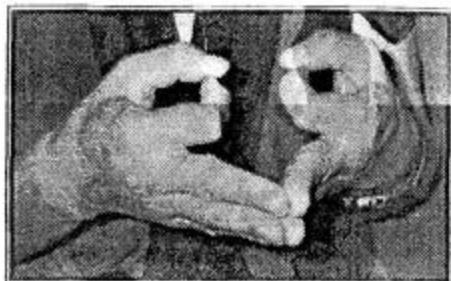
The next phase of the liturgy is to invite all buddhas and bodhisattvas into the sky in front of you. You address all the buddhas and bodhisattvas as "those who have become the protectors of all sentient beings without exception and have completely conquered

⁹ OM BENZA ARGAM AH HUNG, OM BENZA PADYAM AH HUNG, etc.

MUDRAS FOR GREEN TARA OFFERINGS



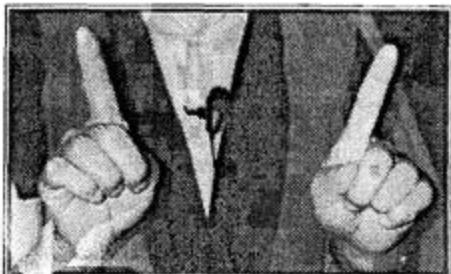
1. ARGHAM (Drinking water)



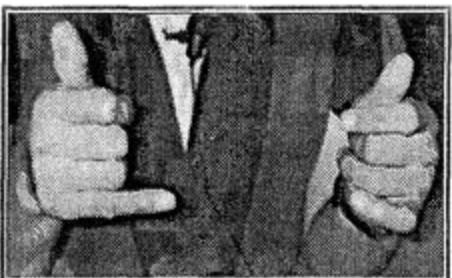
2. PADYAM (Water for the feet)



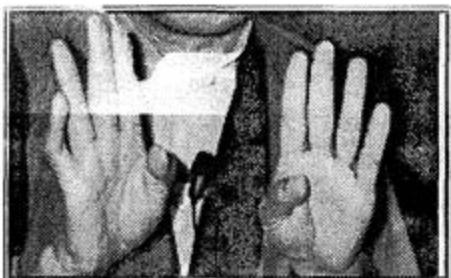
3. PUPHE (Flowers)



4. DUPHE (Incense)



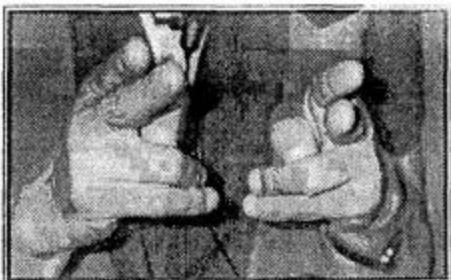
5. ALOKHE (Light)



6. GENDHE (Perfumed Water)



7. NEWIDE (Food)



8. SHABDHA (Music)

During the puja, drinking water, water to clean the feet, flowers, incense, light, perfume, food, and sound are offered. With each of these offerings there are hand mudras. Many pujas have these offerings, yet depending what practice one is doing the mudras differ slightly, so the following mudras are the ones for Green Tara.

the maras together with their armies." Looking at this superficially, it would imply that we are talking about the external defeat of armies of demons. However, what is actually meant by maras, together with their armies or hordes, is anything that gets in the way, literally, of dharma practice. In brief, maras are any kind of tainted emotionality. In this invitation we are saying that the buddhas and bodhisattvas have completely conquered, completely eradicated all negative emotionality.

After the words of invitation you request that all the buddhas and bodhisattvas be seated with the words PEMA KAMALA YA TAM.

Then, having visualized that the deities are seated on lotus thrones, you offer a second recitation of the Seven Branch Prayer to all the Three Jewels in general. It is not necessary to go over this Seven Branch Prayer in detail, since it is a more elaborate version of the prayer I have already explained. At the very end of this prayer, however, is a short section which we will go over word by word. (p.17, middle line, toward the end) It starts with CHAK TSHAL WA, which is the first branch offering of homage or prostrations; CHÖ CHING means offerings, and SHAK PA is the confession of all your negative actions. JE SU YI RANG is the rejoicing in the virtue, the positive practice and actions of all the different types of beings. KUL ZHING means requesting the enlightened beings to reveal the teachings of dharma, and SOL WA is another request—asking them not to pass into nirvana but to remain to benefit beings in samsara. Lastly, GE WA CHUNG ZE means whatever little virtue that you have practiced. The merit you have accumulated out of the virtue that you have performed, you dedicate to the awakening of all beings. Thus these four lines recapitulate the seven branches of offering in a very short form.

After the invitation and Seven Branch Prayer of offering comes the offering of a mandala to the Three Jewels and Three Roots. The Three Jewels are the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. The Three Roots are one's Lama, the Yidams, and the Protectors, Dakas, and Dakinis, including all the deities of prosperity. You think that you are offering the bodies, possessions, and merit of yourself and all sentient beings who are endless, together with the four continents, Mt. Meru, the Sun and the Moon and so forth, and all the inconceivable riches and splendor of gods and humans. Beyond that, you are offering what is called a great cloud of offerings like those of the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra. This means that the offerings are inexhaustible, and while similar to those of gods and men, actually surpass the human and celestial offerings in their magnificence.

As an example, in offering your body, you emanate countless replicas of yourself. In the same way, you think that each of the individual offerings becomes inexhaustible in order to perfect the accumulation of merit which is, as was mentioned, conceptual. Your purpose in making these inexhaustible offerings is to request the enlightened beings' blessing so that you and all the countless beings in existence will recognize the buddha nature which is the ultimate realization. This is literally called "the appearance or vision of wisdom," which means a completely pure state, buddha nature, which is the same thing as saying the attainment of mahamudra. Then the mandala offering is completed

by the recitation of the mantra of offering, accompanied by the mandala mudra. This mudra is a symbol for the whole universe in Buddhist cosmology—Mt. Meru, the four continents, and so forth.

Next comes a prayer to the deities. NAMO again means “I pay homage.” SANGYE, CHÖ, and GENDÜN are the Tibetan terms for Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, the Three Jewels. Then there is “LAMA, YIDAM, KHANDRO and CHÖ SUNG.” The lama or guru is the root of blessing, the yidam is the root of siddhi, and the dakinis and dharmapalas are the root of activity. Therefore those are called the Three Roots. Together with them are the wealth lords and the lords of terma, TER GYI DAK, the beings who hold and guard the terma, the teachings which will be later discovered by tertons. As I said earlier, there are many teachings that are hidden by enlightened beings such as Guru Padmasambhava. Such enlightened beings also designate a protector, a kind of dharmapala, to protect each of the hidden teachings so that it cannot be found by anyone but the person who has the right karmic connection and the proper qualities of realization.

Next it says in the text that all of these deities, the Three Jewels and Three Roots, arise from the nature of one wisdom. This means that from the point of view of the dharmakaya they are all the same, but they display everywhere, unimpededly. Displaying everywhere unimpededly means that these deities, all of whom, from the ultimate point of view, have the same nature in being the dharmakaya, emanate in many different ways. Some arise as lamas, some as deities, some as dharma protectors, some as local deities and so forth, but they are all of one ultimate nature. Then the text says that they have excellent compassion and activity, which means incomparable activity and compassion. In this way, they are protectors and overseers of beings. These deities have two kinds of qualities, wisdom and compassion. It is not enough for a deity simply to have knowledge because the wisdom itself is not the means by which sentient beings are protected. It is that this wisdom deity also has loving kindness and compassion that affords sentient beings the protection of the deity. To these deities who all embody these qualities, you say, “I pay homage and from my heart I go for refuge to you.”

Then you say, “I offer to you my body and all my possessions as offerings.” And you ask, “Through your compassion, please grant protection to myself and all innumerable sentient beings, not just for today or for tomorrow, but continually, permanently.”

Then you make an aspiration that yourself and all other living beings be free from any illness, enjoy longevity, and overcome any hindrances to the practice of dharma. Thus, being free from those obstacles, you aspire that all beings may be able to practice and accumulate the merit that will lead toward the experience of the awakened state of mind. Thus the offering and the refuge is for yourself and all beings, and the blessing that you are requesting is that these aspirations which are in accord with the dharma be accomplished.

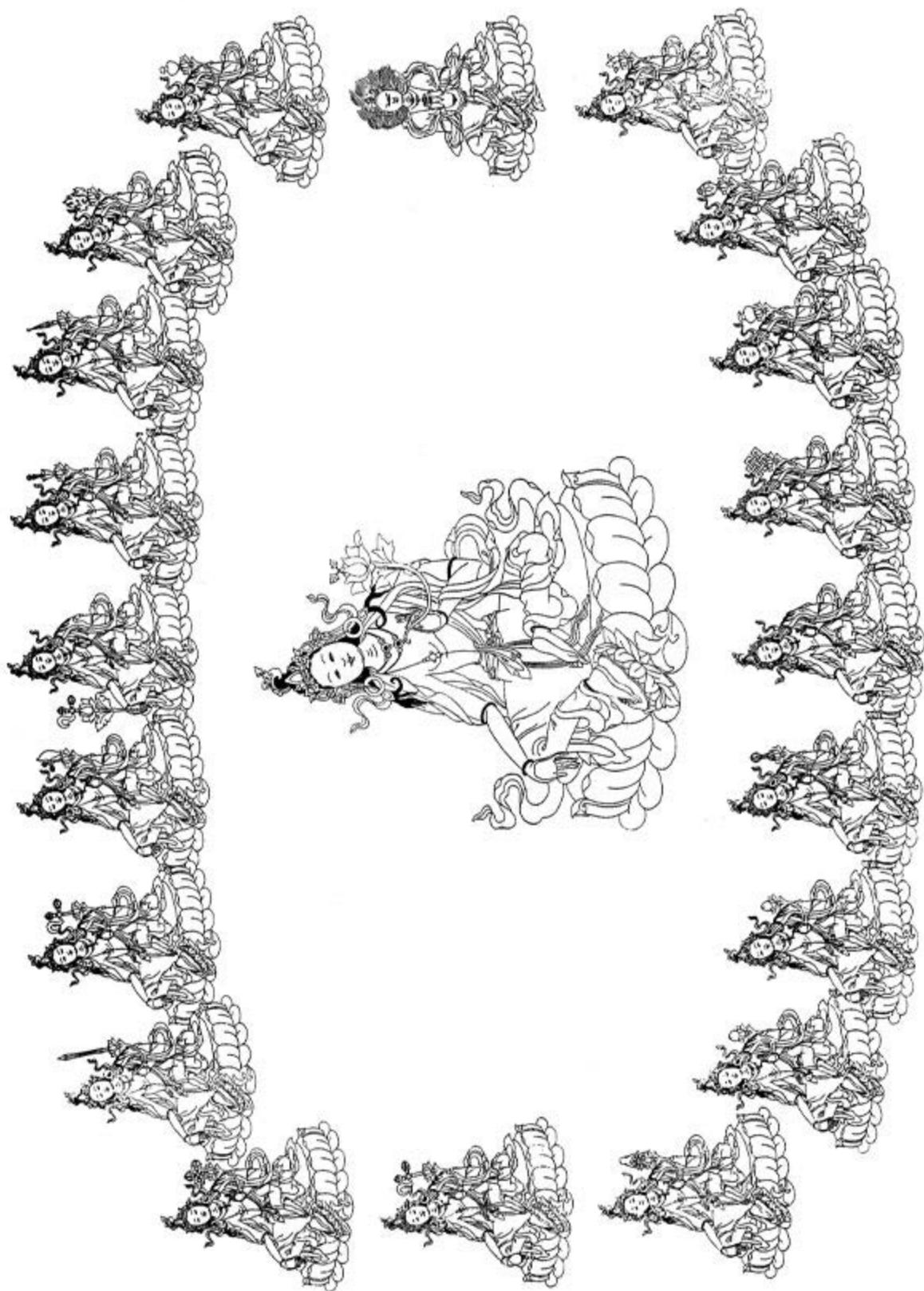
The Visualization of Tara

Now we will discuss the visualization of Tara. This visualization is described in detail in the more extensive version of the practice text. In this short practice text it just says, "Complete in an instant of recollection, I appear as the noble Jetsunma Tara." I will give the more extensive instructions here. You should keep in mind that you have some flexibility, depending on your ability to visualize, in terms of how much of the visualization you do. At the least, you should try to visualize yourself as Tara, with another Tara in space in front of you, and think that both of these visualized Taras are inseparable from the blessing of all the 21 Taras and the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. The more complete form of the visualization consists of yourself as Tara surrounded by the other 20 Taras, along with Tara in the sky in front also surrounded by the 20 Taras. If your development stage practice (i.e., your visualization) is good, then you should visualize each one individually and carefully. The degree of detail is an individual matter.

Here are the details of the visualization: As you visualize, remember that you have previously purified everything into emptiness. You visualize that out of the emptiness appears a white lotus, with a full moon disc laying flat on top of it. You think that resting on top of the full moon disk is your consciousness in the form of a green syllable TAM. From the syllable TAM rays of light go out. Those that proceed upwards make offerings to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas and please them. Those that go downwards to the six realms remove all the obstacles of all sentient beings. Then the rays of light collect back into the TAM. When that happens, it instantly changes into yourself as the deity Tara. She is green, with one face and two hands. She is youthful and beautiful in appearance. Her right hand is making the gesture of bestowing generosity. Her left hand is holding the stem of a blue lotus flower to her heart. She is adorned with silk and precious ornaments. Her feet are in a position called 'half-crossed' which means that one of her feet, the right one, is slightly extended, and the left one is pulled in. It is important to remember that her body emanates light and is not made of material substance but is actually of the nature of five-colored light. She sits in the midst of a radiant expanse of light.

It is very important to understand how to visualize deities properly. The form of the deity should not be visualized as being like our own illusory body, which is made of flesh and blood and so forth. The actual body of the deity is completely hollow like a crystal container or a balloon. There is nothing inside it—no organs, no flesh or blood or anything. Even the form itself is not like a thin skin because it is actually light; it is made of light like rainbows. A rainbow is very clear, with colors you can see, yet it is also transparent and insubstantial. You can see through the rainbow to whatever is on the other side of it, yet the rainbow itself is clearly visible. That is how to visualize Tara, as the union of clarity and emptiness, inseparable from your guru.

Another traditional metaphor for this is the appearance of the moon in a body of water. The moon reflects in water and if you look at the water you might think there is actually



a moon in it, because the entire orb of the moon is visible, but there is actually no moon there. It is appearing, although it is empty; and it is empty, although it is appearing.

Then while visualizing yourself as Tara you should think that from your body there are emanating countless small Taras who perform benefit for sentient beings and dispel their fears and obstacles. Next, think that you, as the main Tara, are marked at your forehead by a white syllable OM, at your throat by a red AH, and at your heart by a blue HUNG. Then the self-visualization also has a retinue. You are the main deity and there are 20 Taras surrounding you, 21 Taras altogether. Below the self-visualization is the moon on which you are seated and the petals of the lotus below that. Outside the central lotus on which you are seated are 20 similar lotus and moon seats arranged in a circle. Directly to your front, right, rear, and left, respectively, there are four main Taras with peaceful, increasing, overpowering, and wrathful forms of Tara. In between each of these four main retinue Taras, there are four additional Taras, which makes a total of 20.

Directly in front of you is Shiwai Drolma. She is white in color, smiling and peaceful, and her right hand is making the gesture of bestowing protection. Most of the retinue Taras are like the main deity, making the gesture of supreme generosity, but the four Taras at the cardinal direction points display different postures.

The next one to her right is Tara who protects from fears related to the earth element. She is dark blue. In her left hand she holds an Utpala, a blue lotus flower, on top of which is a dorje.

Continuing clockwise around the circle, the next one is Tara who protects from fears related to the water element. She is red and the Utpala in her left hand has on top of it a jewel called a fire crystal.

To her right is Tara who protects from fears of fire. She is yellow and atop the Utpala, the stem of which she is holding in her left hand, is a jewel called a water crystal from which a steady stream of water is flowing.

The next one to the right is Tara who protects from fears of wind. She is white and the flower she is holding has a Mt. Meru on top of it, which is adorned with a wheel. That completes five Taras: the one directly in front and four more.

The next section begins with increasing or enriching Tara, Gyepay Drolma. She is directly to the South, in other words to your right. She is yellow and she has an extremely beautiful, almost seductive appearance. However, she is not completely peaceful; she is sort of strong or intense, but not wrathful. Her form is very full and she is holding a jewel in her right hand and atop the flower in her left hand is a iron hook.

To her right is Tara who protects from fears of vajras. She is green and on top of the flower in her left hand is a Natsok Dorje,¹⁰ or double dorje.

Next to her is Tara who protects from fears of weapons. She is blue and on top of the flower she is holding in her left hand is a sword.

To her right is Tara who protects from fears of kings. She is red and on top of the lotus she holds in her left hand is an iron hook.

Then there is Tara who protects from fears of thieves, who is black and has an ax on top of the lotus in her left hand. That completes the second set of five Taras beginning with Increasing Tara.

The third series begins to the West, which is directly behind you, with Overpowering Tara. She is red. She has an air and appearance which is extremely attractive to the point where it could be said to inspire desire. In her right hand she is holding an iron hook marked with a lotus, and her left hand holds a noose.

Continuing clockwise, next is Tara who protects from flesh-eating demons. She is black and on top of the Utpala is a phurba,¹¹ a ritual knife.

Then, after her is Tara who protects from elephants. She is smoke-colored and on top of the lotus she is holding in her left hand is a short spear.

Next is Tara who protects from lions, who is black. On top of the lotus she is holding is a mass of fire.

The last Tara in this section is Tara who protects from snakes. She is white and on top of the Utpala in her left hand is a vase made of water crystal, filled with nectar. That completes another set of five Taras.

The last set of five begins at the North, to your left, with Wrathful Tara. She is black and with her two hands she is holding a phurba. A phurba is a three-sided dagger. There is a great deal of meaning to the specific design, the shape, and so forth, but generally speaking it is a scepter of wrathful deities, a wrathful tool. Its basic meaning is the same as that of the hooked knife held by wrathful deities.

Then comes Tara who protects from sickness, who is greenish yellow. On top of the lotus in her left hand is the myrobalan plant¹², which is emitting rays of light, the nature of which is nectar.

¹⁰ Sanskrit: Vishvavajra

¹¹ Sanskrit: Kila

¹² Sanskrit: Arura

Next is Tara who protects from death. She is white and on top of the lotus she is holding is a vase of long life.

Then there is Tara who protects from poverty. She is yellow and on top of the lotus she is holding in her left hand is a vase of treasure.

Last is Tara who protects from, literally, the impairment of prevention of one's aims, and who bestows whatever siddhi is desired. She is greenish-yellow, and on top of the lotus she is holding is a glorious knot. Usually in English this is called the "endless knot," but in literal Tibetan it is actually "glorious knot."

With the exception of the four Taras of the four activities who are visualized at the four directions, all the others are peaceful, smiling and appear very pleased or happy. Their right hands are resting on their right knees in the gesture of supreme generosity. Their left hands are at their hearts with the thumb and ring finger holding the stem of a blue lotus, the flower of which opens by their left ears, on top of which is their particular emblem, or CHAK TSEN. They are all seated with the right leg slightly extended and the left leg drawn in.

You should think that in the forehead of each of these twenty-one deities is a white syllable OM from which radiates rays of white light. In the throat is a red syllable AH from which radiates rays of red light. In the heart is a blue syllable HUNG from which radiates blue rays of light. In the center of the heart of each Tara, on a moon disc, is a green syllable TAM from which radiate rays of the colors of the five families, that is to say, white, blue, yellow, red, and green. These rays of light go out from yourself and the 20 Taras visualized surrounding you, and invite all the buddhas and bodhisattvas in the form of the 21 Taras into the sky in front. All of the 20 retinue Taras surrounding you should be facing forward, in the same direction as you are, and all the Taras in space in front of you are facing toward you.

The visualization of yourself and the deities surrounding you is what is called self visualization, or DAK KYE—the visualization of oneself as a deity. The visualization of the rays of light going out from the body, speech, and mind, and the heart essence of the deities, going to the realm of Tara, Lotus Design, striking her heart and invoking the wisdom deities who come in front of you in the sky, is the second part, which is the invitation.

The visualization with all its details is difficult to do in the time it takes to recite these four or five lines, but in the actual recitation of the sadhana there is a long musical interlude (ROL MO) at the end of the invitation (CHEN DREN). This music gives you time to visualize the deity.

Though you can visualize in greater or lesser detail according to your ability, strictly speaking, according to the tradition, there are two essential elements to the development

stage (KYE RIM) of the visualization. It has to be clear and, it has to have purity (DAK MA). Purity here means unconfused and unsullied, like pure water that does not have any mud in it. This means you should be able to visualize the deities without confusing the details of their appearance, or having it waver, or be unsteady. For example you should be able to visualize the color and hand implements of each deity separately and clearly. It should not be distorted in any way, or confused.

It is important to make a distinction between two processes. One is called meditation, and the other is called investigation or analysis. For example, in shamata meditation, if you use a statue of the Buddha as an object of focus for your practice, you would place your awareness on the statue, without investigating the nature of it. You should not, in the context of that practice, engage in any thoughts about the statue—whether it is well or poorly made, of what material, and so on. You simply place your awareness on the statue. However, in the context of the development stage, it is necessary to have a certain awareness of each particular detail of the visualization. It is meditation, but in the development stage meditation there has to be clarity and purity of the visualization.

For someone who has an excellent development stage meditation, a great lama for example, he or she could visualize the deity the size of Mount Meru, but in perfect proportion, with all the details correct. The deity would not, for example have a very big head and very small hands. The entire visualization would be in perfect proportion, consistent with itself. On the other hand, the visualization of the deity could be as small as a mustard seed, but even though the visualization was that small, all the details of the deity would still be complete and in correct proportion. There are lamas whose meditation is such that they can visualize as many deities as motes of dust in rays of sunlight, again with complete detail in each one.

However, in the beginning, if you have trouble remembering and visualizing the colors and implements or ornaments of the various deities, it is sufficient to visualize just one. It is also correct, in order to receive blessing quickly, to visualize that the form of Tara in front in the sky is completely inseparable from your root guru.

The symbolic meaning of the syllable TAM is birthlessness, that phenomena are unborn (KYE ME in Tibetan). This refers to the unborn nature of all the Taras and to the simplicity and unconditioned quality of the dharmakaya. Because the deity is unborn it is also beyond all conditions. To use the words of Gampopa, it is said that nirvana is in essence empty, and is unestablished or non-existent. In its manifestation or appearance it is blissful. Samsara is in essence empty, and unestablished or non-existent, and in its appearance or manifestation is of the nature of suffering and confusion. From the ultimate point of view they are the same in that they are both empty and unestablished. From a relative viewpoint, however, they are different in that samsara is suffering resulting from ignorance, and nirvana is happiness resulting from the absence of ignorance. This ultimate, unborn, and empty nature of samsara and nirvana is what is meant by the syllable TAM.

CHÖ KUY is dharmakaya, YING means space, and ÖSAL means luminosity or clarity. This refers to the ultimate essence of Tara which is the unborn, unconditioned dharmakaya. Sometimes this is also called the dharmadhatu or dharmata. Now something that is unborn does not cease. If something is born it must die or end. Since the dharmakaya is unborn, it is unimpeded and unceasing. Thus there is the sambhogakaya, which is the unimpeded manifestation of the birthlessness of the dharmakaya. Therefore it is said that from the expanse of the dharmakaya which is unborn luminosity, arises the sambhogakaya, which is the unimpeded form or body of Jetsun Drolma, Arya Tara. The term GAK ME means unceasing. It refers here to Tara's capacity to manifest sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya forms to benefit others unceasingly. These unceasing manifestations are in accordance with whatever is suitable to the needs and capacities of individual beings. That itself gives some idea of the continuity and vastness of the activity of Tara. Then P'HAK MAY means mean exalted, or Arya in Sanskrit. The second syllable MA makes it feminine, referring to Tara. Continuing, YE SHE is wisdom, KUR is body, so this means wisdom body. That is the description of the nature of Tara, who is unborn and unconditioned yet is unceasing in her activity and her ability to benefit.

GANG means whatever, DÜL is to subdue or to pacify, and GYU T'HRÜL means a magical illusion, which refers to the performance of miracles. What we are requesting here is that Tara, in her omniscient wisdom, manifest in whatever forms are necessary to pacify and subdue the minds of each and every individual. This means that from one form of sambhogakaya Tara emanate countless numbers of Taras who perform benefit for sentient beings. From one body come many emanations of illusory manifestations. Then TS'HUR SHEK is a respectful way of saying, "please come," which is the direct invocation of Tara. At this point in the sadhana, in the mantra ARYA TARE DZA, we are saying "Noble Tara, please come," using her Sanskrit name, Arya Tara.

You should understand that this process involves all three kayas. You state that from the unborn dharmakaya arises the unimpeded sambhogakaya, which is Tara. Then from her heart or mind, emanate the nirmanakayas in order to benefit sentient beings. You actually visualize the deities coming in front of you in the sky. Then you say that, "out of kindness for myself and all sentient beings, by the power of your miracles, please remain here for as long as I continue to make offerings." The mantra PEMA KAMALAYA TAM is a request that the deities be seated.

To genuinely understand the basic teachings of Buddhism and the meaning of what we have been discussing here, we need a good understanding of the three kayas. Without such an understanding we may not really be able to comprehend the deeper meaning of this prayer or invocation that we have just gone over, so I would like to briefly explain the three kayas.

Dharmakaya in essence is emptiness, shunyata. When we speak about emptiness, though, we should not regard it as literal emptiness or non-existence. Emptiness means being

beyond any conditioned existence—yet it is not nothingness. The dharmakaya is actually the wisdom of the fully awakened mind. It is the wisdom of enlightened beings in the state of realization, and it is said that the dharmakaya wisdom of all enlightened beings is of the same nature. Emptiness is also known as thatness or suchness. Since the suchness is unconditioned, it has the capacity to emanate, which is known as the nirmanakaya. From the unconditioned nature of the dharmakaya emanates the nirmanakaya in actual physical form that it is tangible and visible, such as a human being. The capacity and activity of the dharmakaya is unceasing, and that quality of being unimpeded and ceaseless in manifestation is the sambhogakaya aspect.

Sambhogakaya is defined as that which possesses what are called the five certainties. These are: (1) the certain place, which is, in this case, the sambhogakaya realm of the padma family; (2) a certain teacher, which in this case is Tara; (3) certain retinue, which is all the bodhisattvas between the first and tenth stages; (4) certain time, which means continual, not stopping or being impeded; and (5) certain teaching, which is only the mahayana, and not hinayana.

Teaching or transmission takes place in different manners in different realms, in accordance with the capacities of the recipients. One explanation of this is in terms of three types or lineages of transmission. The first of these transmissions, which is what is taking place in the sambhogakaya realm, is called the “lineage of the thoughts of the victorious ones” (GYALWA GONG GYU). This means that the transmission takes place from the buddha of that specific realm—in this case from Tara—to those bodhisattvas in her retinue, automatically. The teacher and the retinue remain in samadhi. There is no overt communication, but the intention of thought of the main figure is known by the retinue automatically. This kind of transmission is the first of the three lineages. The second is called the “lineage through symbol among vidhadharas” or RIKDZIN DA GYU. This occurs when those receiving the transmission are sufficiently trained that they can understand the meaning of the dharma through either a sign such as a gesture, or a simple use of a term or word.

A third kind of lineage or transmission is GANG ZAK NYEN GYU or the “oral lineage to individuals.” This is what is used when a lama gives instruction to ordinary people like ourselves where the instruction must be given in a clearly explained form, literally poured into the ear of the student. The teaching has to be transmitted to someone who will place the instructions in their mind and not forget them. You need to be a specific type of vessel. In this way we as ordinary being experience and obtain connection with the transmission of teachings from the nirmanakaya aspects of enlightenment, which in Tibetan are known as tulkus.

You are probably familiar with tulkus such as the high lineage lamas and His Holiness Karmapa. The source of these tulkus is actually the wisdom mind of the dharmakaya, and they embody all the qualities of the sambhogakaya, the five qualities or the certainties, manifested in a human form. For this reason their manner of taking birth and experiencing death is very different from ours. They have a choice in the process. They

choose to be born, and their death is also by choice. Their death is not caused by the karmic exhaustion of their life, as it is with ordinary beings. Instead, they choose to leave their human body at a particular time. When tulkus die they dissolve back into dharmakaya. However they do not immediately do so. They continue to benefit living beings by remaining in the sambhogakaya for some time and then they dissolve back into the dharmakaya.

When an ordinary being dies it is said to wander in the bardo for 49 days. That is not a specific or exact amount of time, but it is the general explanation that is given. However, when a tulku dies, these 49 days after death are a time of great power during which such a being can manifest in the sambhogakaya and benefit beings extremely effectively. Having left their body of the nirmanakaya, they dissolve into the sambhogakaya where they are of great help and benefit to beings. After 49 days of benefiting living beings in this way they then re-unite with the dharmakaya. Thus the way incarnated lamas experience birth and death it is very different from our own. They have chosen to take birth where they think it is most beneficial to beings, and even after they choose to die they benefit beings in the 49 days after death.

Because of this, when high incarnate beings pass away, traditionally their bodies are kept for 49 days and a special crown is placed on their heads symbolizing the sambhogakaya buddhas of the five families, which is a reminder of their activity during this period. It is a reminder that, although they have left the physical form, their capacity to benefit others does not cease. Since their enlightened mind is continuously present, during that period of time if you concentrate and pray to such a teacher or lama then in some sense you will actually be closer to the teacher than when he or she was alive. It is said that during that period of time beings can be liberated by high incarnate lamas simply through hearing their name, through remembering them, feeling gratitude toward their presence and, if one is fortunate enough to be there, to have the blessing of touching the hand. Simply by doing such things as hearing about, and remembering, or touching such a being we could experience liberation.

Here is a review what we have covered so far of the practice: at the beginning you visualize Tara, surrounded by the Three Jewels, in the sky in front of yourself as objects of refuge. You then take refuge in them, and they are your witnesses as you engender bodhicitta. Next, in order to gather the accumulation of merit, you perform the Seven Branch Prayer after which the objects of refuge visualized in front melt into light and dissolve into yourself. With this dissolution you think that all the unwholesome karma accumulated through acts of body, speech, and mind, and the obscurations of body, speech, and mind are purified. Your ordinary body becomes the deity; your speech is transformed into mantra; and your mind, samadhi.

In general when we speak of what exists in physical form, we say there is the container (NÖ), which is the world, and the contents (CHÜ), which are sentient beings. This term "container" can mean either one world system, one continent such as Jambudvīpa, or

many world systems. Likewise the term CHÜ, or “contents,” can be used for one sentient being or many sentient beings—for animals, humans, really anything that has a mind, down to the smallest form of animal. At this point in the practice the “contents” (the sentient beings) are purified by the objects of refuge dissolving into you. Then the “container” (the universe) is purified by visualizing that the entire impure world dissolves into emptiness while you recite the mantras, OM BENZA AMRITA KUNDALI and OM SWABHAWA.

Thereafter you visualize the world, not in its ordinary form, but as Tara’s realm of Lotus Design and invite all the buddhas and bodhisattvas, who assemble in the sky in front of you. You make offerings and praises to them, then you offer a mandala and perform the Seven Branch Prayer in order to purify obscurations and gather the accumulations.

Following the Seven Branch Prayer you make another mandala offering. Following that you take refuge in and supplicate the deities in the field of accumulation. After this comes the meditation on yourself as the deity and the invitation of the deities who are visualized in front. The conclusion of what we have discussed so far was offering a lotus seat to the deities who had been invited in the sky in front of you.

The next step of the practice is like when we invite a lama to come and teach—we first request the lama to be seated and then we offer him or her tea and rice. In the same way, once the deities have been visualized arriving in front of you in the sky, you make offerings to them. The words of offering mean that first you are offering the actual offering substances that you have assembled. Do not think about whether the offerings are great or small. Just offer whatever you have been able to gather together. Beyond that, offerings can be emanated by the mind in addition to the physical offerings you have made. These mentally emanated offerings are visualized as vast clouds of offerings, like those of the bodhisattva Samantabhadra, which means that they are incredibly extensive. In the words of the mandala offering, it is like 100,000,000 universes all contained in one mandala. You visualize that these offerings completely fill the dharmadhatu, which is to say everything, and you offer these to Tara and her retinue. At the conclusion of the verse describing the offering, you recite the mantras of offering.

Next you offer a mandala. This starts with OM AH HUNG, the syllables corresponding to body, speech, and mind. The meaning of the mandala offering is that you are offering all the glory and riches (PAL JOR) in the three realms (KHAM SUM), the external container and its contents (NÖ CHÜ). The three realms are first, the realm of desire, which includes the desire gods (one of the three kinds of gods) along with all the beings of the other five types. The second and third realms are the other parts of the god realm. The second realm is the realm of form, which comprises 17 levels of godly existences of form. Third is the formless realm, comprising four types of formless godly existences. These three realms of desire, form, and formlessness make up the totality of samsara. You offer all of them, the external container, the entire universe and its contents, sentient beings, and all the wealth and glory that is contained in them, your own body and all your possessions, and all the merit or virtue you have accumulated or performed

in all your lifetimes. You offer all of these to Tara and her retinue who are the embodiment of compassion. You then request that having accepted this mandala offering, she grant her blessing that all sentient beings have happiness and the causes of happiness.

With regard to blessings, there are ordinary blessings and extraordinary blessings. Ordinary blessings are protection from and removal of hindrances such as accidents, poverty, and sickness. Extraordinary blessings are those that enable beings to experience total enlightenment by virtue of removing all obstacles to the practice of the path. We are requesting Tara to bestow both kinds of blessing upon ourselves and all sentient beings.

Next there is the Sanskrit mantra of the mandala offering, OM SAR WA TA T'HA GA TA RATNA MANDALA PU DZA HO. Usually when doing a mandala offering you hold a little rice in the palm of your hand while making the mandala mudra. When you begin chanting the mantra, OM SAR WA TA T'HA GA TA and so on, you toss the rice upwards in the air, thinking that you are making the offering.

Following the mandala offering, you recite the *21 Praises to Tara* twice. There have been various explanations of this prayer both in Sanskrit and Tibetan. The following section is a teaching on the *21 Praises to Tara*, based on a traditional text.

The Twenty-One Praises to Tara

Before we begin with the explanation of the *Twenty-One Praises to Tara*, it would be good to reflect again on some points that are traditionally taught about the correct basic motivation and attitude in receiving teachings. Some of these points are just a review from what was mentioned earlier, and some of them we have not discussed yet.

Whenever we practice any dharma of the mahayana it is essential to have a proper motivation. This is true whether you are practicing meditation, or receiving an empowerment, reading transmission, or instruction. Whenever you are engaged in any of these activities, reflect in the following manner. "I am engaging in this dharma activity not only that I may achieve buddhahood but so all beings may be brought to that same state of awakening." All beings are your equal in the sense that they equally desire happiness and equally fear suffering. Yet beings lack knowledge of the causes of happiness, and therefore do not engage in them. Likewise they lack knowledge of the causes of suffering and thus do not avoid them. The result is that beings suffer, which is not at all what we wish for them. With that understanding, think that in order to be able to establish all beings who fill space in a state of perfect and lasting happiness you will receive this instruction about Tara.

In addition to this, there are a set of instructions that we call *The Four Thoughts Which Turn the Mind*. These have been taught by all buddhas of the past and by all the teachers of the lineage and are preliminary contemplations that are necessary in order for your meditation practice and dharma study to actually be successful. “Turning the mind” means reorienting yourself, turning yourself away from samsara. These four contemplations consist of (1) reflection on the difficulty of acquiring this precious human existence, (2) reflection upon death and impermanence, (3) reflection upon causes and results, and (4) reflection upon the defects of samsara. If you reflect upon these before engaging in any practice or any process of studying dharma, there will be no obstacle to your practice and it will be successful. The reason why we need to reflect in this way, reminding ourselves of these four things is that we tend to take our human existence for granted. The only possible cause for our human rebirth is having amassed vast amounts of virtue, engaged in a great deal of meritorious action and avoided negative actions. In particular, that we now have a human body means we have definitely engaged in moral conduct in previous lives.

Although we possess this human body, we take it for granted, unaware of its value. We do not make proper use of the eighteen unique endowments of our precious human birth—that is to say, the tenfold resources and eight freedoms. If we do not make good use of them, there is no guarantee that we will automatically acquire a human rebirth in the future. As is said in the sutras, this precious human existence is extremely difficult to acquire. Although it can be used to accomplish our aim, if it is not made proper use of in this life, how could we expect to simply attain it again and again in the future? In order to remind yourself of the rarity of your present opportunity, it is necessary to precede the actual practice of dharma by reflection on these *Four Thoughts*.

With that in mind, we will begin with the actual subject of this teaching, which is Tara. The sources of refuge for all Buddhists are the Three Jewels—the Buddha, who is accepted as a teacher, the Dharma, which is accepted as a path, and the Sangha, who are accepted as companions on that path. The sangha can be divided into the exalted sangha of the mahayana and the ordinary sangha of individuals. The exalted sangha of the mahayana consists of male and female bodhisattvas who abide on any of the ten bodhisattva levels or *bhumis*, from the first up to and including the tenth. From among the Three Jewels, Tara is a member of the exalted sangha of the mahayana.

The commentary that we are using to study this praise of Tara was composed by Taranatha, a Tibetan master who lived in the 17th century. The commentary begins *Namo Lokeshvaraya*, meaning “Homage to the Lord of the World,” which refers to Chenrezig or Avalokiteshvara. The first four lines of the commentary are an initial homage to the deity Tara, then a statement of the author’s intention in composing the text and finally a request for Tara’s blessing that it proceed without obstacle. He says, “Tara, who liberates all from samsara, I respectfully pay homage to you. I then will explain to some extent the meaning of the tantra which contains your praise. Please pacify all impediments to this without exception.”

Since this praise in itself is a tantra, it needs to be explained, first of all, to what class of tantra it belongs. Buddhist tantras are divided into four classes, which from the lowest up to the highest, are *kriya* (or action) tantra, *carya* (performance) tantra, *yoga* tantra and *annuttara yoga* (highest yoga) tantra. Of these four, this belongs to the highest yoga tantra class. Highest yoga tantra, as well, can be divided into *patratantra*, or father tantra, and *matratantra*, or mother tantra. Of these two, this belongs to the mother tantra class. Mother tantra can be divided into six, which correspond to the six families, that is to say, the five buddha families plus the pervasive family of Vajrasattva. Of these six principal classes of mother tantras, this is the principal mother tantra of the family of Amoghasiddhi, also known as the karma family. Thus this is the principal mother tantra of the karma family. It is principal because among the mother tantras of the karma family this is the tantra of she who is like the empress or queen of the karma family. As well, this praise, in itself, is considered an entire tantra rather than a quotation from or extract from a tantra.

If you now start following in the text, the first line in the text **“I pay homage to Jetsunma, Arya Tara.”** That was probably added by the Tibetan translator, when it was translated from Sanskrit into Tibetan. The actual tantra starts with the words following that, which in the English are, **“Homage to Tara, the quick and heroic.”**

There are twenty-one stanzas to this praise. The first stanza begins with the words **“Homage to Tara, the quick and heroic.”** While in English and Sanskrit it is normal to have the expression “homage to...” at the beginning, it is not the usual word order in Tibetan. Nevertheless, in this text CHHAK TS’HAL (the Tibetan phrase meaning “homage to”) is placed at the beginning to emphasize that in this tantra of praise, the act of praise comes first in each of the stanzas describing the attributes and activity of Tara. Each stanza begins with the words CHHAK TS’HAL and after that, in this first stanza, the object of homage is identified as the *bhagavati* Tara, the fully awakened being named Tara. Following that is a statement of why you are paying homage to her. You are paying homage to Tara because she is the quick and heroic. “Quick” here means that her mind is in a constant state of non-conceptual compassion. Normally, when we think of compassion it is something blundering and cumbersome. We have to think, “I feel compassion for so and so, therefore I must do something about it.” Tara’s compassion is spontaneous, automatic and all pervasive. It is without partiality, limitation or conceptual thought. Thus her action of benefiting beings is immediate and that is why she is called quick. Then she is referred to as heroic because she protects beings from all dangers. She has unstoppable power to do this and her activity, therefore, is also unstoppable. What is her activity like? This is described in the next line which says, “whose eyes flash in an instant like lightning.” Her response to the needs of beings through the pervasive quality of her wisdom, which here is likened to her eyes, is instantaneous, constant and without obstruction. Because she is so quick, so heroic and so wise in her activity of freeing all beings from samsara she is called “Tara” in Sanskrit or “Drolma” in Tibetan, which means “she who liberates or frees.”

This initial stanza has outlined three qualities that Tara possesses. She has wisdom, she has loving kindness, and she has power or ability to effectively protect. The statement of these three qualities and her ensuing activity is actually a summary of all of her qualities. These first two lines, **“Homage to Tara, the quick and heroic, whose eyes flash in an instant like lightning,”** summarize what will be expanded upon in the stanzas that make up the rest of the praise.

With regard to Tara’s origin, it is said that she **“arose from the open stamens of the lotus-face of the lord of the three worlds.”** This refers to the story of how Tara arose from a teardrop of the bodhisattva, Chenrezig, whose Sanskrit name, *Avalokiteshvara*, means, “lord of the world.” It also has the hidden or subtle meaning of the *nupakaya* or form body arising as the compassionate expression of the *dharmakaya*. The lord of the three worlds is the *dharmakaya*. The tear on the face of Chenrezig represents the arising of the *nupakaya*, or form body, as an expression of the compassion of the *dharmakaya*.

The second stanza reads **“Homage to her whose face is like one hundred full autumn moons and who blazes with light like that of thousands of stars.”** All full moons are bright, but the autumn moon is the brightest, so that is used as an image for a very bright, cooling, pleasing light. Tara’s face is even brighter than that. It is as though one hundred autumn moons, one behind another, were all blazing at one time. Not only is it luminous in itself, but it radiates even more light, like the moon being surrounded by thousands of stars which are also glittering on their own. Using these images, the words convey the meaning that Tara’s form radiates a great deal of light and rays of light. Among the many different forms of Tara, this stanza refers primarily to White Tara because it says that she is a brilliant luminous white in appearance, so lustrous and magnificent that it is bewitching to behold her.

The third stanza reads **“Homage to her whose hands are adorned by golden blue lotuses and who enacts generosity, exertion, austerity, tranquility, patience and meditative stability.”** The words “homage to her” refer to Tara, of course. “Whose hands are adorned by golden blue lotuses” means that in her hands she is holding lotuses that have golden stems and blue flower petals. When it says she enacts various virtues it means that she is the embodiment of the six perfections—generosity, the first perfection, exertion, the fourth, and austerity here means moral discipline, the second perfection. In this line, tranquility refers to the tranquility of wisdom or *prajna*, the sixth perfection; patience is the third; and meditative stability is the fifth perfection. In that way you are paying homage to she who possesses all the virtues of the six perfections.

The fourth stanza says **“Homage to her whose crown is the *tathagata*, who revels in boundless complete victory, and who is thoroughly relied upon by bodhisattvas who have attained the perfections without exception.”** To say that her crown is the *tathagatha* means that atop the crown of her head is the *tathagata*, or buddha, *Vairocana*. This indicates that Tara herself brings all benefit and goodness, and that she is the wisdom emanation of that *vidya* mantra (awareness mantra) that brings victory over all adversity. From that point of view, it can also be said that not only is *Vairocana* atop her

crown, but that she is like the crown of *Vairocana*. There are deities which are sometimes referred to as crown deities and the praise indicates Tara is of that type. She embodies all of these virtues of wisdom and the power of mantra which benefits innumerable sentient beings. Since she has mastered the ten *paramitas*, she is therefore respectfully relied upon or attended by all bodhisattvas of the ten *bhumis* or levels.

The fifth stanza reads **“Homage to her who with the syllables TUTTARA HUNG fulfills wishes and fills all directions and all space, who tramples the seven worlds underfoot and is able to summon all without exception.”** Again, “homage to her” means homage to Tara, who with the syllables TUTTARA and HUNG fills this world—in fact, all places within all the realm of desire—with the sound of that mantra. She not only fills the realm of desire, but she also fills space, which means the realms of form and formlessness, and all directions, which means all other universes in all directions throughout space. In short, she fills the entire vastness of space with the sound of her mantra, fulfilling the wishes of beings. She is said to trample the seven worlds underfoot, which is an expression of the degree of her supremacy throughout the universe. Since she is in that way utterly supreme, she is able to summon all without exception. This means that she is the empress of all gods and all-powerful beings throughout the universe. If, for example, even *Maha Isvara* and other great gods in the world are her servants or attendants, then it need not be said that all minor spirits and gods serve her. What is here called the “seven worlds” has been explained in dharma teachings in different ways. Some have said it refers to seven worlds or environments. Some have said it is seven different types of beings within one environment. And some have said it is a combination of less than seven environments and less than seven types of beings, making up a total of seven. Here, in Taranatha’s commentary, it is explained as the seven powerful worlds or realms in which there are beings who have great power. These seven realms are the *nagas*, *pretas*, *asuras*, humans, *vidyadharas*, *devas* (or gods), and another one that in Tibetan is called MIAMCHI, which means “human or what.” As their name indicates, one is not sure whether these beings are humans or spirits.

The sixth stanza says **“Homage to her whom Indra, Agni, Brahma, Vayudeva, Vishvakarman, and Isvara present offerings; who is praised by elementals, vampires, scent-eaters and yakshas.”** Tara is referred to here as one worshipped by various gods. The first god mentioned is *Indra*, who is the king of the gods. The second one is *Agni*, the god of fire, who is the chief or principal among the *rishis* of the gods. The third one mentioned is *Brahma*, who is asserted by his followers to be the maker or creator of the world. The next one is *Vayudeva*, the god of wind, who is the arranger, the architect of the world. In the translation it then mentions *Vishvakarman*, who is the artificer of the gods. However, in this commentary, the name NATSOK, which was translated as *Vishvakarman*, goes together with *Isvara* to mean “various *Isvaras*.” *Isvara* means “the powerful,” referring to various powerful gods. (The commentary names some of these gods, including Rudra, the rishi called “Color of the Sun,” and the Bön deity, Cha.) All

of these powerful gods who assert themselves to be rulers of the universe in fact worship and make offerings to Tara.

As well, she is praised by spirits. The first type of spirit mentioned is elementals, which refers to various troublesome spirits such as Vinayaka. Next in the list is vampires, which probably means something more like zombies here. This refers not so much to the zombies themselves as to those *rakshasas* which are somewhat like vampires, who have the ability to raise zombies. *Rakshasas* are a class of lower gods, who can raise zombies and so on through the power of mantra and miraculous power. These include the nine *bhairavas* and so forth. Then scent-eaters, or *gandharvas*, are those such as Natsok Shingta and others. Finally, *yakshas*, which literally means those who are mischievous, refers to gods who are lords of wealth, such as *Vaisravana*, and all of the various gods, spirits, and so on who affect us. In short, Tara is not only worshipped by the most powerful gods but she is worshipped and praised even by troublesome spirits who are difficult to tame. If even these gods and spirits worship her, then she is like the guru or teacher of all beings without exception.

The seventh stanza says, **“Homage to her who thoroughly conquers the machinations of others with TRE and P’HE, who tramples with right leg contracted and left outstretched, and is totally blazing with swirling flame.”** This means that Tara, through her mantra, especially her mantra with the ending of TRE or P’HE (depending on the specific activity required) is able to reverse all negativity that would otherwise affect one. Through the intense power of her mantra all direct action will be accomplished. However, direct action here does not mean attempting to control or harm others because you dislike them. Direct action means action to benefit others who are difficult to tame; it is never something harmful. These varieties of endings affixed to her mantra, TRE and P’HE and so on, have the capacity to conquer and reverse such things as negative magic that could be directed against you, such as a magical device, or spells or mantras. As well, in her capacity of protecting from negativity, Tara displays a wrathful form, demonstrating postures of the legs and feet such as having the right one drawn in and the left one outstretched. This indicates that she subdues and overcomes all viciousness. Her activity of pacifying illness, such as epidemics and other communicable diseases, is symbolized by the blazing of wisdom fire from her wrathful form. In that way, she scatters all manner of demons and bestows the blessing of great protection on all beings.

The next stanza, which is the eighth, requires careful consideration. **“Homage to TURE, the terrifying one who totally conquers the fiercest maras, who with a frowning lotus-face, kills all enemies without exception.”** Tara here is referred to as TURE, which is actually part of her mantra. This indicates that through the power of reciting her mantra, all aggression will be pacified. Tara arises from the tranquil space of wisdom as a forceful or wrathful figure who conquers the fiercest *maras*. *Maras* are obstacles to awakening; the fiercest *maras* are like the equivalent of generals among demonic forces. She conquers them because she is much more fierce than they are, which is expressed in the image of her “frowning lotus-face,” the frowning of the face of wisdom. In that vein, when the praise states that she “kills all enemies” this does not mean that Tara will kill off your

competitors. It means that she annihilates or exterminates aggression itself, which is the source of enmity. She puts an end to viciousness as an intention, and vicious actions as the execution of that intention.

The ninth stanza says, **“Homage to her whose fingers adorn her heart with the mudra indicating the Three Jewels, whose radiant swirling halo adorns all directions.”** “Her,” of course, is Tara. When it says “whose fingers adorn her heart with the *mudra* indicating the Three Jewels” it means that Tara is most commonly depicted making a gesture with her left hand that is called the “*mudra* of the Three Jewels.” In this gesture, her left hand is held in front of her heart, holding the stem of a lotus between the ring finger and the thumb, with three fingers left upraised. This *mudra* or posture of the hand is like the seal of Tara because it is her characteristic gesture. Therefore, by implication, if her followers make that gesture they will be blessed by her. When the praise says, “whose radiant swirling halo adorns all directions” it means the light from her body fills all space and also, by implication, through the practitioner making that *mudra*, Tara will be invited from the pure realms in all directions.

The tenth stanza reads, **“Homage to her who is crowned by garlands of light, resplendent with great joy, who overpowers maras and the world with her laughter of TUTTARA.”** The first meaning of this is that her form inspires delight in anyone who witnesses it. “Resplendent with great joy” means not only that her form is an expression of her great joy but that it causes great joy in the observer. That she is crowned by garlands of light means that from her whole body, and especially from the jewels and ornaments on her crown, innumerable rays of light blaze forth. Her laughter of TUTTARA (which is part of her ten-syllable mantra) represents her laughter of great joy and wisdom. The sound of that mantra, the laugh of great wisdom, subdues even those *maras* or demons who would otherwise overpower the world. Thus she brings the entire world under her control, including the most powerful spirits in it. In that way she establishes all beings—even the most resistant—on the path to liberation and omniscience.

The eleventh stanza states, **“Homage to her who can summon all guardians of places, who fully liberates from all poverty with the syllable HUNG of her grimace.”** That Tara can summon the guardians of places means that she has mastery over all of the deities—gods and goddesses—having dominion over specific places in the world. These include the various kings of the gods or kings of spirits who guard specific places or directions, the goddess of the earth itself, and all of the subterranean beings, such as *nagas*, *asuras*, *vidyadhara*s, *dakinis*, and so on. Tara has the power to summon and control all of these. When the praise refers to her grimace, it means that her wrathful mantra of HUNG, the syllable HUNG, embodies the power which dispels the poverty of all beings. Dispelling poverty has two aspects. The first is pacification of the suffering of poverty. The second aspect is enrichment, bringing consummate wealth, prosperity and the *siddhi* of the discovery of treasure.

The twelfth stanza says **“Homage to her who blazes with all adornments, crowned with a sliver of the moon, from whose topknot Amitabha continually illuminates.”** Blazing with all adornments means that Tara is lustrous with jewels and silks, all of which are luminous. Specifically, “crowned with a sliver of the moon” means that part of her crown is a crescent moon. Rays of light shine from the crescent moon and all of her ornaments, conquering the pride and arrogance of all powerful spirits in the world. Also, sometimes she displays the manner of yogic austerity. In that case, within the topknot of her hair is the form of the Buddha Amitabha radiating an unceasing display of brilliant light.

The thirteenth stanza reads **“Homage to her who abides in the midst of garlands of flame like the fire at the end of a kalpa, who totally conquers hordes of enemies of those who delight in the turning of the dharma wheel, with her right leg outstretched and her left contracted.”** The light which emanates from her body, in which she abides, is overwhelmingly brilliant. It is compared to the flames which destroy the world at the end of an aeon or *kalpa*. Although she never wavers from a state of undefiled joy, she manifests forceful activity through postures such as, for example, her right leg stretched out and her left contracted, and so on. In that manner she demonstrates her joy of wisdom in activity for the benefit of others and conquers all those who would obstruct the practice of beings who delight in the turning of the dharma wheel.

The fourteenth stanza says **“Homage to her who pierces the ground with the palm of her hand and stamps with her feet, who overthrows the seven levels with the syllable HUNG as she grimaces.”** Tara’s power is so great that by slapping the ground with her palm she can pierce it; by stamping with her foot, by demonstrating a grimace, or by exclaiming the wrathful sound of HUNG from her nostrils, she can shake the entire universe down to the seven levels below the ground. Thus she can render unconscious and pacify all vicious spirits such as *nagas*, *asuras*, *rakshasas*, and *pretas*. The seven levels refer to seven planes within this world. There is the notion that within the world are various non-human spirits who abide in successive realms, one level below the other. Some people explain it as starting from the top of Mt. Meru, going downward. According to this commentary, that is incorrect. The names of these levels are “the ground,” “the extra ground,” “below the ground,” “the very ground,” “the ground of beings,” “the excellent ground,” and “the pure ground.”

The fifteenth stanza reads **“Homage to her who is bliss, virtue, and tranquility, enjoying the peace of nirvana, who conquers great wrongs with the perfect possession of SOHA and OM.”** Here it is said that Tara embodies three qualities: she is bliss, she is virtue, and she is tranquility. First of all, this means that she herself is continually blissful, continually virtuous, and continually tranquil. She continually abides in the expanse of the cessation of ignorance and suffering, which is the peace of nirvana. It also means that through embodying and displaying these qualities she bestows them on other beings. She bestows bliss upon beings, which is to say she bestows happiness in this life. She bestows virtue upon beings, which means she bestows the virtuous conduct which brings happiness in future lives. To those who are capable of perceiving it, she teaches the path to tranquility and liberation, which is nirvana. As well, through recitation of her

awareness mantra which is adorned with OM at the beginning and SOHA at the end (this refers to her usual mantra, OM TARE TUTTARE TURE SOHA), great wrongs can be corrected. All the wrongdoing you have engaged in throughout beginningless time can be purified and therefore its results, great suffering, can be conquered. By implication, this stanza gives her peaceful mantra, and indicates that when the mantra of the peaceful Tara is recited it ends with SOHA. The text implies here that there are different endings to the mantra for the various activities: pacification, enrichment, magnetizing and direct action. Previously, we had two other endings for the mantra. One was TRE, which is used for reversal or exorcism. It is the ending of the mantra when it is used to protect you from the negative magic of others. The other ending given for the mantra was P'HAT which is the mantra of eradication. Eradication means the elimination of all *klesas*, especially anger or aggression, either the aggression within yourself or the aggression of others.

We will pause here for now in going over the explanation as given in Taranatha's commentary. There are several general remarks I need to make about this material. There does not seem to be much of a problem in understanding the significance of the iconography of peaceful deities. However, the iconography of wrath such as the wrathful appearance of deities or mantras that are given wrathful significance can be very confusing.

For example, when it is taught that TRE is used to reverse the curses or magic of others and that P'HAT is used to eradicate aggression, you could misunderstand it to mean that TRE is used to turn a curse back onto its perpetrator, or that P'HAT is used to kill aggressors. This is incorrect. The fundamental thing that needs to be understood is that all of these deities, including the various peaceful and wrathful forms of Tara, are only expressions of awakening that arise for the benefit of beings. They never arise as a vehicle for the harming of beings; therefore you cannot use these deities or these mantras to curse others. The wrathful form of a wrathful deity, as it says in many liturgies, is the arising of a wrathful form as a display of the peace of the dharmadhatu. In other words, the wrathful form itself is the iconographical representation of peace. The wrath itself represents peace. It does not in any way signify anger or aggression.

In this liturgy, when there are expressions such as "Tara kills all enemies," "killing" really means the ending of *samsara*. *Samsara* is a continuity, a beginningless continuity of karmic cause and result, which arises from and is continually maintained and reinforced by ignorance. The cessation of ignorance, and therefore the cessation of karma and of suffering, is what is meant here by "kill." When the text says that Tara kills enemies, it means that Tara can end *samsara* for you by ending the continuity of your karma. It is important therefore to understand that the peaceful and wrathful deities represent exactly the same thing, albeit in two seemingly different ways. The representation of dharmadhatu wisdom in the form of peaceful deities is a simple and obvious one. In cases where beings cannot be tamed by that, which means they cannot relate to the

iconography of peace, there is the manifestation of the iconography of wrath. Its meaning, nevertheless, is to indicate that same peace or tranquility of liberation.

You might ask, then, if this is what the term “kill” means in this context, why do we need to use such a word, since it is so liable to misunderstanding? The reason this term is used is because of its force and its power. It indicates the uncompromising attitude we have to take towards ignorance. All of us have been wandering throughout samsara, taking rebirth again and again beyond our control throughout beginningless time. Even while we have done so, innate within each one of us is buddha nature. Fundamentally, we have the immeasurable qualities of buddhas already present within us. The only reason we have failed to recognize and manifest these innate qualities is because we are blinded by ignorance. It is ignorance, and ignorance alone, that obstructs our awakening and binds us to endless cycling through samsara. Therefore ignorance is our only true enemy. Until we conquer ignorance we will never transcend samsara; we will never recognize our own innate qualities or goodness. Thus, in liturgies like this one, phrases like “killing the enemy” mean the eradication of ignorance. There is no external enemy. Killing does not mean the taking the life of other beings. It is non-dualistic killing—which is the eradication of your own inner ignorance, the taming of your own mind, the taming of your own klesas.

Now we will continue with the explanation of the Twenty-One Homages to Tara, as expounded by Jonang Taranatha in his commentary. We have reached the sixteenth stanza, which says, **“Homage to her who overthrows the enemies of those who delight in the turning of the dharma wheel and liberates with the awareness mantra, HUNG, surrounded by the ten syllables.”** This commentary interprets the word “turning” not as the turning of the dharma wheel, but instead referring to those who surround Tara, her retinue. According to the commentary, we would have to translate this line as “Homage to her who is delightfully surrounded, and overthrows enemies.” The rest of this is the same. “Delightfully surrounded” is explained here as meaning that Tara is always surrounded by vidyadharas, that is to say, siddhas, and bodhisattvas. They are delightfully surrounding her in the sense that they are all abiding in a state of meditative absorption characteristic of bodhisattvas, which is joyful. Tara, surrounded by her retinue, tames all of the vicious beings, those who harm sentient beings, such as the king of the god realm known as “Enjoying the Emanations of Others.” Tara arises from the mantra of ten syllables, OM TARE TUTTARE TURE SOHA, blazing with the majesty of the light from the awareness mantra. Here the awareness mantra means HUNG, the seed syllable of wrathful Tara. The seed syllable of Tara in general is, of course, TAM. It is pointed out that while the basic mantra for repetition for both peaceful and wrathful Tara is OM TARE TUTTARE TURE SOHA, in the case of the wrathful Tara, the seed syllable is different—it is HUNG.

The next stanza, the seventeenth is **“Homage to TURE, who stamps with her feet, whose seed is HUNG, who shakes Sumeru, Mandara, Bikjay, and the three worlds.”** First of all, TURE is part of Tara’s mantra. TURA is the Sanskrit for “quick,” which is one of Tara’s epithets, and TURE means “to she who is quick.” “Homage to TURE” thus

means homage to she who is quick. The expression “who stamps with her feet,” refers to wrathful manifestation, and Tara, in her wrathful form, is especially expeditious in her response to the needs of beings. The stanza mentions three particular mountains that she shakes. The first is Sumeru, the axial mountain of the world. The second is a mountain called Mandara, and the name of the third one appears differently in different texts. According to Taranatha’s commentary, in the original Sanskrit text of this stanza, it did not call this mountain Bikjay, but Mount Kailash. In Tibetan that would be not Bikjay but Gangchen. However, he says there is evidence that there were two authentic Sanskrit versions, one of which said Kailash and the other of which said Bikjay. Thus we should not consider this difference to be a corruption. In any case, the praise is saying that Tara shakes even the highest mountains of the world, which are supposed to be the abode of the gods. Now in legend, Kailash is the abode of the god Shiva, so it would be mentioned for that reason. The “three worlds” are the subterranean world, the terrestrial world and the celestial world—the three types of environments in which various beings live. The commentary remarks that the reader might want to know why, if it says she shakes the three worlds, is it necessary to mention mountains in addition since obviously they are part of the three worlds. The reason is simply is that one might get the idea that while Tara can shake the three worlds where ordinary beings live, she is not powerful enough to shake the mountains where gods like Shiva and so forth live. The meaning of this verse is to point out that Tara is so extraordinarily powerful in her compassion that there is no part of the universe beyond her reach.

The eighteenth stanza reads **“Homage to her, who holds in her hand that which bears the sign of a hare in the form of a divine lake, who dispels all poisons without exception with the dual repetition of TARA and P’HE.”** Now here, some Tibetan texts have the dual repetition of HARA and P’HE and some have TARA and P’HE. This commentary has HARA, but this text, however, has TARA. So the commentary will be explaining a mantra that has HARA twice and TARA once. The expression “that which bears the sign of a hare in the form of a divine lake” refers to the moon. In Sanskrit poetics, the moon is conceived of as being shaped like a swirl of cooling ambrosia which radiates light, soothing and pleasing to the mind. The phrase “divine lake” alludes to this aspect of lunar imagery in classical Indian poetry. Viewers in the western hemisphere have traditionally considered that the visible markings on the surface of the moon resemble a face, but in India and Tibet those markings have been considered to resemble a rabbit. Therefore, “that which bears the sign of a hare” is another way of referring poetically to the moon.

The form of Tara in this particular stanza is a specific alternate form of the deity whose primary function is to dispel sickness that comes from poison. Poison does not necessarily mean something intentionally given to you. For example, it might be the bite of an animal or vegetable poisons or food poisoning and so on. The mantra of this special form of Tara has the syllables TARA once, HARA twice, and P’HE at the end. This mantra, it says, will dispel the effects of poison both from the environment and from beings. In this application of dispelling poison, the form of Tara is visualized as

holding a moon in her hand from which soothing ambrosia streams forth. The mantra dispels the poison of animals such as snakes and so on, but also other poisons as well. The basic mantra for this form of Tara is OM NAMA TARE NAMO HARE HUNG HARE SO HA. Then the actual application mantra used to heal poison has that mantra with SARVA BIDZA SHANTIM KURU P'HE added to the end. This is the activity mantra or application mantra of the wrathful Tara that is used to purify poison.

The next stanza, the nineteenth, says **“Homage to her on whom the kings of the gods, the gods, and the miamchi rely, who dispels disputation and bad dreams with the armor of her delightful majesty.”** Now, the praise lists three kinds of beings who rely upon her: kings of gods, gods, and miamchi—which literally means “human or what.” When the text says the gods, it means the six god realms of the desire realm. There are gods of the desire realm, of the form realm and of the formless realm. In the realm of desire there are six levels of gods and that is what is meant by gods here. Kings of gods means not only the kings of those gods but also kings in this world, human kings. Gods and kings of gods means all the various gods and spirits that affect our lives, such as the gods of mountains, gods of trees, gods of lakes, and so on. Then the miamchi, the powerful “humans or whats,” also depend on Tara. The expression “armor of her delightful majesty” refers to the protection of her blessing. This protection is bestowed through her mantra and her form, both of which can influence or bless us and therefore bestow protection. Thus the practitioner who meditates on her form, recites her mantra, and binds the body with the appropriate mudra, through the majesty of her entering his or her own body, speech and mind, is protected from the disputation of others, from bad dreams, in short, from all sorts of unpleasant things.

The twentieth stanza is as follows, **“Homage to her whose radiant two eyes are like the sun and full moon, who dispels fierce contagion with the dual recitation of HARA and TUTTARA.”** You may recall that the last time we had the dual recitation of TARA, the commentary said in that verse it should be HARA. In the same way, here, according to the commentary, the Tibetan has HARA in the root text, but the commentary says this time it should be TARA. The commentary says this is because it refers to the basic mantra, OM TARA TUTTARE TURE SOHA. There are some texts where it has HARA before and TARA here, and others where it has TARA before and HARA here, like this one. In this verse, it is said that her two eyes radiate rays of light as strong and effective as those of the sun and moon. With these eyes of wisdom she gazes upon all beings and establishes them in a state of happiness and virtue, freeing them from the sufferings of the lower realms and so on. By reciting the mantra which has TARA twice and TUTTARE (which means her main mantra, the one we normally use), all fierce contagion, which means contagious diseases that suddenly seem to appear out of nowhere, can be dispelled.

This has two meanings. The explicit aspect of the meaning is that through reciting the ten-syllable mantra of Tara contagious diseases can be pacified. The main meaning here, however, is that the *klesas*, which have afflicted us like a dangerous contagious disease throughout beginningless time, can be pacified through the repetition of this mantra.

When the verse says that her two eyes are like the sun and the moon it means that the light of her right eye is fierce, like the sun, and dispels all harm. Harm refers to wrongdoing and its result, suffering. The light of her left eye is soothing and cool, like the moon. It radiates ambrosia and promotes longevity, prosperity, bliss and so on. The mantra which contains TARA twice and TUTTARA means her ten-syllable mantra, OM TARA TUTTARE TURE SOHA. This is the mantra for approach, for accomplishment and for application—the single sufficient mantra for all stages of Tara practice.

The last verse of praise, the twenty-first, is **“Homage to her who genuinely possesses the power to pacify through the establishment of threefold thatness, and to the supreme TURE, who conquers dōns, vampires, and yakshas.”** This verse has three ways of being explained or analyzed—the literal meaning, the inner meaning and the ultimate meaning. These three explanations are basically concerned with what is meant by threefold thatness, because the words of the praise say that Tara possesses the power to pacify through the establishment of threefold thatness. The literal meaning of threefold thatness is the three aspects of the nature of things, or absolute truth, which are enumerated as (1) emptiness, (2) absence of inherent characteristics, and (3) passionlessness, or freedom from attachment. Through Tara’s power to establish the realization of these three things in the minds of disciples, all of our obscurations are abandoned and we are established in peace, which is nirvana. Tara pacifies through the establishment of this realization in us, and what is being said here is that she possesses the power to bring this realization. The literal meaning of the three types of demons mentioned—*dōns* means troublesome spirits, spirits that can sometimes be helpful but are risky to get involved with. The next word, which for some reason was translated as vampires, really is more like zombie. Here it is explained as meaning the voodoo-like magical actions that can bring about things like zombies. The third type of demon, yakshas, means in this case spirits that steal your vitality.

One is freed from the external affliction of these spirits when one realizes the so-called three gates to liberation—emptiness, absence of inherent characteristics, and desirelessness. The phrase “to the supreme TURE” has two meanings. Expressly, it is a reference to her mantra. The verse is stating that through the recitation of her mantra, the supreme mantra that contains TURE, you will realize these three gates of liberation and thereby be free from affliction by spirits. As we saw before, TURE means she who is quick. Thus this verse also means, “Tara, you who are so quick, protect us from these demons.” It has both these meanings.

The second way of looking at this stanza is according to the inner meaning. According to the inner meaning it refers to the visualization of yourself as Tara and the establishment of threefold thatness, which means visualizing a white OM inside your head, a red AH inside your throat, and a blue HUNG inside your heart. This is said to be the best visualization for protecting yourself from obstacles, which would also include beings such as dōns, zombies, and yakshas.

Finally, the ultimate meaning is that threefold thatness is the essence of the body, speech, and mind of all buddhas. These are also called the three vajras: vajra body, vajra speech, and vajra mind. According to the ultimate meaning, they have, from the very beginning, been the essential nature of all things. In their essential nature, all things have from the very beginning been pure. That is why through cultivating the path we can actually attain the tranquility of awakening. The path means the methodical cultivation of the wisdom qualities that are already inherently present as a basis. Therefore, the path consists fundamentally of resting evenly within that openness which is the unity of these primordially present three vajras. That will protect you from suffering, metaphorically referred to as *dōns*, or troublesome spirits. That will protect you from karma, which is metaphorically referred to as a vampire or zombie. Thirdly, that will protect you from *klesas*, mental afflictions, which are metaphorically referred to as *yakshas* that steal your vitality. Through resting in that nature and becoming free from the harm of karma, *klesas* and suffering you will attain that which is supreme, the coemergent wisdom of great bliss, here represented by TURE.

After the twenty-first stanza there is one line that says: **“That was the praise of the root mantra and the twenty-one homages.”** This refers to the stanzas that contain a praise of the mantra as well as twenty-one different homages to Tara.

What follows next in the liturgy is the statement of the benefits, which is chanted after you chant the Twenty-One Homages. In the long Tara practice it is chanted after the last set of repetitions of the homages. If you repeat the homages many times, you will chant the benefits after the last set of repetitions. The statement of benefits is actually part of the same tantra as the homages. The benefits go together with the homages, which is why the commentary explains them.

The statement of the benefits begins, **“Anyone who has genuine respect for the Goddess and recites this clearly, recollecting it at dawn upon awakening and at dusk, will receive protection from all dangers. All their harmful actions will be fully pacified. All their bad migrations will be conquered.”** First, it identifies the object of praise, referring to her as “the Goddess,” which means the Bhagavati Tara. Then it says “anyone who has genuine respect,” which refers to the one reciting the praises and indicates how the recitation is to be performed. With an attitude of genuine respect, and the exertion or diligence that comes from that, one precedes the recitation with prostrations and offerings. It can be recited in the morning after awakening and in the evening, keeping in mind the qualities of Tara. Following that the benefits of its recitation are enumerated.

The first is protection from all dangers, in the sense that you will be protected from fear of the eight or sixteen types of danger or misfortune and will attain fearless confidence.

The next benefit is that all your harmful actions will be fully pacified. Here, “harmful actions” means the result of harmful actions, the result of wrongdoing, which is suffering. Through the recitation of the praises your negative karma will be purified, and

you will be freed from sickness, troublesome spirits, disaster and so on. Additionally, through this pacification of your previous negative actions, even though you may have the karma that would otherwise certainly lead to rebirth in a lower state, that karma will be purified and you will not be reborn in lower states. The actual words of the text are that “all their bad migrations will be conquered,” which by implication means that you will be reborn in higher states.

Up to that point the commentary has been dealing with the temporary benefits that accrue from recitation of these praises to Tara. These benefits come to one within this life and the immediately following lifetimes within samsara.

The next set of benefits concern the ultimate benefit leading to full awakening. The text says, **“they will quickly attain empowerment by seventy million victors. Greater than this will be obtained, and finally, buddhahood.”** The first part of this refers to the fact that surrounding and attending Tara are an innumerable number of other buddhas, who are traditionally enumerated as seventy million. By reciting her practice and her mantra and her praise, you will be blessed by those seventy million nirmanakaya buddhas who abide together with Tara. Seeing Tara’s face, you will see their faces as well. Having seen them, either in actuality or in a dream, you will receive empowerment from all of them, all at once, either through rays of light coming from their bodies or through ambrosia coming from their hands. This also describes the process of the bestowal of empowerment of Tara herself, but through receiving empowerment from seventy million buddhas, your obscurations will be purified and you will attain great meditative absorption. You will gradually attain that which is even greater—the supreme siddhi of mahamudra. Having attained that, you will gradually traverse the ten stages or bhumis of a bodhisattva, and finally attain perfect buddhahood. Those are the long-term benefits of the attainment of full awakening and liberation that ensue from the recitation of the praises of Tara.

Then, the commentary describes further temporary benefits achieved through the recitation of her mantra and praise. The first concerns dispelling of poison. (*Translator’s comment:* In the English translation it says, “Virulent poison, whether abiding in the firmament or within beings...” The word “firmament” is a mistake. A firmament means the sky. For some reason on the day that I translated this, I thought it meant the ground. The Tibetan word means “the ground” in the sense of a capacity to support. It refers to the inanimate environment in general. Thus the translation of the Tibetan should read **“virulent poison, whether abiding in the environment or within beings, whether eaten or drunk, will be dispelled by recollecting this.”**) This means lethal poison in the environment, in the ground, in minerals, and so on, or within beings, such as scorpions, spiders, snakes, frogs, etc. The effects of any and all of this can be dispelled through the recollection of Tara’s mantra and also through the recitation of this praise. In fact, through the faithful recollection of her mantra, the poison can be transformed into ambrosia. This is true no matter how it enters your system, whether it is eaten or drunk. At this point the commentary mentions that in some translations from Sanskrit into

Tibetan there is an added phrase, “or by touch.” In any case, no matter how the poison enters you, it can be dispelled.

Next it says, “**the sufferings of affliction by dōns, contagion, and poison will be totally relinquished. And this is also true for other beings.**” Through the recollection of the mantra and praise of Tara not only poison but also spirits and contagious diseases will be pacified. This is not only true for yourself as a practitioner but you can also pray for others. You can use the power and practice of Tara to attempt to heal or protect others as well.

The last stanza of the benefits reads “**if it is recited twice, three times, and seven times, those wishing children will obtain children, those wishing wealth will obtain wealth. All wishes will be fulfilled, and all impediments destroyed.**” The root text does not have the final syllable CHIK, which means, “may it be so,” but this syllable CHIK is always added when these verses are recited.

There are two interpretations of what is meant by “twice, thrice, and seven times.” According to the commentary, the original meaning of “twice” referred to doing the practice in both daytime and nighttime sessions. “Thrice” meant three sessions during the daytime, and three sessions during the night, so a total of six sessions of practice each day. Finally, “seven” times meant that in each session of Tara practice you would chant the praises seven times. Altogether that would be a total of 42 repetitions in each twenty-four hour period. In common usage nowadays, however, when you do the long Tara practice in its full form, you chant the praises twelve times—first twice, then later, three times, then later on in the practice again, seven times. In any case, the meaning is that through chanting the praises again and again, however many times, you will get what you want. For example, if you are a householder who wishes for children, you will have a child. If you are a monastic who wishes for students—who are like children—you will have students. If you want more money, you will become more wealthy. These are just a few examples. In short, whatever kind of meaningful success or attainment you wish for will be gained through reciting this praise. In addition, all impediments to attainment will be removed at the same time.

We have now completed the explanation of the abbreviated tantra that was spoken by the Buddha Vairocana. It is also part of a long tantra, which is called *The Seven Hundred Stanza Tantra of Tara*. This completes my instructions on the praises of Tara.

Questions and Answers

Question: If Tara's victory is boundless and complete, why do beings remain in samsara?

Rinpoche: Tara is both powerful and effective, so it is not the case that Tara has abandoned those sentient beings who remain in samsara. Buddhas and bodhisattvas like Tara cannot do one hundred percent of the job to free beings from of samsara. Their efforts to liberate beings are impeded by the karma and other obscurations of individuals that keep them in samsara. In fact, until these are purified we cannot be pulled out. Tara cannot save you without any effort on your part. You still have to pass through the process of the path. This process will be facilitated by supplication of Tara which can form part of, or even the basis of the path, but you still have to exert yourself. It is not that Tara lacks compassion. The process of liberation from samsara is an interdependent function of an individual's own effort and devotion on the one side and the compassion of buddhas and bodhisattvas on the other.

A traditional image for this interdependence is to describe the compassion of buddhas and bodhisattvas as being like a hook that is extended downward, and sentient beings as being like clumps of metal or iron. If a given sentient being has faith, it's as if there were a ring on top of this iron ball, allowing the hook to fasten onto it, and, no matter how heavy the clump of iron may be, to pull it up. If a sentient being lacks faith then there's no ring for the hook of compassion to make contact with. So it is not the case that there is limitation or partiality to the compassion of Tara, buddhas, and bodhisattvas; there must be the receptivity, in terms of faith, on the part of the individual beings. If you have faith, even if you are a very heavy clump of iron indeed, you could still be pulled up. If you do not have faith, then even if you are as light as a golf ball there is no way to hook onto it.

Question: On page 44 of the text it refers to the "seven worlds" and on page 48 "seven levels." Are these synonymous or are they two different things? Does either of these seven levels or worlds correspond to the six realms of samsaric existence?

Rinpoche: The seven worlds and the seven realms mean something different. The seven worlds refer to the seven realms of the different kinds of powerful beings or spirits—the *devas*, *asuras*, *nagas*, *pretas*, and so on. *Nagas* are part of the animal realm. *Pretas* have their own realm. *Devas* are one realm and *asuras* are another. Thus the seven worlds correlate in part to the six realms. Then, the seven levels are probably seven levels within the *preta* realm. The *pretas* comprise one realm within the six realms.

Question: Why is Green Tara green?

Rinpoche: Tara is the embodiment of the activity of all buddhas. In Buddhist iconography, green is the color associated with the quality of enlightened activity to benefit others.

Question: I was surprised to learn that Green Tara had wrathful manifestations as well as peaceful ones. Do most bodhisattvas have both wrathful and peaceful forms?

Rinpoche: Most bodhisattvas have a primary peaceful form, but also there can be wrathful forms as well. There are people who respond to peaceful means and people who do not, who have to be convinced. For the benefit of that type of person the iconography is presented as wrathful, but it leads to the same meaning or same realization as the peaceful one.

Question: Is it helpful to do Tara practice to help overcome feelings of resentment when anger is directed to me?

Rinpoche: It is fine to use Tara, but the way to do it would be to pray to Tara that your resentment over their anger be pacified and that in addition their anger itself be pacified.

Question: How does one deal with an overabundance of enthusiasm and joy, for example, towards a particular practice?

Rinpoche: This type of excessive enthusiasm may be what is called "enthusiasm for novelty." The typical pattern of enthusiasm for novelty is that when something is still new and exotic to you, not yet really a part of your everyday life, at that point you have tremendous enthusiasm for it. After the novelty wears off, we also lose our interest. Then, enthusiasm arises for something or someone else. When *that's* no longer novel, again we lose our enthusiasm and interest. The problem with this kind of pattern is obvious. We never achieve anything because our enthusiasm continually shifts from one focus to another. We are constantly running from one thing to another. That is a problem for any endeavor, spiritual or secular. When it arises in dharma practice, the best way to proceed is not to begin your practice too dramatically, not to start with doing too much. Rather, start small, but keep it going as an unbroken continuity, until you reach the end of whatever you have set out to do.

Question: Could you speak about the appropriate situations for using the mantra syllables TRE and P'HET?

Rinpoche: It is not like you just remove SOHA and add TRE and P'HET onto the end of the mantra. These mantras are used only in the context of a specific liturgy that prescribes the use of that mantra. In the text of that liturgy the entire mantra will be given. The root mantra of Tara is OM TARE TUTTARE TURE SOHA, but when one has completed the recitation of the root mantra, and does what are called application

practices, those specific application practices will involve particular mantras which are likely to be permutations of the root mantra. For example, there is a longevity mantra with additional syllables in it. Then there are mantras for pacification, enrichment, magnetizing and so on. Each liturgy that gives that specific application will give the necessary mantra.

Question: Would you say something about faith?

Rinpoche: Faith is necessary in order for practice to be effective. A traditional saying is that someone without faith will not develop spiritually, just as a burnt seed will not lead to a plant. Trying to practice with no faith is like planting a burnt seed. It will not lead to anything; the seed will just rot in the ground.

On the other hand, we need to be intelligent about what we mean by faith. Part of our cynicism about faith is correct—faith has to be of the right kind. There is a type of faith that basically is a sort of naïve hope or blind faith. We are hoping that something wonderful will happen to us. When we go to meet a lama or spiritual teacher we have this tremendous expectation about it. The expectation itself causes us to contrive a kind of dramatic enthusiasm, a feeling of dramatic faith. You meet this person. You admire them. There is an intense emotional response to them that is positive. That is faith, but it is an iffy thing, because it is based on wanting something, hoping for something, or expecting something. As soon as things do not go the way you want, the way you expect, the whole thing can sour very quickly.

The type of faith traditionally considered genuine and stable is what is called “informed faith.” This is faith that comes from a basic and realistic understanding of spirituality. It means, for example, understanding what dharma really is, and therefore how it actually will effectively benefit the practitioner and those influenced by the practitioner. By really understanding the reasons for faith, faith will become stable. Then, with the basis of a fundamental understanding of dharma, you can read literature that traditionally promotes faith, such as the biographies of great meditators. Principal in our tradition would be the biographies of Milarepa and Gampopa and so forth. When you read these biographies and you see how these individuals practiced, and what types of realization and experience they developed through practice, and having achieved these realizations how they were able to effectively benefit others, that will foster in you the attitude of intense aspiration to follow their example—to do what they did and to achieve what they did. This is based, however, upon having correct information and not merely upon expectation.

Question: I was very pleased to see that Green Tara uses laughter. At times I feel the only way I can respond to either general chaos or absurdity is with laughter. Obviously, there is a therapeutic use of laughter. How does that fit into Tibetan Buddhism?

Rinpoche: There is no formal practice of laughing in this tradition, no practice manual that says, "if you laugh in the following way, these will be the specific benefits." But, as you said, it is obvious there are therapeutic benefits of appropriate laughter. If someone is suffering, and that individual is surrounded by gloomy people, who appear to be suffering to the same or even greater degree, then everyone's misery is compounded and it just keeps escalating. If someone enters that situation and, in an appropriate and respectful way, introduces a bit of levity, so people don't take themselves so seriously, it can gradually help to ease, at least to some extent, the suffering of others. We don't find a particular prescription for this in the teachings. It is certainly something that is well known in the secular world, however, that appropriate levity and laughter does help people. It is healthy. Therefore I encourage you to laugh as much as you can!

Question: Is it necessary for someone to understand this text completely before receiving the empowerment?

Rinpoche: No, what is of primary importance is faith. If you have faith in it then you will receive its benefits. Of course, it is excellent to understand. It is best to understand as much about it as possible, but if you do not have faith, and understand everything, you will still not get any benefit.

Question: At the end of the statement of benefits, do we say CHIK?

Yeshe Gyamtso: You do say it. It is not actually in the text, because the text is phrased as a statement of the benefits. It is Buddha Vairocana's statement concerning the benefits of the recitation. When we are reciting it, the word CHIK ("may it be so") is customarily added because it turns the meaning from a statement into an aspiration. However, when Buddha Vairocana was teaching it, he wasn't making an aspiration, he was saying what was going to happen.

Question: Can you explain the difference between the recitation of the praises to Tara and the mantra?

Rinpoche: There is no real difference in the benefits. The mantra is the essence of the praises and the praises also contain and expound the mantra. But there is a big difference in convenience. The mantra is ten syllables and the praises are three pages.

Question: Speaking of convenience, is it appropriate to recite the 21 praises repeatedly just as a practice in itself?

Rinpoche: Sure, a lot of people do that.

Question: Is the statement of benefits recited more than once as well?

Rinpoche: That is not done repeatedly. It is just chanted once at the end.

Question: Is it okay to use the short OM TARE TUTTARE TURE SOHA in a sad situation, like if you see a dog running out into the street or something? Can you do that when you don't have time to do the visualization or other parts of the practice.

Rinpoche: Sure.

Question: If you're doing the 21 praises, is it always necessary to finish with the benefits.

Rinpoche: At the end of the last recitation of the praises.

Question: Since certain stanzas have certain specific benefits or effects associated with them, is it appropriate to do in certain situations, to apply only that...

Rinpoche: It is not wrong to do that. You can, if you wish, extract a stanza and repeat that.

Question: What about the other mantras mentioned in the praises?

Rinpoche: In this practice, there really is only the ten-syllable mantra, the main mantra. This liturgy is actually the practice of the peaceful Tara. While references are made in the praises to other forms of Tara, the basic practice itself, into which these praises are inserted, is that of peaceful Tara.

Question: In stating the benefits, does that sort of mean that it is acceptable to bring Green Tara and her blessings into mundane things as long as they are not harmful to others? Is it okay to ask her for such mundane benefits?

Rinpoche: Yes. That is one aspect of her superiority—she can be accessible to us in that way.

Question: Can Tara help with the poison of environmental pollution?

Rinpoche: Yes.

Continuing with the Main Practice

After reciting the *21 Praises to Tara* twice, you then repeat the offerings—both the outer offerings and the offering of the mandala—and visualize as follows. When you perform the practice for the benefit of someone who is sick, or afflicted by particularly virulent demons, or suffering from weapons or warfare, or from poison, or any other danger, you can actually visualize these people below Tara, in the frontal visualization. This is the point in the practice where you actually include these beings in your visualization,

whether this is a relative, a friend, or anyone else you wish to help. In general, visualize all sentient beings, and these beings in particular.

With the words CHAK YE CHOK JIN, you imagine that the right hand of the frontal visualization Tara, which has been in the posture of supreme generosity, moves into the mudra of bestowing protection. Below Tara, under this mudra of protection are yourself, the beings for whom you have particular concern, and all sentient beings in general. You think that by being placed under Tara's protection all beings are assured protection from whatever individual danger or fear is threatening each one. For example, someone who is afraid of sickness is protected from sickness. Someone who is suffering from poison is protected from poison, and so forth. Thus you can visualize individuals who are sick or having specific obstacles, below and in front of you, under Tara's protection, and also yourself and all sentient beings.

With regard to specific words of the text, KYAP JIN means giving protection, and CHAK GYA is mudra. DAK means self. DANG is "and." SUNG JA refers to whoever you want to be protected by Tara. KÜN means all, and TS'HÜ NE means being under, in the sense of being under the protection mudra of Tara. JIK PA means fears, and KÜN LE means "from all." UK YUNG means giving relief, and GYUR means something like "become." In brief, you are requesting Tara's protection for yourself and all the rest of beings, and in particular, those specific ones you want to be protected. Through being under the mudra of Tara's protection, may we be relieved from all fears and dangers.

Then you recite the *21 Praises to Tara* three times while maintaining this visualization.

All meditation practice is a matter of mind. If your mind is not concentrated on the visualization and the meaning, then simply uttering the words verbally does not lead to the complete benefit or results. In Tibet there were parrots that heard the Mani mantra recited so often that they learned to say "OM MANI PEME HUNG." Thus it became a well-known Tibetan saying to compare a practitioner's mindless repetition of mantras to a parrot reciting OM MANI PEME HUNG.

Whether or not you are actually able to benefit the beings for whom you are praying depends on how strong your concentration is. Thus it is important that while you are reciting the *21 Praises to Tara* three times, your concentration on Tara as well as the being you want to benefit must be very strong. It is also said that the accuracy in the reading of the sadhana as well as that of the mantras is very important. Doing the sadhana once with precise and accurate pronunciation is equal to doing it 100 times without accurate pronunciation. Likewise, if you do the recitation of the *21 Praises to Tara* 100,000 times without a very clear, strong, concentration on those you wish to benefit or on the visualization, that would really only equal the benefit of doing one full Tara sadhana with clear, strong concentration. Maintaining proper concentration is that important.

Following this repetition of the Tara praises, you repeat the general offerings and the mandala offering a third time. You then visualize that from Tara's body comes a stream of nectar, amrita, which flows down and enters the top of the head of yourself and all sentient beings, especially those you are trying to protect. You can either think that the nectar streams from her body as a whole or from the large toe of her right foot. The nectar enters the top of the head, flows down through the body, and as descends it drives out all the impurities and obscurations which leave from the bottom and dissolve into the ground. Then your body and that of all sentient beings become filled with nectar, and you should think that all the blessings of Tara's body, speech, and mind are complete. Maintaining this visualization, you recite the *21 Praises* seven times.

Following the seven recitations of the *21 Praises*, you recite a description of their benefits. (*Editor's note: This section covers much the same material as was given in the description of the benefits at the end of the teaching on the 21 Praises, but it goes into greater detail on the actual words of the liturgy and presents some additional points.*) The text starts with the words LHA MO LA GÜ YANG DAK DEN PA. The literal meaning of LHA MO is goddess, and GÜ means devotion. YANG DAK means totally pure or perfect. DEN PA means having developed or possessing. Thus it is referring to someone who has perfect respect or devotion for Tara. What this means is that you are not praying to Tara for temporary protection for today or tomorrow because something is threatening you, or for temporary freedom from sickness, and so on. Instead, you have absolute certainty that Tara is a complete source of refuge until attaining enlightenment. It is possible to take refuge thinking that, "I'm taking refuge now, I'm receiving protection now, but I don't know if I'm always going to take refuge, and I'm not sure if they'll always protect me." Faith is the opposite of this doubting attitude. There is an absolute commitment on your own part to take refuge in Tara from now until you attain enlightenment, and an absolute certainty on your part that Tara will afford you protection until you attain enlightenment.

In the next line of the text LO DEN means having this awareness. GANG GI means "whose," RAP is highest or supreme, DANG is "and," and JÖ PE means to say or utter. This refers to the practitioner who recites the sadhana with purity of mind and perfect devotion to Tara. SÖ means before darkness or sunset, DANG is "and;" T'HO RANG is before dawn—very early in the morning. LANG PAR means to rise, JE NE is an auxiliary verb here meaning "doing." Altogether the phrase means reciting the sadhana early in the morning and at sunset. In the next line, DREN PE means to remember or recollect. MI JIK means not to be afraid. T'HAM CHE means "all," in the sense of all fears. RAP is supreme or excellent, and TER means given. Thus these two lines together mean that, for someone with this kind of attitude, recollecting Tara at dusk and at dawn (having risen at dawn), Tara will bestow all kinds of fearlessness—protection from everything that could possibly harm you.

Next the text states that this practice will completely pacify or uproot all your unwholesome actions, purify them, and conquer all the lower realms. This means that

any unwholesome karma you have accumulated that would cause you to be reborn in the lower realms will be purified. You will quickly obtain empowerments from 70 million buddhas—the victorious ones. In addition, in every lifetime you will obtain an excellent precious human body, have increasing faith in Tara, and finally come to attain full buddhahood.

People often have mistaken notions about the various deities of vajrayana practice. They do not understand that all the various peaceful and wrathful deities have exactly the same essence, which is the dharmakaya. It is taught that all the victorious ones are the same, or are one in the expanse of wisdom. In other words, the essence of all the buddhas, bodhisattvas, and deities is the same in that they all arise out of the dharmakaya. The different aspects that arise, the different yidams and so forth, arise in the same manner that the moon's reflection arises on many bodies of water. There is a single moon, yet each body of water displays a different image of the moon in it. The varied forms of the deities are simply displayed in order to perform benefit for and to discipline and train sentient beings. Not understanding that this single wisdom essence is the source of the varied manifestations, people think that meditation on different deities leads to different results. Sometimes they think that if they meditate on a peaceful deity like Chenrezik, they will not attain enlightenment very quickly, that it is not very powerful. They think they had better meditate on a wrathful deity and attain great power and enlightenment very quickly. This misconception arises from not understanding the fact that the nature of peaceful deities such as Chenrezik and the nature of wrathful deities is exactly the same. The essence of a deity such as Chenrezik is the dharmakaya, and the state or sphere in which he operates is loving-kindness and compassion. This is true of all peaceful deities.

The wrathful deities' essence is also dharmakaya, and the state or sphere in which they operate is also compassion and loving-kindness. The reason their appearance differs is that there are beings who cannot be trained by peaceful means. In order to train them, the dharmakaya appears in a wrathful form. But it is important to understand first that the form of the wrathful deity involved does not waver from the state of the dharmakaya while maintaining its appearance. As well, the origin and essence of the wrathful appearance is compassion. It is out of compassion for the confusion of sentient beings that the deities appear in a wrathful form.

While the minds of all these deities are of the nature of compassion and loving-kindness, we do not, as ordinary individuals, have the opportunity to meet or see these deities. This is because the deities are all sambhogakaya manifestations and ordinary beings cannot meet directly with the sambhogakaya. Therefore, for our benefit, it is necessary that they emanate further as nirmanakaya, as lamas or gurus who are actually born in the manner in which we are born, in places where we are born, in this area, on this planet. Thus while we cannot meet the sambhogakaya, we can meet and obtain teachings from these lamas. It is for this reason that enlightened beings are reborn again and again, in the manner, for example, of the Gyalwa Karmapa. It is important to understand that although these lamas appear in an ordinary form, with a human body like our own, that

they are actually (as in the case of the Gyalwa Karmapa) the body, speech, mind, qualities, and activity of all buddhas combined into one form. By relying upon such a great guru, we can actually traverse the paths and stages. Having done so and attaining bodhisattva realization through relying on the instructions of a guru such as the Gyalwa Karmapa, at that point we can really experience or meet with the sambhogakaya. Since we cannot do this presently, it is necessary to rely on human gurus.

Returning to the sadhana text, the effects of even extremely powerful poisons can be dispelled simply by remembering Tara. This is true whether the poisons are encountered in our own home or while traveling. They can be dispelled whether they are eaten or drunk, however they are consumed. Additionally any affliction from demons, epidemics, or any kind of suffering can be completely abandoned, completely transcended by remembering Tara. This is not only true for ourselves, but by praying to Tara we can actually cause these kinds of sufferings to be dispelled for other sentient beings.

Then in the text you continue with NYI SUM DÜN DU. NYI means two, SUM means three and DÜN means seven. Next, NGÖN PA JÖ means to recite, and NA means "if." This is referring to the recitations of the *21 Praises of Tara*. If one is able to pray to Tara, reciting the *21 Praises of Tara* twice and then three times and then seven times, with true, one-pointed concentration on Tara, then all your wishes and can be accomplished, whether for yourself or for others. If you are wishing for wealth, your wish will be accomplished. If you wish for anything else, like a son or daughter, such a wish could be also accomplished. Whatever one wishes for, whether it is relative or ultimate siddhi, it will be obtained. If there are any hindrances or obstacles to the accomplishment of your wishes, through the performance of the Tara practice they will be swept away.

The important factor that determines whether or not you actually obtain blessings and siddhi is your faith. There are three kinds of faith. There is the faith of longing or aspiration, the faith of trusting, and finally the clear faith which is the actual understanding that the deity has the qualities one is attributing to them. Based on the presence or absence of these three types of faith you obtain blessing. In the case of Tara, if you pray to her with genuine faith and absolute certainty that she can bestow the fulfillment of your aims and protect you, you will obtain all that you pray for.

In the same way, if we are able to have actual certainty in our root guru, then we will obtain great blessing. It is said that it depends upon our perception of the guru whether or not we receive blessing. If you perceive your root guru as inseparable from Vajradhara then you will receive the blessing of a lama who is inseparable from Vajradhara. If you think of your guru as a great lama, unlike other lamas, then you will receive the blessing of the great lama who is unlike other lamas. If you conceive of your root guru as a completely ordinary person wandering in samsara endlessly and aimlessly, not unlike yourself, then you will receive the blessing of a root guru who is like yourself wandering in samsara and you will continue to experience rebirth in samsara endlessly and aimlessly.

Equally important is that your aims and wishes in performing Tara practice must be in accordance with the wishes and intentions of the enlightened beings—the buddhas and bodhisattvas. From the very first moment they enter the path of practice until the final realization of enlightenment, all buddhas and bodhisattvas develop and cultivate bodhicitta—altruistic mind. This means wanting to make all sentient beings happy, to benefit them. Since this altruism is the sole intention of the enlightened beings—whether they are fully enlightened buddhas or bodhisattvas—if you do not have the welfare of all sentient beings in your aspirations, if what you wish to attain through your practice is harmful to others, you will not please enlightened beings at all. In short, in every practice you have to include all sentient beings, wishing benefit for them, and for them to be happy. That is the main concern in practice.

Understanding the altruistic attitude of enlightened beings could be quite confusing to ordinary people like ourselves. The teachers of the past and present always emphasize how vital it is for us to develop the altruistic attitude and to work to benefit all beings. Yet we might not see them physically doing very much that is overtly helpful or beneficial to beings. If we do not see the benefit in physical manifestation, due to our being at ordinary level of mind, we may sometimes have doubts. We must realize, however, that bodhicitta, enlightened mind, is not just for the present; it is not for just for one lifetime. It carries on from lifetime to lifetime, from incarnation to incarnation. It is benefiting countless beings in very subtle ways that are beyond the capacity of ordinary being such as ourselves to experience or recognize. This is how the blessings and activities of the enlightened beings work. The wish to make all living beings happy, to help all beings, is really the essence of mahayana Buddhism.

The other key to achieving enlightenment, of course, is to cut attachment—to remove the grasping and clinging we all have within ourselves. The great master Tilopa said to his student Naropa, “outer appearances, the phenomena of samsara, are not preventing you from experiencing enlightenment. What is really preventing you from achieving total enlightenment is your inner attachment, your grasping and clinging, to those outer appearances.” Therefore cutting through attachment is also essential to progressing toward enlightenment.

Returning to the text of the sadhana, following the recitation of the benefits, you offer a tormā to Tara. You purify the offering substances by means of the AMRITA mantra and then with the SWABHAWA mantra, you dissolve them into emptiness. Next you visualize that from emptiness arises a syllable OM, which changes instantly into an inconceivably vast vessel or container of precious substances. TONG PAY NGANG LE means from emptiness, and OM YIK means the syllable OM. Inside it, from the three syllables OM, AH, and HUNG, symbolizing the body, speech, and mind, comes the actual offering tormā, which is visualized as inexhaustible wisdom nectar, JNANA AMRITA. ZAK ME means inexhaustible, YE SHE DŪ TSI is wisdom nectar and GYUR means becomes. What you should understand about YESHE KYI DŪ TSI (which is the Tibetan for JNANA AMRITA), is that the wisdom nectar is something quite unlike what

we eat or drink. It is a substance which is the absence of the five poisons—the absence of anger, desire, stupidity, jealousy, and pride.

You then bless the torma with the recitation of OM AH HUNG three times. While you say OM AH HUNG, you are doing a blessing mudra with your hands. Then you offer the torma with two offering mantras and the torma offering mudra. The first mantra is to Tara, OM ARYA TARE SAPARIWARA IDAM BALINGTA which is a mantra of food offerings, and KHA KHA KHAHI at the end means “please eat” in Sanskrit. You say that three times. The last time as you say KHAHI you snap your fingers. Having said that these mantras, you think that you have done a complete offering to the all the 21 Taras.

The second one, the AKARO mantra, is to the accompanying retinue. As we said, you have invoked not only the Taras but also a cloud-like assemblage of buddhas, bodhisattvas, and the protectors and so forth. Thus when you say this second mantra three times think that you have made offerings to the rest of the assembly that surrounds Tara.

Following the actual offering of the torma, you make a request to the deities. First, you describe the torma as an offering of generosity. The word CHÖ, or offering, refers to the offering of the torma to Tara and the Three Jewels. The word generosity, JIN, means that you are also making the offering to all sentient beings in general, and especially to those to whom you owe karmic debts, and to demons. The word DAMPA, which is literally the word for holy, means undeceiving, pure in the sense of undeceiving. The meaning is that you are not just pretending to offer something. You are requesting that Tara and her retinue regard you with great wisdom as you are making this offering, and that receiving the offering in the state of great bliss, they may bestow relative and ultimate siddhi on yourself and all sentient beings. This is the request for the fulfillment of one's aims.

Then you make the outer offerings to Tara with the offering mantras. Verses of praise follow this, starting with the words OM NANG WA T'HA YE. NANG WA T'HA YE is one of the Tibetan names for Amitabha Buddha, the Buddha of Boundless Light. PE MAY RIK is the lotus family. This refers to the fact that Amitabha is lord of the Lotus Family. JIK TEN WANG CHUK is another name for Chenrezik.¹³ ZHAL LE JUNG here means originating from the face (of Chenrezik). This refers to the story of Tara's origination. At one time Chenrezik was feeling discouraged at the sufferings of sentient beings, thinking he might not have enough energy or power to liberate them all, and so he shed many tears. His tears formed a lake and at the center of the lake grew a lotus, from which Tara appeared. Thus in the text where it literally says she appeared from his face, it is a very condensed reference to this story.

¹³ Sanskrit: Avalokiteshvara

In the next line, SANG GYE KÜN GYI T'HRIN LE DAK means master of the activity of all buddhas. We are saying that Tara is the embodiment of the activities of all the buddhas—their body, speech, mind, and qualities. In the next line we call her P'HAK MA DROL MA, exalted Tara. Exalted in what sense? She is exalted in the sense of being free from all the mental afflictions or kleshas, and in being the one who liberates others from these samsaric patterns as well. The line ends with CHAK TS'HAL, homage or prostration, and TÖ which means praise.

Beyond that, you make praise to all who are worthy of praise, all the Three Jewels, bowing down with as many bodies as there are atoms in all realms. You make this praise with supreme faith—unchanging, unwavering faith which will persist until you attain enlightenment.

Following the praise, you request the fulfillment of your particular aims. You address this request to Tara (JE TSUN P'HAK MA) and her retinue (KHOR DANG CHE) and request that she think of you with non-conceptual compassion (MIK ME T'HUK JE) and loving-kindness. An ordinary being might think, "this being should not suffer," but regarding someone else think, "it's all right if this person suffers." Tara is not like this. She has no conception of friends, enemies, or those in between. Her compassion is like the sun, which shines impartially and spontaneously. The sun shines on the ocean, it shines on castles, on kings, on fields—it shines on everything without any preference. In the same way, Tara's compassion pervades everything and strikes all sentient beings. We then request that whatever aims we are praying are accomplished without any sort of obstacle.

There are some particular things for which you are praying. First, that the doctrine of the Buddha (SANG GYE TENPA) spread and increase (GYE). You also pray that among the holders of the teaching, TEN DZIN, there may be harmony of mind. T'HUK means mind, and T'HÜN means harmonious or in accord. You pray that the teachers live long (ZHAB PE TEN), and that all obstacles (BAR CHE) that threaten their lives be pacified. Finally there is the aspiration that their activity both of teaching and practicing the dharma increase.

Next you request that all sickness (NE), famine (MUK), as well as agitation and strife (T'HRUK TSO) be pacified, and that wealth and glory combined with dharma increase. In other words, you are requesting that people have a lot of wealth and happiness and material benefit, but in the context of practicing dharma. You also request that the authority of kings who guard the dharma increase, and that beings in all kingdoms, whether borderlands (countries without dharma) or central countries (those with dharma), be happy.

Then we request to be protected from a number of things. First of these are the 16 fears. JIK PA means fear, CHU DRUK is 16. The 16 fears are specific things, such as fears of flood, fire, wind, and earth. In the visualization, we have the central Tara encircled by 20 Taras. Of the 20 Taras in the retinue circle, the 4 Taras at the cardinal direction points

are the peaceful, enriching, magnetizing and wrathful Taras. The other 16 Taras bestow protection from the 16 fears. You ask Tara to protect you from these, and as well, from untimely death (DÜ MIN CHI), from inauspicious dreams during the night, and inauspicious signs during the day. You request her protection from the suffering of samsara in general and particularly the suffering of the lower realms, such as the hell realm, and animal existence, from all temporal suffering such as illness and poverty, and from the ultimate or final fear which is the suffering of samsara and emotional defilements. You ask her to conquer all of these. Then you request that she cause life, merit, and personal power (WANG T'HANG) to increase.

The meaning of WANG T'HANG is something different from merit. It comes as a result of merit, but is a quality that can be distinguished from it, as a fruit of merit. It is a kind of personal presence or power that makes someone almost difficult to look at or talk to. For example, you think of many things to say to this person, but as soon as you are confronted with their presence you forget them all right away.

Continuing in the sadhana, you request that meditation experience and realization (NYAM TOK) increase. You pray that not even the thought of non-virtue arise, and that the two kinds of bodhicitta (JANG CHUP SEM), relative and ultimate, arise without any effort. Ordinarily, when you want to give rise to relative—or even more so to ultimate bodhicitta—it demands a great deal of concentration or work. Here you pray that these arise automatically, and that all of your wished-for aims are accomplished in accordance with the dharma.

You then request that from now until all sentient beings attain the essence of enlightenment, may Tara regard them with immeasurable loving-kindness, as a mother would regard her only child, and ultimately may all sentient beings attain her state, and become inseparable from her.

Following that prayer, you think that the frontal visualization, Tara together with her retinue, melts into light, and dissolves into yourself. At that point you should think that the body, speech, and mind of Tara and your own body, speech, and mind become completely inseparable by means of this blessing. You yourself are Tara; that sort of pride is necessary. This is not arrogant pride, but is the pride of confidence that you are now inseparable from the body, speech, and mind of the actual, primordial Tara. Having developed the pride of the deity, you visualize yourself naturally in the form of Tara. Again, it is an appearance without any essence or nature, without any solidity or established existence. Maintaining this view, recite the mantra, OM TARE TUTARE TURE SOHA.

During the mantra recitation, if you are able, you should regard all appearance as the deity, all sound as the mantra, and all thought or memory as the play of wisdom.

For those who are doing this Tara practice on a regular basis, the usual amount of mantras to do would be one round of the mala. A mala is traditionally strung with 108 beads, so there would be 108 recitations of the mantra for each round of the mala. However, if someone were to do a retreat on the practice of Tara, then the amount of the mantra he or she would need to accomplish would be 100,000 for each syllable. Since the mantra has 10 syllables, that would amount to one million recitations. That is what would traditionally be considered as accomplishing the mantra in retreat.

You should maintain the conviction during the recitation that you actually are Tara. At the end of the mantra, recite the 100-syllable mantra of Vajrasattva once, three, or however many times. Along with this you request the patience of the deity with whatever failings or shortcomings there were in your practice. For example, you might not have gathered all the necessary materials, or they may have been defective or impure. You may have made errors in the recitation or been distracted in your visualizations, so you request Tara's patience for whatever mistakes you have made in connection with the practice.

Next comes the request for the deities to depart. Note, however, that this part is not usually recited in the regular practice. It is only recited when you will be no longer be practicing in a particular place, and the images of the deity will be moved. Here at KTD, for example, we have receptacles for the body, speech, and mind of the deity—statues for the body, and so forth, and we dissolve the deities into them at the end of the sadhana. However, if you have been doing the practice in your home and you are about to move to a new place, before packing your pictures and statues and shrine articles, you should chant this request for the deities to depart. If you are doing the practice in a particular location for a period of time and then are moving, you would also chant these verses. Not to do so would be like inviting someone to your house, requesting them to be seated, giving them a meal, speaking to them, and then abruptly leaving them. It is a little impolite; a little incorrect. Therefore, although we do not chant the SHEK SOL, the request to depart, on a regular basis here, it is necessary to do so if the objects of support are going to be disturbed or moved in any way. The actual meaning of the recitation is: "You perform the benefit for sentient beings. Please bestow siddhi which is in accordance with the needs and capacities of each and every different being." Then you ask that they return to their pure land, which in the case of Tara is Lotus Design, but that they come back when you request them to do so. Then you say BENDZA MU, make the appropriate mudra, and think that the deities have departed.

After this you recite the two lines beginning with LHA DANG RANG SEM. LHA DANG RANG SEM YER ME PA means "my mind and the deity's are inseparable." CHO YING NYUK MAY NGANG DU ZHAK means "resting in the primordial essence of the dharmadhatu." Literally you are saying that that you should rest in the natural state, the dharmadhatu, which is the deity Tara, with her mind and your own mind inseparable. When doing this practice in a group, it is usual not to pause very long here. If you are doing the practice on your own, then you can stop and meditate at this point. It is fitting to do shamata (tranquility) meditation. Alternatively, if you have developed

some capacity to do so, it is appropriate to meditate in accordance with, for example, the words of the Third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje, in *The Aspiration of Mahamudra*.

Concerning the nature of mind, he said,

It is not the case that it exists, because it is not seen even by the victorious ones.

It is not the case that it does not exist, for it is the basis of samsara and nirvana.

It is the unified middle way without contradiction.

May this nature, the dharmata, of the mind which is beyond extremes, be realized.

To say the mind does not exist means that it cannot be described as having specific characteristics. It is said that none of the victorious ones, none of the buddhas, has ever seen the mind. If they had, they could say it is shaped like this, it is this size, it has this color, and so forth. However, none of these qualities can be ascribed to the mind. On the other hand, the mind cannot be said not to exist because it is the mind that attains the state of omniscience, buddhahood, and it is the mind that wanders in the lower realms of samsara.

The third line of Karmapa Rangjung Dorje's verse says the unified middle way is without contradiction. This can be explained in words from the *Uttaratantrashastra* of the Bodhisattva Maitreya, in which the word mahamudra is defined by its syllables. In Tibetan, the word for mahamudra is CHAK GYA CHENPO. In the Tibetan, the word for mudra, CHAK GYA, comes first. CHAK is said to be the wisdom which cognizes emptiness (TONG PA NYI KYI YE SHE). Then GYA, which literally means "vastness, "extent," or "seal," is explained as "not passing beyond that." It is the aspect of clarity, which is not something separate from, other than, or beyond emptiness. Finally there is CHENPO, which means "great," ("maha" in Sanskrit), which is the fact that the two are indivisible, inseparable, and unified. That is what is meant by the path of the great middle way, which is the unification.

Concluding the Practice

Following the meditation, as short or long as it may be, you dedicate the merit with a short prayer. Looking at the words of the dedication, GE WA means virtue, and DI means "this," referring to whatever virtue you have accomplished in doing the practice. NYUR DU means quickly. DAK means self, as in "myself who has done the practice." P'HAK MA DROL MA again means exalted Tara, and DRUP GYUR NE means "becoming accomplished" (in the exalted state of Arya Tara). DRO WA means sentient being, CHIK KYANG means "even one;" and MA LÜ PA means "not excluded." SA means "stage" or "level," and LA means "at" or "to." GÖ PAR SHOK means "may be established," referring to all sentient beings. Thus you are saying, "By the virtue of this, may I quickly attain the state of Arya Tara, and having attained that, may I establish all sentient beings without any exception in that same state."

After the dedication comes the Tashi, or the request for auspiciousness. It takes the form of a prayer to Tara and the Three Jewels that they grant their blessing. You say, "Like a wish fulfilling jewel or an excellent vase (made from a material such as gold), bestowing without any impediment all wished-for aims, may you, Jetsun Drolma, together with all the victorious ones and their offspring, the bodhisattvas, protect us with your compassion and be inseparable from us." Then you conclude it by saying, "May there be the auspiciousness of the protection by the compassion of not being separate from Arya Tara and all the victorious ones and their offspring."

This completes the instruction in the practice called *Zap Tik Drolma Mandal Choga*, the Tara practice that we recite. Instruction in this is based upon three things: the sources in the tantras, transmission or LUNG, and instruction or MEN NGAK. We went through the origin of this practice in the tantras earlier. There are sources for it in all four levels of tantra: kriya, charya, yoga, and anuttarayoga, and these four are all combined in this practice. With respect to transmission, the source of it is Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava). The method of transmission from him in this case is primarily terma—the termas of Guru Chökyi Wangchuck, a very early tertön, Guru Ratna Lingpa, and so forth. The teachings which come from these terma transmissions from Guru Rinpoche have so much blessing that they are literally like the nectar of his heart, and the blessing of the teaching and the teacher is completely unimpaired. With regard to these, it is also said that the breath of the dakinis (i.e., the blessing) has not subsided from these practices.

Guru Rinpoche said that this instruction is the tantra which bestows inexhaustible bliss from the expanse of Samantabhadri, the prajna or knowledge aspect of the dharmadhatu. It is the explanation of all appearances as deity, all sound as mantra, and all thought as wisdom, in the state of the highest vajra realm.

Thus the source of this transmission is from the dharmakaya. That is what is referred to by Samantabhadri in the dharmadhatu. It is transmitted through the sambhogakaya, which is to say, Vajrayogini in the Akanishta pure land (OK MIN). Then it manifests through the nirmanakaya emanations of Tara at suitable times in order to benefit sentient beings, to train and discipline them.

All this is collected into three forms: (1) an extensive form, (2) a form which is literally "useful and necessary," which is to say on a daily basis, and (3) an especially profound form, with instruction.

Hidden together with the extensive form of this was an image of Tara which was promised by Guru Rinpoche to bestow liberation upon sight. This is probably the one which was at Tsurphu, and is now at Rumtek, which has been known to speak to the Karmapas. This particular statue has conversations with and gives prophesy to every Karmapa. The texts were hidden in different places. The shorter version of the three arose as thought treasure (GONG TER) through the tertön Chokjur Dechen Lingpa, which is the one we have been studying here.

Thus this practice is the combined essence of tantra, transmission, and instruction, and the sources of it are found among all four tantras. The transmission comes in the form of a prophesy from Guru Rinpoche, who predicted it would be found particularly as a thought treasure, and the actual instruction, the method of practice, comes from the terton Chokjur Dechen Lingpa, who received it as a thought treasure more than 1000 years after Guru Rinpoche had departed from Tibet.

In this way, having completed the instruction in the profound essence of Tara, *Zap Tik Drol Ma*, according to the great terton, Chokjur Dechen Lingpa, you should now dedicate the roots of virtue of having received instruction in this to all sentient beings.

Terchen Barway Dorje

This summary of Terchen Barway Dorje's autobiography was written by Karma Yeshe Gyamtso.

I bow to the guru.

The manner of emanation of buddhas and bodhisattvas is inconceivable and therefore an object of skepticism for nihilistic materialists. However, in order to inspire the faithful, I will briefly describe the origin and achievements of Terchen Barway Dorje as presented in his autobiography.

According to his autobiography, Terchen Barway Dorje was an emanation of Manjushri, the wisdom of all buddhas. He therefore had appeared innumerable times as intentional emanations who benefited beings.

In the time of Buddha Shakyamuni, he took birth as the bodhisattva Marutse, who began life as a butcher of low caste. Meeting Buddha, he was given two instructions by him: to not eat the flesh of a lion cub, and to not marry a princess. At that time two kings, one a Hindu and the other a Buddhist, were at war. The Buddhist king befriended Marutse and, having found the body of a lion cub, presented it to the butcher as food. Recollecting Buddha's advice, Marutse refused to eat it, which so impressed the Hindu king that he abandoned his war against the Buddhist king and accepted Dharma. In gratitude, the Buddhist king presented his daughter as a bride to Marutse. Again recollecting Buddha's advice, Marutse refused to marry her, and went on to attain the tenth bodhisattva level in that life.

He was reborn as Manjushrimitra, the second holder of dzogchen. Manjushrimitra studied at Vajrasana and became the crown jewel of its five hundred pandits. One day, during an assembly, he asked if anyone possessed instructions that could bring buddhahood in one life. He was told that Garab Dorje, then living in western India, possessed such instructions, having received them directly from Vajrasattva. Manjushrimitra went to Garab Dorje, received dzogchen from him, and meditated until he achieved the rainbow body of great transference. According to Terchen Barway Dorje's autobiography, and according to the writings of Jamgön Lodro Taye, Jetsun Milarepa can be considered an emanation of Manjushrimitra.

Manjushrimitra was reborn as the mahasiddha Naropa, who was the mahapandit guarding the northern gate of Nalanda. Having achieved common siddhi and great learning, Naropa left Nalanda in response to a prediction by his yidam. He arduously sought the mahasiddha Tilopa, and achieved supreme siddhi through Tilopa's instructions and his own twelve great austerities. Naropa empowered the Tibetan Marpa

the Translator as his successor and departed for the celestial realm without abandoning his body.

Another previous life of Terchen Barway Dorje was Nupchen Sangyay Yeshe, who was one of Guru Rinpoche's twenty-five main Tibetan disciples. These twenty-five are considered to have been emanations of Guru Rinpoche, five each of his body, speech, mind, qualities and activity. Among these, Nupchen was the primary emanation of Guru Rinpoche's body and as such held the lineage of the yidam of body, Manjushri Yamantaka. When Guru Rinpoche bestowed the empowerment of the "Sugatas' Assembly," Nupchen's flower landed on Manjushri Yamantaka. Therefore, Guru Rinpoche bestowed on him alone all of the tantras, agamas and upadeshas of that deity. Nupchen achieved both siddhis through the sadhana of Manjushri Yamantaka and departed for the celestial realm without abandoning his body. His teachings survive down to the present day.

Among the other previous lives of Terchen Barway Dorje were several distinguished tertons and many lineage holders of both the Barom Kagyu and Surmang Kagyu traditions.

His birth immediately preceding that as Terchen Barway Dorje was as Karma Sungrab Trinlay Rabgyay of Surmang. He was a disciple of Dzigar Rikdzin Dorje Drakpo, and the brother of Surmang Tendzin Rinpoche. He received and assiduously practiced various terma and other instructions, including the uncommon secret lineage of Surmang concerning the yidam Chakrasamvara. He became responsible for overseeing Namgyal Tse monastery of Surmang as his brother, the throne holder, advanced in years. In that position, Trinlay Rabgyay added to the monastery's images and scriptures while continuing to practice intensively. He had numerous visions of the three roots and received indications of the existence of terma to be entrusted to him, but departed in his forties for Lotus Light, the realm of Guru Rinpoche.

The birth of Terchen Barway Dorje is described in his autobiography in the following way. The speech of all buddhas is present in the realm of Lotus Light atop the Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain on the island of Chamaradvipa. It appears there as Guru Rinpoche, surrounded by his twenty-five emanated disciples and innumerable dakas and dakinis. They continually gaze upon beings in general and Tibet in particular, and produce innumerable emanations to benefit beings. In the early part of the male fire monkey year of the fourteenth cycle (in the spring of 1836), they gazed upon southeastern Tibet, and saw the great need of beings in this degenerate age. From the heart of Guru Rinpoche rays of white light issued forth. These entered the heart of Nupchen Sangyay Yeshe. From his heart rays of blue light issued forth. These mixed with a sphere of red light that emerged from the heart of Yeshe Tsogyal, and entered into the union of Rakshur Menla Dargyay and Jangza Rinchen Dronma. Terchen Barway Dorje was born at the end of that year.

As Karma Kagyu Tashi, the editor of Terchen Barway Dorje's autobiography, wrote, "I can express at most the smallest drop from the ocean of my guru's achievements." This is all the more true in the case of this extremely brief summary. However, with the understanding that what follows is only what little of his immeasurable achievements can be held in the narrow mind of a faithless materialist such as myself, the achievements of Terchen Barway Dorje may be said to be the following.

He was of great service to the teachings in general and the Kagyu in particular. As the recognized reincarnation of Trinlay Rabgyay, he lived at Surmang, upheld its traditions, and served as dance master for the Great Feast Dance of Chakrasamvara. He served the Barom Kagyu by reviving its traditions through his terma. He transmitted the Karma Kagyu teachings, especially the Six Dharmas of Naropa, to many. Finally, he founded Raktrul monastery in Nangchen, which is active to this day.

He discovered both mind and physical terma. He had continuous visions of Guru Rinpoche from the earliest age, and began finding terma such as images of Guru Rinpoche at the age of five. Several years later, he visited one of Guru Rinpoche's practice caves. Inside it, he found a rock that suddenly fell apart revealing fifty-five crystal flowers of various colors marked with various syllables. He offered these to Chokgyur Lingpa, who remarked that these were a list of the terma that Terchen Barway Dorje would discover. In addition to his Barom Kagyu revelations, his major terma include several sadhanas of Guru Rinpoche and sadhanas of Vajrakumara, Yamantaka, and various dakini and protector practices.

Among these, the Vajrakumara sadhana renowned as "the Life-Stake of Existence and Tranquillity," also known as "the Necklace Pouch of Yeshe Tsogyal," is the most famous. When Guru Rinpoche was leaving Tibet, Yeshe Tsogyal accompanied him part of the way. Just before they parted, Guru Rinpoche gave her his final instructions on the practice of Vajrakumara, her yidam. He then placed the written form of these instructions in a pouch that he tied around her neck. She later concealed these teachings, and they were discovered by Terchen Barway Dorje in the late nineteenth century. They are practiced to this day.

Throughout his life, Terchen Barway Dorje was guided by Guru Rinpoche. As a young man, he had a vision in which he flew across a great blue sea, reaching a large island with a red mountain in its midst. He came to a magnificent palace on top of that mountain. It was made entirely of jewels and had three stories. In the upper story he saw the five sambhogakaya buddhas surrounded by bodhisattvas of the ten levels. In the middle story he saw Guru Rinpoche surrounded by his twenty-five emanated disciples. In the bottom story he saw Guru Rinpoche in the form of the ruler of the rakshasas, surrounded by male and female rakshasa vidyadharas. He received empowerment from Guru Rinpoche, and the name "Dechen Barway Dorje," "Great Bliss Blazing Vajra," which he used from then on. He is therefore known as "Terchen Barway Dorje," "The Great Revealer of

Spiritual Treasure Blazing Vajra," and his reincarnation is called "Barway Dorje Tulku Rinpoche," usually shortened to "Bardor Tulku Rinpoche."

Terchen Barway Dorje mastered the four paths of the four empowerments and attained the two siddhis. Through his practice of the generation and completion stages he removed all the impurities of his channels, winds and drops, and realized the unity of bliss and emptiness. Through the practice of mahamudra and dzogchen he attained buddhahood.

Through the instructions of Goche Nawa Lagen and his own mother, Terchen Barway Dorje attained "one-pointedness." Through the direct transmission of Tai Situ Rinpoche, he realized "simplicity," after which his recognition of the mind's nature never changed. By cultivating various methods, he realized "one taste," and finally "no meditation." In that way, he perfected the path of mahamudra.

From Terchen Chokgyur Lingpa he received the empowerment of the Heart-Drop of Vimalamitra. He engaged in the conduct that separates samsara and nirvana and then practiced the unity of breakthrough and leapover for the rest of his life. Directly experiencing the four appearances, he perfected the path of dzogchen.

An indication of this is that in his later life it was not uncommon for his disciples to see rainbows emerging from his body. When asked about this, he said that it indicated his perfection of the path of leapover, although he had long since exhausted such path-appearances in the final fruition.

Approaching the end of his life, Terchen Barway Dorje continually manifested such signs of attainment. His disciples, seeing that the end was near, asked him if he would take rebirth. He said that his awareness had already mixed with space. Having attained buddhahood, he was not restricted by physical embodiment. However, he promised to take rebirth in order to continue his activity. He then appeared to pass into parinirvana at the age of eighty-five in the year 1920.

