



PRAISES TO
THE TWENTY-ONE TARAS
taught by Khenpo Sodargye

2021 Edition

Praises to the Twenty-One Taras*

Commented by

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Tara, the embodiment of the activity of all Buddhas,
Works solely for the welfare of living beings.
Her blessing comes the swiftest among all deities.
So pray to her, whatever you wish will be fulfilled.

— Khenpo Sodargye



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TEXTUAL OUTLINE AND ROOT TEXT

A1. Prologue

B1. The Title

The Praise to Tārā with Twenty-One Verses of Homage

B2. The General Homage

Om. Homage to the noble lady Tārā!

A2. Content

B1. Praise for Her Historical Origin

Homage to Tārā, swift and gallant,
Whose glance flashes like flares of lightning;
Born on the heart of a blossoming lotus
That rose from the tears of the Triple-World's Lord.

[Homage to Tārā, swift and gallant,
Whose glance flashes like flares of lightning;
Born from the opening stamen of
The lotus face of the Triple-World's Lord.]

B2. Praise for the Body Aspects

C1. Praise for the Sambhogakaya Aspects

D1. Praise for the Peaceful Body Aspects

E1. Praise for the Luminous Countenance and Radiance

Homage to you whose countenance is
A hundred full moons gathered in autumn,
Smiling and glowing with brilliant radiance,
Like a thousand stars clustered, ablaze.

E2. Praise for Her Body Color and Practice of the Six Parami- tas

Homage, golden lady, your lotus-hand
Is graced with a blue water-born flower.
You embody generosity, diligence, endurance,
Serenity, patience and meditation.

[Homage, golden-blue lady,
Your hand is graced with a lotus.
Generosity, diligence, austerities, serenity,
Patience, meditation, your field.]

E3. Praise for Being the Object of Refuge for Buddhas and Bodhisattvas

Homage to you, whose victories are endless,
Jewel on the great Tathāgata's crown.
You are well served by the heirs of the Victors,
Those who've accomplished all the perfections.

[Homage to you, whose victories are endless,
Jewel on the great Tathāgata's crown.
Having accomplished all the perfections,
You are well served by the heirs of the Victors.]

E4. Praise for Subduing All Beings in the Three Realms

Homage to you, who with *tuttāra* and *hūṃ*
Fill desire realms unto the ends of space.
You trample underfoot the seven worlds,
And have the strength to summon all.

[Homage to you, who with *tuttāra* and *hūṃ*
Fill the realms of desire, direction and space.
You trample underfoot the seven worlds,
And have the strength to summon all.]

**E5. Praise for Being Paid Tribute by the Great Worldly
Lords**

Homage to you, praised by Indra,
Agni, Brahmā, Maruts, and Śiva.
All the hosts of bhūtas, vetālas,
Gandharvas and yakṣas pay tribute to you.

E6. Praise for Crushing the Opponents' Yantras

Homage to you, who with *traṭ* and *phaṭ*
Crush the enemies' *yantras* to dust.
With right leg bent in and left leg extended,
Shining you tread amidst flames wildly blazing.

D2. Praise for the Wrathful Body Aspects

E1. Praise for Destroying Foes and Demons

Homage to Ture, the fearsome lady,
Destroyer of the most powerful demons.
With a lotus-face and a deep-furrowed brow,
You are the slayer of each and every foe.

[Homage to Ture, the fearsome lady,
Destroyer of the most powerful demons.

With a deep-furrowed brow on your lotus-face,
You are the slayer of each and every foe.]

E2. Praise for Safeguarding Others

Homage to you, whose fingers grace
Your heart and display the Three Jewels *mudrā*.
You're graced by wheels adorning every direction,
With dazzling radiance that overwhelms all.

E3. Praise for Magnetizing All Hosts of Maras and Worldly Beings

Homage to you, supremely joyous,
Your splendid crown spreading garlands of light.
Smiling and laughing, with *tuttāre*
You bring demons and worlds under control.

E4. Praise for Dispelling Destitution

Homage to you, who can summon
The hosts of earthly guardians.
Your frown it quivers, and the syllable *hūṃ*
Delivers us all from every misfortune.

**E5. Praise for Having the Lord of Her Family
as Crown Ornament**

Homage to you, so brightly adorned,
With a sliver of moon as your crown,
Your locks are graced by Amitābha,
Whose gleaming rays stream forever forth.

E6. Praise for Taming Ferocious Beings

Homage to you, seated in a halo
Blazing with apocalyptic flames.
Your right leg stretched out and left bent inward,
Immersed in joy, you crush legions of foes.

E7. Praise for Protecting Self and Others

Homage to you, who on the earth's surface
Strike your palms and stamp your feet;
Your brow deeply furrowed, with *hūṃ* you smash
The seven netherworlds to nothing but dust.

[Homage to you, who smites the ground with
Your palm, and with your foot stamps on it!
Your brow deeply furrowed, with *hūṃ* you smash
The seven worlds to nothing but dust.]

C2. Praise for the Dharmakaya Aspect

Homage to you, blissful, gracious and tranquil,
Whose domain is the peace of nirvāṇa.
With *oṃ* and *svāhā* in perfect union,
You lay to waste every terrible evil.

[Homage to you, blissful, virtuous and tranquil,
Whose field is the peace of nirvāṇa.
By the root mantra with the *oṃ* and *svāhā*,
You lay to waste every terrible evil.]

B3. Praise for Her Activities

C1. Praise for the Activity of Bestowing Wisdom

Homage to you, who, immersed in rapture,
Shatters the bodies of all your foes.
You manifest from the wisdom-syllable *hūṃ*,
And display each of your mantra's ten syllables.

[Homage to you, who, immersed in rapture,
Surrounded by the hosts of noble ones,
Shatters the bodies of all foes, with *hūṃ*
The wisdom-syllable adorned by the ten syllables.]

C2. Praise for the Activity of Protecting from the Horrors of Enemies

Homage to Ture, your feet stomping boldly,
Formed from the seed of the syllable *hūṃ*.
The mountains of Meru, Mandara and Vindhya,
And all the three worlds, you cause them to quake.

[Homage to Ture, your feet stomping boldly,
Whose seed syllable appears in the form of *hūṃ*.
The mountains of Meru, Mandara and Vindhya,
And all the three worlds, you cause them to quake.]

C3. Praise for the Activity of Cleansing Poisons

Homage to you, who hold in your hand
A deer-marked moon like a divine lake.
With *tāra* twice and then with *phaṭ*,
You totally cleanse all of the poisons.

[Homage to you, who hold in your hand,
A moon clear and bright as a divine lake.
With *tāra* twice and then with *phaṭ*,
You totally cleanse all poisons.]

C4. Praise for the Activity of Clearing Away Conflicts and Nightmares

Homage to you, who is served by kings
Of hosts divine, and of gods and kinas.
Suited in armor of joy and splendor
You clear away nightmares, soothe away strife.

[Homage to you, who is honored by divine kings,
And served by gods and nonhuman spirits.
Armored with the splendor of joy
You clear away nightmares and soothe away strife.]

C5. Praise for the Activity of Pacifying Plagues and Diseases

Homage to you, whose eyes shine with lustre,
Bright with the fullness of sun and moon.
With twice-uttered *hara* and *tuttāre*
You pacify the most intractable diseases.

[Homage to you, whose two eyes shine with lustre,
Bright with the fullness of sun and moon.
With twice-uttered *hara* and *tuttāre*
You pacify the most intractable plagues and diseases.]

C6. Praise for the Activity of Accomplishing All Dharma Activities

Homage to you, who have the power to free,
You put forth the realities as a set of three.
Supreme Ture, you completely destroy
The hordes of grahas, vetālas, and yakṣas.

[Homage to you, who with a set of three realities
Have the miraculous power to pacify.
Supreme Ture, you completely destroy
The hordes of grahas, vetālas, and yakṣas.]

A3. Conclusion

This Praise with the twenty-one verses of homage is itself the
root mantra.

[This is the Praise of the root mantra with twenty-one verses of
homage.]

TARA, SHE WHO LIBERATES

LECTURE ONE

Surely everyone has their own goals in life or in spiritual practice. In the process, when facing certain challenges that need to be dealt with immediately, pray to Tara. Then miraculously, these difficulties will be solved swiftly.

– Khenpo Sodargye

PRaises TO TWENTY-ONE TARAS

BACKGROUND FOR TEACHING PRAISES TO TWENTY-ONE TARAS

Today, we will begin our study of *Praise to Tara with Twenty-One Verses of Homage*, often simply referred to as *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras*. It is a scripture that can be found not only in the Tibetan Kangyur but is also contained within the Chinese Buddhist Canon. Historically, in Tibet as well as in ancient India, many of the greatest masters of the past composed teachings and sadhanas for Tara which still exist to this day. In present day Tibet and India, a great many people continue to believe in and offer devotional practices to Tara, and in these regions, she remains as popular a figure as Manjushri or Avalokiteshvara. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of Chinese Buddhism, where devotional practices, such as the recitation of prayers and mantra

dedicated to Tara are not widely practiced. In recent years, some Tibetan masters have been trying to propagate Tara related teachings and practices in Taiwan, Hong Kong and other places. However, except in these few areas, at this time there is very little propagation of Tara worship in mainland China. This may be, in part, because throughout the course of Chinese history, only a very limited number of texts dedicated to Tara have been translated into the Chinese language. In Chinese Buddhism, Tara is known as the Bodhisattva Duoluo and in spite of the overall scarcity of scriptures concerning the Bodhisattva Duoluo in the Chinese Buddhist Canon, some do exist. Among these are a sutra describing rituals of Bodhisattva Duoluo translated into Chinese by the prolific translator, Master Amoghavajra, who lived during the Eighth Century. Additionally, during the Yuan Dynasty, the Academician Ansar, from Hanlin Academy, was probably the first to translate *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras* into the Chinese language. Having been initiated by Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang dynasty, over the next several dynasties, the Hanlin Academy grew in prestige and its members gradually became more and more highly regarded. Hanlin Academician Ansar was assigned by Kublai Khan, Emperor Shizu of Yuan Dynasty, to translate *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras*. I've read his translation in Chinese but was left with the feeling that some parts were translated word-for-word, a process that was my feeling left some parts difficult to understand. My translation was made by relying on the Tibetan version as well as referring to some of

the commentaries made by recognized Tibetan Buddhist scholars*.

I believe that many of you who have chosen to attend this teaching may be unfamiliar with Tara, thinking that it belongs to Tibetan Buddhism. In fact, practice and belief in Tara originated in India, where from the biographies of such eminent Indian masters as Nagarjuna, Nagabodhi, Shantideva, Lord Atisha, etc., we have learned that these renowned masters often received prophesies, blessings and instructions from Tara. Even those of you who may have heard such stories from your study of Buddhist history, are unlikely to have engaged much in the practices of Tara yourselves. Although some simple practices, sadhanas, and mantras of Tara do exist in Chinese and other languages, they are very few in number. So, it is my hope that through learning this text, from this point on, you will try to propagate the practice of Tara extensively in your own country and around the world, as that will greatly benefit many people. Because everyone will certainly encounter difficulties, adversities, obstacles, and troubles in life or in the course of spiritual practice, by praying to Tara, through the swift, fierce and sharp blessing of Tara's wisdom, compassion and power, all obstacles can be dispelled. Meanwhile, wisdom, merits, talents and benefits of other aspects can be acquired naturally. That's why Tara is also called "the embodiment of the activity of all Buddhas",

* Regarding the English version of *Praises to Twenty-One Taras*, there are many different translations. Some are translated from Sanskrit version and some from Tibetan version. The English version used for this teaching is from the Lotsawa House, as it is translated from Tibetan and quite in accordance with the Chinese version translated by Khenpo Sodargye. Meanwhile, there are cases that some stanzas vary slightly from Khenpo's Chinese explanation. In such cases, another version revised from that of the Lotsawa House is provided, so as to correspond to the teaching here, as well as to provide the audience a better understanding of the teaching. The revised translation is to be found in square bracket.

just as Manjushri is often referred to as "the embodiment of the wisdom of all Buddhas" and Avalokiteshvara as "the incarnation of the compassion of all Buddhas". The activity of the Buddhas is to alleviate the suffering of sentient beings and to establish them in the fruition of happiness. In this regard, Tara has exceptional blessing and power. Whoever believes in Tara, prays to her respectfully and recites her prayers and mantras frequently, will certainly receive blessings from her that will transform his or her mindstream.

"MY CONNECTION WITH TARA"

Personally, I have had a strong faith in Tara since childhood. Perhaps some might think that this is a boast that I make about whichever topic that I'm teaching. That isn't true. Whichever teaching I give, it's always my favorite or at the very least, it's one that I've studied, recited and practiced extensively. This is my way of doing my best to make the teaching the most beneficial for you. If I were to be skeptical of the practice or feeling indifferent towards it, then I wouldn't be able to teach it to others. Even if I could say the right words, the teaching would be like an empty vessel with no content to fill up other vessels—in other words, you would gain no benefits from it. So, whenever I give a teaching, I first observe myself, and only if I truly like the teaching, do I feel happy about attempting to share it with others. This is my habit and this time is the same. A while ago, I taught *The King of Aspiration Prayer*. Compared to that teaching, I

feel that I am far more of an expert on Tara. When I say this, I am not referring to the expertise or knowledge on how to give this teaching. I am saying from the aspect of devotion that I have a stronger faith in Tara. Based on this aspect alone, my teaching of the *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras* should bring you some benefits.

When I think back, I was able to memorize *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras* at around the age of six and a half, when I didn't even know how to read, and ever since that time, whenever I have been caught up with obstacles or suffering, the first thought in my mind is, "Tara will bless me. She will definitely help me." This conviction arises naturally. When I was around ten years old, there was a practitioner named Pema Tenzin who was a Dharma teacher of the Nyingma Dzogchen lineage. Although he later returned his monastic vows, nevertheless, his faith in the Three Jewels and his insight into Buddhadharma remained exceptional. At that time, this practitioner gave me a tiny statue of Tara, which I had kept throughout elementary school, junior high, high school, Garze Normal School, and even monkhood. Around 1991 when I returned from accompanying H. H. Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche to India, I still had it. I had kept it close to me for so many years, but later, this small statue of Tara, to say it nicely, flew away, or to be frank, was lost, I felt so sad that it was gone even though it wasn't made as exquisitely as the sculptures that are made nowadays. Around that time, in the 70's, when I was still in school, the state policy on religion was still very restrictive. It was much different from now, in that at that time, one would have been in big trouble if they were found to

be engaging in religious practice, and sometimes even teachers and classmates couldn't be trusted. Even in such a time as I am describing, I took the Tara statue with me wherever I went, wrapped in a piece of yellow cloth, praying to her secretly. I could truly feel the great blessing.

THE AUSPICIOUSNESS FOR TEACHING THIS PRAISE

This time of giving the teaching on Tara is graced with many auspiciousness. Actually, the idea of giving teachings on Tara came up years ago, but there hadn't been an opportunity with proper causes and conditions to actualize the idea. This year, however, the opportunity has finally arrived. For those who aren't religious or who don't believe in dependent arising, this might seem like nothing more than a matter of chance or coincidence. But to me, from the beginning of this year, many auspicious signs relevant to Tara have arisen one after another, suggesting that the timing of giving teachings on Tara was ready.

First, I received many books about Tara that had been sent from masters and Buddhists abroad. Then about two or three months ago, I met Khenpo Depa in mainland China, and happily received a Tara statue from him as a gift. After returning to Larung Gar a while ago, a businessman in India expressed the desire to offer me a statue of Manjushri, but somehow was unable to find one. Amongst all of the products that he had with him, he eventually found a very nice Tara sculpture that he had requested from Nepal and gave it to me. A

couple of days ago, a survey team came to our academy from Serxu County (Sichuan, China), where there is a very famous Tara statue, which now is a registered national cultural relic. Around 2002, when I went to Serxu, I had specifically arranged to visit this Tara statue. Since the Tara statue has, in the past, been targeted by thieves, it is now preserved in a safe and is not shown publicly. In order to see this statue, one has to know the right people and pull some strings as it takes three different doorkeepers to open up the doors behind which it is kept. When we went to Serxu, we were extremely fortunate to get the opportunity to see the beautiful sculpture. After seeing this Tara, I generated a strong faith toward her. It is said that this fine statue was brought in by the Chinese Princess Wencheng, upon her marriage to King Songtsen Gampo and was left with the local people as a gift. The survey team brought a few precious pictures of the Tara with them which they put into frames. When they arrived at Larung Gar, there was only one last picture still remaining and I was very happy that they gifted it to me when we met. Another auspicious sign refers to the Green Tara and White Tara thangka hanging here in our shrine hall. A while ago, some lay practitioners said they'd like to offer a thangka to our shrine hall. Whether intentional or not, the thangkas they brought turned out to be a White Tara and a Green Tara. These arrived just two days ago, on the exact day that I announced that I would be giving this teaching. There were also many other signs of auspiciousness. Perhaps some materialistic people, or those with lots of discursive thoughts, and who are only convinced by deductive logic, might not believe in these sorts of things. They might think,

"Well, such coincidences happen all the time. There is not necessarily a link between them. You are thinking too much." But I believe in dependent arising and feel that these are auspicious signs for the giving of this teaching.

Starting from this year, I hope that you will pray to Tara in the course of your practice. Indeed, praying to Tara will bring significant benefits to all aspects of your practice. In Tibetan Buddhism, regardless of which monastery, whether Gelug, Sakya, Nyingma or any other, devotional practice to Tara is a common practice of the sangha in their daily recitation or in prayers dedicated to patrons. On almost all occasions involving chanting, prayers to Tara will be recited. In particular, Tibetans recite the *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras* very quickly, to show that Tara bestows blessing swiftly. This is particularly true in the Gelug tradition, where the speed is so fast that it is difficult even to catch up with them. A couple of days ago, we chanted the prayer together in Tibetan three times. But many of the Chinese students here simply moved their lips and were unable to keep up with the pace. Later on, we can try to do it a little slower. It's okay to start a bit slower in the beginning. But still, we should try to finish one cycle within two or three minutes, tops. It will surely be great to start to learn teaching of Tara and to pray to Tara together from now on, and I'm sure that many people will develop great faith in her. With faith, Tara's blessing will certainly enter into our mind. Then whatever we do will be successful. So, as we proceed with the course on Tara, at the end of every lecture, let's chant the *Praises to the*

Twenty-One Taras together, followed by the dedication prayer. Please be prepared for this.

PROLOGUE

Now let's begin with our study of the *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras*. Historically, there are different iconographic traditions that place a different emphasis on the image of each of the twenty-one forms of Tara, regarding color, posture, hand gesture, etc., as well as different traditions of naming them. This time, I will present descriptions of the twenty-one Taras based primarily on the Nyingma tradition. In order to create a more systematic analysis of each praise, I will compose a textual outline which will explain the praises as different appearances of Tara. While to refer the twenty-one praises as respective praise for each of the twenty-one Taras may be easier for you to memorize and understand, this outline will provide you a more organized way of reaching that understanding.

Based on the textual outline, this Praise can be divided into three parts: A1) Prologue, A2) Content, and A3) Conclusion. The first part includes B1) The Title and B2) The General Homage. Let's begin first with the title.

A1. Prologue

B1. The Title

The Praise to Tārā with Twenty-One Verses of Homage

The Praise describes the twenty-one Taras, with a stanza of praise for each one, so it is also called "*Praises to the Twenty-One Taras*". The twenty-one Taras mentioned in this Praise are in fact the same by nature. By reciting this Praise often, we will receive all these Taras' blessings as a natural result.

As we've mentioned, this Praise exists not only in the Kangyur but is also found in the Chinese Buddhist Canon. In Tibetan Buddhism, great masters, such as Atisha, classified this Praise in the Kriya Tantra, one of the three outer classes of tantra, with the other two being Charya and Yoga Tantra. According to Atisha's point of view, there are thirty-five collections in the Kriya Tantra, the third collection of which is the *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras*. Meanwhile, other masters, such as Master Suryagupta, considered the Praise to be categorized as part of the Anuttarayoga Tantra, believing it to be the 570th collection in the Anuttarayoga Tantra. There are also a few masters who regard the Praise as not only included in the tantric section of Kriya Tantra, but also in the Anuttarayoga Tantra. As a matter of fact, there is nothing contradictory in the views of these masters. It is in the same way that the *Chanting the Names of Manjusri* can be interpreted from the view of the Anuttarayoga Tantra, while also being interpreted from the view of outer classes of tantra. Therefore, we can understand

it in this way: while the ultimate meaning of this Praise can be interpreted from the perspective of Annuttarayoga, it can also be interpreted from the view of the outer classes of tantra, to apply to beings with different inclinations. Thus, we can regard this Praise as a tantric text. In Chinese Buddhism, especially as it was enacted during the active period of the Chinese Esoteric Buddhism, there were many practices regarding Tara. Unfortunately, these never became widespread throughout mainland China.

Perhaps, some may wonder, "Is Tara a Bodhisattva or a female Buddha?" Ultimately speaking, she has already attained Buddhahood. *The Guhyagarbha Tantra* mentions the five Buddhas and the five mothers of the five families. Among the five female Buddhas, the consort of Amoghasiddhi, who resides in the north, is Samayatara, also known as Green Tara. So, we should be cognizant that Tara has attained Buddhahood, but to tame and liberate different kinds of beings, she manifests in the form of female bodhisattvas known as the twenty-one Taras.

The twenty-one Taras can dispel all kinds of misfortunes and sufferings of sentient beings. So, for anyone, whenever you encounter disaster, fear or obstacles in life, praying to Tara sincerely is very important. As many of the older students here may recall, when certain disasters and sufferings occurred in Larung or the world, H. H. Jigme Phuntsok would often ask the entire sangha at Larung, including practitioners outside of the academy, to pray wholeheartedly to Tara to dispel the obstacles. In Chinese Buddhism, people often refer to Avalokiteshvara

as "the one who helps the needy and relieves the distressed". This title also applies to Tara. In fact, the true meaning of "Tara" is "She who Liberates", i.e. one who liberates all sentient beings from suffering. Who is the one that liberates? Arya Tara is. Who are to be liberated? Suffering beings. How are they liberated? By praying to Tara devotedly themselves, or by others holding faith and praying or imploring Tara on their behalf. Then, from Tara's wisdom mind, blessings will stream naturally and be bestowed upon these beings. With such blessings, they are able to weather these challenges.

In this Age of Degeneration, without the blessing of yidams, dakinis, and Dharma protectors, one who is relying solely on one's own strength, which is like a candle in the wind that can be easily put out, will be feeble in achieving good results. If we get support from these noble ones, even in the Age of Five Degenerations, when wrong views become prevalent, demonic influences turn rampant and obstructing forces seem to pervade our life, there are still ways to fight back. Just like a downpour from the sky can put out a raging fire, through the blessing of the noble ones' wisdom and compassion, all sufferings and adversities in the world crumble.

So, I'd advise that all Dharma friends should, as a first step, engender faith in Tara. Once such faith arises, everything can be worked out smoothly; this also applies to our Dharma study and practice. To be honest, learning, contemplating, and practicing the Dharma is not an easy task. For people who lack faith, coming to Larung to study and contemplate on the Dharma all-day, day after day, can be quite

punishing and may even become a kind of suffering. But as long as we have faith, we will feel this learning to be something to be enjoyed and a true meaningful activity. That is why faith is particularly essential. Regardless of which Dharma you would like to practice, or whatever else you would like to do, first, it is imperative to generate faith. Without faith, it's fairly challenging to carry out the work, or to listen to even one lecture. Some people, cannot even sustain one lecture, let alone try to keep on a long-term study. Someone I once met, told me that, "I heard how auspicious it is to attend Dharma teaching, so I went for one class. Oh my, it was so hard to sit through the whole time. Time passes so slowly. It was so unbearable and painful. My knees were numb..." Actually, to sit just cross legged won't make your knees numb, but to him, it was extremely painful. The point is that whatever we practice, to first generate confidence in it, is extremely important. If we can generate faith and a joyful mind, then whatever we do, including listening to the Dharma, or even entering a hell filled with burning fire to liberate sentient beings, would be like the case of the bodhisattvas that is described in *The Ornament of the Mahayana Sutras*, who were able to regard it with total ease, like touring a garden. So, as we approach the practices of Tara, we should first generate a joyful mindset and faith, so that the blessing of Tara will be able to enter our minds directly.

B2. The General Homage

Om. Homage to the noble lady Tārā!

"Om" is an invocation and a mantra that integrates one's body, speech, and mind with the three vajras of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. "Noble lady" is a respectful form of address to Tara. "Lady" or "Jetsünma" in Tibetan contains the meaning of having wisdom and compassion, as well as possessing three sets of vows. "Tārā" or "Drolma" in Tibetan means saving or benefitting sentient beings. So, this line of the homage means that: Before this noble lady Tara, who is endowed with wisdom and compassion, who is pure in precepts, works for the benefit of beings, who possesses all kinds of beneficent qualities, we, the devoted followers, pay homage reverently and respectfully.

In the traditions of ancient India, even amongst non-Buddhists, many practiced and paid homage to Tara. In historical times, for example, in the Nalanda Monastery, images of Tara featured prominently in the paintings that covered their interior walls. In Bodhgaya, there are also quite a number of Tara statues that can be found among the many sculptures of the different Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. In Tibet, almost every monastery has Tara images, statues, and thangkas and in Tibetans' daily life, there is almost no one who doesn't know how to chant the prayers or mantras of Tara, although among younger Tibetans, many may not know how to pray to Tara as they have become more interested in making money, or some aspect of pop-culture. However, among the older generations, most do have faith in Tara and often chant prayers to her.

Whoever has faith in Tara gains her blessing, just like the silver moon reflects naturally as long as the water in the pond in which

it is reflected is clear. Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have impartial compassion towards all sentient beings and do not favor any particular beings over any others. Therefore, whoever holds faith in these deities naturally receives their blessing and is able to gain accomplishments. So, whichever practice we engage in, we must first understand the extraordinary qualities of the yidam of the practice. Once we have understood this, we will generate pure faith. Then, with a pure mind filled with piety and respect, we should pay homage, prostrate, and make offerings to the yidam, that is, to practice by attending to the yidam through the Seven Branches practice (i.e. prostration, offering, confession, rejoicing, requesting to turn the wheel of the Dharma, requesting not to pass into parinirvana, and dedication of merit). Only in such ways can we truly experience the blessing. We will now turn our attention towards learning about the qualities of Tara through this Praise.



DROLMA NYURMA PAMO, TARA WHO IS SWIFT AND COURAGEOUS

Let us now turn our attention to A2) Content, which has three parts: B1) Praise for Her Historical Origin, B2) Praise for the Body Aspects, and B3) Praise for Her Activities. First of all, let's talk about B1) Praise for Her Historical Origin.

A2. Content

B1. Praise for Her Historical Origin

Homage to Tārā, swift and gallant,
Whose glance flashes like flares of lightning;
Born on the heart of a blossoming lotus
That rose from the tears of the Triple-World's Lord.

[Homage to Tārā, swift and gallant,
Whose glance flashes like flares of lightning;
Born from the opening stamen of
The lotus face of the Triple-World's Lord.]

This is Tara Turavīrā or Drolma Nyurma Pamo in Tibetan, the Tara

who is swift and courageous. She is depicted as either yellow or red. Generally speaking, her right hand is shown in the mudra of bestowing the sublime, meaning that she is ready to protect sentient beings, while her left hand holds an utpala flower on top of which is a right-coiling conch shell.

What is the meaning of "Nyurma Pamo"? "Nyurma" means very swift and "Pamo" means heroine or courageous. So, here it means that she is courageous in liberating sentient beings and bestows blessing swiftly. Ju Mipham Rinpoche mentioned in *A Garland of Jewels: Eight Great Bodhisattvas*, that among all the yidams, Tara's blessing comes the swiftest. At Larung Gar, in the time of H. H. Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, whenever obstacles befell, His Holiness would ask every sangha member to recite prayers to Tara or Özer Chenma (Marichi), the 21st Tara in this Praise. Then what are the qualities of Tara Turavīrā? According to the second line, "Whose glance flashes like flares of lightning", her eyes of wisdom see and perceive all phenomena instantly, as swift as a flash of lightning. Lightning happens very fast and illuminates everything in a split second. Thus, in a fraction of a second, Tara's wisdom sees the ultimate reality of all that is knowable, from material phenomena to the existence of sentient beings, from secular things to supramundane matters. Then, what is the origin of Tara? It is mentioned in the last two lines, "Born from the opening stamen of the lotus face of the Triple-World's Lord." Here, the "triple-world's lord" refers to the lord of the three realms of desire, form, and formlessness, Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, who is imbued

with great loving-kindness and great compassion. His countenance is analogized as that of a lotus. So, these two lines describe that, from Avalokiteshvara's eyes, which are like the center of his lotus-like face, appeared tears of strong compassion for all sentient beings, and from the tears, Taras were born. Stories of the origin of Tara are clearly recorded in Buddhist scriptures. In particular, it is mentioned three times that Tara made great vows in her causal ground that caused her to become Tara, "She who Liberates".

Here is one of the three stories of her making her aspiration: In days of yore, in the universe called Manifold Light, there appeared a tathagata called Drum-Sound. At that time, in that world, there was a princess named Yeshe Dawa (Moon of Wisdom-knowledge) who was endowed with all of the necessary roots of virtues and had great devotion to the Three Jewels. At that time, people enjoyed a very long life. For millions of years, the princess made grand offerings to that Buddha and his countless attendant sangha. At that time, some bhikshus urged her, "Because of these roots of virtue, whatever you wish will come true. Why not pray in this body that you may become a man, which would make it easier to perform virtuous deeds and engage in practice?" Then, the princess said,

*"[I see] here there is no man, there is no woman,
No self, no person, and no consciousness.
These appellations of 'male' or 'female' are illusory,
Which deceive worldly beings of shallow wisdom."*

Having said this, she then made the great vow, "There are many who desire enlightenment in a man's body, but very few who work for the benefit of sentient beings in the body of a woman. Therefore, until samsara is empty, I shall work for the benefit of sentient beings in a woman's body." Then, for millions of myriads of years, she practiced diligently and thereby attained the realization that nothing really arises or perishes. By the power of this realization, every day she liberated millions of myriads of beings. Because of this, she became Tara, "She who Liberates". Then the Tathagata Drum-Sound prophesied her to be known by the name of Tara from now onwards.

The second story is that, another time, she vowed before the Tathagata Amoghasiddhi to protect and guard sentient beings of all the infinite realms of the ten directions, and to dispel all harm and obstacles of maras. Therefore, each day for ninety-five eons, she liberated millions of sentient beings and subdued millions of maras. Thus, she received the name of Tara.

The third time, she appeared from the tears of Avalokiteshvara and aspired to share the responsibility of Avalokiteshvara to liberate countless beings. For uncounted eons Avalokiteshvara had been working tirelessly to liberate all sentient beings from suffering through all forms of manifestations. However, when he took a look again at the six realms, he saw that the number of suffering beings was no less than when he began. At that time, Avalokiteshvara appeared to be extremely saddened and shed two tears of compassion. The tears turned into two lotuses and from these two blossoming lotuses, White

Tara and Green Tara appeared. They vowed before Avalokiteshvara, "Lord Avalokiteshvara, don't be saddened. We will assist you to liberate boundless beings." These two Taras then transformed into 21 Taras to more fully help Avalokiteshvara benefit beings.

There's another historical account of the origin of Tara. Eons ago, there was a bhikkhu named Immaculate Light. All Buddhas of ten directions bestowed upon him empowerment, and thus, he became Avalokiteshvara. Then Avalokiteshvara received empowerment from the Tathagatas of the Five Families, and Tara appeared from his heart.

So, since Tara comes from Avalokiteshvara's heart or tears of pity, the two are essentially one and the same. In mainland China, Avalokiteshvara is usually regarded as a female figure who works to liberate boundless beings, while in the Tibetan region, Avalokiteshvara is regarded as a male figure, with Tara being his female embodiment. From this aspect, Avalokiteshvara in Chinese Buddhism corresponds with the image of Tara. It's just that such a point is not generally revealed. So, when we pray, we should realize that they share the same nature.



DROLMA YANGCHENMA, TARA WHO BESTOWS LONGEVITY, ELOQUENCE AND WISDOM

Now, let us move on to B2) Praise for the Body Aspects, which has two parts: C1) Praise for the Sambhogakaya Aspects and C2) Praise for the Dharmakaya Aspect. The first part can be further divided into two more parts: D1) Praise for the Peaceful Body Aspects and D2) Praise for the Wrathful Body Aspects. D2) Praise for the Peaceful Body Aspects includes six praises. Among the six, the first is E1) Praise for the Luminous Countenance and Radiance, which means to give praise to the aspect of Tara's countenance and her brilliant radiance.

B2. Praise for the Body Aspects

C1. Praise for the Sambhogakaya Aspects

D1. Praise for the Peaceful Body Aspects

E1. Praise for the Luminous Countenance and Radiance

Homage to you whose countenance is
A hundred full moons gathered in autumn,

Smiling and glowing with brilliant radiance,
Like a thousand stars clustered, ablaze.

This is White Tara, also known as Tara Sarasvati or Drolma Yangchenma in Tibetan. As Buddhists, we should get to know these noble deities. To not do so would be quite unreasonable. The first two lines describe the countenance of this Tara as a hundred full moons in autumn stacked up layer upon layer, unmarred by all dusts, clouds, mists, and stains. Having a hundred such autumn moons gathered together does not mean that her face is big, rather it is an image that suggests her countenance is of utmost perfection. The last two lines describe the radiance of her body. It is as brilliant as thousands of stars gathered together, even more brilliant than moonlight or the brightest starlight, radiating white beams, from which stream the moonlight-like nectar that dispels beings' burning suffering.

White Tara and Sarasvati, the Goddess of Wisdom, Literature and Poetry, are of the same oneness. In Tibetan Buddhism, many sadhanas of White Tara and Sarasvati are very similar. If we practice Sarasvati sadhana well, our poetry skills, intelligence, and our meritorious wisdom will certainly improve. These are the uncommon and extraordinary blessings of Sarasvati. To engage in White Tara practice can also cultivate great wisdom. White Tara is also known as Sapta Lochani, the Seven-Eyed Tara. In some historical records, White Tara has seven eyes of knowledge: three on her face, two on her palms, and two on the soles of feet. The eye on her forehead looks upward to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, while her other six eyes gaze out

upon the condition of beings in the six realms. White Tara is one of the Three Long-life Deities in Tibetan Buddhism, with the other two beings Amitayus, "The Buddha of Boundless Life" and Ushnishavijaya, also one of the twenty-one Taras. In many long-life prayers of the great masters, the supplication is made to Amitayus, White Tara, or Ushnishavijaya for the longevity of those masters. White Tara can also be understood as a manifestation of Amitayus. Thus, whether one wishes for long-life for oneself or for others, praying to this Tara is very important.

In Tibetan history, Princess Wencheng and Princess Bhrikuti Devi are considered as embodiments of Tara. Princess Bhrikuti Devi of Nepal is considered the incarnation of White Tara, with Princess Wencheng being the incarnation of Green Tara. According to some historical accounts, after King Songtsen Gampo had fulfilled many national projects, arranged and prophesied exceptional events regarding the nation and the Dharma for the future, he began to prepare to leave this world. At that time, with his right hand, he touched the head of Princess Bhrikuti Devi, turning the princess into a white eight-petalled lotus upon which the seed syllable of White Tara was displayed. Then, the king touched the head of Princess Wencheng with his left hand, turning the princess into a green sixteen-petaled lotus on which the seed syllable of Green Tara appeared. Then looking up to his deity, Eleven-faced Avalokiteshvara, the king, together with the two lotuses, turned into light and dissolved into the heart of Avalokiteshvara, vanishing there. Therefore, all three of these

incarnations are the manifestations of Avalokiteshvara, although they appeared as different persons originating from different places—one coming from mainland China, one from Nepal, and another from Tibet. People with discursive thoughts may have some other accounts of this history, but this account is from reliable historical records.

Many people these days wish for happiness, wealth, wisdom, longevity, to have children and to remain safe and sound. In many Tara sadhanas, it is mentioned that if you pray to Tara, all of your wishes can be fulfilled. Other than for those with great negative karma, as long as you pray to Tara sincerely, by the one-pointed recitation of either this Praise or the mantra of Tara, Tara will grant you whatever you wish for. Most people these days seem able to enjoy fine clothing and food, but many are suffering. Their suffering isn't from the lack of materials, but because of an inner inadequacy. There are many beings who are suffering mentally, experiencing lots of fear, worry, sadness, disappointment, and the feeling that they are victims of injustice. Why is there a growing number of suicides? It is the incompleteness within, which makes people view everything in life negatively and is the cause of their pain. In such cases, if they would pray to Tara, all the fear and uneasiness in their mind could be dispelled instantly.

Whenever we encounter disasters, fear, or dangers that threaten our life, just pray to Tara. Long ago, there was a master named Triratnadasa, who was a disciple of Dignaga. Once he was preaching the Dharma in Eastern India, a monstrous serpent came out of the ocean and devoured many people and elephants. Then, the master

prayed fervently to Tara and recited her mantra. Thus, the monstrous serpent immediately turned around and returned to the ocean.



DROLMA SONAM CHOKTER, TARA WHO LIBERATES BEINGS BY WAY OF THE SIX PARAMITAS

Next is praise for Tara for the aspect of her physical complexion and her practice of the six paramitas.

E2. Praise for Her Body Color and Practice of the Six Paramitas

Homage, golden lady, your lotus-hand
Is graced with a blue water-born flower.
You embody generosity, diligence, endurance,
Serenity, patience and meditation.

[Homage, golden-blue lady,
Your hand is graced with a lotus.
Generosity, diligence, austerities, serenity,
Patience, meditation, your field.]

This is Tara Puṇyottama-dā, or Drolma Sonam Chokter in Tibetan. This Tara is yellow-bodied, with her right hand in the gesture of bestowing the sublime and her left hand graced with a lotus, having

a wishful-filling jewel on top which can dispel poverty and bestow fortunes for whoever prays to it.

The main feature of this Tara is that she liberates beings or fulfills beings' wishes by way of the six paramitas: the paramitas of generosity, discipline, patience, diligence, meditative concentration and wisdom. The four paramitas of generosity, diligence, patience, meditation are clear in the stanza. In many commentaries of this Praise, "austerities, serenity" is explained as discipline, because to uphold discipline, one must undergo asceticism while remaining in a place of serenity. The sixth paramita comes from "your field", which means to steer or master every knowable phenomenon, making them "your field". That is, to enter into the nature of all phenomena or to engage in the realization of the nature of every phenomenon. In order to do that, one must unfold one's wisdom of prajna. So, "your field" refers to the paramita of wisdom. By way of the six paramitas, with the former five as the skillful means, the last being the direct development of the wisdom of prajna, as well as through boundless activities, this Tara benefits sentient beings. Praying to her can increase one's wisdom and merit, prolong life, while eradicating ignorance, removing suffering and dispelling disasters, as well as fulfilling wishes of the like. So, if we pray to Tara devotedly with a cheerful spirit, then whatever we need can be fulfilled.

In Taranatha's *History of Buddhism in India*, there is a story about how Tara fulfills wishes. In ancient India, there was an old and poor woman whose daughter was getting married. As the household was

extremely poor and without the means to arrange for her marriage, the old woman went out begging in various places. Having heard about the famous Master Chandrakirti who resided at Nalanda Monastery, she decided to ask him for the wherewithal to arrange her daughter's marriage. Chandrakirti, although very famous had few material possessions himself, but wanting to be of some help, he said to the old woman, "I'm an ascetic monk myself without many belongings, so I have nothing to give to you. But there is one named Chandragomin nearby, go to him. After all, he was a lay practitioner." Now, Chandragomin, although a lay practitioner, was a famous Indian master and scholar who had famously challenged Chandrakirti to a debate in Nalanda that lasted for many years. So, the old woman went off to find Chandragomin, only to discover that though the master expressed strong compassion for her, he had nothing to give as he had nothing but a sutra of prajnaparamita and a set of robes. However, full of compassion for the poor beggar, Chandragomin prayed earnestly to a painting of Tara on the wall. Moved by his devoted prayer, the Tara came to life and took off all the various ornaments and jewelry that she wore, and gave them to the master. The master, in turn, gave them all to the old woman who was thrilled to accept these gifts and very happily left. From that time on, this Tara, now bereft of ornaments became known as "Tara without Ornaments". It is said that to this day, this painting of Tara continues to be revered and cared for.

Whether in India or the Tibetan region, there have been many miraculous stories of how Tara statues have spoken to, or instructed people.

There are many stories of Tara's miracles, just as is the case of Avalokiteshvara in mainland China and many other Asian countries. Chandragomin once said that as long as you pray selflessly, all you wish for will be swiftly fulfilled, while in other cases, you may need to pray for a longer time. When we pray, it's best that we pray selflessly, not out of self-interest but for the welfare of all sentient beings. Nonetheless if your prayer is born out of personal interest, you may still receive a corresponding blessing.

In our daily life or throughout the course of Dharma learning and practice, we should pray to Tara, just as many previous masters did, so that adversities may be dispelled naturally. Take myself for example. When I was about to become ordained as a monk, I faced many challenges. Back then, it seemed to me that I was unable to fight back against them. I tried my best to pray to Tara and magically, all of the obstacles facing me disappeared. At that time, I was studying at Garze Normal School, and the head teacher of the class thought highly of me and gave me a great deal of attention. When I decided to become a monk, I had not graduated yet, and so I needed to ask the permission of my head teacher to leave school. If I failed to get his approval, my family would have been fined 3,000 RMB which was a huge sum of money at that time and which my family wouldn't have been able to afford. So, I had no choice but to go to my teacher to ask for his permission. Before entering his house, I secretly did many recitations of the mantra of Tara and things turned out so smoothly that the teacher approved my request without hesitation. A while ago,

this teacher came to visit me and I asked him, "I was sure that you were not going to agree to let me quit school as at the time you didn't want me to become a monk. What made you change your mind?" He said, "I don't know why I agreed to allow you to quit school. I must have got into a muddle at that time." So, I personally feel that the blessing of Tara is extremely genuine and responsive.

Surely everyone has their own goals in life or in spiritual practice. In the process, when facing certain challenges that need to be dealt with immediately, pray to Tara. Then miraculously, these difficulties will be solved swiftly. Starting now, please try to pray to Tara constantly so that you can remove the challenges that stand in the way of your Dharma practice and your wishes can be fulfilled.

**TARA, THE RESPONSIVE
FEMALE BUDDHA REVERED
BY ALL**

LECTURE TWO

From this year onwards, I also hope that Buddhists from everywhere in the world can fit the chanting of this Praise into their schedule. Do not be satisfied with just understanding the literal meaning of the text, but try to put it into practice, like by chanting it.

– Khenpo Sodargye

We have finished lecture one of *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras*, now let's continue. The Praise has twenty-one verses with one verse praising one Tara respectively, so one might get the impression that the text is in praise of 21 Taras. As we have stated previously, in nature, the twenty-one Taras are the same, that is, they are just different forms of the same female Buddha. That is why the textual outline here suggests that the stanzas to *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras* are praises to different aspects of the same deity. For the purpose of taming different sentient beings, manifestations of Tara appear in twenty-one unique forms with each manifestation exhibiting different qualities, appearances, hand gestures, skin colors, and so on. As regards skin color, Tara's various manifestations appear as either white, green, red, yellow, orange, blue or black, with each color representing one feature of the deity as follows: White represents Tara's body, red her speech, blue and black her mind, yellow and orange her qualities and green her activity.

As I mentioned in the first lecture, in addition to this particular Praise, the Buddhist Canon contains many other texts that reference Tara. Several days ago, I had a look at the Kangyur and found many sadhanas devoted to Tara, including several that reference the practices of the four activities of pacifying, enriching, magnetizing and subjugating. There are also a number of Tibetan Buddhist terms that describe Tara practices. In addition, if you have a look into the Chinese Buddhist Canon, particularly those writings that refer to Chinese Esoteric Buddhism, you will find that there are texts with guidance to devotional practices relating to Tara that can be found there, as well. Although many of the texts found in these collections are considered as sutra, they can actually be classified as tantra. This particular Praise is a good example of this. We mentioned in the first lecture that while some masters classified this Praise as a part of the Kriya Tantra, others feel that it more correctly belongs under the Highest Yoga Tantra. In fact, both classifications are acceptable. Although mentioned it earlier, I also want to stress that should not think that Tara practices only exist in Tibetan Buddhism. They are also available within the context of Chinese Buddhism and have a long history of being propagated in mainland China as far back as the Tang Dynasty.



DROLMA TSUKTOR NAMGYAL, JEWEL ON THE GREAT TATHAGATA’S CROWN

Now, let us continue with the Praise. We left off previously as we were learning the second part of D1) Praise for the Peaceful Body Aspects. Now we will learn the third part which praises Tara for the aspect that she is not only the refuge of ordinary beings of the six realms, but is also the object of reliance, praise, and veneration of accomplished Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

E3. Praise for Being the Object of Refuge for Buddhas and Bodhisattvas

Homage to you, whose victories are endless,
Jewel on the great Tathāgata’s crown.
You are well served by the heirs of the Victors,
Those who’ve accomplished all the perfections.

[Homage to you, whose victories are endless,
Jewel on the great Tathāgata’s crown.
Having accomplished all the perfections,
You are well served by the heirs of the Victors.]

This is Tara Uṣṇīṣa-vijayā or Drolma Tsuktor Namgyal in Tibetan, the Tara who is completely victorious or Tara Ushnisha. This Tara is orange in color, with her right hand held in the gesture of bestowing the sublime. In general, every Tara's right-hand is held in the gesture of bestowing the sublime, indicating that Tara's activity is to liberate all sentient beings who are suffering in samsara. In other words, Tara is ready to help and liberate beings with her hands. In daily life, when someone helps others, we would also say that they are willing to give a hand. Therefore, this gesture symbolizes the activity of liberating sentient beings. The left hand of this Tara holds a long-life vase containing the nectar of eternal life, which symbolizes that Tara constantly rains down the amrita of the Dharma which dispels all such negativities as afflictive emotions, the suffering caused by poverty, and most particularly, the enemies of the six paramitas.

This Tara is called the "jewel on the great Tathagata's crown" for the reason that all of the tathagatas, with great veneration, regard this Tara as their Ushnisha or crown protrusion. From this we can see how extraordinary this Tara is, since even the Buddhas, who are held in the highest regard among all beings, venerate her as their crown jewel. Also, this Tara carries out boundless victorious activities. "Victories are endless" refers to triumphing over all unfavorable conditions and obstacles—from obstacles in secular life, to hindrances in spiritual practice or from problems in samsara to challenges in attaining nirvana. She triumphs over all harms caused by external and internal enemies and demons. Such are her victorious activities. "Having

accomplished all the perfections” means that she has attained all of the ten paramitas, including the six paramitas of generosity, discipline, patience, diligence, meditative concentration and wisdom, as well as the four paramitas: paramita of skillful means, strength, aspiration prayer and primordial wisdom. According to the *Sutra of the Ten Bhumis*, one can be said to be fully enlightened after having attained the ten paramitas, completely and perfectly. The accomplishment of the ten paramitas indicates that this Tara has obtained the ten types of freedom and completion, and thus attained the path of no-more-learning and complete perfection. Taken together, this suggests that Tara is no ordinary goddess or a female Bodhisattva, but is one that has already attained Buddhahood. In addition, all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas can be said to be born from Tara. For those reasons, she is “well served by the heirs of the Victors”. In other words, all Bodhisattvas from the first bhumi of Perfect Joy to the tenth bhumi of Cloud of Dharma praise, rely on and attend to Tara.

With that in mind, what need is there to mention that all Buddhists, regardless of which school they are aligned with, should pay homage to Tara with great respect and often engage in practices that honor her? In this regard, there is no need to hold onto a sectarian view of Tibetan Buddhism, Chinese Buddhism, or Theravada Buddhism. As a matter of fact, any of the sublime figures of Buddhism, no matter which school they appear to belong to, are worth everyone’s veneration and homage because they far exceed ordinary beings in their qualities, abilities, and wisdom. As regards this aspect, there is no point for

people from different traditions, races, or tribes to argue or fight with one another. If one narrow-mindedly sticks only to one's own sect, then one can hardly venerate the worthy noble ones from other sects. As an example, some people who follow the Pure Land School, the Chan School or any others think that only a few Indian masters took Tara for their spiritual reliance or that only a small number of Tibetan masters engage in devotional practices to her. Therefore they feel that for them, there is no need to engage in Tara practices. In fact, this is an ill-informed and poorly reasoned opinion.

THE TARA IN MAINLAND CHINA AND THE JOWO BUDDHA IN LHASA

Over the course of Tibetan Buddhist history, there have been many famous supreme Tara statues created or brought in from other places. Some were colored green, while others were colored gold. At Jokhang Monastery in Lhasa, there are many well-known Tara statues whose bodies glow with a golden radiance. Tara statues that carry great power can also be found in mainland China. For example, during the Tang Dynasty, the Tibetan King Songtsen Gampo assigned a Great Minister named Gar Tongtsen to travel to the Chinese kingdom for a marriage alliance. The ambassador took with him a statue of Tara, made with six kilograms of gold, as a gift for the Chinese emperor. This statue was very famous in Tibet due to her ability to bestow great blessings and fulfill the wishes of her devotees. Carrying with

him the Tara statue, Gar Tongtsen went to Chang'an (present day Xi'an), which at that time was the capital of China, to meet with the Chinese Emperor Taizong of Tang. As a result of Gar Tongtsen's diplomatic efforts, Emperor Taizong agreed to become allied with the Tibetan King Songtsen Gampo, and to that end, agreed to marry Princess Wencheng to the Tibetan King. The princess requested as her dowry the life-size statue of 12-year-old Buddha Shakyamuni, which was housed in the enormous Kaiyuan Temple in Chang'an and, even at that time, was considered to be a national treasure. In order to ensure a harmonious relationship, Emperor Taizong granted Princess Wencheng's request. So, the statue of Buddha Shakyamuni was taken to Tibet and placed in Jokhang Temple in Lhasa, where it became known as the Jowo Buddha. Since then, the Jowo statue has been greatly venerated, and every day, people arrive at the monastery to worship before this magnificent statue.

But, while the statue of the figure of Buddha Shakyamuni was brought to Tibet, the lotus seat upon which the statue rested was left behind in Kaiyuan Temple. Meanwhile, the statue of Tara, carried by Gar Tongtsen as a gift of the Tibetan King, was also housed at Kaiyuan Temple. During a visit to the monastery, Emperor Taizong noticed the empty lotus seat, and as he was considering which statue would be suitable to be placed there, the statue of Tara began to speak, "Your Majesty, please do not worry about which Buddha statue to place upon the empty lotus seat. Seat me there. I could liberate sentient beings on behalf of the Buddha Shakyamuni." Thus, the Emperor

decreed that the Tara statue should be placed upon the vacated lotus seat, where it remained until the construction of Guangren Temple was completed. Begun by Emperor Kangxi in 1703, the construction was an attempt by the Chinese emperor to appease Tibet and to provide a convenient destination to the Tibetan lamas and ministers who periodically journeyed to Chang'an to attend an audience with the Chinese political leadership. Upon completion, the statue of Tara which had been housed at Kaiyuan Temple was moved to Guangren Temple. It is said that two wooden statues of two other goddesses — the Goddess Great Light and Ekadzati, a protectress with a single tuft of hair, were also moved from Kaiyuan Temple to Guangren Temple, and placed beside the Tara statue newly installed there. To this day, these three statues remain treasured as precious historical relics. Due to the placement of this special Tara statue there, Guangren Temple has become the main Dharma center for propagating Tara in mainland China. We know that in the great majority of temples within China, a statue of Buddha Shakyamuni is usually placed in the center of the Mahavira or Main Hall. However, due to the special historical reasons mentioned above, the Mahavira Hall at Guangren Temple houses the statue of Tara, brought as a gift to Emperor Taizong of Tang from the Tibetan king, Songtsen Gampo. Since the Guangren Temple was built, generations of Tibetan masters, Panchen Lamas and Dalai Lamas, have often traveled there as part of their efforts to spread the Dharma. It is said that in 1954, Lama Panchen and the Dalai Lama stayed there for some time on their way to Beijing. The well-known Tibetan master, Geshe Sherab Gyatso had also been

there and gave teachings to Chinese students, lay practitioners and monastics. Hence, over the past 300+ years, this temple has become recognized as the most influential Dharma center in China devoted to Tara practice. So, once again, I remind you not to think that there has been no propagation of Tara practice in mainland China. It is just that in the Chinese communities, Tara is not as popular as she is in Tibet, where every household and every temple has many Tara images or statues.

In the future, if you have a chance to go to Xi'an. I think it is worth including a visit to Guangren Temple to pay homage and make offerings to the Tara statue housed there. I have seen her in photographs, but as of yet, I have not been there in person. In the photographs that I have seen, there were very few items of offering on the altar in front of the Tara, except for some containers for lamp offerings. And I could not tell if the lights were lit. Anyway, we should visit and make offerings when the opportunity arises. Unlike the statue of the Jowo Buddha in Lhasa to which many people worship every day, not many people come to worship the Tara statue housed at Guangren, in spite of the fact that they share the same significance in Buddhist history. This is mainly because of the fact that the Chinese people are not as devoted to Buddhist worship as the Tibetan people are, which may be attributable to various historical factors in mainland China.

These days, in general, many of the religious beliefs of the Chinese people are fading, including their belief in Buddhism, Confucianism and other religions. This contributes to the irresponsible conduct of

many people, including many university students and other intellectuals, which in turn, acts as a negative influence on society as a whole. As one example, factories are processing food that is harmful to people's health, as well as producing many kinds of counterfeit products. Moreover, many people no longer support or respect their parents, nor do they treat animals and other beings with kindness and respect. In many aspects, people these days behave very ruthlessly. From this we can see that without spiritual belief, people act in a manner that could be considered as insane, and eventually end up behaving as outrageously as animals. To witness this is truly terrifying. Some time ago, I read that when the parietal bone relics of the Buddha in Nanjing, the Buddha's finger-bone relic in Xi'an and the Buddha's tooth relic in Beijing, were exhibited in Thailand, Macao, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and other places, tens of thousands of people visited to show their veneration each day. So different! So, from my perspective, a spiritual belief is truly important. During the Tang Dynasty, everyone, from the emperor to the ordinary people, had faith in Buddhism and their devotion to Buddhism was truly praiseworthy. Unfortunately, I am sad to say that within a century or even less, people's belief in Buddhism has faded considerably.

CULTIVATE GENUINE FAITH IN TARA AND PRAY TO HER

I think that people really need a spiritual belief, and in my mind, nothing serves this need like Buddhism. It is essential to engender

respect and a joyful mind toward the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, for example, towards Tara and Avalokiteshvara. But your joyfulness and confidence need to arise from a reliable source. Otherwise, to simply feel touched, because “Guru, you are so compassionate and dignified in appearance!”, or “Wow, that statue of the Buddha looks so dignified!”, may not be an expression of authentic faith. Gendün Chöpel shared a story involving himself, where at one time he intentionally went to a non-Buddhist shrine and prayed fervently with his eyes closed. After a while, he became so moved that he broke into tears. Thinking of this story, I feel that Gendün Chöpel was such a prankster that he wanted to pray to a non-Buddhist deity with such fervency, that as he supplicated with his palms joined together, he was moved to tears. Anyway, this suggests that although we may sometimes feel deeply touched, that is not necessarily a true sign of reliable faith. It is the sort of feeling that can easily happen in specific environments or at certain moments. Speaking of tirthikas or non-Buddhists, I do not mean to say that there wouldn't be any blessing in their practice. There have been so many religions and their related branches in human history, and surely, many of them have offered to their followers extraordinary blessings and energy, as well as the manifestation of miraculous feats in response to prayer. Many religions in this world have their own skillful means to do good and to help sentient beings. It is unreasonable for Buddhists to think that only Buddhist doctrines are correct, while all others are wrong. This is why in the Tantrayana tradition, it is prohibited to criticize, slander or reject any heretic schools, including Vaisheshika, which

is a non-Buddhist school that teaches eternalism. Whether we see it or not, there must be some hidden meaning and purpose for the Tantrayana tradition to establish such a restriction.

I hope that you can generate joyfulness and devotion to the Taras, as they are imbued with supreme blessings and great qualities. This, I believe, is essential. I am thinking that since all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas pay homage to Tara, we Buddhists, regardless of which school we follow, have no reason to reject her. It would be an act of ignorance to insist that because you are a follower of the Pure Land Sect or some other school, that you don't have to venerate Tara. As mentioned in this verse, she is "well served by the heirs of the Victors", suggesting that even Avalokiteshvara and Manjushri respectfully pay homage to Tara. Thus, we ordinary beings have no reason not to follow them in offering homage to her as well. So, once again, I hope that everyone will embrace Tara with a pure mindset.

From this year onwards, I also hope that Buddhists from everywhere in the world can fit the chanting of this Praise into their schedule. Do not be satisfied with just understanding the literal meaning of the text, but try to put it into practice, like by chanting it. It would be great if every Dharma center, Buddhist association and temple could start to chant the Praise. Regarding the technique of chanting this Praise, we Tibetans chant it very quickly. Over the last few days during which we chanted in Tibetan, the chant was delivered at a rather slow pace and still the Han students could not keep up. We cannot go any slower, because according to Tibetan Buddhist tradition, the Praise

should be chanted very quickly, otherwise the swift blessing of Tara cannot be fully manifested. In some Gelug temples, monks chant the Praise extremely fast. As we've just begun this lecture series, we've been chanting it at what is probably the lowest speed possible, as it cannot be chanted any slower while the blessing could be fully manifested. I'd suggest that you find a tune for chanting the Praise in your own language. For instance, the Chinese sangha here can find a tune for chanting it in Chinese next time. Could the office of educational affairs check to see if there is a suitable tune for it, please, and I will observe if it is a good tune for the future spread of the Praise in mainland China? So far, there hasn't been any particular tune to which the Praise has been chanted in Chinese, so maybe you could try to compose one. Keep in mind that because Tara grants her blessings swiftly, the melody shouldn't be too slow. The prayer to Tara should be chanted eagerly and quickly. Shall we try it during the next lecture? I'll see if you can come up with something good and will also observe if the dependent arising is favorable. As for today's session, we will still perform the chant in Tibetan.



DROLMA RIKCHEMA OR TARA

KURUKULLA, THE ONE WHO BRINGS FREEDOM AND EASE

This stanza praises Tara for taming sentient beings in the three realms.

E4. Praise for Subduing All Beings in the Three Realms

Homage to you, who with *tuttāra* and *hūṃ*
 Fill desire realms unto the ends of space.
 You trample underfoot the seven worlds,
 And have the strength to summon all.

[Homage to you, who with *tuttāra* and *hūṃ*
 Fill the realms of desire, direction and space.
 You trample underfoot the seven worlds,
 And have the strength to summon all.]

This is Tara Kurukulla or Drolma Rikchema in Tibetan. This Tara is red in color, holding a lotus on her left hand, on top of which is a bow and arrow.

"You, who with *tuttāra* and *hūṃ*" means that this Tara rebukingly emits the sound of TUTTARA and HUM. Here, HUM signifies the compassionate mind of bodhichitta and TUTTARA symbolizes the wisdom of emptiness, free from all attachment. "Space" refers to the formless realm. So, the first two lines convey that this Tara emits the sound of TUTTARA and HUM, which is the union sound of wisdom and compassion and which pervades all the three realms—the desire realm, the form realm, and the formless realm.

The last two lines describe the posture of this Tara: she tramples underfoot all the seven worlds. Buddhist scholarship provides us with two explanations of the seven worlds. One explanation is that the seven worlds refers to:

- The realm of bardo;
- The six realms, which include:
 - The three lower realms: the hells, the hungry ghost realm, and animal realm; .
 - The three higher realms: the human realm, the demi-god realm, and the god realm.

Another explanation is that it refers to:

- The three lower realms: the hells, the hungry ghost realm, and animal realm;
- The human realm;
- The realm of gods in the desire realm;

- The form realm;
- The formless realm.

In this case, the seven worlds refer to the six realms. To reiterate, the seven worlds refers to the form realm, the formless realm, and the desire realm which can be subdivided into the five realms of: hells, hungry ghosts, animals, human beings and gods. The realm of gods here refers only to heavens of the desire realm. So, to “trample underfoot the seven worlds” means that, all beings in the seven worlds, without anyone excluded, are subdued by Tara through her wisdom and compassion, symbolized by the pervasive sound. Thus, all beings, even the demonic forces and tirthikas, can be easily summoned, conquered and magnetized by this Tara.

Kurukulla is one of the nine deities of magnetizing activity that we practice in our Dharma Assembly of the Awareness Holders, which takes place annually in the period of Chotrul Düchen, the “Festival of Miracles”. In the sadhana used in the Assembly, which is the terma titled *“Profound Practice of the Illusory Lasso of Avalokiteshvara’s Nine Principle Deities,”* revealed by Lerab Lingpa, there are some lines referring to Rikchema. His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche also composed praises and rituals of Kurukulla. The visualization and practice of Kurukulla helps one to observe pure precepts. For practitioners who struggle to observe pure precepts, if they pray to Kurukulla or simply visualize her in their minds, their lust will dissipate naturally and they will more easily be able to uphold pure

precepts. Kurukulla practices also helps attract and magnetize all sentient beings, visible and invisible. If we want to accomplish the activity of magnetizing, we should rely on Kurukulla. Many fellow Dharma friends aspire to fulfill the goal of spreading the Dharma and benefiting beings. In that case, if you pray to this Tara, even in the shortness of one lifespan, you can certainly overcome all unfavorable conditions, as well as accepting and benefiting immeasurable sentient beings who are karmically linked with you.

Starting this year, I hope that we can accomplish the activity of magnetizing by relying on the power and blessing of the nine deities, such that we can magnetize many beings and benefit them. Let those who do not believe in Buddhism be turned towards Buddhism. Let those who already believe in Buddhism attain actual freedom, physically and mentally, rather than merely remain holding a surface belief. For that purpose, in the past we have made lots of red flags with the prayer of *Wang Dü*. This year, we have also made many such prayer flags and hung them in lots of places, including the mountains of my hometown. Speaking of prayer flags, if you want to hang prayer flags, it is better not to hang them from tree branches. I have heard that many Dharma friends at Larung often hang the flags on the branches of trees on the mountain where we make offerings to the Dharma protectors. It is said that there are spirits living in the trees, as well as earth spirits in the cliffs and mountain spirits in the mountains. Thus, if you hang the flags from the branches of trees, the tree spirits that reside in those trees will be constrained from moving about freely. So,

it would be better for you to hang them in other places than on the mountain of the Dharma protectors and by other methods than on the branches of trees. I passed by the yards of some Dharma friends and noticed that they had decorated their yards with prayer flags of *Wang Dü*; it seems as if they are using prayer flags to keep out the wind or whatever. This is inappropriate and will result in accumulating severe negative karma. You would do better to move these prayer flags to clean places.

Nowadays, few Buddhists enjoy both physical and mental comfort and ease. They often feel more confused and disoriented than blessed and relaxed. This is because they have not accomplished the activity of magnetizing. If the magnetizing activity is accomplished, we are capable of helping and liberating sentient beings, not to mention being able to completely triumph over our own afflictions. Actually, when we think more about how we may benefit others, we experience less of our own afflictions. Unfortunately, many people think about their own affliction daily, but never think about benefiting others. "I am so troubled. How do I get over it?" or "I have got another obstacle! They come one after another!" As a matter of fact, the more you think about yourself, the more undesirable conditions will arise in your own life. The less you think about your own situation, the fewer obstacles will arise. This shows us that suffering and demonic obstacles are created by our own conceptual thoughts. Hence, by praying to Tara and imploring her to bless us to accomplish the activity of magnetizing, she will grant us her blessings.

THE BLESSING OF TARA: STORIES OF ATISHA AND SHANTIDEVA

If you have read the biographies of precedent masters, you will see how responsive a yidam Tara is. Take Lord Atisha as an example: From the biography of Atisha we find that Tara gave him instructions and prophecies on many occasions. The earliest factored into how he became ordained. Lord Atisha was a prince of East Bengal, which now belongs to Pakistan. When he was an elegant young man, daring and energetic and enjoying all kinds of happiness, Tara appeared to him and instructed him not to become too attached to the samsaric happiness of worldly life. Based on this visitation, he renounced the royal life and became ordained as a monk.

The second story took place when Lord Atisha was at the Vajra Seat, Bodh Gaya, and was diligently engaging in such practices as circumambulating the Mahabodhi stupa, debating with others about Buddhist philosophy, and so on and so forth. While Atisha was circumambulating these holy sites, Tara manifested to him in many forms, including as young maidens, beggars, old ladies, etc., to instruct him in the importance of practicing bodhichitta. Each time, he saw two manifestations communicating with each other, whose communication took the form of various guidance and instruction. At one point, he saw two rocky statues beneath the stupa communicated with each other, saying, "If one wants to quickly receive enlightenment, train in the mind of bodhicitta." At another point, an ivory statue

said to him, “If you wish to quickly progress from the ground of Bodhisattva to the fruition of Buddhahood, train in the mind of bodhicitta.” In this manner and through many of these kinds of manifestations, Tara urged Atisha over and over again, until he finally came to the realization of the importance of bodhicitta. At that time, one of the most famous masters holding the complete teachings of how to develop bodhicitta was Dharmakirti (Serlingpa), the Sublime Teacher from Suvarnavipa, the Golden Isle. Atisha went through untold hardships on his journey to Suvarnavipa to seek this master, and ended up spending twelve years learning the teachings of bodhicitta from Dharmakirti, until true bodhicitta was generated in his mindstream, after which he returned to India.

The third story relates to Lord Atisha’s propagation of the Dharma in the Tibetan region. Following the persecution of Buddhism by Langdharma, Tibet was in the period between the Early and the Later Propagation of Buddhism, a period when Buddhism in Tibet was at a low ebb. The Tibetan king, Yeshe Wo, repeatedly invited Lord Atisha from India to Tibet to revitalize Buddhism there. Many times, the King sent delegates to Lord Atisha, but as Atisha was getting on in years and had many responsibilities and many monasteries to care for in India, he did not at first accept the king’s entreaties. Finally, touched by the Tibetan King’s sacrifices, the efforts of his delegates and out of a sense of compassion, he expressed to the Tibetan delegates that he would consider whether it would be possible for him to make the arduous journey to the Land of Snows. Thus, he inquired of

Tara with three questions: “Can I benefit sentient beings in Tibet? Can I fulfill the Tibetan King’s wishes? Is there enough time left in my life span?” Tara answered his questions, one by one, in this manner: “If you go, you will bring benefit to boundless beings there. You will fulfill the Tibetan King’s wishes, because his only wish is to propagate Mahayana Buddhism and turn Tibet into a Buddhist country. However, you could have lived up to 92 years old. But if you go to Tibet, your life will be shortened by 20 years, that is to say, you will die at age 72.” Hearing this prophecy, Lord Atisha decided to make the sacrifice of 20 years of his life and decided to travel to the Tibetan region. At that time, Tara also gave him this prophecy: “After you have arrived in Tibet, you will meet an exceptional disciple named Dromtönpa, you must accept him.” It is said that the night before Dromtönpa’s arrival, Tara said to Atisha again, “Tomorrow, a lay practitioner named Dromtönpa will come to visit you, you must accept him.” The next day, Lord Atisha waited for a long time, but when Dromtönpa still hadn’t shown, he thought to himself: “Did Tara lie to me? Why hasn’t he come yet?” Late in the afternoon, Lord Atisha was invited to a patron’s house for a meal. He was still thinking of Dromtönpa as he was enjoying the tsampa and butter. “As my disciple may yet come, I shall leave some food for him.” However, by the end of the meal, Dromtönpa still hadn’t shown. Atisha returned home disappointed, not realizing that while he was visiting at the home of his patron, Dromtönpa had arrived at Atisha’s house and anxious to see his teacher, quickly ran toward the patron’s house. They met on the street, and because they already had lifetimes of close karmic

links, they recognized each other immediately, feeling blissful and harboring veneration toward each other.

Moreover, after Lord Atisha came to Tibet, he made tsa-tsa (small sacred images crafted from clay) every day, which also comes from Tara's instructions to him. This story can be traced to the time when Atisha was the head of discipline in Vikramashila, overseeing the monastic's observation of precepts and conducts. During Atisha's tenure in Vikramashila, there was a master named Maitripa or "Master of Loving Kindness", who was, in fact, a great bodhisattva. While engaging in yogic practices which involve making offerings to Dharma protectors and dakini, he was caught drinking alcohol, and Atisha, as the head of discipline, had to expel him from the sangha. Accepting the expulsion, Maitripa chose not to leave through the door but by going through the wall with the use of his magical power. After he had left, Lord Atisha felt very regretful and consulted Tara about how to make amends. Tara told him: "First, go to Tibet to propagate the Dharma." This was because, after the persecution of Buddhism initiated by Langdarma, Buddhism in Tibet was in a dire state and if Atisha could reignite the light of the Dharma there, he would accumulate great merit. "In addition, you must make seven times seven tsa-tsas every day, and in this way your negative karma will be purified." That is why Lord Atisha made forty-nine tsa-tsas every day after he arrived in Tibet. It is mentioned in the *Words of My Perfect Teacher* that, when his followers saw him making tsa-tsa every day, they asked Lord Atisha to let them do it for him. "What are you

saying?" he replied, "Are you going to start eating my food for me as well?" So, he wouldn't let others do it for him. His making tsa-tsa was to make amends for the fault of offending a practitioner of great accomplishment during his tenure as the head of discipline. So, if our inspectors at Larung want to expel anyone, please first make sure that they are not the accomplished ones. If they are, you should give them special permission to do whatever they like, even if that includes drinking alcohol. All others should follow the requests and rules of the Sangha.

Another example of great masters who received instruction from Tara is Shantideva, who wrote *The Way of the Bodhisattva* (*Bodhicharyavatara*). The story is recorded in his biography, which can be found in Taranatha's *History of Buddhism in India*. Shantideva was a prince of Saurashtra. The night before he was about to be enthroned as king, Shantideva dreamed of Manjushri sitting on his throne, saying, "My son, this is my seat, and I am your teacher. How can the two of us sit on the same seat?" Also, in his dream, Shantideva saw Tara in the guise of his own mother, pouring hot water on his head (a ritual that is performed during enthronement). When he asked what the cause of this was, Tara said, "A Kingdom is nothing more than the unbearable boiling water of hell. Thus, I am consecrating you with this." This was meant to express to him that if he were enthroned and became king, he would commit evil acts that would lead him to rebirth in the hell realms, where the boiling water that he would experience there would be far less easy to bear than the hot water of his dream.

He then realized that it would not be proper for him to accept the kingdom, and he instead gave up the throne and ran away. Later under the guidance of a woman who was a manifestation of Tara, he went to a yogi in a forest cave who was a manifestation of Manjushri. By following the spiritual practices of this yogi, Shantideva gained inconceivable spiritual achievement.

Above are just the examples of two great masters who benefitted greatly from Tara's blessing and guidance. From these stories, we should recognize that many great masters have a close bond with Tara and have received great blessings from her.



DROLMA JIKCHÉ CHENMO, TARA WHO CAUSES TERROR FOR NEGATIVE FORCES

E5. Praise for Being Paid Tribute by the Great Worldly Lords

Homage to you, praised by Indra,
Agni, Brahmā, Maruts, and Śiva.
All the hosts of bhūtas, vetālas,
Gandharvas and yakṣas pay tribute to you.

This is Tara Mahābairavā or Drolma Jikché Chenmo in Tibetan, the Tara who causes terror for negative forces or Tara who is revered by all. She is red in color and holds a phurba in her left hand. Although she is by and large a peaceful form, in order to signify her ability to destroy all kinds of wrong understandings and views, she manifests as being surrounded by flames. This verse means: Whom to pay homage to? To Tara, who is revered by such worldly gods as Indra, Brahma, Agni (the Fire God), Maruts (the Wind God), and Shiva which in some other translations is referred to as Varuna (the Water God). In addition, she is venerated by the hosts of bhutas (ghosts), vetalas (corpse-raisers), gandharvas, yakshas (one of the eight classes of gods and demons),

and rakshasa (a kind of malignant spirit that eats human flesh). Thus, it is explained that she is praised and venerated by them.

According to some tantric texts, our world is under the control of ten main guardians. Each of them guides one of the ten directions, which include the four cardinal directions, the four intermediate directions, the above and the below. To be specific, Indra is the guardian of the east. Veruna, the god of water, is the guardian of the west. Gandharva, who, although explained in the *Abhidharmakosa* as a being in the bardo who feeds on odors, is here referred to as the guardian of the south. Vaishravana, leader of yakshas, guards the north. Brahma guides the zenith, i.e. the world above, and Earth God guides the nadir, the world below. Agni, the god of fire, guides the south-east; Maruts, the god of wind, the north-west; the lord of the bhutas, the north-east and the chief of the vetalas, the south-west. These ten guardians of the ten directions can often be found in the texts of "Liberation upon Hearing". Excluding noble ones like the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas, these guardians, being the lords of the hosts of heavenly beings, human beings, ghosts, etc., surrounded by their retinue of numerous followers, receive the highest prestige in our world. Even these prestigious ones see the qualities of Tara and are impressed by her compassion and wisdom. Thus, they pay tribute to her respectfully and often praise her various qualities with awe and veneration. From this, we can see that Tara is really extraordinary.

WALL PAINTINGS OF TARA CAME TO LIFE

Therefore, should disasters occur, including natural disasters like earthquake, flood, fire, and hurricane, they will immediately disappear if we pray to Tara. Such cases are well documented in both India and Tibet. In the Tibetan region for example, there are a great many cases of disasters being prevented as a result of people praying to Tara.

There is a wonderful story about The Derge Printing House. The Derge Printing House was built more than 270 years ago by a remarkable King of Derge. After the completion of the Printing House, and for quite a long time after, there was a rule that no females were to be allowed inside. At that time, it was said the rule was made for the preservation of the wooden sutric printing plates that were kept there. One night, a woman's scream was heard coming from the printing house, "Fire! Help! Everyone comes!" She screamed so loud that everyone came running. Seeing that the Printing House had indeed caught fire, everyone became very focused on extinguishing the flames. After the fire was extinguished and the people reflected on the incident, they found it very odd because the Printing House is surrounded by very high walls meaning that nobody could enter the building unless the door was open. "How could there have been a woman inside who was able to detect the fire?" people wondered. As they searched around, they came to a corner where there was a painting of Tara on the wall. As they stood there, the painting of Tara

came to life and spoke these words, "It is fire that you should guard against, not women." From then on, the rule forbidding women was removed. To this day, males and females are all welcome to enter the Printing House and that painting of Tara is now known as "The Speaking Tara". This Tara is very responsive, as the people there have often said. The painting is still there. I saw it when I visited there not too long ago. Last year, I attended a Buddhist conference at the Printing House and took the opportunity to tour all around the complex. During that visit, I brought back a painting of Tara, which though not a replica of the painting of Tara who saved the Printing House from burning down, is a replica of another special Tara that is also known to offer great blessing. It is block printed on paper that is made by hand from local materials and looks like a scanned image. I can show it to you some other time as I now have it placed in my shrine.

There is another story about a wall painting of Tara that happened at Drepung Monastery. Once, when the monks in the monastery were holding a debate, a group of beautiful Indian girls dressed in Indian attire came in. As they watched the debate, they kept up a steady criticism of the monks, saying such things as, "That really is a terrible argument", "This one lacks eloquence", "That one is wrong", and so on. They kept this up for the entire time that they stayed there, chatting and giggling amongst themselves, until eventually, the monks could not tolerate it anymore and demanded that the ladies leave, saying, "You are not allowed to stay here, please go!". As they

were driven away, they ran to some corners of the monastery where they seemed to vanish. Everyone was surprised and realized that these girls were very probably not ordinary visitors. Later, images of Tara began to surface on the walls in the corners where the girls had disappeared. Then, people counted the images and found that there were exactly twenty-one. When pilgrims come to visit, they can see these images clearly from a distance. It is said these images were still there during the Cultural Revolution, but I am unsure whether they are still there now, since some temples in Lhasa were badly damaged during the revolution, while others remain in relatively good shape.

BE OPEN-MINDED TO A DIVERSITY OF VIEWS AND TRY TO KEEP YOUR WORD

Those without sincere belief might find these stories impossible to accept. Due to wrong views or the influence of an atheistic education, many will think that these descriptions of events are nothing more than legends or folk tales, however, those with faith and a true understanding of such extraordinary things will know that these stories are not deceptive at all. Surely, blessings from sublime beings like Tara are hard to fathom for ordinary people, but we shouldn't negate them just because we don't have any experience of them ourselves. Actually, even without talking about transcendent spiritual experience, in our ordinary experience, such as in dreams or in our daily lives, many unusual things happen that are beyond our comprehension.

These occur from time to time in everyone's experience. Therefore, regarding unusual phenomena, it is better for us to keep an open mind and observe them carefully, and with wisdom, before passing judgment.

The blessing of noble deities is indeed inconceivable. This is why, throughout the entirety of human history, there are so many fantastic stories that have been recorded in books. From the stories of many enlightened masters or advanced practitioners, we see that while they appear to be as ordinary as everyone else, they possess extraordinary abilities. This is because they have relied upon the power of such noble ones as yidams, dakinis and Dharma protectors. By reverently relying on these noble beings and devotedly making offerings to them, such people receive the support from these deities and thus have great power in achieving things. Mipham Rinpoche said in *The Treatise on the Modes of Being*,

*A person like this, who is protected by divine beings,
Even when on his own
His capabilities are equal in every way
To many thousands of men combined.*

Some people may not believe in the truth of such unusual events or of such appearances and may even feel contempt towards them. Such disbelief or contempt only incurs harm and destruction to oneself, but never to others. During the Cultural Revolution, many people slandered Buddhism and committed a multitude of non-virtuous

deeds, which eventually invited misfortune upon themselves. Indeed, karmic law is infallible and the result can be terrifying. There was a man in my hometown who had become caught up in several lawsuits. In the Tibetan region, in such cases, if people who have done wrong go to a well-known temple and vow to never repeat the mistake again, they will then be let off from some punishment. That man from my hometown came to Larung Gar and swore never to repeat his misdeeds. I and some other masters were there to be present as witnesses. However, in less than one year, he had committed another crime. After that, everything went wrong for him and he was later sentenced to death. I am not sure whether he was ever put on probation or not as it was said to be impossible. What I am saying is that if you have sworn an oath in a temple or in front of Buddhas or Bodhisattvas, yet you fail to keep your word, misfortune and disaster may befall you even in your present life.

To stick to one's faith or vow is very important. During our practice, we should try our best to keep our vows. It shouldn't be just a formality and while this may be a little off topic, I would like to take this opportunity to stress it. Today, I encountered something that impressed me quite a lot. The year before last, after the Yushu earthquake, I went to Yushu to provide some help. We found an orphan there, whose father, mother and sister had all died in the earthquake. The boy said that he only had his old granny and that no other relatives remained alive. I later decided to bring him back with us, but before we took him, we visited his granny who seemed to be

in her seventies. Thinking that he had no other relatives, I brought him back with us and placed him in my school at Drakgo and asked one of my sisters to look after him. While we thought that the boy had no other living relatives, it turned out that he actually had an uncle who was his mother's younger brother. This uncle is a monk, and at the time that the earthquake took place, he was in retreat. The day after the earthquake, he heard the news during a break in his meditation sessions and learned that only his old mother was alive, while his sister, her husband, and one of their children had all died in the disaster. He also heard that another child of his sister had been taken away by a Buddhist monk. Since he had made a commitment to be in retreat for 3 years and 3 months and had not yet completed it, he elected to continue with his retreat. About a month ago, this monk completed his retreat and today he came to me, saying that he was looking for his orphaned nephew and was hoping to see how the boy is doing now. I said to him with admiration, "You are an excellent practitioner. Your vow was unshaken. If I were you, knowing that my sister had died in the earthquake, leaving my mother alone, I might have come out of retreat right away. I may not have stayed there a single day longer."

In fact, if we can keep to our vows, we will be less fixated on many of life's distraction and will instead place more importance on upholding the precepts or the vows that we have made, and regard them as the most valuable things in life. However, ordinary people do not value these things as they should and instead treasure the things that

they should not. This is the norm these days. During our course of study and practice of the Dharma, whenever we aim to do something, whether it is a retreat or a particular practice, we must make a firm vow and stick to it unwaveringly. Mipham Rinpoche stressed again and again, in relevant texts, that we should keep our word. This also applies to doing volunteer work. Some volunteers here were enthusiastic in the first day or two, yet, not long after, when they had met a tiny challenge or obstacle, exclaimed, “Oh, no! I cannot do that. I quit.”, and they left right away. You will achieve nothing by acting in this way, regardless of whether it is volunteer work, Dharma study, benefiting sentient beings or anything else. That is why the honored masters always emphasized that we should be stable, reliable, and stick to our vows and principles. This is crucial.

Now, as we are learning the qualities of Tara, it is my hope that everyone can be joyful and generate great devotion to her. In particular, these days there are many female Buddhists and I think that Tara, as a female deity will probably take special care of you. So, for this reason, females in particular should pray to Tara. In this world, females inevitably encounter more unfavorable conditions and karmic obstacles than men. This is also mentioned by the Buddha in sutras; it's not a prejudice against women. Thus, if female practitioners pray devotedly to Tara, many unfavorable conditions can be removed completely. Of course, male practitioners should also pray to Tara and will certainly receive swift and immense blessing, as well. Hopefully, all of you will cherish this opportunity to diligently learn and practice Tara.

**TARA, THE MOTHER FOR
ALL**

LECTURE THREE

I hope that in the future, every Dharma friend will carry forward the practice of Tara because without its propagation, its benefit and powerful blessing will never become widely known.

– Khenpo Sodargye

PRaises TO TWENTY-ONE TARAS

LIBERATION DEPENDS ON YOU, SO EXERT YOURSELF

Let's continue with our study of *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras*. In Tibetan Buddhism, not only does every school and every tradition like to chant this prayer, but this is also true of countless everyday people going about their daily lives. This is because there are so many cases of it being effective in dispelling the eight great fears, which are the fear of drowning or water, the fear of thieves, lions, snakes, fire, spirits or flesh-eating demons, captivity or imprisonment and the fear of elephants. It is equally effective in dispelling the sixteen lesser fears, which are the fears of enemies, lions, elephants, fire, snakes, bandits or robbers, prison or captivity, ocean waves, demons and cannibals, leprosy, the fear of the harm inflicted by gandharvas (who are the

messengers of Indra), as well as the fears of poverty, separation from friends or loved ones, punishment by the king, meteor showers, and the fear of misfortune or failure. All of these fears can be dispelled by relying on Tara's responsive blessing. Hence, I think that from now on, we should, without question, propagate the practices of Tara in mainland China as well as in all other places.

The blessings of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are inconceivable, in the same way that an effective medicine has an amazing power to bring healing and that magic possesses the unbelievable power to display miracles. In this world, there are many inconceivable powers. Most of you are Buddhists, so, it goes without saying that you must have faith in the qualities of wisdom, compassion and power that are expressed by the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Furthermore, since you have faith, you should pray to them often, because whether or not one receives their blessing is very much related to one's devotion and effort in practice. If one has little or no yearning for their blessing and as a consequence never prays to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, or never recites their scriptures, then despite the fact that these sublime beings possess extraordinary powers, virtues and blessings, one will not receive the benefit of their extraordinary abilities.

Whether one becomes a good practitioner or not depends on one's self. As the Buddha said: "I have shown you the methods that lead to liberation, but as liberation depends on you, (you must) exert yourselves." Surely, to attain liberation, we need to rely on the instructions of spiritual teachers. In the early stages, the guidance

from spiritual teachers is absolutely necessary. It is like learning how to drive a car. First, you need to receive instruction from experienced drivers. After that, whether or not you become a good driver depends on your own effort and practice. In much the same way, when we are first beginning our spiritual journey, without the guidance of spiritual teachers, we have no way of knowing the correct way to practice. Take the practice of Tara for example. Even though many people may have seen images of Tara, it is likely that they may not have had the chance to learn what the practice of Tara really is like. By learning this Praise together, many of you will get to know its profound meaning, as well as receive some guidance on how to practice Tara. After that, whether you receive the blessing of Tara or not will rely entirely on your own efforts.

I hope that in the future, every Dharma friend will carry forward the practice of Tara because without its propagation, its benefit and powerful blessing will never become widely known. It is the same for any of the beneficial medicines in the world. Without advertising and promotion, not many people would become aware of their effectiveness and their magical abilities to heal, but before you share the practice with others, you must practice it yourself. Otherwise, without ever having experienced Tara's blessing, it is certain to be difficult to teach the practice to others. Yesterday, I heard the women's group reciting *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras* in Chinese and I must say that they chanted it very well. Today is the male group's turn. Not sure how they will perform. Before class yesterday, I saw a

group of male students preparing for today's chanting, but before today's class, when I took a short look, I saw no one was making any preparation. Maybe when they show up later today they will do a better job. Regardless of the outcome, just as I did last night with the female group, I will, as always, sprinkle the rice and recite the *Essence of Dependent Origination Dharani* to bestow blessings upon you, and I will hope that through this, and by the power of dependent arising, the *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras* will spread more widely throughout mainland China. Meanwhile, every one of you should also contemplate how you will, in the future, spread this Praise, as well as the other blessed words of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, since the propagation of the Buddhadharma will only succeed with the collective efforts of many, instead of relying on the strength of any one teacher or practitioner.

Over the long history of Tibet, Tara has become deeply rooted in people's minds, to the point that these days almost everyone prays to her and recites her mantra. I often wonder why, in this modern age, the Buddhadharma is still so well-preserved in the Tibetan region. The Buddhadharma, as a mental remedy, is indeed what mankind is most in need of. In this age of globalization, such material things as food and necessities are no longer in short supply for most people. What is it then, that people these days are most lacking? The answer is spiritual sustenance. As you can see, many people with a high level of education are interested in the Tibetan culture and yearn to one day visit the Tibetan region. They must have a very good reason

for their desire, but what, we may well ask, is it? Some people say they are attracted by the blue sky, the white clouds and the vast green grassland of the Tibetan region. But this natural scenery is not unique to Tibet and similar scenery can be seen in several other places. In point of fact, the outside world's primary attraction to Tibet is rooted in the spirit of Buddhism, and most particularly, in the essence of the altruistic Bodhichitta that has remained intact there through generation after generation. As long as the spirit of Buddhism remains well preserved within the Tibetan plateau, the people there will continue to be simple and pure, with very little greed, hatred or ignorance in their minds and they will continue to enjoy the atmosphere of inclusivity, freedom, and equality that they have become accustomed to. But if the essence of the Buddhadharma disappears from the Tibetan region, Tibetans will become as restless as people in the big cities. Regardless of whether people are Tibetan, Han or from elsewhere, as ordinary beings, they can all be easily caught up in the waves of greed, aversion and ignorance that will cause them to continually experience suffering. So, if they were to lose the nurture of the Buddhadharma, Tibetans and others, will also suffer the pain of spiritual and physical deprivation.

Back when Buddhism was still prosperous in India, the quintessential nature of Buddhism was well-preserved at Nalanda monastery and other sacred sites. Because of this, scholars from all over the world, such as the renowned Chinese Master Xuanzang and Master Faxian of the Tang Dynasty, were attracted to travel to these places to study and

bring back to their home countries many important scriptures. After having returned home, they were able to bring benefit to many people. In modern times, this continues to be the case with many monastics and lay practitioners who seek to gain insight and understanding into Buddhist practice and scholarship. They study and practice Mahayana Buddhism, so that they can later influence and bring benefit to the people around them. For those of you who have come to study, do not isolate yourself from society, or attempt to be like the pine tree that stands alone on the hilltop. Since every one of you have families, relatives, friends and work colleagues, once you have gained the wisdom of altruism, it is certain that you will bring illumination and light to others with whom you come into contact. Wherever you are, you will radiate the light of great compassion and because of this you will benefit those around you. In this way, it will not be too difficult to make a positive impact on the world. So, I hope everyone can study the Dharma devotedly and make the sincere aspiration to benefit others.

Now, to return to this Praise. Although it seems fairly simple and contains only twenty-one stanzas, be aware that its meaning is actually quite profound. In fact, in many terms and sadhanas, there are volumes of Tara practices to be found. Therefore, do not think that Tara practices are simple. Regarding the *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras*, I'm only explaining the outer meaning by giving you a very literal explanation. In fact, every stanza can be expounded upon from the view of the generation stage, the completion stage and the Great

Perfection. If we explain the Praise according to the teachings of the Great Perfection, each stanza can be interpreted individually by taking the view of the Mind, Space and Pith Instruction, the three categories within the Great Perfection. If I were to give an extensive explanation of each stanza according to the teaching of every vehicle, there would be far too much to cover. Take the practice of *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras*, for example. If we were to practice it according to the four activities of pacifying, increasing, magnetizing and subjugating, there would be many accompanying rituals and practices. In these rituals, the chanting of each Tara's mantra is integrated with the four activities. To accomplish these would involve lots of complicated steps of visualization. Since this is the first time I am giving a teaching on *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras* to you, I am only giving a simple explanation along with many stories intended to illustrate the basic themes. I know that most of you like stories and probably 70 percent are story-inclined. Why do I say that? I don't mean that as any kind of negative criticism, but each time I tell a story, you seem to become so drawn into it, yet when I refer to more sophisticated or abstract aspects, you seem to immediately become sleepy or lethargic. So, I think that since most of you are interested in stories, I will introduce this Praise by utilizing this simple approach. If possible, in the future, I'll translate more practices on Tara with explanations on a more profound level, that will include resorting to the pith teachings of the Vajrayana. During this lecture series, although we will only be learning the literal meaning of the *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras*, we can still gain lots of inspiration.



DROLMA SHYENKYI MITUPMA, THE TARA WHO IS INVINCIBLE IN CRUSHING ADVERSARIES

Today, let's continue from where we left off the other day, which was at D1) Praise for the Peaceful Body Aspects, of which there are six parts. As we've finished five of them in the two previous lectures, let us now turn to E6) Praise for Crushing the Opponents' Yantras.

E6. Praise for Crushing the Opponents' Yantras

Homage to you, who with *traṭ* and *phaṭ*
Crush the enemies' *yantras* to dust.
With right leg bent in and left leg extended,
Shining you tread amidst flames wildly blazing.

This is Tara Aparadhṛṣyā, or Drolma Shyenkyi Mitupma in Tibetan, the Tara who is invincible in crushing adversaries. Here, Tara is praised for her invincible power in destroying all opponents. Whether they are foes, demons, unfavorable conditions, or obstacles, through Tara's compassion and power, all can be subdued. This Tara's body is

blue-black and she holds the same gesture in her right hand as that of the previous Taras that we discussed, that is, her right hand is held in the mudra of bestowing the sublime, while her left hand holds a utpala flower, on top of which is a sword that can cut off the root of ignorance and wrong views. Although she is generally depicted in a peaceful form, in order to destroy her foes as well as all such hostile conditions as hailstorms, wars, epidemics, etc., she manifests in a somewhat wrathful form, in that she sits amidst wildly blazing flames that symbolize the power to incinerate all negativity. With her right leg bent inward and her left leg extended outward, she treads on all enemies.

In general, it can be said that to tame different sentient beings, Tara's methods vary. When working with mildly ignorant beings, Tara tames in a compassionate manner. As to vicious and stubborn beings who are difficult to tame, she manifests a fierce and wrathful form like Tara Aparadhṛṣyā. Regarding her speech, Tara Aparadhṛṣyā utters TRAT and PHAT to destroy all the yantras or wheels of delusion that her enemies display. That is, this Tara crushes all instruments her enemies summon in their effort to confuse sentient beings. TRAT is actually a mantra used to purify and uproot samsara, while PHAT is a mantra useful in obtaining peaceful nirvana. In other words, TRAT signifies the nature of unconditional compassion, and PHAT exemplifies the nature of non-grasping wisdom. So "*with traṭ and phaṭ*", signifies the perfect union of wisdom and compassion, that gives rise to a powerful strength, by which there is nothing that cannot be conquered. That is

to say, this Tara is able to overcome all unfavorable conditions and obstacles. In some practices of Tara, we visualize Tara emitting the two seed syllables which have the power to dispel all of her enemies' evil deeds.

When we encounter unfavorable conditions or horrifying obstacles, visualizing Tara is an effective way to meet them. If you can visualize all forms of Tara, that would be best, but if not, you can just visualize just one of them, such as Green Tara or Tara Aparadhṛṣyā. Then, all external obstacles, including the adversities one faces in daily life, can all be dispelled. Long ago, in India, there were five hundred monastics who engaged in spiritual practice in a forest. At one time, they were beset by evil spirits that had surrounded them. As these spirits began to make trouble, many of the monastics began behaving crazily and speaking nonsense. At that moment, an old bhikshu recalled something that he had been taught by his guru. This was that if he was ever confronted with hostile conditions or suffering, he should immediately begin to engage in Tara practice. So he immediately began to practice according to his guru's pith. He prayed fervently to Tara, who then appeared to him as if in a dream state and gave him the instruction to hang images of Tara everywhere throughout the whole forest. When the demons saw that the entire forest was filled with these images of Tara, they were no longer able to impose any danger to the practicing monks. †

† It may be noticed that the account of the story here is slightly different from the story recorded in some other resources like Taranatha's *Golden Rosary*. This is because there are different resources of the story in Tibetan.

In the Tibetan region, there are many stories of Tara's direct responsiveness. I don't know if you have visited the Jokhang Temple in Lhasa, but there used to be an exquisite wall painting of Tara there, where many great masters had placed gold leaf upon her image and made grand offerings to her. It has been recorded that as they chanted and prayed to her, many auspicious signs appeared. In some historical accounts, it is recorded that once when Chögyal Phagpa came to worship at the Jokhang Temple, he offered this Tara painting a khata. As he was placing the khata on the floor beneath her image, he distinctly heard Tara speak, instructing him, "You'd better put the khata up here, rather than on the ground."

Some of you may hold doubts regarding the authenticity of these stories, but they are all taken from reliable historical records. If we don't acknowledge such historical records, then it is no different than if we were to deny the validity of the historical records of Chinese or any other country's history. Whether it's this lesson that is taking place now, or something that we have done, acted upon or talked about previously, it will all become a part of shared history, sooner or later. At that point, it would be unreasonable if someone were to negate that these events took place. Also, some of you might think that these stories are outdated and question whether such miracles could still happen in modern times. Some might even be wondering whether Tara practice itself is outdated or whether she is still as responsive these days as she was in the past. That should never be a question that you ask yourself. In mainland China, there aren't

many stories about Tara, but in places like Taiwan, since practices of Tara were propagated much earlier, due the efforts of many Tibetan masters, there are lots of people who like to engage in Tara practice and modern stories about the wonders and benefits of Tara practice can often be heard. There are cases of young people going through difficult times of breakups after reciting prayers to Tara. There are also cases of businessmen finding a better path by relying on Tara's blessing after their factories had been forced to close down. There are many stories like these and there are so many successful outcomes that it is clear that these aren't just empty stories or myths.

Therefore, we can conclude that when we encounter certain unfavorable conditions and troubles during our practice or when there are bumpy situations in our career or personal life, praying to Tara is certainly the most responsive and swiftest way of receiving her blessing. This is probably not known to some of you because before receiving this teaching, you had very little knowledge of Tara and her qualities. As you have now learned about her power, however, you should engender a strong conviction in her and with that conviction, you can beseech her. I hope that in the future, all of the Dharma friends can try to practice Tara as they encounter the different situations one faces in one's life.

BUDDHISM: OTHER-ORIENTED OR SELF-ORIENTED?

Yesterday, as we were chanting the *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras*, my mind was filled with heartfelt conviction and my tears of faith became unstoppable. On one hand, I was crying because I felt a bit sad that even though I have had a strong sense of devotion to Tara and have been praying to her since I was little, other than seeing thangkas and statues, I haven't seen her face-to-face yet. But mostly I felt sorry that in this samsara, so many beings are undergoing tremendous suffering and I really wish that Tara would bestow her blessing and eradicate all of their suffering. Actually, all of you here are very fortunate. You are physically healthy and enjoy sufficient food, clothing, and life's basic necessities. Of course, not everyone is content in mind. Every one of you has your own afflictions and problems. Whatever these problems might be, by and large, the condition of everyone here is fairly good. Among all of the different groups in this society, there are many individuals who are in anguish. This is especially true if you happen to visit any hospital, as whichever department you enter, you will see countless people suffering. For instance, if you go to an optical clinic, you will feel as if everyone is having eye problems. If you go to an orthopedics practice, it seems that everyone has bone problems. Each department of a hospital is filled with suffering patients. So, when we pray, we should pray on behalf of all sentient beings.

Regarding the teaching of Buddhism, some may ask, "Is Buddhism primarily concerned with the interest of others or with one's own

interests?" It should be understood, that Buddhism is both other-oriented and self-oriented. But as to how this is expressed in individual Buddhists, there are some differences. Superior practitioners are entirely altruistic and pay no attention to themselves; mid-level practitioners aim to benefit both others and themselves, while inferior practitioners only care about their own personal liberation from samsara. In other words, the ultimate spirit of Buddhism is altruism, but as far as the extent to which any one practitioner applies it, this depends on the depth of their own spiritual practice. So, when we pray to Tara, we should try to remind ourselves that all around us, in places that we can neither see nor hear, countless beings are suffering and are in unbearable pain; they are filled with sadness and constantly in tears. We should pray for them so that they can be liberated by the swift and powerful blessings of Tara and thus, attain liberation. The attainment of liberation does not come out of nowhere. For some beings, through the prayers of others given on their behalf, their suffering can be alleviated and liberation can be achieved. For others, when good causes and conditions come together, they will, by the power of their own prayers, attain liberation. So, there are many different individual situations and circumstances. No matter what, we should try to pray for the welfare of all beings. This is very important.

We will now speak about the appearance of Tara amidst raging flames. When we pray, we should visualize the appearance of Tara surrounded by blazing fire. As regards visualization in our practice,

this requires instruction and guidance. There's a story of a practitioner in retreat that visualized the wrathful deity without knowing exactly how or why. As he had seen blazing fire surrounding those wrathful deities, he took it as a sign that it might be good to meditate that way himself. As he practiced, his retreat room caught on fire because of some other unrelated reason. At first, he thought the fire was just a meditative experience that came from his successful visualization, so he remained in his meditative posture and endured the rising heat. As he became hotter and hotter, he wondered, "Can it be that I am truly surrounded by fire?" When he came out from his abiding state and looked out, he found out that the monastery had actually caught on fire and so, petrified, he jumped to his feet and ran away. According to some tantric teachings of higher level, one needs to visualize oneself as the deity. At this time in our study of *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras*, we can just use a simple method of visualization which is similar to the visualization method of Kriya or Charya Tantra, the more basic level tantric traditions. Using this approach, we will visualize Tara, the extremely compassionate female Buddha, sitting before us and pray to her for blessings so that all of our obstacles can be removed. By practicing in this manner, we don't have to visualize ourselves as Tara, as we have not touched on that level yet.



DROLMA SHYEN MIGYALWA, THE TARA WHO CAN PROTECT YOU FROM FEAR AND WORRY

Next, D2) Praise for the Wrathful Body Aspects. This is divided into seven parts, the first of which is E1) Praise for Destroying Foes and Demons.

D2. Praise for the Wrathful Body Aspects

E1. Praise for Destroying Foes and Demons

Homage to Ture, the fearsome lady,
 Destroyer of the most powerful demons.
 With a lotus-face and a deep-furrowed brow,
 You are the slayer of each and every foe.

[Homage to Ture, the fearsome lady,
 Destroyer of the most powerful demons.
 With a deep-furrowed brow on your lotus-face,
 You are the slayer of each and every foe.]

This is Tara Aparajitā, or Drolma Shyen Migyalwa in Tibetan, the

Tara who saves beings from great horrors. She is red in color with a flaming vajra, which can destroy all ferocious demons, as her implement. When she is peaceful, her face is as beautiful as a lotus flower, but faced with certain beings that are hard to tame, she frowns, with her eyebrows and forehead wrinkled, displaying a wrathful expression. By her power and blessing, all foes are slain and all kinds of fear are dispelled. In our life, we all face various kinds of fear: fear that comes from the inner mind and fear that comes from external things like demons, enemies, failing to sustain a livelihood and more. For example, a businessman might be afraid of losing money in business, "Am I doing a good job? Am I losing profit?", while employees are concerned about the development of their career. Regardless of the specific case, by the great power of Tara, foes and demons can be slain and all worries can be cleared away.

"Slay", doesn't mean to harm beings or to kill them. Rather, it means to liberate them. In a Buddhist context, such expressions as "destroy", "subjugate", "expel", etc., are skillful means utilized to benefit and liberate beings. Fierce means, such as subjugation or destruction, as they have been adopted by Buddhism, are different from the way these terms are used when speaking of the behavior of ordinary people. Ordinary people use these types of behaviors for their own interests, i.e., they kill enemies and drive away those they consider as threats to their interests. Such values can be reflected in the policy-making of many nations. As a matter of fact, the intention or actions to harm beings has never existed in Buddhism. It may seem as if

Tara exerts her power to cast out and slay all maras and other such opponents, but actually, by the power of Tara's extraordinary ability, she uses these seemingly ferocious methods to release and liberate these beings. We must be aware of this point. On the surface, there are methods of subjugation or expulsion in Esoteric Buddhism, which can also be found in Exoteric Buddhism. Actually, these methods are skillful means adopted under the guidance of compassion, which are workable for eradicating non-virtuous acts.

Thus, through the support of Tara, hostile forces and obstacle-makers can be removed. I don't know if you've heard of the famous Tibetan story of the one-legged Tara, but this is a well-known story in the Tibetan region that almost everyone can tell some version of. Long ago, in a small town in the Tibetan region, there lived a woman who was a pious follower of Tara. Near the town was a bridge that was known to be occupied by many non-human beings, demons, and evil spirits, who, on a regular basis, caused harm to those who came near. You may know weird places like this yourself, as it is well-known that there are places that are troubled by demonic forces who like to create problems for those who venture close, while other places remain peaceful and free of such afflictions. Now, with this particular bridge, whoever crossed over it would almost certainly, encounter some kind of trouble. One day, the spirits of the bridge came to the home of this woman and her husband and played some tricks that caused the couple to quarrel with one another. In a fit of pique, the woman decided to leave the house for the night. As she left, she realized that

she would have to cross the bridge and so, as she approached it, she began to feel worried about encountering one of the evil spirits that were often hanging around in that area. In spite of being terrified at this prospect, she was so infuriated with her husband that she refused to return home, leaving her with no choice but to cross the bridge. As she set out, she began to chant prayers to Tara, but as she was still so filled with anger and in such a hurry to get away that she could only remember half of the prayer. Still, as she walked, she continued to recite the half of the prayer that she remembered, and was able to cross the bridge without any trouble befalling her. Soon after this, the spirits who had visited the couple's home returned and asked those who kept watch of the bridge, "A woman just crossed the bridge, why didn't you push her off?" The spirits replied, "We saw nobody passing by but a one-legged Tara."

The story seems simple, but, in fact, it is indeed inspiring. Even though the woman recited just half of the prayer, because of her conviction in Tara, she appeared to these non-human beings as a Tara lacking one leg. Since that time, Tibetans in that area and elsewhere have known to pray to Tara whenever dangers occur. Ever since I was a little boy, whenever I run into trouble, if time does not allow for a more extensive prayer, I will recite at least the Tara mantra or the succinct prayer of two lines, which can be found at the end of the *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras*. I will include it here:

jetsün pakma drolma khyé khyen no

*I pray to you, noble savior Tārā,
jik dang dukngal kün lé kyab tu sol
May you protect us from all danger, fear and suffering.*

It would be good if you would also develop this habit when faced with obstacles. When you have time, you should chant the whole *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras*, but if you really have difficulty doing so, recite this short prayer or her mantra and all demonic obstacles and hostile conditions can be dispelled. This is very crucial.



GREEN TARA, THE MOTHER FOR ALL

E2. Praise for Safeguarding Others

Homage to you, whose fingers grace
 Your heart and display the Three Jewels *mudrā*.
 You're graced by wheels adorning every direction,
 With dazzling radiance that overwhelms all.

This is Tara Khadira-vaṇī, or Drolma Sengdeng Nakkyi in Tibetan, who is in fact the Green Tara. Her right hand is held in the gesture of bestowing the sublime, while her left hand is at her heart in the mudra of the Three Jewels, a gesture in which the ring finger and the thumb are joined with the rest of the other three fingers pointing up. Held in her joined ring finger and thumb, is the stalk of the lotus flower, on top of which there's a Dharma wheel. In other images of Green Tara, sometimes her left hand holds only a lotus without a Dharma wheel on top of it, while at other times, she holds a Dharma wheel directly without the lotus. Basically, the gesture of the right and the left hand of each Tara is pretty much the same and it is the implements in their left hand that differs. "You're graced by wheels adorning every direction" means that Green Tara adorns or safeguards all worlds of

every direction. “Every direction” represents a scope of area which includes every place, including the furthest corners of the universe. As there is no place that she does not safeguard, we should pray to Green Tara often. “With dazzling radiance that overwhelms all” means that the radiance from her body embraces all sentient beings. That is, all sentient beings are protected by the light of Tara. When confronted with suffering and unfavorable conditions, we can visualize that Tara shines the light of her blessing upon us to safeguard and protect us. Such visualization brings immense benefit.

Throughout the history of China, there have always been some who practiced Green Tara, although such cases were never as widespread as in the Tibetan region. During the time of the Qing Dynasty, Imperial Preceptor Changkya taught the practices of Tara to the imperial families. The mother of Emperor Qianlong was a devoted practitioner of Green Tara and created a thangka of Green Tara that is now preserved as a precious cultural relic in the Lama Temple (Yonghe Temple). It is a barbola thangka made of thousands of pieces of embroidered brocade, the craftsmanship of which is exquisitely delicate. In addition to this Tara thangka, the Yonghe Temple has many other precious collections of Tara as well. In Tibet, there are also many precious cultural relics of Tara. In early Tibet, Princess Bhrikuti of Nepal brought what is said to be the first statue of Tara into the Tibetan region. Later, Princess Wencheng of the Tang Dynasty also brought a Tara statue with her on the occasion of her marriage to the Tibetan king. This Tara is now housed in the Tara shrine called

Drolma Lhakang in Luoxu Town, Serxu County. I mentioned this beautiful Tara statue in the first lecture of this series. The location of this Tara shrine is not too far from the place where Ju Mipham Rinpoche passed away, which is a very auspicious site that I have visited and which is associated with many prominent masters. It is said that when Princess Wencheng passed through this place on her way to Lhasa, the Tara statue she brought with her suddenly began to speak, "I want to stay here to benefit beings, instead of going to Lhasa." So, the statue was left there, and now has a history of bringing benefit to the people of that area for the past 1300 years.

Although there is a long history of Tara statues in the Tibetan region, it is from the time of Lord Atisha that practices of Tara became truly prevalent. Speaking of Lord Atisha, there is a famous Tara temple related to him, whose history can be traced back to the year 1046. In that year, under the request of Dromtonpa and other disciples, Atisha came to Nyetang, a place near Lhasa, and taught the Dharma there for nine years, until around 1054 when he entered into nirvana, leaving his relics in the place of Nyetang, along with his other personal belongings that contain holy blessing. Later, in commemoration of Lord Atisha, his disciples built a Tara temple to house the Tara statue that Atisha had often brought with him when he was alive, as well as some of his relics. The Tara Temple, which is located only 21 miles away from Lhasa City, is now known as Nyetang Drolma Lhakang and is well-known for its great blessing, especially to people in the area around Lhasa City. In 1990, when I accompanied H. H. Jigme

Phuntsok to India, we went by way of Lhasa and on our way, we passed by the village of Nyetang and visited this temple. During our visit, H. H. Jigme Phuntsok consecrated the temple in person and we prayed together there. If you visit Lhasa in the future, I hope that you will also go to Nyetang and visit this temple. As far as I can remember, the temple is rather small but carries important historical significance and contains great blessing.

When praying to Tara, you should do so with sincere devotion. By praying with devotion, people who are critically ill can be cured. There is a story about this, that took place in more recent times. A certain businessman owned a seafood restaurant, whose business was booming with profits pouring in from all sides. While he was in his palmy days, he was unexpectedly diagnosed with gastric cancer, which was in its final stages. He was extremely desperate and felt that there was no hope for his recovery. One night, a green-bodied lady came to him in a dream and reprimanded him by saying, "I am your mother. You should close your restaurant right away, and I will save you." She probably also exhorted him to engage in Dharma practice. Surprised and thrilled, he woke from his dream wondering who this remarkable green lady was and why she would say that she was his mother. A few days later, he happened to enter a Buddhist shop and there he saw a thangka of a woman who looked exactly the same as the green woman in his dream. Overjoyed, he inquired of the shopkeeper who she was and was told that this was Green Tara, an embodiment of Avalokiteshvara. Upon hearing this the man immediately bought

the thangka, brought it back and hung it in a prominent place in his home. Following the instruction that the mother Tara had given to him in his dream, he sold his business and closed the restaurant. Not long after this, he met a Buddhist master who, after hearing his unusual experience, imparted to him the practice of Tara. Soon after, the man set up a Dharma center dedicated to Green Tara and not long after, he miraculously and completely recovered from cancer without the need for further treatment. It is said that he later helped many cancer patients who were critically ill and encouraged them to engage in Green Tara practice. Many of these people have recovered and all feel that they owe their recovery to the great blessing of Green Tara.

Praying to Tara does not only cure illness but can also prolong life. There was once a Kadampa geshe who had a dream of the setting sun. Feeling that it might be a bad omen, he went to tell his guru about the dream. The guru said, "This is a very bad dream as it is a sign of your impending death. But there is no need to worry as I have a profound pith instruction that can dispel all obstacles." Then the guru imparted to him the practice of Tara. Following the guru's instruction meticulously, the man began to engage in Tara practice as he had been taught. After eleven months of this practice, Tara appeared to him and his life span was extended for ten additional years. When he reached sixty, he hoped to further extend his life span so as to make more of a contribution to the Dharma and the benefit of sentient beings, so once again he prayed to Tara. Tara appeared

again and instructed him, "If you make a thangka or statue in my image, your life will be prolonged." He drew a thangka of Tara and his life was extended to seventy or ten more years. When he reached seventy, he still felt that his Dharma work was not complete, so he again prayed to Tara who again appeared to him and said, "Make another thangka or statue of me and your life will be prolonged for ten more years." He did as he was told and once again, his life was extended. At eighty, he again prayed to Tara, who told him, "Make one more thangka or statue and your life will be prolonged for fifteen more years." By following Tara's instructions, the old geshe was able to continue his Dharma work until he was ninety-five years old.

Many people seek longevity, wealth, a happy family, and the like. Indeed, for ordinary people, these are big things. If we talk to them about ultimate liberation, they think that the afterlife is too far away and that to strive for a happier family and better living in this life is more important. If this is also what you wish for, and because the blessing of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas is indeed incredible, if you pray to Tara, by her brilliant power, obstacles will be cleared away and your wishes can be fulfilled. Of course, this pertains primarily to those with great faith. For those with little or no faith, it may be difficult for them to experience such blessing.



DROLMA JIKTEN SUMGYAL, THE TARA WHO CAN GRANT YOU CHARISMA

E3. Praise for Magnetizing All Hosts of Maras and Worldly Beings

Homage to you, supremely joyous,
Your splendid crown spreading garlands of light.
Smiling and laughing, with *tuttāre*
You bring demons and worlds under control.

This is Tara Trailokavijayā, or Drolma Jikten Sumgyal in Tibetan, the Tara who is endowed with uncontaminated supreme joy and great bliss, and liberates infinite sentient beings by her mighty power and merit. The characteristic of this Tara is that the radiant light of her crown ornament is uncommonly splendid and she emits the sound of laughter, which according to some materials sounds like “ha-ha, he-he, hey-hey, ho-ho”. Buddhas and Bodhisattvas do not laugh for no reason; they laugh only if their laughter brings benefit to sentient beings. In fact, the sounds of Tara’s laughter make up the words of the mantra of Tara that we often recite. “OM TARE TUTTARE TURE SVAHA”, which is a sound that can magnetize and

command the hosts of maras, worldly devas (like Indra and Brahma), as well as such worldly beings as human kings and ministers.

If we want to protect ourselves from all unfavorable conditions and the harm caused by demons or foes, as well as to benefit and liberate all beings, both human and non-human, we must first conquer the minds of those beings. Otherwise, it will be rather difficult. Without virtuous prestige and influence, to conquer their minds will be overwhelmingly challenging. For example, when in a family situation, if you lack the charisma to maintain your mate's attraction to you, the more you cling to him or her, the further they will stay away from you. Even if you have done all that you can to keep him or her around, they may still leave you. But if we have a charming influence and virtuous behavior, then naturally, sentient beings will come and gather around us, in the same way that bees are spontaneously attracted to flowers. Once they feel attracted to your presence, to bring benefit to them with the Dharma will not be a problem. Therefore, if we want to benefit beings, we need to pray for the blessings of Tara.

Speaking of the blessings of Tara, even her clothing and ornaments are endowed with blessing. As we mentioned before, Tara is dignified with the thirteen ornaments of perfect sambhogakaya, including the eight jewel ornaments and the five silk adornments. These ornaments are also signs of blessing. If we have faith, with the proper causes and conditions coming together, we can also be blessed by Tara's ornaments. There is a story of Longchenpa in his biography that illustrates this: while Longchenpa was studying in Sangphu, some

Khampa people made his life difficult and actually threw him out of his rooms seven times. Finally, he decided that it was time to leave Sangphu for good. Leaving behind a poem he had composed about his weariness with the samsaric life, he departed. Begging along the road to sustain himself, Longchenpa came to a valley, where he met a geshe (a title awarded to scholars in the Gelugpa school) from Gyama. Longchenpa asked him whether he knew of a cave in Gyama associated with Druptop Chokla in Gyama and the geshe replied, "That is indeed an excellent cliffside cave. Why do you ask this?" Longchenpa said, "If I can gather a full bag of tsampa barley while begging, I will stay there for the winter." The geshe replied, "I am also planning to stay there for the winter. Let's go together." From that point on, many favorable conditions emerged and so they had no problems getting provisions. So, they continued on to the cave with the determination to remain in retreat there for the following eight months.

During the retreat, Longchenpa taught the *Ornament of Clear Realization* to the geshe every morning at dawn. When not teaching, Longchenpa remained in meditative absorption in complete darkness. After five months of practice in total darkness, one morning at dawn he had a profound and visionary experience, in that Tara appeared before him as a sixteen-year-old girl of unparalleled loveliness, riding on a horse and richly dressed in brocade clothes, a jeweled tiara, and a golden veil, replete with gold and turquoise ornaments. He then supplicated to her, saying, "Noble lady, please take me under your

compassionate care!" She removed her jeweled crown and placed it on his head, saying, "From now on I shall always bless you and grant you siddhis." She also conveyed to him the prophecy that he would meet his destined guru, the great Rigdzin Kumaradza. After receiving this blessing from Tara, for a month he remained absorbed in a state of bliss, clarity, and nonconceptual awareness, and from that time on, Tara would appear to provide assistance at almost every critical time of his Dharma activities.

So, these stories illustrate why I think Dharma friends attending this teaching should generate faith toward Tara. Last year I printed some images of Tara and distributed them to you, however, you might not feel anything towards them as I hadn't yet introduced any of Tara's qualities. Last year, I also made some cards of Tara which should be accessible to you. We did distribute them, didn't we? Did you get them? It may be that you do not care much about them either, and have just left them aside. I think it's necessary that large numbers of people should perform Tara practices regularly. In the past, when epidemics or other kinds of unfavorable conditions occurred in Larung Gar, H. H. Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche often asked the sangha members to engage in Tara practice together. We used to pray to her when we were facing major problems. Therefore, I want to stress to you that to practice Tara brings significant benefits in our daily life.

There is a present-day story of how one particular woman received Tara's blessing. Having been married for years, the lady was no longer young and pretty as she used to, but her husband still cared for her

very much. When he looked at her, his eyes were as full of love as if they were still newly married. Many people admired her for this and asked her what her secret was. She said, "Actually in the past, my relationship with my husband was not harmonious. In his eyes, I was almost an eyesore. Then, a master told me that if I were to recite the Tara mantra 400,000 times, things would change for the better. So, I started to recite the mantra and by the time I had reached 200,000 recitations, our relationship had already begun to change for the better. From that time until now, our relationship has become more and more harmonious. Therefore, I aspired to chant more and decided to complete a million recitations of the Tara mantra."

It is surely the case that many people have experienced blessings after practicing Tara, As a matter of fact, whether or not one receives the blessing of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas depends upon one's faith. In this lecture series, we are just learning the outer or the literal meaning of this Praise, which is focused primarily on visualizing the appearance of Tara. Perhaps some of you who practice Chan or Dzogchen are thinking, "Oh, don't tell us these things. We shouldn't be attached to anything." Although that statement is true, there are times when we still need to be attached to what is good and virtuous. As I mentioned in the last lecture, if the Dharma protectors, dakinis and yidams frequently grant us their support, then regardless of whether our activities involve our personal practice, our career or propagating the Dharma, all aspects of our life and practice will go smoothly and we will become extremely capable and powerful in

whatever we do. This is clear.

CHERISH THE OPPORTUNITY OF DHARMA STUDY AND CARRY ON THE HOLY TEACHING

In this Age of Degeneration, Buddhism in different places doesn't seem to be that prosperous. To be honest, many temples in mainland China, I'm not saying all of them, but some, have turned into business operations and tourist attractions. If one visits these temples, one can hardly find the authentic essence of Buddhism, as in these places there's no propagation of the real philosophies of Buddhism. Many people go to worship the Buddha only to pray for their own personal well-being: that their kids might enter college, that their businesses will be successful or that by praying to the Buddha, they will end up making a fortune, or other such entreaties. In fact, although they pray to the Buddha, there is no true desire for spiritual improvement. Even if there are few that are sincere in seeking liberation, there are not many qualified masters in the temples who can expound Buddhist scriptures and philosophies to them. The situation in the Tibetan region is not optimistic either. While there are many monasteries, old monastics are passing away, one after the other. Meanwhile, distracted by the internet, television and other external temptations, many young

monastics demonstrate inappropriate behaviors or even return their vows. Children are prohibited from becoming ordained as they are now mandated to receive compulsory education according to the laws of the nation. Therefore, many monasteries are facing the risk of a monastic shortage. Although in the Tibetan region, there are many magnificent monasteries, a monastery should be more than just a splendid architectural construction. To run a monastery isn't as simple as building a majestic construction. The quintessence of a real monastery is the spirit of Buddhadharma.

In times like this, it is amazing that several thousand monks and nuns are able to gather at Larung Gar to study and practice the Dharma. In addition, we are able to hold Dharma assemblies smoothly here at Larung so that sangha members are able to gather together to practice in a relaxed atmosphere. This can hardly be seen anywhere else. In other places, to hold a small puja with even seven, eight or ten people would incur many kinds of troubles. Why is there such a difference? I think, it can be attributed to the blessing and aspiration of H. H. Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche and many other great masters. Also, it could not happen without the skillfulness of the masters in our academy. If they couldn't deal with matters skillfully, and our academy were to get involved in political or financial issues, etc., it would not exist for long. At the same time, we have the incredible blessing from the noble ones, i.e., deities, Dharma protectors, and such Buddhas and Bodhisattvas as Tara, Avalokitesvara, and Guru Padmasambhava who was particularly powerful in pacifying obstacles in the time

of degeneration with his might and great compassion. When these causes and conditions come together, even in this time of degeneration, it is still possible for us to carry the Buddhadharma forward and study Buddhism together.

So, what I am trying to point out is that it is not easy for us to gather here together to study the Dharma. Knowing this, if you attend a Dharma assembly or Dharma lecture, do not think of it as an ordinary social gathering. You should treasure the opportunity and regard it as something as precious as the only meal you could have in a hundred days. To maintain this heart of cherishing and appreciation is important. It's hard to say when one might lose an opportunity like this to study and practice the Dharma or even how long our academy will be able to sustain into the future. Look back on history, Nalanda University, at one time, was a great monastery and one of the earliest Buddhist academies in the world. Now it's nothing but a historic site. This is how things are now. So, will our academy exist for a long time into the future? The lama shrine hall is now under construction. It has been designed to be built very solidly. Just in the foundation alone, the concrete below the ground is about one meter deep. This compares closely with the foundation of an airport runway, which is about 1.6 meters deep. Sometimes when overseeing the workers laying the foundation, I think, "Even if our academy no longer exists, the concrete foundation upon which it was built will still remain very solid." To think this way might be inauspicious when we are still in the process of laying the foundation, but indeed, as the

teaching on impermanence tells us, “whatever is born is impermanent and is bound to die”. Personally, I am in the habit of contemplating impermanence. There’s a tree in my backyard that grows about one foot a year, year after year. At times, when I see this tree, it comes to my mind to question whether it will still be there when I die. My point is, whether we are speaking of an individual or the academy as a whole, truly, all are impermanent. We now have the opportunity to attend the Dharma assembly, to study the Dharma and make good aspirations together, so we should never regard it as a common social gathering. If we see it as just another worldly meeting or in the same way as if we were going shopping with friends, then we are not recognizing the true value of Buddhism. How much hardship did the great masters of the past undergo on their way to India? And why did they put themselves through such hardships? It was for the pursuit of Buddhadharma. For some lay practitioners here, I believe you have also gone through many challenges to come here, but in order to acquire the Dharma, every effort is worth it. Just to obtain some simple knowledge, secular people spend lots of money and undergo many hardships. This is not uncommon. So, I think that in order to acquire knowledge of Mahayana Buddhism, even just to listen to one teaching, is worth all of our effort.

In sum, whether it’s for the good of our personal practice or in order to benefit all of Buddhism, we should consistently pray to the noble ones, constantly make good aspirations, and stay brave the whole while. While we are in samsara, both blessing and bravery are needed.

As part of the teaching on Buddhist logic that was given a few days ago, I mentioned that a vase needs many causes and conditions to stay “alive” or present in this world. If we want to carry forward the Buddhadharma, we need to make an effort ourselves, as well as relying on the support of non-human beings, such as the powerful blessing of Bodhisattvas and Buddhas and the strength of the Dharma protectors. It is only when all of these forces have gathered together, that the wonderful vase of the Dharma can sustain in this world. As long as the Buddhadharma exists, people will definitely receive both its temporary and ultimate benefits.

**TARA, FORTUNE AND
SUKHAVATI**

LECTURE FOUR

I hope that everyone can take Tara practice as a lifetime practice to dispel all the unfavorable conditions and to increase the favorable ones. With the blessing of Tara, all sorts of restless emotions can be pacified and bliss and joy will naturally arise and fill up one's mind.

– Khenpo Sodargye

ENJOY HAPPINESS AND SUCCESS IN LIFE AND PRACTICE

Let us continue on with our study of *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras*. This prayer consists of only twenty-one stanzas. So, put simply, there really isn't that much content in it. However, if we analyze its meaning from its various aspects, every stanza can be interpreted from the perspective of both the Mahayana and Vajrayana points of view. Looked at from the perspective of the Vajrayana aspect, it can be expounded upon from the generation stage, the completion stage, and from the view of the Great Perfection. During this lecture series, I will be giving you a general explanation from the Mahayana point of view, together with some stories that will be recognizable to those familiar with Indian and Tibetan history. I believe that this is the easiest way to

convey a general understanding of its essence. Through this teaching, I hope that most of you will be able to generate a genuine faith in Tara and in the Tara practice.

Many years ago, some Taiwanese scholars and practitioners told me that they felt that it was a pity that on the Chinese mainland, the Tara practice was not that popular, and that so many people could benefit from Tara's support and blessings in various aspects of their life, such as marriage, finances, career, etc.. Many practitioners, through having prayed to Tara, have indeed received auspicious signs, as well as obvious benefits in their lives, so they are certain about Tara's swift blessing. I agree that not only should we spread the Tara teaching widely but we should also engage in the practice ourselves. *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras* had become widespread in Europe and North America since the 1970s and 80s. My hope is that this prayer will become a common practice for Han practitioners at Larung Gar and as well as for people everywhere else around the world.

There are many different translated versions of this prayer in both Chinese and English. Regarding your personal practice, whichever version you have faith in, you can use it for either recitation or practice. Whichever one you choose should not be cause to negate the others. Several days ago, some students came to me and asked, "Before this, I used to recite another version, should I now switch to your translation?" I said, "That's not necessary. Whichever version you are used to, should work just fine." This is not only true for the Tara prayer, as many sadhanas or scriptures also have multiple translations.

In Tibetan Buddhism, many schools, such as the Madhyamika, have multiple translations of their main scriptures. Likewise, in mainland China, there are many Chinese versions of the *Heart Sutra*, the *Diamond Sutra* and the *Amitabha Sutra*. Undoubtedly, due to the power of a particular translator's aspiration, along with his Dharmapala's blessing, the circulation or popularity of a specific version can vary a lot. For example, the *Diamond Sutra* has about five or six Chinese versions, among which, only one or two are commonly recited, while the others remain practically unknown. As I said, this is probably due to the power of the translator's aspiration and his Dharmapala's blessing. Anyway, regarding which of the translations of this Tara prayer one should choose, one is free to use whichever version one likes best or feels most connected to. There is no problem on that, but there is one thing that we don't appreciate nor agree with—that is to revise a couple of words in another's translation and then add one's own name to it. There are also some people, who rather than correcting any grammar or misspellings, have made incorrect changes to the correct words, with the result that their meaning is altered. This is also not appreciated. If you are really capable, just do your own translation. That would make much more sense.

If one wishes to dispel all unfavorable conditions and receive favorable support, one can certainly rely on Tara, and in particular on this prayer, the blessing of which, without doubt, will bring forth many accomplishments. Many great Tibetan masters, although they never declared it openly, included Tara in their practice of the Three

Roots, which, as you know, is an essential and necessary practice for every Vajrayana practitioner. Therefore, it can be said that Tara was one of their primary practices. They regard Padmasambhava as their guru, Avalokiteshvara or Manjushri as their yidam, and Tara as their dakini. Some female practitioners wonder if it is appropriate for male practitioners to take Tara as their dakini, but how about female practitioners? Indeed, the so-called dakini is often misinterpreted. When practicing the completion and generation stage, the visualization remains the same, regardless of whether the practitioner is male or female. A female practitioner should also have her own Three Roots. She can take one female Buddha such as Sarasvati, Tara, or Ekajati as her dakini, Padmasambhava as her root guru, and have a yidam which her root guru chooses for her or one in which she has confident faith. In our course of practice, if we wish for blessings, we rely on our guru. If we wish for spiritual accomplishment, we rely on our yidam, and if we wish to swiftly fulfill our activities, we rely on our dakini, whose blessing and power are immense. In particular, for many practitioners, the Tara practice should be included in their practice of the Three Roots, because Tara can bestow the most reliable and swiftest blessing. Moreover, her blessing is particularly fierce. Other than the karma created in past lives, that will irreversibly mature in this life, Tara can dispel any temporary unfavorable conditions in whichever aspect of your life they may occur.

It is really important to have the blessings of the Three Roots. For many practitioners, even though over the course of their practice life

certain kinds of obstacles sometimes appear, in general it can be said that their practice is successful, when viewed through the perspective of their entire life. But there are also some practitioners who regularly encounter obstacles to their practice and can seldom surmount them. Why is there such a difference? Mainly, it is due to whether or not one receives the blessings of the Dharmapalas, yidams or dakinis, and whether or not one prays to them sincerely. This follows the principle of dependent arising. If you pray to a deity with faith, you will certainly receive the corresponding blessing. However, if you don't pray, or even worse, if you hold wrong views and negative thoughts, or maintain a scornful attitude towards the deity, then it is certain that you will not receive their blessing. So, I hope that most of you will exert yourselves in your practice of dakini, and in particular, in the Tara practice. After some time has passed and you have received some auspicious signs, or after you have experienced the true benefits of your Tara practice, you will be more than happy to share this practice with others.

I'd highly recommend the Tara practice to as many people as possible. In many aspects, most people these days seem to be living a comfortable life. They are dressed well, they eat well and by most external criteria, they are pretty well off. But in their inner worlds, many suffer from mental afflictions and sicknesses, which force them to endure various kinds of suffering and pain. In this regard, I believe that they can rely on the power of Dharma practice to dispel most or all of this suffering. This is essential. Without the power of the Dharma,

ordinary beings caught in the cyclic existence of samsara, regardless of whether they have a fancy life, a successful career, or great wealth, will be weighed down with heavy suffering and affliction. This may not be obvious from outside, but if one's mind is nurtured by the Dharma, no matter how miserable or poor one appears to be, this person is actually filled with happiness and finds everything joyous. So, deep in my heart, I always think how wonderful it would be if everyone were infused with the blessings of the Dharma. Once one has achieved a certain level of enlightenment, regardless of what kind of suffering or challenges one is dealing with, he or she is still able to remain unperturbed, as they are secure in the belief that nothing can defeat them. Without the support of the Dharma, however, no matter how outstanding one's talent and status might be, one will still be unable to shatter the shackles of their mental afflictions. Therefore, I'd encourage you to constantly pray for the blessings of deities like Tara, and once you are able to integrate your devotion with your wisdom, you can eventually dispel the darkness of ignorance within yourselves and others. This can be of great significance.

THE BLESSING OF MASAH TARA

Speaking of Tara practice, if you pray to Tara with your sincerest faith, she will take care of you in various ways and even render you special blessings, causing your wisdom to increase and many

Mahayana or Vajrayana teachings to naturally appear in your mind. An example of this is the great master Sthiramati, who was the author of the *Abhidharmakosa*. Being one of the most prominent disciples of Vasubandhu, who was revered as the “Second Buddha”, Sthiramati’s understanding of Abhidharma even surpassed that of his teacher, Vasubandhu. As such a great master, Sthiramati exhibited the signs of an auspicious connection with Tara. This began in his former life. When Vasubandhu was reciting from the extensive collection of the prajnaparamita, which consisted of ninety-nine sections, a pigeon was dwelling underneath his rooftop, and so was frequently able to listen to the master’s recitation. From time to time, virtuous seeds in the pigeon’s mindstream awaked and it would listen to Vasubandhu’s recitation with great joy and would sometimes even bow its head in respect. As a result of this, the pigeon was able to accumulate a great deal of merit, and in its next life, the pigeon was reincarnated as a human child in an Indian family in a country different from that of Vasubandhu. Vasubandhu was born in, what is today known as Pakistan and later taught the Dharma in middle India. Immediately after his birth, the child started to ask, “Where is my teacher?” When asked, “Who is your teacher?” the boy replied, “Vasubandhu.” After years of asking around, his parents finally figured out that Vasubandhu was a widely renowned master. So, they took the seven-year-old boy to Vasubandhu and asked him to accept the boy as his disciple. As the boy studied closely with Vasubandhu, he was very diligent in his studies, displayed a great deal of intelligence and also demonstrated great compassion. Since

he had heard of prajnaparamita in his previous life, and also had an excellent memory, he was able to follow Vasubandhu and study the Dharma diligently day after day.

Once, when the monastery was distributing food, Sthiramati received a handful of beans. As he enjoyed his meal, he recalled his favorite Tara statue and thought, "It's not right that I eat these beans by myself. I should offer them to Tara." So, straightaway, he ran to the Tara statue to make an offering of them. He wanted to place the beans on the statue one by one and with the hope that Tara would accept his offering, but as the statue was highly polished, all the beans slipped to the ground one after the other. He took this as a rejection from Tara and so was very sad. Also, he saw that beneath the statue, many mice came to pick up the beans that had fallen, often fighting with one another over the fallen beans. Finally, once all the beans were taken away, the mice ran back into the darkness. In the end, there were no beans left in front of the Tara, nor were there any left on the ground. When the boy saw that not only hadn't Tara received his offering, but that he also had no more beans for himself to eat, he became so sad that he burst into tears. Just then, Tara appeared to him and said, "Don't be sad, my child, I've accepted your offering. From this moment on, I will grant you my blessing and remain close to you as you go forward in your life." Beginning in that moment, his intelligence soared and he gained an unailing memory for the scriptures that he read. Together with his karmic connection, gained during a previous life, and the Tara's blessings in this life, his wisdom was able to grow

magnificently. He later composed many commentaries and became renowned for his teachings and made many great contributions to the flourishing of the Dharma. The statue became known as Masah Tara, the “Tara of Beans” and, though I have not seen it personally, it is said to still exist.

When reading this story, I was thinking that Sthiramati certainly had a deep connection with his teacher, Vasubandhu. Indeed, because when a teacher and a disciple have established a connection in their former lives, when they meet again in this life, they will be able to carry out certain activities together. This is one of the more profound types of relationship that are found in samsara. Also, it occurs to me that for such a great master as the renowned Sthiramati, who was an exceptional scholar of the Abhidharma and had demonstrated better comprehension and accomplishment on this subject than his teacher, he still behaved in a kind of childish manner. So, it is quite understandable that some new Buddhists will speak to yidam, make naive wishes and act in some unusual ways.

From this story, we can see that for those who hold great faith in Tara, Tara’s wisdom will enter into their mind in a very natural way. In the past couple of days, I feel that my devotion to Tara has gotten more intense, probably because I’m teaching this Tara prayer, as well as the length of time I’ve been practicing Tara and have had great faith in her, going back to when I was very young. The other day, I suggested that we should install a Tara statue in the shrine hall. When I shared this idea with others, they all agreed. In the past, we had

some wall paintings of Tara at Larung Gar. When we have visited temples, Tibetan monasteries or other sacred sites, there would always be the figure of Tara in the shrine hall. /If we visit temples, Tibetan monasteries or other sacred sites, there are always the figure of Tara in the shrine hall. Whenever we visit a temple and see an image of Tara, we should pray to her with devotion. As a result, whatever wishes we have for this and future lives, can be all fulfilled.



DROLMA NOR TERMA, THE TARA WHO DISPELS ALL DISASTERS AND MISFORTUNES

Now let us return to the Praise. We are still in part D2) Praise for the Wrathful Body Aspects, of which there are seven praises. We've finished three of them, now we will also talk about E4) Praise for Dispelling Destitution.

E4. Praise for Dispelling Destitution

Homage to you, who can summon
The hosts of earthly guardians.
Your frown it quivers, and the syllable *hūṃ*
Delivers us all from every misfortune.

This is Tara Vasudā, or Drolma Nor Terma in Tibetan, known as the Tara who has the power to dispel all disasters and misfortunes. Her body color is reddish-yellow or orange, with her right hand held in the mudra of bestowing the sublime and her left hand holding a lotus, on top of which is a treasure vase. She can magnetize or summon the

hosts of earthly guardians, including Indra, the Eight Divisions of Dragons and Devas, land gods, earth gods, water gods, mountain gods, gods of the Seven Luminaries (including the sun, the moon and the five stars), as well as many other well-respected worldly gods. All of these gods will protect us because of the power of Tara. So, wherever we go, even when we're walking at night and filled with fear, or if we are going somewhere dangerous, if we can recollect Tara and pray to her, she will surely dispel our fear. Although this Tara does not appear in the complete wrathful form of other deities, her face exhibits a frown, indicating a slightly wrathful appearance. The light of the syllable HUNG radiates from her heart. This light can dispel all suffering, throughout the three realms, caused by destitution, as well as having the power to gather wealth, fortune, and merit. So, this Tara can liberate sentient beings from the sufferings of poverty.

In general, praying to Tara, and Tara Vasudā in particular, is the same as the practice of the wealth deity. Many people want to have good fortune and therefore, request the transmission of the Dzambala practice. Since about twenty years ago, I've often received requests for this teaching. I haven't yet given one as it may be that there's has not been the right timing, or it may be because it is hard to say whether wealth is beneficial or harmful for people, as with too much wealth, some practitioners become distracted from their practice. Even at Larung Gar, those who possess great wealth often face unique obstacles, while those without it are often able to maintain a purer practice. For lay practitioners, it may be a different case, since they

certainly need some amount of good fortune and merit, as without it, they would have difficulty carrying on with their practice. Today, the practice of Tara Vasudā is exactly same as the practice of the wealth deity. By praying to this Tara, her blessing will shower us with wealth naturally. With the wealth that she has bestowed, happiness can also be obtained.

So, we can just rely on Tara to dispel destitution. When I was teaching *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, I shared a story of Tara that took place in the Tibetan region. Long ago, there was a poor child who had lost his parents while still very young. Leading a life of poverty, he often went days without meals, wore threadbare clothing and was often mistreated by the people of his village. He had no permanent shelter and slept on the bare ground in the wilderness, near to where there was a stone statue of Tara. Not having parents to confide in, the boy thought of Tara as his mother and often shared his happiness and sorrow with her. Once, after the boy had been bullied terribly by some of the other kids, he was so sad that he wrapped his arms around the statue and began to cry uncontrollably. As the poor child continued to cry, the statue came to life and held the child in her arms. Tara continued to comfort the boy and played with him until he was able to stop crying. As he was about to leave, Tara took off her jeweled necklace, and placed it around the boy's neck. The next day, when others saw the boy wearing the precious jeweled necklace, they asked how he got it. He answered, "My mother gave it to me." "Didn't your mother die long ago? Where is she?" The boy answered, "She is the

mother Tara." When the crowd went to see the statue, they could see that the necklace was gone, but as there were no chisel marks to be seen, they had no choice but to believe the boy. From that time on, the boy lived with great blessing and no longer had to suffer from the hardships of poverty.

In India, there are many stories of how Tara helped people dispel the suffering of poverty. There is one story that took place in ancient India about a poor Brahmin who was greatly afflicted by poverty. Upon seeing a Tara statue by the roadside, he poured out his suffering to her with great sincerity. After hearing of his suffering, Tara instructed him to go to a stupa nearby, and said, "Dig there and you will find treasure". He followed her instruction and found so much treasure under the stupa, that he was able to eliminate the suffering of poverty down to the seventh generation.

There is similar story that also took place long ago in India and involved a man who was really poor. Suffering so badly from poverty and wishing so much for good fortune, he started praying to Tara. In responding to his prayers, Tara manifested in a dress of leaves and instructed him to go to the east. Following her instructions, he immediately took off for the east and after crossing a desert, the man fell asleep in the wilderness. After sleeping for some time, he was awakened by the sound of bells, and saw near to him, a horse with bells as ornaments, digging in the sand with its hoof. As suddenly as he had appeared, the horse was gone and when the man dug in the mark left behind by the horse's hoof, he discovered seven doors made

of seven different precious treasures. After opening these seven doors one after another, the man entered the palace of the naga, where he resided for quite a long time, enjoying much wealth and experiencing all kinds of pleasures and happiness. By the time that he returned to the human world, the reigns of three king had come and gone.

These stories are part of a valid history that goes beyond our ordinary thinking. Those who are skeptical might consider them as myths, but there are many true stories about Tara's blessing. It is impossible that all of them are fictitious. I encourage you to read some of these histories, and you will see the unbelievable blessing that can come from praying to Tara. I hope that reading these stories, will convince you to embrace the Tara practice. Many Tibetans, after praying to Tara, have, within a short period of time, naturally obtained great wealth. This kind of story is very common. Because some people may have failed to practice generosity in their past lives, they are trapped in deprivation, in this life. This kind of poverty can be eradicated by the accumulation of merit from doing good deeds, praying and making good aspirations. When one is sincere in performing these kinds of actions, poverty can be alleviated.



DROLMA TASHI DONCHE, THE TARA WHO BRINGS AUSPICIOUSNESS

E5. Praise for Having the Lord of Her Family as Crown Ornament

Homage to you, so brightly adorned,
With a sliver of moon as your crown,
Your locks are graced by Amitābha,
Whose gleaming rays stream forever forth.

This is Tara Maṅgalārthā, or Drolma Tashi Dönché in Tibetan, the Tara who brings auspiciousness. This Tara is yellow in color, with a crescent moon on top of her crown and holds in her left hand a lotus topped by an auspicious infinite knot. All of her ornaments are extremely splendid, dignified and beautiful, bringing everyone who sees her incredible joy. Buddha Amitabha sits in her piled hair, as the Lord of her Family. The Buddha Amitabha constantly radiates light, which can dispel mental illness and the suffering of sentient beings, and can bring forth all worldly and transcendental happiness and auspiciousness. As she is called the Tara of auspiciousness, those who wish for a happy life, a good family, a prosperous career

or for everything to be auspicious from the beginning to the end, should pray to this Tara. She can transform any and all things into auspiciousness, change unfavorable conditions into favorable ones and suffering into happiness, making all unfavorable things smoothed and perfected.

The Tara practice and the Pure Land practice are deeply connected. Karma Chagmed Rinpoche's, *Aspiration Prayer to be Reborn in the Pure Realm of Sukhavati* says,

*The dharmakaya Amitabha as the Lord of the Family
Radiates light from his right hand, which transforms into Avalokiteshvara,
Who then disperses ten million Avalokiteshvaras;
(He) radiates light from his left hand, which turns into Tara,
Who then disperses ten million Taras;
(He) radiates light from his heart, which turns into Padmasambhava,
Who then disperses ten million Padmasambhavas.*

Therefore, those who wish to take rebirth in the Pure Land can also pray to Tara. By praying to Tara at the moment of your death, all the malicious non-human beings or ghosts and spirits that may bring you harm will be cleared away. Many great masters, when passing away, have received the blessing of both Tara and Amitabha. In some cases, even their remaining relics showed the image of Tara. My book, *Brief Records of Those Who Attained Rainbow Body*, describes a guru named Pema Gyatso, who lived in Garze and passed away in 1997. He was a disciple of H. H. Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche. Upon his passing, he sat

in the Dzogchen posture of Finding Comfort and Ease in Meditation, recited PHAT three times, and then entered into nirvana. Later, a monk from his monastery told me that his body shrank until it was only one cubit in height. After the cremation, lots of relics were shown and among them was a small relic that had taken the form of Green Tara. I assume this means that his accomplishment must have been related to the Tara practice. Although I didn't hear anything about his Tara practice, many great masters did indeed engage in Tara practice for their entire lifetime. This is very common in the Tibetan area. But even those who aren't great masters, including lay practitioners such as housewives and the like, would recite the Tara prayer and the *Aspiration Prayer to be Reborn in the Pure Realm of Sukhavati* throughout their entire lives. I would say that the reason that the great master's relic displays the image of Tara is likely related to his rebirth in Sukhavati.

It is also mentioned in the *Aspiration Prayer to be Reborn in the Pure Realm of Sukhavati* that after rebirth in Sukhavati, one can go to visit Tara's pure land or other pure lands. As mentioned by H. H. Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, when viewed from a larger scale, the pure lands of Tara, Manjushri or Akshobhya, can all be included in the realm of Sukhavati. This is because all bodhisattvas in Sukhavati may go to different pure and impure lands to liberate sentient beings, and then return to Sukhavati. Therefore, all Dharma friends, especially those who consider themselves to be Pure Land practitioners, should never think that the Tara practice only belongs to Tibetan Buddhism

or is completely separate from the practices of the Pure Land School. In my opinion, some individuals in the Pure Land school are very conservative and outdated. It is a matter of simple fact to state that we are now in the 21st century, a modern age that human beings have advanced into, and that everything in the world, including ideologies and cultures, must adapt to the new modernity. Certain Buddhists are still stuck in the 1970s or 1980s, and in their thinking, may not have yet stepped out of the 20th century. I'm not saying that we should get carried away by secular influences, but Buddhists should always strive to have an inclusive mind. The philosophy of any Buddhist school should be able to harmoniously embrace all other Buddhist schools without the feeling of there being any contradiction. So, along with this way of thinking, I'd encourage any Pure Land practitioners to pray to Tara with sincerity. It certainly won't bring you any harm. Without such praying, in an Age of Degeneration such as this, riddled with rampant, negative conditions and demonic obstacles, and lacking the powerful blessing of dakinis like Tara and the protection of the Dharmapalas, reciting only the name of Amitabha or practicing alone by oneself, is not enough to overcome obstacles and unfavorable conditions. Therefore, while each of us should possess a strong resilience, it is also important to rely on the blessing of Tara as our support and backbone. In this way, we will definitely reach a level of accomplishment, rather than having our efforts result in defeat.



DROLMA DRAPUNG JOMMA, THE TARA WHO DESTROYS THE POWER OF ENEMIES

E6. Praise for Taming Ferocious Beings

Homage to you, seated in a halo
Blazing with apocalyptic flames.
Your right leg stretched out and left bent inward,
Immersed in joy, you crush legions of foes.

This is Tara Ripu-cakra-vināśinī, or Drolma Drapung Jomma in Tibetan, the Tara who destroys the power of enemies in war. She is in red color and holds in her left hand a lotus flower with a vajra on top. She sits in a halo, blazing with flames, which are as powerful as the eon-ending conflagration that destroys everything beneath the heaven of the First Dhyana, including Mount Meru. With her flames, she can destroy vicious devils and tirthikas and liberate them so that they can enter into the pure Buddha field. Such flames can crush all external harms. Those who pray to this Tara will wear a vajra garland of protection. As we often say, Tara practitioners are protected from external harm-doers. With her right leg stretched out and left bent inward, she is immersed in joy. Such a gesture of joy indicates that

she works with amicable beings through the turning of the Dharma wheel. While residing within her wrathful appearance of fire and rage, she can destroy the hosts of human and non-human enemies and harm-doers. In this degenerate age, we need the practice of a powerful and wrathful deity. In fact, wrathful deities like Vajrakilaya, Dorje Trolo, Yamantaka, etc., can also be considered as manifestations of Tara. Thus, it is extremely beneficial for us to perform the practices devoted to these deities. By praying to this particular Tara, obstacles and enemies can all be destroyed.

Once upon a time, a king was crossing a forest. Troops of his enemies were coming towards him, equipped with various weapons and ready to act. The king was so terrified and desperate to find a way to escape, that he began to pray to Tara. Hearing his prayers, Tara immediately responded with a gust of wind that blew all of his enemies back to the country of their origin. There are many stories like this told in the Tibetan area. I often think that, in this Age of Degeneration, with so many countries suffering from the dangers of war and civil unrest, people do need a way to protect and defend themselves. That being said, it is not absolutely necessary to impose harm on one's enemies. There should be some skillful means to bring them happiness, too. People often ask, "If you Mahayana Buddhists keep your bodhicitta vows, what will you do if enemies attack you with weapons?" Indeed, if we truly have devotion, by praying to the Tara sincerely, our enemies will often abandon their attack before they bring harm to us.

There is a story of an extremely wealthy merchant in India who was

once on his way to a distant place. On the way, his route led him through a wilderness where there lived many bandits and where many merchants had been robbed of their goods and wealth. Being very afraid, the merchant began to earnestly pray to Tara, and in an instant, he was surrounded by soldiers, each of whom was an emanation of Tara. They protected the merchant and drove away the bandits, without killing any. Thus, the merchant was able to safely arrive at his destination and get back home safely. Indeed, at your most critical moments, if you quickly pray to Tara without any hesitation, miraculously, all harmful situations will dissipate. However, if you hold any doubt or negative thought, more troubles are likely to emerge.

Therefore, at times when we are scared, praying to Tara is very crucial action that you can take. I have a story from my own days at junior high. One evening as the sun was setting, a telephone nearby, that had seen better days, began to ring. Being informed that it was from my family, I came to answer the phone. It was an acquaintance from my village. He told me that my father was terribly ill and asked me to hurry back home. At that point, the phone broke down again, or something went wrong with the sound, and I wasn't able to hear anything further. Being convinced that my father was dying, I began to walk home, even though the sun had already set. By the time that I reached about the halfway point, it had become completely dark and I could no longer see anything around me. I needed to go through a place which was considered very scary because quite a few

people had died there, and some said that the corpses had turned into zombies that would attack you, even in broad daylight. It was also known that recently someone had hung themselves from a tree in that place. Yet, I had no choice but to walk through there because I thought to myself, "If I don't reach home tonight, I'll never see my father again. This is my only chance." As I was walking alone, I felt as if there were no other sound in the whole world except for the sound of my footsteps. . . nothing else. Even the slightest sound, no matter how small, was enough to startle me. The person who had committed suicide was someone that I had been familiar with and his face filled up my mind. I was so scared that I kept praying to Tara until I eventually, got through that place. Even after I had passed by it, I dared not look back, as I was afraid that the dead person might be following me. When I got home, it turned out that there was actually no big deal. My family had some good news, so they wanted me to return home so that they could tell me about it. They worried that I might not be able to get the permission to leave school, so they made up an excuse that sounded very serious. I then started crying, thinking about what a terrible night it had been. I didn't get home until around 3 am, and I truly believed that the reason that I was able to make it home safely was due to the blessing of Tara. Not only had I been terrified by the tiniest bit of sound, but I couldn't even imagine how petrified I would have been if I really had encountered ghosts or spirits. Also, that mountain road was very narrow and because of the darkness, it had been difficult to see anything around me. It truly left me with a deep impression.

All of these stories are to make the point that if we can recollect Tara constantly in our life, all of our fear, suffering and unfavorable conditions can be dispelled by the power of Tara. Long ago, in the Kashmir area, there was a prominent master named Devasinha, who was the imperial preceptor of the king in that area. As Devasinha was extremely knowledgeable in the Sutrayana and Tantrayana teachings, he often taught the Dharma to people in the surrounding area and had built 500 temples in his lifetime. In one of the neighboring countries, where the people mainly believed in Islam, many of them had converted to Buddhism and had gone to hear Devasinha's teachings and to take refuge. Now, the king of that country, who also believed in Islam, was very angry with Devasinha and sent a message to the master demanding that he, "Give up your faith in Buddhism and embrace the Muslim religion or you will be killed." The master replied, "I will never forsake Buddhism. I'd rather die than convert!" So, he was put in iron shackles and thrown into prison. While in prison, Devasinha silently prayed to his deity, Tara. By the blessing of Tara, the iron shackles on his body turned into flower garlands. When the king came to investigate and saw what had taken place, he demanded that his guards shackle the master with another set of iron chains. Again, the chains turned into flower garlands. When seven sets of iron chains became flower garlands, the king was unable to contain his shock and eventually, he also took refuge with Devasinha. During the Cultural Revolution, many practitioners were put in prison and relied on Tara to help them through their difficulties, and to inspire others, including their enemies, to generate faith. There are many

cases like this.

As practitioners, we don't need to say much, but should cultivate an unshakable faith, always rely on Tara as our root yidam or dakini, and pray to her throughout our lifetime. Once we have shown our devotion to Tara, she will definitely grant us blessings and accomplishment. Surely, Tara is unlike worldly earth or land gods. If you make an offering or pray to a local land god on regular basis, they will grant you a corresponding blessing or success. However, if you stop or forget to make offerings, they won't be pleased, and may even punish you. So, in that way, local deities are a lot like ordinary human beings. Ordinary people are pleased if you maintain good relations with them, but once that is no longer the case, they will treat you badly. This will never be the case with Tara. She is watching out for sentient beings at all times. But even though Tara is looking out for us, if we lack faith and devotion, do not engage in prayers, recitations, or offerings, Tara's blessing may come so slowly that we may not even notice it. Nonetheless, Tara will never punish us for that. On the other hand, if one has an intense faith and joy, her blessing will, with certainty, come incredibly swiftly.

I believe, that this time of giving the Tara teaching enjoys an excellent initiation. Larung Gar was founded thirty-two years ago. During all of that time, up until yesterday, we've never performed a puja entirely devoted to Tara. But yesterday, as we prayed for the long life

of Lama Mumtso, and also to dispel various disasters in the world, we held a Tara Puja for the first time. These days, tsunami, earthquake, snowstorms, terrorist attacks, epidemics, and many other kinds of disasters and catastrophes are taking place all around the world. While the outside world is in such a chaotic state, it is also entirely possible that our own personal life could also become afflicted by various problems. Many people, including practitioners, are troubled by emotional problems, physical sickness, career crises, family conflicts, or other difficulties. Several people have told me that these past few years, they have been enduring constant and nonstop suffering, and that nothing has been going smoothly for them. It seems that nowadays, there are very few who would consider themselves to be very happy or to have a smooth and easy life, although, monastics may be better off than most. My impression is that some monastics are kind of okay, some are kind of dull, while others are absent-minded, as if they were in the dream-like state described in Dzogchen realization. In many ways, it seems like they've reached certain level of realization, and if that is true, I am very happy for them. But many ordinary people are living with lots of stress. From the outside, the economy and the overall conditions in China are doing pretty well, compared to many other countries. However, many powerful nations such as the US, Japan, and Singapore, are struggling with their own economic crises. Their overall economies and national power are declining, creating more tension and anxiety for the whole world. This situation is quite obvious in the big cities. Compared to two decades ago, people's mental anxiety has heightened, and the same goes for physical stress.

It seems that people are struggling to catch up with the fast pace of the world and have to spend all their effort just to lead a toilsome life that forces them to suffer for many decades. I am especially struck by how many young people now experience all sorts of suffering in life. I have heard that there are some people who have wanted to take on monasticism immediately after visiting the charnel ground, but I believe that this is too much of a rushed decision. As we look around us, we can see that other than through the Dharma, people can hardly find a bright future from following any other path. So, I hope that everyone can take Tara practice as a lifetime practice to dispel all the unfavorable conditions and to increase the favorable ones. With the blessing of Tara, all sorts of restless emotions can be pacified and bliss and joy will naturally arise and fill up one's mind.

**TARA, YOUR FOREVER
PROTECTOR**

LECTURE FIVE

When I was young, I always thought of Tara as my mother. In my mind, I trusted her in exactly the same way that I trust my own mother and I always hold a sincere devotion to her, and felt secure in the belief that by praying to her, all obstacles and disasters in this world can be dispelled. When faced with a problem, my first thought is always: “Tara, please come to help me.” Such devotion and conviction have been within me since I was a kid.

– Khenpo Sodargye

PRaises TO TWENTY-ONE TARAS

MIRACULOUS STORIES OF TARA'S

BLESSING

Now let us continue with *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras*. As you have been learning this teaching, you have probably been realizing that Tara has the ability to provide great blessing. Her blessing is not a myth nor is to speak of it making a groundless statement. Rather, if we pray to her, and think of her constantly, we will undoubtedly experience the swift infusion of her blessing. I'm sure that after having absorbed this teaching, many Buddhists listening to this, will purchase an image of Tara and worship her in their shrine rooms or place her image in their offices. The image of Tara is normally found in the form of a thangka painting or a gold-plated statue. In India, there are also many statues of Tara that are exquisitely crafted from

sandalwood or other highly valued woods. In fact, the Tara teachings are very popular in both the Tibetan region and in India, as can be seen from their local arts and cultural traditions. In the Tibetan region, almost every household has a Tara statue on their shrines and if you go into the shops that carry Buddhist items, you will notice many people purchasing images of Tara. People who recite the Tara mantra can be found everywhere, as well. So, as we learn the devotional practices dedicated to Tara, as well as listen to the many miraculous stories about her, we should realize that this practice is not restricted to Tibet, but is applied quite broadly throughout India, as well.

Around the Vajra Seat in Bodh Gaya, it is well known, that many miracles related to Tara have taken place near to there. One story refers to a bhikkhu from the Theravada tradition who had rejected and slandered the deity of Tara. Once, while crossing a river near Bodh Gaya, he fell into the rushing water and was swept away and nearly drowned. At that moment, it occurred to him that: "People say Tara is a protector who saves beings from the fear of water." So, as he was feeling very afraid, he cried out, "Tara! Tara!" and suddenly, a wooden statue of Tara that was in the Vajra Seat, appeared to him and said, "You never think of me or respect me—why do you call for my help now?" But the Tara got him out of the water anyway. Since then, that particular statue is known as the "Tara who Enters Into the Water", because she went into the water herself to rescue the drowning bhikkhu. Another story about Tara took place at the Vajra Seat itself: There was an old lady who was very devoted to Tara

and intended to build a shrine room for her near to the Mahabodhi. To accomplish this task, she hired people, at great cost to herself, to build the shrine room. When it was completed, the woman found that the door of the shrine hall was facing in the opposite direction of the Mahabodhi, which is not correct. Although, she felt very bad about this, she could not afford to reconstruct it. As a result, she felt remorseful and regretful that she hadn't thought the construction through more completely before the construction began, and now that the building was nearly completed, she didn't have a clue of what to do to fix the mistake. As she was feeling very sad and distressed about this, the statue of Tara spoke to her: "If you are not pleased, I shall turn my face towards the Mahabodhi." At that moment, both the door to the shrine room, and the statue, on its own, turned around until they were both facing the proper direction. This Tara later became known as the "Tara of the Turning Face". While there are many stories like these that are well-known in India, such stories are also told in Tibet where many monasteries have shrine halls dedicated to Tara. There is a story that took place at the Tara shrine hall in Sera Monastery. It once happened, that just as a monk was passing by the shrine, he accidentally slipped and just as he was about to hit the ground, he instinctively cried out: "Mama!", at which point, Tara responded to him, speaking in a clear voice: "Mama is here". The monk looked up and noticed that it was the statue of Tara who was talking.

When I was young, I always thought of Tara as my mother. In my mind, I trusted her in exactly the same way that I trust my own mother

and I always hold a sincere devotion to her, and felt secure in the belief that by praying to her, all obstacles and disasters in this world can be dispelled. When faced with a problem, my first thought is always: "Tara, please come to help me." Such devotion and conviction have been within me since I was a kid. In my shrine, I have many statues of the Buddha Shakyamuni and also of Tara, made in many different sizes, as well as with varying degrees of craftsmanship. Most of these, I brought back from visits to such countries as India and Thailand. When I was a child, we didn't have a statue of the Buddha or Tara but we used to play games where we would put little bones and pebbles on a big rock and pretend that they were the green Tara, the white Tara or other deities. We used to place fine sand in front of them as offerings, and that's how we played when we were little. I always think that over the course of my life, many obstacles that might have impeded my Dharma practice have miraculously disappeared. This, I feel, must have something to do with my sincere devotion to Tara and her powerful blessing.

I'm sure some of you who attend this teaching will one day have great resources in respect of wealth and power. I hope by then you will make use of some of that wealth or power to install some Tara statues, whenever you have an opportunity. Say for instance, that you become the abbot of a monastery, then, first thing, you should commission a statue of Tara to be placed in the monastery, as that will be very beneficial for the local people in terms of dispelling disasters. As we have said previously, all kinds of disasters including tornadoes,

floods, and fires, can be eliminated through Tara's blessing. In this degenerate time, practitioners who are able to overcome obstacles by themselves are extremely rare. Even though we all wish our practice to go smoothly and successfully from beginning to end, adverse conditions will from time to time, occur, either as a result of our afflictions or caused by demonic forces. When they appear, it will feel as if the control of our mind has been taken from us. In times like these, it is very difficult to overcome these negativities or bring them under control on our own. However, by relying on transcendental power by such actions as praying to Tara, adverse conditions can be counteracted through her extraordinary blessing. The inconceivable power of her blessing is not easy for us ordinary beings to describe in words or to understand with our conceptual thinking.

THE THANGKA OF TARA IN THE NEW YEAR'S EVE

Through this study, I believe that whenever and wherever you see the figure of Tara, a great devotion to her will arise in you. I remember that when I was a child of about six or seven years old, my family was living in a neighborhood with several other households, who were all, including my family, nomads herding yaks. A senior monk lived next to our tent that was a very close friend of mine. He had several thankas that he kept in his tent, among which was a thanka of Tara, and every New Year's Eve according to the Tibetan calendar, if there were no unexpected events taking place, he would hang up

the thangkas for the entire day. When the old monk hung up the thangka of Tara, all of us in the neighborhood, kids and grown-ups, would enter his tent and pay homage to her. In my memory, I can clearly recall that every time we saw the thangka of Tara, we were very delighted. We all looked forward to the coming of the next New Year's Eve, so that we could see her holy image again. This was in the late 60s to the early 70s, which was an unusual period of time when the religious policy was very strict and it was not easy to get the chance to see Buddhist-related images. I was thinking the other day that these days we can very easily purchase the image of Tara. The stores nearby have thangkas of Tara for sale at reasonable prices. Moreover, many these thangkas are embroidered in beautifully decorated patterns, lovely colors and golden thread, and are far more exquisite than the one owned by the monk from my old neighborhood. Looking back at the impact of the Cultural Revolution, I can tell you that Buddhism was virtually devastated and no Buddhist symbols whatsoever could be seen. The Cultural Revolution began in 1966, which coincided with the years of my childhood. During that unusual time, people felt very grateful and excited when they got the opportunity to see an image or a thangka of Tara. Many old people could not keep from crying, with tears gushing out, when they saw the image of Tara. This happened quite a lot.

So, I'd like to remind you of the fact that you are very fortunate to live during such a liberal environment. I am sure that long past period of history is difficult for you to imagine. At that time, Buddhism as a

whole was severely damaged, and on the verge of vanishing entirely. Unlike in the past, these days you are free to own Buddhist images and display them to anyone, anywhere you like. Back during that time, if we had a Buddha statue, we had to keep it secretly hidden to avoid getting into trouble. I remember that my family had a book about the sadhana of the Tsok feast of Guru Rinpoche. Every time we moved to a new place, we had to find a cave to hide it in. Even now when I see a cave, the first thing comes to mind is: "Wow, this would be a good cave to hide scriptures." At that time, as soon as we moved to a new place, my parents would ask me to go to the mountains nearby to see if there was a good cave to hide the book, and I would hike all around the area to find one. Nowadays, we are free to keep as many scriptures as we like without needing to worry about getting into trouble because of it. Also, we have the freedom to follow Buddhism, and even take ordination if we want to. Ironically, these days we tend to abuse these freedoms and privileges. In contrast, during difficult times, people were more devoted in cultivating their Buddhist practice. I sometimes feel that if we were living in an age similar to the Cultural Revolution, many practitioners would be more determined and diligent in their studies and practice, but with so many favorable conditions, such as, qualified masters, good Dharma companions, and access to authentic teachings, we don't recognize the rarity of this opportunity and thus we fail to cherish it. We honestly don't realize how invaluable this opportunity truly is. Well, just thinking about a Tara statue has triggered lots of memories and brought back to me, some of those early meaningful experiences.

I hope that all of you here, after attending this teaching, and on into the future, regardless of whether when you're propagating the Dharma or practicing on your own, you will devotedly follow Tara as your principal deity or dakini. The *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras* was expounded by Buddha Shakyamuni, who manifested in the Dharmakaya form of Buddha Vairochana to Manjushri. This is mentioned in the afterword. You may not find this afterword in the version of the Praise we are using here, but you can find it at the end of the Tara Tantra. So, there are many good reasons that we should recite this Praise consistently. In fact, Tara is the mother of the Buddhas of the three times; so as long as we pray to her, she is able to grant to us all of the common and supreme siddhis. Of course, to some individual Theravada practitioners, or people who hold wrong views or those who simply reject Buddhism, Tara will not be recognized as great and powerful. We can hardly change their views and unfortunately, such phenomena are quite common. In the eyes of people with little merit, even gold is seen as worth no more than common stone. There are plenty of analogies like this in the world.



DROLMA TRONYER CHENDZE, THE TARA WHO GIVES YOU PROTECTION

Let us now return to the Praise. We are at B2) Praise for the Body Aspects, which has two parts, C1) Praise for the Sambhogakaya Aspects, and C2) Praise for the Dharmakaya Aspect. Now, let's look at the last praise under section C1.

E7. Praise for Protecting Self and Others

Homage to you, who on the earth's surface
Strike your palms and stamp your feet;
Your brow deeply furrowed, with *hūṃ* you smash
The seven netherworlds to nothing but dust.

[Homage to you, who smites the ground with
Your palm, and with your foot stamps on it!
Your brow deeply furrowed, with *hūṃ* you smash
The seven worlds to nothing but dust.]

Homage is paid here to Tara Bhṛkuṭī or Drolma Tronyer Chendze, the Tara with the furrowed brow. This Tara's color is blackish or

blue, and upon the utpala in her left hand is her implement—a vajra emitting flames, through which all demonic forces can be rooted out and destroyed. With her furrowed brow, her forehead appears as if there are deep wrinkles on it. This indicates that this Tara manifests in a wrathful form. But the wrathful form here is not the same as the fully wrathful deities such as Dorje Drolo and Vajrakilaya. This Tara manifests a slightly more fierce and wrathful appearance compared to the peaceful and smiling appearances of some other Taras in order to tame vicious and stubborn beings who are notoriously difficult to subdue. She strikes the ground with her right hand, exhibiting the gesture of bestowing the sublime. This shows that she takes control of all negativities and demonic forces. She stamps her feet on the ground, indicating that she is able to smash all the negativities and evil influences in all of the seven worlds. The definition of the seven worlds was already discussed in our second lecture. With her brow deeply furrowed, she utters the syllable HUM, whose sound can destroy all obstacles and unfavorable conditions in the universe.

In some practices, we visualize protective spheres to prevent negative influences, but in actuality, this Tara is one of the best protections for us. Nowadays, many people love to buy and wear amulets. It is my belief that the image of Tara offers the best protection of all. Last year, I had some small Tara cards made and gave them to students here at Larung. For those that received one, if you carry it with you at all times or keep it in your car or in your house, it will benefit you immensely. This is because, under Tara's protective spheres or through her flaming

vajras, all external obstacles and disasters can be destroyed. She is also able to save us from every kind of danger. I have mentioned before, that Tara can protect us from the eight great fears, such as the fear of fire, water, snakes and poison. All of these disasters can be eliminated by Tara's power. This is particularly true for those people who suffer involuntarily from demonic influences. Although they don't seem to encounter any major negativities externally, their minds are very much afflicted and full of obstructing emotions. Praying to Tara can help to overcome such obstacles as well. The reason that some people's practice is incredibly smooth and successful is that they have protection from within, from their deities. Tara is such a deity who can bestow her protection upon you.

There was at one time, a Buddhist teacher called Drubthob Rinpoche who was born in central Tibet. I have read stories about him that described his experience during the Cultural Revolution. His father had served as the Nepalese Consulate in Lhasa and his mother was a simple Tibetan lady. During the Cultural Revolution, master Drubthob was arrested and put in prison for three years. While he was in prison, he was asked to forsake his faith in Buddhism. When he refused firmly, the prison guards gave him a hard time. They said: "Well, since you won't forsake the Three Jewels, there will be no food for you here. If you want to eat, ask your Three Jewels for food. Let's see if your protector will keep you from going hungry." Thus, for the next few days, Drubthob Rinpoche was given no food to eat at all. So, instead of eating, he prayed silently to Tara. Surprisingly, even though he

didn't have any food for many days, his complexion became even more radiant and he didn't feel any sense of hunger. Seeing this, the guards were astonished and came to believe that he must be a very unusual person. When he was later released, as a result of his father's connections, he went to Nepal and India. When asked about the conditions in the prison by journalists and spiritual masters, he talked about how the blessings he had received from Tara had helped him to get through those difficult times.

Therefore, regardless of who we are, whatever situation we encounter and whichever danger we are in, as long as we pray to Tara, she will help us get through it. There are certain some individuals who may think that Tara can't possibly be that powerful or that her blessings can't possibly be that effective, but when people such as these are in a dreadful situation, they will try any way they can to get themselves out of it. Many people don't pray when things are going well, but they will pray when times are difficult. It's like when you are healthy, you don't think at all about doctors or hospitals, but once you get sick, you are sure to go to and seek one out. If a doctor, who is filled with kindness, cures you, your attitude towards him will be completely different from what it was before. I saw many people who didn't care about healthcare or doctors when they were healthy, but after they had fallen sick and later recovered, they showed so much gratitude to the doctors who cured them. Similarly, when nothing bad or difficult happens, people tend to ignore the blessing of Tara. They think: "However sublime she might be, it has nothing to do with

me.” But when they are caught up in difficulties, they want to receive help from the most powerful god or Buddha. We all seem to have thoughts such as these. All in all, when we do our daily chanting, we should include a prayer to this Tara.

There have been manifestations of this Tara throughout history. According to some Tibetan records, the Nepalese princess Bhrikuti was a manifestation of this Tara, Drolma Tronyer Chendze. Regarding this, in order to benefit beings, compassionate Buddhas or Bodhisattvas can transform into various forms, both masculine and feminine, and in various appearances, either wrathful or peaceful. It is important that we keep a pure mind when praying to Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and not regard them as substantial beings. For example, when we see Dorje Drolo, we may think he is and will always remain in his wrathful form. That is not the case. A good teacher with skillful means may at times appear to be very kind, while at other times, he may manifest in a way that we find quite scary. This should be seen as an expression of his skillful means. If an ordinary teacher can present differently to various beings, it is quite reasonable for Buddhas and Bodhisattvas to manifest in numerous forms in the course of benefiting sentient beings. So, we must hold the conviction that Buddhas and Bodhisattvas can assume any form they wish and can perform any deed. All we need to do is to pray consistently. If you make this a habit, the blessing of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas can dissolve into your mindstream at any time.



DROLMA RABTU SHYIWA, THE TARA WHO IS BLISSFUL, VIRTUOUS AND TRANQUIL

We've finished C1) Praise for the Sambhogakaya Aspects, and now we will start with C2) Praise for the Dharmakaya Aspect.

C2. Praise for the Dharmakaya Aspect

Homage to you, blissful, gracious and tranquil,
Whose domain is the peace of nirvāṇa.
With *oṃ* and *svāhā* in perfect union,
You lay to waste every terrible evil.

[Homage to you, blissful, virtuous and tranquil,
Whose field is the peace of nirvāṇa.
By the root mantra with the *oṃ* and *svāhā*,
You lay to waste every terrible evil.]

This Tara is also called Tara Praśāntī or Drolma Rabtu Shyiwa, the Tara who is blissful, virtuous and tranquil. This Tara is white in color. On the pistil of an utpala flower, held in her left hand, stands a perfect vase from which nectar rains down.

“Homage to you, blissful, virtuous and tranquil”: “Blissful” here refers to the fruit this Tara has attained, which is one of uncontaminated bliss, free from suffering. The second quality she has is “tranquil”. “Tranquil” means that she has exhausted the objects of karma and afflictive emotions. “Virtuous”, states that from the aspect of the causal stage, all of her conduct has been virtuous, and that she has refrained from all conduct that was non-virtuous while still in the causal stage of her spiritual practice. Because of these three qualities, she is also called “mother of bliss”, “mother of virtue”, and “mother of tranquility”. Because she has realized all Dharmas and is free from the two obscurations, her field is the peace of nirvana, meaning that she has actualized the nondual Dharmakaya that is mentioned in *The Ornament of Clear Realization*. She is the true Samantabhadri. According to the Tantrayana, Samantabhadri is the Dharmakaya of Tara and Tara is the Sambhogakaya of Samantabhadri. Thus, she abides within the peace of nirvana. With OM at the beginning and SVAHA at the end, her complete root mantra is “Om Tare Tuttare Ture Svaha”. By reciting this mantra and visualizing light emitting from the body of this Tara, all the negative karma that we have committed since beginningless time can be purified. Even such great downfalls as the five heinous crimes, killing people and breaching the four root downfalls of the vows of “individual liberation”, can be purified through reciting this mantra and visualizing this particular Tara. From the vase that rests upon the utpala flower, held in her hand, nectars rain down that purify all the wrong deeds that have been committed by sentient beings since beginningless time.

In certain Tara sadhanas, Lord Atisha taught that the Tara practices include the four activities of pacifying, enriching, magnetizing, and subjugating. In particular, the activity of pacifying our wrong deeds, illnesses and suffering, can be accomplished through the Tara practice. In the Venerable Jigme Lingpa's terma, there are also Tara practices. In one of these termas, it mentions the ten qualities of Tara practice, including, increasing wisdom, merit, and dispelling demonic forces. The last of the ten says that Tara practice purifies negativities. In terms of purifying negativities, while practicing Vajrasattva is a good choice, reciting the *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras* and the Tara mantra are also good ways of confessing our misdeeds.

There are many cases where misdeeds have been purified and illnesses dispelled through the Tara practice. In India's historical past, there was once a well-known Brahman teacher that had many Brahman followers. At one point, due to the ripening of his karma, this Brahman teacher contracted leprosy. Because this disease is highly contagious, one by one, his followers became ill until all 500 brahmans had become infected with this lethal disease. This made their lives very difficult because, up until that point, they had depended on the support of others to survive. When their supporters learned that they were all sick with leprosy, they no longer brought them food and other donations, so the entire sangha was forced to live as beggars. One day, they saw a carved stone Tara by the side of the road holding a slim vase in her hand. Sincere devotion to this Tara arose in them, and so, they prayed to her to cure their disease and to dispel the suffering

they were experiencing as a result of their extreme poverty. As they began to earnestly pray, a stream of nectar began to flow from her vase, and as the nectar fell upon their emaciated and disease-ravaged bodies, their leprosy was immediately cured.

Whenever I think of sick people who are suffering miserably, especially those who are bed-ridden for long periods of time, I feel terribly for them. We might find it hard to empathize with those who are ill, when we are healthy, but once we fall sick, we will certainly understand how unbearable their suffering is. Some illnesses are simply living torture. Whenever we fall sick or see others who are ill, we can dispel the suffering of this illness by visualizing Tara. There are many methods of visualizing Tara, through which others' suffering of illness or our own diseases can be dispelled. For example, by visualizing the image of Tara and of her nectar showering down upon us, our misdeeds, suffering and illnesses can all be washed away. This is an extraordinarily effective practice to clear away negativities and illnesses. All the negativities we create, as well as the suffering that we experience due to the ripening of karma, can be purified by practicing Tara. I once read a story about a Han Chinese woman who was very distressed for having brought forth no children after eight years of marriage. She tried every way possible to get pregnant but all of her efforts had failed. Hearing that Tara was very powerful, she prayed to Tara and recited her mantra earnestly, and after only one month of performing this practice, she became pregnant. By the blessing of Tara, much of her negative karma had been cleansed and favorable

conditions for her pregnancy had emerged, after which, she aspired to continue her Tara practice for the rest of her life.

Personally, I believe that the Tara practice is especially suitable for people in these troubled times. Tara not only bestows upon us the ultimate bliss of nirvana, but also is very powerful in helping us to fulfill our worldly wishes. Why do Indians and Tibetans like Tara practice so much? It is because they are ordinary beings with worldly wishes. Almost all ordinary people wish for power, to become rich, to have a pleasant appearance, to manage a successful business and to be healthy and live a long life, and so on and so forth. None of these wishes are beyond Tara's power to fulfill. In particular, if you want a good job or a successful career, this can be achieved by receiving the blessing of Tara. There are certain kinds of severe karma that can't be reversed, such as the grave karma committed in the past or in this present life, the results of which are certain to ripen and be experienced in this life or in future lives. Besides these though, all other negative karma can be swiftly reversed with Tara's blessing. I believe that most ordinary people like blessings. Today at noon, a young girl followed me as I was walking on the road. I looked back and walked faster, but she caught up to me. Holding a khata in her hands, she said that she wished for my blessing. When I asked, "What do you want the blessing for?" She replied, "Peace, safety and a smooth life." I felt that her wish reflects the expectation of most ordinary people. Few people ask for a blessing for the next life or for the attainment of perfect Buddhahood, or to be able to benefit

numerous beings. Quite simply, they don't ask for these things. All they ask for are felicity and a happy and secured life. Felicity and happiness are wishes that Tara can easily fulfill. So, if you want these things, you should diligently engage in Tara practice, right?



DROLMA BARWÉ ÖCHEN, THE TARA WHO IS ABLAZE WITH LIGHT

Now, let's move onto the next stanza, which belongs to B3) Praise for Her Activities. It has six subsections, the first of which is C1) Praise for the Activity of Bestowing Wisdom.

B3. Praise for Her Activities

C1. Praise for the Activity of Bestowing Wisdom

Homage to you, who, immersed in rapture,
Shatters the bodies of all your foes.
You manifest from the wisdom-syllable *hūṃ*,
And display each of your mantra's ten syllables.

[Homage to you, who, immersed in rapture,
Surrounded by the hosts of noble ones,
Shatters the bodies of all foes, with *hūṃ*
The wisdom-syllable adorned by the ten syllables.]

This Tara is called Tara Kiraṇojjalā, or Drolma Barwé Öchen, the Tara who is ablaze with light or the Tara of the radiant and luminous

HUM. She is of red color, holding in her left hand, the stem of an utpala flower, on the pistil of which is a double vajra. She is surrounded by the assembly of highly realized beings, vidyadharas (“awareness holders”) and Bodhisattvas, etc., who are endowed with such extraordinary attainments as, true speech, extraordinary samadhi, eloquence, wisdom, etc. Encircled by those holy beings, her mind is filled with supreme joy. Immersed in rapture, wisdom light radiates from her body which destroys the bodies of her enemies. Some commentaries say that enemies here refers to ignorance. With her mind filled with supreme joy, her body emits the syllable HUM and delightful rays of wisdom. Ornamented and surrounded by the array of the ten-syllable mantra, "Om Tare Tuttare Ture Svaha", HUM also radiates immeasurable light. The light from the syllable HUM and the body of this Tara can totally dispel the darkness of ignorance and self-grasping—the grasping of “I” and “mine”—in the minds of sentient beings, in addition to all kinds of external foes in this world.

If we consistently recite the mantra of Tara in our daily lives, all of our enemies and adversities can be dispelled. Here’s a story that took place in India a long time ago: Some 500 merchants set out across the ocean south of India in three ships to seek treasure. As they were setting out, their families came to see them off, feeling reluctant to let them go, because seeking treasure was a risky business and many never returned from such a journey. The ships carrying the 500 merchants set off, and after great effort, finally reached the Island of

Jewels where they quickly filled the ships with ample treasure. As they set off on their return voyage, the guardians of the treasure and the lords of the ocean, who were not at all pleased, began to make trouble for them in the same way that if we over-exploit the natural resources of the mountains and rivers to the point that they are destroyed, it will certainly provoke the local protectors, the lords of the mountains, earth, waters, and trees. Thus, the lords of the wealth of the seas caused a fierce wind to blow and caused there to be such violent waves that the ships were nearly engulfed. All the merchants prayed day and night to their various gods, each according to their own faith. Some called upon Indra, some cried out to Maheshvara, some called upon the Sun and some called upon the Moon. Some held jewels in their hands and called out the names of the jewels; some cried out the names of their beloved ones. At this critical moment, a lay Buddhist remembered that Tara could save people in the most difficult situations as long as they prayed to her. So, he began to recite the Tara mantra. As he was reciting her mantra, miraculously, the fierce wind and waves gradually became calmer and the three ships were able to reach home safely. Whatever obstacle we encounter in life, whether it's the harm caused by the spirits of the mountains, the earth, the sea or other enemies, as long as we pray to Tara, we will certainly be able to overcome them and to clearly see the signs of the clearing of these obstacles. I am sure that there many more stories about Tara in both mainland China and Tibet. I have not yet gathered a collection of Tibetan stories, but in my daily life, I often hear people telling stories about how Tara has saved sentient beings from various

kinds of trouble.

According to some great masters of the past, this Tara mantra can dispel the darkness of ignorance and bestow wisdom. These days, when people want to pass an exam or to increase wisdom, many prefer the Manjushri practice. In fact, practicing Tara can also enhance wisdom. For example, practicing certain Tara sadhanas or taking sacred pills blessed through certain Tara rituals can bring an increase in wisdom. If you are not familiar, or do not have access to the above means, reciting the Tara mantra or *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras*, also works. I've heard of several cases of wisdom being gained by praying to Tara. There is one story of some students who were afraid of not getting good marks on their exams, so they recited the Tara mantra 1,000 times on their way to take the exam, and they were rewarded with good results. There are many cases like this. This applies to the students here (at Larung) as well. If you are not well prepared for your exams, you may recite the Tara mantra, but if you fail your exam, it may cause you to doubt Tara's blessing: "Why did I still not know the answer, even after I prayed so hard to Tara?" Just kidding. I don't think that you would be this unreasonable. Actually, all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have the ability to bestow powerful blessing in many aspects, such as enhancing our wisdom and increasing our compassion. It's just that we lack the key of "faith", and it is this lack that prevents us from getting access to the treasures of their boundless blessing.



DROLMA PAKMÉ NÖNAM, THE TARA OF LIMITLESS SUBJUGATION

C2. Praise for the Activity of Protecting from the Horrors of Enemies

Homage to Ture, your feet stomping boldly,
Formed from the seed of the syllable *hūṃ*.
The mountains of Meru, Mandara and Vindhya,
And all the three worlds, you cause them to quake.

[Homage to Ture, your feet stomping boldly,
Whose seed syllable appears in the form of *hūṃ*.
The mountains of Meru, Mandara and Vindhya,
And all the three worlds, you cause them to quake.]

This stanza pays homage to Tara Aprameyākramaṇī, or Drolma Pakmé Nönam in Tibetan, the Tara who causes the three worlds to tremble, or the Tara of limitless subjugation. This Tara is reddish yellow in color. Her seated posture and mudra are the same as those of the previous Taras, except that upon her utpala flower is a stupa. Speaking of this, there are twenty-one Taras named in this Praise, and their images are

all different. In this teaching, I've tried to introduce their features so that you will know them better, but I didn't go into the deepest level of meaning, as this is very difficult to understand. This particular Tara assumes an image of stomping her feet upon the earth. Her seed syllable appears in the form of HUM, and from this HUM radiates boundless light. The light causes the mountains of Meru, Mandara and Vindhya to tremble. In the realms of gods, nagas, or humans, there are mountains that are known in different realms by either the same name or by different names. In general, it can be said these mountains are not easily shaken by external forces. However, through the power of Tara's seed syllable HUM, the entire triple world—the desire, form, and formless realms, including all the mountains, rivers and grounds within them, can be shaken and caused to tremble. So, there is nothing in this world that can't be defeated by the power of Tara. We can say that even the most horrendous forces in the world, including demonic forces and other uncontrollable influences, can all be subjugated by this Tara.

From both historical and contemporary reports, we know that the blessing of Tara is beyond incredible. There are many people who didn't, at first, believe in Tara, but later generated a strong faith in her. In ancient India, there was a great Pandita of the Theravada school whose name was Sanghamitra. He was a scholar who was well-learned in the *Abhidharmakosa*. One time, the Buddha Shakyamuni appeared to him in a dream and beside the Buddha there was a blue goddess. The goddess told him: "You should train well in the

Great Vehicle, in addition to learning the Theravada teachings.” After waking up, he decided to follow her advice. Actually, the blue lady was Tara, who appeared as a goddess who was different from her normal form. In order to follow her instruction, this great Pandita decided to immediately go to Kashmir to study Mahayana Buddhism extensively. On his journey to seek teachings, he was captured by a troop of bandits. These bandits took him to the shrine of a Hindu goddess and intended to kill him there as an offering to this female deity. Faced with grave danger, he thought of Tara and began to pray fiercely to her. Spontaneously, by the swift and responsive blessing of Tara, the statue of the female Hindu goddess split into many fragments. Seeing this, the bandits became extremely frightened and ran away, leaving the master free to continue on his way.

Some individuals who have studied Theravada Buddhism, as well as some practitioners of Chinese Buddhism, may doubt the practice of Tara, or the Vajrayana teachings as a whole. This is a seriously misguided view as their doubts are truly groundless. To study Buddhism holistically, one needs to study not only the Sutrayana but also the Tantrayana. Without learning the Tantrayana, one’s understanding of Buddhism is not complete, and needs to be complemented. By learning the Sutrayana and not the Tantrayana, we will remain ignorant of those vital and profound Tantric teachings. Many people think that the Pure Land school is categorized as following only the Sutrayana teachings, but that is not the case. Many theories found within the Pure Land school can be interpreted as being based on the

Tantrayana; this will give you a more complete understanding. Such theories as the validity of Sukhavati, the true kayas of Amitabha and how he liberates sentient beings, and even more, can be more fully understood by including the Tantric approach. I wish to make this point very clearly.

To continue with what we have been discussing, praying to Tara can help to overcome lots of suffering, including unfavorable conditions that occur in our practice. Some people say: "Demonic forces are very scary. Wrong paths and evil demons are rampant. We will not be able to defeat them." At moments like these, the scarier the evil forces are, the more sincerely we need to pray to Tara. Whether in your own practice or in such activities of spreading the Dharma as establishing a monastery, if you find the obstacle to be undefeatable, you must remember to pray to Tara.

At one time in India, there was a Theravada monastery where many monks of the Theravada school resided and were diligently engaged in their practice. At some point, however, rakshasas began to often appear around that monastery, and several monks who were meditating in the forest around the monastery, were eaten by these rakshasas. This happened frequently. One day, a novice monk was meditating under a tree and a black, ugly rakshasa appeared to him, baring its fangs and looking very scary. The rakshasa snatched the monk and began to run away with him. Knowing that there was little hope for his escape, the young monk thought: "They say there's a deity called Tara who can save beings from fear in times of great danger." In order to survive,

the novice began to call the name of Tara. Immediately, a wrathful Tara, brandishing a sword, appeared and threatened the rakshasa. In extreme dread of this fearsome deity, the rakshasa let go of the novice and promised to Tara that no further harm would be imposed upon the monastery or upon other monastics. From then on, no harm from non-humans ever occurred again to that monastery or its residents. Speaking of this, as we know, at a certain time in the past, rakshasas were rampant in this world. Now we don't see real rakshasas much, but other spirits such as fox spirits do exist, especially in northeastern China. These days, some people are afraid of extraterrestrial beings, some fear fox spirits and some are intimidated by various other evil spirits. It is important to pray to Tara in moments when this kind of fear is present. When I read this story, I thought about the way that we tend to ignore or simply don't care about how to deal with suffering when we are happy. For example, when I'm healthy, if someone were to recommend an effective medicine to me, it would matter not at all to me, but when I'm very sick, I will listen to others' recommendation of medicine, even if I had previously rejected it or paid no attention to it. However, if I am ill and eager to be treated, I will take this medicine, hopeful that it will cure my illnesses.

Whether it's a historical account or the kind of history that has been passed by word of mouth, we should know that they all convey some profound messages to us. These messages aren't meant to scare people, nor are they intended to make people superstitious. Truth be told, modern education gravitates towards theories like materialism,

which we have been bombarded with since we were very young. Having these kinds of theories forced on us amounts to a kind of brainwashing. Because of this style of education, we are trained to conform to a materialistic way of thinking. Thus, many people don't have a high regard for anything other than the love of money. I don't appreciate this kind of education. This system corrupts people's mind, causing them to believe in nothing other than science. Trained in this way, they deny all of the inconceivable happenings in this world, which is the same with refusing to admit the effectiveness of unusual remedies or things of that sort. I think that it's fair to say that this is a tragedy of humankind. If we had received some amount of Buddhist education, beginning at a young age, more would believe that "we reap what we sow". When something miraculous happens in our life, we would then have the ability to comprehend it. Unfortunately, in the modern age, we tend to negate everything that is beyond our ordinary perceptions. Such an attitude is an indication of mankind's ignorance, instead of a form of improvement or a sign of progression. We should really reflect on the education that we've received while growing up and how we can improve upon it. Therefore, when you find yourself faced with profound Buddhist teachings, never think that they are simply meaningless sayings. The inconceivability and profundity of Buddhist teachings cannot adequately be described through language.

All in all, we should pray to Tara when we meet disasters caused by the imbalance of the four elements of earth, water, fire and air,

that threaten the entire world, or when we meet with obstacles over which we are unable to triumph. Larung Gar has gone through many adversities in spreading the Dharma over the years. Every time that unfavorable obstacles occurred, the whole sangha gathered together to recite the mantra of Tara Marici, the *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras*, the Mani mantra and other prayers, and most often, the obstacles would disappear within a couple of days. When many Buddhists get sick or meet with adversity, they immediately do some kind of chanting and often will offer money to ask the sangha to chant for them, as well. Non-believers are of the opinion that this is foolish. "How can it help when things are already critical?" Actually, if we dedicate our practice to certain deities, with their respective powerful blessing, problems can be solved at once. To give you an example: Say you are stopped by the police for violating a traffic law and the car is towed. If possible, you will use your connections and get the car back, by asking for the help of a powerful person, or if you are supposed to be taken into custody for fifteen days, if you can, you will call a relative who has the connections and influence to get you out. In that case, a phone call from your relative can immediately set you free. Stories like these are not unheard of and we never dismiss them by saying that they are only legendary, right?

**BUILD AUSPICIOUS
CONNECTION WITH TARA**

LECTURE SIX

I hope that everyone who has attended or read this teaching, will complete at least 10,000 repetitions of the Tara mantra and one hundred repetitions of Praises to the Twenty-One Taras, within a period of one year. Our one-year collective practice will enable all the participants to make an auspicious connection with Tara. I hope that all of you will join this collective practice. I surely will.

– Khenpo Sodargye

STORIES OF THREE GREAT PRACTITIONERS WHO RECEIVED THE BLESSING OF TARA

This is the last lesson on the *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras*. By the end of this lesson, the noble qualities of the 21 Taras and the benefits of this practice will have been introduced completely. I would have been able to expound on this Praise in great detail as there are many sadhanas and texts of the Tara practice available in both Chinese and Tibetan, however, the main purpose of my teaching at this time has been to briefly introduce to you the extraordinary benefits of Tara practice. Thus, it is my hope that you will apply what you've learned in these lectures in your daily lives. It is also my hope that, whenever possible, practitioners in monasteries, at Dharma centers and other

Buddhist groups will recite this Praise, as well. I see that many of you now are able to recite this Praise fluently. This is important as the prayer is often recited in Dharma assemblies in the Tibetan regions. For this reason, it's best if you are able to recite it in Tibetan. This Praise is also commonly recited in Dharma assemblies in India and in other places, as well. Some Dharma friends have been able to recite it very well after having attended a Dharma assembly elsewhere. Up to this point, there hasn't been a tradition of reciting this Praise in mainland China, but as we now have two melodies to recite this Praise in Chinese, you can choose either of them, as both the chanting performed by the monks or the nuns would work just as well. With these two new melodies, it is my hope that you will spread this Praise extensively in monasteries and Dharma centers on the mainland and elsewhere. If the sound of praising Tara can spread across different Buddhist groups, as a result of my inference, I believe that many obstacles related to Dharma propagation will be removed, while the favorable conditions for an individual's practice will gather. So, I encourage you all to make an effort to accomplish this.

Now, let's continue with the *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras*. As I mentioned previously, many earlier masters had an auspicious connection with Tara. During this course, there has not been enough time to introduce all of the many experiences of general practitioners who have received Tara's blessing, but I have shared with you a few cases of some of the great masters. In fact, many masters in India and the Tibetan regions have had miraculous experiences with Tara, one of

them being Bhavideva, the author of the *Fifty Stanzas on Following a Teacher*, which we may study at some point in the future. It's said that his composition of the *Fifty Stanzas on Following a Teacher* is closely related to the blessing of Tara. At first, Bhavideva's Dharma activity wasn't particularly influential, despite the fact that he was proficient in the Buddhadharma. For this reason, he wanted to make a pilgrimage to a Tara statue in Eastern India, but to get there required crossing the sea. During his voyage, he was seized by the inhabitants of a certain remote island and was taken against his will to the island where they resided. While trapped there, he suffered a lot mentally, because he couldn't teach the Dharma, nor could he benefit other beings. During this difficult time, Bhavideva prayed to Tara wholeheartedly, and one day, Tara appeared in his dream and instructed him to, "Sleep with your head pointed towards the direction you want to go and you will arrive there." As he desperately wanted to go back to his homeland, he eagerly followed Tara's instruction and slept with his head pointed in the direction of his homeland. The next morning, he awoke in his hometown.

Upon returning to his monastery, he found that great changes had taken place. Many great masters had passed away during his absence, and many of the younger monastics had been influenced by new trends of thought. Therefore, it was even more challenging for Bhavideva to expand his Dharma activity than it was before he had left on his journey. Feeling upset and annoyed, he attributed the failure of his Dharma activity to the islanders who had created such great adversity

for him. To vent his anger and take revenge on those beings, he made the tarjani mudra or the threatening gesture, and recited wrathful mantras. As a result, the island where he had been held prisoner, sank into the sea. Later, Bhavideva felt really regretful about these misdeeds, so, in order to purify this grave negativity, he resolved to go on a prostration pilgrimage, all the way from India to Mount Wutai, the sacred place where Manjushri resides. Before he could carry out his plan, Tara appeared to him and told him that, “Prostrating to Mount Wutai alone, cannot purify your karmic debts. If you really want to purify this negativity, you need to compose a treatise that that will guide people to attain Buddhahood swiftly. This can purify your negative karma.” After years of meticulous contemplation, Bhavideva realized that among all practices, the swiftest way to attain Buddhahood is to appropriately rely on qualified Dharma teachers. Armed with this understanding, he composed the *Fifty Stanzas on Following a Teacher*. Although this treatise is very brief, it was written under the direct instruction of Tara and provides a collection of profound pith instructions which are essential for attaining Buddhahood over the course of one lifetime.

A lot of masters of the past, after attaining accomplishments in their Tara practice, made big breakthroughs, not only in their own practice, but also in the expansion of their Dharma activities. Many Dharma friends here genuinely wish to complete their Dharma practice smoothly. More than that, some aspire to do all that they can to benefit beings and propagate the Dharma. Yet, in spite of this,

your abilities may fall short of your expectations. In that case, your eagerness alone won't be enough to help you to achieve your goal. It must be done with skillful means, one of which is to pray to Tara, as benefitting beings through engaging in Tara practice is known to be very effective.

As we have mentioned, there are plenty of stories about Tara in India and the Tibetan regions. Here's another story from the biography of a Tibetan master. It is a story of Gyalse Tokme Zangpo, the author of *The Thirty-Seven Practices of All Bodhisattvas*, which you may find in his biography, and which I have previously translated into Chinese. Once, after leaving his hometown to journey to Lhasa, Gyalse Tokme Zangpo was walking along a big river, where he saw seven or eight people crossing the river on horseback. Just as they reached the center of the river, they were suddenly swept away by the strong current. Tokme Zangpo, fearing for their lives, immediately began to pray to Tara, and a short while later, the whole group miraculously reappeared at the surface and quickly arrived at the far bank, safe and sound, except for one man and his horse. Just as this man and his horse were about to be engulfed by the water, a tall man in a white pulu, with a grass belt around his waist, appeared out of nowhere, just behind Tokme Zangpo. Without hesitation, the man said, "I'll go to save them." He dived right into the river, swam to the drowning man, and pulled him up to the bank. After the man and his horse arrived at the riverbank safely, the tall man in white disappeared without a trace. Everyone, including Tokme Zangpo, was astounded by this and exclaimed at

what a miracle had taken place. “But what just happened?” asked Tokme Zangpo. Those beside him replied: “It must be the blessing of Tara! That man must have been a manifestation of Tara!” Tokme Zangpo nodded his head in agreement and said, “Yes, it must have been the blessing of Tara. As long as we pray devotedly, the Three Jewels will never deceive us.”

In our daily lives, when obstacles or adverse conditions occur to oneself or to a group, it is of vital importance that we pray to Tara. Also, individuals who frequently run into unfavorable conditions or tricky problems that require an immediate solution should pray to Tara. This is crucial. I’m sure that you will have your own experiences when praying to Tara and when the conditions are ripe, we can compile a book of your special experiences when praying to Tara. However, we must be sure that the experiences collected are all truthful and authentic. In the biographies of many masters from the past, their miraculous experiences related to Tara and other deities are documented and recorded. I think we should pray to Tara sincerely at all times so that our own suffering as well as the suffering of others can be dispelled. Please take note of this.

In fact, Tara is here with us all the time. Professor Yu Fang, a Chinese student of Norlha Hotogtu, who lived for about a hundred years, is a female practitioner who had gained a high level of accomplishment in the practice of Tara. There is an analogy that she often used, in which she referred to Buddha Amitabha as the President, Avalokiteshvara as the provincial governor or mayor, and Tara as a neighborhood officer.

She said: "It's rather difficult to have the President, the provincial governor or mayor show up to fix your problems, but it is fairly easy to get the neighborhood officer to help. Tara is an emanation of both Amitabha and Avalokiteshvara, and we can seek her help at any time." This is kind of a mundane analogy, but it suggests that the manifestations of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are inconceivable. Tara is no different from Amitabha and Avalokiteshvara and will bestow her blessing for anything that we may need in our daily lives. Tibetans seek help from Tara with all kinds of things, even when a thief is about to steal, he will pray to Tara to make sure that he will make it back home unharmed. So, pray to Tara in all circumstances.



DROLMA MABJA CHENMO, THE TARA WHO CLEANSSES ALL POISONS

Now we will continue with the third topic under B3.

C3. Praise for the Activity of Cleansing Poisons

Homage to you, who hold in your hand
A deer-marked moon like a divine lake.
With *tāra* twice and then with *phaṭ*,
You totally cleanse all of the poisons.

[Homage to you, who hold in your hand,
A moon clear and bright as a divine lake.
With *tāra* twice and then with *phaṭ*,
You totally cleanse all poisons.]

In this praise, who we are paying homage to? To Tara Mahāmāyūrī, or Drolma Mabja Chenmo in Tibetan, the Tara who is as majestic as the Great Peahen, or the Tara who cleanses poisons. The Great Peahen has the power to neutralize all poisons, whether it is the venom of the nagas or an ailment caused by the nagas. This Tara is white in

color. “Who hold in your hand, a moon clear and bright as a divine lake.” means that she holds the stem of an utpala flower, on which there is a full moon, which is as bright and clear as a lake of white nectar in the god’s realm. This moonlight can dispel the three inner poisons of greed, hatred, and ignorance of all sentient beings and can counteract all such outer toxicants as mixed poisons, food poisons and the poisons by which we become infected simply by seeing a certain kind of venomous naga. All toxicants can be counteracted by the radiance of this moon.

“With *tāra* twice and then with *phat!*”, refers to the way to recite her mantra. The mantra of this Tara is OM TARE TUTTARE TURE SARVA VISHA TARA PHAT SVAHA, which adds SARVA VISHA TARA PHAT to the root mantra of Tara, “OM TARE TUTTARE TURE SVAHA”. By reciting this mantra with TARA twice and then with PHAT, “You totally cleanse all poisons”. Among all the outer, inner and secret poisons, the poison of self-grasping is the most terrifying one, as all ordinary beings are harmed by it. So, we need to remove this poison as well as all poisons from the external environment. We should pray to Tara to protect us from becoming contaminated both mentally and physically. All kinds of poisonous conditions, including the venom of snakes can be remedied through the blessing of this Tara. In other words, all hostile conditions caused by poisons can be eliminated by the Tara’s blessing.

There is a story in India that speaks of a very beautiful prostitute who was very pleasant to her clients, and with her lovely appearance, she

attracted many. Once, a merchant offered to give her a necklace of 500 pearls, just to spend one night with her. The prostitute accepted these terms and set off at nightfall on her way to the merchant's house. As she was passing through a forest, she became very tired and decided to take a break beneath a large tree. Unexpectedly, a venomous snake snuck up and tightly coiled itself around the lady. Quickly, her greed and desire were replaced by a great fear. She then recalled that praying to Tara would remove all obstacles including the harm from poisonous snakes, so she prayed to Tara desperately and soon after, a sense of compassion arose in the snake's mind and it released the girl. Therefore, no matter what kind of danger we find ourselves in, we need to pray to Tara.

There is another story from India, in which a young girl met a mad elephant on her way to gather flowers in the forest. This elephant was so out of control that it trampled to death anyone it met. The bloodshed that the elephant left behind was a terrifying sight to behold. This elephant caught the young girl with its mighty trunk and was just about to kill her, when suddenly, the young girl remembered the name of Tara and began praying to her wholeheartedly. Compassion arose within the elephant's mind and it soon regained control of itself. The elephant set her down in the town marketplace and prostrated to her. It picked up the girl again and brought her to a temple and once again, prostrated before her. Lastly, the elephant brought her to the gate of the palace and for a third time, prostrated its mighty body before her. People were convinced that the girl must be embodied

with great merit for the elephant to show such respect. As the prince of the country was at the right age for marriage, the king then wed the girl to the prince.

So, anyone, any ordinary person, by praying to Tara sincerely, will receive her powerful blessing. As it is mentioned in *The Excellent Benefits of the Praise*, every wish of ordinary beings can be fulfilled as long as we pray to Tara earnestly. Whether it's the wish to have children, wealth, status, or to remain safe, happy and healthy, all of these can be fulfilled by the blessing of Tara. In Han Buddhism, Avalokitesvara is the one who helps the needy and relieves those in distress through his great love and compassion. So, if we recall the analogy that we used earlier, besides being the provincial governor or mayor, the role Avalokitesvara plays, sometimes resembles that of Tara. When Tara is "off work", Avalokiteshvara also works as a neighborhood officer to solve our problems. In any case, we should know that Tara possesses many noble qualities to fulfill our worldly wishes. With this knowledge, devotion to Tara will naturally arise in us. Even when we see stone-made or wooden statues or thangkas of Tara, we should feel joyous and generate veneration. With such veneration and joy, our obscurations can be dispelled.

We have sometimes seen that great masters of the past, in their younger years, appeared to be just as common as any ordinary man, or as Milarepa said, they were just the same as any others before practicing the Dharma. However, through their persistent practice, as well as by the protection and blessing from deities, Dharma protectors, and

dakinis, their Dharma activities became incomparably vast. Just as Mipham Rinpoche said in his *Treatise on the Modes of Being*, when one has the support and protection from deities and Dharma protectors, even when one is on their own, his or her capability and power can surpass that of thousands of people. I think this is unquestionable to all of us. For every one of us, we should dispel all the doubts and wrong views about Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and establish right views towards these noble beings by studying the Buddha's teachings, and meanwhile try to pray to them consistently in our daily lives.

Perhaps influenced by the environment where I grew up, I have always had immense faith and joy towards all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Whenever I had a little bit of time, I would recollect and pray to them. Wherever I see their figures, may it be thangkas or statues, I feel extremely joyful. I think that this is a small virtuous root of mine. It's very important for everyone to cultivate such virtuous roots and to habituate ourselves through virtuous thoughts.



DROLMA MIPAM GYALMO, THE TARA WHO CLEARS AWAY CONFLICTS AND NIGHTMARES

C4. Praise for the Activity of Clearing Away Conflicts and Nightmares

Homage to you, who is served by kings
Of hosts divine, and of gods and kinas.
Suited in armor of joy and splendor
You clear away nightmares, soothe away strife.

[Homage to you, who is honored by divine kings,
And served by gods and nonhuman spirits.
Armored with the splendor of joy
You clear away nightmares and soothe away strife.]

This Tara is called Tara Ajitarājñī, or Drolma Mipam Gyalmo in Tibetan, the Tara who is honored by divine kings. She is also called Sitatapatra, “the One with the White Parasol”. From the Dharmakaya aspect, Tara is Samantabhadri; from the Sambhogakaya aspect, she is Vajravahni or Vajrayogini; from the Nirmanakaya aspect, she appears

as Sarasvati, Palden Lhamo (Glorious Goddess) and many other goddesses. The three kayas of Tara are inseparable.

This Tara, Sitatapatra, is venerated and served by all the divine kings, such as Indra, Maheśvara, and Vishnu; they all serve and venerate her. Since even the divine kings revere Tara highly, it is without doubt that human kings, national presidents, and prime ministers should venerate her. Whichever national leader it is, he or she should follow the example of the divine kings and pay homage to Tara. Considering that the leaders of mankind only lead, at most, several billions of people, they pale in comparison to the celestial kings who lead a retinue of numerous gods. In addition, gods and such worldly spirits as the mountain spirits, the river spirits and the tree spirits, as well as kiṃnaras, asuras, yakshas, rakshas, hungry ghosts, and more, all venerate and take refuge in Tara. Therefore, if or when you are caught up in frightening circumstances, you should pray to Tara immediately. With her blessing, disturbances from nonhuman beings, malicious spirits or ghosts will be pacified. Nowadays, there are all kinds of disturbances caused by demonic influences. Some people talk about being possessed by malicious nonhuman spirits. My suggestion to them is to recite the Tara mantra as it can dispel this, and any other kind of harm.

Tara can also help to pacify wars, and drive away our nightmares, as well as all physical and mental discomforts. So, we should put on this armor of protection, which is to visualize Tara's appearance in our mind and recite the *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras*, or the mantra

of Tara regularly. With the power of our delight-filled and devoted veneration of Tara, we will be free from the suffering of nightmares, and be protected from wars and disputes between countries, races, and families, as well as conflicts among Dharma friends. Nightmares can happen as a result of various reasons. Some of them are caused by the physical imbalance of the four elements, and some are caused by harms from malicious nonhuman spirits or karmic creditors. These harms can be relieved or eliminated through the blessing of Tara. When Dharma friends have asked for my help after having had a nightmare, "I had a nightmare last night and I am worried that it means something bad. What should I do?" I tell them that even if the nightmare signals something ominous, it can be dispelled by Tara's swift blessing. Speaking of conflicts and disputes, when we are influenced by malicious nonhuman spirits, we can become very critical of others. This can happen to Buddhists, monastics and lay practitioners alike. They despise others in their minds, yet, they still smile at them when they meet. Because this is nothing more than a false smile, their inner feelings can still be detected. Such disharmony is a form of "small war". Normally big wars are wars between countries, like World War I and World War II, but within some families, family members can also have their own "World War I" and "World War II". It has happened that some family members have also been completely defeated in these so-called "small wars". These days, it seems that wars are happening somewhere in the world all the time. If we pray to Tara, it will help end the wars and promote world peace. Yet, if the war is inevitable, praying to Tara will help one

to gain victory.

It's said that in ancient India there were two kings who fought with one another for many years. One king was named Kumicha, and the other was Asoge. King Asoge had a strong military and considerably better weapons. He was stronger than King Kumicha in many aspects, as well. So, he was confident that would defeat King Kumicha and, because of his confidence, he became a bit relaxed. However, King Kumicha came up with an idea. He called on all of his generals and soldiers and told them to pray to Tara for seven straight days. Altogether, they recited the *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras*, 100,000 times. When the two troops next fought, King Asoge noticed that King Kumicha's troops had become much stronger than in their previous battles. Also, while they were fighting, a great number of female warriors in black appeared amongst King Kumicha's troops and fought ferociously. Their faces were fearsome and horrifying, and because Asoge's soldiers couldn't fight them off, in the end, King Asoge's troops lost the battle. Speaking of this, it's very likely that Tara liberated and transferred the consciousnesses of the dead soldiers to pure realms. I'm not completely certain about this, but one thing for sure is that Tara will never harm sentient beings. This story shows how immediately Tara responds to the requests of living beings.

As a matter of fact, as long as one prays to Tara devotedly, she will definitely reach out, even if it is to a villain. In ancient India, there was a Theravada Bhikkhu who had rejected the Mahayana teachings, burned lots of Mahayana texts in a fire and slandered the Tantrayana.

This irritated the king, who demanded that the Bhikkhu be punished. When the king's men came to arrest him, the Bhikkhu felt terribly afraid and went before a nearby stone statue of Tara and prayed to her. Beside the statue, there was a small ditch. As he prayed, the statue began to speak: "Get into that ditch!" "But the ditch is too small to fit in my body," thought the Bhikkhu, "How is it possible for me to hide there!" However, having no time to give it too much thought, the Bhikkhu got into the ditch and was able to hide there successfully, thereby escaping from the king's men and the king's punishment. Thereafter, he generated a strong, enduring faith in Tara. It may seem unreasonable that Tara would extend her help to one who had slandered the Mahayana teachings, but whoever prays to her will receive her response due to her unfailing vows. Gradually, beings whom Tara has helped, will become regretful for what they have done wrong and confess their misdeeds.

So, I think, whatever negativity we encounter in life, be it a nightmare or an adverse situation, we should pray to Tara immediately. When I was young and herding yaks, there were times that I couldn't find my yaks. Then, I'd pray to Tara. Sometimes I felt embarrassed that I had to trouble Tara with small matters like this, but it had become a habit to pray to Tara whenever I was worried. Her blessing is indeed very powerful. But we should not lose faith in Tara when things don't turn out the way that we had expected after praying to her. This is because when your karma has fully ripened, you need to experience it. No one, not even Tara, can alter it as the effect has matured, but if

there is even a slight chance to make a change, Tara will help us. The more sincere we are, the swifter her blessing comes. As I mentioned in the teaching on the *Seven-Line Prayer*, if you have a strong feeling and generate sincere devotion when praying, whether it's to Tara or Padmasambhava, they will resonate with your prayers and respond. However, if you do not have sincere feelings, or even worse, you doze off when reciting the mantra or prayer, will you receive the response of the deity? Undoubtedly, merely reciting the mantra also accumulates merit. Yet, whether or not one attains accomplishments in yidam practices is very much related to one's conduct and attitude.



DROLMA RITRÖMA, THE TARA WHO PACIFIES PLAGUES AND DISEASES

C5. Praise for the Activity of Pacifying Plagues and Diseases

Homage to you, whose eyes shine with lustre,
Bright with the fullness of sun and moon.
With twice-uttered *hara* and *tuttāre*
You pacify the most intractable diseases.

[Homage to you, whose two eyes shine with lustre,
Bright with the fullness of sun and moon.
With twice-uttered *hara* and *tuttāre*
You pacify the most intractable plagues and diseases.]

This Tara is called Tara Śabarī, or Drolma Ritröma: Tara, the dweller in the mountains or Tara, who pacifies plagues. She is yellow-red in color, and holds a utpala flower on which is a jeweled container full of immortal nectar. The nectar can heal contagious diseases and plagues that make sentient beings suffer. Her eyes shine with lustre, bright with a sheen like the sun and the moon. This radiance can dispel all kinds of suffering and diseases that strike human beings.

“With twice-uttered *hara* and *tuttāre*” suggests the way to recite her mantra. By reciting the mantra with TUTTARE and HARA twice, all deadly epidemics and contagious diseases can be annihilated. Her mantra is OM TARE TUTTARE TURE NAMA TARE MANO HARA HUNG HARA SVAHA. OM TARE TUTTARE TURE remains the same with Tara’s root mantra. The latter part, NAMA TARE MANO HARA HUNG HARA SVAHA has two HARA, and the former part has one TUTTARE. This mantra can pacify deadly epidemics and sicknesses in the world. Even such awful diseases that exist in the world today, such as leprosy, cancer, and AIDS can be removed swiftly by the blessing of Tara and her mantra.

There is a well-known story in the Tibetan region where a kind of epidemic struck an area and almost wiped out the entire population. People tried everything to control it but to no avail. There was a practitioner in the mountains nearby, who had been in retreat for years. The villagers went to him for help. Through divination and observation, he told the people from the village to hang prayer flags of Tara everywhere throughout the region. Speaking of prayer flags, there are not only Tara prayer flags in the Tibetan region, but prayer flags of Avalokiteshvara, Vajrasattva, and others, as well. The local people followed the practitioner’s advice and they chanted praises to Tara while hanging the prayer flags throughout the area. As the flags fluttered in the wind, the people who were touched by the wind were cured of their disease and no other epidemics ever happened there again.

Hence, we should pray to Tara when an epidemic or intractable disease is going around. At the same time, we should also seek medical treatment. Some practitioners don't go to the doctor but wait to die passively when they get sick. This is because they don't trust Chinese medicine, Tibetan medicine or Western medicine. This is not wise. We should believe in the effectiveness of these types of medicine. In the *Lama Yangtik* ("*The Innermost Heart Drop of the Guru*"), it mentions several things that are inconceivable, stating that the miraculous power of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas is inconceivable, as are the potency of medicine and mantras. Medicines contain within them an incredible power. Similarly, mantras like the mantra of Tara, as well as the *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras*, have their own inconceivable power, as well.

Yet, such power is unknown to those who are not experts in these areas. For instance, someone who has never learned about medicine may find Chinese medicine quite odd. They may wonder, "How can these piles of herbs treat illness?" If I knew nothing about Chinese medicine, it would also be difficult for me to accept them immediately. Personally, I find traditional Chinese medicine to be quite amazing. The way that the doctors of Chinese medicine make their diagnosis is very simple. By looking at your tongue or your eyes, they are able to know your illness and prescribe herbal medicines accordingly. Actually, there is a great deal of science behind this simple way of diagnosis, so it would be unreasonable for those who know nothing about Chinese medicine to criticize it.

Similarly, people may wonder how a mantra which consists of nothing more than several syllables strung together can be so powerful. Those who don't know about Buddhism may think that it's meaningless to hang prayer flags, hold a mala, turn a prayer wheel and recite sutras. In reality, these activities are actually the opposite of meaningless. As materialism is so deeply rooted in their minds, it is understandable that some would think this way. A while ago, I met a teacher who asked, "Why is it that turning a prayer wheel can be of great merit?" I explained briefly to him about the logic behind. It is understandable that he was holding some wrong views because he lacked a basic understanding of Buddhist teachings and the function of mantras from a Buddhist perspective. It seemed to me that he would need to study Buddhism for a long time to understand all this. If, on the other hand, we learn about the logic of the blessing mentioned in Buddhist teachings, we will be able to understand and accept it. For instance, in the *Essence of Clear Light*, it introduces the benefits and blessings of samadhi and mantra. By studying this treatise, we will come to understand the logic of these concepts and moreover, will completely accept the point it makes as we will not find any points of argument to refute it. There are things of mystery that can't be perceived by the eyes and mystical powers that can't be physically touched, and there is no reason for us to deny the existence of these things just because we cannot see them. That being the case, what need is there to say how improper it is for us to deny the profound meaning of the Buddhadharma which we have not yet completely realized.

As Buddhists, we must study these things systematically. On the one hand, it can serve to dispel our own doubts and wrong views, and on the other hand, when we are propagating the Dharma, people will raise questions, either to challenge you or because they are unfamiliar with the basic concepts of Buddhism. In times like these, we shouldn't just keep silent or find an excuse not to answer their questions. That would be inappropriate. In fact, we should work through their doubts by answering their questions in accordance with the Buddhist teachings.



DROLMA ÖZER CHENMA, SHE WHO DESTROYS ZOMBIES AND MALICIOUS NONHUMAN SPIRITS

C6. Praise for the Activity of Accomplishing All Dharma Activities

Homage to you, who have the power to free,
You put forth the realities as a set of three.
Supreme Ture, you completely destroy
The hordes of grahas, vetālas, and yakṣas.

[Homage to you, who with a set of three realities
Have the miraculous power to pacify.
Supreme Ture, you completely destroy
The hordes of grahas, vetālas, and yakṣas.]

This is paying homage to Tara Mārīcī, or Drolma Özer Chenma in Tibetan. She is Tara, “Rays of Light”. This Tara is white in color and holds in her left hand an utpala flower, upon which stand the auspicious golden fishes.

How to practice the visualization of this Tara? “Who with a set of three realities” refers to the three syllables of OM AH HUNG. Vividly visualize Tara Mārīcī with a set of the three syllables of reality—OM AH HUNG. Centered at Tara Mārīcī’s forehead is the white OM, at her throat is the red AH, and at her heart is the blue HUNG. Three colors of light radiate from the syllables and touch all beings. By such power, the bodies, speech and minds of those beings, are transformed into the three vajras, i.e. vajra body, vajra speech, and vajra mind. The light of Tara Mārīcī has the power to bestow peace on all beings. What does this mean? Ordinary beings lack many qualities such as wisdom, compassion and faith. With Tara Mārīcī’s blessing, beings are freed from afflictions and their virtues and qualities are then revealed. “Supreme Ture, you completely destroy the hordes of grahas, vetālas, and yakṣas.” suggests that Tara Mārīcī can completely destroy all such evil beings in the world as grahas, vetalas, and yakshas. In sum, this practice is to visualize light emanating from the three doors of Tara Mārīcī which purifies the bodies, speeches, and minds of all beings. As the light reaches those who create obstacles for Dharma practitioners, including non-human beings and demonic beings, it has the power to dispel their evil thoughts and bring forth happiness, both to themselves and to the subjects they seek to harm. The practice of Tara is nothing like the way that some countries use the military and nuclear weapons to try to wipe out others in seconds. It is actually an exceptionally powerful practice that frees from suffering those beings who appear to have been destroyed by Tara.

There is a story about Master Jnanadeva, who was a disciple of Shantideva. After studying and teaching for a long time in Southern India, he went to meditate in the snow mountains. When he arrived in a certain small town, he found that the town had been experiencing harm from evil spirits. Many people in the district had died from the harm caused by these nonhuman spirits, and corpses were everywhere. When the Master arrived, a terrible vetala, or zombie, came running towards him. At that moment, Master Jnanadeva threw his Phurba, a ritual dagger over which he had recited Tara's mantra, toward the zombie. When his Phurba hit the zombie, it immediately collapsed to the ground, yet its consciousness was transferred to the pure land. Through Master Jnanadeva's invocation to Tara, a rain of nectar with the power of resurrecting the deceased began to fall. By the power of the nectar, the dead townspeople were once again returned to life. This is a very unusual story. From history, we know that in some regions of ancient India, evil spirits such as rakshasas and yakshas were, at one time, rampant and brought great harm to people. There are also many folkloric stories about zombies in the Tibetan region and the mainland China. Although there haven't been too many cases in recent years, last year, a Dharma friend told me that he had seen a corpse before he went to sleep. He was terrified that the corpse might rise during night, so too afraid to sleep, he stayed awake all night. Generally speaking, these days, these types of stories are rare, but in the past, zombies were not unheard of.

Anyway, I believe that we should pray to Tara Mārīcī consistently. At

Larung Gar, we often recite the mantra and prayers to Tara Mārīcī collectively in order to dispel certain kinds of negative circumstances. In this degenerate age, we will inevitably encounter certain obstacles over the course of our practice. Some practitioners have the belief that life is full of happiness, but this is not true. On the contrary, life is full of suffering. This is what all of us must acknowledge and accept. Without this knowledge, we may not have the courage to face suffering when it befalls us, however, knowing that suffering is pervasive in life, what matters is how to recognize it, how to deal with it and how to transform it onto the path of enlightenment. At times like this, we need to pray to Tara so that we can transform suffering and obtain real happiness with her blessing.

THE END OF THE PRAISE AND OTHER BRIEF PRAYERS TO TARA

A3. Conclusion

This Praise with the twenty-one verses of homage is itself the root mantra.

[This is the Praise of the root mantra with twenty-one verses of homage.]

This phrase that appears at the end of the Praise is always recited along with the Praise. “This is the Praise of the root mantra” means that in this Praise, all syllables of the root mantra are included, with different syllables, such as TARE, TURE and SVAHA, appearing in different verses. “With twenty-one verses of homage” means that it praises the noble qualities of Tara from twenty-one aspects. In essence, these twenty-one Taras are the same and are all inseparable from Samanthabadhri. Yet, for the benefit of different beings, Tara manifests in twenty-one forms, which, like Avalokitesvara, appear in various forms to different sentient beings. In general, it can be said that all forms of Tara are included in these twenty-one forms, however, if we are to analyze her manifestations more specifically, we will find that the number of forms in which she appears is infinite.

OTHER BRIEF PRAYERS TO TARA AND MERITS OF TARA

MANTRA

There is also a very short prayer to Tara called the *Brief Prayer to Tara*. If you don't have enough time to recite the *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras*, you can recite this short prayer as often as you like:

jetsün pakma drolma khyé khyen no

I pray to you, noble savioress Tārā,

jik dang dukngal kün lé kyab tu sol

May you protect us from all danger, fear and suffering.

This means: Noble savioress Tara, please be compassionate, bless me, and know me. I pray to you to protect me from all danger, fear and suffering. As long as you are willing, it's easy for you to make use of this prayer at any time and in any place. As we have been saying, praying to Tara can protect us from suffering and fear. The Tibetan term "jik dang" means danger and fear. Generally, there are eight great fears. For instance, there is the fear of venomous snakes, the fear of floods, the fear of fire and the fear of elephants. Not only can these great fears be removed, fears unique to the modern world, such as the fear of an economic crisis, can be dispelled as well. So, calling upon Tara with this short prayer is crucial. Avalokitesvara is widely considered to be the one who helps the needy and relieves the distressed with his great love and compassion, and we can say that such a title also applies to Tara. If all of us can pray to Tara consistently, her powerful blessing will be well-received and will bring great benefit to many beings.

There is another brief prayer to Tara that was composed by Mipham Rinpoche, which the Larung Gar sangha would recite regularly. It is:

om chaktsal jetsünn taré lhamo

Oṃ! We pay homage to you, reverend goddess Tārā,

tuttaré shyé dungwa kün kyob

With Tuttāre, you protect us from suffering,

tukjé tokmé turé pamö

*Your compassion is unobstructed, Turé, swift lady warrior,
dak la drub chok tsol chik soha
Grant us the supreme accomplishment, svāhā.*

Additionally, at the end of this Praise, is included the root mantra of Tara:

OM TARE TUTTARE TURE SVAHA

Ju Mipham Rinpoche indicated in his *Merits of Hundreds of Mantra*, that this mantra can dispel all deteriorations and purify all non-virtues. It is also the essence of the mantras of the five Buddha consorts. By reciting this mantra on a regular basis, it can protect us from all disasters. In such places as Taiwan and Singapore, many masters say that the more one recites this mantra, the more attractive one's appearance will be. That is likely why so many females like to recite this mantra. As long as you pray to Tara, by making use of either the mantra or this Praise, she will fulfill all your wishes and bestow all kinds of siddhis.

KHENPO'S WISHES FOR THOSE WHO ATTEND THIS TEACHING

When H. H. Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche was still with us, every one of us recited the Tara mantra 700,000 times. I will not request you to recite that much, but I hope that everyone who has attended or read this teaching, will complete at least 10,000 repetitions of the Tara

mantra and one hundred repetitions of *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras*, within a period of one year. I'll do this too. This is not too much for you to finish. If we recite *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras* once each day of our Dharma class, at that rate, we will finish one hundred times of accumulation in about 3 months. Whether we recite the Praise together in class or you do the practice individually after class, our one-year collective practice will enable all the participants to make an auspicious connection with Tara. I hope that all of you will join this collective practice. I surely will.

Now, we've finished the course on the *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras*. Many signs have proven that teaching and learning the Tara practice at this time is very auspicious. As for me, I have engaged in the Tara practice since childhood. Although I didn't have significant experiences or amazing stories of my own, I have great faith in it and for this, I'm kind of proud. Therefore, I feel confident that I am qualified to give this teaching to you, as since I was young, I have experienced great joy towards this practice. In my school days, Buddhism was at a low ebb and whoever practiced it, for instance, by reciting Buddhist prayers and mantras, would be expelled if caught. Even at that time, I never stopped my practice and just recited my prayers and mantras silently. I have firm faith in this practice. Now I've given the entire transmission to you, and throughout the entire teaching, I've kept praying to Tara that she may grant her compassionate blessing so that every one of you will receive her blessing quickly, and that your wishes will be fulfilled under her

glorious blessing.

We should also aspire to commission and place Tara statues in different places around the world, when there are appropriate opportunities. Happily, at present, there are many Tara shrines in the Tibetan region. Usually, statues of the 21 Taras are placed in a giant hall. In our newly built shrine hall, we will install three principal statues: Buddha Shakyamuni, Tara and Padmasambhava. I made this proposal yesterday and the board of our academy has approved it. To build such shrines in other places and countries shouldn't be too difficult. If statues of Tara and Padmasambhava can be placed in the big cities of different countries, I feel certain that Buddhism will definitely flourish there. In this Age of Degeneration, with the swift blessing bestowed by powerful deities, favorable conditions for propagating the Dharma will come together spontaneously. I hope that in the future, Tara statues will be seen everywhere and there will be more and more people reciting the *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras*. With this auspicious origination, obstacles for personal practice and Dharma propagation can be removed and more and more favorable conditions are certain to gather.



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