

*Essays*  
*on the*  
*Shambhala Buddhist Chants*

*By*

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*With a Contribution from Acharya Christie Cashman*

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## *Preface*

The Kootenay Shambhala Centre is in the town of Nelson, B.C., Canada. We have had the usual disagreements about whether it is appropriate to do the chants at public sittings. When the editor of our local newsletter requested me to write some dharma essays for the newsletter, it occurred to me that articles about the chants would be appropriate. They allude to a lot of dharmic ground, and there is a shortage of published explanation available in simple, everyday non-technical language.

As I wrote the essays, I imagined having a conversation with a newer student, one who had been sitting for a while and may have taken a class or two. This imaginary person had some connection to the Centre, but, understandably, had questions and reactions to the chants. For this reason, the essays have a somewhat informal, conversational quality, rather than an authoritative, encyclopedic style.

I am not a scholar or translator, and I wasn't present when Trungpa Rinpoche talked with his inner circle about introducing certain chants. However, I have been a practitioner since 1974, and have contemplated the material in the chants over that time period. Like many older students, I have been repeatedly put in the position of trying to explain the chants to new people. I view these essays as a work in progress. My own oral explanations to people are never exactly the same. I hope they stimulate discussion and input from others, especially from people with special knowledge or insight.

I would be most happy to coordinate and assemble additional information about the chants if it is offered by others. One option would be to keep the basic essays simple and include more technical detail in appendix form. That would make the information useful to a spectrum of new and older students. While I am confident that most of what I have written is roughly on track, I am certain that others would choose to emphasize different aspects or explain things in different ways. For that reason further essays by knowledgeable people should probably be attributed to those persons.

I have not attempted to write about the specific chants that are done only at practice centres or at Karne Dzong, because I have not had the opportunity to contemplate those chants extensively over time. I invite people with more knowledge and experience with those particular chants to write explanations. I have already included, with her permission, Acharya Christie Cashman's excellent commentary on the Homage and Invocation chants.

It is my belief that there is so much dharma in the chants that explaining them offers an excellent opportunity for new people to make at least some contact with large sections of the Shambhala Buddhist path. I have also found that the contemplation involved in trying to explain them in everyday, simple language has been very helpful for my own understanding.

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Finally, it's important to know that Lady Diana Mukpo holds the copyright for the chants, so any material that quotes from the chants and is made generally available has to be cleared with Acharya Larry Mermelstein, who acts as her agent.

## *The Four Dharmas of Gampopa*

*Grant your blessings so that my mind may be one with the dharma.*

*Grant your blessing so that dharma may progress along the path.*

*Grant your blessings so that the path may clarify confusion.*

*Grant your blessings so that confusion may dawn as wisdom.*

The author of these lines, Gampopa, lived at a very critical time in the birth of our lineage and helped shape its future in profound ways. After his birth in 1079, Gampopa displayed much curiosity and openness to the dharma, and received teachings from many gurus. He was also very interested in medicine, and eventually became a physician. Gampopa married, and he and his wife were very much in love. When he was 24, she became terminally ill. Gampopa was unable to help her, despite his medical training. Moreover, she experienced great pain and suffering, and according to Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, was unable to experience her death properly. Gampopa asked her why this was and she replied, "I am not attached to possessions, nor wealth, nor faith, but I am very attached to you. Because you are only 24 years old, and you are very handsome, it is very hard for me to leave you. It is because my attachment to you is so very strong that I am unable to experience death."

Knowing there was no cure for her illness, and at the same time understanding that her attachment to him prevented her from dying properly, Gampopa promised that he would take a vow of complete celibacy, never marry another woman, and become a monk. This promise released her from her attachment, and she experienced her natural death.

So, as he had promised his wife, he took the vow of a monk in the Kadampa tradition and went into retreat. There he practiced meditation, saw many signs and had mystical experiences.

However, his practice in this tradition did not completely satisfy him, so he sought out one of the greatest yogis of all time, Milarepa. Under Milarepa's

guidance, Gampopa's practice matured into enlightenment and he became Milarepa's main lineage holder and successor.

Gampopa's previous training enabled him to temper the spontaneous and relatively unstructured yogic style of his teacher (and the lineage altogether up to that point) with the structure and steadiness of his earlier monastic training. It fell to Gampopa's student, the first Karmapa, Tusum Kyenpa, to start the tulku tradition. In this tradition, the previous abbot of a monastery reincarnates, and is found and trained to become the next abbot. This introduced an element of continuity into the transmission of the dharma from generation to generation. The steadiness of the monastic tradition enabled the dharma to flourish for many centuries, into modern times. The monasteries provided institutional continuity and training to large numbers of monks and nuns, while yogis and married lamas continued to ensure that the dharma did not lose touch with ordinary reality.

Gampopa died in 1153, and later his four main students spread his teachings by means of what have come to be known as the "four great" schools of the Kagyu lineage.

Each line of the Four Dharmas of Gampopa begins with the phrase "*Grant your blessings .....*" It isn't clear who is being asked to grant their blessings, but a good rule of thumb in buddhadharma is that, even if there is a guru nearby, that teacher's mind is ultimately the same as yours in its basic buddha nature. However, since we don't experience ourselves as buddhas, we seem to need to experience enlightened mind as though it is external to us. So we supplicate enlightened mind as though it is outside.

The first line also contains the phrase "*one with the dharma*". When we first hear the dharma, it may seem remote. We do not feel "one with" it. As we contemplate the dharmic teachings and compare them to our own experience, we gain confidence in what is being said. The final result of contemplation is that the dharma becomes part of us. It becomes how we view the world. We are now "one with" the dharma.

We could take the idea of karma, for instance, as an example of how we might become *one with* the dharma. When we first hear about karma, it sounds like another example of religious belief: cosmic punishment of sin. We feel remote from the dharma. Becoming *one with* the dharma has three stages. The first is *listening*; the second is *contemplating*, and the third is *taking to heart*, or becoming *one with*. At the first stage of listening, we simply have to listen and understand clearly the concept of karma, and disentangle it from our previously existing ideas about Judeo/Christian ideas of sin and retribution. We have to understand that karma is just cause and effect. After listening, we go through an extended stage of contemplation, where we compare the Buddhist ideas of karma with our experience. We become more and more conscious of actions and their results. We then enter the third stage, taking to heart, automatically considering the karma inherent in everything we do or say. We begin to actually experience the world in terms of karmic cause and effect: we have become *one with*. Karma has become part of our natural view of the world.

The second line, “*Grant your blessing so that dharma may progress along the path*” reflects the fact that one’s ego cannot attend its own funeral. “Dharma” progresses along the path, rather than our personal selves. The teachings direct us to examine the sense of self to see if it exists or not. Only after continuous searching over a lengthy period of time is it possible to say with conviction that the self does not exist. So the self doesn’t progress along the path. The word “dharma” has several different meanings: It can refer to the “teachings”, or it can refer to natural law, in the sense of how things work. One can have the dharma of cooking eggs: when heat is applied, eggs cook. It can also mean “elements”: for instance the dharmas of existence. If there is no self, then dharma, with all its shades of meaning, might be a good word for what progresses along the path.

*Grant your blessings so that the path may clarify confusion.* Most of us practice because we want to clarify our confusion. We practice shamatha to tame our minds and bring them into a sense of peaceful presence. However, we notice that this calm presence happens mainly during the gaps between thoughts. This has the paradoxical effect of making us more aware of what is on either side of the gaps between thoughts: confused emotions and discursiveness. At first we try to push the thoughts aside. Later, with vipashyana, or insight, we see the nature of



our thought-based projections, and how insubstantial they are in the presence of awareness. At this point confusion becomes clarified because we have seen how empty it is.

*Grant your blessings so that confusion may dawn as wisdom.* We can understand this on two levels. On the first level, confusion may dawn as wisdom through a profound understanding of the mind from which confusion arises. At the pre-thought level, mind is like empty space out of which anything can appear. One can glimpse a bit of this in meditation if one tries to find where one's thoughts come from and where they go. The productive nature of the empty space of mind is sometimes called "luminosity".

If we are ignorant of the nature of our minds, we don't perceive luminosity directly. We perceive it fully formed as thoughts and also as perceptions of a world outside of the mind. This world seems to be "out there", with a perceiver "in here". So the first level of understanding is to experience thoughts, emotions and the phenomenal world as the display of the luminous-empty mind. This mind is not the personal, discursive mind of the self. The sense of a thinker and its thoughts and perceptions are just one part of a display in a much bigger picture. Understanding and living at that level is wisdom.

There is a second way to understand how confusion is transformed into wisdom. The five buddha families are an intermediate stage between the basic empty but expressive nature of mind that we just discussed, and the well developed thoughts and emotions that comprise our confusion. At this intermediate level, confusion is experienced as the wisdom energy of the mind, as opposed buying into the emotional story lines that often accompany that energy. For more on that, see Appendix II.

If you are interested in finding our more about Gampopa, check out <http://www.kagyu.org/kagyulineage/lineage/kag06.php>

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## *Supplication to the Shambhala Lineage*

In this chant, Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche acknowledges the sources of the Shambhala Lineage. There were four main lineages in Tibet: the Gelugpa (the Dalai Lama's lineage), the Sakya, the Kagyu and the Nyingma. Calling ours the "Shambhala Lineage" was, at the time it was written, a controversial statement because it seemed to add a fifth lineage, marking a separation from our Tibetan heritage.

Some historical background is in order: Trungpa Rinpoche, our founder, was officially a Kagyu lineage holder, but his major teachers were Nyingma. When he came to the West, he found that Westerners seemed to miss the point when presented with practices that worked for Tibetans. So he began to adapt practices from his own tradition and from the Zen tradition in ways that would suit us. For instance, having beginners sitting as a group on cushions doing shamatha meditation is not a Tibetan tradition at all. It was borrowed from the Zen. Weekthuns and dathuns and seminaries for laymen did not exist in Tibet. Trungpa Rinpoche also added Shambhala teachings and practices, many of which also did not exist in Tibet.

Shambhala *culture*, however, was embedded in Tibetan society. Some of what we now call the Shambhala lineage also originated with the pre-buddhist religion of Tibet, Bön. Trungpa Rinpoche greatly expanded these Shambhala elements into a path for Westerners, a path that would be complimentary to his previously introduced Buddhist teachings. He felt that Western culture needed some help before it could be a suitable container for Buddhism on a large scale. The Shambhala teachings were his answer to that problem. However, at the time of his death, we still nominally regarded ourselves as Kagyus, with a Tibetan, His Holiness Karmapa, at the head of our school.

To complicate things further, Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche, when he took over the reins from his father, studied mainly with Nyingma teachers. By that time, a

Tibetan visiting one of our more than one hundred centres around the world probably wouldn't recognize much of what we do, at least in its outer forms. However, if the visitor were perceptive, he or she would probably recognize that the inner heart of our teachings and practices synchronizes completely with the heart of the Tibetan tradition. So Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche took the step of naming a new lineage, the Shambhala Buddhist lineage, and wrote this chant, acknowledging our heritage and at the same time giving an outline of what would be emphasized in this particular school, Shambhala Buddhism.

*Primordial Rigden,  
All-good Samantabhadra,  
Great Vajradhara;*

The first three lines pay homage to three major sources of our lineage. All are similar in that they symbolize a source of inspiration in what Buddhists would call the dharmakaya level. At this exceedingly spacious level of mind, there is not even the appearance of any entities, such as observer and observed. There is only emptiness and luminosity. One could say that the dharmakaya level is a level of pure awareness, without the usual objects of such awareness. However, at this level emptiness is pregnant with possibilities. These possibilities are at the pre-thought level, but they will have slightly different flavors as they develop out of the dharmakaya towards the level of symbolic thinking and finally to the manifestation of seemingly physical, seemingly outer, appearances in the mind.

The “*Primordial Rigden*” is the symbolic source of the Shambhala Lineage. Rigden translates as “holder of the family”. In this case, the luminosity/emptiness represented by the Rigden will develop flavors of enlightenment embedded in life as lay people live it, surrounded by family and society at large.

*Samantabhadra* is connected with the Nyingma lineage which specializes in the variously named Great Perfection, ati or dzogchen teachings. Samantabhadra symbolizes complete primordial purity and utter wakefulness. (see the discussion of the [Seven Line Supplication to Padmakara](#) for more information on the Great Perfection teachings). Vajradhara occupies a similar position with the Kagyu.

Here, it could be said, the flavor will develop more towards how to look, step by step, into all aspects of our minds and discover the true nature.

*Lotus-born Padmakara,  
Wisdom Yeshe Tsogyal,  
Prahevajra, Shri Simha,  
Holders of the Ancient Great Perfection:*

These lines pay homage to the human founders of the Nyingma lineage. (See the commentaries on the Seven Line Supplication to Padmakara and the Supplication to Padmasambhava for information about Padmasambhava, also known as Padmakara). Prahevajra was the first human in Ancient Great Perfection tradition. Shri Simha followed shortly after that. It is difficult to find much historical information about them. It seems likely that Padmasambhava knew both and received teachings from them. Yeshe Tsogyal was Padmasambhava's consort. She became a powerful teacher in her own right. The two of them were largely responsible for establishing Buddhism in Tibet. Her influence is still felt because of the practices that she and Padmasambhava hid for future generations. Certain yogis, called tertons, still find examples of these teachings when the time is appropriate for them to be found and put into practice.

*Tilo, Naro, Marpa, Mila,  
Siddhi-accomplishing masters of mahamudra:  
Please approach and grant your blessings.*

In contrast to the Nyingma lineage of the Ancient Great Perfection, there are many stories and histories about the early Kagyu mahamudra lineage holders. Tilo, short for Tilopa, is said to have gotten the teachings directly from Vajradhara. While it is difficult to know what this actually means, it does seem that he tuned into the space-like potential of the dharmakaya, as symbolized by Vajradhara, and started a new line of transmission. The four lineage holders mentioned here started the Kagyu lineage. They could not have had more different personalities, but their relationships went far beyond the constraints of personal character. Tilopa started as a cowherd, worked for many years as a servant for a courtesan during the night and pounded sesame seeds to extract their

oil during the day. His student Naropa was a university professor. Naropa's student Marpa was an irascible Tibetan farmer, and Milarepa, who received the lineage from Marpa, was an earnest but guilt-ridden murderer. Each was able to receive the inspiration of the mahamudra lineage and then pass it on to establish the Kagyu lineage.

*Dawa Sangpo, the other dharmarajas, and the twenty-five Rigdens,  
Who guide beings to the sacred land of Shambhala,  
You are the sun and moon, the wish-fulfilling jewel.  
Your brilliant mind is the ornament of the world.  
Protect my vajra awareness.  
Grant your blessings so that I may realize great bliss-wisdom.*

With these lines we introduce the first lineage holders of the Shambhala tradition. The story goes that Dawa Sangpo, a king, requested the Buddha for teachings that would not require him to become a monk. Buddha sent his monks and nuns out of the room, and gave Dawa Sangpo teachings that could be practiced by lay people in the context of their usual societal obligations. It is said that the whole kingdom of Shambhala became a place where it was easy to practice and society was vastly uplifted. The twenty-five Rigdens are the kings who followed Dawa Sangpo.

*Gesar Norbu Dradul, you are the great activity lion.  
All-victorious Sakyong, you reveal the treasure of basic goodness  
And radiate the Great Eastern Sun.*

Gesar was a king in ancient Tibet. He is the quintessential warrior of Shambhala, fearless in the face of psychological and physical obstacles. One sees depictions of him on prayer flags, riding his magnificent horse, magnetizing energy to overcome the degradation of human society. A Sakyong, or "Earth Protector" is an enlightened ruler who protects the sense of sacredness of human existence. The Great Eastern Sun represents the inherently awake quality of mind. It is from the east because, at dawn, there is a sense of freshness and eternal new beginning.

*Ashe, the essence of life, fearlessly reveals confidence and compassion;  
May all discover the power of this magic.*

*The drala lineage of Mukpo, you bring about the new golden age.  
Grant your blessings so that I may liberate all beings.*

The ashe stroke is part of the calligraphy of the syllable “A”, the first syllable of the Tibetan alphabet. It communicates the awake quality of Great Eastern Sun. It is likened to a sharp razor, cutting through the inherent aggression of any attempt to solidify reality. It is also a symbol of wakefulness, bravery, and gentle openness in the human heart.

*The drala lineage of Mukpo* refers to the Mukpo clan. In Eastern Tibet, clan membership didn't necessarily refer bloodlines. One can become part of a clan by adopting that clan's customs and spiritual practices. So our sangha has been adopted into the Mukpo clan, Trungpa Rinpoche's ancestral family lineage. It is called a *drala* lineage because it has power and presence that overcomes confusion and degradation.

*Buddhas, bodhisattvas, warriors, masters of the three times,  
You guide us along the path to liberation.  
You awaken bodhichitta.  
You teach us the great view of emptiness.  
You reveal the joy of luminosity.  
Transmitting awareness-wisdom,  
You lead us to perfect enlightenment.  
Grant your blessings so that I may realize my nature  
As the profound brilliant Rigden.*

In these lines, we make the aspiration that we accomplish the completely awake, spacious state of the Rigden. He could have aspired that we realize our natures as Vajradhara or Samantabhadra, but he chose the Rigden instead. Perhaps this reflects the fact that unlike our predecessors, we are not, by and large, cave yogis or monks and nuns. We are a special category, householder yogis. This category of practitioners also existed in Tibet, Marpa being an example. However, Western society doesn't provide much support for recluse yogis or monks and nuns. The path of the householder-yogi is by far the most prevalent here, and the most appropriate for most people.

Some masters say that, although the path of the householder is more difficult, it is the most profound. It does not shy away from all the energies of family relationships and society at large. When we have transformed these energies, the possibility arises that we can enlighten the society around us. This is the goal of the Shambhala Buddhist Lineage.

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# *The Seven-Line Supplication to Padmakara*

*HUM*

*In the northwest of the land of Uddiyana,  
On a blooming lotus flower,  
You have attained supreme, wondrous siddhi.  
You are renowned as Padmakara,  
Surrounded by your retinue of many dakinis.  
We practice following your example.  
Please approach and grant your blessing.  
GURU-PADMA-SIDDHI HUM*

HUM is the seed syllable of mind. Not the discursive mind that we are so familiar with, but the completely awake mind of emptiness and limitless possibility. This is the mind of Padmasambhava, who is also known by the name Padmakara.

The Seven-Line Supplication is a famous prayer to Padmasambhava, a powerful yogi renowned in Tibet as the “Second Buddha”. Padmasambhava’s exact dates are unclear, but it seems that he lived in the 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> centuries CE. His birth had been prophesized over a thousand years earlier by Buddha Sakyamuni. Padmasambhava was born in Uddiyana, which at the time was a prosperous kingdom in a fertile river valley near the border of what is now Pakistan and Afghanistan. At that time, this valley was a thriving Buddhist society on the trade route between India and Persia. It is possible that Osama Bin Laden hides nearby now.

*On a blooming lotus flower,  
You have attained supreme, wondrous siddhi.*

These lines have a literal meaning and some symbolic meanings as well. Literally, the legend of Padmasambhava’s birth says that he was not born of a mother and a father, but instead spontaneously appeared on a giant lotus flower in the middle of a lake. Therefore the names Padmasambhava or Padmakara contain the word “padma”, which means “lotus flower”.



The symbolic meaning of these lines derives from the fact that lotus flowers grow out of the mud on a lake bottom, but are themselves immaculate and unstained. According to the legend, Padmasambhava was one of those rare individuals who arrive in this world unstained by previous karma, in full realization of the nature of their total being. In other words, they are fully enlightened. Such persons may appear to need to tread on a path, but that is only to demonstrate for others that a path exists, and perhaps, to learn some skillful means to ripen others.

Another level of symbolism evoked by this image has to do with the path of Dzogchen, the Great Perfection—the highest of all the Buddhist practice vehicles. At this level, one is presented with the view of a fully enlightened person, and asked to step directly into that view. In contrast, the lower level teachings speak to our more predominate and immediate concerns as a way starting us along the path. These concerns might include anxiety about our living situations, fear of impermanence, the need for compassion in our lives, or simply the desire for a little clarity and mental peace.

From the Great Perfection point of view, our own enlightened, fully awake mind is already within us. It is not only awake, but it manifests as everything that we experience. Even though it is in us and all around us, we do not recognize it. This mind is one of limitless possibilities. One of these possibilities is that it can obscure itself by manifesting ignorance and solidified thoughts and concepts. Like Padmasambhava, this mind isn't born from external causes—it doesn't have a father or mother. Meditative practice doesn't produce this mind. It only uncovers it. Even as we meditate, that enlightened mind is what manifests as the self that meditates, the objects of meditation and the obscuring thoughts. It manifests the seeming mud of samsara, but is itself immaculate.

This style of introducing very profound teachings at the beginning of the journey should be somewhat familiar to those who have done Shambhala Training. In Level I, we are introduced to the notion of “basic” goodness. Basic goodness means that, within a state of perfect nowness, before ordinary thoughts of good or bad have arisen, everything that arises is pure and unstained. Everything is

primordially and basically “good”. It is “good” beyond and before ordinary thoughts of good or bad.

With respect to the Great Perfection teachings, it is said that people like Padmasambhava, who have practiced a great deal in previous lives, will recognize, internalize and accomplish the teachings as soon as they hear them. Ordinary people like ourselves may feel that these ideas have the ring of truth, but we need to practice on a more ordinary level in order to extend beyond the words into actual, continuous manifestation. For us, the more ordinary paths of renunciation, generation of compassion, and shamatha and vipashyana are more appropriate. Even so, we might be able to appreciate that the legend of Padmasambhava’s birth could also be an allegory for discovering our own pre-existing enlightened nature, a nature that, like Padmasambhava, doesn’t have to be produced by external causes such as a father or mother.

..... *You have attained supreme, wondrous siddhi...*

“Siddhi” means “power”. There are two kinds: relative and absolute. Relative siddhis are powers that relate to the phenomenal world. They could refer to powers as simple as the mechanical aptitude to fix cars, or to highly unusual abilities such as being able to leave foot prints in stone, read minds, or the ability to predict the future. Absolute siddhi is the ability to recognize and remain in the totally awake wisdom mind. Relative siddhis often arise as by-products of enlightenment, but sometimes they appear spontaneously in otherwise ordinary individuals. In the case of ordinary people, the more supra-mundane relative siddhis are regarded as potentially problematic because they can result in seductive side-tracks that actually enhance the sense of solidified self.

Padmasambhava’s legendary siddhis came into play with respect to the obstacles that arose in bringing the dharma to Tibet. Others before him had failed. Padmasambhava, in fact, was working on a grand scale--a scale in space involving a whole country and in time involving many centuries. Because of his ability to see into the future, he could tell when, at a later time, particular teachings would be appropriate. He left many teachings that would be re-discovered at the appropriate time by special yogis called tertons. The *Seven Line*

*Supplication to Padmakara*, for example, was discovered by a yogi named Chokyi Wangchuk. Our own founder, Trungpa Rinpoche, discovered many such teachings when he was a young man in Tibet.

On his arrival to Tibet, Padmasambhava faced resistance from the native religious traditions, from the rugged physical environment, and from what might be called the psyche of the land and people. Many of these obstacles are described in the stories as demonic forces. If Padmasambhava were trying to bring dharma on a such a vast scale to North America today, one could imagine the obstacles that would be presented by the national psyche of North American materialism and the existing theistic religions. These were the obstacles that Trungpa Rinpoche faced, and one can see why the story and example of Padmasambhava were so important to him.

Because of Padmasambhava's profound openness, he saw the energies involved in those obstacles as opportunities. Padmasambhava harnessed those energies as aides. Many of the protector practices that are done in Tibet today originated from Padmasambhava's encounters with those forces.

*.....Surrounded by your retinue of many dakinis...*

*Dakinis* are embodiments of the feminine principle—either in human or non-human form. The feminine principle in tantric Buddhism refers to the insight, or prajna, that discovers the emptiness of our conceptual, thought-based solidifications of the world. The masculine principle is more connected with methods or skillful means. Padmasambhava used many masculine skillful means to subdue the obstacles facing him. However, he knew that unless the masculine principle of skillful means is balanced with the feminine principle of openness, emptiness and insight, the skillful means would become twisted into mere spiritual and materialistic technologies, such as those often used to maintain modern nation states and corporations.

Being surrounded by many dakinis has different levels of meaning. On one level it could be said that Padmasambhava was surrounded by the feminine principle in the form of female goddesses, and thus was able to balance masculine skillful

means with the feminine principle of insight. On another level, Padmasambhava took many female human consorts and brought them into enlightenment. Among these was Tibet's most famous woman yogi, Yeshe Tsogyal. Western observers might think that this is just another example of patriarchal harem building. However, Yeshe Tsogyal herself took male consorts and taught them in the same way. This sort of relationship between teacher and student would be the essence of politically incorrectness today, but in the Tibetan culture, if a teacher is truly egoless, and the student is ready, the intimacy and power of the male/female relationship presents unique opportunities for transmission of the true heart of the teachings.

*.... We practice following your example, please approach and grant your blessings...*

Again, there are at least two levels of understanding possible. Tibetan legend has it that Padmasambhava never actually died. He resides in the Copper Colored Mountain pure land, beyond the view of ordinary humans. From this vantage point, he watches over the dharma, and issues forth when called.

Another, second level of understanding suggests that the more we know of his story, the more merely thinking of Padmasambhava will open our minds to vast possibilities. Part of this level of understanding is that our own Padmasambhava nature is always there, waiting.

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## *Supplication to the Takpo Kagyu*

The Kagyu lineage is one of the three main Tibetan lineages that form the basis of Shambhala Buddhism. Each of these lineages contributed a unique approach to enlightenment. The particular approach of the Kagyu lineage is marked by a very methodical progression of practice and study that leads deeper and deeper into their specialty, mahamudra. The majority of the major practices that we do, including shamatha/vipashyana, Kagyu ngondro, Vajrayogini, Chakrasamvara, the mahamudra retreats, and the six yogas of Naropa are all part of the Kagyu mahamudra system.

The Kagyu forefathers are the ones whose stories we are most familiar with. The stories are well documented historically, and colorful as well. Many older students have treasured relationships with Kagyu teachers, including Thrangu Rinpoche, Khandro Rinpoche, His Holiness Karmapa and Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso. Trungpa Rinpoche himself was a Kagyu. So this lineage has a major place in our heritage.

Turning to the chant itself, it begins:

*Great Vajradhara, Tilo, Naro,  
Marpa, Mila, Lord of Dharma Gampopa,*

In the Kagyu lineage, devotion is very important. “Devotion” is a translation of the Tibetan word “mo-gu”, which implies longing to experience the guru’s mind, accompanied by a genuinely humble and open quality on the part of the student. Therefore the chant begins by acknowledging the sources of the lineage. Knowing a bit about the stories helps to get a sense of what kind of guru’s mind is at play.

Vajradhara is the source of inspiration. Because we live in a world based on names and concepts, the name “Vajradhara” enables us to point our awareness to the nameless source: the dharmakaya. The dharmakaya is the great space of mind that is empty but has the potential to manifest all experience. At the dharmakaya

level, it remains as pure potential. So Vajradhara could be described not as an entity, but as a sort of cosmic buddha-potential that pervades all sentient beings.

Tilo, short for Tilopa, was born in India, and lived from 988-1069 A.D. He had human teachers, but he went beyond his human teachers into the dharmakaya. He was the first human in the Kagyu lineage to enter the dharmakaya and report back, thus starting the Kagyu lineage.

At a certain point in Tilopa's training, his teachers gave him permission to abandon formal meditation and enter into meditation in action. In Tibetan buddhist paintings, he is usually depicted holding a fish. According to Thrangu Rinpoche, as he was wandering about, he noticed that fishermen were catching fish and discarding the entrails. By eating the entrails, he was able to do two things: be free to practice whatever he wanted and also to practice equanimity. Equanimity is the ability to separate the concepts about things from the pure experience, which is beyond good or bad, tasty or disgusting.

For twelve years, Tilopa pounded sesame seeds during the day to obtain their oil. At night he served a village courtesan, escorting male clients in and out. In the Indian Buddhist tradition, by putting oneself into lowly jobs, one can eliminate any vestige of arrogance. In this way he practiced the samadhi of suchness.

Tilopa's student Naro, short for Naropa (1016-1100 A.D.), came from a quite different walk of life. He was a famous and successful professor at Nalanda University. At that time, universities in India were great centres of learning and debate. Each of the four gates to Nalanda had a master scholar in charge. It was that person's job to debate opposing masters from other schools who wished to challenge the views of the scholars at that university. Naropa was a great success, and, like many very intelligent people, became very proud of himself. This pride was punctured when an old woman asked him if he understood the words of the dharma. When Naropa confidently retorted that he did, the hag was very happy. When she asked if he understood the meaning as well as the words, Naropa again attested confidently that he did. The hag began to cry. She told him in no uncertain terms that he had better seek out the yogi Tilopa if he ever wanted to truly understand the dharma.

Tilopa was not easy to find, and Naropa's arrogance prevented him from recognizing Tilopa several times when he did encounter him. However, Naropa had intense longing for someone who could show him enlightened mind, and he finally succeeded. Tilopa put him through rigorous trials in order to break through his residual arrogance and suppositions about reality.

Naropa's student Marpa (1012-1097) was the first Tibetan in the lineage. Marpa had been angry and aggressive as a child. His parents, thinking that he would likely become a brigand unless something was done, sent him to a monastery. When he grew up, Marpa went to India, looking for teachings that he could bring back to Tibet. He made three trips to India, studying with Naropa and others. At first, he just wanted to collect teachings without really understanding them. When he lost his books in a river on the way back to Tibet, he finally realized that the only teachings that mattered were the ones that he understood. On one of his trips, he presented the customary offering of gold dust to Naropa, who casually threw it into the jungle. Striking his big toe on the ground, rocks and pebbles became gold. Naropa said, "Everything is a land of gold."

Marpa's student Mila, short for Milarepa (1040-1123), had been involved in a family feud and killed several people. He was a very earnest person and he had a very guilty conscience. By that time Marpa had understood the energy of anger in its enlightened form, so he used his anger to cut through Milarepa's false assumption that by dutifully being a "good" student, he could receive Marpa's transmission. Milarepa was at that point not genuinely open, so Marpa made him build a four story stone tower and then tear it down and start over. He did this four times. Each time he directed his anger at Milarepa and accused him of not following instructions. Finally, Milarepa dropped his façade of earnestness and was genuinely open to Marpa's mind. Subsequently, Milarepa meditated in caves throughout Tibet, and ripened Marpa's instruction to the point where he became Tibet's most famous yogi-saint. His extemporaneous songs and verses expressed his realization and are still important teaching tools today.

Gampopa (1079-1153) was a physician-monk from Takpo, who, upon merely hearing of Milarepa, was filled with great longing and the need to find him.

Gampopa brought a monastic element into the Kagyu lineage, which up to this point had been composed of wandering yogis.

*Knower of the Three Times, omniscient Karmapa,  
Holders of the four great and eight lesser lineages—  
Drikung, Tag-lung, Tsalpa, these three, glorious Drukpa and so on—  
Masters of the profound path of mahamudra,  
Incomparable protectors of beings, the Takpo Kagyu,  
I supplicate you, the Kagyu gurus.  
I hold your lineage, grant your blessing so that I will follow your example.*

Four great and eight lesser Kagyu schools evolved from Milarepa's students. The Karma Kagyu descended from Gampopa. Since Gampopa was known as "The Physician from Takpo", the Karma Kagyu are also known as the Takpo Kagyu: hence the name of this chant, *Supplication to the Takpo Kagyu*.

One of Gampopa's students was the first Karmapa, Tusum Kyenpa. In the tulku tradition that Tusum Kyenpa initiated, when the abbot of a monastery dies, he reincarnates, is later recognized as a young child, and then trained to be the next abbot. Accomplished students of the previous abbot train the young tulku, so that there can be an unbroken line of transmission. The Kagyu tradition holds that a living human connection is essential to transmit the essence of the lineage wisdom.

*Revulsion is the foot of meditation, as is taught.  
To this meditator who is not attached to food and wealth,  
Who cuts the ties to this life,  
Grant your blessings so that I have no desire for honor and gain.*

Before one can be effective in the world, one has to move beyond attachment. One path is the actual abandonment of people or things that one is attached to. A more subtle path involves maintaining a connection, but abandoning the attachment. As meditators become more experienced, they begin to see their thought patterns and how those patterns create suffering. A sense of revulsion arises towards those patterns. One of the most fundamental kinds of renunciation



is to abandon attachment to one's own thoughts. Only then can one appreciate them as the energetic play of the mind.

*Devotion is the head of meditation, as is taught.*

*The guru opens the gate to the treasury of oral instructions.*

*To this meditator who continually supplicates him*

*Grant your blessings so that genuine devotion is born in me.*

*Devotion*, or mo-gu, means “longing and respect”. At its crudest level, devotion can be blind hero worship of the guru as a person--a kind of personality cult. Perhaps one wants an all-knowing advisor who will help one select a career or solve marriage problems. Maybe one wants to simply improve one's social status by having close proximity to the teacher and then have stories to tell. This kind of primitive devotion does have some useful aspects, but the true meaning of devotion goes deeper. It is longing to experience the world as the guru does. True devotion also has a strong element of respect, based on one's own personal experience of the mind of the guru and the mind of the lineage that he or she represents.

The mind of the guru can be found in the atmosphere of the room he/she is in, in the teachings, and in the teaching mandala that he/she has created to communicate that mind. Trungpa Rinpoche and Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche, for instance, have placed tremendous emphasis on how the shrine room is set up and the quality of wakefulness that communicates. The appointment of acharyas as traveling teachers is just another small example of how a guru can create a mandala to transmit the sense as well as the words of the teachings.

*Awareness is the body of meditation, as is taught.*

*Whatever arises is fresh—the essence of realization.*

*To this meditator who rests simply without altering it,*

*Grant your blessings so that my meditation is free from conception.*

Many meditators think that meditation is a thoughtless, blank, peaceful state. In fact, this is a often kind of ignorance--dwelling in subtle thoughts, like the thought of meditation. Some thoughts can be so subtle that they are hard to detect.

Instead of dwelling in a peaceful, blank state, we are asked to notice the quality of freshness—which is related to awake mind. When one rests in pure wakefulness, thoughts can come and go, and there is no need to alter anything. Freshness remains in the midst of thoughts. In the beginning, though, it is necessary to rely heavily on mindfulness of the breath, or one will simply become carried away by the stream of discursiveness.

*The essence of thoughts is dharmakaya, as is taught.*

*Nothing whatever, but everything arises from it.*

*To this meditator who arises in unceasing play*

*Grant your blessings so that I realize the inseparability of samsara and nirvana.*

If one rests in fresh awareness, without attachment to conceptualization, then one can appreciate thoughts as the play of the mind. They come out of the great empty space of mind called dharmakaya, and they retain the qualities of dharmakaya as their essential nature. They are empty and transparent, but still part of the present display. In this way thoughts become an opportunity for experiencing the dharmakaya. The meditator sees them as inherently empty, but still appreciates the vividness and dance of their energy. Their vividness and energy is the discovery of luminosity. That is how nirvana (the peace of liberation) is realized in the very midst of samsara (the entrapment of thoughts and projections).

*Through all my births may I not be separate from the perfect guru*

*And so enjoy the splendor of dharma.*

*Perfecting the virtues of the paths and bhumis,*

*May I speedily attain the state of Vajradhara.*

The Buddhist journey is commonly divided into five paths, or stages of development: the paths of accumulation, unification, seeing, meditation, and no-more-learning. These overlap with an alternate classification called the ten *bhumis*. Each bhumi is a stage in the approach to buddhahood. For example, the first bhumi is called Supreme Joy, because one experiences true emptiness for the first time, and is freed from fear of all kinds. The joy experienced here is far deeper and more permanent than the transient joy experienced by ordinary

people. The major practice here is transcendental generosity. Attaining the state of Vajradhara is equivalent to buddhahood, the final stage after the 10<sup>th</sup> bhumi.

*The perfect guru* is the perfect spokesperson for reality. If we have a strong karmic connection with a guru, then it is likely that we will have a relationship with him or her in the future, *and so enjoy the splendor of dharma.*

## *The Heart Sutra*

The “Heart Sutra” is chanted by Mahayana practitioners all over the world. We Chant it as a group on Sunday mornings, although anyone also can do it at home to start their meditation. Its full title is “*The Sutra of the Heart of Transcendent Knowledge*”. “Transcendent knowledge” is also known as “prajnaparamita”. It means, roughly, not “book learning”, but penetrating insight that arises on the spot. The word “sutra” refers to teachings of the Buddha. It is the *heart* of transcendent knowledge because it is a condensation, the pith, of several longer discourses. So this sutra is a really a starting point for study: it tells you what you need to learn, and lays a ground for meditation.

The sutra begins, *Thus have I heard.....* The Buddha’s teachings were not written down until well after his death, so persons with good oral memory would recite them at gatherings. Needless to say, scholars debate what was actually said, and what words were put into Buddha’s mouth later on. One way of looking at this problem is to consider that what has survived as the core teachings of our tradition has been checked over by countless generations of enlightened lineage gurus. So trust in the sutras is really trust in those who have put them into practice and found that they work. Therefore trust in one’s experience of present day teachers is very important. As well, in the Buddhist tradition, no one is required to accept things without questioning.

This sutra was expounded at a particular place and time--Vulture Peak Mountain in India 2500 years ago. One can visit there today on pilgrimage. In the sutra, Buddha goes into a profound samadhi or deep meditation. A realized disciple, Avalokiteshvara, picks up on that and goes into a samadhi of his own. Shariputra, who has a scientific, questioning mind, asks Avalokiteshvara what is happening, and the sutra unfolds as Avalokiteshvara responds. The Buddha doesn’t utter a word until the very end, when he confirms what has been said. This is one of several styles that the Buddha used to teach.

In the sutra, Shariputra asks: “*How should one practice the profound prajnaparamita?*” “Prajna”, as we discussed before, means insight. “Paramita”

means “other shore”. So in this case we are talking about insight into the ultimate nature of reality, not just the insight into how to cook eggs. On our level, we have to *practice* it, because we don’t have direct, spontaneous insight yet.

Avalokitesvara answers: one should see the *five skandhas to be empty of nature. Form is emptiness; emptiness also is form. Emptiness is no other than form; form is no other than emptiness.* Form refers to the first skandha. Skandhas are clusters—literally, “heaps”-- of separate mental events that one conceptually unifies into a Self, an I.

Let’s deal with the form part of this somewhat enigmatic statement. Form is the first skanda. One way of understanding how *form is emptiness* is to consider that our perceptions of form arise in the mind. Forms by their nature cannot physically exist inside of our heads—there isn’t room in there. We have to experience them as mental impressions. Since the mind doesn’t contain actual forms, there is nothing to push aside. Therefore thoughts, emotions and forms can arise unobstructedly because there is nothing substantial to get in the way. Form is not separate from the emptiness of mind. Mind and form are the same. So form is empty mind and empty mind can become form. Emptiness has a further meaning: one cannot say definitively whether or not forms exist separately from mind. That would be a just a another thought, a concept.

Now consider that we have used the term “mind”, and that implies that there is some *thing* called mind that we can conceptualize and give a label to. But no one has ever found a “thing” called mind. One just finds the fleeting perceptions and thoughts that stream through and then disappear. Through what? We call it a self, or a mind, but that is just a label for something that cannot be found. You can check this out for yourself, when the thick underbrush of your discursiveness has been thinned out by shamatha and you have a bit of clarity.

Some masters say that what we experience as a self is in fact just a name given to a sense of empty presence that has no content other than what is flowing through, appearing and disappearing. Even the sense of presence, of awareness that knows it is aware, cannot be pinned down as any thing that can be located. It is not enough that one hears and accepts this assertion: the masters say that one needs to

look again and again, until one is absolutely certain that nothing called mind can be found and that mind itself is empty. The word “mind’ is just a thought. However, it’s a useful thought, and we’ll continue to use it.

The sutra lists the skandhas in sequence: form, feeling, perception, formation and consciousness. “Formation” here refers to the formation of well-developed conceptual patterns of thoughts, labels and emotions. “Consciousness” is the vague sense that someone is there, commenting, perhaps telling you that you are a good or bad meditator. Even though the subtle thought of a commentator comes and goes, because of the speediness of our minds, we see those thoughts as a continuous presence of a self. Likewise, each of the other skandhas is a cluster of discontinuous mental events. Conceptual mind sloppily merges all the clusters together under the crude label “I”. As awareness grows, one becomes aware that anything that could be identified as with a self is just temporary thoughts and perceptions floating through the space of mind. The idea of an “I” is just another subtle, discontinuous, but persistently recurring thought.

At first the idea of skandhas mistakenly seen as a self seems intellectual, but an experienced meditator can use the teachings on the skandhas to dissolve the sense of duality whenever it arises. This is done by looking directly at the division between subject and object from the point of view of the skandhas. For instance, one could look at the sense of an “I” trying to meditate, and ask whether the “I” is the same as the body, the feelings, perceptions, and so on. This kind of meditative questioning can be quite handy, since the sense of a self, an I, is associated with discursive thoughts, conflicting emotions and struggle in meditation as well as in life. Having to take care of a self makes one’s life anxious and meditation tedious.

After dispensing with the self as empty, Avalokitesvara takes on what are translated as “characteristics”: *There is no birth and no cessation. There is no impurity and no purity. There is no decrease and no increase.* What is being pointed out here is the activity of conceptual mind in making comparisons. Comparisons do not exist by themselves in objective reality. They are a function of conceptual mind. *Impurity* is a label that we project based on a purely conceptual idea of *purity*, and *purity* depends on comparison with *impurity*. Likewise *birth* as a concept depends on *cessation* and *decrease* depends on

*increase*. These judgments exist in conceptual mind and have no inherent reality outside of the thinking process.

In a single very long sentence, the sutra next declares as empty most of the key concepts in Hinayana Buddhism. (Hinayana refers to the initial phase of the Buddha's teaching.)

*Therefore, Shariputra, in emptiness, there is no form, no feeling, no perception, no formation, no consciousness; no eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind; no appearance, no sound, no smell, no taste, no touch, no dharmas; no eye dhatu up to no mind dhatu, no dhatu of dharmas, no mind consciousness dhatu; no ignorance, no end of ignorance up to no old age and death, no end of old age and death; no suffering, no origin of suffering, no cessation of suffering, no path, no wisdom, no attainment, and no non-attainment.*

First, Avalokiteshvara reviews the skandhas: form, feeling, perception, formation and consciousness. The psychology of perception comes next, starting with the physical sense organs: eyes, ears and so on. Then he goes on to the sense consciousnesses associated with the organs, and finally to the objects of perception. The objects, organs and consciousnesses are all called *dhatus*, which could be translated as “elements.” One might take the position that the self doesn't exist, but there is a real world of material objects out there, and the sense organs and so forth are also real. We might find such an interpretation comforting and grounding, and some interpretations of Hinayana Buddhism encourage such an understanding. Our modern day culture also has similar ideas about an objective reality.

All the elements involved in perception are temporary mental events that make an appearance and then dissolve. They arise in the mind stream in dependence on other temporary events: for instance, consciousness arises only in dependence on an object. Or, something happens that causes you to feel your eyeball. The feeling lingers for a bit, then it stimulates thoughts which appear and then die out, followed by some other mental activity. One can mentally project that seeming objects have objective reality outside of the mind, but that's just a projection based on a consistency of patterns, which could also be a consistency of *mental*

patterns as opposed to the stability of an objective reality *out there*. A logical conclusion is that there is no eye, no eye consciousness and no visual object, just patterns evolving in empty mind, each element or elements setting the stage for the appearance of the next. None of the elements in the patterns can stand by themselves as independent entities. The technical term for this is “dependent origination”. They are “dependent” because their temporary appearances depend on a host of other conditions. We have to use the term “appearance” rather than “existence”, because “existence” implies entities that are not just transitory points in a sequence of change--entities that continue to exist outside of our mind stream after we have ceased to notice them.

“Dependent origination” is a difficult concept to understand and even more difficult to incorporate into an ongoing moment-to-moment experience of emptiness. It usually takes a lot of contemplation and many exposures to the logic and to direct experience. However, this is one case where concept can be used to at least point to non-conceptual, empty experience.

The next topic in that extended sentence refers to the twelve nidanas, sometimes known as the twelve links. These describe the mechanism of karma: there is *no ignorance, no end of ignorance up to no old age and death, no end of old age and death...* Briefly, the production of karma starts with a flicker of ignoring of the basic nature of mind. Due to past conditioning, the idea of a self that is separate from the other events arises in our mind stream. Then this self responds to these seemingly external events according to its habitual conditioning left over from previous karma. There arises like, dislike, and indifference to how the seemingly external events relate to the newly created self. There follows a sequence of events where we become more and more involved with our projections, and finally we decide to do something about it. We launch an action towards the “external” object, and this action creates ripples of reaction. This is the stage in the sequence that creates future karma. What follows is the birth: the creation of a new situation, or even a new person. This new situation has its own momentum, and it evolves into maturation, old age and final death of that person or situation.

Each cycle further imprints a habitual karmic pattern that comes into play at the beginning of the next cycle. This cycle could take place over the span of a single



emotional upheaval, or several lifetimes. From an unenlightened point of view, there is no end to old age and death because we are caught in seemingly continuous cycles of karma. From an enlightened point of view, nothing has happened to the empty mind stream: it has just assembled itself into different configurations of appearances that we label as separate life experiences.

Finally, the long sentence concludes with *no suffering, no origin of suffering, no cessation of suffering, no path, no wisdom, no attainment and no non-attainment*. This final statement declares the Four Noble Truths to be empty as well. Briefly, the Noble Truths, the quintessential teachings of the Hinayana, state that existence is marked by suffering and dissatisfaction, that this suffering is due to positing a self that is separate from the rest of reality, that there are moments of relief and that this relief can be made continuous by means of the Buddhist path. From the Buddhist point of view, suffering has an upside, in that it indicates to us that there is something fundamentally wrong with our approach to life. However, one could take these statements as doctrine, an item of belief guaranteed by the Buddha, much as the Bible is taken as the word of God. Such beliefs invite intense attachment, and legend says that many of the advanced Hinayana practitioners, (called arhats,) in attendance at Vulture Peak Mountain had heart attacks.

We shouldn't look down at the arhats: their meditation was so profound that they were able to completely eliminate disturbing emotions. Their clarity and stability was far beyond what most spare-time meditators like ourselves could hope to attain. What Avalokiteshvara is saying is that the arhats still had some beliefs in Buddha's teachings that were just concepts. These beliefs were useful guidelines at first, but perhaps, for the arhats, had now become obstacles to further insight.

With the Four Noble Truths, Avalokiteshvara has finished emptying out the foundation doctrines of Buddhism in a single long sentence. The rest of the chant is fairly straightforward and easy to understand. Avalokiteshvara cites the results of realizing emptiness: no obscuration and no fear because there is no self to lose or be obscured. One *transcends falsity and attains true complete enlightenment*. He then praises the virtues of the mantra of prajnaparamita: *OM GATE GATE PARAGATE PARASAMGATE BODHI SVAHA*. Translated, this means, roughly,

"OM gone, gone, gone beyond, completely gone beyond, awake, so be it." What is being indicated here is that the realization of emptiness takes one into a level completely beyond the conventional versions of reality. Not only does one find release from suffering, but ultimately, one obtains the powers of a buddha to help humanity.

Finally, Buddha utters his first statement in this sutra: *“Good, good, O son of noble family; thus it is, O son of noble family, thus it is. One should practice the profound prajnaparamita just as you have taught and all the tathagatas (enlightened ones) will rejoice.”* The sutra closes with everyone present, including gods, humans, asuras (demigods who jealously aspire to be gods), and gandharvas (celestial musicians) rejoicing. So be it.

If you are interested in further reading about emptiness, you could try Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso’s Progressive Stages of Meditation on Emptiness, published by Zhyi-sil Cho-kyi Gha-tsal, 2001. Another excellent source is Andy Karr’s Contemplating Reality, published by Shambhala, 2007.

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# *The Homage and Invocation Chants*

By Acharya Christie Cashman

September 2000

This fall, in honor of our Shambhala Buddhist heritage, our Centers worldwide will begin to incorporate the complete form of the Shambhala *Homage* and *Invocation* into the morning and evening liturgies as we did this past summer at Vajradhatu Seminary. Until now, these chants were only introduced at Warriors' Assembly without the third, or "Mukpo" stanza. On behalf of the Practice and Study Committee, it is my pleasure to offer a brief explanation of these chants in their entirety, so that the Shambhala wisdom tradition that is invoked by their recitation is more accessible. Both the *Homage* and the *Invocation* are based on the opening section of the terma (Tibetan: hidden treasure) text, *The Golden Sun of the Great East*, received by the Dorje Dradül, founder of Shambhala International, in October of 1976.

## **Stanza One: The Rigden King**

*He who has neither beginning or end,  
Who possesses the glory of Tiger Lion Garuda Dragon,  
Who possesses the confidence beyond words:  
I pay homage at the feet of the Rigden King.*

*(The Invocation and Homage are identical except for the last line of each stanza.  
Invocation: May the goodness of the Rigden King be present.)*

This first stanza is in the form of a verse typically found in Buddhist tantric literature, paying homage to a particular deity. In this case, the homage is to the Rigden King. *Rigden* is a Tibetan term meaning, "endowed with the family," which refers to the indestructible family to which all Shambhala students belong. The Rigden principle of primordial warriorship represents the wisdom contained in the open and relaxed mind before thought. In the later levels of

Shambhala Training the student warrior is taught to invoke the Rigden principle through practices that open the heart on the spot and bring about a sense of majesty, strength, and insight. In this context, the notion of "king" is the reigning principle of unbiased meditative awareness.

The following is an excerpt from a public talk given by the Dorje Dradül on March 12, 1978 in Boulder, Colorado: It was printed, as you see it below, in the *Karma Dzong Community Newsletter*, July/August, 1978.

*"When one enters the Shambhala world there are certain things one deals with—identification with the Rigden fathers, the Rigden aspects, and a relationship with that. The way one identifies with the Rigdens is by actually becoming a warrior oneself. Not copying the Rigdens, not mimicking them, but actually those qualities become the warrior, and the warrior becomes those qualities. The warrior takes on the same qualities as the Rigdens. So there is total identification. There is a parallel in Buddhism—our Buddhist practice is total identification with Buddha, or awakening; Shambhala practice is total identification with the Rigdens, or earthholders. Even in the Buddhist tradition, when Shakyamuni became the Buddha, he was known as the world-renowned one, the ruler of the earth.*

*“So Rigden and Buddha are the secular and spiritual side of awakening. And the path of the Rigdens and Buddha's path are parallel paths. They go hand in hand but have their own particular practices, their own particular philosophy, with one thing in common. Do you want to guess what the one thing in common is? Shamatha-vipashyana practice. We talked yesterday about the fact that neither the Shambhala world nor the Buddhist world had any copyright on awakening, but I am going to make a rather outrageous statement: There is no awakening without shamatha-vipashyana as a basic, underlying quality. The link to awakening and the method, the path to awakening, is always associated with shamatha-vipashyana.”*

## **Stanza Two: The Ancestral Sovereigns**

*They who possess great wisdom, brilliant and profound,  
Who are ever just and benevolent to their subjects,  
Who subjugate their enemies and are supremely powerful—  
By the golden yoke of their imperial rule  
They ward off döns of plague, famine, and war—  
Gesar Norbu Dradül, Ashoka Maharaja,  
Emperors of Japan, China, and so on:  
I pay homage to the ancestral sovereigns.*

*(Invocation: May the goodness of the ancestral sovereigns be present.)*

This stanza speaks of the “ancestral sovereigns”—a specific reference to four historical figures who were revealed to the Dorje Dradül through his Shambhala terma: Ashoka Maharaja of India, Prince Shotoku of Japan, Emperor Yung-lo of China, and King Gesar of Tibet. They are invoked here as brilliant leaders of humanity. Several members of the Shambhala community have researched their lives beyond the usual historical depictions, attempting to explore what may be their true place in history. Shambhala Training International has copies of articles and community talks on the sovereigns by Robin Kornman, Fenja Heupers and Blake Thompson for the interested reader; the following, however, provides a very brief snapshot of each of their lives.

Generally speaking, it would seem that Dharmaraja Ashoka, Prince Shotoku, Emperor Yunglo and King Gesar were able to overcome much of the social depression of their times and accomplish a great degree of cultural revitalization—in short, enlighten their societies. Although they were bound by various cultural norms, they had the chutzpa and vision to go beyond these norms. Their initiatives, generally speaking, were ordinary in nature but extraordinary for their time, providing basic care for the elderly, easing the voyages of travelers, relieving the suffering of animals, increasing accessibility of medicines, and bringing about reforms in education. Under each of their influence, Buddhism was elevated and

established, and its ideals of benevolence and harmony incorporated into the culture.

**The Indian King Ashoka lived in the third century BC.** Known as one of the greatest emperors of India, Ashoka is famous for his dramatic life change upon hearing of the horrors caused by his conquest of Orissa. He experienced extreme anguish and remorse and embarked upon a journey of personal transformation and awakening. He converted from Brahmanism to Buddhism and vowed to rule his people according to the principles of compassion and non-violence from that day forward. His activities were pragmatic and effective: he gave up the royal sport of hunting, prohibited the slaughter of animals for the royal kitchen, built hospitals for both animals and people, and constructed rest houses and dug-wells for travelers and had road-side trees planted for shade. He is perhaps most widely known for broadcasting teachings of personal and social well being. These became known as the “Edicts of Ashoka,” and were engraved on large stone pillars and rocks throughout India. Ashoka convened the famous "Third Council" after the death of the Buddha in Pataliputra to settle certain doctrinal controversies. He also expanded Buddhism eastward to large areas of Southeast Asia, including Burma, Thailand, and Indonesia.

**Prince Shotoku Taishi of Japan was born in 574 AD.**

Seven hundred years after Ashoka, Prince Shotoku was instrumental in the transformation of Japanese culture. Although only the Regent to his Aunt, Empress Suiko, he exerted enormous influence, and is known today as the "George Washington" of Japan. Among his many accomplishments...

- \* He encouraged the addition of merit as a qualification beyond that of heredity as a requirement for holding public office.
- \* He issued the Constitution of 17 articles setting down Confucian principles of government and ethics, and introduced the Chinese calendar and Chinese aesthetic values to Japan.
- \* He was an influential royal patron of the arts. Under his direction, Chinese and Korean craft-workers were invited to Japan to build, paint and sculpt.
- \* Under his patronage, Buddhism became firmly established in Japan.
- \* He prohibited the killing of all animals; however, after much pressure, he conceded to allowing the slaughtering of fish, maintaining strict protection of all

four legged creatures.

**Gesar Mukpo of Tibet is said to have lived around the 11-12<sup>th</sup> centuries.**

He is seen as a restorative figure in a time of social upheaval—a time when people's minds had become "hard as rock and stone." Most of our knowledge of Gesar comes from stories passed down from generation to generation through an oral tradition called the *Epic of Gesar of Ling*. Gesar's monumental task was to overcome the influence of four kings who, through their perverted aspirations, had spread harm to people and caused the destruction of the buddhadharma. In our current Shambhala teachings, these four kings have come to represent “the enemies of the four directions,” or forces of materialism, which we are taught to directly engage and transform through our dignity and awakened heart. The stories of Gesar, his Aunt Manene and others put the teachings of lungta, drala, auspicious coincidence, authentic presence and so into a living historical context.

**Emperor Yung-lo of China was born in 1360.**

As the third emperor of the Ming dynasty, Yung-lo, is known for his sense of overwhelming power, political acumen and expansive societal vision. He accomplished enormous projects. In the area of education, he had a body of scientific, cultural, religious knowledge gathered, printed and preserved in an eleven-thousand volume encyclopedia, which was published within the first few years of his reign. He oversaw the moving of the capital and the building of the Forbidden City in Beijing, and was dedicated to the flourishing of the arts—painting, art theory, drama and porcelain were at an all-time high in this dynasty. He promoted the principles of non-aggression and devotion, which he had learned through his teacher, the Fifth Karmapa, Teshin Shekpa, whom he placed above and before himself—a most unusual approach for an emperor of his time. It was Yung-lo who saw a vision of a black hat or crown upon the head of Teshin Shekpa, and physically replicated it. This is the hat that has been worn subsequently by the lineage of Karmapas to bestow the famed “Black Crown Ceremony.”

*Stanza Three: The Mukpo Clan*

*The ones who are nobly born as Mukpo clan,*

*Who defeat the eclipse of the Great Eastern Sun*

*And sharpen the blade of primordial Ashe:  
The are victorious over all their enemies, the forces of materialism.  
They see the Tiger Lion Garuda Dragon vision.  
They are fearless in the midst of barbarian arrogance.  
They tame the untamable beings.  
They inspire the savages of the setting sun  
Into the sophistication of the Great Eastern Sun:  
I pay homage to the Sakyong and the Sakyong Wangmo.*

*(Invocation: May the goodness of the Sakyong and the Sakyong Wangmo be present.)*

Within a Shambhala Center, one may take part in two streams or lineages, each with their own deep history. One consists of the religious or spiritual traditions of Tibetan Buddhism, specifically the Nyingma and Kagyu lineages, and the other is the secular and sacred Shambhala lineage. The Shambhala tradition has been passed down through a family lineage of warriors, the Mukpo clan—one of six main tribes of Tibet. (The "u" in "Mukpo" is pronounced as in the word "book".) The first Mukpo was the great warrior Gesar, the progenitor of the Mukpo family, and the vanguard of our Shambhala world. As we recite the complete set of morning and evening chants at a Shambhala Center, we are invoking the blessings and wisdom of both these lineages—described by the Dorje Dradül as being "in league" with one another.

Although both the Dorje Dradül and the Sakyong are better known by their Buddhist titles—Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche and Mipham Rinpoche—they are also proud inheritors of the family lineage of Mukpo warriors, and, therefore, retain the Mukpo name. In this way, they are holders of both lineages, as are their Shambhala Buddhist students. Those of us who are students of Shambhala Training and Nalanda, and followers of other religious traditions, are also quite naturally welcomed and included in the Shambhala community and family of Mukpo warriorship.

The last line of the stanza is a specific reference to Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche. "Sakyong," is the Tibetan word for "Earth Protector." This is a Shambhala term



referring to one who has been empowered or enthroned to protect this world, and is therefore known as one who joins heaven and earth—a Confucian term used to express the fusion of sacredness with the often gritty realities of our personal and communal lives. A “Sakyong Wangmo,” (“Lady Earth Protector”) embodies the principles of harvesting peace—fostering communication and binding a society together with sophistication and culture. Either a Sakyong or Sakyong Wangmo can manifest as the ruler of a society if he or she is raised in this capacity from an early age.

#### **Fourth Stanza: The Great Eastern Sun**

*Radiating confidence, peaceful,  
Illuminating the way of discipline,  
Eternal ruler of the three worlds:  
May the Great Eastern Sun be victorious.*

*(Invocation: May the goodness of the Great Eastern Sun be present.)*

The Great Eastern Sun is the unsetting awareness, which arises as the power and dignity of human beings. Such lucid and direct awareness is magical—it is what opens the treasury of phenomena, the golden quality of phenomena. At the same time it is the experience of waking up from personal confusion and darkness to a connection with our own courage. Sometimes referred to as the genuine sun that rises in one's heart, the Great Eastern Sun's radiance is perceived through the senses as the luminosity of the "three worlds"—the worlds of heaven, earth and man—above, below and in-between. Such light is not ordinary light, but is the innate brilliance of mind that shows one how to proceed and how to care for others. Illuminating the deep, subtle and fluid energies of reality, the Great Eastern Sun brings unshakable confidence and doubtless precision to the warrior's mind.

#### **Daily Use**

Shambhala chants are traditionally recited in warrior posture, though that is not always necessary. Within the order of the liturgies, the *Homage* is recited in the morning after the Heart Sutra and/or the Mahayana Morning Liturgy, and the *Invocation* is chanted in the evening, after the *Dedication of Merit*. The

*Invocation* follows the *Dedication of Merit* because it has the nature of being verses of auspiciousness, which traditionally conclude any liturgical recitation.

**Purchase:**

Nicely printed copies of the *Homage* and *Invocation* are available for purchase through Samadhi Store, Zigi Book and Gift Catalog, Alaya c/o Elke Puts, and the Nalanda Translation Committee < [nalandatranslation@shambhala.org](mailto:nalandatranslation@shambhala.org) >, as well as other Shambhala Center bookstores.

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## *The Protector Ritual*

The protector chants have been causing controversy at centres since Trungpa Rinpoche first asked us to start doing them almost thirty years ago. Periodically, members argue over whether or not it is appropriate to expose new people to them, fearing, perhaps, that the bloody imagery will frighten them off. Or, maybe, new people will develop resentful feelings that they are being asked to take on the religious baggage of Tibetan culture. Our own culture's religious baggage seems to have reached dangerous proportions, and it's certainly understandable that people would be sensitive.

There's no denying that there is a steep learning curve connected with the protector's chants. My own feeling, having done them for thirty years or so, is of more and more appreciation for why Trungpa Rinpoche asked us to do them. I'd like to share some of my perceptions about the nature of these rituals, and, in future essays, talk about the specific contents of each chant. In this essay, I'd like to focus on how we use ritual in general to make our somewhat rigid realities more pliable.

When we perceive something, the first impression coming in from the senses is mere sound, mere sensation, or mere appearance. By "mere" we mean unadorned, nothing added. Sometimes in sitting practice we might have the very simple perception of our body as an outline in space. An itch might be mere sensation, not good or bad. To these first impressions we unconsciously add associations and names. Looking at the wall in front of us, we "name" it a "wall". From the past memories, we think it to be solid, so we don't try to walk through it. We know it as a specific type of wall—drywall or brick or wood, and each of categories has countless more associations that are added to the mere image that just our eyes perceived. On top of all that are our feelings of like or dislike for the appearance of the wall. All of this is unconscious. If we saw the wall as mere image, it would be like the image on a television set or in a dream when you recognize that you are dreaming: just an image that doesn't dictate a particular way of behaving towards it. In a dream, you could walk through it if you wanted.

The result of this way of perceiving is that our world is rigid and stale. We are living in a world of past memories, learned associations, and concepts about things, rather than direct contact. In fact, some experiments have shown our associations are so powerful that if you don't have concepts or associations for something, you won't actually see it. There is, for instance, the story of people living in the jungle, who don't have a concept of airplane, and so they don't actually see the airplanes that regularly fly over their homeland. A major effect of our projections is that the world loses its fluidity and self-existing magic. We become prisoners of our own habits, and our world becomes stale and closes in on us.

Ritual functions as a way of moving our frozen projections around and making the world more malleable. We do rituals all the time, unconsciously. When we brush our teeth in the morning, is it actually the case that removing a thin layer of film from insensitive bone really makes us prepared for the day? We brush our hair, shave, put on deodorant and then we think about our morning coffee. Even thinking the word "coffee" has an effect on us—we get a slight buzz. Our choice of clothes determines how we will go through the day, and how others will respond and thus re-enforce our initial intention.

When we shake hands, say "hello" or "how are you" our mind rides out on the gesture or verbal expression and meets the mind of the other person. Our world expands a bit to allow the other person in, or at least relieve social tension. There are countless rituals connected with money, politeness, food, flirtation, who to make eye contact with on the street and so on. We continually use unconscious ritual to navigate our habitual world and make adjustments to it.

Conscious ritual, ritual that we are aware of as we do it, has a further effect: it opens up the boundaries beyond the limits of the ritual. It becomes more than just making us comfortable with the other person. Our awareness travels in the direction prescribed by the ritual, but its destination is wide open. When we are aware of ritual, we transcend it because we are aware of the open space around the ritual. Buddhists call this state of mind "emptiness". It is empty of projection or distortion. If you are completely there with your awareness when you shake

hands, you are wide open, and anything could happen. Your connection to the other person could take you to Vienna, or Singapore.

In order to be effective, Buddhist ritual should be done very consciously, with present awareness of all the parts of the ritual, and also awareness of the limits of the ritual itself. We know that the ritual or chant is a mental fabrication, our imagination, but we let it direct our awareness beyond the limits of habit into open space.

Rituals such as the protector's chants take us beyond what we can do in simple sitting practice. As we sit, we as beginners usually only recognize the grosser, more obvious thoughts. The subtle associations and projections with which we fasten down our world are harder to spot and let go of. Vajrayana rituals like the protector chants point us back to the underlying fluidity, magic and sacredness of primordial existence.

The protectors, specifically, are connected with the *karma* principle. Karma means action, continual change and flux, the active principle of reality. This active principle is threatening to habitual pattern. It's connected with impermanence and groundlessness. When we try to fight the karma principle by stopping change, we experience change as the pain of losing ground. Of course karma also refers to karmic consequences: when you push something, it creates ripples of cause and effect. These could be positive from the point of view of our path, or negative. However, the more awake we are to change, the more even seemingly negative situations just become part of our path.

In order to create a ritual to evoke the karma principle, we need to have images to work with. The images in this case are uncompromising and blunt, like reality itself. The protectors are surrounded by flames, symbolizing tremendous energy and wrathful compassion. This compassion burns away projections that will ultimately cause us alienation and suffering. They wear garlands of human heads that represent thoughts and emotions that are self-liberated as soon as we recognize them. In some sense the protectors are more real than our habitual, projected world. They are more real, because they represent unvarnished reality itself.

The ritual of the protector chants points our awareness toward feedback from the world, because we know that this feedback is the language or action of the protectors. We become sensitive to more and more subtle signals from the world. We become super-sensitive to karmic cause and effect and constant flux.

Our relationship to the protectors can be summarized by a line from the Vetali chant, referring to her as *our mother, sister and maid*. At first, we don't understand her, and the karmic feedback from the world seems capricious—unrelated to what we think we deserve. Later, we appreciate her as a sister. At this stage we are tuned into the kind of action and consequences that she symbolizes and represents. We are very sensitive to signals from the world. Finally, she acts as a maid. There is no separation from the flux of the universe. We are one with it, we appreciate it. It works for us. Because we are aware of it, we can use the active quality of the universe to help with enlightened action.

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## *Meet the Four Armed Mahakala*

What is a mahakala? Do they exist in reality? These are questions provoked by doing the chants. In this essay, I'll explore those questions a little more, and in addition talk about the Four Armed Mahakala in particular.

In the previous essay, "The protector Ritual" we explored the protector chants as a way of focusing our awareness so that we become super-aware of the active aspect of reality, of impermanence, of constant change, and of the creation and unfolding of karma. The wrathful nature of the protectors encourages us to become super-sensitized to signals from the environment. From that point of view, it could be said that protectors symbolize and point to a deeper level of reality, deeper than the level that we habitually inhabit.

In this essay, we'll look at the protectors in terms of psychological atmosphere. The hippy generation had a great word, "vibe", for this. One of the characteristics of atmosphere or vibe is that you can't tell whether it is in your own mind, or outside in the environment. One could take either position. However, all of us intuit, perhaps unconsciously, the "vibe" of situations and respond accordingly. For instance, we might avoid an ominous-feeling dark alley at night, or be drawn to a part of town that feels exciting to us. Perhaps the shrine room at the Centre has a palpable atmosphere for you. Different towns have different vibes. Some people notice a different feeling tone when they cross the border into Canada.

A Tibetan might say that what we are intuiting in these situations are local deities, yidams, protectors, guru's mind, ghosts, demons, harmful or helpful spirits. Perhaps what we feel in the shrine room is the Rigden, or maybe a space where awareness of basic goodness is being protected by mahakalas. The sense of deity or spirit in these situations can actually be felt. These feelings aren't as abstract as the belief systems that one commonly encounters in ordinary Western religion. The presence of a certain atmosphere or vibe has a lot to do with the kinds of things that tend to happen in that particular space, and we feel that. These intuitions are very practical, in some sense.

In tantric Buddhism, protectors are more than just a metaphor for heightened intuition about situations. The liturgies and drum accompaniment evoke the feeling of presence of the protectors. It could be that we feel their presence because we have invited them and they have come, or it could be that we are just evoking something that was always there as a possibility in our minds. In either case, because the feeling tone affects our expectation of what might happen, different things do tend to happen. Sometimes we act differently, and sometimes things happen coincidentally.

Wisdom protectors, or mahakalas, are a particular class of deities. If one thinks of them in terms of atmosphere, they would be the sense that reality is pregnant with potential change, activity and impermanence. They are “wisdom” protectors because they represent enlightened action, and they have made a promise (samaya) to protect the inherent sacredness of existence, and the dharma teachings that lead one to the truth of that. By “sacredness” we mean the condition of things as they are, in primordial basic goodness, before we have superimposed our projections and conceptual interpretations.

In our culture, shamanism and paganism have been seen in opposition to a single jealous God who does not like having other deities around. In Tibet, the historical situation was different. When Buddhism came in, it incorporated the indigenous shamanistic way of working with energies and enfolded them into a deeper understanding. Since there is no equivalent of protector practice in our culture, and since protector practice dovetails nicely with the Buddhist teachings on mind and reality, it makes sense to borrow the Tibetan imagery. Understanding the meanings of the words and images in the chants is really important to understanding the qualities of the particular protector we are dealing with. Then we will be able to work with these energies in a creative way.

One can invoke the atmosphere of a protector through appropriate rituals. In order to invoke the energy of a certain deity, we have to follow steps that our minds can grasp and that will evoke the appropriate atmosphere. Traditionally, protector chants contain the following elements: they start with a seed syllable, then there may be a description of the environment that the protector comes from, a request



for the deity to approach, a description of the deity and what s/he is holding, an offering to the deity, a request for the deity to fulfill their vow or perform actions, and finally, the mantra of the deity. Probably something like this kind of structure is inherent in shamanistic rituals all over the world. We'll see how this format applies to the Four Armed Mahakala.

The chant begins:

*HUM*

*From Glorious Mount Malaya, from the red field in the blood lake Koka, from the charnel ground of Matram Rudra, I invite the great protector.*

*SAMAYA JAH*

*HUM* is the seed syllable of ultimate mind, empty but radiant. The Mahakala arises from that. What is he like? He comes from a red field in the lake of blood that arose from the slaying of *Matram Rudra*. Mythologically, *Matram Rudra* is the ultimate ego, the kind of person who gathers all the confused and neurotic energy and power of the samsaric world into himself. A modern example might someone like Hitler.

*Like a rain cloud adorned with lightning, please enter this place of practice.*

His presence and atmosphere are awesome, and we invite him in and confirm his presence with *SAMAYA JAH*.

*The vajra Mahakala is savage and terrifying.* In the iconography, he is surrounded by flames representing wrathful compassion that burns away delusion, the source of suffering. He is savage in the sense that his action is without hesitation, abrupt. He wears garlands of human heads that represent emotional negativities that are not rejected but transformed and worn as ornaments.

The next section of the chant tells us something about the qualities and dynamic energy of this particular protector.

*Holding a hooked knife with your first right hand.* A hooked knife represents the energy of enriching. "Enriching" is the energy of appreciation of the richness

inherent in all phenomena. It's also connected with equanimity, since everything has the same basic richness or basic goodness in its essence. It could be that the protector acts by bringing more elements that express richness and basic goodness into a situation.

*Holding a skull cup of blood with your first left hand....* The skull cup contains a kind of nectar of the gods that pacifies situations. Intellect, for instance, can be pacifying because it puts things into a sense of perspective. Pacifying has a quality of cooling out.

*Brandishing a sword with your second right hand....* When the sword is waved about, it magnetizes all the energies of the situation. The energy of magnetizing is warm and attractive.

*Thrusting a khatvanga with your second left hand...* The khatvanga is a kind of trident, which destroys confusion and annihilates obstacles. So here we have a description of the four karmas, or the four different modes of enlightened action: pacifying, enriching, magnetizing and destroying. Although we think of mahakalas primarily as fierce destroyers of ego, it is clear from this description that his energy has other qualities besides destruction.

*You, the warrior with a tiger skin round your waist, are surrounded by your retinue, with the Raven-Headed one among them.* The Raven-Headed one represents the masculine aspect of destruction. He is a servant of the mahakala, and he preys upon and consumes whatever endangers the teachings. He holds a hooked knife and a skull cup.

*In accordance with your vajra oath proclaimed before the great Trungpa, Kunga Namgyal, at the hermitage of Dorje Khyung Dzong, protect the heart teachings of the Kagyu.* Kunga Namgyal was the 4<sup>th</sup> Trungpa (our founder was the 11<sup>th</sup>), Kunga Namgyal spent six years in retreat. He established the Four Armed Mahakala as protector of his monastery and also of the Chakrasamvara teachings and practice. Seasoned practitioners in our centre do Chakrasamvara practices. Chakrasamvara practice uncovers the primordial sacredness of the world. This sacredness needs protection from degrading and corrupting influences. As well,

there needs to be situations created that are conducive to practice. The protectors are responsible for the auspicious coincidences that make supportive circumstances possible.

*The evil beings with two tongues who pervert the dharma and delight in disrupting the teachings—eat them as your food, o black protector.* Sometimes we pervert the teachings, and use them to become bloated and arrogant. It's good to get feedback.

*By the fierceness of your compassionate wrath, instantly accomplish the karmas of pacifying, enriching, magnetizing, and destroying. Lead the faithful holders of the Practice Lineage to the state of Vajradhara.* The practice lineage refers to the Tibetan Kagyu and Nyingma lineages. These lineages form much of the basis of Shambhala Buddhism and are famous for their emphasis on meditation practice as opposed to purely intellectual learning.

*OM MAHAKALAYA DEVA-RAKSA SAMAYA HO BALIM TE KHAHI.* This mantra invokes the energy of Mahakala. It translates roughly as “Homage to Mahakala, O protector of devas (gods), keep the samaya vow. Eat this food.” In our centres, the food referred to would be represented by the tea offering that is carried out at the end of the protector chants. The tea could be just tea, or it could represent blood, or life force.

The atmosphere created by the drum and the imagery can sometimes be quite electric. At this point we have not only tuned our awareness to the action aspect of reality, but we've also invoked an atmosphere or vibe. Within this pregnant atmosphere, it might not be too surprising to experience auspicious coincidences associated with the action of the protectors.

When we do a chant, it's good to pay especial attention to the atmosphere we invoke. You can then ask yourselves whether it is just purely psychological or whether it's a kind of presence that you have actually invited in from the outside. Perhaps you have met the mahakala and didn't realize it, or maybe it's your projection. If you have a definitive answer, you can tell the rest of us.

In the next essay, we will look at the protectress Vetali from the point of view of the Cittamatra understanding of reality, and examine the question of whether protectors are real, though invisible, entities in a theistic sense.

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## *Is Vetali Real?*

“Is Vetali real” seems like a simple enough question, deserving a “yes” or “no” answer. In fact, this question has many levels. In one of the previous essays about the protectors, we looked at the protector ritual as a doorway to deeper understanding and awareness of impermanence, karma, auspicious coincidence, and sensitivity to signals from the environment. In a second essay we looked at the protectors as an atmosphere, or “vibe”. This kind of atmosphere can be invoked through a particular chant or ritual and it may seem to exist in the environment outside of us. However, in neither of these two interpretations is there any definite way of separating our personal psychology from the protector being invoked. In this essay we’ll examine the Vetali chant from the point of view of whether she actually exists or not on two levels: the relative and the absolute. First we’ll look at these two levels of truth, and then we’ll look at the chant itself.

If you ask a Tibetan about the protectors, most will tell you that they are bodhisattvas who have promised to protect the dharma. This sounds pretty real. Trungpa Rinpoche, as a young man in Tibet, is reported to have had terma (hidden) teachings delivered to him personally by Ekajati. (Ekajati is a protectress of the Ati teachings). Chagdud Rinpoche recounts that he was given a written page with a practice liturgy on it by a man that only children could see. Later in his life, a protector manifests as a mysterious one-legged herdsman and tells him how he can escape the Chinese. This sort of story is not unusual in Tibet. Except for the fact that we might be ethnocentrically suspicious of how imagination works in a foreign culture, it sounds like a “real” occurrence.

On the other hand, Trungpa Rinpoche encouraged his students to take a non-theistic view. In other words, deities are not to be understood as independently existing entities, but as expressions of one’s mind. I think that this is actually a very subtle statement. Those who take it superficially, without understanding what is meant, risk over-simplifying or dismissing the protectors as a sort of useful superstition.

I was present when a student asked Trungpa Rinpoche whether protectors were real or not. His answer was: “they’re as real as you are”. Let’s look at this statement more closely, from absolute (ultimate truth) and relative (everyday understanding of reality) points of view. “Relative” refers to the fact that we live in a world where concepts are embedded in our sense of what is real. The nature of concepts is that they are always relative to other concepts: tall has meaning relative to short, human is relative to non human, bad to good, and so on, like a house of cards leaning on each other. When we experience the world, it is very hard to experience it without concepts about it. When we look at the wood floor, we project a concept of solidity that is not present in just the visual image. But if we question the embedded concept of solidity, other cards start to wobble: if it’s not solid, what is the nature of wood? This is a beginning experience of emptiness.

As good Buddhists we are supposed to know that we don’t exist, ultimately, in absolute truth. When we study the skandhas, we find that we have conceptually isolated some groupings of phenomena (sensory snapshots of body over time, feelings, impulses, conceptual pigeonholing, and a vague sense of consciousness) from all the other phenomena in the world, given this arbitrary grouping a name, “me”, and taken it to be a real entity simply because it has been named. This is the working of relative truth. The understanding that “me”, “I”, or “John” is only a name is absolute truth. If we truly understand that, we have discovered emptiness.

Another way of looking at the absolute point of view is expressed in the Sadhana of Mahamudra: *“All apparent phenomena are the play of the mind. All qualities are complete within the mind.”* In other words, mountains, oceans, people, tornados, and galaxies do not physically exist in our craniums, but their appearances do, along with their qualities: vastness, force, solidity, fluidity, wonder, the magic of existence, and so on. These are not expressions of the small mind that struggles on the cushion with self-centered discursiveness, but big mind, Buddha mind. So this big mind has an empty, space-like quality that can accommodate all phenomena, and also an expressive quality that plays in the form of the appearances that we experience.

Turning now to the Vetali chant, the first line goes:

*Vetali, Vetali, life, life!* Vetali is dark blue with red hair, and wears a crown ornamented with skulls. She has bone ornaments, and is seated on a saddle of human bone over a saddle cloth of human skin. She has chains around her ankles. She rides over a blood lake. She is the consort of Four-Armed Mahakala.

*The Devi with one face and four arms approaches and accepts the offering.* Vetali has one face because she has arisen from primordial emptiness and her single nature is emptiness. This means that she doesn't exist ultimately as an entity. Perhaps she is a grouping of auspicious coincidences that has simply been named. Perhaps she is a way of symbolizing an underlying reality. Perhaps a Tibetan lama "saw" her as the play of his mind, which was culturally Tibetan. Going back to our original question, her one face of emptiness seems to carry a simple message: she doesn't exist. She's just a figment of ours (or some Tibetan's) imagination.

But wait! If Vetali is as real as I am, there might be other levels happening here. Firstly, absolute truth means truth un-obscured by conceptual overlays. If we say that Vetali doesn't exist, that is a conceptual overlay. So absolute truth is empty of both existence and non-existence. Absolute truth is empty but full of unconfirmed possibilities. This leaves us with relative truth: the conventional, apparent truth of seeming common sense.

On the common sense level, as I go about my life, I act as though I am real, and as though there is a real world out there. When I see a door, I open it to walk through. I don't say it's all in my mind: just thoughts of past memories and concepts about doors. I don't try to walk through the closed door. I'd get a bloody nose and bruises. I think like this 99.9 per cent of the time, except when I remember my Buddhist logic. So is it appropriate for a person who is in dualistic reality to adopt superficial, convenient parts of absolute reality when he's not actually functioning on that level? Is it possible for Vetali to exist on a relative, perhaps invisible, level, just as we seem to exist ourselves? I suspect that Tibetan culture would say "yes". Should we ask for Vetali's help in the same dualistic

way that we might ask for help from one another? This, in fact, is what we do in the chant. Let's see how the rest of it goes:

*Bhyo, protector and friend of the yogin, guardian of the practice lineage, you enjoy drinking the blood of ego. "Bhyo" is a seed syllable that embodies her energy. The "practice lineage" puts especial emphasis on meditation experience, as opposed to purely intellectual study. Your sword cleaves the heads from the destroyers (this might be us) of the teachings. Holding the mirror which reflects the three worlds, brandishing the phurba, you fulfill all actions.* The three worlds are different ways of being with the mind. Our confused world is one of them. The other two are dead-end meditational states: the form and formless god realms. The mirror reflects them as they are, without partiality. The phurba is a three bladed knife, triangular in cross section, which slices through passion, aggression and ignorance.

*You ride on a donkey with a white blaze. As day downs, you guard the meditator.* In mythological history, Vetali was a trickster who lived in the realm of the gods. The gods are beings that have discovered ways, some of them "spiritual" to blank out suffering and dwell in pleasure. Vetali sowed discord, plague, famine and war, interrupting their blissful ignorance. Trying to banish her, the gods shot arrows, one of which hit her donkey. The wound turned into an eye, symbolizing that whatever you try to do to her, it just turns into more awareness.

*As night falls, you cut the aortas of the perverters of the teachings.* Nightfall is regarded as a time of shifting energy, good for contacting the energy of the protectors. The perverters of the teachings are those, including ourselves, who try to make a nest out of the teachings to support our own egos. As a female protectress, she is especially concerned with protecting prajna, the insight that discovers emptiness. When we try to solidify the dharma, there will be consequences.

*You send out a million emanations. As our mother, sister and maid, please look after us of the lineage of Marpa the translator.* At first, like a small child with its mother, we don't understand what she is up to and the karmic feedback that she represents seems capricious. Later, we appreciate her as a sister. At this stage we



are tuned into the kind of action and consequences that she symbolizes and represents. Psychologically we aren't quite one with it, but on a par with it. Finally, she acts as a maid. There is no separation from the flux of the universe. Karma works for us. We can use it for enlightened action.

*Accept this amrita, blood, and tormas as tokens of samaya.* Amrita is an alcoholic drink with blessed substances in it. It intoxicates concepts and emotions and liberates them back into awareness. Blood represents life force. These are symbolized by the tea offering at the back of the shrine room. Torma is a kind of barley cake offering which is omitted in our normal protector ritual.

*Fulfill the actions of the four karmas.* The four karmas are enlightened actions that are used to transform the world: pacifying (providing perspective, cooling out), enriching (bringing out the natural richness of situations), magnetizing (the warmth of connection), and destroying (bringing unworkable situations to an end.)

So should you regard Vetali as a "real" entity? That completely depends on the reference points imbedded in your question. This is called "relative reference point" thinking and is characteristic of the way Buddhists approach the truth. It enables us to shift into another person's point of view and empathize with that person. It is anti-dogmatic. It's groundless. You might as well get used to it.

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## *Concluding Request to the Protectors*

Doesn't the *Concluding Request to the Protectors* contradict other Buddhist teachings? Certainly, this is the most frequent comment I hear about this chant. The line requesting "*glory, fame, good fortune and all great and vast enjoyments*" sounds suspicious—it seems to refer to situations we are supposed to renounce. Perhaps it even contradicts the previous protector chants by suggesting that the dharma could be used for personal worldly gain. Didn't we just ask the Four Armed Mahakala and Vetali to stand on guard against this sort of perversion of dharma?

In order to understand the Concluding Request, it is helpful to have some understanding of how the different schools of Buddhism have dealt with the problem of attachment to worldly things.

For the Hinayana, or foundation teachings, the part of this chant that asks for "*glory, fame, good fortune and all great and vast enjoyments*" would indeed be problematic. It seems to be asking for things that could carry immense dangers of ego enhancement and attachment. Sometimes the Hinayana, because it names situations to be avoided, can seem moralistic. However the intent is very simple: avoid situations that are traps.

The Mahayana Rangtong school takes a deeper, more subtle approach to the problem of attachment and ego enhancement. It's not so much a question of having a simplistic list of things to be renounced, but of seeing those things, and oneself, to be empty of the conceptual projection that they have real, independent existence from our minds. One cannot be attached to something if oneself and the object aren't really there.

The Rangtong logic runs something like this: we aren't really in touch with the true nature of existence because we have created a conceptual web that stands in for reality. For instance, the concept of "good" fortune depends on the concept of "bad". "Bad" in turn depends on the idea of a self that something is bad for. The concept of a self doesn't actually result from a direct perception of reality in any

given moment. The idea of self results from giving a conceptual name, John or Mary, to a collection of thoughts about body, memories, feelings, labels and so forth. Each of these thoughts in turn depends on other circumstances in the conceptual web. All of this together is called “samsara”, and it leads to suffering because the thoughts, concepts and names substitute imperfectly for reality, which is empty of names and concepts.

From the Rangtong point of view, “*glory, fame, good fortune and all great and vast enjoyments*” are just as empty as their opposites: being inconspicuous, unknown, and having bad luck and suffering. Rangtong people wouldn't be as threatened by this chant as Hinayana people, because they have understood the problem of attachment at a deeper level.

We used what was essentially a Rangtong perspective to examine the question of whether the protectors exist in objective reality. When we looked at the protectors from that point of view, we found that, on the level of ultimate, absolute reality, it is impossible to find a truly existent entity such as the protectors, or even our selves. Likewise, any qualities we might describe, such as glory or fame, would be relegated to the realm of artificial concept: thoughts that interpret reality dependent on a framework of other thoughts. The thought of fame, for instance, is meaningless without the thought of being inconspicuous and unknown.

The Rangtong point of view teaches us a lot about concepts and their limitations. “*Glory, fame, good fortune and all great and vast enjoyments*” are not a problem, but they aren't a promise either. The result of the Rangtong analysis is egolessness and groundlessness. However, it doesn't explain the positive qualities of enlightened mind. It doesn't explain the qualities of compassion that we see in a Buddha, or in great teachers. For that we have to turn to experience beyond concept. At this level, the Shentong school of Mahayana is helpful. If we understand the Shentong perspective, then the Concluding Request will start to make some sense.

Once again, Shentong does not abandon the Hinayana requirement of nonattachment, or the Rangtong way of working with nonattachment through emptiness. Each of those stages is still appropriate for practitioners at different

levels of understanding and practice. If one moves through the Hinayana or Rangtong too quickly, the Shentong view will become mere pretense and an obstacle to one's path. If one has thoroughly mastered the previous schools, then the Shentong offers an opportunity to go even deeper.

In Shentong, essentially, what we are appreciating is the capacity of our minds to be empty yet luminous in terms of the endless thoughts, energies and appearances that manifest in it. One aspect of this radiance is compassion. Sometimes compassion may seem like something we have to manufacture conceptually. However, if we think about it, the less obstructed we are by our own concepts and projections, the more naturally connected, empathetic and warm we become. We can empathize with people's struggles with their fixations, and that naturally manifests on a relative level as being accurate and able to say or do the things that will actually help.

When we think of great teachers like the Dalai Lama, the Karmapa, Trungpa Rinpoche or the Sakyong, we realize that their compassion is unobstructed. They are without arrogance or self-cherishing. Their minds may be empty, but they shine forth with immense intelligence, humor and curiosity. So the "absolute" truth, or enlightenment, is not devoid of empty yet radiant qualities.

The vajrayana builds on the Shentong perspective through a variety of skillful means, such as visualization, offerings, chants and so on. Although we aren't ready to practice or live our lives at the level of Shentong understanding, we are allowed brief glimpses of it in vajrayana chants like the Concluding Request. We can have a sense that, at least potentially, worldly fame and good fortune might no longer be a problem. In the Shentong/vajrayana perspective, glory, fame and good fortune are not personal in the usual sense. They are expressions of benefit to others and provide the circumstances that are conducive to the practice of the dharma and the release of many people from suffering.

The Dalai Lama is a great example of this kind of understanding. His title is "His Holiness", and he won the Nobel prize, so he has glory. He is the most famous and respected of religious leaders. He has set the highest example of enlightened

statesmanship. Personally, however, he is completely humble, and that is the reason we love him.

Turning to the chant itself, we ask the existent/nonexistent protectors, who are the symbolic agents of change, to create the worldly conditions for dharma to flourish.

*Assemblies of oceans of samaya-bound,  
Accept this offering gift of torma.*

This chant is a generic request that can be used in different contexts. In some liturgies, it may refer to ghosts, local deities and other non-enlightened beings who have promised (samaya) to protect the sacredness of situations, but who need to be reminded or bribed with offerings. When done in the context of the Four Armed Mahakala and Vetali, this chant refers to the wisdom protectors who carry out enlightened action. We mentally offer them torma. Usually, torma is a sculptured offering made of butter and barley flour. For convenience, we substitute tea, which is offered to the shrine at this point in the chant, and then taken out and poured onto a clean place where no one walks. One might ask, if they are wisdom protectors, why do they need to be bribed or reminded? Perhaps, in this case, the offering is more about extending our own awareness and openness towards the protectors as the active aspect of open space.

*May we yogins with our disciples  
Obtain lordship, freedom from disease, long life,  
Glory, fame, good fortune,  
And all great and vast enjoyments.*

Because we are dealing with the empty radiance of the mind, whatever appears is beyond concepts of good or bad. It just is. It is pure, not stained by concepts. It is primordial. It is basic goodness. In fact, with this understanding, we could celebrate whatever appears as a feast of experience of *great and vast enjoyments*.

*Grant us the siddhis  
Of the pacifying and enriching actions and so on.*

*Samaya holders, guard us.  
Support us with all the siddhis.*

“Siddhis” are yogic accomplishments. “Supreme” siddhis have to do with enlightened compassion and realization of the nature of appearance and mind. “Ordinary” siddhis involve mastery over phenomenal world, such as reading people’s minds and making money. The pacifying and enriching actions and so on refer to the “four karmas”, or enlightened actions. These were explained in the previous essay on the Four Armed Mahakala.

*May there be no untimely death, illness,  
Döns, or obstructing spirits for us.  
May we have no nightmares,  
Ill omens, or bad dealings.*

Döns are a type of malevolent spirit, usually from the so-called “hungry ghost” realm. They tend to cause physical or psychological disease and are provoked by lack of mindfulness on the part of the practitioner. As with all such beings, the Buddhist view is that ultimately they are not separate from one’s own mind.

*May the world enjoy peace, have good harvests,  
Abundant grain, expansion of dharma,*

In order for the dharma to flourish, we need suitable conditions so that we have the time and resources to practice. It may be possible for advanced yogis to live on practically nothing, but most of us need good luck and a lot of help from the phenomenal world in order to have the time and energy to practice.

*And glorious auspiciousness.  
Accomplish whatever mind desires.*

“Glorious auspiciousness” refers to synchronicity or good fortune. “Accomplish whatever mind desires” means to fulfill the aspirations of the practitioner. It could also refer to the mind’s fulfillment of itself in the course of its own play.

In keeping with other vajrayana practices, what is presented in this chant is outrageous sanity.

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## *Supplication to Padmasambhava*

Buddhism's tremendous success in Tibet can be traced to the activities of an eighth century Indian yogi named Padmasambhava, known by Tibetans as "Guru Rinpoche". His story is important for us because it illustrates how Buddhism can enter and tame a foreign culture. In his case, the new culture was Tibet. In our case, it is us. The founder of Shambhala Buddhism, the Vidyadhara Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, drew extensively on the experience of Padmasambhava for his work in North America.

In the eighth century, India was a highly developed civilization, with great universities and a highly developed spiritual tradition. The king of Tibet, Trisong Detsen (755-797), wishing to bring literacy and spiritual sophistication to Tibet, invited a great Indian Mahayanist scholar, Shantarakshita, to present the foundation teachings of Buddhism. However, many obstacles arose when he came to Tibet. Some were political, some were cultural, some were psychic, and some were environmental. Realizing that something else was needed, Shantarakshita told the king to invite Padmasambhava, an Indian tantric yogin of great power.

Padmasambhava's realization was so profound that he was able to contact the basic energies that underlay the apparent obstacles, and re-cast them as aids to practice. Instead of attempting to destroy the mountain gods and demons of the native Tibetan religion, he harnessed these energies into the form of protectors of the dharma. In this way he tamed the Tibetan national psyche. One might ask how this situation parallels our own.

When the Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche came to North America in the early 1970's, he found on the one hand a tremendous interest in dharma, and on the other, as in Padmasambhava's Tibet, a cultural environment that needed to be tamed. For dharma to truly take root, it couldn't just be an exotic transplant of foreign culture. Buddhism would have to embrace, and then transform the barbarism of the West—corporate culture, militarism, materialistic consumerism, and theism.



The example of Padmasambhava was very real to Trungpa Rinpoche. Padmasambhava didn't try to block the energies that he encountered in Tibet: he embraced them and extracted their wisdom. Whatever he encountered became further fuel to his activities. This approach is called "crazy wisdom", and it does not work on conventional logic at all. It is completely uncompromising in seeing and responding to the sacredness of all situations. Since this sacredness is generally covered over by conceptual projections about reality, the actions of such a yogi will seem crazy to someone caught in those projections.

Following the example of Padmasambhava, the Vidyadhara did not block the energies he found in the West, but transformed them. To transmute militarism, for instance, the Vidyadhara introduced the kasung, or vajra guards, whose motto was "victory over war", and who replace violence with presence, awareness and spontaneous action. He structured the governing body of his organization along Western corporate lines, and then taught people the principles of enlightened leadership. He worked with materialistic consumerism by teaching how to appreciate the natural richness of our perceptions and the ability of perceptions to wake us up. He worked with theism by showing how to use the power of deities in spiritual practice, without solidifying them as external egos. Like Padmasambhava, he extracted the wisdom energy of each situation from its egoistic cloak.

When we invoke Padmasambhava in this chant, we are invoking his enlightened example as a way to work with the obstacles we encounter—whether they are personal, or obstacles in our physical or social environment. Tibetans think that Padmasambhava still exists and relates to our world from his enlightened realm. We could understand the chant in this way, or we could understand that we are invoking an enlightened aspect of mind in general. In the latter case, Padmasambhava represents part of ourselves that is there but not normally accessible to us. Obviously, our understanding of what this means comes from some kind of contact with present day holders of Padmasambhava's lineage.

Turning to the words of the chant:

*O Jetsün Guru Rinpoche,  
Refuge of all beings in the three realms,  
Consider your vow.  
Dispel outer, inner and secret obstacles.*

*Jetsün* is an honorific term for especially revered gurus. The *three realms* refer to the realm in which we live, and the form and formless god realms. These latter two are accessed in some meditation experiences, but are regarded as not being particularly spiritually relevant to our path.

*Outer obstacles* are obstacles in the environment, such as not having enough money to attend a dharma program. *Inner obstacles* refer to the physical sicknesses and conflicting emotions that happen in one's own person. Secret obstacles have to do with the loss of one's awareness of sacred outlook. When this loss happens, one can fall into confused projections of self and other, friend and enemy, good and bad.

*When the pure four truths are propagated.....*

The pure four truths refer to the “Four Noble Truths”: The first is the truth that the human condition is marked by perpetual dissatisfaction, suffering and anxiety. The second refers to the source of that condition: the belief in a self and the web of concepts that are created around that. The third truth is that one is sometimes released momentarily, just long enough so that one realizes that suffering, anxiety and dissatisfaction are unnecessary. The fourth is the truth of the path: how to stabilize that release from suffering.

*If misfortunes of malicious māras arise....*

*Maras* are seductive spirits: personifications of four basic neurotic tendencies. First is skandha-mara, the seduction of belief in a solid, permanent, unitary self. Klesha-mara refers to the seduction of confused emotions, and believing them to be the truth about reality. Devaputra-mara is the unbalanced pursuit of pleasure and accompanying ignorance of the signals of pain. Attachment to blissful states of meditation is part of this mara. Yama-mara is death, which interrupts one's practice unless one knows how to include death as path. This mara is also

connected with the fear of death, or simply the fear of losing reference points and experiencing groundlessness. Losing ground, or the fear of it, is at the root much neurosis.

*O Guru Shākya Senge,  
Dispel outer, inner, and secret obstacles.*

Padmasambhava had different names at different periods of his life. These names reflected the kind of energy that he was manifesting at that time. *Shakya Senge* (Tibetan for "lion of the Shakya clan") was the name that he was given when he received ordination. Although he was said to be enlightened from birth, in this phase he demonstrated the importance of relating to the tradition of lineage. As Shakya Senge, he appears in iconography wearing monk's robes, sitting in lotus posture, holding a begging bowl in his left hand and a vajra in the right. Sakya Senge shows Guru Rinpoche's mastery and protection of the foundation teachings of the dharma.

*When the bodhichitta path of aspiring and entering is propagated,  
If there arise misfortune of māras causing one to harm others,*

The *bodhichitta path* refers to the Mahayana. At first we “aspire” to awaken our hearts towards others. This aspiration is formalized with the bodhisattva vow. We actually “enter” that path when we begin to practice the six paramitas. The paramitas are practices based on enlightened activities. Our basic inspiration may come from a brief glimpse of natural, spontaneous awakened heart, but our practice of that may feel somewhat awkward and artificial because we have conceptualized projection of what compassion and emptiness are. Through practice, we get closer and gradually “enter” into genuine, spontaneous, non-conceptual awakened heart. At this point, we are able to practice the paramitas fully.

*O Guru Loden Chokse,  
Dispel outer, inner, and secret obstacles.*

The name “*Loden Choksi*” was given to Padmasambhava after he had studied

under many vajra masters and accomplished many Vajrayana practices. He became the guru of the king of Sahor in India. Loden Choksi is depicted in royal robes, wearing a white turban on his head and a mirror around his neck. Through his miraculous ability to deal with whatever threats, difficulties, and obstacles arose, Loden Choksi manifested invincibility. Whatever obstacles arose these became adornments for him.

*When the chariot of vajrayāna  
Is brought into the world,  
If the perverted aspirations of barbarians run rampant.....*

The Vajrayana teachings are powerful: they accept the world as it is, within self-existing sacredness and non-ego. Sometimes people pervert these teachings out of a desire to capture the power of Vajrayana by twisting the teachings to enhance ego. One common way to twist the teachings is to say that since everything is sacred, it doesn't matter what one does. In this case, there is usually a lot of ego happening on the side of the person doing the action, and a lack of understanding of karma and compassion.

*....O Guru Dorje Trolö,  
Dispel outer, inner, and secret obstacles.*

*Dorje Trolö* is a wrathful manifestation of Padmasambhava, with a red face and three eyes, biting his lower lip with his fangs, wielding a vajra in his right hand and a phurba (three bladed dagger) in his left, standing on a pregnant tigress. Both he and *Senge Dradrok* are crazy wisdom forms; they transmute the poisonous confusion of samsara into spontaneous wisdom activity. In The Sadhana of Mahamudra, the form and the activity of Dorje Trolö is unified with that of Karma Pakshi, the second Karmapa. Dorje Trolö is the form that Padmasambhava manifested when he came to Tibet and encountered Tibetan religion and culture, which was much more earthy than the Indian religion of the time. However, that culture still had a dualistic relationship between man and the gods, and between man and the external world. Dorje Trolö, because he lived in non-duality himself, exploded this duality through his own example. He also left “terma”, teachings that were not appropriate during his time, but would be at a later date. The

Vidyadhara found several of these in the form of yellow scrolls when he was still a teenager in Tibet. The Sadhana of Mahamudra is an example of a terma, although he discovered it without the aid of a written text.

*When the three yānas of the excellent Great Eastern Sun  
Are propagated and established,  
If māra -hordes of gyalgongs and senmos gather,  
O Guru Senge Dradrok,  
Dispel outer, inner, and secret obstacles.*

Usually, the three yānas refer to the Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana. Putting them in the context of the “*Great Eastern Sun*” highlights these in a different light. In this case it refers to the Shambhala teachings for creating an enlightened society, based on fundamental human dignity and wisdom. Guru *Senge Dradrok* (Tibetan for "Lion's Roar"): is another wrathful manifestation of Padmasambhava. He appears as a defender of the dharma and great magician: dark blue, with three eyes, fangs, trampling on human corpses, wearing a tiger skin skirt, hair streaming upwards, with a crown of five small skulls and a necklace of human heads, surrounded by flames of wisdom and wrathful compassion.

Trungpa Rinpoche comments that, when presented with a problem based on some kind of misunderstanding of reality, Senge Dradruk was not afraid to meet those who were presenting the problem on their own ground. He did not try to block them, but mixing his presence with theirs had the effect of accelerating the natural course of problem towards dissolution. Since he was not attached to the “this-ness of himself, he wasn’t afraid of the “that-ness” of the world. The chant specifically mentions *gyalgongs*, or "monk demons", who provoke competitive aggression by perverting the dharma with their analytical preconceptions. They transform dharmic vision into politics and sectarian strife. *Senmos* are female demons who seduce the practitioner into samsaric passion through sensual fascination.

*Just as at Hepo Hill at glorious Samye,  
You bound by oath devas and rākshasas,  
So utterly destroy these obstacles of māras.*

*Consider well your former vow of compassion.  
Destroy outer, inner, and secret obstacles.  
Dispel the dōns who bring darkness to the world*

*Samye* was the first monastery built in Tibet. During the building of the monastery, there were many misfortunes and obstacles. It seemed as though what was built in the day was being dismantled at night by devas and rākshasas –gods and demons. Padmasambhava was invited to turn things around, and he did it in such a way that the environmental situation began to work for, rather than against the building of the monastery. *Hepo Hill* is near Samye, where Padmasambhava tamed the local deities who were interfering with the establishment of dharma in Tibet. *Dōns* are malicious spirits whose attacks are associated with lack of mindfulness on the part of the practitioner.

*O Mahaguru, compassionate one,  
There is no other hope but you.  
Please issue your command to the ocean of dharmapālas (protectors of the  
dharma)  
So they will destroy all obstacles without exception.*

Because Padmasambhava had tamed the obstructing spirits and energies to the service of the dharma, they became dharmapālas, or protectors of teachings. We might wonder what that means for our own culture.

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*The Supplication for the Longevity  
of the  
17<sup>th</sup> Gyalwang Karmapa*

*Indestructible, eternal self existing dharmakaya,  
Arising in the form of the miraculous rupakaya,  
May your three secrets remain in the vajra nature  
And may the splendor of your limitless, spontaneous buddha activity blaze.*

This chant is one of three chants called “lineage supplications”. Since enlightened beings don’t have the normal egotistical reasons for perpetuating themselves in a human life, their existence in this realm is a response to the openness and devotion of students who look to them for guidance. So we do this chant to help create a connection that can further this relationship and keep them alive.

The Karmapa line of reincarnations started with Tusum Khyenpa in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Tusum Khyenpa was a student of Gampopa, who was himself a student of Milarepa. Tusum Khyenpa was the person who started the tulku tradition in Tibet. In this tradition, a realized master would choose to be reborn as a “tulku”. The prospective tulku would be recognized as a child by other masters, then be put through an intense training process and eventually be installed as the abbot of the same monastery as his predecessor. Often the teachers of the young child would be students who had attained realization under the guidance of the previous reincarnation. This process created stability in the teachings and resulted in many monasteries enduring as centres of profound excellence for many generations. Although the tulku system was occasionally subject to bureaucratic corruption, it has worked remarkably well for the Karmapas over the space of nine hundred years.

The Karmapas are the heads of the Karma Kagyu lineage, which is the lineage of Trungpa Rinpoche, our founder. The Karmapas are regarded as very special,

among the most highly realized tulkus. They are immensely respected by Tibetans and those Westerners who have met them. High tulkus don't learn in the normal way: it's almost as though they only have to be reminded of things they learned in a previous life. Many stories abound about their clairvoyance and other special powers.

The current 17<sup>th</sup> Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje, is 22 years old (as of this writing in 2008) and is now being trained in Dharamsala, India. The chant for his longevity begins: "*Indestructible, eternal self existing dharmakaya, arising in the form of the miraculous rupakaya...*". Dharmakaya refers to the space-like but luminous quality of enlightened mind. Out of this space-like luminous emptiness, anything can manifest. What manifests here is a rupakaya, or form body, that will be visible to other sentient beings and thus enable communication and teaching.

*May your three secrets remain in the vajra nature and may the splendor of your limitless, spontaneous Buddha activity blaze.* The *three secrets* refer to his body, speech and mind. Remaining in the vajra nature means that these are indestructible, because the Buddha mind, being luminous emptiness, has no thing or entity in it that could be destroyed. Karmapas intentionally take birth from within luminous emptiness, but unlike ordinary people, they maintain awareness of where they came from, so that even if their bodies pass away, their essential nature remains. Their buddha activity blazes spontaneously because they are completely open to the needs of people and situations as they arise.

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## *The Longevity Supplication for Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche*

As with other longevity chants, this one is all about the power of devotion. For genuine gurus, it is the devotion of their students that prolongs their life. Because they are bodhisattvas, they exist to serve, and since they don't have ordinary ego-based survival instincts, their lives could be short.

Longevity supplications are also a way to stimulate a continuing awareness of the guru principle in general. The “outer” guru is the one we see and study with. Because we initially find it easier to recognize enlightened mind in someone else, the outer guru's example makes it easier to later recognize the “inner” guru in ourselves. What we are talking about here is a spacious, warm, awake and aware quality that normally exists un-noticed in the background of our daily experience. It is this quality that devotion to the outer guru gradually helps to bring to the foreground of our awareness as we travel on the path.

Longevity chants can often seem “over the top” with superlatives about the guru. This one is no exception. We praise the guru's limitless good qualities, and ask him to stay around teaching us for eons. We aspire for him to accomplish unbounded buddha activity. There is a reason for this limitless quality. Essentially, what we are talking about is buddha nature—our own and the guru's. Buddha nature is connected with emptiness, which includes emptiness of limits. Individual appearances that come into our awareness are temporary and dependent on conditions, but the mind itself is like a vast emptiness from which anything can arise. Buddha nature is connected with the intelligent, awake and aware quality of mind at that level. So what we are praising is buddha nature's limitless potential, first in the guru and by implication in ourselves and other sentient beings.

The chant opens with the words “OM SVASTI”. *Svasti* could be translated as “good”, or “auspicious” or “wonderful”. So the opening could mean something like “Ah, wonderful”. The next lines invoke the blessings of *deathless Amitāyus*. Amitāyus is the buddha of the western pure land, Sukhāvātī. Prior to becoming a buddha, Amitāyus is said to have vowed to create an ideal place for practice and awakening, one that could be easily reached by ordinary people through the power of aspiration. He is connected with the padma energy of warmth and compassion. Amitāyus is frequently called on in the context of longevity practices

or when we make aspirations for a recently deceased person to be reborn in his pure land.

The following lines in the chant praise the Sakyong's role as a lineage holder of three great teaching streams: that of Padmasambhava, Mipham the Great, and the Shambhala lineage.

The first line in the body of the chant invokes power of the truth of *the long-life vidyādhara Padmākara, his consort, and so forth*. Padmākara is another name for Padmasambhava, who was instrumental in establishing Buddhism in Tibet. Tibetans revere this eighth century master as the ultimate rinpoche, or "Guru Rinpoche". Padmasambhava had several consorts, so it's not clear which one is being called upon here. We can guess that it might be Yeshe Tsogyal, the most well known to us. Besides invoking Padmasambhava's blessings and that of his consort, the chant also invokes the blessings of the assembly of "*those who have attained deathlessness*". Attaining deathlessness is one of the four attainments of a yogin who reaches the level of *vidyādhara*. Deathlessness could be understood literally-- that Padmasambhava and the *vidyādhara*s are still alive, just not visible to ordinary people. Or, it could be understood in the sense that the essence of their minds, like space, cannot be destroyed.

The following lines contain some traditional Tibetan word play. The Tibetan writer of a longevity supplication, in this case the Sakyong's father-in-law, Namka Drimed Rabjam Rinpoche, will often find a way to incorporate a word whose meaning somehow connects back to the name of the person we are supplicating to live a long life. In this case, the words with double meanings are italicized. "Ruler of the three *worlds, protector* who guards our well-being..." The three worlds could refer to realms above, on and below the surface of the earth, or the phrase could refer to the realm that we occupy, plus the form and formless god realms. In any case, the italicized words "*...worlds, protector....*" relate to the title "Sakyong". "Sa" means "world" or "earth", and "kyong" means "protector".

The next lines refer to the Sakyong as *dharma king, heir of the Rigden kings*. He is responsible for propagating the buddhist dharma, and also the shambhala tradition of secular enlightenment. The term *rigden* means "holder of the family". The term *rigden* can refer to a cosmic principle of wakefulness that exists as a potential to manifest in human society. It can also refer specifically to the 25 enlightened kings who are said to rule in succession in the legendary kingdom of Shambhala.

The chant further praises the Sakyong as *the compassionate display of the three secrets...* The *three secrets* refer to vajra body, vajra speech and vajra mind.

Vajra body refers to the world of forms. Vajra speech is the sense of communication beyond the words. Vajra mind is the empty but wakeful and aware mind. They are “secret” because they are not apparent to conventional mind. “Vajra” means “indestructible”. The indestructible quality is the empty aspect. Emptiness cannot be destroyed, just as space cannot be destroyed. One could also relate these to basic goodness: at a certain level of oneness, all projections drop away and anything that happens has a quality of self existing primordial goodness, beyond conventional designations of good and bad.

Further word play happens with the lines that characterize the Sakyong as the manifestation “of lord *Mipham* who was Manjushri in person...” The word *Mipham* is italicized because the chant’s author has cited the Sakyong’s previous incarnation, Mipham the Great, while and at the same time managing to include another reference to the Sakyong’s own name: Sakyong *Mipham* Rinpoche. The historical Mipham referred to here lived from 1846–1912. That Mipham was famous for his scholarship and tremendous written output. Therefore he is identified with Manjushri, a deity who symbolizes enlightened intelligence and knowledge.

The next line refers to the Sakyong as a subjugator of maras. Maras are seductive forces or tendencies that tend to degrade us. There are four of these: denial of impermanence and death, belief in a self, the wish to ignore suffering and dwell exclusively in pleasure, and attraction to emotional upheavals (kleshas). With respect to the latter, even though we dislike emotional upheavals, we still engage in them again and again. That engagement reinforces a familiar and perversely comforting sense of self-against-the-world.

*Friend who raises the victory banner of the teachings of the great secret, lord messenger of Padma, may you ever remain.”* The *great secret* refers to the vajrayana teachings. They are secret in an outer sense because key aspects of these teachings are only available through a qualified teacher to a qualified student. They are secret in an inner sense because you have to be ready in order to understand them. He is called the *lord messenger of Padma*, meaning that the Sakyong brings the tradition of Padmasambhava into this world.

In the final four lines we acknowledge the limitless possibilities of buddha nature and aspire that the Sakyong continue to embody these. *May your three secrets be indestructible like a vajra...* His three secrets are his vajra body, speech and mind. *May your lotus feet stand firm for oceans of kalpas....* We also ask that he live a very long time, in fact for *oceans of kalpas*. “Kalpas” could be translated as eons. *May your vast buddha activity spread throughout the whole world...* We aspire that his vast buddha activity spread auspicious benefit and happiness throughout

the whole world. *And may the splendor of auspicious benefit and happiness blaze throughout Jambudvipa.* Jambudvipa is the ancient Indian term for the land that human beings inhabit.

Legend has it that when the Buddha was nearing the end of his life, his disciples missed the appropriate time to ask him to prolong his life. Only later, when he was actually dying, did they remember to ask him. However, at that time Buddha told them that their motivation was not pure enough: they just wanted to avoid losing his company. If he acceded to their request it would be bad for the sangha in the future. In this supplication we are trying not to repeat that mistake.

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## *The Buddhist Dedication of Merit*

*By this merit, may all obtain omniscience*

*May it defeat the enemy, wrong doing.*

*From the stormy waves of birth, old age, sickness and death,*

*From the ocean of samsara, may I free all beings.*

The idea of *merit* is a key concept in Buddhism. Merit is closely related to what is commonly called “good karma”. Merit is something that confused beings must cultivate because it can help them on their path. In order to understand how merit fits into the Buddhist path, one needs to understand *absolute* and *relative* truth. To become enlightened, one has to understand and work on both these levels.

Merit, or good karma, is connected with patterning. The next time you sit in meditation, take notice of how each of your thoughts is related to the last one or to some event in the environment. The point that I am making here is that thoughts are instigated and conditioned by events or by other thoughts. They follow habitual patterns that become very familiar to us when we sit. Thoughts aren’t independent actors.

Actions follow thoughts and then are followed by even more thoughts. They also are part of our habitual patterns. So what we have might be a rather stale, closed circuit. This is called *relative* reality, the first of the two truths. It is relative because everything that happens is relative and depends on previous events in our patterns. Another word for this is *dependent origination*. Still another word that could be used is *samsara*. Samsara is associated with anxiety and suffering because our thoughts synchronize with each other and not necessarily with reality. This creates many painful contradictions in our lives.

Merit is part of this relative reality. This is where we live for the vast bulk of our lives, so it behooves us to work with relative reality skillfully. When we accumulate merit or good karma, we are accumulating patterns beneficial to our path. Merit simply refers to those patterns that lessen suffering and lead oneself and others closer to discovering reality, our true nature. These patterns are still

patterns, and mostly habitual, but they are beneficial patterns and we can use them to advantage.

What kinds of actions produce merit? When we open to others and help them, our thoughts become relative to their reality as well as ours. When we acknowledge enlightened teachers or study dharma, our relative conceptual world expands even more. Habits of regular sitting practice create a lot of merit. This merit, or “good” karma, will subtly alter our lives for the better. It’s still on the level of thoughts and habitual patterning, but it is good patterning, good karma.

The chant goes, *By this merit, may all obtain omniscience*. Omniscience refers to buddhahood, the level of absolute truth, as opposed to the relative truth that we have been talking about. At the absolute level patterning doesn’t apply, because one resides at the source of thoughts. Until we get to that level of realization we have to rely on merit, because our glimpses of omniscience are brief, partial, and not self-sustaining.

Each time we meditate, we slightly shift our habitual allegiance from thought patterns, relative truth, to awareness. We haven’t reached the self-sustaining pure wakefulness of a Buddha, the level of ultimate or absolute truth, but at least we are creating beneficial habits of sitting practice that will eventually lead us there. At the level of absolute truth, we are not ruled by patterns. Each moment is a completely fresh start, and the future is not pre-determined.

In the chant, rather than hoarding merit for ourselves, we dedicate it to others. We don’t want to use the merit of our dharma practice in a mistaken way to solidify our patterns by promoting arrogance or pride in our dharmic accomplishments. That is why this chant is customarily said after listening to the dharma or sitting in meditation. Whether we are actually transferring our merit to others is an open question. However, we do know that we are connected to others in many subtle ways, and it’s possible that dedicating the merit could have some effect.

Furthermore, if we give away the merit fully and completely by following the meaning of the words as we speak them, we have the opportunity for a brief glimpse of the absolute truth—the open space of enlightened mind. This open

space happens because we have momentarily given away all our patterning. Paradoxically, this creates more merit.

*May it defeat the enemy, wrong doing.* As Westerners, when we hear “wrong doing” we think “sin” in the religious sense. Here it simply means harmful patterns, or “bad” karma. On the absolute or ultimate level both merit and wrong doing are both just expressions of the energy of mind.

In thinking about wrong doing, it is important to remember that what is wrong for one person might be beneficial to another. It depends on the person’s ability to see thoughts as just thoughts and to see circumstances simply, without projection or overlay. Sexuality is a great example of this. The same act can result in intimacy, openness and love, or attachment, jealousy and aggression. One cannot even very successfully put restrictions on it, such as “it’s OK if you’re married”. In determining wrong doing, one must have the insight to see all the results that are likely to happen for oneself and others.

*From the stormy waves of birth, old age, sickness and death, from the ocean of samsara, may I free all beings.*

How are we to free all beings from *birth, old age, sickness and death*? We have to attain Buddha mind and show that to others. Only Buddha mind is not born, doesn’t grow old or die. Ultimately, this is something that one has to prove for oneself by direct experience, once shamatha has tamed and strengthened the mind enough to look directly. However, a basic provisional logic for beginners like us goes like this: pure awareness, awakened buddha mind, is not put together from constituent elements in a process of birth, so no effort is required to maintain it, and likewise there are no elements that will disperse in death. Any possible elements have to exist in the field of awareness and are not the awareness itself. It is true that awareness can be obscured by thought patterns that apparently have a beginning and end, but these are only temporary obscurations, like clouds in the sky. When the thought patterns cease, the awareness is there. You may be able to see this in your meditation practice.

Connecting with fully awakened buddha mind ourselves seems bit of a stretch, not to mention ripening others into it. It seems to take all our effort to manage our obscurations in shamatha. It turns out that, ultimately, this struggle is unnecessary, and we just have to find the proper way to relax and open. This is much easier said than done. One way to understand this experientially is to reflect on the fact that awareness in meditation comes in spontaneous flashes that are not caused by our relative selves. There is just a sudden sense of being there. “We” are surprised. Then we go back to the breath and try to manage the situation that we have found ourselves in. It is as though there is an obscuring cloud of thoughts that has momentarily parted to let the sun shine through. We may, in retrospect, try to claim credit for this moment of wakefulness. But the flashes of awake-ness are brief and we cannot control them: we can only acknowledge that something has happened. This is the buddha mind of wakefulness that we need to bring ourselves and others into on a sustained basis. It is not that far away.

In order to sustain that buddha mind, we need to cultivate merit--the habits of mind that will enable us to relax, and not buy into the clouds of thoughts. Then we have to give that merit away.

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## *The Shambhala Dedication of Merit*

*By the confidence of the golden sun of the great east,  
May the lotus garden of the Rigden's wisdom bloom.  
May the dark ignorance of sentient beings be dispelled,  
May all beings enjoy profound brilliant glory.*

In general, dedications of merit turn us outward, away from gathering spiritual attainment as personal property. In the Buddhist dedication of merit, we simply dedicate the benefits to others. In the Shambhala Dedication, we dedicate it to human society. Let's see how this works.

*By the confidence of the golden sun of the great east:* When the sun rises in the east at dawn, there is brilliance, radiance and freshness. "East" doesn't particularly refer to the orient or to Tibet. It is simply where the freshness of dawn takes place, anywhere on the globe. The golden sun of the great east symbolizes the innate wakefulness of human beings. When we are completely wakeful, the world seems fresh, clean and pure. It has original purity. It always was that way, but we are just now seeing it. Powerful awareness radiates like the rays of the sun.

There are two types of *confidence*: conditional and unconditional. At first, we develop conditional confidence because we only have concepts about great eastern sun wakefulness. We have been told about it and we are entertaining the idea as a thought. When we are actually completely in the experience of wakefulness, present and aware, our confidence doesn't need the support of thoughts. Wakefulness knows when it is awake. In fact, any thoughts that arise about wakefulness tend to obscure it. Wakefulness doesn't depend on external circumstances either: it dawns equally in pleasant and unpleasant situations. That is unconditional confidence—confidence that depends on nothing other than itself. It is confidence in our wakefulness, on the spot, without judgments.

When one is wakeful, one sees directly. Things are what they are, in suchness, pure and good. One cannot argue that the sun and stars are good or bad: they just

are. Later we can develop quarrels and appreciations, but these are added later to our memory of the experience. Our wakefulness, symbolized by the golden sun of the great east, can be temporarily obscured by confused thoughts and projections, but it is still there, like the sun in the sky, when the clouds of obscuring thoughts and projections have passed. Even the obscuring thoughts have basic goodness if we see them directly, on the spot, as suchness. On the level of great eastern sun, the experience can be of pure energy, or pure sensation.

*May the lotus garden of the Rigden's wisdom bloom:* Rigdens are personifications of the vast, fresh mind of the great eastern sun. Just as lotus flowers grow out of the mud and are themselves unblemished by the mud, the Rigden's wisdom exists wherever ordinary phenomena are beheld in complete, present awareness.

The Rigden principle emphasizes the presence of fresh goodness in secular and societal contexts. There is no real difference between the seemingly more religious approach of Buddhism and the Shambhala Rigden principle. Both are attempts to designate something with words, and the choice of words depends on the perspective of the speaker. The actual state of enlightenment is beyond words.

*May the dark ignorance of sentient beings be dispelled,  
May all beings enjoy profound, brilliant glory.*

So the logic of this dedication goes something like this; to the extent that we experience the confidence of the great eastern sun of wakefulness, then the lotus garden of the Rigden's wisdom will bloom in the society around us.

Trungpa Rinpoche, the writer of these lines, contrasts the striking imagery of the *dark ignorance of sentient beings* to the state of *profound, brilliant glory*. It makes you think, doesn't it?

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# *Fulfilling the Aspirations of the Vidyadhara*

## *Trungpa Rinpoche*

In midst of our discursive thoughts, aspiration chants serve to remind us of our dharmic vision. As well, if one consciously aspires to something, there is a much greater chance that it will come to pass. So this chant reminds us of dharmic vision, and what we need to do.

After Trungpa Rinpoche died, Thrangu Rinpoche, a close friend and dharma brother, wrote *Fulfilling the Aspirations* for Trungpa Rinpoche's students. Thrangu Rinpoche is one the great Tibetan teachers who were instrumental in helping the sangha recover its equilibrium when our teacher died. The chant covers all the major aspects of the path that Trungpa Rinpoche laid out for his students. It also helps to remind us of him and the aspirations that he shared with us. There are many technical terms in this chant. However, as one slowly begins to understand the language, the path ahead and the vision become clear.

The chant begins: *NAMO GURU KARMAKAYA*, which means, roughly, "I pay homage to the manifestation of the guru's activity". Many high Tibetan teachers, including Thrangu Rinpoche, the author of this chant, regarded Trungpa Rinpoche as a siddha, a person whose activities and powers were truly extraordinary. He transmitted Tibetan buddhadharma across a huge cultural barrier using methods that were unique and surprising to his fellow Tibetans. He did this in a way that protected the heart of the teachings, but in ways that actually worked for Western lay practitioners as opposed to Tibetan monastics and cave yogis.

In the first paragraph, Thrangu Rinpoche calls to mind the *utpatti and sampannakrama of the anuttarayoga tantra of the secret mantra vajrayana*. There are a lot of technical terms in this sentence. *Utpattikrama* refers to a class of practices that use the mind's basic luminosity to create visualizations of deities. In contrast to our normal unconscious projections and fantasies, these projections of deities are ideally done in full, present self-awareness of the mind that is making the projection. The deities embody aspects of one's own enlightened nature. After generating the visualization, one does *sampannakrama*, or resting in the aware

nature of one's own mind, without applying any effort at all. The alternation between the suggestive qualities of the visualization and the effortless, undirected resting is a powerful means to create insight into the mind itself.

The *annutarayoga tantra of the secret mantra vajrayana* is a specialty of the Kagyu lineage. It includes the ngondro, Vajrayogini, Chakrasamvara, and Kalachakra deity practices. The process of visualization is for the eye sense consciousness, and *mantra* works for the ear sense consciousness. Each practice highlights a different aspect of enlightened mind. The word *tantra* means “thread”, or “continuity”. Underlying birth, death, the bardo, and all of our experiences is a continuity of basic mind.

In order to do the vajrayana practices with proper effect, one has to have instruction from a guru who has realized that particular practice. Vajrayana is called *secret* for two reasons: its true meaning is “self secret”. Only those who are ready to understand it can know its meaning. For others the meaning will remain hidden. It is also *secret* because it is only effective if a guru is able to initiate the student into the true sense beyond the words. This kind of instruction is called “oral instruction”. Usually, but not always, it takes place in the presence of the guru. These days, some kinds of oral instructions can be passed along with video tapes and so on.

The next lines go “...*May we easily attain the supreme and ordinary siddhis. Having attained them, may we instruct and teach fortunate students, and may this spread throughout the entire expanse of Jambudvipa, completely fulfilling the wishes of this lord.*” *Ordinary siddhis* are powers over the phenomenal world, such as telepathy and so on. *Supreme siddhis* are the recognition and ability to remain in the utterly wakeful enlightened nature. Thrangu Rinpoche makes the aspiration that this *spread throughout the entire expanse of Jambudvipa*. Jambudvipa is the southern continent in ancient Indian cosmology. It is the world that we inhabit, and in the Indian cosmology, it is where people are open to receiving the dharma.

“*The excellent tradition of Shambhala, which arose as his mind terma*”... *Terma* refers to a discovered dharma text or artifact. “*Mind terma*” refers to a dharma text

that arises effortlessly and spontaneously in the mind of a great master. It is not deliberately composed in the usual way. There is a sense that it comes from somewhere else, perhaps planted there by a great yogi of the past who recognized that the time would come in the future when a particular set of teachings would be appropriate.

Trungpa Rinpoche received several Shambhala texts as mind terma. The Vidyadhara felt strongly that the Shambhala teachings were particularly important for the West at this time. He thought that these teachings could transform society, particularly in certain places that he felt were more receptive, like the maritime provinces of Canada. He envisioned a transformed society that could be a container for the Buddhist teachings at time in the future when the rest of the world would become unreceptive to buddhadharma.

In particular, in this place on which this lord walked, which he blessed, and which he prophesied—the land of Kalapa and so forth—may drala and werma gather like clouds.

*Kalapa* was the capital of the ancient kingdom of Shambhala. The Vidyadhara felt that in the future a society like Shambhala would arise in the Maritimes. Historically and mythically, Shambhala was a kingdom where the whole of society was uplifted by the principles of wakefulness and gentleness. *Dralas* and *Wermas*, the uplifted energy that gathers in power places, would *gather like clouds*. These are variously considered as local protectors, or embodiments of natural awakened energy of the world. *Werma* is another name for drala. Werma may also be messengers of the dralas. They are a kind of enlightened warrior principle. The Vidyadhara taught that the energy of the dralas could be magnetized to a particular place, making it a power spot. It is up to the inhabitants of that place magnetize the dralas by maintaining a respectful attitude towards the inherent sacredness of the phenomenal world, and by doing certain practices.

*Through completely increasing and expanding the teaching of Vajradhatu, the Dharmadhatu and Shambhala, may we be able to fulfill effortlessly and spontaneously all the buddha activity and wishes of the great vajra vidyadhara, the supreme Chokyi Gyatso.*

As well as laying a foundation for a future Shambhalian society, the Vidyadhara created a structure for disseminating the Buddhist teachings. *Dharmadhatu* is the name for a level of enlightened mind that is extremely spacious and empty. *Vajradhatu* is the name for an even higher and more subtle and empty level of mind. Accordingly “Dharmadhatus” were the names originally given to what are now called Shambhala Centres. *Vajradhatu* was the name given to the central governing organization now called Shambhala International.

For having created the structures for transmitting Buddhist and Shambhalian enlightenment, Thrangu Rinpoche praises *Chokyi Gyatso* (another name for Trungpa Rinpoche) as a *Vajra Vidyadhara*. *Vajra* means indestructible. “*Vidyadhara*” means “wisdom holder” in Sanskrit. Wisdom in this case means resting at a pre-thought level, before conventional interpretations of reality have arisen. Such a person is not constrained by convention, and can reflect all the energies of the world in completely unexpected and creative ways. Another name for this kind of realization is “crazy wisdom”.

What follows are five verses that describe the path laid out for the Vidyadhara’s western students. Most are self explanatory, so we’ll just deal with the high points. First we train in *shamatha*, striving towards one-pointed attention to the breath and attending month-long sittings such as *dathun*. We train on the paths of the *greater and lesser vehicles*. The *lesser vehicle* contains the foundation teachings of the hinayana. At this stage we learn shamatha meditation and renounce attachment to thoughts. We also absorb some basic Buddhist theory about suffering, its origin in ego, and how the mistaken impression of self arises. The *greater vehicle* is the Mahayana, which brings in more subtle teachings about buddha nature, emptiness and compassion. Hinayana is indispensable, but it is called “lesser” because it aims for individual liberation. Mahayana is called “greater” because it aims for the liberation of all beings.

*Through practicing the general and special preliminaries—  
By purifying our beings, completing great accumulations of merit,  
And by the power of the guru’s blessing entering us—  
May devotion, the root of dharma, be firmly planted.*

The *general preliminaries*, also called “the four reminders”, are contemplations of (1) the preciousness of human birth, (2) impermanence and death, (3) the inevitability of karmic cause and effect, and (4) the sufferings of samsara. The *special preliminaries* are four practices known as ngondro. The first is taking refuge in the Buddha, dharma and sangha. This is usually combined with prostrations and arousing compassion. This practice is essentially a contemplation of devotion and what that means for the practitioner, personally. The second, Vajrasattva mantra, is an extended contemplation of innate purity, using visualization and mantra. The third generates merit, or good karma, by continuously offering one’s world in the form of a mandala. The fourth, guru yoga, attunes one to the mind of the guru. This is called receiving *blessings* because then one can experience the world as the guru experiences it.

*Prajna in the form of the mother Varahi,  
Supreme upaya in the form of the father Chakrasamvara—  
Through the practice of the unified utpatti and sampannakrama,  
May we attain supreme siddhi in this life.*

Having prepared him or herself with the preliminaries, the student is prepared to undertake the practice of Vajrayogini, also known as *Varahi*. In this practice one visualizes oneself as a semi-wrathful feminine deity. *Varahi* is connected with the student’s recognition of the feminine principle: emptiness, and the insight (*prajna*) that uncovers that emptiness.

Having completed the practice of the feminine *Varahi*, one can move on to the practice of a male deity, *Chakrasamvara*, in union with *Varahi*. *Upaya*, or skillful means are the methods and practices that one uses. These are associated with the male aspect. *Varahi* and *Chakrasamvara* are the principle deity practices of the Kagyu Lineage. When one brings the visualized forms together with the present awareness of the mind that is projecting them, then this is the unification of *utpatti* (visualized forms) with *sampannakrama* (resting the mind in its own natural awake state). It is also the union of the luminous aspect of mind and the empty aspect. The luminous quality is the aspect of mind that manifests intelligence, thoughts and sensory experience. The empty quality is the space-like aspect that

accommodates all experience. Out of uniting sampannakrama, resting in the absolute nature, and utpattikrama, skillful means, comes siddhi, or powers.

*Through Ashe, the essence of Shambhala—  
The place of the seven dharmarajas and the twenty-five rigdens—  
May confidence enter our hearts,  
And through the power of that may drala and werma gather like clouds.*

With these lines, Thrangu Rinpoche returns to the Shambhala aspect of the Vidyadhara's legacy. *Ashe* in the Shambhala tradition is a symbol of wakefulness, bravery, and gentleness in the human heart. The *dharmarajas* were the first seven rulers of the kingdom of Shambhala. The *rigdens*, literally “possessors of noble family” in Tibetan, were the subsequent twenty-five rulers of Shambhala.

*Through relying on the blessings and power of the truth  
Of the genuine three jewels and three roots,  
May all the excellent fruition of our aspirations  
Be spontaneously accomplished, quickly and effortlessly.*

Here, Thrangu Rinpoche concludes the aspiration chant by invoking the blessings of the *three jewels and the three roots*. The *three jewels* are Buddha, dharma, and sangha. Dependence on these three defines one as a Buddhist. The Buddha represents the awakened state in human form. His teachings are the dharma. The sangha, or fellow practitioners, provide feedback and help. The *three roots* are the vajrayana equivalents of the three jewels. The gurus, provide an up to date example of enlightened buddha mind. Like the dharma, the practice of identifying with yidams (deities like Varahi or Chakrasamvara) is the skillful means for transmitting the enlightened nature. The protectors, like Vetali or the Four Armed Mahakala, are the activity aspect of enlightened mind. Like the sangha, they provide feedback to keep us on the path. The protectors are somewhat different from the sangha in that they represent feedback from the world in general, not just the community of practitioners.

In chanting this aspiration, we have covered a lot of ground. However, there is a lot of ground to cover. Many of the concepts are subtle and require contemplation



and study over time. So this explanation, and the chant itself, are just a teaser. Aspiration chants are just that, teasers for difficult and profound teachings.

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## Appendix I

### *It's All In Your Mind: Understanding the Chants*

Many people look to Buddhism for peaceful meditation, but are often put off by what they see as cultural baggage from its countries of origin. The novice meditator, trying to figure out whether this path is trustworthy or not, has to cope with chants that refer to protector deities, pure lands, reincarnation into many realms of visible and invisible existence, miraculous deeds by enlightened people, tulkus, and much, much more. It may seem bizarre. Is there a way to bridge this gulf between cultures? I intended this series of essays to be an explanation of the chants. However, I think it's worthwhile to take some to sketch out some general background.

One of the problems we encounter in the chants is that the cultural lens through which we westerners view the world is very different than that of most other cultures. The Greeks, Romans, Celts, Japanese, Chinese, Hindu and indigenous shamanic traditions all had, and sometimes still have, a more fluid and magical view of the "material" world than we do. Our perspective of reality has been heavily influenced by the monotheistic religions originating in the holy lands of the Middle East. The Judeo Christian and Islamic religions tend to see physical reality as separate from and lesser than their godhead. Most likely, only a relative handful of Christian, Jewish or Islamic mystics would think that, in looking at the natural world, they are actually seeing the magical body of God.

Most religious people in our culture think that one God created material reality while maintaining a separate, spiritual, identity for himself. In this view, physical reality operates at a lower level, mechanically, like a giant clock. (God does, however, reserve the option to give nature the occasional nudge.) Scientists have accepted this basic assumption about matter and have tried to interpret material reality on a purely mechanistic basis. They have been so successful that in some sense they have displaced the traditional religious priesthood in our esteem. However, the materialistic view leaves an aching void because it doesn't address

what really matters to people: love, esthetic expression, and a holistic sense of place and connection with a living and magical universe.

Buddhist cultures, on the other hand, originated from a polytheistic environment, where the gods embodied elemental forces—the natural elements of earth, wind, fire, water, space and living creatures. One could connect deeply to, and influence, the elements through appropriate ritual and understanding of their divine and essentially magical nature. This kind of thinking can make scientifically inclined people very uncomfortable.

Buddhist cultures have historically placed less emphasis than monotheistic ones on rejecting the polytheistic religious cultures that gave birth to them. They have tended to incorporate the magic, fluidity and earthiness of polytheism, but understand it from a more profound point of view that makes it more workable from a critical, agnostic point of view. The Cittamatra school of Mahayana Buddhism is one such tradition. If one understands the Cittamatra, then one can understand and accept some of the world-views that one encounters, for instance, in the chants.

Cittamatrans say that all the experiences that we have of the world occur in the mind. Trees and rocks don't grow in our heads, but mental perceptions of trees and rocks do. So trees and rocks are mind, even though we mentally designate them as "other". The apparent material solidity of trees and rocks is also a quality of mind, as is illustrated by the fact that trees and rocks are apparently solid in a dream. The dream example shows that we are quite capable having "solid" thoughts. Cittamatrans say that whatever the attributes of matter we experience, since they exist in our perception, they are thus attributes of our minds.

The dream example is very important to understanding the Cittamatran view. They say that dreams differ from waking projections only in relative terms, by degree, but not by a fundamental difference in kind. We distinguish dreams from waking consciousness by degree of vividness, logical coherence, and how they fit in with the consensus of other people's waking experience. However, we sometimes have very vivid, logically coherent dreams where all the dream people apparently experience the same thing. From within the dream, we can't tell the

difference between waking consciousness and dreaming. In the dream and in waking life, there is an apparent perceiver and perceived. Both poles of this duality are obviously mind in the dream example. Why not so in waking life? Great meditators say, from their experience, that there is a vaster, more basic kind of mind that contains subject, object and everything else that we think we know.

Scientists have a material explanation for perception, involving sensory perception of a truly existent exterior world, electrons, nerves, brains and so on. However their experiments registered as perceptions in their minds, and their scientific explanations travel from the mind of one scientist to that of another using mental concepts. There follows from their experiments (as perceived in their minds) a resulting logic, based on a beautiful consistency of repeatability, that says that there must be something real and stable out there. However, what is out there could just be a consistent, stable aspect of the observing mind. The idea of perceived outer objects and a subjective inner perceiver, for instance, seems consistent and stable in our experience. It fits with the consensus of our peers. However, the dream example and logical analysis show that subject and object are both in the mind. This is something that one can investigate for oneself in waking life, if one's shamatha meditation is stable enough.

Furthermore, if our brains are just electrical circuits, then are we really saying that matter can think? If so, what do we mean by matter? In short, our reality is our minds and we don't really know if anything is out there, except through a consensus of conventional thinking. Historically, we know that unexamined consensus is often wrong. Interestingly, atomic and quantum physics also suggests that matter, if it exists, isn't what we normally think it is. On a quantum level, matter seems to come in and out of existence, consist mostly of empty space, change when observed, distort time, and transform from particles into energy and back again. Theoretical physicists talk openly about dimensions we aren't conscious of, and multiple universes. Buddhists just leave the question of a truly existent separate material reality as a question mark. Cittamatrans say that the first thing to look at, the thing that we have ignored all along, is the mind that contains these appearances.

The mind that the Cittamatrans are talking about is not what we think of as our personal, thinking, discursive and confused mind. They are talking about a mind that is vast and contains all the reality that we experience and, in fact, contains the potential for many realities. If one realizes the nature of this mind, in the moment, actually and not just intellectually, then habitual ways of conceptualizing and freezing reality dissolve. What is left is empty, luminous, powerful, fluid and magical. Although it's all mind, nevertheless there are patterns of action and result, and karma is important.

Viewed from the Cittamatran of view, the “cultural trappings” of Tibetan Buddhism are not particularly bizarre. They just illustrate certain points about the possibilities of the mind. They are possible ways that mind can seemingly embody itself into the appearance of reality. We could look into these cultural trappings and try to see what wisdom they contain, and why they were included in the Buddhist world view as illustrative examples of something valid, rather than rejected as primitive superstition.

The protectors are a good example of “cultural trappings” that can be seen from a wisdom point of view. Tibetans tell stories about actually seeing protectors in one form or another. This may be a case of believing is seeing, and our own experience may be an example of not believing is not seeing. From the wisdom point of view, protectors are connected with action. It is through action and movement in the seemingly external world that is our minds speaks to us and guides our path. In a way, whether we see protectors with our eyes is beside the point. The point is the message. Doing the protectors chants sensitizes us to the messages.

The Cittamatrans were great meditators, because their view raised many questions that individual meditators can test against their experience. All you have to do is practice shamatha until your mind is clear and stable, and then look directly, moment by moment, at your experience to see if it agrees with that view. This kind of looking is called vipashyana. It is a tall order, but achievable with diligence in shamatha and curiosity about one's experience.

For a more complete discussion of the Cittamatra view, see Progressive Stages of Meditation on Emptiness, by Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso.

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## *Appendix II*

### *The Four Dharmas of Gampopa: Grant Your Blessings so that Confusion May Dawn as Wisdom*

*Grant your blessings so that my mind may be one with the dharma.*

*Grant your blessing so that dharma may progress along the path.*

*Grant your blessings so that the path may clarify confusion.*

*Grant your blessings so that confusion may dawn as wisdom.*

In the first essay on this chant, we dealt with all four lines of the Four Dharmas of Gampopa. This essay will expand on the final line—confusion dawning as wisdom. If we look at the world around us, we find that there is tremendous energy in confusion. Wars, environmental problems, personal struggles of all kinds—all that activity has its basis in confusion. If we could transform that energy to into wisdom, that tremendous bank of energy could benefit instead of harm. In fact, this very transformation is the distinguishing feature of path of vajrayana buddhism.

The final line of the Four Dharmas, “*Grant your blessings so that confusion may dawn as wisdom*”, can be understood in a couple of ways. As we discussed in the first essay of the Four Dharmas of Gampopa, the primary level of understanding is to actually experience confusion as the display of the mind. If we understand it at that level, the conceptual basis of confusion is seen as just thoughts, and an experienced meditator can realize the primordial nature of the mind that is producing those thoughts. This is not the personal, discursive mind of the self. The sense of a thinker and its thoughts are just one part of the display. This mind is understood to be like space: it is empty, but anything can appear in it. What appears could be thoughts, such as thoughts of a self, or it could be mental

pictures of the phenomenal world based on data from the senses. This mind also has the quality of self-knowing: it is aware that it is aware. The space-like quality of mind is called emptiness, and the raw ability to manifest insight or appearances is known as luminosity. Confusion dawning as wisdom in this sense is seeing through confusion to the primordial mind at its base. The confusion dissolves and is seen as the energetic play of the basic mind.

The five buddha families are a second way to understand how confusion and wisdom are intertwined. They are an intermediate stage between the basic empty but expressive nature of mind and the well-developed, solidified thoughts and emotions that comprise our confusion. With the buddha families, the basic primordial mind begins to take on a flavor, or energy, that later forms the basis for confused emotions. However, unlike our normal thoughts and emotions, buddha family wisdoms retain, in their pure form, the character of the pure, primordial, luminosity-emptiness that enlightened people experience. If one is able to experience this pure nature within confusion, then one can relax with whatever arises. Fortunately it is actually possible to have brief glimpses of how this might work. The transmutation of confusion into wisdom has its basis in awareness, which we all experience to some degree or another.

The first buddha family is called, simply, “buddha”. Ignorance, being spaced out, dull or sleepy, is the basic energy that happens when “buddha” family mind loses track of its own nature. Anything can appear in the empty space of mind, including ignorance. But once ignorance happens, a cascade of other mental events follows. If one looks at ignorance directly, with an unbiased mind, then one can reverse the process of confusion and recognize ignorance as an expression of primordial mind. The wisdom here is the “wisdom of all encompassing space”, because the basic wisdom mind encompasses everything we experience. Being spaced-out becomes spacious awareness. The similarity between the two is that one just lets everything be as it is. It could be laziness, or it could be spaciousness. The difference is ignorance. With awareness, ignorance dissolves, because the two are mutually exclusive, just as light and darkness are mutually exclusive.



If one is able to look directly at anger when it arises, then the quality of becoming fixated on a specific outcome dissolves, just as any thought dissolves when held in awareness. The mind becomes free to reflect all perspectives equally and dispassionately, like a mirror. In fact, the wisdom of this family is known as “mirror-like wisdom”. In its active form, it could have a pacifying effect by introducing different perspectives with great clarity. It is connected with intellect. This kind of buddha family energy, called “vajra” could also slice through preconceptions like a sword, with crisp clarity.

In the case of pride, which is connected with the “ratna family”, the neurotic quality tries to centralize all positive qualities on to the projection of a self, at the expense of others. Ratna family energy might accumulate lots of possessions, or focus on supposedly superior qualities within one’s personality. The wisdom within pride has to do with awareness of all qualities *wherever* they arise. Everything has a naturally rich quality in spontaneous raw experience, before it has been separated by thoughts into good or bad, mine or yours. Thus the energy of pride contains within it what is known as the “wisdom of equality”. As with the other buddha families, the wisdom quality dawns when the basic energy is infused with awareness.

Passion and desire, associated with the “padma” family, is a sense of warm or even hot connection with an object. One is fascinated with the process of seduction, and not so much with owning the object of desire after the seduction has succeeded. In the midst of padma neurosis, one might simply move on to the next conquest, leaving the original object of desire behind. Sometimes very attractive people do not look beyond the project of being attractive, and ignore all other aspects of the relationship. When looked at with awareness, the obsession with the dance of seduction becomes tremendous interest in discriminating all the qualities of the situation. The wisdom here is “discriminating awareness wisdom”. The dance of seduction becomes compassionate connection that is always warm and appropriate to the situation.

Neurotic speed, associated with the “karma” family, is connected to the attempt to cover all bases and hurry specific outcomes. It comes from the failure to acknowledge the natural unfolding of reality. The wisdom here is the “wisdom of

all accomplishing action”. It arises when the unfolding of reality is happening in present awareness, and all the potential for unfolding in the future is also brought into awareness. At this point, enlightened action in tune with reality is possible. The Vidhyadhara Trungpa Rinpoche is a great example of this wisdom: he had thousands of students, started a university, several major practice centres, and a hundred or so local centres, seminaries, and a monastic abbey. He wrote many books, translated traditional texts, and established ikebana and tea ceremony schools. He wrote several books of poetry, and on and on. Yet he never seemed to hurry. Thrangu Rinpoche is another example of a man who never hurries but has projects coming to fruition all over the world.

Although it is possible to describe the buddha families conceptually, or experience them briefly in an intensive weekend, the buddha family energies are very subtle in their pure form. When conceptualized, they can become a kind of Buddhist pop psychology. However, in order to truly realize the buddha families there is no substitute for serious vajrayana practice. Deity practice helps to create a “sacred world” where everything that arises is seen as an expression of the deity. Within that kind of practice, one is commanded to view confusion as pure, non-conceptual energy. In many of the traditional practices, the buddha family energies are in fact represented in the form of deities.

Mahamudra is another practice that is extremely helpful in realizing these wisdoms. Our basic introductory shamatha practice is a very beginning level of mahamudra. Fully developed mahamudra, on the level of vajrayana, takes the basic sitting practice to its ultimate level. In this case it is usually coupled with “pointing out” transmission, during which a guru points out the basic nature of mind. When, through much practice, the mind has become clear and stable, mahamudra techniques show one how to look directly, without the mind splitting into subject and object, at whatever arises. Then one can relax, without struggle, into the pure nature of whatever arises. This is the primary way that confused energies can dawn as wisdom.

The buddha family wisdoms are very intriguing to those of us who live on the confused side of these energies. Obviously, we need to hone our awareness through meditation practice in order to actualize these wisdoms on a consistent

basis in our lives. However it does help to have some intellectual understanding. If you would like to read more, you could check out the short but very pithy section on these wisdoms in Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism by Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche. For a more lengthy presentation from the psychotherapeutic point of view, read Irini Rockwell's book The Five Wisdom Energies: A Buddhist Way of Understanding Personalities, Emotions, and Relationships. For a Dzogchen perspective, try "Spectrum of Ecstasy: The Five Wisdom Emotions According to Vajrayana Buddhism" by Ngakpa Chogyam.

For experiential glimpses of the buddha family energies themselves, one could sign up for a Maitri Space Awareness weekend, or take Levels 4 and 5 of the Dharma Art program.

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## Appendix III

### *Pacifying Obstacles: the Mamo Practice*

In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, there is a ten-day period before the Tibetan New Year in the late winter/early spring when obstacles abound and old karma ripens unpleasantly. Accidents, sickness and general bad luck seem more common. From an ordinary, non-Buddhist point of view, we could say that we have survived the winter solstice but the harshness and darkness of winter are still dragging on. The fresh promise of spring and bliss of summer have not yet arisen. Statistically, suicides tend to be highest around this time. When we look around the world, there seems to be no relief from suffering and no escape from the karmic baggage we humans have created. Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche has requested that all Shambhala Centres perform a pacification of obstacles practice during a period before the Tibetan New Year, known in our sangha as Shambhala Day.

This time of obstacles is known as the “dön” season”. Döns are negative forces that arise out of the environment and cause us to do something self-destructive or mindless. They can manifest as sudden fits of anger or madness, or bad decisions that lead to injury or misfortune. They produce sudden, unexpected neurotic upheavals. More generally, they can also manifest as problems in the larger society. On a personal level, the best protection against döns is increasing one’s mindfulness. Therefore, it’s an especially good time for meditation practice.

“Mamos” are another source of obstacles during this period. They are symbolized in the form of feminine deities called dakinis. Mamos are mostly a worldly variety of dakini, unenlightened aspects of the feminine principle. (Mamos can be enlightened, however, like Ekajati.) Many mamos were tamed, or at least partially tamed, by Padmasambhava, a great adept of the eighth century. He was known by Tibetans as the “Second Buddha”. As the legend goes, when he encountered mamos in the form of various obstacles on his way through Tibet, he overcame them and bound them by oath (samaya) to protect the dharma.

Tibetans depict mamos as fierce and ugly demonesses, black in color, with

emaciated breasts and matted hair. They appear with sacks full of diseases. They cause havoc with a roll of their magical dice, creating pestilence and warfare. They are associated with the karmic consequences of degraded personal or societal actions. Their response might be in proportion to the karma accumulated, but it could also be unpredictable and completely out of proportion. Similarly, we know that there have been many cases where small provocations have produced great wars.

In Tibetan monasteries, for several days preceding the New Year, monks do ceremonies, all day and through the night, invoking protectors and wrathful deities to clear obstacles. At the end of this period, the karmic baggage from the old year is symbolically concentrated into a giant sculpture, which the monks burn to the accompaniment of firecrackers, horns, cymbals, chanting, lama dancing and drums. After the practice ends, there is a relatively neutral day where one cleans one's house to expunge the unwanted traces of the old year. Then, on the first day of New Year, one visits one's guru, and on subsequent days people visit each other in their homes and there is general feasting and celebration. There is a strong sense of a fresh beginning.

In our community, we also do intensive practice, including the mamo practice, during the ten-day dön season. Neutral day, the day before Shambhala Day, is when we do our yearly deep cleaning at the Kootenay Shambhala Centre, and also our homes if that has not been done already. On Shambhala day itself, rather than visit the lama at our nonexistent village monastery, the lama comes to us in the form of a live broadcast from Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche on Shambhala Day morning. Celebrations follow throughout the day.

The Mamo practice begins by chanting the *Seven Line Supplication to Padmasambhava*. We ask him to please approach and grant his blessings. We do this to establish some sense of presence of Padmasambhava's energy. If there are only vajrayana practitioners present, they would do a Vajrakilaya practice, just as Padmasambhava did before going to Tibet. The practice that he did was probably much more elaborate. In this short liturgy, vajrayana practitioners visualize themselves as a wrathful deity, rolling a huge dagger ("kila" in Sanskrit, "phurba" in Tibetan) between the palms of their hands. This dagger has three edges, and is

triangular in cross section. It points downwards. Its three edges slice through passion, aggression and ignorance. The kila pierces any possible obstruction. It works by arousing a penetrating, exquisitely sharp quality of awareness.

Vajrakilaya is dark green and surrounded by flames of wrathful compassion. This is not “feel-good” compassion, but the fiery quality of uncompromising destruction of egoistic tendencies. These are tendencies that may seem familiar and comforting in the short run, but will inevitably produce alienation and suffering in the future.

After flashing themselves as the wrathful deity, vajrayana practitioners can tune into Vajrakilaya’s energy while they recite the mantra of Vajrakilaya. Shamatha students might best work with just a sense of wrathful energy.

But why would we do such a practice? In our culture we may occasionally feel “hounded” by misfortune, but we do not, except perhaps jokingly, attribute it to agents like mamos, gremlins or dōns. The concepts are foreign. Let’s digress for a few paragraphs to talk about what we are being hounded by and why we might do this practice in the first place.

As always, with protectors, dōns, mamos, and other deities, one can see them as external to oneself, or as aspects of one’s own mind. If you contemplate for a few minutes, you will realize that both the sense of self and the sense of an external “other” are interpretations in the mind. As you read these words, the paper or the computer screen probably seem to exist outside, but they are actually images in your mind. You may think that these images are faithfully assembled from electric impulses traveling down your optic nerves, but the idea of electric impulses and nerves is, again, a thought in your mind. So, not only do the labels and interpretations of phenomena reside in our minds, but the appearances do as well. So appearance and mind are the same. Obviously this has implications for the sense of being “hounded”.

Whether, or in what manner, there is an objective reality outside of the mind, beyond appearances, and what this reality might be, we can never really know for sure. However, since we habitually operate on a dualistic level, we mostly think

that the outside world is separate and distinct from our minds. Karma Chagme, the 17<sup>th</sup> century yogin who wrote this liturgy, has conveniently phrased the liturgy for us in just that way, as though there were real mamos “out there”, just as real or unreal as we are “in here”.

The lineage masters are fully aware of the problems of duality/nonduality when they create these practices. One enters into them with the most obvious tool that one has: dualistic conceptuality. However, by becoming conscious of one’s conceptuality as one uses it in the chant, the concepts become transparent, just as any thought becomes transparent when you see it in meditation. At the same time that one is using the conceptual mind, the practice points one to subtle layers beyond the concepts.

Practices such as this one belong to an advanced level of Tibetan Buddhism, called “Vajrayana”. Another name for Vajrayana is the “vehicle of skillful means”. There are many, many techniques in Vajrayana, and they have been found over the centuries to be very quick and effective. Most seem strange when one first encounters them. To enter in to them, one has to have some basic trust that the lineage masters have access to wisdom and know what they are doing. We acquire that trust over time by listening and contemplating teachings that are easier to understand: usually those of the earlier stages of the path. As we test them against our own experience of mind and gain insight into our being, our trust increases to the point where we are willing to try something like the mamo practice.

Returning now to the practice itself, we go on to invoke the presence of the protectors by chanting our usual protector liturgies. After the Vetali chant, we get into the heart of the mamo practice with the chant entitled “Pacifying the Turmoil of the Mamos”. This liturgy is based on the story of the mamos that Padmasambhava bound by oath to protect the dharma. The story goes that these mamos become active when people, especially practitioners, forget ground of basic goodness, the sacredness of all phenomena, and act in a degraded way. Then the mamos express their legendary wrath in order to repair our commitment to sacred outlook and basic goodness. Their wrath arises not from personal insult or

violation, but from the practitioner's improper relationship to life. The chant begins:

*BHYOH*

*At the end of the five-hundred-year dark age,  
When the secret mantra has strayed into Pön.*

The secret mantra straying into Pön refers to the tendency of Buddhist practitioners to corrupt the advanced Vajrayana teachings (*the secret mantra*) by slipping into popular folk magic in order to attract a following.

*When sons do not listen to their father's words,  
An evil time, when relatives quarrel,  
When people dress sloppily in clothes of rags,  
Eating bad cheap food,  
When there are family feuds and civil wars:  
These provoke the black mamos wrath.  
These various women fill a thousand realms  
Sending sickness upon man and beast.  
The sky is thick with purple clouds of sickness.  
They incite cosmic warfare.  
They destroy by causing the age of weaponry.  
Suddenly, They strike men with fatal ulcerous sores.  
Completely daring, they bring down hail and thunderbolts.*

Humans become susceptible to the attacks of the mamos when they lose contact with their own being. When we are truly in contact with that sense of being, we experience sacredness, primordial purity, and basic goodness. The clouds of thoughts cease and one is simply present, nakedly. When one has the confidence of just being, then one's presence and energy become powerful, and obstacles seem to be repelled, or at least easily overcome. Such persons might metaphorically be described as having a certain glow. They have a kind of authentic charisma.

*Earth lords, nagas, and nyens are your subjects.*



*The eight classes of devas, raksasas and so on are your retinue.  
There is nothing that you cannot subjugate...*

Having acknowledged their power, we beg for forgiveness:

*I make this offering so you may be appeased.  
By the samaya substances, amrita, and torma,  
And the offerings of representations, appeasements and practice materials,  
May the turmoil of the mamos be pacified.  
Be appeased! SAMAYA!....*

Instead of torma (a barley flour and butter sculpture), we put offerings of food and cookies on the protector shrine, adding more to the plate with each day of practice. We also offer body (in the form of meditation posture and gestures), speech (in terms of chanting and mantra), and mind (in terms of confession and devotion to the dharma). We do not actually physically offer amrita (a kind of blessed alcoholic drink), or representations. With “SAMAYA!” We exhort them to remember the oath that they made to Padmasambhava.

Then we ask them to act on our behalf:

*Through the blessings of appeasing you,  
For us yogins and our disciples  
May sickness cease and plague be averted.  
Erase us from your chart of doom: put away your dice.....*

*.....May the misfortunes of the he-maras be banished to the right;  
May the misfortunes of the she-maras be banished to the left.....*

*Maras* are sources of personal degradation. There are four: denial of impermanence and death, belief in a solid self, being blinded by attraction to pleasure, and giving in to emotional upheavals (*kleshas*).

*....Now is the time of the great exorcism.  
Now is the time—SAMAYA!*

*Please perform the activities we request of you.*

Next, we acknowledge our own culpability in bringing on misfortune:

*Overcome by ignorance from beginningless time,  
Clouded by stupidity due to laziness,  
However we have strayed from the path of omniscience,  
May the host of emanation dakinis forgive us.*

The chant ends with an adaptation of the long Vajrasattva mantra. This mantra, which is prefaced in this case by “OM SAMAYA / AH SAMAYA / HUM SAMAYA...” is one of the most famous of all Tibetan mantras, and it is used whenever one wishes to purify oneself of the stains of karmic misdeeds and obscurations. When we say this mantra, we should think of the world and ourselves as being fundamentally pure, sacred and basically good. “Good” here means good beyond the thought of good or bad. In fact, the Tibetan word for that is *kadak*, which means “first pure”, or as Trungpa Rinpoche put it, alpha pure.

Whether one regards the *mamos* as existing separately from us or not, or whether one regards them as a deeper aspect of our own minds, the practice can still be effective. The effectiveness is found in simply doing the practice and being aware of what we are doing, while we are doing it. On one level, the practice may serve to bring about a sense that the dangers and unpredictable threats in the external world could be seen and as aids and warnings on our path. They might be indications that we need to guard with awareness the sacred ground of pure being. On another level, we might become conscious of how the mind projects reality, and therefore, how reality can be worked with.

The *mamo* practice is essentially an extended protector practice. Protector practices in general at first seem foreign and difficult to understand. However, with time, most experienced practitioners come to regard them as essential. As well, they are highly recommended by the same teachers in whom we put a lot of faith—so everyone is invited to start the new year right by joining with us to pacifying their obstacles during the *dön* season.

For further reading, you could check out [The Dakini's Warm Breath](#) by Judith Simmer Brown, and [The Vajradhatu Practice Manual](#). Werma practitioners could read Robin Kornman's essays on lhasung practice in the Werma Sadhana Manual.

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# Appendix IV

## *The Art of Chanting*

People from different centres tend to chant differently. This is natural, because different styles evolve over time in more or less isolated groups of people. However, there are some points that I think are worth paying attention to. One of them is related to proclamation and the other is related to breath control.

Firstly, the chants should be done with a sense of proclamation. The chants contain the distilled wisdom of great lineage masters. If one does them with a sense of proclamation, then the resulting energy means that there is more chance that their true meanings will sink in. In Tibetan monasteries, a lot of artistry goes into how the chants are done. They use large and small horns, cymbals, large drums, bells and damarus. Tibetan chant leaders train to develop their voices so that sound resonates in their body cavities to produce deep, rich, harmonic tones. There are often specific tunes associated with each chant. This kind of elaboration isn't practical in our own non-monastic environments, but just having a sense of proclamation can go a long way.

Especially if one is an umdze, it is good to learn some breath control. A natural tendency is to take a breath at the end of each sentence. However, if one does that, momentum can be lost as the assembled chanters wait for the umdze to start up again. The resulting gap can become longer and longer until the chant starts to drag.

If the umdze takes his or her breath before the end of a sentence or paragraph, then the chant can proceed at an even pace without dragging. When the end of a sentence is reached, the umdze is ready to lead the assembly through the potential dead spot without hesitating to take a breath.

Some umdzes do not have strong voices, or perhaps they are simply shy about projecting. In this case others in the assembly often unconsciously start to lead without actually paying attention to the umdze. The chanting then breaks up into un-harmonious sections in different parts of the room. People in the assembly can help by putting extra awareness on whatever they can hear of the umdze's voice. If they know the chants by heart, they can even try to read the umdze's lips so that the assembly remains synchronized. In any case, the umdze is the one to follow, not the person with the loudest voice. (For some unknown reason, the

loudest person is often the one paying least attention to the umdze!) If the umdze takes their seat and develops a sense of proclamation and leadership, it's easier for everyone.

As umdzes and chanters develop more experience, further refinements are possible. In the beginning of a chanting session, an umdze may have to be more assertive until the assembly picks up on the desired pacing. Later, the umdze may be able relax a bit and listen for the pitch and tones of different people in the assembly, and by using his or her own voice, bring out harmonies and cadences that will make a nice chanting session.

Especially with longer liturgies like the Sadhana of Mahamudra and other long sadhana practices, it is good to choose a pitch that works for everyone. Sometimes in long chants, the pitch of the voices goes lower and lower. Low pitches tend to be more tiring for most people, so the umdze can vary the pitch of different sections, making most of them higher. There is some room for creativity here, and if people are aware of and in tune with each other's voices, there can be effects similar to singing.

Sometimes, in doing the chants, one might choose to emphasize mindfulness and awareness of speech—the emotive sounds coming out of one's mouth. In this case the emphasis is not on the conceptual content, but on the present awareness of the sounds. The sounds themselves are empty of any ascribed meaning, just pure sounds that have basic goodness in their pure nature. Vajrayana practitioners might hear this described as “all sounds are mantra”.

When one is finished with a chanting session, it is customary to keep chant booklets on the zabuton mat and off the floor. This is similar to the practice of putting dharma books on the highest shelf, or not covering them up with old newspapers on a coffee table. If one has a sense that the material in the chants is talking to one's own basic goodness, or pure being, then there will likely be an attitude of sacredness and respect. Keeping chants or other dharma materials in a higher place is a practice for ordering one's priorities in life. If one treats those materials with respect, then one sets in motion a larger pattern of prioritizing that makes it easier to choose beneficial courses of action that will help one on the path.

If one is practicing at home, one can be flexible about which chants to do, depending on one's time and inclination. It is always good to make a connection to the lineage, or perhaps to remind oneself of the protector principle.

The material in the chants is subtle, and one should not expect to understand the chants simply by reading about them, although that is a good start. The chants raise issues and questions that require contemplation over time. Sitting practice is necessary in order to integrate them fully into ones own being. Sometimes, after years of exposure to a particular section, one will have a sense of “Ah ha—that’s what it means!”. That is why we follow a particular path—we sort of know about things on the path because they have been described, and because of that we know where to look. But when we do arrive, it is still a totally deep and fresh experience.

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