

NOTES ON GREEN TARA PRACTICE
For the Sravasti Abbey Green Tara Retreat
July 3-10, 2020

A. WHO IS TARA AND WHY DO WE PRAY TO HER?

1. The origin of Tara

“In the past, many eons ago, during the time of Buddha Dundubhisvara (Drum-sound), in the Universe called Manifold Light, there lived a princess by the name of Moon of Wisdom-knowledge. She was a very devoted disciple and would daily set out many offerings to the Buddha and His Sangha. Eventually she generated bodhicitta, the aspiration to attain Enlightenment and become a Buddha herself, in order to help all living beings.

“Some bhikshus (monks) came to know of this, and urged her to dedicate the merits she had created to be reborn as a male. However, the princess rejected this advice, saying:

Here there is no man, there is no woman,
No self, no person, and no consciousness.
Labelling ‘male’ or ‘female’ has no essence,
But deceives the evil-minded world.

“She went on to make the following vow:

There are many who desire Enlightenment in a man’s body, but none who work for the benefit of sentient beings in the body of a woman. Therefore, until samsara is empty, I shall work for the benefit of sentient beings in a woman’s body.

“From that time onwards the princess dedicated herself to winning full and complete Enlightenment. Once she accomplished that goal, she came to be known as Tara, the Liberator.”

*(From *In Praise of Tara: Songs to the Saviouress* by Martin Willson)*

According to another story, Chenrezig (Skt: Avalokitesvara, the Buddha of Compassion) had been working for a long time to help sentient beings. He had been able to help hundreds of thousands of beings become free from samsara (cyclic existence), but then he checked and realized there were still so many more beings suffering in samsara. He began to cry, and from the pool formed by his tears a lotus arose, and from the lotus Tara appeared, saying: “Don’t worry; I will help you.” Thus Tara is associated with Chenrezig, as well as with Amitabha Buddha (she has a tiny image of Amitabha Buddha on her crown.)

2. The purpose and benefits of practising Tara

Lama Zopa Rinpoche, in *Tara the Liberator*, explains:

“There are many inner obstacles to our mental development, and these inner obstacles can create external obstacles. To obtain success in our Dharma practice, to actualize the path to Enlightenment, we need to rely on a special deity or Buddha, for example, Tara. All actions of the Buddha manifest in the female form, Tara, to help sentient beings successfully accomplish both temporal and ultimate happiness.”

Practising Tara can bring the following benefits:

- accumulating a great deal of merit

- avoiding a suffering rebirth in the next life
- quick attainment of Enlightenment
- removing obstacles and fulfilling our wishes (good health, success in business or job-hunting, having a child, etc.)
- protection from fear and dangers

3. Protecting from the eight fears

A sutra says that Tara protects from the eight fears, external and internal:

EXTERNAL FEAR	INTERNAL FEAR
1. floods	1. attachment
2. fire	2. anger
3. elephants	3. ignorance
4. snakes	4. jealousy
5. lions	5. pride
6. imprisonment/chains	6. miserliness
7. thieves	7. wrong views
8. ghosts	8. doubt

B. GREEN TARA AND THE TWENTY-ONE TARAS

1. The symbolism of Green Tara (from *Images of Enlightenment* by J. Landaw and A. Weber)

“Green Tara is seated upon a lotus arising from the waters of a lake, just as Tara is said to have arisen from the compassionate tears of Avalokiteshvara. Her right hand is in the mudra of supreme generosity, indicating her ability to provide beings with whatever they desire. Her left hand at her heart is in the mudra of bestowing refuge: her thumb and ring finger are pressed together to symbolise the united practice of method and wisdom, and the three remaining fingers are raised to symbolise the Three Jewels of Refuge – Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. In each hand she holds the stem of a blue utpala flower. Each flower consists of three blossoms, indicating that Tara, the embodiment of enlightened activities, is the Mother of the Buddhas of the past, present and future.

“Tara is dressed in the silken robes of royalty. She wears rainbow colored stockings, a white half-blouse and various jeweled ornaments. These symbolise her mastery of the perfections of generosity, morality and so forth. The tiara fastened in her black hair is adorned with jewels, the central one is a red ruby symbolic of Amitabha, her spiritual father and the head of her Buddha family.

“She is seated in a distinctive posture, her left leg withdrawn to symbolise her renunciation of worldly passion and her right leg extended to show that she is always ready to arise and come to the aid of those who need her help.

“With a warm compassionate gaze she looks down upon each sentient being as a mother regards her only child. Her emerald-green color – related to the wind element and hence to movement – signifies her ability to act swiftly and without delay to bring benefits to sentient beings.”

From the teachings of Ven. Lama Thubten Yeshe:

“Tara is known as the ‘Mother of all Buddhas.’ This is because she is the wisdom of reality, and all Buddhas and bodhisattvas are born from this wisdom. This wisdom is also the fundamental cause of happiness, and our own spiritual growth comes from this wisdom. That is why Tara is called the Mother. And Mother Tara has much wisdom to manifest many aspects, sometimes peaceful, sometimes wrathful, in different colors – all to help sentient beings.”

Below is a digital image of Green Tara painted by Fred van der Zee, from the website:

<https://www.digitalthangka.com/>



2. The mantra of Tara (from *Tara the Liberator* by Lama Zopa Rinpoche)

Tara's mantra is **OM TARE TUTTARE TURE SOHA**

OM represents Tara's holy body, speech, and mind.

TARE ("liberate") means liberating from true suffering: the sufferings of samsara, mainly our aggregates being under the control of delusion and karma.

TUTTARE means liberating from the eight fears: the external dangers, but mainly from the internal dangers, the delusions, and also karma.

TURE means liberating from the ignorance of the absolute nature of the I; it shows the true cessation of suffering.

SOHA means "may the meaning of the mantra take root in my mind."

Also, in the context of the Lam Rim, **TARE** refers to the graduated path of the lower capable being; **TUTTARE** refers to the path of the middle capable being; **TURE** refers to the path of the higher capable being. So the meaning is that by taking refuge in Tara and doing Tara practice, we can achieve the fully enlightened state with the four Kayas, which is the state of cessation of, or liberation from, the two obscurations.

To practise reciting Tara's mantra, you can visualize Tara in front of you, with a white syllable OM at her crown, a red syllable AH at her throat and a blue syllable HUM at her heart. As you recite the mantra, visualize rays of light flowing from these three places, and striking your three places. These purify all negative karma and obscurations of your body, speech, and mind created from beginningless time.

Alternatively, you can visualize Tara on the crown of your head, and do the visualization as above. Recite as many mantras as you wish. At the end, pray to Tara to help you develop bodhicitta. Your practice of ethics and your development of bodhicitta are what please Tara the most. This is the best offering you can make to Tara, and will bring you closer to her.

Then, Tara dissolves into light, which dissolves through your forehead (or crown) and into your heart. Feel, "My body, speech and mind are now blessed to become Tara's body, speech and mind." Then dedicate the merit that you will become Enlightened – like Tara – in order to be able to help all sentient beings.

3. The twenty-one Taras

Tara has 21 primary emanations, each of which perform different activities. The different colors of these Taras correspond to the four different types of enlightened activity (pacifying, increasing, over-powering, and wrathful) as explained by Ven. Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche:

Tara is the female Buddha of Enlightened Activity (Tib: *trinley*), of which there are four types: pacifying, increasing, overpowering, and wrathful. Each of these is represented by a different color:

1. **White** represents the enlightened activity of **pacifying**, for example overcoming sickness, causes of untimely death, and obstacles to success in one's life or one's practice.
2. **Yellow** represents the enlightened activity of **increasing** the positive qualities conducive to a long life, peace, happiness, and success in one's Dharma practice.
3. **Red** represents the enlightened activity of **power**, or overpowering external forces that cannot be tamed through the first two activities, for example, removing obstacles to sickness, untimely death, etc., and forcefully accumulating conducive conditions for one's Dharma practice.

4. **Black** represents the enlightened activity of **wrath**, which involves using forceful methods to accomplish activities for enlightened purposes that cannot be accomplished through other means.

THE 21 TARAS (from *How to Free Your Mind* by Thubten Chodron)

NAME(S)	COLOR	FUNCTION
1. Tara Swift and Heroic	Red	Controlling; turning back the power of others
2. Tara White as the Autumn Moon	White	Pacifying infectious diseases
3. Golden-colored Tara, Giver of Supreme Virtue	Golden with a bluish hue	Prolonging life, increasing resources, wisdom and merit
4. Tara, the Victorious Ushnisha of Tathagatas	Golden	Neutralizing poison, increasing life, counteracting untimely death
5. Tara Proclaiming the Sound of Hum; Tara Summoning the Three Worlds	Golden, or red/yellow	Influencing/subjugating
6. Tara Victorious over the Three Worlds	Ruby red or reddish-black	Purifying obscurations and negativities
7. Tara Crushing Adversities	Black, fierce	Destroying external and internal hindrances
8. Tara Who Crushes all Maras and Bestows Supreme Power	Golden, fierce	Destroying maras, e.g. afflictive emotions, and all obscurations to liberation and enlightenment
9. Tara Granter of Boons	Ruby red	Helping beings and granting realizations
10. Tara Dispelling All Sorrow; Tara the Conqueror of the Three Worlds	Red	Destroying maras, controlling the worlds of sentient beings, fulfilling all wholesome wishes
11. Tara Summoner of all Beings; Tara Dispeller of All Misfortune; Tara the Treasure of Wealth	The color of darkness	Increasing enjoyments and wealth, eliminating poverty
12. Tara Giver of All Prosperity; Tara of Auspicious Light	Golden	White light from her crown ornament eliminates suffering, and yellow light increases (wealth, etc.)
13. Tara the Ripener; Tara Bestowing Maturity	Ruby red, surrounded by fire	Subduing hindrances
14. Tara the Wrathful Summoner; Shaking, Frowning Tara	Black	Destroying hindrances to the flourishing of Dharma and to the happiness of sentient beings
15. Tara the Great Peaceful One	White	Pacifying negative karma
16. Tara Destroyer of All Attachment	Coral red	Amplifies the power of mantras and cuts negative thoughts and emotions
17. Tara Accomplisher of All Bliss	Orange	Binding thieves and eliminating the power of black magic mantras
18. Tara the Victorious	White	Dispelling diseases caused by nagas (e.g. leprosy, tumors, boils) and by poisons/toxins
19. Tara Consumer of All Suffering; Tara the Invincible Queen	White	Freeing from poisons, conflicts, bad thoughts, nightmares
20. Tara the Source of All Attainments	Orange	Curing disease; her rite is for making one invisible
21. Tara the Perfector	White	Pacifying internal poisons (afflictive emotions) and external harms such as demons. Her rite is for sky-going (taking one to Akanishta)

3. An outline of the Twenty-One Praises to Tara

I. The first line: a brief praise (OM I prostrate to the Noble, Transcendent Liberator)

II. The extensive praise: the 21 Verses of Prostration and Praise

Verse 1 is the praise to Tara's story

Verses 2 – 14 are praising the Sambhogakaya aspects of Tara

2 – 7 are praising her peaceful aspects

8 – 14 are praising her wrathful aspects

Verse 15 is praising her Dharmakaya aspect

Verses 16 – 21 are praising Tara for her enlightened activities.

III. The Concluding Lines (The Benefits of Reciting the Praises)

These describe: the attitude of the practitioner; the best time to do the practice; the beneficial effects of the practice; and the number of recitations to be performed, together with a summary of the beneficial effects that are produced.

* * * * *

Bibliography and further reading

Chodron, Thubten. *How to Free Your Mind*. Snow Lion, 2005.

Landaw, Jon and Weber, Andy. *Images of Enlightenment*. Snow Lion, 2006.

Thubten Zopa Rinpoche, Lama. *Tara the Liberator*. <https://www.lamayeshe.com/article/tara-liberator>

Willson, Martin. *In Praise of Tara: Songs to the Saviouress*. Wisdom, 1986.

Colophon: compiled from various sources by Sangye Khadro. Any mistakes are my own.