

A Brief Explanation of the Mandala of The Five Deities of Chakrasamvara

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Here is the sand mandala of the Five Deities of Chakrasamvara I created over four days. Its colors, measurements and forms are made according to Drikung Dharmakirti's (Rigdzin Chokyi Drakpa, 1595–1659) system and explanation.

It was made in the beautiful Museum der Kulturen in Basel, Switzerland, where many other beautiful Buddhist objects, such as statues, thangkas, and tsa-tsas are stored and will be conserved. Upon completion, the mandala was blessed in a puja. Viewing the mandala has great significance, as it symbolizes the universe and represents all Tantric mandalas. It will remain here for many years, truly protecting the universe and benefitting living beings, the elements, and the environment around us.



In the center of the mandala is the Sambhogakaya form of Chakrasamvara, holding a vajra and bell, in union with his consort Vajrayogini (Vajravaraḥi), holding a skull cup (Tib. *kapala*) and a hooked-knife (Tib. *drigu*).

Chakrasamvara symbolizes method, or compassion, whereas Vajrayogini symbolizes wisdom. Thus, the union of Chakrasamvara with Vajrayogini symbolizes the union of method/compassion and primordial wisdom.

The dark blue color of Chakrasamvara symbolizes the dharmakaya, or emptiness, whereas the red color of Vajrayogini symbolizes bliss. Thus, they also symbolize the union of emptiness and bliss.

According to Lord Jigten Sumgön, the deities' forms are the manifestation of emptiness-bodhicitta, which is the union of relative bodhicitta and ultimate bodhicitta.



In some representations, rather than depicting the full forms of Chakrasamvara and Vajravaraḥi in the center, they are indicated by their hand implements—the blue vajra, red skull cup, and blue vajra-hooked-knife—or by their seed syllables—HUNG and BAM—surrounded by HA-RI-NI-SA HUNG PHAT, the syllables of the four Heruka dakinis discussed below.

Around the innermost circle are eight lotus petals.



The petals in the four cardinal directions are red, symbolic of Vajrayogini's infinite bliss.

There are four red petals, symbolic of the four joys (Tib. *gawa shyi*) joy, supreme joy, special joy and innate joy.

On each petal is a vajra-hooked-knife with a blue blade to represent each of the four Heruka dakinis. The blue color symbolizes the emptiness aspect of the four Heruka dakinis, so the red and blue colors on the four petals of the cardinal directions again symbolize the nature of bliss and emptiness of the four Heruka deities.

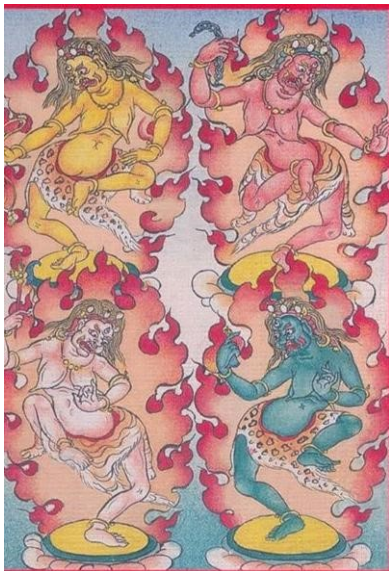


The four Heruka dakinis are Khandarohe (Tib. *Dumkyima*), Lamei (Tib. *Lama*), Rupini (Tib. *Suchenma*), and Dakini (Tib. *Khandro*). They symbolize the four foundations of mindfulness (body, feelings, mind, and phenomena) and the four immeasurables (loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity).

Together with Vajrayogini in the center, they are the five Vajra Heruka dakinis.



On each of the four petals in the intermediate directions is a vase (Tib. *bumpa*) topped with a skull cup filled with blood that transforms into wisdom nectar. As samsara is often said to be an “ocean of blood,” this symbolizes transforming the ocean of samsara into enlightenment through the practice of Chakrasamvara.



These four intermediate petals represent the four gatekeeper dakinis (Tib. *gomashi*) who guard the gates to the four lands of the Heruka families. They will be discussed below.

The familiar mantra DZA HUNG BAM HO also symbolizes these four gatekeeper dakinis, who hold a hook (DZA), a lasso (HUNG), a chain (BAM) and a bell (HO).

The two yellow petals represent the elements of fire and wind, which blow and burn the other elements in order to establish the complete mandala.

The green petal, which is the same color as the background of the central circle, symbolizes the ground of the mandala.

The blue petal symbolizes the seat of the empowerment deity (Tib. *Wangden*, in this case, of Chakrasamvara with consort), which is actually the seat of the five Dhyani Buddhas (Vairocana, Buddha Family; Aksobhya, Vajra Family; Ratnasambhava, Jewel (*Ratna*) Family; Amitabha, Lotus (Tib. *Padma*) Family; and Amoghasiddhi, Action (Tib. *Karma*) Family. The blue petal also symbolizes dharmakaya, or emptiness.



Surrounding the lotus petals is a protective layer of blue vajra hooked-knives with golden vajra handles, to symbolize the five Vajra Heruka dakinis' protection of the Secret Dakinis' Ear-whispering Lineage of the Chakrasamvara tantras (Tib. *dechok ningyu*).



Outside that, are the four lands of the Heruka families (Vajra, Jewel, Lotus and Action) with the four Heruka dakinis mentioned above. Along with Vajrayogini's land of the Buddha Heruka Family in the center, they comprise the five lands of the Heruka Families, which is also known as the "Mantra Mandala."

The four lands of the Heruka Families symbolize the four classes of tantra (Kriya, Charya, Yoga and Anuttarayoga), as well as the four stages/yogas of mahamudra (one-pointedness, simplicity/non-elaboration, one-taste and non-meditation).

Each Heruka family has its own color, own ground, a gate, and a balcony. At the entrance to each land is a large tall gate. These gates are known as the "Gates of the Four Heruka Families" or the "Gates of Nirvana" and they are protected by the four intermediate gatekeeper dakinis mentioned earlier. On top of each gate stands a golden Wheel of Dharma (tib. *dharmachakra*) accompanied by a golden deer on each side, resting and listening attentively to the Dharma teaching. Not only can human beings hear the Buddha's teachings, animals can also hear and benefit from the teachings.



In the front, the east, is the land of the Vajra Heruka Family, blue in color. It is associated with the water element, Buddha Askobya, Chakrasamvara, Vajrasattva, and the blue Vajra Heruka dakini named Dakini. This Heruka family represents

the mirror-like wisdom which reflects clearly whatever arises in samsara and nirvana. It is the purified form of the afflictive emotion of hatred or aggression. Water symbolizes clarity.

To the central deity's right, in the south, is the land of the Jewel Heruka Family, yellow in color. It is associated with the earth element, Buddha Ratnasambhava, and yellow Jewel Heruka dakini Rupini. This Heruka family represents the wisdom of equanimity, which is the purified form of the afflictive emotion of pride or arrogance.

Behind the deity, in the west, is the land of the Lotus Heruka Family, red in color. It is associated with the fire element, Buddha Amitabha, and red Lotus Heruka dakini Khandarohe. This Heruka Family represents discriminating-wisdom, which is the purified form of the afflictive emotion of desire, or attachment and miserliness. Those who have discerning wisdom know the essence of things, have the ability to discern things just as they are without confusion or prejudice, and can also discriminate among the 84,000 afflictive emotions. This Amitabha Pureland, also known as Sukhavati, symbolizes bliss, comfort, joy, and emptiness.

To the left, in the north, is the land of the Action Heruka Family, green in color. It is associated with the wind element, Buddha Amoghasiddhi, and green Action dakini Lamaei. It represents the all-accomplishing wisdom that accomplishes all the buddhas' activities to fulfill the wishes of all sentient beings. It is the purified form of the afflictive emotion of jealousy.



Outside the four Heruka Family Lands is a circular green region in which four big vajras of the four Heruka families symbolize the vajra ground of the four Heruka families.



Surrounding that is the circle of lotus petals that symbolizes clarity and purity, within which everything has the nature of purity free from any mental affliction or obscuration; all four obscurations—karmic, emotional, cognitive, and habitual—are purified.

The multiple colors of the lotus symbolize the seats of the buddhas and bodhisattvas.



Outside that is the circle of the indestructible vajra fence which forms the boundary of the protected, unshakable, indestructible ground of the mandala inside it.



Outside that vajra fence is a circle of the five-colored wisdom fires which extend out to the charnel grounds around the periphery. The fires are the border between samsara and nirvana, burning up the five mental poisons (ignorance, aversion, pride, attachment and jealousy) and the four obscurations (karmic, emotional, cognitive, and habitual) and transforming them into the five wisdoms (dharmadhatu, mirror-like, equanimity, discernment, and all-accomplishing). In other words, the five wisdom fires symbolize transforming samsara into nirvana.



Outside that wisdom fire is the outermost layer, a ring of holy charnel grounds known as the “Eight Great Charnel Grounds”—Gruesome in the east, Dense Wilderness in the north, Blazing Vajra in the west, Possessing Skeleton in the south, Auspicious Grove in the southeast, Extremely Obscure in the southwest, Uttering the Sound Kili Kili in the northwest, and Wild Laughter Ha Ha in the northeast. In addition, there are headless corpses, hanging corpses, corpses lying on the ground, corpses impaled on stakes, heads, skeletons, jackals, crows, owls, vultures, zombies, siddhas, yakshas, rakshas, pretas, flesh eaters, lunatics, bhairavas, dakas, dakinis, ponds, fires, stupas, and sadhakas. All of these fill the charnel grounds. Each charnel ground is surrounded by a pond. In this mandala, the Eight Charnel Grounds are represented by eight mahasiddhas, eight mountains, eight clouds, eight fires, eight stupas and eight ponds. The Eight Charnel Grounds remind us of samsara—its futility, impermanence, and transformation, as well as the courage and fearlessness required to make transformation possible. Everything in the charnel grounds is a manifestation of the five Heruka families and is used as skillful means to transform our samsaric mind to enlightened mind.

This very brief explanation of the mandala of the Five Deities of Chakrasamvara is just to give you some idea of its meaning. For those who want to meditate on the deities, it is very important to study with a qualified teacher in order to have a clear understanding of the generation stage (Tib. *kyerim*) and the

completion stage (Tib. *rdzogs rim*) of the outer mandala and the inner deity, as well as, how they correspond to stages in human development such as conception, birth, death, etc. In general, the generation stage begins with emptiness, then moves out from the center, building the mandala step by step; whereas in the dissolution stage, the mandala dissolves step by step from the periphery inwards to the center, finally dissolving into emptiness, the mahamudra state, which is beyond the mandala. All in all, the mandala is a manifestation of the enlightened Heruka families as a skillful means to transform our transitory existence of samsaric suffering into the innate, immutable blissful state of enlightenment through progressing on the path of purification and transformation step by step, layer after layer, as depicted in the mandala. This gives us the tremendous inspiration, courage, and confidence necessary to practice and follow the Dharma path diligently and sincerely.



For those who are interested, a three-dimensional Chakrasamvara Mandala at Drikung Rinchen Ling Monastery in Nepal can be seen here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pL5Cw6jypU>

May this be of benefit to all. SARVA MANGALAM

The text is transcribed by Ratnashri Meditation Center and edited by Kay Candler.