

The Explicit and Hidden Aspects of Tāra:

Commentary on the Twenty-One Praises to Tāra

By Jetsun Tāranātha



Translated and edited by Adele Tomlin

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TO BE READ ONLY BY THOSE WITH TĀRA AND KĀLACAKRA
EMPOWERMENTS

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Translator's Introduction

This is the first published English translation of the *Commentary on the Praises to the Twenty-One Tāras*, composed by Jonang, and Shangpa Kagyu, master Tāranātha (1575-1634)¹. The text gives a verse- by-verse explanation of both the explicit (or literal) meaning of the words of the commonly-recited *Praises to the Twenty-One Tāras*, as well as their hidden (or secret) meaning.

The Praises to the Twenty-One Tāras

The tantra known as the *Praises to the Twenty-One Tāras* is said to be spoken by the Buddha Samantabhadra, out of which arose the system of practice with twenty-one Tāra emanations - one for each verse of praise. Each form of Tāra has a specific colour and accomplishes a specific activity. There are said to be at least four 'twenty-one Tāra' traditions, those of Sūrya-Gupta (7th/8th cent.), Atīśa Dipaṃkara (982-1054), Longchen Rabjampa (1308-1363), and Terchen Chokgyur Lingpa (1829-1870). The latter three traditions are very similar in that the individual Tārās are described as varying only slightly in body colour and the emblems shown on the lotus flowers they hold. The two most well-known are the twenty-one Tāras according to the

Atīśa tradition, and the earlier, more complex, twenty-one Tāras according to the great Mahasiddha Sūrya-Gupta ². In the Atīśa system all the Tāras have the same basic appearance and only differ in the colour of the body. Green is considered the primary colour of Tāra based on other teaching lineages describing Tāra in solitary form or with the accompanying deities Marichi and Ekajati. However, green Tāra is not included in the enumeration of the Twenty-one Tāras of Atīśa. There are four red Tāras, six white, three yellow, four orange, two maroon (red-black) and two black Tāras for a total of twenty-one. Some of the Tāras are described as being slightly fierce, meaning they may have an open mouth with slightly enlarged canine teeth and furrowed brow above the eyes. The Mahasiddha Sūrya-Gupta lineage of the twenty-one Tāras is quite different from the Atīśa lineage in that each of the twenty-one Tāras is very distinctive in appearance and attributes and each Tāra has her own sadhana³. Tāranātha does not specify which tradition and visualisations he follows in this commentary. However, in his other commentary on the twenty-one Tāras (see below) he states that he is teaching the Atīśa tradition. Instruction on how to understand this text in greater detail should be sought from a qualified lama⁴.

Tāranātha and the twenty-one Tāras

Tāranātha was an expert scholar and practitioner on Tāra. He wrote several sadhanas and instruction texts about Tāra, and a historical text about the origin and history of the Tāra tantras, which has been translated and published in English by David Templeman⁵. In a recent article by Templeman, Tāranātha describes what happened when he met his Indian master teacher, Buddhaguptanātha⁶:

The ascetic told the young student of his own trans-oceanic travels to Potalaka, the abode of Avalokiteśvara, which was also believed to be the abode of the form of Tārā known as Bhṛkuṭī as well as being the actual residence of Tārā. The young Tāranātha requested Buddhaguptanātha for the yoga empowerments for Tārā, the root instructions for her practice as well as for the requisite blessings to permit him to commence them. He then had certain visionary dreams of Tārā and other deities who predicted that if he were to supplicate Avalokiteśvara until his twentieth year he would become a master of the caryā practices of Avadhūtipa and would as a result spread the Buddhist doctrine in various nearby lands, especially in Garzha (Gar zha) in the region of Zangskar (Tzangs dkar). Almost drily, Tāranātha observes that despite this dream prophecy of Tārā he never really put the necessary requirements into practice and therefore did not fulfil the prophecy.

Another famous text by Tāranātha, known as the *Ocean of Yidam Deities*⁷, contains the descriptions and short sādhanas for altogether four hundred and seventeen deities. Among them are forty-two aspects of Tārā⁸.

The commentary

There are three extant editions of this Tibetan commentary available online at TBRC. The main one I have used is in the *Collected Works of Tāranātha*, published in Beijing⁹. It is also contained in the other major editions of Tāranātha's *Collected Works*, under a different Tibetan title¹⁰. As far as I can see, there are no major differences between the texts, although I have not done a critical edition.

There is another Tāra commentary written by Tāranātha, on the definitive aspects of Tāra *The Ṭikā Commentary on the Definitive Characteristics of Noble Tāra*, which is found in the Beijing and Dzamthang editions of his *Collected Works*¹¹. In the colophon of this work, it states that it was composed by Tāranātha when he was thirty years old. This second commentary is very similar to the main commentary translated here, however, as there are slight differences or additional explanations, I have included them as annotations where relevant. In this second text, for example, Tāranātha refers to the 'hidden' meaning as 'definitive'.

The main section of the commentary (that is translated here) consists of a verse-by-verse explanation of the twenty-one Tāras, in terms of the explicit and hidden meaning. The text does not state when, or where, Tāranātha wrote the text and it is not clearly mentioned in his biographical material, according to scholar, David Templeman.

The Kālacakra six vajra-yogas and their connection to Tāra

In this commentary, within the explanations of the hidden meaning, Tāranātha refers to how the Tāra connects to the six vajra-yogas of Kālacakra¹². However, as he does not give the actual pith instructions on them, it would not be inappropriate for people to read it. Nonetheless, it is highly recommended to have the Tāra and/or Kālacakra empowerment, transmission and instruction before reading this text.

In the Kālacakra tradition, the completion stage consists of six vajra yogas. These practises involve the manipulation and control of the channels, winds and essential drops. By doing this, a practitioner can attain the fully enlightened vajra-body state of Kālacakra, or here Tāra, in one lifetime¹³. Deities are sambhogakhāya Buddhas and so, even though on the relative level they appear different with differing qualities and aspects, on the ultimate level they are inseparable from and are the embodiments of the ultimate Buddha, the Tathāgatagarbha.

Therefore, in that respect, all deity practices are leading to the same result.

When Tāranātha specifically refers to one of the vajra-yogas, I have included annotated references of some of the descriptions given by Tāranātha in his major root text on the Kālacakra preliminaries and six vajra-yogas, *Meaningful to See*¹⁴ and some of Jamgon Kongtrul the First (a devoted follower of Jonang Kālacakra and Tāranātha), in his *Treasury of Instructions: Book Eight, Part Four: Esoteric Instructions*.¹⁵

For Tāranātha, the Kālacakra six vajra-yogas are the pinnacle of all the tantras; all other advanced practices, whatever name they go by, include them. As he states at the beginning of his instructions on the six vajra-yogas in *Meaningful to See*¹⁶:

It is stated in the (Kālacakra) Mulatantra and in the Guhyasamaja UtTāratantra: "individual sense withdrawal, mental focus, wind control, retention, recollection and samadhi are held to be the six-branch yogas." Also, in the Cakrasamvaramulatantra, it is said: "Realization is achieved through mantra repetition, wind-control and bliss." Also, in Hevajra: "Contemplating the six branches, the yogin..." There are many other such comments. In brief, the six branches are: individual sense withdrawal, mental focus, wind control, retention, recollection and samadhi.

From the point of view of the yoga of the four vajras, individual sense withdrawal and mental focus are the yoga of body-vajra, wind control and retention are the yoga of

speech-vajra, recollection is the yoga of mind-vajra, and, samadhi is the yoga of awareness-vajra. From the point of view of the four-fold approach-accomplishment, individual sense withdrawal and mental focus are 'approach' (bsnyen pa), wind control and retention are 'near accomplishment' (nyer sgrub, also called 'close approach'), recollection is 'accomplishment', and, samadhi is 'great accomplishment'.

Here in this text too, according to Tāranātha, the practice of the hidden (or ultimate) aspects of the twenty-one Tāras, is a practice on the six vajra-yogas.

I received the direct oral transmission and instruction on the text from Jonang lama, Chokyi Nangwa Rinpoche in 2017. However, due to various obstacles and lack of harmonious and supportive conditions, the translation was unable to be completed until 2020. Thanks also to my sponsors, friends and supporters, in particular, Gonpo Jack, Louise, and the Khyentse Foundation. I apologise for any errors and dedicate any merit so that we may one day see all sentient beings as precious and worthy of our love and compassion, like our only child and thus attain the fully awakened state. Eternal thanks always to precious root lama, HH 17th Karmapa, Orgyen Trinley Dorje, for bringing me onto the Dharma path in 2005 and may all the obstacles facing him and Karma Kagyu be swiftly eliminated.

May it be of benefit!



Verse of Homage

Namo lokeshvaraya!

Goddess Liberator, who liberates all from samsara. Having paid homage with devotion, I will explain a little about the meaning of the *Praises to Tāra Tantra*. May all obstacles be pacified! In terms of this tantra, it is an excellent Yoga Tantra and more than that it is an Unsurpassable Highest Yoga Tantra¹⁷. From the six realms of beings, it is the supreme vajra chariot of royal cavalry. Furthermore, it is the tantra of the powerful, victorious, Tāra.

First Verse: Swift and Heroic

*Praise to Tāra! Swift heroine,
Whose eyes flash like lightning,
Born from the blooming lotus of
Avalokiteshvara, protector of the three-worlds.*

The first half of the verse should be understood as explained below. To whom does one ‘pay praise’? To the all-victorious liberator goddess, Tāra. Moreover, if one asks, what distinguishes her? It is a mind of great compassion, without duality, that swiftly benefits sentient beings. She is the ‘heroine’ who protects from all fears, dangers and fire and so on¹⁸, with the power and energy of unobstructed enlightened activity. Whose primordial awareness *eyes are like a flash of lightning*, swiftly moving, beholding and understanding all knowable phenomena. For that reason, Tāra the liberator is the one possessed with the enlightened activity who liberates all sentient beings from samsara. Likewise, she has knowledge, love, power and enlightened activity. Not only that, but she exemplifies having the power of all infinite good qualities. The goddess who possesses these qualities, was born from a blooming lotus sprung from the tears on the face of

Avalokiteshvara, protector of the three worlds. The translator Namkha Zangpo¹⁹ said: ‘born from the tears on the face of the protector of the three worlds. The Goddess arose from a blooming lotus’. I will rewrite this phrase in an easy way to understand that is not the literal meaning. The form body of Tāra arose from the Dharmakāya, the protector of the three-worlds²⁰.



Second Verse:

White as Autumn Moon

*Praise to Tāra! Whose face is like
A mass of hundreds of full autumn moons,
Blazing with expanding brilliant light of
A constellation of thousands of stars.*

This verse means a female with a beautiful, clean-clear face like a mass of radiant light which resembles a celestial constellation. Like the radiant light from an assembly of thousands of stars, a female possessing a form of expanding, blazing clear, radiant light. Her body is white, clear, transparent and extremely beautiful and ravishing, emanating white, brilliant rays of light.

The hidden meaning²¹ is: *hundreds of full autumn moons* are the stacked up unmoving bodhicitta from the jewel tip²² to the crown of the head. *A constellation of stars* means all the subtle channels and essential drops that are filled up with kunda²³.



Third Verse:

Golden-goddess of the six pāramitās

*Praise to Tāra! Golden goddess,
Hand adorned with a blue, water-born flower
Whose field of activity is generosity, effort, endurance,
Pacification, patience and mental focus.*

The *golden goddess, hand adorned with a water-born blue flower*²⁴, means you Goddess Tāra, who arose from generosity, effort, endurance, peace, patience and mental focus. You are the one who possesses all these six pāramitās and takes delight in them. In terms of the pāramitās, this is your, goddess Tāra's conduct.

The profound meaning is as follows: *water-born* is the secret lotus and *hand* means the vajra²⁵. The union of those two gives birth to the unchanging *effort, endurance* and bliss of *mental focus*. With the realisation of emptiness, the *wisdom* that has *pacified* thoughts, you never depart from *joyous effort*. From that comes the *patience* that is able to bear with calm equanimity all pleasure and suffering; and the *generosity* that is carried out without self-clinging. That is the teaching of this verse.

Fourth Verse:

Victorious Crown Pinnacle

*Praise to Tāra! Crown jewel of the Tathāgatas,
Whose victorious actions are infinite;
You attained the transcendent perfections, without
exception,
Revered and relied on by the Victor's heirs.*

Emanating brilliantly from the *crown jewel*²⁶ of the *Tathāgatas*²⁷. The one with infinite beneficial qualities, who is completely victorious over all unharmonious and difficult conditions and situations; who manifests as the primordial awareness knowledge mantra/female deity. The female practitioner, Tāra, with your positive deeds of the Samboghakāya (Enjoyment Body)²⁸, and with the knowledge mantra, you accomplish for beginningless sentient beings, without exception, the ten transcendent perfections²⁹. The *Victor's children* means those with the power of the tenth bodhisattva level.

The deep meaning is as follows: the descending and ascending levels of joy³⁰ are that which is called the glorious *Tathāgata* [One Gone Thus], and is that which 'goes thus' again and again [ascending and descending]. By dissolving the elements and the winds at the *crown jewel* pinnacle, one is

completely victorious over all infinite things worthy of being abandoned. The ten perfections are transformed into the ten winds³¹. The bodhisattva *Victors' heirs*, are transformed from the eye sense-spheres and so on, into primordial awareness³². This joined with the previous verse about the *full autumn moons* and so on, is the stage of *samādhi*³³.



Fifth Verse: Trampling Seven Worlds

*Praise to Tāra! Whose tuttāra and hūṃ
fills the desire realms and space in all directions;
trampling the seven worlds beneath your feet,
with the power to summon all.*

The sound of the letters *tuttāra* and *hūṃ* fills the *desire realms* means all the desire realms, and *space* means the form and formless realms; *all directions* means all the places in the worldly realms of the ten directions, become pervaded by, and full of, your activity. *The seven worldly realms* are trampled underneath you by the power of your stamping feet. With the great power and energy of your blessing of the knowledge mantra and so on, even the great worldly deities are enslaved and summoned to you by your power and abilities. What need is there to consider anything subtler or smaller! *The seven worlds* means the seven inanimate containers [outer environment] and seven animate contents [sentient beings]. There are many different ways of explaining the environment and beings combined together. However, here it means the seven worldly realms endowed with life-energy: the nāgas, hungry ghosts, demi-gods, humans, vidyadharas, kiṃnarass and worldly deities.

The hidden meaning is as follows: *tuttāra* means 'burning longing'. It is the sweltering longing of the fire of inner heat tummo. The letter *hūṃ* is the indestructible sound, which arises from the inner heat tummo. *Desire realm* means the place of the secret chakra; *all directions* means the inner central channel becomes filled completely with sound; the *space* becomes completely full with the inexpressible mantra. The *seven worldly realms* are the five root chakras and the two chakras of fire and wind, the burning of the inner heat melts the seven and completely fills them with *kunda*. This kunda, without leaving any residue, ascends again from the secret chakra and is brought back up to the top of the crown.



Sixth Verse:

Praised by All the Gods

*Praise to Tāra! Whom Indra, Agni, Brahma,
Vahyu and the other mighty gods worship.
Before whom, the hosts of evil spirits, zombies,
gandharvas and yakshas respectfully offer praise.*

*Indra*³⁴ means the king of all the gods. *Agni*³⁵, the fire god means the chief of all the sages. *Brahma*³⁶, is the creator of all worldly desires. The wind god, *Vāyu*³⁷, is in particular, the creator and maker of the worldly realms. Wrathful ones, those that desire to take the wealth of another, the sages with magical powers who can block the sun, prognostics and so on, the renowned rulers, these various rulers and Sovereigns. All these greatest of the renowned also make offerings and praise. *Evil spirits* (jungpo) means all the lords of the feast and so on, obstructing spirits and obstacles that lead one in the wrong direction. *Zombies* (rolang) are those who do the work of raising dead spirits; the name is given to that activity. *Yakshas* (cannibal spirits), those with the power of mantras, those endowed with great magical powers, the nine yamantakas³⁸, odour-eaters³⁹, gods, demons and those difficult to tame and so on, offer praise and reverence in front of you, the goddess Tāra. All sentient beings offer you, the teacher, praise.

The hidden meaning is as follows. The phrase *Indra* and so on, these five gods are the five elements. *Indra* means earth; *Agni*, the fire god is fire; *Brahma* is water; the wind god is wind; 'the various rulers' are space. In that way, the winds of the five elements dissolve into the essential drops, this is the *respectfully offering praise*. The *evil spirits* are the nadi channels. The *zombies* are the essential drops. The *odour-eaters* are the winds. The *yakshas* are conceptual thoughts. The dissolution of all these into the essential drops is the *offering and praise to you*. Doing this demonstrates the stage of *retention*⁴⁰.



Seventh Verse:

Destroying Adversaries

*Praise to Tārā! Whose trat and phat,
completely destroy adversaries' magic circles.
Right leg bent, left outstretched, pressing down,
Blazing with a fierce and raging fire.*

The mantra *TRAT and PHAT* and so on, are the knowledge mantras of Noble Liberator, Tāra. By the power and energy of her fierce and wrathful activities, she transforms all the various enemies and obstructing spirits. Furthermore, in order to benefit others, she tames the difficult to tame. This is not the application, or practice, of harmful violence. In particular, with the knowledge mantra she completely conquers the *magic circles (trulkhor) of adversaries*, with the force and power of the mantra. She is a wrathful, fierce female manifestation. *With right leg bent and left outstretched* and so on, wicked, evil-doers are trampled on. Infectious diseases, plagues and epidemics and so on are pacified and through the agitated, fiery body of the inner heat tummo - fierce, wrathful woman, *blazes with a fierce and raging fire*. Expelling the Lord of Death⁴¹ and so on, and providing great protection to all sentient beings.

The hidden meaning is as follows. *TRAT* tears open and *PHAT* cracks apart, conquering all conceptual thoughts. External

negative forces, the *magic circles* of the afflictive mental states, means the juncture (unions) of the twelve winds are blocked/halted. The right main channel is looking upwards [red essence is ascending]. The left channel is looking downwards [white descending]. These two channels are then completely pressed into the central channel at the base. The winds of these two channels are then halted in the central channel. As a result, the tummo inner heat fire blazes and the letter HŪṂ melts like water, becoming agitated and excited and even more intensely hot and blazing, which causes greater melting and so on. This is the stage of *vital energy control* (prāṇāyāma).⁴²



Eighth Verse:

Slaying all Enemies and Demons

*Praise to Tāra! Extremely fearsome lady,
Whose TURE totally destroys hosts of 'demons'⁴³,
with the wrathful look on your lotus-face
Slayer of all enemies without exception.*

From the naturally peaceful expanse, the one with the power of reciting the mantra OM TURE, Tāra manifests as extremely fearsome. *Destroys hosts of demons* means like an army general, she conquers and destroys them. *With the wrathful look on your lotus face*, she slays all enemies, those who wish to cause harm to many sentient beings, and hostile and malignant forces. She also eliminates harmful thoughts and intentions, and death.

The inner meaning is the heroine destroyer of the 'demons', the one whose conduct is victorious over all. The *wrathful look* symbolises one who is included among the deities, exemplifying one who is a primordial awareness (jñanakāya) form being. Since she is the non-dual primordial awareness of bliss-emptiness, which manifests in order to frighten all those pitiful ones, she is the *extremely fearsome lady*. With both the primordial awareness and the primordial awareness body, she conquers, without exception, all the enemies, the obscurations. TURE means by following the swift path, one attains complete

enlightenment. This is the result of the stage of samādhi of *total illumination*⁴⁴ and so on until the twelfth bhūmi level.



Ninth Verse:

‘Three-Jewel’ Mudrā

*Praise to Tāra! Whose fingers perfectly adorn your heart,
with mudrā symbolizing the three precious jewels,
adorned with a wheel of all directions,
whose radiant light, without exception, outshines all.*

The *three precious jewels* are illustrated by the form of the uptala flower, which is the mudrā of Tāra’s commitment⁴⁵. *Whose fingers perfectly adorn your heart* means cupped hand, the middle finger up and index finger joined from behind touch the top of the thumb up touching the root of the index fingers, arranged and directed towards the heart centre. If all disciples also hold this hand mudrā of commitment while doing this ritual, it bestows the blessing of the knowledge mantra goddess, as it is similar to the physical expressions of previous victorious goddesses. *Adorned with a wheel of all directions* means a mass of radiant, sparkling, extremely exciting light radiates out to the Buddha realms of all the ten directions; *without exception*, means emanates a radiant light that pervades and shines on everything. For the disciple, the mudrā invitation manifests radiant light rays from the realms of the ten directions and actual manifestation.

The hidden meaning is as follows. The example of the *three precious jewels* means the seminal fluids of the man,

woman⁴⁶and wind energy. Those three unify together, like the mudrā of the three fingers, all these three are bound at root chakra heart centre. At the navel essence drop inside the central channel, from the inner heat tummo of the primordial awareness body, radiant rays of light stream out and pervade all directions. Through the power/force of holding this dissolution, the *recollection*⁴⁷ stage is generated.



Tenth Verse

Joyful Laughter 'Tuttāre'

*Praise to Tāra! Whose joyful and shining
crown ornament radiates a garland of light,
conquering the demons and all worldly gods,
with mocking, extremely joyful laughter 'Tuttāre'*

The one with utterly joyful form for wanderers, whose brilliantly sparkling and beautiful jewel *crown ornament* is a garland of brilliant light that expands and radiates outwards. The words *mocking* and *extremely joyful* laughter mean with the mantra sound of OM TUTTĀRE, she forcefully overcomes all the demons, worldly gods and beings. With her power she brings under control all the worldly realms and establishes them in liberation and omniscience.

The hidden meaning is as follows: brilliantly shining, radiant light of innately spontaneous absolute joy, adorns the crown of her head. It is the innate joy that descends from the top of the head. The sound of laughter and utterly joyful laughter is the fire of the inner heat tummo. TUTTĀRE means the burning longing of the inner heat fire. The demons of lust, concepts and the three worldly body, speech and mind are blessed and empowered by the great bliss of primordial awareness. This is the stage of *recollection*⁴⁸

Eleventh Verse:

Summoner of Beings 'Hūṃ'

*Praise to Tāra! Able to summon
all local earth protectors and their retinue;
frowning and shaking with the letter 'Hūṃ',
liberating all impoverished from misfortune.*

The goddess with her mantra, is the one who has the power to *summon*⁴⁹ and bring under her control the retinue of the kings of the *local earth protectors*, the earth goddesses, the nāgas⁵⁰ who live underground, the demi-gods and vidyadharas and dākinīs, this whole assembly. *Frowning and shaking* means the frowning goddess with the energy force of the letter HŪṂ. She who liberates and pacifies, without exception, the suffering of poverty and destitution of all impoverished sentient beings; she expands and increases the siddhis of great treasures and auspicious and abundant resources.

The hidden meaning is as follows: The earth protectors and rulers of the underground, means the atomic, essential energy⁵¹ that is 'summoned' by stabilising the essential luminous energy from the crown until the jewel tip. The terms *frowning and shaking* HŪṂ means the *frowning and shaking* essential energy of the moon that is stabilised at the essential drop at the point between the eyebrows until the crown of the head. *Liberating*

all impoverished means the samādhi such as the ‘Sky-Treasury’⁵² and so on.

This is the stage of *samādhi* that is characterised by halting the upwards and downwards flow of the white and red elements⁵³.



Twelfth Verse

Eternally Radiating Light

*Praise to Tāra! Crowned with sliver of moon,
all adornments blazing brightly.*

*Amitabha [infinite light] at matted topknot
eternally radiating bright, shining light.*

*Sliver*⁵⁴ *of moon* means an ornament that is part moon. Also, all the other ornaments are blazing with radiant light. She is the one who vanquishes the arrogant conceit of one billion great lords of the nāgas⁵⁵. Who sometimes manifests in the form of an ascetic hermit, with matted dreadlocked topknot, in the centre of which resides Tathāgata, Amitabha [Infinite Light].. The one who eternally, without interruption, radiates intense, bright light; this illuminating light making all luminously clear.

The hidden meaning is about that which is radiated above. The *crowned with sliver of moon* is the stabilised [white] bodhicitta at the top of the head. The *matted topknot* is the stabilised 'shadow' at the top of the head. *Amitabha* means the 'red' essential element. From these two, *continually radiates intense bright light*, means the white and red elements transform into the infinite chakra wheel of the empty-form mahamudrā mandala⁵⁶.

Thirteenth Verse:

Aeon-Ending Fire

*Praise to Tāra! Residing in the centre of a halo
blazing like an aeon-ending fire,
right leg extended, left drawn in,
fully circulating with joy, defeating hordes of enemies.*

The term *aeon-ending fire* means residing in the centre of a massive garland of fire which incinerates a universe⁵⁷. Within that is completely immaculate joy that is unperturbable. With right leg extended, left drawn in, *circulating* with wrathful poses and movements, these manifold displays are *joyful*. *Enemies* means the hordes of human and non-human harm-doers are totally defeated.

The hidden meaning is as follows: the fire of the primordial awareness, inner heat tummo is like an *aeon-ending fire*; the cause of the pervasive origin of appearance and the body. *Right leg extended and left drawn in, fully circulating with joy* means the right and left channel and the upward and downward movement of the 'life-force' and 'downward cleansing winds'⁵⁸ is fully circulating within them. The dissolution of the five elemental sources⁵⁹ in each of the individual main energy chakras is the source of the manifestation of the manifold display. With *joy* means the wind energies transform into the

bliss of the essential drops; *defeating hordes of enemies* means abandoning the 'demons' of afflictive mind-states.



Fourteenth Verse:

Wrathful, frowning Hūṃ

*Praise to Tāra! Who on the ground's surface
Beats with palms and stamps with feet,
wrathfully grimacing with Hūṃ,
destroying all seven worlds into dust.*

She smashes down with her palms and stamps with her feet, on the surface of the vast ground surface of the realm of Mount Meru. Her expression is wrathfully grimacing through the force of her fury. With the fearsome sound of HŪṂ, the seven underground abodes of nāga serpents, demi-gods, raksha spirits, hungry ghosts and poisonous ones, are destroyed⁶⁰ and all shattered into pieces. The words, *seven underground worlds*, means below the great ground base are the seven innermost

levels of a huge abode of non-humans. Some say that the peak of Mount Meru holds them in a crevice there below the surface, but this is not well-evident. One should know them as the ground, the ground above, without ground, the ground itself, the ground container, the excellent ground and the pure ground. These are the underground levels of the enormous, worldly cosmos.

The hidden meaning is: the *ground surface* is the navel chakra. The fire of the primordial awareness tummo is the *stamping feet* of the definitive goddess, and the *hands smashing down* are its tongues of fire. Moreover, the meaning of the *seven underground worlds* is at the lower end of the central channel, like an emanation of the 'fire of Bhrama', is a coil wound round seven times. It abides there blazing intensely. When the bodhicitta comes down to the blazing tummo heat, it completely pacifies the burning longing of the fire.; conquering and *destroying* these *seven roots*.⁶¹



Fifteenth Verse:

Blissful, virtuous and peaceful

*Praise to Tāra! Blissful, virtuous, and peaceful,
Whose field of activity is 'gone beyond suffering'.
Perfectly endowed with OM and SVAHA
Completely obliterating horrendous acts.*

This verse means the Bhagavati is eternally *blissful*, *virtuous and peaceful*; the supreme peace of 'nirvana'; '*gone beyond suffering*'. The one whose meditative equipoise on the expanse of the truth of cessation, embodies the field of activity of peace. Therefore, she is the one who brings bliss to wanderers in this life and generates virtue in them for the sake of the next life. She is the one who shows the path of peace to the fortunate ones. The one who establishes them in the field of activity of the sacred peace of the result of the non-abiding nirvana. Also, she is the goddess who chants the knowledge mantra, whose *perfect* recitation SVAHA and OM, *completely obliterates horrendous acts* and the vast suffering that is their result. Repelling those before with TRAT and slaughtering after with PHAT, transforms other activities.

The definitive, ultimate meaning is as follows: *blissful* means the primordial awareness of *individual sense withdrawal*⁶², *virtuous* means mirror primordial awareness, *peaceful* means

equality primordial awareness. The peace of *having gone beyond* means the expanse primordial awareness. The *completely obliterating horrendous acts* is the primordial awareness that accomplishes actions⁶³. The invincible sound of the knowledge mantra of OM and SVAHA exemplifies the dawning of infinity. Conqueror of negative actions and so on, means accomplishing the result for the benefit of sentient beings.



Sixteenth Verse:

Ten Syllables Destroying Enemies

*Praise to Tāra! Who completely immersed in joy
totally destroys the bodies of enemies.*

*The saviouress arisen from the rigpa HŪṂ
from the array of sounds of the ten-syllable mantra.*

Completely immersed in joy, means the one with the mind of total joy of the meditative equipoise of a bodhisattva and accomplished vidyadhara. The one who shatters into pieces and *totally destroys the bodies of enemies* who harm and do negative actions, such as the lords of those with power over other emanations and horrific evil-doers. The *ten syllable mantra* means: You, the goddess who arises from the *arrayed mantra*; *rigpa* means the embodiment of the blazing brilliant light lamp that arises from the rigpa mantra, letter HŪṂ. Therefore, it is taught that the ten-syllable mantra that approaches the HŪṂ seed syllable is that of wrathful Tāra.

The ultimate meaning is as follows: the brilliant light of the mahāmudrā empty-form is the unchanging bliss of being *completely immersed in joy*. *Bodies of enemies* means defeating those forms whose appearances are impure. This is the stage of *meditative stability*⁶⁴. *The ten-syllables* means the ten signs of

attainment⁶⁵ that come from halting parts of the ten chakras in the left and right [channels].



Seventeenth Verse: Stamping Feet TURE

*Praise to Tāra! TURE, whose stamping feet
And seed syllable HŪṂ
Cause Mount Meru, Mandara, Kailash
And the three worlds to shake.*

TURE means 'the swift one'. She is the goddess whose activity is swift for the benefit of others. Wrathfully stamping her two feet, causes Mount Meru, Mandara and Kailash to shake. These mountains are the abode of the powerful ones, such as Mahesvara⁶⁶ and others. Tāra causes those, and the *three worlds*, (underground, on the ground and above the ground)⁶⁷, to shake.

In most Tibetan texts, 'bigje' means Mount Meru. In this text, if one looks at the Sanskrit, it appears as Kailasha⁶⁸. Therefore, saying 'snow mountain' is compatible with that, even though there are various examples. Since it is difficult to definitely identify it as one, it is not contradictory to see them as like both.

The aspect of HŪṂ means HŪṂ KARA. The second meaning of *the three worlds*, is that the seven syllables make these three main ones shake and tremble. If one asks what is the object of 'causing the three worlds to shake and tremble'? Generally,

even though the three worlds are shaken, as the abodes of the extremely powerful gods, in particular, are unmoving yet still part of existence, it means the noble lady has even greater power to move them.

The hidden meaning is: *Mount Meru* means the 'Brahma lineage' (central channel)⁶⁹. The other two mountains means the heart nadi channel and the lower part of the central channel⁷⁰. *Shakes* means completely filling up with bodhicitta. The *three worlds* means dividing those three roots (the heart, navel and central channel) into three, that makes six. The HŪṂ is the mind vajra in the *avadhūti* (central channel); all the nadi roots dissolve into that seed syllable there.



Eighteenth Verse:

HARA and PHET Poison-Eliminator

*Praise to Tāra! Who holds in her hand
the' hare-shaped' moon⁷¹, like a divine lake.
Cleansing all poisons without exception
With twice-said HARA and then PHAT.*

Divine lake, means the 'Lake Mānsarova', or resembling a pool that has the aspect of being relaxed and gently-flowing. She is the one who has the knowledge mantra HARA, spoken twice. Finally, with the mantra support of PHAT, she eliminates, without exception, the poisons of the animate and inanimate. To illustrate that, one meditates that her form eclipses the moon. By recitation of the distinctive mantra, she eliminates and cures the poisons of snakes and so on. As for the mantra HARA, that is said twice: *Om nama tare mo hare hūṃ hare sva ha*. And then at the end, *sarva bidza zharinya du ru phat* is labelled the mantra from the wrathful Tāra that eliminates poison. That is the meaning of the final sentence.

The definitive meaning is as follows. *Divine* means the body's elements. *The lake* is the spontaneously present bliss, the stabilised *kunda*. The primordial awareness of emptiness which is inseparable from that, is like the moon, stainless. Over what does she have mastery? That is the meaning of what she

holds in her hand, mastery of the inseparable bliss-emptiness. HARA means 'to rob' [or take away]; by reciting it twice, she robs our faults and negativities of the two obscurations. Conquering and destroying the *poison* of an impure body.



Nineteenth Verse:

Disputes and Nightmares Eliminator

*Praise to Tāra! Whom the assemblies of divine-Kings
Gods and Kiṃnaras rely upon.*

Who eliminates disputes and nightmares

With a vast armour of joy and splendour.

This verse, *the assemblies of divine kings* means the six classes of gods of the desire realm⁷². Likewise, *kings* means the wheel-turning masters of this world (*cakravartins*) and so on. In particular, the mountain gods, forest gods and goddesses of the oceans and so on, these are divine. The powerful *Kiṃnaras* and so on, bow respectfully at your lotus-feet. Oh goddess, praise Tāra, the blessing of your mantra speech, the vast armour the cause of bliss and joy, accomplishes by embracing all. Eliminating all bad dreams, external disputes and discord with her majestic body, speech and mind. Here, *armour* means protection.

The definitive meaning is as follows: *Divine* means Bhagha the primordial-awareness 'body' (jñānakaya) arises from the body. *Assembly* describes the primordial-awareness 'body', endowed with the completely pure ten aggregates and elements⁷³. Since that itself is the Master of the Vidhyadharas, she is worthy of praise of the three worlds. The *gods and*

kiṃnaras rely upon her means that with the majestic glory of the binding of the unchanging assembly, she conquers the 'disputes', which means separated from attachment and the ordinary appearances of bad dreams.



Twentieth Verse:

TĀRA TUTTĀRE Disease eliminator

*Praise to Tāra! Whose two eyes shine fully
with the brilliant light of sun and moon.*

Whose twice-spoken TĀRA and TUTTĀRE

Clearing away the most powerful diseases.

Her two eyes are like the brilliant light of the sun and moon, that see clearly like an outer blazing light, that sees fully the aspects of all wanderers. Establishing all suffering wanderers of the lower realms into bliss. Whose *twice-spoken TĀRA and TUTTĀRE* cures extremely powerful diseases and plagues, without exception. Whose ten-syllable mantra pacifies disease, severs contagious epidemics and protects from infection.

The main meaning is this. Reciting the ten syllables, she pacifies, without exception, the afflictions, such as intense. powerful diseases. As for *whose two eyes are the brilliant light of the sun and moon*: the right eye scares away all troubles and distress, like the sun's brilliant light incinerates suffering and negativities. The left eye's light bestows bliss, resources and long life; like the light of the moon's joyful nectar. Twice-recited HĀRA means, as was said before, within the twice TARE and TUTTARE identified as that of the ten-syllable mantra. Thus, the mantra, *om tāre tuttāre ture svaha* is widely renowned. It is the

mantra of the approach, accomplishment and activities⁷⁴ of peaceful Tāra.

The hidden meaning is as follows: the *sun and moon* means blood and semen. Her eyes, which are full of that, means those two substances⁷⁵ of the upper and lower central channel. Since the primordial awareness comes out of [practising with] those, it says the *brilliant light clears away*. Twice-recited HĀRA means liberates, thus the union bliss-emptiness liberates from the extremes of peace and existence. TUTTĀRE means the tortuous longing of ascetic discipline. The ascetic discipline of the sun energy pulling down and drawing out the moon energy at the crown protuberance. This unchanging discipline that moves the essential drops is the *clears away the most powerful diseases*.



Twenty-first Verse

Brilliant, Vast Light.

*Praise to Tāra! Truly possessing the power to pacify
With the arrayed three natural states.*

*Destroyer of hosts of evil spirits,⁷⁶ yaskhas and zombies,
TURE, completely supreme one.*

There are four meanings, the *word meaning*, the *general meaning*, the *hidden meaning* and the *ultimate meaning*. First, *the three natural states* are ‘emptiness’, ‘devoid of characteristics’ and ‘free of intention’. By establishing the disciples in the authentic mind itself, like that, all harms are conquered via these three doors of liberation.⁷⁷ This is done by means of the completely supreme TURE mantra. Also, TURE means swift one. ‘O supreme goddess, destroyer of evil spirits’; if we translate the meaning of this it means, the completely supreme one who swiftly destroys.

Second, the general meaning is as follows. Within the mental focus that generates the form of Tāra the Liberator, one arranges the three syllables in the three places (means the *array of the three natural states*). *Pacify* means who supremely protects against obstacles and whose oral instructions also protect *against harm from the evil spirits* and so on.

Third, the hidden meaning is as follows: the *three natural states* illuminate and expand to full attainment. The *array* of those states gradually arises and all the four moments comes closer to the luminous clarity-emptiness. *Evil spirits* means the channels, *zombies* means essential drops, *yakshas*⁷⁸ means conceptual consciousnesses. These all become *destroyed* in the expanse of the luminous-clarity. *Completely supreme one* means the form of the deity swiftly arises. That kind of awareness, from the luminous clarity of the brilliant light lamp, completely reveals and completely realises the union and reveals the two extremes.

Finally, in terms of the definitions of these words, in our tradition of the Guhyasamaja teachings of Nāgārjuna⁷⁹ they also state that for the explanation of the ultimate meaning, one should understand the hidden meaning. Fourth, the ultimate meaning. The *three natural states* are the vajra body, speech and mind. They are the primordial array of the nature of all phenomena. Since the primordial nature is completely pure, by meditating on the path, it *truly possesses the power to attain peace*. By the meditative equipoise on the ultimate expanse inseparable from the three vajras, the *suffering of the harms of evil spirits* and so on, the work of *yakshas* and demons, those afflictions are swiftly destroyed. *Completely supreme* means completely one with the primordial awareness of the spontaneously present great bliss.

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¹ Although this text, and some of the teachings contained within it, are indirectly referred to in DONGYAL and SHERAB (2007), they do not provide a reference for, or direct translation of, the text nor its connection to the six Vajra-yogas. They also do not appear to have had the lineage transmission of the text from a qualified Jonang or Kalacakra lineage master.

² Thomas Roth says (2009): “According to Tāranātha, Sūrya-Gupta was born in present day Kashmir. A Mahāsiddha who practiced and accomplished Tārā for seven consecutive lifetimes, he was a contemporary of such masters as Śāntideva, Candrakīrti, and Candragomin, another important master in the various transmission lineages of the Tārā tantras and practices.” <https://jonangfoundation.org/blog/21-t%C4%81r%C4%81s-s%C5%ABrya-gupta>

³ For an extensive description of the twenty-one Taras according to the Sūrya-Gupta lineage, see the post: ‘The 21 Tārās of Sūrya-Gupta’ by Thomas Roth (2009), see citation above.

⁴ Martin Willson in his book, *In Praise of Tārā* (1992), traces many different lineages of Tārā Tantras, Tārā scriptures used as Tantric sadhanas. Willson's work also contains charts which show origins of her tantras in various lineages. Tārā as a tantric practice quickly spread from around the 7th century CE onwards.

⁵ *Origin of the Tāra Tantra* by Jetsun Tāranātha, tr. David Templeman (LTWA, 2007).

⁶ Buddhaguptanātha, an Indian tantric master, (16th century) was one of the main teachers of Tāranātha. His life was recorded in extensive

detail by Tāranātha who wrote his biography around the year 1601. Tāranātha's work is almost entirely devoted to his journeys across South and Southeast Asia and the many miraculous events that he experienced. Tāranātha presents the narrative as a faithful account of the events as told him by Buddhagupta himself. For more on his life, see TEMPLEMAN (1997) and the *Treasury of Lives* biography.

⁷ *Yi dam rgya mtsho'i sgrub thabs rin chen 'byung gnas* often called *Rinjung* for short.

⁸ For an English translation of these different descriptions, see the post by Thomas Roth (2009) at <https://jonangfoundation.org/blog/tāranātha's-descriptions-tārā>

⁹ See: *Collected Works by Tāranātha*, Peking edition, (Jo nang rje btsun tA ra nA tha'i gsung 'bum, dpe bsdur ma/), vol. 24, pp.71-94, 2008. TBRC W1PD45495.

¹⁰ The same text, which is titled, *Explanation of Tāra (sgrol ma'i 'grel pa/)* is found in the Dzamthang edition, Vol. 12, pp. 573-603; and in the Tagten Phunthsog Ling edition (rtag brtan phun tshongs gling gi par ma/), Vol. 12, pp.565-594.

¹¹ *'phags ma'i sgrol ma'i mtshan nges pa'i Tik+ka 'grel pa rnams kyi lugs su sbyar ba*, in the Peking edition, Vol. 42, pp. 39-53, TBRC W1PD45495 and Dzamthang edition, pp.545-563, TBRC W22276. In the Introduction to this text, Tāranātha states that:

Here the definitive characteristics of the renowned essence of the source of the Tāra tantras, is that of the tradition of the Twenty-One Tāras of great master, Dipamkara Shri Jnana (Atisha). Atisha himself, made a concise summary of his extensive explanations of the tantra. This is that together

extended with some other explanations taught by lamas. In relation to that, there are three teachings: the explanation of the meaning of the *Praises to the Twenty-One Tāras*, the application [training] of the definitive characteristics and the number of characteristics. From among those three, first, if one speaks of a word by word commentary, since there are many, I will roll it up into the essence.

I have only translated the first of these three: the explanation of the word for word meaning, for the purposes of this text.

¹² Six vajra-yogas (ṣaḍaṅga-yoga, *sbyor drug*). These are the completion stage practices according to the Kālacakra system. The six yogas are:

1. *so sor sdud pa* – individual sense withdrawal (pratyāhara)
2. *bsam gtan* - mental focus (dhyāna)
3. *srog rtsol* - wind control (prāṇāyāma)
4. *'dzin pa* – retention (dharāṇā)
5. *rjes dran* – recollection (anusmṛiti)
6. *ting nge 'dzin* – samādhi (samādhi)

¹³ For more on this see DHARGYEV (1998) and TOMLIN (2019a and b). The recently passed scholar-translator, Edward Henning, also gave some detailed descriptions of the six vajra-yogas on his website, www.kalacakra.org and in his article 'The Six Vajra Yogas' (see HENNING 2009).

¹⁴ *Meaningful to See (mThong ba don ldan)* is an important text by Tāranātha, and is still used by the Jonang and other traditions when teaching the Kālacakra six vajra-yogas. Unpublished translations of this short, root text have been completed by Cyrus Stearns and

Edward Henning. I have now also translated this text and the much larger supplementary commentary to it, *A Hundred Blazing Lights*. Both texts will be published together in the near future. The edition I have used here is the Peking edition (2008), see *Zab lam rdo rje'i rnal 'byor gyi khrid yig mthong ba don ldan/* in *gsung 'bum/_tA ra nA tha/ (dpe bsdur ma/)*, Volume 7, pp. 33 – 138, TBRC W1PD45495.

¹⁵ See HARDING (2007).

¹⁶ See *mThong ba don ldan* (2008), p22.

¹⁷ Generally there are four classes of tantra (*rgyud sde bzhi*). Three outer classes: Action (Kriya) Tantra (*bya brgyud*), Performance (Charya) Tantra (*spyod brgyud*) and Yoga Tantra (*rnal 'byor brgyud*); and one inner class of tantra, Anuttarayoga Tantra, or Highest Yoga Tantra (*rnal 'byor bla na med pa'i rgyud*). Out of these four classes of tantra, Tāranātha is explaining that Tāra is not only included in the third class of Yoga tantra but also in the Highest Yoga Tantra.

¹⁸ The eight fears are 1) danger of pride and from lions, 2) danger of torpor and from elephants, 3) danger of anger and blazing fire, 4) danger of jealousy and poisons of snakes, 5) violence of false view and of thieves, 6) danger of insatiable greed and imprisonment, 7) danger of desire and waters, 8) danger of doubts and demons. The sixteen fears are the fear of the five elements (earth quakes, floods, wind, fire and fear of space), fear of weapons, tyrannous authority, criminals, spirits, elephants, wild animals, poisonous animals, sickness, accidents and untimely death, poverty and frustrations of hopes and plans.

¹⁹ Lotsawa Namkha Zangpo (*lo tsā ba nam mkha' bzang po*), is said to have taught the *Mirror of Poetry* (*snyan ngag me long*) to Je Tsongkhapa at Bodong Monastery. He was also the student of

Kālacakra lineage holder. The *Blue Annals*, Chapter Ten, mentions him in the account of the Kālacakra lineages and history:

The lo tsā ba nam mkha' bzang po, the son of yu mo and student of byang chub rtse mo had a student named dpal 'jigs med grags pa. dpal 'jigs med grags pa was the teacher of two other important scholars rnam rgyal grags pa and bsod nams rnam par rgyal ba. bsod nams rnam par rgyal ba is noted for composing a seven volume commentary on the Vimalaprabhā, (a famous commentary on Kālacakra).

²⁰ In the *Tika*, Tāranātha states about the definitive meaning:

That is not the explicit, literal meaning, as it teaches the result. The literal meaning is “liberates’ from samsara with ‘swift’ activity.

²¹ The Tibetan term is *sbas don*, Tāranātha uses the word ‘hidden’ not ‘ultimate’ here, even though it is referring to the inner aspects of Tāra, it is not ultimate because it is still involving mental focus on objects of the mind. The ultimate meaning goes beyond concepts, objects and so on. However, in the *Tika* commentary, Tāranātha uses the word ‘definitive meaning’ (*nges don*) for similar explanations of the Tāras.

²² The Tibetan term, *nor bu* here means peak tip of the penis.

²³ The Tibetan term, *kun da* is the Sanskrit word for jasmine, but here refers to white seminal fluid. With the inner heat tummo and tsa lung practises, bodhicitta refers to the white seminal element at the top of the crown.

²⁴ It is not always clear from some translations of the Praises to Tāra if the word blue refers to a golden-blue Tāra or a golden Tāra holding a

blue lotus. In the *Tika* Commentary, Tāranātha makes it clear that is is a golden goddess holding a blue lotus. He says:

The literal meaning is, the golden one who holds a blue lotus in her hand and who has completed the six paramitas. (sgra ji bzhin pa ni/gser gyi yu ba can gyi pad+ma sngon po phyag na bsnam pa dang/_phar phyin drug rdzogs pa'o/_/)

²⁵ These terms are referring to the secret place/vagina of a woman and penis of the man.

²⁶ The Tibetan term for crown pinnacle is *gtsug tor*: this term means *ushnisha*, the protuberance on head of a buddha, one of the thirty-two major marks.

²⁷ Tathāgata (*de bzhin gshegs pa*) translated as the 'One Gone Thus'. It refers to the Buddha Nature, which according to the empty-of-other view (*gzhan stong*) followed by Tāranātha and the Jonang tradition, is continually present at all times as the ultimate nature of our mind. In the *Tika* commentary, Tāranātha refers more the subtle essence (*dwang ma*) and states that:

The Tathāgata means the subtle essence of the five aggregates completely dissolve into the crown top and the assembly of the winds and the male and female seminal essences. Victorious over all the conventional phenomena. Thus, since she has discovered the Buddha body, the great Bodhisattvas also praise her. (de bzhin gshegs pa ste/_phung po lnga yi dwangs ma gtsug tor du yongs su thim pas khu rdul rlung gi tshogs pa zhig pa'i phyr/_kun rdzob kyi chos thams cad las rnam par rgyal

bas/_des ni sangs rgyas kyi sku brnyes pa'i phyir rgyal
sras chen pos kyang mchod pa'o/)

²⁸ Sambhogakāya (*sambhogakāya; longs sku*) is defined as a 'form body' (*rupakāya*) of a buddha, which appears only to bodhisattvas and is the basis for the arising of the nirmanakāya. It is adorned with the major signs and minor marks. It is one of the four kāyas (Skt. *catuḥkāya; sku bzhi*) are the: 1) dharmakāya (*chos kyi sku*), 2) sambhogakāya (*longs spyod rdzogs pa'i sku*), 3) nirmanakāya (*sprul pa'i sku*), and 4) svabhavikakāya (*ngo bo nyid kyi sku*).

²⁹ The ten perfections/*pāramitas*, are the six commonly referred to perfections as well as 7) means (*thabs*), 8) strength/ power (*stobs*), 9) aspiration (*smon lam*), 10) primordial awareness (*ye shes*).

³⁰ The four joys (*catvārimuditā; dga' ba bzhi*) are four increasingly subtle experiences of bliss-emptiness connected with the advanced practices of tsa-lung; they completely transcend ordinary feelings of joy or pleasure. They are: 1) joy (*muditā; dga' ba*), 2) supreme joy (Skt. *pramuditā; mchog dga'*), 3) special joy (*viśeṣamuditā; khyad dga'*) and 4) innate joy (*sahajamuditā; lhan skyes kyi dga' ba*). They are experienced when the white bodhichitta drop, (also called white essence), ascends from the lowest chakra to the navel, heart, throat, and crown chakras. The place of joy (*dga' ba'i sa*), sometimes referred to as the female genitals.

³¹ There are taught to be many channels and minor centres around the body, but these are the main ones, and also the ones that feature in the meditation practices. Winds in the purified form are called awareness-winds, and in the impure form, action-winds. There are ten of these main winds moving within all these channels. One can also

understand these as ten types of winds that move within the channels of the body. The names of these ten winds and the elements associated with them, are:

- Prāṇavāyu (*srog*) – space
- Samānavāyu (*mnyam gnas*) – wind
- Udānavāyu (*gyen rgyu*) – fire
- Vyānavāyu (*khyab byed*) – water
- Apānavāyu (*thur sel*) – earth
- Nāgavāyu (*klu*) – awareness
- Kūrmavāyu (*rus sbal*) – wind
- Kṛikaravāyu (*rtsangs pa*) – fire
- Devadattavāyu (*lhas byin*) – water
- Dhanañjayavāyu (*nor rgyal*) – earth

³² In the *Tika* commentary:

The meaning of Victor’s Children means the winds of the sense spheres and realms all enter into the luminous clarity.

³³ Samādhi (*ting nge dzin*), translated as meditative absorption, Tāranātha is referring to the final stage of the six vajra-yogas. See footnote 12 above. Jamgon Kongtrul (HARDING 2007: 323) says:

The branch of meditative absorption is the unity of the empty-forms and unchanging bliss.

And:

The Meaning of the Name

Samādhi is meditative absorption. It also has the connotation of total adherence to a state of equipoise, and is therefore free of

subject-object dualism. So it refers to the mind abiding in a state where subject and object are undifferentiated.

The Time for Meditation

The time for this meditation is at the culmination of the branch of recollection, when one is able to immediately produce unchanging bliss.

³⁴ The Buddhist cosmology places Indra above Mount Sumeru, in Trayastrimsha heaven. He resides and rules over one of the six realms of rebirth, the *Gods'* realm of Saṃsāra. In Buddhism, Indra is commonly called by his other name, Śakra or Sakka, ruler of the Trāyastriṃśa heaven.

³⁵ Agni appears in many Buddhist canonical texts, as both a god as well as a metaphor for the element of heart or fire. In Pali literature, he is also called Aggi-Bhagavā, Jātaveda, and Vessānara.

³⁶ Brahma is a part of the Buddhist cosmology, and rules over the heavenly realm of rebirth called the Brahmaloaka. Brahma is generally represented in Buddhist culture as a god with four faces and four arms, and variants of him are found in both Theravada and Mahayana Buddhist cultures.

³⁷ Vāyu is a primary Hindu deity, the lord of the winds. He is also known as Anil ("Air, Wind"), Vyān (Air), Vāta ("Airy Element"), Tanun (The Wind), Pavan ("The Purifier"),[1] and sometimes Prāṇa ("The Breath").

³⁸ The nine scary ones; belongs also under (lhag mgron). 1) ('jigs byed kyi bdag po). 2) ('jigs byed bra mi ta) 3) ('jigs byed bhE ra ba) 4) ('jigs byed ku be ra) 5) ('jigs byed ye shes bee ra) 6) ('jigs byed bhE shan ta) 7) ('jigs byed bi ti) 8) ('jigs byed kA la bhE ra) 9) ('jigs byed ga na pa ti).

³⁹ A gandharva (Sanskrit; Pali: gandhabba) is one of the lowest-ranking Gods in Buddhist cosmology. Sometimes referred to as yaksha.

⁴⁰ The fourth of the six vajra-yogas is *retention* (dharāṇā, 'dzin pa). According to Tāranātha:

Dharāṇā in Sanskrit means both retaining ('dzin pa) and the object that is retained (gzung bya) and can be translated in many ways. Here, the meaning is the retention of the winds without coming and going. For the main practice of dharāṇā, this is practised until the winds continually move through the central channel and prana and apana are combined.

Jamgon Kongtrul repeats this (HARDING 2007:313).

The branch of retention is to dissolve the energy wind [*srog*] into the indestructible vital essence [*thig le*].

It is about manipulation of the winds in the central channel that in Prāṇāyāma originated from the ten aspects of the right and left winds. Here, these Prāṇa and Apāna winds that have been combined into one entity are made stable with breathing exercises and are merged into the indestructible essential drops in the central channel. This is the dissolution, or fading, of the coming and going of the winds. They dissolve back into the drops from which they originated.

⁴¹ Yamantaka (*gshin rje*).

⁴² This is the third of the six vajra-yogas, energy control (prāṇāyāma, *srog rtsol*). According to Kongtrul (HARDING 2007:307-308):

The stage of vital energy control causes the karmic energy currents to cease within the central channel.

And:

Prāṇā in Sanskrit can be translated as vital energy [or life force]. Ayama is to stop ('gog pa) or to control (rtsol) or to extend (ring tu byed pa). Through grammatical linkage, it becomes prāṇāyāma, which means to control vital energy (srog rtsol) or to stop vital energy (srog 'gog). Here, "vital energy" (srog) is a name for energy winds (rlung, Skt. prāṇā) and to halt or control means to direct them [into the central channel].

The Time for Meditation

The real branch of vital energy control is a meditation for after the five branches of meditative stability arise in the mindstream. But even a beginner may meditate in the analogous vital energy control. In particular, it is excellent to meditate on it after gaining a bit of experience in either withdrawal or meditative stability, which are virtuous in the beginning.

Thus, the process of prāṇāyāma is the yoga that combines the Prāṇa and Apāna winds into one entity in the central channel, through suppressing the movements in the right (rasanā) and left (lalanā) channels. This is mainly done by means of vajra-

repetition meditations, observing the coming and going of the breath, and other breath-manipulation exercises.

⁴³ The Tibetan word for 'demon' is *bdud (mara)*. Translated as 'demons', but means any negative force or obstacle to practising and accomplishing Dharma. The four maras (Skt. *catvāri māra*; *bdud bzhi*) are the four types of obstructive, 'demonic' forces (sometimes also translated as 'demons') which create obstacles to practitioners on the spiritual path. They have no inherent existence and are only created by the mind.

- 1) the *māra* of the aggregates (*skandhamāra*; *phung po'i bdud*), which symbolizes our clinging to forms, perceptions, and mental states as 'real';
- 2) the *māra* of the destructive emotions (*kleśamāra*; *nyon mongs kyi bdud*), which symbolizes our addiction to habitual patterns of negative emotion;
- 3) the *māra* of the Lord of Death (*mṛtyumāra*; *'chi bdag gi bdud*), which symbolizes both death itself, which cuts short our precious human birth, and also our fear of change, impermanence, and death; and
- 4) the *māra* of the sons of the gods (*Sdevaputramāra*; *lha'i bu'i bdud*), which symbolizes our craving for pleasure, convenience, and 'peace'.

⁴⁴ Here Tāranātha is referring to the 11th Bodhisattva level, the *samādhi* stage of 'total illumination'. The three *samādhis* (Skt. *trisamādhi*; *ting nge 'dzin rnam pa gsum*), an important aspect of generation stage practice presented in the Mahayoga tantras, are as follows:

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- the samādhi of as-it-isness (*de bzhin nyid kyi ting nge 'dzin*)
 - the samādhi of total illumination (*kun tu snang ba'i ting nge 'dzin*)
 - the causal samādhi (*rgyu'i ting nge 'dzin*)

⁴⁵ *Samayamudrā*, seal of commitment. In the tantras, there are four types of mudra (Skt. *catumudrā*; *phyag rgya bzhi*), which 'seal' the enlightened body, speech, mind and activity of the deity. The four mudrās are:

1. the great mudrā (*mahāmudrā*; *phyag rgya chen po*)
2. the dharma mudrā (*dharmamudrā*; *chos kyi phyag rgya*)
3. the samaya mudrā (*samayamudrā*; *dam tshig gi phyag rgya*)
4. the activity mudrā (*karmamudrā*; *las kyi phyag rgya*)

⁴⁶ This refers again to the red and white elements of the man and woman (*khu rdul*).

⁴⁷ The fifth of the six Kālacakra vajra-yogas is *recollection* (*Anusmṛiti, rjes dran*). According to Jamgon Kongtrul (HARDING 2007: 316-317]:

The branch of recollection is the thorough recollection of the empty-forms.... Anu is translated as “subsequent,” and smṛti as “recollection” [or “remembering”]. The term anu can apply both to inferior (*dman pa*) and to superior (*lhag pa*), but in this case, it has the meaning of superior. Thus *Anusmṛiti* or *subsequent recollection* means superior recollection. Recollecting again what was previously cultivated in meditation, it is intense recollection (*shin tu dran pa*). It refers

to the vigorous effort of meditating again and again on the empty-forms of mahāmūdrā.

With Anusmṛiti the practitioner's body is substituted by the mahāmūdrā of empty-form. (The practitioner's body is naturally perceived as appearing as Kālacakra in union with the consort, Viśvamātā.) Through the union of male and female divine empty-forms, based on the blazing-melting of the white and red elements of the practitioner's physical body, one repeatedly cultivates and perfects the four joys in both upwards and downwards. Not only does this successively increase the experience of bliss but it also increases the experience of empty-form. Having brought the movement of the winds under control, the practitioner now starts to practise with the drops and winds and the forces that operate between them.

⁴⁸ See footnote above. This suggests the stage is accomplished and not only generated.

⁴⁹ The Tibetan word is '*gugs*. It can also be translated as to 'summon', 'draw in' or 'gather'.

⁵⁰ As in Hinduism, the Buddhist nāga generally has the form of a great cobra, usually with a single head but sometimes with many. Some of the nāgas are capable of using magic powers to transform themselves into a human semblance. The nāga is sometimes portrayed as a human being with a snake or dragon extending over his head.

⁵¹ The Tibetan word is *rdul gyi dwang ma*, this can mean energy, essence, sperm and so on.

⁵² *nam mkha' mdzod kyi ting nge 'dzin*.

⁵³ White (*dkar*) and red (*dmal*) here means the white seminal element of the man and the red seminal element of the woman. Here again, Tāranātha connects it with the final stage of the six vajra-yogas.

⁵⁴ The Tibetan term, *dum bu* means 'part of the moon' said to be on the 8th or 9th day of the lunar month, the energy of the moon is said to be cooling then.

⁵⁵ The Tibetan word is *phyag bdag chen po*.

⁵⁶ This sentence here means that when the red element is brought up to reside with the white element, the great bliss empty-form is realised (stong gzugs phyag rgya chen po'i dkyil 'khor gyi 'khor lo mtha' yas par gyur pa'o//).

⁵⁷ The Abhidharma describes the seven stages of destruction of the universe, by fire, water, and wind, after which this world will totally disappear. The first step of this destruction to come will be the biggest fire we can possibly imagine. These flames, powerful enough to destroy a universe, are a reflection of the great energy Tāra can apply to her enlightened activities.

⁵⁸ In the Kālacakra tradition, the winds of the upper half of the body above the navel are described as life force winds (*srog rlung*) and the winds of the lower half below the navel are described as the downward-clearing winds (*thur gsel rlung*). In practise these two winds are brought together and unified at the navel chakra in the central channel.

⁵⁹ The Tibetan word, *'byung ba* can also be translated as 'elements', referring to the earth, water, fire, wind and space.

⁶⁰ The Tibetan word, *'gegs ma* here can mean 'subdue' but also 'destroy'. As Tāranātha talks about 'shattering them into pieces' in the next line, 'destroy' seems to fit better than 'subdue' here.

⁶¹ In the Kālacakra tantra, the movement of the subtle inner fire of Brahma through the seven coils or spirals upwards is the 'seven underworlds'. If one is able to direct the fire through these coils, then these 'roots' of duality and ignorance are completely destroyed and incinerated.

⁶² *Individual sense withdrawal (so sor dud pa)* is the first of the six vajra-yogas, see note 12 above. Tāranātha states that:

The first part of the name in Sanskrit, 'prati' means 'individually'; the second part 'ahara' means, according to context, 'to gather', 'eliminate', 'consume', 'sever', 'grasp'; in this instance it means 'gather'. Combined together as pratyahara, the meaning is 'gather all together', withdrawal. Cutting the connection between the five normal senses and their objects, withdrawing consciousness from the objects, one experiences through five other awareness senses five objects that have the nature of radiant light – the meaning here being to consume or grasp. In brief, the meaning is that by withdrawing the mental attention away from normal appearances, one starts to experience appearances of awareness. As it says in the tantra: "In pratyahara there is no involvement at all with the ten physical subjects and objects".

And:

The essence of pratyahara is the development of the ability to gather the ten winds into the central channel by means of the three non-conceptual tranquillities. This consists of the two day and night yogas, because all things are categorised into pairs of method and understanding: the creation and destruction of the physical worlds, the birth and death of beings, the two passages of the Sun, the two fortnights of a month, daily day and night, the right and left (female and male) kinds of orgasm, odd and even ascendants and (internal) wind changes, and so forth. For this reason day and night yogas are necessary...

Kongtrul gives the exact same definition as Tāranātha in terms of the meaning of the term and states (p299) that:

With the gaze of an uññīcakrin and the vital points of binding the bodily functions, all connections between the ordinary five sense organs and their five objects are individually severed and the consciousnesses that stray to objects are drawn inside. Five other faculties that are the nature of pristine awareness then interact with five alternate objects that are the nature of luminous clarity. Those stages of yoga cause the right and left channel mandalas of method and wisdom to cease within the central channel, and the ten signs are quickly completed.

⁶³ Here Tāranātha is referring to the five primordial awarenesses (*ye shes Inga*):

- The primordial awareness of the expanse of reality (*chos dbyings kyi ye shes* or dharmadhatu jñāna).

-
- the mirror-like primordial awareness (*me long gi ye shes* or *adarsha jñāna*).
 - the primordial awareness of discernment (*sor rtog pa'i ye shes* or *pratyauekshana jñāna*).
 - the primordial awareness of sameness (*mnyam nyid kyi ye shes* or *samata jñāna*).
 - and the primordial awareness of accomplishment (*bya ba'i ye shes* or *krtyanusthana jñāna*).

⁶⁴ Meditative stability (*bsam rten*), is the second of the six Vajra-yogas.

Tāranātha says:

The term *dhyana* has the meaning of holding the mind unwaveringly on the object (focus of attention). That also means to take control of the point of reference, such as when a door bolt that is well secured prevents the door frame from shifting or warping, allowing one to control opening and closing the door, the meaning is that one has control over the focus of attention.

It states in the *Vimalaprabha*: "The mental focus is on various forms with the ten subjects and objects as one." This means to have the mind focused one-pointedly on the radiant light, empty-forms possessing the totality of possibilities, while having control over (the mind) being at rest or active, as one wishes. The meaning here is similar to the explanations in other vehicles, of one-pointed focus of attention.

Kongtrul says (2007:303):

This means resting in equipoise with one-pointed mental focus on the luminous clarity of images of emptiness endowed with the supreme of all aspects, allowing one to attain control of abiding and moving [of thought] as desired.

⁶⁵ The 'ten signs' are explained clearly in *Systems of Buddhist Tantra* by Jamgon Kongtrul: p 437-438, n. 21:

The ten signs (rtags bcu), specifically related to the sixfold yoga of the Kalachakra tantra, are empty images (stong gzugs) to be meditated upon for the actualization of the vajra body. These empty images are not produced by thoughts and are extremely clear. They are the manifestation of pristine awareness, free from subject-object dualism. They resemble space in that they are devoid of mental constructs, beyond existent and non-existent phenomena. They are the luminous clarity nature of one's own mind and also the totality of the dimensions of awakening. Empty images manifest in infinite ways but are explained to be ten in number when considered in terms of their special importance and what they purify. The ten signs pertain to the yoga of the day (nyi mo'i rnal 'byor) and the yoga of the night (mtshan mo'l rnal 'byor). The four signs of the yoga of the night are smoke (du ba); mirage (smig rgyu); light in the sky (mkha'i snang) resembling fireflies; and blazing lamp (sgron me 'bar ba). The six signs of the yoga of the day are flame (me) (blazing yellow light); moon (zla ba) (blazing white light); sun (nyi ma) (blazing red light); Rahu (sgra gcan) (blazing black light); lightning (klog); and great sphere (thig le chen po) (an azure moon globe). After the

appearance of these, in the center of the tenth sign, the great sphere, the yogin sees the image of Kalachakra and, simultaneously and instantaneously, the manifold images of the universe, as clear as water in one's hand. These are called "signs" because they indicate the presence within oneself of ultimate pristine awareness and because they constitute the basis for the confidence that by experientially cultivating the path, one will be able to actualize pristine awareness. See Tāranātha's *Meaningful to Behold*; CSI, f. 25a1-7.

⁶⁶ Maheśvara (*dbang phyug chen po*) is one of the Shambhala Kings.

⁶⁷ *Three worlds* means the three spheres of gods, humans, and nagas (*sa 'og sa steng sa bla gsum*).

⁶⁸ In Sanskrit, Kailasha means 'snowy mountain'.

⁶⁹ Brahma lineage here means the central channel. *tshangs pa'i rus pa*

⁷⁰ The lower extension of the central channel, known as the śamkhinī (*dung can ma*); is blue in colour and is also called the 'channel of semen'.

⁷¹ The Tibetan word, *ri dwags rtags can*, literally means the symbol of wild animals, but normally means 'moon'.

⁷² This is referring to the six heavens of the desire realm: 1) Heaven of the Four Great Kings (*Caturmahārājakāyika*; *rgyal chen rigs bzhi*); Heaven of the Thirty-Three (*Trāyastriṃśa*; *sum cu rtsa gsum*); 3) Free of Combat (*Yāma*; *'thab bral*); 4) Joyous Realm (*Tuṣita*; *dga' ldan*); 5) Enjoying Emanation (*Nirmāṇarataya*; *'phrul dga'*); 6) Controlling Others' Emanations (*Parinirmītvashavartin*; *gzhan 'phrul dbang byed*).

⁷³ This is referring to the purified five aggregates (form, feelings, perception, mental formations and consciousness) and five elements.

⁷⁴ The Tibetan ords, *bsnyen sgrub las gsum ga'i sngags* are the three stages of practice. Approach (*bsnyen pa*) — the first phase of sadhana practice. The word *nyenpa* in Tibetan implies 'familiarization', 'associating with', or 'approaching', and is often translated as 'approach'. It is normally connected to mantra recitation while visualising the deity. Accomplishment (*sgrub pa*) — the second phase of 'sadhana' practice, sometimes translated as 'accomplishment' phase.

⁷⁵ This is referring to the two syllables, the HAM at the crown chakra and the short AH at the navel chakra.

⁷⁶ The Tibetan term 'don' (*gdon*) means evil influence, there are eighteen types according to Tibetan medicine.

⁷⁷ These are referred to as the three gates of liberation/emancipation [1] emptiness (*stong pa nyid*); 2) without intention (*smon pa med pa*); 3) without characteristics (*mtshan ma med pa*).

⁷⁸ Yakshas (*gnod sbyin*) are demons that are malignant, violent, and devourers of human flesh.

⁷⁹ In Tibetan, *gsang 'dus 'phags skor*.