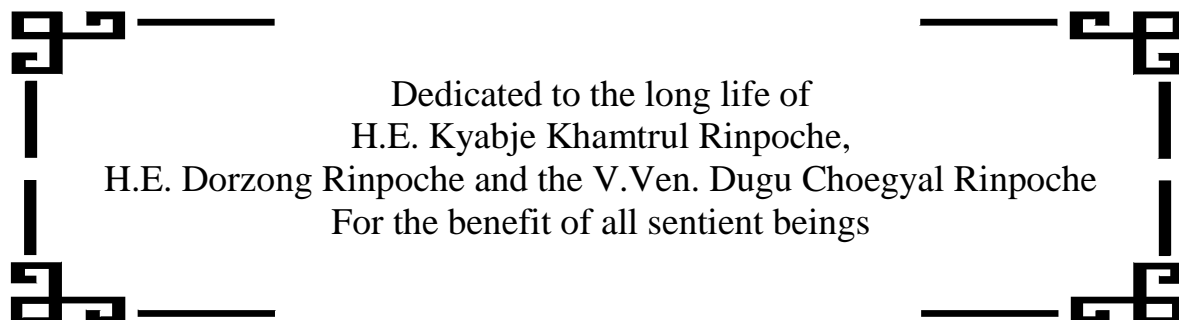




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**OFFERING THE MANDALA**

**2 - INSTRUCTIONS AND NOTES**



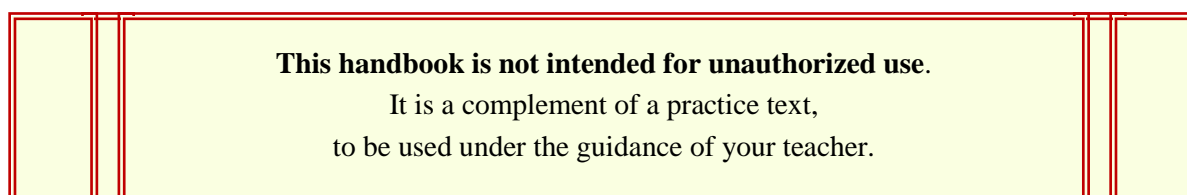
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*Once more we feel deeply thankful to our root lama Dorzong Rinpoche for his kind and profound advice, and to Dugu Choegyal Rinpoche for his unconditional help and his invaluable dharma art.  
Many other dharma friends have contributed with their suggestions and their beta reading of this volume. We thank them all!*

#### **Offering the Mandala**

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ཨ། མཆོད་འབུལ་བ་ནི།

**OFFERING THE MANDALA**  
**2 - INSTRUCTIONS AND NOTES**

This volume includes only the practice instructions and notes

The root text of the practice in Tibetan and English  
is given in a separate volume:

**Offering the Mandala**  
**1 - The Practice**



## OFFERING THE MANDALA

### Suggestions for the practice session

✿ If you are doing only the *Offering the Mandala* practice in this session, as in all your other sessions, make the practice 'good in the beginning' by starting with:

- Establishing the foundation.
- The four ordinary preliminaries.

For your convenience, we have included the annotated English versions of these sections in Appendix I starting on pg. 42. Then continue with:

**Refuge and Enlightened Attitude** in concise form. For your convenience, we give here the corresponding prayer. *Taking refuge* means we feel the need for protection from the sufferings of the cycle of conditioned existence and we seek support on the path to enlightenment. Therefore, we go for refuge in the Three Jewels, Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. The *enlightened attitude* is the altruistic intention to attain enlightenment in order to benefit all sentient beings.

༄༅། སངས་རྒྱལ་ཚོ་ཏང་མཚན་གྱི་མཚན་ལ།      །བྱང་ཆུབ་བར་དུ་བདག་ནི་སྐྱབས་སུ་མཆི།

SANG GYE CHÖ TANG TSOK KYI CHOK NAM LA      JANG CHUB PAR TU DAK NI KYAB SU CHI  
In the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, until enlightenment,      I take refuge.

།བདག་གིས་དག་སྦྱོར་བཀྲིས་པའི་བསོད་ནམས་གིས།      །འགྲོ་ལ་ཕན་ཕྱིར་སངས་རྒྱལ་འགྲུབ་བར་ཤོག།

DAK GUI GUE JOR GYI PEY SÖ NAM KYI      DrO LA PEN CHIR SANG GYE DrUB PAR SHOk  
By the merit of my spiritual practice,      may I attain buddhahood in order to benefit all beings

Recite this prayer three times, in Tibetan or in your own language, according to your wish. As with all prayers and recitations, if you decide to do it in Tibetan, make sure you remember the meaning.

✿ If your *Offering the Mandala* practice is the continuation of previous practice *in the same session*, such as the *Dorje Sempa* practice, then all of the above has been performed at the beginning of the session, and you do not need to repeat it now.

✿ After completing your practice session, make it “good in the end” with an appropriate dedication.





## THE ROOT TEXT

### ANNOTATED ENGLISH VERSION

#### NAMO GURU

##### ✿ Sequence of the practice session.

The complete mandala offering in the context of the *ngöndro*, the extraordinary preliminary practices, entails the repetition of 111,111 offerings, and is done along many sessions. So after the first few ones, what has to be done will gradually become clear in the practitioner's mind. Always check with your teacher your practice and your doubts. This practice is NOT useful if performed alone, just by reading a text. There is much more to it.

- ✿ Once settled in your meditation place, as with all your sessions of practice, start by making it 'good in the beginning' You may want to do this through reciting the prayer to the lama, reflecting on the four ordinary preliminaries, taking refuge, and arousing the enlightened attitude, as recommended in 'Suggestions for the practice session' in pg. 4.
- ✿ The first part of the actual practice entails the generation of the visualization of the assembly of enlightened beings to whom the offerings will be made, called the **mandala of realization**.
- ✿ In the second part we find the core of the practice, '*Offering the mandala*'. The core practice consists in generating the visualization of the offerings to be made (called the **mandala of offerings**) and its offering. This is to be performed as many times as possible during the session. There are two versions of the mandala, the thirty seven points mandala and the seven points mandala, as will be explained later.
- ✿ The third part of the practice is the dissolution of all visualizations, and resting in the non-dual state, where there is no longer separation between the one who offers, the offering, and those to whom the offering is made. This is referred as the **absolute mandala**, and completes the three sections indicated in the text.
- ✿ The fourth and final part is making the practice 'good in the end' by praying to the lama and dedicating the merit for the benefit of all sentient beings.

✿ The practice involves mental, verbal, and physical activities. The preparations and practical procedures for the mandala practice will be given in detail beginning on pg. 33.

The manifold aspects are explained with very different levels of detail, depending on each mentor's methods and the needs of each student. One example is Dza Patrul Rinpoche, who in his book, 'The Words of my Perfect Teacher' (See bibliography), after explaining the whole practice in just a few paragraphs says:

"As to what is to be visualized for each of these points, my teacher did not say any more than this when he gave the teaching, so I shall not write anything more here myself."

On the other hand, some texts give an extraordinary amount of information on each and every element, describing their numerous meanings and qualities. It will shortly become apparent for the reader that as dozens of items are to be included in the visualizations, this approach rapidly leads to hefty volumes of commentary.

At the time of writing the explanatory notes in this annotated version, we have opted by what we consider to be a middle path, leaving out some of the traditional details, and including just as much as we believe necessary for the beginner to have an idea of what he/she is doing and repeating. Further understanding will come with time and practice.

Regarding your own practice, whether you visualize in minute detail, or in a more general way and with strong devotion, check your inclination and your possibilities and then discuss it with your mentor. He will guide you in the most appropriate method for you in this particular moment of your spiritual process.

✿ The **accumulation of merit** through offering the **mandala**, in three parts.

1 The meditation on the object of the offerings, the **mandala of realization**.

In front is **Rirab**. Its nature is the **four precious gemstones**.  
 It is square, has four terraces and is ornamented with obelisks.  
 Immense and vast, higher than the summit of existence.  
 On its top, a four-petalled lotus, reaching the horizon.  
 At its centre, a throne seat supported by lions.  
 Upon it, the root **lama**, Lord **Dorje Chang**,  
 He is surrounded by the assembly  
 Of all the venerable masters of the **Chakchen lineage**,  
 The lamas of the **long transmission** and the lamas of **all schools**. ✿

✿ **Accumulation of merit**. The wholesome tendencies imprinted in the mind as a result of the performance of positive and skilful actions of body, speech, and mind. The accumulation of merit is recommended because these positive imprints in our mind bring about a double benefit:

- ✿ Improves the quality of our life experiences as a result of the workings of the law of cause and effect. Read more in the next note on the law of *action, cause and effect*.
- ✿ Improves our progress along the spiritual path as a result of acquiring 'good' habits instead of the previous 'bad' ones. With time and realization, both good and bad will be transcended, and no more 'accumulation' will be needed.

The objective of the *Offering the Mandala* practice is precisely the accumulation of merit by learning to overcome miserliness, craving, attachment, etc. This is implemented through the repeated offering of all the elements of the universe (from those very remote from us to our own body and life) to all the manifestations of refuge.

This accumulation of merit is conceptual, in the sense that it involves the offering of something to somebody by someone, but sets a correct frame of mind for further training. It is necessarily completed with the accumulation of wisdom, which is non-conceptual and eliminates the obscurations of mental defilements and obstacles to omniscience. Together these two are known as 'the two accumulations'.

Some remarks on the accumulations:

- ✿ If done without the enlightened attitude of benefiting others, no matter the 'importance' of the wholesome deeds performed, they may lead to future rebirths in the higher realms but not to liberation. In other words, the worth of the deed is less significant than the motivation. Even a morsel of food given to a dog with the heartfelt intention of alleviating its hunger is more effective than very important financial offerings to the teachers or the buddhas made with the object of attaining wealth or health for oneself.
- ✿ The accumulation of merit alone (being conceptual and on the relative level), if not joined with the accumulation of wisdom (which is non-conceptual and on the absolute level), will not lead to liberation.

Quoting Gampopa: "Even if you realize that in the absolute level there is nothing to accumulate or to purify, in the relative level still continue to accumulate even the smallest amount of merit".

✿ Action, cause and effect. (Tib. las rgyu 'bras, phonetic *le gyu dre*. Skt. *karma*) Also variously translated as 'behavioural cause and effect', 'law of karma', and so on.

The law of cause and effect is a basic tenet of the Buddhist view of existence. Essentially, it establishes a relationship between our deeds and our experiences. When we execute an action with desire, hatred, or ignorance, such performance leaves an imprint on our consciousness. Some time



later, these imprints will mature, in conjunction with the prevailing conditions at that moment, as experiences of different types.

Generally speaking, good actions will mature as experiences perceived as pleasant and the result of evil actions will be lived as unhappy situations. The definition of good and bad is usually given as those actions carried out with the motivation of benefiting or harming others (including oneself) respectively.

Therefore, what we are living today is the result of our actions of the past. There is not much we can do now. However, our future is being conditioned by our actions of today. Consequently, here and now there is a lot we can do to shape this future. To be able to do something meaningful (instead of persisting with past mistakes), it is suggested to train the mind through spiritual practice. Otherwise, we will only be able to repeat habitual patterns of conduct and perpetuate the cycle of suffering-happiness-suffering beyond our control, with no hope of becoming free.

This law of cause and effect has been variously misunderstood as being something heavy, fateful, a punishment for sins, etc. It must be remembered that:

- ⌘ It works both ways, positive and negative.
- ⌘ It works at all times, and will go on working until we learn to act without desire, hatred, or ignorance, that is, until we become enlightened.
- ⌘ It is not enforced by anyone. Only the imprints on our mind make it function. It makes us free to determine our future. With an untrained mind, we keep on repeating habitual patterns of conduct, independently of what the circumstances around us would recommend. Fears, attachments, pride, hatred -these all insure difficulties. With a trained mind, we can choose the type of actions we perform in the present, so to live one or other type of life in the future.
- ⌘ As a consequence of the liberty we have, we are responsible for our actions, and therefore for our experiences, be they pleasant or unpleasant. There are no innocent victims or guilty perpetrators. It is not the government, our parents, or our boss, but ourselves.

❁ **Mandala.** (Tib. dkyil 'khor, phonetic *kyil'khor*. Skt. *mandala*) Literally centre-perimeter. In different places, both the Tibetanised Sanskrit word '*mantel*' (in this case we have used the Sanskrit form '*mandala*') and the Tibetan rendering '*kyil'khor*' (we have left it in Tibetan) are used. This term can have various meanings, according to the context.

- ⌘ One basic definition of the word '*mandala*' is 'circle, wheel, circumference', and also a 'totality, assembly, literary corpus'.
- ⌘ Another meaning of this term is the central (*kyil*) and peripheral (*khor*) lha described in the tantra texts (See note on *lha* on pg. 21). These manifestations reside within a celestial palace that has a perfectly symmetrical design, with four gateways and four main walls composed of five layers of different colours. Each of these features is a specific aspect of the principal lha, and thereby corresponds to an aspect of the meditator's enlightened mind. Therefore, in this context the mandala is a perfected state of being and perception encompassing all phenomena. The celestial palace itself and the lha within it are the perfected states of the meditator's own being. When such mandalas are represented symbolically, they may take the form of a two-dimensional image made of coloured sand or painted on cloth, or be constructed as a three-dimensional structure carved from wood or other materials. The visualization of a mandala (in its three-dimensional form) plays a crucial role in tantric meditations during the generation/creation stage. Here, these 'abodes of the lha' are never perceived as independently existing universes but as manifestations of the enlightened mind of the principal lha being meditated upon. The tantric mandalas are therefore never visualized without the presence of their related lha.
- ⌘ It can also mean the environment in which a mentor and his/her students interact, whom are then said to belong or to be in the same mandala

In this *Offering the Mandala* practice the term mandala is used in several ways:

- ⌘ The mandala of realization.
- ⌘ The mandala of offerings.

- ⌘ The absolute mandala.
- ⌘ The ritual artefact (a plate) used for the actual practice.

Each one will be explained when it first appears in the text.

✿ **Mandala of realization.** Here the term mandala refers to the assembly of enlightened beings, teachers, yidams, lha and so on, included in the visualization that will be described further on. It is to them that the practitioner makes the offerings.

Refer to the two images of the mandala of realization by the Ven. Choegyal Rinpoche. On pg. 11 is shown a complete version, while pg. 12 is a detail of the abodes of the enlightened beings. The mandala is to be visualized as big as your mind allows. Ideally it would be all encompassing, floating in infinite space.

✿ Visualization (note 1). A special method of the dorje path. What follows are teachings and suggestions on how to visualize what the text will start to describe as the universe and so on.

Referring to visualization as a practice method, Tulku Thondup teaches:

"It can transform our mental patterns from negative to positive. Some beginners at meditation regard visualization as a difficult or unusual mental activity. Actually, it is quite natural, for we think in images all the time. When we think of our friends or family, or imagine ourselves at a lovely beach or mountain lake, we see these images in our mind quite vividly. In meditation we visualize for a particular purpose, but the mental process is the same. With practice, we can get better at it."

And Jamgon Kongtrul says:

"In general, visualization is a contrivance, but the path of contrivance leads to the authentic natural state."

We might be inclined to scoff at visualizing as 'imagining', a mental making up of non-existent situations, and therefore unhealthy, not commendable, and an escape from reality. However, one question could be: "What is the rest of our other usual mental contents?" The Buddhist answer is 'deluded perceptions'. So in this case, the teachings use sacred imagination as a tool to go beyond ignorant imagination. The result will be, with time and perseverance, the dawning of the perception of things as they are.

Some aspects to be taken into account:

- ⌘ Dimensions, qualities, quantities are all as big, as good, and as many as you can imagine.
- ⌘ They are to be visualized as transparent, non-substantial, pervasive, subtle, as if made out of non-physical light. This light is not solid, so there is nothing to grasp. Nothing can cause pressure or stress. Everything is light and immaterial.
- ⌘ These characteristics help us to rectify our habit of thinking of all phenomena as solid, permanent, existing by themselves, their *form* aspect. They gradually introduce us to their *empty* aspect. Finally, we will realize the *inseparable union* of form and emptiness.
- ⌘ You may have trouble to visualize these complicated structures. Do not get discouraged, as it will gradually improve.
- ⌘ Take time to visualize. Do not rush along.
- ⌘ A basic element of the practice is, apart from visualizing, a deep feeling of connection (in all its meanings) with the object of visualization. The most important point is to call up the image with warmth and whole-heartedness. Give your full attention to the mental object, become totally absorbed in it. Allow the mind and the object to become one. It is said that if we sincerely, genuinely feel to be in the presence of the visualized enlightened manifestations, then they actually are here.
- ⌘ The motivation that supports our practice, the enlightened attitude to help all beings, will also be a help to overcome these initial inconveniences.
- ⌘ It is important to realize that the manifestation is not 'someone out there' with a solid, concrete, separate existence. They are pure manifestations of your teacher and your own essence. Initially, this may appear as an artificial mental fabrication, but one of the signs of success of the practice is the gradual appearance and increase of a sensation of warmth, connection and finally oneness with the manifestations and their pure nature. In the end,





duality will totally collapse, and there will no longer be an I, an assembly of enlightened beings and a practice being done.

- ⌘ Referring to the visualized images -whether they are visualized in great or small detail, and whether the meaning of each detail is known and remembered or not- it depends on each practitioner's needs and capacities in a specific moment of his/her spiritual development. Quoting the masters:

- ⌘ Tulku Thondup: "For beginners especially, the key is to feel the presence of what you are imagining. Your visualization does not need to be elaborate or detailed; the clarity and stability of your mental images are what matters."
- ⌘ Jamgon Kongtrul: "You may recollect the appropriate purities, but this mental exercise might just add to discursive thoughts. For the beginner, it will become the cause of unclear, scattered meditation. It is better to meditate on the deity's form as empty and light, as a rainbow."
- ⌘ Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche: "When a skilled artist paints a buddha, he first paints the face: the nose, the eyes, the circle of hair between the eyes, the mouth, the ears. When all the details of the face are finished, he paints the expression... Thus a skilled artist paints all the details very clearly, without mixing them up. Having visualized all the details in this way, one can then concentrate on the entire form. Then again one can visualize the details." And Rinpoche proceeds further, giving instructions on how to visualize in minute detail.

What to do? Knowing that there is not only one way but many, that the 'good one' is 'good' only for one person in a particular moment, and not knowing which is the best for you now, you may want to consult this with your mentor. And after some time, you may want to check again. Do not solidify the instructions.

⌘ **Rirab.** (Skt. Mount Meru or Sumeru). Here starts the actual practice, the generation of the mandala of realization. This visualization (as well as another to be generated as the mandala of offering in the subsequent part of the practice) is based on the ancient Buddhist view of the universe. This presentation, prevalent in India at the time of the Buddha, and incorporated into the Buddhist corpus of teachings, is entirely different from the modern conception proposed by Western science. A graphical outline is presented in Fig. 3 on pg. 13.

In this respect, we propose avoiding two extremes. The first is making this presentation culturally and temporally dependent, so it would have to be continually adapted to the ever-changing views of different times and societies. Secondly, blindly accepting it as the 'real' description of the cosmos, just because it is presented as such in the texts. Maybe seeing it as a symbolic representation, to be used as a temporary support for spiritual development of certain internal qualities would free us from too much pondering and accepting-rejecting.

When asked about the contradiction between the ancient and modern cosmology, H.E. Dorzong Rinpoche answered that both views were on the relative truth level, implying that both are impermanent and subject to change.

Ven. Dugu Choegyal Rinpoche explained: "Lord Buddha said that if teachings more profound, more truthful than his own were ever found, both in the relative and absolute levels, they were to be adopted without clinging to what he had taught.

"He also spoke of the perfect relative truth, as perceived by the perfect eye, the perfect ear, the perfect mind and so on, which would correspond to what we today understand by science, and the deluded relative truth, corresponding to hearsay or superstitions.

"And he made the difference between what was important in the path to enlightenment and what was not. The notions of a flat earth, a central mountain, and so on, were prevalent in his time and place. Proposing different views would have created additional resistances to the changes he proposed through his teaching, so he let things be as they were. This not clinging to static views makes the mind very flexible.

"For example, when we Tibetans first came in contact with what for us was an entirely different view, namely the Western notions of the earth, planets, solar system, etc. it did not pose a problem."

And H.H. the Dalai Lama, in 'The Joy of Living and Dying in Peace', pg. 168 (See bibliography), teaches:

"An example can be found in a text called 'Treasury of Knowledge', where the size of the sun and the moon are compared to half the height of Mount Meru, the mountain that is said to form the axis of the universe. The measurement is given in ancient terms, and is equivalent to about four hundred miles. These scriptures are referring to the same sun and moon that scientists can measure today. What is asserted in the scriptures is at variance with direct perception using scientific instruments. We cannot defend what is stated in the text when it is contradicted by scientific knowledge. Thus, although something in the scriptures may have been taught by the Buddha, whom we regard as a valid teacher, if what is taught in the text does not stand up to reason, we cannot accept it literally. We have to interpret it in terms of the Buddha's purpose and intention in giving it."

For this practice, the classical representation described in the text should be seen in the light of the above and other teachings of the Buddha such as:

- ⌘ 'The worlds of the ten directions',
- ⌘ 'With as many bodies as there are atoms in all universes',
- ⌘ 'On each atom, buddhas equal in number to the atoms in all universes'.

They all try to convey the notion that the place where we live, including its contents and its inhabitants, is only one of an infinite number of cosmos, hardly imaginable to our minds.

So the proposal is to visualize with a very open, loose mind, without fixed concepts, remembering that there is much more than what we are used to thinking there is. Each item is to be visualized as vast and open as possible, as a basis for still more vastness and openness. It is a beautiful starting point useful to reach greater dimensions.

It is repeated several times in the Pali Canon (the original scriptures) that in culturally sensitive subjects such as the ordination of women (India being in those days a rigidly patriarchal society), Lord Buddha did not want to risk people misunderstanding his teachings, thus despising, losing faith, or out rightly opposing them. He did not insist in going against prevailing opinions or customs when they were not fundamental for the main goal. Nevertheless, when opposing convention was deemed necessary then he was quite clear. For example, in the midst of a stratified, rigid society of castes and hierarchies, he exposed the essential notion that all beings are equal, in the sense that they all share buddha nature. The differences among beings are only differences in the type and depth of their temporary ignorance. Moreover, this referred not only to human beings but also to all sentient creatures, such as animals and so on. In modern terms, this would be called outright social subversion. And probably punished accordingly...

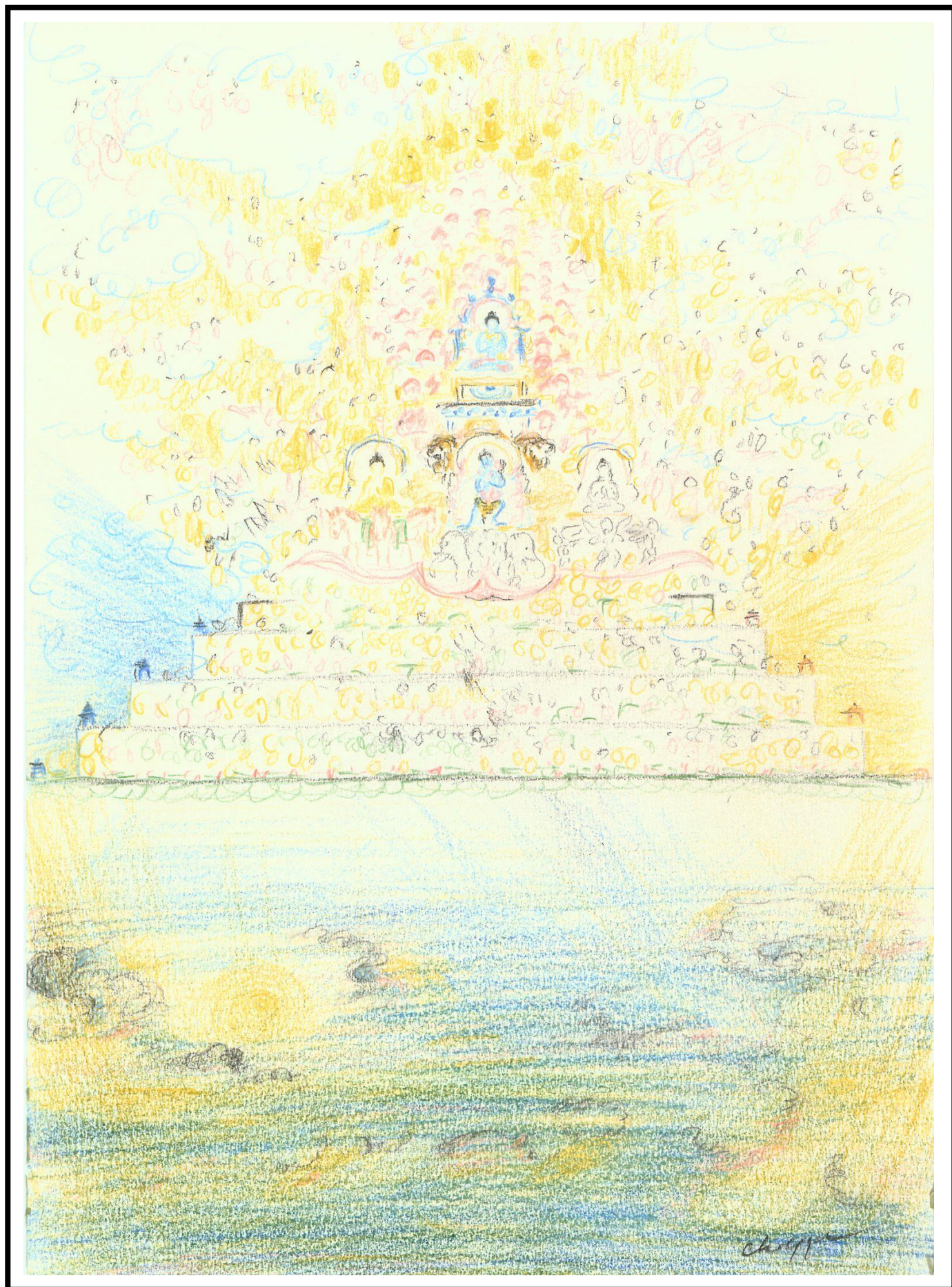
One example of his considering the prevailing culture is illuminating in this respect. The Buddha was the heir to the throne of the Shakya clan. He had renounced it, left to live a spiritual life, attained enlightenment and then started teaching and leading the growing sangha (In those days *sangha* denoted the community of ordained persons only). Eventually, other princes of the Shakyen royal house decided to follow him. Among them were his cousin Ananda, who later would become his personal assistant for the last seventeen years of his life, and his cousin Devadatta, who would become the classical example for jealousy and hatred. By that time, it had already been established for the monks that the rule for seniority and precedence would be the moment of ordination, and nothing else. Quoting the Canon:

"Then the Shakyen princes went with Upali the barber to the Blessed One, and after paying homage to him, sat down at one side. When they had done so, they said to the Blessed One: 'Lord, we are proud Shakyans. This Upali the barber has long attended us. Let the Blessed One give him the Going Forth first, so that we can pay homage to him and rise up for him and give him reverential salutation and honour. Thus, the Shakyen pride will be humbled in us Shakyans.'

"Then the Blessed One gave the Going Forth first to Upali and then to the Shakyen princes."

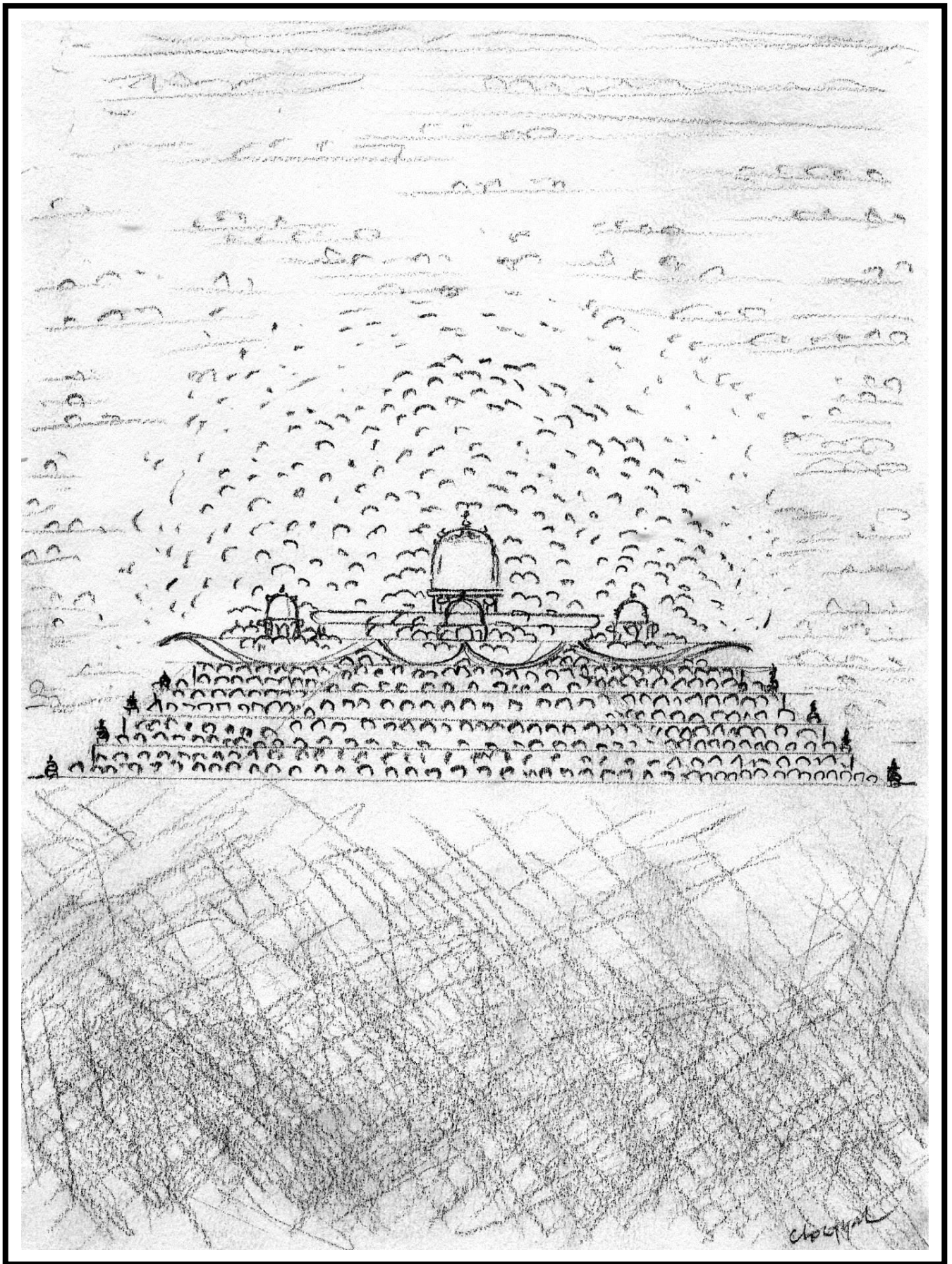
For the following description, we again refer the reader to Fig. 1 and Fig. 2 below, as well as Fig. 3 'Traditional Buddhist view of the universe' on pg. 13.





**Fig. 1 - MANDALA OF REALIZATION**  
A vision of V.Ven. Dugu Choegyal Rinpoche





**Fig. 2 - MANDALA OF REALIZATION**  
An outline of the abodes by V. Ven. Dugu Choegyal Rinpoche



The mandala of realization is generated on top of the central mountain, Rirab. Later on, the mandala of offering will also include all the components of the universe as the objects to be offered to the mandala of realization. Therefore, we recommend the reader to go through the traditional presentation of the universe now, and then use these notions for the rest of the practice.

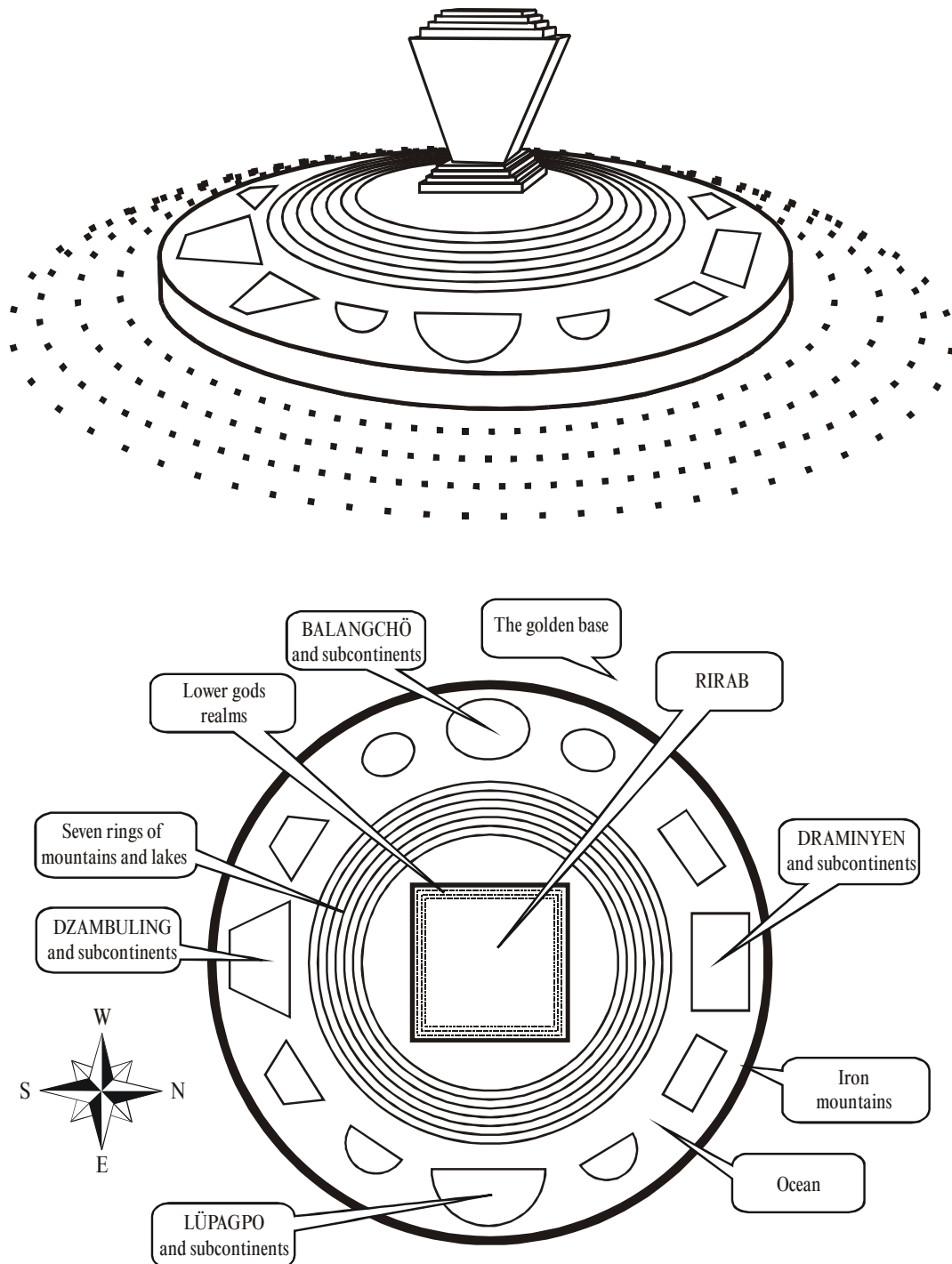


Fig. 3 Traditional Buddhist view of the universe  
(Perspective and top view)

The whole universe (of dimensions beyond comprehension) sits on a golden ground. An iron mountain in the form of a boundary surrounds an ocean on which stand four groups of continents and subcontinents, one in each cardinal direction. Each continent is endowed with its own charac-



teristics, such as types of inhabitants, types of wealth, etc. The world we live in, the only one ordinary beings are able to perceive, is Dzambuling, lying to the south. Towards the centre there are seven consecutive rings of mountains and then seven rings of lakes. At the centre stands Rirab, the king of mountains. It looks like an inverted pyramid standing on four terraces. Many additional details are sometimes given, such as the palace of Indra standing at the top of Rirab, with enormous parks in each corner, each park with wish-fulfilling trees and magical stones, the dwellings of the form and formless lha above everything, and so on and so forth. As these additional components are not mentioned in the root text, we omit them.

✿ **Four precious gemstones.** Each of Rirab's four slopes is made out of a precious gemstone, which reflects the light of the sun and the moon onto the four respective continents. The northern slope is emerald, the eastern crystal, the southern lapis lazuli and the western ruby. It is said that the reflections of the southern lapis lazuli slope explain the blue colour of the sky in our continent Dzambuling.

✿ **Lama.** (Skt. guru). The traditional meaning of this title combines the Tibetan terms 'la' meaning 'nothing superior', and 'ma' meaning 'mother of all sentient beings without any discrimination between them'. This is the title given to a mentor with at least a reasonable level of realization. A mentor can be a man or a woman, an ordained person or a layperson, Western or Asiatic, formally educated or not, famous or unknown.

In the words of Tsangpa Gyare, one of the ancestors of the Drukpa Kagyü lineage, a true teacher should possess four qualities:

- ✿ He/she should have liberated himself/herself.
- ✿ He/she should liberate others out of compassion.
- ✿ He/she should know when it is the time to teach what to his/her students.
- ✿ He/she should be skilled in many different methods of teaching.

Traditionally, it was considered on a higher level than the title of Rinpoche. Today, this very important title is inappropriately used to denote almost any novice monk. In the Himalayan region, it is even adopted as a surname by families who count among their ancestors a lama.

From the point of view of the student, the teachers with whom he/she comes in contact can be:

- ✿ The *connection teacher* -with whom he/she comes across on a few occasions, and receives teachings not specifically intended for him/her, but in the context of a larger audience.
- ✿ The *kind teacher* -with whom there will be a more intimate contact and eventually teachings are given on an individual basis.
- ✿ The *root teacher* -who will transmit the pith instructions to recognize the nature of mind. It is this last teacher that is to be considered the ultimate teacher.

✿ The relationship between mentor and disciple is a subject of the utmost importance. Much will be clarified during and after the practice of Guru Yoga, the fourth extraordinary preliminary practice. For the time being, it is recommended that prudence be exercised when relating to this concept.

The relationship should be essentially mature and healthy, avoiding extremes.

- ✿ A very submissive or devotional approach will hinder understanding and progress.
- ✿ An approach strongly relying on 'my inner teacher' or 'my own essence' rather than an external mentor can be confusing for someone without a certain degree of realization. It will not always be clear when the 'messages' are from the inner teacher or when they are coming from the ego.

The suggested course is an approach that balances all factors, such as faith, devotion, self-confidence, understanding, and so on.

Moreover, it should be remembered that this relationship is to be seen as temporary and liberating. Gradually it evolves towards the final, total freedom of an enlightened being, who no longer needs any spiritual guide nor any teachings. There is more on this in the note on *lama* on pg. 14.



❖ **Dorje Chang.** (Skt. *Vajradhara*). Literally 'dorje holder'. The absolute body buddha of the Ka-gyü lineage. In some practices, the teacher is also visualized as Lord Dorje Chang.

A reason for the root teacher to be represented in the form of a buddha like Dorje Chang is that the results that will be obtained from the practice will depend on how we relate to him/her during the actual course of the practice. If seen as a qualified teacher, the results will be limited. If perceived as a bodhisattva, the result will eventually be the attainment of at most that level. Only if we feel our mentor to be a totally enlightened being, an actual buddha, can we be helped to secure the ultimate level.

In this respect, Tulku Thondup cites a Tibetan proverb:

*"From whomever one sees as a Buddha  
The blessings are received as from a Buddha.  
From whomever one sees as a fool  
The effects come as from a fool."*

Nevertheless, this injunction should not be taken too literally. It refers to remembering and contacting the buddha nature intrinsic in all beings.



Fig. 4. Lord Dorje Chang

A line art illustration of Dorje Chang is shown on Fig. 4

Dorje Chang is visualized transparent, as if made out of non-physical light, deep blue, thus indicating his infinite sky-like wisdom. He has one face and two arms. He is holding at his heart level with his right hand the golden dorje -symbol of method- which is also translated as skilful means (see next note on *method*), and with the left the silver bell -symbol of wisdom. The crossing of the hands indicates the inseparability of both characteristics. He is dressed in the traditional way of the ancient Indian princes, with precious ornaments and silken garments. Each one of these elements manifests a different aspect of enlightenment. It is important to realize at the time of visualizing that the enlightened manifestations are not a mere representation or reminder of qualities, as a picture would be, but the actual qualities themselves. In the absolute sense, Dorje Chang is the symbol of complete enlightenment. A line art illustration of Dorje Chang is shown on Fig. 4

❖ **Method.** Sometimes translated as 'skilful means'. The method aspect of the teachings include *doing* something, such as visualizing, reciting and so on, as complementary to the wisdom aspect that emphasizes *being and recognizing*, without any mental, verbal, or physical activities. Methods are used as temporary supports and learning aids in order to attain knowledge, and they correspond to the relative truth level, while knowledge belongs to the absolute truth level. Both are necessary, and both are ultimately indivisible. An example in everyday life would be the physician and the medicines he prescribes. Only using *both* the knowledge aspect of the doctor and the method aspect of the medicines will cure an illness. A car can be put together only through having the parts and knowing how to assemble them. One or the other of the two aspects alone would not be enough to attain the result.

Quoting H.E. Dorzong Rinpoche:

"To be able to fly, a bird needs two wings. In the same way, it is important to understand the two aspects of method and wisdom. If we think only of wisdom, as this is based on everything being empty and devoid of any real existence, we could reach the erroneous conclusion that nothing exists in our world; no law of cause and effect, no consequences of our actions, etc. As we hear that everything is emptiness, we might think about jumping into a river. But the river would nonetheless

carry us away with quite unpleasant results. And if we jump into the fire, we will burn. Only when we actually realize emptiness will the river not carry us away or the fire burn us to ashes. But for now, we do not have this realization.

"If on the other hand we do not mention at all the wisdom aspect, and consider only method, for example love and compassion, it will not be possible to cut through ego's fixation, which is the root of samsara, the cycle of conditioned existence."

Finally, and in order to avoid confusions, it should be clear that the designation of method and wisdom varies with the school and the vehicle of Buddhism considered. The listing below gives some of these definitions:

School	Method	Wisdom
Great vehicle	Compassion	Emptiness
Dorje vehicle	Development stage	Completion stage
Madhyamika	Relative truth	Absolute truth

In all cases, the final result of unifying method and wisdom is taught to be full enlightenment.

✿ **Chakchen.** (Tib. phyag chen, phonetic *chakchen*. Skt. *mahamudra*). Literally 'great seal' or 'great symbol', it is a path of practice for realizing our own buddha nature. The 'seal' or 'symbol' referred to is the realization of emptiness. It is the main meditation in the Kagyü lineage. The Sakya and Geluk schools of Tibetan Buddhism also practise it. The term can also denote the lineage, the teachings, and the supreme accomplishment, the attainment of enlightenment. (See also next note on *Chakchen lineage*.)

It can be seen from the perspective of:

- ✿ *Ground Chakchen* -the nature of mind, present in all sentient beings but unrealized as such.
- ✿ *Path Chakchen* -the methods to realize the nature of mind.
- ✿ *Fruition Chakchen* -the nature of mind stably realized.

So ground and fruition are identical, except for the fact that in the former the mind nature is not realized (ordinary beings) and in the latter it is (buddhas). Nothing has changed, only realization has happened. The transition from one state to the other is the path.

In a mystical song, Jamgön Kongtrül Lodrö Taye expressed:

*Since in the view of Chakchen analysis does not apply, cast mind-made knowledge far away.  
 Since in the meditation of Chakchen there is no way of fixating on a thought, abandon deliberate meditation.  
 Since in the action of Chakchen there is no reference point for action, be free from the intention to act or not.  
 Since in the fruition of Chakchen there is no attainment to acquire, cast hopes, fears, and doubts far away.  
 This is the deep mind of all Kagyüs.*

✿ **Chakchen lineage.** In Buddhism, a lineage is an uninterrupted succession of teachers who receive a corpus of teachings, realize them and transmit them to their disciples. They also contribute their own specific teachings to the original stream. Many times, an original lineage branches into several others, as different mentors emphasize some aspects of the teachings or some methods and practices over others. The Chakchen lineage originated with Dorje Chang. It continued in India through several masters such as Tilopa and Naropa, and was brought to Tibet by Marpa Lotsawa (1012-1096). He is also known as Marpa the Translator (see next note on *Lotsawa*). The lineage of Marpa continued through his disciple Milarepa and then Gampopa (one of Milarepa's main disciples). After Gampopa, several sub-lineages branched out, and grew, dwindled or intertwined depending on the circumstances they had to traverse along the centuries. In Appendix II on pg. 48 we include the spiritual genealogy of some Drukpa Kagyü lineage lamas.



✿ **Long transmission.** The transmission of the teachings from master to disciple in a chain-like mode is the 'long' transmission. Sometimes the 'short' transmission can happen from one master directly to a disciple appearing many generations later.

✿ **All schools.** (Tib. ris med, phonetic *rime*) In this case we have translated the original Tibetan term '*rime*', literally meaning 'without sectors' or 'without bias' as 'all schools'. Actually '*rime*' is also used to refer to a non-sectarian or eclectic movement which crystallized during the nineteenth century in Eastern Tibet where the study and integration of all schools of Tibetan Buddhism was encouraged by the leading figures of that period, namely Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo, Jamgon Kongtrul Lodrö Taye, Chögyur Dechen Lingpa and Mipham Gyamtso. A principal feature of the *rime* movement was the emergence of a new literature. This consisted primarily of compendiums of major works of all the major and minor schools of Tibetan Buddhism on convergent topics of thought and practice. The point is that there are no essential differences between teachers and teachings of the different schools of Tibetan Buddhism, as they all teach what Lord Buddha taught. The apparent differences are due to the conceptual, relative level in which they are presented and in which they are perceived. Another way of understanding this is through the fact that realized spiritual guides manifest particular styles of behaviour and teaching according to the needs and capacities of their disciples in a particular moment of their spiritual path.

In the words of H.H. the Dalai Lama in 'The Joy of Living and Dying in Peace', pg. 90 (See bibliography):

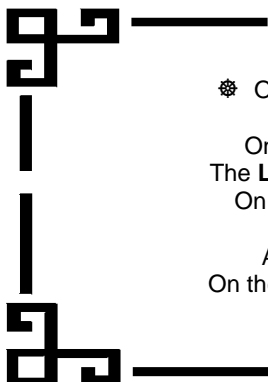
"Among Western Buddhist practitioners there are many who are familiar only with their own school and do not know anything beyond that. Consequently, they feel apprehensive about the authenticity of other schools and other teachings. In response I try to explain that all four Tibetan Buddhist schools follow the same teachings of the Buddha without any contradiction. From my personal point of view I have found very useful and beneficial to study and practice teachings found in all four schools.

"It is very dangerous to adopt sectarian attitudes, because the different levels of the Buddha's teachings are supposed to be used to attain Buddhahood. If, instead of using them to attain Buddhahood, we use them to create conflict among different schools or different religious traditions, it is very unfortunate".

And Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche in 'The Bardo Guidebook', pg. 48 (See bibliography), says:

"Learning and studying should be unbiased because we need to understand what is what, both in the Buddhist and the non-Buddhist teachings. Understand the different views taught, and then you will know what is correct or incorrect. Without having studied, how can we recognize correct teaching from wrong view, true from untrue?"

One of the archetypes of the non-sectarian teachers was Kunu Lama, a very learned master from Kinnor, in Northern India. The Nyingmapas, if asked to what school belonged Kunu Lama, would say that he was a Nyingma lama, because he received many teachings of that school. The Gelukpas would answer that he was a Geluk lama, as he taught as one. And so would it be for the Kagyüpas and the Sakyapas. But if Kunu Lama was asked the same question he would answer, "I am just a Buddhist, practicing the union of sutra and tantra". And when after disappearing from the places he used to live in, and being found years later in Varanasi (Benares) living among the locals, when asked, they would answer "Guruji is a very learned and realized Hindu swami".



✿ On the eastern petal, upon a throne seat supported by elephants,  
**Khorlo Demchog** and the assembly of **yidams**.  
 On the southern petal, upon a throne seat supported by horses,  
 The **Lord of Sages** and the assembly of **buddhas** of the **three times**.  
 On the western petal, upon a throne seat supported by peacocks,  
 The **Absolute Body Yumchenmo**  
 And the teachings of the sacred Dharma in the form of texts.  
 On the northern petal, upon a throne seat supported by **shang shang**,  
 Lord **Chenrezi** and the assembly of the **noble Sangha**. ✿



✿ **Khorlo Demchog.** (Skt. *Chakrasamvara*) One of the main yidams of the Kagyü lineage. Also known as Heruka and Khorlo Demchok, Khorlo Dampa is a yidam (See next note on *yidam*), a meditational lha of the Anuttarayogatantra class. There are many different aspects of this same manifestation, deriving from the various traditions established by the Indian masters who propagated this practice. The study and practice of this tantra is widespread in the Kagyü, Sakya and Geluk traditions of Tibetan Buddhism, while related forms known as buddhasamayoga and shriheruka are well-known within the Nyingma tradition.

✿ **Yidam.** Meditational enlightened manifestations. They are the embodiment of buddhahood as perceived by a particular being in a particular moment of his/her spiritual path. Therefore, they appear in many different forms (peaceful or wrathful, male or female, alone or in union with a consort, with different colours and attributes), in order to conform to the different dispositions of beings.

Normally, at a certain point of the practitioner's development, the teacher will indicate him/her the appropriate personal yidam, and give the empowerment, oral transmission, and specific instructions. Yidam practice sometimes serves as a stepping-stone for the more advanced practices of the Chakchen lineage, such as the Six Yogas of Naropa and so on.

It is also one of the three roots, the source of accomplishments. Such a meditational lha should not be perceived as an externally existing or independent being, but rather as a manifestation of the nature of mind itself. The ultimate, absolute yidam is completely beyond words and thoughts. Beyond the extremes of existence and non-existence. This non-dual approach is one of the most essential elements of yidam meditation.

And referring to the vast number of yidams in the dorje vehicle pantheon, Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche in his book, 'As It Is', pg. 132 (See bibliography), says:

"There are no essential differences between the yidams. You cannot say that there are bad and good yidams, in that all yidams are included in the five buddha families. It is not that one buddha family is better or worse than any of the other ones -not at all. People's individual feelings do make a difference, in that some people want to practice Padmasambhava as their yidam, while other wants to practice Avalokiteshvara or Buddha Shakyamuni or Tara. The preference varies from person to person due to karmic inclinations. It is not that there is any distinction in quality between yidams."

✿ **Lord of Sages.** An epithet of the historical Buddha Shakyamuni. He was born as prince Siddharta, son of Suddhodana - king of the Shakya clan, and queen Mahamaya. He married princess Yasodhara and had a son, Rahula, who in due time would become a monk and one of the main disciples of Lord Buddha. Siddharta would have become king of the Shakyas were he not have abandoned secular life at the age of twenty-one years to become a spiritual seeker.

The four most sacred places for all Buddhist traditions, and a common pilgrimage route (See map on Fig. 4a on next page), are related to the main events of his life:

- ✿ Lumbini -his birthplace, in the south of present day Nepal, some 500 years B.C.E.
- ✿ Bodhgaya -the place where he attained enlightenment, in the present state of Bihar in India.
- ✿ Sarnath -near the sacred city of Varanasi (Benares) in the state of Uttar Pradesh in India, where he gave his first teachings.
- ✿ Kushinagar -near the modern city of Kasia, also in Uttar Pradesh, where he passed away at the age of eighty-one years.

Classical Buddhist literature lists Lord Buddha as the fourth among the thousand buddhas who are predicted to appear during this 'auspicious aeon'.

Two excellent books on his life and teachings are 'The Life of the Buddha', by Ven. Bhikkhu Nyanamoli and 'Old Path White Clouds', by Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh (See bibliography).



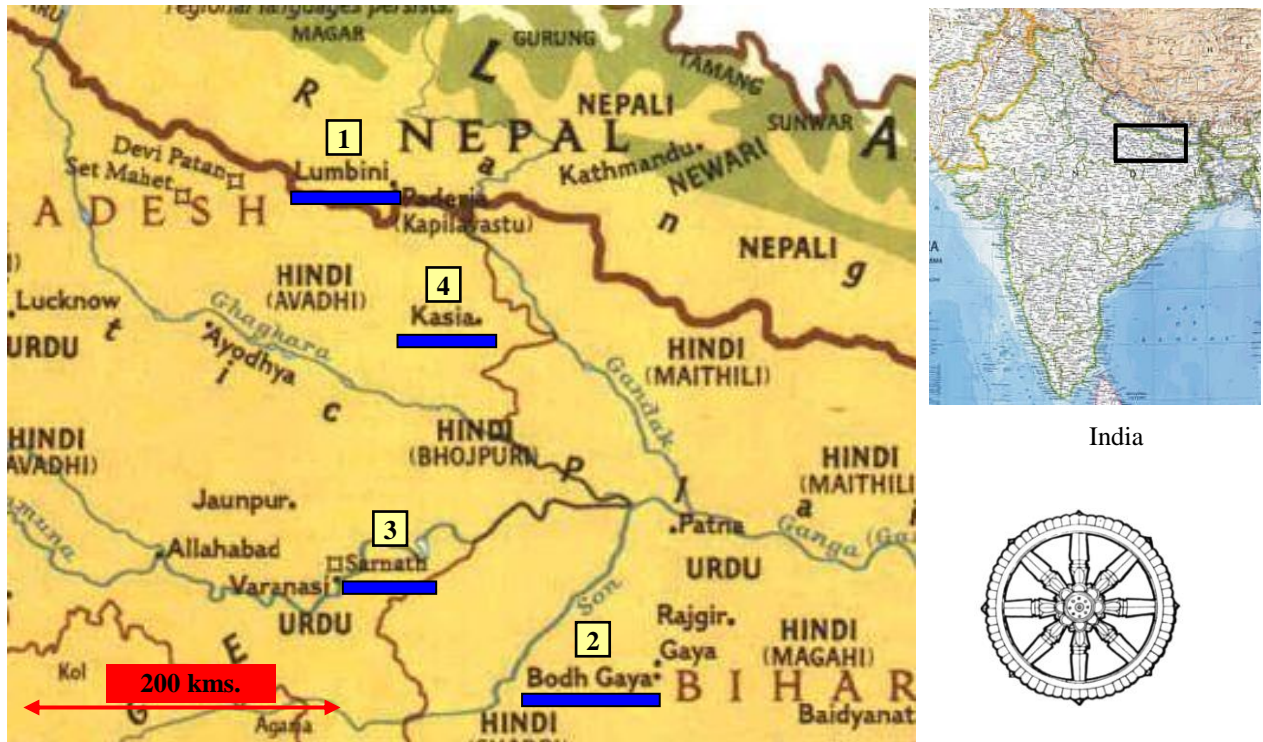


Fig 4a. The four sacred places of Buddhism

❖ **buddha**. (Tib. sangs rgyas, phonetic *sangye*, Skt. *buddha*) The spelling 'Buddha', capitalized, is reserved for the historical Buddha Shakyamuni. The spelling 'buddha' applies to all fully enlightened beings, including the Buddha.

The term '*buddha*' literally means 'awakened', 'developed' and 'enlightened'. The Tibetan equivalent is a combination of two words:

- ❖ *sangs* (awakened or purified) -a full awakening from ignorance in the form of the two obscurations.
- ❖ *rgyas* (developed) -a full realization of true knowledge or the pristine cognition of buddha-mind.

A fully awakened being is therefore one who, as a result of training the mind has eliminated all the obstructions to true knowledge and liberation and has finally realized the full potential for complete enlightenment.

❖ **Three times**. The three times are the past, the present and the future.

❖ **Absolute Body** (Tib. chos sku, phonetic *chöku*. Skt. *dharmakaya*). One of the three bodies, the other two being the complete enjoyment body (Tib. longs sku, phonetic *longku*. Skt. *sambhogakaya*) and the enlightened manifestation body (Tib. sprul sku, phonetic *tulku*. Skt. *nirmanakaya*). These are not three physical bodies or places, but the intent to conceptualise the totality of existence. As such, the division in three aspects is artificial, and a relative understanding can only be attempted by laboriously explaining in words what is beyond words.

The absolute body is the expanse from where everything can happen or manifest and into where everything can disappear. We can relate it to emptiness.

The complete enjoyment body, sometimes translated as 'intangible appearance body', can be thought of as a bridge between the other two bodies. It is the expanse of substanceless light and sound, of visions. We can relate it to energy, again in a non-physical aspect. Enlightened beings can manifest in this level in order to help sentient beings. Although not visible to ordinary beings, they are represented in the iconography and practice texts as extraordinarily richly attired royalty,

with the purpose of inspiring and enriching a practitioner's meditation. It must be remembered that when we use terms such as energy, light, sound, we are not implying physical elements. These are non-physical characteristics, and they are not known to ordinary beings. We try to approximate them by using metaphors.

The enlightened manifestation body can be related to form. Enlightened beings arise out of emptiness as energy, and coalesce into form, with wisdom and awareness. They take a variety of roles in order to be able to help beings with different needs and capacities -as an ordinary looking being, as a great teacher, or as a buddha.

The underlying indivisible union of the three bodies is referred as the essential body (Tib. ngo bo nyid sku, phonetic *ngowo nyiku*. Skt. *Svabhavikakaya*).

Higher tantras speak of five bodies, including the abhisambodhikaya and vajrakaya, as the expressive and indivisible aspects of the absolute body respectively.

The term 'body' in this context is used to refer not only to the physical body of a buddha, but also to the differing 'dimensions' in which the embodiment of fully enlightened attributes occurs, as explained above.

✿ **Yumchenmo.** (Tib. yum chen mo). The Great Mother. Also known in Tibetan as Chöku Sherchin and in Sanskrit as Prajnaparamita, is the manifestation of the wisdom activities of all the buddhas on the absolute level (Tib. chos sku shes rab phar phyin, abbreviated form: chos sku sher phyin, phonetic *Chöku Sherchin*. Skt. *Dharmakaya Prajnaparamita*).

In the dorje path female enlightened manifestations embody different aspects of liberation. For example, among other sublime qualities, Drolma (Tib. sgrol ma, phonetic *Drolma*. Skt. *Tara*) is related to protection; Dorje Pakmo (Tib. rdo rje phag mo, phonetic *Dorje Pakmo*. Skt. *Vajravarahi*) to realization of great bliss, and so on.

✿ **Shang shang.** Beings with beautiful human bodies and bird's legs and wings. They are normally engaged in Dharma support activities, such as carrying offerings and musical instruments, preparing and decorating thrones, and so on.



Fig. 5. Four armed Lord Chenrezi

✿ **Chenrezi.** (Tib. spyan ras gzi, phonetic *Chenrezi*. Skt. *Avalokiteshvara*). In its outer, or relative aspect, he is the embodiment of the compassion of all the buddhas. He is the patron deity of Tibet, and manifests in many different forms, according to the practices: peaceful with 4 or 1000 arms, feminine as Drolma, wrathful as six-armed Yeshe Gönpö (Tib. ye shes kyi mgon po, phonetic *Yeshe Gönpö*. Skt. *Mahakala*) and so on.

H.H. the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama of Tibet is considered an embodiment of Chenrezi. Fig. 5 shows a four-armed Lord Chenrezi.

On the absolute level, he is our own innate wisdom and compassion.

In the words of Pema Wangyal Rinpoche:

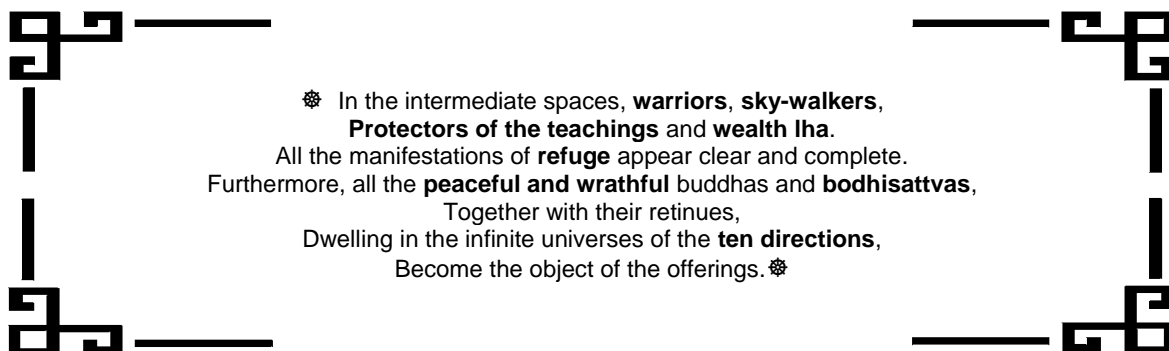
"Someone who has true compassion is not afraid of any situation. That attitude is what Chenrezi means. It is not a person outside. Anybody who has fearless compassion to be able to deal with situations is the real Chenrezi."

✿ **Noble Sangha.** The assembly of the sublime beings.

By extension, the expression *sangha* is sometimes used to denote practitioners with different levels of realization:



- ✽ The liberated teachers who transmit the Dharma -they possess the qualities of enlightenment and the limitless compassion required to provide ultimate refuge.
- ✽ The community of ordained persons.
- ✽ All those who have taken refuge.



✽ In the intermediate spaces, **warriors, sky-walkers,**  
**Protectors of the teachings** and **wealth lha.**  
 All the manifestations of **refuge** appear clear and complete.  
 Furthermore, all the **peaceful and wrathful** buddhas and **bodhisattvas,**  
 Together with their retinues,  
 Dwelling in the infinite universes of the **ten directions,**  
 Become the object of the offerings. ✽

✽ **Warriors.** (Tib. dpa' bo, phonetic *pawo*. Skt. *daka*) Sometimes translated as 'hero'. The masculine principle associated with wisdom and form.

In the dorje vehicle they are the equivalent of the bodhisattvas in the sutra vehicle.

On another level of meaning, they are just the mind's display, and not outer, self-existing entities.

You can read much more on the use of this concept in everyday life in 'Shambhala, the Sacred Path of the Warrior' by Trungpa Rinpoche (See bibliography).

✽ **Sky-walkers.** (Tib. mkha' 'gro, phonetic *kandro*. Skt. *dakini*). Sometimes rendered as 'sky-goers' or 'sky-dancers'. The feminine principle associated with wisdom and emptiness.

In one level of meaning there are ordinary sky-walkers -beings with a certain degree of spiritual development, and wisdom sky-walkers - realized buddhas.

On another level of meaning, they are just the mind's display, not outer, self-existing entities.

The Tibetan term '*kandro*' literally means 'space voyager'. The term 'space' here being used metaphorically to imply emptiness (the ultimate nature of reality), and the term 'voyager' meaning someone immersed in that experience.

✽ **Protectors of the teachings.** (Tib. chos skyong, phonetic *chökyong*. Skt. *dharmapala*). They protect the teachings from being diluted and its transmission from being distorted. Protectors can appear as emanations of buddhas or bodhisattvas, acting with wisdom and out of compassion, or they can appear as spirits, lha or demons, subjugated by great spiritual masters and bound under oath to protect instead of harming. Such protectors can have male or female forms. They are said to be the root of activities, as they usually perform actions conducive to the removal of obstacles and the creation of favourable conditions for the dharma. Occasionally, you will find these protectors mentioned as being part of the third root, together with the warriors and the sky-walkers.

On another level of meaning, they are just the mind's display, not outer, self-existing entities.

✽ **Wealth lha.** Entities propitiated in order to increase wealth. (See next note on *lha*)

✽ **Lha.** (Skt. deva) We have opted to leave the Tibetan world *lha*, usually translated as 'god' or deity', in order not to lead readers with non-Tibetan backgrounds to consciously or unconsciously introduce meanings and flavours belonging to other spiritual traditions. Some aspects are similar, others entirely different.

In many spiritual traditions, in one level of understanding, a 'god' is conceived as an entity that, no matter how abstractly it can be presented in the teachings, is felt as 'someone' separate and superior. It has strong anthropocentric connotations. For example, it establishes sets of rules of conduct, and rewards or punish according to compliance with them. It is happy if propitiated with offerings and ceremonies, and it becomes wrathful if forgotten. And so on.

Only with spiritual development can further, subtler views come into play. And most traditions suggest a progression towards an ineffable level beyond words, beyond concepts, variously called the absolute, or the cosmic conscience, or god or whatever name can be applied to something that is beyond naming.

So we have to deal with a notion that is greatly dependent on context: spiritual tradition, level of understanding, purpose of the author, and so on.

In the frame of reference of the dorje path and the text the following aspects should be considered:

- ⌘ Although Buddhism is reputed to be a non-theistic spiritual tradition, its dorje path form (commonly known as 'Tibetan Buddhism') seems to function comfortably with a well-endowed pantheon of lha. They come in all sizes, colours, and shapes.
- ⌘ The term lha is used to variously denote:
  - ⌘ Worldly entities, who can help or hinder human endeavours.
  - ⌘ Supra-mundane entities within and beyond the round of samsara and nirvana.
  - ⌘ Energies like mantras.
  - ⌘ Qualities like compassion or wisdom.
  - ⌘ The absolute.
- ⌘ The above lha are to be seen in the relative level. In the absolute level there is nothing such as a lha, or a not-lha. See note on the two truths below.
- ⌘ There is a view similar to monotheism when for example Lord Dorje Chang is presented as the embodiment of *all* other manifestations, and there is a polytheistic view when the practitioner is encouraged to visualize an infinite number of lha residing in an infinite number of universes.
- ⌘ In Tibetan '*lha*' is normally used to denote both one and many, both male and female. Only when there is some specific need would it be clarified by the suffix '*po*' or '*mo*' to indicate male or female respectively.
- ⌘ The ngöndro practice will gradually lead the practitioner from the multifaceted conceptual view of the lha within the relative realm, to the 'beyond the lha' of the absolute.
- ⌘ All approaches are necessary to fulfil the different needs and capacities of each sentient being, in order to finally reach freedom from all views and conditioning.

So what to do with all this? The practitioner is inspired to develop an open-minded attitude that will allow for an easy, comfortable coexistence with all this apparently conflicting views. Remembering that ultimately nothing is inherently existent, or non-existent for that matter, he/she is invited to dance, to enjoy, to relax, and not to get overly serious or dogmatic about the lha. The emphasis is on openness, non-sectarianism, free flowing along with all and each one of the lha. The concepts of lha and no-lha, samsara-nirvana are relative. The natural state is equanimity and wisdom. If it fits the practitioner's frame of mind, they can be felt as the 'different energies of life' rather than personified entities, but the same considerations of openness, playfulness, enjoyment described above apply in this case.

⌘ **Refuge.** Generally speaking, when we realize that we are in a very difficult or hopeless situation, and feeling we are not able to overcome it on our own, we sometimes decide to look for help and protection from someone else.

When having to decide where or from whom to seek help, it must be remembered that the source of refuge must itself be totally free. A blind man cannot guide other blind people. A prisoner cannot liberate his jail mates. Therefore, powerful people, friends, relatives, money, institutions, can only be of limited and temporary support.

From the original perspective, the sole sources of ultimate refuge are the Three Jewels (See note on pg. 31).

Another perspective is that the ultimate source of refuge is the Dharma. The Buddha himself repeatedly said that he only showed the way, but that each one had to traverse its own path to enlightenment. He could not magically enlighten beings. As for the sangha, in its extended meaning



of all those who have taken refuge, they are the companions in the perfect way. They deserve all our respect, but can only be sources of limited help. Once more, enlightenment is a personal affair. The sources of refuge on the absolute level are the three bodies: the absolute body, the complete enjoyment body, and the enlightened manifestation body (See note on pg. 19 for the meaning of these terms).

Also considered on the absolute level, and quoting H.H. Dudjom Rinpoche, their meaning is respectively:

- ⌘ Awareness itself.
- ⌘ Its unceasing self-luminous display.
- ⌘ It's all pervading capacity.

Referring to the engagements entered upon at the time of taking refuge until attaining enlightenment, the traditional presentation of the teachings is;

- ⌘ Not to take refuge in worldly gods or entities.
- ⌘ Not to harm other sentient beings.
- ⌘ Not to get involved with people who negate Dharma basic teachings, such as the law of cause and effect, the continuity of the cycle of death and rebirths unless enlightenment is attained, and so on.

Succinctly, taking refuge may be summarized as engaging oneself not to harm anyone, to benefit all beings and thoroughly train the mind. In the words of Lord Buddha:

*Abandon all evildoings.  
Practice the wealth of virtues.  
Thoroughly train your mind.  
These are the teachings of the Buddha.*

In the dorje vehicle, supplementary engagements are taken:

- ⌘ When taking empowerments, oral transmissions and meditation instructions from the teacher, to consider him/her as a buddha. He/she embodies the first jewel, the Buddha.
- ⌘ Receive the teacher's words and teachings as the jewel of the Dharma.
- ⌘ Consider his/her disciples, attendants and our pure conduct spiritual companions as the jewel of the Sangha.

Considering the different levels of motivation for the decision to take refuge:

- ⌘ We take refuge for our own sake because we are afraid or tired of suffering. From the teachings' point of view, although worthwhile, this is an inferior motivation.
- ⌘ On the contrary, we might experiment the wish to take refuge in order to attain enlightenment so we will then be able to guide all other sentient beings to reach that same liberation. This is considered a superior motivation.

⌘ **Peaceful and wrathful** manifestations. Buddhas and bodhisattvas will manifest in the form best required to transmit the teachings and help beings. For example, some disciples will be able to learn better if taught through harsh, uncompromising methods. Their teacher will therefore manifest as a wrathful rather than a peaceful form. Others, with a gentler, more sensitive disposition, require a teacher appearing as a peaceful manifestation.

The peaceful manifestations, which from the point of view of the dorje vehicle are associated with the purification of attachment, symbolize the calm aspects of buddha-nature. The wrathful manifestations, which are associated with the purification of hatred and aversion, symbolize the dynamic aspects of buddha-nature.



One example of these seemingly different appearances is shown on Fig. 6. On the left the familiar manifestation of Lord Dorje Sempa in its peaceful aspect. On the right, Lord Dorje Shönnu (Skt. *Vajrakilaya*), its wrathful form. Here, numerous terrifying details are shown: snakes, corpses, bared fangs, blood-shot eyes, skulls, freshly cut human heads, and many others. And yet, Dorje Shönnu is a manifestation of total enlightenment - a buddha, as much as Dorje Sempa or Buddha Shakyamuni. The difference is that he manifests and works with different energies. On a conceptual level, 'peaceful' is usually considered good or desirable, and 'wrathful' or 'horrifying' are thought as bad and to be avoided. But in the dorje vehicle view, and at a more developed level of perception, there is no such discrimination. Everything is to be seen, as it is, primordially pure.



Fig. 6. Dorje Sempa and Dorje Shönnu

✿ **Bodhisattva.** Literally, a being who has developed an awakened or enlightened mind. There are different meanings of this term.

- ✿ Generally, a person who:
  - ✂ Has decided to develop the enlightened attitude (See next note on this concept).
  - ✂ Has taken a set of vows known as the bodhisattva vow.
  - ✂ Practises and lives according to them.
- ✿ Specifically, a practitioner who has attained the first level. He/she is then referred as a sublime bodhisattva.

Essentially, what the bodhisattva is all about is enlightened compassion. Again, a distinction must be made between the compassion ordinary beings are used to, which many times takes the form of a limited, ego centred 'help', and the enlightened compassion of a bodhisattva. Some of the characteristics of the latter are:

- ✿ *It is permanent.* It does not sometimes increase, decrease, or disappear at other times, depending on his/her state of mind.
- ✿ *It is all encompassing.* It does not consider some beings and ignores others. 'Good' people, such as a social worker, a nurse or a priest, deserve as much help as 'bad' people, the torturers, ethnic cleansers and witch hunters. All are temporarily immersed in ignorance, albeit to different degrees, and all have the potential for enlightenment. It does not consider assisting friends and relatives at the expense of enemies. There is a total absence of moral judgment on who merits help. At first glance these assertions seem subversive of the natu-



ral order of things, and certainly go against the grain of our ordinary way of being. Only with long and perseverant spiritual training will their wisdom and truth become clear.

- ⌘ *It does not expect any retribution.* Enlightened compassion is beyond the three extremes. As an example with the act of giving the three extremes would be the giver, the recipient of the giving, and the object given.
- ⌘ *It works to alleviate the suffering of beings* but considers the elimination of the *causes of suffering* the prevailing theme. That is why the giving of teachings, that dispel the clouds of ignorance -and thus of suffering, is considered the highest form of compassion.

In the 'Samadhi Raja Sutra' Lord Buddha taught that a bodhisattva possesses four qualities:

- ⌘ *Patience and forbearance.* They will enable him/her to tolerate unpleasant or difficult situations without falling prey to anger, fear and so on.
- ⌘ *Discipline.* The Tibetan term '*tsultrim*', literally 'according to the law' connotes a sense of keeping a gentle, correct mode of behaviour. The Sanskrit equivalent '*shila*' means 'tranquillity' or 'serenity'. So an attitude that respects the methods, is pure, gentle, unswerving.
- ⌘ *Renunciation.* An attitude that, having recognized the limitations of the cycle of conditioned existences (samsara), lets go of all worldly objectives, keeping only in mind the attainment of enlightenment for the sake of the welfare of all beings.
- ⌘ *Yearning* to attain a full comprehension of the teachings.

Then the bodhisattva strives to apply this understanding to alleviate the suffering and bring happiness to all sentient beings.

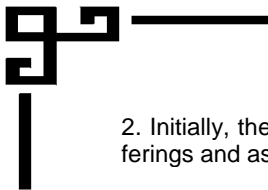
We again refer the reader to Shantideva's 'The Way of the Bodhisattva'. See bibliography.

⌘ **Ten directions.** The ten directions are the four cardinal points (N, E, S, W), the four intermediate points (NE, SE, SW, NW), the zenith above and the nadir below. More generally, it implies the notion that the place where we live, including its contents and its inhabitants, is only one of an infinite number of cosmos, hardly imaginable by our minds. To be conceived and felt as vast and open as possible, as a base for still more vastness and openness.

⌘ **Visualization** (note 2). The descriptions above give an outline of what is to be visualized. In common with other tantric practices the actual visualization is a threefold process:

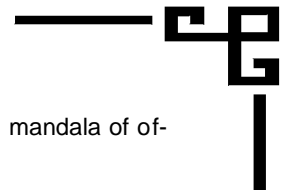
1. It starts by the manifestation of the whole universe and the mandala of realization from emptiness.
2. Then the manifestation remains in front of the practitioner during the relevant parts of the practice.
3. At the end it dissolves back into emptiness.

You may already have noticed this sequence while performing the first two extraordinary preliminary practices of the ngöndro, Refuge and Dorje Sempa. It will also be like this in the fourth, Guru Yoga. And it happens all the time, not only during formal practice. For example, every single thought arises from emptiness, dwells during some time in our mind, and then dissolves into emptiness.



2. Initially, the mandala of offerings, which also has two parts: the actual mandala of offerings and aspirations:

2.1. First, the mandala of offerings. **Offering the mandala** has two possibilities: the main, offering as much as you can, or alternatively, just offering with **hand gestures**. In any case, the intention is most important, along with a clear, complete, and vast visualization.



OM VAJRA BHUMI AH HUNG  
*The completely pure base, the powerful golden ground.*  
 OM VAJRA REKHE AH HUNG  
*It is surrounded by the circular iron mountain boundary.*  
*At the centre, HUNG, the king of mountains, Rirab. ❀*

❀ **Offering the mandala.** Here starts the central part of the practice. The practitioner will engage in three simultaneous activities:

- ❀ Mentally -generate the visualization of what is to be offered.
- ❀ Verbally -recite the description of the mandala, and the associated prayers according to the text.
- ❀ Physically -offer symbolical representations of each of the items visualized and recited.

It is essential to practice without distractions. As a rock can remain forever under the water, and still be dry inside, practising distractedly will be useless. Concentrate one-pointedly on the visualization, recitation, and offering. If initially all this cannot be done simultaneously, alternate from time to time between the different aspects, until all can be done together.

After the generation of the mandala of realization -the recipients of the offerings, what will now be prepared is the offering to be made. It is based on the visualization of the traditional cosmos as described in the note on Rirab on pg. 9, so we suggest you review it again. It is on this representation of the universe that the actual offering is made through the preparation of the *thirty-seven points mandala*. This is a traditional set of many precious items, arranged in a specific way, to be perceived as the whole universe and all its contents. Please refer to Fig. 8. on pg. 27, where this mandala is viewed from above, with the name and position of each element. You might come across other presentations of the thirty-seven points mandala, with the east facing away from the practitioner, or mandalas with a different number of points. For example, in many practices of the Drukpa Kagyü lineage a twenty-three points mandala is offered (points 14 to 17, 26 to 33, 36 and 37 are not included), and in the Kalachakra tantra a five points mandala is mentioned. But in the context of the ngöndro, we will only use the thirty-seven points mandala and its abridged version in seven points. This last one will be explained later.

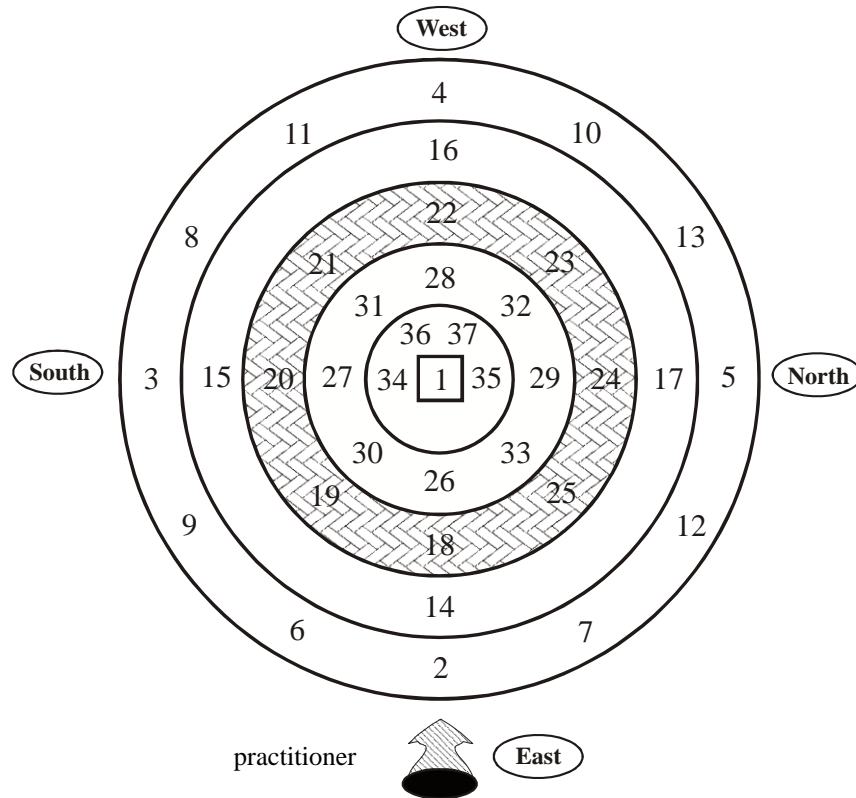
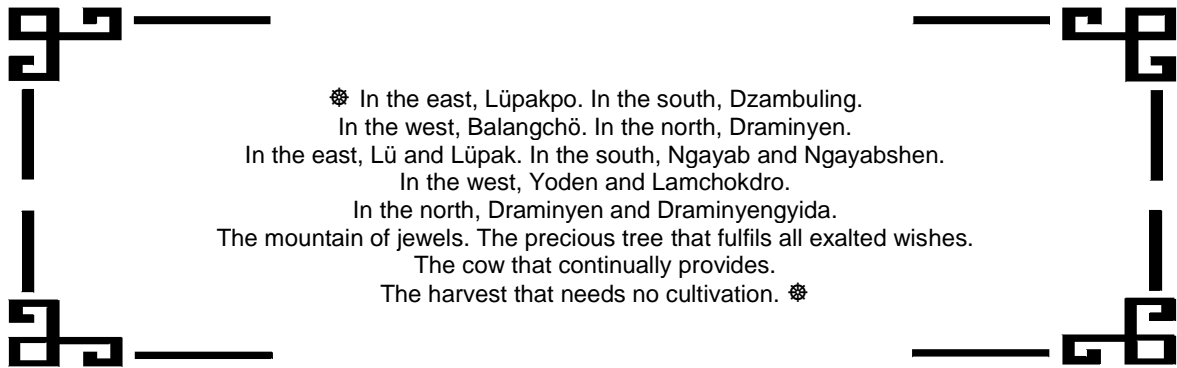
The practitioner visualizes himself/herself facing to the east of the mandala of offerings, and it will be imagined in front of him/her. In what follows we will explain first the mental and verbal activities (visualization and recitation) and then the physical actions. However, it must be remembered that they are being performed simultaneously, and the division in three types of actions -mental, verbal, and physical, is only for the sake of the explanation.

❀ **Hand gestures.** Sometimes known by the Sanskrit term '*mudra*', it has many different meanings depending on the context. For example, they can be the expression of innate pristine awareness, where the hand movements 'just come' into existence as a manifestation of realization. Another example is during rituals, when a number of hand gestures are used to symbolize different aspects of the practice being performed. You can read more and see many beautiful drawings in chapter six of Robert Beer's book 'Encyclopedia of Tibetan Symbols and Motifs'. (See bibliography)



Fig. 7. Hand gesture of offering a mandala

It is taught that even if the practitioners does not have the means to offer material things, the practice can be done with gestures. Fig. 7 shows the traditional gesture of offering a mandala. The two ring fingers are placed back-to-back and pointing upwards, representing Rirab. The remaining four fingers of each hand are interlocked to symbolize the four continents.



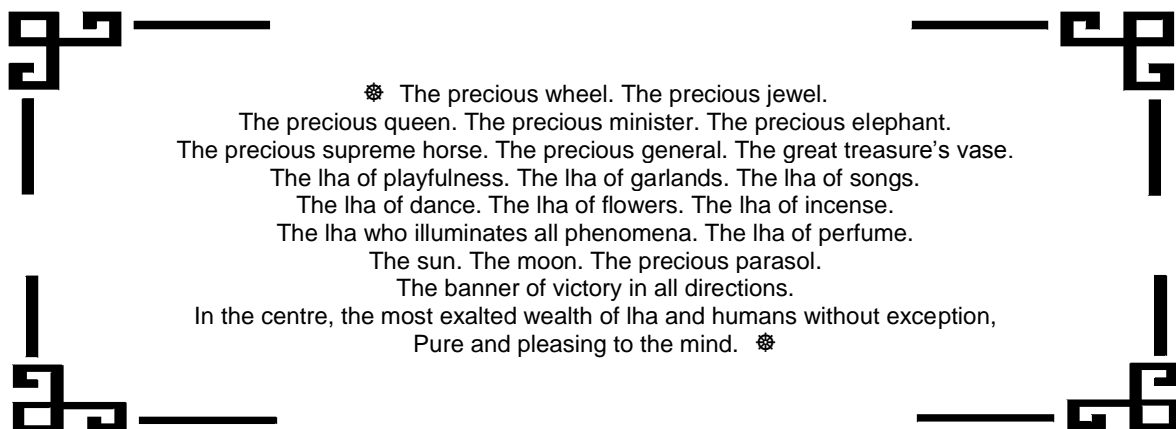
1- Ri Gyalpo	11- Lamchokdro	21- Precious minister	31- Lha of incense
2- Lupakpo	12- Draminyen	22- Precious elephant	32- Lha who illuminates all
3- Dzambuling	13- Draminyenyida	23- Precious horse	33- Lha of perfume
4- Balangchö	14- Mountain of jewels	24- Precious general	34- Sun
5- Draminyen	15- Precious tree	25- Precious vase	35- Moon
6- Lü	16- Always providing cow	26- Lha of playfulness	36- Precious parasol
7- Lüpak.	17- Harvest	27- Lha of garlands	37- Victory banner
8- Ngayab	18- Precious wheel	28- Lha of songs	Practitioner. (Sitting on the east of the mandala)
9- Ngayabshen	19- Precious jewel	29- Lha of dance	
10- Yoden	20- Precious queen	30- Lha of flowers	

Fig. 8. The mandala of thirty-seven points.

✿ Referring to how to visualize during this recitation, you may want to review the notes on *Visualization (note 1)* and *Visualization (note 2)* on pg. 8 and pg. 25 respectively. Finally, on Fig 11 on pg. 30 a painting by the Ven. Dugu Choegyal Rinpoche, 'Mandala of Offerings', that will greatly help in the process.

✿ The first group of thirteen objects to be offered are the central mountain Rirab, the continents and its subcontinents. Please refer to Fig. 8 on pg. 27

The second set, numbers 14 to 17, indicates the particular type of wealth of each continent. For example, number 15, (in correspondence with number 3 representing Dzambuling, our continent), is the precious tree that fulfils all exalted wishes. To the west is number 4, Balangchö, with number 16, the cow that continually provides. It gives superb milk in whatever quantities are required, whenever it is needed. And similarly with the rest.



The third set, numbers 18 to 24 are the seven possessions of the universal monarch, shown on Fig. 9 in their classical depictions. In this ancient Indian tradition, adopted by Buddhism, this king represents the perfect ruler, possessing each and every of the qualities required to govern the entire world. He is endowed with all powers, wealth, capacities, and so on. He is in secular life the equivalent to what the Buddha is in spiritual life, i.e. those who have attained the summit in their respective fields. In an inner meaning, he represents the practitioner and his/her qualities and resources. Again, each of the possessions has outer and inner meanings, and they should be seen and felt as highly desirable, therefore suitable for offering. Just to show the multiple levels of underlying content, we can take as an example the minister. He embodies the ability of the universal monarch to transform his wishes into realities, immediately, without obstacles. Some of the qualities of the minister are:

- ✿ Whatever the king has in his mind, even if the minister has not

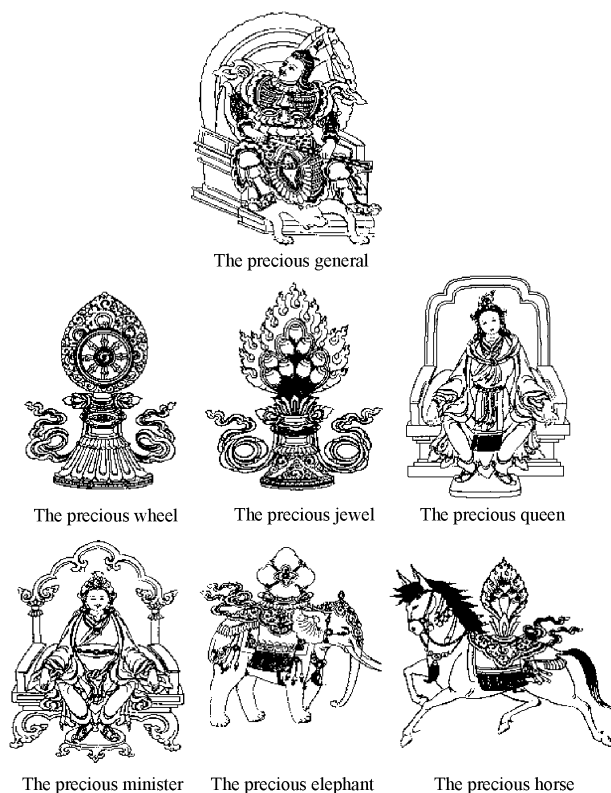


Fig. 9. The seven possessions of the universal monarch



been told, he already knows them and carries them out perfectly and without delay.

- ⌘ Working with perfect diligence, without attachment, all he does is perfectly in accordance with the Dharma. He does what is right, at the right moment, in the right place, without complications, without harming anyone, without disturbing anyone.
- ⌘ He is tireless in the performance of his perfectly pure actions.
- ⌘ His motivation is solely the service of the Dharma and the king.
- ⌘ Whatever will have to be done in the future, he will do it in the same way.

For a detailed explanation of meanings of each possession, as well as beautiful renderings, see Robert Beer's 'The Encyclopedia of Tibetan Symbols and Motifs', pg 162. (See bibliography)

The eight lha are offering different elements corresponding to various pleasant sensory experiences. Traditional images of four of them can be seen in Fig. 10. Again, there are outer and inner meanings for the lha. They are not just young, desirable women dressed in exotic fashion, but facets of the practitioners mind.

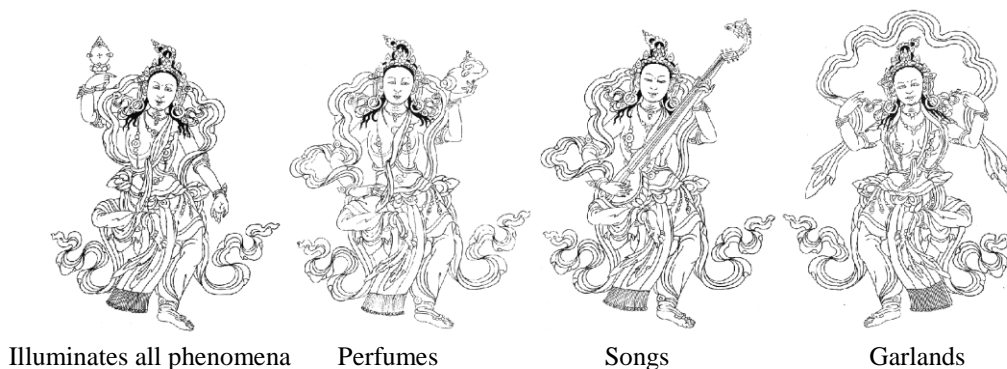


Fig. 10. Lha of offerings

The parasol is a traditional symbol of high rank, secular or spiritual, and the banner of victory represents the vanquishing of ignorance. See traditional Tibetan renderings in Fig. 12 below.

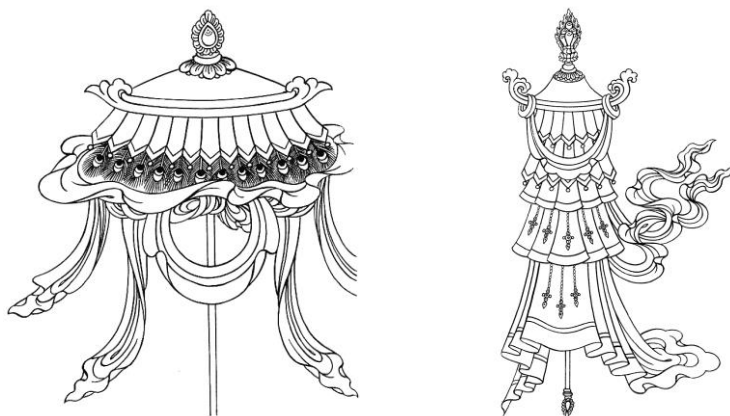
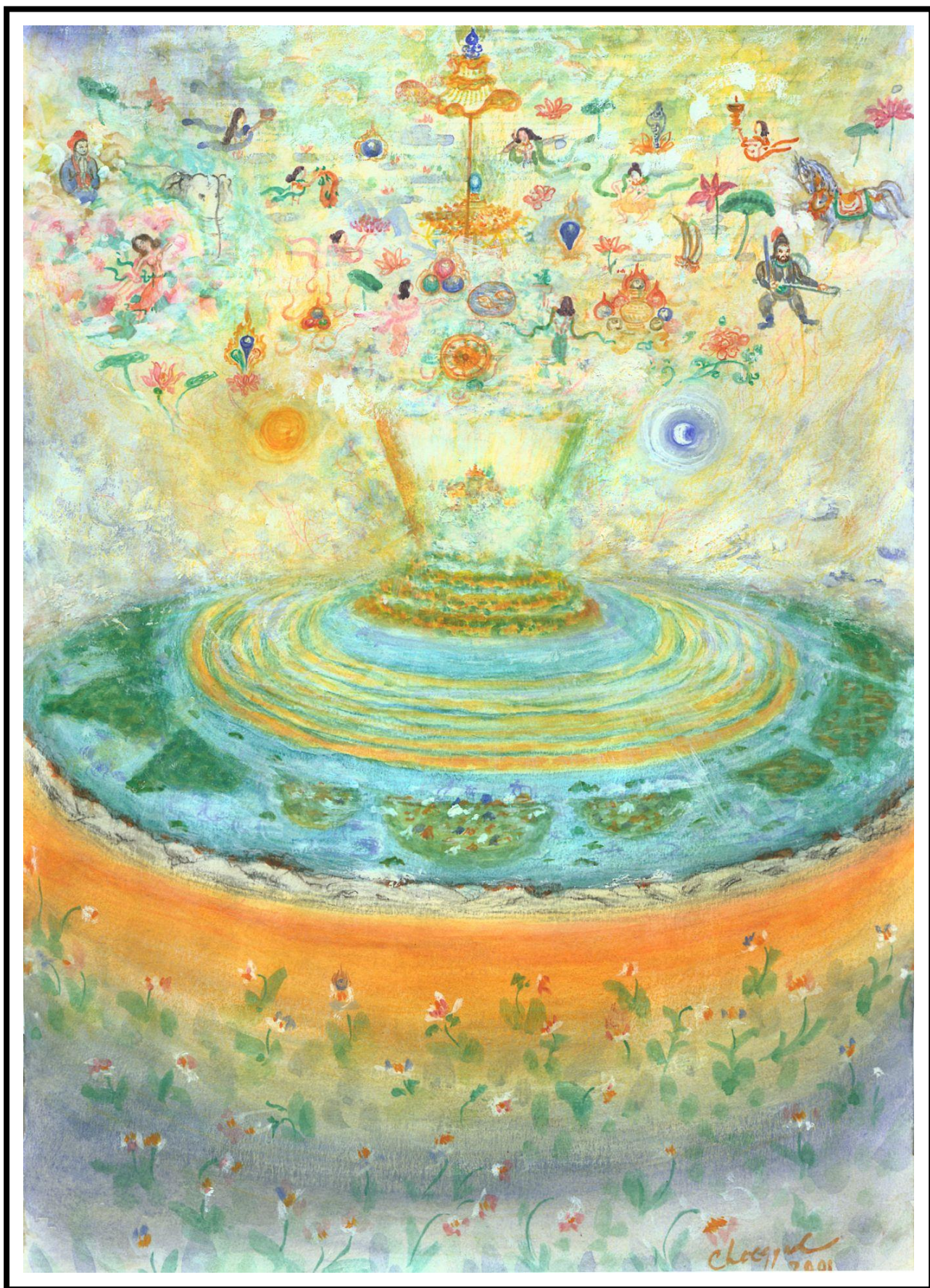


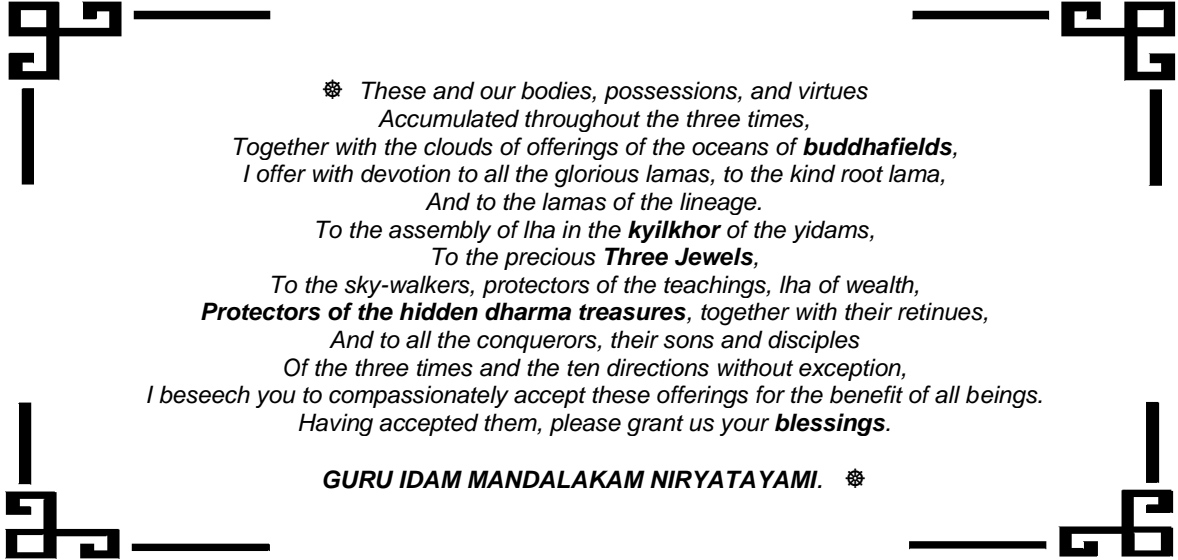
Fig. 12. The parasol and the victory banner.





**Fig. 11 - MANDALA OF OFFERINGS**  
A vision of the V.Ven. Dugu Choegyal Rinpoche





☸ *These and our bodies, possessions, and virtues  
 Accumulated throughout the three times,  
 Together with the clouds of offerings of the oceans of **buddhafiels**,  
 I offer with devotion to all the glorious lamas, to the kind root lama,  
 And to the lamas of the lineage.  
 To the assembly of lha in the **kyilkhor** of the yidams,  
 To the precious **Three Jewels**,  
 To the sky-walkers, protectors of the teachings, lha of wealth,  
**Protectors of the hidden dharma treasures**, together with their retinues,  
 And to all the conquerors, their sons and disciples  
 Of the three times and the ten directions without exception,  
 I beseech you to compassionately accept these offerings for the benefit of all beings.  
 Having accepted them, please grant us your **blessings**.*

**GURU IDAM MANDALAKAM NIRYATAYAMI.** ☸

☸ **Buddhafiels.** This term can be understood on two levels:

- ☸ The outer sense -realms of existence, which spontaneously arise as result of the altruistic aspirations of an enlightened being. They are the dwelling place of a particular buddha or family of buddhas, environments totally free from suffering, both physical and mental. For example, the buddhafiels of Chenrezi (Skt. *Avalokiteshvara*) is in the Potala Mountain, and Öpakme's (Skt. *Amitabha*) is Dewachen. These buddhafiels can manifest in the enlightened manifestation body (Tib. sprul sku, phonetic *tulku*. Skt. *nirmanakaya*) or in the intangible appearance body (Tib. longs sku, phonetic *longku*. Skt. *sambhogakaya*) levels. See note on absolute body on page 19 for the meaning of these last two terms. Beings who take rebirth in a pure realm are those who have established strong karmic links with the particular buddha associated with that realm.
- ☸ The inner sense -buddhafiels can be understood as our pure personal vision or pure outlook, as opposed to our ordinary, deluded one.

☸ **Kyilkhor.** See note on *mandala* on pg. 7.

☸ **Three Jewels.** From the original Buddhist perspective they are the sole sources of ultimate refuge. They are:

- ☸ The Buddha -the original teacher.
- ☸ The Dharma -the teachings.
- ☸ The Sangha -the liberated teachers who transmit the Dharma.

They possess the qualities of enlightenment and the limitless compassion required to provide such a refuge.

The dorje vehicle also includes as sources of refuge the Three Roots: the lama, the yidam, and the sky-walkers. For *lama* see pg. 14. For *yidam*, see pg. 18. For *sky-walkers*, see pg. 21.

☸ **Protectors of the hidden dharma treasures.** Great masters of the past, particularly Guru Rinpoche and his consort Yeshe Tsogyal, have hidden many teachings known as *termas*.

They have been concealed in many places: in the earth, in rocks, in lakes, in the mind of special beings, in space. At the appropriate time, they are discovered by the reincarnations of the disciples of Guru Rinpoche, known as treasure discoverers (Tib. *tertön*). Until then, the protectors or guardians of the hidden dharma treasures keep them safe. You can read more in the chapter *Terma Tradition in the Nyingma School* in Tulku Thondup's book 'Enlightened Journey'. (See bibliography)

✿ **Blessings.** (Tib. byin brlab, phonetic *jinlab*. Skt. *adhisthana*) In a Dharma context, the word 'blessing' relates to a sense of inspiration from an external source, which transforms the potentials inherent within the individual's mental continuum. '*Jinlab*' is the Tibetan term that is commonly translated into English as 'blessing'; '*jin*' means 'magnificence', 'excellence', 'splendour', 'brilliance', and '*lab*' means 'wave', also with a connotation of 'transformed', 'overwhelmed' and 'enveloped'. Thus, together, the two syllables can be rendered as 'to be transformed through the waves of inspiring magnificence'.

This term might mislead persons with a non-Buddhist background, as the term translated as 'blessing' has different meanings in different cultures and spiritual traditions. In addition, even within the Buddhist tradition, it will take different meanings depending on the level of understanding.

On the relative level, as a result of a perfect teacher's realization and compassion, which are the source of the blessings, he/she generates power, the blessings in themselves. Compassion is the key to realization, as it means the teacher has gone beyond the ego fixation that otherwise would hinder all his/her other capacities.

According to the interaction of the teacher's realization and compassion, these blessings can take many forms. If the sources are limited, then the blessings will have a limited effect. In addition, as they can be expressed through any combination of body, speech, and mind activities, they will manifest in myriad different forms. The teacher's physical attitudes, clothes, any other item in contact with his/her body, his/her relics after death, can all have positive effects. Hearing his/her voice or teachings can help the practice of the student. His/her practice, prayers, and meditations can create beneficial or protective conditions according to the particular needs. In Tibet, for centuries, faith in these capacities has proved to be truly effective.

In a mentor-student practice context, a student can relate through confidence, faith, or devotion in the mentor's Mind. Then, and only then, the teacher can transmit wisdom. This process is individual, Mind to mind, and its success depends on the level of realization of the spiritual guide and his/her compassion on one hand, and on the openness, inclination, and devotion of the student on the other. Without these components, no blessing, seen as wisdom transference, can take place.

However, the student's future depends on his/her past and present actions, and not even a fully realized buddha can change that. Quoting Lord Buddha:

"I cannot transfer you my realization. I can only show you the way to obtain it. You are the only one who can attain it through your own practice".

However, the blessings of a realized teacher can help by creating a favourable, inspiring, energizing setting for the practice, and sometimes generate the conditions for insights that otherwise would have taken much longer to be realized. The traditional metaphor is the maturation of a furuncle or boil. When it first appears, there is not much that can be done. It will mature at its own pace, and some days later it will reach a point where it is ripe for cutting open and draining the pus from inside. This, if done too soon or too late, would not be as beneficial. In the same way, through training over many lives, with a strong connection with the teacher, and in conducive circumstances, a moment can reach when it is possible for a qualified mentor to create the conditions for the student's insight.

When teaching on this subject, Dorzong Rinpoche gave the example of *Pakmo Drupa* and his disciple Lingchen Repa. Pakmo Drupa, a realized lama, one day told his attendants that he was expecting someone who would arrive soon, in which case the newcomer was to be shown in immediately. The attendants were expecting some important person, but nobody like that showed up. Only a beggar appeared during the day, asking to see Pakmo Drupa. Of course he was told that the lama was absolutely not able to meet him because he was very busy, etc., etc. By the end of the day Pakmo Drupa inquired whether someone had appeared or not, and was told that nobody had come, except a beggar, who obviously was not his expected guest. "But yes, he is the one I am waiting for, show him in!" And so the surprised attendants did just that. When the visitor was ushered into the lama's room, he suddenly jumped towards Pakmo Drupa, embraced him and started weeping from joy. The attendants, overwhelmed by this breach of all the norms of protocol when meeting a lama of Pakmo Drupa's standing, tried to drag him out, excusing themselves at the same time. "Let him be with me, he is my son and now we will not be separated again!" said the lama. And Lingchen Repa attained instantaneously the realization of Chakchen, and spiritually grew to be-



come in due course a realized master himself, and the founder of the Drukpa Kagyü lineage. This is an example of the auspicious coincidence of a realized master, a ripe disciple, at the appropriate moment, resulting in the instantaneous indivisible union of the two minds. This process can also be described as the blessings of the master inspiring the disciple.

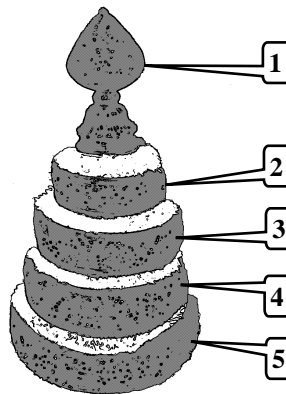
✽ **Guru Idam Mandalakam Niryatayami.** The actual offering is done while reciting this line. The visualization is extended from the mandala that has just been completed to the generation of an immeasurable number of similar mandalas. Then, the whole is offered. Everything is infinite in size, number, qualities...

✽ Preparations and practical procedures for the mandala practice. The practitioner visualizes the mandala as described above, while reciting as per the text. During this time he/she also performs a series of ritual actions, thus involving his/her three doors (mind, speech, and body).

We will describe in general terms how to perform them, but it is also important to receive a 'visual transmission', either directly from the teacher or from other practitioner that the teacher might indicate as an adequate helper. By being shown, understanding how it is done, and asking as many questions as needed to clarify everything, mistakes and loss of time can be avoided.

Also, if you read or hear about this practice in other texts from other schools, such as Nyingma, Geluk or Sakya, or even from this same Drukpa Kagyü lineage, you will notice certain differences in the visualizations, the actions to be performed and/or the prayers to be recited. It should be clear that the essence and purpose of all these practices is the same, and only details vary. But for the practitioner who does not have a long experience in these matters it might be confusing, so once more, the golden rule is to request the teachings from your mentor, practice as indicated by him/her, and not mix different lineages until realization dawns.

What is described in this text is the practice as taught by H.E. Khamtrul Rinpoche, H.E. Dorzong Rinpoche and Ven. Dugu Choegyal Rinpoche to their disciples.



1	Top ornament. (Tib. <i>tog</i> )
2	Ring to hold the offerings of lha, sun, moon, etc.
3	Ring to hold the offerings of the possessions of the universal monarch.
4	Ring to hold the offerings of mountains, continents, etc
5	The golden base

Fig. 13. Mandala of offerings and its outline.

You will need:

- ✽ **A set of one plate, three rings, and a top piece.** Utilized to represent the mandala of offerings. They are arranged to approximate the form of the thirty-seven points mandala. (See a picture in Fig. 13 above) Mandala sets can be borrowed, bought, or improvised. They come in many different sizes and materials, with various amounts of engravings and elaboration. It is to be arranged as carefully and elaborately as the practitioner feels, and placed in the shrine in front of him/her. Nevertheless, this ritual implementation is not

mandatory, but depends on the wishes of each one. Here start the personal decisions as to how to implement the details of the practice. More will follow.

- ⌘ **A plate** or disk, of approximately 15/20cm. diameter, with a rim of approximately 4 cm high so it can be held comfortably, usually called 'mandala' for brevity. This plate is similar to the bottom part of the arrangement of the mandala of offerings shown in Fig. 13. It is normally obtained from other practitioners or bought for the occasion, and is used to support the offerings. It should be made of a material as good as one can afford (gold, or silver or copper, and so on). However, poor practitioners can even use a piece of wood or a flat stone. Nowadays, stainless steel and aluminium utensils may also be considered. It can be improvised out of the kitchen implements normally used to bake cakes.
- ⌘ **Offering materials** that will be placed on the plate while reciting. The teachings state that there are different types of materials that can be offered, depending on the practitioner wishes and possibilities:
  - ⌘ Precious jewels.
  - ⌘ Traditional medicinal fruits such as churura, arura, etc.
  - ⌘ Mixture of grains (rice, wheat, barley, etc) mixed with a proportion of jewels or gold/silver coins.
  - ⌘ Mixture of grains, or one single type of grain.
  - ⌘ Poor practitioners can even use earth or sand.
- ⌘ Once offered, the materials can be discarded and new materials employed, or they can be recycled, totally or partially. Again, this is a subject where each person has to decide individually. As an example, in Tibet the ngöndro was usually performed in retreat, and the practitioners devoted themselves full time to the practice. The practitioners would usually do four sessions of this mandala practice every day for months on end, until the total number of offerings was performed. They would utilize around 1kg of grain during four or five days, that is for some 20 sessions, and then discard it and continue with a fresh quantity. The materials that were offered were not just thrown away, or used later for personal consumption, but offered to suitable recipients. For example, rice would be welcome by poor people, birds or insects. So you have to decide what materials you will offer, how often you will renew them and so on. However, as you start to practice you will note that, apart from the spiritual motivation of your decisions, the subject is not simple from the practical point of view. You might soon find yourself hauling substantial amounts of materials in and out of your meditation room. And in a modern urban setting it is not so easy to appropriately discard items without throwing them to the garbage can for later collection by the municipal waste outfits. Birds and animals are few and far between, needy people may not be nearby or willing to take the grains, insects are not welcome and so on. One idea would be to throw the materials into a nearby river. Other possible solutions will have to be thought out by the practitioner to suit his/her particular situation. In case you decide to mix jewels or coins into the grain, they can be retrieved for later recycling into the next batch of grain.
- ⌘ Before offering the grain, it was recommended to wash it and, if saffron or perfumed water is available, to soak or sprinkle it to perfume it. Then the whole is to be thoroughly dried to prevent rotting. Again, these traditional recommendations were formulated for practice settings entirely different from today's, so use your judgment and your feeling. The grain you will probably acquire from a supermarket, it comes bromatologically clean and does not require washing to eliminate small stones, dead or live insects, and other impurities that have been common part and parcel in humankind's food stuff. And so on, and so on.
- ⌘ **An apron**, made out of a piece of cloth, about one square meter, preferably white or yellow colour, to place on your lap. It will hold the grain to be picked up for each offering, and collect it once it has been offered and before it starts to get all over the place.
- ⌘ **Saffron or perfumed water** to symbolically clean and purify the mandala before starting to offer it.
- ⌘ **Rosary** (sometimes known by the Sanskrit term '*mala*') **and counters** to keep track of the number of offerings made. The total number, offered along many sessions, is 111,111 mandala offerings. Each mandala offering is constituted by either the offering of a com-



plete thirty-seven points mandala or the abridged seven points mandala (to be described below), to be done as many times as possible during each session.

To orient decisions on the items and materials to be used and not forget the objective of this practice, the teachings of Dza Patrul Rinpoche might be of help:

"Although the teachings permit the offering of earth and stones, this is for the benefit of those so poor that they have no possessions at all. Or for those with such superior faculties that their mind can create, on a single speck of dust, buddhafi elds as numerous as all the particles of earth in the whole world. If you actually have what is necessary, but cannot let go of it and give it as an offering, and you then claim to be making offerings by using mantras and visualization, you are only fooling yourself."

On the other hand, he also teaches:

"If you lack resources or are otherwise unable to make offerings, there is nothing wrong with offering even something dirty or unpleasant, as long as your intention is perfectly pure. The buddhas and bodhisattvas have no concepts of clean or dirty."



Fig. 14. Cleaning the mandala.



Fig. 15. A completed seven points mandala

Once the necessary items are available, they will be used to complement the visualization and recitation. Only an outline is given below, so you will need to complete it with the visual transmission mentioned above.

- ⌘ Wash your hands before starting the actual practice.
- ⌘ Hold the rosary in the left hand between your thumb and index, the plate in the left, sprinkle a few drops of perfumed water on it, and symbolically clean it by rubbing in a clockwise sense with the back of your forearm and/or the ball of your right hand, (see Fig. 14. above) while reciting three times the long (100 syllables) Lord Dorje Sempa mantra. While doing this cleaning, visualize that the illnesses, misfortunes, bad deeds, obscurations, and impurities of yourself and others, of the whole universe and all its inhabitants, which have arisen due to dualistic fixation, are totally purified. Just like the nature of your mind, the plate should be totally free of dirt and impurities. The cleaning gesture can be seen as the scythe of wisdom cutting the grass of ignorance.
- ⌘ Now take some grain in the right hand and while visualizing and reciting the description of the thirty-seven points mandala, start preparing the offering. For the first line (Om Bezar Bhumi Ah Hung) distribute a small amount of grain evenly on the mandala, signifying the golden base. For the second (Om Bezar Rekhe Ah Hung) distribute it around the rim of the mandala in a clockwise sense, symbolizing the iron wall. For numbers 3 to 35, small heaps on each point indicated in Fig.8 on pg. 27. The last two points, 36 -the precious parasol and 37 -the victory banner, are to be visualized not as one item of each, but as a great number of parasols and banners in the sky in front of the practitioner. The grain should be evenly distributed on the base and not placed in two heaps.
- ⌘ After completing the mandala of offerings as described above, visualize that you are now actually offering all the elements of the universe: beings and things, precious or common, big or small. Then hold it with both hands, recite the final lines ("These and our bod-

ies..."), and while reciting the offering mantra GURU IDAM MANDALAKAM NIRYATAYAMI visualize the actual offering being made and then wipe away the grain with the

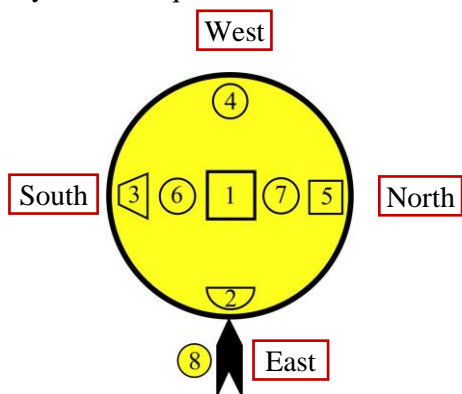


Fig. 16. Offering a thirty-seven points mandala

back of your right hand, so it falls onto the apron on your lap. This completes one offering of the mandala (in this case, the thirty-seven points one). It will be the same for the seven points mandala explained below. A traditional line drawing of a monk offering the thirty-seven points mandala is shown in Fig 16.

Fig. 17 below shows the abridged version of the thirty-seven points mandala known as the seven points mandala. It is the one to be offered during most of the practice. The recommendation is to try to keep the visualization of the thirty-seven points mandala, while reciting and offering with the seven points one. If this were not initially possible, at least visualize clearly and in its proper order the elements included in the seven points mandala. The placing of the seven grain heaps and the offering is done in the same way as described for the thirty-seven points mandala.

All the elements of the offerings are to be visualized and felt as big, as many, as pure, with as many great qualities as possible. In addition, not limited to our small universe but including an infinite number of them. Love, compassion, kindness, wisdom, purity, all these qualities are inherent in the offerings.



1 - Ri Gyalpo	6 - Sun
2 - Lupakpo	7 - Moon
3 - Dzambuling	8 - Practitioner. (Sits on the east of the mandala)
4 - Balangchöd	
5 - Draminyen	

Fig. 17. The seven points mandala.

The recitation for the seven points mandala is:

ས་ཤི་པོ་ཅུ་ཅུ་ཅིང་མེ་ཏོག་བཟུམ།

Sa Shi Pö Chü Juk Ching Me Tok Tram

རི་རབ་ལིང་ཤི་ཉི་དེ་གཡེན་པ་འདི།

Ri Rab Ling Shi Nyi De Gyen Pa Di

*The base -spread with scented water, strewn with flowers,  
Ornamented with Rirab, the four continents, the sun, and the moon-*

སངས་རྒྱལ་ཤིང་དུ་མིག་ཤིང་པུ་ཡ་ཡི།

Sang Gye Shing Du Mik Te Pül Wa Yi

འགྲོ་གྲུན་རྣམ་དག་ཞིང་དུ་སྐྱེ་བར་གོ།

Dro Kün Nam Tak Shing Du Kye War Shok

*Perceived as a buddhafiield, I offer it.  
May all beings be reborn in a totally pure realm.*

གུ་རུ་ཨི་དམ་མཁའ་གྲི་འུ་ལྷ་མི།

GURU IDAM MANDALAKAM NIRYATAYAMI





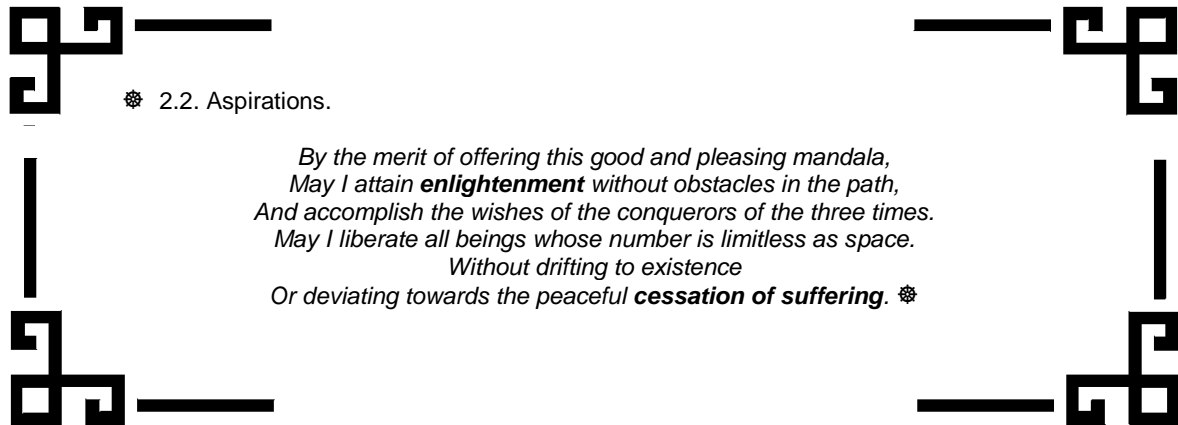
Fig 15 on pg. 35 shows a completed seven points mandala, just before offering it. Note how the right hand now contributes to support the mandala. Check your counting method with your mentor or guide to ensure it does not introduces undue delays or distractions.

After a certain number of repetitions of the seven points mandala, when you decide that the amount done is enough for the session, continue with the rest of the practice as given below.

Referring to the eventual repetition of the thirty-seven points mandala, some of the possibilities are:

- ✽ Just once at the beginning, as described above.
- ✽ Add another one at the end, for a total of two per session.
- ✽ Include one at the beginning, one after a certain number of repetitions of the seven points mandala, and one at the end of the session.
- ✽ Assess your disposition, check with your spiritual teacher, and then decide what is better for you now. It is said that in Tibet some practitioners did their ngöndro reciting just the thirty-seven points mandala, without resorting to the short version!

When you finish your session, the amount of recitations accumulated is registered, and all the elements used for the practice are stored in a clean and appropriate place. In particular they should not be stepped over, or left in a place where they might get dirty or handled without due respect.



✽ 2.2. Aspirations.

*By the merit of offering this good and pleasing mandala,  
May I attain **enlightenment** without obstacles in the path,  
And accomplish the wishes of the conquerors of the three times.  
May I liberate all beings whose number is limitless as space.  
Without drifting to existence  
Or deviating towards the peaceful **cessation of suffering**. ✽*

✽ **Enlightenment** (Tib. byang chub, phonetic *jangchub*. Skt. *bodhi*) There are several levels of spiritual realization called enlightenment. For example, the fundamental vehicle recognizes as enlightenment a level that, from the point of view of the dorje vehicle, is incomplete.

The highest level, full enlightenment, implies both freedom from all obscurations and limitations on one hand, and on the other realization of all knowledge, having gone beyond both samsara and nirvana. It pertains to the domain of the absolute

This absolute level is sometimes known as buddhahood. It is important to remember that all the pure qualities and capacities of this absolute level already dwell within us in their entirety, that nothing can deteriorate them, that nothing can improve them. They are not something to be attained, to be generated, to be sought or to be received from outside. They have been with us since beginningless time, albeit unrecognized due to our ignorance. The teacher will teach how to realize them and the associated benefits.

The usual example for this situation is the sun. It is always shining, but temporarily the clouds can obscure it from us. Remove the clouds of the deluded mind, and the sun of enlightenment will be apparent.

Tradition, as presented in the Dharmapada (one of the texts of the Buddhist canon), verses 153-4, has it that the first words that came to Lord Buddha after his enlightenment under the bodhi tree were:

*"Seeking but not finding the house builder  
I travelled through the round of countless rebirths.  
Oh, painful is birth ever and again!"*



*House builder, you have now been seen.  
You shall not build the house again.  
Your rafters have been broken down; your ridgepole is demolished too.  
My mind has now attained the unformed cessation of suffering,  
And reached the end of every kind of craving."*

Succinctly, fully enlightened beings possess four qualities:

- ⌘ Wisdom.
- ⌘ Loving-kindness.
- ⌘ Power to protect all beings.
- ⌘ Ability to perform altruistic activities.

More attributes are mentioned in the texts. For example, the eighteen unique qualities of full enlightenment as detailed by Thrangu Rinpoche in 'Buddha Nature', pg. 100. (See bibliography)

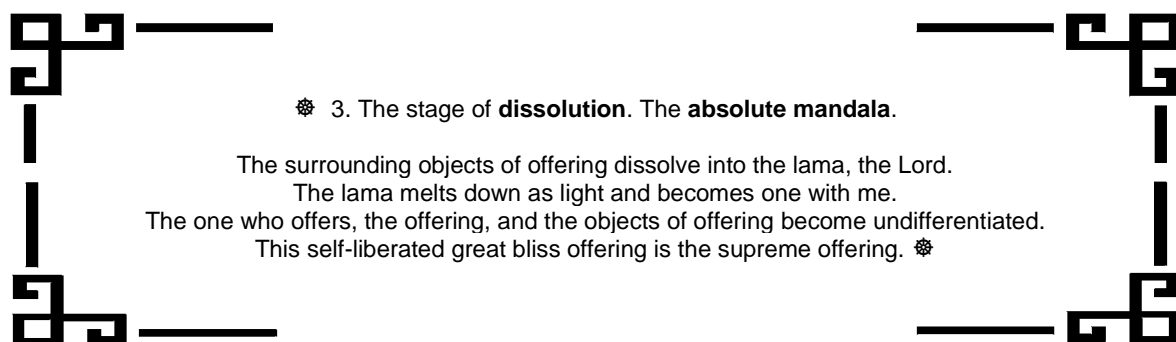
⌘ **Cessation of suffering.** (Tib. mya ngen las 'das pa, phonetic *nya ngen le depa*. Skt. *nirvana*) Modern Sanskrit etymology derives '*nirvana*' from the negative prefix '*nir*' plus the root '*va*' meaning 'to blow'. The original meaning was probably 'to let extinguish a fire that requires blowing' (i.e. with a smith's bellows). In its spiritual meaning, it would be 'not to blow the fire of mind with the air of disturbing emotions'.

This term is used in different senses according to context. The lesser nirvana mentioned here refers to the partial liberation from the cycle of conditioned existences attained by the practitioners of the fundamental vehicle. It essentially means a state 'beyond suffering', when the disturbing emotions have finally subsided and the mind rests in peace, but without being the full enlightenment of a buddha.

In the context of the dorje vehicle, 'cessation of suffering' refers to the full awakening of a buddha, and belongs to the domain of the absolute. It is beyond words, beyond thoughts, beyond explanations.

In yet another, more immediate perspective, the term can also be applied to a particular state of our mind. The instant the essence of mind is recognized and sustained, delusions are not present. The conceptual mind is no longer there, and a true experience of peace and joy becomes manifest. That is the cessation of suffering, nirvana, here and now.

Dignaga, as quoted by Tsele Natsog Rangdrol ('Empowerment', pg. 52. See bibliography), says; "Conceptual thinking, the great ignorance, makes you fall into the ocean of samsara. Once free from this conceptual thinking, you are forever beyond sorrow".



⌘ **Dissolution.** The dissolution of the mandala of realization is similar to the sequence of dissolution of the objects of refuge in the *Refuge and Enlightened Attitude* practice. The refuge objects in the intermediate spaces dissolve into the lha in the front. Then, in a clockwise sequence, they condense one into the other. The surrounding lamas of all lineages absorb into the chakchen lineage who melt in the form of light one into the other from the top to the bottom into the root lama. The root lama melts down as light and dissolves into the practitioner. The teacher and the disciple become inseparably one, 'as water poured into water'. Feel this. There is nothing more that is needed.



Time, space, future, present, and past are transcended. Nothing is to be accepted, nothing is to be rejected.

This description tries to put into words an experience that is mostly beyond words. We suggest you complete it by requesting your mentor's advice.

✿ **Absolute mandala.** As in other practices of this spiritual tradition, this one is divided in two parts. The first (where you have visualized the images of the mandalas, recited, made offerings, and so on) is called the development stage and corresponds to the level of the relative truth and the accumulation of merit. Dissolving all visualizations and resting without concepts in the nature of mind is the second part, known as the completion stage and corresponds to the level of the absolute truth and the accumulation of wisdom. Once again, this level is beyond thoughts, beyond words, beyond description.

Relax and rest the mind as long as possible without involving yourself in the thoughts that may arise. Just let them arise, dwell, and cease naturally.

✿ In the words of H.H. Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche ('Heart Treasure...' pg. 107):

"The mind has, in general, two aspects: stillness and movement. Sometimes, the mind is quiet and free from thoughts, like a calm pool; this is stillness. Eventually, thoughts are bound to arise in it; this is movement. In truth, however, although in a sense there is a movement of thoughts within the stillness, there is actually no difference between the two states. Just as the nature of stillness is voidness, the nature of movement is also voidness. Stillness and movement are merely two names for the one mind.

"Most of the time we are unaware of our state of mind and pay no attention to whether the mind is still or moving. While you are meditating, a thought might arise in your mind- the idea of going shopping, for instance. If you are aware of the thought and just let it dissolve by itself, then that is the end of it. But if you remain unaware of what is happening and let that thought grow and develop, it will lead on to a second thought, the thought of having a break in your practice, and in no time at all you will find yourself actually getting up and going out to the market. Soon many more thoughts and ideas will arise- how you are going to buy this, sell that, and so forth. By this point, you will be a very long way away from your Dharma practice.

**"It is completely natural that thoughts keep on arising. The point is not to try to stop them, which would be impossible anyway, but to liberate them. This is done by remaining in a state of simplicity, which lets thoughts arise and vanish again without stringing on to them any more thoughts. When you no longer perpetuate the movement of thoughts, they dissolve by themselves without leaving any trace. When you no longer spoil the state of stillness with mental fabrications, you can maintain the natural serenity of mind without any effort."** (Our emphasis. MDTG)

H.E. Dorzong Rinpoche, when referring to this non-conceptual stage, also known as *the sphere devoid of the three concepts* teaches:

"In this case, the three concepts are: the *object* -the mandala of realization, the *action* -the practice and the offerings, the *subject* -the practitioner. But they should not be seen as three separate units coalescing into a new single one. Once one remains in the natural state of cognition, then one is spontaneously in the sphere devoid of the three concepts.

"Otherwise, the thinking that evaluates 'this does not exist', 'that does not exist' etc., this labelling of many non-existences here and there, is biasing the mind to a nihilistic view. Removing 'the three concepts' but holding to a view of 'not existent' is not the meditation of the sphere devoid of the three concepts because still it is not without any conceptions. Therefore, the practitioner is to remain in the natural state that is without grasping to any view".

Tulku Thondup conveys the same in other words:

"Do not try to shape the openness, or see it as one thing or another, or gain anything from it. Just let things be. This is the way to find your centre. Just be open and aware."

✿ In the previous stage all and everything has dissolved into emptiness. Now comes the process of re-emergence, when the practitioner once again returns to everyday life and ordinary activities. Re-

quest your mentor to instruct you on whether in your case it would be convenient to keep visualizing yourself as a yidam, or some other enlightened manifestation, or maintaining some particular view, such as the dreamlike aspect of reality, and so on. This will help to prolong the formal session of practice into the rest of your life.

✿ In the conclusion of his teaching on the mandala offering in 'The Words of my Perfect Teacher', Dza Patrul Rinpoche writes:

"All the practices that Bodhisattvas undertake to accumulate merit and wisdom, or to dissolve obscurations, have but one goal: the welfare of all living creatures throughout space. Any wish to attain perfect buddhahood for your own sake, let alone practice aimed at accomplishing the goals of this life, has nothing whatever to do with the great vehicle. Whatever practices you may do, whether accumulating merit and wisdom or purifying the obscurations, do it for the benefit of the whole infinity of beings, and do not mix it with any self-centred desires. That way, as a secondary effect, even without wishing it, your own interests, and comfort and happiness in this life will automatically be taken care of, just like smoke rising when you blow on a fire, or barley shoots springing up when you sow grain. But abandon like poison any impulse to devote yourself to such things for your own sake."

✿ A practice 'good in the beginning' means praying to the lama, taking refuge and establishing the correct motivation, the intention to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. A practice 'good in the middle' means practising earnestly and without distractions or attachment. A practice is made 'good in the end' by dedicating all the merits that have been developed for the temporary benefit and ultimate enlightenment of all beings. The dedication prayer is given below.

བསོད་ནམས་འདི་ཡིས་བམས་ཅད་གཟིགས་པ་ནིད། ཐོབ་ནས་ཉེས་པའི་དག་རྒྱུ་མས་པམ་བྱས་ཏེ།

SÖ NAM DI YI TAM CHE ZIK PA NYI

TOB NE NYE PEi DRA NAM PAM JE TE

*By this merit, after attaining the state of all enlightened beings, and overcoming all the forces of confusion,*

སྐྱེ་གླ་ན་འཆིའི་བ་རྒྱུ་མས་འབྱུགས་པ་ཡི།

སྤྱིད་པའི་མཆོ་ལས་འགོ་བ་སྦྱོལ་བར་ཤོག།

KYE GA NA CHi BA LAB TRUK PA YI

SI PEi TSO LE DRO WA DRÖL WAr SHOK

*May all beings buffeted by the waves of birth, old age, sickness and death, be liberated from the ocean of existence.*

This is the relative dedication, involving concepts. It should be sealed by the absolute dedication without concepts. It is the recognition that the one who dedicates, the dedication itself, and the object of the dedication are all inherently empty. Rest in this state, devoid of the three concepts. When we dedicate the merit of the practice we must sustain a very strong motivation to benefit all sentient beings, the enlightened attitude. In addition, we maintain a clear realization of the empty, illusion-like nature of all phenomena.

✿ At the beginning of your formal practice session you have visualized your kind teacher in your heart. During the actual practice he/she manifests in front of you and then dissolves into you. At the end of this practice period, you can keep the feeling of your teacher either above your head or in your heart. Remember him/her and feel his/her presence during your daily activities.

✿ You have completed a period of practice intended to benefit you and, through your spiritual development, all other sentient beings. You have done it with the guidance of your kind mentor, and to the best of your present abilities. It is therefore a very worthwhile endeavour. Appreciate it.

✿ After you finish your session, try not to rush over to your other activities. Allow yourself time to gradually shift and adjust from one environment to the other. Be kind to yourself. Be a friend to yourself.

✿ In the closing sentences of his teaching, 'The Heart Treasure of the Enlightened Ones', H.H. Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche says:



"Whether practising formally in a session or carrying the practice into the activities of your daily life, you should remember three supreme points applied to the preparation, the substance, and the conclusion of whatever you are doing. The preparation is to wish that what you are about to do may benefit all beings, bringing them happiness and ultimately leading them to enlightenment. The substance is to be fully attentive to what you are doing, without ever taking subject, object, or action as having any true existence. The conclusion is to dedicate to all beings the merit you may have accumulated through your practice or activity. By sealing everything you do with this dedication, you ensure that the merit will ripen into the fruit of buddhahood both for yourself and for others.

"In this age troubled by war, famine, disease, disasters, and physical and mental suffering of all kinds, to think even for an instant of the welfare of others is of inconceivable merit. Please take these teachings to heart and put them into practice. That will render everything I have said here truly worthwhile."



## APPENDIX I

Here we include the notes of the sections before the actual practice of the *Offering of the Mandala*

### ESTABLISHING THE FOUNDATION ANNOTATED ENGLISH VERSION

#### NAMO GURU!

✽ Part 1. Establishing the foundation through faith in the lama and the Dharma.

*Glorious, precious root Lama,  
On the lotus anthers at our heart  
Remain forever inseparable and  
Grant your blessings of body, speech, and mind.*

*With immutable and indestructible faith I will rely  
On the pure masters of the unequalled **Drukpa Kagyü lineage**,  
Which is not an outer lineage of mere words and temporary experiences,  
But the wondrous, marvellous transmission that realises the essential meaning.*

*With joy I enter today in the path of **Chakchen**, the nature of how things are,  
Difficult to obtain in a thousand aeons.  
Superior to the long path of the **fundamental vehicle** of provisional meaning,  
It is the excellent essence of the profound meaning  
Of the **great vehicle** and the **secret mantra vehicle**. ✽*

✽ **Prayer to the lama.** For your convenience, we give below this prayer with the approximate Tibetan pronunciation. During your daily activities, you can visualise your lama above your head. At the time of starting your formal session of practice, visualise him/her descending into you, and remaining at the level of your heart, the size of the thumb, transparent, as if made out of light. Then recite:

པལ་དྲལ་ལྷན་ཅུ་བའི་སྤྲུལ་མ་རིན་པོ་ཆེ།	བདག་སོགས་སྤྱིང་གར་བསྐྱེད་ཟེུ་འབྲུ་ལ།
PAL DEN TSA WEY LA MA RIN PO CHE	DAK SOK NYING KAR PE MOY ZEU DRU LA
Glorious, precious root Lama,	on the lotus anthers at our heart
འབྲུལ་བ་མེད་པར་རྟག་པར་བཞུགས་ནས་ཀྱང་།	སྐུ་གསུང་ཐུགས་ཀྱིས་བྱིན་གྱིས་བརྒྱབ་ཏུ་གསོལ།
DREL WA ME PAR TAK PAR SHUK NE KYANG	KU SUNG TUK KYI JIN GYI LAB TU SÖL
remain forever inseparable and	grant your blessings of body, speech, and mind.

Recite this prayer three times, in Tibetan or in your own language, according to your wish. As with all prayers and recitations, if you decide to do it in Tibetan, make sure you remember the meaning.



❖ **Drukpa Kagyü lineage.** In Buddhism, a lineage is an uninterrupted succession of teachers who receive a corpus of teachings, realise them in themselves, and transmit them to their disciples. They might also contribute their own specific teachings to the original stream. Many times, an original lineage branches into several others, as different masters emphasise some aspects of the teachings or some methods and practices over others. The Chakchen lineage descends from Dorje Chang (see note on pg. 15). The lineage manifested in India through several masters such as Tilopa and Naropa, and was taken to Tibet by Marpa the Translator (1012-1096). The lineage of Marpa continued through Milarepa and Gampopa. After Gampopa, several sub-lineages branched out and grew, dwindled or intertwined depending on the circumstances they had to traverse along the centuries. The Drukpa Kagyü lineage continued its separate transmission line through Pakmo Drupa, Lingje Repa, Tsangpa Gyare, to the present day. At one time there was a saying in Tibet that '*Half of the Tibetans are Drukpa Kagyü. Of those, half are beggars. Of these, half are drubthobs*' (Tib. grub thob, phonetic *drubtob*. Skt. *siddha*, those who have attained accomplishments).

❖ **Chakchen.** (Tib. phyag chen, phonetic *Chakchen*. Skt. *Mahamudra*). Literally 'great seal', it is a path of practice for realising our own buddha nature. It is the main meditation in the Kagyü lineage. The Sakya and Geluk schools of Tibetan Buddhism also practise it. The term can also denote the lineage, the teachings, and the supreme accomplishment, the attainment of enlightenment. See also note on Chakchen lineage on pg. 16.

❖ **Fundamental vehicle.** (Tib. dman pa'i theg pa, phonetic *menpay tekpa*. Skt. *Hinayana*). The school of Buddhism chiefly practised in the South Asian countries, such as Sri Lanka, Thailand, etc. The Tibetan and Sanskrit names for this vehicle mean 'narrow' or 'lower' path, and can incorrectly imply a demeaning sense. This school is usually called *Theravada*, 'the ancient ones', by its practitioners. They claim to be the holders of the historically genuine teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni, against what they see as the later deviations of other Buddhists schools. From the point of view of the dorje vehicle, the fundamental vehicle's emphasis on renunciation and practice, is a necessary stepping stone in the spiritual path, not something of lesser or lower level. However, it has to be complemented with the compassion emphasised by the great vehicle, and the wisdom generated by the dorje vehicle to allow for complete enlightenment.

❖ **Great vehicle.** (Tib. theg pa chen po, phonetic *tekpa chenpo*. Skt. *Mahayana*). School of Buddhism practised mainly in the North and South-East Asian countries, such as China, Japan, and Korea. It emphasises the development and practice of compassion, whose goal is not the attainment of enlightenment for our own benefit, but mainly in order to be able to help all sentient beings along the spiritual path.

❖ **Secret mantra vehicle.** (Tib. gsang sngags kyi theg pa, phonetic *sang-ngak kyi tekpa*. Skt. *Mantrayana*). The school of Buddhism developed and practised in Tibet. Nowadays it is the main branch of Buddhism in the Himalayan countries and Mongolia. Also known as the dorje vehicle or the tantric vehicle. It emphasises the practice of the fundamental and great vehicles, and complements them with its own methods, such as the practice of the yidam, physical exercises such as the 'tummo' practice, etc.



## THE FOUR PRELIMINARIES

### ANNOTATED ENGLISH VERSION

NAMO GURU!

✿ Part 2. Binding the mind to the Dharma with the four ordinary preliminaries.

2.1 Reflecting on the difficulty of obtaining the **freedoms and advantages**.

*In the beginningless **cycle of conditioned existence***

*These innumerable rebirths have been so tiring.*

*This time I have obtained these precious freedoms and advantages*

*Which arise from causes and conditions, so difficult to find and of great benefit.*

*With unmistakable aspiration, I devote myself to the Dharma, the ultimate goal. ✿*

✿ **Freedoms and advantages.** Reflection on the difficulty of obtaining these freedoms and advantages is the first of the four ordinary preliminaries. Unenlightened beings wander in an unceasing cycle of birth, death, and rebirth in the six realms of existence. Among the infinite number of possible rebirths (animals, hungry ghosts, etc.), only a rebirth as a human being, with its balance of suffering and joy and its capacity for learning, will eventually allow travel along the spiritual path that leads to enlightenment. Even then, if the human life, with its limited duration, is not used to its fullest extent for practice and training of the mind, this result will not be obtained. This fortunate rebirth is therefore called 'the precious human existence' and the teachings describe some of its characteristics. Being born as a human being in a country where the teachings are available, without physical impairments or mental deficiencies that might hinder the practice, with an interest in the spiritual path, are some of the freedoms. Some of the advantages mentioned in the texts are: the appearance of a buddha, the presence of teachers and spiritual companions to help along the path and so forth. Therefore, the bottom line is:

- ✿ The probability of attaining again all of these situations simultaneously in the future is extremely low.
- ✿ The duration of this fortunate conjunction of circumstances is very short.
- ✿ Start practising now, as intensely as possible.

For a more detailed explanation of the various freedoms and advantages, you can refer to the first chapter of "The Words of my Perfect Teacher" by Patrul Rinpoche. (See bibliography)

✿ **Cycle of conditioned existence.** (Tib. 'khor ba, phonetic *kor wa*. Skt. *samsara*). Literally 'whirlpool', it refers to the world as perceived by common unenlightened beings, and the ensuing endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth as a result of their deluded perceptions. This functioning can also be seen in everyday life, as the restless movements of our mind from one thought to the next, usually with no possibility of attaining a stable state. See also note on 'cessation of suffering' on pg. 38. As taught by H.H. Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche ("Heart Treasure... ", pg. 115): "When the nature of mind is recognized, it is nirvana. When it is obscured by delusion, it is called samsara. Yet neither samsara nor nirvana has ever departed from the continuum of the absolute."

✿ 2.2. Meditating on **death and impermanence**.

*The whole universe and all its inhabitants are compound,  
Therefore, their nature is impermanent,*





*I myself will definitely die, and the time of death is uncertain.  
At the moment of death, all the appearances of this world will be of no benefit.  
There is no time. In this very life, I will develop renunciation and perseverance. ☸*

☸ **Death and impermanence.** This is the second of the four ordinary preliminaries. Although we intellectually understand the fact of change and impermanence, most of the time, we ignore it in our everyday life. We act as if life situations were permanent, unchanging. We make plans for the distant future, supposing that conditions such as friendships, political situations, employment, health etc. will be stable, which they are not. Therefore, our plans have to change or be discarded repeatedly, and suffering and waste of time is the inevitable result. Change and impermanence seem intimidating, as we forget that not only good things finish, but that also sickness, wars, famines, hard times, come to an end. In addition, trying to prevent change is a war lost before starting it. An alternative view would be to consider impermanence as a good friend that constantly points to what is a common sense attitude towards life, thus sparing much agony.

One specially forgotten form of impermanence is our own life. We know that all beings in history, no matter how powerful or endowed, have died. We see people dying around us all the time. Yet, we live our life as if it were to be of indefinite length. A Tibetan parable reminds us of this aspect of reality: A man, standing near the edge of a cliff, slipped and started to fall into the precipice. He precariously got hold of a tuft of grass, and grasped it with all his strength, knowing too well that it was his only way of staying alive. A white rat suddenly appeared and started nibbling at the grass, only to be later replaced by a black one, both leisurely feeding on the same grass. They took turns, once the white, then the black one, until finally, the last spade was eaten, and the man fell down to his death below. Here the white rat is the day, the black one is the night, and their sequence the passing of time. Although he did not realise it, the man holding to the grass has been dying all the time. Like all other beings. The grass only gave a temporary reprieve, the *illusion* of unending life. In addition, death is perceived by most of us as something terrifying, thus increasing our avoidance of the whole subject. The traditional meditation on death brings forward three certainties:

- ☸ All beings will die.
- ☸ The moment of death is uncertain.
- ☸ Nothing of what we cherish can be taken with us. Family, wealth, reputation, all will be left behind.

This second reminder of death and impermanence, combined with the first one on the precious human existence, insists on the intelligence of the decision of putting spiritual practice above most of our other usual concerns.

### ☸ 2.3. Respecting **action, cause and effect.**

*The undesired full ripening of evil deeds is the cause of all misfortunes.  
The fruit of virtue is the basis of peace, perfection, and all what is correct.  
Having faith in this, I will act with precise discernment  
Of what is to be cultivated and what is to be abandoned.  
Even **undefined actions**, I will skilfully transform into virtue. ☸*

☸ **Action, cause and effect.** (Tib. las, rgyu, 'bras, phonetic *le, gyu dre*. Skt. *karma*). The law of cause and effect, also known as 'law of karma', is a basic tenet of the Buddhist view of life. Essentially, it establishes a relation between our deeds and our experiences. When we perform an action with desire, anger or ignorance, such performance leaves an imprint in our consciousness. Some

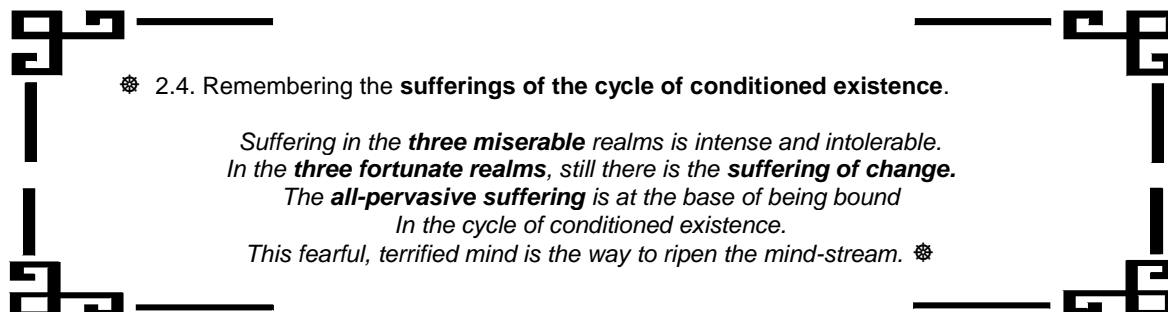
time later, these imprints will mature, according to the prevailing conditions at that moment, as experiences of different types.

Generally speaking, good actions will mature in pleasant experiences and the result of evil actions will be lived as unhappy situations. The definition of good and bad is usually given as those actions carried out with the motivation of benefiting or harming others (including oneself), respectively. Therefore, what we are living today is the result of our actions of the past. There is not much we can do here. However, our future is being conditioned by our actions of today. Consequently, here and now there is a lot we can do to shape this future. To be able to do something meaningful, (instead of persisting with the mistakes of the past), we have to train our mind through spiritual practice. Otherwise, we will only be able to repeat habitual patterns of conduct and perpetuate the cycle of suffering-happiness-suffering beyond our control, with no hope of becoming free.

This law of cause and effect has been variously misunderstood as being something heavy, fateful, a punishment for sins, etc. It must be remembered that:

- ⌘ It works both ways, for the positive and for the negative.
- ⌘ It works at all times, and will go on working until we learn to act without desire, anger, or ignorance, that is until we become enlightened.
- ⌘ It is not enforced by anyone. Only the imprints on our mind make it function.
- ⌘ It makes us free to determine our future. With an untrained mind, we keep on repeating habitual patterns of conduct, independently of what the circumstances around us would recommend. Fears, attachments, pride, hatred -these all insure difficulties. With a trained mind, we can choose the type of actions we perform in the present, so to live one or other type of life in the future.
- ⌘ As a consequence of the liberty we have, we are responsible for our actions, and therefore for our experiences, be they pleasant or unpleasant. There are no innocent victims or guilty perpetrators. It is not the government, our parents, or our boss, but ourselves.

⌘ **Undefined actions.** Contrary to 'good' or 'bad' actions, those actions that are not performed with a specific motivation. Examples could be breathing, sleeping, etc.



⌘ **Sufferings of the cycle of conditioned existence.** (Tib. 'khor wa'i nye dmigs, phonetic *kor way nye mig*). The last point of the 'four reflections that turn the mind towards the Dharma' reminds us that suffering, as a result of our ignorance, is inherent in the structure of this world. Contrary to common belief, difficulties cannot be avoided for any length of time, and even pleasant situations hide within them the seeds of future trouble. This is not to be seen as a pessimistic, nihilistic view of life, but just one more fact to be taken into account when making decisions about what to do with whatever is left of our own life. The proposal is to let go of exhausting, endless activities that will presumably give us lasting pleasure, security and so on (which they never do), and to devote ourselves to the taming of our unruly minds with a view to attain enlightenment. That is to say, to transcend the ordinary view of life, and develop a spiritual outlook. See below note on suffering of change and all pervasive suffering.

⌘ **Three miserable and three fortunate realms.** Together they constitute the six realms of existence.



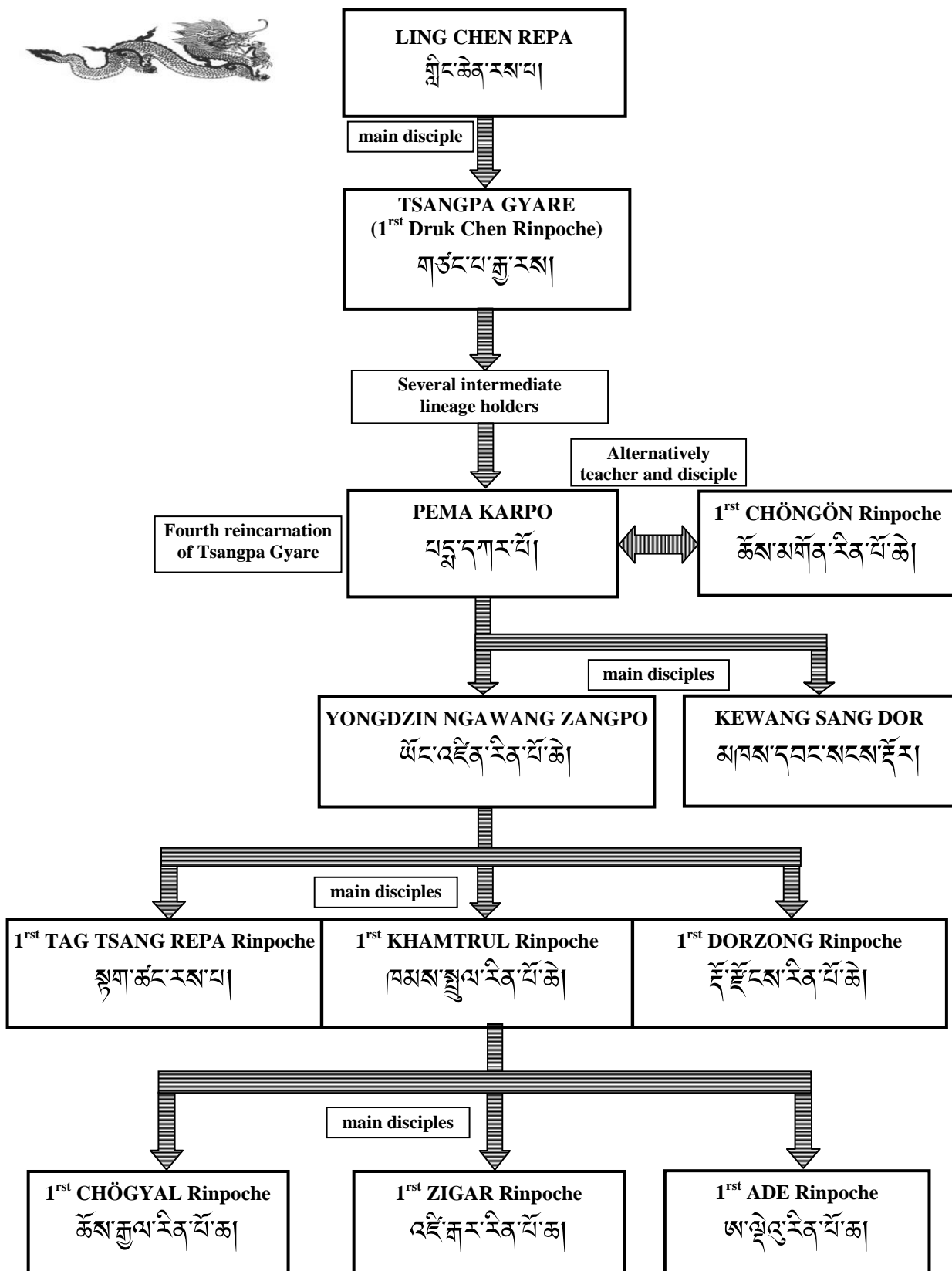
✿ **Suffering of change and all-pervasive suffering.** Three different types of suffering pervade our conditioned, unenlightened existence:

- 1- Suffering of pain. The additional pain perceived on top of the usual suffering of sickness, losing a beloved one, being separated from what is desired, coming into contact with undesired situations or persons, etc.
- 2- Suffering of change. The suffering and frustration experienced when situations considered desirable change into something different, perceived as less alluring or altogether unhappy.
- 3- All pervasive suffering. The subtle, all pervasive suffering inherent in conditioned existence. Usually it is not perceived, being obscured by the first two gross forms of suffering. It becomes apparent only after attaining a high level of realisation, and therefore overcoming the habitually gross perceptions of suffering.



## APPENDIX II

### THE LINEAGE OF SOME OF THE DRUKPA KAGYÜ LAMAS





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