

An Overview of the Green Tara Practice



Introductory Prayers

These are related to Padmasambhava as he hid this practice as a terma.

pg. 2.1-2.2

SEVEN LINE SUPPLICATION

This is a customary preliminary homage to Guru Rinpoche for any practice connected with him.

pg. 2.2-4.1

SUPPLICATION TO THE THREE KAYAS OF GURU RINPOCHE

Six lines of supplication for each of the three kayas of Guru Rinpoche.

pg. 4.1-6.3

PRAYER TO THE VARIOUS ASPECTS OF GURU RINPOCHE

The prayer supplicates many different emanations of Guru Rinpoche.

pg. 3.1-3.3*

Invitation / Refuge and Bodhicitta

Lotus seat mudra for the first line of invitation.

With the first line we invite Tara in the space before us.

Palms joined for the following four lines of refuge and bodhicitta

Refuge begins with *Namo (I and all...)* Imagine that she is the embodiment of all objects of refuge, including the buddhas, the dharma and the sangha, as well as the gurus, yidams, dakinis and protectors. Think that all beings are going for refuge with you. Then recite verses for generating aspiration bodhicitta (the wish to attain buddhahood for the benefit of beings) and application bodhicitta (vow to engage in the means to do so—the profound practice of Tara).

pg. 3.3-5.3*

Accumulation of Merit through the Seven Branch Prayer

Palms joined

The accumulation of merit brings about all positive circumstances. Because of our previous accumulation of merit, we have encountered the buddhadharma and have received instruction on this practice. However, we must not be complacent, and in order to accumulate further virtue to aid and deepen our practice of Tara, we perform a sevenfold practice here.

It's more than a seven branch "prayer" as it is not merely a supplication, but seven actions we perform to accumulate merit and purify obscurations. This sevenfold practice is considered one of the most profound means for such. Each branch serves a certain purpose. Several lists of the benefits exist; one follows:

Prostrations—antidote to pride, ensures that we will be nurtured by three jewels

Offerings—the antidote to miserliness/attachment

Confession—the antidote to the three poisons and all negative deeds

Rejoicing—the antidote to jealousy, leads to having supportive dharma friends

Requesting teaching—the antidote to ignorance and obstacles arisen from having previously abandoned the dharma

Supplicating buddhas and masters to remain—the antidote to karmic obstacles that prevent us from meeting our teachers

Dedication—antidote to wrong views such as not believing in cause and effect

pg. 5.3-6.3*

Consecration of Offerings*Sprinkle the offerings with water from the vase using the right hand at the initial mantra**Palms joined for the four lines*

The offerings set on the altar are merely symbolic. It is said that the offerings we imagine are even more profound than the tangible ones. However, this does not mean that we needn't put forth effort and expense towards material offerings. This is also important, and we should do this as much as we can. Through making physical offerings, we show respect, undermine miserliness, and accumulate merit which will enhance our ability to practice more effectively.

Through the consecration, the offerings and environment dissolve into emptiness, and in that place arises a pure land, extremely beautiful and made of light. It is adorned with a vast array of inconceivable offerings of divine quality. The *om vajra spharana kham* means something like "vajra profusion [of offerings]"

*Mudras for the offerings and for vajra spharana kham.***Offering and Homage to the Three Jewels**

pg. 6.3-7.2

INVITATION AND OFFERING A SEAT*Holding the bell and vajra do the gathering mudra at the end of the first line**Continue holding vajra and bell*

The first line is an invitation followed by the mantra and mudra for gathering. One is inviting the buddhas, bodhisattvas, enlightened gurus and their retinues. The mantra means: "Vajra assembly". The following four lines are a praise and a further invitation for them to come before us. This is followed by the mantra and mudra to have a seat upon a lotus flower.

pg. 7.2-11.3

SEVENFOLD PRACTICE*Palms joined*

Then a longer passage for a sevenfold practice is recited. This is a famous liturgy from the beginning of the *Noble Aspiration for Excellent Conduct* and is often recited before empowerments or the commencement of an extensive set of teachings, etc.

pg. 11.3-15.2

This is not part of the root text. It's inserted as an elaboration, and we don't recite it.

pg. 15.2-16.2

MANDALA OFFERING*Mandala mudra—in elaborate version, offer a spoon of rice to the mandala plate*

Now we have a mandala offering to the three jewels, in general. We imagine offering all we hold dear: tangible wealth, our body and even our virtue. We offer this together with the traditional mandala—a representation of the universe and all its wonderful contents. Don't get hung up on the strange configuration, just focus on offering the entire universe and that's within it that's worthy of offering. Make the visualization as vast as possible and understand that it is all encompassing—that is, we are offering absolutely everything.

pg. 16.2-17.3

EXPRESSING ONE'S WISHES*Palms joined*

This passage contains a recap of homage and offerings and ends with a request for what we wish to come from the virtue we are gathering.

Offerings and Homage to Noble Tara

pg. 17.3-18.2*

SELF AND FRONT VISUALIZATION

Hold vajra and bell

The first seven lines are the description for the instantaneous self-visualization as Tara and the process for inviting the front visualization of the 21 Taras.

pg. 18.2-18.3*

INVITATION

Hold vajra and bell

The next four lines are the formal invitation of the front visualization.

pg. 18.3-19.1*

PRESENTING THE LOTUS SEAT

Hold vajra and bell with right hand in seat mudra

The following four lines are offering lotus seats to the Taras in front of us and requesting them to remain to receive our offerings. The ensuing mantra is the mantra for offering the lotus seat.

Lotus round and seat mudra at mantra

pg. 19.1-20.1*

OFFERINGS AND MANDALA OFFERING

Add some rice or water to the offering bowls before starting. Sprinkle the bowls with water at Om—ngo jor...

Palms joined for offering verse, then individual mudras for each offering

Mandala mudra for mandala offering—in elaborate version, offer a spoon of rice to the mandala plate

These next two sections—a verse for offerings and one for a mandala offering—will be recited on three occasions. Each time they are followed by some number of repetitions of the Twenty-one Praises. On the second repetition (20.1-21.2) and third repetition (21.3-23.1) of these verses, an additional four-line verse is recited before beginning the Twenty-one Praises.

P1-P8 (insert)*

RECITATION OF THE PRAISES

Traditionally, at the first instance, the praises are recited two times. During this recitation, you can focus on seeking refuge in Tara and her entourage. *Refresh the offering near the end.*

The second time they are recited, the praises are recited three times. You can focus on generating bodhicitta—the wish to attain buddhahood and establish all beings in that state.

Refresh the offerings near the end.

The third time they are recited, they are recited seven times and you can imagine performing the sevenfold practice (see pages 3.3-5.3 and 7.2-11.3). *Refresh the offerings near the end.*

If one abbreviates the number of recitations of the praises, the focus of each set of recitations remains the same. When doing a lesser number of recitations than is traditional, the beginning four-line praise—spoken to Atisha by Tara herself and not actually one of the Twenty-one Praises—can be recited and considered to count for a recitation of the Twenty-one Praises).

The praises can be understood on many levels: there are outer, inner and secret interpretations. In an outer fashion, the words of the praises are descriptions of the twenty-one Taras in the tradition of Suryagupta. However, those Taras are not what one visualizes in this practice, as this practice belongs to one of the many other traditions of Tara. Still, the Twenty-one Praises are considered “vajra words” with many levels of meaning, and they are recited in most practices of Tara, regardless of any seeming discrepancy. A detailed description of the twenty-one Taras for this tradition can be found at the end of this document.

pg. 23.1-24.3*

The Benefits of the Practice*Palms joined*

This passage recounts some of the benefits of the practice including protection from lower rebirths, the lessening of suffering and other obstacles, and swift attainment of buddhahood.

Offering a Torma

pg. 24.3-25.2

CONSECRATION OF THE TORMA*At the beginning mantra, sprinkle the torma with water using the right hand*

We imagine that our the actual torma dissolves into emptiness. From an *om*, appears a precious vessel. Within it, wisdom nectar arises from the three syllables—*om ah hum*.

pg. 25.2-25.3

OFFERING THE TORMA*Lotus round, offering mudra, and snap for each repetition*

The mantra reads: “*Om* noble Tara along with your retinue, please partake of this food.”

With this, offer to the twenty-one Taras.

Lotus round, offering mudra, and snap for each repetition

With the *Om akaro...* mantra, offer to her extended retinue of buddhas, bodhisattvas, gurus, etc.

pg. 25.3-26.1

EXPRESSING ONE’S WISHES*Hold vajra and bell*

Having offered the torma, we make a request to be granted all the siddhis (accomplishments) without exception.

pg. 26.1-29.1

Brief Offerings, Praises and a Supplication for the Fulfillment of Wishes*Mudras for the offerings**For the praises, hold vajra and bell with right hand in prayer mudra**Palms joined for the supplication 27.1-29.1 (* the supplication is optional for the shortened practice)*

After the offerings and praises, we supplicate Tara to invoke her compassion and activity by making prayers for the propagation of the buddhadharma, the long life of masters, the eradication of obstacles, and suffering of beings, etc.

pg. 29.1-29.3*

Mantra Recitation

The front visualization dissolves into you. Recite the mantra while attending to the clarity of her appearance, while reflecting on the pure meaning of her appearance, or while summoning the pride of the deity.

Concluding Sections

page 29.3-30.1*

REQUEST FOR FORGIVENESS*Hold vajra at heart and ring the bell during the mantra**Still holding vajra and bell, join palms for prayer of forgiveness*

Recite the 100-syllable mantra and the prayer to make amends for any shortcomings in our practice.

pg. 30.1-30.2	DEPARTURE OF DEITIES In our tradition, this passage (beginning with: <i>om kye kyi sem chen...</i>) is not recited if there is a support (a photo or torma of Tara) on the altar.
pg. 30.2-30.3	REQUEST FOR DEITIES TO REMAIN WITH SUPPORT This passage does not exist in my version of the text and is not recited in Mirik.
pg. 30.3*	DISSOLUTION Let go of the visualization and rest in the nature of mind.
pg. 31.1-31.2*	DEDICATION Dedicating the merit preserves it until the goal of buddhahood is attained.
pg. 31.2-31.3*	PRAYER OF AUSPICIOUSNESS <i>Hold vajra and bell with vajra in auspiciousness mudra</i> Making the wish that Tara's auspicious activity abounds.

* The asterisks after the page numbers mark the sections you would recite to do a shortened version of the practice.

The Symbolic Meaning of Green Tara's Appearance

- The color green: Represents awakened compassionate activity that is swift like the wind
- Left leg drawn in: The renunciation of afflictions and freedom from samsara
- Right leg extended: Ready to rise to aid and benefit beings and though free of samsara, appearing within it to aid beings
- Right hand in mudra of generosity: She bestows the common and supreme accomplishments
- Left hand in protection mudra: Provides refuge; thumb and ring finger joined is union of skillful means and prajna; the three fingers extended represent the three jewels
- Holding flowers: All qualities of realization have fully blossomed in her
- Her charm and beauty: She is the mother of all the buddhas and the embodiment of compassion
- Silks and jewels: Symbolic of her qualities and activity
- Straight back: her meditation is diamond-like, unwavering
- Moon at her back: Represents the fullness of true happiness and well-being

The Twenty-one Taras from Chokgyur Dechen Lingpa's Tradition

Understanding the pattern of the arrangement of the twenty-one Taras can be helpful to create the visualization. This follows along with a list of the twenty-one Taras including their names, colors, and hand implements.

Imagine a lotus flower with twenty petals and a moon disc at its center. Upon this moon disc is Green Tara (also known as Tara of the Acacia Forrest). She is green with one face and two arms. Her countenance is peaceful and smiling. Her right hand is in the mudra of supreme generosity (resting on her knee, palm out and fingers pointing downwards) and her left hand is in the mudra of protection (palm out, fingers pointing upwards) and holds the stem of an utpala flower between her thumb and ring finger. The flower's blossom is next to her left ear. Her right leg is extended and the left is drawn in.

On the four petals in the cardinal directions are the Taras of the four enlightened activities: pacification, enrichment, magnetism and forceful activity. The Tara of Pacification is on the petal directly in front of Green Tara, Tara of Enrichment on the petal to Green Tara's right, Tara of Magnetism is on the petal directly behind Green Tara and Tara of Forceful Activity is on the petal to Green Tara's left. The expression of each corresponds to her particular activity. While Green Tara in the center and the other sixteen Taras hold both of their hands in the same way and grasp the utpala flower with the thumb and ring finger of the left hand, these four Taras are somewhat unique. Tara of Pacification displays the protections mudra with her right hand (instead of the mudra of supreme generosity); the Taras of Enrichment and Magnetism hold implements in their right hands; and Tara of Forceful Activity holds a ritual dagger between her two hands.

In between each of these four petals in the cardinal directions are four more petals, making for twenty petals in all. Upon the remaining sixteen petals are the Taras who protect from the 16 perils/fears. Green Tara in the center and the Taras who protect from the sixteen perils all have the same peaceful expression, hold their right hands in the mudra of supreme generosity, and hold an utpala stem between the thumb and ring finger of their left hands at their hearts. Upon each utpala blossom beside their left ear is a particular implement relating to their specific activity.

Beginning with the lotus flower with twenty petals, the following arrangement begins directly in front of Green Tara and circles clockwise. The names of the Taras of the four enlightened activities are in bold and located in the four cardinal directions. The four sets of four Taras in between them are the Taras who protect from the sixteen perils or fears. Their names are, for example, "Tara who Protects from the Peril of Earth", etc. For brevity's sake, merely "Peril of Earth" is how the name is listed.

Green Tara	Green	Peaceful and smiling countenance. Right hand in the mudra of supreme generosity mudra, holding stem of flower in left
Tara of Pacification	White	Peaceful and smiling countenance. Right hand in protection mudra, holding utpala flower in left (no implement on flower)
Peril of Earth	Blue	Vajra atop the flower
Peril of Water	Red	Fire crystal atop the flower
Peril of Fire	Yellow	Water crystal atop the flower
Peril of Wind	White	Mt. Meru adorned by a wheel atop the flower
Tara of Enrichment	Yellow	Enchanting countenance. Right hand holds a jewel and the implement atop the flower on the left is a hook
Peril of Thunderbolts	Green	Crossed vajra atop the flower
Peril of Weapons	Blue	Sword atop the flower
Peril of Evil Rulers	Red	Hook atop the flower
Peril of Thieves	Black	Battle axe atop the flower
Tara of Magnetism	Red	Passionate countenance. Right hand holds a hook of lotuses and the implement atop the flower on the left is a lasso
Peril of Pishachas	Black	Ritual dagger (<i>purba</i>) atop the flower
Peril of Elephants	Grey	Spear atop the flower
Peril of Lions	Black	Mass of fire atop the flower
Peril of Snakes	White	Precious crystal vase filled with nectar atop the flower
Tara of Forceful Activity	Black	Ferocious countenance. She rolls a ritual dagger (phurba) between her two hands
Peril of Illness	Spring Green	Arura (myrobalan) medicine radiating light atop the flower
Fear of Untimely Death	White	Vase of longevity atop the flower
Peril of Poverty	Yellow	Excellent treasure vase atop the flower
Fear of Failure	Spring Green	Endless knot atop the flower

