



## WEEK TWO: MANTRAS

This week we will focus on three of the most commonly used mantras in Tibetan Buddhism\*:

- Avalokiteshvara mantra: *om mani padme hung*
- Buddha Shakyamuni mantra: *om muni muni maha muniye soha*
- Green Tara mantra: *om tare tuttare ture soha*

The goal of this week is to become familiar with these common mantras so that you can use them in various aspects of your practice and daily life.

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**Avalokiteshvara mantra: *Om Mani Padme Hung***

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*Om mani padme hum* is an ancient mantra that is related to the bodhisattva of compassion, *Avalokiteshvara*, and with therefore the Dalai Lama, who is considered to be an incarnation of *Avalokiteshvara*. \*

## **How to Pronounce the Avalokiteshvara Mantra**

*Video: Om Mani Padme Hum: How Tibetans Say It*

Tibetans, who typically pronounce the mantra as “Om mani peme hung,” believe that Avalokiteshvara, who we call *Chenrezig*, has a very special connection with Tibetans as our protector.

In Tibetan, we say, “Chenrezig po kang chen pay lha kyel,” which means: “Chenrezig is the Tibetans’ Buddha.” By practicing Chenrezig’s mantra, we believe that we can accumulate merit and purify our delusions.

Every Tibetan child is taught the mantra by our parents, and we all use it very commonly in daily life, and especially if we make a prayer walk (*kora*) or go to the temple, or pray using a rosary (*mala* or *trenqwa*).

Basically, any mantra is “a sound, syllable, word, or group of words that is considered capable of ‘creating transformation.’”

This mantra naturally comes to our hearts in any kind of difficult situation. For example, when I was in an earthquake in Dharamsala once, when the earth started shaking, I automatically started praying, “Om mani peme hung.”

Many people recite the mantra thousands of times in a day as part of their daily prayer practice. We also print it on prayer flags that blow the prayer to the winds, carve it on stones, and insert papers printed with it inside holy statues and in prayer wheels. Almost all Tibetans recite the prayer, even though many of us don’t know the meaning.

### **The Meaning of Om Mani Padme Hung**

The most common meaning offered for the mantra is usually something like “Behold! The jewel in the lotus!” or “Praise to the jewel in the lotus.” But it is almost impossible to give one exact meaning for “om mani padme hum,” since it has been interpreted in many ways. Below, you can see His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s interpretation.



**From His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama**

*It is very good to recite the mantra Om mani padme hum, but while you are doing it, you should be thinking on its meaning, for the meaning of the six syllables is great and vast .... The first, OM ... symbolizes the practitioner's impure body, speech, and mind; it also symbolizes the pure exalted body, speech, and mind of a Buddha....*

*The path is indicated by the next four syllables. MANI, meaning jewel, symbolizes the ... altruistic intention to become enlightened, compassionate and loving....*

*The two syllables, PADME, meaning lotus, symbolize wisdom.... Purity must be achieved by an indivisible unity of method and wisdom, symbolized by the final syllable HUM, which indicates indivisibility....*

*Thus the six syllables, om mani padme hum, mean that in dependence on the practice of a path which is an indivisible union of method and wisdom, you can transform your impure body, speech, and mind into the pure exalted body, speech, and mind of a Buddha....*

— His Holiness the Dalai Lama, [www.sacred-texts.com](http://www.sacred-texts.com)\* and Wikipedia

There is a lot to learn this week, so we are trying to keep the explanation of each of the three mantras brief.

You can learn more about the Avalokiteshvara mantra here >>

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### **Buddha Shakyamuni Mantra: *Om Muni Muni Maha Muniye Soha***

Many Tibetans recite this mantra every day, many times a day, while praying on their malas (Tibetan: *trengwa*), or circumambulating or prostrating.

*Video: How to Pronounce the Buddha Shakyamuni Mantra*

### **Who was the Buddha Shakyamuni?**

Although there are various Buddhas – such as Maitreya, the Future Buddha, or Amitabha, the Pure Land Buddha – it is the Buddha Shakyamuni that we mean when we say “the Buddha.”

Shakyamuni Buddha was, historically, a spiritual master who lived and taught in modern day India and Nepal in either the 6th or 5th century BCE, and who founded Buddhism. The name Buddha means the “awakened” or “enlightened” one, and after his own awakening, Shakyamuni taught a path by which others might also be awakened to the true nature of reality, and freed from suffering.

### **What Does Om Muni Muni Maha Muniye Mean?**

One simple way to interpret the mantra is to consider that:

*Shakyamuni’s mantra is a play on his name. Muni means sage. Maha means great. So the mantra reads “Om wise one, wise one, greatly wise one, wise one of the Shakyans, Hail!”\*\*\*\**

Of course, the mantra, like all of the great Buddhist mantras used by Tibetans, signifies infinitely more than the words that comprise it. This is a classic case of the sum of the whole being much greater than its parts.

## Lama Zopa Rinpoche's Interpretation

*TA YA THA – it is like this*

*OM – The All-Knowledge of the three bodies of a buddha and of the infinite Buddha's Holy Body, Speech and Mind. The knowledge of the two paths to enlightenment (Method and Wisdom), and of the two truths (Absolute and relative) that contain all existence within them.*

*MUNI – Control over the suffering of the three lower realms and over the wrong conception of the self-existent I.*

*MUNI – Control over the suffering of all samsara and over self-cherishing thoughts.*

*MAHA MUNIYE – Great control over the suffering of subtle illusions and over the dualistic mind.*

*SVAHA – May my mind receive, absorb and keep the blessings of the mantra, and may they take root.*

*I'll finish with a quote from Lama Thubten Yeshe:*

*“Reciting a mantra...does not mean the mere vocal repetition of speech syllables. Many meditators know from experience that the act of reciting mantras transcends external sounds and words. It is more like listening to a subtle inner sound that has always inhabited our nervous system.”*

Learn more about the Buddha Shakyamuni mantra in a full post here >>

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## **Green Tara Mantra: *Om Tare Tuttare Ture Soha***

*Om tare tuttare ture soha* is an ancient mantra that is related to Tara, the “Mother of all Buddhas,” and especially to her manifestation as Green Tara.

Tara, who Tibetans also call *Dolma*, is commonly thought to be a Bodhisattva or Buddha of compassion and action, a protector who comes to our aid to relieve us of physical, emotional and spiritual suffering.

*Video: How to Pronounce the Green Tara Mantra*

## Tara's 21 Forms

Tara has 21 major forms, each of which has a different color and spiritual attribute.

Of these 21 forms, two are especially popular among Tibetan people — White Tara, who is associated with compassion and long life, and Green Tara, who is associated with enlightened activity and abundance.

We usually think of *om tare tuttare ture soha* as Green Tara's mantra, although sometimes it is used as the main mantra for all the Tara's.

The Green Tara mantra is one of the main mantras that we say to help ourselves and others.

To better understand the Green Tara mantra, let's first talk a little about who Green Tara is, and then look at the deeper meaning of the mantra.

### Green Tara: Compassion in Action

Green Tara is usually depicted as a compassionate being ready to step down from her lotus throne to offer comfort and protection from all of the sufferings we experience in the world.

She is shown “in a posture of ease and readiness for action. While her left leg is folded in the contemplative position, her right leg is outstretched, ready to spring into action. Green Tara's left hand is in the refuge-granting mudra (gesture); her right hand makes the boon-granting [giving] gesture. In her hands she also holds closed blue lotuses (utpalas), which symbolize purity and power.” \*\*

### The First Dalai Lama's Teachings on Tara

The first Dalai Lama wrote that we could call on her to instantly save us from eight particular dangers, each of which represents a corresponding human mental problem:

- lions — pride
- wild elephants — delusion and ignorance
- forest fires — hatred
- snakes — jealousy
- robbers — wrong views, including fanatical views
- prisons — greed and miserliness
- floods — desire and attachment
- demons — doubts caused by delusion

**Ordinary Tibetans pray to her when we are sick, when leaving for a long journey, or when we hope for success or wealth. His Holiness' teaching shows us that this is not actually the true purpose of praying to or reciting mantras to Tara.**

**When we chant the Green Tara mantra, we are not simply asking for Tara's blessings and help with our lives and our "real world" problems.**

**Actually, we are also asking to be liberated from the misery of the mental delusions and negative emotions that blind us to true freedom, and to achieve the same enlightened body, speech and mind that Tara represents, not only for our own benefit, but for the benefit of all sentient beings.**

Like om mani padme hum, the Green Tara Mantra is much greater than the sum of its parts, with layers of meaning and benefit that resonate with us beyond what our minds perceive.

By calling on Tara's protection from danger and from our fears with a sincere motivation to be relieved of our suffering for the benefit of all beings, we can gain the multiple benefits of selfish altruism, and compassionate action, becoming happier ourselves as we help others.

## **WEEK TWO PRACTICE**

To become familiar with each of the three mantras in this lesson, choose one of the mantras to recite each day, like this for example:

- Day 1: Recite *Om mani padme hum* 25 times
- Day 2: Recite *Om muni muni maha muniye soha* 25 times
- Day 3: Recite *Om tare tuttare ture soha* 25 times
- Days 4-7: Pick your favorite of the three mantras, and recite that one 25 times each day. Of course you can switch it up if you like, and you can say all of them each day if you like!

You can recite your mantras pretty much any time, anywhere – while walking or sitting quietly. If you are in a public place it is encouraged not to disturb others or "display" your practice, or be prideful of it, so you can recite silently to yourself. It's nice to say the mantras out loud, so you can do this in the privacy of your home or out in nature somewhere. Of course if you are living in a Tibetan Buddhist community, it is common and acceptable to say your mantras out loud, especially on circumambulation paths.

Questions? Please ask on our group's Facebook page. And please share your experiences there too.

## **PRACTICE TOOLS FOR WEEK TWO**

Handout: Mantra practice