



Brilliant Rays of Light A Commentary on the Praise to Tara

by Jetsün Drakpa Gyaltzen

Homage to the noble lady Tara!

Homage to Tara, she who liberates from the suffering of samsara. She is **swift** in aiding beings and **gallant** in conquering afflictions. Her **glance flashes like flares of lightning**, a statement that serves as an analogy for its luminosity. She was **born on the heart of a blossoming lotus** or utpala flower **that rose from the tears of the Triple-World's Lord**, Avalokiteshvara. (1)

Homage to her, whose **countenance is** comparable to many **hundreds of full moons**, each as radiantly white as on the fifteenth day of the lunar month, **gathered together in autumn**. This image illustrates the immeasurable number of light-rays that shine from her; this is also conveyed by the image of her **smiling and glowing with brilliant radiance, like a thousand stars clustered, ablaze**. (2)

Homage, golden-blue colored lady, shining like the light reflected upon refined gold. A **lotus** is held in her left **hand**; it is **graced with** the symbolic implement of a **water-born** lotus flower.¹ Through the practice of the six paramitas: the paramita of **generosity**; the paramita of **diligence**; the paramita of **endurance**; **serenity**, or, the pacification of afflictions; the paramita of **patience**; and the paramita of **meditation**; and through **embodying** the paramita of wisdom, she attained the form of the goddess Tara. This is illustrated by her emblem, the utpala **flower**. (3)

Homage to her, whose total **victories** over demons, enemies, and all such opposing forces **are endless**. She is the **jewel** adorning all **the great Tathagatas' crowns**. **She is well served**, honored, and praised **by** all the bodhisattvas, **the heirs of the Victors, those who've accomplished all the perfections**—the ten paramitas, which are the essence of all ten bhūmis. (4)

Homage to her, who with the power and light from the mantra syllables *tuttare*² and *hung*, **fills the desire realms**, and the form realm, and the formless realm, **unto the ends of space**. **She tramples underfoot the seven worlds**—the five types of desire realm for the five types of beings, and the form and formless

realms—and **has the strength to summon**—to bring others, like kings, under her control—and to fulfill **all** the wishes of sentient beings. (5)

Homage to her, praised and venerated **by Indra**, the king of gods, and by **Agni, Brahma, Maruts, and** their lord, the great and powerful **shiva**. All the eight classes of gods and demons; the **bhutas**, such as Ganapati; the **vetalas**, such as Maheshvara; the **gandharvas**, such as Pañcaskikha; **and** the **yakshas**, such as Vaishravana, **pay tribute to her**. (6)

Homage to her, who with the fierce utterances of *trad* and *phaṭ* **crushes the enemies' yantras**,³ all their evil concoctions, **to dust**, thereby averting their schemes. **With** the posture of the **right leg bent in and left leg extended, shining, she treads** or tramples, the meaning of which is explained above, **amidst flames wildly blazing**, a sign of her majestic stance. (7)

Homage to her, who with the sound of *ture*⁴ dispels the dangerous demons.⁵ She is **the fearsome lady**, for she strikes terror into these demons. She is the **destroyer of the most powerful demons** of the afflictions. Having conquered them, she defeats the other three demons as soon as they arise.⁶ Tara's **lotus-face**, like a blooming **lotus** flower, is astonishingly beautiful like that of a heroine, while her **deep-furrowed brow** reveals her wrath. **She is the slayer of each and every foe**, such as the opposing forces of the afflictions. (8)

Homage to her, whose left thumb and ring-fingers gracefully hold a lotus flower **to her heart**. Her three other fingers are extended to symbolize or **display the mudra of the Three Jewels**. Her right hand is extended in the mudra of supreme generosity, and the palm is **graced by a wheel adorning every direction**.⁷ Light streams forth from this wheel, in a **dazzling radiance that overwhelms all**. (9)

Homage to her, who fulfills the wishes of all sentient beings with **supreme joy**. She is beautified by a **radiantly jeweled garland that crowns her head in a splendor** that outshines all others. **Smiling and laughing with** the sound of the mantra *tuttare*, it is through the laughter of this mantra that **she brings demons and the world under control**. (10)

Homage to her, who can summon the hosts of earthly guardians, the guardians of the ten directions; they follow her orders and thus act as her messengers.⁸ **Her frown it quivers**, for she is the wrathful lady, whose heart center is marked by **the syllable bung**. She **delivers all of us** sentient beings **from** the suffering of **every misfortune**—the torment of bad circumstances and absence of good circumstances—thereby establishing us in bliss. (11)

Homage to her, who's **so brightly adorned with a sliver of moon**, which resembles that of the first day of the lunar month, **as her crown**, blazing with rays

of light. Amongst **her locks** resides **Amitabha**, Buddha of Boundless Light, who **graces** her as another crown ornament. His **gleaming rays stream forever forth**, constantly benefitting sentient beings with the shining of his boundless light. (12)

Homage to her, seated in a halo blazing with apocalyptic flames, just like those of the seven suns which burn all the earth, stones, and mountains at the end of the eon. Her posture, with **her right leg stretched out and left bent inward**, is the opposite of before. **Immersed in joy, she crushes** all the opposing forces, the **legions of foes**. (13)

Homage to her, who on the earth's surface strikes her left palm and makes the threatening mudra **and stamps her feet**. **Her brow deeply furrowed, with** the utterance of the syllable *hung*, light shoots forth from the vajra in her right hand. This light fills **the seven netherworlds** and all their obstacles are dispelled.⁹ (14)

Homage to her, the lady who is **blissful**, since she is endowed with untainted bliss; and **gracious**, because she is free from what needs to be abandoned, the afflictions.¹⁰ She acts out of the **domain of the peace**—the pacification of suffering—of **nirvana**, which is the total exhaustion of all thoughts. **With** the essence of her enlightened form, **om and svaha in perfect union, she lays to waste every terrible evil**—the afflictions of others, which must be abandoned. (15)

Homage to her, who, immersed in rapture, shatters the bodies of all her foes. She manifests from the wisdom-syllable *hung*, for this is the essence of her wrathful mantra—*om namas tare namo hare hung hare svaha*. She likewise **displays each of her peaceful mantra's ten syllables**—*om tare tuttare ture svaha*. (16)

Homage to Ture, whose wrathful emanation enters a dance. **Her feet stomping boldly**, she pacifies obstacles wherever they may be. Her wrathful body is born or **formed from the seed of the syllable hung**. **The supreme mountain** of the three-thousand-fold world system, called **Mandara**, is pierced by the light radiating from the syllable *hung*.¹¹ **All the three worlds**—the desire, form and formless realms—**she causes them to quake**. (17)

Homage to her, who holds in her hand a moon disk, which is **likened to a divine lake**. This is a sign that she has cleared away the poison of the afflictions. **Deer-marked** here refers to the moon.¹² **With tara twice and then with phat**, and with the mantra *tare*, **she totally cleanses all of the poisons** of the world and all that moves within it. (18)

Homage to her, who is served—worshipped—**by kings of hosts divine, and leaders of gods and of the kimnaras**, such as King Druma. She is **suited** or manifests **in** a deity's form and mantra, which serves as her **armor of joy and**

splendor. She dispels all nightmares, soothes away the strife caused by those opposed to the Dharma. (19)

Homage to her, whose eyes become sources of shining light. They both **shine with luster, bright with the fullness of** her right eye, represented by the **sun**, and her left eye, represented by the **moon**. **With twice-uttered *hara***—a mantra that is both peaceful and wrathful—and ***tuttare* she pacifies** all, including the **most intractable diseases**. (20)

Homage to her, who has the power to free us from all afflictions. **She puts forth the realities** of enlightened body, speech and mind **as a set of three**—the syllables *om*, *ah* and *hung*. **Supreme Ture, she completely pacifies and destroys** all opposing forces—**the hordes of grahas, vetalas, and yakshas** that create obstacles—through the power of the ten-syllable mantra. (21)

This Praise with the twenty-one verses of homage
Is itself the root mantra of all peaceful and wrathful Taras.

The wise who recite these words in earnest,¹³ with body, speech and mind **filled with devotion for this goddess**, (22)

Should recall her wrathful form **at dusk, and also having risen at dawn** her peaceful form. **With the mere recollection** of her divine form, they **will be granted fearlessness**; and likewise, just by recollecting her, **they will utterly eliminate all misdeeds, and surmount all evil destinies**, their results. (23)

Seventy million victorious buddhas will swiftly and immediately **confer empowerment upon them, and they will attain** the common result of **greatness in this world, and** not only that, but they will also **reach the ultimate state of buddhahood**. (24)

Even the most powerful and toxic poisons, such as those used by dangerous thieves, **which derive from plants, or living beings**, such as those from dangerous snakes,¹⁴ **whether eaten or taken as a draught, will be purged entirely by recalling this praise**, this mantra, and the deity herself. (25)

Reciting this two or three or seven times, however much you can, while visualizing the goddess before you, **will eliminate multitudes** of both the causes and results **of suffering brought about by spirits, pestilence, and poisons**. Through this praise you have the power to aid others **and therefore this applies even to other beings as well**. (26)

Those who wish for progeny will bear them; those who wish for riches will acquire them; thus each and every wish—all the supreme or common accomplishments—**will hereby be fulfilled, and obstacles will be entirely**

vanquished, for everything that had to be abandoned has been overcome by its appropriate antidote. Thus, there **will be no more** obstacles left to hinder the one who recites this praise. (27)

This completes the Praise to Bhagavati Tara as spoken by the completely perfect Buddha, the great Vairocana.

This Praise was transmitted by Nagarjuna¹⁵ to Nyen Lotsawa Darma Drak¹⁶ who translated it into Tibetan. Later, the great Jetsün Drakpa Gyaltzen revised the translation. This completes the commentary on the Praise to Tara with Twenty-one Verses of Homage, entitled Brilliant Light.



Translation Origin

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Bibliography

Tibetan Source

grags pa rgyal mtshan. 2007. “bstod pa’i rnam bshad gsal ba’i ’od zer.” In *gsung ’bum grags pa rgyal mtshan/ pod gsum pa/*, 638–646. Pe cin: krung go’i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang.

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- 1 Drakpa Gyaltsen connects blue here with gold, the colour of Tara's appearance. Other commentaries explain that blue describes the colour of the lotus flower in Tara's hand.
- 2 Drakpa Gyaltsen's commentary reads *tuttare* instead of *tuttara*.
- 3 The word *yantra* (*'khrul 'khor*) designates an instrument or other type of mechanical device (esp. one used in warfare), or a magic diagram.
- 4 Drakpa Gyaltsen reads *ture* as a mantra syllable uttered by Tara. Other commentaries read *ture* as an epithet of Tara.
- 5 Dangerous demons here could be understood as a reference to the eight great dangers (*'jigs pa chen po brgyad*).
- 6 Drakpa Gyaltsen here describes Tara as being victorious over the four maras or demons. These are the demons of 1) the aggregates, 2) the afflictions, 3) the Lord of Death, and 4) the sons of the gods.
- 7 Tara is not described here as holding an actual wheel; rather, this sentence implies that her hands and feet are marked by wheels, as in the first of the thirty-two major marks.
- 8 These are: 1) Indra in the east; 2) Yama in the south; 3) Varuna in the west; 4) Kubera in the north; 5) Agni in the south-east; 6) Nairrita in the south-west; 7) Vayu in the north-west; 8) Ishana in the north-east; 9) Brahma at the zenith (above); and 10) Vishnu at the nadir (below).
- 9 Drakpa Gyaltsen's commentary reads "fill" (*'gengs*), unlike most versions of the Praise which read "smash" (*'gems*).
- 10 Drakpa Gyaltsen here does not comment upon the word **tranquil** (*zhi ma*).
- 11 Drakpa Gyaltsen reads *'bigs byed* here as the verb to pierce. Accordingly, it is the light radiating from Tara's seed syllable *hung* that pierces the supreme mountain Mandara. The Sanskrit versions of the Praise as well as other Tibetan commentators (see for example, Willson 1996: 153) suggest that the line of the Praise in question (*ri rab mandara dang 'bigs byed*) provides a list of three mountains, namely Meru (*ri rab*, literally "supreme mountain"), Mandara (*mandara*) and Vindya (*'bigs byed*). Both the Sanskrit version and other Tibetan commentators read *ri rab* as the proper name for Meru, rather than an epithet for Mandara as in this commentary; they read *'bigs byed* as the proper name for Vindya mountain, rather than a verb as described.
- 12 In India it is believed that when looking at the moon at night the shape of a deer is visible on the moon. Hence, the moon in Indian literature may be referred to as the 'deer-marked' (*harimatika, ri duags rtags can*).
- 13 Drakpa Gyaltsen reads "with complete faith" (*rab dad brjod*) instead of "in earnest" (*rab dang brjod*).
- 14 Thieves and snakes are part of the eight great dangers. Drakpa Gyaltsen appears to read poisons here as referring to both actual poisons and mental afflictions.
- 15 The Nagarjuna who authored Tara-related literature appears to use this as a pen-name; his precise identity remains unclear. Presumably, the author of this practice tradition of Tara lived in the ninth century or later. For a discussion of the problematic authorship of Nagarjuna, see: Mabbett 1998: 332–346.
- 16 The translator of Nyen, Darma Drak (*gnyan lo tsa ba dar ma grags*, late 11th century), is said to have taken part in the council of 1076. He accompanied Ra Lotsawa (*rwa lo tsa ba*, 1016–1128?) to India where he stayed for twelve years. Darma Drak is credited with Prajnakaramati's commentary on the *Bodhicaryavatara*, texts on Kalacakra and Tara, and other works (Roerich 1949: 71 & 293; Obermiller

1931: 219).