

And experiencing and practicing on the basis of this expedient means,
he will always gain supramundane accomplishments.

As is said in an *udana*⁵ verse that has been taught:

The Dharma without [differentiating] characteristics, most profound, is unsuitable for those of inferior intelligence. In order to cater for them there also exists the teaching of that which has [differentiating] characteristics.

The above ritual of worship from the *Scripture of the Enlightenment, Supernatural Transformations, and Empowerment of Mahavairochana*, collected by the *acharya*,⁶ ends herewith. The transmitter is quite satisfied with it. Moreover, out of a desire to reduce its volume, duplicated mantras have been deleted; they are to be transposed and used [as appropriate]. The practitioner should simply combine the meaning of the passages before and after [to determine the omitted mantras].

5. An inspired utterance.

6. Tantric master.

TANTRIC MASTERS

LIVES OF THE EIGHTY-FOUR SIDDHAS

(*The Chaturashitisiddhapravritti*)

ABHAYADATTA

The *mahasiddhas*, or “great adepts” in Sanskrit, are the saints of tantric Buddhism in India and Tibet. Traditionally eighty-four in number (although there are other counts), they are a motley crew drawn largely from the lowest levels of traditional Indian society, including hunters, fishermen, blacksmiths, gamblers, beggars, shoemakers, pimps, and lapsed monks. They are masters of transforming pollution into purity.

This mastery is rooted in their possession of *siddhis*, a Sanskrit term that literally means “accomplishments” but in this context means something closer to “powers,” especially magical powers—clairvoyance, clairaudience, telepathy, teleportation, the ability to fly, the ability to walk through walls, the ability to stop the movement of the sun, the ability to transmute base metals into gold, the ability to find buried treasure, the ability to attract a love, the ability to destroy an enemy, and so on. These are sometimes referred to in Buddhist texts as “mundane accomplishments,” to distinguish them from the “supramundane accomplishment”: buddhahood. Such powers, whether mundane or transcendent, are attained through initiation by a *guru* (the Sanskrit word for “teacher”) and the practice of his instructions.

Their stories are widely known and collected in such works as *Lives of the Eighty-Four Siddhas*, composed by Abhayadatta in the late eleventh or early twelfth century, in the final period of Buddhism in India. The biographies he recounts typically begin with the person’s name, caste, and place of birth; a brief description of early life culminates in some crisis, at which point the person encounters the *guru* (whether human or divine), who bestows initiation and offers instruction. The practice of these instructions for a period of time—often twelve years—results in the attainment of magical powers, which the person, now a *mahasiddha*, puts to use in

wondrous ways before departing for a heavenly realm. The lives of three of the most famous *mahasiddhas* are presented here.

The first *mahasiddha* is Virupa, whose name in Sanskrit means “deformed” or “misshapen.” He begins as a monk devoted to the goddess Vajravahni, the “diamond sow.” But disgusted at his failure to receive *siddhi* from her, he throws his rosary (commonly used by monks for counting mantras) into the latrine. A goddess then appears to him and exhorts him to practice without conceptions. After the customary twelve years, he achieves *siddhi*. Eventually expelled from the monastery for eating meat and drinking alcohol, he wanders through India, defeating Hindus (this was a period of philosophical debate between Buddhists and Hindus), taming witches, and performing miracles, the most famous of which is mentioned by Abhayadatta. Virupa stops in a tavern to drink, and when the tavern keeper demands payment, he offers to pay when the sun has set and then uses his ritual dagger to halt it in its course. While the sun remains fixed for three days, Virupa consumes huge amounts of wine. In order to set the sun in motion again, the king agrees to pay his bill.

The second is Saraha the arrow maker. He was likely a historical figure who lived in Bengal in the eighth century, remembered especially for his enigmatic songs (called *doha*) of spiritual realization. In the story here, he is a wealthy brahmin—a Hindu by day, but a Buddhist by night (Buddhism was persecuted by various Hindu kings). He is accused of drinking, an activity prohibited to brahmins, but denies the charges, passing many tests before his accusers become his disciples. He then retires with his fifteen-year-old wife to the mountains, where he meditates for twelve years. When he rises from his meditation, his wife teaches him an important lesson.

The third is Nagarjuna, already encountered in this volume as the most famous expositor of the doctrine of emptiness (see *Verses on the Middle Way*, p. 366) and as the composer of pious hymns (see the *Chatuhstava*, or Four Hymns, p. 375). Scholars distinguish that Nagarjuna from the tantric alchemist described here; in the Tibetan tradition, they are the same person, who lived for six hundred years. This Nagarjuna, after reciting mantras for twelve years, achieves the power to transform base metals into gold. Later, he grants the wish of a lowly boatman to become a great king. Although he has concocted the elixir of life to extend his life span, when someone asks for his head, he responds as a proper bodhisattva and offers it. But his great powers make it impossible for anyone else to decapitate him. He therefore does it himself, using a sharp blade of grass—an effective method, according to other accounts, because he long ago killed an insect on a blade of grass. It is also related elsewhere that upon his decapitation, his head and body turned to stone; they remain on earth, and his head slowly moves closer toward the body with each passing year. When they reunite, Nagarjuna will again teach the dharma.

PRONOUNCING GLOSSARY

Arya Nagarjuna: <i>ah-rya nah-gahr-ju-na</i>	Kanchi: <i>kan-chi</i>
Bhahitana: <i>ba-hi-ta-na</i>	Mahamudra: <i>ma-hah-mu-drah</i>
Brahmaputra: <i>bra-ma-poo-tra</i>	Maheshvara: <i>ma-haysh-va-ra</i>
Chaturashitisiddhapravritti: <i>cha-too-ra-shi-ti-sid-da-pra-vrit-tee</i>	Maitreya: <i>mai-tray-ya</i>
dakas: <i>dah-kas</i>	Manjushri: <i>man-ju-shree</i>
dakini: <i>dah-ki-nee</i>	Nagabodhi: <i>nah-ga-boh-di</i>
Devapala: <i>day-va-pah-la</i>	Nagarjuna: <i>nah-gahr-ju-na</i>
Devikota: <i>day-vee-koh-ta</i>	Rajagriha: <i>rah-ja-gri-ha</i>
Ghadhashila: <i>ga-da-shee-la</i>	Rajni: <i>raj-nyee</i>
Kahora: <i>ka-hoh-ra</i>	Ratnapala: <i>rat-na-pah-la</i>
Kanasati: <i>ka-na-sa-ti</i>	Shalabhanda: <i>sha-la-ban-da</i>
	Shitavana: <i>shee-ta-va-na</i>

Shriparvata: *shree-par-va-ta*

siddhi: *sihd-dhi*

Somapuri: *soh-ma-pu-ree*

Sunandeshvara: *su-nan-daysh va-ra*

Tara: *tah-rah*

Tripura: *tri-pu-ra*

Vajravarahi: *vaj-ra-vah-rah-hee*

Virupa: *vi-roo-pa*

Virupa

Virupa was born in the East, in Tripura, the city of King Devapala.¹ There was, in south India, a vihara² called Somapuri, 'the City of the Moon': a Dharma-circle with thousands of monks, a veritable ocean of them. Though he was only a novice, Virupa asked for initiation. In twelve years, Virupa twice-over recited the mantra of Vajravarahi³ a million times; but not one sign of siddhi⁴ came to him even in a dream. He became despondent at this, tore up his rosary, and threw it into the latrine. That evening, when he customarily gave worship, it occurred to him that he was without his rosary. A dakini⁵ then appeared, put a rosary in his hand, and gave him these words of encouragement: "O worthy aspirant, do not despair for my blessing. Perform the practice that abandons all names and conceptions."

This place of the natural mind
is the essence of Vajravarahi.
This is so for you as for everyone else;
you are inexperienced like a child.
The wishing gem of the mind
is not polished by conceptualizations.
To know the best of practice is sufficient.

Virupa then practiced for twelve years, and obtained siddhi. His servant bought meat and wine and brought it to him; Virupa then killed and ate the pigeons in the vihara. When all the pigeons were gone, the monks asked, "Who among us would eat pigeons? Surely no monk would do such a thing." The monks then looked in all the cells, also going to Virupa's room. As they looked in the window, they saw him drinking wine and eating pigeon meat. The monks then assembled and decided to expel Virupa from the vihara. So Virupa offered his monk's robes and begging bowl in front of an image of the Buddha, did reverence, and left. As he was leaving, a monk said to him, "Where will you go now?" And Virupa replied, "You expelled me; why should you care?"

Beside the vihara there was a large lake. Virupa cut off a lotus flower floating on the water and offered it to the Buddha. Then, placing his foot on a lotus leaf at the edge of the lake, he walked across the water to the other shore. Those who were in Somapuri deeply repented; they grasped Virupa's feet, did reverence to him, and asked him, "But why did you kill the pigeons?" "I did not kill them," Virupa said, and he told his servant to bring him the pieces of the pigeon's wings. The master snapped his fingers, and the feathers became pigeons again, which flew off bigger and better than before. This

TRANSLATED FROM the Tibetan by James B. Robinson.

1. A Buddhist emperor (9th century) who ruled the eastern region of the Indian subcontinent.
2. Monastery.

3. "Vajra Sow," a female tantric deity.
4. Accomplishment; magic power.
5. A type of tantric goddess.

was seen by everyone. From then on, Virupa put aside the habit of a monk and took on the ways of a yogin.

When Virupa came to the bank of the Ganges, he begged food and drink from the Ganges goddess, but she did not give him any. The master became angry, parted the waters, and went to the other side.

In the city of Kanasati, Virupa bought wine from a tavern girl; she gave him a glass of wine and a plate of rice which he greatly enjoyed. He continued eating and drinking. For the space of two days and a night, he prevented the sun from moving and the king, amazed, exclaimed: "Who is it who performs such a miracle?" In answer, the goddess of the sun appeared to the king in a dream and said, "A yogin has pledged me as payment to a tavern girl." The king and his subjects paid the price of the wine, which came to a million glasses, and Virupa disappeared.

Virupa then went to the land called Indra in the country of the idolators. In this place, there was an image, eighty-one cubits high, of Shiva as 'the Great Lord' Maheshvara.⁶ The inhabitants told Virupa to do reverence to the image, whereupon Virupa replied, "In no system does the older brother do reverence to the younger brother." The king and the others then said to him, "If you do not give reverence we will kill you." But the master replied, "It would be a sin to give reverence to it; so I will not bow down." "Then let the sin fall on me," said the king.

When the master brought his hands together and bowed down, the great statue of Shiva split in half. A voice coming from the sky called forth: "I vow to listen to you." After taking the oath, the statue was restored to its previous condition. The people made the offerings of the statue of Shiva to the master, and were then converted to Buddhism. It is said that the offerings still exist.

After that, the master went to the east of India to Devikota⁷ where the entire population of the country had become witches. If anyone stayed in their castle, they put a spell on him.

The master, having arrived at this place of the witches, found food in the town, but no place could he find lodging. He met with a single Buddhist, a young Brahman, who told him that there were no humans left in the land, that all had become witches, and they were doing great harm to everyone. The master and the Brahman boy then proceeded to the temple where the master stayed. There the master initiated the Brahman boy and gave him mantras.

All the witches having gathered, they said among themselves, "What is to be offered: there are all kinds of meat here, but we have no human flesh." One of them spoke up and said, "I have two victims for you!" "Bring them here!" they all cried. But when the witch tried to bring them she was not able to do so, because of the power of the Brahman child. She tried over and over again, but to no avail.

The witches then saw Virupa sitting on a fallen tree. They carried him away together with the tree; but although they planned to cook him, Virupa drank up all the wine they were using as broth. They then thought to kill

6. An epithet of the Hindu god Shiva.

7. A region of West Bengal, in eastern India.

him another way: all the witches together made a hissing sound, but Virupa just laughed twelve fearful laughs, and all the witches fainted dead away.

Later Virupa bound the witches by oath: that from then on, they would take the Buddhist refuges⁸ and would not harm any who had faith in him. They were not to harm any living being, so they could only drink a handful of blood from the bodies of those who had not taken the refuges or who had not produced the thought of enlightenment. If they broke this oath, their necks would be cut off with his discus, and the Yaksha⁹ of the North would drink their blood. Even now, the form of that discus and that yaksha can be seen in the sky. He then bound the witches by oath and put them in the retinue of the Dharma-protectors.

Again Virupa returned to Devikota. On the road, Shiva and the goddess Uma¹ created for him a phantom city with 450,000 inhabitants, and the gods of the thirty-three heavens and all the divine realms made him extensive offerings of food. Virupa spoke to them in verse:

As a novice and monk in Somapuri
I faithfully carried out the Vinaya,²
and then, by power produced by previous karma,
I gained full initiation and teachings.
For twelve years I meditated with conceptions
and nothing occurred, even in a dream;
my weary mind cursing, I threw away my rosary.
After that, a dakini appeared to advise me:
because of this, I strengthened myself
and rightly understood the character of samsara.
From then on I practiced without conceptions,
although the monks believed I was misbehaving.
So in order to destroy their misconceptions,
I walked on water without sinking.
I reversed the course of the Ganges, and while enjoying myself,
I put up the sun as a pledge.
I split the idol of the idolators, breaking its pride,
and in Devikota, I controlled the witches.
When Shiva saw my many powers
he created a city to make me offerings.
Now, if I did not do these miraculous deeds,
why would people prefer even the outer Dharma?

Then he went to the realm of the dakas.³

Saraha

Saraha, the son of a dakini, was born a Brahman in a city called Roli in a particular part of Rajni, in the east of India. Though he was a Brahman, he had faith in the Dharma of the Buddha, and because he had listened to the Dharma from innumerable masters, he had trust in the Tantric doctrine.

8. A Buddhist is traditionally defined as someone who "takes refuge" in the Buddha, the dharma, and the sangha (the Buddhist community).
9. A category of nonhuman beings, a nature

spirit.
1. Shiva's wife.
2. Rules of monastic discipline.
3. The male counterparts of *dakinis*.

During the day, he practiced the Hindu system; at night, he practiced the Buddhist system. He also drank wine.

There came a time when this was discovered by the Brahmans, who then attempted to have him banished. They went to King Ratnapala⁴ and said to him, "You are the king. Is it proper for you to allow a disreputable system of religion to be practiced in your country? Even though Saraha, 'the Arrow-shooter', is chief of fifteen thousand residences in Roli, he has lowered himself in caste by drinking wine, and therefore must be expelled."

The king, not wanting to expel a man who controlled fifteen thousand households, went to Saraha and said, "You are a Brahman; it is not fit that you drink wine." But Saraha replied, "I do not drink wine. Gather all the men and those Brahmans here, and I will take an oath to that effect." After they had gathered, Saraha stated, "If I have been drinking wine, let my hand burn. If I have not been drinking, may it not burn." He then put his hand in boiling oil, and it was not burnt. "In truth, he does not drink wine," the king said. But the Brahmans said, "But truly he does drink wine."

So Saraha spoke as before. He drank molten copper and was not burnt. "He still drinks," the Brahmans maintained. Saraha then said, "Whoever sinks when entering the water, he is the one who drinks. If he does not sink, he does not drink." So he and another Brahman both entered the water. Saraha did not sink, but the other one did, so they finally said, "Saraha does not drink."

Similarly, Saraha was weighed on a scale: "Whoever is heavier does not drink," he said. They put three iron weights on the scale, each as heavy as a man, and still Saraha was heavier than the weights. He was heavier than even six of those weights. Finally the king said, "If anyone who has powers like these drinks wine, then let him drink."

The king and the Brahmans bowed to Saraha and asked for his instructions. Saraha then sang to the king, the queen, and all the subjects, of the three cycles of Doha.⁵ The Brahmans all abandoned their own system and became Buddhists. The king with all his retinue attained siddhi.

Saraha married a fifteen-year-old house girl, left his home, and went into another land. He settled in a solitary place, where he practiced the Dharma while the girl went out begging for his food. One time, he asked her to prepare some radishes for him. She mixed some radishes in yogurt and took them to him, but he was sitting in meditation, so she went away without disturbing him.

Saraha remained uninterruptedly in meditation for twelve years. When he finally arose, he asked, "Where are my radishes?" The serving girl replied, "How could I keep them? You have not arisen from meditational trance for twelve years. It is now spring, and there are no radishes." Saraha then said to the girl, "I will go to the mountains to meditate." But the girl replied, "A solitary body does not mean solitude. The best solitude is the mind far away from names and conceptions. You have been meditating for twelve years, yet you have not cut off the idea of radishes. What good will it do to go to the mountains?" Saraha thought, "This is true." And so he abandoned names and conceptions.

4. A Hindu king of the late 10th century.

5. A series of songs; one cycle was addressed to each of the recipients named.

By experiencing the essential meaning, he obtained the highest siddhi of Mahamudra,⁶ and furthered the aims of living beings. He, together with his woman, entered the realm of the dakas.

Nagarjuna

Nagarjuna lived in a place called Kahora, a section of Kanchi in eastern India. He was of Brahman caste, and he obtained siddhi from Tara.⁷ There were 1,500 cities in Kahora, and all of them had been plundered and despoiled. The Brahmans gathered together and decided to leave the strife-torn land and go to another country. The master heard this and sent a messenger to these Brahmans, counseling them not to go to another land, for they would find suffering in those places as well. Then he gave them all his property and wealth. After this, the master left Kahora, and having come to Nalanda,⁸ on the other side of the shitavana, he became a monk.

Mastering the five sciences,⁹ Nagarjuna arrived at the pinnacle of knowledge. Then, becoming disgusted with just preaching, he set himself to practicing, and saw Tara face to face. He then abandoned the home and sustenance of Nalanda—where abide the hundred assemblies of the Dharma-circle—and begged alms in another city. When again he returned to his home, he thought to himself: “With such a mental attitude as I now have, I will not be able to accomplish the benefit of living beings.”

In order to obtain the qualities to benefit living beings, Nagarjuna went to Rajagriha.¹ On the first day of reciting mantras, twelve demonesses of the principal order of demons shook the earth. On the second day, they caused water to flood. Fire appeared on the third day, and on the fourth, a great wind. On the fifth day, a rain of weapons fell, and on the sixth, a rain of stones. On the seventh day, all the demonesses appeared in their own form and threw things around, but they did not frighten the master out of his meditation.

Then these demonesses of the North came to him and said, “What can we do to serve you?” “Serve me enough to sustain me; I need nothing more,” Nagarjuna said to them. So every day from then on, they gave him four handfuls of rice and five vegetables. The master ate these and practiced for twelve years. During this time, one hundred and eight demonesses gathered under his power, and his thoughts were on doing benefit for living beings.

Nagarjuna then went to the mountain Ghadhashila and considered transforming that mountain into gold for the benefit of living beings. He made the mountain first into iron, and then into copper. But then the holy Manjushri counseled him that the gold would bring about a great quarrel among the people, and evil would accumulate. Hearing this, Nagarjuna abandoned further effort. Yet to the dull-witted Ghadhashila still appears as a copper-colored lump.

6. Literally, “Great Seal,” a form of tantric Buddhist practice as well as its goal.

7. A female bodhisattva believed to be an emanation of the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara; see the following selection.

8. A Buddhist monastery in the present-day state

of Bihar, in eastern India.

9. Language, fine arts and crafts, medicine, logic, and philosophy.

1. The capital of the kingdom of Magadha, in northeast India, where the Buddha lived for many years.

After this, Nagarjuna traveled south toward Shripurvata.² Along the way, he came to the shores of the Brahmaputra where he met a group of cowherds. He asked them about a passage across the river, and they showed him an inauspicious way which was filled with ravines and crocodiles. But another cowherd came along who cautioned him about the river and showed him a better place to cross. And the cowherd set out across the river carrying the master on his back.

In the middle of the river, Nagarjuna caused crocodiles and other fearful things to appear, but the herdsman continued on, saying, “You need not be afraid while I am still alive.” The master then did away with the apparitions. When they came to the shore, the master said, “I am the Arya³ Nagarjuna. Do you know me?” “I have indeed heard talk of you,” said the herdsman, “but I did not recognize you.” “Yet you have saved me from the river. What can I give you as a reward?” The herdsman was elated. “I would like a method to become king,” he said. So the master cleared away some ground, sprinkled water on the trunk of a sala tree, and it immediately turned into an elephant. “That will be your vehicle,” said Nagarjuna. When the herdsman asked him if he would need an army, the master replied, “If the elephant trumpets, an army will appear.” It occurred exactly as was said: the cowherd became King Shalabhandha, his queen was called Sindhi, and he ruled over the extraordinary city of Bhahitana. Under this king there were eight hundred tax-paying cities of 100,000 people.

The master went south to Shripurvata, and he remained there practicing meditation. But King Shalabhandha missed his guru. He went to Shripurvata, gave reverence to Nagarjuna, and circumambulated him. “Since my kingdom has small value and large problems, my unhappiness is increasing. I do not need a kingdom. I ask only to sit before the eyes of the master.”

“Do not desert your kingdom,” replied Nagarjuna. “Let the precious rosary be your master. Rule the kingdom, and I will give you the elixir which removes fear of death.” The king was chagrined. “If it is necessary to rule the kingdom at the same time as I obtain the elixir, then I will do so. But I hope it is not necessary.”

Although the king did not want to return to his kingdom, but only wished to remain in that place, the master gave him instructions to practice in his own country. The king then accomplished the alchemical art, and for one hundred years he ruled the kingdom. During that time, the people became wealthy, and even the birds and wild animals in the mountains lived happily.

After one hundred years, the king had reason to go again to Nagarjuna, who was working to extend the teachings of the Buddha. The evil spirit Sunandeshvara had grown jealous and was producing various misfortunes and disruptive omens. The moon and the sun had become dim and without luster; all the fruit was rotting spontaneously; the rain did not fall at the right time; and famine was afflicting the people. Sickness and war increased. The trees and forests were drying up, and various other unfortunate signs were appearing.

King Shalabhandha reflected on this, thinking that these portents were a sign that harm had come to his guru. He gave the kingdom to his son

2. Literally, “Glorious Mountain,” a center of tantric worship in modern-day Andhra Pradesh, in

southeast India.

3. “Noble.”

Chandhikumara and together with only a few of his followers, he went to Shriparvata to the presence of the master, who asked him, "My son, why have you come?" The king replied:

Either I and the people have exhausted our fortune,
or the Conqueror's⁴ teachings have decayed.
Or the darker half has become the victor;
or the great compassion white like the moon,
has been covered by demons like rainclouds.
Will the holy guru who is like a diamond
follow the nature of compounded things?
I have come because these signs have occurred—
out of your compassion, please remain in the world.

The master replied, "All that is born must die. All compounded things must disintegrate. All accumulations are spent. Since all compound things are impermanent, why are you unhappy? Take the elixir for yourself and go."

"The elixir is there in front of the guru. If the guru will not remain in the world, what need I of the elixir?" And so the king remained. Then the holy master made gifts of all his property. When the god Brahma appeared as a Brahman and begged for his head, Nagarjuna agreed to give it to him. The king, Shalabhandha, could not bear suffering the death of his teacher, and laying his forehead to the foot of the master, he died. Everyone turned on the Brahman and blamed him for this.

The master then gave his head. However, no one could sever it; so he finally had to cut off his own head, which he did with a stalk of kusha grass. When he then gave his head to the Brahman, all the trees withered, and the people's merit degenerated. Eight of his yakshis⁵ were set to guarding the master's body; they are still there.

A light then entered Nagabodhi, the guru's successor, and emanated for about a month during the year in which light emanates. It is said that the body of the master will rise in the future, and will aid living beings when the Buddha Maitreya⁶ appears.

4. The Buddha.

5. The female counterparts of yakshas.

6. The next buddha.

EVER IN THE FEMALE FORM

IN PRAISE OF THE TWENTY-ONE TARAS

Among the female bodhisattvas in the pantheons of Indian and Tibetan Buddhism, perhaps the most famous, and most propitiated, is Tara. Her name has several meanings in Sanskrit, including "Star" and "Saving." Her historical origins are uncertain; she has both Hindu and Buddhist forms, and begins to appear in Buddhist iconography in India around the seventh century C.E. It is said that Tara was born from a

lotus blossom that sprang from a tear shed by the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara as he surveyed the suffering universe. She is thus the physical manifestation of the compassion of Avalokiteshvara, himself viewed as the quintessence of all the compassion of all the buddhas. Because buddhas are produced from wisdom and compassion, Tara is hailed as "the mother of all buddhas" even though she is most commonly represented as a beautiful sixteen-year-old maiden.

Like all bodhisattvas, she continually appears in the world to benefit suffering sentient beings. According to Tibetan Buddhism, she took human form as the Chinese princess who married King Songtsen Gampo, the first of the Tibetan "dharma kings," bringing with her the Buddha image that would become the most revered in Tibet. Later Tara appeared as the great practitioner of the *chö* tradition (see *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, p. 724), Machig Lapdon (1062–1149). Indeed, it is said that long ago a princess developed the aspiration to enlightenment (*bodhichitta*) for the sake of all sentient beings, thereby beginning the long bodhisattva path. When a group of monks urged her to pray to be reborn as a man, she replied, "I developed bodhichitta as a woman. For all my lifetimes along the path I vow to be born as a woman, and in my final lifetime when I attain buddhahood, I will be a woman." Over the intervening aeons, Tara has therefore always appeared as a female.

She has many iconographic forms in different colors, the most common being Green Tara and White Tara, propitiated especially to bestow long life. Her numerous wrathful forms include Kurukulla—a dancing naked yogini, red in color, who brandishes a bow and arrows in her four hands.

Tara is renowned for her saving powers, appearing the instant that her devotee recites her mantra, *om tare tuttara ture svaha*. She is able to deliver those who call on her from eight fears: the fears of lions, elephants, fire, snakes, bandits, prison, water, and demons. Many tales recount her miraculous interventions. She can appear in peaceful or wrathful forms, depending on the circumstances; her powers extend beyond the subjugation of these worldly frights into the heavens and the hells.

Apart from her mantra, the prayer here is the most common means used in Tibet to invoke Tara. Addressed to twenty-one Taras, it is derived from an Indian tantra devoted to her, the *Source of All Rites to Tara, Mother of All Tathagatas* (*Sarvatathagatamatritara vishvakarmabhavatantra*). According to some traditions of commentary on the prayer, each of the verses refers to a different form of Tara. The prayer is known by heart by Buddhists throughout the Tibetan cultural region, recited by monks each morning, recited especially by travelers to protect them in their long journeys on foot and horseback across mountains and plains, and printed on prayer flags. These colored squares of cloth, imprinted with a prayer or mantra, are attached to poles, and to the rooftops of temples and dwellings, or are strung from the cairns at the summits of mountain passes. The wind is believed to carry the benefits sought by the imprinted prayer not only to the person who flies the flag but to all beings in the region.

PRONOUNCING GLOSSARY

Amitabha: *a-mi-tah-ba*

Avalokiteshvara: *a-va-loh-ki-tay-shva-ra*

gandharva: *gan-dar-va*

kinnara: *ki-na-ra*

Mandara: *man-da-ra*

Meru: *may-ru*

Namo Arya Taraye: *namoh ah-rya tah-*

ra-yay

phat: *pat*

svaha: *svah-hah*

Tara: *tah-rah*

Tathagata: *ta-tah-ga-ta*

ture: *tu-ray*

tuttara hum: *tu-tah-ra hoom*

tuttare: *tu-ta-ray*

Vindhya: *vin-dya*

yaksha: *yak-sha*

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