

BUDDHISM

IN PRACTICE

Donald S. Lopez, Jr., Editor



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Princeton Readings in Religions is a new series of anthologies on the religions of the world, representing the significant advances that have been made in the study of religions in the last thirty years. The sourcebooks used by the last generation of students placed a heavy emphasis on philosophy and on the religious expressions of elite groups in what were deemed the "classical" civilizations of Asia and the Middle East. Princeton Readings in Religions provides a different configuration of texts in an attempt better to represent the range of religious practices, placing particular emphasis on the ways in which texts are used in diverse contexts. The series therefore includes ritual manuals, hagiographical and autobiographical works, and folktales, as well as some ethnographic material. Many works are drawn from vernacular sources. The readings in the series are new in two senses. First, the majority of the works contained in the volumes have never been translated into a Western language before. Second, the readings are new in the sense that each volume provides new ways to read and understand the religions of the world, breaking down the sometimes misleading stereotypes inherited from the past in an effort to provide both more expansive and more focused perspectives on the richness and diversity of religious expressions. The series is designed for use by a wide range of readers, with key terms translated and technical notes omitted. Each volume also contains a substantial introduction by a distinguished scholar in which the histories of the traditions are outlined and the significance of each of the works is explored.

Buddhism in Practice is the second volume of Princeton Readings in Religions. The thirty-three contributors include leading scholars of Indian, Chinese, Tibetan, Japanese, Thai, Burmese, Korean, Nepalese, and Sri Lankan Buddhism, each of whom has provided one or more translations of key works, most of which are translated here for the first time. Each chapter in the volume begins with a substantial introduction in which the translator discusses the history and influence of the work, identifying points of particular difficulty or interest.

Two other volumes of the Princeton Readings in Religions are in press: *Religions of China in Practice* and *Religions of Japan in Practice*. Volumes currently nearing

Two Tantric Meditations: Visualizing the Deity

Luis O. Gómez

The following is an English translation of two chapters from a Sanskrit text describing the essentials of various tantric ritual and meditation sessions. The Sanskrit name for this genre of texts, and for the religious practice they describe, is *sādhana*—literally, “realization.” As a text, a *sādhana* is presented as a description of the essential elements of a “visualization.” Secondly, a *sādhana* is also an iconographic description of the features of a particular deity. The description is intended as a guide for the practice of invoking, and mentally creating and retaining the visual image of, a sacred figure. But the term *sādhana* can be used in more general terms to refer to all of the ritual practices associated with the visualization.

Numerous *sādhana*s are preserved as independent texts or in collections. The one translated below forms part of an Indian anthology titled *A Garland of Sādhana*s (*Sādhanaṃālā*). This anthology was compiled in the eleventh century C.E., but may contain *sādhana*s from as early as the seventh century. Each of the sections in this work describes the characteristics and features of the image that is to be visualized. Although many sections in this manual only describe the image to be visualized, the *sādhana*s translated below also describe the process or method of visualization—the first text does this in abbreviated form, the second is a complete visualization session, including its rituals and the content of its meditations. These *sādhana*s provide general guidelines that are followed in the visualization of most images.

The two *sādhana*s translated below are both dedicated to the late Buddhist female deity Tārā. She is often associated with the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, as his consort or as a member of his entourage. She shares with the bodhisattva the role of patron of compassion. Her name is usually explained as “she who saves” (or, more literally, “she who ferries [living beings] across [the ocean of saṃsāra]”), although the name probably originally meant “star,” specifically the north star, which “guides [sailors] across [the ocean].” Her role as savior (and

therefore protectress) is clearly stated in the first of the two texts translated below, where she takes on one of the major roles of Avalokiteśvara as the one to protect us from the “eight perils.” Tārā, however, is more than just a feminine version of Avalokiteśvara; she comes to assume the attributes of a buddha and perfect wisdom as well, as implied by the second of the two texts translated below.

The first of the two *sādhana*s is an anonymous poem dedicated to Tārā as the deity that protects the worshiper from the “eight great fears” or “dangers.” The details of the ritual are only suggested, but the allusions are comprehensive, so that the *sādhana* can be seen as a summary of a tantric ritual. This *sādhana* is also a classical example of the combination of religious elements forming the tantric ritual. These elements form the four axes of a visualization session: protective magic, philosophical discourse and reflection, devotion, and symbolic transfiguration of the self.

The second *sādhana* is one of the longest and most detailed in the *Sādhanaṃālā*. It is attributed to the Indian tantric master Anupamarakṣita, a learned monk who flourished around the year 1165 C.E. Although most of his works have come down to us only in Tibetan translation, the *Sādhanaṃālā* preserves two scholarly and richly detailed summaries of the tantric ritual of meditation (these same texts are also preserved in Tibetan translation). One of these texts is devoted to the visualization of Khasarpāna, the other to Tārā. The Tārā *sādhana* is translated below in full. It is a fine example of the elegant and scholarly liturgical writing that is as characteristic of tantra as the stereotypical sexual and cosmic symbolism.

The original Sanskrit text appears in B. Bhattacharya, ed., *Sādhanaṃālā*, vol. 1 (Baroda: Gaekwad Oriental Series, 1925), pp. 200–206 (number 98). This *sādhana* was translated in part by Bhattacharya in the first edition of his *Indian Buddhist Iconography* (Baroda: Gaekwad Oriental Series, 1928), pp. 169–75. The Sanskrit text accompanying that translation contains many errors, and makes a complicated, already defective text all the more difficult to decipher. Bhattacharya did not explain what criteria he used in deciding which sections to omit from his translation. Both text and translation were omitted without explanation in the second, revised edition of 1968, where Bhattacharya includes only a summary (pp. 20–23). The same author’s *Introduction to Buddhist Esotericism* (2nd rev. ed., Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1964) contains a paraphrase of the *sādhana* (Chapter II, “Procedure for Worship,” pp. 104–8). Bhattacharya’s abbreviated text and translation of 1928 were also the basis for an improved, but further abbreviated, rendition by E. Conze, *Buddhist Meditation* (New York: Harper & Row, 1956), pp. 133–39 (§III.3). Kūkai’s recounting of the tale may be found in Tajima Ryūjun, *Étude sur le Mahāvairocana Sūtra (Dainichikyō)* (Paris: Adrien Maisonneuve, 1936), p. 31.

Method for Visualizing Tārā [as She Who Protects Us against] the Eight Great Perils

Ārya Aṣṭamahābhaya Tārā Sādhana

1. I bow to her, to this one whom we only need remember to be freed from all of the eight great perils [death by fire; death by drowning; death by falling from a cliff, thunderbolts; dying at the hands of one's enemies by the sword, etc.; imprisonment or death by execution; spells and incantations, demons and ghosts; and wild beasts and vipers].
 2. First, one meditates on her as Tārā the Remover of the Eight Perils, [visualizing her] in the middle of the sky.
 - After one has worshiped her mentally, then one should confess one's transgressions.
 3. After rejoicing in [the] merit [of all beings], one should offer one's own merit.
 - Then, one should give away one's whole person (*ātmanbhāva*), and then perform the triple refuge three times.
 4. After one has carried out whatever [duties one] had to perform, one should immediately [concentrate one's mind] on emptiness.
 - Thereupon, [one should visualize] an eight-petal lotus flower in full bloom, within the moon in one's heart.
 5. In the middle of this [lotus], one imagines [the syllable] "Tām," [and, then, within this syllable,] a blue-colored lotus.
 - In the middle of this [lotus, one visualizes] again the syllable, [now] shining with the flames of [a burning] fire.
 6. With this, he generates [a mental image of] the deity [Tārā], adorned with all of her ornaments [and features].
 - On her right [side] she [displays the gesture of] a deity that grants all wishes, at the same time her left hand holds a lotus.
 7. She has a single face, a beautiful countenance, and the appearance of fresh youth.
 - Her hair [is covered] with the sweetest smelling blossoms, and she stands on a moon resting on a lotus.
 8. She sits in the half-lotus position, [and from this seat] will protect the three worlds.
- This image of Tārā should be visualized in the midst of a group of eight other deities by the serene yogin who mediates [in this way,] pervading [all] with the power of the mantra, [he recites the following:]

Om, Tāre tutāre ture, svāhā.

Om, tā, svāhā in the east.

Om, re, svāhā in the south.

VISUALIZING THE DEITY

- Om, tu, svāhā in the west.
- Om, tū, svāhā to Vahnikoṇa [fire, in the southeast].
- Om, re, svāhā to Nairṛī [earth, in the southwest].
- Om, tu, svāhā to Vāyavya [wind, in the northwest].
- Om, re, svāhā to Aiśāni [water, in the northeast].
- "Om Tām. Receive the Diamond Flower—[it is for you, O Tārā,] who ferries [us across]. Svāhā.
- One should offer flowers [to her]. One should present [her] with perfumes, food, and other [offerings, while holding one's hands] in the lotus gesture (*utpala-mudrā*).
9. In this way the visualization is practiced, evoking the youthful deity.
- One should practice this [visualization], the highest in the world, the one that destroys the eight perils.

[Thus] concludes *The Method for Visualizing Tārā [as She Who Protects Us against] the Eight Great Perils*.

Fairly Detailed Description of the Method for Visualizing the Goddess Tārā

Kīncid vistaraṃ Tārā sādhanam

After paying obeisance to Tārā, the great mother of the conquerors (*jina*), who is totally free from fault or defect, I now write [this account of] her sādhanā, at the request of [my] friends, for the good of persons of virtue, writing with clear and beautiful words, and with devotion.

I had never before written anything at all, even at [my] teacher's behest. [I now] write in summary form what I remember from what has been taught [to me].

THE PROPER PLACE FOR MEDITATION

First of all, the person who will use mantras [for his meditation] should arise early in the morning, wash his face, feet, and other [parts of his body], and, after purifying himself, should sit in a comfortable cross-legged position in a secluded and agreeable place, where one has spread sweet fragrances and has strewn the ground with fragrant flowers.

FIRST VISUALIZATION

[Then] one should mentally perceive, [as if present] in one's own heart, the first vowel, "A" which gradually turns into the orb of the moon. In the middle of this moon one should see a lovely blue lotus. On the filaments of this lotus

one will see the spotless orb of [a second] moon, upon which [appears] the yellow seed-syllable (*bīja*) *Tām* . . . Thereupon, [he sees rays of light] issuing from this yellow seed-syllable *Tām* . . . , and [this] mass of rays, which destroy the darkness of the world's delusions, illuminate all the endless worlds that exist in the ten directions, and gather the numberless, measureless families of greatly compassionate buddhas and bodhisattvas that exist in [all] these worlds, bring them [here, before the mediator], and sustain [them in mid-air] in the sky [above him].

PRELIMINARY VISUALIZED RITUAL

1. Act of Worship

Then one should worship those buddhas and bodhisattvas who are standing [suspended in mid-air] in the sky [above him], [offering them] heavenly flowers, incense, perfumes, garlands, unguents, [fragrant] powders, robes, parasols, banners, bells, hanging cloths, and the like.

2. Act of Confession

Having done this, one should confess his sins [as follows]:

Whatever evil deed I have committed, caused others to commit, or consented to their being committed, as I have wandered through the beginningless cycle of transmigration (*anādisamsāra*), whether I did so with [my] body, [my] speech, or [my] mind, all of these I confess.

After one has confessed following this prescribed [ritual], one should resolve to practice restraint and not to repeat [these evil actions] again.

3. Rejoicing

Then one should rejoice at the merit [of all beings in the following manner]:

I rejoice at all the good attained [by living beings], whether possessed by conquerors who are full sugatas, or solitary buddhas, or disciples, or by their sons, the bodhisattvas, or by all beings in the world, with its gods and Brahmanās.

4. Triple Refuge

Thereupon, one takes refuge in the triple treasure as follows:

I will take refuge in the Buddha, until [I have myself] reached the highest awakening. I will take refuge in the dharma, until [I have myself] reached the highest awakening. I will take refuge in the saṅgha, until [I have myself] reached the highest awakening.

5. Relying on the Path

Next is the expression of reliance on the [Buddha's] path:

I will rely on this path preached by the Tathāgata, and on none other.

6. Appeal

Following this, one should pronounce the appeal:

May the blessed tathāgatas and their sons [the bodhisattvas], who have worked for the benefit of the world since the beginning of the cycle of rebirth, remain [in this world], without entering nirvāṇa.

7. Entreaty

Then follows the entreaty:

May blessed tathāgatas teach such an incomparable teaching of dharma that [all] living beings in the cycle of rebirth may quickly become free of the bonds of existence.

8. Dedication of Merit

Immediately thereafter, one should perform the dedication of merit:

Whatever merit may arise from the incomparable sevenfold act of worship and confession, I dedicate to the attainment of full and perfect awakening.

ALTERNATIVE RITUAL PROCEDURE

Alternatively, as a shorter procedure, one may recite this stanza, which expresses the sevenfold incomparable worship [in abbreviated form]:

I confess all evil. I rejoice at merit with supreme joy. For as long as I remain in the cycle of birth, I seek the treasure of the good dharma of the Blessed One, I take refuge in the triple treasure, I dedicate my thoughts to awakening, and I rely on his path. I dedicate [all these] meritorious actions.

CONCLUDING THE ACT OF WORSHIP

After one has carried out in this manner the ritual of the sevenfold incomparable worship, one should take leave [of the buddhas and divinities invoked in the ritual] by pronouncing [the mantra] "*Om Aḥ Māḥ*" . . . or else by means of the following stanza:

Dwell in ease as you will, you whose limbs are smeared with the sandal powder of morality, who are dressed in the garments of meditation, and who are covered with [petals from] the flower that is awakening [and all its] attributes.

BEGINNING THE MEDITATION—THE FOUR HOLY ABIDINGS

Thereupon one should cultivate, in the order in which they are mentioned here, the four holy abidings, namely: friendliness, compassion, joy, and even-mindedness.

What is meant by "friendliness"? It is characterized as [feeling] toward all sentient beings the love (*prematā*) one would feel for one's only son; or else it is defined as the inclination to bring benefit and happiness [to others].

Furthermore, what sort of thing is compassion? It is the desire to remove [other sentient beings] from suffering and the causes of suffering. Or, [one also says that] compassion is the higher aspiration expressed in the thought "I will pull out even from this [prison] those persons who are immersed in [this] iron house of the cycle of rebirth—[an iron house] burning [red hot] in the fire of pain caused by all three kinds of suffering [suffering of pain, suffering of change, and suffering intrinsic to conditioned things]." . . . Or [one may also say that] it is the desire to pull out from the ocean of the cycle of rebirth those sentient beings that are suffering the three kinds of suffering.

Now, regarding joy, it is of the following nature: rejoicing is joyful enthusiasm (*pramodā*). Or [one also says that] joy is the higher aspiration expressed in the thought "I must [bring to full awakening] all sentient beings who are in this cycle of transmigration, establish all without exception firmly in the station of an awakened one (*buddhava*) and in the means leading to that condition." . . . Or [one may also define it as] a state of mind [in which one is] drawn to [seek] full possession, [enjoyment,] and mastery of all the virtues possessed by all [beings in the universe].

What is evenmindedness? Evenmindedness is the practice of [actions that provide] the greatest benefit [equally] to those persons who benefit [us] and to those who do not, by overcoming the impediments that are hostility and attachment. Also, evenmindedness is the inclination to practice what is beneficial to others, under all circumstances, free from [any feelings of] love or resentment, [and moved by an evenminded motivation that] arises and proceeds of its own accord [without ulterior motives]. Or, again, evenmindedness is indifference toward all irrelevant concerns, chief among which are the eight worldly conditions of profit and loss, fame and disrepute, praise or blame, pleasure or pain.

MEDITATION

Following the cultivation of the four holy abidings, one should cultivate [the mind so as to realize] that all things (*dharma*) are by nature perfectly pure. [In order to do so,] one should bring [into awareness and] face-to-face reflections such as the following: "All things (*dharma*) without exception are by nature and in their own being perfectly pure. I too am by nature perfectly pure." . . .

VISUALIZING THE DEITY

And this [fact, that] all dharmas are by their nature perfectly pure, one should realize by means of the following mantra: "Om, pure in their own being are all things, pure in my own being am I. . . ."

But, if all things are perfectly pure by nature, how is it that one brings [upon oneself this] cycle of transmigration? [This is possible] because [the original purity] is covered by the soil of [dual thoughts] such as [the duality of] subject and object. The means to remove [this covering] is the cultivation of the true path. By this [cultivation] the [cycle of transmigration] can be interrupted. Consequently, it has been established [as true] that all things are perfectly pure by nature.

After one has cultivated [this awareness of] the perfect natural purity of all things, one should cultivate [an awareness of] the emptiness of all things. Now, [with respect to] this emptiness, one should reflect in this manner: "Everything [here], moving and unmoving, is in itself nothing but the varied manifestations of the nondual, obscured by conceptualizations and discursive thought [based on constructed oppositions] such as [that between] subject and object." . . . And this same [insight into] emptiness one should realize by means of the following mantra: "Om, I in my true self am of the nature of [this] diamond of the knowledge of emptiness." . . .

SECOND AND MAIN VISUALIZATION (SĀDHDHANA PROPER)

Thereupon, one should bring to mind [a] detailed [visual image of the] blessed holy Tārā. [One should see her as] proceeding from the yellow germ-syllable *Tām* [one had previously visualized] resting on the spotless orb of the moon within the filaments of the full-blown blue lotus [growing] in the middle of the lunar orb [on the syllable *A*] originally visualized in one's own heart. One should conceive her to be of deep green color, with two arms, with a smiling face, endowed with all of the most incomparable virtues, and free of every defect, without exception. She is adorned with ornaments of heavenly precious substances such as gold, rubies, and pearls, her two breasts decorated with hundreds of lovely garlands and necklaces, her two arms wrapped in heavenly bracelets and bangles, her hips adorned with the beautiful splendor of the glittering rows of flawless gems on her girdles, her two feet beautified by golden anklets set with multicolored gems, her lovely matted hair entwined with fragrant wreaths made of [exquisite] flowers like those [growing in] paradise. In her resplendent jeweled headress is [the figure of] the blessed Amoghāsiddhi, the tathāgata. She [is visualized as] a shapely corporeal image, a radiant and most seductive semblance, in the prime of her youth, her eyes [the color] of a spotless blue lotus blossom in autumn, her body dressed in all [sorts] of heavenly fabrics and garments, seated in the half-lotus posture, within a circle of white rays on a white lotus as large as a cartwheel. With her right hand [she indicates that she is] granting [all] boons. In her left hand, she holds a blue lotus in full bloom.

One may cultivate such a visual image of the blessed [Tārā] for as long as one wishes.

Next, one will see this same [image of] the blessed [Tārā] being carried away by countless bundles of rays of light illuminating the triple world. [These rays of light] themselves issue from the yellow germ-syllable *Tām* on the filaments of the charming blue lotus in the moon that [one had] established in [one's own] heart. [And one then] sees the blessed [Tārā], who is perfect since beginningless time, [now present] also in the form of the essence of [pure] knowledge. [And she] is brought forth from the [empty] space [in the firmament, by those rays illuminating the world]. Once she has been led forth and established on the firmament, one should [receive] this same blessed [Tārā that one visualizes, welcoming her as a guest by] offering [her] water [for the mediator] to wash her feet, scented water and fragrant flowers in a jeweled vessel. And one should worship this same Blessed One with many kinds of [offerings]—heavenly flowers, incense, lamps, food offerings, perfumes, garlands, unguents, fragrant powders, garments, umbrellas, flags, bells, banners, and so forth.

THE HAND GESTURE (*MUDRĀ*)

After worshipping her in this manner, again and again, and praising her, one exhibits the hand-gesture (*mudrā*) [appropriate to this visualization]: [first] one cups the hands [forming a hollow]. Then, one extends the two middle fingers to form a wedge. Bending slightly the three joints of these two [fingers], one keeps the two index fingers [as they were held at first]. Holding the thumbs parallel [to each other], one holds their three joints close together. Extending the two ring-fingers to form a hollow, one joins and extends out the little fingers. This is the "open blue-lotus" hand gesture.

THE INCANTATION (*MANTRĀ*)

After one has propitiated with this hand gesture the Blessed One [as she is] in her aspect as the essence of [pure] knowledge, one should cultivate [the repetition and visualization of] the incantation appropriate to her aspect as the essence of the symbol. In this manner one should strengthen [the] conviction that these two [aspects] are nondual.

RESTING AND RISING FROM MEDITATION

Thereupon, [the light rays] that issue from the yellow germ-syllable *Tām* on the filaments of the blue lotus blooming within the orb of the moon, rays that are of unlimited range, proper to the divine Tārā, illuminate all the world spheres in the ten directions, removing, with showers of numberless precious substances and for all the sentient beings in those worlds, the suffering caused by poverty and other ills. And they refresh them with the nectar of the teachings

of the dharma—such as [the teachings] on impermanence, no-self, and so forth.

Furthermore, [in connection with this], one should benefit [those in] the world with a variety [of good deeds], and at that time also produce [a visual image of] Tārā in her cosmic aspect.

Also, for as long as one does not begin to feel tired, one may continue to develop [these visualizations, focusing] on whatever [is seen] in the yellow germ-syllable *Tām* in the stages of expansion and contraction, such as [the image of] the blessed [Tārā as she appears] therein.

When one feels tired from developing [this visualization exercise], one may rest by uttering the incantation [that says]: *Om tāre tuttāre ture svāhā*. . . For, it is said that this incantation is truly powerful, that even all the tatāgatas salute, worship, and honor it.

AFTER THE VISUALIZATION SESSION

Emerging from trance, the yogin sees the whole universe in the form of Tārā, and moves about freely, seeing himself as the blessed [Tārā].

BENEFITS OF THE VISUALIZATION

At the very least, the eight great magical powers [empowering a weapon, use of the magical eye ointment, use of the magical foot ointment, power of invisibility, use of the essence of all essences—either a panacea or miraculous balsam, or a solution that turns baser metals into gold, power to fly, instantaneous travel on the ground, and power to visit the nether worlds] fall at the feet of one who cultivates [the visual image] of the Blessed One following the process [described] above. What need is there to speak of the other [lesser] powers, which come to him as a matter of course? Whoever goes to a lonely mountain cave and cultivates [the visual image of] the Blessed One, will behold her with his own eyes. And the Blessed One herself will give this person her inbreath and outbreath. Why say more? In the very palm of the hand of such a person she will place even the state of a buddha, so hard to win.

CONCLUSION AND COLOPHON

May [all in] the world travel on peaceful and auspicious paths by virtue of the merit acquired by composing this *Fairly Detailed Visualization of Tārā*. This is the work of the pandit and elder Anupamaraksita.