

Mandala Offering

Compiled from articles by Lama Zopa Rinpoche on Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive

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The Legend of The Beginning of The Universe, Mount Meru

A void, dark emptiness was before all time. From within this nothingness came a wind, gentle and quiet. From east and south, west and north, it filled the void, growing in power with the passing years. After many, many years, the wind became thick and heavy, forming *Dor.je gya.dram*, a great double Vajra in the form of a cross.

From the Vajra came clouds, one upon the other, growing thick and heavy, as did the Vajra wind. Then, from the clouds came the great rain. Each drop as big across as a wagon wheel, each drop enough to cause a flood. For countless years the great rain fell, and when it had stopped falling it had created *Gya.tso*, the primeval ocean.

When *Gya.tso* was still, its surface smooth and quiet, there came once again a wind, gentle and smooth, like *Gya.tso*, moving the face of the waters softly back and forth. As the churning of milk brings forth cream to the surface, so the moving of the waters caused a light foam, *Wang.ch'en ser.gy'i sa.zhi*, which covered them becoming heavier as the wind grew in strength, until the foam was heavy and yellow, like the milk given by a mother cow when her child is born. And, as cream becomes butter, so from the ocean was earth created.

The earth arose like a mountain, around the top of which blew the tireless winds, covering the peaks with clouds. When the rain fell once more, the water it dropped was salty—and so, ocean upon ocean, our universe was made.

In the centre was the great mountain, *Ri.rab lhün.po*, a four-sided column of precious stones, the abode of gods. Around it lay a lake, and around the lake, a circle of golden mountains. Beyond the golden mountains was another lake, encircled again in turn. In all, there were lakes and seven rings of golden mountains, the innermost being the mightiest. Seven times earth, seven times water. Beyond the outer mountains lay the outer ocean, *Ch'i Gya.tso*. It is in *Ch'i Gya.tso* that the four worlds are found, like islands, each with its own shape and

different nature. The world of the south is pointed downward, like a cone; the western world is circular; the wealthy land of the north is square in shape; and the eastern world is a crescent. On each side of each world is a smaller island, of similar shape: four worlds and eight islands. This was the universe, and it was dark.

To *Ri.rab lhün.po* came the gods and demigods. They divided the mountains between them, into different levels, the highest being the most blessed. The centre of the universe was like our world, with hills and valleys, rivers and streams, with trees and flowers, and beautiful things; but everything was more beautiful than we can imagine, being most beautiful at the top. There lived the *Lha*, the embodied gods, but even they, like us, must suffer and die.

Far above the universe of the worlds of desire and form of *Ri.rab lhün.po* exist other heavenly worlds, the formless universe of *Zug.me k'am*. In the mountain itself, in its lower regions, are the six worlds of *Dö.k'am*, the universe of desires. Above this lie the seventeen formed worlds of *Zug.k'am*, peopled with gods embodied, on whom we can call when in need.

Of *Ri.rab lhün.po* there is more knowledge. This mountain has a tree, rising up through its very centre, bursting into flower and fruit at the top. The mountain is populated by gods and demigods, living at four different levels of the mountainside. Those at the top are the most powerful. You can pray to these gods, to be born amongst them on *Ri.rab lhün.po*. But each level is more powerful than the level below, and constant fighting is the suffering of these gods, for the demigods of the lowest level say that the tree does not grow only on the top of *Ri.rab lhün.po*, but that it has its roots way down at their level and is nourished from the base of the mountain; so that they are entitled to a share of its wonderful fruits. Therefore, with the gods of the other two lower levels they all fight, to force their way to the top of the mountain to claim their share of the fruit, and even to *Ri.rab* there is suffering.

Ri.rab lhün.po is the centre of our universe, and each of its four sides looks out across the seven lakes and the seven rings of golden mountains, the four worlds. The gods on the side of *Ri.rab lhün.po* facing south are guards; those facing northward look after the northern world; and the worlds of east and west are the same. It is said that the chief of the northern gods, and the guardian of the northern quarter is *Nam.t'ö.sä*; the guardians of the east and the west are *Yül.k'or.kyong* and *Chän.mi.zang*. The guardian of the southern gate, facing our world of *Dzam.b'u ling* is *P'ag.kye.po*.

After *Dzam.b'u ling* was created, a *prak.cha* tree grew up in the middle of a river. When its fruit was ripe it would fall into the water, making a noise that sounded like "dzambu." Many *lu* (water creatures) lived in that river, and they ate the fruit of the *prak.cha* tree. Their excrement turned to gold, so wonderful was the fruit. The best gold in our world comes from the water of the *prak.cha* tree, and our world takes its

name from the sound of the falling fruit. Now we do not know where the river with the tree is, but it is here somewhere.

The original human beings, because of their power and greatness, did not need to work. Food was there for the taking; there was no famine, no hunger even. There was no sickness, and the gods lived a long time, far longer than any of us can live. Their power was received from *sam.tän.sa*, and deep meditation, in which creation issues from the mind. Their power was such that there was no need for light; each god's body was his own light, and by his own power his body glowed like a heavenly body.

After many years of content in *Dzam.b'u ling*, one of the gods noticed a kind of fat, like cream, called *sa.ch'a*. This fat came from the earth itself. Touching and tasting it, the god found it good and told others to try it. The gods from *Ri.rab lhün.po* began to eat the *sa.ch'a* rather than other foods. The more they ate, the more their powers diminished, and the light they created became more feeble. Finally, when all the *sa.ch'a* was gone, they had lost their long life, and they had lost their light, for they had lost the power of *sam.tän.sa*. They lived in darkness. Then, due to karma, the sun, stars and moon came into existence, and the human beings depended on the sun and the moon and the stars for light.

They ate a corn-like plant called *nyu.g'u*, which bore large fruits. Each day, each person took one fruit, and the next day there was another ready for him. Thus, there was no hunger or famine; it was still a world of plenty. Each person had his own *nyu.g'u* plant. One day, a greedy person, finding that his *nyu.g'u* had provided two fruits, plucked and ate them both. The following day there was no fruit at all and he became hungry—so hungry that he took someone else's fruit. The latter, having no food, became hungry in turn, so he took the fruit from yet another person's *nyu.g'u* plant. Soon everyone was forced to take what was not his, and in this way theft came into our world. So also came work, for everyone had to start planting so that he would have enough food even if some were stolen from him.

All this time, these people, who had been gods, were in the shape of men. But once they started stealing, and the planting, they began to feel and think strange things. One man felt that his genitals were troubling him; he found them uncomfortable so he tore them from his body. In this way he became a woman. Having contact with men, she gave birth to children, and from them came more children; and soon the world was filled with men and women, all having more children.

With so many people, there was more and more difficulty in finding enough food, and in finding places to live. Instead of living together peacefully, each family began to look after its own needs, no longer bothering about the others—and they soon began fighting each other. After much fighting the people came together in a huge assembly and determined to end the fighting. They chose a leader, and called him *Mang.kur*, meaning “many people made him king.”

Once made king, *Mang.kur* taught the people. He taught them how to build houses, telling that each family should have its own house and its own fields, each family planting, growing and reaping its own food. In this way we became subject to the round of life and death, for while living we must work, fight, steal and get sick. Thus the world was created.

The sun, moon and stars, the sky and the clouds are not seen by the other worlds. Nor can we see those worlds or travel to them, unless we have supernatural powers. Some of us may have come from them. They have people living on them, but these are very different from us.

Lü.p'ag is the eastern world, shaped like a half moon. The people living there are giants, with moon-like faces. They live for three hundred years. They are not like us because they do not fight. They are quiet and peaceful. But they have no real religion. The average size is eight cubits tall, double our size.

The western world is *B'a.lang chö*, shaped like the sun. The people there are like those on *Lü.p'ag*, though their faces are round and they are sixteen cubits tall, and live for five hundred years. *B'a.lang chö* is a land of cattle—many, many cattle, and the people eat mostly butter and cheese.

North of *Ri.rab lhün.po* and furthest away from our own world of *Dzam.b'u ling* is *Dra.mi.nyän*. Unlike *Lü.p'ag* and *B'a.lang chö* *Dra.mi.nyän* is square in shape. People there have square faces, like horses; they are thirty-two cubits tall and live for a thousand years. There is no fighting and no work. *Dra.mi.nyän* is the land of plenty where food grows in abundance and needs no tending. When you are born on *Dra.mi.nyän* you are born with everything you need. Never in your lifetime need you look for clothes, shelter or food. When you die on *Dra.mi.nyän*, your wealth dies with you. It is a land of quiet, peace and bliss, for the whole thousand years; for all continents but our own, the life span is set. Only the last seven days are evil for these people, for *Dra.mi.nyän* is also the land of the unpleasant voice. Seven days before you die you receive a sign. The clothes that have always been kept fine and clean for you become dusty and torn. Decay sets in. You hear the chilling voice of death whispering in your ear, a sound that brings the first pain in a thousand years, telling you that now the time to die has come. The voice whispers to you and tells you how you are going to meet your death, where you will be sent afterwards, what hells and sufferings are in store for you. For nearly a thousand years the people who live on *Dra.mi.nyän* do not know suffering, want, pain or fear. For the last seven days of the thousand years they know more suffering than we know in a lifetime.³

Introduction

The mandala offering is an extremely powerful method for accumulating extensive merit and receiving realizations such as bodhicitta and emptiness quickly. Just as great strength is needed to carry a heavy load, a great amount of merit is needed to lead all sentient beings to enlightenment. There's nothing that can be offered with your hands that is more meritorious than offering mandalas.

The Tibetan term for mandala is *khyil-khor*, which means "taking the essence." The essence you take is the whole path from guru devotion to enlightenment. That's what you get from doing this practice, plus the result: the unification of dharmakaya and rupakaya. Therefore by doing this practice you receive inconceivable temporal and ultimate happiness.

Mandala Offerings and the Six Perfections

Offering the mandala contains the practice of all six perfections. By cleaning and blessing the mandala base with liquid mixed with a *bajung* pill you practice the perfection of giving (water symbolizes prosperity). Checking the grain for insects and looking after the base, keeping it clean, leads to the perfection of moral conduct. Removing insects from the grain without harming them leads to the perfection of patience. Thinking of how fortunate you are to be able to practice Dharma and making the offering with joy, you cultivate joyous effort. By not forgetting the visualization, you attain concentration. By clearly visualizing the colors and objects in the mandala, and by meditating on its emptiness, wisdom is attained. Therefore offering mandalas helps you to quickly complete the two accumulations of the merits of method and wisdom as it contains all six perfections.

This practice pacifies all hindrances to your temporal and ultimate happiness. These depend on merit and merit depends on offerings. The most meritorious object to offer is the mandala. Therefore if you wish to achieve temporal and ultimate happiness, the best thing you can do is to offer many mandalas.

Lama Tsongkhapa offered a million eight hundred thousand mandalas and achieved all the realizations of the stages and paths. If you wish to gain realizations you should offer mandalas to your guru every day as his jewel-like body can bestow the sphere of great bliss in an instant. All realizations depend on your guru. Offering mandalas to him/her is like offering gifts to a king before requesting a favor of him. Achieving enlightenment in one lifetime depends on your relationship with your guru.

Lama Tsongkhapa was instructed by Manjushri to leave the monastery and go to a hermitage where he was to concentrate on bodhicitta, seeing his guru as Buddha, meditate on the path, purify and accumulate merit. Without working on all of these, even if you practice for a hundred years you won't gain realizations. However, if you

do, you will receive realizations within three years or even in a few months. The mere wish to make progress doesn't make it happen. It's necessary to create the causes, one of which is accumulating merit.

How to Get the Most Out of Your Practice

Basically, offering the mandala involves mentally offering the entire universe: all the planets and worlds, all sense objects, and especially the objects to which there is much clinging, such as your body, possessions and friends. All these are offered to the merit field. The essential technique of offering is to offer the best quality materials, in the greatest quantity and to have as clear a visualization as possible. In this way you can create extensive merit in just a short time.

Even if you're a beggar, by making mandala offerings you will receive all the necessities for your practice in this and future lives. By visualizing and then offering whatever you need in the space above the mandala, you create the cause to receive it. Visualizing anything golden and offering it to the buddhas frees you from disease, and offering the moon creates the cause for you to be reborn as a god or a holy being. Offering jewels, gold and enjoyments creates the cause to be reborn in the caste of kings.

By visualizing the offerings as more precious and extensive, you create vast merits. For example, imagining that you're offering a Mt. Meru of silver, lapis lazuli, ruby and gold, even if there are no such materials on your base, you receive the merit of actually offering them. So in just a few seconds it's possible to create the merit of having offered the entire universe. When you offer water bowls it's good to visualize the water as nectar. The water appears as nectar to the devas, so of course it appears as nectar to the buddhas—this is explained in Maha-anuttara Yoga Tantra. It generates infinite bliss in the holy mind. So if you offer only water, you get the merit of offering water, but if it's offered as nectar you gain much more merit because of the superior quality of that offering.

The Story of King Ashoka's Previous Life

Similarly, when making an offering of ten cents to the Buddha, if you clearly visualize the sky filled with dollars, you receive that much merit even if you don't have a single dollar. What's the reference that shows that by visualizing nectar or gold you receive the merit of actually offering these? Who had that experience? This was explained by Pabongka Rinpoche in his teaching called *Giving Liberation In Your Hand*, where he tells the story of King Ashoka's previous life:

The Importance Of Clear Visualization

Generating lam-rim realizations in the mind quickly depends on creating extensive merit. However much merit can be created in one day, in one hour makes it that

much quicker to attain realizations of the lam-rim. Creating merit depends on how clearly and extensively you can visualize. That is the key; that is the essential thing about mandala offerings. In the *Lam-rim Chen-mo*, Lama Tsongkhapa did not explain mandalas in detail, but he explained the importance of offering the mandala with a clear visualization. This is incredibly important advice. If the visualization is not clear, less merit is created. That's the secret of mandalas; the amount of merit created depends on clearly visualizing the worlds, etc., as explained in the prayer. The number of mandalas that are done isn't so important. The goal is lam-rim realizations, and quick realization depends on clear visualization. You would create more merit by doing ten mandalas with clear visualization than a hundred vaguely visualized. The prayer can be said quickly, but it wouldn't have so much meaning if done in that way.

It's not enough to have mere intellectual knowledge of the path—that doesn't change the mind. If there are seeds, but no soil, water, fertilizer and warmth they won't grow. Similarly, in order for realizations to grow, for the mind to be transformed by the teachings, you need to purify obstacles and accumulate merit. Offering the mandala is one of the most important methods to accumulate this much-needed merit.

Multiplying the Offering

You can also increase the merit of the offering by imagining that you're offering many universes, as many as you can imagine. After constructing the mandala, imagine beams of light going out in all directions from the mandala. On the end of each beam is another mandala. Then from each of these mandalas emanate beams of light with a mandala on the end of each, and so on. Another way of multiplying the mandala is to imagine another whole universe on each atom of the first mandala, and then another universe on each of those universes' atoms, etc. You can also imagine a duplicate image of yourself making a mandala offering in each atom of space. The entire space becomes filled with mandalas.

Although the mandala base is small, you must imagine everything in the universe on it. It's like seeing many objects reflected in a tiny water bubble, or looking at a mountain through the eye of a needle, or looking at a city from an airplane. It's very important to think that all these objects actually exist. The imagined symbol of the universe does exist as a creation of the mind.

Between Sessions

Whenever your mind feels solid and unmoving and everything seems to be at a standstill, you should make mandala offerings and strong requests to the guru and the merit field. When you feel like this, heresy towards the teachings can arise and instead of gaining energy to practice and increase your wisdom, you create nothing but downfalls. Offering mandalas will prevent this.



MANDALA OF 37 HEAPS

Mandala Offering in Tantra

One of the commitments of Maha-anuttara Yoga Tantra is to offer mandalas six times a day to your guru. This is done during the six-session guru yoga practice. If you don't have a plate, you can just visualize offering the mandala three times a day and three times at night. If you fail to do this, it's one *bombo* (transgression of a branch tantric vow). Kyabje Pabongka Rinpoche said in the lam-rim that breaking a bodhisattva vow is a hundred thousand times heavier than breaking a root vow of a fully ordained monk, and breaking a branch tantric vow is a million times heavier than breaking a root bodhisattva vow. The karmic consequence of breaking a branch tantric vow is the same as that of killing dakinis. However, if you visualize offering the mandala as described in the six-session prayer you don't receive this fault. It is necessary to recite the six-session prayer to be conscious of what you should practice.

Even those who have achieved the developing stage of tantra have to offer mandalas. If you don't continuously make mandala offerings from the time you receive a tantric initiation until you achieve the completion stage, there is a great danger to your life from such things as spirits.

The more you understand karma, the more you will recognize the preciousness of this simple practice. The benefits of making one mandala offering are incredible. The disadvantages of not doing so are also very heavy. Kadampa geshees would always carry with them their mandala plates, offering bowls and yellow robes. By offering mandalas it's possible to have visions of deities. One fully-ordained nun saw Chenrezig after making many mandala offerings.

Mandala offering is a powerful method for accumulating extensive merit in a short time. The Tibetan word for mandala is *kyil.kor*. *kyil* is essence, *kor* is taking—taking the essence. The term means taking the essence on the base of offering a mandala, and what you get from this is merit—the cause. Therefore the essence you take is the generation of the whole path, from guru devotion up to enlightenment, as well as the result, the unification of the dharmakaya and rupakaya. The cause is merit, the path; and the result is enlightenment. In other words, from this practice inconceivable temporal and ultimate happiness results. One is making unbelievable business with the merit field!

It is mentioned that the better the quality of the offerings that one can imagine, the more details and clarity, the more merit one accumulates. The offerings are explained in the commentaries on the mandala, but it is very good to recite the verse from *Lama Choepa* when you offer the mandala alone, because you then have the leisure to visualize clearly. Doing it this way you dedicate the merit from each offering for the sentient beings as it is performed. It is very effective for the mind.

There are different types of mandala offerings. The mandala offering practice was taught by Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, and is referred to in the *Guhyasamaja Root Tantra*, I think in the verses on offerings. That is the reference for mandala offering. It is not just a Tibetan tradition. There is the thirty-seven heap mandala offering according to Drogoen Choegyael Phagpa, the great Tibetan Sakya yogi. Then there are the twenty-five and the twenty-three heap mandalas. According to Lama Tsongkhapa's tradition the twenty-three heap mandala is offered. The twenty-five heap mandala is derived from the one of thirty-seven heaps by leaving out the eight offering goddesses and the specific enjoyments of each continent. These are the jewel mountain, the wish-granting tree, the cow which gives milk unceasingly, and the uncultivated crops. These are visualized, but not mentioned in the recitation because each is the particular enjoyment of one of the four continents and the visualization of the continents includes these enjoyments. No heaps are placed for the eight offering goddesses nor the four enjoyments. One is supposed to visualize them but they are not mentioned separately. If the fence around the base and Mount Meru are not included it becomes the twenty-three heap mandala of Lama Tsongkhapa's tradition.

It is said that once a year, or every month, the mandala plate should be purified. There is a pill called the *pachung*, which I think the tantric college monks have as they need them for consecrations and other purposes such as fire-pujas. The dung from cows which eat one special grass is used to make these pills. I think there are some other ingredients, not only that! One dissolves the pill into saffron-water and dips one's index finger into that and spreads it around the mandala base. The main purpose is to purify the base with a scented smell in order to accumulate merit. When performing the offering do not hold the base in an empty hand, but put some grains, or whatever, in your hand first. Then do the action of purifying all of your obscurations and negative karma created by your body, speech and mind; and you can also think of all sentient beings. Put some grains on the base and wipe them off by circling the base three times in a clockwise direction with the outside of your wrist. It is said that there is a nerve in the outside of the wrist which has the function of clairvoyance and the idea is that because of this the purification is a cause for clairvoyance and a clear mind. Then put some grain on the base again and wipe it off three times in a counter-clockwise direction. Think that all the blessings —"blessing" means quality—of the entire merit field's holy body, holy speech and holy mind enters yourself and all the sentient beings.

Then put some grain on the base. I think the reason is similar to what I mentioned elsewhere about Milarepa offering an empty pot. In the teachings it says that due to the dependent arising from offering something empty one gets born in places where there is no buddha.

The Actual Practice

If you're using grain such as rice, it should first be cleaned (insects and dirt removed, washed in water and dried) and made nice-smelling with perfume or scented water. The base should also be cleaned the first time with water to which saffron, scent and a *bajung*³ pill have been added. This is similar to sprinkling scented water on the ground before inviting a king or guru to the place.

OM VAJRA BHUMI AH HUM—bhumi means base; OM AH HUM is a blessing.

WANG CHEN SERGYI SAZHI—the golden ground.

OM VAJRA REKHE AH HUM

CHI CHAG RIKOR YUG GYI KOR WA—the iron fence.

U SU RI GYAELPO RI RAB—Mount Meru.

OM VAJRA BHUMI AH HUM—the powerful golden ground. This is recited to bless the mandala. Hold a small amount of grain in each hand. Holding the mandala base with your left hand, pour some grain on the base with your right. This grain symbolizes the negativities and obscurations of yourself and all sentient beings. Tip the base away from you so that the grain spills off and rub the base three times in a clockwise direction with your right wrist. Here there is the "bodhicitta vein" associated with the development of clairvoyance. Think that you're wiping away all the negativities of yourself and all beings. The first wipe eliminates those of body, the second of speech and the third of mind. Think that you're also eliminating all undesirable places such as the hells and undesirable things such as thorns, illness, misfortunes, the two obscurations and all the impurities of yourself and others that have arisen due to clinging to external objects and the internal mind.

The mandala base becomes the golden ground, representing our buddha nature, with plains as smooth as the palm of a child's hand. Now place more grain on the base. Tipping it towards you, rub it with your wrist three times counter-clockwise. Think that you're receiving the qualities, blessings and attainments of the guru and the merit field; these enter your body, speech and mind. You transform into the merit field, or your yidam.

OM VAJRA REKHI AH HUM—encircled by an iron fence. Place some grain in the center of the base and then place the first ring. Never put the ring on an empty base as that would create the karma to take rebirth in a place where a buddha has not descended. After placing the first ring, pour a handful of grain around the edge of the plate, just inside of the ring, moving in a counter-clockwise direction.

The main point in regard to the mandala is that the higher the quality of one's visualization, the more merit.

Now you begin to place heaps of rice to represent the different objects. There are different ways of constructing the mandala—37 heaps, 25 heaps, 23 heaps and 7 heaps, but here it's according to the 37-heap method. When you place the heaps, think that the grain is the object. Instead of thinking that the objects drop onto the base with the grain, visualize that they appear out of emptiness, lighting up in space like a light bulb when it's been turned on. Clear visualization and clear recognition of each object of the mandala is extremely important if you wish to quickly complete the accumulation of merit.

Don't rush; go slowly and spend time on the visualization to make it as clear as possible. Visualizing each object in turn, think, "I'm offering this to my guru who is the merit field." Then even if your visualization becomes unclear or gets lost you still create merit. Try to remember the qualities and functions of each object as you name it. This is very beneficial for the mind.

After offering each object, dedicate the merit to all sentient beings.

(The large objects like Mt. Meru you can offer at the end altogether rather than each time.)

The arrangement of the objects offered depends on the purpose of making the offering. In order to request realizations, the east is placed towards you, but in order to make an offering to the merit field, east is on the opposite side, towards the merit field.

Objects Offered in the Mandala of 37 Heaps

Base

1. **Mt. Meru:** It is good to visualize Mount Meru as you are offering it. Place a heap of grain in the center of the base to represent Mt. Meru, which has four faces, each of a different precious substance. Each jewelled face of Mt. Meru radiates dazzlingly, and its reflection accounts for the colour of the sea, sky and world on its respective side:

- The eastern face is made of radiant, silvery crystal.
- The southern face is of bright blue lapis lazuli.
- The western face is of ruby.
- The northern face is of gold.

That is why here in our continent we have a white sunrise and red sunset. This is so for all the four levels. Visualize this and offer it mentally.

The top of Mt. Meru is flat and square, like a plateau. Here are found the four guardian kings, and the palace of the worldly gods, who have incredible enjoyments.

The shape of the mountain resembles an inverted pyramid with the apex buried beneath its lower levels. There are eight lower levels which are like eight steps all around the bottom of the mountain. Only four of these are above the ocean, visible to the eye, while the other four are beneath the ocean. The asura realm is located where the water meets Mt. Meru. The sura realms are located on the upper four levels or steps. Here they have enjoyments a hundred times greater than those found in America! Above the fourth level is the god realm, Tushita.

2. The Eastern World - *Lü.p'ag*: It is white and semi-circular like a half-moon. The people who live there are tall and very beautiful with half-moon-shaped faces. They have subdued minds and limitless possessions. They always enjoy a high status and live for three hundred years. They eat rice and vegetables. They are a quiet, peaceful people who never fight, but they have no religion.

This world has a white sky because that face of *Ri.rab lhün.po* is composed of silver. The size is two thousand *pag.tsä* across, and its name—“body longer (double body)”—applies to its inhabitants, who are much taller than those in the southern world.

3. The Southern World - *Dzam.b'u ling* (this is our world): It is blue and trapezoidal (similar to the canopy of an Indian rickshaw). The inhabitants' faces are the same shape as their world, as is true of all the worlds. Here, many people have high realizations.

This is a blue continent because the colour of the jewel, lapis lazuli, of which that face of *Ri.rab lhün.po* is composed, is reflected in the sky. The size of this world is two thousand *pag.tsä* across.

4. The Western World - *B'a.lang chö*: It is red and circular. The people here have round faces, live for five hundred years and have infinite enjoyments. This world has a red sky, reflecting the jewel ruby. Its size is two thousand *pag.tsä* wide, and the name means “cow enjoyments.”

5. The Northern World - *Dra.mi.nyän*: It is yellow and square with a golden sky because of the jewel sapphire on Mount Meru. The size is two thousand *pag.tsä*, and the name means “uninteresting sound.”

The people here have square faces and beautiful bodies made of light. They live for a thousand years. The standard of life is god-like: there is no fighting, food grows in abundance; the moment one is born one receives everything one needs. Because there is very little suffering there is no desire for religion and the people are

unaware of death. But seven days before they die, they hear a voice whispering, telling them where they will be reborn and what sufferings they will experience.

There are not many examples of suffering in the western, northern and eastern worlds, so it is very difficult for those people to practice Dharma.

6-13. Each world has two smaller, similarly-shaped and coloured worlds on either side of it. These are the next eight heaps of grain on the base. First put a heap to the left of the main world, then one to the right (i.e. for the eastern world, put the first heap in the south-east and the second in the north-east, then move on to the southern world.)

The Precious Things.

The next four objects are called the four "precious things." They are the particular enjoyments of each of the four worlds; things that the inhabitants of each world enjoy the most. We should visualize them in the aspect of offerings, but think that in essence they are realizations of the Dharma. They are to be visualized floating in the sky above their respective world.

14. The Precious Mountain (east): This is a huge mountain made of the seven precious gems: gold, silver, lapis, coral, diamonds, pearls and emeralds.

15. The Wish-Granting Tree (south): It is huge and made of the seven precious gems: its roots are gold, trunk is silver, branches are lapis lazuli, leaves are emeralds, with sapphire buds, pearl flowers and diamond fruit. Thinking of whatever you wish for and praying to the tree, your needs pour down from it like rain. This is by the power of the object. When its leaves rustle, they make the sound of Dharma. The people of the southern world like fruit, so this tree is their particular enjoyment.

16. The Wish-Fulfilling Cow (west): This cow is also made of jewels: with diamond horns, sapphire hooves and a tail like the wish-granting tree. Its body is golden-orangish colored, healthy and very beautiful. Its excrement is gold. Whatever one desires springs forth from its pores. It also gives unceasing milk.

17. The Uncultivated Harvest (north): These are crops that grow unceasingly, without needing to be cultivated. Its fruit is perfect: skinless and clean, easy to pick (just falls off in one's hand), beautiful and delicious, satisfying all desires.
(If using four rings, place the second ring at this point. If using three rings, the second ring is placed later.)

The next seven objects are the seven possessions of a *chakravartin* (wheel-turning) or universal monarch; offering them creates the cause to become such a monarch. The qualities of these objects are explained in the *Heruka Lama Chöpa*.⁶

First ring

18. The Precious Wheel - KORLO RINPOCHE (east): This is a vehicle for the universal monarch, actualized by and propelled by his great stock of merit. It travels very fast—it can cover the four worlds and the god realms in a day—and can carry the monarch and his entire retinue to any part of the universe he wishes to go to. Made of gold, with a thousand spokes, it's very bright, like the sun.

You can visualize numberless wheels, not just one, in space on the eastern side and offer them.

Then dedicate: "By my offering this precious wheel may all sentient beings achieve control of the dharma activity." That means sentient beings receiving all the teachings, understanding the meanings of the words and having the realizations. It could also mean that through having an understanding of the meanings of the words and having the realizations being able to do dharma activities to benefit other sentient beings. Saying "all sentient beings" also includes yourself. If you are a sentient being! This wheel is the perfect chariot. It is extremely bright, made of gold, and has one thousand spokes. It can roll for one hundred thousand *pag.tsä* and carries universal monarch to any part of the mandala.

19. The Precious Jewel - NORBU RINPOCHE (south): This is an eight-sided wish-fulfilling jewel made of lapis lazuli. It is as bright as the sun, can make night like day-time, and emits light rays of five colors that can be seen for thousands of miles.

These rays bring all success and whatever is needed by sentient beings. When we're tormented by heat they make us feel cool; when it's cold they provide warmth. They bring all happiness and prevent illness and untimely death to all those within their range. They also fulfill whatever Dharma wishes sentient beings have.

Dedicate: "By offering this precious jewel, may all sentient beings have their Dharma wishes fulfilled perfectly."

20. The Precious Queen - TSUNMO RINPOCHE (west): She is extremely beautiful, charming, has a camphor-scented body and sweet-smelling upali-flowered breath. Perfectly dressed, she has a calm, subdued mind and gives good vibrations. She is free of the five faults of women: greed or miserliness with men and other objects, jealousy, anger and pride; and possesses the eight qualities of a perfect lady: harmonious mind, bearing only sons, of noble birth, of high caste, free of jealousy towards other women, does not gossip or hold wrong views, and remains unaffected by objects of the senses. She bestows bliss and freedom from hunger and thirst on any being who touches her. Her mind is endowed with love and compassion; she grants all success and guides all beings from physical and mental suffering.

Dedicate: "By offering this precious queen, may all sentient beings enjoy the non-contaminated, non-deluded great bliss of aryas."

21. The Precious Minister - LOENPO RINPOCHE (north): He has renounced all non-Dharma actions, so all his projects are Dharma-related and for the benefit of others. He is never treacherous or harmful, but always acts with love. He never gets upset about or tired of working for others. He spontaneously carries out the wishes of the universal monarch without having to be asked (he is able to read the monarch's mind). He is extremely wise and skillful in all situations and in directing the activities of the entourage and the army.

He does not harm other sentient beings; has abandoned anything that is not dharma; is not upset about doing virtuous activities to benefit others; expertly accomplishes whatever work the king has in mind without needing to be told; is expert in leading the armies.

He possesses the eye of a god and can see for one hundred *pag.tsä*. He desires to do only good for people, always acting with love and never with treachery, and he directs his will to accomplish Dharma projects to benefit all beings.

Dedicate: "By offering this precious minister may all sentient beings fulfill exactly all the wishes of the buddhas."

22. The Precious Elephant - LANGPO RINPOCHE (south-east): He is as large and as white as a snow mountain and as strong as a thousand ordinary elephants.

He is so wise, skillful and alert that he doesn't need to be led by a rope; a fine thread is enough. He is decorated like a ceremonial elephant. He has a large penis, and his trunk, tail and testicles touch the ground. He carries the universal monarch wherever he wants to go without needing to be ordered—he can read his master's mind. He can travel around the universe three times in a day, without shaking or disturbing the rider's body. He is peaceful, never violent or harmful to others; perfectly obedient, incredibly wise and able to conquer all opposing forces.

It is white and as huge, like a snow-mountain, and has jewelled decorations on its forehead, as you see in India. It has seven limbs—I think it includes the trunk and so on. It has more power than thousands of elephants and can circumambulate the continents three times in one day. The elephant can be easily led, even with a tiny thread and without needing to hit it, because it is so intelligent. It does not harm others and moves in a very subdued way without disturbing the person riding on it. Offer the elephant to the merit field and then dedicate: "By offering this precious elephant may all sentient beings ride the supreme great vehicle to enlightenment."

23. The Precious and Excellent Horse - TACHOG RINPOCHE (south-west): Is white, of perfect shape, size and color, is decorated with the jeweled crown of the

devas, a jeweled saddle and various jeweled ornaments. He can travel around the universe three times in one day, and never gets tired or sick. He is very wise and subdued and can be led by a thread; a bridle is not necessary. He is magnificent-looking, and protects his rider from harm.

Like the flower kumoeta, it is extremely white, and is decorated in a similar way to the elephant. Its color and size are perfect. If one wishes, it can circumambulate all the continents three times in one day. It has a very healthy body, free of disease. It is very glorious and never tires.

Dedicate: "By offering this precious, excellent horse, may all sentient beings attain mundane and supra-mundane psychic powers." (Offering the precious horse creates the cause to achieve clairvoyance.)

24. The Precious General - MAGPON RINPOCHE (north-west): He never harms others as he has totally abandoned all non-Dharma actions. However he can never be defeated in battle. He intuitively knows the wishes of his ruler, and never tires in his service. He leads large armies of horses, elephants, chariots and foot soldiers. In times of struggle and hardship visualizing the precious general prevents you from being harmed by others (the would-be harmers are subdued) and protects you from poverty.

He never harms others, having abandoned all irreligious actions, but he can never be defeated in battle. He has the power to know the exact wishes of the ruler, never tiring in his service. He can lead his armies on elephant, horse chariot or on foot.

Dedicate: "By offering the precious general may all sentient beings become holders of the entire collection of teachings."

According to Lama Tsongkhapa, the precious householder is offered at this time, instead of the precious general, who is included with the precious minister. The precious householder has many possessions and jewels: all sentient beings are pleased to see him.

25. The Great Treasure Vase - TERCHEN POI BUMPA (north-east): It is made of gold, and decorated with jewels. It has a flat base, large belly and long neck, like a Greek urn. The neck is decorated with cloth from the deva realms, and the vase has a beautiful tree as a stopper. The vase contains various treasures and grants all wishes.

As I mentioned above, when you have the time, think of the quality of the offering, then offer numberless of them, then dedicate. Whatever sentient beings wish for the wish-granting vase can grant.

Second Ring

The Goddesses

Each of these eight offering goddesses has the same nature as the sixteen offering goddesses. Each offering goddess is of a beautiful shape so is an offering to the eye-senses of the merit field; has scents coming from her mouth and body, so is an offering to the nose-sense; sings extremely sweet songs, so is an offering to their ear-sense; has a nature of bliss and voidness so is an offering to the mental-sense. Thus each goddess is an object of all the six senses. So there are numberless of each one in space.

26. The Goddess Of Beauty - GEG MA (east): She is white, she stands in an S-shaped dancing posture with hands on her hips, holding a vajra in each hand. She exhibits her beauty through dancing and moving her body.

27. The Goddess Of Garlands - TRENGWAMA (south): She is yellow-colored and very beautiful. She holds a rosary made of precious vajras with both hands at her breasts; with this she grants initiations to whomever comes before her.

28. The Goddess Of Song - LUMA (west): She is pink-colored; she plays a lute and sings, offering the music to all beings.

29. The Goddess Of Dance - GARMA (north): She is multi-colored: her face and feet are white, neck and breasts are pink, hands and hips are blue and her thighs are light yellow. She holds a vajra in each hand, with her right hand on her head and left hand on her left hip.

Gegma through to Garma are in the cardinal directions. Metogma through to Drichabma are in the corners, the sub-directions.

30. The Goddess Of Flowers - METOGMA (south-east): She is bright yellow; in her left hand she holds a vase containing a vajra and flowers. She scatters the flowers in the air with her right hand.

31. The Goddess Of Incense - DUGPOMA (south-west): She is white in colour and carries an incense pot in her right hand at shoulder level. This incense gives complete satisfaction to whomever it is offered. Her left hand is in a special mudra also at shoulder height: the two end fingers point up in the air, the palm faces forward, and the thumb holds the two middle fingers down.

32. The Goddess Of Light - NANGSAELMA (north-west): She is pink and holds a beautiful lamp on her left shoulder with her right hand held over her head. Her left hand is at her heart.

33. The Goddess Of Perfume - DRICHABMA (north-east): She is rainbow-colored. In her left hand at her heart she holds a conch shell containing a vajra and beautifully scented sandal water. With her right hand she sprinkles this perfume in all directions.

These eight goddesses, visualized in space above the first level of Mt. Meru,⁷ are the emanations of your own transcendental wisdom of non-dual bliss and emptiness. They should be visualized as young and very beautiful. They have slender waists, enchanting faces with fine blue eyes and red lips. Their bodies are fragrant; they have soft, smooth skin which, when touched energizes great bliss. Any sounds they make are lovely to hear. Visualizing the goddesses as exquisitely beautiful in all respects is for the purpose of transforming desire into the path. Imagine that all space is filled with these goddesses.

Offering goddesses could have similar merit to offering a wisdom mother having sixty qualities in the mandala when we take the secret initiation and the wisdom initiation. It is a preparation for oneself to sooner or later have the experience of bliss and voidness, and then with a wisdom mother be able to cut off the dual view and achieve the unified state of no-more-learning.

Top Ring

34. The Sun - NYIMA (south): It's in the southern sky above the level of Mt. Meru. It's like a gigantic magnifying glass dispelling darkness (the darkness of sentient beings' gross and subtle delusions); like a clear lens through which hot rays are focused, and it emits brilliant rays of light. Its shape is that of a disc, with a golden fence around its edge. At its centre, stairs lead to a palace in which the children of the gods are dancing and singing.

Think about the function of the sun; for instance, how it causes crops to ripen. The sun signifies all wisdoms, all paths: Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana. It signifies the clear light, which results in the dharmakaya. The sun is absolute bodhicitta; it dispels the darkness of ignorance grasping at true existence, the root of samsara.

35. The Moon - DAWA (north): The moon, in the northern sky, is the same size as the sun and is equal to the sun in brightness. Usually, the sun's light obscures the moon but in the mandala the light of both pervade the world. The moon is also disc-shaped, with a fence around its edge and a palace at its centre where the children of the gods are singing and dancing. The moon causes samsara to cease; its two edges are the two extremes which it eliminates. The light of the moon has the power to dispel sentient beings' gross obscurations.

The moon symbolizes method, the methods of the three vehicles; also conventional bodhicitta, whose root is compassion. Its light extinguishes the darkness of the self-

cherishing attitude, so that we naturally come to cherish others. The light also prevents us from falling into the blissful state of self-liberation.

The moon and the sun are visualized together because method and wisdom, bodhicitta and emptiness, should be practiced together, simultaneously. From the tantric viewpoint the sun represents the clear light of wisdom and the moon represents the illusory body. Visualize that the light of the sun and moon dispels the darkness of the obscurations and ignorance of all sentient beings. By visualizing like this you create the cause to achieve the entire path, both the method and wisdom aspects, that result in attaining the rupakaya and dharmakaya. The sun and moon are also offerings of light.

I think in some teachings it is explained that *nyima* and *dawa* are placed in the south-east and north-west respectively, but Phabongkha Dechen Nyingpo said they should be placed in the south and north. The sun, you should think, represents the wisdoms of all the paths: the wisdom of the lesser vehicle path, the wisdom of the paramitayana path, the wisdom of tantra. The wisdom of tantra means the subtle mind directly realizing shunyata—the simultaneously-born bliss. So that is all wisdoms. There are numberless suns. The moon represents the methods of the lesser vehicle path, the paramitayana path and of the tantra path. The moons are also numberless. Visualizing the sun and moon, the method and the wisdom of the whole path, creates the cause within one's mind to generate the whole path of method and wisdom and achieve the rupakaya and dharmakaya.

The moon is of the same size as the sun, but its cool light only has the power to dispel the gross delusions of beings. There is also a similar palace enclosed by a golden fence, where the children of the gods sing and dance.

36. The Precious Parasol / Umbrella - RINPOCHE DUG (east):8 Its handle is of lapis lazuli encrusted with jewels and gold. Its thousand spokes are of gold, and it is crowned with an eight-sided sapphire. The canopy is white and has a fringe hanging all around; the ends of the fringe are richly decorated with various jewels, some of which are like magnifying glasses and emit powerful light. There are also strands of pearls hanging from the edge; from the jewels and pearls come a flow of nectar that eliminates the true sufferings and true causes of suffering of all sentient beings. There are small glass vases hanging from the fringe from which nectar pours as an offering to the buddhas. This nectar also quenches the thirst and alleviates the suffering of those beings who suffer from thirst. There are also small bells making very sweet Dharma sounds in praise of the Buddha and teaching sentient beings according to their level.

This parasol is similar to the one that the naga king, Maitri, offered to Lord Buddha. Its essence is all the qualities of the cessations, the abandonment of the two obscurations. The parasol can provide extensive protection from suffering and offering it creates the cause for oneself to become an object of refuge, able to save sentient beings from the heat of samsara.

37. The Banner Of Victory Throughout All Directions - CHOGLE NAM PAR GYAEL WA GYAELTSSEN (west): It has a jewelled shaft with three pieces of cloth hanging from it. There are innumerable small bells hanging from the banner making pleasant tinkling sounds. The banner is illustrated with different symbols, such as an eight-legged lion and a special kind of fish. Its top is crowned with a half-moon and an eight-sided sapphire.

The essence of the banner is all qualities of all realizations. It symbolizes total victory; by offering it we create the cause to be victorious over the four maras. We also create the cause to be able to benefit others perfectly by leading them according to their level, and to liberate them from the fears and sufferings of samsara. It brings about the auspicious conditions for us to realize the Dharma and thus become a holder of the banner of the teachings, like Vajradhara.

In times of trouble, banners were placed on the roofs of monasteries to overcome negative forces. By putting the banner in the front of the mandala, we create the cause to have perfect listening, reflecting and meditation, and to become a holder of all Dharma teachings.

Now place three heaps in the center, symbolizing the realizations of the body, speech and mind of the merit field; by offering these we create the cause to be able to attain them. Then place the mandala top. With a small amount of grain in both hands, hold up the mandala.

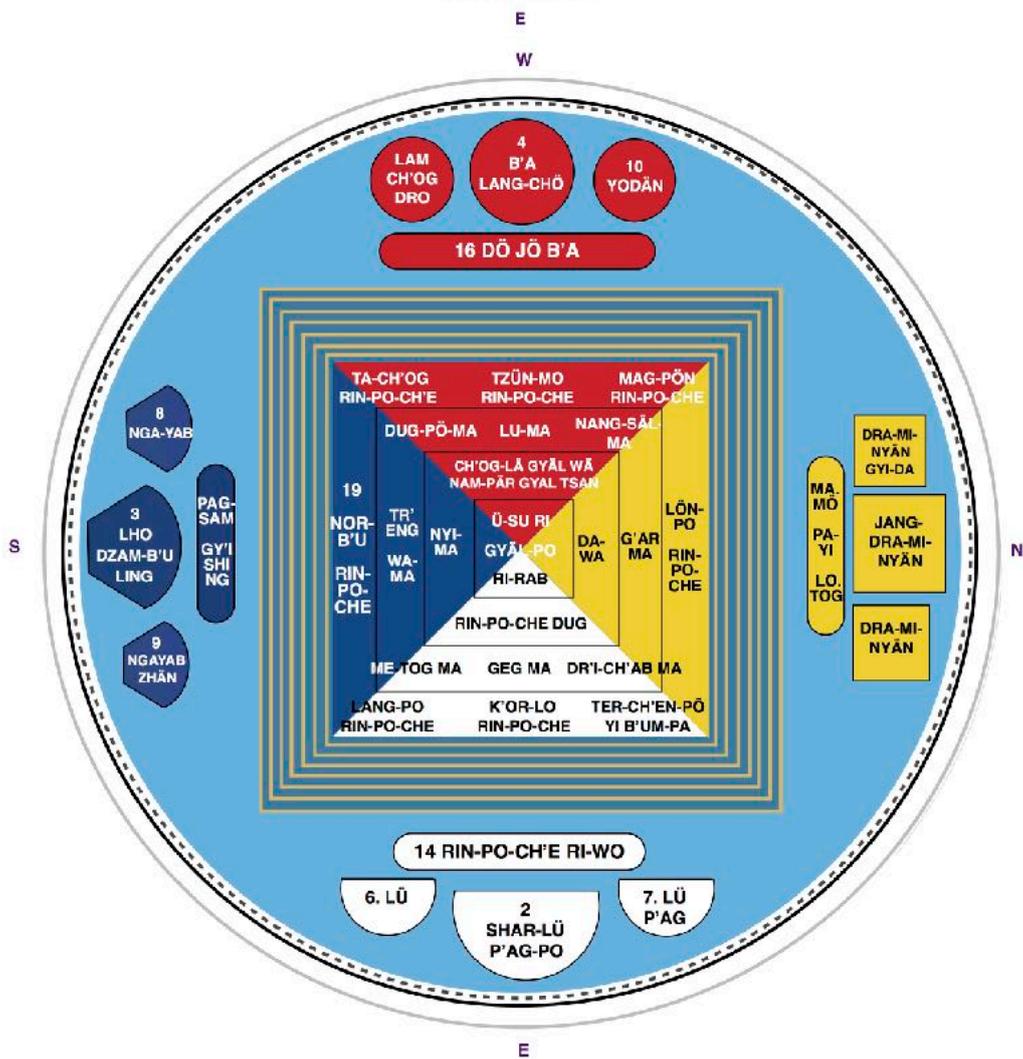
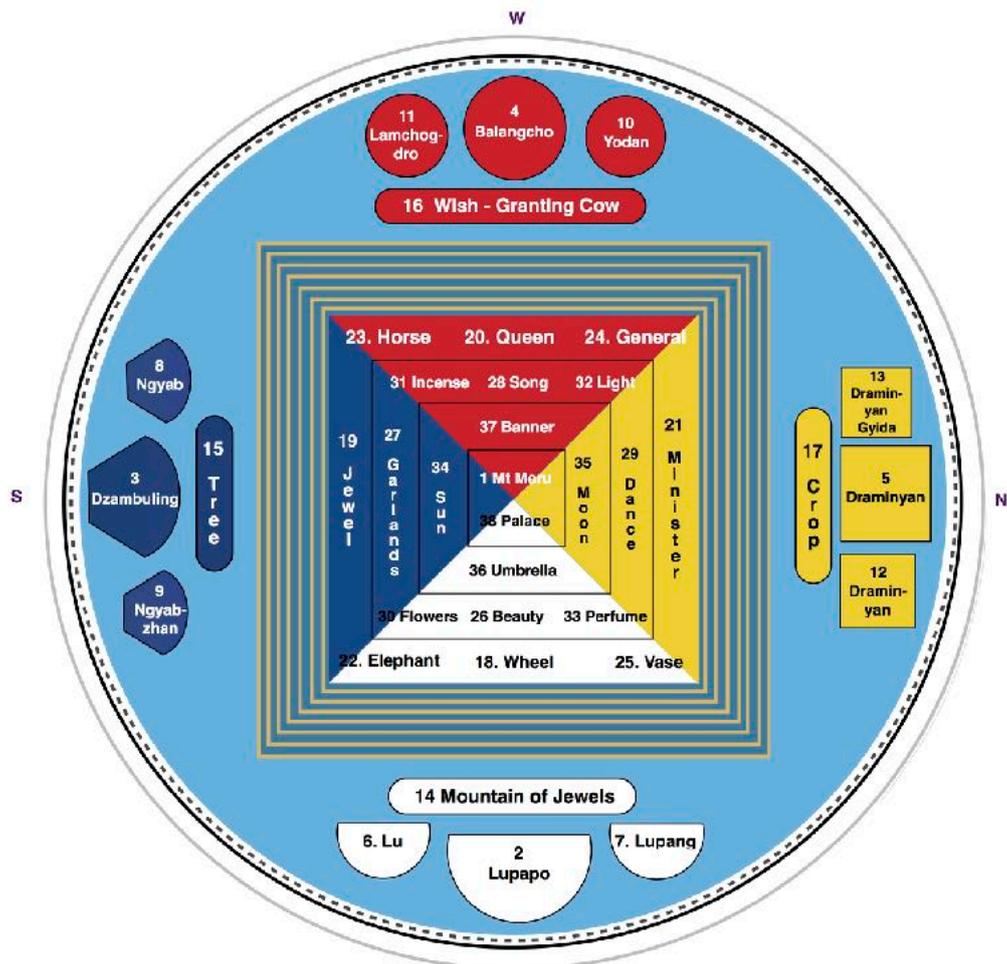
USU LHA DANG MI...

"...*u.su lha.dang mi...*" —"at the center are all possessions precious to gods and humans..." Visualize clouds of offerings floating in space above the center of the mandala. These include: your body, wealth and all your merits of the three times as well as all the various enjoyments of gods and humans.

this is for all the perfect enjoyments of the devas and human beings. According to Geshe Sengye one should put three heaps in the center representing the realizations of the holy body, holy speech and the holy mind of the merit field. It is a preparation for receiving these three realizations.

After you finish setting up the mandala there are two ways to hold it: in order to eliminate obstacles you face the mandala towards the merit field, but in order to receive realizations you face it towards yourself.

As you recite the prayer, mentally offer all that brings pleasure to the five senses. Imagine that you are offering everything, not leaving anything out: all the possessions of gods and humans as well as all the wonderful things that exist throughout the ten directions and are not possessed by anyone.



How to Construct a Mandala with Three Rings

First Ring

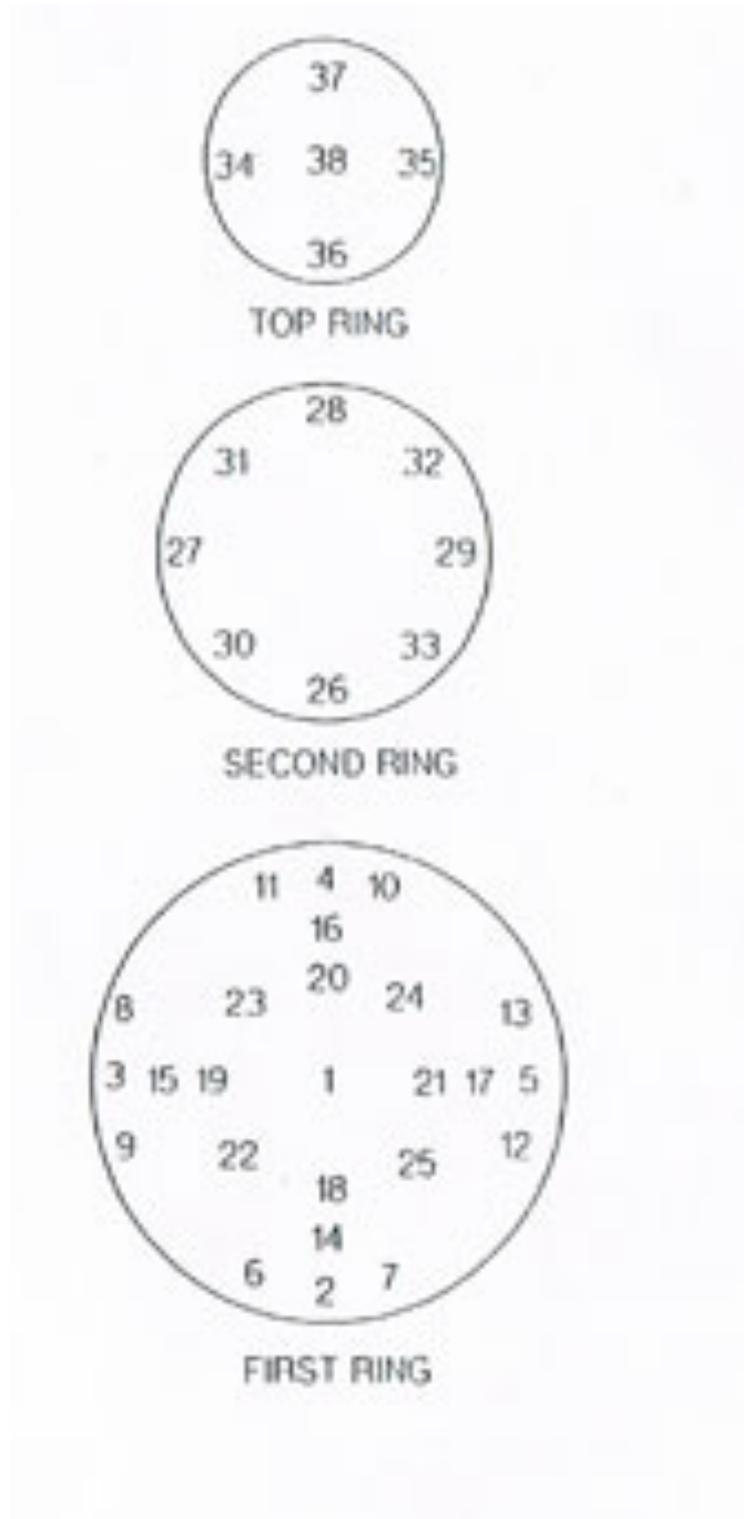
1. Mount Meru
2. Lu pag po
3. Dzam bu ling
4. Ba lang choe
5. Dra mi nyan
6. Lu
7. Lu.pag
8. Nga yab
9. Nga yab zhan
10. Yoe den
11. Lam chog dro
12. Dra mi nyen
13. Dra mi nyen gyi da
14. Precious mountain
15. Wish-granting tree
16. Wish-fulfilling cow
17. Unploughed harvest
18. Precious wheel
19. Precious jewel
20. Precious queen
21. Precious minister
22. Precious elephant
23. Precious horse
24. Precious general
25. Great treasure vase

Second Ring

26. Goddess of beauty
27. Goddess of garlands
28. Goddess of song
29. Goddess of dance
30. Goddess of flowers
31. Goddess of incense
32. Goddess of light
33. Goddess of perfume

Third Ring

34. Sun
35. Moon
36. Precious parasol
37. Banner of victory in all directions
38. In the center, the most precious possessions of gods and humans



Outer Mandala

OM VAJRA BHUMI AH HUM

Blessing the foundation diamond ground Holy Body, Speech and Mind

WANG.CH'EN SER.GY'I SA.ZHI

Great golden ground

OM VAJRA REKHE AH HUM

iron fence

CH'I.CHAG.RI.K'OR YUG.GY'I KOR.WÄ.Ü.SU

outer iron fence circle of surrounding in centre

RI GYÄL.PO RI.RAB,

Mount king Meru

SHAR LU.P'AG.PO, LHO DZAM.B'U.LING,

east body higher south this world

NUB B'A.LANG.CHÖ, J'ANG DRA.MI.NYÄN

west cow enjoy north sound not sweet

LÜ.D'ANG LÜ.P'AG, NGA.YAB.D'ANG NHA.YAB.ZHÄN,

two small quarters of east two small quarters of south

YO.DÄN.D'ANG LAM.CH'OG.DRO, DRA.MI.NYÄN.D'ANG DRA.MI.NYÄN GY'I.DA

two quarters of west two small unimaginable quarters of north

RIN.PO.CH'E RI.WO, PAG.SAM GY'I.SHING, DÖ.JÖ,B'A,

treasure mountain wish-granting tree, wishing-granting cow

MA.MÖ.PA.YI LO.TOG, K'OR.LO RIN.PO.CH'E

crops that need no cultivation, wheel precious

NOR.B'U RIN.PO.CH'E, TZÜN.MO RIN.PO.CH'E, LÖN.PO RIN.PO.CH'E

jewel precious queen, precious minister, precious

LANG.PO RIN.PO.CH'E, TA.CH'OG RIN.PO.CH'E, MAG.PÖN RIN.PO,CH'E

elephant, precious horse, best precious general, precious

TER CH'EN.PÖ.YI B'UM PA, GEG.MA, TR'ENG.WA.MA,

treasure pot beauty goddess, garland goddess

LU.MA, G'AR.MA, ME.TOG.MA, DUG.PÖ. MA,

song goddess, dance goddess flower goddess. incense goddess

NANG.SÄL.MA, DR'I.CH'AB.MA, NYI.MA, DA.WA

light goddess, perfume goddess, sun, moon

RIN.PO.CH'E DUG CH'OG.LÄ NAM.PAR GYÄL.WÄ GYÄL.TSÄN,

precious umbrella, banner of victory in all directions

Ü.SU.LHA.D'ANG.MI PÄL.JOR P'ÜN.SUM TSOG.PA,

in centre gods and men possessions perfect gather

MA.TSANG.WA ME.PA, TZANG ZHING YID.D'U WONG.WA

not missing without complete beautiful

DI.D'AG DR'IN.CHEN TZA.WA D'ANG GYÜ.PAR

there kind principal Guru and lineage

CHÄ.PÄ PÄL.DÄN LA.MA D'AM.PA NAM. D'ANG,

having magnificent Guru Holy all and

CHEN.PO LHA.TSOG K'OR.DANG CHA.PÄ NAM.LA

great gods assemble surrounding and all to

ZHING.GAM ÜL.WAR.GYIO

offering

T'UG.JE DRO.WÄ D'ÖN.D'U ZHE.SU.SÖL

compassionate one all beings for accept

ZHE.NÄ DAG.SOG DRO.WA MAR.GY'UR

after accepting me so on sentient being become mother

NAM.K'Ä T'A.D'ANG NYAM.PÄ SEM.CHÄN T'AM.CHÄ.LA

sky edge and equal sentient beings all to

T'UG.TZE.WA CH'EN.PÖ GO.NÄ J'IN.GY'I LAB.TU.SÖL.

Holy compassion great with please grant blessings

SA.ZHI PÖ.KYI J'UG.SHING ME.TOG.TRAM.

ground incense put over flowers also

RI.RAB LING.ZHI NYI.DÄ GYÄN.PA.DI

Mount Menu worlds four sun moon adorn this

SANG.GYÄ ZHING.D'U MIG.TE ÜL.WAR GYI

Buddha realm to visualised offering

DRO.KÜN NAM.D'AG ZHING.LA CHO.PAR.SHOG.

all beings pure realm in enjoying

TÖN.PA LA.NA ME.PÄ TÄN.PA.D'ANG

Founder higher not teaching and

JÄL.WA DI.DRA LA.MÄ DR'IN.YIN.PÄ

meet this such Lama's kindness is by

GE.WA DI.YANG DRO.WA MA.LÜ.PA

Virtue this even living beings each and every

SHE.NYEN D'AM.PÄ DZIN.PÄ GYU.RU.NGO

Guru holy hold cause for dedicate

OM IDAM GURU RATNA MANDALAKAM NIRYATAYAMI

(Om Vajra bhumi ah hum

Here is the mighty and powerful base of gold.

Om Vajra rekhe ah hum

Here is the diamond-hard fence.

The outer ring is encircled with this iron fence.

In the centre of which stands Mount Meru, the king of all mountains.

In the east is the continent Purva-Videha.

In the south is the continent Jambudvipa.

In the west is the continent Aparā-Godaniya.

In the north is the continent Uttarakuru.

Around the east the sub-continent Deha and Videha.

Around the south the sub-continent Chamara and Aparā-Chamara.

Around the west the sub-continent Satha and Uttara-Mantrina.

Around the north the sub-continents Kurava and Kaurava.
 In the east is the treasure mountain.
 In the south is the wish-granting tree.
 In the west is the wish-granting cow.
 In the north is the unplowed harvest.
 Here is the precious wheel.
 Here is the precious jewel.
 Here is the precious queen.
 Here is the precious minister.
 Here is the precious elephant.
 Here is the precious and best of horses.
 Here is the precious general.
 Here is the precious vase.
 Here is the goddess of beauty.
 Here is the goddess of garlands
 Here is the goddess of song.
 Here is the goddess of dance.
 Here is the goddess of flowers.
 Here is the goddess of incense.
 Here is the goddess of light.
 Here is the goddess of perfume.
 Here is the sun.
 Here is the moon.
 Here is the umbrella of all precious things.
 Here is the banner of victory in all the directions.
 In the centre are all the possessions precious to both gods and men.
 This magnificent and glorious collection,
 Lacking in nothing,
 I offer to you, my most kind root Guru,
 Together with you venerable and holy lineage Gurus.
 And to you, Lama Je Tzong.k'a.pa,
 To you, the Buddha, and to you Vajradhara,
 Together with the entire assembly of gods.
 Out of your great compassion
 Please accept all these offerings
 For the sake of the welfare of all sentient beings.
 And after accepting them bestow on me please
 And on numberless mothers as vast as all space
 Your true inspiration with loving compassion.
 By the virtue of offering to you assembly of Buddhas
 Visualised before me, this mandala built on a base
 Resplendent with flowers, saffron water and incense,
 Adorned with Mount Meru and the four continents,
 As well as the sun and the moon,
 May all sentient beings share in its good effects.

It is solely from the kindness of the Gurus who have taught me
That I have come to be acquainted with the peerless Buddha words,
Thus I dedicate this merit so that every sentient being
May be cared for in the future by most kind and holy Gurus.
I send forth this jewelled mandala to you precious Gurus.)

Visualizing the Mandala as a Pure Realm

"*Sa.zhi po.kyi...*" At the beginning of this part of the offering, the mandala is seen as impure, then it transforms into the pure realm of a buddha. This practice creates much merit and the karma to take rebirth in a pure realm. It also purifies wrong conceptions. Imagine the pure realm that you would like to be reborn in (according to your practice: Tushita if your practice is *Ganden Lha Gyäma*; Kacho Shing if you're practicing Vajrayogini, etc.) and visualize that all sentient beings are there, receiving teachings and just about to become enlightened. It is very powerful to imagine your enemies there in the pure realm, receiving teachings. While reciting the prayer, visualize a rain of offerings showering down in that pure land.

In pure lands one isn't born from parents but from lotus flowers. One doesn't have physical bodies subject to sickness and old age, but bodies made of light that never experience sickness or aging. Whatever is wished for spontaneously appears. Food and drink are nectar and do not cause attachment to arise. The entire environment is beautifully decorated and filled with wish-granting trees.

There are buddhas and bodhisattvas everywhere. Depending on which pure land one is in, it's possible to see the particular buddha of that land and receive direct teachings from his holy speech. All the sounds we hear are Dharma teachings. There are bodhisattvas in the aspect of birds flying around whose songs are teachings. The ground is made of lapis lazuli and there are lotus ponds filled with large, beautiful lotus flowers. The air is perfumed with sweet scents. Goddesses in space scatter a rain of flowers. There are also many dakas and dakinis.

It's also extremely beneficial to multiply the offering, imagining that you are offering many universes. [*As explained before: see the [Introduction](#).*]

hen you can think that on each atom of the mandala there are numberless of you making a mandala offering to the merit field. If that is difficult, then think that beams are emitted from each atom of the mandala, and on the tip of each beam there is a mandala; and from those mandalas also beams are emitted according to the number of atoms in each. So in this way there become more and more mandalas and the entire space is completely filled with mandalas. Then you offer these.

The whole point of why we do such elaborate visualization is so that even if you have not done a hundred thousand mandala offerings, if your visualization is clear and you can visualize that many, then you will accumulate the same merit as by

having offered a hundred thousand mandalas! So, within two or three days you can actually finish accumulating as much merit as from having separately offered a hundred thousand mandalas—only the number of times that the mandala has been set up and offered is not as great. Even within one minute you can accumulate that much merit. So the whole thing is dependent on the skill of the practitioner.

Now the whole point is, just talking about the mandala might be helpful, but actually visualizing the continents and so on and offering the mandala in this way is a skillful means of buddhas and the lineage lamas of the lam-rim, those who have completed the lam-rim realizations and reached the state of omniscient mind. It is a skillful means to quickly finish the work of accumulating merit in order to generate the realizations from guru devotion up to enlightenment. The main endorsement of the extensive merit accumulated by the mandala offering practice is the story of King Ashoka—how as a child in a previous life he offered sand into Guru Shakyamuni's begging bowl while visualizing it as gold. There was not the slightest amount of gold, but by visualizing gold he received the merit equal to having actually offered gold. As a result in his next life he was reborn as the dharma king Ashoka and built many monasteries and made many offerings to the monks, and built one million stupas. In Phabongkha Dechen Nyingpo's lam-rim he says the king was able to build one million stupas in just one night and so accumulate inconceivable merit. That life-story establishes the benefits of offering the mandala. If you visualize one mandala, in those few seconds you will receive the merit equal to having offered the entire Mount Meru and the continents and all the other things. And if you visualize a hundred thousand or however many, in that minute you receive merit equivalent to having actually offered that many universes, even though you do not own those things.

So on this small base you can make an incredible profit! The base should not be smaller than your own mug or cup. It is said that it should be one cubit wide, but at least it should not be smaller than your tea-cup. The best ones are made of silver or gold and so on, but you can use even a low quality material like a wooden board or a flat stone—like the ascetic lamas do. They use those purposely, to protect their gelong vows, and because valuable possessions can give rise to attachment. They use those things to which clinging does not arise. The materials you place on the base should be the best you can manage: the best is jewels, the middling is conchshells and grains, and the basest is sand. You can offer any of these.

By making many mandala offerings Gelongma Palmo was able to see and receive teachings from Chenrezig. Likewise for so many great yogis and pundits, including Lama Tsongkhapa. Lama Tsongkhapa did many hundreds of thousands of mandala offerings and realized the unmistakable view—shunyata—and then achieved enlightenment.

Hold the mandala at your heart and without attachment to the offerings, offer them with devotion. At the end of the prayer imagine that the mandala dissolves into light

and absorbs into the heart of the guru-deity. Think that the guru experiences incredible bliss. Then tip the mandala base to dismantle the mandala: towards you if the offering was made in order to receive realizations, and away from you if the offering was made to the merit field. As you do this, light comes from the guru and enters your body, purifying all hindrances and negative karma of body, speech and mind. Then a replica of the guru dissolves into you. Think that you have become one, completely unified, with the guru and have received all his realizations.

Short (Seven-heap) Mandalas

When you are counting thousands of mandala offerings you offer the short mandala. It is Lama Tsongkhapa's tradition to begin each mandala offering by reciting *sangye choe dang...*—the refuge and bodhicitta prayer. You put some grains on the base and wipe them off three times clockwise to purify and then put some more grains and wipe them off counter-clockwise three times to bring realizations; and then you place heaps for Mount Meru, the four continents, and the sun and moon—seven heaps. In general the short mandala is done with seven heaps, but that does not mean you cannot visualize the umbrella and banner. Even though there are only seven heaps, the visualization should be as extensive as you are capable of and include the features of the long offering. Also you should visualize as many mandalas as possible.

Then recite: *sazhi poekyi...* Saying *...sangye shingla migte ulwa...* is not proper because it means "offering to the merit field..." What you have just visualized is ordinary continents, an ordinary place, and you should not offer an impure place to the merit field. But *sangye shingtu migte...* means "by visualizing this as a field of buddha I'm offering..." So this is correct. If you are making the offering in conjunction with Lama Tsongkhapa guru yoga, then you can visualize the continents as the Tushita pure realm, with Lama Tsongkhapa and Maitreya buddha giving teachings and many sentient beings already enlightened, some are about to be enlightened, and some are half enlightened! I'm joking! If you are offering to Vajrayogini you can think of Vajrayogini's pure realm. You can relate it to the deity to whom you are offering the mandala; that creates the karma for you to be born in that pure realm.

I think *sazhi poekyi...* is the stanza the bodhisattva "Always Crying" used when making mandala offerings to his guru Choepa. And *sangye choe dang...* is a prayer Lama Atisha composed.

The most important aspects of the mandala offering are how clearly you can visualize a mandala, and how many. If these two points are done well you can finish accumulating inconceivably extensive merit in a very short time. That is why in Lama Tsongkhapa's *Great Commentary on the Lam-rim* he does not explain the details of how to offer a mandala—wipe off this way three times, and three this

way, and then put this and that. There are only a few words on the mandala: "Offer a mandala to the merit field by visualizing very clearly." That is all it says. That is how Lama Tsongkhapa's teachings are—a few words. But the most skillful way of practicing mandala offering is mentioned. It is the same for the other preliminary practices. The most important parts, the most subtle and difficult subjects which even the learned ones could not realize correctly or even have a correct intellectual understanding of, Lama Tsongkhapa made very clear and extensive. The nature of Lama Tsongkhapa's teachings is very deep and they contain all the important points. Each word has so much taste, and much power. It gives one deep understanding of deep meanings. As I mentioned before, if you just say the words and do not do the visualization, you will not feel comfortable because that does not fulfill the meaning of the mandala offering practice.

I mentioned Phabongkha Dechen Nyingpo's advice: "If possible, many done perfectly, if not, fewer, but done perfectly." How much merit one accumulates does not depend simply on how many one does. One could perform all the actions of heaping the grains and saying the recitations, but if one does not do the meditation then even if one finishes one hundred thousand it does not mean that one has gained the merits of having offered the whole universe one hundred thousand times. Receiving that merit does not depend on prayers, it depends on the visualization.

As I mentioned, the important thing is clarity and a large number. If you can imagine a hundred thousand universal mandalas, either by transforming them from the first mandala, or visualized on that mandala, by doing the physical action of offering once you can accumulate merits equal to having actually offered one hundred thousand universes. That is so even though the universe that you are offering is visualized and among the grains there may not be the slightest amount of gold or diamond, not even a small part of the umbrella, the banner or the offering goddesses. If you can imagine more than a hundred thousand mandalas, of course, no question!

- Start by offering one long mandala of 37 heaps, recite the four-line prayer and dismantle the mandala, then begin to construct short mandalas. Each short mandala begins in the same way as the long mandala: pouring grain on the base and wiping the base with your right wrist three times clockwise and three times counter-clockwise (or as many times as you like), to purify and receive blessings. While doing this, recite the prayer of refuge and bodhicitta (*sang.gye cho.dang...*) once or as many times as you like. Then pour a little grain on the base, place the first ring and pour grain around the inside of the ring, moving in a counter-clockwise direction.

While reciting the four-line prayer (*sa.zhi po.kyi...*) place grain for the seven heaps:

1. Mt. Meru in the center,
- 2-5. The four worlds in the east, south, west and north,
6. The sun in the south,
7. The moon in the north.

Holding the mandala at your heart, recite the rest of the prayer, doing the appropriate visualization. Then dismantle the mandala and visualize receiving light and blessings from the guru.

If you wish you can offer a nine-heap mandala, adding another heap in the east for the precious parasol and one in the west for the victory banner. This practice is advised sometimes as it is very auspicious to offer the victory banner.

When counting mandala offerings [as a preliminary practice], you offer only mandalas of seven or nine heaps.

Begin slowly, with twenty-five short mandalas, and build up slowly. When your physical action becomes smooth, concentrate on the visualization. It is important to open up and give everything to the guru, and to feel that you are really receiving your guru's blessings.

You can eventually do a hundred mandalas in the morning and a hundred at night as a comfortable number, without pushing.

When offering the mandala of seven heaps, it's best to visualize all thirty-seven features of the long mandala. But if your mind cannot cope with the elaborate visualization, at least imagine clearly and in proper order, the golden ground, iron fence, Mt. Meru, the four worlds, the sun and the moon. It's also very beneficial to offer objects that symbolize the realizations you wish to achieve, such as a sword, bell or text, or materials you need for your practice. Visualize these in the space above the mandala. This creates the karma for you to quickly gain these realizations and materials.

Four Ways of Offering the Mandala

1. The Outer Mandala - as described above

2. The Inner Mandala

The inner mandala is a powerful remedy to the three poisonous minds of attachment, aversion and ignorance, that cause us to discriminate other beings as friend, enemy and stranger. It involves imagining your body transforming into the mandala and then into a pure realm, as well as offering the objects of your attachment, aversion and ignorance. The prayer "*dag.gi chag.dang...*" is recited while visualizing this offering. This prayer is a method to counteract attachment and miserliness towards your body, possessions, merits and the environment. It loosens the grip of attachment; suddenly it makes no sense to be attached to things any more. The mind is transformed and feels very peaceful. The way to transform your body into the mandala is as follows:

- Your skin becomes the surface of the golden ground; your blood becomes an ocean of nectar;
- Your flesh becomes beautiful garlands of flowers floating on the ocean of nectar;
- Your stomach becomes Mount Meru;
- Your hands and feet become the four worlds and the upper and lower parts of your arms and legs become the eight sub-worlds; your head becomes a beautiful palace on top of Mt. Meru;
- Your heart becomes a beautiful jewel adorning the top of this palace;
- Your eyes become the sun and moon;
- All your inner organs become wonderful possessions and enjoyments of gods and humans.

Sometimes regret is felt for having given something. This creates the karma of miserliness. True offering should not be like this; instead, you should completely and sincerely give from the depths of your heart. If you sincerely renounce and dedicate whatever you offer without any clinging, you'll receive the same merit as if you had actually made the material offering.

Each time you recite the six-session prayer you dedicate your body, life and wealth to your guru and then request his help. You should actually give up attachment to these things, but instead you still think of them as yours: "my body, my possessions." By verbally offering them while still thinking of them as yours, you receive many downfalls.

Visualize many objects of your attachment, aversion and ignorance in the space above Mt. Meru, and offer all this to your gurus. Don't visualize one object only: for example, if you have attachment for someone, imagine offering many numbers of that person. Think of possessions or certain types of food that you like, imagine them multiplied many times and offer them to your gurus without any sense of loss. By offering the objects of your negative mind you renounce them and thereby cut off your attachment to them. If they are offered sincerely to the guru-buddha, then they become his and no longer yours, so it is not appropriate to feel attachment or aversion for them.

Ordinary beings are pleased by material offerings, but the best offering to make to your guru is your renunciation of the three poisonous minds. Your guru is extremely pleased by this; not for himself, but because he knows that this is the only way you will achieve liberation.

The essential meaning of giving up is not giving up the object, but relinquishing your attachment to it. A renounced mind is the best offering. It's no use making offerings to your guru unless you completely offer your body, speech and mind. And once you have offered your body, speech, mind and enjoyments to your guru you should never again think of them as "mine" or try to prevent others from using or taking them.

Therefore, when making the inner offering it's very powerful to think, "As I have offered my body, speech, mind and the objects of my three poisonous minds to my guru, how can I ever again use them for myself? From now on I must use them only according to his wishes. What does he wish? That I become Buddha to enlighten all sentient beings. For that to happen I cannot use these objects to carry out the aims of my negative mind; that would be completely opposite to my guru's wishes. I would be misusing my guru's possessions."

At the end of the prayer of the inner offering, think, "By offering the objects of my three poisonous minds and those of all sentient beings, may those objects and poisons automatically disappear from our minds." Imagine that the three poisons have dissolved into emptiness. Even the names, "attachment", "aversion", and "ignorance" cease to exist.

3. The Secret Mandala

Here, you manifest as a deity and then your own dharmakaya nature manifests as the mandala. The aspect is the universe: the golden ground, Mt. Meru, etc., but its essence is the transcendental wisdom of non-dual bliss and emptiness. You can visualize yourself as the deity in your own pure land and offer that to your gurus.

4. The Suchness Mandala

Recognize that the three circles: yourself, the action of offering and the guru (or subject, action and object), are all merely labeled by mind and do not exist from their own side. So you are offering the empty nature of these three. See that the appearance of a self-existent circle of three is like a mirage or a dream. As the subject, action and object are all merely labeled by mind, it's like offering a mandala in a dream. This practice cuts the root of samsara.

These four types of mandala offering can be practiced consecutively or simultaneously. To practice them simultaneously, first meditate on emptiness. Then, from the blissful space of non-duality you manifest as the deity. The different parts of your divine body, the nature of which is the dharmakaya, transform into the various features of the mandala. Then recognize that yourself (the deity), the action of offering and the object of the offering (your guru) are unified in non-duality.

Dedication

At the end of every session of offering mandalas, recite the following prayer written by Lama Tsongkhapa:

May none of these merits become the cause of taking pride in understanding, reputation or receiving things.

May these merits only become the cause of attaining enlightenment.

May none of these merits become the cause of taking pride in understanding, reputation or receiving things. May these merits only become the cause of attaining enlightenment.