

THE DEITY PRINCIPLE AND THE AGE OF TARA
Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche
Deer Park Institute
Bir, India
April 2, 2017



Very briefly, I'm speaking about the deity principle for those of you who are participating the 21-day Tara puja in Chauntra. Some of you may just be here visiting or paragliding or something. If you're passing through, I can't really kick you out. You can sit here and get totally confused and not understand what I'm saying.

Puja in Sanskrit means offering. When we talk about offering, we often mean substances such as flowers, incense, and lamps, those things we can actually tangibly offer. We can also offer imagined offerings.

When we talk about offerings, we think about the one who is making offering and probably more importantly, or more interestingly, the object to whom we make offerings. During this puja, the object of the offerings happens to be Tara. The concept of Tara is vast, profound, and infinite. In contrast to the Prajnaparamita teachings —“no nose, no ear, no this, no that” —when you enter into the temple in Chauntra, with the Buddha statue and chanting, not only does it appear theistic, sometimes it almost seems shamanistic.

So you can't help but ask "what is going on? Are we worshipping somebody? Are we worshipping 21 Taras?"

This is why I wanted to talk to you about importance of the deity principle.

So what is deity? According to the dictionary [reads definition from phone], “Any supernatural being, worshipped as controlling some part of the world or some aspect of life, or who is the personification of a force.” English words are so strange. I think the latter resonates a bit, "personification of a force." I think that is probably the closest to what we mean by *deva*. The Tibetan word is *lha*. On a side note, I have a vague feeling that the Tibetan word *lha* is connected to the word *Allah*. Allah – Lha. I have a little bit of a feeling about that.

So anyway, what is the deity in tantric Buddhism? If I tell you, not only will you not believe, but you will also not understand. If I say deity is everything, that is so abstract. What do I mean by "deity is everything?"

But I am actually telling the truth. See, this [holds up his sandal] is a deity. I'm serious. And don't think it is because "Oh, it was worn by a Rinpoche." No, no, not at all. Gyan, can you bring your *chappal* here? [Gyan holds up his shoe] Yes, he's also holding a deity.

Everything—the floor, the ceiling, the sky—everything is the deity. But more importantly, you, your nature, the absolute aspect of your self is the deity. But the problem is you don't act like a deity. Do you act like a deity? You don't act like a deity. You don't think like a deity. You don't look at things like a deity. You don't swallow like a deity. You don't listen as a deity. You don't taste as a deity. You don't move like a deity. You don't chew like a deity. You understand what I'm saying? You don't look like a deity. Look at you. I mean, look at me too. You don't look like a deity. You don't think like a deity. You don't smell like a deity.

And anyway, what is the deity's smell? Ah, you see this is the thing.

So you call yourself something else, even though you are actually the deity. And this is why we need to do something.

What do we need to do? We need to actually approach this self deity. In the Tibetan we call it *nyenpa*. *Nyen* means approaching. But before we approach this deity, you have to sort of *like* this deity. You have to long for it. You have to get excited. The feeling is important.

You can use all your feelings, actions and reactions—the way you move, the way you swallow, way you chew, the way you, I don't know what—as a fertilizer. They stink, they're deluded, they're defiled, but you can use them. That's all you have, so you use that. To do what? To approach to this deity. In order to approach this deity as I have said, you have to like this deity.

After liking and admiring and longing for this deity—which is everywhere all around and actually is you—you need to chant, you need to pray. This is the big game, by the way, the most interesting game. It's a bit like: You are already where you want to be, but you don't really know that, so you have to pretend that you are going where you already are. You understand? So to play that game you need to have longing, then you need to chant and you need to pray.

And we the Tibetans, we love numbers. Indians on the other hand, when they chant the 21 Taras, they begin with OM and their OM is like OMMMMMMMMM [draws out syllable]. Not the Tibetans. We have to finish 100,000 in 21 days so we go "OM [speedily recites the verse] You see? The word OM is expressed so quickly. Actually you should be like, OMMMMMMMMM. You should. But there's a reason why the Tibetans love numbers. It's a

good strategy. The Tibetan strategy is: let's do a lot! If you make a mistake, maybe you will not fail another time. So let's do a lot just in case. So if you are sitting there the whole day from 8:00 in the morning until 4:30 in the afternoon, chanting the 21 praises with your mind wandering, if you do a lot, at least once you may be actually thinking of Arya Tara. And that's is already quite good. That's a strategy, you understand. We love numbers. We love to offer lots of things and we love numbers.

But the essential point here—to be more serious now—you are hear words like *shunyata*, emptiness and compassion, in the sutras and the shastras, and here we are talking about the same thing but instead of calling it shunyata or the emptiness and compassion, we are hearing it as Arya Tara. The deity is none other than the union of clarity and emptiness, the union of emptiness and compassion.

So why then are there twenty-one of them? Actually twenty-one is the most abbreviated form. There are so many, many, many Taras. There's even a set of 100 million Taras and each has characteristics, there are details for each. The devotees of Tara, especially the devotees from great universities like as Nalanda, they go bananas. They long for her, they praise to her, they really supplicate, they beseech her.

Great poets have written about her and to her. There was one actually very beautifully written—I don't really remember the sentence properly—but he says to a really wrathful Tara, "Please Arya Tara, I beseech you to bat your eyelashes at me." So it seems he's asking her to like him. But then another way of reading it is, because she is very wrathful and the whiteness of her eyes is so intense, when she blinks it is like a flash of lightning so powerful that it will numb your discursive thoughts. All your discursive thoughts become crippled and useless and completely chaotic and disorganized. What better blessing can you ask for then crippling your discursive thoughts?

Going back to the question: Why are there twenty-one forms of Tara? It's a bit like supply and demand. That's the logic, actually. There are myriad discursive thoughts and defilements and emotions and to combat those, we need 21 or more Arya Taras.

And just for your information, many of the deities are Arya Tara. Kurukulle, for instance, is none other than Arya Tara. She's sitting there with the 21 Taras. And Kali is very much Arya Tara.

This leads to the next subject I wanted to just briefly mention: The Age of Tara. This is the age of Tara and why I say this is because this is the age of Kali. What do we mean by Age of Kali? Just read the headlines. [takes out laptop and reads] Let's see what the BBC has to say. "Race to rescue Columbia mudslide..." There you go. And there's always something about Trump. It's a volatile time. Time is not stable. Time is not balanced.

Things are always going up and going down. Volatility in the world, as a country, environmental volatility, family volatility, relationship volatility. I don't know – everything. The climate is volatile. And volatility is the aspect of Kali.

Though it may sound like the volatility aspect is something negative, if you are savvy and if you are clever, volatility can be used for your benefit. If you're good at it, this is the time to make profit. Now is the time for your spiritual achievement, your compassion, your love—all this will also mature and improve and benefit others.

This is actually the main reason why I asked you to come here. When you are down there following the Tibetan tradition, reciting again and again, what I want you to do is supplicate. Supplication, prayer, is important. Prayer is meditation. Prayer is shamatha. Prayer is vipassana. Prayer is so important.

People talk about meditation being such an important thing to do. Especially these constipated mindfulness people. They always boast “Oh ho mindfulness!” They show off their zafu cushions. They show off their straight body posture. I mean, you should rejoice that they do that. Being able to be in the present, not dwell in the past, not dwell in the future, being in the present is very difficult. So you should still do that. You should still use your zafu and all of that. But you and me, people like me especially, we are by nature emotional, eternalist, nihilist, whining, complaining, “hello, please help.” You understand? We love sending emails and Wechat messages. So prayer is so important. Prayer is everything. Prayer also is humbling. Prayer makes you humble because you are saying “I don't have these things... please give me.” You're already admitting that you lack something. So prayer is humbling. Prayer is so important.

What should you pray? I'm going to go backwards, OK?

The most important prayer in the Arya Tara is when you are praying: “Make me you.” Basically that's what you are saying. “Make me you. Make me you. Make me and you inseparable. Make you me. Make me you.” You understand? That's the prayer that you have to have been doing.

But since you are this pathetic, whiny, dualistic being who still wants to look up to the 21 Taras on the throne, and remain this pathetic, useless, sort of this strange person who is smelly, who is not good, then you do the other prayers. Then we pray, “Please think as a mother to her only child.” Another great thing about Arya Tara at this time is that Arya Tara comes in the form of feminine. The female is open, receptive, forgiving. Tara always sort of understands, she has this motherly, sisterly, kind of energy. This is what we are trying to take advantage of here. So we say, “Yes, please look upon me as your only child.” You should do that. I actually do this more than the previous one I was just telling you.

And not only now, from now until enlightenment, look upon me. Guard me, nurse me, guide me, nurture me, protect me. Pinch me. Not in a kinky way, I know what some of you are thinking. Look upon me like as I'm your only child and fulfill my wishes.

But also think: May this wish eventually be in accord with the dharma. Whatever the wish you have—to be beautiful, good looking, rich, powerful, fast, slow, thin, fat, it doesn't matter. *May I become really chubby and voluptuous.* But then you add: *So that I can maybe get the attention of certain people, and then this person forever will ever be indebted to me so that he or she will become a victim of my bodhicitta.* You wish that whatever wish you have will eventually be in accord with the dharma. And then of course wish that relative bodhicitta and the ultimate bodhicitta grow within you, effortlessly.

May the non-virtuous thoughts and actions never come and even if they come, please let them not stay long. Let them be short. And may my life be long, healthy, and prosperous. May my meditation have realization and experience. And please protect me from the fear of temporary dangers such as—I don't know—all kinds of natural disasters, earthquakes, landslides. And also protect me from the very big danger, the danger of samsara. Even things like, may I not have bad dreams. And then may this earth be peaceful and harmonious. May this country be peaceful and harmonious and may the world be peaceful and harmonious. May the leaders who actually lead the nations do so according to the law of cause and condition. Whatever they plan, may they be successful. And those who are devoted to dharma, may they live long, may they be prosperous. May war and famine dissolve or be pacified. May the study and the practice of the dharma prevail. May the holders of the dharma, the gurus, live long. And may they be free from obstacles. And may the dharma of the Buddha remain on this earth.

So these are what you should be praying for.

Meanwhile, where's Tashi Colman? He collected some questions that people have asked.

Tashi Colman [reading from his computer]: One person has many competing practices.

DJKR: I can tell this person has met Tibetan lamas. Isn't it? So many practices. Well this is what Atisha Dipamkara said. Indians achieve hundreds of attainments through one deity. Tibetans are ruined by hundred deities. So do whatever you feel like doing. It doesn't matter. As long as you're practicing, it really doesn't matter what you practice. Okay what's next?

TC: The question is about which ngondro to do in what places.

DJKR: Which ngondro practices to do in what places? Really doesn't matter. And then?

TC: This person has resistance to practice.

DJKR: Resistance to practice? Yeah that's a difficult one. Resisting practice is going to be a tough one to overcome. Make it short. Make the practice short but consistent, and try not to narrow and limit yourself in practicing only in your shrine room or bedroom or living room. Try practicing it sometimes in a hammock and in different places at different times. Okay?

TC: And the same person asks about how to deal with energy blockages and inner conflicts.

DJKR: Energy blockages and inner Conflicts? Do Tara puja. Okay next?

TC: This person feels lost and confused and is doubting dharma practice.

DJKR: Well, fact that he's saying that he's doubting - that's really good. Because that means he doesn't want to doubt. Isn't it? He doesn't want to doubt but the doubt is coming. I kind of like that kind of problem. It means you know you're practicing.

TC: What skills should I practice in order to act with wisdom and compassion is the question.

DJKR: I don't understand what you are saying. I don't know. What skill? Okay next one.

TC: The other one I think you answered - someone you told to come here for instruction.

RINPOCHE GIVES CHETSUN NYINGTIK LUNG