

MANGALA SHRI BHUTI
TSOK MANUAL

THIRD EDITION

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THIS MANUAL IS SOLELY FOR MSB STUDENTS WHO ATTEND MONTHLY GURU AND DAKINI TSOK PRACTICES.

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SADHANA PRACTICE: SEEING THE POSSIBILITIES

As Buddhists we enter the path to learn how to transcend our confusion and find deeper meaning in our lives. As we do this, it is important that we actually *see the possibility of liberation*. The notion of waking up cannot remain as just a vague idea tucked away in the back of our minds as something remote, idealistic or unattainable.

Sadhana practice is based on the premise that it is within our reach to directly experience an enlightened world beyond our ordinary, mundane and confused perceptions. We use our body, speech and mind to create this world, and then we invite the blessings of the deity and mandala, which bring it to life. The practice should have all the elements of ‘good theater’ — coming alive with music, visuals, a variety of tastes, fragrances and movement. These we both offer and enjoy.

In sadhana practice we use everything that meets our sensual and conceptual awareness — pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral — as an opportunity to go beyond ordinary mind. Seeing the possibility of transcending confusion does not mean downplaying or dismissing the challenges we face in our practice or in working with others. It means these challenges only become *pliable* if we can see the possibility of working with them, and transcending them. This view helps us rise above our small-mindedness to meet our deeper intention. If we simply wait for enthusiasm or inspiration, we may have to wait forever. Kongtrul Rinpoche has often challenged us:

If not now, when?

In the context of a tsok practice, or *gathering*, this understanding becomes even more important. Why? Because *it is our responsibility to be present and to come through, not only for ourselves but for the entire group as well*. If we recite the liturgy from within our own bubble — be it the bubble of irritation, depression, bliss, or any other of the limitless possibilities that arise and proliferate in our minds — we become a weak link in the group, which affects the entire practice environment. Given that the practice is to embrace the view of pure perception actively as a community, *we need to rise to the occasion by using any discomforts or distractions as a means of transcending ordinary mind*. We use them to enhance our practice by seeing their vibrant and awake qualities, and by

compassionately embracing them with the view. If we are unable to do this in full, we can still use the practice as an opportunity to elevate ourselves from our own self-absorption. Why else do we practice? What are we waiting for?

To execute a tsok takes tremendous *energy, passion* and *alertness*. We invite, enter into, and rest inseparably with the body, speech and mind of the deity — a world that is passionate and awake. There is nothing sleepy or passive about sadhana activity. We are the hosts who invite the deities and establish the mandala. We are not, as is sometimes mistakenly assumed, the guests of the Dorje Lobjön, or whoever leads the tsok. The purpose of the Dorje Lobjön is to serve as a reference point for the rest of the assembly, an axle, if you will, around which the spokes of the wheel turn and travel forward in the practice. The wheel will not turn if the rest of the assembly wanders off or hides behind pechas. Each practitioner should participate equally.

If we keep with this view, the magic and blessings of the practice will take care of the rest.

THE BENEFITS TSOK PRACTICE

The following teaching was given by Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche on Sept. 10, 2008 at Phuntsok Choling during a tsok.

Doing the tsok practice twice a month is the best preparation for accomplishment in this life, at the time of death, and in the bardo. This is true for even the worst practitioners of this lineage. After receiving the abhisheka, if we just keep the samaya by attending the bimonthly tsoks, Guru Rinpoche has promised that he will be there after our death to guide us to the Glorious Copper Colored Mountain. Even if we've been completely lost in samsara, there is no doubt that we will meet with Guru Rinpoche in the *sipa bardo*, the bardo of becoming.

For ordinary beings in the bardo, having a chance to attain enlightenment depends on having a chance to go to the Copper Colored Mountain. We hope for the best—to be liberated in this life, or in the bardo of dharmata—and we prepare for the worst, by at least doing tsok practice twice a month. Guru Rinpoche's vajra words and promise are that he will meet us and guide us to the Copper Colored Mountain. It's otherwise difficult to have full confidence to be liberated in the bardo, so this is an important practice.

What kind of practitioner are we? What chance do we have to attain enlightenment in this life or in the first part of the bardo, the bardo of dharmata? Based on our level of distraction and our various circumstances, it is difficult to say what our chances are. Few can confidently say they will attain enlightenment in this life or in the bardo of dharmata. Even for those who have done years of retreat in the practice of Dzogchen Nyingtik, it is rare nowadays to have that kind of confidence. From the Dzogchen texts' point of view, that confidence is necessary, and it must be based on certain signs. But what if we don't have the signs? And even many great practitioners who do have the signs and know where they will be reborn still do feast practice. Masters who have had all four visions still do feasts twice a month. His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche and Tulku Urgyen never missed doing a tsok in their lives.

Coming to the tsok regularly requires commitment and dedication. People keep up their commitment to health by exercising every day, even though they can't take their body with them after death. You can come to the

feasts even without understanding much —just with the aspiration to be guided by Guru Rinpoche to the Copper Colored Mountain, and continue your path there. By not coming, you miss so many blessings, and can easily become lost in confusion. I was thinking of moving the center back down to Boulder to make it easier for people. But I decided against it for this reason of commitment. I thought about how Buddha Shakyamuni intentionally established gathering places for his followers in remote areas so that people had a reason to visit those places.

This is not pressure. It is just information. The purpose of coming to tsoks isn't merely to maintain a tradition of ritual. Regular tsok practice is like our insurance policy, a policy guaranteed by Guru Rinpoche himself. We aren't just trying to save the face of the lineage or MSB, while getting irritated and resentful that others aren't participating. Regular tsok practice is our best insurance to continue the Nyingtik path. Keep this in your heart. If your participation also helps continue the tradition, it is a double service: to yourself and to the lineage.

Of course, do the tsok wherever you are, but when you have the opportunity, do the tsok at the center. The gathering of males and females, dakas and dakinis, creates important tendrel. The Nyingma and Kagyu lineages emphasize coming to the gathering. In the celestial and human realms, the gathering of male and female energy is important. A feast is a party, and you can't have a party by yourself.

For us, tsok practice is a ticket to the Copper Colored Mountain. We develop the right relationship by committing to do the feast without resistance, so that even the worst kind of Nyingtik practitioner will still, without a doubt, join the mandala at the Copper Colored Mountain. Guru Rinpoche doesn't require the commitment from us; we have to develop the connection from our own side. The hook of Guru Rinpoche's compassion is always there, but in the sipa bardo, it will be of no benefit without a ring, the relationship we have developed with Guru Rinpoche through the tsoks.

Some things in life are very simple and easy. If you had clairvoyance, it would be easy to win the lottery by knowing the winning numbers. You could just fill out the ticket and win. Attendance at tsoks is that simple and easy, and the benefits are much greater than winning a lot of money.

So just by coming to the tsoks, without any high realization, wisdom, or skillful means, you will be reborn in the Glorious Copper Colored Mountain to continue your path there and swiftly attain enlightenment. Even if you're distracted, preoccupied, and don't have signs of realization, you can still be certain to attain rebirth in the Glorious Copper Colored Mountain.

SADHANA RECITATION: HARMONY AND PRESENCE

The practice of reciting the sadhana liturgy is both a musical offering and a support for evoking devotion. In the same way that we offer fresh flowers, tea lights and food to the shrine, we make pleasing and melodious music. Aside from being beautiful, *offering music deeply inspires our faith and connects us to the practice*. Making this collective offering requires an awareness of our own presence as well as that of everyone else in the assembly. We should be aware of our own voice and how it interrelates with the voices of others.

We have not yet learned how to recite in a precise way: either we try to emulate Rinpoche, or we follow the general flavor of the group sound. From childhood Rinpoche was strictly trained in the discipline of reading and reciting texts. He has a base of refined technique from which he can improvise. When we try to emulate Rinpoche's advanced use of technique and improvisation, without having the same basic training in pronunciation, rhythm and tone, we end up with cacophony! Picasso spent many years studying formal painting techniques, and although he was later known for putting an eye where a mouth would ordinarily be, his work reflects a deep understanding of technique and form. As beginning sadhana practitioners we are not ready to be inventive, but should focus on refining our basic training.

The tradition of group practice has always been passed down in the monastic context. We have all marveled at the depth of training of Örgyen Tobgyal Rinpoche's monks. *The essence of this training is precise knowledge of the rituals, and a clear, natural sense of knowing where one fits in the bigger group and how one can benefit the overall situation*. It is now appropriate for us to introduce this tradition of training into the Sangha. We cannot expect the guru to teach us this; it is not his role. As a Sangha, we need to take initiative to sharpen our skills and awareness in order to benefit our own practice and, more importantly, to properly carry on the tradition.

How do we go about this training? In terms of chanting or recitation, there are two principles:

1. leader and assembly
2. tone and harmony

In most cases, whoever leads the tsok also serves as *umdze* or chant leader: the person responsible for setting the *tone* and *pace* for the recitation. The *umdze* is the reference point to whom the assembly should stay connected throughout the tsok. *The assembly needs to develop a fine-tuned awareness of what the umdze is doing.* The “sound” of the tsok is generated through tone and harmony. We should think of the recitation of the liturgy as a song, with the *umdze* as the principal voice and the assembly as the choir. *The umdze sets the key for the rest of the assembly.* In following, we have two choices:

1. to stay in the same key
2. to choose the harmonizing note.

This relationship between the tsok leader and assembly is dynamic. On the part of the assembly, we don't follow along passively. *The role of the individuals in the assembly is to listen and know what's needed, keeping the following points in mind:*

1. If your individual voice sounds flat or dissonant in relation to the *umdze*, hold back until you can find the same or harmonizing note. Deviating from the group throws off the entire assembly.
2. If your voice is too loud and overpowering, lower the volume.
3. If it seems like energy is needed, exert (but don't yell).
4. If you find yourself going faster than the *umdze*, slow down; if lagging behind, speed up.

We must also be aware of the following “syndromes” that we can fall into:

1. The Picasso Syndrome – being creative and departing from what the group is doing. If you walked into a cathedral and one of the choir was doing his *own thing*, how would that seem? The Picasso syndrome can manifest as:

- a. reciting the morning and evening chants in a singsong voice while everyone else chants without melody.
- b. making up melodies to the liturgy.

c. doing something fancy that Rinpoche does, but lacking the ability to pull it off.

2. Being enamored of your own voice – having a beautiful, strong, resonant voice, and tending to listen only to yourself; being overly passionate about how connected you feel to the practice and forgetting to listen.

3. Yelling – the umdze may indicate that there needs to be more energy. What is being asked for is not yelling, but more heartfelt presence and upliftedness. Yelling is by no means a tradition.

4. Hiding in your pecha – self-absorption. In this practice, remember that you are part of a larger mandala.

5. Chiming in too soon – overeagerness. When beginning a section, such as refuge, or each protector chant, we should wait for the umdze to chant a few words before we chime in. It is important to hold back for a moment. On the other hand, in the middle of a chant, if the umdze needs to pause for breath, sneeze, or point something out to the chöpön, the assembly should continue.

We can remedy the above problems by keeping in mind the two principles of leader and assembly, and tone and harmony, and by staying connected to the practice and the other participants. We can help each other by practicing and experimenting with our voices in small groups outside the actual sadhana practice. While we are doing the sadhana, if our neighbor is off key or following a different rhythm, we can gently point this out in a way that doesn't distract others. We just need to have an attitude of openness and a desire to improve. Sadhana practice, and in particular *recitation, succeeds when we are all aware of the presence of our own mind, and how it is interdependently connected with the rest of the mandala.* With everyone focused in this way, the whole assembly will be in harmony and our musical offering will please and inspire.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING SADHANA RECITATION:

Mastering sadhana practice, particularly group sadhana or tsok practice, requires education. In addition to studying the *view* of the practice, there are many technical aspects, such as using the instruments, doing the mudras, and reciting the liturgy.

At Longchen Jigme Samten Ling, we felt motivated to improve the way we did the practice as a group. We noticed there were times when the group dynamic was strong and cohesive, and other times when we didn't come together. We explored the reasons and discovered a variety of causes and conditions.

Much of what we discovered had to do with the overall view, discussed above in *Sadhana Practice: Seeing the Possibilities*. However, we also recognized that something else needed to be addressed – the students' ability to sing in a group.

When we gathered to practice recitation, some students felt natural and confident in projecting their voices. They knew where their most comfortable range was and could tell if they were off key. Others didn't have these abilities and kept their voices low or inaudible.

We discussed some basic musical principles in response to the variety and range of voices. Students less confident about their voices would sing some verses with an appointed umdze and would find that they could indeed sing in the same key. With growing confidence, they began to fine-tune their abilities to *hear* the umdze's pitch, and whether they were *on* or *off* key.

We identified the students with higher and lower voices and broke off into groups to experiment with harmony. We then practiced sustaining the note/key, which produced even more confidence. When confident, we can project our voices, which arouses a deep sense of devotion and connection, and makes tsok practice a different experience. We become true participants in the group practice.

For those still developing this confidence, it is helpful to sit next to someone with a strong and clear voice. Those who like to harmonize should sit together, and those who stay with the umdze's key should sit

together. The latter can sustain the flow and melody of the chant without getting confused by the harmonizers. This seating will also make it harder for individuals to go off on their own without noticing they are out of sync with the group. By gently touching your neighbor's knee, you can indicate that he or she is off key or off rhythm and should listen carefully to his or her sound and the sound of the group. Raising your volume a bit can help the other person tune his or her voice. Improving our ability to make music is a group effort.

It helps the umdze to have strong support nearby. When the assembly is spread out, lacking in energy, or off key, it is difficult lead the tsok. Anyone who regularly leads the practice knows the experience of trying to pull along the entire assembly. It is therefore helpful for students with strong, clear voices to sit near the umdze. Seating should be arranged with this in mind. Rather than spreading out, the practitioners should create a cohesive group. They should be aware of the space and how they can best serve to enhance the situation. They should consider the umdze's job and try to sit close enough to hear him or her. The assembly should always maintain an awareness of *interdependence*.

The umdze should begin on a manageable note, not so high or low that others can't follow. This should be figured out beforehand. If the tsok leader does not have a strong, resonant voice or cannot sing in a comfortable key, it may be helpful to have a designated umdze.

For many newcomers, pronunciation is a struggle. None of us has perfect pronunciation, but we should do our best and know it will improve with practice.

The Umdze should also go at a pace that others can follow. However, for those just beginning with the practice, it may be just a matter of time before they can keep up.

It would be helpful for motivated students to organize time at Phüntso Chöling, Pema Ösel, or Ösel Ling to learn and practice recitation. Attaining a basic understanding would increase confidence and enable individuals to participate fully in the tsok. This would not take much time and would result in a richer experience for both the individual and the group.

TSOK OFFERINGS

The tsok and sadhana practices encompass all aspects of offering from relative to absolute. First, we offer the relative richness of the senses and the phenomenal world, along with our practice. The merit in so doing purifies our obscurations; and the innate richness of our own nature, which manifests as the sacred world of the deity, reveals itself. Given the power and depth of this practice, it is crucial how we view the offerings, how we treat them, and how we follow through to the end of the tsok and afterwards.

Setting up for tsok

It is important to understand that, in reality, we are receiving and hosting the most honored of guests. Rinpoche explains:

We invite Guru Rinpoche and his hundreds, thousands, millions and billions of retinue deities.ⁱ

Therefore, how we relate to the offerings is of the utmost importance. Patrül Rinpoche advises:

All the tantras and pith instructions speak of “clean offerings, cleanly prepared” or “these cleanly prepared objects of offering.” They never recommend “dirty offerings, dirtily prepared.” So never offer leftovers or dirty food.ⁱⁱ

The whole environment should be uplifted, with clean hands and clean cutting boards, surfaces, plates and utensils that are only used for tsoks. Do not incorporate personal kitchenware. Also, do not mix the plates. Do not use the leftover plate from one tsok for the Dorje Lobjön in another tsok and for Ekajati in a third. Mark the plates clearly. It is also not appropriate to offer packages already opened for non-offering purposes, or anything half-eaten; this would be like offering leftovers. Do not offer anything crushed or broken. Wash fruit and vegetables thoroughly, cutting off old stems or anything not presentable. Do not offer anything old, shriveled or badly bruised.

We must pay special attention to organizing trays so that nothing will fall off, while also making sure they are full to the brim. These two do not contradict; it just takes extra effort and care to make sure they both

happen. It is fine to use fewer trays so that all are well-heaped. Fullness is important because of the *tendrel* in making the offering. If we prepare and arrange everything as we would for a special guest, such questions as, “Should we offer moldy cheese?” or, “If it falls on the ground, can we still put it on the tray?” or, “Is it better to leave dirt on the organic vegetables?” will not be hard to answer!

Here are a few helpful tips for arranging trays:

1. If possible have a *separate tray* or *smaller platters* and dishes for meat, cheese, sliced fruits and candies. These can rest on the larger trays. Separating wet offerings (baby carrots) from dry offerings (red-hots and crackers) keeps the tsok fresh. Sorting and packing up the offerings after the tsok will be neat and fast. The tsok can then be offered to others in a pleasing way.
2. Place whole fruits, veggies, etc. around the *edges* of the trays, and dry crackers, chips, fruit and nuts in the *center*. The offerings look nice when the most colorful items, such as cookies and candies are on top. Small items like Jelly Bellies and M&Ms can be placed in tiny bowls on top of the trays so they don't fall to the bottom and get mixed up and gooey. These simple methods add a sense of abundance and uplift the offerings tremendously.
3. Have as many different shapes, sizes, textures, and especially colors as possible. Colorful cookies, candies and cakes are nice to offer in order to offset all the beige chips, crackers and nuts, giving the offerings a much richer feeling. Other colorful items include red, orange and yellow peppers, whole papayas, whole mangoes, whole pineapples, plums, tomatoes, broccoli, purple cabbages and eggplants.

How to View Tsok Substances

The word tsok means gathering. Everyone must be involved for it to be successful. We should not leave it to Rinpoche or the tsok leader or chöpon to fix everything out of place. If something falls on the ground do not hesitate to pick it up and put it aside. Don't think twice about rearranging a precariously heaped tray. Also, if something seems out of line with the lineage tell the chöpon or the tsok leader at an appropriate

time. And don't hesitate to ask the khenchungs or other experienced students questions.

It is unacceptable to drop *anything* – particularly off the plates or trays. This is not only true for the chöpöns, but for all of us. Think of yourself as a waiter in a nice restaurant. If when serving customers, you let potatoes or peas slide off their plates, or spilled wine all over the table, how would that be? Rinpoche has often had the chöpön arrange a whole new plate when something dropped. Therefore, we need to apply extra care while handling offerings. But this is more than simply being a good waiter and following rules of etiquette. *It has to do with mindfulness, connecting to the significance of what we are doing, and, most importantly, our awareness of the presence of the guests.* These details create the auspicious coincidence, or good tendrel, which counteracts our ignorance and wrong views, allowing us truly to enter the mandala. Therefore arrange the plates so nothing falls off when they are held up. During the collection of the leftovers, make a nice offering (which can be small), but also be aware of the size of the assembly and the size of the leftover tray. Be careful with the *serchyem*, the *dütsi* and the drinks. Candles, shrine implements and statues should all be treated with the utmost care.

Arrange protector plates plentifully but precisely, again taking care that nothing falls off. Always include something torma-like and grain-based, like muffins, donuts or bagels, as well as sweets and fruits.

Buying offerings for tsok

When choosing and buying the tsok offerings, we take our relative understanding of what is valuable, rich and elegant as our guiding principle. We can fall into a confused notion of nondiscrimination. We may find ourselves offering a can of tuna on a paper plate with the view that we can truly transform it into Samantabhadra's inexhaustible display. *To disregard relative appearance is a fault; essence and appearance are not at odds with one another.* Sadhana practice has to do with enjoying the richness aspect of the nature itself. According to our means, we should engage that richness directly by purchasing lavish offerings with a generous attitude of abundance. This is not a small-minded approach.

The bigger the tsok, the bigger the accomplishment. 卍

We should be wary of searching for offerings that we individually look forward to eating. The offering is not made to *me*, but to the lineage for the purpose of going *beyond me*. Therefore, we must never think of the tsok as a meal. By eating a good lunch before and planning to eat dinner afterwards, we can avoid the pitfall of being the *jackal of the feast*.^{iv}

Relating to tsok substances

Any tsok offering is a samaya substance. Simply put, it is not ordinary food or drink. It has been transformed by the blessings, power and view of the practice. Rinpoche has given many instructions on this topic, but essentially, we should be aware of any attitudes of grasping or rejecting. *The purpose of the tsok is to enjoy our experience in a deep and non-discriminative way.* This goes for our outer environment as well as our minds. When we speak of *one taste* we don't mean there are not many flavors or a multitude of rich appearances. Rather, we mean that everything equally shares the same profound nature and can be enjoyed in a transcendent way, beyond the duality of grasping and rejecting. In sadhana practice this view applies not only to tsok substances, but to all experience, including thoughts, emotions and the entirety of the phenomenal world.

Ultimately the point is to carry out and mix the view of one taste with all of our experience. Knowing that everything arises as an expression of our own nature, we can enjoy and appreciate every aspect, no matter how “difficult,” of our experience and our practice:

Because of the essence of the mind, our experience is full of potential and full of tremendous vitality and charge. If that essence were not there, there could not be an ego, nor the cherishing or protecting of the self, negative emotions, the charge of negative emotions, the flavors of negative emotions, the spices of the negative emotions and what they bring forth to us.^{iv}

Pure perception is beyond the notions of pleasant and unpleasant, toxic and pure, organic and inorganic, healthy and unhealthy. Negative biases toward certain foods often come from the strong attachment we have to our bodies and our physical comfort. While eating, we may think, “Even though these cookies are loaded with sugar and the apples are not organic, do I still have to eat them because they are supposed to be

pure?” This is misunderstanding “pure” in the context of practice; the purity of the nature has nothing to do with good and bad.

On the other hand, eating samaya substances in an ordinary, excessive way, hiding behind the notion of “pure,” is sneaky. Some of us go straight for the alcohol. Some like the cookies, but are repulsed by the meat. Others try to balance the carbohydrates with the protein. Vegetarians who go straight for the meat with the justification that it is tsok again miss the point. *The point is to bring the view of one taste to the act of eating.* The tsok is a chance to make a leap and go beyond the solidity of our preferences.

If we open up to a bigger picture of what is going on in the practice and what the tsok really is, we may receive the full benefit and merit of the practice. It does not make sense to go through the whole process of buying offerings, arranging them beautifully, and engaging in the practice fully -- but during the enjoyment of the tsok, collapsing into ordinary discriminating mind and dismissing the view of one taste altogether. We should be aware when preferences based on attachment or aversion arise, and instead of following them, *use them as an opportunity to work with our minds* and self-reflect joyfully, investigating our strong stance along with the beliefs that back it up.

We must drop our usual attitudes of modesty and pickiness. We should accept whatever comes without discrimination and serve ourselves and others generously. We should not worry about how we will *deal* with our remaining tsok, or feel overwhelmed about eating it all. Ideally, we should take the time to pack up our plate nicely and bring it home. Then we should not be in a rush to get it out of the house. It is a blessing for your home, so keep it wrapped up in the refrigerator for a little while and eat it at your leisure. If need be, respectfully dispose of whatever cannot be eaten, keeping in mind that it is a precious substance of *samaya*.

When handling large quantities, such as after a drupchö, we should joyfully take whatever we can. If we can't take it all, we should think of creative ways of dispersing it, doing our best to stay in line with the view, not seeing the blessed substances in an ordinary way, such as something to get rid of.

Also treat offering substances with respect before they are offered. Do not store candles under the bed or incense in the sock drawer. Be especially mindful where tsok offerings are stored. Do not keep them on the floor or in the bathroom; do not step over them on your way out the door. This kind of mindfulness applies to all offerings, objects of refuge, and representations of the Three Jewels. Hanging a picture of our teacher over the toilet or storing Dharma tapes in the shoe closet will not help us progress on the path. To accumulate merit it is crucial to develop conscientiousness and mindfulness.

These guidelines are given in order to preserve the tradition, its blessings and genuineness, as well as for one's own merit.

MAKING TORMAS

Tools and Ingredients:

- barley flour (20 – 22 cups for each tsok, or for a complete set of protector tormas)
- butter (four sticks total: two for the pak and two for painting)
- purified water
- men (from the shrine)
- a large heavy pan to roast the barley
- a small sauce pan to melt the butter
- two large mixing bowls
- a wooden spoon to stir the flour as it roasts
- several cutting boards
- several large and small knives
- red and black food coloring
- several brushes (smaller ones for painting and larger ones for buttering)
- a few small bowls for water
- a variety of small (real or fake) flowers for Tseringma, her retinue, and the shalze
- candies for Tseringma (it is better not to use red or black candies, and also to avoid red flowers on Tseringma)
- Ekajati, Rahula, and Tseringma cutouts
- scissors, glue and sticks (skewers or thin bamboo) for cutouts
- plates for each torma
- sponges and towels for washing and drying the torma-making supplies

Keep these supplies clean and use them only for making tormas. If you use your own utensils and supplies, be sure they are reserved only for the tormas and keep them in a clean high place.

Making the Pak:

- Plan on about an hour to make the pak (start to finish, including clean up).
- Before beginning, wash hands and be sure area is clean. Wear a mask while making the pak.
- It takes two to three large panfuls to roast the flour properly, each taking about half an hour. It should turn a toasty-brown color and have a nutty smell. Stirring it constantly is the key, otherwise it burns

quickly, especially toward the end. Covering the pan of flour in the beginning helps it heat up faster.

- You may find it easier to use two big bowls, mixing the ingredients in two batches and combining them in the end.
- Once the roasted flour is in the mixing bowl, add purified water. Add a spoonful of men (from the shrine) to the water before mixing it with the flour. The amount of water will vary depending on the climate, the temperature of the barley, etc. The desired consistency should be like cookie dough; moist enough to work with without cracking, but dry enough to keep the forms from sagging.
- Once the water and flour mixture is lumpy, add two sticks of melted butter (keep the rest of the butter for painting the tormas at the end). Continue to work the dough.
- Most importantly, knead and knead and knead and knead the dough. Make sure it is very well worked.

Making the tormas:

- Wash hands and be sure area is clean.
- Cover mouth and nose so as not to breathe on the tormas. This also applies when carrying, moving, *and* setting them up. We should not breathe on them at any time.
- Be mindful not to scratch your body or pick something up off the floor, and then go back to making the tormas without washing your hands.
- Don't mix eating and tormas. If you need a snack, eat away from the tormas and wash hands before resuming.
- Follow the proportions and shapes precisely. Make straight parallel lines when pressing in the triangles on the front of Ekajati, cheto, tenma, etc.
- Apply the paint and melted butter in upward strokes. The butter will dry evenly if kept very hot during application.
- The surfaces of the tormas look better – more evenly buttered with fewer dry patches – when the butter is smoothed over and worked into cracks with your fingers after a coat of butter has been applied. Then apply a second coat, particularly if the tormas have been made the night before a tsok. Along with covering them with plastic wrap, this will keep the tormas from drying out over night.

THE JOB OF A CHÖPÖN

As chöpöns we may think our primary job is to perform the sadhana rituals correctly and on time. While this is true, *if we forget to connect to the deeper significance of what we are doing, our activities may become mechanical.* Connecting here means understanding the deeper meaning of the sadhana and the larger scope of the practice - maintaining the view of the natural presence of the deity and how we are an integral part of the mandala. Holding this view, we will naturally be mindful and precise and the many details of the rituals will fall into place.

The chöpön should not expect to practice the sadhana in the same way as the rest of the assembly. We must take care of many details before, during, and after the tsok so that everything runs smoothly. During the tsok we should have one eye on the shrine and the offerings and one eye on Rinpoche or the tsok leader; then if time allows we can read the pecha. Our attention should follow this order. Knowing this, we won't be confused or uncomfortable about not doing the practice in the same way as everyone else.

In order to be in sync with the rest of the assembly we must have a thorough knowledge of the sadhana and the order of its rituals. In essence, the chöpön's job in relation to the ganachakra is simply to help make the mandala manifest fully for all who are present. Rising to this occasion with grace, simplicity, and precision makes a good chöpön.

We can think of ourselves as a waiter in a nice restaurant, who attends to each aspect of his job with poise. He does not spill wine on the floor or let food slide off a plate, but has a larger awareness of the way the restaurant functions as a whole, ensuring that the customers have excellent service and the restaurant runs smoothly and efficiently. Whether seating customers, taking orders to the kitchen, or clearing a table, he is at ease, yet aware of what is happening around him. Like a waiter, we need to have an awareness of the entire environment and our effect on it. We will then be more natural and connected to everything we do. This broader perspective is as important as all the details.

We can be too precise in engaging the details of the sadhana. If our focus is too tight, we may become rigid and forget to connect to the practice. We should always do our best to attend to the rituals properly, but also

reflect on the view and the interconnectedness of the entire mandala. Remembering that we are in a dance together, we can relax and allow our activities to be natural, rather than just trying to do everything right.

The most important point for a chöpön, as for everyone in the assembly, is to maintain an awareness of the *presence of the deity*. Rinpoche has said that a chöpön's grace arises from this awareness. Without it, the forms and rituals are empty performance. Instead of feeling awkward or self-conscious in front of the shrine, Rinpoche, or the assembly, we can enjoy being part of the mandala by remembering the presence of the deity. This enjoyment is a natural result of understanding the significance of what we are doing. With an awareness of the presence of the deity, we naturally stay interconnected to the sacred world of the deity's mandala.

A chöpön simply serves the mandala in any way needed. If we notice the tsok leader needs a glass of water, we signal someone; if it's getting dark we turn on the lights. If something unpredictable happens and we remember we are there to serve completely, we won't become flustered or tense.

We may catch ourselves making a mistake, or someone else might point something out. Instead of getting overwhelmed or frustrated, we can appreciate the opportunity to learn and to deepen our understanding. We should also keep a flexible mind as things change in how they are done. Whatever happens we should be light, cheerful and confident.

Lastly, we should be discreet in everything we do. Even during a small gap in the activity, a chöpön should not stand there, just waiting. In a monastery, the chöpön hides behind the mandala or steps back into the shadows and watches attentively, maintaining an overview of the situation. A good chöpön must always look ahead discreetly – not anxious or tense, but simply present. We should always be cheerful, yet unassuming – and never cocky or proud.

We have many details to learn. If we remember the key aspects of how to view the job, the subtleties will gradually emerge and many of the details will naturally fall into place. In summary, these key aspects are precision, grace, confidence, discretion, cheerfulness, lightness, and, most importantly, remembering the presence of the deity.

ABBREVIATED TSOK INSTRUCTIONS

If for some reason, you are not able to join the MSB group tsok or do a full tsok on your own, you may do the following instead.

1. Arrange a general tsok plate and shrine tsok plate. Include meat and alcohol for both offerings.
2. If possible, sprinkle mendrup (dutsi or alcohol with dutsi in it) on the tsok offerings.
3. Place the general tsok offering on a table in front of the shrine and the shrine plate on the shrine itself.
4. Recite the Refuge and Bodhicitta prayer and the Four Immeasurables prayer from the MSB chantbook's Opening Prayers section.
5. Recite the Kong Shak Dorje Tol-Lü.
6. Do some recitations of the Short Ganachakra Offering.
7. Dedicate the Merit.
8. Afterwards, the practitioner(s) should enjoy the general tsok offering. If possible, the shrine plate should be left undisturbed on the shrine for at least 24 hours.

In place of the Kong Shak Dorje Tol-Lü, one may also recite the Narak Dongdruk. A third option is to do His Holiness Khyentse Rinpoche's Guru Yoga, "The Aurora of Blessings," which is considerably shorter than the Rigdzin Dupa and Dechen Gyalmo sadhanas. Finally, if one is very short of time, it is permissible just to recite the Seven Line Supplication or some Varja Guru mantras while offering the tsok.

FOOTNOTES

ⁱ Guru Drupchö, Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche, 2/2/01

ⁱⁱ *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, Patrül Rinpoche, p. 290

ⁱⁱⁱ Sadhana Retreat, Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche, 8/26/95

^{iv} “Jackal of the feast” refers to one who covets food that is being offered.

^v *Appreciating Your Wealth*, Personal Link #87, Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche, 10/22/00