

Vessantara

THE FIVE FEMALE BUDDHAS

A COMMENTARY ON THEIR
SADHANAS AND PUJAS

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Acknowledgements

Thinking about who has contributed to a book like this is like tossing a pebble into a pond and watching the ripples spread in all directions. We are all so inter-connected that it is hard to know where to stop. So to prevent this section from becoming completely out of hand, I shall limit myself to those who have contributed very directly.

Firstly there is Saccanama, who first set me thinking in depth about these beautiful figures. You will see more about how crucial his contribution has been when you read Chapter 1. Then there are all those at Guhyaloka who gave me excellent conditions to meditate, and supported me practically through months of solitary retreat during which I focused on these figures. Next I must thank all the artists who have painted pictures of these forms of the Female Buddhas. (You will find them all listed in Appendix B.) I am particularly grateful to Sihapada, for keeping me supplied with copies of her paintings, and for kindly allowing me to use some of them for the cover of this book.

I am also very grateful to all those who have come on retreats dedicated to the Female Buddhas that I have led over the last couple of years. Dialoguing with retreatants on the Dharmacharinis' retreat in France, the Open Retreat at Rivendell, and on weekends for the Cambridge and Manchester Buddhist Centres has greatly increased my own understanding of these figures. I am particularly grateful to the team on the Rivendell Retreat: Maitrivajri, Saccanama and Taradasa for their stimulating ideas.

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So all the above have my heartfelt thanks, but the ripples of my gratitude and appreciation spread out to more people than I can name here, to all those who contribute in any way to making these female embodiments of wisdom and compassion known in the West.

Vessantara,
Cambridge,
10th October 2004.

A Note on Language

I have tried to make the text as accessible as possible to readers who are fairly new to Buddhism. However, as Buddhists we are heirs to an eastern tradition, and it is helpful to pick up some of the traditional terms from Pali and Sanskrit as we do not have standardised translations of them into English. So I leave a number of terms untranslated, including Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, Bodhisattva, and Prajña.

I have tried to help readers by mainly putting technical terms in English, often followed by the original Pali or Sanskrit term in brackets. As this book is not aimed at an academic audience I sometimes take liberties with the Pali and Sanskrit terms where I think that it will be helpful for the reader. Examples of this are adding 's' onto Sanskrit nouns in order to make them into an English plural, or not being consistent in how I transliterate Sanskrit words.

CHAPTER 1: THE PRAJÑAS APPEAR

Introduction

This book is an introduction to a set of five Female Buddhas – embodiments of Enlightened awareness. This set of figures is not well-known, as they have been rather neglected in the Buddhist tradition, but I believe that that situation is going to change in the West, for reasons that will become clear in the course of this book. Most Buddhist meditational figures can be visualized in a number of different forms, and this is true of the Female Buddhas. The particular forms described here are only found within the practice of the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order. In this chapter I shall outline how these particular forms appeared, talk a little about the place of the Female Buddhas in Tibetan Buddhism, and then briefly look ahead to what may happen to these figures in the future.

The Five Female Buddhas are also known as the Five Prajñas. *Prajña* is a Sanskrit feminine noun meaning ‘wisdom’. All Buddhas have completely developed wisdom and compassion, the two major aspects of the Enlightenment experience. However, meditations upon them may emphasise one aspect particularly. So while they are certainly very loving and compassionate, through devoting yourself to the Female Buddhas you particularly develop the wisdom side of the golden coin of Enlightenment.

Meditations on Buddhist figures are usually taught very carefully, with a lot of specific detail about how the figure is to be visualized, and how the interaction with them is to happen. These formal meditation practices are known in Sanskrit as *sadhanas*. The *sadhanas* of the Five Prajñas were introduced into the FWBO in 2002, followed a year later by *pujas* – devotional ceremonies - devoted to the figures. Since that time, there has been a great deal of interest in the Prajñas. Talks, weekends, and longer retreats about them have taken place in the UK and other countries from Finland to Australia; some Order members have taken up the visualizations; almost a thousand copies of the *pujas* have been sold. In addition, several artists have painted the figures.

In response to this very considerable interest, I thought that I would write a kind of introduction or commentary about the figures. By doing this, I hope to enable people who have made an emotional connection with the figures to deepen it, and to provide some background information which may be new to you.

At the moment there is very little in print about the Female Buddhas. There are bits and pieces written about them in books on the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist tradition, but they have been largely overlooked. For instance, in his recent large book on Buddhist female figures, Glenn Mullin hardly mentions them. I did give them a chapter in my book on *Female Deities in Buddhism* and a couple of pages in the Tantric section of *Meeting the Buddhas*. But that doesn’t begin to do them justice. So this book is an attempt to make amends, and to give these rich figures the fuller treatment that they deserve, and that they have been waiting for, in a sense, for over a millennium.

This chapter lays the groundwork for the rest of the book, giving the background to practice with the Five Prajñas. In the first part of Chapter 2 I shall explore the rich tapestry of symbolic connections that links these figures to many aspects of life. Then,

in the rest of that chapter and in Chapters 3-6 I look at the figures individually: their symbols, colours, mantras and so on, and then explain some points that may not be obvious in the pujas. Chapter 7 looks at how practising with these five figures can transform the nature of consciousness. In Appendix B you will find various resources for obtaining materials related to the Prajñās and for exploring them further.

How These Sadhanas and Pujas Appeared

We have my friend Saccanama to thank for the sadhanas and pujas of the Five Prajñās. He is an Order member who has for a number of years been very engaged with the Mandala of the Five Buddhas. This is a set of five archetypal Buddhas in male form, who are often referred to as the Jinās – *jina* means ‘conqueror’ in Sanskrit, and these archetypal Buddhas have overcome all suffering and the ignorance that causes it. Saccanama was responsible for developing a ritual year at the Bristol Buddhist Centre, with the year divided into five segments, during which there were talks, meditations and rituals connected with the Five Buddhas. (For example, they would do a puja to Aksobhya, the blue Buddha, at a place on the east side of the city at dawn on the Spring Equinox.) Saccanama also lived for a while at Rivendell Retreat Centre, where he led a cycle of retreats of the Five Buddhas.

One of Saccanama’s talents is for drawing other people in to his spiritual schemes. For instance, in Bristol he was responsible for commissioning Amir Boestamam – now ordained as Kumuda - to paint large canvasses of the Five Buddhas, which formed the centrepiece of the devotional practice during the ritual year.

As his engagement with the Five Buddhas, the Jinās, deepened, Saccanama wanted to develop his involvement with the female consorts, the Five Prajñās. Apart from Tara, there were no visualization practices available for any of them. So he asked me if I would be interested in creating a set of sadhanas. I was planning to take a year’s sabbatical, in order to devote myself to meditation, and this commission seemed as if it would fit very well into my plans. Saccanama also checked the idea out with Subhuti, the Chairman of the College of Public Preceptors, and he was happy for me to see what I could come up with.

So in April 2001 I began my sabbatical. I wanted to do a year’s solitary retreat, but that wasn’t possible as I had one or two responsibilities that I could not put down. So I did the best I could under the circumstances. I went out to Guhyaloka, the men’s ordination retreat Centre in Spain, and settled myself in a wooden hut in the valley there. This hut had been built by my late friend Arthadarshin, who had died of heart failure on a run up the valley the previous year, and I had constant reminders of him. As well as two large hangings of the Refuge Tree that he had created, there was also an urn with his ashes next to my shrine. So I spent most of a year in this hut, doing as much solitary retreat as possible, and in between keeping up a good level of meditation. This gave me excellent conditions for tuning in to the Five Prajñās.

It was during a 3-month period of solitary retreat in the second half of my year that I began to turn my mind towards the Prajñās. I began by recalling what I knew of the Prajñās in the Buddhist tradition to date. But that didn’t help me very much...

The Prajñas in the Indo-Tibetan Tradition

The Five Prajñas appear in Tantric Buddhism, and are particularly important in the Highest Tantra, which is the level of Tantra on which Buddhas are often represented in sexual embrace, in what the Tibetans call Yab-Yum (Father-Mother) form. For instance, they appear in a mandala of 32 deities in the Arya tradition of the *Guhyasamaja Tantra* – one of the earliest forms of Highest Tantra, and the first to be translated into Tibetan. In different tantras the Five Prajñas appear in somewhat different forms. For instance in the *Guhyasamaja* they all have six arms, Locana is white, and Mamaki is blue. Sometimes too they are associated with different Buddhas. Pandaravasini is almost always associated with Amitabha, and Tara (when she is part of the set of the Prajñas) with Amoghasiddhi, but the other three can shift around.

Their mantras too, in these Highest Tantra texts may give the wrong idea to newer Buddhists. For instance Locana's mantra in the *Guhyasamaja* includes the word *moharati* – which means delighting in ignorance!

It is rare to come across paintings of the Five Prajñas as a group. There is a set of murals in a temple at Alchi in Ladakh. And, more recently, Andy Weber has produced a card of them. But considering that they have been around for over a thousand years there is not a lot to show for it. And compared to the Five Jinas they are very neglected. Similarly I have never seen a published sadhana of the Five Prajñas as a set. Doubtless both paintings and sadhanas must exist in the Tibetan tradition, and I would be interested if anyone comes across any. But considering the tremendous amount of material on Tibetan Buddhism that is now available in the West: in books, cards, on the Internet, and in other ways, I find it extraordinary that I can only remember a couple of paintings of the Prajñas, and no texts devoted to them at all.

How the Figures Appeared 2

During my Guhyaloka solitary retreat, I started by reflecting on everything that I knew about the Jinas and Prajñas, especially all the different associations with them. Because a Yab-Yum figure is essentially one figure, then whatever applies to the Jinas must also apply to the Prajñas. The only differences are ones of emphasis. So I knew that the Prajñas especially embodied the Five Wisdoms (we shall learn about these later on), and that they were also particularly associated with the five elements: earth, water, fire, air, and space. Taking those features as my starting point, and reflecting on them both in and out of meditation, I began to envision the Prajñas.

Saccanama needed a sadhana for Locana quite quickly, as he wanted to meditate on the whole mandala in the course of the year, and Locana in the East would be the figure that he would start with. So I began with Locana, but it very quickly became clear to me that I could not reflect on her in isolation. A mandala is a dynamic interplay of energy, and so, like an artist, I needed to work on all five canvasses at once. As the figures began to emerge, I kept finding that the aspects of the mandala were sensitive to one another. If one detail of a figure changed, it had repercussions for all the figures.

I love this kind of inner work, and I spent a very happy few weeks allowing the figures to appear. As usual, from starting on a more abstract level – thinking about associations and traditional Buddhism – after a while the whole thing came to life, and

I found myself dealing with inner realities that had a life and energy of their own. I felt very grateful to Arthadarshin and all those at Guhyaloka who had made it possible for me to be able to focus so undistractedly on the mandala, and to Saccanama for inviting me to take on a task that I would never have done off my own bat.

Eventually all five figures attained a stable form. I have a deep love for the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist tradition, and I wanted to stay loyal to it, even while I was producing something that no Tibetan lama would recognise. So what appeared was a new arrangement of familiar symbols. A lama might not recognise these forms, but he would be able to read all the elements of the symbolic language that they used.

There were two ways in which I allowed myself to deviate from the tradition when I need not have done so:

- 1) To my surprise, the forms of some of the Jinas (who are seated on the heads of the Prajñas) also slightly changed. This seemed to be in response to what was happening in the mandala itself. I didn't decide that I wanted them to be different; it just happened.
- 2) Each of the Jinas has a symbolic animal supporting his throne (known as a *vahana* in Sanskrit). When it came to the Prajñas I could have borrowed the animals from the Jinas, but somehow this didn't seem right. So after a while the Prajñas acquired symbolic animals of their own. As these are not traditional, I made them an optional extra that could be visualized or not, depending on whether they worked for you.

The Mantras

The mantras only started to appear late on in the process. I looked at traditional mantras associated with the Prajñas, but most of these were 'too tantric'. I didn't think it would be helpful for people to be reciting mantras about the 'bliss of hatred' and so on. In Highest Tantra hatred and other negative emotions are transformed through seeing the nature of the energy tied up in them. But I thought that something more down to earth would be appropriate.

I came up with various possible mantras in which there was a common template for all five. But quite often these turned up words that were names of Dharmacharinis, and I thought that might be a little odd for people. So in the end I gave up employing formulas and just asked the Prajñas how they wanted to be invoked. As a result I ended up with mantras that did not follow a set formula, though they had some elements in common.

A little later I began to find tunes for the mantras. I have no great musical ability, and the tunes that I came up with may well be superseded, but it felt important to have some way of chanting the mantras. There are a couple of recordings of these mantra tunes available. (See Appendix B: *Resources*.)

The Sadhanas

Once the forms of the figures had stabilised, I then had to consider the form of the *sadhanas* in which they would be visualized. As I wanted the *sadhanas* to be useful to

as wide a range of people as possible, including new Order members, I based their structure on that of the revised and simplified sadhanas that have been given to new Order members since the early '90s. I followed this structure closely, even when my personal preference was to arrange the visualization in a slightly different way.

By the time I had produced the five basic sadhanas I was very much in the creative swing, and so I carried on writing. Eventually I produced a collection of 13 sadhanas, and called the set *Queens of the Mandala*. Visualization practices fall into two broad categories. There are practices in which you visualize the Buddha or Bodhisattva in front of you, and there are others in which you *become* the Buddha or Bodhisattva. The set contains:

1-5: In-front visualizations of the Prajñas individually.

6: A 'trip around the mandala' in which all five Prajñas are visualized in front of you within a mandala palace.

7-11: Self-visualizations of the Prajñas individually - so that you see yourself as Locana, or Mamaki, etc.

12: In this sadhana you visualize yourself as the central Prajña, and see yourself surrounded by the other four in the cardinal directions.

13: In the thirteenth sadhana the Prajñas decided to let their hair down, metaphorically and literally. They suddenly changed and took on the forms of *dakinis* – the wild, dangerous female forms that play an important part in Buddhist Tantra. Whilst in the other sadhanas I had kept their hair the traditional black, in this practice their hair colours changed to a variety of shades. As dakinis often do, they were dancing naked in the mandala, adorned only with bone ornaments. And the animals supporting their thrones changed again...

So far, I have only shown anyone the first six sadhanas, the in-front visualizations. It is good to start with these things slowly and carefully. Perhaps at some point a few Order members will want to practise the self-visualizations. As for the thirteenth sadhana, we'll see!

The Pujas

I wrote first drafts of all the sadhanas during my retreat at Guhyaloka, and also sent off a finished version of the Locana sadhana to Saccanama. But then, as my retreat continued, I began to feel a lack. The Prajñas had appeared, but I had no adequate way of expressing devotion to them. I knew of no traditional pujas or verses that addressed them. So, with some trepidation I began writing pujas to them. I felt uneasy about this because I have high standards for pujas, and in the past I had always shied away from writing them as I didn't feel qualified to do so. However I was in a situation where no-one else was likely to do it, so I thought that my efforts would be better than nothing. On the retreat I wrote the puja to Locana and a draft of the Mamaki puja.

That kind of devotional, poetic writing is entirely dependent on being in the right mental state. During the following year I had various times when I sat down to write more of the pujas, but the result was either a complete mental blank or something riddled with clichés. But then in May 2003 I led a retreat on the Prajñas in France for a group of Dharmacharinis. After a few days of living with them in that mandala, I sat

down one afternoon and most of the Pandaravasini puja poured out onto paper. Very soon after that I had all five pujas.

As with the mantra tunes, I wrote the pujas because nobody else was likely to do it, and I felt that something was needed. I hope that over time more - and more beautiful - verses, pujas and rituals to the Prajñās will appear.

The Pictures

One of the especially pleasing aspects of watching the Prajñās going out into the world has been seeing artists engaging with them. The first person to paint the Prajñās in the forms that I had seen at Guhyaloka was Vijayamala. She and I were staying in France in semi-retreat over the winter of 2003, and we were talking about a retreat on the Prajñās that was to be held later that year. Vijayamala decided to do paintings that could be used for the five shrines. Although she is not a trained artist, what she produced still affected me quite strongly. I was very moved when she had finished the final painting, and we could put together the mandala of all five Prajñās. It was a special moment to be able to see the figures that I had imagined again and again in the Spanish sunshine appearing before my eyes in her five paintings.

The retreat for Dharmacharinis was attended by Sihapada, an artist who connected with the figures very deeply. Since that week in France she has circled the mandala repeatedly with her paintbrushes. To date she has done five sets of paintings, and has now embarked on her sixth Locana. Also on the retreat was Subha, who has produced small cards with paintings of the Prajñās.

Another Dharmacharini, Visuddhimati, painted a Locana that was exhibited at the Order Convention in 2002. Finally (at least for the time being) Kumuda, a new Dharmachari in Bristol, has begun a set of paintings, commissioned by Saccanama and sponsored by Padmakara. These will be interesting to see, as Kumuda has in the past painted a successful set of large canvasses of the Five Jinās.

It is exciting to see Buddhist artists responding to the Prajñās. The more images of them that there are available the more the figures will take root in people's imaginations.

The Future

That is the story so far, at the time of writing in August 2004. It has been fascinating watching the process unfold. Beginning with Saccanama, and then me in my hut in the Spanish mountains, the Prajñās have engaged the interest and enthusiasm of people in the FWBO around the world.

Although I have spelt out the process by which these forms came about, I no longer feel any particular ownership of them. Writing the sadhanas and the pujas was a strange process. There were times when rationally I felt very presumptuous – who was I to be doing such things? Yet at another level it felt very right – as if the figures just needed a channel to communicate themselves, and I happened to be that channel. And I decided early on in the process that I needn't worry about the outcome. If there

was no spiritual power in the figures then, perhaps after some initial interest, they would die away. But if they spoke to people's spiritual needs, and helped them to engage with the spiritual adventure, then they would find a way to do so despite any imperfections that I might have introduced.

We shall see what the future brings. What I am sure of is that, in some form or another, the Prajñas have a part to play in the development of Buddhism in the West. Here, men and women will practise on a much more equal footing than often happened in traditional Eastern Buddhism. I think that fact is bound to be reflected on a symbolic level: in a change in the relative importance given to the Jinas and the Prajñas. The Prajñas will assume much greater significance in their own right. So I expect that in the West there will be many people who will be meditating on the Prajñas, chanting their mantras, painting their pictures, and writing pujas and other verses in praise of them. I shall be pleased if the particular forms, mantras, and pujas that I produced, catalysed by Saccanama's vision, contribute to a creative process in which the Prajñas become known and loved in the West.

CHAPTER 2: LOCANA – WATER AND MIRROR-LIKE WISDOM

Making Connections

A sense of connectedness, of relationship, is one aspect of what develops as we follow the spiritual path. When we are at our most alive, we feel in relation to both our inner world and the outer world. When we are in a creative mood we start to make new connections between things. On the other hand, we only have to look at our language to see that feeling ‘disconnected’, ‘cut off’ or ‘isolated’ is a painful and deadened way to experience. Tantric Buddhism is both highly creative and concerned with the true nature of things in which everything is interconnected. So it is not surprising that over the centuries the Tantra has woven a fine tapestry of associations around the Jinas and the Prajñās. In order to make the most of both the visualizations and the pujas, we need to be aware of these connections and correlations. By doing this we shall enrich our practice, because calling to mind the Prajñās will be linked in our minds to many different experiences and feeling-tones. Also we shall enrich our life, because many things that we see will remind us of the Prajñās, and therefore of the wisdom and compassion that they represent.

In *Meeting the Buddhas* I gave a table of correlations for the Five Jinas. As we’ve seen, many of those associations are equally valid for the Prajñās. I’ll give a similar table here for the Prajñās, focusing on those associations that will be particularly helpful if you are working with the pujas or sadhanas.

The Jinas are particularly associated with the skandhas, a traditional analysis which was used to show that what we think of as ‘me’ is actually a collection of different processes. As we saw in the previous chapter, the Prajñās are strongly linked both with the elements and the Five Wisdoms (*Jñāna* in Sanskrit). Thus they are connected both to the natural world, through the elements that make it up, and to ways of experiencing that are transcendental – the Wisdoms. This way in which they span both everyday and spiritual reality is one of the most appealing facets of the Prajñās. The fact that they do so also suggests that these two aspects of reality are linked on a deep level.

We shall look at the different correlations as we explore each figure in turn.

Table 1: Correlations with the Five Prajñas

Correlations	Locana	Mamaki	Pandaravasini	Tara	Akasadhatesvari
COLOUR	Blue	Yellow	Red	Green	White
ELEMENT	Water	Earth	Fire	Air	Space
WISDOM	Mirror-like	Sameness	Discriminating	All-Accomplishing	Dharmadhatu
JINA CONSORT	Aksobhya	Ratnasambhava	Amitabha	Amoghasiddhi	Vairocana
FAMILY	Vajra - Thunderbolt	Ratna – Jewel	Padma – Lotus	Karma - Action	Buddha – Awakened
DIRECTION IN MANDALA	East	South	West	North	Centre
TIME OF DAY	Dawn	Noon	Sunset	Midnight	
EMBLEM	Vajra	Jewel	Lotus	Crossed Vajra	Wheel of the Dharma
MUDRA	Touching the Earth	Supreme Giving	Devotion *	Ringing the Vajra Bell *	Turning the Wheel of the Dharma
SEED-SYLLABLE	LOM	MAM	PAM	TAM	AM
ANIMAL	Polar Bear*	Camel *	Phoenix *	Cobra *	Lioness *
POISON	Hatred	Pride	Craving	Envy and Fear	Ignorance
REALM	Hells	Human	Hungry Ghosts (<i>pretas</i>)	Animals* and titans (<i>asuras</i>)	Gods (<i>devas and Brahmas</i>)
MAGICAL FUNCTION	Destroying	Increasing	Attracting	All Functions	Pacifying
AGGREGATE (Skt: <i>skandha</i>)	Form** (<i>rupa</i>)	Feeling** (<i>vedana</i>)	Discrimination** (<i>samjña</i>)	Volitions** (<i>samskara</i>)	Consciousness** (<i>vijñana</i>)

* denotes associations that are non-traditional.

** The aggregates are particularly associated with the Five Jinas, but it is helpful to bear them in mind when thinking about the Prajñas.

Locana and her Wisdom

Rather than give my interpretation of the meaning of 'Locana', I shall borrow one from the Register of the Western Buddhist Order. We now have a Dharmacharini called Locana, who also happens to be a Sanskrit scholar. So her very reliable entry under 'meaning of name' in the Register reads: *She who is illuminated by the Dharma. Also means 'eye' as in the 'eye of wisdom'*. So we can gather that Locana, the Prajña, is a figure who embodies clear seeing. This is brought out in her association with the 'mirror-like wisdom'. As its name suggests, this wisdom is objective – a state in which your mind reflects experience impartially and objectively. It is a calm state, just as water has to be calm in order to function as a mirror. This wisdom is the fullness of equanimity, in which life is allowed to flow along as it is, with no 'for' and 'against'. For this to come about, one has to have ceased, at least temporarily, producing the idea of an ego, with its cravings and aversions, its likes and dislikes. In this state you just let experience be.

Sometimes people imagine that this wisdom must be cold – impersonal and unfeeling. They imagine it as being a bit like some piece of machinery that registers impartially – a speed camera perhaps. But this is completely wrong. It is how you experience when you are not building an ego-barrier between yourself and life. So it is a very alive, organic state.

Mirror-like wisdom also has a further connotation for me. A mirror presents a whole world to us, but that world is not in the direction in which it appears to be. Similarly, we tend to interpret life in terms of looking out from within at a world that is external to us. While some Buddhist schools are happy to see things in this way (provided that nothing is seen as fixed), others challenge the whole idea of a subject/object dichotomy. For the Yogachara School, there is no need to introduce the concept of matter as opposed to mind. Everything is mind. They argue that while we may interpret ourselves as perceiving an 'outside world', all that we ever have is our own experience. So when we see an outer reality, all the time we are actually experiencing our own mind. For the Yogachara the situation in waking life is not fundamentally different from that in dreams, where we appear to be experiencing something outside ourselves, but are actually still dealing with our own mental contents. Just as the mirror may appear to contain an environment, people and so on, similarly we think we perceive an 'outer world' when actually the truth lies in another direction, within the mind.

Just as the contents of a mirror are ungraspable, in the same way the contents of experience cannot finally be got hold of. They are essenceless and constantly changing. And just as a mirror is never affected by what passes across it, so at a deep level the mind is unaffected by whatever it experiences.

We can gain some feeling for this mirror-like wisdom by noticing how our mind always perfectly reflects what is happening. This doesn't mean that our senses, including the mental sense, are up to the job of giving us a total picture of the universe. It means that however the senses are functioning the mind always accurately reflects that state. So if I stand on a hilltop on a sunny day with my eyes open, my mind accurately represents what is happening - the scene below and the effect of the

sunlight on my retina. Similarly, when I was 18 and got very drunk at a college debate, my mind perfectly recorded the crazy way that the pillars in the old cloistered building spun before my eyes as I tried to stagger back to my room.

So as the embodiment of the mirror-like wisdom and water, Locana is clear-seeing, calm, and equanimous.

Elements of the visualization

In dealing with each of the Prajñas we shall look first at the details of her figure, and then go verse by verse through the puja, picking out points that need explaining or amplifying. In discussing the figures I do not propose to give a detailed commentary on the whole sadhana. Most readers of this book will be working with the pujas rather than performing the entire visualization practices. But in order to gain the most benefit from the puja you need to have called to mind the figure of the Prajña and her qualities. After all, a puja is a devotional ceremony directed to a spiritually developed figure. In order to feel devotion you need to be in touch emotionally with that figure. I have sometimes sat in pujas - both within and outside the FWBO - where no time or thought was given to calling to mind the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas before we started. In consequence people recited the puja 'into the empty air', in a flat or distracted way, disconnected from any emotion. So I shall go through the part of the visualization in which the Prajña's appearance is described, so that when doing her puja you can call her to mind and bear in mind something of the symbolism of her figure. Order members who are performing a sadhana of one of the Prajñas and have questions about it are welcome to contact me.

The Water Mandala

In the sadhana Locana is visualized as appearing above a water mandala - a circle of pure, clear water. This water mandala is the essence of the water element. As it is calm, it forms a perfect mirror, like the still surface of a lake. For me the water mandala has a visionary quality. There are certain lakes and pools in which someone with psychic gifts may learn all manner of things. For instance, in Tibet, the lake Lhamo'i Lhatso was used to look for indications of where important lamas would be reborn. I like to visualize the water mandala and then look into it in order to see things clearly. As Locana's wisdom is the antidote to hatred, it is a very good practice to visualize the water mandala and then to see within it the image of someone whom you dislike or have trouble with. The calm water and the reflection give you a distance and perspective, enabling you to see them as they are in themselves, aside from the role that they are playing in making you angry or upset. It can also be helpful to see yourself and your actions reflected in the water mandala, as a way of seeing impartially who you are and how you live.

The pearl throne

There are two options for what happens next in the sadhana once you have visualized the water mandala. You can move straight on to the lotus. But if you like you can imagine the supporting throne with its animals. If you practise in this more elaborate way, then out of the water mandala arises a throne made of pearl. The sadhanas incorporate ten precious stones: in the thrones and in the jewels worn by the Prajñas. These ten are the substances that Sangharakshita describes in *The Ten Pillars of Buddhism*. In that published paper, he discusses the ten precepts taken by all members

of the Western Buddhist Order, and associates each one with a precious stone or material. I find these correlations very helpful to reflect on, as they help to prevent the precepts from becoming a list of rules by emphasising the beauty and preciousness of the mental states that they promote.

It seemed appropriate for Locana to have a pearl throne. Firstly, of course, pearls are found deep in the water, which is Locana's element. Secondly, Sangharakshita associated the Fourth Precept, about truthful speech, with pearl. He said that in order to speak the truth, even in a factual sense, you have to dive very deep within yourself, just as a pearl diver needs a long breath to find a pearl on the ocean bed.

The Polar Bears

If you are including the throne, then it is supported by polar bears. You can see them appear above the water mandala, but I prefer to see them rising up out of it. First they break its calm surface, then they take their places with their paws appearing to stand on the paws of their reflections in the mirror of the mandala.

Of course these animals are *completely* non-traditional – India being a bit of a hot habitat for polar bears. All these animals came intuitively, but I can see why the polar bears might have turned up with Locana. Polar bears are very at home in the water, though they also spend time on land. (Several of the Prajñas' animals have turned out to have connections with two elements, for some reason.) They are also dangerous, sometimes vicious beasts who live by killing other creatures. Their staple diet is seals, but they also kill and eat reindeer, small rodents, seabirds, ducks and fish. This makes them a good symbol for the cold hatred that is the poison that Locana overcomes. Symbolically the polar bears supporting her throne suggest that the energy of hatred has been transformed and now is in the service of the Awakened state.

Although polar bears are aggressive animals, the beautiful creamy white of their coats also suggests purity. In Buddhist Tantric texts, such as the *Bardo Thodol*, popularly known as the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, Aksobhya who is Locana's consort is sometimes linked with Vajrasattva, the Buddha who embodies the purity of the Enlightened state. So the polar bears also hint at that link with Vajrasattva.

From the centre of the water mandala grows a pale-blue lotus flower,...

Next appears the lotus throne. If you have left out the throne and the bears then it appears on top of the water mandala. Again, as lotuses rise through water to blossom on the surface, you see the lotus appearing out of the water. If you already have the pearl throne in place then the lotus simply appears on top of it.

The lotus is made of pale-blue light. Lotuses have many associations, and are given different symbolic meanings in Buddhist Tantra. One obvious one is that they are symbols of renunciation of unskilful states of mind – just as the lotus leaves its muddy bed and rises into the sunlight.

... on which rests a moon mat.

On the lotus throne appears a moon mat. This is a perfect circle of white light, like a full moon, that forms the seat of the Prajña. It suggests that all her good qualities are complete and perfect, just as the full moon has reached its maximum radiance. In

some systems of correspondence the moon mat is associated with the Relative Bodhicitta, i.e. with compassion for all that lives.

On the moon mat appears the female Buddha, Locana.

The great Tibetan teacher Je Tsongkhapa wrote a famous text on the Three Principal Paths of Buddhism. First you develop renunciation - you give up on the repetitive, habitual cycle of mundane life (Skt: *samsara*), seeing that it will only give you frustration; second you develop love and compassion so that you are motivated to gain Enlightenment for the sake of all living beings; thirdly you develop wisdom, the clear seeing that enables you to be of true help to the world. That scheme can be seen as represented symbolically here by the lotus, the moon mat and the figure of Locana, who embodies enlightened wisdom.

For some schools of Buddhism the idea of a female Buddha would be a contradiction in terms. So you find some Mahayana sutras in which women close to Enlightenment become transformed into men so that they can take the final steps to Buddhahood. But Buddhist Tantra gives a high value to women, and sets no limits on what they can achieve. On the level of the Awakened Mind, distinctions of gender disappear. But here we are concerned with symbolism, in which a female form can suggest slightly different aspects of the Enlightenment experience from a male one.

She is blue in colour, seated in the vajra posture.

Her body is made of blue light, suggesting the ungraspable nature of experience. I deliberately did not specify what shade of blue she should be. Often the Prajñas are represented as somewhat paler in colour than the Jinās. This may just be for practical purposes, so that the two figures are more clearly distinguishable when they are represented together in Yab-Yum. So it is up to you to see what *your* Locana looks like as she appears in your imagination.

The vajra posture is the cross-legged posture in which each foot is on the opposite thigh. In the West it has become more commonly known as the Lotus Posture because of its use in Hatha Yoga. Buddhist figures in paintings and sculptures tend to have the right leg on top; Hindu figures are often the reverse. This vajra posture is very solid and stable. It is appropriate for the consort of Aksobhya, whose name means 'the imperturbable'. It is only Transcendental Wisdom that gives you an unshakeable place to stand in the flood of mundane existence. So Locana's vajra posture emphasises her wisdom.

She is dressed in exquisite clothing, and is adorned with diamonds and other precious things.

Again, I have not been very specific about how the Prajñas are dressed, in order to allow each person to visualize whatever they find beautiful and engaging. Sangharakshita is of the opinion that we should not continue in the West the way in which female Bodhisattvas are often represented as scantily clad in the Indo-Tibetan tradition. He would prefer these figures to be represented in beautiful dresses or similar clothing. The colours that Locana wears are also up to you. I tend to visualize her wearing a short-sleeved blue upper garment and a silver skirt, but these aesthetic issues are very personal, and my choice might not suit you at all. The most important thing is that you should enjoy visualizing the figure so that your concentration will flow more easily.

In *The Ten Pillars of Buddhism* Sangharakshita connects diamond with the first of the Ten Precepts – not killing or, more positively, love. He says that diamond is the hardest natural substance and thus appropriate for love because the ‘love mode’ is ‘harder’ and more enduring than the ‘power mode’.

Her right hand is in the earth-touching mudra holding a golden vajra.

This gesture of touching the earth (Skt: *bhumisparsha*) is made by placing the hand on the right knee with the palm turned inwards, so that the tips of the fingers just reach the ground. Locana’s gesture is identical to that of her consort Aksobhya. It is associated with the incident where the Buddha Shakyamuni was challenged by Mara (the embodiment in Buddhism of everything that holds us back spiritually) when he was on the verge of gaining Enlightenment, and responded by touching the earth. Out of the ground emerged the Earth Goddess who testified that the Buddha was ready to gain Enlightenment because she had witnessed his practice of skilful actions over many lifetimes. To me this gesture has connotations of touching the bedrock of experience.

The power of the gesture is reinforced because Locana holds in her hand the supremely powerful vajra-sceptre, the tantric symbol that unites all the qualities of the diamond and the thunderbolt. The vajra gives its name to the family (Skt: *kula*) of figures that is headed by Locana and Aksobhya. Here the vajra is held horizontal, so that it is largely hidden by Locana’s four fingers in the earth-touching mudra. This suggests that Locana wields great spiritual power that it is not openly displayed, but is more hidden and inner.

Her left hand is at her heart. On its open palm stands a vajra-bell.

As we shall see, all the Prajñās are visualized with a vajra-bell. This is not surprising, as they particularly embody the wisdom aspect of Enlightenment. In Buddhist Tantra the two principal symbols are the vajra and bell. When they are seen together, the vajra stands for compassionate skilful action and the bell symbolises wisdom. The bell is a very rich and complex symbol, including a whole mandala. (See my book *The Vajra and Bell*.) Below the vajra-handle on the bell is the face of Prajñāparamita, the goddess of Perfect Wisdom. When we see the vajra-bell on Locana’s palm this face is turned outwards, towards us.

I cannot think of a traditional Buddhist figure that is represented holding the bell to their heart in this way. This mudra arose spontaneously, but I can see that it parallels – or in Locana’s case ‘mirrors’ might be a better word – the way in which Vajrasattva holds the vajra to his heart with his right palm. (We have already seen that there is a link between Vajrasattva and Aksobhya and Locana.)

I find this gesture very rich. The bell is a symbol of wisdom and of feminine qualities. Locana holds it to her heart, valuing it. There are times when for me she seems to be looking down at the bell and contemplating it. At others she is holding it up, offering wisdom from her heart as a gift to all beings.

On her head is a five-jeweled crown.

All the Prajñās wear this, as do the Jinas. The five wisdom jewels are the colours of the Five Prajñās. This suggests that the Prajñās are not, finally, five separate figures.

They are simply Enlightenment presenting itself in five different guises. It also conveys the idea that the Five Wisdoms are not fully separable, and that all the Prajñas embody them all; they each just emphasise a particular one.

She has long black hair, some of which is bound up in a topknot, the rest flowing over her shoulders.

This is the way in which Tara and other female Bodhisattvas are represented. It is different from the abandoned loose hair of the dakinis. As virtually everything in these visualizations has symbolic meaning, we could interpret this partly bound-up hair as suggesting a balance between form and formlessness, discipline and spontaneity.

In front of her topknot sits the deep-blue Buddha Aksobhya.

I did consider leaving the Jinas out of these sadhanas altogether, as the Prajñas are quite self-sufficient. But eventually I decided to include them for a few reasons. I felt that most people approaching the Prajñas and their symbolism would do so via knowing about the Jinas, so I thought it would be good to include the Jinas to help people integrate their feelings for them into visualizations of the Prajñas. Also, the Jinas and Prajñas are very closely linked – in a sense they are one figure – so it felt very natural to have the Jinas there. And they add another dimension of richness to the visualization - a further figure with its own potent spiritual symbolism.

My only doubt about including the male figures was that people might take it that the Prajñas are somehow less Awakened, and therefore need the Jinas on their crowns as gurus to teach them. That certainly isn't my reading of the situation, and I thought it was worth taking the risk of misunderstanding in order to gain the benefits mentioned above.

He is in the vajra posture, with his right hand in the earth-touching mudra, and his left resting in his lap, supporting an upright golden vajra.

This is a common way in which Aksobhya is visualized.

Locana's head and body are surrounded by auras of light.

These head and body auras are traditionally associated with what are known as the Two Accumulations (Skt: *sambhara*). These are merits and wisdom. A Bodhisattva is said to perfect the accumulation of merits by practising the first five Perfections (Skt: *Paramita*): giving, ethics, patience, effort and meditation. He or she completes the accumulation of wisdom by practising the Perfection of Wisdom. The body aura of a Buddha or Bodhisattva figure symbolises the accumulated merit; the head aura represents the wisdom.

She is very beautiful, with calm blue eyes that take in everything.

One or two people have questioned my stress on the beauty of the figures. They have wondered if it was sexist, reinforcing stereotypes. I don't agree, and when we have examined the thinking behind these objections it often seems to be related to an idea that women are only seen as decorative by people who do not value their other qualities. I am not stressing the beauty of the Prajñas in order to make up for their inferior qualities in other areas! They are fully Enlightened Buddhas with all that that implies. On top of that, they're beautiful. And anyway I often stress the beauty of

male Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. These figures, made of light, loving and compassionate, with perfected qualities, can hardly fail to be beautiful.

Locana's eyes convey her mirror-like wisdom. They register everything, calmly and serenely, just as it is.

The Seed-Syllable and Mantra

In the full visualization Locana has a blue seed-syllable (Skt: *bija mantra*) at her heart. Her seed-syllable here is LOM, though you may find some texts in which it is given as LAM. These seed-syllables are a common feature of Tibetan Buddhist visualizations. Often figures and objects arise out of emptiness first in the form of a seed-syllable. That then transforms into the figure or object. They in their turn are often marked with the seed-syllable. Various technical meanings are ascribed to these seed-syllables. In general we can say that they represent subtle forms, the mind working at a pre-verbal level. Sometimes if you watch your mind when you are in a meditative state you can see the beginnings of thoughts arising like bubbles. The seed-syllables are also, in a sense, the essence of a figure or object. Of course, Buddhism, denies that phenomena have any fixed essence to them, and the seed-syllables arise out of, and disappear back into, emptiness. But the seed-syllables do contain the essential qualities of a figure or object in an undiluted way. Thus in visualization practice figures and objects appear from seed-syllables in the same way that a whole string of generous actions may be generated from one particular moment in which you were seized with the urge to give.

Locana's mantra here, which you will not find in the traditional texts, is OM VAJRALOCANE LOM SVAHA. Mantras are not usually translatable – they work at a level deeper than that of conscious meanings. 'Vajra' is the diamond thunderbolt. 'Locane' is the vocative form of Locana's name in Sanskrit. The vocative is used for addressing or calling someone. So here it is as if we are invoking or calling upon Locana through her mantra, and we are doing so mindful of the fact that she embodies all the qualities of the vajra and the Vajra Family.

The Locana Puja

The puja to Locana was the first one that I wrote. I wanted all the pujas to have a poetic title, although I knew that they would generally be referred to as 'the Locana puja', 'the Tara one', etc. I took the titles from phrases found in the pujas themselves. The Locana puja is called *Dawn of Wisdom*, which comes from the Salutation section.

I thought of varying the format of the pujas, but in the end I stayed with the sevenfold structure that we are very familiar with in the FWBO. This form felt like a restriction occasionally, but overall it gave me a discipline that was helpful.

I am going to give a commentary on the pujas, as many people have mentioned to me that 'There is a lot of Dharma in them'. Some of it will be obvious, but some of it requires some explanation. I tried to write the pujas in such a way that they would be reasonably accessible on first hearing, but I wanted there to be enough in them for people to find new depths in them as they explored them more. So I didn't shy away from including lines to do with the wisdom aspect of Buddhism. After all the Prajñās

are embodiments of wisdom! To save you having to look at the puja booklets I shall quote all the puja text, so that you can see things in context, even though I shall not be commenting on all of it.

Worship

To your perfect eyes,/ That light up the world's darkness,/ I offer endless lights./

To your perfect body,/ Exquisite but ungraspable,/ I offer endless waters and flowers./

To your perfect senses,/ Unstained by grasping,/ To which nothing is ever impure,/ I offer endless perfumes and music.

To your perfect lips,/ That never cease teaching Dharma/ But have never uttered a single word,/ I offer endless food and drink./

To your perfect mind,/ That remains in imperturbable bliss,/ Ocean deep, mirror bright,/ I offer my endless devotion./

This section is a poetic giving to Locana of what are known as the 'offerings to the honoured guest'. In ancient India when a guest came to your house you would make them comfortable and satisfied by offering them: 1) water for drinking; 2) water to wash the feet; 3) flowers; 4) incense; 5) lights; 6) perfumed water; 7) food. Often music is added to the set as an eighth offering. Here we make all these offerings except incense –it would have made the third verse rather cluttered to have offered perfumes, music and incense, and a verse beginning *To your perfect nose...* just doesn't work!

The section starts with Locana's eyes because of her special connection with clear seeing. Her body is *ungraspable*, because it is made of light, of the nature of shunyata emptiness.

Salutation

Dawn of wisdom,/ Your blue radiance illuminates a new world,/ Free from suffering./ Your eyes are like calm oceans/ Reflecting perfection./ Seeing all, knowing all./ To you I joyfully prostrate./

Dawn of wisdom/ Your slender fingers/ Touch the bedrock of reality./ Your upturned palm supports the vajra-bell,/ The empty mandala of the wisdom goddess./ To you I reverently prostrate./

Dawn of wisdom,/ Destroyer of all suffering,/ In the vajra-sphere beyond subject and object/ You fashion the jagged shards of hatred/ Into wisdom's diamond adornments./ To you I lovingly prostrate./

Dawn of wisdom,/ Vajra Queen,/ Buddha from time before time,/ Complete in yourself,/ And consort of the noble Aksobhya./ To you I endlessly prostrate./

In this section we offer prostrations to Locana. If you want to you can get up at the end of each verse and make physical prostrations, or bow if they are too physically demanding for you. On a group retreat one person could make prostrations at the end of each verse on behalf of everyone.

Dawn of wisdom – of course this connects to the time of day associated with Locana and Aksobhya. It suggests that they are connected with beginners' mind, making the effort to let go of old ideas and concepts and to see everything fresh in the moment. It also implies that mirror-like wisdom in some way is the first aspect of wisdom that we encounter. This is certainly true of 'bare awareness' approaches to insight. Through peeling away layers of conceptualisation we come more and more into the present moment. Finally there is a moment of simple seeing. Our story about who we are and what life is falls away for a few instants, and we see just what is there. This moment of clear, mirror-like seeing then affects our feelings, perception, volitions and our consciousness, so that they take on the characteristics of the other four Wisdoms.

The empty mandala of the wisdom goddess. A vajra-bell includes within its symbolism a whole mandala. If you see it in two dimensions, looking down on it from above as Locana is doing, you find Prajñāparamita seated in the middle, surrounded by other figures in a circular mandala, with a wall of vajras protecting the outer edge. (For more details see my book on *The Vajra and Bell*.) The mandala is empty both because the shape of the bell encloses empty space and because the mandala has no self-nature.

In the vajra-sphere beyond subject and object... Reality is not only empty of any inherently-existing self-nature, it is also empty of subject and object. These are just concepts that we superimpose onto how things are. When ideas of 'me in here' and 'you out there' fall away, we enter a transcendental sphere in which reality is one seamless whole. While we may partition it with our concepts, in reality it is unbreachable in the same way that a vajra cannot be cut or broken.

You fashion the jagged shards of hatred/Into wisdom's diamond adornments. This suggests a tantric approach to dealing with negativity. In more common Buddhist practice, the *kleshas* or poisons are to be overcome, eradicated. In Tantra they are transformed by sublimating the energy that is tied up in them.

Buddha from time before time, - Enlightenment is a timeless state. Paradoxically, when you become a Buddha you realize that you have always been Enlightened.

Going For Refuge

Perfect Refuge,/ All-knowing,/ All-seeing,/ I am endlessly deceived/ By the mirage of samsara./ From now onwards/ I shall always rely on your clear vision/ To find the true path./

Perfect Refuge,/ All-knowing,/ All-seeing,/ I am full of doubts/ From Mara's questioning./ From now onwards/ I shall always turn to you to witness/ My efforts to realize the truth./

*To you, a perfect Buddha,/ Who see samsara and nirvana as they are,/ I go for
Refuge./*

To your mirror-like wisdom/ Unshaken in the flood of change,/ I go for Refuge./

To the entire Vajra Family,/ Born from your heart, I go for Refuge./

In this section we commit ourselves to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Here the Three Jewels are embodied in Locana and the members of the Vajra Family which she and Aksobhya lead.

I am endlessly deceived/By the mirage of samsara. – Samsara is the endless round of frustrating and unfulfilling experience in which we find ourselves trapped. The mirage of course is another water image, but it also suggests that we are not really trapped at all. We are continually causing ourselves frustration and suffering by failing to recognize the true nature of our situation. Once we take a close enough look at the mechanisms of samsara we see that there is really nothing there. At that point we are free, just like the traveller who understands that the mirror is just an optical effect.

I am full of doubts/ from Mara's questioning. This verse refers to the incident in the legendary life of Shakyamuni where, in response to Mara's efforts to undermine his confidence, he called the Earth Goddess to bear witness to the spiritual work that he had done over many lives. He invoked the Earth Goddess by using the earth-touching mudra that we see being made by Locana.

To the entire Vajra Family, The Vajra Family includes many of the most important Tantric deities. As this family is associated with the transformation of hatred, many of its members appear in wrathful forms, including the Bodhisattva Vajrapani and the fearsome buffalo-headed Vajrabhairava.

Confession of Faults

*O loving Locana,/ How can I see your beautiful face/ When my mind is like a mirror
in the mud?/ It lies there,/ Sticky with grasping,/ And caked with useless fantasies./ It
is cracked with hatred,/ And pitted with resentment./ It is fogged with the cold mists
Of ignorance and doubt./*

*O loving Refuge,/ Despite its sad condition/ My mind longs to reflect your perfect
eyes./ Please cleanse it with the nectar of your equanimity./ Polish it with your gentle
touch./*

*Today I vow to begin anew./ I shall bathe in the pool of your wisdom/ And emerge
with a vajra heart,/ Unshakable in your service./*

For me the first verse has echoes of one of the most famous events in the history of Chinese Buddhism. Hung Yen, the Fifth Patriarch of Ch'an (the form of Buddhism that would become known as Zen in Japan), announced that he would pass on the succession in his lineage to whoever could write stanza demonstrating that they had realized the true nature of the mind. Everyone assumed that the Head Monk, Shen Hsiu, would receive the transmission of the lineage. Shen Hsiu himself was in an agony of doubt. Eventually he composed a stanza but, not being able to bring himself to give it to the Fifth Patriarch personally, he wrote it on a wall. The verse was:

*Our body is the Bodhi-Tree,
And our mind a mirror bright.
Carefully we wipe them hour by hour,
And let no dust alight.*

Reading this verse, the Fifth Patriarch praised its anonymous author, encouraged people to venerate the verse, and said that whoever learned it and put it into practice would avoid falling into unfavourable states of existence.

Working in the monastery kitchen pounding rice, as he had been doing for many months, was Hui Neng. Although overlooked because he was poor and illiterate, he had had some taste of mind's true nature, and when he heard the verse he wrote a verse in reply:

*There is no Bodhi-Tree,
Nor stand of a mirror bright.
Since all is empty of inherent nature,
Where can the dust alight?*

Although the Fifth Patriarch had praised the Head Monk's verse, he knew that it did not demonstrate any penetration into the true nature of things. Reading Hui Neng's verse, he saw at once that its author had experienced Awakening, so the Fifth Patriarch secretly passed on the succession to him.

This Confession of Faults is clearly written from the standpoint of Shen Hsiu rather than Hui Neng. But that is not a bad thing as after all that is where most of us are standing. And, as the Fifth Patriarch pointed out, even if we do not see the nature of the mind, if we can keep purifying our minds of faults that will save us from a great deal of suffering. It will also help to set up conditions so that one day we do see the primordially pure, unstained nature of the mind.

Rejoicing in Merits

*Queen of ever-flowing bliss,/ I rejoice in your radiant awareness,/ In your confidence
and compassion,/ In your perfect knowledge/ Of dependent arising and emptiness./*

*I rejoice in the happiness/ Of all those you have awakened/ From the dream of
samsara/ With your clear dawn light./ I rejoice in all those who,/ Despite still
slumbering,/ Create delightful dreams through skilful actions./*

I rejoice in my own good fortune/ That like the turtle in the vast ocean/ I have somehow been encircled/ By your loving embrace./

In your perfect knowledge/ Of dependent arising and emptiness. The first verse finishes by rejoicing in another aspect of wisdom which Locana embodies. This sees things from the Madhyamika point of view expounded by Nagarjuna. For this stream of Buddhist thought, the highest wisdom is to see the perfect interplay of dependent arising (Skt: *pratitya samutpada*) and emptiness of inherent existence (*shunyata*). In this vision of reality, everything is essenceless and non-abiding because everything that appears is a dependent phenomenon, arising when conditions are appropriate, and disappearing when those conditions change. If phenomena had some kind of fixed inherent existence, this could not happen. So dependent arising is made possible by the fact that everything is empty of existing by itself. Emptiness is not a thing, but simply a quality of all dependently arising phenomena.

The second verse – The first four lines rejoice in all those who have gained some insight into reality. The last three lines refer to those who have not yet seen the true nature of things but who enjoy positive mundane states through practising ethics and meditation.

That like the turtle in the vast ocean – This last verse refers to an image used by the Buddha in the *Chiggala Sutta* of the *Samyutta Nikaya*. He states that human life is a very precious opportunity to practise the Dharma because it is very hard to come by. He describes the situation of a blind sea-turtle who lives in the ocean and only rises to the surface once every hundred years. A small yoke is floating on the surface of the vast ocean. The Buddha asks his hearers to contemplate the odds against the turtle happening to surface at the exact spot in the ocean where the yoke is floating, so that the turtle's head is encircled by it. He stresses that the chances of gaining human rebirth are as remote as this.

People often feel discouraged about their Dharma practice, feeling that they are not getting very far along the Path. But, if the Buddha is to be believed, we have already come a very long way. We cannot have been at all bad, as we have managed to find a human birth at a time when the Dharma is available to us. We may or may not want to take the Buddha's image literally. But certainly if we can take the spirit of what he is saying, then we shall feel the precious opportunity that we have, and we shall work to make this life meaningful through practising the Dharma.

Entreaty and Supplication

Queen of the vajra and bell,/ If the sun of your compassion/ Never rose in the eastern sky/ All would be ice and darkness./

May you forever shine/ Your diamond light/ Upon all of us poor creatures,/ Whose hearts otherwise will freeze/ Into cold stones of hatred./ May the vajra-bell at your heart/ Burn like a beacon/ To guide us to our true home./

May you empower us to experience everything/ In its naked perfection,/ To know in the seen only the seen,/ In the heard only the heard./ O you who embody the whole of the Dharma,/ Please teach us your simplicity./

To know in the seen only the seen,/ In the heard only the heard. – This is a reference to the Buddha’s advice to Bahiya of the Bark Garment in the *Udana* of the Pali Canon. Bahiya has travelled a very long way to Savatthi in order to see the Buddha. On his arrival he is told by monks in the Jeta Grove that the Buddha has gone into town on his alms-round. Bahiya is so aware of impermanence and so desperate for the Dharma that he goes after the Buddha and interrupts his silent movement from house to house by begging for a teaching. When the Buddha realizes that Bahiya will not wait, he gives him a very short, direct piece of teaching:

*Bahiya, you should train yourself thus: 'In the seen will be merely what is seen; in the heard will be merely what is heard; in the sensed will be merely what is sensed; in the cognized will be merely what is cognized.'*¹

In other words the Buddha teaches Bahiya mirror-like wisdom, not adding any concepts onto his experience, not working it up into a story, just experiencing it nakedly and directly.

Please teach us your simplicity. – This last line always moves me strongly. We usually miss the Dharma, the truth of things, because it is too simple for us. Even with Buddhism we can build up all kinds of grand structures of thought, when the simple truth of each moment is waiting, patiently and faithfully, for us to deign to notice it.

Transference of Merits

Diamond-adorned one,/ Only you can know/ The merits of your worship./ May they be vaster than suffering,/ Deeper than the hells./ May they overflow/ Even the ocean of your heart./ May they be far more than enough/ To liberate all living beings./

Just as a mirror never tires of reflecting,/ Just as the Sun never tires of rising,/ Just as you never tire/ Of holding wisdom to your heart,/ So may I never tire/ Of leading living beings/ Into your diamond realm,/ Into your loving presence,/ Where they may be freed forever/ By one glance from your perfect eyes./

The merits of your worship. – Of course this means ‘the merits of worshipping you’.

Deeper than the hells. Traditional Buddhism recognizes five or six main divisions of samsara. The one of greatest suffering, though never seen as permanent, is the hell realm. Locana and Aksobhya are particularly associated with this realm, presumably because hatred, either directed at others or at yourself, is the negative emotion that is most likely to cause you to end up in hellish states. Locana transforms hatred, and thereby rescues beings from the potentiality or actuality of experiencing hellish suffering.

Just as you never tire/ Of holding wisdom to your heart – Locana holds wisdom to her heart in two senses. Metaphorically, as wisdom is very dear to her, and physically as with her left hand she holds to her heart the vajra bell, the symbol of wisdom.

Of leading living beings/ Into your diamond realm – This poetic imagery suggests that there is an actual realm or Pure Land where Locana resides. Some Mahayana sutras

¹ *Udana I.10*, tr. John D. Ireland.

speaking in this way. There is an *Aksobhya Vyuha Sutra* in which his Pure Land is described. But the Pure Land is not really a place. We can lead people into Locana's loving presence by helping and encouraging them to practise the Dharma. If they do so sincerely then at some point they will experience a glimpse of the mirror-like wisdom. Then they will truly be in the presence of Locana.

CHAPTER 3: MAMAKI – EARTH AND THE WISDOM OF EQUALITY

Into the Southern Realm

Having absorbed some of the blue radiance of Locana's qualities, we can now move round into the south of the mandala. We shall need to spend a little less time now, as some of what we found out about Locana applies to all the Prajñās and will not need to be repeated.

Out of the warm southern sky appears the figure of Mamaki. She embodies the element earth, so she is a solid, stable figure, whilst still being made of light! She and her consort Ratnasambhava are particularly associated with the riches of the earth. (Ratnasambhava means 'the one born from a jewel' or 'the one who produces jewels') So Mamaki has endless resources. Her warm yellow colour is associated with abundant harvests and with gold.

The name 'Mamaki' means 'the mine maker'. Not as in mines of jewels, but in the sense that Mamaki identifies with everyone. The hopes and aspirations, sufferings and fears of all beings are her concern. She cares for them all like a mother does for her children. This transcendental state of love and compassion needs to be clearly distinguished from its mundane near enemy. You sometimes meet people who have no boundaries. They try to mother or father everyone. They are so emotionally permeable that they are affected by everything, trying to make everything all right for everyone in a compulsive way. Mamaki's love and compassion is not smothering or demanding. It is a flood of pure loving kindness that has broken its banks and pours out to all beings in every direction.

The wisdom that Mamaki particularly embodies is the wisdom of equality (Skt: *samata*). This does not mean that everything has been reduced to a dreary sameness. Mamaki's is not a bleached-out world in which you cannot distinguish one thing from another. But it does mean that her attention is focused on what is common to all human beings, all life. We can understand this on different levels. On the highest level, Mamaki vividly experiences the emptiness of all phenomena. In that sense all the many things that we experience: from shoes to ships, from cabbages to kings, are all equally dependently arising, empty of any scrap of true existence. On a more everyday level it means that she is aware of the commonality of experience of living beings. We all search for happiness and strive to avoid suffering.

For me, experiences of our common humanity are all pointers towards the wisdom of equality. Sometimes in group situations you start by feeling isolated, as others seem different from you, with different levels of confidence, attractiveness, wealth, etc. But if real communication happens in the group you start to see more and more that people work with the same hopes and fears, the same insecurities and frustrations, within the unique circumstances of their lives.

Mamaki's time of day is noon, and her season of the year is summer. So she is all warmth. And with the Sun comes relaxation. So though she has the steady, even quality of mind of the earth element, there is nothing stuck or hard about her. Having nothing to defend, endlessly generous, she is completely at ease. So she embodies serene equanimity and evenness of mind.

Elements of the Visualization

The Earth Mandala

If you are performing the full sadhana (whether in-front or generating yourself as Mamaki), you begin by seeing an earth mandala emerge from the blue sky of emptiness. This earth mandala is the essence of the qualities of the earth element. It is visualized as square in shape and completely flat. It shines brilliantly against the blue sky because it is made of yellow jewels.

If you are performing the visualization and you find it difficult to feel the solid, rooted earth element qualities in something that is made of light, then you could try imagining rocks and mountains, great trees and earthy fields all dissolving into the earth mandala. (You can do something equivalent with all the element mandalas in these visualizations.)

The Golden Throne

If you want to visualize in a slightly more extensive way you can include the throne and animals at this point. Mamaki's throne is made of gold, a kind of crystallization of the riches of her mind. Sangharakshita associates gold with the Second Precept, which concerns not stealing but giving generously. In working with this precept we aim to transform our state of mind from a poverty mentality to a wealth mentality. When you are in an impoverished state of mind it feels as if there is not enough of anything to go around. You have to fight to get your share, and if you succeed then you hold onto it because if you give any of it away the universe will not provide you with any more. In a wealth mentality it feels as if there is plenty for everyone, you enjoy making others happy by giving and sharing, and you trust that under the law of karma your generosity will set up the conditions for you to have even more resources in future. If, like Mamaki, you were seated on a great throne of solid gold then you could practise generosity unthinkingly, to your heart's content.

The Camels

The golden throne is supported by camels. These animals are associated with hot countries, and the ability to survive in places where the Sun beats down relentlessly. As well as being associated with the desert heat, camels represent endurance, the stamina and steadiness of the earth element. A camel can travel up to 100 miles a day in temperatures over 40 degrees Celsius. Also they have associations with sand, which can be heaped up into all kinds of extraordinary shapes, and yet all these forms are made of small pieces of silica. This for me is a reminder of the wisdom of equality.

These camels are one-humped Arabians, generally associated with hotter places than the smaller Bactrian camels that have two humps. Whilst not amphibious, they are associated in many people's minds with two elements, as they are wonderfully adapted to cope with lack of water. They store it not in their humps but in pouches in their stomachs. To replenish its reserves a thirsty camel can drink as much as 25 gallons (120 litres) of water.

From the centre of the earth mandala grows a pale-yellow lotus flower, on which rests a moon mat. On the moon mat appears the female Buddha Mamaki. She is yellow in colour, seated in the posture of royal ease.

Some Bodhisattvas are represented almost lolling on the ground in what is described as royal ease with one hand behind them on the ground. Mamaki's posture is like some forms of Padmasambhava, seated straight, but with the right foot down. The main point is that her posture should be upright but very relaxed.

She is dressed in exquisite clothing, and is adorned with an amber necklace, as well as other ornaments made of gold and precious things.

Amber is another of Sangharakshita's Ten Pillars of Buddhism. He associates it with the fifth of the Ten Precepts: avoiding harsh speech and practising kindly communication. Amber comes in different shades, but some are honey-coloured and warm to the touch, a bit as if you were holding a small piece of crystallised sunlight in your hands. Sangharakshita makes the point that amber can be rubbed to produce an electrical charge, so that it attracts things to it, just as friendly speech draws people to you.

Her right hand is in the mudra of supreme giving, palm turned out by her right knee, and holds a wish-fulfilling gem.

This mudra of generosity is known as the *varada* mudra in Sanskrit. The gem that Mamaki holds can be a single jewel or a triple-gem of golden-yellow, blue, and red, as you often see in Tibetan art. These three colours of course are associated with the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha respectively. You could even think that the upper part of the jewel reflects Mamaki's yellow radiance, the blue lower left part reflects that of Locana, who is on one side of her in the mandala, and the red lower right part reflects that of Pandaravasini, who is on the other side of her.

However you see the jewel, the main thing to bear in mind is that it is no ordinary jewel but a jewel that fulfils all wishes (Skt: *chintamani*). This is what Mamaki is offering you with her open palm – the complete fulfilment of whatever you desire. We know from many folk tales that it is easy to squander your chance when a magical being turns up and offers you three wishes. So it is worth being careful about what you wish for.

The wish-fulfilling jewel is a symbol for the Bodhicitta, that spiritual force that enables the Bodhisattva to vow to rescue all beings from suffering. It is this that is the true fulfilment of everything that you wish for. Only if we understand the nature of the 'me' that is wishing for happiness, and open our heart to the wider world will the happiness that we long for come about.

Her left hand is in front of her heart in the mudra of bestowing the protection of the Three Jewels

In this gesture, the palm is turned outwards, with the thumb and ring finger touching (or in this case holding the lotus stem), whilst the other three fingers are all raised to symbolize the Three Jewels. It is a gesture often made by forms of Tara, but here it has crossed the mandala to associate itself with Mamaki.

She is holding the stem of a pale-blue lotus flower that blossoms at her left shoulder. On it is a moon mat, upon which stands a vajra-bell.

Like all the Prajñas, she has the vajra-bell of wisdom. In each case it is on the left side of the body, as in Buddhist Tantra the right side is associated with compassionate skilful means and the left with wisdom.

On her head is a five-jeweled crown. She has long black hair, some of which is bound in a topknot, the rest flowing over her shoulders. In front of her topknot sits the deep yellow Buddha Ratnasambhava. He is in the vajra posture, his right hand in the mudra of supreme giving, and his left resting in his lap supporting a treasure vase.

In early versions of the Mamaki sadhana, I described Ratnasambhava as having a wish-fulfilling jewel in his left hand, and gave the treasure vase as an alternative. He is traditionally represented with the jewel. However, as time went on, the Jinas' attributes started to change in their new context within the visualizations of the Prajñas, and I reversed things so that Ratnasambhava held the treasure vase, giving the jewel as an alternative.

The treasure vase (Skt: *kalasha*) is a fat-bellied vessel with a short, slim neck. Its opening is crowned by a jewel. In Buddhist legend it is an inexhaustible source of riches. Vases of this shape are used in some Tibetan rituals. For example, they are sometimes filled with jewellery and other valuables and buried on the site where a temple is to be built, or under a house whose occupants wish to attract good fortune. The vase's link with the earth in this way makes it particularly appropriate to Mamaki and Ratnasambhava.

Mamaki's head and body are surrounded by auras of light. She is very beautiful, serene and relaxed.

Mamaki is serene and relaxed because her wisdom of equality gives her complete equanimity. She lives in a mental spaciousness that is far removed from the tensions of the Eight Worldly Winds: pleasure and pain, gain and loss, praise and blame, fame and infamy.

The Seed-Syllable and Mantra

Mamaki's seed-syllable is MAM. The MAM has a long 'A' - so that it is pronounced like the 'a' in 'father'. Her mantra in this form of practice is OM RATNE SURATNE MAM SVAHA. 'Ratna' means 'jewel', and like Locana's mantra it is in the vocative form. 'Su' means 'beautiful' or 'happy'. So in the mantra we are invoking Mamaki as a jewel, a happy and beautiful gem.

The Mamaki Puja

Borrowing a phrase from the sixth section, I called the puja to Mamaki *The Heart's True Wealth*. Its verses have a strong emphasis on spiritual riches. To perform the puja you should first call to mind Mamaki, and allow her yellow light and her abundance of good qualities to warm and enrich your mental state.

Worship

Buddha of beauty,/ Possessor of all riches,/ I, who own nothing at all,/ Must borrow from your infinite wealth/ To pay you homage./

From your treasury of good qualities/ I borrow the clear waters of purity,/ The delightful food and drink of Dharma teachings,/ The sweet perfumes of loving mental states,/ To pay you homage./

*From your treasury of good qualities/ I borrow yellow lotuses/ Of pure renunciation,
Incense made of divine meditation,/ Butter lamps fashioned from wisdom's gold,/ To
pay you homage./*

*From your compassionate heart/ I borrow this precious human form,/ This devoted
voice,/ These loving words,/ To pay you homage./*

Buddha of beauty, - Beauty is not a quality particularly associated with the South in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. But Sangharakshita in his Tantric series of lectures characterises Ratnasambhava as the Buddha of Beauty, though without giving any explanation. Gems are brilliant, alluring objects, so as the heads of the Jewel Family Mamaki and Ratnasambhava are strongly linked with the beautiful.

As with Locana, during the course of this verse we make the seven offerings to the honoured guest. Here there is no music – unless you want to sing the verses with the ‘devoted voice’ mentioned in the last verse!

*Possessor of all riches,/ I, who own nothing at all,/ Must borrow from your infinite
wealth/To pay you homage.* - These lines are not about self-effacing humility, or flattery. The fact is that ‘I’ as ego cannot truly possess anything. In the short term we can buy a car or a house, but we only enjoy them for a limited time, at the most for our lifespan before they pass out of our possession. The ego is unstable, ‘like a bubble or a mirage’ as the Perfection of Wisdom texts say, so its ownership is also temporary and uncertain. From that perspective, everything that we have, even our physical body, is only borrowed from the universe, and one day will be returned. Contrast this with the Enlightened person who has found a state that is deathless, permanently fulfilling, and endlessly creative. So in expressing devotion to a Buddha we have one of those ‘what do you give to the person who has everything?’ questions. Yet, to use another cliché, ‘it’s the thought that counts’. Even though Mamaki does not lack for anything, if we feel devotion for her and her qualities then that needs expression. If the only worthy offerings that we can find have to be borrowed from her then it is still worth doing.

*From your compassionate heart/ I borrow this precious human form,/ This devoted
voice,/ These loving words,/ To pay you homage.* - You can take this verse as just a poetic image. But you can also see that Mamaki represents the true nature of our mind. This true nature is the union of the wisdom that perceives emptiness and of great compassion. As all forms are emptiness, everything that we think of as ‘me’ is just an appearance arising from that true nature of the mind. Our lives start to become rich and meaningful when, although still feeling ourselves to be isolated separate selves, we turn in the direction of that true nature of the mind again. One way to do this is by personifying that true nature and expressing love and devotion for it.

Salutation

*You have mined the jewels of wisdom/ In the depths of the heart,/ Now your form
shines brilliant with their splendour./ Bathed in your wisdom light,/ On this jewel
ground/ To you I prostrate./*

You are the source of all giving,/ Open-hearted, open-handed./ You give without any sense/ Of a donor, recipient, or gift./ Offering myself to you completely,/ On this jewel ground/ To you I prostrate./

You are higher than pride,/ Lower than humility,/ Equal to the unequalled./ With no thought of comparison/ On this jewel ground/ To you I prostrate./

Through emptying your mind/ Of any thought of ownership,/ You possess the entire world./ Giving up attachment/ To 'my body'/ And 'my mind',/ On this jewel ground/ To you I prostrate./

You give without any sense/ Of a donor, recipient, or gift. - This form of giving is described as the perfection of giving (Skt: *dana paramita*) in the Mahayana texts. The whole thought-structure of 'I give this to you' falls away in advanced practice. What is left is a spontaneous, open-hearted generosity that does not keep score of who gave how much to whom.

You are higher than pride,/ Lower than humility,/ Equal to the unequalled. /With no thought of comparison,... - There are a number of passages in the Pali Canon, for instance in the *Sutta Nipata*, in which the Buddha warns against comparing yourself with others. This isn't just looking down on them, he also specifically cites thinking that you are inferior or equal as causes of suffering. A certain degree of comparison is inevitable if you are to learn from life, but building that up into a view simply strengthens your sense of isolation.

Through emptying your mind/ Of any thought of ownership,/ You possess the entire world. - You 'possess' the entire world by not narrowing down your identification to one place or one set of objects. As soon as you limit yourself in this way then everything else becomes 'other', 'not yours'. Of course, when you give up this narrow thinking you don't literally become the owner of the planet. It is more that you are free to enjoy everything. It is like looking out at some countryside from a hilltop. If you don't start thinking about ownership then you are able to enjoy the view on its own terms.

Giving up attachment/ To 'my body'/ And 'my mind',... - When we think in terms of something being 'mine' we also subtly strengthen a sense that we control it in some way. (If you can't control it, in what sense is it 'yours'?) But both mind and body are only under our control to a limited extent. When we forget this fact we store up suffering for ourselves.

Going For Refuge

Queen of the zenith sun,/ Long have I wandered/ In the desert of samsara,/ Walking in circles of self-concern,/ Becoming mired in the quicksands of comparison,/ Thirsting for true satisfaction./ Now, at last,/ I turn to you for refuge./

Queen of golden light,/ I go for refuge to your wish-fulfilling jewel,/ An abundant treasury of compassion,/ Turning to dust the need for outward riches./

Queen of the earth element,/ I go for refuge to your generous heart,/ That offers this jewel of jewels/ To every living being./

Queen of the southern Pure Land,/ I go for refuge to your golden retinue:/ All those for whom there is no 'yours' or 'mine',/ And who live in perpetual contentment./

Queen of the vajra bell/ I go for refuge to your limitless mind,/ In which all phenomena are equal,/ So that nothing compares to you./

Queen of the southern Pure Land - There is no mention that I know of in the Buddhist texts of Mamaki having a Pure Land. Ratnasambhava's Pure Land is known as Shrimat – the Glorious.

Confession of Faults

O you who grant all wishes,/ Please give me the courage/ To see myself as I am./

O you who grant all wishes,/ Please give me the kindness/ To acknowledge even the darkest/ Of my faults, failings, and unkindness./

O you who grant all wishes,/ Please give me the confidence/ To believe I can transform/ This rough carbon lump of a heart/ Into a wish-fulfilling gem./

O you who grant all wishes,/ Please purify me completely/ Of all narrow self-concern,/ Meanness and pettiness./ O you who grant all wishes,/ Please pour your golden-yellow light/ Into every dark corner of my being,/ Please turn the stony ground of my mind/ Into rich and fertile soil/ In which to sow the seeds/ Of perfection.

To believe I can transform/ This rough carbon lump of a heart/ Into a wish-fulfilling gem. - Diamonds are formed from carbon that has been crystallized under tremendous heat and pressure deep down (often 120 miles) in the Earth's crust. In the same way through the intensity of spiritual practice we can transform ourselves into a Bodhisattva.

Rejoicing in Merits

Appreciation is a wish-fulfilling gem/ That causes all beings to grow and prosper./ It is the antidote to lonely pride and separateness./ So I shall value the good in all that lives./ I shall sing the praises/ Of those whose merits are great or small./

I rejoice in those who have heaped up/ Jewel mountains of good deeds,/ And in those who,/ In the darkness of unawareness,/ Have found even one tiny gem./

I rejoice in all those/ Who create mundane beauty:/ The artists, poets, and composers,/ And all the bringers of learning and culture./

I rejoice in all those/ Who by their skilful actions/ Collect diamonds, gold and crystal;/ Who with their beautiful speech/ Heap up pearls and amber,/ Silver and opal;/ And those whose minds are ablaze/ With the light of emeralds, rubies and sapphires.

Above all I rejoice in your beauty,/ Your serene form,/ Regal yet relaxed,/ Your speech like liquid amber,/ Your mind of light,/ That experiences all phenomena/ As adornments/ Fashioned from the gold/ Of emptiness./

Fourth verse - This verse uses all of Sangharakshita's 'ten pillars' to rejoice in people who practise the Ten Precepts. This doesn't simply mean people who have consciously taken these precepts on. These ten embody every positive action of body, speech and mind. Thus they are known as the 10 Skilful Actions (Pali: *kusala dhamma*).

Your mind of light,/ That experiences all phenomena/ As adornments/ Fashioned from the gold/ Of emptiness. For those familiar with Chinese Buddhist thought this will call to mind the Hua Yen teacher Fa Tsang's *Treatise on the Golden Lion*. In this brief text he explains the nature of reality to the Empress Wu, by taking the example of a lion made of gold that guards her palace hall. The teaching is very deep, and there are different interpretations of it. According to one view, he describes the interplay of dependent arising and emptiness as being like the relation between the form of the lion and the gold of which it is made up.

FA Tsang starts by saying that it is because gold is *shunya* – lacking any inherent existence – that it can be fashioned into endless forms, such as the Empress's lion. This emptiness of inherent existence is not something that stands behind phenomena and gives birth to them. Rather phenomena *are* emptiness. The lion has not appeared out of gold; it is itself gold. Just as you always experience gold in a particular form: a gold bar, a necklace, a lion statue, so you never experience emptiness separate from dependently-arising phenomena.

More than this, although the gold appears in the shape of a lion, there is no real lion there, there is just gold. From the viewpoint of gold, as it were, nothing has changed, whether it is formed into a bracelet or a coin. Thus from an absolute point of view there is only emptiness.

Fa Tsang takes his arguments much further than this, into some very philosophically demanding territory. But hopefully this is enough to gain a sense of how the analogy between gold and emptiness can work.²

Entreaty and Supplication

O Jewel Queen,/ You who hold the gem/ That grants all desires,/ May these wishes/ All come true:/

In this very life,/ Through sincere striving on your path of light,/ May I discover the One Jewel:/ The Bodhicitta, the heart's true wealth,/ Of which all mundane gems/ Are worthless imitations./

May your golden radiance/ Always illuminate the world./ May you pour the Dharma/ Like liquid sunshine/ Upon all living beings,/ For as long as time exists./

² See Paul Williams' *Mahayana Buddhism* (Routledge, London, 1989), pp 130-4.

May all beings, your children,/ Turn like sunflowers toward you,/ May they experience your wisdom-mind./ May they all become equal to you/ In Enlightenment./

Transference of Merits

May the merits of this worship/ Never be lost,/ Or stolen by the thieves/ Of anger, regret, or false views./ To keep them safe forever,/ I offer them to you, O Jewel Queen./ Please store them in your heart/ Like buried treasure,/ And there, by your rite of increase,/ May they be multiplied and transformed./

May they turn into radiant goddesses/ Making you sublime offerings./ May they become a rain of flowers/ Falling at the golden feet/ Of the noble Ratnasambhava./ May they transform into Bodhisattvas/ Rescuing beings in the ten directions./ May they transmute into an abundance of Dharma,/ A harvest of happiness,/ For every living being./

Or stolen by the thieves/ Of anger, regret, or false views. – In Buddhist tradition there is the idea that through skilful action you gain merit, which in time results in happiness for you. However, it is also said that the effects of these meritorious deeds can be cancelled out. For example, if you act generously but later regret it and wish that you had not given, this will undermine the positive effects of your generosity. Similarly the Bodhisattva builds up a tremendous stock of merits through practising the Perfections, but it is said that this can be destroyed if he or she then generates states of anger towards the beings that they have pledged to help. In traditional Buddhist countries all this is often taken very literally, with merit becoming a commodity, like some sort of spiritual equivalent of the Euro. But the basic principle - that the effects of positive actions can be mitigated by subsequent unhelpful mental states, and vice versa - is just basic Buddhism.

And there, by your rite of increase, / May they be multiplied and transformed. - Tantric Buddhism made use of various magical rituals common in India, but changed their purpose. So it took magical rites designed to ensure good harvests and transformed it into a rite for the purpose of increasing wisdom and compassion.

Rescuing beings in the ten directions. – The ten directions are the cardinal and intermediate points of the compass, the zenith and the nadir, i.e. everywhere!

CHAPTER 4: PANDARAVASINI – FIRE AND DISCRIMINATING WISDOM

As it sets in the West, the Sun looks deceptively approachable. Its power is veiled, and it is easy to forget that it is a star, harbouring such intense heat that any life would be destroyed if it came too close. So it is appropriate that the West is the direction associated with craving and passion. When we crave something, we always exaggerate its attractive qualities, and disregard the dangers and unappealing aspects of it. And we don't recognise that craving is itself an unpleasant state which, if we fuel its flames, will surely burn us.

We tend not to let go of craving partly because that would feel like giving up on life. We often have an intuitive sense that there has to be more to life than we currently experience. This gets translated into feeling that our lives will be enriched, if not fixed, if we can only have something (or someone) or other. And we are right to have this deep sense that life could be much richer and more fulfilling. But it only becomes so when we let go of craving, or at least transmute it. Desire for the mundane (Skt: *kamachanda*) needs to be transformed into desire for the truth of things (Skt: *Dharmachanda*). This process and its culmination is represented by the figure of Pandaravasini, the red Prajña of the West.

Pandaravasini's name means 'the white-robed one'. As we shall see, this suggests various associations. One strong one is with a common simile for the fourth *dhyana*, or higher state of meditation. The Buddha describes it in this way:

*And furthermore, with the abandoning of pleasure and stress - as with the earlier disappearance of elation and distress - he enters and remains in the fourth jhana: purity of equanimity and mindfulness, neither-pleasure nor stress. He sits, permeating the body with a pure, bright awareness. Just as if a man were sitting covered from head to foot with a white cloth so that there would be no part of his body to which the white cloth did not extend; even so, the monk sits, permeating the body with a pure, bright awareness. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by pure, bright awareness.*³

This connection with *dhyana* relates also to Pandaravasini's consort, Amitabha, who is often traditionally represented seated with his hands in the *dhyana mudra* of meditation. Amitabha is sometimes described as the Buddha of love, and shown seated in the middle of the ocean, like a great red sun sinking into the sea.

All this suggests that Pandaravasini represents the completion and perfection of the process of spiritual sublimation of craving. I once characterised this process of transformation by saying that desire for anyone becomes love for someone which in its turn transmutes into loving compassion for everyone. Through meditation and devotion, craving is fulfilled in unimaginable ways.

³ *Digha Nikaya 2, Samaññaphala Sutta - The Fruits of the Contemplative Life*, tr. from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu.

The wisdom that Pandaravasini embodies is the discriminating wisdom. This wisdom focuses on the uniqueness of every person, every phenomenon, and celebrates it. She is also associated with the throat chakra, and with communication.

Elements of the Visualization

The Fire Mandala

Pandaravasini's element is fire, so in the sadhana out of the blue sky emerges a red fire mandala. This is a triangle, lying flat, with its apex toward you. It is helpful to develop the feeling that this red triangle embodies the essence of the fire element. To strengthen this, you can imagine flames playing on the mandala's surface. You could even call to mind images of fire: bonfires, volcanoes, etc. and imagine them dissolving into the fire mandala.

As Pandaravasini is also associated with discriminating wisdom, you could also watch the flames dancing on the surface of the mandala, being aware that each one has a unique shape and appearance.

The aim of meditating on the Prajñas is to develop the Five Wisdoms. And this process is only complete when your vision of reality includes all five. The wisdom of equality and the discriminating wisdom are, in a sense, opposites. With discriminating wisdom you see the uniqueness of each experience, you focus on its unrepeatable form and other characteristics. With the wisdom of equality you focus on what that unique phenomenon has in common with every other unique phenomenon, i.e. you reflect on its emptiness of inherent existence. It is very good to practise swapping between these two standpoints, slowly at first and then faster, until it starts to feel as if you are integrating them into one view, one vision of existence.

You can do this on a small scale with the fire mandala. First you watch the flames and reflect how each one is a unique combination of shape and colour, then you reflect that they are all equally of the nature of fire. From this beginning, you can widen out the reflection. You can see that the flames are not just of the nature of fire, they are also empty, arising for an instant in response to a particular set of conditions, then transmuting into something else. And then you can reflect that what applies to flames applies to all people, all phenomena: they are all unique dependent-arising, and they are all empty of inherent existence.

The Crystal Throne

If you wish to include it, Pandaravasini's throne is made of crystal. Sangharakshita links crystal with the third precept – avoiding sexual misconduct and practising contentment. In describing it he talks about how we need to avoid identifying too strongly with our gender. The crystal he has in mind, he says, is clear, pure and transparent, and at most only tinged with pink or blue!

He is also careful to spell out that this state of contentment in which you have largely transcended gender identification cannot be achieved by repression of your sexuality. The way out is the way through. This should be clear from the figure of Pandaravasini, who is not a pale, bloodless creature, but the brilliant red of transformed passion. It is not an easy task, but if we can be ourselves at our most passionate and totally in love with the Dharma then miracles can happen.

The Phoenixes

I was surprised when phoenixes turned up to support Pandaravasini's crystal throne. They are mythical creatures, and I wasn't sure if that was all right. But then I reflected that in the traditional sources Amoghasiddhi's throne is supported by bird-men or *garudas* (great eagle-like horned birds), and you don't find *them* in the ornithology books either. And the more I thought about it the more appropriate the phoenixes seemed.

People these days are most likely to have come across a phoenix by courtesy of JK Rowling, who describes the magical bird Fawkes, in the Harry Potter books. According to legend, the phoenix had gorgeous plumage and lived in Arabia. It was a very long-lived bird, and every five or six hundred years an old phoenix would consume itself by fire. A funeral pyre was set alight by the rays of the sun, the phoenix fanned the fire with its beautiful wings and then allowed the flames to consume it. From the ashes arose a new, young, vigorous phoenix.

Not only is the phoenix associated with the fire element, it also has links to discriminating wisdom. According to fable, there was only ever one phoenix at a time. It was a unique bird. Thus according to my dictionary the term phoenix can also mean 'A person or thing of unique excellence or of matchless beauty'.⁴

In ancient Egypt, the phoenix came to represent the Sun, because it 'dies' at sunset, and is 'reborn' at dawn. The funeral pyre is a potent symbol of spiritual transformation. Padmasambhava, another member of the Lotus Family, is described in his extensive biography as several times being burned on a pyre, and emerging unscathed and more spiritually vigorous than ever.

So, without any conscious thought, I stumbled on an animal for Pandaravasini that embodied fire, spiritual transformation, and discriminating wisdom, as well as having a couple of echoes of Amitabha: longevity (Amitayus, the reflex of Amitabha, is associated with meditations designed to increase your lifespan), and sunset.

In the centre of the fire mandala appears a pale-red lotus flower, on which rests a moon mat. Seated on the moon appears the female Buddha Pandaravasini, 'the White-Robed'. Her body is brilliant red in colour, and she sits in the vajra posture.

In the tradition, Pandaravasini is sometimes a light red, and Sangharakshita describes her in this way. If that is how she appears to you, then that's fine. But I decided to specify that Pandaravasini's body should be brilliant red because her symbolism is about attraction, fascination, and transmuted passion. There is nothing pale about her. She is seated in the vajra posture because of her connection with meditation.

⁴ *Oxford Talking Dictionary.*

She is wearing exquisite clothing, of which at least the upper garment is pure white. As she is called the ‘one in the white robe’ some of her clothing should be white; it is up to you to choose whether all or part of it is.

She is adorned with rubies and other precious things. Rubies are the stones that Sangharakshita associates with the ninth precept: not generating hatred but developing love and compassion. He links the deep red of some rubies with both love and blood – the blood that the Bodhisattva is prepared willingly to shed for the sake of others.

Her hands are at her heart in the anjali mudra. This is a mudra of devotion, reverence and salutation, with the palms together – here at the level of the heart centre - and the fingers pointing upwards. *Anjali* comes from the Sanskrit root *anj*, meaning to honour or celebrate. It is interesting that Pandaravasini, as a fully Enlightened being should be making a gesture of reverence. But it is said that the historical Buddha after his Enlightenment wanted something to which to pay honour. Not seeing any human teacher whom he had not outstripped spiritually, he decided that he could only express devotion to the Dharma, the truth that he had realized. There is a need in the human heart to have someone or something to which to look up. Pandaravasini’s mudra expresses this receptive, loving, devotional attitude.

Over the years I have spent a lot of time, in Dharma study groups and alone, trying out various correlations with the mandala of the Jinas and Prajñas. Sometimes there has been a pleasing rightness about what has emerged from this effort; sometimes most of the correlations work very well but one item is left that does not fit at all, or that needs quite a lot of nudging into place. The five spiritual faculties (Skt: *indriyas*) fall into the second category. This list is a model for a balanced spiritual life, as it has two pairs of qualities: wisdom and faith, energy and concentration, all developed equally. This equal development of all four qualities is achieved through the central quality, mindfulness. So these two pairs with their central quality naturally arrange themselves into a mandala, and seem to cry out to be superimposed onto the mandala of the Prajñas.

Most of the work is quickly done. Akasadhatesvari’s radiant awareness that overcomes ignorance goes well with mindfulness in the centre. Locana, we have seen, embodies the wisdom that overcomes hatred. Although all the Prajñas embody wisdom, she has a special connection with it. And if the East is associated with wisdom, then the West must be associated with faith (Skt: *sraddha*). This works fine, as Amitabha and Pandaravasini embody the heartfelt, passionate, affirming aspects of Dharma practice.

Then we are left with energy (Skt: *virya*) and concentration (Skt: *samadhi*). Energy we can happily assign to Tara, who is tirelessly stepping down into the world to help living beings, and she heads the Karma or Action Family. But then we are left with concentration and Mamaki, and this is where we may have to bend things to fit. The best that I can come up with is that Mamaki belongs to the Jewel Family, and jewels are very concentrated matter, produced deep in the earth’s core under enormous pressure. Also concentration takes you into the dhyanas, which are very beautiful, rich states of consciousness. So there are some links with Mamaki, and I suspect that she adopted her very relaxed posture in the sadhana partly to emphasise that (beyond a basic level) concentration is not a matter of will-power but a gentle harmonising of your energy. However, although this works up to a point, you cannot help feeling that

concentration is actually more of a Lotus Family attribute, as their symbolism is more concerned with meditation.

There is no doubt, though, that the link between Pandaravasini and faith is strong and clear. Craving is the sign of a restless heart, a heart that has found nothing to satisfy it. Faith is the deeply satisfying sense that you have encountered something that you can set your heart upon. Faith in the Dharma carries this feeling to the highest level, you can feel that you have stumbled upon something that will never let you down, that has so much richness and beauty that it takes your breath away. The *anjali* mudra expresses this wondrous feeling.

They hold the stems of two lotuses that blossom at her shoulders. At her right shoulder is a red lotus on which, on a moon mat, is a vase of immortality.

The vase of immortality (Skt: *amrita kalasha*) is a symbol associated with the Lotus Family. It is held by the Buddha Amitayus ('Infinite Life'). Although his meditation is believed to confer longevity, the practice is not about immortality in this body. It is about recognizing the true nature of the mind, which transcends the whole cycle of birth and death. This insight is a little like being deeply absorbed in a film and then the film breaking for a moment and there just being the white light of the projector shining onto the screen. This breaks the spell of the film. You had become so immersed in it that you had forgotten that it wasn't real. Now you are reminded that the film is a temporary illusion, and its true nature is just light-images thrown onto a screen. If you identify with the film, then when one of the characters dies that seems like a real death. When you become aware that it is an image on an unchanging screen then you recognize that no-one has died. This rough metaphor can give you a feeling for what Buddhism means by 'the deathless state'.

At her left shoulder is a pale-blue lotus on which, on a moon mat, is a vajra-bell.

Her two lotuses started off being the same colour, but then changed so that one was red and the other blue. Perhaps this has to do with discriminating wisdom and uniqueness.

On her head is a five-jeweled crown. She has long black hair, some of which is bound up in a topknot, the rest flowing over her shoulders. In front of her topknot sits the deep red Buddha Amitabha. He is seated in the vajra posture. His right hand holds up a red lotus; his left rests in his lap, holding a setting sun.

Amitabha is most often represented with his hands in the mudra of meditation (*dhyana mudra*). However, during his travels in India Sangharakshita had a vision of Amitabha in which he was holding up a lotus, and he introduced this form of visualization into the Order. I have retained the lotus and added the setting sun in his left hand. There are some traditional representations of Buddhas holding a setting sun in this way. Apart from being a reminder of sunset and the West, for me it has a deeper significance. Amitabha holds the setting sun at the level of the navel chakra. In Tibetan yoga the navel chakra is especially associated with the fire element. In the *tummo* practices described in the Six Yogas of Naropa, heat is generated through visualization of a fiery syllable within the central psychic channel at the level of the navel chakra.

Pandaravasini's head and body are surrounded by auras of light. She is very beautiful, smiling at you with infinite loving-kindness.

Loving-kindness (Skt: *maitri*) meditation is often described as the antidote to hatred.

But it also seems to work effectively against craving. Partly this is because it is an emotionally satisfying state, and craving is always searching for some emotional satisfaction. Partly it helps to shift our view - where the object of our craving is a person, we become aware of them as a human being, separate from the role that we want them to play in our own ego drama. Doing this makes it much harder for us to maintain our craving attitude in relation to them.

The Seed-Syllable and Mantra

Pandaravasini's seed-syllable is PAM. The PAM has what is called in Sanskrit a short 'A' - so that it is pronounced like the 'u' in 'but'. Her mantra is OM PADMADEVI PUSHPADEVI PAM SVAHA. 'Devi' can mean a goddess in Sanskrit, but here it means 'queen'. 'Padma' is a lotus, and 'pushpa' is a flower. So the mantra invokes Pandaravasini as 'queen of lotuses, queen of flowers'.

I'm not aware of any direct connection between her and flowers apart from lotuses. These words are just what came when I tuned in to her and asked her what her mantra was. One indirect connection is that most of the Jinas can be linked to archetypal incidents in the inner life of the historical Buddha. When he was preparing to gain Enlightenment and had seated himself under the Bodhi-Tree, some texts describe Mara as launching an all-out assault in an attempt to dislodge him from the Seat of Enlightenment. Mara sent forward a misshapen army, who hurled rocks, boulders and weapons at the Buddha-to-be. But he simply continued with his meditation, and when they touched the aura of deep concentration that surrounded him, all the rocks and weapons turned into flowers and fell at his feet. Among the Jinas, this incident seems to be connected to Amitabha, and by extension Pandaravasini.

The Pandaravasini Puja

The title of this puja – *Speech of Fire* – comes from the Salutation section. Of the five pujas, this is my current favourite, though these things change.

Worship

To Pandaravasini,/ Whose discriminating wisdom/ Sees the uniqueness/ Of every phenomenon,/ I make offerings of infinite variety./

I offer you flowers/ Of scarlet, vermilion and crimson,/ For every subtle shade/ Is sacred to you./

I offer you incense/ Of sandalwood, jasmine and musk,/ For every subtle scent/ Is sacred to you./

I offer you foods/ Spiced, salt and sweet/ For every subtle flavour/ Is sacred to you./

I offer you garments/ Of silk, velvet and lace,/ For touch of every texture/ Is sacred to you./

I offer you music/ Of strings, drums and voice,/ For every single note/ Is sacred to you./

I offer these gifts / With great devotion/ On behalf of all living beings:/ Human and hungry ghost,/ Animal and titan,/ Hell-being and god,/ For every single one/ Is sacred to you./

In this section we make offerings of various kinds of flowers, incense, food, garments, and music to Pandaravasini. These are to delight her five senses (with the beautiful red flowers here being the sight offering). In each verse specific colours, scents, etc. are mentioned because Pandaravasini's wisdom is about the mind's capacity to discriminate and name different phenomena.

I offer these gifts/ With great devotion/ On behalf of all living beings:/ Human and hungry ghost,/ Animal and titan,/ Hell-being and god,/ For every single one/ Is sacred to you. In this last verse, we make the offerings on behalf of all sentient beings, who will all thereby share in the benefits of making offerings to Pandaravasini. The verse names the six kinds of being that are found within the Wheel of Life (Skt: *bhava chakra*), that depicts all the main forms of possible samsaric rebirth. Pandaravasini's compassion embraces every being in all these different realms.

Salutation

Body of fire,/ Transcender of the world,/ Through the flames of meditation/ You have burned away/ All that was subject / To birth and death./ So your body of light/ Is itself a vase of immortality./ Undying love and wisdom/ Of all the Buddhas,/ I pay homage to you./

Speech of fire,/ Namer of the world,/ You bring light to all beings/ Through symbols and doctrines./ Yet you only produce the concept/ 'All living beings'/ In order to love them all./ Perfect communication / Of all the Buddhas,/ Homage to you.

Heart of fire,/ Burning up all craving / With the blissful flames / Of your great love./ Your steeped fingers/ Express your ardent devotion/ For truth itself./ Great heart of all the Buddhas,/ Homage to you./

Mind of fire,/ Knower of the world,/ In the empty crucible/ Of mind's true nature/ You mould each individual moment./ Yet you bring into existence/ Nothing at all./ Pure perception of all the Buddhas,/ Homage to you./

This section praises Pandaravasini's body, speech and mind. Because she is particularly concerned with emotion, it also has a verse in praise of her heart.

Body of fire,/ Transcender of the world,/ Through the flames of meditation/ You have burned away/ All that was subject/ To birth and death./ So your body of light/ Is itself a vase of immortality. - This verse describes a kind of alchemical process. The physical body that is subject to birth and death has been purified and transformed through meditation into a body of light. This may sound like poetry, but there are many Tibetan stories of people who, through Dzogchen meditation, have transformed the elements of the physical body into their subtle essences, thereby attaining a Rainbow Body. There are quite well-attested stories of yogins and yoginis living in secluded retreat whose bodies dwindled and disappeared, leaving only the hair and nails behind.

*Speech of fire/ Namer of the world,/ You bring light to all beings/ Through symbols and doctrines. /Yet you only produce the concept/ 'All living beings'/ In order to love them all. - The Five Jinas especially embody the Five Skandhas or aggregates. Amitabha is concerned with the skandha of perception (Skt: *samjña*). This is the aspect of our mental functioning that is concerned with organising sense-impressions into coherent units that can be assigned meaning. So, for instance, as I look out of my window a mass of visual impressions strikes my retinas. From that mass of impressions I separate out certain colours and shapes and label them 'the alder tree'. This capacity to discriminate and give names to things is a wonderful tool that human beings have developed. However, often we use this tool to gain power over others and to exploit the environment. Also, most of the time we forget that these ways of organising and naming our perceptions are things that we have added on to our experience, and instead we treat them as if they were attributes of the phenomena themselves. The discriminating wisdom is this capacity to organise and name, but used with awareness and placed at the service of the Bodhicitta.*

Thus Pandaravasini, like all of us, is a 'Namer of the world'. She uses her power of conceptualisation to teach the Dharma, and thus to bring light to all beings. But, unlike unenlightened people for whom the traffic of conceptualization rumbles ceaselessly through their minds, her natural mental state is wordless meditation. Thus she uses concepts consciously, producing ideas such as 'all living beings' only in order to embrace them all with her compassion.

*Your steeped fingers/ Express your ardent devotion/ For truth itself. - The 'steeped fingers' of course are in the *anjali* gesture, as she reverences the Dharma.*

In the empty crucible/ Of mind's true nature/ You mould each individual moment./ Yet you bring into existence/ Nothing at all./ - More alchemical imagery here. In this verse Pandaravasini embodies the way in which the mind moulds the raw material of experience. It interprets and labels it. Yet that organising and naming is never the identification of a real object. Everything is always of the nature of emptiness.

Going For Refuge

To you, the white-robed queen,/ Clad in the snow/ Of pure renunciation,/ Clad in the white heat/ Of profound concentration,/ Clad in the white light/ Of ultimate reality,/ To Pandaravasini/ I go always for refuge./

To you, the queen of lotuses,/ Tenderness itself,/ Your heart's eight petals/ Open forever,/ The PAM at its centre/ Radiating infinite light,/ To Pandaravasini/ I go always for refuge./

To you, the queen of rubies,/ Through the alchemy of your love/ You transmute craving into contentment,/ The final fulfilment of all desire./ Now I understand/ That all my longing/ Was for your undying state,/ To Pandaravasini/ I go always for refuge./

Clad in the white light/ Of ultimate reality, - I am stretching a point a little here. The experience of the subtlest levels of consciousness is often described in Buddhist Tantra in terms of light. However, the most subtle level of consciousness is usually described as an experience of 'clear light', rather than white light, which is an earlier stage in the process, a preliminary to the clear light experience.

To you, the queen of lotuses,/ Tenderness itself,/ Your heart's eight petals/ Open forever,/The PAM at its centre/ Radiating infinite light,/ To Pandaravasini/ I go always for refuge. In the sadhana, Pandaravasini is visualized with her seed-syllable PAM at her heart. In Buddhist tantric yoga the heart chakra is visualized with eight petals, or eight branches in the psychic channels.

Now I understand/ That all my longing/ Was for your undying state, - Sangharakshita has said that, in a sense, all craving is what he calls the 'long-circuiting' of the desire for Enlightenment. When we experience Awakening all our desires are satisfied.

Confession of Faults

O Queen of Compassion,/ Going for refuge to you,/ Bathed in your warm red light,/ I become aware/ Of all my faults and failings,/ Of a past filled/ With craving, aversion and stupidity./

Looking back at my life,/ I see that all too often/ I didn't care/ I didn't give/ I didn't try/ I didn't help/ I didn't say/ I didn't love/ I didn't forgive/ I didn't empathise/ I didn't think of the consequences./

All too often/ Without intending it/ I was part of Mara's forces./ Please forgive me/ And help me,/ So that all my negativities/ Fall as flowers at your feet./

Knowing that you will always love,/ May I find it in my heart/ To forgive myself;/ May I find it in my heart/ To make amends/ To those I have hurt/ Or left uncared for;/ May I find it in my heart/ To plunge into the flames/ Of compassion./

And from the ashes of my failings,/ May I be reborn/ On wings of light./

This section is very simple, and there is not much that needs commenting on. Still, I find it the most emotionally affecting section of any of the pujas. Although usually I have no sense of particular faults as I say the words, still it goes very deep.

All too often/ Without intending it/ I was part of Mara's forces./ A reference to the attack by Mara's forces on the Buddha-to-be, as described above.

And from the ashes of my failings,/ May I be reborn/ On wings of light. Of course this is a reference to the phoenix.

Rejoicing In Merits

O queen of flowers,/ I rejoice in your tender heart,/ That cares for all beings,/ Embracing us all/ Like infinite lotuses./

I rejoice in those lotuses/ That are struggling from the mud,/ Called to an unknown destiny./

I rejoice in those lotuses/ That are rising up through the water,/ Drawn by distorted gleams of freedom./

I rejoice in those lotuses/ That have grown into the light,/ Unfolding their petals In the warmth of your love./

O queen of flowers,/ I rejoice in your tender heart,/ That cares for all beings,/ Embracing us all/ Like infinite lotuses. – For me, this has echoes of another incident in the inner story of the historical Buddha's story. Feeling that the effort to attain what he had seen with his Enlightenment went against the grain for human beings, he was doubtful whether it would be worth trying to point out the Path to anyone else. But then Brahma Sahampati encouraged him to teach, and Shakyamuni had a vision of human beings as like a bed of lotuses. Some were lost in the mud, but others were quite developed. This encouraged the Buddha to believe that there would be some people who would be able to understand his message of Awakening.

Entreaty and Supplication

Queen of loving-kindness,/ I entreat you to rescue me./ My craving has me in a strangle-hold./ I am tired of grabbing and grasping,/ Tired of clinging to shadows,/ Tired of clinging to concepts,/ Tired of clinging to disappointment,/ Tired of clinging to suffering,/ Tired of clinging to the wreckage/ Of mundane existence./

In my desperation/ I squeeze the life/ Out of my life./

Queen of egoless passion,/ Please teach me what love really is./ Teach me what happiness really is./ Teach me what life really is./ Please teach me To crave only freedom./

Please teach me to trust/ The Buddha's teaching./ Please teach me/ To open my rigid hands/ And embrace the world./

This section is pretty self-explanatory.

Dedication

Pandaravasini,/ Sunset Queen,/ I offer this worship/ And its merits to you./ May you accept them./

And, if it pleases you,/ May you work magic/ For all sentient beings:/ Red magic,/ Fire magic,/ Flower magic,/ Lotus magic./

By this love magic/ May everything that lives/ Become devoted to you./

By this rite of attraction/ May they all follow/ Your glowing path into the West./

By this rite of fascination/ May they all be drawn/ To the Land of Bliss./

And there may they dwell,/ Eternally free from suffering,/ Spell-bound by the Dharma./

By this rite of attraction/ May they all follow/ Your glowing path into the West./ The Lotus Family is associated in Tantric Buddhism with the rite of attraction or fascination. This is love magic redirected towards the goal of attracting people to the Dharma.

By this rite of fascination/ May they all be drawn/ To the Land of Bliss./ The Land of Bliss is Sukhavati, the Pure Land of the Buddha Amitabha.

CHAPTER 5: TARA – AIR AND ALL-ACCOMPLISHING WISDOM

Tara is a figure who needs no introduction. She is perhaps the best-loved of all the figures in Tibetan Buddhism. When considering her as part of the mandala of the Prajñas, my original thought was that as her iconography was already well-known it would make no sense to change it. But the mandala is an organic whole, and during the process of envisioning the figures, Tara's figure changed slightly in response to the other Prajñas.

In the set of the Five Prajñas it is Tara who is associated with the air element and also with the all-accomplishing wisdom. This wisdom represents the volitional aspect of our experience when it is no longer driven by the ego, but is at the service of the Bodhicitta. So it represents the spontaneous skilful action of the Bodhisattva, which accomplishes all deeds because it is powered by wisdom and limitless compassion.

Elements of the visualization

The Wind Mandala

At the beginning of the sadhana a wind mandala appears out of the blue sky of emptiness. The wind mandala is a flat semi-circle, with its straight edge towards you, like a bow of light. Sometimes the colour of this symbol in Tantric Buddhist meditation is blue, sometimes green. Here it is light-green. In its corners are two fluttering banners. Like the other element mandalas, you need to feel that it embodies the qualities of the air element, especially the restless, constant movement of the wind.

The Emerald Throne

If you decide to put her on a throne, then Tara's is made of emerald. This is the precious stone that Sangharakshita associates with the eighth precept: giving up covetousness for tranquillity. He says that its deep green is a cooling soothing colour, suitable to represent the state of mind in which the fever of covetousness has died away. He also links it to the green of dense vegetation, which has a calming effect on the mind.

The Cobras

Supporting Tara's throne are cobras. As with the other animals, the cobras turned up of their own accord, but I can make a case for them being there. Tara is a figure who is known for her compassionate activity in rescuing beings from both spiritual and mundane dangers. One list of these is called the Eight Great Terrors, and one of these eight is the fear of danger from snakes. So Tara has overcome the cobras, and they now support her throne.

The Eight Great Terrors can be understood both literally and symbolically, as eight negative states to be overcome. In a song to Tara, the First Dalai Lama writes:

*Attached to its dark hole of ignorance,
It cannot bear seeing the wealth and excellence of others,
But quickly fills them with its vicious poison,*

*The Snake of Envy – save us from this fear!*⁵

Envy is the mental poison particularly associated with the Karma Family of Amoghasiddhi and Tara, so it is appropriate to have snakes supporting her throne. (Again we have animals that have links with two elements, for although they seem quite earth-bound, cobras rise up into the air when threatened, raising their hoods.)

There is a further connection. In the ‘inner story’ of the Enlightenment, the Buddha is described as sitting under the Bodhi-Tree, having gained Awakening, absorbing this tremendous event. As he sits there a great rain storm begins. The king of snakes, Mucalinda, comes and wraps his coils seven times around his body, and extends his cobra’s hood over him to protect him from the rain. When the rain has finished, Mucalinda transforms into a young prince and pays homage to the Buddha. Some commentators read this event as connected with Tantric Yoga. (In Hindu Tantra the psychic force called the Kundalini, known as the Serpent Power, is awakened through yogic exercises and rises up from the Root Chakra at the base of the spine opening all the chakras until it reaches the Crown Chakra.) I link this incident with Amoghasiddhi, who is also associated with the Root Chakra in some Buddhist Tantras such as the *Guhyasamaja*. On some Buddhist stupas the figure of Amoghasiddhi, who is looking out towards the northern direction, is represented with a snake or snakes rising up over his crown as in the Mucalinda story.

So Tara is linked by the cobras to the Buddha’s assimilation of the tremendous energy released by his Enlightenment experience. Perhaps, too, only a being of Tara’s unswerving compassion could transform the venom of envy – that foul concoction of craving and hatred – into energy that can fuel us on the path to Awakening.

Seated on the moon appears the female Buddha, Tara. Her body is green in colour. She sits with her left leg drawn up in meditation posture, and her right leg extended, the foot resting on another small pale-blue lotus and moon mat. In all these details the figure of Tara is as commonly depicted. Her extended right leg represents her compassionate activity, being prepared to step down into the world to come to the aid of living beings.

She is dressed in exquisite clothing, and is adorned with silver and other precious things. Silver is the precious metal that Sangharakshita associates with the Sixth Precept – working to avoid frivolous or useless speech and to practise meaningful communication. Like gold, it is a medium of exchange. It is ductile, and can take many forms, just as there are many ways of communicating the Dharma. But, as he points out, it is also liable to tarnish, just as our communication, even about the Dharma, can lose its shine unless, as he also mentions, it is burnished by insight into the true nature of things. Tara steps down into the world in order to communicate with living beings, finding apt and appropriate ways of putting across the Dharma so that they can find true meaning in their lives.

For me, gold and silver have symbolic associations with the sun and moon. As Tara’s time in the Prajña mandala is midnight, she becomes something of a moon goddess, so silver seems appropriate to that.

⁵ tr. Martin Willson in *In Praise of Tara*.

Her right hand is at her right knee, palm turned outwards, in the mudra of supreme giving, holding a crossed vajra.

This is the *varada* gesture that one commonly sees Tara making. However, in this form she is holding, by pressing her thumb against its hub, a double vajra (Skt: *vishva vajra*). The double vajra is an emblem of the Karma Family of Amoghasiddhi and Tara. Amoghasiddhi is often depicted holding it. It consists of two vajras with a common hub, so that they form a cross shape. It is a very powerful symbol indeed, with all the symbolism of the vajra reinforced. The crossed vajras make a very stable shape. Often they are represented underneath a mandala or imagined world of a tantric figure, giving a firm foundation on which the whole structure is built up.

Her left hand is in front of her heart, ringing a silver vajra-bell.

This is an innovation, as usually Tara holds the stem of a spray of lotuses in her left hand. However, as I kept contemplating the mandala, she began to ring the vajra bell. She is associated with the air element, and air is the medium through which sound travels. Also the Karma Family is the Action Family. It emphasises activity, particularly skilful means. So it feels right for Tara to be ringing the bell, actively rousing living beings from the sleep of ignorance. The Action Family is also associated with the union of opposites, and the clapper sounding against the sides of the bell suggests if not a union of opposites at least a rapid alternation between them which links them together.

On her head is a five-jeweled crown. She has long black hair, some of which is bound up into a topknot, the rest flowing over her shoulders. In front of her topknot sits the deep green Buddha, Amoghasiddhi. He is seated in the vajra posture. His right hand is in the abhaya mudra; his left rests in his lap, holding a crescent moon.

Amoghasiddhi is very often shown in the vajra posture and making the *abhaya* gesture of total fearlessness. So all that is traditional, but the crescent moon is not. I have explained above why Tara has something of the Moon Goddess about her. Amoghasiddhi's time of day is also midnight, which puts him into the realm of the moon. And perhaps the crescent moon carries some echo of the Horned God of pagan tradition.

Tara's head and body are surrounded by auras of light. She is young, beautiful, and smiling compassionately.

Tara's compassion is emphasised as this is her central quality, which has endeared her to generations of Buddhists. When you imagine her you should feel, as with all the Prajñas, that she is aware of you personally, that you are embraced by her compassionate awareness.

The Seed-Syllable and Mantra

Tara's seed syllable is TAM. It has a long 'A' - so that it is pronounced like the 'a' in 'cart'. I briefly flirted with the idea of seeing if she would have a different mantra when she appeared in the mandala of the Prajñas. But I soon decided that you cannot improve on perfection, and that her ten-syllable mantra OM TARE TUTTARE TURE SVAHA would do just fine. The mantra plays on Tara's name. Again, the words that do so all have the vocative -e ending, meaning that you are invoking Tara.

The Tara Puja

This puja is called *Midnight Star* from a phrase in the Salutation section. ‘Star’ is a (very secondary) meaning of the word ‘Tara’.

Worship

Heart of compassion,/ For whom no thought of self/ Could ever arise,/ Committed to the welfare of the world,/ You encourage your devotees/ To express their love for you/By serving all beings./

So, out of devotion to you,/ I offer to all beings/ The fruits of your heart:/ To each individual being/ I give without end/ Cool lakes and rivers/ So they may bathe in your compassion;/ Sweet food and drink/ So they may feast on your compassion;/ The sun, moon and stars/ So they may be lit by your compassion;/ Rich breezes, full of perfume and flower scents/ So they may breathe your compassion;/ Music of birds and instruments/ So their minds may be filled with your compassion.

Included in these offerings, explicitly or implicitly, are the seven offerings to the honoured guest. (The lights are represented by the sun, moon and stars!)

Salutation

Midnight star,/ Lighting up the northern sky,/ With the brilliance of your love,/ You who are worshipped/ Even by the loving gods,/ To Tara I pay homage./

Sweet breath of all the Buddhas,/ Perfuming the world/ With the scent of your compassion,/ You who are worshipped/ Even by the compassionate gods,/ To Tara I pay homage./

Great archer of the Sugatas,/ Striking down the Hydra-heads of jealousy/ With the unfailing arrows/ Of your sympathetic joy,/ You who are worshipped/ Even by the joyful gods,/ To Tara I pay homage./

Victory banner of the supreme Dharma,/ Raised standard of the Victorious Ones,/ Planted in the firm soil of equanimity,/ You who are worshipped/ Even by the equanimous gods,/ To Tara I pay homage./

Midnight star,/ Lighting up the northern sky,/ With the brilliance of your love,/ As we have seen, a minor meaning of ‘Tara’ is ‘star’. Through her place in the mandala she is associated with midnight, and with the north.

You who are worshipped/ Even by the loving gods,/ To Tara I pay homage.

The Buddhist worldview includes various beings who dwell in higher and more blissful states of consciousness. These are called *devas* or *devis* and *Brahmas* – the Brahmas inhabiting superior planes of existence to the *devas* and *devis*. The word ‘god’ tends to be used in English to translate both types of being. There is no suggestion that any of these higher beings are creators of the universe – indeed this idea is satirised in some of the Buddhist texts. Also these gods are understood still to dwell within the wheel of *samsara*. Thus, although they are said to be very long-lived

by human standards, once the power of the positive volitions that caused them to become gods has been exhausted, they fall back into lower realms of existence. This is part of the reason why I describe them as worshipping Tara – she has the understanding of the nature of existence and of the mind that enables her to go beyond *samsara* altogether. The power of this insight also means that she can generate much more loving states than the gods. They are still trapped in subtle dualistic thinking, seeing others as separate to them. Tara has torn apart the paper prison of wrong views that give the illusion of isolation from the rest of life. So her heart is open to all beings as not finally separate from herself.

Great archer of the Sugatas,/ Striking down the Hydra-heads of jealousy/ With the unerring arrows/ Of your sympathetic joy,...- Although the well-known Green and White forms of Tara are represented as peaceful and loving, among the twenty-one forms of Tara are many that take on a more wrathful and threatening appearance in order to overcome obstacles to Enlightenment. Here Tara is pictured as an expert archer. There are a couple of links between her and archery. The first one is through the air element. The hemisphere of the air mandala is sometimes described as bow-shaped, and the arrow is an airborne projectile, in earlier times fletched primarily with the feathers of such birds as eagle, crow, goose or turkey (although inevitably these days some have vanes made of plastic).

The second link is the connection with Kurukulla, who is sometimes considered to be a form of Tara. She is a red dakini figure, naked and dancing, whose emblem is a bow and arrow made of flowers. However, Kurukulla is particularly associated with drawing people to the Dharma, so in that respect she has more in common with Pandaravasini and her rite of fascination.

The ‘Sugatas’ are the Buddhas. ‘Sugata’ is a title meaning something like ‘the one who has gone well’ – the suggestion being that the Buddha has gone from *samsara* to *nirvana*.

The Hydra is a nine-headed monster in Greek mythology. It was killed by Hercules as the second of his Twelve Labours. Jealousy is pictured here as having multiple heads because once it has gained a foothold in your mind suspicions and comparing thoughts keep springing up.

Tara overcomes jealousy with sympathetic joy (Skt: *mudita*). Appreciating the good qualities of someone of whom you feel jealous gradually antidotes that very painful and poisonous mental state.

Victory banner of the supreme Dharma,/ Raised standard of the Victorious Ones,...
The victory banner (Skt: *dhvaja*) is an emblem that you often see in Tibetan Buddhism. It symbolises the victory of the Buddha’s teaching over hindering forces. The Tibetan Buddhist version is usually set on a cylindrical frame, with layers of silk and other things draped upon it.

Planted in the firm soil of equanimity,/ You who are worshipped/ Even by the equanimous gods,/ To Tara I pay homage.

In the course of these four verses, we pay homage to Tara for her love, compassion, her capacity to rejoice in others' happiness, and her equanimity. These four positive emotions form a well-known set in Buddhism. They are sometimes known as the Four Immeasurables because there is no limit to the extent to which they can be cultivated. They are also known as the Four Divine Abodes (Skt: *Brahma Vihara*), because when you develop them very fully they lead into the kinds of radiant mental state in which the gods dwell. Tara embodies all of them to an unimaginable extent.

Going For Refuge

Mysterious Queen,/ In the deep midnight of despair,/ When there is no safety,/ No clarity,/ No certainty,/ You appear./

With your gift-bestowing hand/ You hold the double vajra/ In which all opposites unite./

May I accept the wisdom that you offer,/ See beyond the prison of duality,/ And emulate your still activity./

Where samsara and nirvana/ Fuse and disappear/ There I go for refuge./

Where birth and death/ Fuse and disappear/ There I go for refuge./

Where wisdom and compassion/ Fuse and appear everywhere/ There I go for refuge./

With your gift-bestowing hand/ You hold the double vajra/ In which all opposites unite./ - Tara holds the double vajra in her right hand, which is in the *mudra* of supreme giving. In a way, the double vajra embodies the wisdoms of the three previous Prajñas. It has the 'as it is' quality of the mirror-like wisdom. Its hub fuses together all differences into the wisdom of equality. And its spokes reaching out into the different directions suggest the uniqueness of the discriminating wisdom.

May I accept the wisdom that you offer,/ See beyond the prison of duality,/ And emulate your still activity. - Here we have the kind of paradox which is a feature of the Karma Family of Tara and Amoghasiddhi. Tara is both active and still at the same time. She never ceases working for the benefit of living beings, but she never leaves the state of meditation. This is symbolised by her posture – actively stepping down with her right leg whilst her left remains relaxed in meditation posture.

Where samsara and nirvana/ Fuse and disappear/ There I go for refuge. - The double vajra suggests the union of opposites. Opposites are conceptual constructions that depend upon one another for their existence. 'Up' only makes sense in relation to 'down'; 'ugliness' has no meaning unless you have some sense of 'beauty'. With Enlightenment all these conceptual structures fall away. Then there is no *samsara* to escape from, and no farther shore of *nirvana* to attain. It is this state that is a true Refuge.

Where life and death/ Fuse and disappear/ There I go for refuge. - Life and death are a further set of conceptual distinctions, a double act whose two partners could never make it on their own. When you experience the true nature of the mind you see that it

is beyond the cycle of birth and death. It is this true nature, to which all Buddhist teachings point, which is a Refuge.

Where wisdom and compassion/ Fuse and appear everywhere/ There I go for refuge.
The Dharma is sometimes mistakenly understood to be nihilistic. The previous two verses have focused on what vanishes with Awakening. In case there could be any misunderstanding, in this last verse the sun comes out. Wisdom and compassion pour, as it were, in all directions from the hub of the double vajra. They are fused in one state of mind, that experiences at the same time both the emptiness of inherent existence of all experience, and a profound love for all these empty phenomena.

Confession of Faults

Fearless lady, powerful queen,/ You who save beings/ From the Eight Great Terrors,/ Please rescue me/ From the thousand and eight/ / Fears and anxieties/ That possess my mind./

Before you I confess/ To all the commonplace worries and anxieties/ That fill my day,/ So that I rarely take/ An easy breath:/ The fear that stops me trying,/ The fear that creates a façade,/ The fear of being with others,/ The fear of being alone,/ The fear that makes me harsh, tight, and unkind,/ The fear of not getting what I want/ That makes me grabbing and self-concerned./

Before you I confess/ The deep fears:/ Fear of madness,/ Fear of death,/ Fear of life,/ Fear of anything/ Beyond the tortoise shell/ Of my own ego./

Before you I confess/ Most of all/ The fears that hold me back/ From giving myself to the Dharma:/ Fear of commitment to the Path,/ Fear of change,/ Fear of renunciation,/ Fear of generosity,/ Fear of courage,/ Fear of going deeper,/ Fear of freedom,/ Fear of wisdom,/ Fear of devoting myself to all beings./

These fears did not arise by themselves,/ They stem from a million choices and acts/ In many lives –/ Choosing unawareness,/ Choosing lack of courage,/ Choosing to bury my head in samsara./

Please forgive me,/ And help me/ To lay these fears at your feet./ May you pacify them all./

O loving Tara,/ Please take my shaking hand in yours,/ And gently form it/ Into the mudra of fearlessness./

Fearless lady, powerful queen,/ You who save beings/ From the Eight Great Terrors,/ Of wild beasts, robbers, and so forth,/ Please rescue me/ From the thousand and eight/ Fears and anxieties/ That possess my mind. - Although Tara's Karma Family is associated with envy in the mandala of the Five Buddhas, as a westerner I find it strange that fear is not included in the Buddhist list of the five main negative mental states. Of course it is a form of aversion, but hiding fear away in the same box as hatred does not seem enough when it figures so largely in many people's lives. In fact, traditional Buddhism does not seem to address fear as much as I for one would

expect. The Buddha describes working with fear before his Enlightenment by carrying on doing whatever he was doing when it came upon him. But one looks for more advice than that. Fear is addressed more in some Tibetan Buddhist texts. A prime example of this is the *Bardo Thödol* – the so-called *Tibetan Book of the Dead* - in which the consciousness after death is represented as becoming afraid of the brilliance of reality and continuing to ‘run away’ from it until eventually it finds a way of organising itself which enables it to feel secure. From this viewpoint we were born as human beings because our human faculties and consciousness enabled us to keep the nature of reality at a comfortable distance.

Bearing the above in mind, I decided to make much of the connections between Tara and Amoghasiddhi and fearlessness. As we’ve seen, Tara rescues from the Eight Great Terrors, and Amoghasiddhi’s main gesture is one of bestowing fearlessness. As fear holds us back in so many ways from experiencing Enlightenment it is good to purify your mind of it by confessions like the one in this section.

Before you I confess/ Most of all/ The fears that hold me back/ From giving myself to the Dharma:/ Fear of commitment to the Path,/ Fear of change,/ Fear of renunciation,/ Fear of generosity,/ Fear of courage,/ Fear of going deeper,/ Fear of freedom,/ Fear of wisdom,/ Fear of devoting myself to all beings. - If it seems odd or unnecessary for you to be confessing to the fears in this verse then either: (a) you are still in the paddling pool of the spiritual life and haven’t got up the deep end yet; or (b) You’re an advanced Bodhisattva!

These fears did not arise by themselves,/ They stem from a million choices and acts/ In many lives –/ Choosing unawareness,/ Choosing lack of courage,/ Choosing to bury my head in samsara./ - This verse is a reflection on the basic Buddhist doctrine of *karma*. According to this, our current mental states are the product of past conditions, and in particular of how we chose to use our minds in the past. So if we are experiencing fear in this life we can assume, if we take the traditional Buddhist point of view, that it is the product of burying our head in the sand and not facing situations in previous lives. Of course there is no way of proving the existence of past lives and many Buddhists in the West are agnostic about this part of Buddhist teaching. However, particularly as you get older, it becomes easy to see how the ways in which you have used your mind in this life have conditioned it and become habitual.

O loving Tara,/ Please take my shaking hand in yours,/ And gently form it/ Into the mudra of fearlessness. - This mudra of fearlessness (Skt: *abhaya*) is the powerful gesture made by Amoghasiddhi’s right hand. So there is a suggestion that we are asking Tara not just to make us fearless but to raise us to the level of a Buddha and her close companion.

Rejoicing In Merits

O joyful Tara/ Titans rejoice in their own conquests,/ Their one source of happiness is themselves;/ You rejoice in the good deeds of all beings,/ So you have infinite sources of delight./

*Fearlessly and free from envy/ I rejoice in the achievements/ Of all those who bring
Beauty, peace and courage/ To the world./*

*Fearlessly and free from envy/ I rejoice in the spiritual heroes and heroines,/ Those
victorious ones/ Who conquer self-conceit./*

*Fearlessly and free from envy/ I rejoice in you,/ The emerald goddess,/ And in your
endless selfless activity/ That accomplishes all deeds./*

*Fearlessly and free from envy/ I rejoice in your intimate care for the world,/ So that
every leaf,/ Every blade of grass,/ Is soaked with the green/ Of your compassion./*

This section is pretty straightforward. The titans (Skt: *asuras*) referred to in the first verse are powerful beings, described in some Buddhist texts as constantly warring with the gods. As well as using and abusing power in order to manipulate things to their own ends, they are portrayed as jealous of the gods. This jealousy links them with the Karma Family of Tara and Amoghasiddhi. The fourth verse celebrates Tara's all-accomplishing wisdom. The verses reiterate *Fearlessly and free from envy...* because fear and envy will block any real rejoicing in merits. The fear in this case is often that if we rejoice in others then we shall feel badly about ourselves in comparison. But this fear is unfounded. When we genuinely appreciate others we find that we feel better about ourselves.

Entreaty and Supplication

*Love travels faster than sound,/ Swifter than light,/ It traverses the galaxy/ In a
moment./ O Queen of Great Compassion,/ Wherever your love is needed / It is
instantly there./*

*Caught in the hurricane of suffering/ Its winds tearing/ At my body and mind,/ I
have only to call your name:/ Tara, Tara, Tara!/ And the gales of longing and fear/
Are pacified./*

*Who could have imagined/ That those two tiny syllables/ Could contain so much love
– /Tender love,/ Fearless love,/ The love of all the Buddhas./*

*May I and all beings/ Always call on you:/ Tara, Tara, Tara!/ And in response/ May
you shower the Dharma/ Of your great love/ Instantly/ Upon us all./*

First verse - Many people will read this verse as a flight of poetic fancy, but I believe that there is literal truth in it. Although separated by physical distance and physical bodies, mentally we are all interrelated. When you make a mental picture of someone, or remember their voice or their touch, and send them your love, it links you with them mentally and has an effect upon them. Of course there is no way to prove this scientifically, but I and people I know have had so many experiences of picking up on someone sending *metta* to us that I for one am convinced that it is a fact.

It can be helpful, and sometimes sobering, to reflect that what we do in the supposed privacy of our own mind actually has big effects. Not only does it condition our

consciousness and affect our future mental states, but also when we think of other people, positively or negatively, that ‘broadcasts’ on a subtle level to them.

Second verse - Naturally the imagery in this verse derives from Tara’s association with the air element. It also suggests that Tara can help us to find a refuge from the Eight Worldly Winds. By invoking her we focus our minds on something beyond our wearisome efforts to avoid pain, loss, blame, and notoriety, and our exhausting chase after mundane happiness, gain, praise, and fame.

Dedication

May the merits of this praise/ Ring out like a vajra bell,/ Playing always Tara’s name,/ The gentle heartbeat of compassion./

Vajra bell of Tara’s love,/ Echoing through time and space,/ May your sounding never cease/ Its voyage out beyond the stars./

Vajra bell of Tara’s love,/ Rescuing beings in every realm,/ May your sounding never cease/ Until all suffering has gone./

Vajra bell of Tara’s love,/ Ringing gently in my heart,/ May your sounding never cease/ Till you and I/ Are one at last./

This last section focuses on the most distinctive aspect of the form of Tara in this mandala – her ringing the vajra bell. The last verse hints at the realization that Tara is not some figure completely external to us, although to start with we may relate to her in that way. As time goes on we shall see that she personifies the potential for wisdom and compassion in our own heart. When we actualize that potential, we shall be one with Tara, and all the Buddhas.

CHAPTER 6: AKASADHATESVARI – SPACE AND THE DHARMADHATU WISDOM

At last we come to the centre of the mandala. In doing so we are coming to the hub, the core, of the mind. Yet when we arrive at that point we find Akasadhatesvari, who embodies infinite space. It is as if when we reach the centre of the mandala we are pointed at the central truth that Buddhism sees everywhere: that nothing has any fixed core, or unchanging nature, everything is spacious and in process of transformation into something else. Coming to the centre of the mandala is like a nineteenth-century scientist thinking that in the atom they have found the solid building block of the universe, and then discovering that atoms too are almost entirely made up of empty space and charges of energy. The search for solidity, for a core, is a fruitless one.

Akasadhatesvari's consort is Vairocana. His name means 'the illuminator', so together they stand in the same relationship to one another as the Sun and the seemingly endless space through which its light travels.

There is some confusion about the correct spelling of this Prajña's name. Akasadhatesvari is commonly found in the FWBO. It is the spelling normally used by both Sangharakshita and Lama Govinda, but neither of them studied Sanskrit at any depth. The name is made up of 'akasha' which means something like 'inner space'; 'dhatu' which means a 'sphere' or 'realm'; and 'isvari' which has connotations of sovereignty, and could be translated as 'lady' (thinking of it more as the counterpart of 'lord' than of 'gentleman'). There are complex rules for combining words in Sanskrit, but using the correct elision of 'dhatu' and 'isvari' gives Akasadhatvisvari. However, I have decided to stay with the form that Sangharakshita generally uses⁶, not from any feeling of 'my teacher right or wrong', but simply because it is the form that is well-known in the FWBO, and it is simpler to pronounce than the 'dhatvisvari' form. (She and Pandaravasini both have names that newcomers can have trouble remembering and pronouncing. For them the names either need to be translated, or we need to start calling them Akasa and Pandara for short.)

The space element (Skt: *akasa*) with which Akasadhatesvari is associated is not outer Newtonian space. It is 'inner space' – the mental space in which you can picture a garden or visualize the New York skyline. You could call it 'imaginal space'.

Her wisdom is the wisdom of the Dharmadhatu. As we've seen, 'dhatu' means a sphere or realm, so the Dharmadhatu is something like 'the realm of truth' or 'the sphere of reality'. This wisdom encompasses all the other four.

The Flaming Drop

In the sadhana, out of the blue sky in front of you appears a blue flaming drop. I had some trouble with this flaming drop, for three reasons. Firstly, I started without it. Visualizing the blue sky seemed to be sufficient to put you in touch with the space element, why did we need the drop? But then Sacchanama, who was test-driving the sadhanas, felt it would be good to include it. In each of the other four sadhanas a

⁶ When his Tantric series of lectures was edited into book form as *Creative Symbols of Tantric Buddhism*, Sangharakshita decided to adopt the correct Sanskrit spelling.

symbol for the element had appeared, and he found the drop a positive and helpful symbol of the space element. He was familiar with the Stupa Visualization Practice, in which symbols for the elements are arranged one on top of another to build up a meditation object that helps suggest to the mind a progressive refinement of energy (water being more refined than earth; fire more refined than water; etc.). In the Stupa Visualization the drop appears at the summit of the arrangement of the elements. It did seem to make a certain sense to include the drop in the sadhana here, giving a greater symmetry with the others in the set.

Having decided to include it, I bumped into my second problem, what should the drop look like? Sangharakshita gives at least three descriptions of the Stupa Visualization Practice in his lectures, and his descriptions of the drop differ. Kamalashila, in his book on meditation, says that at the top of the stupa we are to imagine 'an iridescent `jewel drop', scintillating with all the colours of the rainbow'. Lama Govinda describes the drop as blue and flaming. In the end I went with Lama Govinda in my description, but if you want to see it as an iridescent jewel drop that is fine too.

My third problem was what happens if you go on to visualize the throne, lotus, etc. It was quite natural for such things to appear on or out of the other element mandalas. But that procedure does not work in this case, unless the drop is made very large which doesn't seem right to me somehow. So rather than trying to perch a throne or a large lotus on the drop, it seems simplest for the drop to transform into whatever you visualize next.

The Opal Throne

If you want to see the throne, then it is made of opal. There are many kinds of opal, and Sangharakshita says that he is thinking of what is called precious or noble opal when he connects it with the Seventh Precept. This precept (sometimes listed sixth in some versions of the ten skilful actions) is about avoiding backbiting or slanderous speech and communicating in a way that promotes harmony. Sangharakshita says that noble or precious opal brings all the colours of the rainbow together in a single gem, which makes it a fitting symbol for harmony and harmonizing speech.

It seems appropriate for Akasadhatesvari because she is the central Prajñā, who embodies and harmonizes the qualities of all of them. Also, as we shall see, she is very much concerned with communicating the Dharma, and it is the deep truths of the Dharma which are the best basis for human beings to come into true harmony with one another.

The Lionesses

Vairocana's animal is the lion, and if the lion is 'the king of beasts' then the lioness is the queen. Male lions may be up to 50% larger, but it is the females who do the work, almost exclusively tracking and killing prey. The male lions then use their superior size to muscle in on the ensuing dinner party. But I must admit that lionesses don't have much to do with space, apart from liking open savannah as a habitat.

Perhaps the main reason why we find lionesses at the centre of the Prajñā mandala is that Vairocana and Akasadhatesvari are concerned with teaching the Dharma. The historical Buddha's teaching, confidently proclaiming the truth of things, is often referred to as his lion's roar (Skt: *sinha nada*). It is said that when the lion roars all

other animals fall silent. And indeed it is a very powerful sound that can sometimes be heard over five miles away. So when Akasadhatesvari proclaims the Dharma, the sound may not literally be loud, but its deep truth echoes and re-echoes within the inner space of our mind, and all the voices that call us to avoid, to cover up, to cut corners, to ignore that deep truth in ourselves, fall silent.

Akasadhatesvari is brilliant white in colour.

Just as white light is composed of a whole spectrum of colours, so Akasadhatesvari embodies the whole spectrum of wisdom, especially the Five Wisdoms.

She sits with her legs crossed in the vajra posture.

Akasadhatesvari is at the centre of the two axes of the mandala. If we look at the east-west axis we see Locana and Pandaravasini in the vajra posture, emphasising meditation. On the north-south axis are Tara and Mamaki whose postures are more active and more relaxed respectively. Akasadhatesvari is once more in meditation posture, which has been the common posture in which Buddhas have been represented since the earliest times when they began to be depicted. (In very early Buddhism the Buddha's figure was never shown, but represented by an emblem such as his footprint.) This does not mean that Akasadhatesvari is emphasising meditation over activity. She is engaged in the activity of teaching the Dharma. Her vajra posture emphasises that her Dharma teaching comes out of deep meditative states.

She is wearing exquisite clothing, and has adornments of sapphire and other precious things.

Sangharakshita relates sapphire to the last of the Ten Precepts, which is about avoiding wrong views and developing wisdom. He compares the deep blue of sapphire to the colour of the unclouded sky, with which wisdom is often associated in Buddhism.

Her hands are at her heart, in the mudra of turning the Wheel of the Dharma.

In this mudra of teaching, her hands are at the level of her heart centre. For each hand, the thumb and forefinger is touching, while the other three fingers point straight upwards. The palm of her right hand is facing away from her; the palm of her left hand towards her.

Between the thumb and forefinger of her right hand she holds the stem of a pale-blue lotus that blossoms at her right shoulder. On the lotus is a white moon mat, on which stands a golden Dharmachakra.

The pale-blue lotus is sometimes associated with Tara, but it is also an emblem of Prajñāparamita, the goddess who embodies the teaching of the Perfection of Wisdom. It is not surprising that there should be some similarities between the iconography of Akasadhatesvari and Prajñāparamita. They both particularly embody the wisdom aspect of Enlightenment; they are both associated with the spacious emptiness of *shunyata*; and they both have some solar symbolism.

The Wheel of the Dharma (Skt: *Dharmachakra*) is a symbol for the Buddhist teaching. It is often represented as having eight spokes, symbolising the Noble Eightfold Path.

Her left hand also holds the stem of a pale-blue lotus between her thumb and forefinger. This lotus blossoms at her left shoulder, supporting a moon mat, on which stands a silver vajra-bell.

Like all the Prajñas, Akasadhatesvari has the silver vajra-bell of wisdom, here embodying her wisdom of the Dharmadhatu.

*On her head is a five-jeweled crown. She has long black hair, some of which is bound up into a topknot, the rest flowing over her shoulders. – In his lecture on *The Five Buddhas, 'Male' and 'Female'*, Sangharakshita describes Akasadhatesvari as 'represented in dakini form, with loose flowing garments and long dishevelled hair'.⁷ However, none of the few pictures I have seen of the Female Buddhas show her in this form. I therefore decided to keep her appearance in accord with the other four Prajñas. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, she does let her hair down and appear in dakini form in the Thirteenth Sadhana.*

In front of her topknot sits the brilliant white Buddha Vairocana. He is seated in the vajra posture. His hands rest in his lap in dhyana mudra, holding a golden sun. Vairocana is usually represented holding a golden Dharmachakra. The Dharmachakra is clearly a solar symbol, and here it has transformed into the sun – not the setting sun of Amitabha but a brilliant golden orb. Perhaps it hints at the orb that many monarchs used to have as part of their regalia, and therefore at his sovereignty over the spiritual universe. Usually his hands are in the mudra of turning the Dharma Wheel, but here they are in the *dhyana* mudra of meditation.

Akasadhatesvari's head and body are surrounded by auras of light. She is regal, intensely beautiful, serene and smiling.

For me her serene smile has a radiant quality, as if somehow the smile were filling the space around her. Serenity is a quality of Akasadhatesvari. Her Buddha Family is associated with the tantric rituals of pacification, in which the energy of obstacles and hindrances is calmed and stilled.

The Seed Syllable and Mantra

Akasadhatesvari's seed-syllable is AM. The AM here has a short 'a', so it is not pronounced as in 'I am', but more like the 'u' in 'drum'

Her mantra in this practice is OM SARVA BUDDHA JÑANA AM SVAHA. 'Sarva' means 'all'; 'jñana' is 'wisdom' or 'knowledge'. So the mantra invokes Akasadhatesvari as the embodiment of the wisdom and knowledge of all the Buddhas. She especially embodies all the Five Wisdoms of the five Buddha families.

The Akasadhatesvari Puja

This puja, the last of the five to be written, is a little simpler and more wisdom-oriented than some of the others. Those qualities feel appropriate for this pure white figure. As she embodies space, it would not have been right to have produced something very wordy.

Worship

⁷ See *Creative Symbols of Tantric Buddhism*, Windhorse Publications, Birmingham, 2002, p. 194.

*I worship the Buddhas/ In all the directions of space,/ So how much more must I
worship you,/ Akasadhatesvari,/ The shining space in which all Buddhas appear?/*

*Your space is not the dark aloneness/ That separates the galaxies,/ But the live and
vibrant/ Sphere of light/ Of consciousness itself./*

*Boundless Queen,/ Your mind perceives/ The true nature of all things./ So to delight
your mind/ I conjure from space/ The flowers of emptiness/ The perfume of emptiness/
The light of emptiness/ The waters of emptiness/ The music of emptiness./*

*These mind-made treasures fill the sky,/ Above, below,/ On every side,/ Countless,
limitless as space./ In this way I offer you to yourself:/ Vastness to vastness./ Beauty to
beauty,/ Emptiness to emptiness./*

*I worship the Buddhas/ In all the directions of space,/ So how much more must I
worship you,/ Akasadhatesvari,/ The shining space in which all Buddhas appear?/*
As space is a symbol for emptiness of inherent existence in Tantric Buddhism, this
verse works on two levels. On one level, Akasadhatesvari represents the imaginal
space of the mind within which the figures of archetypal Buddhas are visualized and
worshipped. On another level she represents the *shunyata* nature of everything. As
everything lacks any core, any fixed existence, it is all process. If things had a fixed,
unchanging nature they could never fully transform into something else. A caterpillar
could not become a butterfly, and an unenlightened human being could never
transform themselves into a Buddha. So it is this open-ended, space-like quality of
phenomena that allows Buddhas to appear.

*Your space is not the dark aloneness/ That separates the galaxies,/ But the live and
vibrant/ Sphere of light/ Of consciousness itself.* - As we have seen, *akasa* is the ‘inner
space’ of the mind. If you think about it, we are always experiencing the reaction of
our organism to some catalyst or other. So, even if you are contemplating the infinite
darkness of space, what you are experiencing is the alive response of you as a living
organism to that stimulus. The Yogachara School of Mahayana Buddhism particularly
explores this idea. I find it helpful to bring it to mind in unnatural environments when
I am surrounded by so-called ‘dead matter’. We can never know such things as
concrete or plastic as they are in themselves, all we can know is the effects that they
produce through their impact on our eyes, our breathing, the tension of our muscles,
and our state of mind. So we never experience anything dead; we only experience the
alive response of our organism to what we interpret as ‘inanimate objects’.

‘Sphere’ here means ‘realm’. Consciousness is often referred to in Buddhist texts as
radiant or shining (Skt: *prabhasvara*).

*Boundless Queen,/ Your mind perceives/ The true nature of all things./ So to delight
your mind/ I conjure from space/ The flowers of emptiness/ The perfume of emptiness/
The light of emptiness/ The waters of emptiness/ The music of emptiness./* - In Tantric
meditation offerings are visualized as emerging from the blue sky of emptiness. Like
the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas to whom they are offered, the offerings are beautiful,
perfect, and (where they have visual form) made of light. The text often refers to them
as ‘vajra flowers’ ‘vajra lights’ and so on, as a reminder of their essential nature.

These mind-made treasures fill the sky,/ Above, below,/ On every side,/ Countless, limitless as space./ - Eastern Buddhists sometimes make offerings in huge numbers in a rather literal-minded, ‘the more I offer the more merit I get’ sort of way. It is better to offer one flower out of love and devotion than to do endless mental multiplication of offerings while focusing on the merit you are supposedly accumulating. However, if you feel love and appreciation for someone then you do want to give them as much as possible. Here especially, because of Akasadhatesvari’s connection with space, it feels appropriate to imagine masses of offerings. Done in the right spirit, making offerings in this way does have a very expansive and liberating effect on your mind.

In this way I offer you to yourself:/ Vastness to vastness./ Beauty to beauty,/ Emptiness to emptiness. - Seeing that the offerings and the object of giving are of the same nature is a step on the way to understanding the Perfection of Giving in which gift, giver and receiver are all understood to be of one nature.

Salutation

*Peaceful Queen,/ For what could ever trouble space?/
Eternally still,/ For all movement is within you./
Eternally silent,/ For all speech is within you./
Eternally tranquil,/ For all concepts/ Are within you.*

To you,/ The queen of queens,/ I prostrate without moving,/ Praise you without speaking,/ Commit myself to you/ Without a thought.

What is being suggested in the first four verses is an analogy between space and the nature of the mind. Space is not affected by anything that happens within it. Similarly we are only troubled because we identify with the contents of consciousness rather than with the nature of mind itself. To return to an analogy that I used earlier, if you identify with the characters in a tragic film, you go through their suffering with them. If you remain aware that the true nature of the experience is just light projected onto a screen then you will not suffer in the same way. Of course, this doesn’t mean that you don’t care about the characters. The experience of Akasadhatesvari combines both wisdom that sees the true nature of things and compassion for those who, not having that wisdom, take the ‘film of life’ for reality and suffer as a result. A Buddha’s experience is a mysteriously paradoxical combination: intimately involved with life through their awareness and love; they are serenely detached from it through their wisdom and equanimity.

Space and consciousness are strongly linked from a spiritual point of view. In the highest possible states of mundane consciousness, the formless concentrations (Skt: *arupa dhyanas*), you can move from the state of awareness of infinite space to the even more lofty state of awareness of infinite consciousness. You can do something similar in more everyday Dharma reflection. First you consider the serene state of space, within which all phenomena arise and pass away. Then you look more subjectively, and there are two approaches to this. The first one is to reflect that space is experienced within consciousness. The second is to use the analogy of space and its contents to see how serene the mind becomes when you identify with its spaciousness, allowing its contents to come and go, without identifying with them.

To you,/ The queen of queens,/ I prostrate without moving,/ Praise you without speaking,/ Commit myself to you/ Without a thought.

These lines are reminiscent of the last verses of Aksobhyavajra's famous *Praise of Aryatara*⁸. In these wisdom verses we have gone beyond words and concepts. If we are strongly identified with our thoughts then we may imagine that when they die away there is nothing left. But actually the strength of feeling of the Salutation becomes even deeper and more intense when it is not mediated through words. 'Without a thought' also implies that you are so sure that you want to commit yourself to Akasadhatesvari and her wisdom that you don't even need to stop and consider whether it is what you really want to do. You just do it immediately.

As for prostrating without moving, you could take it to mean that the prostration is entirely inward, a heart prostration rather than a physical prostration. Or you could have the sense that the physical prostration is such a heartfelt and spontaneous surrender of yourself that there is no concept of a 'me' doing something called 'a prostration'.

Going for Refuge

O Queen of wisdom,/ In this world of constant change/ In which appearances fade as fast/ As breath on a mirror, /To what can I go for refuge?/

Not to form or feeling,/ Not to words and concepts,/ Not to any object of the mind,/ Only to the nature of mind itself./

Space is more intimate than breath,/ Closer to the heart of life,/ Yet I barely think of it./

The true nature of mind/ Is more intimate than space,/ At the very heart of life,/ Yet I never recognise it./

Mind of space,/ Clear, translucent, knowing,/ Open secret of all the Buddhas,/ I go for refuge to you./

O Queen of wisdom,/ In this world of constant change/ In which appearances fade as fast/ As breath on a mirror, /To what can I go for refuge?/

This verse is a meditation on the fact that all phenomena are impermanent, and therefore none of them can give us lasting fulfilment. They are all false refuges.

'Breath on a mirror' is a double symbol of transitoriness. It quickly evaporates, so it gives a sense of the speed at which things pass. But it also suggests a method which was sometimes used to ascertain if a dying person was still alive. If their breath was too faint to be ascertained directly, a mirror would be held to their nose and mouth to register any signs of an exhalation.

Not to form or feeling,/ Not to words and concepts,/ Not to any object of the mind,/ Only to the nature of mind itself./

The previous verse looked at outer phenomena to find that they were all transitory. This verse looks at subjective experience, to come to the same conclusion about the five aggregates (Skt: *skandha*). Not all the five are made explicit. Form and feeling (Skt: *rupa* and *vedana*) are the first two aggregates; words and concepts are part of the defining and labelling function of perception (Skt: *samjñā*); volitions (Skt: *samskara*)

⁸ See *In Praise of Tara* by Martin Willson, Wisdom Publications, London, 1986, p. 276.

are not mentioned directly, but can be included within ‘any object of the mind’. The last of the five skandhas is limited consciousness (Skt: *vijñāna*), which sees things in terms of subject and object. So as long as you are experiencing phenomena as objects you are still not on safe ground, and have not found a true refuge.

The only safe refuge is the nature of the mind itself. Some schools of Mahayana Buddhism will identify this nature of the mind with emptiness, *shunyata*. Some other schools believe that to do so runs the risk of falling into nihilism, so they are prepared to make positive statements about the nature of mind, such as that it is clear and knowing.

Space is more intimate than breath,/ Closer to the heart of life,/ Yet I barely think of it./

Here there is a suggestion of moving from Tara’s realm, which is associated with the air element and therefore with the breath, to that of Akasadhatesvari. We tend to think of the breath as very intimate, and in some way close to us. Certainly it is ‘close to our heart’, and our physical existence is intimately linked with it. Yet space, as a function of consciousness is even closer to the heart of things. According to texts such as the *Bardo Thödol* we shall have some experience of space even when our breathing has stopped and consciousness is no longer associated with the physical body.

In general we tend to take our lives for granted. Practising the Dharma involves rekindling an ability to look afresh, as if we had been born new in this moment, to be able to appreciate, to enjoy, and to question. As our practice deepens it should generate a sense of awe, of wonder, of mystery at least occasionally!

The true nature of mind/ Is more intimate than space,/ At the very heart of life,/ Yet I never recognise it./

Above all we take for granted consciousness itself, the miraculous fact that we are aware. In a sense we are right to do so, for the nature of life is such that the true nature of the mind is always there. Yet if we begin to appreciate the wonderful fact that we are conscious beings, it will have a very positive effect on us, helping prevent us from becoming lost in the labyrinth of the contents of the mind.

Mind of space,/ Clear, translucent, knowing,/ Open secret of all the Buddhas,/ I go for refuge to you./

As we have seen, some schools of Buddhism are prepared to make positive assertions about mind’s true nature, and this verse takes their standpoint, describing the nature of the mind as clear, translucent and knowing. It is described as the ‘open secret of all the Buddhas’ because it is through coming to know it that all Buddhas have gained Awakening. They have not kept it secret - indeed the historical Buddha declared that he had held nothing back ‘in the closed fist of a teacher’⁹ – but it is a matter of experience, and experience is not transferable, so it is a closed book to those who have not discovered it. It is an ‘open’ secret because the nature of the mind is the same in all beings, so it is there waiting to be discovered if we examine our experience closely enough.

Confession of Faults

⁹ See *Digha Nikaya* 16 – *The Mahaparinibbana Sutta*, 2:32.

O Queen of white light,/ You who have no views at all, / I confess the stubborn self-concern,/ The deep-rooted ignorance,/ That spawns a thousand wrong ideas,/ Clouding how I see and act./
Believing that I and the world/ Could truly exist,/ I cling to things/ With useless hope./
Believing that I and the world/ Could really not exist,/ I live in a sweat of fear/ Stalked by death and destruction./
O Queen of space,/ Although I talk of love and care,/ If I look at how I act,/ I am the centre of the world,/ Round which the moon and stars revolve./
O please help me to recognise/ That this 'self' I hold so tight,/ Causing me and others pain,/ Is just a habit of the mind/ Empty as a summer cloud./

In keeping with the rest of this puja, this section of confession is concerned with wisdom, and with clearing away the obstacles to attaining it.

O Queen of white light,/ You who have no views at all, / I confess the stubborn self-concern,/ The deep-rooted ignorance,/ That spawns a thousand wrong ideas,/ Clouding how I see and act./

The spiritual path takes us from wrong views – fantasies and delusions about how things really are – to right view – in which our concepts are as closely aligned with reality as possible. That is not the end of the story, however, for words and concepts are by their nature limited, and cannot do justice to reality. So there comes a point when we need to step off the rock of conceptualisation and fly free in the space of reality. Akasadhatesvari symbolises the state in which you have done this, so she has ‘no views at all’.

Ignorance (Skt: *avidya*) is the mental poison that Akasadhatesvari transforms. It is the root failing that causes us suffering. There is in us a deep self-clinging. It is pre-verbal; babies have it; animals have it. Out of this fundamental, primitive self-grasping is born a whole view of the world that is then rationalised in endless ways as we grow into adulthood.

Believing that I and the world/ Could truly exist,/ I cling to things/ With useless hope./

One of the major wrong views that grows up on the basis of self-clinging is a belief that things have true existence. This is a form of eternalism. Although we know rationally that everything is impermanent, if we look at how we live we see that we have not fully internalised this fact. We expect certain people and possessions to be around indefinitely. Out of this misplaced confidence we hold onto them for security, comfort, etc. Then we are shocked and upset when they are taken away from us.

Believing that I and the world/ Could really not exist,/ I live in a sweat of fear/ Stalked by death and destruction./

Eternalism was dismissed by the Buddha as an extreme view. He also showed the mistakeness of its opposite: nihilism. Nihilism philosophically is the belief that nothing exists. But here I am looking more psychologically. Having a sense of being a truly-existent self, we then feel threatened by the thought of death, which looks like the end for the ego. This causes us deep-seated anxiety that can become fear and outright terror, as we feel ourselves hunted by what the Buddhist Tantric teacher

Naropa calls 'The Lord of Death's rough-coated dogs'.¹⁰ Both the ego's hopes of living forever and its fears of total non-existence are unfounded.

O Queen of space,/ Although I talk of love and care,/ If I look at how I act,/ I am the centre of the world,/ Round which the moon and stars revolve./

This self-grasping causes us to create a world-view in which our safety and security, and that of our 'nearest and dearest', are paramount. Given that there are billions of other people very like us on this planet, as well as endless other life-forms, this is a very strange delusion. But then all these other people, animals, etc. are doing the same thing, building a world-view with themselves at the centre.

O please help me to recognise/ That this 'self' I hold so tight,/ Causing me and others pain,/ Is just a habit of the mind/ Empty as a summer cloud./

In the Buddhist vision of things, there is no fixed self, like everything else it is a constantly changing phenomenon, arising in dependence upon an infinite web of conditions that are all interacting. When you begin to understand this vision of things, you realize that ideas like 'to exist' are hopelessly clunky and inadequate. It can come as a bit of a shock at first to recognise that basic building blocks of your thinking, that you have relied upon since you first learned to talk, are deeply flawed, and that 'To be, or not to be...' really isn't the question at all!

The idea of a fixed, unchanging 'me' is a mirage. There are, at best, momentary 'me's, constantly disappearing and being replaced by something new. But we can hold the idea of a fixed self because our mental habits are so strong and repetitive that, under normal circumstances, one 'me' is pretty much like another. So we can maintain the idea that there is something fixed and unchanging that 'has' different moods, ideas, and experiences.

Rejoicing in Merit

Queen of total freedom,/ For my own sake/ And for the sake of all that lives/ I rejoice in you,/ And in all our good fortune./

Suffering could have been limitless,/ Samsara could have had no end,/ I rejoice in all those/ Who have pointed out the Way/ That leads beyond all pain:/ To the unborn,/ The unmade,/ The uncompounded./

Life could have had no meaning,/ Death could have been the end./ I rejoice that beyond birth and death/ Is your endless sphere -/ Radiant,/ Timeless,/ Perfect in itself./

Suffering could have been limitless,/ Samsara could have had no end,/ - These lines are both true and untrue. They are untrue in the sense that given the way things are there is always the possibility of Enlightenment. Anyone who examines their experience deeply enough will see the same laws of life that the Buddha found. Our mind always has the potential to awaken to how things are. The lines are true in the sense that without guidance and teaching the odds are infinitesimal that we shall find the way out of suffering. This is because our mental tendencies to self-grasping are so strong that gaining Enlightenment is counter-intuitive for most human beings. We believe that there is some way that we can wring happiness out of life if we just cling

¹⁰ See *The Life and Teaching of Naropa* tr. Herbert V Guenther, OUP, London, 1963, p. 26.

on to what we want and avoid or hit out against what we don't want. To let go of this whole project, and of the ego that is running it, never occurs to us, except briefly perhaps, at times when our whole game-plan has come to nothing. So without Buddhist teachers to present a critique of how we usually live and to provide an example of something far more satisfactory, the chances are that our suffering would be endless.

I rejoice in all those/ Who have pointed out the Way/ That leads beyond all pain:/ -
Seeing that we would not have found a way out of suffering unaided, we can rejoice in those who have helped to set us on the path to freedom.

To the unborn,/ The unmade,/ The un compounded./ - In the very early Pali text called the *Udana*, the Buddha tells his followers that there is 'an unborn, unmade, un compounded'¹¹, and if there were not such a state then there would be no escape from *samsara*.

Life could have had no meaning,/ Death could have been the end./ I rejoice that
beyond birth and death/ Is your endless sphere -/ Radiant,/ Timeless,/ Perfect in
itself./

Like many teenagers, I remember going through a phase where I began to wrestle with philosophical questions: What is life about? Does it have any purpose? Does it all cease at death? I still remember the feelings of fear and dark despair that came over me on the days when I found no positive answers to these questions. It is good to keep an appreciation of the fact that life has - or can be given - meaning, and that according to Buddhist practitioners who have voyaged deep into the nature of life, death is not the end.

Incidentally, I think that meaning is a function of your level of consciousness. In states of despair and depression there seems to be no meaning to anything. In more positive human states, we feel that our relationships with our loved ones, our work and so forth all give meaning to our lives. In states of deep awareness, everything seems to be imbued with meaning. This is one of the reasons why one of the words for the highest level of attainment in Tibetan Buddhism is Mahamudra. This means the Great Symbol. A symbol is something which seems to point to layers of meaning beyond itself. In the Great Symbol experience, everything symbolizes itself - everything feels resonant with meaning and significance. But it is not that everything points to something beyond itself; it is as if everything 'symbolizes itself', everything has deep meaning and resonance in itself.

Entreaty and Supplication

Goddess of the sphere of Truth/ There is no need/ To entreat you to remain/ For how
could truth ever disappear/ The mind is eternal,/ And cannot be destroyed./
Goddess of the Golden Wheel/ There is no need/ To supplicate you to teach/ For in all
worlds/ In all times/ It is you who set rolling/ The Wheel of the Doctrine./
Whenever the Dharma disappears/ It is you who set it turning again./ All Buddhas to
be,/ Coming at last to the vajra seat,/ See the morning star/ Of your wisdom./
In the Deer Park at Sarnath/ You appeared./ It was you who opened Kaundinya's

¹¹ *Udana*, VIII, 3.

*eyes,/ You who set all five ascetics/ On the path to the Deathless./
Goddess of pure awareness,/ I need to entreat you to teach,/ For like an exhausted
traveller,/ Fighting to stay awake,/ It is only by calling on you/ That I save myself
From falling back into unconsciousness,/ Into the delusive dreams of samsara./
And so I beg you from my heart/ To care for me and all the world:/ May your teaching
of emptiness,/ The roar of the lioness,/ Echo forever,/ Throughout time and space./*

*Goddess of the sphere of Truth/ There is no need/ To entreat you to remain/ For how
could truth ever disappear/ The mind is eternal,/ And cannot be destroyed./*
Akasadhatesvari symbolises the wisdom of the Dharmadhatu, which is always a potential for human consciousness. You can see it as something that you can develop, or as a depth of the mind that can be uncovered, as you prefer. The Buddha is represented as a re-discoverer of a truth that had been lost, but was always available to be found. Whilst the products of the mind come and go, mind itself is beyond space and time.

*Goddess of the Golden Wheel/ There is no need/ To supplicate you to teach/ For in all
worlds/ In all times/ It is you who set rolling/ The Wheel of the Doctrine./*
Here Akasadhatesvari becomes a symbol for the Buddha principle.

*Whenever the Dharma disappears/ It is you who set it turning again./ All Buddhas to
be,/ Coming at last to the vajra seat,/ See the morning star/ Of your wisdom./*
According to Buddhist legend, the vajra seat (Skt: *vajrasana*) is the axial point of the universe. It is the first place to coalesce out of the fiery matter at the beginning of an aeon, and the last place to dissolve away at the end. It is at this place that a Buddha gains Enlightenment. Obviously it is nonsense to believe that the universe literally coalesced around Bodh Gaya on the planet Earth. But if you look at it symbolically then it suggests that in order to gain Enlightenment a Buddha has to come mentally to a 'place' beyond space and time, and to settle themselves there.

Seeing the morning star is a reference to a detail in some versions of the story of the historical Buddha's Enlightenment. It is said that, after a long time of sitting in meditation, he finally gained Awakening at dawn, just as Venus, the morning star, had appeared in the sky.

*In the Deer Park at Sarnath/ You appeared./ It was you who opened Kaundinya's
eyes,/ You who set all five ascetics/ On the path to the Deathless./*
This verse refers to the Buddha's first teaching of the Dharma. He walked from Bodh Gaya to Sarnath, and in the Deer Park there found his five old companions from the time when he had practised asceticism. He worked to convince them of the truth that he had discovered, and one by one all five, starting with Kaundinya, became Enlightened. 'The Deathless' (Skt: *amrita*) is one of the epithets of the Awakened state. After his Enlightenment the Buddha said to Brahma Sahampati: 'Open are the doors of the Deathless'.

*Goddess of pure awareness,/ I need to entreat you to teach,/ For like an exhausted
traveller,/ Fighting to stay awake,/ It is only by calling on you/ That I save myself
From falling back into unconsciousness,/ Into the delusive dreams of samsara./*
The Buddhas are always seeking ways to help living beings to find the way out of suffering. Their compassion is unfailing, and from their side they do not need to be

entreated to teach. But, as this verse suggests, we need to express our openness, our desire for the Dharma. This is part of setting up the conditions for us to see things as they are. Samsara is often compared to a dream in Buddhist texts. Like a dream, it can appear very real and convincing, but when we see its true nature then, like a nightmare in which we have become lucid, it no longer bothers us.

And so I beg you from my heart/ To care for me and all the world:/ May your teaching of emptiness,/ The roar of the lioness,/ Echo forever,/ Throughout time and space./
As we've seen, the Buddha's teaching is often described as his lion's roar. So here we have the roar of a lioness, a female Buddha.

Transference of Merits

At the beginning of time/ An earthquake within consciousness/ Created that great rift/ Into subject and object,/ Into 'me' and 'you',/ Across which we all call/ With longing to one another./

O Queen of non-duality,/ By the merits of devoting myself to you,/ And by the power of your compassion/ For all sentient beings,/ May subject and object,/ Like long-lost lovers,/ Be reunited./

By the power of your word of truth/ May that chasm of suffering/ Be closed at last./ May our minds all be healed./ May life be made whole./

By the power of your great love/ May all separateness disappear./ May we all enter the shining space/ Of the Dharmadhatu wisdom./

At the beginning of time/ An earthquake within consciousness/ Created that great rift/ Into subject and object,/ Into 'me' and 'you',/ Across which we all call/ With longing to one another./

There are several different ways of looking at what Buddhist practice aims to achieve. One common one, stressed very strongly in the Yogachara School of Mahayana Buddhism, is that we are striving to see through the mind's tendency to create a dichotomy between self and other. This isolates us from the rest of life, placing it all 'out there', out of reach, and it imprisons us 'in here', caged inside the confines of our ego-boundary.

This split into subject and object is not real. It is a concept we have created to explain a very deep-rooted emotional tendency. In this verse though I treat it as if it were real – it feels real enough to us most of the time! – and I place it at some beginning point in time. This is all poetic. Buddhism does not believe in a beginning of time, nor a creation of the universe.

O Queen of non-duality,/ By the merits of devoting myself to you,/ And by the power of your compassion/ For all sentient beings,/ May subject and object,/ Like long-lost lovers,/ Be reunited./

By the power of your word of truth/ May that chasm of suffering/ Be closed at last./ May our minds all be healed./ May life be made whole./ - This is all fine, as long as we remember that the chasm has always been illusory. In reality we are interconnected with all life, we just do not recognise it.

By the power of your great love/ May all separateness disappear./ May we all enter the shining space/ Of the Dharmadhatu wisdom./ - The request that we make in this verse is on behalf of all living beings. It is through identifying with their aspirations, recognising that they all wish to be happy and long for an end to suffering just as we do, that we shall begin to overcome the painful illusion that we are separate from life.

CHAPTER 7: THE FIVE WISDOMS AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

So far we have looked at how the Prajñas appeared, at the symbolism of their visualizations, and we have unpacked the meaning of five pujas. There is one more important area to cover, and that is how you develop the Five Wisdoms. Certainly, imagining the figures and performing the pujas will help this to happen. But to facilitate the process it is important to understand how the Five Wisdoms are transformations of aspects of our experience. There are two approaches to this:

- 1) Seeing the Five Wisdoms as transformations of the eight consciousnesses;
- 2) Seeing them as transformations of the five aggregates.

We shall look at each of these in turn.

The Eight Consciousnesses

There are many different tools that Buddhism uses to analyse the nature of the mind. One that was frequently used by the Yogachara School is an analysis into eight consciousnesses (Skt: *vijñana*). These eight are:

- 1-5: The five sense consciousnesses
- 6: The mental sense.
- 7: The tainted mind consciousness.
- 8: The store consciousness.

The five sense consciousnesses are what we think of as the five senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. However, the Yogacharins would deny that these senses perceive a truly-existent external world.

The mental sense (Skt: *manovijñana*) is the mind seen as a sixth sense whose objects are purely mental: the sense that perceives dreams, memories, and fantasies. This sense also brings together the experience supplied by the five senses.

The tainted mind consciousness (Skt: *klishtamanas*) interprets experience in terms of subject and object. It does this by assuming that the store consciousness is a fixed self. Where there is a fixed self as subject, there must be what is not self – objects. So the tainted mind consciousness's misinterpretation causes us to create a false dichotomy of experience into subject and object. It is this mistaken conclusion that, for the Yogacharins, underlies all our suffering.

The store consciousness is referred to in Sanskrit as the *alayavijñana*, which literally means storehouse consciousness. It is the Yogacharin answer to the awkward question of how karma works: if you perform a skilful action today how does it come about that you experience a positive consequence of that in the future? They would say that volitional actions create 'seeds' (Skt: *bija*) in the store consciousness that come to fruition when the conditions are right. We can take this idea of seeds as just a rough metaphor. The store consciousness is compared to a great river by the Yogacharin teacher Vasubandhu¹². This suggests that the store consciousness is dynamic not

¹² In his *Trimshika*, verse 5.

static, more like water than earth. So even though the effects of karma are referred to as ‘seeds’, it might be better to think of them as like pouring dye into water, or setting in motion a certain current. Or you could see a really horrible karmic action as like throwing a corpse into the ocean of the store consciousness that is eventually washed up on land when the tides are right! However you see it, the Yogachara suggests that there is a deep level of the mind that registers all our volitional actions, is affected by them, and which out of a dynamic interplay of conditions generates effects that are appropriate to those actions.

Sangharakshita divides the store consciousness into two aspects, while acknowledging that this is not a traditional distinction. He talks of the relative *alaya* and the absolute *alaya*. In doing this he seems to be following the thinking of Paramartha (499-569 CE), who distinguished nine consciousnesses by discriminating between the *alaya* (equivalent to Sangharakshita’s ‘relative *alaya*’), and a ninth consciousness, the immaculate consciousness (Skt: *amalavijñana*). This ninth consciousness is equivalent to Sangharakshita’s ‘absolute *alaya*’. While the eighth consciousness or relative *alaya* is conditioned by your karmic actions, the ninth consciousness or absolute *alaya* is unaffected by them. It is always pure, shining, waiting to be uncovered.

Apart from the absolute *alaya*, which is untouched by anything mundane, all these eight consciousnesses affect one another. In particular the tainted mind consciousness misinterprets the store consciousness. Although the store consciousness is dynamic and changing, its different manifestations have common characteristics. Because of this, the tainted mind consciousness sees the store consciousness as a fixed self.

This gives you at least a rudimentary idea of how these eight consciousnesses work. So then the question is: how does the experience of Enlightenment affect them? The following table shows what happens (though it must be said that there are different Yogacharin positions on the nature of the store consciousness and what happens with Awakening).

Table 2: Relationship of the 8 Consciousnesses to the 5 Wisdoms

CONSCIOUSNESS	WISDOM	PRAJÑA
5 sense consciousnesses →	All-Accomplishing Wisdom	Tara
Mind consciousness →	Discriminating Wisdom	Pandaravasini
Tainted mind consciousness →	Wisdom of Equality	Mamaki
Relative store consciousness →	Mirror-Like Wisdom	Locana
Absolute store consciousness =	Dharmadhatu Wisdom	Akasadhatesvari

For a Buddha, the five sense-consciousnesses, which perceive through the five senses, become expressions of All-Accomplishing, or All-Performing Wisdom. It is these senses which link us to the world, and they become the vehicle for the Enlightened activities of a Buddha, going out into the world to help living beings to overcome suffering.

The mind consciousness which, as well as cognizing mental objects, also organises the experiences received through the other five senses, becomes the Discriminating Wisdom. This wisdom enables us to perceive uniqueness and difference. However, at this wisdom level these discriminations are not seen as between wholly different real

external objects and people. They are all enjoyed as the eternally-fresh play of consciousness.

The tainted mind consciousness, with all its reified concepts, its divisions into subject and object and other dichotomies is replaced by the Wisdom of Equality which sees that all phenomena are of the nature of emptiness.

With Awakening, the relative *alaya* no longer carries the seeds of karmic volitions. Yogachara teachers give different accounts of what happens to the relative *alaya* at this point. According to Asanga and Vasubandhu it disappears altogether, leaving just the absolute *alaya*. The teaching of the Five Wisdoms suggests that it continues as a kind of deep current within the mind. Unskilful actions produced distortions into the *alaya*, but now it becomes a stream of pure mental events, accurately reflecting the reality of things. This is the Mirror-like Wisdom.

Lastly the absolute *alaya* (Paramartha's 'immaculate consciousness') was never affected by anything mundane. There is nothing to transform; it is just a question of realizing it. When you do so, everything becomes an expression of reality, of the truth of things. You have become the Dharmadhatu Wisdom.

The whole question of what is meant by these Five Wisdoms is deep and difficult. The Yogachara was a major force in Mahayana Buddhism whose teaching evolved over hundreds of years. We still do not have translations of many important Yogacharin texts into English. The Wisdoms themselves refer to a level of experience which is beyond anything that we are likely to have encountered. It is said that the Wisdom of Equality and the Discriminating Wisdom begin to appear at the first level of the Bodhisattva's development (Skt: *bhumi*), while the All-Accomplishing Wisdom and the Mirror-Like Wisdom only appear at the time of Full Enlightenment. (It is the All-Accomplishing Wisdom that enables a Buddha to produce infinite manifestations in order to help living beings.) Nonetheless it is important to try to gain some feeling for them, and of how our ordinary experience can be transformed into them.

The Five Aggregates and the Five Wisdoms

As with the Eight Consciousnesses, the question of the relationship of the Five Aggregates to the Five Wisdoms is a complex one, and I cannot begin to do justice to it here. Still we can try to gain some idea of the connection. That there *is* a connection is suggested symbolically by the representation of the Jinās and Prajñās in sexual union. The Jinās, we have seen, embody the aggregates, and the Prajñās are expressions of the Wisdoms. The sexual symbolism therefore implies that the aggregates and the Wisdoms are linked. The next table shows the relationships:

Table 3: Relationship of the 5 Aggregates to the 5 Wisdoms

JINA	AGGREGATE	PRAJÑA	WISDOM
Aksobhya	Form	Locana	Mirror-Like
Ratnasambhava	Feeling	Mamaki	Equality
Amitabha	Perception	Pandaravasini	Discriminating
Amoghasiddhi	Volitions	Tara	All-Performing
Vairocana	Consciousness	Akasadhatesvari	Dharmadhatu

The form aggregate (Skt: *rupa*) is what Dr Guenther describes as ‘the objective content of the perceptual situation’. As the aggregates are an analysis of the person, of what goes to make up what we think of as ‘me’, the form aggregate refers to our physical body. With the dawning of enlightened consciousness the physical body is still there, but our relationship to it changes. The mental poisons that caused us to see it as more or less than it is have disappeared. So we no longer add subjective factors onto our experience of the body – pride about our looks or our physical prowess, self-consciousness about our appearance, or self-hatred that causes us to treat the body badly, all vanish. There is just the objective experience of being embodied, reflected clearly in the mirror of our consciousness. The idea of a mirror also suggests that the body is not an object. Just as the ‘contents’ of the mirror are not in the mirror, so the idea of your body as a ‘thing’ that you ‘own’ is an idea coming from the mind, not a reality that the body knows anything about.

The feeling aggregate (Skt: *vedana*) is the hedonic aspect of our experience. All our experiences come with a feeling-component: pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. Most often we attribute these feelings to the object itself, not recognising that we have added them on to the objective experience. So we speak of ‘a wonderful meal’ or ‘a terrible film’. For someone else the same experiences might be ‘a terrible meal’ and ‘a wonderful film’. With Awakening, we develop equanimity towards all the contents of experience, based on seeing their true nature. Then these feelings become infused with the Wisdom of Equality.

The aggregate of perception (Skt: *samjñā*) is the organising and labelling function of the mind. For example, this function is in operation when we separate out a particular aspect from our visual field and call it ‘a white peony’. This transforms into Discriminating Wisdom, which can distinguish people and objects, and manipulate ideas, but at the same time is never duped into believing that any inherently existing object or person has come into existence.

The aggregate of volitions (Skt: *samskara*) is concerned with our willed actions. Usually we have an experience charged with pleasant or unpleasant feeling and we work that up into a whole conceptualised scenario, on the basis of which we are driven to act. As this scenario is based on a reactive response to feeling, and a misconstrued view of the nature of what we are experiencing, often these willed actions lead us into trouble. A Buddha sees the nature of experience, is equanimous about the feelings that it is charged with, and does not bring into existence any notion of a separate fixed self. As a result his or her volitions are spontaneous, and spring from compassion. This spontaneous helpful activity, based on heartfelt feeling for all life, is the All-Accomplishing, or if you prefer All-Performing, Wisdom.

The aggregate of consciousness (Skt: *vijñāna*) is a deluded consciousness which interprets experience in terms of a fixed subject confronted with objects that are completely separate from itself. With insight into the nature of things you see that this is not the case. Then your consciousness transforms into a realm of non-dual awareness and becomes the Wisdom of the Dharmadhatu.

CONCLUSION

When I began writing this commentary I did not expect there to be so much to say, but the figures of the Prajñas are rich in symbolism, so it is not surprising that my notes have turned into a small book. I hope that over time, as more and more people practise with these figures, still further layers of meaning and significance will be revealed.

Throughout this book I have stated my belief that the Prajñas are figures whose time has come, and who have much to communicate to us in the West. Now it is a question of those of us who respond to the figures putting ourselves into practising their sadhanas, pujas, or both. Then as our experience grows, we can share it with one another. In that way, through a collaborative effort, the mandala of the Five Prajñas will be revealed, more and more fully, and the influence of these five wise and loving figures will begin to spread around the world.

APPENDICES

Appendix A - The Status of the Figures

For the sake of those of you who are in contact with Tibetan Buddhists, or who may be wondering, perhaps I should say a little about the relationship of these practices to traditional Tantric Buddhism.

The FWBO does not see itself as continuing tantric lineages. The Prajñas, as described in these sadhanas and pujas, have some of the qualities of tantric figures but these practices do not fulfil all the requirements that would make them tantric practices.

The sadhanas certainly have tantric elements. They follow the structure of simple tantric sadhanas, with everything dissolving into emptiness, the appearance of the form from emptiness, receiving the blessings of the figure, reciting the mantra, and then dissolving the visualization back into emptiness. The Prajñas themselves are figures that appear in Buddhist Tantra, and virtually all the elements that go to make up the visualizations – the emblems, the mudras, and so forth, are taken from the symbolic vocabulary of Tantric Buddhism.

However, for traditional Tibetan Buddhists, the practices cannot be tantric, because for them a valid tantric practice is one that has been handed down through a lineage of great masters from some great *siddha*, or accomplished tantric practitioner. This lineage is guaranteed by each member of the chain having received a valid initiation into the practice concerned from a previous lineage-holder. This system has its advantages, and has been able to keep alive effective forms of practice over hundreds of years. But it does mean that there is little leeway in the Tibetan tradition for new forms to appear. The exception to this is the Nyingma School, where a *terton* – a ‘treasure-revealer’ – may find a ‘new’ form of practice that was hidden by Padmasambhava or his disciple Yeshe Tsogyal for a future time when the new form would be needed.

There is also the question of initiation. Contrary to what some people say, it is often not necessary to receive an initiation in order to visualize a figure from one of the Lower Tantras in front of you. However it is considered absolutely necessary to receive initiation before you visualize yourself as a Buddha or Bodhisattva, or any other tantric figure. Within the Western Buddhist Order we do not give tantric initiations, and the most ‘initiation’ that anyone taking up one of these practices of the Prajñas would receive would be a simple transmission of the mantra.

So while these practices have a tantric background, and use some tools found in Buddhist Tantra, we can say that they are ‘just’ Mahayana visualizations. And after all, over the centuries very many non-Tantric Mahayana practitioners have developed deep wisdom and compassion, and that is all that is really important...

Appendix B - Resources

The Sadhanas – are available only to members of the Western Buddhist Order. I have made sets of the external visualizations available to the Public Preceptors. Or Order members can obtain them from me.

The Mantras – I have made 2 recordings of the tunes of the mantras. I did a solo one, which is available from *Dharmachakra*. Then Corine, a mitra from Holland, recorded the mantras from the closing ceremony of a retreat on the Five Prajñas that I led at Rivendell in June 2004. Although the recording quality isn't great, I prefer this to the *Dharmachakra* version, as it has more atmosphere.

The Pujas – are available from all good FWBO Centre bookshops! Failing that, contact me and I'll send you copies. In the UK they are usually priced at £1.00.

The Paintings – so far, to my knowledge five people have produced paintings of the Prajñas. (Apologies if I have forgotten anyone!) They are Kumuda, Sihapada, Subha, Vijayamala and Visuddhimati. So you may be able to get photos of their work. All of them are based in the UK.

Appendix C – Amendments to the Pujas

When I started producing the pujas for sale, I tried to ensure that they were all in their final form, but inevitably errors slip through. Unfortunately I have not kept a full list of the corrections that I have made. However here are notes on some of them so that you can amend your copies of the pujas. The correct version is underlined.

Pandaravasini

Worship, verse 1

To Pandaravasini,
Whose discriminating wisdom
Sees the uniqueness...

Salutation, last verse

Yet you bring into existence
Nothing at all.

[Lose the full stop after 'existence']

Dedication, verse 1

I off this worship
And its merits to you
May you accept them.