

# *The Preliminary Practice of Tsa-Tsas*



*Translation and Commentary by  
Lama Zopa Rinpoche*

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# *The Practice of Making Tsa-Tsas*

*by Tropa Lotsawa*

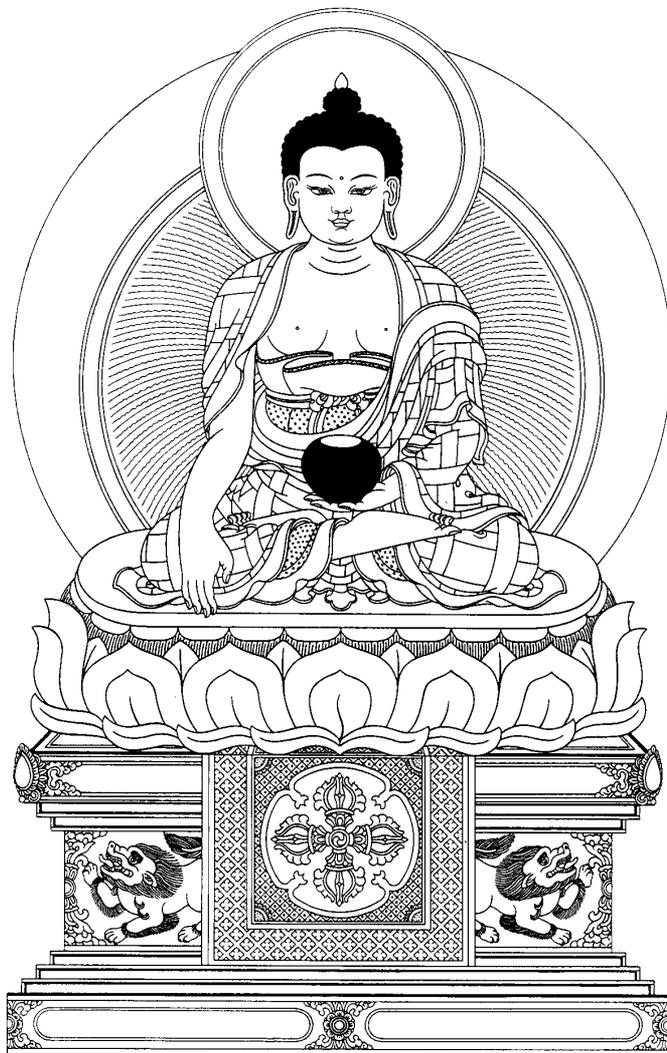
*translated and with additions and instructions from  
Lama Zopa Rinpoche*

Here is the advice of utilizing the tsa-tsa practice in the path to enlightenment, written by the great translator Tropa.

Namo Guru, I prostrate to the gurus who are the glorified saviors of sentient beings, the lords of omniscience and compassion, the refuge object of transmigratory beings, and the step towards liberation, who have completely conquered all opposing conditions.

Please grant the sublime and general realizations to me and all other transmigratory beings. In order to accumulate the causes of enlightenment, I am going to write the advice of how to utilize the tsa-tsa practice in the path to enlightenment.

The practice has three divisions: the preliminaries, the actual body, and the completion.



## The Preliminaries

---

First of all, generate yourself as the deity.

[The self-generation of Yamantaka has been added by the editor. However, the practitioner may use any highest yoga tantra deity for which they have received the initiation. Students without highest yoga tantra initiation should visualize Shakyamuni Buddha, Medicine Buddha, Tara, or Chenrezig at the crown of their head or at their heart and repeat the mantra associated with that deity.]

---

RANG NYI KÄ CHIG GI PÄL DOR JE JIG JE ZHÄL CHIG CHHAG NYI KYI DRI  
GUG DANG THÖ PA DZIN PÄI KUR ZHENG PAR GYUR

**Instantaneously I arise in the form of glorious Vajrabhairava,  
with one face and two arms, holding curved knife and skullcup.**

---

Then take refuge and generate bodhichitta:

---

### *Taking Refuge and Generating Bodhichitta*

SANG GYÄ CHHÖ DANG TSHOG KYI CHHOG NAM LA

**I go for refuge until I am enlightened**

JANG CHHUB BAR DU DAG NI KYAB SU CHHI

**To the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Supreme Assembly.**

DAG GI JIN SOG GYI PÄ SÖ NAM GYI

**By my practice of giving and other perfections,**

DRO LA PHÄN CHHIR SANG GYÄ DRUB PAR SHOG

**May I become a buddha to benefit all sentient beings. (3x)**

## ***Increasing Mantra***

---

First, recite the Mantra Taught by Buddha Drogen Gyälwa Chhö, which increases the merit of making a tsa-tsa or stupa by ten million times. If you are making stupa tsa-tsas, you may also like to recite the Zung of the Exalted Completely Pure Stainless Light, which appears on p. 32.

---

### ***Mantra Taught by Buddha Drogen Gyälwa Chhö***

OM HRI YA DHE SARVA TATHAAGATA HRIDAYA GARBE /  
ZOLA DHARMA DHATU GARBE / SANGHA HARANA AYU  
SANGSHODHAYA / PAPAM SARVA TATHAAGATA SAMENDRA  
AUSHNI KHA VIMALE BISHUDHE SVAHA *(a few times)*

## ***Purifying and Blessing the Materials***

---

Purify the amount of prepared clay in emptiness with the mantra:

---

OM SVABHAVA SHUDDHA SARVA DHARMA SVABHAVA  
SHUDDHO HAM

Your wisdom then manifests as the five syllables OM HUM TRAM  
HRI AH.

---

Recite the mantra three times.

---

OM HUM TRAM HRI AH *(3x)*

The syllables transform into mountains of jewels.

### ***Extensive visualization (optional)***

While everything is empty, a lotus appears. On the lotus is a moon disk, and on the moon disk appears the syllable BHRUM. The syllable BHRUM transforms into piles of jewels.

At the heart of yourself visualized as the deity is the seed syllable. From the seed syllable, light beams radiate, invoking Bhagavan Vairochana from Ogmin, where the sambhogakaya abides. These light beams persuade Bhagavan Vairochana's holy mind. Then light beams radiate from the holy mind and absorb into the clay or powder. The clay or powder becomes in the nature of the transcendental wisdom of the holy mind of all the buddhas, the tathagatas.

---

While doing this meditation and reciting the mantra, your hands should be in this mudra: Your left hand is held above the bucket of powder, palm down with the thumb pressing down the pinky finger. Your right hand is held below the bucket, palm up with the thumb pressing down the pinky finger.

Then, holding this mudra and doing the meditation, you chant the mantra:

---

### *Mantra of Vairochana*

OM NAMO BHAGAVATE VAIROCHANAYA / PHRABA  
 RADZAYA / TATHAGATAYA / ARHATE SAMYAKSAM BUDDHAYA  
 / TADYATHA OM SUSHAME SUSHAME / SAME SAME /  
 SHANTE / DANTE ASAMA ROPE / ANALAMPE / TARAMPE /  
 YASHOWATE / MAHA TENDZA / NIRA GULE / NIRUWANI /  
 SARVA BUDDHA / ADHISHTANA ADHISHTITE SVAHA (3x)

---

Then recite the following mantra. If you recite this mantra, you collect the merit of having made ten million stupas:

TADYATHA / SUKSHAME SUKSHAME / SAME / SAMAYE /  
 SHANTE DANTE / NIRA GULE / YASHO TENDZA / SARVA  
 BUDDHA / ADHISHTANA ADHISHTITE / ANUMITE SVAHA

---

Then recite the Great Wisdom Mantra on the next page:

---

## Great Wisdom Mantra

OM TADYATHA/ SARVA TATHAAGATA HRIDAYA GARBE/ ZOLA  
DHARMA DHATU GARBE/SAMHARANA AYUR SENSODHAYA/  
PAPAM SARVA TATHAAGATA SAMANTA USHA NISHA VIMALE  
BISHUDDE SVAHA (21x)

OM AH HUM (over and over or 3x)

---

While your body is clarified as the mind-bound deity, with your speech recite the Dependent Related Heart Mantra:

---

OM YE DHARMA HETU PRABHAVA HETUN TESHAN  
TATHAGATO HYAVADAT TESHAN CHA YO NIRODHA EVAM  
VADI MAHA SHRAMANA YE SVAHA (over and over or 3x)

OM AH HUM (over and over or 3x)

## Blessing the Mantras or Grain

---

On well-cleaned grain, recite the Dependent Related Heart Mantra. This grain is inserted in the back of the tsa-tsas in the way that mantras are put in statues to consecrate them. Your hands, the clay, and everything else should be kept clean. (Lama Zopa Rinpoche suggests using actual mantras rather than replacing them with rice. If this is not possible, rice or small beads may be used):

---

OM YE DHARMA HETU PRABHAVA HETUN TESHAN  
TATHAGATO HYAVADAT TESHAN CHA YO NIRODHA EVAM  
VADI MAHA SHRAMANA YE SVAHA (over and over or 3x)

OM AH HUM (over and over or 3x)

---

If you are making tsa-tsas **for a person who is sick or has life obstacles**, continue on the next page.

If you are making tsa-tsas for **a person who has passed away**, turn to p. 14.

If you are making tsa-tsas for **ngondro** or any other reason, turn to p. 15 and with the pure attitude of taking the complete responsibility for liberating the person from the lower realms by yourself alone, and for leading them to the perfect body of a happy transmigratory being, begin to print the tsa-tsas.

---

## *Mantras for Sickness or Long Life*

---

If you are making the tsa-tsas for a person who is sick or in danger of not having a long life, before printing the tsa-tsas, recite mantras of long-life buddhas and request these buddhas to increase the life of that person.

---

### *Amitayus Mantras*

#### *Long Mantra*

NAMO RATNA TRA YAYA / OM NAMO BHAGAVATE /  
 APARIMITA AYUR JÑANA / SUPINISH CHITATAYE / JORA JAYA /  
 TATHAGATAYA / ARHATE SAMYAK SAM BUDDHAYA /  
 TADYATHA / OM PUNYE PUNYE / MAHA PUNYE / APARIMITA  
 PUNYE / AYU PUNYE / MAHA PUNYE / AYUR JÑANA / SARVA  
 RUPA SIDDHI / AYUR JÑANA / KE CHE BHRUM / OM BHRUM /  
 AH BHRUM / SVA BHRUM / HA BHRUM / CHE BHRUM / OM  
 SARVA SAMSKARA / PARISHUDDHA DHARMATE / GAGANA  
 SAMUDGATE / SVABHAVA VISHUDDHE / MAHA NAYA  
 PARIVARA YE SVAHA

#### *Middle-length Mantra*

OM NAMO BHAGAVATE / APARIMITA AYUR JÑANA / SUPINISH  
 CHITATAYE / JORA JAYA / TATHAGATAYA / ARHATE SAMYAK  
 SAMBUDDHAYA / TADYATHA / OM PUNYE PUNYE /

MAHA PUNYE / APARIMITA PUNYE / APARIMITA PUNYE  
JÑANA / SAMBHARO PACHITE / OM SARVA SAMSKARA /  
PARISHUDDHA DHARMATE / GAGANA SAMUDGATE /  
SVABHAVA VISHUDDHE / MAHA NAYA PARIVARA YE SVAHA

### **Short Mantra**

OM AMARANI JIVAN TIYE SVAHA

### **White Tara Mantra**

OM TARE TUTTARE TURE MAMA AYUR PUNYE JÑANA PUSHTIM  
KURU YE SVAHA

### **Namgyälma Mantras**

#### **Long Mantra**

OM NAMO BHAGAVATE / SARVA TRAILOKYA  
PRATIVISHISHTAYA / BUDDHAYA TE NAMA TADYATHA /  
OM BHRUM BHRUM BHRUM / SHODHAYA SHODHAYA /  
VISHODHAYA VISHODHAYA / ASAMA SAMANTA / AVABHA  
SASPHARANA GATI / GAGANA SVABHAVA VISHUDDHE /  
ABHISHINCHANTU MAM / SARVA TATHAGATA SUGATA /  
VARAVACHANA AMRITA ABHISHAIKAIRA / MAHAMUDRA /  
MANTRA PADE / AHARA AHARA / MAMA AYUR  
SAMDHARANI / SHODHAYA SHODHAYA / VISHODHAYA  
VISHODHAYA / GAGANA SVABHAVA / VISHUDDHE USHNISHA  
VIJAYA / PARISHUDDHE SAHASRA RASMI SANCHODITE /  
SARVA TATHAGATA AVALOKINI / SHATA PARAMITA  
PARIPURANI / SARVA TATHAGATA MATE DASHA BHUMI  
PRATISHTHITE / SARVA TATHAGATA HRIDAYA / ADHISHTHANA  
ADHISHTHITE / MUDRE MUDRE / MAHAMUDRE / VAJRA  
KAYA / SAMHATANA PARISHUDDHE / SARVA KARMA  
AVARANA VISHUDDHE PRATINIVARTAYA / MAMA AYUR  
VISHUDDHE / SARVA TATHAGATA SAMAYA / ADHISHTHANA  
ADHISHTHITE / OM MUNE MUNE MAHA MUNE / VIMUNI  
VIMUNI MAHA VIMUNI / MATI MATI MAHA MATI / MAMATI /

SUMATI / TATHATA BHUDHAKOTI PARISHUDDHE / VISPHUTA  
 BUDDHE SHUDDHE / HE HE JAYA JAYA VIJAYA VIJAYA /  
 SMARA SMARA / SPHARA SPHARA / SPHARAYA SPHARAYA /  
 SARVA BUDDHA ADHISHTHANA ADHISHTHITE / SHUDDHE  
 SHUDDHE / BUDDHE BUDDHE / VAJRE VAJRE / MAHA VAJRE /  
 SUVAJRE / VAJRA GARBHE / JAYA GARBHE / VIJAYA  
 GARBHE / VAJRA JVALA GARBHE / VAJRODBHAVE / VAJRA  
 SAMBHAVE / VAJRE VAJRINI / VAJRA MA BHAVATU MAMA  
 SHARIRAM / SARVA SATTVANANCHA KAYA / PARISHUDDHIR  
 BHAVATU ME SADA SARVA GATI / PARISHUDDHI SHCHA /  
 SARVA TATHAGATA SHCHA MAM SAMASHVASAYANTU  
 BUDDHE BUDDHE / SIDDHYA SIDDHYA / BODHAYA BODHAYA/  
 VIBODHAYA VIBODHAYA / MOCHAYA MOCHAYA /  
 VIMOCHAYA VIMOCHAYA / SHODHAYA SHODHAYA /  
 VISHODHAYA VISHODHAYA / SAMANTA RASMI /  
 PARISHUDDHE / SARVA TATHAGATA HRIDAYA / ADHINA  
 ADHISHTHITE / MUDRE MUDRE MAHA MUDRE / MANTRA  
 PADAIH SVAHA

### **Short Mantra**

OM BHRUM SVAHA / OM AMRITA AYUR DADE SVAHA

---

With the pure attitude of taking the complete responsibility for liberating the person from the lower realms by yourself alone, and for leading them to the perfect body of a happy transmigratory being, begin to print the tsa-tsas.

Now continue with the **Actual Practice** on p. 15.

---

## ***Mantras for a Being Who Has Passed Away***

---

If you are making the tsa-tsas so that a person who has died finds a good rebirth in the body of a happy transmigratory being, recite the mantra of Mitrugpa:

---

### ***Mitrugpa Mantra***

NAMO RATNA TRAYAYA OM KAMKANI KAMKANI ROCHANI  
ROCHANI TROTANI TROTANI TRASANI TRASANI PRATIHANA  
PRATIHANA SARVA KARMA PARAM PARA NI ME SARVA  
SATTVA NANCHA SVAHA

---

Recite the Vajrasattva mantra also, and the mantras of other deities powerful in purifying obscurations:

---

### ***Vajrasattva Mantra***

OM VAJRASATTVA SAMAYA MANUPALAYA / VAJRASATTVA  
TVENOPATISHTHA / DRIDHO ME BHAVA / SUTOSHYO ME  
BHAVA / SUPOSHYO ME BHAVA / ANURAKTO ME BHAVA /  
SARVA SIDDHIM ME PRAYACCHA / SARVA KARMA SU  
CHAME / CHITTAM SHRIYAM KURU HUM / HA HA HA HA HO /  
BHAGAVAN SARVA TATHAGATA / VAJRA MAME MUNCHA /  
VAJRA BHAVA MAHA SAMAYA SATTVA AH HUM PHAT

### ***Kunrig Mantra***

OM NAMO BHAGAVATE / SARVA DURGATE PARI SHODHANI  
RAJAYA / TATHAGATAYA / ARHATE SAMYAKSAM BUDDHAYA /  
TADYATHA / OM SHODHANI SHODHANI / SARVA PAPAM  
VISHODHANI / SHUDHE VISHUDHE / SARVA KARMA  
AVARANA VISHODHANI SVAHA

---

With the pure attitude of taking the complete responsibility for liberating the person from the lower realms by yourself alone, and for leading them to the perfect body of a happy transmigratory being, begin to print the tsa-tsas.

---

## The Actual Practice

---

Prepare the molds (wash the molds and prepare them with wetting agent) while reciting this mantra. [If making tsa-tsas out of clay, recite this mantra while preparing the clay with oil.]

---

OM AH RAJE BIRAJE SVAHA

---

Pour the plaster into the water (or take the clay) while reciting:

---

OM NAMO SAMANTA BUDDHANAN / OM VAJRA AYU KSHE  
SVAHA

---

As you mix the ingredients (or cut the clay) recite:

---

OM VAJRODDHA VAYE SVAHA

---

Five tsa-tsas are cast and offered as follows: to the Triple Gem, one's gurus, parents, sentient beings in the bardo, and for oneself and all sentient beings.

Think about on whose behalf you are making each tsa-tsa, then pour the mixture into the mold (or put the clay into the mold) while visualizing that you are offering jewels to the buddhas and reciting OM DHARMADHATU GARBHE SVAHA and OM VAJRADHATU GARBHE SVAHA, followed by the appropriate prayer.

If you are doing many tsa-tsas at once and it is difficult to recite the prayer after each tsa-tsa, then finish the total number of tsa-tsas you will make during your session and recite the appropriate prayers when you have finished.

---

## ***Making the Tsa-Tsas***

### ***1. The Triple Gem***

---

Think:

---

I am making this tsa-tsa for the Triple Gem.

---

While pouring the mixture or putting the clay into the mold, recite:

---

OM DHARMADHATU GARBHE SVAHA

OM VAJRADHATU GARBHE SVAHA

---

Pray:

---

May the teachings of the Buddha spread and be developed. May the holy Dharma last a long time. May the Sangha achieve the holy Dharma and may the highest enlightenment be accomplished.

### ***2. Direct and Indirect Gurus***

---

Think:

---

I am making this tsa-tsa for my direct and indirect holy gurus to have long lives, for their holy actions to be developed and the wishes within their holy minds to be fulfilled.

---

While pouring the mixture or putting the clay into the mold, recite:

---

OM DHARMADHATU GARBHE SVAHA

OM VAJRADHATU GARBHE SVAHA

---

Pray:

---

May the lives and holy actions of the direct and indirect holy gurus be developed and the experiences of realizations in their holy minds be increased. May the field of objects to be subdued be increased.

### 3. Parents

---

Think:

---

I am making this tsa-tsa for my parents (past, present and future), to all sentient beings who have been my mother and father, to those who are now my mother and father and to all who will be my mother and father in the future.

---

While pouring the mixture or putting the clay into the mold, recite:

---

OM DHARMADHATU GARBHE SVAHA

OM VAJRADHATU GARBHE SVAHA

---

Pray:

---

May all the wishes of fathers and mothers, the transmigratory beings of the six realms, be accomplished. May all the sufferings of each individual be completely purified and may they achieve the state of omniscience.

## 4. *Sentient Beings Who Have Died*

---

Think:

---

I am making this tsa-tsa for sentient beings who have died and who have not yet taken another body.

---

While pouring the mixture or putting the clay into the mold, recite:

---

OM DHARMADHATU GARBHE SVAHA

OM VAJRADHATU GARBHE SVAHA

---

Pray:

---

Due to the good karma of making offerings to the Sangha and of making statues of the holy bodies of arya beings, may the hallucinated minds of all intermediate state beings be eliminated completely. May they achieve the three kayas of enlightenment.

## 5. *Myself and Other Sentient Beings*

---

Think:

---

I am making this tsa-tsa for myself and other sentient beings.

---

While pouring the mixture or putting the clay into the mold, recite:

---

OM DHARMADHATU GARBHE SVAHA

OM VAJRADHATU GARBHE SVAHA

---

Pray:

---

May I and all sentient beings accumulate merit and purify the two obscurations. May we pacify all disease and suffering and increase life, merit, wealth, and reputation. May I have whatever control I wish over the three realms, human beings, possessions, and food. I am requesting to dispel the bad conditions of enemies, interferers, obstacles, and untimely death.

---

Gently agitate the mix inside the molds (beat the clay into the mold) and recite:

---

OM VAJRA MUNGARA AH KOTTAYA AH KOTTAYA HUM

---

And also recite the Dependent Related Heart Mantra:

---

OM YE DHARMA HETU PRABHAVA HETUN TESHAN  
TATHAGATO HYAVADAT TESHANĀ CHA YO NIRODHA EVAM  
VADI MAHA SHRAMANA YE SVAHA

## *Placing the Mantras into the Tsa-Tsa*

---

Now recite these mantras before placing the previously blessed mantras, grain or beads into the mold at the heart of each deity, like putting mantras into a statue:

---

OM SARVA BUDDHAYA SVAHA

OM VAJRA AYUKHE SVAHA

OM YE DHARMA HETU PRABHAVA HETUN TESHAN  
TATHAGATO HYAVADAT TESHANĀ CHA YO NIRODHA EVAM  
VADI MAHA SHRAMANA YE SVAHA

---

Then place the bead or grain into the tsa-tsa at the heart.

---

OM AH HUM

---

If you are making tsa-tsas out of plaster, you will need to pause here while the material is setting. Recite the seven-limbed prayer to the buddhas and dedicate the merits in an abbreviated or extensive way, making sure to include the special dedication prayers listed above.

---

## *Seven-Limb Prayer*

GO SUM GÜ PÄI GO NÄ CHHAG TSHÄL LO

**Reverently, I prostrate with my body, speech, and mind;**

NGÖ SHAM YI TRÜL CHHÖ TRIN MA LÜ BÜL

**I present clouds of every type of offering, actual and imagined;**

THOG ME NÄ SAG DIG TUNG THAM CHÄ SHAG

**I declare all my negative actions accumulated since beginning-less time**

KYE PHAG GE WA NAM LA JE YI RANG

**And rejoice in the merit of all holy and ordinary beings.**

KHOR WA MA TONG BAR DU LEG ZHUG NÄ

**Please, remain until the end of cyclic existence**

DRO LA CHHÖ KYI KHOR LO KOR WA DANG

**And turn the wheel of Dharma for living beings.**

DAG ZHÄN GE NAM JANG CHHUB CHHEN POR NGO

**I dedicate my own merits and those of all others to the great enlightenment.**

---

When the tsa-tsas are ready to be removed from the molds, continue with the practice.

As you remove the tsa-tsas from the molds (or cut off the extra clay) recite:

---

OM GHAYUTE SVAHA

OM DHARMADHATU YE SVAHA / DHAMADHATU GARBHE  
SVAHA (7x)

---

When you recite this mantra, the tsa-tsa becomes numberless holy objects. *The Non-dual Method Wisdom Sutra* says, “This holy object does perfect work for all the transmigratory sentient beings until the end of samsara.”

---



---

When the tsa-tsa is dry and you are painting it, buffing, or sealing it, recite:

---

OM VAJRA AH RAJE BIRAJE SVAHA

---

After you finish all this, to consecrate the tsa-tsas, say:

---

OM SUPRATISHTHA VAJRA YE SVAHA

## *The Completion*

The completion involves remembering the benefits of making tsa-tsas and the dedication prayers. Then put the tsa-tsas in a solitary place.

### *Benefits*

Do not make less than five tsa-tsas. Making more than five tsa-tsas has inexpressible benefits. Even in this life, you will have less disease, your enjoyments will increase, and you will achieve long life and good reputation. It is the best method to betray death.

Making tsa-tsas pacifies obstacles, bad conditions, accidents, and sudden diseases like heart attacks and paralysis. By making tsa-tsas you pacify enemies, interferers and harms. You accumulate all merit, purify all obscurations, and achieve the resultant three kayas in a future life.

This advice on utilizing the tsa-tsa practice in the path to enlightenment should be practiced every day without stopping.

## *Dedications*

GE WA DI YI NYUR DU DAG

**Due to the merits of these virtuous actions**

LA MA SANG GYÄ DRUB GYUR NÄ

**May I quickly attain the state of a Guru-Buddha**

DRO WA CHIG KYANG MA LÜ PA

**And lead all living beings, without exception,**

DE YI SA LA GÖ PAR SHOG

**Into that enlightened state.**

JANG CHHUB SEM CHHOG RIN PO CHHE

**May the supreme jewel bodhichitta**

MA KYE PA NAM KYE GYUR CHIG

**That has not arisen, arise and grow;**

KYE PA NYAM PA ME PA YANG

**And may that which has arisen not diminish**

GONG NÄ GONG DU PHEL WAR SHOG

**But increase more and more.**

JAM PÄL PA WÖ JI TAR KHYEN PA DANG

**Just as the brave Manjushri and Samantabhadra, too,**

KÜN TU ZANG PO DE YANG DE ZHIN TE

**Realized things as they are,**

DE DAG KÜN GYI JE SU DAG LOB CHHIR

**I, too, dedicate all these merits in the best way,**

GE WA DI DAG THAM CHÄ RAB TU NGO

**That I may follow their perfect example.**

DÜ SUM SHEG PÄI GYÄL WA THAM CHÄ KYI

**I dedicate all these roots of virtue**

NGO WA GANG LA CHHOG TU NGAG PA DE

**With the dedication praised as the best**

DAG GI GE WÄI TSA WA DI KÜN KYANG

**By the victorious ones thus gone of the three times,**

ZANG PO CHÖ CHHIR RAB TU NGO WAR GYI

**So I might perform good works.**

DAG GI JI NYE SAG PÄI GE WA DI

**I dedicate whatever virtues I have ever collected**

TÄN DANG DRO WA KÜN LA GANG PHÄN DANG

**For the benefit of the teachings and of all sentient beings,**

KHYÄ PAR JE TSÜN LO ZANG DRAG PA YI

**And in particular, for the essential teachings**

TÄN PÄI NYING PO RING DU SÄL JE SHOG

**Of perfect, pure Losang Dragpa to shine forever.**

### *Colophon:*

I, the great translator Tropu, translated this text into Tibetan to benefit transmigratory beings. By this merit, may sentient beings achieve enlightenment.

Translated and with mantras added by Lama Zopa Rinpoche, 1987, 2004, 2007. Edited and compiled in this form and with dedications added by Venerable Gyalten Mindrol., FPMT Education Services, October 2009. All mistakes are the sole fault of the editor.



# Commentary on the *Tsa-Tsa Practice*

*by Lama Zopa Rinpoche*



# Commentary on the *Tsa-Tsa Practice*

*by Lama Zopa Rinpoche*

One of the practices for accumulating merit and purifying negative karma is making tsa-tsas: clay statues of Buddha and clay stupas. Many previous meditators and yogis like Lama Tsongkhapa and the Kadampa geshe, practitioners of the graduated path to enlightenment, did this practice of making tsa-tsas. When not doing the actual sessions, in the break times such as after lunch, they would do the practice of making tsa-tsas and also Dorje Khadro burning puja. When they were not doing other Dharma activities for sentient beings, they would do these.

These are practical methods that are easy to do and are incredibly beneficial in purifying obscurations and in accumulating merit for the practitioner and other sentient beings. Also, in order to do the three year retreat of a special deity, you have to do the nine preliminaries, of which making tsa-tsas is one. “Special deity” means the particular aspect of Buddha with which you have close karmic contact. Having close karmic contact with that deity now means that you had close karmic contact in the past. If you practice that particular aspect of Buddha, it is much easier for you to transform your mind into Dharma. You receive blessings more quickly, which means you are able to transform your mind much more easily from the self-cherishing thought into bodhichitta, from self-grasping into the wisdom of shunyata, and

from attachment clinging to samsaric perfections into renunciation. As well as realizing those, you are able to realize the two stages of the tantric path, the generation and completion stages, more easily. Therefore, you can see that it becomes quicker and easier for you to achieve enlightenment.

These nine preliminaries need to be done before you actually do the three year retreat of that deity, which involves meditations and recitation of the deity's mantra. One of the preliminaries is the practice of offering sesame seeds to Dorje Khadro, and another is making tsa-tsas by printing buddhas in clay with a mold.

Using the same techniques as those great yogis used for these practices brings more merit. If we use the same meditations and prayers as those who have generated all the realizations of the path and purified all obscurations, if we practice in the same way, the merit is much greater. It is not that without saying these mantras or without knowing the meditations and techniques we do not accumulate merit when we print statues of buddhas but, with this right advice, the practice is more perfect and creates more merit.

Here is the advice of utilizing the tsa-tsa practice in the path to enlightenment, written by the great translator Tropu.

I think Tropu was a very high lama who translated scriptures from Sanskrit into Tibetan.

Namo Guru, I prostrate to the gurus who are the glorified saviors of sentient beings, the lords of omniscience and compassion, the refuge object of transmigratory beings, and the step towards liberation, who have completely conquered all opposing conditions.

There is another prayer which says: "I request you, the virtuous teacher, who is the eye to see all the extensive scriptures, the

door for the fortunate ones to receive liberation and, out of compassion, a skillful guide.” Some prayers call the Guru the door to liberation, but here it says “the step towards liberation.” In this sense, it means that you cannot get into a house from down below without using the steps. Similarly, without a virtuous friend you cannot achieve liberation. “Opposing conditions” means any conditions which prevent the achievement of enlightenment.

Please grant the sublime and general realizations to me and all other transmigratory beings. In order to accumulate the causes of enlightenment, I am going to write the advice of how to utilize the tsa-tsa practice in the path to enlightenment.

The practice has three divisions: the preliminaries, the actual body, and the completion.

## *The Preliminaries*

The most important thing to do when making tsa-tsas is to generate the correct motivation. Before making tsa-tsas, you should spend some time generating the correct motivation.

The next most important thing is how the tsa-tsa is actually made. Bless the powder that will be used in making the tsa-tsas. In order to do this, we recite the mantra of Buddha Vairochana. If you bless the powder before making tsa-tsas, then, after you make the tsa-tsas, you collect the merit of making the same number of tsa-tsas as there are the number of atoms in the powder or clay.

That is unbelievable! If you make a stupa one or two stories high, then you can bless the powder, concrete, stones, or bricks. You can put them in a big pile and then bless them with this meditation and mantra. This is amazing! You collect the merit of having made as many stupas as there are atoms in the building materials.

Even if you make a tsa-tsa the size of a thumb or smaller, because there are so many atoms, you still collect so much merit. If you make a tsa-tsa the size of your palm or bigger, then you will

create unbelievable merit. It will blow your mind. If you think of the benefits from doing this, you will faint.

This advice comes from the Kangyur and is extremely important. His Holiness Chögye Trichen Rinpoche has also explained these benefits.

## *Purifying into Emptiness and Blessing the Material*

### *Mantra Taught by Buddha Drogen Gyälwa Chhö*

OM HRI YA DHE SARVA TATHAAGATA HRIDAYA GARBE /  
ZOLA DHARMA DHATU GARBE / SANGHA HARANA AYU  
SANGSHODHAYA / PAPAM SARVA TATHAAGATA SAMENDRA  
AUSHNI KHA VIMALE BISHUDHE SVAHA

It is said by the Victorious One, the Buddha, Drogen Gyälwa Chhö: By having recited this mantra, if you make one stupa or tsa-tsa, you receive the merit of having made ten million stupas or tsa-tsas. By having recited this mantra, if you touch any of the four elements [earth, fire, water, air] those elements are blessed two times the power of a stupa, and anyone who sees you or touches you is purified of the five uninterrupted negative karmas, and they will be born in a higher caste. By having recited this mantra you will have long life, be purified of the five uninterrupted negative karmas, have wealth, and will remember past lives. You will be protected from all harm and become enlightened.

If you recite this mantra and make a billion story stupa or stupa the size of a fingertip, you collect the same amount of merit as having made ten million. After you recite this mantra, if you make one, you receive the same benefit of having made ten million stupas. That means however much merit you receive from making one stupa — which is inconceivable merit — is multiplied by ten million. For example, if you are building a five-story stupa, you receive the benefit of having built ten million five-story stupas.

It is important to recite this mantra before you begin the work on building the stupa, but also you can recite the mantra every

day during the construction of a stupa. It is the same for statues and tsa-tsas.

By reciting this mantra, if you touch any element (fire, water, air, earth), the elements are blessed. Then when those elements touch any being, that sentient being is liberated double the power of a stupa and purified of their five uninterrupted negative karmas. This means if you recite this mantra and then swim in the water, the water is blessed and becomes so powerful. When the water touches any sentient being, including those living in the water — numberless insects and creatures from the largest whale to the tiniest insect that can be seen through a microscope, and even the human beings who are diving and playing in the water, they all are liberated from negative karma by the water touching their bodies. It's the same for the rest of the elements. They have so much power to purify other sentient beings.

By reciting this mantra, you become meaningful to behold — even more powerful than a stupa. You become more powerful to liberate others and anybody who sees you or touches you, their negative karma is purified, twice as powerfully as a stupa.

By reciting this mantra, if you do massage, it becomes so beneficial because when you touch other people's bodies, your touch purifies them.

By reciting this mantra, anybody who sees you is liberated from the lower realms and their five uninterrupted negative karmas are purified; no question about the ten non-virtuous actions. This means even if you are walking on the street, or in a department store, at the train station, anywhere where there are a lot of people, even if you have no other purpose, just walking around purifies sentient beings' minds, because you have recited this mantra. You could do some strange thing, like make a strange noise, so that everybody looks at you. Just by that they are purified.

This mantra can be recited a few times at the beginning of each day along with the other morning prayers and mantras, as well as before making statues, stupas, or tsa-tsas.

People who could use this mantra to benefit others: anyone who is seen by people or who touches people or animals, such as performers, models, public speakers, teachers, nurses, doctors, or veterinarians, etc. Anyone who touches objects or elements that other sentient beings will see or touch, such as cooks, bakers, potters, artists, painters, factory workers, dry cleaners, swimmers, etc.

***Zung of the Exalted Completely Pure Stainless Light*** (*mantra to recite 8000 times before building a stupa*)

OM SARVA TATHAAGATA / MALA BISHODANI / RUDHABALE  
 PRATISANSKAARA / TATHAAGATA / DHAATU DHARE / DHARA  
 DHARA SANDHARA SANDHARA / SARVA TATHAAGATA /  
 ADHISHTHANA ADHISHTHITE SVAHA

I meant to advertise a long time ago that there is such a practice to do before you build a stupa, but it didn't happen. This is the mantra of Rigpa Chenmo, or great wisdom, Vimala Ushnisha. This mantra is incredibly powerful. It has inconceivable, mind-blowing benefits.

Reciting this mantra every day when you're building a large stupa has unbelievable benefits. Even if you recite this mantra only once before you begin the stupa, you will get the same benefit as having built ten million stupas. It is explained that by reciting this mantra and building one stupa, whether it's small or big, you get the same benefit as having built ten million stupas. That's unbelievable! If you were actually going to make ten million stupas, even small ones, imagine how many months or years it would take. If you were going to build ten million big stupas the size of Lama's stupa [at Vajrapani Institute] down there, imagine how many years, or maybe lifetimes, it would take. But if we recite this mantra when we start to build a stupa, we get the same benefits as having built 10 million stupas without needing to undergo all that hardship.

Also, if you recite this mantra, any element – fire, water, air, or earth – that touches your body becomes very blessed. I would think that this also means that your own body becomes meaningful to behold, which means that by seeing or touching you, other sentient beings are liberated from their negative karma, the cause of the lower realms. Any one of the four elements, such as wind or water, that touches your body becomes blessed and has the power to liberate sentient beings; wherever the wind or water goes, the negative karma of any sentient being touched by it is purified. Any sentient being who sees or touches these elements is liberated from the lower realms; the benefit is double that of seeing or touching a stupa. I think this would also include the body of the person who recites this mantra; his or her body becomes meaningful to behold.

This mantra also purifies the five uninterrupted negative karmas. These very heavy negative karmas are purified. Also, you will develop tantric realizations. You will have a long life and wealth, will remember your past lives and might also be able to see the future. You'll be protected from all harms and will become enlightened.

Droden Gyalwa Chhō said that it's good to recite this mantra on the day you are going to make stupas, whether it is a large stupa or even the very small tsa-tsa stupas. Tibetans make a lot of those tsa-tsas, where one tsa-tsa contains many small stupas, after people die and also for preliminary practices. You can recite this mantra every morning, especially while you are building a stupa, and you can also use it to bless the bricks, cement or any other material that you are going to put on the stupa. The whole point is that the more merit we are able to collect, the more easily and quickly we will be able to achieve enlightenment, which means that we will be able to liberate sentient beings from the suffering of samsara and bring them to enlightenment more quickly. That is the whole point of doing all these practices.

Whether you are repairing a stupa or making a very small stupa from clay, bricks or stones and whether you yourself are

actually involved in the building or you are asking or hiring other people to build the stupa, if you recite this mantra 8,000 times single-pointedly without distraction and with faith, due to the power of mantra, after you have built the stupa, a scented fragrance similar to sandalwood, musk, or the divine incense of the devas will come from the stupa. And all your wishes and those of the other people who work on the stupa will be fulfilled. That is the main aim, of course. The main point is not that the stupa produces a scented smell but that all your wishes are fulfilled after you have made the stupa.

Also, you achieve all the collections of goodness, or qualities, which means you are able to achieve all the good things that you are wishing for. And if you had the karma to have a very short life, you will then have a very long life. At the time of your death, you will see a hundred million buddhas, and the buddhas will always consider you. Also, even after this life, in your next life, you will be born in a pure land of Buddha; you will receive the prediction about your enlightenment directly from Buddha, achieve the five types of clairvoyance, and then achieve enlightenment in that pure land.

Whether you are making a tsa-tsa stupa or a large stupa, if you recite as many mantras as possible, all your wishes and those of the others who are working on the stupa will be fulfilled. You will receive all these benefits.

I meant to advertise a long time ago that there is such a practice to do before you build a stupa, but it didn't happen. It might be helpful for those people who want to achieve all that success – to succeed in all their wishes, to have realizations, to benefit others, and to serve the teachings of Buddha – to recite this mantra.

### ***Benefits of This Mantra***

Anyone who makes a stupa by oneself, or has others make it, or fixes an old stupa – whether one makes a very small stupa from mud, or with bricks, or stones, one must first recite this heart mantra 8000 times.

Even if one has the karma to have a short life, one will have a long life.

Also, if one puts perfume (scented water or saffron water, which is normally offered, or scented perfume that has a good smell) – even a tiny drop the size of a mustard seed – by reciting this mantra (on it) and anointing the stupa with it, you will achieve all the qualities and goodness as explained.

Whenever death happens, you will see 100 billion tathagatas and all of them will think of you (you are in their hearts).

In future lives, you will be reborn in a completely purified buddha realm and will receive a direct prediction of your enlightenment. There, you can live a lifespan of 10 million x 100 billion years – like that one hundred times over, and like that a thousand times over. One is able to remember one's past lives, and one achieves the deva's eye (clairvoyance).

One achieves the completely pure deva's ear and one is able to understand/read others' minds; able to see the death time and transition (where one will be reborn next birth).

Sandalwood smell comes from one's body and pervades everywhere.

From one's mouth, also, the scented smell of upali pervades.

One will achieve the peerless oath of fully completed enlightenment.

One will achieve also the non-returning ground (stages).

Everyone should realize that all this is explained by the Buddha. One should devote oneself to the words of this secret mantra, recognize it as rare, and for purification, recite it a minimum of 100 times – more is better.

## *Purifying and Blessing*

First of all, generate yourself as the deity. Then take refuge and generate bodhichitta. Purify the amount of prepared clay or powder in emptiness with the mantra: OM SVABHAVASHUDDHA SARVA DHARMA SVABHAVASHUDDHO HAM.

The simple way of purifying the clay in emptiness is to think like this: when you look at it, the clay appears as if it exists from its own side, but “clay” is merely labeled by thought on that collection of atoms mixed with water. This is how the clay is existing in reality but to you it does not appear as existing from its own side. The label “clay” and the base on which you label somehow appear to you as oneness. The clay does not seem to be merely labeled but existing from its own side. This is how the clay appears.

This truly existent, independent clay does not exist; it is completely empty. It is completely empty there. The clay that appears as if existing from its own side is empty of existing from its own side. This wrong conception that grasps the truly existent appearance of the clay disturbs your seeing the reality of the absolute nature of the clay and interferes in your achieving enlightenment. This wrong conception that believes in the appearance of the truly existent clay interferes in your liberation from samsara.

Therefore, while making the tsa-tsas, you should have the awareness that the clay is empty of existing from its own side. And also, as it is empty of existing from its own side, it is a dependent arising. This means the way the clay is really existing is by being merely labeled on the base, the group of atoms. On that base, the thought merely labels “clay.” If you do the tsa-tsa practice with awareness of emptiness and dependent arising, it becomes a direct remedy to samsara, to cutting off the true cause of suffering. As it becomes a remedy to the true cause of suffering, the practice also eliminates the true sufferings.

Those of you who have received maha-anuttara initiations know the meaning and meditations of this mantra, OM SVABHAVA SHUDDHA SARVA DHARMA SVABHAVA SHUDDHO HAM, which you use when you bless the inner offering and before the dharmakaya meditation. Do that same meditation here, according to the meaning of the mantra. This is the dharmakaya meditation. Meditate that your own mind is the actual result-time dharmakaya of the deity you practice. If it is Chakrasamvara, think: “This

is my actual result-time Chakrasamvara holy mind, the dharmakaya.” This is the basic meditation according to the meaning of this mantra. Details of this meditation can be explained only after you have received a maha-anuttara initiation. There are three basic meditations: dharmakaya, sambhogakaya, and nirmanakaya. This one is dharmakaya.

The simple way is just to analyze the clay that is there. Look at the appearance of the clay and analyze how it appears. Analyze whether it is appearing as merely labeled or not as merely labeled but existing from its own side. If the clay appears to exist from its own side, this is the hallucination. This clay does not exist. Think: “This is completely false.” Concentrate on the meaning of “false” – not even the slightest atom of that clay on the table in front of you exists at all. If you look at the clay on the table, this truly existent clay, this independent clay, this clay existing from its own side – it is completely empty there. Not even an atom of that clay exists. Meditate on this emptiness.

With this awareness you continue to work. Even though the clay is still appearing as if it exists from its own side, keep the continuation of the understanding that this clay existing from its own side is completely empty. It is like a magician who has transformed a beautiful palace and dancing girls and is playing with these transformations. There is the appearance of these things to the magician and he does activities with them, but at the same time, he has an understanding in his mind that they are empty of reality.

Similarly, there are appearances but in our hearts we have an understanding that they are empty. Keep the awareness that the clay which appears as if existing from its own side is empty. The clay with which we are printing Buddha statues is merely labeled by thought on the base. If you do the tsa-tsa practice with this awareness that the clay is a dependent arising, empty of existing from its own side, the whole practice becomes a remedy to stop samsara.

When you meditate on emptiness, you recognize the object to be refuted, which is the merely labeled clay or powder. In reality, that is totally non-existent. It's not there. It is totally empty.

Then you look at the emptiness of the truly existent I, which is apprehended by the self which grasps at the aggregates. You look at the emptiness of the aggregates which you see as truly existent, which are apprehended by the thought that grasps at the aggregates, those aggregates that are seen as real and apprehended by ignorance. Then you look at all phenomena which appear to you as not merely labeled by your mind. The object which appears as truly existent and which you believe is truly existent is actually empty. Even the perceiver, the mind which holds the object as appearing not merely labeled by mind, is actually empty.

Your wisdom then manifests in the five syllables OM HUM TRAM HRI AH. Recite the mantra three times. These syllables transform into mountains of jewels.

To make the meditation a little more profound, your wisdom realizing the emptiness of the clay manifests in the syllables of the holy mind of the five lords of the buddha families: OM HUM TRAM HRI AH. Both the truly existent clay and the impure appearance of the clay are purified in emptiness. Then your wisdom that realizes emptiness manifests as the five syllables of the lords of the five buddha families. You recite this mantra OM HUM TRAM HRI AH three times.

While everything is empty, a lotus appears. On the lotus is a moon disk, and on the moon disk appears the syllable BHRUM. The syllable BHRUM transforms into piles of jewels.

At the heart of yourself visualized as the deity is the seed syllable. From the seed syllable, light beams radiate, invoking Bhagavan Vairochana from Ogmin, where the samb-

hogakaya abides. These light beams persuade Bhagavan Vairochana's holy mind. Then light beams radiate from the holy mind and absorb into the clay or powder. The clay or powder becomes in the nature of the transcendental wisdom of the holy mind of all the buddhas, the tathagatas.

Even though to your eyes the material is still clay, if you visualize that you are making the tsa-tsas with jewels and precious materials, you create more merit. Visualizing the clay as jewels and precious stones follows the same logic as the mandala offering. By visualizing offering the entire universe, you gain the merit of having actually offered it. However many millions of universes and jewels you visualize and offer, in that short time you actually gain the extensive merit of having offered that many universes and jewels. Even if you do not have the smallest piece of gold or diamond, by visualizing and offering gold and diamonds, you receive the extensive merit of actually offering them.

This is proved by the story of King Ashoka. In one of Ashoka's past lives, he was one of three children playing in the sand when Guru Shakyamuni Buddha was going past on his way for alms in the village. These three children wanted to make an offering to Buddha but, because his holy body was very tall, they had to stand one on top of each others' shoulders. They had nothing to offer, but the third child, standing on top of the second child's shoulders, offered a handful of sand in Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's begging bowl, visualizing that he was offering gold. That child received the extensive merit of having actually offered gold and, because of that good karma, was born in India as the Dharma king Ashoka.

During his life as King Ashoka, he built many monasteries and made many offerings to the Sangha. In one day, in different places, King Ashoka was able to build ten million stupas. By being born as a Dharma king with all the enjoyments and power, he was able to accumulate unbelievable merit. This all came from that one small good karma of making an offering of sand to Buddha and visualizing it as gold.

This is the main reason we accumulate extensive, inconceivable merit by offering the mandala, visualizing the whole universe and the best quality enjoyments. Similarly, these lamas practice Buddha's technique for sentient beings to accumulate merit. Even though the material is clay, visualizing it as jewels is a skillful meditation technique which creates much more merit.

While doing this meditation and reciting the mantra, your hands should be in this mudra: Your left hand is held above the bucket of powder, palm down with the thumb pressing down the pinky finger. Your right hand is held below the bucket, palm up with the thumb pressing down the pinky finger.

Then, holding this mudra and doing the meditation, you chant the mantra:

OM NAMO BHAGAVATE VAIROCHANAYA / PHRABA  
 RANZAYA / TATHAGATAYA / ARHATE SAMYAKSAM  
 BUDDHAYA / TADYATHA OM SUSHAME SUSHAME / SAME  
 SAME / SHANTE / DANTE ASAMA ROPE / ANALAMPE /  
 TARAMPE / YASHOWATE / MAHA TENDZA / NIRA GULE /  
 NIRUWANI / SARVA BUDDHA / ADHISHTANA ADHISHTITE  
 SVAHA (3x)

After you recite the Vairochana mantra, there is another mantra to recite over the clay or powder (or building materials). If you recite this mantra, you collect the merit of having made ten million stupas:

TADYATHA / SUKSHAME SUKSHAME / SAME / SAMAYE /  
 SHANTE DANTE / NIRA GULE / YASHO TENDZA / SARVA  
 BUDDHA / ADHISHTANA ADHISHTITE / ANUMITE SVAHA

Then recite the Great Wisdom mantra. The Great Wisdom Mantra (Vimala Ushnisha) is very, very important. When you make tsa-tsas or a stupa, you need to bless the building materials (or clay powder) with this mantra. Reciting this mantra purifies all the negative karma accumulated over unimaginable eons. You

purify even the stains of negative karma and the defilements. Because of reciting this mantra, you will be reborn as an extremely high, wealthy lord (sala chenpo) and you will achieve the bhumi of a non-returner. This means you will never go down; you only go up. If you use this mantra to bless the powder for making tsa-tsas, or the stones or wood that you will use to make the stupa, then without doubt you will be reborn like that and you will achieve the ten bhumis. This mantra can also be recited after the tsa-tsas are made and are in the process of curing.

Anyone who memorizes this Great Wisdom mantra, who keeps this mantra, who writes this mantra, who reads this mantra, who listens to this mantra, purifies all past negative karma. The ten non virtuous actions and even the five uninterrupted negative karmas are completely purified.

This Great Wisdom mantra (Vimala Ushnisha) is:

OM TADYATHA/ SARVA TATHAAGATA HRIDAYA GARBE /  
ZOLA DHARMA DHATU GARBE/SAMHARANA AYUR  
SENSHODHAYA/ PAPAM SARVA TATHAAGATA SAMANTA  
USHA NISHA VIMALE BISHUDDE SVAHA (21x)

Reciting this mantra makes an object a holy object. For example, while you are crossing the road, if there is a mountain and you chant this mantra, it makes the mountain into a holy object. If there is a tree or log that people go around, and you bless it by chanting this mantra, it becomes a holy object, like a stupa. Recite this mantra whenever you want to bless something. Then people can circumambulate for merit.

There is similar mantra that you can use for blessing water, and there is another slightly different mantra for blessing the sky, so they become like holy objects. There are different mantras, but the Great Wisdom mantra is the basic one.

The minute you recite this Great Wisdom mantra, the whole world transforms into the nature of a stupa. If you write the Great Wisdom mantra on the bark of a tree, or on cloth which

you then hang from the roof or put on top of a banner, then all human beings who see it become holy objects. Even the devas prostrate and make offerings to these humans, because they are now objects of respect. If you wear this mantra, all human beings and non-human beings will look at you with respect, as if you are Buddha. Wherever you go – to a park or an isolated place, to the mountains – if you recite this mantra, everything you see becomes blessed, like a stupa.

Anyone who reads this mantra, or writes it, memorizes it, or keeps it on the body, becomes like a stupa, which is the holy body of the Buddha. This person will perform perfect works for themselves and all sentient beings.

A stupa is not consecrated if this mantra has not been recited. This means after you make a holy object, you need to recite this mantra. This is mentioned in the main scriptures of the Buddha himself.

If you make just one stupa and recite this mantra, you collect the merit of having made ten million stupas.

This mantra purifies all negative karma, no matter how much there is, including the five uninterrupted negative karmas. It purifies all the huge piles of negative karma that are like mountains, and which make you circle in samsara for an unbelievable length of time. Everything is purified and you will have long life and all your wishes will succeed perfectly.

In all your lifetimes you will have a sublime holy rebirth, be extremely glorified, and have supreme enjoyments; you will be reborn as a wheel-turning king. It is not possible to have two wheel-turning kings in the world; there can only be one. The wheel-turning king has no comparison to other kings. When the wheel-turning king comes to the world, he causes everybody to engage in the ten virtues.

If you recite this mantra, you will be able to remember all your past and future lives, and you will never be separated from Triple Gem. You won't receive harm from the harm-givers or interfer-

ers, and all your wishes will be completed up to ultimate enlightenment.

Then recite OM AH HUM to bless the material.

OM is a combination three syllables – AH, O and MA. These three signify Buddha’s holy body, holy speech, and holy mind, as do OM, AH and HUM. OM represents Buddha’s holy body, AH his holy speech, and HUM his holy mind. When you recite this mantra, think that you are blessing the material with which you are going to make the tsa-tsas in the essence of Buddha’s vajra holy body, vajra holy speech, and vajra holy mind.

While your body is clarified as the mind-bound deity, with your speech recite the Dependent Related Heart Mantra: OM YE DHARMA HETU PRABHAVA HETUN TESHAN TATHAGATO HYAVADAT TESHANĀ CHA YO NIRODHA EVAM VADI MAHA SHRAMANA YE SVAHA and OM AH HUM, again and again.

## *Making the Tsa-Tsas*

While your mind is contemplating absolute truth, shunyata, make one print of the tsa-tsa. As you make this print, think:

I am making this tsa-tsa for the Triple Gem.

With your speech recite this prayer:

May the teachings of the Buddha spread and be developed.  
May the holy Dharma last a long time. May the Sangha achieve the holy Dharma and may the highest enlightenment be accomplished.

“Sangha” means those intending virtue and this virtue means liberation. It means those who are seeking liberation by living in the virtue of the vows-the path of liberation. “May the highest

enlightenment be accomplished” means for yourself and the Sangha, those who are practicing virtue, and all sentient beings to achieve enlightenment.

The second tsa-tsa print is dedicated for the direct and indirect gurus to have long lives, for their holy actions to be developed, and their wished to be fulfilled. With that intention, recite the following prayer and make the print of the Buddha.

May the lives and holy actions of the direct and indirect holy gurus be developed, and the experiences of realizations in their holy minds be increased. May the field of objects to be subdued be increase.

This means for the gurus to be able to benefit by subduing as many sentient beings as possible and guiding them to enlightenment.

The third print is dedicated to your parents (past, present, and future), to all sentient beings who have been your mother and father, to those who are now and to those who will be your parents in the future. Recite this prayer:

May all the wishes of the fathers and mothers, the transmigratory beings of the six realms, be accomplished. May all the sufferings of each individual be completely purified and may they achieve the state of omniscience.

The fourth print is dedicated to sentient beings who have died and have not yet taken another body. For these intermediate state beings, say this prayer of dedication:

Due to the good karma of making offerings to the Sangha and of making statues of the holy bodies of arya beings, may the hallucinated minds of all intermediate state beings be eliminated completely. May they achieve the three kayas of enlightenment.

The intermediate state beings who have not yet found their next-life body are not only kind people like your friends and parents but even your enemies: sentient beings with whom you had bad, harmful relationships instead of beneficial ones. Now that person is dead and you want to help him find a better rebirth and achieve temporal and ultimate happiness. The “good karma” could be that of both the intermediate state beings and yourself.

The fifth print is for the practitioner himself.

May I and all sentient beings accumulate merit and purify the two obscurations. May we pacify all disease and suffering, and increase life, merit, wealth, and reputation. May I have whatever control I wish over the three realms, human beings, possessions, and food. I am requesting to dispel the bad conditions of enemies, interferers, obstacles, and untimely death.

Of the “two obscurations,” one is the disturbing thought obscuration, which mainly disturbs the achievement of liberation. The second, which mainly interferes in achieving enlightenment, is the obscuration to fully knowing all existence.

You need a long life because without it you cannot complete the actualization of the path. You need merit because without merit, or fortune, you cannot accomplish the wishes and obtain happiness for yourself and other sentient beings. If there is shortage of merit, there are difficulties even to gain temporal happiness and particularly to achieve liberation and enlightenment.

Why is there a need to pray for reputation? It is not for you yourself. To be able to work for sentient beings, there is also a need for a good reputation, therefore you dedicate merit for that. With a good reputation you can benefit many sentient beings. Because they will listen to and obey you, there is an opportunity to guide them to enlightenment by revealing the teachings. This is the purpose of dedicating for reputation.

To dedicate for wealth is the same. To work for other sentient beings and even for yourself to complete the practice, there are always necessary conditions – a suitable place, food, and clothing. And then, especially to work for others, you need wealth. It does not suit many sentient beings to be guided through Dharma revealed to them right at the beginning. They can, however, be guided through first giving them wealth, food, clothing; then gradually they become receptive to the teachings and you can give them teachings. Giving them wealth is a preliminary which also pacifies their difficulties and suffering.

“May I have whatever control I wish over the three realms” means that to be able to continue your Dharma practice for the sake of other sentient beings and especially to guide them to enlightenment, you need control over the humans dependent on the six sense objects here in the realm of desire, and those in the form and formless realms. “Whatever control I wish” means control over the particular conditions – places, possessions, food – that are needed. If you are doing Dharma activities to benefit sentient beings, other people may interfere. Even though your motivation and actions may be very pure – wanting to guide sentient beings by leading them to accumulate the unmistakable causes of temporal and ultimate happiness – other beings may interfere in that. “Whatever control I wish” means control over these beings who are interfering in your ability to do these works for sentient beings. If you need to practice Dharma by doing retreat in a certain place, for example, you need to be supported and to have visas. This depends on people helping you financially and also with visas. If you do not have control over them, they may become obstacles to your wish to succeed in the practice. This is the purpose of praying to have control over beings and wealth.

You are also requesting to dispel your enemies. The main enemy is the inner enemy of the self-cherishing thought. This selfish mind is your worst enemy. Another enemy is the ignorance which grasps at the I, the aggregates, the six sense objects, and

all phenomena as existing from their own sides. While in reality they are merely labeled by thought and exist in mere name, they do not appear as merely labeled. They appear as existing from their own sides. You completely grasp and believe 100% in these objects as truly existent. This particular ignorance is grasping at things as truly existent. The other branches of ignorance are not knowing Dharma, the causes of happiness and suffering, ignorance in karma, the five wrong views and the five non-views. However, the origin of these branches is the ignorance grasping at true existence.

The self-cherishing thought and ignorance grasping at true existence are the real enemies, the real obstacles. Because of being friends with these, your greatest enemies and delusions, you find outside enemies. By having inner enemies, you find outside enemies who harm you. Through being friends with the inner enemy, external obstacles arise. These obstacles are not necessarily sentient beings but can even be non-living things such as fire, water, air and earth which can cause danger to your life and harm you. Even non-living things can become conditions that disturb you. Other sentient beings, instead of giving the help you wish, can give you harm that you do not like. Similarly, the four elements, instead of benefiting you, can become disturbances. All these disturbances are created by inside enemies.

All these disturbances are created by inside enemies. Things bother you instead of benefiting you because of the inner enemy. This is why the great bodhisattva, Shantideva, said in *Bodhicaryavatara*: "Once the one enemy, the inner enemy, is destroyed, it is like having conquered and destroyed all outside enemies." Otherwise, if you do not destroy the inside enemy, you have endless enemies. Destroying those people that give you harm, that you have pointed out as being enemies, only makes continual enemies. Look at the examples in the world of two countries or even two people fighting. Even if you are able to defeat and kill the other person, for the time being no one may come to kill you, but

eventually your own life will be in danger. The relatives of your enemy may come to kill you, for example. And even if this does not happen in this life, in other lifetimes, because of the evolution of karma, the person you killed in the past will kill you.

The example is given that if you want to destroy all the thorns on this earth, you will not be able to finish the work of cutting them. But wearing shoes is like covering all the thorns on the earth with leather. If you wear shoes, these small pieces of leather, wherever you walk on this earth, no thorns can go into your feet. It is similar with the enemy. The greatest profit comes from attempting, your whole life long, to destroy the inner enemy. This example shows the disadvantages of dedicating your whole life to destroying the outside enemy and the inconceivable advantages of destroying the inner enemy.

Once this inner enemy is eliminated, it is impossible for it to arise again. It is impossible for you to be controlled by disturbing thoughts because there is no cause for them to arise. Once the seed of ignorance holding things as truly existent is eliminated, there is no way disturbing thoughts can arise. This is why Dharma practice is one-time work. Worldly work, no matter how many times it is done, cannot be completed. There is no end to it. In other words, there is no way worldly work, work for the delusions, can ever be finished. Doing worldly work makes the work continue longer.

The prayer also mentions dispelling “untimely death.” There are two kinds of death: general death and untimely death. Untimely death means that although you have accumulated the karma to live longer, to seventy or one hundred years, because of some heavy negative karma or obstacle, death happens before this life span is finished. If you are going to die because of some heavy negative karma, you can postpone death and live longer by purifying with practices like Vajrasattva and making tsa-tsas. Some buddhas, such as the Immovable Buddha (Mitrugpa) and Kunrig, have manifested to allow sentient beings to purify these kinds of obstacles. Then for obstacles to long life, there are White

Tara, the Long Life Buddha (Amitabha) and the Infinite Life Buddha (Amitayus), whose particular function in guiding sentient beings is to grant long life. Shortage of life happens because of shortage of merit, finishing your good karma. You can accumulate more merit if you practice these methods.

As objects of merit, starting from this life, there is more power and more merit in offering service to and helping your parents than other people. Next is the Sangha, which here seems to mean only those living in vows of celibacy. The absolute Sangha are much greater objects of merit than ordinary Sangha. Bodhisattvas are much greater objects of merit than arhats.

There is quite a big difference in regard to bodhisattvas. Looking respectfully at one bodhisattva with a calm devoted mind has much greater merit than making charity of eyes to all the beings of the three galaxies. Looking disrespectfully, with an angry mind, is also very powerful: the negative karma is much greater than taking out the eyes of all those beings. The big difference is because of the realizations of a bodhisattva. Even though he is only one being, because of his realizations of bodhichitta, a bodhisattva is an unbelievably powerful object. And this is only talking about looking at a bodhisattva with a little respect, not even beginning to talk about making offerings to him. Buddhas are much more powerful objects of merit than bodhisattvas. Higher than buddhas, though this may sound strange to you, is your own virtuous friend. This is explained in the teachings. Try to practice what is the most powerful according to this explanation.

### *Filling the Tsa-Tsas*

All statues need to be filled with scriptures and the mantras of different deities in different parts of the statue such as the throne, lotus, and holy body. Tsa-tsas are the same. The different parts inside our bodies have different functions; similarly, statues have different parts that need consecration.

On well-cleaned grain, recite the Dependent Related Heart Mantra.

In other words, bless the grain by reciting the mantra. This grain is inserted in the back of the tsa-tsa the way that mantras are put in statues to consecrate them. Your hands, the clay, and everything else should be kept clean.

If you are making the tsa-tsas for a person who is sick or in danger of not having a long life, at the beginning, before actually printing the tsa-tsas, recite mantras of long-life buddhas and request these buddhas to increase the life of the person.

If you are making the tsa-tsas so that a person who has died finds a good rebirth in the body of a happy transmigratory being, recite the mantra of Mitrugpa, the Immovable Buddha, from the Guhyasamaja tantra:

NAMO RATNA TRAYAYA OM KAMKANI KAMKANI ROCHANI  
ROCHANI TROTANI TROTANI TRASANI TRASANI PRATIHANA  
PRATIHANA SARVA KARMA PARAM PARA NI ME SARVA  
SATTVA NANCHA SVAHA

Recite the Vajrasattva mantra also, and the mantras of other deities powerful in purifying obscurations.

Reciting these mantras purifies the negative karma to experience the suffering of the narak, animal, and preta realms. Actually, the most important thing is for the person to find a body which has the opportunity to practice Dharma. Otherwise, if the person does not meet Dharma, being born in the upper realms does not mean much. It does not mean that he will not be born later in the body of an unhappy transmigratory being. Where he will go de-

depends on what he does with his life, with his body, speech, and mind. Being born as a deva, a worldly god, does not mean much because they do not have the opportunity to practice Dharma. Worldly gods are only living on previous merit and are not creating any more. When that previous good karma is used by enjoying its results, there is nothing left.

By taking a body that has the opportunity to practice Dharma, a person not only experiences his previous good karma, but creates more good karma. From life to life, it gets better and better; and by continuing to practice, the person can achieve peerless enlightenment. Therefore, praying to find a perfect body in which to practice Dharma is most important.

With the pure attitude of taking complete responsibility for liberating the person from the lower realms by yourself alone, and for leading them to the perfect body of a happy transmigratory being, begin to print the tsa-tsas.

When making the tsa-tsas, there are various mantras to recite. When you take the clay, recite:

OM NAMO SAMANTA BUDDHANAN / OM VAJRA AYU  
KSHE SVAHA

As you cut the clay, recite:

OM VAJRODDHA VAYE SVAHA

When putting oil on the clay, recite:

OM AH RAJE BIRAJE SVAHA

As you put the clay in the mold, recite:

OM DHARMADHATU GARBHE SVAHA

OM VAJRADHATU GARBHE SVAHA

And as you beat the mold, recite:

OM VAJRA MUNGARA AH KOTTAYA AH KOTTAYA HUM

and also the Dependent Related Heart Mantra

OM YE DHARMA HETU PRABHAVA HETUN TESHAN  
TATHAGATO HYAVADAT TESHANĀ CHA YO NIRODHA EVAM  
VADI MAHA SHRAMANA YE SVAHA , and OM AH HUM

Now put the previously blessed grain in the back of the tsa-tsa, like putting mantras in a statue.

As you cut off the extra clay, say:

OM GHAYUTE SVAHA

When the tsa-tsa is dry and you are painting it, recite:

OM VAJRA AH RAJE BIRAJE SVAHA

After you finish all this, to consecrate the tsa-tsas, say:

OM SUPRATISHTHA VAJRA YE SVAHA

Then when you take the tsa-tsa out of the mold, recite:

OM GHAYUTE SVAHA

OM DHARMADHATU YE SVAHA / DHAMADHATU GARBHE  
SVAHA (7x)

When you recite this last mantra, the tsa-tsa becomes numberless holy objects. *The Non-dual Method Wisdom Sutra* says, “This holy object does perfect work for all the transmigratory sentient beings until the end of samsara.”

## *The Completion*

The completion involves remembering the benefits of making tsa-tsa and the dedication prayers. Then put the tsas in a solitary place.

You achieve the following ten benefits from making tsa-tsas:

1. Perfect human rebirth – perfect body, senses, limbs, etc.
2. Perfect surroundings. You are able to fulfill all wishes (in benefiting other beings). Your surroundings are harmonious with your mind and you are surrounded by people who support your practice. Otherwise one cannot practice Dharma.
3. Pure morality. Without this, you cannot achieve the path.
4. Devotion to one’s teachers and to the buddhas.
5. Courage (perseverance). You will have the supreme courage to do things in public to benefit others.
6. Rebirth in the human realm or deva realm to benefit others.
7. The path of accumulation.
8. The arya’s path of seeing, where delusions and defilements cease. One stops creating karma, is free from delusion and karma, and thus is free from cyclic existence and rebirth. In tantra the arya’s path means that one has attained the wisdom of direct perception of emptiness.
9. The path of meditation.
10. The path of no more learning, where you are totally free from rebirth, old age, sickness, and death. You will achieve

the actualization of body, speech, and mind of enlightenment.

The benefits of making tsa-tsas and statues were explained by Guru Shakyamuni Buddha to King Sengyal, in a sutra. The essence is that the happiness of sentient beings depends on the teachings lasting a long time and being developed. This does not mean just the scriptures. If you remember when you say “teachings” that meaning is abandoning bad karma and creating good karma, it is clear why the happiness of sentient beings depends on the teachings. The teachings were revealed by Buddha and accomplished by the Sangha, through practicing them. It is all dependent on the Triple Gem. For ordinary sentient beings, it is difficult to see directly the internal Triple Gem of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, so there are statues, scriptures, and stupas which represent Buddha’s holy body, holy speech, and holy mind. Ordinary sentient beings can directly perceive these things, and then can easily accumulate merit.

By the condition of the existence of these holy objects, sentient beings accumulate merit in many ways: by praying, making offering, prostrating, and paying respect. Every single action such as making offerings, prostrating, and paying respect, not just to the actual Buddha but even to statues or paintings of Buddha, becomes the cause of achieving the highest, peerless happiness. This is without counting all the inconceivable temporary happinesses such as receiving the body of a happy transmigratory being, wealth, a long life, and all the desirable things that can be enjoyed. From the good karma of making one offering, you can enjoy the results in so many lifetimes.

Without counting these temporal enjoyments, each and every action becomes a cause for highest enlightenment. It is unbelievable.

Making statues or stupas becomes a very skillful and easy mean to guide sentient beings to create the cause of happiness.

This sutra also says that, equal in number to the atoms in the statue or stupa you have made, you will receive a human or a deva body and be born as a king. You will reach the perfect concentration of the form and formless realms and, after enjoying all these perfect places, you will be liberated from rebirth, aging, sickness, and death, and achieve enlightenment.

There are stories of beings like the previous Kadampa geshes who made statues to prolong their lives. For example, Depu Rinpoche was advised by White Tara to make a statue of her to postpone his death. He did so and his death was postponed for eleven years. Tara advised him to make another statue and Depu Rinpoche lived for ten years more. By this time he was more than eighty years old. When the ten years were up, he requested Tara again; once more she advised him to make a statue for his long life. He made a painting of Tara on a wall and lived until he was ninety-five. Even in these present times, there have been experiences of life being lengthened and death being postponed by doing this practice.

It is also commonly mentioned in the teachings, especially in regards to astrology, that making statues and paintings of buddhas can change the next rebirth. Instead of being born in the lower realms, you can be born in the upper realms, in the body of a happy transmigratory being, as a religious person relying on Dharma, and also as a wealthy person.

It is important to know the benefits, and to be able to tell others how to use the tsa-tsas and what they are for. Then, their attitude can be to use them more to purify the mind and accumulate merit with the idea of a deeper benefit for sentient beings. That is, purifying what you don't like, collecting what you do like.

There are many different types of dedication prayers you can make for the sake of yourself and others. Then the tsa-tsas you make can be used to put inside big statues or stupas, or can be on altars as objects to which we can make offerings. In Tibet and other countries of the Himalayan region, if they do not have place

for the tsa-tsas in the house, they put them in caves or on rocks where there is protection from rain. There is also a practice relating to nagas where you take the tsa-tsas to the ocean and respectfully – not throwing them or putting them upside down – put them in the water so that the nagas can accumulate merit with them as their holy objects. You put the tsa-tsas in the water for the happiness of the nagas. Doing this also purifies the animals living in the ocean who are touched by the water which has touched the tsa-tsas, the holy bodies of the buddhas. There are many other benefits.

If many people are making tsa-tsas and there is no place to put them, build a small square house and put the tsa-tsas inside it. In this way, the tsa-tsas are respected and you do not break your refuge precepts. If the tsa-tsas are not taken care of well but just left on the road, other people create negative karma by breaking and disrespecting them. The main point is that you keep them in a safe, clean place.

### *Colophon:*

Commentary given by Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche at Tushita Retreat Centre, Dharamsala, India on July 6, 1986. Originally edited by Venerable Ailsa Cameron and further edited with later commentary inserted by Venerable Gyalten Mindrol, FPMT Education Services, October 2009.

Teachings on Mantra Taught by Buddha Drodan Gyälwa Chhö from Lama Zopa Rinpoche dictated to Venerable Matthew Tenzin, Kachoe Dechen Ling, February, 2005. Words in [ ] were added by the translator for further clarification. Lightly edited by Venerable Holly Ansett, Kendall Magnussen, and Venerable Gyalten Mindrol, May 2005.

Teachings on the Zung of the Exalted Completely Pure Stainless Light scribed by Venerable Holly Ansett, Kachoe Dechen Ling, 2004.

Teachings on the Vairochana mantra, the mantra following the Vairochana mantra and the Great Wisdom Mantra dictated by Lama Zopa Rinpoche at Kachoe Dechen Ling, November 2006 to Venerable Lobsang Yangchen. Arranged by Venerable Holly Ansett and edited by Venerable Gyalten Mindrol, FPMT Education Services, June 2007.

# *Stories from Tsa-Tsa Makers*



# *Finding Freedom*

*by Venerable Amy Miller*

Over the years, I have been working on completing one whole set of the nine preliminary practices that are commonly given in the Gelug tradition (prostrations, guru yoga, Vajrasattva, refuge, mandala offerings, water bowls, Dorje Khadro, tsa-tsas, and Samayavajra). At one point, as part of these practices, Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche advised me to make 200,000 tsa-tsas instead of the usual 100,000. My mind wasn't overly pleased with this news. That is how it tends to go at first, right? We feel as if it is a burden, as if the Guru is putting this heavy, undesirable practice on top of us. The practice is time consuming, we feel guilty if we don't get started right away, and furthermore, it interferes with our pursuit of samsaric happiness.

In my heart, I could hear Lama Yeshe saying, "That's wrong thinking, dear."

I had been told how long and difficult this particular practice can be, so I decided to get started. I gathered all the necessary prayers and some information from those who had made them before.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche first suggested I make tsa-tsas during the break times of another retreat at Lawudo Retreat Center, in the Himalayan mountains of Nepal. I had never made tsa-tsas before and when I discussed this with Rinpoche, Rinpoche manifested the most enigmatic manner and said, in a mere whisper, "The people will show you. The people will show you." Rinpoche directed me to a very humble and sweet old monk named Gelong

Wangchuk, who lived at Khari Gompa, just below Lawudo. Gelong Wangchuk was in a sense “the tsa-tsa king” of the Thamé Valley, making countless images of buddhas. I had done many Nyung Nä retreats with the nuns there and had known Gelong Wangchuk for many years, so I asked Tsultim Norbu – the monk at Lawudo – if he would take me to see Gelong Wangchuk and translate for me, so I could get some instruction on how to make tsa-tsas. One afternoon, we went down to the nunnery and the three of us sat in front of Gelong Wangchuk’s hovel as he taught me to make tsa-tsas “the old fashioned way.” He showed me the consistency of the clay, how much water to add, how to press the mold in, how to pound the mold with a wooden paddle, what sort of paddle to use and so on. Once a big wind came up and blew dust all over us and Gelong Wangchuk reached up to rub his eyes and asked me, “Is it this dusty where you live?” I was humbled, realizing that he had only been to India a couple of times to attend teachings with His Holiness the Dalai Lama and truly had no concept of the type of world in which I lived.

Before I started my retreat, the staff at Lawudo secured a giant sack of beautiful white clay from Kumjung, one mountain away. It was carried by porter to Lawudo for the astonishing price of a mere US \$4 (I was unable to even move the bag myself). I fervently set to work in the yard of the retreat hut.

The weather at Lawudo is highly changeable and it is recommended to make tsa-tsas in sets of five. There were times when I had two or three little Mitrugpa Buddhas drying nicely on a wooden board by my side when a massive rain storm would sweep in and melt them back into clay before I could complete the set. It was good for my mind to check how the tsa-tsa had come into existence and where the buddha image had gone, now that it was melted back into clay, and so on. Even after I finished my retreat, I continued to make tsa-tsas outside my retreat hut. On many afternoons, the four-year-old Ngawang Jigme – the reincarnation of Lama Zopa Rinpoche’s mother – would visit and sit next to me while I worked.

About a month later, while I was in retreat, Gelong Wangchuk passed away. Inspired by the example of his life, I worked even harder at my tsa-tsa practice.

I made 2,000 tsa-tsas in the period after lunch while I was there. When it was time to leave Lawudo, I carefully packed up the tsa-tsas I had made into two clean soybean oil tins (many things at Lawudo are cleaned and reused), under the direction of Lama Zopa Rinpoche's precious sister, Ani Ngawang Samden. Together, we strapped the tins to our heads and carried them over to Charok, a twenty minute hike up the mountain behind Lawudo. We deposited the tins in a cave alongside the tins and tsa-tsas of generations of local practitioners.

I completed the bulk of the remainder of my tsa-tsa practice at Vajrapani Institute in California, while I was director there. The process in the West is very different from that at Lawudo – we use plaster rather than clay – and I had the good fortune to receive instruction from Venerable Lobsang Monlam, who was running the Tsa-Tsa Studio in San Francisco at the time. I also received tips from Kendall Magnussen and from Venerable Thubten Munsel, who gave me several molds and a wonderful work table.

I originally started making tsa-tsas on the porch of the small Chenrezig gumpa on the grounds at Vajrapani and was constantly running up and down the stairs of the building to wash the molds and get water. I purchased a number of silicon molds from Nalanda Monastery in France. Although they cost quite a lot of money with the shipping costs, they were beautiful molds and enabled me to make many images in one session. I used a type of plaster called hydrostone (in 50 and 100 lb bags). It was a laborious and dusty process. Leaves and pieces of bark from the large redwood trees continually found their way into the molds. Eventually, Vajrapani completed a large workshop at the center and I was able to move inside, into a small tsa-tsa studio in the building.

The studio was not heated nor did it have electricity. I remember during one month of retreat in winter, I stood making tsa-tsas

for several hours each day in damp conditions and with minimal light. The tsa-tsas were not drying quickly enough and I ran out of drying space. I was very cold and tired, and – remembering that it’s best to visualize as much as possible that you are making tsa-tsas out of precious jewels and metals – I kept myself motivated with a song that got going in my head (to the tune of “Get Me to the Church on Time” from the musical, “My Fair Lady”):

I’m making tsa-tsas out of rubies;  
EM AH, they’re really looking fine!  
Vajrayoginis, chase out the meanies,  
Oh get me to the state sublime!

I’m making tsa-tsas out of sapphires;  
EM AH, no air bubbles this time!  
Tiles of Mitrugpa, Medicine Buddhas,  
Oh get me to the state sublime!

When you have hydrostone, you have it all,  
But with the pigments you can really have a ball!

I’m making tsa-tsas out of diamonds;  
EM AH, they sparkle and they shine!  
Giant Herukas, dance ‘round the stupa,  
So get me to the state,  
Get me to the state,  
For beings’ sake, get me to the state...sublime!

I made a variety of buddha images at Vajrapani: tiles of Mitrugpas, giant Heruka Chakrasamvaras, triple molds with Chenrezig, Manjushri, and Vajrapani, Medicine Buddhas, and Vajrayoginis. I made tsa-tsas containing the ashes of recently deceased people. I made tsa-tsas in every spare moment I had: first thing in the morning or following lunch, during weekend programs, between giving teachings and after taking teachings, during group retreats

and while leading Nyung Nä and lam-rim retreats, and when I had time off. I was living and breathing tsa-tsas, and completed another 173,000 images while I was at Vajrapani.

It seems that a large part of the process of making tsa-tsas is figuring out what to do with the images after you make them. With the completion of thousands of buddha images, I didn't have the luxury at Vajrapani of depositing them in a local cave for safekeeping. However, I got an idea from the Tsa-Tsa Studio to mix the powdered plaster with colored pigment and I began creating images in every color imaginable. I had stunning images in purple, forest green, turquoise, salmon, gold, and lapis. You name it and I had a buddha image in that color. It was extremely uplifting for my mind and on occasion, the tsa-tsas turned out very beautifully, so much so that people wanted them for gifts or for their homes.

So I put up a table at Vajrapani and displayed the tsa-tsas at every event the center hosted. I also placed a laminated card on the table that explained what a tsa-tsa was and how and where to display it. Along with the tsa-tsas and the informational card, I included a donation jar and used the offerings to invest in more plaster and materials (this is one of the more expensive ngöndros to complete). Through this process, I was able to distribute most of the 173,000 tsa-tsas I made there, although a few boxes of badly broken tsa-tsas went into the Pacific Ocean off the coast of Santa Cruz, California. I am forever indebted to those who supported me through this tremendous purification practice.

At one point, I found a woman who was building a stupa in the Southwestern part of the United States. She was interested in the tsa-tsas I was making, as tsa-tsas are usually needed to fill stupas. She wanted forty boxes of tsa-tsas and even better, there was someone driving a pickup truck to her who would deliver them. It was too good to be true! I quickly packed twenty boxes of tsa-tsas for her and they were driven out.

There was a deadline for sealing the stupa, and I started madly making tsa-tsas to fill the other twenty boxes. Of course, the holy

Guru is never far away and suddenly, in the midst of my effort to make these tsa-tsas, I received a phone call from Lama Zopa Rinpoche's house in California. Rinpoche had given new instructions for making tsa-tsas: every air bubble in an image needed to be fixed.

I couldn't believe it! It was virtually impossible to make a lot of tsa-tsas without a lot of air bubbles. I tried to be careful, but sometimes they all came out of the molds with bubbles. I felt raw and done and so tired: tired of making tsa-tsas, tired of being the director of Vajrapani, tired of battling my delusions, tired of how slow and arduous this path to enlightenment was. What to do? Was I going to open every box of tsa-tsas I had packed and carefully check them all for air bubbles or just consider them done and start with the new ones? Did I have to tell the woman building the stupa that the ones I had sent were not suitable for placing inside the stupa? I was told that if a stupa is filled with broken images or images with air bubbles, it can create negative karma for the person making the stupa as well as for all those who circumambulate it.

I returned to the workshop and looked over a few of the images. Some had bubbles and some did not. Deep down, I knew that all Lama Zopa Rinpoche wanted was my freedom. My ego revolted. I grew negative and resentful. I took a few days off from the practice to give it space and in the end, I knew there was no choice; you see the writing on the wall, so to speak and it's just the delusions that keep painting over it. I had to check all the boxes. I fixed all the bubbles with clay and got a message to the woman who was building the stupa that the tsa-tsas would all have to be fixed or sent back to me to fix. Then the grace of the Guru: she replied that she would fix them herself.

Finally, with the fixed tsa-tsas packed and delivered and nearly 175,000 images completed according to the instructions of the Guru, I felt I had really done my best with this practice and had really purified something. It was a wonderful feeling to actually

complete one ngöndro in this way. The others I had done did not seem to have this quality, and I suppose the real point of doing these preliminary practices is not quantity, but quality. There felt to be a slight shift inside me, as if my holding so rigidly to certain views had loosened up and dissolved. Some of my negative behavior patterns that seemed to be very fixed in stone – like the images I had created – had melted. Perhaps the tsa-tsas took that energy from me. Inside, I could really feel the difference. I felt at the end that I could do it all over again. Hopefully, when I finish my last 25,000, I won't have to.



# Repaying the Kindness

*by Venerable Thubten Munsel*

In 1997, my holy Guru Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche gave me a number of preliminary practices to complete, including making 200,000 Mitrugpa tsa-tsas. At that time, I had already completed a water bowl offering ngöndro and had experienced *lung* (*lung* is a term from Tibetan medicine that means a person has an imbalance in the energy winds in the body), so I wasn't sure how I was going to fare making so many tsa-tsas. All my doubts came up: how could I afford to buy plaster? Where do you buy plaster? Where do you buy the tsa-tsa molds? And most importantly, where was I going to make the tsa-tsas? I didn't have a place to live at that time.

I purchased my molds from Venerable Tenzin Konchog, who was director of the FPMT Enlightenment Project for Purification and Merit in Australia. Although we never met in person, we corresponded by fax from time to time as the need for purchasing more molds arose.

At first, I considered making tsa-tsa tiles, because after all, the idea of making twenty images at a time rather than one larger image at a time seemed easier. However, right from the start, Ven. Tenzin Konchog encouraged me to make a large Mitrugpa Buddha statue (about three inches high), saying how beautiful they were and extolling the virtues of making them this way. Convinced, I bought my first few molds – which she personally made – and got to work on my practice. Whether I was living in a house, in a tent, in a cabin, wherever – I made tsa-tsas. Due to the kindness of

many people and the blessings of my Guru, I was able to sustain this practice for several years.

Unless you've made tsa-tsas for any length of time, it's not easy to understand the kind of purification that goes on during this practice. Needless to say, it can be intensive. I worked on this practice for two years straight, except for when one of my gurus told me to stop and take a break for a few weeks.

I was working on the last 100,000 tsa-tsas when I received a phone call. Ven. Tenzin Konchog was dying and Lama Zopa Rinpoche was asking several people to make a total of 500,000 Mitrugpa tsa-tsas on her behalf, even before she passed away. Rinpoche asked if I could make her 100,000 tsa-tsas. Rinpoche said that I could include the tsa-tsas I made for her in my own tsa-tsa count. This meant that I would have to make an additional 75,000 tsa-tsas. Without any hesitation, I said I would do it.

As it turned out, my tsa-tsa practice took on new meaning after that. It's not hard to include "all sentient beings" into your prayers, but when you are making just one sentient being your focus with all your heart – I found that very effective for my mind.

Eventually, I went into long retreat in a cabin at Vajrapani Institute. I set up a tsa-tsa table on the deck of the cabin and set up a tarp, like a tent, over the workspace so I could continue to make tsa-tsas during the winter rains. During my break times, I would go out on the deck and make tsa-tsas for Ven. Konchog, who by that time had passed away. Prior to her death, she was made aware of all the individuals who were making tsa-tsas on her behalf. Someone had sent me her photo which I immediately put up on the outside wall near the tsa-tsa table, to serve as a constant reminder of her kindness in encouraging me on with this practice. Moreover, I was now making her tsa-tsas with the molds that she had personally made for my use.

One day, I came out on the cabin deck and I noticed that her photo was on the deck floor. For some reason, I decided to check the calendar and sure enough, it was exactly forty-nine

days since she passed away. I felt this was some kind of sign that the collective efforts of everyone making tsa-tsas for her had helped her out.

While I was still on retreat, I received a card from her mother, thanking me for making tsa-tsas for her daughter. Receiving the card made me reflect on how Tenzin Konchog had been such an inspiration for me, in persevering in my tsa-tsa practice. My understanding of interdependence had deepened, as well as my gratitude that I feel towards my mother sentient beings, for all that they have done and continue to do for me.



# *Practical Advice* *on Materials and Process*



# *Tsa-Tsa Materials*

The practice of making tsa-tsas is a physical one and requires several different materials, utensils, and containers. Here is a shopping list and a brief discussion of the different options you have for tsa-tsa materials. You may need to experiment, as the material will set differently in different climates and altitudes, and may even change over the course of a year in climates with four seasons. If there are experienced tsa-tsa makers in your area, check with them to see what products work best in your climate.

These are standard products often used in the architectural, statuary, and art fields. After the list below is a more detailed discussion of your options for each material. Brand names of different products have been given when available, and a general description of the product has been given so that practitioners in each country can find it.

## *Shopping List for Tsa-Tsa Practice*

- Tsa-tsa molds
- Tsa-tsa plaster
- Wetting agent
- Non-phosphate liquid laundry soap for washing utensils and molds
- 2 or more containers – one for washing and the other for preparing the tsa-tsa material.
- Measuring cup or scoop for scooping material
- Utensils for mixing the material and water – whisk, chopstick, or other

- Container for water
- Pitcher to pour the mixture into the molds
- Fine paint brush or straight stick for brushing in the wetting agent
- Fine paint brush or straight stick for removing bubbles from the mixture
- Mantras, beads, or rice to insert in back of tsa-tsa
- A large table or flat surface to use as a work area
- Shelves or a table for drying tsa-tsas
- Boxes to store your completed tsa-tsas

### *Optional*

- Pigments to color your tsa-tsa plaster mixture
- Paint for painting tsa-tsas – can include gold spray paint
- Pressure tank.

## *Tsa-Tsa Molds*

Silicon tsa-tsa molds can be obtained from Nalanda Monastery in France and from the Enlightenment Project for Purification and Merit in Australia. These are most recommended. Brass molds of several deities and stupas are also available from the online shop Tibetan Spirit in the United States. See the Helpful Resources section of this book for contact information.

Silicon tsa-tsa molds will only last for a certain amount of time before needing to be replaced. If you are making many tsa-tsas, be sure to check your molds periodically to make sure they are retaining all the detail they originally had. If they are not, it is time to order new molds.

Nalanda Monastery and Enlightenment Project for Purification and Merit are also a good source of information on how to create your own molds from other tsa-tsas or from statues.

## *Tsa-Tsa Plaster*

### *Gypsum Cement*

In Tibet and Nepal, tsa-tsas are made from clay and printed with bronze molds. However, in the West, we have developed a system using plaster and silicon molds.

Most tsa-tsa practitioners recommend using a high quality gypsum cement traditionally used for making statuary. The brand names vary from country to country: in the United States, a popular brand is Hydrostone and in Australia the brand name is HydroCal. Makers in France report using a high quality plaster of Paris that is manufactured for making industrial molds and statuary; there are several brands available there.

This type of cement provides several advantages over regular plaster, as it is easier to work with and less prone to bubbles. It dries quite quickly; usually the tsa-tsas can be taken from the molds within 45 minutes, and this enables the practitioner to make more tsa-tsas per day. The finished product is also much harder and durable and thus longer lasting. This type of cement can be found at building supply stores and ceramic suppliers.

Hydrostone/HydroCal can be quite expensive. To bring down the cost of using pure Hydrostone, but retain some of the benefits of its qualities, it is possible to make a blend of Hydrostone and traditional plaster, using a percentage of each material. It is best to err on the side of more Hydrostone than plaster, as plaster is quite prone to air bubbles and takes a long time to dry (often up to 6 hours).

### *Durham's Rock Hard Water Putty*

One tsa-tsa maker in the United States reports amazing results using a product called Durham's Rock Hard Water Putty, which is also gypsum based. The product website reports that it is a good

choice for casting and that it takes color and paint well. It is available in hardware stores, paint supply stores, and many art and craft supply stores.

## *Gypsum-Acrylic Blends*

### *The Forton MG Casting System*

The Tsa-Tsa Studio in the San Francisco Bay Area uses a method called the Forton MG casting system, which consists of a number of different ingredients and is used by professional sculptors. The benefits of using this system are that a) the material is extremely strong, durable, and lightweight (products last some 25-30 years); b) pigments or metal powders can be added when casting, to produce a variety of colors and metal tsa-tsas; c) the metal tsa-tsas can be used outdoors without being damaged, such as in gardens, installations, and walls; and d) the material is non-toxic. The drawbacks to using this system are that it is more expensive than other methods and is more complicated due to the large number of ingredients needed.

Forton MG uses gypsum cement combined with a dry melamine resin powder, a hardener, a liquid polymer called Forton VF-812, and fiberglass. This process was originally developed in the building industry to create architectural ornaments, panels, and facades and it was quickly adopted by artists for casting and sculpting.

Forton MG starter kits, containing everything you need to make tsa-tsas using this process, are available from several online retail outlets. See the Helpful Resources section of this book for more information.

### *Other Gypsum-Acrylic Blends*

Another gypsum cement-acrylic blend is available primarily in the United Kingdom and is called Jesmonite. A similar product called Aqua Resin is available in the United States and Acrystal

is available in Europe. All of these products can, like Forton MG, be mixed with metals and various pigments, and are traditionally used in the architectural design field.

## *Wetting Agent*

All tsa-tsa makers recommend coating the inside of the mold with some substance that will prevent the tsa-tsas from sticking when they are removed from the mold. It also helps prevent the formation of air bubbles when you pour the plaster. After the mold is washed and just before the plaster material is poured into it, this substance is poured or sprayed into the mold, spread around the small details in the mold with a fine rounded paintbrush, and then the excess - if any - is poured out.

Some tsa-tsa makers recommend using Windex or another similar ammonia-based window washing solution. Others recommend coating the inside of the mold with a fine solution of hair conditioner and water. Finally, others use a professional mold release solution that is available from fine art supply shops (see Helpful Resources for more information).

## *Containers*

You may use simple buckets, old ice cream containers (the big plastic kind), or other bowls. Whatever type of container you choose, it should be large enough that you could fit your entire hand inside. One experienced tsa-tsa maker recommends using the special rubber mixing bowls that dentists use. These never break and the unused plaster which is inevitably left in the bowl can be allowed to set hard, then cracked out of the bowl later, rather than washing the plaster out before it has set, which pollutes the environment. This method also saves cleaning time as well as making sure that the inner surface of the container is as clean as possible. Any set plaster left in your bowl will shorten the

setting time of the next lot of plaster you mix.

You may prefer to have more than one bowl for mixing your plaster, so that you can use a clean one while waiting for the other to be cleaned and dried. Depending on your workspace, you may also need a second container to wash tsa-tsa molds and utensils.

## ***Paint Brushes***

Use a small, stiff bristled brush that is normally used for oil painting, with a round head (number 2 or 3). You will need a second brush or straight stick to eliminate air bubbles from the plaster mixture. These are easily found in art supply shops.

## ***Mantras, Beads, or Rice***

Lama Zopa Rinpoche recommends that mantras are inserted in the back of the tsa-tsa, at the level of the heart. Rinpoche has not specifically mentioned mantras for tsa-tsas, but Rinpoche always recommends that statues be filled with the Four Dharmakaya Relic Mantras, as many copies as possible. These mantras can be downloaded from the website of the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (see the Helpful Resources section), reduced in size with a high quality photocopier if necessary, cut out, and completely wrapped in tape to prevent the mantras from getting wet. Some tsa-tsa makers use yellow duct tape for this purpose, as mantras are traditionally wrapped in yellow cloth.

If you choose not to use mantras, you may instead use rice or little glass beads, available from craft and bead shops. Both substances should be clean before they are inserted into the tsa-tsa.

## *Boxes to Store Tsa-Tsas*

You will need a convenient way to store them. Nalanda Monastery recommends using wooden flats used to ship fruit and vegetables. These are available from grocery stores, produce stores and other markets. Depending on the size of your box and the size of your tsa-tsa, each box will hold between 60-100 tsa-tsas.

## *Pigments and Paint*

Pigments for coloring your plaster mixture and paints for painting the tsa-tsa can be obtained from art supply stores. If you would like to paint your entire tsa-tsa gold, you may use gold spray paint over a reddish-brown primer.

## *Pressure Tank*

If you are making many tsa-tsas, you might consider purchasing a pressure tank (or pressure pot). The use of a pressure tank in the tsa-tsa making process helps eliminate air bubbles. After the plaster mixture is put into the molds, the molds are put into the tank, where extremely high pressure forces the bubbles to break. Using a pressure tank is not a total guarantee that air bubbles won't form, but it can aid in the process.

Tsa-tsa makers recommend using at least a five- or ten-gallon pressure tank, depending on the size of your molds and how many you would like to create at one time. Unless you are using very small molds, the ten-gallon tank will be better. You may also need to construct a wooden shelf inside the tank to hold more molds.

Pressure tanks are available new from several online retailers in many sizes and at many price levels. They may also be purchased used on online auction sites such as eBay. A good brand is Binks.

Your pressure tank will also need an air compressor capable of running at 80 psi or higher (but not lower than that). These are available at big hardware and building supply stores.

# *The Process of Making Tsa-Tsas*

## *The Preliminaries*

Do the preliminary section of the practice, including generating yourself as the deity and doing the refuge and bodhicitta prayer, reciting the increasing mantra, blessing the tsa-tsa plaster and the mantras/beads/rice with the appropriate mantras, and, if needed, reciting the mantras for sickness and long life, etc. When you bless the plaster, you may bless a whole bag of at once if you are doing many sessions, making sure to reaffirm the visualization and blessing with each session.

## *Preparing the Molds*

Wash the molds with warm water and mild soap, such as a phosphate-free liquid laundry detergent. If the molds haven't been washed for some time, use a new toothbrush and scrub them gently. Recite the mantra for preparing the molds – OM AH RAJE BIRAJE SVAHA – and think that you are offering a bath to the bud-dhas. Rinse and turn them upside down on a drying rack and allow them to dry. You may need to tap the molds on a hard surface to remove excess water clinging to the inside. If you are doing many sessions in a row, the molds do not need to be washed for every session, only from time to time as needed. The tsa-tsa makers at Nalanda Monastery recommend washing the molds every fourth use or so.

Once the molds are dry, pour wetting agent (windex, mold release solution, or a water-hair conditioner solution) into the

molds while reciting the mantra, again imagining that you are offering a bath or perfume to the buddhas.

If you are using a water-hair conditioner solution, the hair conditioner should be thinly diluted. Add the water to the conditioner bit by bit to avoid small lumps of conditioner forming and floating around in the solution; they can stay in the mold and make the plaster gooey. Using warm or hot water to make the solution prevents lumps. The conditioner can be heavily diluted. Just make sure the water feels a bit slimy when you rub it between your fingers. You can make a jar of it ahead of time and keep it ready for multiple sessions. Pour it into the mold until it is 80% full.

With a rounded brush, brush the wetting agent into the mold, being sure to cover all the fine detail in the mold, paying special attention to the hands, faces, and other detailed parts. Air bubbles will detach from the mold and float to the surface. In order to prevent the formation of new bubbles, keep the brush head below the surface of the liquid, rather than bringing it in and out of the water. Then pour the excess – if any – into an empty container. Turn the mold upside down to drain while you are mixing the plaster.

Alternatively, if you are using windex or a spray solution, you may spray a fine mist of into the mold. This reduces the step of needing to brush the solution into the mold and pour the excess out. Leave only a fine coating of substance on the molds. Windex can be reused until it becomes cloudy or dirty.

## *Mixing the Materials*

When mixing your plaster, you will have to experiment, as different plaster material as well as the difference in water and climate in various parts of the world will affect the consistency of your plaster.

Start by pouring water into your empty mixing container. The amount of water you need depends on how many and what type

of molds you have to fill and how fast you are able to work with the material before it hardens. You will need to learn by trial and error how much you can make and pour in any given batch without hindrances.

Usually, tsa-tsa makers recommend that it is best to make your mixture about the same consistency as a thin milkshake or pancake batter. The plaster, when mixed, should be liquid enough to pour into the molds but it should also be thick enough that it doesn't spread out completely flat and even by itself, but must be spread out evenly across the whole mold with the finger. However, if it is too thick, it won't pour well or go completely into the crevices of the mold.

Put only water in your mixing container first, then slowly add the plaster mixture. Recite the mantra OM NAMO SAMANTA BUDDHANAN / OM VAJRA AYU KSHE SVAHA as you add the mixture. You may stir it with a utensil such as a chopstick or spatula, taking care not to create more air bubbles in the process, or you may use a mixing method recommended by the tsa-tsa makers at Nalanada Monastery, in which the blending process is done completely by hand.

## *Hand Blending Process*

Take a handful of plaster and sprinkle it in finely and evenly over the whole surface of the water, making sure to keep the water as still as possible. Keep sprinkling, letting all the plaster disappear before sprinkling the next handful. Sprinkle the plaster softly, because then the plaster will be absorbed evenly into the water and no lumps will form. This means you won't need to stir it as much and this is good, because stirring the mixture aerates it and causes air bubbles in the finished product. Don't mix the plaster in yet.

Stop sprinkling when the height of the plaster reaches the water surface and is just starting to peak up through the water. It should be even, not with a big lump in the middle. If there are big,

uneven patches above the water surface, the plaster will be thick and lumpy, and if you leave too much loose water on the top the plaster will be too thin. Tap the container gently to dislodge any plaster stuck to the sides so it dissolves into the water.

This is the stage where you have some control over setting and drying times, so depending on what work you are doing, you may want a wetter or drier mix. Experiment with different amounts of plaster. You don't have much leeway to alter the mix if the plaster is to dry properly and with maximum strength.

Before you mix the plaster into the water, set it aside for awhile to allow the plaster to soak. Soaking helps eliminate air in the mix, as well as making the plaster easier to disperse. The recommended soaking time is about two minutes, but this seems too long for the small amounts of plaster used for tsa-tsas, so try a minute or less. While the mix is soaking, you can check your mold to make sure that it is completely clean and that there isn't too much wetting agent left inside it. You may want to flick it to eliminate any excess. Pay particular attention to very deep or detailed areas.

As you stir the mixture, recite OM VAJRODDHA VAYE SVAHA. Put your whole hand in and move your fingers along the bottom, lifting the plaster with smooth movements. Do not lift your hand in and out of the water as this creates air bubbles. Keep mixing until there are no lumps and the plaster is smooth and creamy. If you did the sprinkling well, you won't have to stir much at all. Longer mixing increases the strength of the plaster, so take your time. However, don't mix for so long that the plaster starts setting, since you won't be able to work with it and the strength of the plaster will be reduced.

Never mix the plaster in the opposite way, by putting plaster in the container first and then adding water to the plaster. If your plaster is too thick at this stage, you either have to work more quickly or make a thinner mixture in the first place. You can try to add water if the plaster is too thick but you should not add

plaster if it is too thin. If you use hot water when mixing the plaster, it sets much more quickly.

Mixing by hand is most recommended due to the potential of introducing air bubbles into the mixture when using an electronic device, although the danger is less with a chop stick or spatula. Mix it well until all lumps are gone, but don't take too long as it will start to harden!

Any set plaster left in your bowl will shorten the setting time of the next lot of plaster you mix. If you can't wait for the plaster in your bowl to dry, wash it out with water as soon as possible – you may need to scrub a bit. Keep a number of bowls handy so that you never run out. If you have a rubber dentist bowl, you may allow the plaster to set and then crack it out later and dispose of it properly.

## *Making Your Tsa-Tsas*

Pour your mixture into a water pitcher and use this to pour it into the molds. Set the mold on a level surface and pour the plaster in slowly and steadily from one side, until all the detail is well-covered but the mold not quite completely full.

Pour slowly and carefully, making sure not to overfill the molds or spill. The mixture is blessed, so it cannot be thrown away if you make too much, spill it, etc. Use all of the mixture you have made and fill as many molds as you can with one batch. It is fine to only partially fill a mold and later top it off with another batch. It is better to make too little than too much to start until you work out how much you really need.

Keep in mind the five groups of beings to whom to dedicate your tsa-tsas when pouring and recite the appropriate mantra. If you have time, recite the prayer for the respective group after each 1/5 of the total amount of tsa-tsas you are making. If you absolutely cannot recite the prayers after each 1/5 of the tsa-tsas that you are making, it is possible to recite them at the end, when

all the tsa-tsas have been poured. But it is better to recite it during the process of making the tsa-tsas, rather than afterwards.

When your containers that held the mixture are empty, pour water into them immediately to avoid a crust hardening on them (unless you are using rubber dentist bowls). This makes it easier to clean them when you have finished the session. For the same reason, keep your utensils in water when not in use during the session and rinse them well when you are finished. It is good to have extra water on hand in a pitcher or bucket for this purpose.

Then, while reciting the mantra OM VAJRA MUNGARA AH KOTTAYA AH KOTTAYA HUM and the Dependent Related Heart Manta, brush the mix into the molds using a chopstick or a rounded paintbrush, being sure to get the plaster into the fine details of the tsa-tsa and working out the air bubbles. Don't take too long with this step as the mixture will begin to harden.

You may complete the process of filling the tsa-tsa molds in two ways: 1) you may fill the tsa-tsa mold almost to the top, put in the blessed mantras/beads/rice, and then fill it the rest of the way, being sure to level off the top of the surface with your finger or a stick, or 2) you may fill the tsa-tsa mold the entire way and then put in the blessed mantras/beads/rice. In either case, make sure that the mantras/beads/rice are inserted at the level of the heart and that they do not either float to the surface or fall through to the front of the image. You will need to experiment to see which method is best for you and your materials, climate, and so forth.

### *Adding the Mantras/Beads/Rice*

Take your mantras, blessed glass beads, or blessed rice (beads are preferred to rice or seeds as they sink well into the mixture, do not mold, and do not attract rodents looking for a meal), and place them into the heart of each deity while reciting the mantras OM SARVA BUDDHAYA SVAHA, OM VAJRA AYUKHE SVAHA, and

OM YE DHARMA HETU PRABHAVVA HETUN TESHAN TATHAGATO  
HYAVADAT TESHAN CHA YO NIRODHA EVAM VADI MAHA SHRA-  
MANA YE SVAHA.

If the mantras/beads/rice do not disappear quickly from the surface, you may have made your batter too thick or you may have made too much batter for your production pace and it has had too long to thicken. You will need to physically push the beads below the surface or they will pop out while drying. If disaster strikes and it is too hard to get the beads in, wait until the tsa-tsas are dry and then you may write OM AH HUM on the back of each deity at the crown, throat, and heart to bless them.

Now take the time to go rinse out your containers and mixing implements. As mentioned above, it is good to use unbreakable rubber mixing bowls because you can then leave the plaster which is left over to set in the bowl, then crack it out later and dispose of it properly. Cleaning the bowl while the plaster is still not set can either block up the sinks or if poured away, may cause damage to the environment. Make sure the bowl is properly cleaned before starting another mixture.

Then recite the seven-limbed prayer.

## *Final Steps*

Put the tsa-tsa mold on a level surface and allow it to set well. Depending on the climate and the type of plaster used, they will need from 20 minutes to two hours to set. While the plaster is setting, a chemical reaction takes place and the plaster heats up quite dramatically. When it has heated and then cooled down again and is no longer warm and moist to the touch, the plaster is cured and can be removed from the mold. Care still needs to be taken though, because the plaster will be quite soft. It takes a couple of days for plaster to completely dry.

When removing the tsa-tsas from the mold, be careful to both push the images out from the back of the mold and pull back the mold from the images to remove them, taking care not

to tear the silicon rubber. As you remove the tsa-tsas, recite the mantras OM GHAYUTE SVAHA and OM DHARMADHATU YE SVAHA / DHAMADHATU GARBHE SVAHA (7x).

If your actual mold had small air bubble holes in it, you will find little bobbles on your image. These are easily flicked off with a pin. It is best to do this immediately because they are harder to get off when the plaster is completely dry. Be careful not to scratch the image.

If you find air bubble holes in your image, they must be fixed. Fill them by dotting wet plaster into the holes with a fine, pointed brush or pin and smoothing the surface down. The added plaster will take better if the area is wet.

Place the tsa-tsas on a clean, level shelf to dry. They may stand up or lie down as you like. They should be allowed to dry well for at least two to three days before painting or storing them in boxes (if you are boxing them). If they are boxed too early, moisture still emits from the tsa-tsas as they are drying, creating a damp atmosphere in the box which leads readily to molding. It isn't pretty to open up a box of moldy tsa-tsas only weeks after you put them nicely away.

Make sure to clean up well and to sweep up the bits and pieces of material that invariably end up around the table and ground area. This material is blessed and should be put into a river, lake, or ocean, on top of a mountain, or in the tsa-tsa house with other holy objects. It should not be thrown away or stepped on.

If you are painting the tsa-tsa, wait several days before painting, until the tsa-tsa is completely dry. As you paint, recite the mantra OM VAJRA AH RAJE BIRAJE SVAHA.

Then finally, consecrate the statue with the mantra OM SUPRATISHTHA VAJRA YE SVAHA.

Conclude by remembering the benefits of making tsa-tsas and making dedications.

## What To Do with Your Tsa-Tsas

If you are fulfilling a tsa-tsa preliminary practice, you will quickly find yourself with many boxes of tsa-tsas. The inevitable question arises of what can be done with this plethora of holy images.

One should never allow tsa-tsas with air bubbles or flaws on the body of the Buddha to be viewed by other people. This is because viewing such an image may cause others to disparage the image and may lead them to think thoughts such as “That Buddha’s nose has a hole in it. How ugly!” It is all right to say that the craftsmanship of that particular image could have been better, but one should avoid creating situations where others might make negative comments about a buddha. Therefore, separate the perfect images from those that have air bubbles or flaws.

Perfect tsa-tsas can be given away as gifts, offered to Dharma centers for fundraising events or to give away as a practice of generosity, placed in a stupa (if someone in your country is building a stupa, they may be thrilled to receive tsa-tsas), or placed anywhere where people will see them and receive the benefit of doing so. It is really good to place them where people can make offerings and prostrations to them or circumambulate them.

You may also use perfect images to make a tsa-tsa wall. Tsa-tsas can easily be mounted on wall surfaces with the use of strong mounting pads or other adhesives. In general, square or rectangular tiles are used to make tsa-tsa walls, as they can be laid out in a grid pattern and fit neatly together. However, almost any image could be used, as tsa-tsas have flat backs that make them suitable for mounting. Tsa-tsas made with pigment (colored tsa tsas) are suitable for interior use, while those made of metal (copper, brass, aluminum, or bronze) can be placed outdoors without any deterioration due to the elements. See Helpful Resources for more information.

Tsa-tsas that are damaged and cannot be fixed are not suitable for public viewing. They can be placed in remote caves, in

bodies of water, or in other remote areas where people will not see them but where animals and other beings could still benefit from their presence. Another common practice is to build a tsa-tsa house and place all the damaged or “imperfect” images inside the house. Once the house was full, it should be sealed so that others would not go inside.

*Colophon:*

Information on making and storing tsa-tsas received from Nalanda Monastery, Tsa Tsa Studio / Center for Tibetan Sacred Art, Kendall Magnussen, Vens. Thubten Munsel and Sophia Tenzin. Edited and compiled in this form by Ven. Gyalten Mindrol. All errors are the responsibility of the editor.

# Helpful Resources

## *Tsa-Tsa Molds*

## *Silicon Molds*

### **Nalanda Monastery**

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Tel: (05) 6358 0225

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[www.nalanda-monastery.eu](http://www.nalanda-monastery.eu)  
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### **The Enlightenment Project for Purification and Merit**

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[www.enlightenmentproject.com](http://www.enlightenmentproject.com)  
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## *Brass Molds*

### **Tibetan Spirit**

P. O. Box 57  
Boonsboro, MD 21713 USA

If calling from within the United States: 1-888-327-2890

If calling from outside the United States: (301) 432-1984

[www.tibetanspirit.com](http://www.tibetanspirit.com)

[shop@tibetanspirit.com](mailto:shop@tibetanspirit.com)

## *Wetting Agent*

The Sangha at Lama Zopa Rinpoche's house recommend using a mold release solution for treating the mold prior to pouring in the plaster mixture. They use the mold release solution available from a high-end art supply store in San Francisco called Dougless and Sturgess. The solution is Item# MC1027.

Dougless and Sturgess

730 Bryant Street (at Oak Grove St)

San Francisco, CA 94107 USA

(415) 896-6283

[www.artstuf.com](http://www.artstuf.com)

## *Plaster*

Hydrostone and HydroCal are available from several websites and also from large hardware and building supply shops, etc. For information on obtaining a Forton MG Casting System Starter Kit, see below. You may also obtain all the separate ingredients for the Forton MG Casting System from the same company. If you are interested in the Forton MG Casting system, the editor of this book also suggests doing an internet search for information, as there is quite a lot of information available.

Also included here is information on Durham's Rock Hard Water Putty. Although this is only available in shops, information is included here for tsa-tsa makers who would like more facts on the product before trying it.

### **Forton MG Starter Kit**

Dougless and Sturgess  
730 Bryant Street (at Oak Grove St)  
San Francisco, CA 94107 USA

Tel: (415) 896-6283

[www.artstuf.com](http://www.artstuf.com)

### **Durham's Rock Hard Water Putty**

The Donald Durham Company  
Box 804-E  
Des Moines, IA 50304 USA

Tel: (515) 243-0491

[www.waterputty.com](http://www.waterputty.com)

[info@waterputty.com](mailto:info@waterputty.com)

## *Mantras*

A pdf download of the Four Dharmakaya Relic Mantras is available at [www.fpmt.org/zopa/advice](http://www.fpmt.org/zopa/advice). Click on the Holy Objects heading to see the list of mantras available for download.

## *General Advice*

### **Nalanda Monastery**

Château Rouzegas  
Labastide St. Georges  
81500 Lavour FRANCE

Tel: (05) 6358 0225

Fax: (05) 6358 1987

[www.nalanda-monastery.eu](http://www.nalanda-monastery.eu)

[nalanda@wanadoo.fr](mailto:nalanda@wanadoo.fr)

## **The Enlightenment Project for Purification and Merit**

PO Box 41

Eudlo QLD 4554 AUSTRALIA

Tel: (07) 5453 2108

Fax: (07) 5453 2188

[www.enlightenmentproject.com](http://www.enlightenmentproject.com)

[info@enlightenmentproject.com](mailto:info@enlightenmentproject.com)

## **Tsa Tsa Studio / Center for Tibetan Sacred Art**

5862 Robinhood Drive

El Sobrante, CA 94803 USA

Tel: (415) 503 0409

[www.tsatsastudio.org](http://www.tsatsastudio.org)

[info@tsatsastudio.org](mailto:info@tsatsastudio.org)

## ***Tsa-Tsa Walls***

For more information on how to create a tsa-tsa wall, or to commission one, contact the Tsa Tsa Studio:

## **Tsa Tsa Studio / Center for Tibetan Sacred Art**

5862 Robinhood Drive

El Sobrante, CA 94803 USA

Tel: (415) 503 0409

[www.tsatsastudio.org](http://www.tsatsastudio.org)

[info@tsatsastudio.org](mailto:info@tsatsastudio.org)

## ***Tsa-Tsas***

Already finished tsa-tsas can be obtained from these online outlets, among many other places.

**Tsa Tsa Studio / Center for Tibetan Sacred Art**

5862 Robinhood Drive  
El Sobrante, CA 94803 USA

Tel: (415) 503 0409

[www.tsatsastudio.org](http://www.tsatsastudio.org)  
[info@tsatsastudio.org](mailto:info@tsatsastudio.org)

**Tibetan Treasures**

Chagdud Gonpa Foundation  
P.O. Box 279  
Junction City, CA 96048-0279 USA  
Tel: (877) 479-6129 or (530) 623-3706  
Fax: (530) 623-4039

[www.tibetantreasures.com](http://www.tibetantreasures.com)  
[sales@tibetantreasures.com](mailto:sales@tibetantreasures.com)

**Tibetan Spirit**

P. O. Box 57  
Boonsboro, MD 21713 USA  
1-888-327-2890 or (301) 432-1984

[www.tibetanspirit.com](http://www.tibetanspirit.com)  
[shop@tibetanspirit.com](mailto:shop@tibetanspirit.com)

**Snow Lion Publications**

PO Box 6483  
Ithaca, NY 14851-6483 USA  
Tel: 800-950-0313 (US) or 607-273-8519

[www.snowlionpub.com](http://www.snowlionpub.com)  
[tibet@snowlionpub.com](mailto:tibet@snowlionpub.com)

# *Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition*



The Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT) is a dynamic worldwide organization devoted to education and public service. Established by Lama Thubten Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche, FPMT touches the lives of beings all over the world. In the early 1970s, young Westerners inspired by the intelligence and practicality of the Buddhist approach made contact with these lamas in Nepal and the organization was born. Now encompassing over 150 Dharma centers, projects, social services and publishing houses in thirty-three countries, we continue to bring the enlightened message of compassion, wisdom, and peace to the world.

We invite you to join us in our work to develop compassion around the world! Visit our web site at [www.fpmt.org](http://www.fpmt.org) to find a center near you, a study program suited to your needs, practice materials, meditation supplies, sacred art, and online teachings. We offer a membership program with benefits such as Mandala magazine and discounts at the online Foundation Store. And check out some of the vast projects Lama Zopa Rinpoche has developed to preserve the Mahayana tradition and help end suffering in the world today. Lastly, never hesitate to contact us if we can be of service to you.

Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition  
1632 SE 11th Avenue  
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(503) 808-1588

***[www.fpmt.org](http://www.fpmt.org)***

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Working in collaboration with the Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive, we publish Buddhist prayer books, sadhanas, retreat materials, and practice texts, many with commentary by Lama Thubten Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche. We also offer DVDs and CDs of prayers and teachings that inspire and inform. Whatever your interest, FPMT Education Services provides the materials you need to actualize the Buddhist path.

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