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## Nourishment, Delight and Gratitude in the Queen of Great Bliss Puja

By Michelle Valentino

If you've ever attended our Queen of Great Bliss puja, you've experienced a light, beautiful, joyful celebration. The practice includes a feast offering or tsok, as well as singing, dancing, extensive prayers, mantra recitation, and making other offerings such as tormas.



The Queen of Bliss is the most elaborate and refined tsok of any of our Vajrayana practices. The Tibetan word "tsok" is translated in various ways, as "gathering," "collection," "assembly," or, simply "many." It entails a gathering of deities, of practitioners in a community, of offerings, and of the qualities of wisdom and compassion. The offerings in the Queen of Great Bliss are made to please all varieties of spirits: the gurus and deities, the dakas and dakinis, the dharma protectors, and all of the local spirits (including those who would obstruct the

practice, which are gently sent away). (Our Chod practice is also a form of tsok; it's just that the offerings are visualized rather than external, and the focus is on different types of spirits.)

Tsok is a practice with many of layers of meaning and levels of insight. In the Vajrayana tradition, it is a way to renew our commitment to practice, restore harmony in an environment, strengthen the bonds among members of a community, avert obstacles, and ultimately, to realize our unity in the ultimate reality. In Lama Wangdu Rinpoche's teachings on the puja, he explained that the practice helps to attract blessings and positive energy not only for the practitioners, but for others who need it. There are people for whom material and spiritual prosperity is difficult to achieve due to their life circumstances. Practicing tsok can have real benefit for them by attracting positive energy on their behalf. Rinpoche compared its effects to being like turning barren ground into a fertile land. There are sections in the Queen of Great Bliss in which we visualize blessings coming in different forms: as clouds, rain, mist, fog and wind; as heaps of jewels and precious substances; and deities appearing as huge flocks of birds. The blessings are so profound that, as Rinpoche says, "Even the mice in the walls are held still in meditation."



The material offerings in the puja also delight our physical senses. Nourishing the senses is an important part of tantric practice. As Swami Chetanananda explains, to experience this kind of pleasure naturally gives rise to a feeling of gratitude that leads us to a deeper realization:



“What we begin to appreciate in our state of gratitude is that all of the richness and all of the joy and all of what is juicy about life and delicious and full of surprise and wonder is really inside us. It’s all around us, but it’s also deeply inside us, and it is the cosmic breath of life breathing in us that bestows upon us this gift of life.”



Like our Sri Chakra puja, the sadhana text for the Queen of Great Bliss practice recognizes that the body is a mandala of deities. These deities are pleased by the substances we consume in the feast, which represent spiritual nourishment in the form of wisdom nectar. The point is to experience the bliss of our essential nature.

If you are interested to learn more about this practice, you'll have an opportunity in December. Swamiji and

Lama Wangdu Rinpoche will be giving teachings and an empowerment for the practice on the weekend of December 10 and 11. Save the dates for now; more details will be coming soon.

Namaste



Michelle Valentino is a member of the office staff at the Movement Center as well as a yoga teacher. She is the coordinator of a poetry group that meets monthly at TMC.