

## **Instructions for Blessing the Waters**

### **According to Khenpo Karten Rinpoche's *Propitiating the Devas of the Four Elements***

#### **INTRODUCTION**

There are not only outer physical elements in the world around us, but according to Vajrayana Buddhism, we have the four elements within our own bodies in the qualities solidity, moisture, movement, warmth. The 4 elements also abide as aspects of mind, each being associated with mental poisons like attachment, pride, hatred, jealousy when dualistic grasping is present, and as different aspects of Enlightened Wisdom when grasping is released. When, due to our ignorance, we let competitiveness, anger, arrogance and greed dominate the intentions and actions of people and societies, we can plainly see the devastating effects to the elements in the external environment. This is a major reason why we have all kinds of environmental disasters associated with water, earth, fire and air such as floods, earthquakes, fires and tornadoes. Individually and collectively, we have let the impure elements in our bodies and minds run wild and totally out of control and our environment reflects that. However, through love, compassion and the skillful methods of Buddhadharma, such as meditation and this *Propitiating to the Devas of the Four Elements*, we can bring our internal elements back into harmony with one another and with the external elements, thereby stabilizing and protecting the planet, while at the same time stabilizing and protecting our minds.

The title of the text refers to the “Devas” of the four elements. There are different ways of classifying “Devas” or gods, (*Iha in Tibetan*). Sometimes we talk about “8 classes of gods and demons” (*Iha-dre*). Included in those are the Nagas. Nagas are a class of non-human, semi-divine or divine serpent beings who protect bodies of water and have control over the weather and can create epidemics and other diseases when they are offended or harmed. Nagas can be enlightened or worldly. There are, for example, said to be 8 Great Naga Kings, enlightened Nagas who are emanations of Chenrezig, the Bodhisattva of Compassion.

Worldly (unenlightened) nagas can be helpful or troublesome, and the same goes for other classes of spirits and “local protectors.” Though we don't see them, there are worldly spirits from among these classes of gods, who have resided in a specific geographical location for a very long time and are responsible for protecting that place. Mountains and rock formations, rivers and bays, plains and forests. All have their “local protectors.” That is what we are talking about here: non-human beings sworn to protect the 4 Elements, earth, water, air and fire. In our community, on the right hand side of lover's point beach, there is a prominent rock at the tide line, that Khenpo Karten Rinpoche has identified as being the abode of the local Naga of Lover's Point. That is why we always offer the substances to that rock at our solstice Water Blessings.

#### **PREPARATION**

Prior to beginning the ritual of blessing the waters, identify a favorable and natural body of water where you would like to perform the practice. Rivers, streams, lakes, ponds or your favorite beach are all wonderful places to practice, but it should be a natural body of water, as you will be offering to the spirits, gods, and local protectors of the area. You do not need to bless the waters in your swimming pool, bathtub, or a fountain you have in your yard!

Once you have identified the place for practice, **prepare good quality, organic whole milk and black tea.** These are the primary substances that *nagas* and protectors enjoy. The milk you use should be the first portion of an unopened container, and you can steep the tea in the morning or the night before, so it is cool when you take it to the water.

If you have a *serkyem* (a special Vajrayana ritual item, often made from copper, which looks like a butter lamp holder with a special plate, used for offering liquids to the protectors) use it to offer the milk and tea. Otherwise, you can use a saucer or bread plate and a small wine glass or champagne flute.

Actually, in classical Indian religions there are what are known in Tibetan as *Kar Sum Ngar Sum*: the three whites and three sweets, which are considered very pure foods. The three whites are milk, butter and yogurt. The three sweets are sugar, honey and molasses. Many Tibetan buddhist rituals, such as the *Riwo Sangchod* (*Mountain of Burnt Offerings*, sometimes called “fire puja” or smoke offering”) and *Sur* (offering burnt substances to deceased beings in the bardo), call for these substances, as well as sacred woods, grains, medicinal plants and even precious stones, but in this practice it is not necessary to have all those elaborate substances arranged. Simply the milk and tea is enough.

*Nagas* do not like meat, chili pepper or eggs, so if you can avoid eating these foods from when you wake up until after the practice is completed, this will be very good. Definitely don’t offer these substances to the *nagas*!

Also, **gather many beautiful and fragrant fresh flower petals.** Take these three special substances (milk, black tea, and flower petals) to the shore by the water. Take the milk and tea in bottles or cartons and the flowers in a nice bag or basket.

## **PERFORMING THE PRACTICE**

In general, Khenpo Karten always tells his students that three things above all are to be remembered when performing any dharma activity. In the beginning, set a positive and altruistic motivation to benefit all beings by cultivating the attitude of *bodhicitta*. In the middle, engage wholeheartedly in the main practice without entertaining dualistic concepts of, “Am I doing this right or wrong?” In the end, dedicate the merit of your virtuous activity for the benefit and enlightenment of all motherly sentient beings.

### **Motivation**

So **first**, in the practice of Blessing the Waters, recite the Refuge and Bodhicitta verse three times with palms pressed together. While doing so, consider that you are putting yourself under the protection of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha until enlightenment is attained, and cultivating the aspiration and intention to free all beings from suffering.

### **Visualization, Confession, and Commitment**

**Second**, for the main practice, the text says to visualize yourself as your yidam deity. In Vajrayana Buddhism, your yidam is the deity with which you have a special karmic link, and is your main practice. Different *sadhanas* (liturgical texts involving chanting and visualization of oneself as a deity) have a specific deity or deities as their focus, and that deity would be the “yidam” for that practice.

Here, there is no specific deity that you must visualize. Visualize yourself in the form of whatever Buddha, bodhisattva or deity you are most drawn to. You can visualize yourself as Guru Rinpoche, Buddha Amitabha, Medicine Buddha, Lord Buddha Shakyamuni, Green or White Tara, or whoever you choose. When you visualize yourself as a deity, you are not a deity of flesh and blood and bone. Rather, your form is clearly apparent yet insubstantial, radiant and entirely composed of light, like a rainbow, a magical illusion, or a shimmering hologram.

If you are able, visualize two deities. For the “self-visualization,” you generate yourself as the deity. For the “front visualization,” there is an identical deity in the sky in front, facing you. Consider that you and the deity in front (which appears from its pure land or buddhafield) are of the same nature.

Even more important than how perfectly you visualize, you should have confidence that you are this fully enlightened deity. It is the special view of Vajrayana Buddhism that you are in fact of the same nature as all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. This is why this line in the text is translated as, “visualizing myself in my own divine form...” The form of the deity is your true form. The ordinary body that you perceive from day to day, with brown or red or blond hair, short or tall stature, light or dark skin, freckles, male or female or whatever, is a temporary and illusory form. Your “true face” is the face of the deity. Holding this confidence that you are the yidam, called the “pride of the deity,” or “vajra pride,” you should also have powerful devotion to the deity, and powerful love and compassion for all beings and the environment to be protected and blessed. These are the most important points.

Wisdom light rays emanate from your heart, while simultaneously, light rays radiate forth from the heart of the deity in front of you. These light rays carry innumerable offerings in all directions, which summon all the worldly guardians and protectors of the four elements of Earth, Air, Water and Fire to your place of practice. In particular, the local *nagas* come forth.

As the local protector spirits and devas (gods) arrive, confess with a heart full of remorse the damage and destruction that we humans have wrought on the environment in general and the waters in particular. Ask the god and elemental beings of the world to forgive us and to remember their ancient commitments to protect the land, sea and sky. Commit to them that you will do all you can to protect the planet and refrain from harming the environment in the future.

### **Offering**

At the appropriate point in the text, set up the receptacle for offering the milk and tea. You can blend them together into milk tea, or separately offer all of the milk then all of the black tea. Set the *serkyem* upright on its plate or place the wine glass on the saucer. Pour the offering into the

receptacle until it spills over onto the plate. Then hold the glass in your left hand and the dish in your right hand with hands spread wide at the level of your ears and cast the liquids from the receptacle and plate onto a clean place, such as a large rock or onto some beautiful plants near the water. Imagine that the gods and protectors are receiving the offerings and that they are delighted and appeased. Repeat this process over and over until all the liquid offerings that you have brought are exhausted.

### **Requesting and Receiving Blessings and Protection**

Conclude the main practice by asking all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, wherever they abide throughout the universe, and also the local gods and other worldly protectors to watch over and protect living beings with whatever abilities they have, enlightened or otherwise. Ask the Enlightened Ones to bestow the blessings of mundane spiritual powers and all fully Awakened qualities upon you and all beings.

### **Dedication**

**Finally**, dedicate the merit of your practice for the happiness and enlightenment of all beings.

### **AUSPICIOUS SCATTERING OF FLOWERS**

A shower of blessings and auspiciousness is often represented by the image of a rain of flowers or by the practitioners casting rice or flowers. At this point, with a loving heart, an attitude of rejoicing in the merit of the practice, and a sense of gratitude for the beautiful planet we share with the local devas and protectors, walk to the water and cast handfuls of flower petals far out into the water, so that blessings may be carried to all corners of the world, above and below the sea. Chant the Six-Syllable Mantra of Compassion, OM MANI PEME HUNG, in a melodious tune, until tears of compassion and devotion well up from within.

Here you can also chant or recite Khenpo Karten's **Prayer for World Peace** and if it is evening, you can offer butter lamps or tea lights as a symbol of the light of wisdom that dispels the darkness of ignorance.

*This explanation of the practice of Blessing the Waters was written by Pema Tsultrim (Aaron Joseph) just before the summer solstice of 2020. It is based on the advice of our precious teacher, Khenpo Karten Rinpoche, and according to my own understanding. If there are any errors in what I have said here, they are my own and I ask forgiveness from the lama and protectors. I offer this for those who wish to perform the practice on their own during the Coronavirus Pandemic, with sadness that we cannot all come together in one mandala on this auspicious occasion. May the beautiful tradition of Blessing the Waters in Pacific Grove, started by Khen Rinpoche many years ago, continue well into the future! May all beings benefit!*