

ཕྱི་ལོ་ལྷ་མོ་བསྟོན་པ།

In Praise of the Hearth Deity

Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo



KHYENTSE VISION
PROJECT

thab lha bstod pa

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Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

IN PRAISE OF THE HEARTH DEITY

NOTES

BIBLIOGRAPHY

GLOSSARY

INTRODUCTION

This short text is a ritual work used to propitiate the deity or deities of the hearth. In traditional Himalayan cultures, it is thought that one or multiple deities reside in or near the stove or hearth. This place is important because “the hearth is the central point of the house or tent and so of the entire life of the family; it has a sacred character.”¹ According to the anthropologist Toni Huber, the deities of the hearth are often seen as “ancestral beings of the kin group of the household” by populations throughout the eastern Himalayas and the Tibetan Plateau.² These deities are often grouped among a set of four household spirits: the domestic deity, the deity of the hearth, the door deity, and the deity of the livestock. These deities are not part of any kind of Buddhist pantheon but appear to predate the advent of Buddhism in Tibet.³ While Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo’s collected works contain ritual manuals for three of these deities, it is noteworthy that a ritual for the door god appears to be missing.

In terms of the importance of the ritual, the nutritional value of prepared food as well as the quality of the cooking fire depends on the mood of the hearth deities. They get displeased when the fire or hearth has gotten dirty or “polluted,” such as when substances burn and develop a bad smell. In some cases, a ritual such as the one described here can be carried out to placate the deities of the hearth. In this text, the author explains what the ritual specialists performing this rite should do and what they should recite in order to ensure the deities’ favor.

ཐབ་ལྷ་བསྟོད་པ།

In Praise of the Hearth Deity

I bow to the Three Roots.

When one wants to praise the deity of the hearth, one should sweep and clean the whole hearth and its surroundings well. [51] Rub oil on the hearth and mix the three white foods. Prepare the various food substances for the smoke offerings on the hearth's stone surface. Either an elaborate smoke-offering ritual or the one associated with In Praise of the Domestic Deity⁴ are fine. In any case, regarding the act of cleansing, one says:

Just as the god Brahmā cleansed
The Sugata after he was born,
With water that is unpolluted wisdom nectar,
I now cleanse the deity of the hearth.

May the deterioration and pollution⁵
Caused by impurities in the fire, the hearth's contamination,⁶ and uncleanness,
With which all the deities of the hearth and of sustenance have been affected, be
purified.

May you become delighted in unsullied bliss!

OM ŚUDDHE ŚUDDHE ŚĀDHANA YE SARVA ŚĪNTAṀ KURU SVĀHĀ⁷

Then recite any sort of cleansing mantra and sprinkle the water for bathing. Moisten the hearth's smoke offerings with water.

Hey!

Where did *The Praise of the Hearth Deity* originate?

In an earlier time, during the first era
King Suvarṇarathī invited
A powerful and competent vidyādhara
Named Śāntigarbha,⁸
Who summoned the hearth deity by means of mantras and mudrās
And placated him with offerings and supplications.
Because he was made to abide by a pledge,
There was perfect happiness in that home.
The hearth and the preparation of food and drink did not cease.
An ocean of food, wealth, and sensory objects amassed.

Just as in earlier times when this originated, [52]
In today's auspicious and virtuous era
We, the vidyādhara, call the deity of the hearth
Pleasantly, not sternly.
We beckon to the hearth deity and attend to him without taming him.
We make offerings to the hearth deity, materially and not just a little.
We praise the hearth deity, highly and not just a little.
With the various kinds of nectar-containing wood,
We light a fire, blazing with merit.
We add the great substances of pure and excellent nutriment,
Such as the three whites, the three sweets, fruit,
Roasted flour, boiled milk, various grains, and so on.
We sprinkle pure mineral water and snow water.
With OM AḤ HŪM, we have purified, increased, and transformed it;
With HA HO HRĪ, we have blessed it.
Therefore, this smoke offering made from the sensory enjoyments
Of strong colors, fragrances, and flavors
Is what is offered to the guru, the tutelary deity, and the Three Jewels.
It is presented⁹ to the ḍākinīs, Dharma protectors, and guardian deities.
Please bless this hearth
And make an ocean of siddhis fall like rain!
Crush the hungry and ghostly vampire demons into smithereens!
Please cause the glorious essences of fortune and luck¹⁰ to gather!

Hey!
O great deity Gaṇapati¹¹
Who reigns over the hearth—
You are red in color and you radiate light.

Your hand is held in the mudrā of beckoning.
You are decked out with silks and jewels,
Accompanied by hundreds of thousands of divine *genyen*.¹²
Please come here and partake of this smoke offering!
We respectfully praise and delight you.
Please safeguard this hearth,
Which belongs to us and the sponsor of the materials! [53]
Never let its fire and smoke cease!
Amass an ocean of food and cooking!
Bring forth flavorsome sustenance and ambrosia!
Crush the hungry and ghostly vampire demons into smithereens!
Grant us all desirable enjoyments and spiritual accomplishments!
Please bring about fortune and well-being!

Hey!
O yakṣa hearth deity called Yumo,
Reigning over the hearth,
You are female and wear turquoise ornaments.
Dressed in garments of various kinds of silk,
You hold a golden ladle in your hand.
Accompanied by a hundred thousand yakṣa maidens,
Please come here and partake of this smoke offering!

Then proceed with “We respectfully praise,” and so forth.

Hey!
O nāga king Migön Karpo,
Who reigns over the hearth,
Your body’s hue is like a mass of crystal.
In your hand you hold a thought-increasing jewel.
Your snake-headed serpent hood is majestic and splendid.
You wear a lapis lazuli head ornament.
You have a retinue of a hundred thousand nāga heroes.

Then proceed with “Please come here, partake of this smoke offering,” and so forth.

Hey!
You other deities, nāgas, yakṣas, gandharvas, and the like
Who are connected to the hearth,
All those assemblies that protect for the sake of the good,
Develop an intention toward peace and benefit!

Then proceed with “Please come here,” and so forth.

Hey!

O Sipa, the owner of the fire,

You burn gloriously in light and splendor.

You hold quick-acting blessed juniper. [54]

You are the one who partakes in the libation of all the maṇḍalas.

Powerful king of fire deities,

Your body’s hue is like a mass of flames.

Drangtrengchen, you carry a round water vessel;¹³

You have the accoutrements of a *ṛṣi* and are full of joy.

Come here to this fortuitous place today

And remain within the blazing fire pit!

Please have the sensory enjoyments and nectar burned and poured!

We make offerings and praises, and bow to you.

Please be the guardian of the blazing fire

And bless us with the fire of wisdom!

We offer an ocean of precious things

Through the best of the enjoyments of food, drink, and cooking.

May it fulfill the wishes of the good protectors!

May the illnesses, obstructions, and frailty

Of the sponsors and owners be appeased with excellent flavor and nutrition!

And may our lifespan, merit, and vigor increase ever more!

Please bring about fortune and well-being!

Hey!

Since we have extolled the fortuitous deities of the hearth

In such a way, through offerings and praise,

Please consider this hearth with delight

And continuously bestow your blessings and siddhis!

Bring forth a powerful mass of leaders and friends!

May sensory enjoyments and material goods gather like clouds!

Produce the ambrosia of strong flavor and nutrition!

Please extract from that long lives, good health, and strength,

And abandon envy, malice, and jealousy!

May you fulfill wishes and achieve aspirations!

Please avert the obstacles in life! [55]

Offerings! Offerings! Offerings to the deities!

Victory! Victory! May the gods be victorious!

Virtue! Virtue! Fortune and virtue!

May there be an abundance of auspiciousness and happiness!

Having said this, scatter the best bits of the food and the different kinds of grains into the hearth. Then recite elaborate verses of fortune. The sponsors of the offerings are then consecrated by the food and drink consisting of the three white substances and so on. One should then create auspicious circumstances by singing lucky and happy songs, and the like.

*Maṅgalam.*¹⁴

NOTES

1. Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*, 189.
2. Huber, *Source of Life*, 136.
3. The hearth deity makes an appearance in a Dunhuang text (ca. eighth century). See MacDonald, “Une lecture,” 300, 355.
4. Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo, *khyim lha bstod pa* (Kabum 2014, vol. 28, 46.3–50.6). <https://www.khyentsevision.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/In-Praise-of-the-Domestic-Deity.pdf>.
5. While this term (*nyams grib*) usually refers to the pollution incurred when tantric vows (*samaya*) are violated (see *bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo*, 938), such a gloss seems unlikely here.
6. The term *thab gzhob* refers to the contamination thought to take place when noxious fumes are burned in the hearth, “widely noted as a grave concern in Tibetan and Himalayan ritual cultures” (Huber, *Source of Life*, 136).
7. All editions have the Bengali spelling of *śādhana* instead of *sādhana*.
8. While the reference is to an earlier eon and not the one we currently live in, there is an interesting parallel with the Indian master and translator Śāntigarbha (eighth century). He was one of the eight *vidyādhara*s invited to Tibet and accredited (among others) with consecrating the Samye temple.
9. The verb *brngan pa* used here has a similar connotation to the word *mchod pa*, but in Bönpo works it adds a sense of expected reciprocity. See Dan Martin’s vocabulary entry: <https://sites.google.com/view/tibvocab/home>.
10. The concepts of *phywa* (“fortune”) and *gyang* (“luck”) can be difficult to translate; for a discussion, see Berounský, “Tibetan myths on ‘good fortune’ (*phywa*) and ‘well-being’ (*gyang*),” 55–77.

11. While the name Gaṇapati can refer to the well-known Hindu god Ganesha (Gaṇeśa), in the Tibetan Buddhist context this deity can be quite different, although he is often seen depicted with an elephant's head and multiple hands. See Bühnemann, "Two Forms of Gaṇapati," 201–11. The mudrā described here is not commonly associated with this deity; neither is his proximity to the hearth. That said, there are a number of texts containing smoke-offering rituals for the benefit of this deity. See, for example, Kunzang Drodul Dechen Dorje, *lha chen tshogs kyi bdag po yi bsang mchod don kun 'grub byed*, 359–61.
12. For a description of the *dge bsnyen*, see Rikey, "The Nature-Deities of Tibet," 127.
13. Almost the exact phrase (*bgrang phreng ril ba spyi blugs bsnam*) is found in *The Explanatory Tantra on the Four Parts* (*Śrī Catuḥpīṭhavikhyātatantrarāja*), 184b. Whereas our text reads *spyil*, there it has *spyi*. The tantra appears more correct.
14. "Auspiciousness."

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GLOSSARY

ambrosia

དུལ་ཡན། • *dmu yad*

This Bön term can denote nectar, which in turn sometimes refers to alcoholic substances, not unlike the word *bdud rtsi*. See Dan Martin’s <https://sites.google.com/view/tibvocab/home>.

Brahmā

ཚངས་པ། • *tshangs pa*

The Hindu deity regarded as “the Creator.”

consecrate

ཞལ་བསྐྱོ། • *zhal bsro*

Literally, “warm the face.” This expression is connected to the tradition Indian offering of water (*argham*) for a visitor to rinse their mouth or wash their feet. See Martin, “Ritual Indigenization as a Debated Issue in Tibetan Buddhism,” n28.

deity of the hearth

ཐབ་ལྷ། • *thab lha*

A household deity worshipped in Tibetan and Himalayan cultures.

deity of the livestock

ཕུགས་ལྷ། • *phyugs lha*

A local deity worshipped in Tibetan and Himalayan cultures.

deterioration and pollution

ཉམས་གྲིབ། • *nyams grib*

This usually refers to the pollution incurred when tantric vows (*samaya*) are violated (*bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo*, 938).

domestic deity

ཁྱིམ་ལྷ། • *khyim lha*

Literally, “deity of the house.” A local deity worshipped in Tibetan and Himalayan cultures.

door deity

སྒོ་ལྷ། • *sgo lha*

A house deity worshipped in Tibetan and Himalayan cultures.

Drangtremgchen

བསྐྱང་ཐེང་ཅན། • *bgrang phreng can*

Literally, “The One with the Rosary.” Drangtremgchen is an attested name of the Lord of Fire. See Rigpe Raldri, *gsung ’bum bcom ldan rig pa’i ral gri*, 94.

food, drink, and cooking

བཟའ་བུ་དང་གཡོ་བསྐྱོལ། • *bza’ btung g.yo bskol*

This term here refers to the three categories of consumables: food that does not need to be prepared, drink, and cooked food. In other instances it may refer to all food and drink that have undergone a process of preparation.

Gaṇapati

རྩོགས་ཀྱི་བདག་པོ། • *tshogs kyi bdag po*

While associated with the Hindu god Ganesha (Gaṇeśa), this deity assumes a different form and purpose in the Buddhist context.

gandharva

དྲི་ཟ། • *dri za*

Literally, “smell eaters.” The heavenly *gandharvas* are held in especially high regard as musicians.

genyen

དགེ་བསྟེན། • *dge bsnyen*

This term is more commonly known as a Tibetan translation of the term *upāsaka*. Here, however, it refers to the 21 mountain deities of Tibet. See Rikey, “The Nature-Deities of Tibet,” 127.

guardian deity

སྤྱང་མ། • *srung ma*

A deity that has made a pledge to uphold and guard the teachings of the Dharma.

juniper

བྱིན་ཤུག། • *byin shug*

An evergreen shrub or tree held sacred in Tibet and used for smoke offerings.

Migön Karpo

ལྷ་ཁྱུ་མ་མཐོན་དཀར་པོ། • *klu rgyal mi mgon dkar po*

Literally, “Nāgā King White Lord of People.” Migön Karpo appears in the Gesar saga as a *nāga* (Stein, *Recherches sur l'épopée*, 36), but he is identified by de Nebesky-Wojkowitz (*Oracles and Demons*, 221) as the chief of the earth deities (*sa bdag*) of Markham (*mar khams*) in Eastern Tibet. In Bön cosmology he is seen as inhabiting bodies of water, as *nāgas* tend to do (Ramble, “Gaining Ground,” 93). Interestingly, elsewhere he is described as a *nyen* (*gnyan*) spirit (Berounský, “The Nyen Collection,” 18). On a woodprint purchased in Ulan Bator in the 1960s he is depicted as mounted on a horse and holding something resembling a ladle; see Kelényi, “May They Here Increase,” 101. A very short iconographical description for this deity can be found in Rago Chogtrul Tubten Shedrub Gyatso’s *klu rgyal mi mgon dkar po’i mngon rtogs tshig bcad*.

mudrā of beckoning

འགྲུགས་བྱེད་ཕྱག་རྒྱ། • *’gugs byed phyag rgya*

While this is a literal translation, the deity Ākarṣaṇī (*’gugs byed ma*) is considered to personify the element of fire. See the glossary of the *Samputodbhavaḥ* (*Emergence from Samputa*): <https://read.84000.co/translation/toh381.html?part=glossary>.

nectar

བདུད་མྱི། • *bdud rtsi* • amṛta

While the exact meaning of this term depends on context, especially in the tantras, it is generally positive and symbolic of blessings.

pledge

དམ་ཚིག། • *dam tshig* • samaya

In this context, the vow to uphold the Dharma.

ṛṣi

ངང་ལྷོང་། • *drang srong*

Literally, “righteous one.” Aside from being an epithet of the Buddha, the Sanskrit word *ṛṣi* is used more generally to describe hermits and sages.

Śāntigarbha

ཞི་བའི་སྤྱིང་པོ། • *zhi ba’i snying po*

Literally, “Essence of Peace.”

Sipa

སྤྱིད་པ། • *srid pa*

This name literally means “existence,” but it also denotes a class of deities (*bod kyi srid pa chags pa’i lha*) connected to the land of Tibet. See Rikey, “The Nature-Deities of Tibet,” 121; on the cult of the *srid pa lha* cult in Bhutan and Eastern Tibet, see Huber, *Source of Life*.

slate water

གཡའ་ཆུ། • *gya' chu*

Water that has come down from a slate mountain, possibly water from a waterfall.

smoke offering

བསང། • *bsang*

Substances that get ritually burned, often juniper bushes.

Suvarṇarathī

གསེར་གྱི་ཤིང་རྩ། • *gser gyi shing rta*

Literally “Golden Chariot.” The Sanskrit name is unattested in Indic sources.

thought-increasing jewel

བསམ་འཕེལ་རྫོང་བྲུ། • *bsam 'phel nor bu*

A kind of Tibetan herbal medicinal preparation. See Blaikie, “Wish-fulfilling jewel pills,” 7–22.

Three Roots

རྩ་བ་གསུམ། • *rtsa ba gsum*

The guru, the tutelary deities, and the dākinīs.

three sweet substances

མངར་གསུམ། • *mngar gsum*

Honey, sugar, and molasses.

three white foods

ཟས་དྭགས་གསུམ། • *zas dkar gsum*

Milk, curd, and butter.

vampire demon

ཟ་འདྲེ། • *za 'dre*

Literally, “eating demon.” Linked to the “killer demon” (*gshed*), which takes the life force of those in a weakened condition.

yakṣa

གནོད་སྦྱིན། • *gnod sbyin*

Literally, “harm bringer.” As local deities especially associated with trees, yakṣas can also be benevolent.

Yumo

ཡུ་མོ། • *yu mo*

Yu mo, alternatively spelled *gyu mo* or *yo mo*, is here identified as a yakṣa. According to a list of thirteen *dgra lha* deities enumerated in a smoke-offering text from the Kagyu school, however, Dralha Tablha Yumo (*dgra lha thab lha gyu mo*) is one of the few females in the group. In accordance with the current work, she is described there as wearing white silks and turquoise ornaments and holding a golden ladle. She is thought to reside upon the three stones of the hearth (*thab sgyed gsum*) that support the cooking

pot. According to de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons*, 330–31, she has influence over the process of melting butter over the fire. In the Bön tradition, she is one of the eighteen divine children (*lcam dral bco brgyad*); see Namkhai Norbu & Rossi, *A History of Zhang Zhung*, 57. In contemporary Himalayan cultures, she is still propitiated and regarded as an ancestor spirit; see Huber, “Source of Life,” 98.