

Excellent Path of Auspiciousness: A Sketch of My Reflections on Tea

Homage to the Buddha of medicine!

Emaho! At one time, as I was reflecting thus:

The perfect place — the monastic seats and temples of this southern kingdom of the Four Approaches (Bhutan) — a land that is outwardly the realm to be guided by the glorious Drukpa (Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal) and the hidden land of Orgyen Padmasambhava, and inwardly indivisible from Sukhavati.

The perfect teacher — the all-pervading sixth Buddha, the great Vajradhara; the victorious Akshobhya; Orgyen Padmasambhava, and the rest — the whole assembly of buddhas and bodhisattvas.

The perfect teaching — the swift path, the great secret Vajra Vehicle — the generation-stage rituals of the four classes of tantra.

The perfect retinue — the deities who guard the side of virtue, and the whole gathered assembly of humans — from the vajra-holders endowed with the three vows (Pratimoksha, Bodhisattva, and Vajrayana) down to the male and female lay practitioners who hold the three refuges.

The perfect time — undertaken with the ultimate aim of bringing peace and happiness to the world: a time for conducting the rites by which the three roots—lama, deity, and dakini—are accomplished as the principal deity of the mandala; a time for consecrating the representations of the buddhas' body, speech, and mind, and so forth; and a time for performing the rituals that liberate the deceased from the lower realms.

The perfect substance — that very fine tea, of many kinds, is served during the intervals between the rituals — from twenty-one rounds down to a minimum of three — offered to the deities as a tea-offering; and there is a custom of dedicating the merit to the benefactors. This, too, I bear in mind.



When the Great Monlam was held throughout the various districts, devoted benefactors came each day, many of them, to serve tea — this, too, I bear in mind. And I recall seeing that, on those occasions, some of the monks would not take the tea. I recall, too, the old tale of the tea goddess and the ale goddess quarrelling, each claiming, “I am the greater, I am the finer.” And I recall the astonishing account of a foreigner who said that the lamas of Tibet drink some five hundred cups of tea a day. I myself, too — as my years ripen and I can no longer digest coarse food — have reached a time when I must rely on tea. Recalling all of this, my mind fell into doubt, and on one occasion I asked:

“O Tea, do you have any real qualities? If not, why is so much made of you? And if you do have qualities, why is it that most of the monks take no pleasure in you?” — so I asked.

At this, a tea goddess appeared and said:

It is not that I have no qualities — it is that they do not recognize them. And not only the monks: even those who always love me and drink me daily know nothing at all of my fine qualities.

If I must describe my qualities, they are as follows — so listen!

Kyé! There is no need to tell my story; but if I must tell it at all:

My father comes from the trunk of the Bodhi tree under which Shakyamuni Buddha achieved enlightenment (indicating the compassion of the Buddha).

My mother descended from the fruit of the wish-fulfilling tree of Indra Shakra, lord of gods (indicating the merits of sentient beings). My elder brother is the Jambu (rose apple) tree; my younger brother, the saffron of Kashmir. My homeland is China; I am the leaf of the long-life tree, and my retinue is the plants and forests. Thinking it would not do to remain alone, and in order to benefit other beings, I set out for the land of Tibet.

At that time, the king of Tibet, unwell from a disturbance of the body's four elements (earth, water, fire, and air), was seated atop his great palace; and I fluttered down and fell into his lap. The king took me into his mouth, and by my special power his illness cleared completely — his life lengthened, and



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his radiance flourished. My renown spread through the ten directions; the kinds of tea multiplied, until tea had spread to every far corner of the world.

I, the drink endowed with flavor and potency, am unfit for common vessels; so the auspicious emblems, the long-life birds, the dragon-figured porcelain — all such exalted, precious cups came into being because of me.

And especially in the southern land of the Four Approaches, in the supreme place of Dungsamkha to the east, my kind is renowned by the name “Nyashing Jormo.” There, in the region of Tashi Yangtse, the wood-jewel “Za” — a vessel that shines with golden-patterned light — was bestowed by the tree-goddess as a siddhi upon the fortunate, to be the supreme vessel for me, the drink. We two, both born of trees, are siblings and friends bound by a single samaya (sacred commitment). Unless one is a person of merit, no one may possess such a thing; and whoever owns both the vessel and its contents bears the mark of great fortune and power.

The ale — the unsurpassed sacred substance, nectar — does not possess good qualities: unless one is powerful, ordinary people cannot stomach it; in excess it cuts one's very life short; and for the wise it is a ground of embarrassment and shame. Tea, by contrast, harms no one — I am indispensable to all.

In the dharma hall where the father-lamas gather,
tea is a thing one cannot do without.

In the court of law where the great lords assemble,
tea is a thing one cannot do without.

In the council where the great minds convene,
tea is a thing one cannot do without.

In the ranks of heroes, where tiger-brave young men gather,
tea is a thing one cannot do without.



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Where the young maidens gather,
tea is a thing one cannot do without.

In the playground where little children flock,
tea is a thing one cannot do without.

In the wealthy man's treasure-vault,
tea is a thing one cannot do without.

At the spectacle of song and dance in the market,
it is a tea that delights the great people.

For the auspicious meal at daybreak,
tea is the first thing needed.

When dusk falls and one is left alone,
it is the tea that keeps you company in your sorrow.

For the body worn out and exhausted,
it is the tea that gives rest.

When the heart is glad and light,
it is the tea that is your playmate.

In receiving an esteemed guest,
it is the tea of gracious welcome.

In the happy gathering of kin and kindred,
it is the tea that shows tender love.

For the auspicious opening of any noble activity,
tea is a thing one cannot do without.



And to seal a good deed with its concluding aspiration-prayers,
it is the auspicious tea.

The communal tea served to the assembled sangha — the very source of
refuge — is a thing one cannot do without, for by it the faithful benefactors'
merit is dedicated.

Even the raven-faced Dharma protector [Mahakala] delights in me; and for
that very reason, I am a tea praised by the Omniscient Pema Karpo.

(If you ask what that praise is like:

“The essence produced from the power of perfect merit — Chinese tea,
fragrant, of beautiful color and a hundred flavors, visualized with devotion
as a sky-filling ocean of nectar —

I offer it! Grant the siddhis (attainments) of the eight accomplishments!”

Thus it was spoken in address to the great Dharma protector.)

Samye Gyalpo Pehar, who had pledged to carry out the enlightened activity
of the mighty Ngawang Namgyal, made him an offering — and that offering,
too, was none other than me.

I, the tea-leaf endowed with flavor and essence — unless the causes and
conditions gather, the elements of water and fire and the rest, my qualities
cannot be seen.

The milk of the wish-granting cow; fresh butter, the essence of milk; salt,
the essence of the water element — and so on: these are my good
companions. Through their special power, I bring forth every color,
fragrance, and taste.

Today, on this very day, by the power of perfect auspicious conditions, I am
boiled in a great, wide copper vessel; poured into the belly of a jeweled
kettle; carried into the midst of gods and humans; and drawn out from the
kettle's spout, I swirl within the auspicious cup.



The goddess replied, “Of course I make noble aspiration-prayers,” and spoke as follows:

To all alike, good and bad, I am a tea without bias; and so, for all beings, I hold this auspicious aspiration:

Between the perfect buddhas above and beings below, I have no bias —
may that auspiciousness of impartiality pervade all beings!

Between the enemy who does harm and the loving kinsman, I have no bias
— may that auspiciousness of impartiality pervade all beings!

Between the king upon his throne and the servant, I have no bias — may that auspiciousness of impartiality pervade all beings!

Between the merit-blessed rich and the destitute poor, I have no bias —
may that auspiciousness of impartiality pervade all beings!

Between the learned scholar and the fool, I have no bias — may that auspiciousness of impartiality pervade all beings!

To all, high and low, I am a tea of harmonious samaya. Except where the samaya is in accord, I have no place among the discordant.

(In past times:) A good lama and a good disciple — between them, the tea of a single samaya was I.



(In future times:) for the masters and disciples who drink me, may their samaya never be broken.

(Likewise:) A good chief and a good servant — between them, the tea of a shared samaya was I; for the chiefs and servants who drink me, may their samaya never be disturbed.

Good parents and good children — between them, the tea of a shared samaya was I; for the parents and children who drink me, may their samaya never change.

A good husband and a good wife — between them, the tea of a shared samaya was I; for the couples who drink me, may their samaya never go astray.

In all times, past and future, of all who are learned and expert in the worldly and transcendent dharmas, there is not one who has not mingled with me, the tea. Therefore, I am rich in experience: I am the tea of vast learning, the tea of vast vision, the tea of vast knowledge; I am your teacher. Take me, the good tea, as your example, and you too, act likewise.

If you do not heed my words:
the master–disciple samaya will fall to ruin;
the chief–servant samaya will fall into conflict;
the parent–child samaya will fade away;
the samaya of couples will go astray.

From the great Vajradhara down to the root lama —
by the merit of all these delighting in me, the tea, may auspiciousness come to all beings!

From the raven-faced Mahakala down to the local deities and land-lords —
by the merit of all these delighting in me, the tea, may auspiciousness come to all beings!



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From the powerful chief down to the humble beggar — by the merit of all these delighting in me, may auspiciousness come to all beings!

From the authentic lama down to those in yellow robes who bear only the form of Dharma — by the merit of all these delighting in me, may auspiciousness come to all beings!

When she had spoken thus, I too was filled with inconceivable joy and offered fervent praise to the tea goddess's discourse.

Here concludes the Excellent Path of Auspiciousness: A Sketch of My Reflections on Tea.

This reflection came to mind before the great “Liberation-upon-Seeing” stupa at Tashi Yangtse — the place linked with the auspicious teacup carved from the self-arisen wood-jewel, in which auspiciousness swirls. It was later set down in writing at Pema Gatshel, in Dungsamkha to the east, the very land where the “Nyashing Jormo” tea grows. By the auspicious coming-together of vessel and contents, may there be auspiciousness throughout the whole kingdom! — so wrote Jigme Choedrak.

(The tea-discourse has thirty-seven verses; the aspiration, twenty-one; together, fifty-eight verses — matching the number of the fifty-eight wrathful deities.)

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