

The Round of Existence

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A talk on the first lesson of Tibetan Buddhism¹

THE subject of this essay is the first lesson of Tibetan Buddhism. It consists of some observations on the significance of Human life. The teachings are represented in the diagram known as the Round of Existence which is called *Sipai-Khorlo* in Tibetan.

The *Dharma* from India came to Tibet in the sixth century A.D. By the tenth century the culture of Tibet was predominantly Buddhist. Obviously we cannot learn very much about a civilization of a thousand years in a lifetime and we cannot say very much about it in an hour—unless you are equipped with an auditory *siddhi* or spiritual faculty and I am endowed with one of the sixty attributes of the voice of Manjusri. So we are going to have to limit ourselves to reflections on a few of the most basic and frequently stressed points included in the first lesson that students receive from a Lama in the Tibetan Buddhist framework.

Three fundamental activities come into play in the following of a spiritual path. The threefold division of effort is common to the Vedic-Upanishadic Tradition of Hinduism and to Buddhism. In Tibet the classical Indian division is called *Thos-Sam-Gom*, which translates as Hearing, Pondering, Meditation. By sketching a few features of the first lesson in *Dharma* as a Lama might present it using the device of the Round of Existence, we can describe the first activity of the path, hearing *Dharma* expounded. *Thospa*, hearing itself, in the Tibetan Buddhist sense, requires a Lama to listen to.

A thousand years of Buddhist culture produced four main schools in Tibet and a good number of sub-schools. The organization of the path into activities of hearing, pondering, and meditation is shared by all Tibetan schools. There is another threefold division which applies to spiritual stages in the Buddhist life. It too is common to all Tibetan schools and all lineages of Lamas. So, teaching given by a Lama is introduced in three main stages. Practice of these stages is designed to bring about qualitatively different modes of understanding in the disciple. In Tibetan these stages of *Dharma* are called, *Chiwa*, *Nangwa*, and *Sangwa*. They may be translated as the Outer, Inner, and Secret stages of the Path. The Outer corresponds to our category of Exoteric learning. The Inner and the Secret refer to Esoteric truth. The higher of the two phases of Esoteric teaching is itself divided into stages. Some schools in Tibet use a fourfold division of *Tantric* vehicles. But by the Nyingmapa, the oldest *Tantric* Buddhist school in Tibet, whose name simply means *The Ancient*, nine vehicles or stages are recognized. The Nyingmapa, founded by Padmasambhava, the Indian *Tantric* pandit from a region called Urgyan (possibly modern Swat) who may have taught in Bihar and Bengal, arrived in Tibet in the year 747 A.D. Guru Rimpoche, as he is known in Tibet, imparted deep and powerful skillful means for bringing about Sudden Enlightenment. This is the practice conveyed to Nyingma adepts by the Ninth

Tantra, Maha Ati, or the Supreme Fulfillment, the Dzogpachenpo of Tibetan Buddhism. There is in the possession of Lamas of the Dzogchen school a powerful teaching method aptly named (*Nying-Tik*), or the Heart-Essence. Tibet is the land of snow peaks poised above the clouds in a brilliantly clear sky, summits climbed in solitude. These heights of *Dharma* transmitted by Lama lineages correspond to the Himalaya rising from the Tibetan plateau.

But let us touch upon the first lesson of the first of the three activities of Tibetan Vajrayana, making an introduction to the Outer stage of practice which is common to all three Buddhist Vehicles: Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana, through the activity of hearing the *Dharma* expounded: that is Tibetan lesson one.

It is impossible to forget but always worth recalling at the outset of a discussion of Tibetan Buddhism that at present the extent of our knowledge of this thousand year old field of activity within the *Dharma* which continues to be practiced and added to by our brothers in India today, the Tibetan refugees, is very slight indeed. The reason for our scant knowledge of a vast subject is not that we westerners have been incapable of making a beginning at translating the huge quantities of scripture available from Tibetan sources. This work has been conducted in some instances at a pace almost comparable to that at which Dr. Horner made available the Pali Texts in English and Dr. Conze contributed some of the Prajnaparamita Corpus and Dr. Suzuki transmitted other Mahayana Sutras and Sastras from Sanskrit and Chinese originals. But all these materials have not presented quite the same elusive aspect as have the texts of the Vajrayana, the *Sangwa Dorje Thegpa*. For in the Tibetan scriptures, the texts that we call Tantras, the serene enigma of Prajnaparamita and the challenge of a Zen master's dialogue are matched by a willed obscurity in the language used for the transmission of esoteric teaching. The *Tantras* introduce teaching whose working out in practice is reserved for oral and sometimes non-verbal transmission by a realized master. The Real is transcendent to words. Realization brought about as exchange between an enlightened master and a trained disciple is a silent mind-to-mind transmission. We are familiar with the basic means of teaching Dharma. Then there is an intermediate mode after verbal exposition. This is the *Tantric* level of symbol. In the *Tantra* the body, speech, and mind are each cultivated with appropriate symbols and actions: significant gesture (Skt. *Mudra*); effective sound and sound vibration: *Mantra*, performed as plural recitation of series of syllables, sound values associated with aspects of the Buddha Mind through a system of correspondences; worship or adoration as spiritual exercise for the purifying of the mind, including chant and music accompanying significant gesture: *Puja*; ritual dance exclusive to Tibetan Buddhism (Tib. *Cham*); and finally the expansion of awareness through meditation exercises involving visualizations. Here the mandala and other sacred designs and forms (*Rupa*) come into play. These elements are organized as *Sadhana*, practice leading the devotee to insight through experience of Sunyata, the Unconditioned. Beyond and as a result of these formal activities is the transformation of awareness and the transmutation of being through spiritual aptitude known as *Siddhi*. So the paraphernalia of demonstration and skillful means of meditation referred to comprise the symbolic level of the *Tantra*, the *Sangwa Dorje Thegpa*. The highest activity is a still, silent transmission mind-to-mind between a master and a disciple seated facing each other, resonating together.

The *Tantras* are directions for a training which unfolds between participants in a lineage of realized masters. The practice deals symbolically with all the material of the cosmos, the peaceful and the wrathful aspects of the Buddha Mind. The *Tantras* are written down in a shorthand known to the participants which they will teach succeeding generations of disciples.

No one who is not an initiate empowered by the Lama and embraced in the lineage will receive training. Hence the *Tantras* are manuals, practical guides and cryptic directions for initiates in a rite whose significance is unfolded through training in meditation. They are written in a language of realization. It is not to be deciphered like the breaking of a code. Rather it calls for personal encounter with a Lama. The Lama holds the tradition, a transmission through an unbroken lineage linked with the Indian and Tibetan masters and beyond them to the Primordial Buddha Mind. The indispensable context is initiation and training with a Lama. These factors have in some instances been neglected by western scholars studying the *Tantras*. The omission yields questionable results. There prevails a temporary state of misinformation dressed in the trappings of scholarly research which is either regrettable or mildly humorous according to your point of view.

The higher stages of Tibetan Buddhism, then, pose certain original problems of investigation. These are not simply questions of methodology: they touch on spiritual realities. They are problems in the deep sense that the gaining of valid information calls for a new approach by orientalists. It has proved difficult for our scouts to learn about the *Tantras* without almost violating their subject matter in the act of research. How can the meaning of a text be understood when its function, its practical significance remains out of sight? Of course, on the other hand, there is no longer the hostility of Waddell, for example, who wrote the first survey of Tibetan Buddhism only to condemn it as demonolatry. At any rate Waddell provides a mass of detail on a culture whose significance seems to have eluded his understanding.

Today the problems are different. There are scholars who publish without much Buddhist training and occasionally with what looks like a somewhat hit-or-miss technique. They have not consulted Tibetan experts, either Lamas or erudite lay authorities living, outside what has again become forbidden Tibet. For their interpretation they rely on deduction, sort of scholarly guesswork, coupled with projection of their own philosophical notions onto the material. In this way much of what is translated and annotated lacks its authentic context even when there is a minimum of misinterpretation. The mistake seems to lie in trusting one's own hunches instead of consulting Tibetan teaching authorities. The results can be misleading.

Buddhism is a way of Realization sustained in the early stages by a system of practice. Meditation follows upon moral and mental purification as essential groundwork. In a Buddhist culture the various forms of expression, religious, philosophical, and aesthetic are used to foster realization in the form appropriate to a particular people. If the purpose of realization is neglected, Buddhist teaching becomes treated as a branch of Asian intellectual history. But where Tibetan Buddhism is concerned—at the *Tantric* level—the question is whether practical participation in the tradition is not required. Tibetan Vajrayana relies on the teaching presence of realized masters linked by lineage with disciples. When outsiders merely apply the tool of linguistic analysis, then a fossil may be the result of research, a product fit to be added to the museum of dead forms erected by western scholarship.

Now, to consider the first lesson of the Tibetan Buddhist Tradition, let us look at the *Sipai-Khorla*, the Round of Existence. The Round of Existence is a diagram of *Samsara*. The round is a form or design to which the imagination of the beholder contributes the dimensions of space and time. It becomes a representation of the fundamental conditions of life, the inevitable realities that any individual organism taking life will suffer. The samsaric wheel can be viewed as the various phases of life in series, experienced as the events included between birth and death; all the modifications that an entity undergoes and passes through during the course of his

existence. The impermanence of life means that the events are bound to be fleeting. The tone of the experience will be suffering, that mixture of pleasure and pain which Buddhists call *dukkha*: the insufficiency of life. It will work itself out through Karma, the pattern of action and concordant reaction inherent in our deeds.

Alternately the circle, a wheel with twelve spokes emanating from a center and breaking up the circle into six sections, can be viewed as a totality from moment to moment. It depicts the whole psycho-physical entity at any point in his trajectory around the circle from birth to death. The wheel is man—a man. It is yourself and myself.

"I teach suffering and the way to the ending of suffering" declared the Buddha. The Round of Existence is a diagram of the teaching on suffering. It is the first circular diagram which is shown a student in Tibet for the fostering of realization. If you go today in India, Nepal, or Bhutan to receive teachings from a Lama, the first sight you may have of a symbol of the *Dharma* is the gilded wheel on the roof of the monastic temple. That wheel is flanked on either side by a resting deer. It recalls the Turning of the Wheel of the Law, the first sermon on the Four Holy Truths delivered at the Deer Park of Issipatana at Sarnath three weeks after Siddhartha Gotama attained Enlightenment. The same wheel you will next see depicted in great details as you reach the doorway of the temple. The Round of Existence is frescoed in the entrance to the shrine room.

A wheel is a moving circle with a still center, a point emanating a circle. The Tibetan word for Mandala, the sacred diagram of the realms of the Mind, is *Kyil-Khor*. The compound word means "center-circumference". The mandala, a storehouse of symbolic forms, has the function of introducing the student to the true nature of his mind—to Mind. The Round of Existence is the first mandala proposed to the Tibetan Buddhist. Through it the non-initiate masters the exoteric facts of life. Training in the *Sipai-Khorlo* is divided into six headings. Let us look at some aspects of the first heading, which is related to the significance of Man. The diagram was drawn on the ground by the Buddha to instruct disciples in the various states of experience. These realms of being appear as sections of the circle of Mind. It is the universe itself, the field of spontaneously arising forms, empty of self-nature, and in continuous process of dissolution.

The first lesson of the primary mandala is given by the Lama once you have crossed the shrine room and have sat down together in his meditation room. The message is man. Man is centrally situated upon the Round of Existence. He is in the fortunate position of capability and potentiality. It is within his capacity to attain to "the still point in the turning world". His favored position is related to but not dependent on the existence of the five other infinitely less favorable realms of being in which his brothers dwell, struggle, and suffer. Who are these other beings? Let's look at aspects of the human condition before naming them.

Lamas are masters of the science of spiritual anthropology. The questions of life: "Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going? "And the question "what is Mind?" are studied in Tibet as a science of spiritual anthropology leading up to the Yoga of Mind. As one of several means of basic preliminary teaching on man, Lamas employ the Buddha's diagram, the Round of Existence.

Man's significance is related to his situation in the world. Human significance and the human situation are interdependent. The mind tends to separate the two. This separation seems to be a basic form of dualism that is almost as hard to deal with as other forms of our dualistic thinking. It is one of the results of doubt. Doubt arises inevitably in the mind. It is not doubt about something in particular, but it is a state of doubt. It is easier to think of doubt as needing an

object. So we could say that it is the doubt of the mind doubting its own true nature. In terms of what we have chosen to call spiritual anthropology it is doubt about the possibility of meaning in man's situation. That is doubt, or alienation. Discriminatory functions depend on it, starting with the subject-object duality. Doubt reduces the field of vision. The true relationship with sentient beings is usually lost sight of under the pressure that the ego encounters within the mind. The ego becomes tenacious, perhaps, to deal with doubt in the mind. Thus confusion and conflict arise, producing fear and anxiety.

Now, the means for restoring equanimity to the mind is offered to begin with through the teachings of a Lama on the Round of Existence. Doubt can be overcome by carefully looking at the facts of life as held up to the student by the Lama. The Round of Existence is a horrific depiction as well as a sober and a broadly balanced one. The mind is being prepared for a direct recognition overcoming confusion born of doubt. Such a confrontation with the true nature of the mind when adequately prepared for generates fearlessness, the state of *abhaya*. Thereupon the mind is open to clarity and bliss, which in the ordinary state of obstruction by doubt can only be fleetingly and momentarily experienced.

The first lesson, then, is the significance of taking birth as a human being. Man is a totality. "In this fathom—long body is the arising and ceasing of the world", said the Buddha. In this body one fathom in length exist all the realms of being, *Samsara* and Nirvana. Being a totality in himself it is possible for man to recognize his own true nature, to realize the mind, practice wisdom, become Enlightened, and to lead the Buddha Life. That is the significance of man as taught by the Buddha.

Now what of his situation, the context for Enlightenment? He finds himself living in contradiction. Frustrations block his path through *Samsara* and prevent him from seriously considering the teaching that Nirvana is not beyond his nature. (It is beyond his grasp—but not beyond his nature.) These characteristics of man's condition are included in the Tibetan word *par-chéd*, which we translate as "obstacle". Man's condition is born of doubt and is experienced as the state of obstruction by obstacles. Participating in extremes of conduct and experience, generating ever greater contradiction, the means of survival and of self-destruction, the convergence of extremes is man's situation. The conditions embodied in and suffered as man require an antidote. For Buddhists it is found in the Middle Way taught by the Buddha for the happiness of the many. In order that man may realize his potential Enlightenment, the creature of dualities is encouraged to gain balance by the middle way of conduct and mental training. It leads to wholeness. Or rather, it is the means of living here and now in wholeness. Man, then, is centrally situated on the six-sectioned Round of Existence. He stands midway between the two higher and the two lower spheres, while he shares the earthly plane of existence with his brother sentient beings, the animals. The central being is intersected by all the possible planes of existence. So he experiences the divine attribute of *Samsaric* enjoyment. Man, like the gods, knows sorrow-free periods or at least moments of perfect ease, untainted by anxiety. He also knows something of the anguish of the *Samsaric* gods, which is the price that inhabitants of divine realms must eventually pay for disporting themselves in opulent pleasure—filled delight: suffering loss of youth, effulgent confidence, and vigorous enjoyment of the senses, the on-coming of age, rejection by the community when power is drained and luster lost, self's poverty and decay; the cavernous specter of death approaching more slowly than he may think bearable. The suffering and insufficiency of the heavenly spheres. Man the central, by the time he emerges from youth, knows about the realms of *samsaric* divinities.

He knows about the *Asuras* as well: that other unhappy realm of fatal superiority. The *Asuras* are the anti-divinities, the non-gods who are eternally struggling against zestful divinity, scheming to rob them of resented excellence, engaging in futile warfare against the long-living gods. The gods are the technologists of comfort at home and warfare abroad. They kill millions and millions of *Asuras*. Massacring, they put the thrusting anti-divinities in their place. The asuric warriors fight on desperately, believing that because it is unjust that the gods should enjoy the fruit of the tree of life while the roots grow in the soil of the asuric kingdom, their cause must ultimately prevail. The resort to violence against the gods who are immutable to violence is an endless strategic folly that the asuric forces will never abandon. For to experience life as an *Asura* is to be jealousy and envy embodied. We can imagine that: we are human.

While we look up at the planes of gods and anti-gods and down at the *Yidags* (Skt. *Pretas*) and the hells, we look across the earthly plane itself at the animals. We share this environment with our brother sentient beings. The two middle spheres of existence, the animal and the human, are interrelated. It is a relationship of being present together in the same ribbon of the time-space continuum. We are neighbors with family feeling toward one another. Like all families we quarrel occasionally and are uneasy together. We watch each other constantly to learn, out of fascination, and also because we have to know about one another in order to survive at close quarters. We are the wonder of the earth and our brothers the animals often have a difficult time of it because there is a star in the family. That is why we must devote our full attention to any encounter or relationship with other sentient beings. We ought to show courtesy and understanding, use patience and forbearance, appreciate each other's special qualities, dim our own luster in the animal's presence, and enjoy their company. The first rule of conduct of Buddhist life is *Ahimsa*, non-harming, harmlessness. It extends to man's relations with every species of sentient being. Human beings can have beautiful, instructive, and life-enhancing relationships with all sentient beings. It is not restricted to cats and dogs and horses or the other enjoyable friendships such as with otters, muskrats, possum, deer, foxes, and parrots. We can have happy relationships with fellows from whom we feel remote, toward whom we tend to be indifferent and to ignore, such as reptiles and insects. If we really reverence life we begin to love each individual expression of life, haven't you found? Any animal being possesses so many sentient qualities—his very motility or capacity for movement is enough to endear any sentient being to a man. Our friendly and harmonious relations with all sentient beings are obstructed by indifference, the incapacity to feel *with* someone, and our arrogance, preventing us from seeing and responding to the particular marks of excellence with which each species and each individual sentient being is endowed. The key thing is our feelings. If we have *nyingjé* towards the animals, as Tibetans say, Sympathy, Compassion, and love, *Nyingjé!* the heartfelt essence of living feeling for the living, we shall be able to respond in an enlightened manner to all animal life, toward all sentient beings.

In the Himalaya you sometimes see deserted Tibetan monasteries; on meeting members of the communities who had previously inhabited these abandoned temples you might inquire why they had shifted their residence. The answer is that field mice in one case and rats in another had proliferated in the shrine room where the *Torma* offerings are made to the divinities to such an extent that finally there was no space for the monks to perform pujas. And so the community pushed on and set up house elsewhere.

Only exceptional human beings can have first-hand experience or knowledge of the realms of being other than the human and the animal which intersect. Realms of possible existence within

the spectrum of reality do not always have to be visited in order for the mind to know them. The greater mode of being includes all the lesser modes. The Buddha spoke of realms of gods beyond form and declared that this was the one sphere of being which he had not visited, because if you go there you cannot return as a man. Most human beings have seen only human and animal life. In respect to lower spheres it is just as well. Because the suffering of those realms is extreme, as the sensuous bliss of the samsaric gods during their *kalpas* of enjoyment is an extreme condition.

To complete the sketch of the Wheel of Life let's glance at the two lower spheres, those hideous infernos of which we have some knowledge because of tales of travelers to purgatory and hell. The stark horror of those lower depths sheds a contrasting light upon the situation of man. Beneath the compatible spheres of human and animal life there exist two lower planes of suffering and unspeakable pain. These are the *yidags* or *pretas* who suffer from deprivation and the dwellers in hell who suffer utter torture. Why do these spheres unfold below us, out of our sight?

The original meaning of the word "obscene" is *ob scena*, "offstage". The purgatories of the pretas and the hells are the obscene matter of the cosmos. Our eyes are happily veiled from the sight of their purifying torment.

What underlies the images of purgatory and hell? It is the state of deprivation. The beings in the realm of *yidags* are without food and drink for months and years. There are times when twelve-year periods go by without so much as the words "food" and "drink" being uttered. Now, the *yidags* have mouths the size of pin-points, sticks for necks and bellies as big as cauldrons. Food and drink wouldn't help them even if they were available. The *asuras* or anti-gods, you recall, are seething with jealous envy because they too are in a state of deprivation. But what the *asuras* are lacking are the conditions of power and wealth to which they consider themselves entitled and without which they feel they cannot exist. They own most of the goods the world has to offer—they certainly have enough to eat, for they are bursting with titanic energy, raring for a fight with the gods. Those gods are the problem. They own the delicious fruit blooming on the tree that spreads its roots down into the ground of the kingdom of the *asuras*. It is nature's old story of the production and consumption of coveted goods, unjustly organized and unevenly distributed. The god—anti-god struggle is brought back to mind in the context of the ghastly suffering of the *yidags* whose torment is hunger and thirst. The possibilities of deprivation are infinitely modulated within the life spectrum where obstructions of mind generating unawareness set up patterns of action and reaction. The gods experience delayed deprivation. The beings in hell are deprived of normal conditions, the intermittence of pain, which prevents thought and the transcending of thought through meditation. The varieties of pleasure and pain except under extreme conditions are largely a matter of attitudes about sufficiency or deprivation. There is difficulty in accepting the available, which is the absence of satisfaction. Jealousy and envy are linked with this frustration. The word for envy in Tibetan, *Tra-dok*, is a typically concrete description of a state of mind. *Tra-dok* is a narrow pass in the mountains cutting off the view on either side. The *asuras* or non-divinities typify the *Tra-dok* state of mind. They have everything, yet in their titanic appetite they are maddened by the prosperity of the gods and are blind to the horror of the divine *samsaric* state. For it is said that no suffering in any sphere is so terrible as that experienced by a god during the eons of dissolution to which he tends; the rotting of his garlands, garments, and person after the loss of radiance and glory; the horror of *kalpas* of waiting to die, cast out of paradise by the other gods the moment the first bud on a necklace is seen to fade. The old god sits silently on a rock, alone, outcast, staring down an endless vista of

years towards the inevitable horizon of death.

Now let us look down into hell itself. There the torment is unremitting. It is called by the Buddha "the suffering of suffering"—for everything has an essence and an extreme point including pain. The luckier victims die every moment under some hideous torture and are instantly reborn to undergo again the *coup de grâce*. The process repeats ceaselessly until the sufferer is ready to pass on to the next torment. Ancient cultures elaborated at great length on the varieties of agony experienced in descending circles of hell. We today respond to less dramatic reminders of the nature of suffering. We have seen and heard so much. We have inflicted so much; and are bombarded daily with fresh information on the truth of suffering. Because we live in hellish times we may not have the same need to reflect on the torments of hell as previous cultures seem to have had. But the relevance of the teachings on hell is undiminished.

Having reminded ourselves of the conditions of life in the other five realms of being we can dwell again on the significance of the human situation. We stand at the center of being. We are at the crossroads of opposites, the *coincidentia oppositorum*, and we harmonize the extremes. The pleasure available to us is not so luscious as to dull our minds to the ever present factor of *dukkha*, insufficiency. Nor does pleasure unman us, unfit us to face adversity, sickness, age, and death. Proceeding at our own pace, we are able to dwell in the ever-renewing present. We are not victims of extreme deprivation or of pain so acute that it exempts us from penetrating through ignorance to realization. The central situation of man on the Round of Existence relates to his significance as the potentially realized one. Enlightenment is his end, and that which proceeds from it: the living of the Aryan life, the noble life, and the lovely (*Kalyana*) life of holiness—in solitude and, in withdrawal from solitude, in the company of spiritual friends (*Kalyanainitra*).

So, standing before the temple we have observed the fresco of the Sipai-Khorlo. Stepping into the shrine room we can attend the *puja* of the monks in two rows facing each other, chanting perhaps the Heart Sutra to the accompaniment of drums, cymbals and trumpets. Before us, a towering golden figure of the Buddha seated in the Lotus posture. When the *puja* is finished the Lama will take us to his room and give us tea. Then he will unfold the first of six subjects reflected in the Round of Existence. Just now we have touched on that first subject, the significance of human birth. After the session with the Lama we will go home and ponder on what we heard. At the end of a period of days or weeks in retreat enjoined on us by the Lama we will return to him for lesson two of the Round of Existence. Before his discourse he might teach us some prayers, notably the hymn to Jambelyang or Manjusri from Nalanda Monastery, and impart an initiation or *Che-Nang* of Manjusri for students, for the increase of memory and the sharpening of understanding. The prayer of Manjusri might be a good conclusion for these remarks. If I may recite it, we can together put ourselves under the patronage of Manjusri, who is the Wisdom-teaching function of the Buddha Mind.

The prayer of Nalanda Monastery to Arya Arapacana Manjusri Bodhisattva:

Hail! Your wisdom is free of the two defilements,

Perfect and clear mind like the sun.

For you see everything in its true nature,

You hold the sacred scripture (Prajnaparamita Sutra) close to your heart.

You show compassion toward all sentient beings
As to your only son:
Those being tortured by sufferings,
Clouded by ignorance in the prison of Samsara.
Your voice is endowed with the sixty attributes,
That voice reverberates like a thunderbolt,
Awakening beings from their sleep,
Freeing them from their bonds of Karma.
You hold the sword cutting the shoots of suffering, as many as spring up and grow,

Eliminating ignorance.
From the very beginning you are Enlightened,
Transcending the Ten Stages,
Having perfected all the Qualities,
The foremost son of Buddha,
Whose body is endowed with one hundred and twelve Attributes:

I pay homage to Manjusri who eliminates my ignorance:

OM ARAPACANA DHI

You who are compassionate,
By the rays of your wisdom,
May the darkness of my ignorance be illuminated.
In order to gain understanding
Of the teachings and their elaboration,
I pray for the light of the capacity for Wisdom.

¹ Originally read as a paper at The Buddhist Society, London, 3rd February 1971.