
Festival of Prayer-Festival of Peace

Tara Dhatu's 1st International Montam Sept 2024

At TaraLing - Pirenópolis - GOIAS

A Celebration of the Enlightened Feminine

by Sherry Harris



I arrived a few days early to get a feel for the land, the energy surrounding it and the people of the community. Entering TaraLing I was instantly captivated by the large trees, flowers blooming everywhere. There was a hubbub of construction workers pushing wheelbarrows of cement to an elder man who was laying gorgeous, local slabs of stone, forming walkways.

Other workers were painting walls. Another crew was working on two new washrooms, placing pipes, fixing faucets. Another set of workers were creating stone slab driveways.

Some Tara dancers were watering fresh-laid sod and the innumerable potted plants. A group of Taras were hanging prayer-flags, a gift from the children at a school down south who painted Taras and auspicious symbols to celebrate TaraLing. Some Taras were sweeping leaves and another group carrying bags of produce into the kitchen.

The musicians were carrying their instruments into the temple, setting up to practice.

Myri Dakini, hands on hips, was inspecting, correcting, and directing this flurry of activity, her observations taking in every detail.



As I continued to move onto the land I was delighted by the glimmering pool with a beautiful statue of White Tara at the top of a rock pile waterfall. I see the two original buildings on the property, the purple Double Dorje, once a garage, now a 2-bedroom retreat apartment and the rose colored Lotus Retreat House,

a renovated farmer's cottage.,

The retreat house of Myri and Prema, Casa de Refugio gleamed it's newness. But it is the octagonal light green Temple that demands my attention.

I am stunned at the incredible amount of work and creation that has been completed thus far. Myri's dream, her families' support, donations from Tara dhatu students and friends, Prema's insight are being realized. It's such a joy to behold and my chest tightens in pride.

We gather in the dining hall of the Casa de Refugio with warm embraces, hot coffee, cakes and treats served on delicate porcelain dishes by Chiquita, who is the housekeeper in chief. It is very, very warm as the fans are not yet installed. Prema and Myri have only just moved in to this new building the day before.

Excitement, anticipation, exhaustion are behind the eyes of those living here.





Immense effort has been made to prepare the grounds and the buildings to welcome all of us gathering for this 1st very special Festival of Prayer.



As needs

arise, Myri tends to all - every request, every comment. Nothing escapes her scrutiny...so much attention to detail, her anticipation of each person's needs. Her great love and devotion, her tireless hard work of creating all of this for us

hits me hard. I am filled with gratitude and great love to be a part of

this creation story and to share this with all of you.



After circumambulating clockwise the Temple's outer walkway 3X in silent meditation, turning the prayer wheels, I feel quiet and ready to enter the Temple of TaraLing. I walk into

complete beauty and tranquility. I drop to the floor and prostrate 3X. It is a good space, tall ceilings, beautifully painted with thankas hung. In the center, great wooden trusses are set in a way that looks like the center of a great parasol and I realize we are protected by the huge parasol of Dukkar above us!!! Large windows let in light and the vision of tree branches and wind horses dancing in the breeze. The 3 shrine alcoves are lit up, with Green Tara in the center, White Tara and Red Vajrayogini flanking her on either side. The altar with candles and incense and thoughtfully-placed auspicious items delight the senses and draw me near. Prema's teachers are framed and adorned with

fresh flowers it. An altar is made ready for all the traveling Taras to place their precious items.

Chairs and pillows are arranged along the perimeter for comfort. Dagmola's Green Tara Mantra is being played so gently, filling the deep senses. The room is cool, inviting ... a huge contrast from the very hot air outside at this time of year.

Lama Sonam from the Brazilian Dharma Center arrived pre-Monlam to present two sets of Preliminary Prayers. He led a smoke offering in the fire circle and then presented Prema with well needed tongs. The following day, Prema led a smoke ceremony as part of the preparatory rituals and the tingsha chimed after each line of the puja was read as the smoke was fed, asking for the land spirits to protect us and feel welcome.

In the evening, we entered the temple to read a Mahakala puja together. Protective and transformative, it is compassion in the fiercest aspect as a benefit for all. Prema lowered the lights and we free-danced exploring a powerful Mahakala mantra recording by Yoko Dharma.

Sunday night Tara after Tara entered the Temple, kissing, hugging, reuniting or meeting for the first time, the energy rising like magma in Tara's volcano. We were filled with joy, with anticipation. The live music enveloped us ... Ricardo's melodic voice and guitar blended with the voices of Dani, Priya and Parvati. Isa's deep drum created the connection with ancient circles of women in ceremony, transporting us to the times our bones can remember.

Monday morning our Auspicious Monlam Accumulation begins. Every day we start working directly with energy transformation. We begin with Chi Lel, then Meditation invoking our sources of refuge, followed by La Chi and Fa Chi, the practice of giving and receiving. Tears flow. Hearts open. Walls disappear and love embraces us.

We then enter the focus of Tara's sadhana. Prema arranged a translation of a traditional Tibetan text, a gomter (mind treasure) of Orgyen Dechen Chokjur Lingpa so it could be danced.

Most of the dances we had learned together over the years. Some knew them well. Some were totally new. For me, I enjoyed the way we wove them together.



We opened the main text by invoking Tara and offering the seven purifications. We then established a Field of Protection dancing Dukkhar, the White Umbrella Protectress.

We meditate that all has the Nature of Emptiness and arose out of that experience by dancing “Calling Tara from the Heart”. Tara’s Pure-land envisioned, she appears to receive “The Eight Precious Offerings”.

Arising as Tara we envisioned the ritual bath, “Abhisheka” danced by Myri and the five Wisdom Dakinis, pouring their elixir of wisdom empowerment upon us.

Another set of The 8 Precious Offerings and we are ready to offer the Mandala Dance of the 21 Praises of Tara. We are to dance 12 mandalas of the praises during the course of our five days.

Another important ritual of accumulation is the group keeping Tara’s Mantra going 24 hours a day for the five days of the festival. Every 2 hours two dancers would sit by the altar chanting Tara’s mantra. This very precious practice allowed for many interesting gifts to arise.

Each day we danced our prayers with deeper understanding. The ritual became cellular, energetic wisdom-nectar as we listen, meditate, breathe it in and move our bodies to the prayers in the language of music. Tears flow as I look into the eyes and hearts of my dear Tara-sisters. Their opening and sharing through tears and laughter created non-verbal bonds of shared-experience. This community is so beloved. Other-ness is a distant concept. Interconnectedness is pure love. Non-dualistic. Freeing. We are learning who Tara is. We are learning that we, each and every one of us, is Tara, capable of enlightened mind. These are the tools, our skillful means.

How precious is this life?

Tuesday morning Prema had us dance a double-mandala in the temple, Tara's being born towards each other, sharing a Praise. She was delighted to know that two Mandalas fit in the temple to dance!



Wednesday, after our preliminary practices, we were reminded that Tulku Chokyi Nangpa Rinpoche would be coming to consecrate our TaraLing Temple and give an empowerment of the 21 Taras. Prema thought we had enough time to try on our costumes before the arrival of Rinpoche and with divine timing the gate bell was rung early and we all hastened to line the walkway to the temple offering Katas, singing Tara's Refuge prayer. He walked in slowly, blessing each and every one of us with the

katas we held.

After lunch together, Rinpoche sat on the elevated seat we designed for him and led a 2-hour Consecration ritual of TaraLing in Tibetan, translated into English by his translator, Rabgha (which means 'happy') They went to rest and we worked on our mandala of praises prepared to offer them an evening performance.

It was our first time dancing in costume and it was a powerful experience. Noelle did a magnificent job of creating costumes that are an exquisite expression of Tara's beauty.

Rinpoche and Rabgha gave their full attention. Prema sat next to them explaining the elements of the practice to Rabgha who translated them for Rinpoche. They had their phones out and filmed everything. We were all transported in Tara's Pure Land.

Thursday, after morning Preliminaries, Rinpoche offered the ceremony of Refuge and an empowerment of Tara. The Tibetan Ceremony was beautiful though the teachings given were not easily understood by many of the dancers and the subject of vows brought some questions. Fortunately Prema took some time to offer her interpretation and we were inspired.

After lunch together, Rinpoche led us in a tsok in which we enjoyed a mountain of treats together. We offered the Dance of the 8 Precious Symbols, "May There Be Good Fortune" as part of the ceremony.

For the evening program, we again danced the 21 Praises of Tara in full costume for Rinpoche. You could feel how much he loved the dances. After the presentation, he spoke a lot about Prema, about the importance of Prema leaving this legacy behind to continue this Tara lineage..."she knows what she is doing"..."she's an important teacher"..."you need to listen to her". He kept saying goodnight but then would begin again on the importance of our Tara Dhatu lineage. He personally thanked Myri for her hard work, her sacrifice and her devotion.

On Friday, Rinpoche reported such affection for the dance that he was interested in whatever dances we wanted to present. We put him and his entourage in the center of our circles and danced all the Preliminaries. He especially liked "Calling Tara From the Heart" as Rapgha translated for him from our booklet of texts. All in the room became joyful and uplifted. I cannot express to you the joy of feeling this highly educated, spiritual man being extremely interested to know and understand our Dances.

At the break, Rinpoche went into our dharma store and bought Prema's book and insisted that she sign it for him. Then he bought the largest 21 Tara Thangka we had been displaying to raise \$\$ for Lama Sonam's temple and presented it to TaraLing.

It was such a fulfillment to observe a Rinpoche who wanted to deeply know and understand this work. The interpreter liked how Prema used her words to teach and simplify..."clear and precise" and wanted to learn to speak English like that! Prema's facial expression throughout all of these accolades? Priceless!

Friday night we were invited to place TsaTsas on the kora path to be collected as a blessing before we left on Saturday. They were brought from New Zealand by our senior teacher Clare as a gift to share.

Saturday morning we completed all 12 Mandala Dance offerings together with the prayers and practices to fulfill the guiding text. Through these dances we embodied the wisdom, compassion and power of the Enlightened Feminine. All Her qualities merged into us. The love and compassion we felt extended to all, our generosity grew into wisdom. We were worthy and blessed and ready to bless all. Knowing that we bring benefit to all we touch with right intention, our prayers were multiplied as a collective group. TaraLing was Blessed and



danced and prayed upon and the energy multiplied. The elements were acknowledged and blessed and welcomed.

Myri's and Prema's dreams are being fulfilled. Yes, much more work is needed, every day holds new challenges but we are happy to report they are being met with loving support and many blessings.

We carried each and every one of you who could not attend, those who have departed samsara, and those new generations to come to feel the power of TaraLing, the dharma, and Tara's lineage.