

## **Tormas: The Practice of Offering and Accumulation of Merit**

### ***A Hands-on Torma-making Workshop***

Greetings everyone. I'm excited about our workshop this coming Saturday, January 16, at 11 am Mountain time. You are receiving this because you pre-registered. Following is some information that will help you get the most out of our training.

We will meet for about 90 minutes and will cover this:

- The view of torma offering—the path of accumulation
- How to make a torma
- Materials: tsampa, butter, [Sculpey](#), [Hydro-stone](#) (*not* Hydrocal), clay, paints & dyes, adhesives, the unexpected
- Tools: anything you might use to help shape clay. Be creative.
- Questions and discussion

Depending on how many participants attend, our intent is to allow as much time for interaction as possible. If you're "in to" making tormas, set up with your materials so you can apply what you're learning on the spot. You'll need a clean, flat surface. Ceramic tiles work well and can be acquired for pennies from a used construction materials yard. Good to have some 4" and a couple of 12" tiles. These are quite handy.

Below is a little information I gathered for your thinking regarding torma offering as a practice, and the practice of making offering more generally as a means of accumulation of merit. We'll discuss this a little on Saturday.

#### **Remarks on Torma Offering**

"You could look at *torma* in the context of view, meditation, and conduct. In the context of view, torma means that you are throwing out everything that obscures the view of the abiding nature of mind. You throw out all your obscurations and concepts; this enables you to see the abiding nature of all phenomena, which is unborn.

"In the context of meditation, we speak of the torma of body, which is based on the yoga of meditation. This refers to transforming the skandhas and dhatus of one's physical body into the five victorious ones. ...you unite your own body with the physical torma that you offer; you think that you are offering your body and the torma together.

"The torma of activity refers to the outer tormas that we offer during generation-stage practice. The tormas of activity are offered to the three jewels, the gurus, and to all those who are considered higher than ourselves; and also to the spirits, demons, and so on who are considered lower. It also includes the feast torma [tsok] that we offer to our Vajra brothers and sisters who are considered on the same level as ourselves.

“In some practices, a single torma is transformed and used in a variety of ways. A single torma can be first visualized as the deity. Later in the practice, it can be used as an offering. It can also be used as a weapon to expel spirits, geks, and hindrances. One visualizes one’s own ego-clinging as obstructers, and exorcises them using the same torma.”

--Lama Tashi Tondup, *Ritual Tormas and Music*, pp. 1-2 (transcribed from lecture notes. Talk given to three-year retreatants, Sopa Choling—Gampo Abbey, Feb. 1998)

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“If you give a gift [offering] with something behind it, with an ulterior motive that you feel good about, then you are still planting habitual patterns in the back of your mind. ...You are using the donations that you offer to your teachers as a part of your mental collection.”

--Chogyam Trungpa, *The Tantric Path of Indestructible Wakefulness*, p. 364 (in remarks on Mandala Offering)

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“Even those who have truly realized emptiness need to maintain their progress along the path until they attain perfect Buddhahood, so they still need to make efforts to accumulate merit and wisdom. Tilopa, the lord of yogis, said to Naropa:

Naropa my son, until you realize  
That all these appearances which arise interdependently  
In reality have never arisen, never part  
From the two wheels of your chariot, the two accumulations.

--Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of my Perfect Teacher*, p. 284.

“ Set out as many offerings as your resources permit... that is to say, using clean and perfectly pure offerings, and without being ensnared by miserliness, hypocrisy or ostentation. These offerings are just the support for your concentration.

--Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of my Perfect Teacher*, p. 321.

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### **From my website ([www.tormas.biz](http://www.tormas.biz))**

Tormas are associated with many aspects of Vajrayana Buddhist practice. Sometimes described by westerners as ‘Tibetan ritual cakes,’ tormas are actually made from various substances, often not cake-like, and they vary greatly in appearance and significance. The practice of offering tormas is an important aspect in the generation of merit on the path of accumulation

and as well, many tormas are beautiful, and durable, sculptural objects rich with symbolic meaning. Vajrayana Buddhist practices commonly require the use of tormas, many of which are complex, challenging things to create—the shapes, ornaments, and meaning all prescribed by the tradition.

It may be of interest to know that the Tibetan word *torma* has two parts. The first syllable *tor* is a verb that means to throw out and tormas made of barley flour, butter and other ingredients are literally placed outside as a gesture of making offering—a gesture of generosity. In an inner sense, the notion of throwing out can be understood as severing attachment to desirable things. That is, cutting through entrapment in desire. It may also be thought of as throwing out kleshas—severance of conditioned emotional reactions that cause suffering. Sincerely offering like this can purify the energy of the emotions.

The second syllable *ma* is a feminine ending. It evokes the maternal, a nurturing quality. Understanding the true meaning of this simple syllable is a means of cultivating loving kindness for all beings much as a mother feels love for her children. So, in a way, with the first syllable one severs attachment to self-centeredness. Having cut that, with the second syllable one radiates love and sympathy to others. This is the inner sense of offering torma. As you can see, *torma* is extremely rich with meaning.