



## WELCOME TO TUBTEN KUNGA CENTER!

We would like all newcomers to feel comfortable and at ease as they explore the healing practices of Tibetan Buddhism. We offer this introduction to the typical practices of our teachings and events. Please know that our classes are informal, and everyone is welcome. Feel free to ask any questions after the teachings or by email to [information@tubtenkunga.org](mailto:information@tubtenkunga.org)

The Center's main emphasis is working with the mind -- learning how to understand our own minds and to work with our minds, overcoming inner causes of suffering and dissatisfaction (such as hatred, greed and ignorance) while cultivating inner causes of happiness (such as love, compassion, patience and wisdom). We study, contemplate what we've studied, and meditate together.

### What to Expect

You'll notice that some people attending teachings or other events engage in practices such as prostrating to the teacher, chanting prayers in Tibetan, making offerings and the like. There's never any pressure to take part in such practices. Some practices (such as chanting in Tibetan) are done out of respect for our teachers, most of whom speak Tibetan. Other such practices are common to many schools of Buddhism. But, you should not feel that you need to engage in them unless doing so feels positive and natural to you!

**Sitting:** You may sit on a cushion on the floor or on a chair. Choose the seat that will be most comfortable for you. A point of etiquette is to not extend your the soles of your feet towards the teacher, altar, or holy objects. If you need to stretch your legs, you can turn to the side.

**Appropriate Dress:** Out of respect, it is traditional for both men and women to wear modest clothing at a Buddhist temple (covering at least the shoulders and knees), even in hot weather. One should also avoid wearing revealing clothing that is extremely tight, backless, or low-cut, etc. If you like to dress this way, you can always bring a light shawl to cover your legs or shoulders in the presence of the lama. If you will be sitting for a long period of time it is best to wear loose clothing, for the sake of your comfort.

**Shoes and Socks:** We politely ask that you remove your shoes before entering the temple room. There is a shoe rack provided in the shop area. Please also make sure to wear fresh clean socks. For safety reasons, we strongly prefer that you not come enter the temple totally barefoot. If you have a medical condition that requires you to wear shoes, you may do so.

**Showing Respect to the Teacher:** It is customary to stand as the teacher enters the room and to remain standing until he/she is seated. We also stand as the teacher leaves the room.

**How to Address the Teacher:** Our resident teacher is named Geshe Konchog Kyab (*Ge-shey Kon-Chog Key-ab*). The title “Geshe” indicates that a monk has completed an extremely rigorous 20 year course of study, and attained the highest monastic degree (roughly equivalent to a double PhD from a western university). Very few monks complete this program, and there are only a handful of Geshes teaching in the United States. The name “Geshe la” is a friendly, but polite way to address our teacher (or anyone holding the Geshe degree).

**Prostrations:** By prostrating, we use our body, speech and mind to show our respect for the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Furthermore, as Lama Yeshe said:

Why do we make prostrations at the beginning of the teaching and meditation sessions? It's to beat our ego down a bit. Ego-centric pride looks at things very superficially and never sees the nature of reality. When we prostrate, we are not prostrating to the material objects on the altar but paying homage to true, understanding wisdom.

~ Ego, Attachment and Liberation. Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archives. 2006

If you'd like to offer prostrations, place your thumbs inside your cupped hands, and then place your cupped hands on your head. Place your hands in the space between your eyebrows. Then place your hands at your throat; finally, place your hands at your heart. All these actions both collect merit and purify yourself: they purify the obscurations of your body, speech and mind.

**If you do not choose to make prostrations:** It's perfectly polite to stand quietly while others offer their prostrations. It's thoughtful to avoid walking directly in front of someone who is making prostrations. Usually, at the last session of a series of teachings, prostrations are not offered at the closing, as a sign that you welcome the teacher's return.

**Offerings for the Altar:** You are most welcome to bring flowers or food for the altar as an offering to the Buddhas. Doing so is a wonderful way to accumulate great merit.

**Prayers:** Before and after the teachings, we recite a few short prayers in Tibetan (a copy of the prayers in Tibetan phonetics and English is in the blue prayer book at your desk). The purpose is to correctly set our motivation for listening to the teachings and for paying respect to our teachers. Pabongka Rinpoche quoted *The Sayings of a Buddha*:

Owing to your study, you understand Dharma;  
Owing to your study, you stop sinning;  
Owing to your study, you abandon the meaningless;  
Owing to your study, you achieve nirvana.

~ Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand. Wisdom Publications. 1993.

In one of the prayers, we offer the mandala - the representation of the entire physical universe to the Buddhas and teachers. While reciting the short prayer, we hold our hands in the mandala gesture (mudra) -- the third fingers of both hands are placed back-to-back and point upwards, while the second and fourth fingers are crossed or intertwined horizontally across the palms. The thumbs are then extended across the palms to press upon the tips of the fourth fingers, and the index fingers are curved

backwards to press upon the tips of the second fingers. (If you'd like to learn how to do this, please ask someone, it's not that difficult.)



The two upward extended third fingers represent Mt Meru, the crossed second and fourth fingers represent the four continents surrounding Mt Meru, and the thumbs and curved index fingers represent the great salt ocean surrounding Mt Meru. The rosary can be held within the palms and around the raised fingers representing the seven ranges of golden mountains and lakes that surround Mt Meru. (Robert Beer. *The Handbook of Tibetan Buddhist Symbols*. Shambhala. 2003).

**Dharma Books, Sacred Texts and Holy Objects:** These represent the teachings of the Buddha, so it's best to avoid placing a practice text, Dharma book, or any holy object directly on the floor; instead place them on a clean cloth, a desk or table, or even on top of a backpack or bag, rather than the floor. You will notice people try to avoid stepping over a text or other holy object that is in their path. It's polite to move your texts or hold them if someone needs to walk by.

**Making Donations to the Center:** Our center operates 100% on donations from students and guests and we are so grateful for your generosity. We advertise suggested donations for most of our events on our website. You are welcome to donate that amount, more, or less at your discretion. No one will ever be turned away or made to feel unwelcome for inability to donate. There are also several other donation boxes in the shop area for other charitable or center-related causes. If you have any questions about donations for events, please email [information@tubtenkunga.org](mailto:information@tubtenkunga.org).

**How to Make a Personal Offering to the Lama:** Tibetans offer "Khatas" (a ceremonial scarf, usually white) to friends, acquaintances, loved ones and teachers as a way of showing respect and affection. You can purchase a khata for a nominal fee at our shop. To do so, fold the khata in half with the open edge facing away from you. Put both palms together and drape the scarf over them. Assuming the teacher is sitting, kneel down, bow your head and hold the scarf at the level of your forehead. If you would like to make a donation to him, discreetly place the envelope on the table and then offer the scarf. He will respond by putting the scarf around your neck. He may choose to say prayers for you or touch you gently on the head by way of a blessing. Then you can stand up. If the khata is returned to you, you can keep it for future offerings or hang it over a doorway in your home. The teacher will usually take your donations and send them to his/her home monastery. If you would like the offering to be used by the teacher personally, indicate on the check or envelope "for your personal use."

**Resource for Learning More About Buddhism:** The more you learn about Buddhism, the more these customs will make sense. Here is an excellent online resource: [http://www.fpmt.org/faq/buddhism\\_faq.asp](http://www.fpmt.org/faq/buddhism_faq.asp)

We hope this helps you feel very comfortable in joining us!