

TARA'S COLOURING BOOK



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Text by Jonathan Landaw

Wisdom  **Publications**

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Wisdom Publications

199 Elm Street, Somerville, MA 02144, USA

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ISBN 0 86171 002 9

First printing in 1979

11 10 09 08 07

12 11 10 9 8

Cover: a Tibetan tangka from the collection of Dr. Dora Kalff depicting White Tara, the meditational deity of long life. Surrounding her clockwise from the upper left are Shakyamuni Buddha, Manjushri and two other long life deities: Ushnisha Vijaya and Amitayus.

Printed and bound in Singapore by Ho Printing Singapore Pte Ltd.

Introduction

The illustrations in this colouring book derive from the tradition of religious art that, until recently flourished in remote Tibet: the Land of Snows. There, in a protected and isolated environment walled in by the highest mountains in the world, was preserved the finest flowering of Indian Buddhism, long after it had disappeared from the land of its origin. This was the Buddhism of the vajrayana: the diamond-hard or lightning-fast vehicle. Built on a foundation of loving-kindness, wisdom and wisdom and the morality of avoiding giving harm to others – the foundation common to all forms of buddhist practice – the vajrayana employs a vast wealth of meditational methods designed to bring its practitioners speedily to the goal of full spiritual awakening for the benefit of all. One of its foremost meditational techniques is the practice of visualization, and it was largely to aid in this profound practice that the artistic traditions of India and later of Tibet were developed.

Visualization is the process of becoming intimately acquainted with positive and beneficial states of consciousness as they are pictured before one's mind's eye in the form of various meditational 'deities' and other images. This has a profound effect on one's inner being. Each image visualized serves as an archetype, evoking responses at a very subtle level of consciousness, thereby aiding in the delicate work of inner transformation. By generating an image of compassion, for example, and then focusing on it with single-pointed concentration, one stimulates the growth of one's own compassion and creates a peaceful inner environment into which the dissatisfied and suffering-producing thoughts of anger and resentment cannot easily intrude.

The underlying premise of all vajrayana thought and practice is that the essential nature of each being's mind is pure and clear and that the main task along the spiritual path is to discover and identify with this essential purity, or buddha nature. All disturbing, neurotic thoughts and impulses are seen as mere clouds temporarily obscuring this pure nature and with the proper training they can definitely be removed, allowing the sunlight of crystal clear consciousness to shine forth without obstruction. For this purification to be successful and complete, however, one must follow the instructions of a qualified spiritual guide, someone who has already uncovered and cultivated his or her own buddha nature. Then, in order to travel the profound vajrayana path, one must receive the empowerment into the practice of a particular meditational deity and then train to see this deity as embodying the essence not only of one's own spiritual teacher but of one's own mind as well. Thereafter the disciple follows the various methods for accomplishing the complete transformation of consciousness until the goal of enlightenment, or buddahood, is achieved.

All the aspects of this profound path have been expounded upon in precise instructions handed down in unbroken lineages of teachers and disciples traceable to Shakyamuni Buddha himself, the historical buddha who lived in India during the sixth century before the christian era. The same is true of the iconographic forms used in visualization practices. All of the meditational deities in this colouring book, for example, have been drawn in exact compliance with traditional models by artists who served apprenticeships under teachers of the lineages. Each drawing accords with grid patterns that determine the precise proportions to which the image must conform, and each element of the image has its own symbolic meaning taught to each successive disciple by his or her teacher.

The basic colouring of these symbolic images has also been determined by the masters of the lineages. Different hues have demonstrably different psychological effects and for this reason the colour combinations to be used in painting each deity have been specified by the various traditions. In the separate explanations of each of the twelve figures given below there is room only for the most basic instructions concerning colour. In each case the most important element is the body colour. In addition occasional suggestions – selected from a range of traditional styles – concerning the representation of garments, ornaments and so forth are also given. If anyone is interested in receiving more precise information, he or she would do well to examine traditional examples of Tibetan art found in museums and elsewhere or – better still study directly with a qualified artist.

There are a few general words of advice that may aid in the enjoyment of this book. Traditionally the medium of Tibetan paintings was gouache on smooth cloth canvas, and the colour produced was flat and opaque. The most appropriate medium for this present book, however, is watercolour and to product the best effect one should avoid mixing the colours too thinly, furthermore, there is always the tendency for paper to buckle when wet, especially if too much water is used. To counter this each sheet should be removed from the book before the painting is begun and immersed in water. The wet paper should then be stretched and taped securely to a smooth, stout board. (The thin brown tape used to seal cardboard boxes works quite well for this purpose.) Be sure to apply the tape as neatly and squarely and as close to the edge of the paper as possible. This will allow the finished painting to be kept intact when it is eventually cut from this tape frame. As the paper dries it will buckle, but when it is completely dry it will be perfectly flat and an excellent surface for painting.

It is a good idea to keep the paper fastened to the board in this way until the painting is completed. Begin by painting the large areas first – the sky, earth and so forth – and use small strokes for greatest control. Whenever two edges meet – such as the sky of the background and the robes of a figure – paint up to the most important section, leaving the one requiring the most precision until last. This will give a sharp edge where most needed. To avoid spotting or smudging the painting, rest our drawing hand on a piece of clean paper, which can also be used to test your colour and sharpen the tip of your brush.

The details of the eyes should be the last part of the painting completed. Earlier, the white background of the eyes should have been painted in, followed by the colour of the surrounding face. Whenever anything else has been completed, return to the eyes and fill in the details, adding the pupils in at the very end. When these have been added the painting is said to come to life. No longer a mere artistic creation, it has been transformed into a living symbol of the enlightened mind.

1 Shakyamuni Buddha

An enlightened being is one who has realized the full potential of his or her inner being, has removed all the obscurations clouding the mind and has developed all positive qualities to their fullest extent. Such a being is called a buddha: a fully awakened one. Of the countless buddhas who have appeared and will continue to appear on this earth, figure 1 represents Shakyamuni, the regenerator of the spiritual teachings for our present era.

Shakyamuni lived 2500 years ago in India and performed many deeds for the benefit of others. His supreme deed, however, was to teach the spiritual path leading to liberation from suffering and the full enlightenment of buddhahood. This deed – symbolized by the hand gestures illustrated here – is referred to traditionally as 'turning the wheel of dharma' and Shakyamuni turned this wheel continuously for the last 45 years of his earthly existence.

An essential characteristic of all enlightened beings is that they intuitively understand the individual needs and capacities of others and can therefore offer them guidance in a manner best suited to their personal development. This ability to teach on whatever level is most appropriate for each disciple is illustrated in figure 1 by the appearance above Shakyamuni of Vajradhara. While Shakyamuni teaches the dharma of the ordinary lesser and greater vehicles to his general disciples, he simultaneously appears as Vajradhara to bestow the tantric teachings of vajrayana on his most qualified followers.

Buddha's body is of a golden hue, his hair is blue/black and the aura behind his head is green/turquoise, while his body aura is blue. He is seated upon a lotus, sun and moon seat. In this case the lotus is variegated, meaning that the colour of the petals alternate between blue with a red inset and green with an orange inset. The central petal at the front of the lotus is always a blue and red one. The moon disc is white and the edge of the sun disc below it is gold, resting on the green bed of the inside of the variegated lotus.

Buddha wears the traditional robes of a monk including the orange-coloured outer shawl and the red inner garment tied with a green belt. When the folds of these garments are turned to reveal their inner

side, this is coloured blue. Vajradhara, who appears in a larger format in figure 6, has a body colour of midnight blue.

2 Avalokiteshvara

The fully enlightened mind has three characteristic qualities: universal compassion, the wisdom that sees the true nature of reality and the skilful and effective means to deal with all situations beneficially. The first of these three, loving-compassion, is the attitude that wishes all beings, without exception, to be separated from every form of suffering, pain and dissatisfaction. Such great compassion – and the enlightened motive of bodhicitta which strives towards enlightenment for the sake of others – is symbolized by Avalokiteshvara (Tibetan: Chenrezig), shown here in his four-arm aspect.

His first two hands hold a wish-granting gem, while his other two hold a crystal rosary and a lotus. Around his shoulder is draped the skin of a deer symbolizing the gentle nature of compassion. The lotus appears frequently in buddhist art and usually symbolizes purity. Just as this beautiful flower grows in muddy swamps only to open its petals immaculately above the surface of the water, so too does the enlightened mind emerge from and make its influence felt within worldly existence without being stained by it

Above Avalokiteshvara is his spiritual guide Amitabha, the buddha of the western direction. Also depicted in figure 2 is an offering goddess holding a traditional banner of victory. Her appearance carrying this royal banner indicates the special place Avalokiteshvara has in the affection of the Tibetans, who consider their religious and secular head, each successive Dalai Lama, to be an incarnation of this compassionate being.

Avalokiteshvara's body is white and he is seated upon a white moon disc atop a white lotus having pinkish highlights. Amitabha's body is red.

Avalokiteshvara, Manjushri and Tara are among the class of peaceful meditational deities dressed in royal garments symbolizing the bodhisattva path to buddhahood. Although there are various ways of colouring these garments, etc., what follows is one traditional scheme that can be used not only for this figure, but for many others. The scarf around Avalokiteshvara's shoulders is green and he wears two skirts, the top one being light blue with a dark blue border and the lower one either red, orange or maroon. The colour of the scarf adorning his head depends on the head aura. If this aura is painted green, the scarf is red; if red, the scarf is blue. His hair is dark blue, his body aura generally blue and the deer skin either light blue or gray. His ornaments – earrings, bracelets, tiara, etc. – are gold, encrusted with light blue or

red jewels. The rosary in his right hand is white while the lotus in his left is either blue or white with bluish highlights. His palms and soles, in contrast with his white body, are flesh-coloured.

3 Manjushri

Manjushri embodies the second of the three characteristics of an enlightened mind: discriminating wisdom. This is the ability to see into the true nature of reality by cutting through the distortions of egoism and banishing the deceptive appearance of things. Manjushri has the power to discriminate not only between correct and incorrect views of reality but also between which actions are to be performed and which abandoned as one travels along the spiritual path of inner development. To symbolize these various attributes he is depicted as brandishing the flaming sword or wisdom and holding the scriptural text entitled 'The Perfection of Wisdom', the wellspring of the greater vehicle path to enlightenment.

Figure 3 depicts one of the main legendary deeds attributed to Manjushri: the draining of the Kathmandu valley in Nepal. This valley was once a lake inhabited by serpent-like creatures called nagas. With one thrust of his flaming sword, Manjushri cut through one of the hills encircling the lake, let the waters flow out and thereby opened the valley for human habitation and the spread of the dharma. As the waters receded, the sacred hill of Swayambunath stupa – the Self-born – appeared, and today it remains as a major centre of pilgrimage for hindus and buddhists alike. He was so named because he retrieved from the nages still living below the stupa the perfection of wisdom scriptures, which had been entrusted to them during an earlier age.

Manjushri's body is red/yellow and the scarf across his chest is white; as illustrated in the upper right-hand corner of the cover.

4 Vajrapani

The third characteristic on the enlightened mind is its skilful and effective means, or power. This is embodied in the dynamic and wrathful form of Vajrapani, the wielder of the diamond-hard scepter. Skilful means refers to the intuitive ability of awakened beings to put their compassion and wisdom into effective action in the world, spontaneously providing benefit for all. Vajrapari's wrathful expression, his aura of flames, dynamic pose and ornaments of power all serve to convey the force and vitality of the enlightened spirit as it combats ignorance, greed,

fear and the whole host of crippling delusions. Vajrapani is usually represented in his two-arm aspect but here a four-arm emanation is depicted.

Figure 4 contains a scene from the life of Shakyamuni Buddha which demonstrates Vajrapani's power. Once, while Buddha was residing at Vultures Peak – the site at which he delivered the perfection of wisdom teachings – his jealous cousin Devadatta attempted to assassinate him. He sent a huge boulder rolling down the hill, but just as it was about to crash down upon the Enlightened One, Vajrapani appeared and split the rock so that it fell harmlessly to either side of Buddha.

Vajrapani's body is blue/black, his hair yellow ochre and he wears a tiger skin around his waist. Unlike the other figures in this colouring book, he stands upon a solar instead of a lunar disc. This can either be painted gold like the sun or yellow, red or orange.

5 Green Tara

Tara represents the entire range of virtuous and enlightened activity and is therefore said to be the mother of the buddhas of the past, present and future, an attribute symbolized by the three utpala flowers she holds in her left hand. The gesture of her left hand symbolizes refuge while her right hand is in the boon-granting pose. Because she is quick to answer the petitions of those who request her aid, Tara is known as the Great Liberator. It is said that when Avalokiteshvara looked down upon the misery of the world he shed tears of compassion and from the pool of these tears two emanations of Tara were born to help him bring relief to all suffering beings.

In lifetime after lifetime Tara has manifested in female form, demonstrating that enlightenment is attainable by all – men and women alike. Figure 5 illustrates a story told about her virtuous activity. Once there was a lone traveler making his perilous way across the forbidding plateau of Tibet. Exhausted and without food he was in immediate danger of losing his life when he came upon a young girl tending a herd of yaks. She took the weary man into her tent, nursed him back to health and fed him until his strength returned. As the man was recovering he observed that the young girl was alone. Single-handedly she was doing the work that even a number of strong men would have found difficult. Eventually he was fit to travel again and the girl sent him on his way with a bag of provisions. Although it was a long journey, the man discovered that the food she had given him never ran out until he was back in his own valley again. Marvelling at all that had happened he thought, 'Perhaps that girl was actually Tara!

When he went to his lama and told him the story, the lama upbraided him saying, 'Of course she was Tara, you blockhead! How stupid of you not to recognize her. You must have a strong connection with her, but if you ever want to see her again you had better purify your delusions and practice harder'.

Tara's body is emerald green in colour. The main flower in her left hand is blue, while the other two are red and yellow.

6 Vajradhara

As mentioned before in the commentary to Figure 1, an enlightened being teaches paths appropriate to the aptitude of the individual disciple. To those practitioners who have trained their mind to renounce the circle of ignorantly conditioned existence and have cultivated both the altruistic motivation of bodhicitta and insightful wisdom, and who furthermore desire to reach enlightenment as quickly as possible to be of immediate help to all beings – to these fortunate disciples Shakyamuni revealed the diamond-hard and lightning-fast path of vajrayana.

The emanation in which Shakyamuni Buddha taught the tantric path was that of Vajradhara. In his right hand he holds the diamond sceptre (vajra) symbolizing the power of compassionate method and in his left he holds a bell symbolizing wisdom. His arms are crossed in front of him, demonstrating his complete integration of method and wisdom and of male and female energies.

Vajradhara is midnight blue in colour. As in the case of many meditational deities, the artist is allowed to choose from a wide range of colours and to decorate his robes according to individual taste. However, the objective should always be to set off and bring out the body colour. One can also use the same coloured robes as described above for figure 2.

7 A Stupa

Although each meditational deity has a different appearance, they are all in essence identical with the fully enlightened mind of a buddha. Another traditional way of representing this enlightened mind is through the construction of a stupa, or reliquary monument. These monuments enshrine sacred objects and were originally built to house relics of Buddha himself. As is the case with the meditational deities, the dimensions of a stupa conform to carefully

designated proportions, and each aspect of its design symbolizes a facet of the enlightened mind or of the path leading to its development. Stupas are found throughout the countryside of such buddhist lands as Tibet, Nepal and Ladakh and figure 7 shows a typical Tibetan devotional scene centred around one such stupa, which should be coloured white.

8 Guru Rinpoche

The sole purpose for achieving enlightenment or buddhahood – whether symbolized by a deity, a stupa or any other image – is to be able to help others overcome their suffering and gain true happiness and peace of mind. This is mainly accomplished through the giving of teachings, or turning the wheel of dharma. In light of this the vajrayana practitioner learns to regard his or her spiritual guide(Sanskrit. Guru; Tibetan: lama) as inseparable from all enlightened beings, and the basic spiritual training involves identifying one's own essential mind with that of guru/buddha. The next four illustrations are of several of the most highly revered teachers in the history of Tibet, and the spiritual traditions which they founded or transmitted are still very much alive today.

Figure 8 is of Padmasambhava, the Lotus-born, known affectionately to Tibetans as Guru Rinpoche, the precious teacher. He was a powerful Indian master who was invited to Tibet in the eighth century to pave the way for the entrance of the buddhist dharma. This he did by subduing harmful influences and controlling the forces that would hinder the spread of Shakyamuni Buddha's compassionate teachings.

Guru Rinpoche – shown here with his two wives, each of whom were highly accomplished practitioners as well – appeared in many guises, some wrathful and some peaceful, and caused the vajrayana dharma to spread widely throughout northern India, Nepal, Tibet and elsewhere. Founder of the Nying-ma, or ancient, tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, Guru Rinpoche is as revered by Tibetans as is Shakyamuni himself.

Guru Rinpoche's body is a golden flesh colour and his hat is red. He wears robes of several different colours symbolizing the vast range of his attainments. These robes are quite complex so it is advisable to consult traditional paintings before attempting to reproduce them exactly. Briefly, his inner garment is white, the middle blue and the outer red, while his outermost coat is brown. He is seated upon a variegated lotus of alternating blue with red and green with orange petals.

9 Naropa

Next is Naropa, an Indian master who lived approximately 900 years ago. He was a learned scholar at the famous Nalanda monastic university and had much pride in his intellectual accomplishments. One day a withered old hag appeared before him and asked if he had mastered the words of Buddha's teachings. When he said he had, the old woman laughed out aloud. But when he added 'I also understand their meaning' she began to weep bitterly. Naropa was confused and asked her why she reacted like this. 'When you said you knew the words I laughed for joy because this was the truth' she replied. 'But I cry when you say you understand their meaning, because this is not so' Naropa was chastened by what this strange old woman – who in reality was a manifestation of the female tantric deity known as Vajrayogini – had to say. Eventually he received empowerments and advice from her and, at her insistence, began a long search to find Tilopa, the guru who would teach him the essential meaning of the dharma as revealed in the tantra of Heruka Chakrasamvara.

Eventually, after much difficulty, Naropa found Tilopa by the banks of a river. He was dressed worse than a beggar and was eating fish, most unusual behaviour for a supposed holy man! But Tilopa demonstrated that he was more than the crazed and dirty beggar he appeared to be by restoring the half-eaten fish to life and throwing them back in the river. Naropa then underwent a rigorous training lasting twelve years until eventually he received from Tilopa the inner transmission of the essential teachings.

The profound lineage of esoteric teachings known as mahamudra, or the great seal, was received by Tilopa directly from Vajradhara and was brought to Tibet by Naropa's Tibetan disciple Marpa the Translator, whose chief disciple, Milarepa, is depicted in figure 10. These four illustrious figures, two of them Indian and two Tibetan, were the forerunners of what became known in Tibet as the Kagyu, or whispered lineage, tradition of Tibetan Buddhism.

In the scenes depicting his earlier life, Naropa is dressed in the robes of a monk, as described for figure 1. In the later scenes he and his guru Tilopa are dressed in the red or white lower garments of a yogi. Their skin colour, because they followed a wandering mendicant way of life involving smearing their bodies with ashes, is often depicted as an ashen gray.

10 Milarepa

Perhaps the most beloved and widely quoted of all of Tibet's many highly-accomplished masters is Milarepa. This poet and meditator, whose songs are still sung today by the learned and

simple alike, was born into a well-to-do family. While still a child, however, his father died and he and his mother and sister had all their wealth and property stolen by their cruel relatives. Reduced to a life of poverty and spurred on by his mother for revenge, Milarepa studied the art of black magic and caused the death of many of his enemies. Grieving deeply over his evil deeds, Milarepa eventually found his guru Marpa who put him through the severest of hardships before finally conferring upon him the essential teachings he had received from Naropa. Milarepa meditated on these tantric teachings with superhuman dedication for six years and eventually achieved the full enlightenment of buddhahood in that very lifetime.

Figure 10 shows a famous scene from his life. One day as Milarepa was meditating in a cave on the side of a mountain, a frightened deer was being chased by a hunter and his dog, but when the deer sensed Milarepa's calm vibrations of love and compassion, it lost its fear, entered the cave and lay down at the meditator's feet. Soon afterwards the dog and then the hunter came by and they, too, found their agitated minds calmed as they neared Milarepa's cave. Soon all three of them were seated around the meditator who taught them the dharma through a song.

Because Milarepa's diet consisted of nothing but nettles for long periods of time, his skin assumed a greenish hue, and is often coloured in this fashion. Alternatively, his skin is painted golden to show his realizations. The sheet in which he is wrapped is white.

11 Je Tzong-khapa

In the fourteenth century appeared the great revitalizer of Tibetan Buddhism, the master yogi Tzong-khapa, also known as Je Rinpoche and one of the three principal Tibetan manifestations of Guru Rinpoche and one of the three principal Tibetan manifestations of Manjushri – the other two being the great Nying-ma lama Long-chen-pa and the Sakya Pandita – Je Tzong-khapa added new life to the monastic institutions of Tibet, established universities modelled on such great Indian institutions as Nalanda, wrote extensively on the sutra and tantra paths to enlightenment and left a legacy of spiritual greatness that continues up until the present day. Having studied with the outstanding Nying-ma, Kadam, Kagyu and Sakya masters of his time, Tzong-khapa founded the Gelug tradition and among his closest disciples was Gedun-drub, later recognized as the First Dalai Lama.

Figure 11 presents a vision of Je Tzong-khapa with monk practitioners making actual and visualized offerings in devotion to him. The presentation of such offerings – shown as well at the bottom of figures 1 and 3 and elsewhere – is a dynamic vajrayana method for transforming all

objects of the senses into aids on the pathway to enlightenment. Je Tzong-khapa is shown holding a sword and a book, demonstrating that he is one with Manjushri, the buddha of wisdom. The offering goddesses visualized around him in a clockwise direction are holding a conch shell, musical instrument, mirror, book, cloth and tray of fruit. Also, one of the monks is shown offering a mandala, a symbolic representation of the entire universe and all its treasures.

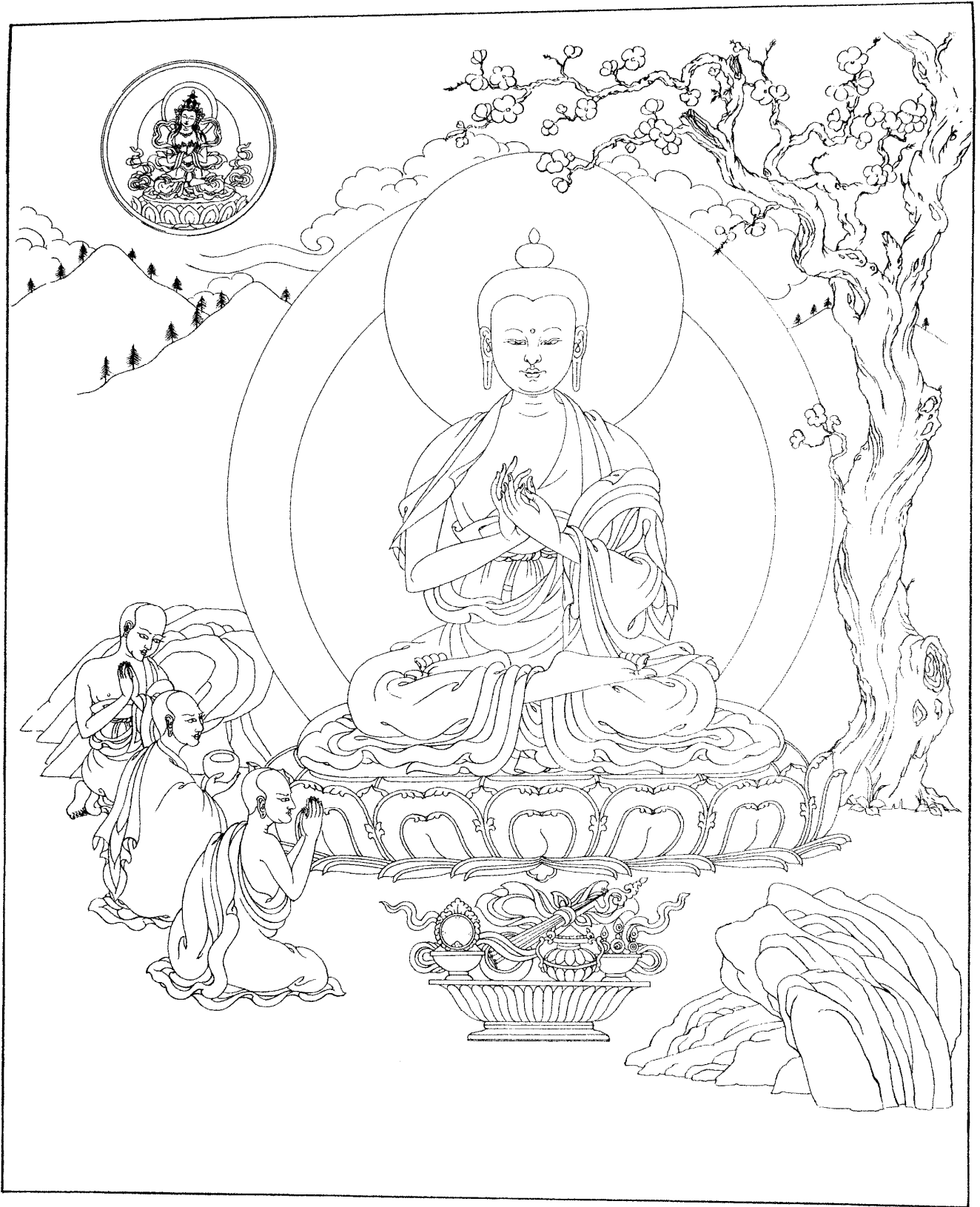
Je-Tzong-khapa's body is radiant white with a reddish glow. The lotus he sits upon is white with pinkish highlights and supports the sun and moon discs described in the explanation for figure 1. He wears the traditional monastic robes and is crowned with the yellow hat of a pandit. In a clockwise direction, the offering goddesses are coloured Hue, yellow, white, white, green and red.

12 Directional Guardians

Depicted here are two of the four guardians of the cardinal directions. Their duty is to prevent hindrances that would block the teachings of loving compassion, wisdom and skilful means from pervading the four corners of the universe. As such they are fitting to serve as the seal of this small offering of art. Many it bring happiness to the minds of all who receive it!

The guardian at the top, who governs the western direction, is the red colour of the setting sun. He is seated upon a leopard skin. The lower figure guards the eastern direction, is the white colour of dawn, and is seated upon a tiger skin.

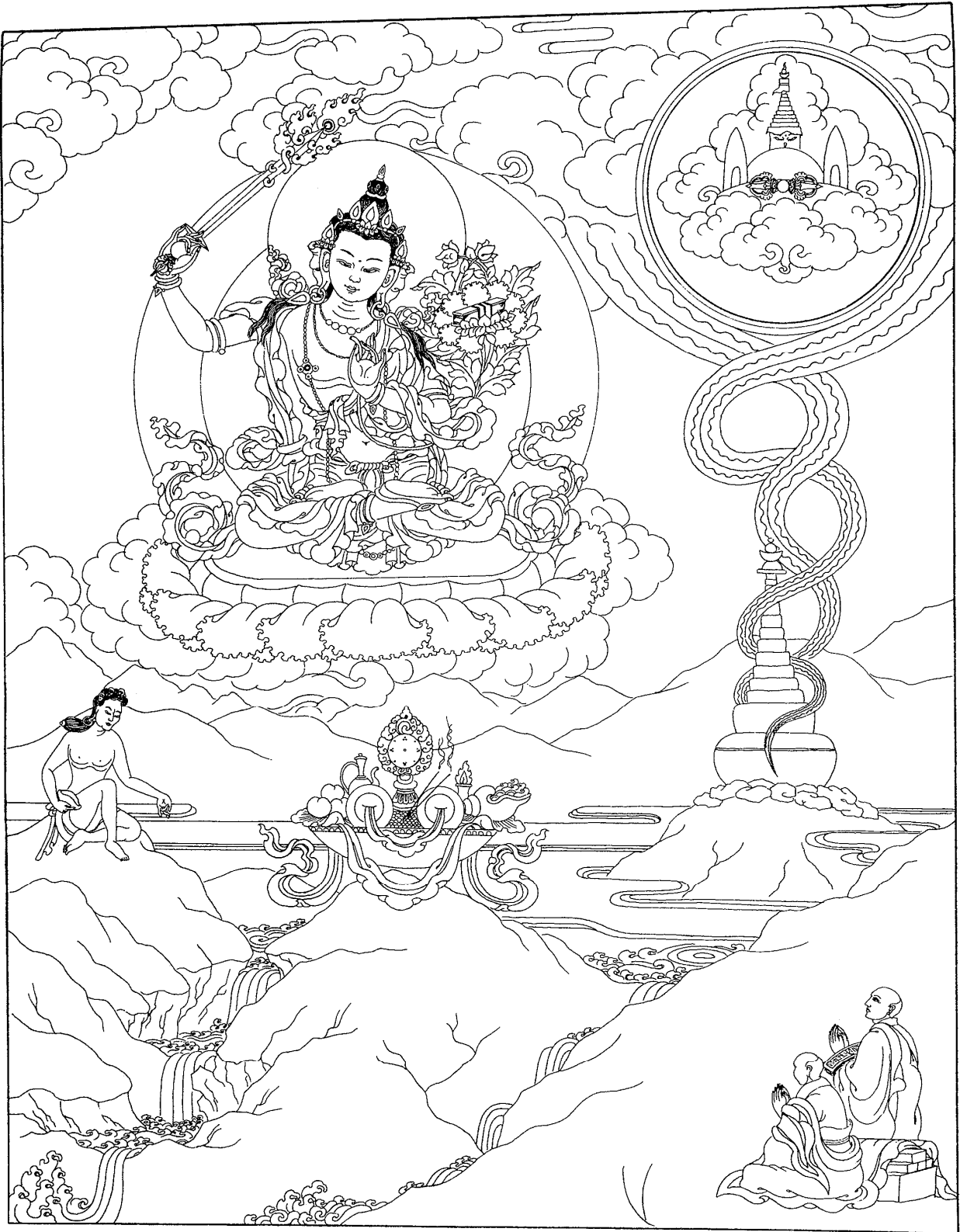




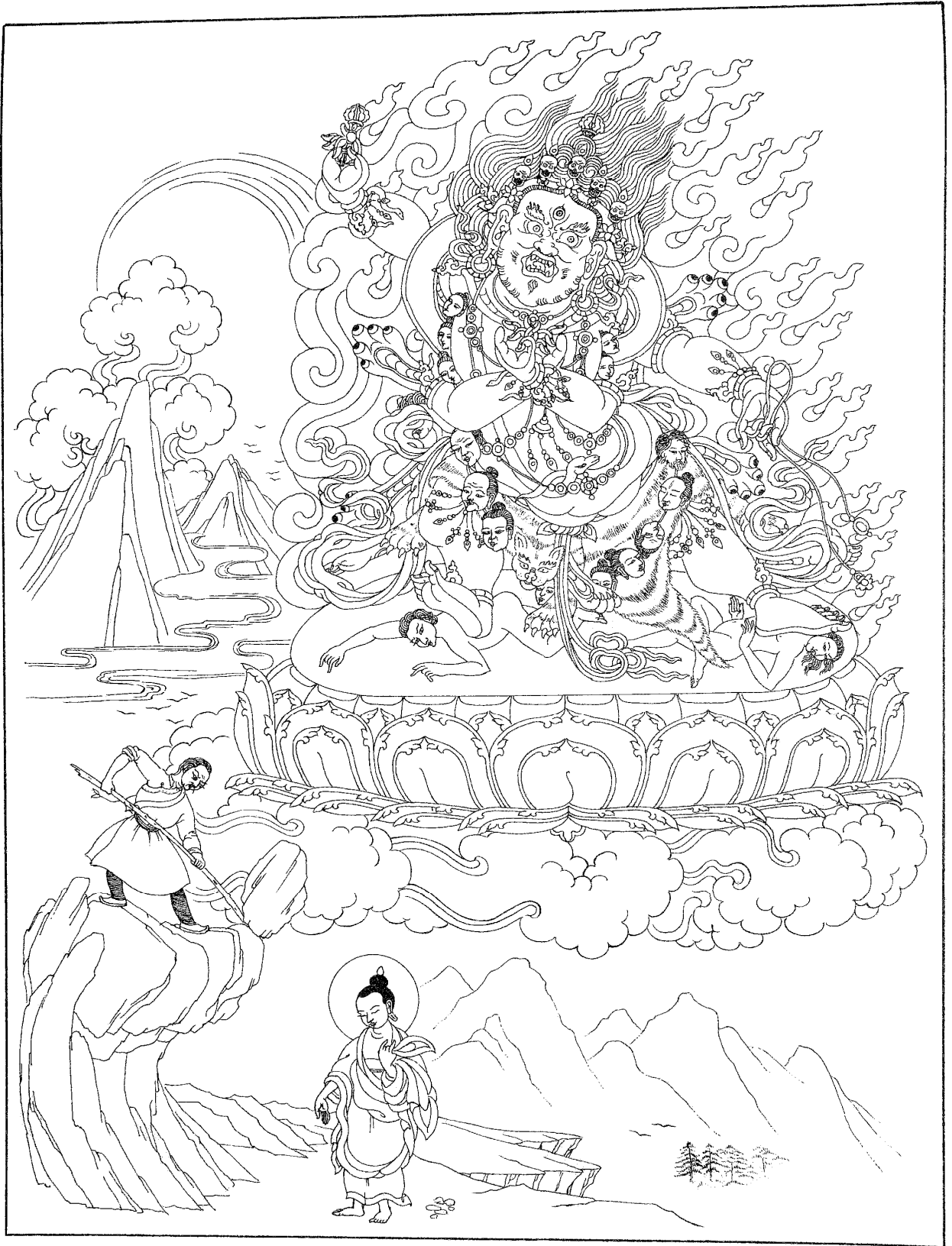
1 Shakyamuni Buddha



2 Avalokiteshvara



3 Manjushri



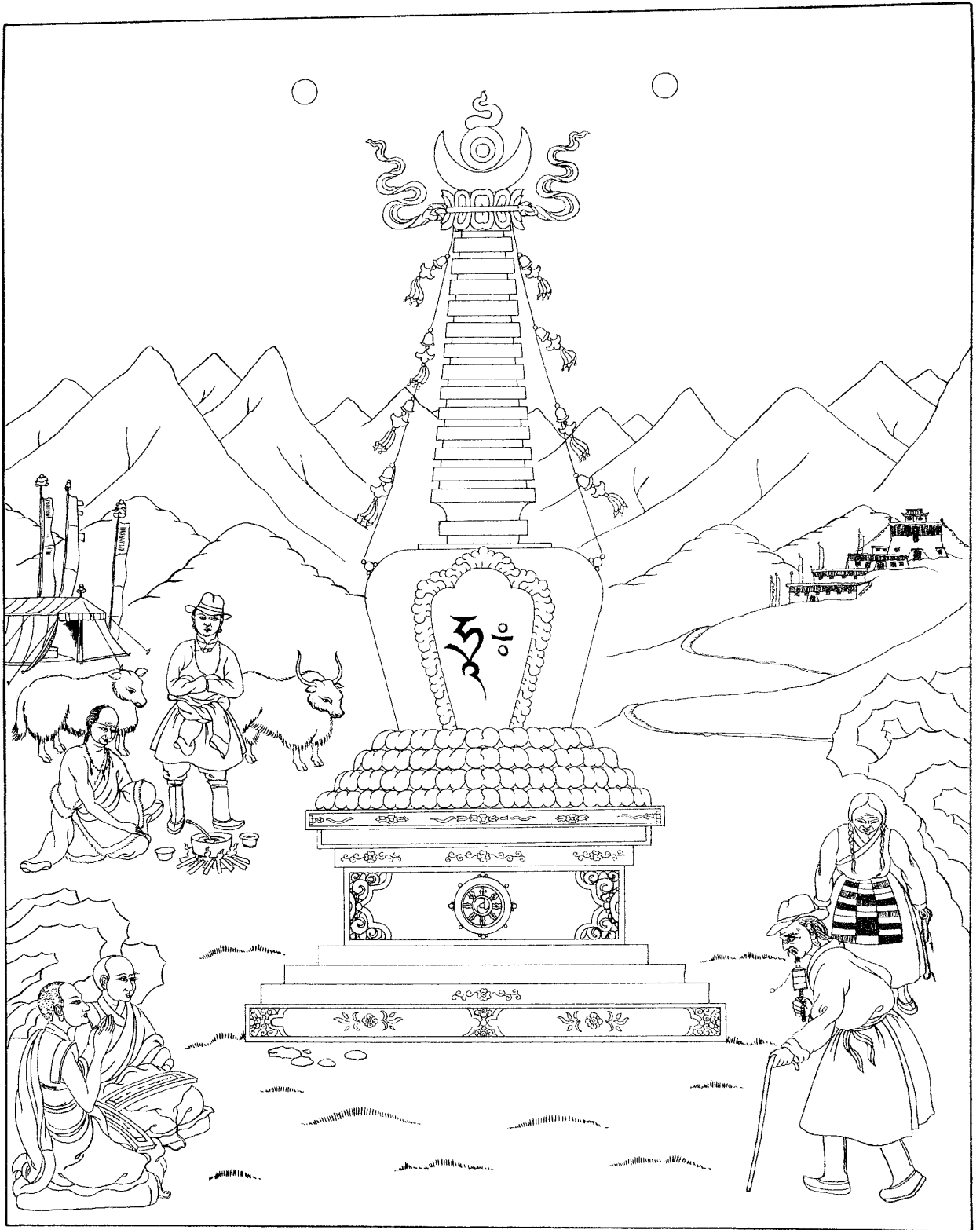
4 Vajrapani



5 Green Tara



6 Vajradhara



7 A Stupa



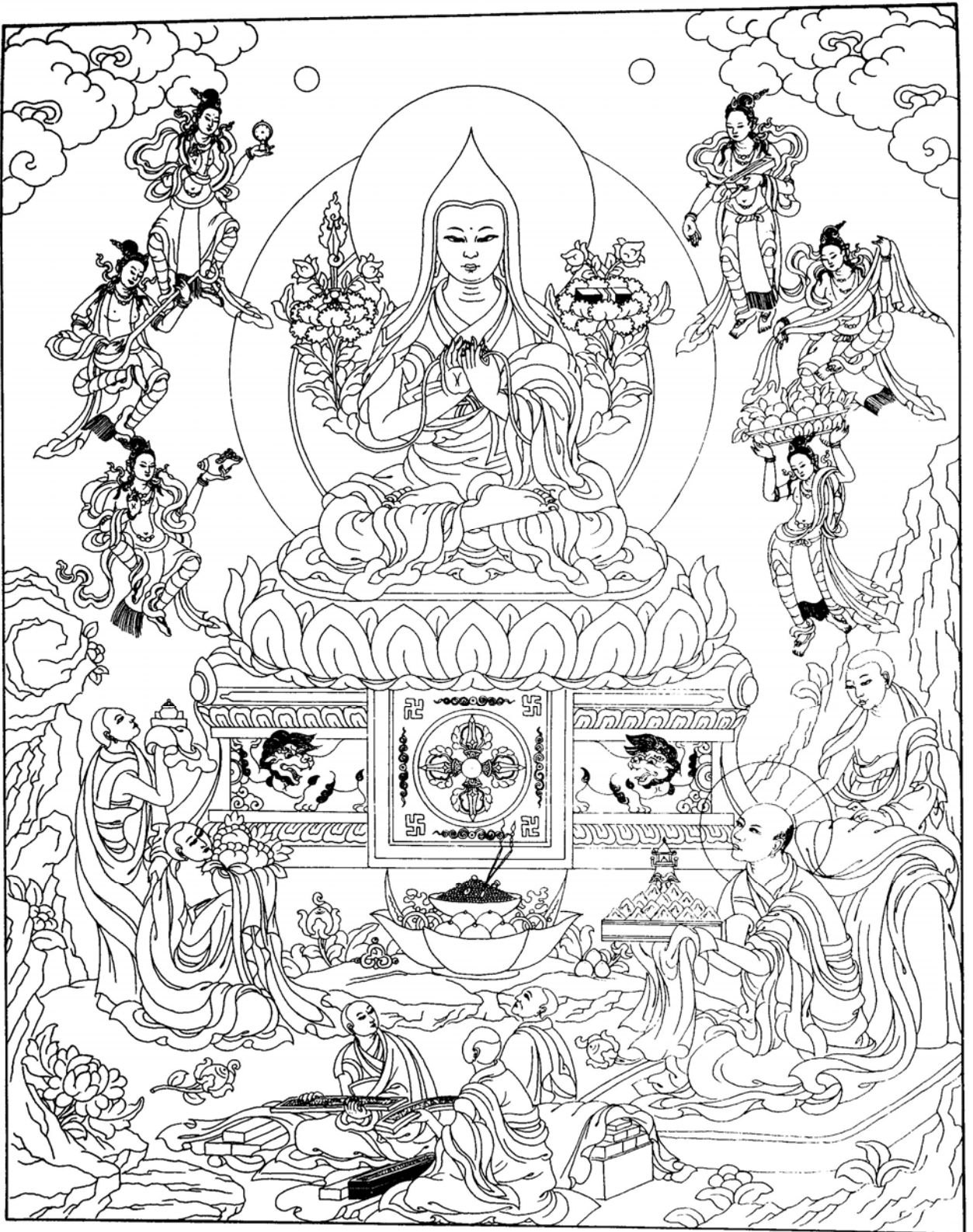
8 Guru Rinpoche



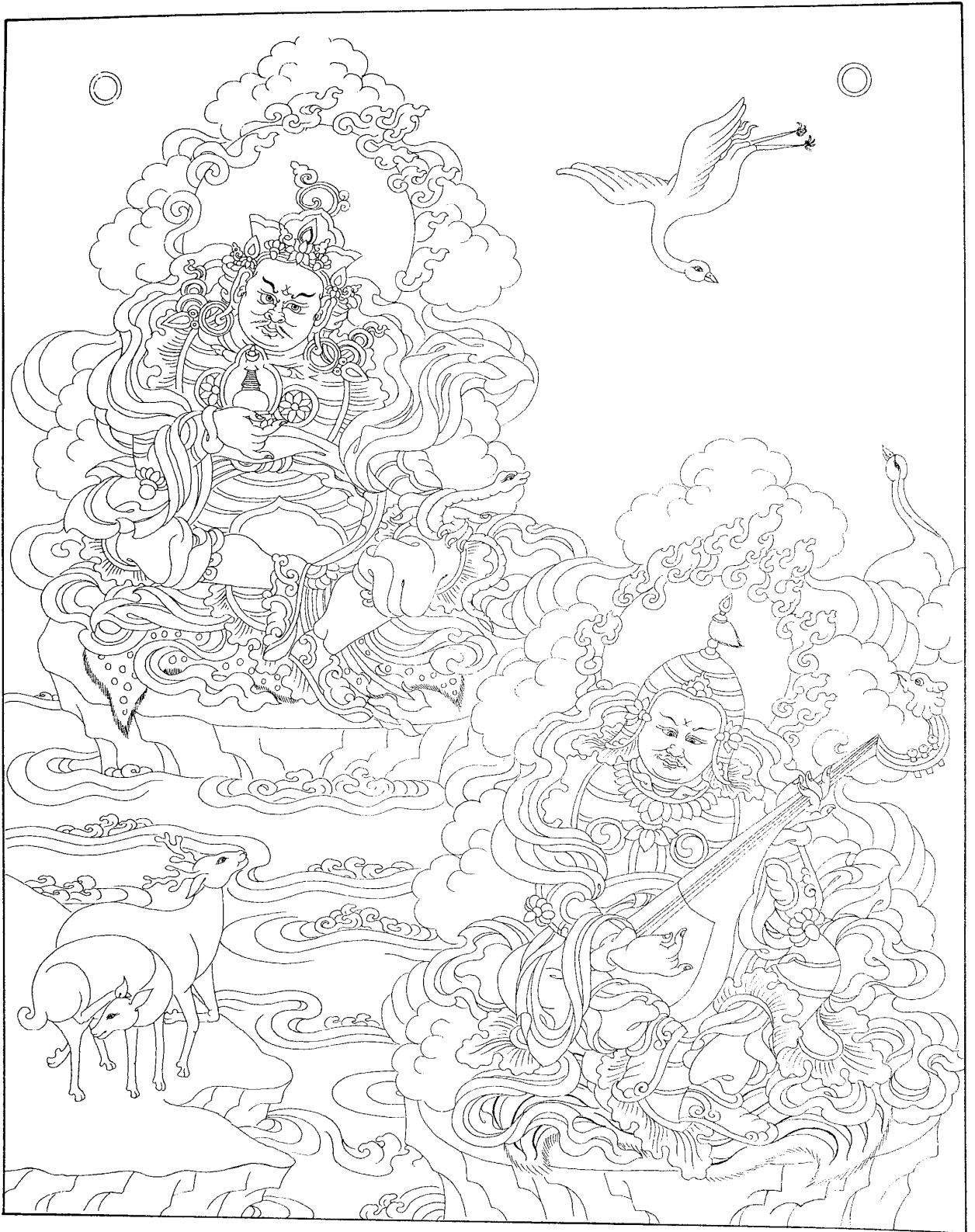
9 Naropa



10 Milarepa



11 Je Tzong-khapa



12 Directional Guardians