

The Guru-mandala-Arcana

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Overview of Main Contents

1. *Guru vandana*:
Salutation to Gurus: Buddha, Dharma, Samgha and Vajradhara, the Doctrinal Buddha.
2. *Udakabhiseka*:
Taking holy bath as previous Buddhas had taken immediate after birth. Assumption like all the Buddhas are empowering own-self.
3. *Kayavisodhana*:
Purifying the body.
4. *Vighana-nivarana*:
Overcome upon all the obstacles.
5. *Puja-samkalpa*:
Sacrifice of Puja materials.
6. *Asana Adhasthana*
Adhasthana? of seat.
7. *Papanpanaya*
Keeping aside all the non-virtues deeds.
8. *Atma raksa*
Protecting own-self.
9. *Bhumi-Adhasthana*
Assumption like the land is being Adhasthana? by all the Buddhas.
10. *Sadparamita*
Reminding the six perfections and result of practicing the six perfections.
11. *Ratnamandala-niryatana*
Offering the Ratnamandal to the Gurus.
12. *Saptavidhanuttarapuja*:
Sevenfold supreme offering.
13. *Balyarcana*:
Sacrificial offering.

Guru-mandala-Arcana : Worshipping the Gurus

“*Guru-Mandala-Arcana*” is a very common and popular ritualistic procedure, which is widely practiced in Nepalese Buddhism (Newar Buddhism) from earlier centuries (exact date of origin is unknown) until today. It is practiced early in the morning each day by Buddhist ritualists known as Vajracharya (Newari: Bajracarya) and Shakyas. Vajracharya priests also perform the *Guru-Mandala-Arcana* for their followers. Occasionally priests lead their followers to observe the *Guru-Mandala-Arcana* as part of the “*dhalam-danegu*,” a vrata ritual. The *Guru-Mandala-Arcana* is observed in happy and as well as sorrowful occasions, from birth to death as part of most rites and life cycle rituals. It is performed at home, in the cremation grounds and at all places. Every Newar Buddhist ritual commences with the *Guru-Mandala-Arcana*.

The term “*Guru-Mandala-Arcana*” is a compound of three different words namely: *Guru*, *Mandala* and *Arcana*. Literally the term *Guru* refers to a master; *mandala* denotes circle; and *arcana* means worship. But here, in the context of the *Guru-Mandala-Arcana* of Nepalese Buddhism the term *Guru* denotes all the Buddhist teachers in the broadest sense: the Buddhas, the Dharma (Buddha’s teachings), and the Samgha (Buddhist monks, nuns, and priests). It also acknowledges Vajradhara, the Buddha who symbolizes the dharmakāya (“doctrinal body”) of all past, present and future

Buddhas. The term Mandala specifically refers to the body, speech and mind of oneself. The term Arcana means sacrifice. So in brief, it can be said that the Guru-Mandala-Arcana means sacrificing the body, speech and mind of one's own-self to the totality of teachers -- the Buddha, Dharma, Samgha and Vajradhara -- with the ultimate objective of the attainment of enlightenment. But the sacrificing of one's own body, speech and mind is not limited to only the Buddha, Dharma, Samgha and Vajradhara; it extended to others, too, like the world's guardian deities.

Guru-Mandala-Arcana begins with Salutation to Gurus and ends with Lokapala-Bali-Arcana (Offering oblations to guardian deities). It consists a series of the ritualistic steps like salutation to Gurus, taking holy bath, purifying the body, overcoming upon all the obstacles, discarding all non-virtues deeds, protecting oneself, reminding the practice of the six perfections (*paramitas*) along with it's result and etc. Apart from that, it deals with four modes of sacrificing the body, speech and mind of oneself. The four modes of sacrificing of the body, speech and mind of oneself are the focal points.

We now turn to the four modes of sacrifice.

1. Puja samkalpa: (Puja materials in Puja-plate)

A Puja plate (Puja-bandha in Sanskrit; pujabha in Newari) contains water, flowers, incense, lamp, *tika* (red and yellow powder), food (like pressed-rice, sweet, fruits), drinks (like cow-milk, spirits, beer, thread-garland, uncooked rice). The contents comprise a set of puja materials.

All puja materials represent the five essential elements: earth, water, light, air and space, and all that denotes the five sensual objects: sight, sound, smell, taste and touch. The Puja-material denotes not only the totality of sensual objects but also all that the five sense organs can perceive, that is through the eyes, ears, nose, tongue and body respectively. Regarding the sense organs, ears and their object sound that cannot be represented by any visible object, so for it a bell represents the sense organ ears, the object sound and relation between the two.

A set -- of bell, a Vajra and a rosary -- is also utilized in relation to the *puja* plate. The bell symbolizes skilful means (*upāya*), the *vajra* represents wisdom (*prajñā*) and the rosary denotes pure consciousness, concentration, and strong determination

The above mentioned puja plate which contains the puja materials symbolically represents the following Buddhist doctrines:

Firstly, A living being is an aggregate of the mind (mental components/consciousness) and matter (physical components). Here the physical components refer to five essential elements that comprise the body, namely: earth, water, light, air and space. All the material world is also made of the five essential elements. In brief, one can say the physical part of all living beings and the material world are an aggregate of the five essential elements. It is the physical reality of life and the world.

Secondly, the five sensual organs endowed with concerning consciousness namely, eye (endowed with eye consciousness), likewise ears, nose, tongue and body come in contact with the respective sensual objects namely, form, sound, smell, test, and touch. Then consciousness notices the objects and gets knowledge of the objects. Eyes see the form and notice the form like shape, size, color, etc., ears hear sound and notice the sound like low, high, male voice, female voice etc. Nose smells and notices the smell of objects. Tongue eats foods and notices the tasters like sweet, sour etc. The body touches objects and notices the softness, hardness etc. Then, feelings arise such like and dislike. The feelings give birth to the feeling of happiness or sorrowfulness, and sometimes neutral feelings, too. When happiness feeling arises, it gives birth to affection for the object. When sorrow feeling arises, it gives birth to hate for the object. And both affection and hate cause the origination of anger, greed, delusion (*kleshas*) and etc.. Then human beings start to commit the tenfold non-virtuous activities, three through body, four through speech and three through mind. Human beings

commit three non virtuous activities namely, killing, stealing and sexual misconduct through body; four non virtuous activities namely, lying, using slanderous words, using harsh speech and wasting time like telling gossip (nonsense talking) through speech; three non-virtuous mental activities namely, greedy thoughts, jealous thoughts and having wrong views and believing in wrong views. Thus, human beings cause suffering for themselves and others. As a result, human beings come into the existence in the world of suffering again and again, a process that is called “rebirth”. It is, therefore, the sensual objects that are neither subject to affection nor hate that are the objects that are to be sacrificed. With this view, here the *Puja samkalpa* means not exactly to sacrifice *but firstly, to take a vow to sacrifice sensual objects*. *Puja samkalpa* is done to show the individual’s strong determination to sacrifice all sensual objects.

Thirdly, bell and Vajra symbolize skillful means and wisdom, and also, respectively, compassion and wisdom. The holding the bell by left hand and the Vajra by right hand symbolizes that one should employ both compassion and wisdom. Finally, crossing the both hands in the embracement-hand gesture symbolizes the union of compassion and wisdom. Ultimately, the union of compassion with wisdom produces the thought of Enlightenment (*bodhicitta*).

2. Ratnamandala-niryatana: Offering the Ratna-mandala to the Gurus

“*Ratnamandala*” refers to an early Buddhist assumption about the world’s cosmology. It says that there are levels of air, fire, water (seven types of sea) and four great/primary islands (*Mahadvipa* in Sanskrit) in four directions, four small/secondary islands (*Upadvipa* in Sanskrit) in four cardinal directions, three main mountains at the center, surrounded by seven mountains, eight types of jewels in the eight directions. It also includes the moon on the right and the sun on the left.

The *Ratnamandala* is considered very holy and precious, like a jewel. The offering of the *Ratnamandala* to the Gurus is regarded as the highest honor and sacrifice. A Buddhist disciple who has been initiated in the Vajrayana (Buddhist Tantra/Esoteric Buddhism), devotedly offers the *Ratnamandala* to the Gurus daily as paying gratitude for what he/she had learned from all the Gurus. It is also subject to offer to the Gurus when seeking higher levels of Buddhist thought and practices too. Offering the *Ratnamandala* shows great faith in one’s Gurus. Similarly, the offering indicates dedication to life-long Buddhist learning and practice. Esoteric Buddhist practice begins with offering the *Ratnamandala* to the Gurus, a distinctive characteristic of Vajrayana Buddhism.

3. Saptavidhanuttara Puja: Sevenfold supreme offering

There are seven steps in the Sevenfold supreme offering. This is not an ordinary but supreme offering because It is performed only by those beings who wish to be a Buddha in future. The seven steps of the offering are as follows:

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| 1. Vandana | Obeisance |
| 2. Pujana | Offering |
| 3. Papadesana | Confession |
| 4. Anumodana | Appreciation |
| 5. Adhyesana | Request |
| 6. Bodhacittotpada | Arising the thought of enlightenment and |
| 7. Punya-Parinamana | Dedicating the merits. |

Vandana: Obeisance

Salutation to the triple Gems -- all Buddhas, Dharma and Samgha-- by body, speech, mind.

Puja: Offering

Offering all the excellent sensual objects namely, form, sound, smell, test and touch.

Papadesana: Confession

Confession of the ten non-virtuous deeds committed by own-self body, speech and mind.

Confession of the ten non-virtuous deeds committed by others but own-self made them commit. Confession of the non-virtuous deeds committed by others but approved by oneself. Taking the vow not to commit the non-virtuous deeds in the future too.

Anumodana: Appreciation

Appreciation of all virtues possessed by the *Sravakas* (the monks and nuns belonging to the lower vehicle), *Pratyekabuddhas* (the solitary Buddhas), the Bodhisattvas and the Buddhas.

Adhyesana: Requesting

Requesting all Bodhisattvas to turn the wheel of law in the future even in taking rebirth.

Bodhicittotpada: Arising the thought of enlightenment.

Arising the altruistic mind, cultivating the paramitas, seeking the thought of enlightenment.

Punya-Parinamana: Dedicating the merit.

Dedicating the merits, accumulated by doing the above six steps of supreme offering, wishing to be a Buddha in the future for the welfare of all sentient beings.

Finally, the *Saptavidhanuttara puja* makes people strongly seek the ultimate goal in life: to become a Buddha for the welfare of all the sentient beings.

4. Lokapala Bali-Arcana: Offering oblations to guardian deities.

Literally, *bali* can refer to an oblation, a gift, an offering of a portion of the daily meal for all creatures, etc. In Tantric Buddhism, *Bali-arcana* means sacrificial offering of one's own sensual organs and respective sensual objects. This *Bali-arcana* has at least two meanings. One is sacrificing own sensual organs and the respective objects. It is because one's own sensual organs and the respective sensual objects are root-causes for attachment (*trishna*) and hate (*ghrina*). The other is to sacrificing/dedicating oneself and worldly objects for welfare of other living beings. Offering oblations to **guardian deities** means offering worldly objects to **all the sentient beings who are around him/herself**. Lokapala Bali-Arcana is an act of putting oneself in action as he took the vow earlier to be a Buddha for the welfare of all the sentient beings.

The procedure of the Lokapala Bali-arcana: (in short)

Then visualize thus, there is the air-mandala, likewise fire-mandala, over there, three skinless skulls situated like an oven; upon the oven, a skinless skull like a bowl. Imagine that you have put your sensual organs and the respective sensual objects inside the skinless skull and boiled them completely. Now the skull is full of foods like nectar, made of each of the five sensual organs and their respective objects. After this invite all the guardian deities along with their family members from all directions. Request them to partake in this "food", and so to be satisfied and happy.

Benefits of all above mentioned practice:

1. You will minimize committing sinful acts gradually. When you are supposed to commit any sinful act, you will remember that you have already sacrificed your sensual organs and the respective sensual objects in your daily practices. It is because the own sensual organs and the respective sensual objects are root-causes for attachment (*trishna*) and hate (*ghrina*).
2. You will lose your individualistic thoughts, self-centered ideas gradually. It will remind you of your duties. You will become more and more dedicated to others. It is because you have already sacrificed/dedicated own self, and the worldly objects for the welfare of others in your daily practices.
3. You will not forget your ultimate aim of your life i.e. to be a Buddha, the enlightened one.