



## Melodious Tambura of Delight<sup>1</sup>

A Guide to Maratika Cave, Supreme Site of Immortality

by Kyapje Chatral Rinpoche

*Namo Guru Deva Dakinyai!*

To the essence of appearance, Padma Amitayus,  
To emptiness itself, Great Mother Tara, clothed in white,<sup>2</sup>  
And to the three root long-life deities<sup>3</sup> in mudra of union,  
Humbly, to all of you I bow!

Bestow the empowerment of immortal life!

North of Bodhgaya's Vajra Seat—hub of this world—

The magnificent sacred site renowned as Haleshi

Lies amidst the rocky mountain wild.

Listen closely now with joy, as I describe:

Outwardly, the site of Shiva and Uma's delightful play,

Inwardly, the great palace of Cakrasamvara,

Secretly, the boundless mansion of the immortal long-life deities,

And most secretly the Akaniṣṭha Dharmadhatu—

Sukhavati, realm of great bliss.

Previously, when Rigdzin Padma Tötreng Tsal

Was staying in the cave with the enchanting Lady Mandarava,

Engaged with her in secret practices of *mudra*,

From Buddha Amitayus, Boundless Life, they received empowerment,

Bestowing on them the gift of immortal longevity.

With their bodies they transcended all of birth, death, age, and sickness,

And even now they still remain, in the southwest, taming *rakshasas*

And sending forth in streams their boundless emanations

To benefit beings for as long as samsara endures.

Later, from the brow of Songtsen Gampo—Avalokiteśvara in person—

There emanated forth the *bhikṣu* Akarma.

When putting up a statue of the Eleven-Headed in the Jokhang,

Akarma sought special substances and relics to place inside.

On his quest, he miraculously reached the cave of Maratika,

Where he had visions of deities gathered all around.

Naming it the "Practice Cave, Mandala of Splendid Qualities,"

His voice rose, melodious, in songs of praise.

This event alone is proof of Maratika's greatness.

When the *tirthika* known as Shankara Acharya

Brought harm to the Buddhist teachings in Nepal and India,  
 Many ancient sites and objects were destroyed and scattered.  
 His followers claiming them as sites of Shiva.  
 Today people make *pujas* and offerings of tridents,  
 Bells and bangles in profusion, thousands of butter lamps,  
 Flowers and incense, the three whites—milk, butter, yogurt.  
 Neither blood offerings nor animal sacrifice ever happen here.  
 From dawn to dusk they sound all kinds of drums, cymbals, conches—  
 A reverberating ruckus of clamour and drones—  
 Making offerings to the worldly pantheon of deities,  
 Brahma, Viṣṇu, Mahadev and the rest.  
 They discriminate by caste, from *brahmin* down to *shudra*,  
 Restricting permission to enter the cave.  
 Adhering still to their ancient traditions,  
 They force lower castes to sit near the entrance.  
 When the brahmins are in the cave, performing their *pujas*  
 On auspicious days, like the tenth of the waxing and waning moon,  
 I have seen them making offerings with their coloured sand mandalas  
 And have watched their great rituals of fire.  
 And so, since all beings have their individual perspectives,  
 It is not right to revile them as having wrong view;  
 We must train in pure perception, with respect, and speak nicely.  
 Contempt towards gods and humans is a basis for misfortune.  
 To foster inspiration at the very outset,  
 I am offering these accounts of the cave at Maratika.  
 Let all doubts regarding this place be herewith dispelled  
 And confidence aroused in Buddhists and non-Buddhists in equal measure.  
*E ma!* Having touched on just a few of the qualities of this place,  
 There's little room for argument among the narrow-minded;  
 As is said in the commentaries—and for good reason—  
 “Well-said words, even from a child, should be heeded and adopted.”  
 Upon seeing this great place, one cannot help but be astonished.  
 Just hearing its name will sow the seed of liberation.  
 Merely bringing it to mind dispels the danger of untimely death.  
 And by prostrating, circumambulating, and making offerings here,  
 You will perfect and accumulate an ocean of merit.  
 The broad sky is vast, like an eight-spoked wheel;  
 The ground like a blossoming lotus,  
 Eight-petalled, fully open, its heart pointing skyward;  
 The sun and moon reach everywhere,  
 And the climate is temperate.  
 In the front of this place, a stream trickles down,  
 A self-arisen hall at its centre—  
 Lofty and spacious, with room for a thousand people.  
 And a circular skylight spiralling above—

The single *bindu*.

Myriad trees and vegetation grow from solid rock.

Within the cave, self-manifest, are statues and *mudras*,

Seed-syllables beyond number, and symbolic implements,

All pertaining to the peaceful and wrathful deities.

In particular, this great holy site is studded with stone *lingas*.

Symbolic forms, they range in size from six feet to six inches.

Naturally arisen, glowing, white and smooth, they glisten.

On auspicious occasions, drops of *amrita* drip down.

The cave has many entrances, showing one's good and bad karma:

Doorways which are paths to the lower realms

And those to higher realms, the path of liberation.

Below the site, facing southwest, there is a small, secluded entrance,

But, once inside, the atmosphere is lofty and spacious—

A place large enough to accommodate a hundred.

There are symbols inside of enlightened body, speech, and mind—

Such as *mudras*, footprints, and pure white conch shells,

And all self-arisen. What a marvel!

When those of fortunate karma come, dew-drops of nectar glisten.

And, since the skylight's opening is completely unimpeded,

It is praised as a site for the practice of *phowa*—

Transference to the Khecara realm.

On the roof of the large cave, a group of bats reside—

Like great meditators, hidden away,

Ceaselessly reciting mantras. (One can hear the sounds of *tsé* and *bhrum*.)<sup>4</sup>

For yogis on the path, this is truly excellent—

A place to practice deity, mantra and luminosity.

This is just a droplet from Maratika's ocean of good qualities,

Given with the thought of benefiting others.

Like a wish-fulfilling jewel, an excellent vase, a tree of wishes,

The fruit of what you pray for here will ripen, never failing.

When we siblings, Uddiyana's followers, come to this place,

In general, we should seek to gather the accumulations,

Purify obscurations, practice approach and accomplishment,

Offer *ganachakras*, perform *homa*,

And make an ocean of every kind of offering.

In particular, we should strive in long life practices,

And in stability of life and healing ceremonies.

Through these words I have written, may temporary obstacles be pacified—

Obstacles such as untimely death and so forth—

For beings vast in number as the farthest reaches of space.

Ultimately, may we accomplish the Protector Amitayus,

And guide all wandering beings to that very same state.

Through the power of the truth and the marvellous compassion

Of all the auspicious ones, the Conquerors and their children,

May all decline and discord be utterly banished,

May glory and splendour remain forever,  
And, day and night, auspiciousness abound!

*Daughter of noble family, Sarasvati Devi, offered a stainless white scarf with a sheet of writing parchment, saying, "Please compose a praise to this site." Thus, the ever-wandering old man Sangyé Dorjé, on an auspicious day during the 10th month of the Fire Tiger year, wrote this guide between sessions while at the supreme sacred site of Maratika (in Tibetan, Chiwatarché), "Destroyer of Death." Shubham!*



### **Translation Origin**

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1 The tambura is a long-necked, plucked string instrument found in various forms in Indian music. It does not play melody but rather supports and sustains the melody of another instrument or singer by providing a continuous harmonic bourdon or drone.

2 White Tara.

3 The three root deities of long life are Amitayus, White Tara and Ushnishavijaya.

4 *isé* and *bhrum* (pronounced 'droom' by Tibetans) are two syllables that are often part of long-life mantras.

5 Chatral Rinpoche, *Compassionate Action*, translated by Zach Larson (New York: Snow Lion Publications), 65–70.