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THE UNIVERSE OF HEALING

a guide to the practice of

THE MEDICINE BUDDHA

Helping Your Life Work in the Ways You Need Most
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Dedicated to Ven. Kenchen Thrangu Rinpoche, and to the focus of his work, the benefit of all sentient beings.

The benefits you will gain from this practice start in the first session, but your recognition of these benefits may come slowly. If you have a health problem, you may find a solution or a more effective way to deal with it. You may find it easier to bear your problem. You may broaden your understanding of your life to include a wider vision of health so that you can engage your illness in a better way. You may be better able to help others, as a friend or as a health care provider. Most important, you will enter the path to ultimate wisdom. You will definitely benefit, as I have, in one or more of these ways or in ways that you may not have considered. No one knows the exact path your healing will take or its timing. Generally, however, the more you engage the spirit of this practice, the quicker results will arise.

While Buddhism is often considered a religion, it is also just way of healing all beings need—healing on all levels—the ordinary and the profound. If you have any interest in healing, this path is for you.

Medicine Buddha practice may seem to be purely mental and thus unlikely to help physical problems. However, as Thrangu Rinpoche said, “the body supports the mind and the mind supports the body.” Working with the deeper aspects of your mind gives you access to the deeper workings of your body and the physical world, and gives you the means to harness the forces of mind and body for healing yourself and others.

There is a time-honored tradition of hearing a teaching first and then studying it in more depth later on. You may wish to start by listening to the Body Scan/Sitting Meditation disc. Then the Story of Menla discs introduces the history, tradition and symbolism of the Medicine Buddha and how this practice can help you work with problems. The Heart of Healing Practice Guide can help you deepen your practice. The important thing is to do and enjoy Menla practice. With that you will find the healing you need.

Meeting Medicine Buddha

Welcome to the universe of healing that is Medicine Buddha. This universe, like any, holds everything—the wonderful and the horrific, the
painful and the pleasurable, the sublime and the seemingly mundane—all the things that you have to hold in your mind, body and heart every day of your life, whether you are sick or well. Because we hold all these experiences within, you and I and every human being that has ever lived, are each in our own way a universe as well. What makes Medicine Buddha a healing universe is how it holds these things.

Because he knows the health beyond concept, instead of holding some parts close and some at a distance as we might do especially when ill, the universe of Medicine Buddha holds all things as family. This fierce yet tender love, helps all parts to know their true nature, and provides structure and space for all to express their nature to help all things in this universe to be as healthy, wise and joyful as possible. From that all-embracing health, every part of your life, no matter how difficult, highlights the wholeness in all your life and your world. That helps you put every part of your life in place, inside and out, and makes your life a healing journey. You can be this healing universe and hold all your life in that way too when you know Medicine Buddha.

When you hold your life the way that Menla holds family, you realize the Menla within, and you manifest the health that powers every healing method there is or ever can be. Whatever you may be doing for healing right now is part of this universe. When you hold any healing method as Medicine Buddha holds life, tension and obstacles soften and that method can work better for you. Whatever physical, emotional, or relationship obstacle you, or someone you care for face, and no matter how bad it might seem, the healing power of Medicine Buddha is waiting to meet you and to help you in some way.

Nothing in this healing universe is foreign to you or beyond your reach in the slightest. This healing universe is your life just as it is—problems and all—seen through your own healing eyes and lived in your own healing way. You don’t have to be Buddhist to enter this universe; everyone is welcome, and all can benefit. Medicine Buddha helps you to find your own healing universe and make your life a healing life. When you truly know your life is a healing life, you will heal all things and people in your life, and they will heal you in their way.

**The Light of Healing in Your Eyes, Heart, and Being**

At one time, we thought our earth, and then our sun, was the center of the entire universe. Now, however, we know that the real center of the universe is not one place but all places and everywhere. Health is like that too—everywhere if you know how to look. In the same way that believing our sun is the center of the universe, becoming attached to any
thought or theory about health narrows our view. A tight grip on any idea or part of life may provide a temporary sense of security, but in the end only breeds more fear as space eventually emerges in all things. Conversely, looking below concept—as Menla did—reveals the pervasive glow of fundamental, core health, and the healing path you need, whatever problem you may have.

Your path to healing in this universe may appear in a sudden breakthrough, or more likely, in a series of stages. The first stage might be just hearing the story of Menla and exploring how you feel hearing it. If his story resonates with you, or even if you just find it an intriguing possibility, you have found a place that opens to that same deep health. You have a healing vision. If, on the other hand, you think this story mere fantasy, it can remain with you as a spark that can come to life and light your path to healing as your struggle with fear changes over time. However you work with Menla, further steps on your healing path will come into view as you are ready to see them.

There are many ways to experience the core health Menla found. One can be to simply let go of even one thought and be in that openness for just one moment. You can do this in sitting meditation or any time during your day, even when you are ill. Trusting your natural health in this simple way is itself a profound healing act. Any kindness, offered or received, is a healing gift. And ordinary healing does occur, sometimes by intervention and sometimes by accident or seeming miracle. We have great traditions of ordinary healing. Many people have worked very hard in these traditions to help others throughout history. Just appreciating whatever help you get, imperfect as it may seem to be, makes that help more effective. Having heard Menla’s story, you know that all experience in life are steps on your healing journey.

Harnessing the Power in Symbols

Symbols are more than mere signs we use to represent something else. Symbols function in the endless matrix of mutuality as binding factors holding all things together, either in conflict or in harmony. Everything in life—the inner and outer world, feelings, thoughts, things, mind, body, brain, family, personal history, concepts of good and bad and life and death—only become knowable and meaningful in life as symbols. Symbols help us join the inner and outer worlds. Everything we do is a symbolic act. Even the experience we call a self is a series of symbols. Our use of symbols is what makes us human.

The symbols that we use to define our particular life include, among other things, our story and appearance. It is normal to cling to and try to
protect these icons in the hope they will provide a pleasant, permanent reality. We enthrone this collection of memories and sensations with the symbolic title, Me, which seems to keep them in tow, and we spend our life defending this quavering mirage. At some point these symbols lose their allure and their power, and symbols of illness can take control of our life and lead us in unseen, negative ways.

It is not just the symbols we use, but how we use them. If we use symbols of mind, body and identity to fend off space, then we are at the mercy of our fears, and we are likely to spend more energy on defending a sense of self than on truly living. If we know all experience is symbol, then the part of us bigger than fear can use the power in symbols in positive ways. If life is what we make it, then symbols are the tools we use to do so. With Medicine Buddha, we see the complete array of symbolic tools arising from our own indestructible core health always within—all the tools we need to make our life a healing journey.

**Some ways to work with Menla**

It is very good to have an empowerment in Medicine Buddha, or at least a relationship with an authentic teacher if possible. But if not, just listen to the Practice Guide. This will help you know what at first may appear to be a complicated process of unfamiliar terms and concepts as just your own mind. Once you have the spirit of it, it is simple and easy to do. You can then practice along with me on the CD until you feel comfortable with it. Any practice will be of benefit, even if it’s only ten minutes a day. Do your practice in a way that suits your situation and your heart.

**If you are working with an illness, or if you are a health care provider**, it is good to do the practice regularly, if you can. Practice until you feel you can see yourself in it, and come back to it often, especially when your sense of basic health needs refreshing. Although Menla is not specifically a practice for the dying, if you are preparing for death, Medicine Buddha can help in that process as well.

Menla can help you use the power of mind, heart, confidence, body, history, society, shapes, sounds and feelings symbols—all elements of ordinary life—as steps to healing. You may want to do the long practice enough to understand the scope of it, and use the shorter versions after that. Use whatever version works for you; you can’t go wrong. You will find explanatory notes at the end of the liturgy, numbered to correspond with the stanzas.
A Further Introduction to Buddhist Practice

I would like to share some basic ideas that I think go beyond religious terminology to the heart of the matter. The word *Dharma* comes from an earlier root word, *dhr*, which means *to hold*. With the non-ism of Dharma, we learn to hold extreme views, but our life in a good way. We can see this holding in three levels of how we use our hand.

The first is like finding our hand, the instrument we use to hold things in ordinary life, and learning that while we have generally held things in our hand well enough, sometimes we have not held our life in accord with our true heart desire. Interestingly, the hand relates to mind as the words *manual* and *mantra* share the same root, *man*. So at this level we find our mind that works like a hand to hold all the experiences of our life. We find that if we work with our mind, we can hold our life better. We clean up our act and make our world more orderly and healthy. We might see this as the stage of science, or factuality.

The second stage is learning how to open our hand, an act that is analogous to opening our mind. This happens in sitting meditation and in the post meditation of living with good, open heart. Here, we appreciate the joy in offering whatever we have to others. This is the stage of compassion and feeling.

The third stage is getting up close with the health and goodness that we have been holding, and nurturing that health in our world in ways that include delight in working with the details of life. One of these details is the process of healing we are discussing here. This is the stage of wisdom and fulfillment.

In terms of healing, in the first level we learn to take better care of ourselves. We let go of what does not help and hold more closely to what does. In stage two we learn to be more helpful to others. And in stage three, we see coordinate the whole process better and focus on specific goals such as promoting health in our world. We see that seeming mistakes and problems are just temporary loss of confidence in this understanding along the way. As we go along, the Buddhist teachings are essentially further ways to help us return to our true heart and to manage this process in more detail. At some point, one may want to say, “I am a Buddhist.” All this means is that you want to make cleaning up your act and benefiting others your life’s work. You may want to relate to a specific teacher. Whatever works for you is good. But remember, cleaning up anything can be a very messy job!
In working with Menla, as H. E. Thrangu Rinpoche has said, this profound healing method is open to everyone. If you consider yourself Buddhist, or have a Buddhist teacher, that can help. And if you have attended what is called an empowerment with an authorized teacher that is even better. But these are not required. And, maybe you have a connection with Menla from a long time ago, even if only to be really dedicated to your healing path. May Menla light your healing journey.

**The Six Realms**

We can understand the great benefit of Medicine Buddha practice better if we see how our minds tend to work in six basic psychological themes called The Six Realms. If we understand these realms we can understand our own patterns better and from that better find the freedom of living in good heart and good health. Understanding these realms is central to how Medicine Buddha practice can be helpful to us and how we in turn can be helpful to others.

This starts with understanding what are called The Three Poisons, namely passion, aggression, and ignorance. The core of all this is how on a deep, but pervasive level we tend to divide our experience into those aspects that seem to be us and those that seem to be other. This is just the normal, everyday workings of that process we call mind.

Once we have done that, and we believe and invest in that sense of divided experience, we find that there are ways that this process seems appealing, some that it seems not so pleasant, and some that seem to not matter. Out of that, we develop the mental dynamics that when invested in and solidified, become the famous three—passion, aggression and ignorance. Sometimes these dynamics seem positive, as when we say we have a passion for something good. So, if we were to just have these experiences as they are, things might be workable. But when we get stuck in them, difficulties tend to multiply and become entrenched into the six realms we spoke of. Each of the three poisons serves as the core of two realms depending on whether the poison seems to be serving us well at the time.

There are three upper realms, where things seem to go reasonably well some of the times, and three lower realms where things go horribly wrong most of the time. The highest upper realm is called the **Realm of the Gods**, and here the split of self and others seems to be going righteously well. Everything is great and it is going to stay that way indefinitely! The ignorance factor here is thinking things will go well forever. We tend to forget the fact that things tend to change over time, and all the fun will someday run out.
Below that is called the **Realm of the Jealous Gods**, or Asuras, who know that things could be better because they can see the gods who have it all the way they want and the Asuras think they might someday get what those others have, especially if they eliminate anyone who gets in their way. So here there is the poison of aggression. Things are going well enough to see that there could be even more happiness, but the process to get there can be very hostile.

Below that is the **Human Realm**, where we have lots of passion and we find that if we pursue our passions with even more passion, we can often get what we want. The problem here is that getting what we want is not always possible. The Gods feel ignorant bliss, the Jealous Gods, jealousy, and humans tend to get wound up in the struggle of happy versus sad and miss what often counts most in life. We can know happiness, but we also feel yearning, sadness, regret, self-doubt, all the things that make the drama of our human life difficult.

Below humans we find the first lower realm, the **Animal Realm**. Ignorance is the prime motive here, but instead of ignoring the possibility of change, as in the God Realm, beings in this realm fear change. In fact, fear drives this realm, including fear of being eaten by other animals. This is ignorance not as happiness, as in the God Realm, but as fear.

Below this is the **Hungry Ghost Realm**, typically represented as populated with ghostly looking figures who have large bellies and very small mouths. The idea there is that whatever they need is available in abundant supply, but these beings cannot take in what is there, so they constantly feel hungry for more. There is never enough. This is constant, unrequited passion, passion that can never be satisfied.

The lowest realm is the **Hell Realm** where beings are tortured by their own anger and aggression. This realm is presented in many of the same horrible the ways that Dante did in his *Inferno*. No need to elaborate here. It is awful, and the anger at being in this realm tends to perpetuate that experience. It is also said, however, that one act of kindness can instantly liberate a person from this realm.

Whether we see these realms as states of mind or actual experience, the same issues arise. We experience our world as a reflection of how we hold it. In particular, we humans can sometimes experience our own version of any of these realms while still in our human body. We can have the ignorant pride of the God Realm, the intense competitive jealousy of the Jealous Gods, the relentless passion of our own human realm, the rigid limitation of the animal realm, the endless hunger of the Hungry Ghosts, and the hatred of the hell realm. None of these realms is permanent. We cycle through them over and over again until we step out of samsara, or
the me-versus-my world state of affairs, into health and the full wakefulness of enlightenment.

This is how Menla helps us. Just thinking of him helps free us from the horrible, painful ignorance of lower realms. The upper realms have their own pain, but at least we have the potential to see the big picture and loosen the grip of the three poisons and live more from our wakeful mind. In the human realm, in particular, we can at least learn something of a bigger view of life from the light that emerges from the cracks of fixed mind as we experience the fact of change. We can learn from change itself. In the lower realms, not only do we have the pain of that realm, but because that pain can be so intense we simply cannot even consider change or a bigger view of life and how to get free. Menla does not solve our problems, but can help make life workable in the way we need most.

**How Visualization and Mantra Can Help Us**

The world we normally experience is itself a visualization, one based on a certain amount of fear and a collection of often hidden bad habits. Menla gives us a better way to visualize our world, and a way to get free of not only negative, but eventually all habits and live in a fresh, healthy way. If you would like to delve further in to this, please read Thrangu Rinpoche's *Medicine Buddha Teachings*. My own book, *Getting Back to Wholeness*, and my *Heart of Healing* audio program may help. In these, we explore the three ways we encounter our world, as a scientist, as an artist, and as a mystic. Menla comes to us in these three ways, and when we realize Menla in our heart, we can offer our own natural goodness to our world in those three healing ways as well.

We will discuss this and other topics in the Medicine Buddha Blog. The main thing is to practice.

Wherever you go from here, it has been a great honor and joy to have offered this material to you. I love everything about Medicine Buddha, including showing him to others, and I have great confidence in the enlightened vision of health he engenders. If even one person benefits from this presentation, it will have been worth the effort. If you practice Medicine Buddha a little each day, or as often as you can, I believe that one day you will feel as I do. You will find your life working in the ways you need most.

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A SADHANA OF MENLA — THE MEDICINE BUDDHA

A Stream of Lapis Lazuli

The Full-Length Practice

Namo. Maha Bekandzeya. If they are available, arrange in front of a Menla thangka as many peaceful offerings as you can, such as a mandala and so forth; in this way the accumulations are completed. If these are not available, it is enough to make mental offerings while imagining the front visualization in the sky — nothing else is needed. Since this is the anuttara, the practitioner need not refrain from meat and alcohol nor perform the rituals of purification, such as taking the blessing of pure water. It is definitely necessary, however, to receive the empowerment and reading transmission for this practice, as it belongs to the anuttara tradition. Since it belongs to the Nyingma tradition, the self and frontal visualizations are simultaneously generated; it is not necessary to create them separately. As it is a chanted meditation of the Nyingma, your mind should meditate on the meaning of the words.

The supplication:

NAMO BEKENDZE MAHA RADZAYE

1. You are endowed with an oceanic treasury of qualities and merit;
   By the blessing of your inconceivable compassion
   You calm the suffering and torment of sentient beings.
   I supplicate you, Light of Lapis Lazuli.

2. Those bound by very intense greed
   Are born in the hungry ghost realm.
   If they hear your name they are said to be born human
   and take delight in generosity.
   I supplicate you, victorious Menla.
3. Violating morality and abusing others, 
Beings are born in the hell realms. 
Hearing your name, they are said to be born in the higher realms. 
I supplicate you, King of Medicine.

4. Whoever by repeated dissension and slander, 
Creates serious schisms and takes life, 
Hearing your name, they cannot harm others. 
I supplicate you, King of Medicine.

5. Excellent Name, Appearance of Stainless Fine Gold 
Glorious Supreme One Free of Misery, 
Resounding Dharma Melody, King of Direct Knowledge, 
King of Melody, And King of Shakyas, I supplicate you all.

6. Manjushri, Kyabdröl, Vajrapani, 
Brahma, Indra, the Four Kings of the Four Directions, 
The twelve great Yaksha chiefs, and so forth, 
I supplicate you, entire and perfect mandala.

7. The Sutra of the Seven Tathagatas’ Aspirations, 
And the Sutra of the Medicine Buddha, 
The treatise by the great abbot Shantarakshita, and so forth, 
I supplicate all the volumes of the genuine dharma.

8. Bodhisattva Shantarakshita, Trisong Deutsen, and others, 
Translators, scholars, kings, ministers, bodhisattvas, 
And all genuine lamas of the lineage, 
Powerful One of the Dharma, and others, I supplicate you.

9. Through the blessing of this supplication, 
May diverse temporal diseases and dangers of this life be stilled. 
At death, may all fear of the lower realms be calmed. 
Grant your blessing that afterwards we are born in Sukhavati.

10. To the sources of refuge, the three jewels
and the three roots, I go for refuge.
To establish all beings in Buddhahood,
I awaken a mind of supreme enlightenment.
(Say this stanza 3 times)

11. From the expanse of primordial purity emanate
Clouds of offerings filling the earth and sky
with mandalas, articles of possessions, and goddesses.
May they never be exhausted. **PUD DZA HO**

12. May all beings be happy and free of suffering.
May their happiness not diminish.
May they abide in equanimity.

**OM SOBHAWA SHUDDHA SARWA DHARMA SOBHAWA SHUDDHO HAM**

13. Everything turns into emptiness.
From the depth of emptiness, this triple universe becomes
The exquisite palace, where,
On lion thrones, each with a lotus and moon disk on top
Appear deep blue **HUNG**s,
The seed syllable of myself and the main figure visualized in
front,
From which arises Menla,
His body the color of lapis lazuli and radiating light.

14. He is clothed in the three dharma robes.
His right hand, in the mudra of supreme generosity, holds an
arura.
His left hand, in the meditation mudra, holds a begging bowl.
With the major and minor marks complete, he sits in the vajra
posture.

15. In particular, on the lotus petals of the front visualization
Are the seven Buddhas, Shakyamuni and the others, and
dharmas texts.
Around them are the sixteen bodhisattvas.
Around them are the ten protectors of the world
and the twelve great chiefs with their respective retinues. The Four Great Kings are at the four gates.

16. From the three syllables in their three places and the HUNGS in their hearts, Lights radiate, invoking from their own eastern Buddha realms, Countless wisdom deities, which dissolve into myself and the one visualized in front.

17. HUNG The eight Menla companions and all deities without exception I invite here to this place. Kindly rain upon us your great blessings. Bestow the supreme empowerment on those who are worthy and faithful. Dispel false guides and obstacles to long life.

NAMO MAHA BEKENDZE SAPIRWARA BENZA SAMAYADZA DZA BENZE SAMAYA TIKTRA LEN. OM HUNG TRAM HRI AH ABHIKENTSA HUNG

18. HUNG Flowers, incense, lights, scents, Food, music and so forth; Forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touch, and all dharmas, I offer to the deities. May we perfect the two accumulations.

OM BENZA ARGHAM PADYAM PUPE DHUPE ALOKE GENDHE NEWIDYE SHABDA RUPA SHABDA GENDHE RASA SAPARSHE TRATITSA HUNG

19. HUNG The eight foremost auspicious substances, The best royal white mustard seed, and the others, I offer to the deity. May the two accumulations be perfected.

MANGALAM ARTHA SIDDHI HUNG
20. HUNG The eight foremost auspicious symbols,  
The peerless royal vase and all others,  
I offer to the deity.  
May sentient beings perfect the two accumulations.

**MANGALAM KUMBHA HUNG**

21. HUNG The foremost desirable qualities, the seven precious articles,  
The most excellent royal one, the jewel, and the others,  
I offer to the deity.  
May I perfect the two accumulations.

**OM MANI RATNA HUNG**

22. HUNG The foremost of all, Mount Meru  
With its four continents and subcontinents  
I offer to the deity.  
May the two accumulations be perfected.

**OM RATNA MANDALA HUNG**

23. HUNG With scented water  
I bathe the sugata’s body.  
Although the deity is flawless,  
This creates the auspicious connection for purifying all wrongs and obscurations.

**OM SARWA TATHAGATA ABIKEKATE SAMAYA SHRIYE HUNG**

24. HUNG With a scented, soft white cloth  
I dry the victor’s body.  
Though your body is flawless,  
This creates the auspicious connection for freedom from suffering.

**OM KAYA BISHODHANI HUNG**
25. **HUNG** With these beautiful saffron robes
    I clothe the victor's body.
    Although your body is never cold,
    This creates the auspicious connection for vitality to flourish.

    **OM BENZA WAYTRA AH HUNG**

26. **HUNG** Your body is like a mountain, the color of lapis lazuli.
    You dispel the suffering of illness in sentient beings.
    Surrounded by a retinue of eight bodhisattvas,
    Holder of Medicine, precious deity, I praise and prostrate to you.

27. Excellent Name, Precious Moon, Fine Gold, Free of Misery,
    Resounding Dharma Ocean, Dharma Mind, Shakyamuni,
    The genuine dharma, the sixteen bodhisattvas and others,
    To the precious three jewels, I offer praise and prostrate.

28. To Brahma, Indra, the Great Kings, the Protectors of the Ten Directions,
    The twelve Yaksha chiefs and all their assistants,
    Vidyadharas and rishis of medicine, divine and human,
    To the deities of ambrosial medicine, I offer praise and prostrate.

29. The **HUNG** in the heart of the self and front visualizations are surrounded by the mantra garland.

    *Through radiating many-colored light rays, offerings are made to Menla in the pure realm appearing in the East as the color of lapis lazuli. These lights invoke his mind stream, whence Menla’s bodies, large and small, his speech as the mantra garland, his mind as the hand symbols of the arura and the begging bowl filled with amrita, all falling like rain, dissolve into myself and the front visualization.*

    **TAYATA OM BEKENDZE BEKENDZE MAHA BEKENDZE RADZA SAMUDGATE SO HA**
Repeat as much as possible and then at the end:

30. I confess all wrongs and downfalls and dedicate all virtue to awakening. May there be the auspiciousness of freedom from sickness, Harmful spirits, and suffering.

A prayer to return and dissolution:

31. The worldly ones return to their own places. **BENZA MU**. The jnana and samaya sattvas dissolve into me, and I dissolve into the expanse of all goodness, primordial purity.

**E MA HO**

**Menla Dedication**

Bhagavat, who is completely compassionate to all beings, The very hearing of whose name pacifies the three lower states, Medicine Buddha, who eliminates the illnesses of the three poisons, May there be the goodness of the Vaidurya Light.

May sentient beings, whatever illnesses they suffer, Be liberated quickly from those illnesses. May all the illnesses of beings, without exception, Forever not arise.

May medicines be effective, and may the intentions of the recitations of the secret mantra path be accomplished. May demonesses, cannibal demons, and so forth Attain compassionate mind.

**General Dedication of Merit**
By this merit may all attain omniscience.
May it defeat the enemy wrongdoing.
From the stormy waves of birth, old age, sickness and death, 
from the ocean of Samsara
May I free all beings.

This ornament that is a mind treasure was compiled from the Sky-Dharma and arranged by Raga Asya. If there are contradictions, I confess them before the deity. Through this virtue, may all sentient beings, once freed from sickness, swiftly attain the level of Menla. Though the sutra rituals have the practice of washing [which is not done here], as this is a higher practice, found at the end of the [supreme] yoga tantra, there is no contradiction.

If you take this as your regular practice, the benefits are the following. If you are ordained, your discipline will be maintained; though there might be an occasion when it is not, having purified this obscuration, you will not fall into the lower realms. Having purified the negative karma of being born as a hell being, a hungry ghost, or an animal, you will not take such a birth. Even if you do, immediately liberated, you will take a felicitous rebirth in a higher realm, and gradually attain awakening. In this life as well, you will easily obtain food and clothing and not be harmed by disease, negative spirits, sorcery, or the punishments of rulers. You will be protected and guarded by Vajrapani, Brahma, the great Kings of the four directions, and the twelve great Yaksha chiefs each with their 700,000 assistants. You will be freed from all harm: from the eighteen kinds of untimely death, the harm of enemies, carnivorous beasts, and so forth. All your wishes will be fully realized, and so forth. In the two more extensive sutras of Menla, the benefits are said to be inconceivable.

In the great monastic centers, such as Jang Damring Pelkhor Chode, and their philosophical colleges, where the scholars find fault with most dharma and are difficult to satisfy, only this Menla ritual for prolonging life and clearing away the obscurations of death has spread widely. The ritual to be
performed before the Jowo in Lhasa, Tibet's Bodhgaya, and before the Great Awakened One at Samye is this ritual of Menla. You should trust that within any of the new and the ancient transmissions, the sutras and the tantras, nothing is more beneficial than Menla. There are many extensive and concise versions, this one has few words and the full meaning. Since it belongs to anuttara yoga, rituals of purification are not needed. Since the offerings are mental, it is all right not to offer tormas. Everyone should practice this.

SHUBHAM DZAYENTU.


The Medium Length Practice

HUM

Your body the color of a mountain of Lapis Lazuli
You dispel the suffering of disease and death from all sentient beings
Your retinue of eight Bodhisattvas surrounds you.
I praise and pay homage to the Deity who holds the Precious Medicine.

TAYATA OM BEKENDZE BEKENDZE MAHA BEKENDZE RADZA SUMUGATE SOHA  (Repeat many times, and then at the end:)

May the many sentient beings who are sick
Quickly be freed from sickness
And may the sicknesses of beings
Never arise again.

A Short Menla Practice
CHOM DEN DAY DE SHIN SHEK PA DRA CHOM PA YANG
DAK PAR DZOK PAY
To you, Bhagavan, Tathagata, Arhat, perfect and fully

SANG GYE MEN GYI LA BE DUR YA O KYI GYEL PO LA CHAK
TSEL LO
Awakened Menla, king of lapis lazuli light, I offer prostrations.
(Repeat 7 times)

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Supplementary notes on the stanzas

1. The word, *supplicate*, here and at other places in this practice, does not mean to beg. We are appreciating Menla’s vow to help, and asking for that help now. Like anyone in a healing role, Menla appreciates the opportunity to help and being asked to do so.

This brings us to the difference between meditation and prayer. To pray literally means to ask. In many traditions, we pray to an external deity to ask for something we don’t have, and often meditation is employed to support prayer. Here, we know that Menla is in some way external because he lived as an ordinary person separate from us, but he is also a reminder of the healing universe we already are within. This universe is not a conceptual idea of life. This healing universe is who we truly are. When we ask for peace, health or wisdom, the Menla we ask is not only an external being and we are not actually asking for something we don’t ultimately already have. We’re asking for help in remembering what we do have. Here, we use what seems to be a prayer, not to get something we lack, but to bring back to awareness the health we are; therefore, just asking starts recollection and the healing we need. Then you can celebrate that healing in all parts of your life, even those that hurt. The color lapis lazuli is the color of Menla and is also considered a support in this process.

2-4. The realms mentioned in these stanzas refer to fear-driven states of passion, aggression and ignorance. While these realms are literal states of being more painful than usual human experience, there are times in ordinary lives, as well, when humans get stuck in these realms. Just hearing the name Medicine Buddha can free you from fear, even if just momentarily, and thus from the grip of these lower states of mind and being. It may take practice to realize confidence in this process, but in that practice is the freedom you seek.

5. These are names of Buddhas from world systems previous to our own. The King of Shakyas refers to the Buddha of our time, Buddha Shakyamuni.

6. The figures named in this stanza are helpful but not fully enlightened. The first three are human-like manifestations of compassionate activity in the universe called Bodhisattvas. This title conveys that compassion is the essence of their being and the motive of their action in the world, but they don’t quite have the wisdom and power of a fully realized Buddha. The second two are gods of the Indian tradition, who, while powerful,
cling to a “self” and thus are subject to birth and eventual death. The Four Kings guard us from the dangers associated with the four styles of untamed energies coming from the four cardinal directions. The twelve Yaksha Chiefs are worldly energies associated with the twelve forms of natural phenomena.

7-8. As this practice is for everyone who is interested, these stanzas honor many of the ordinary people of India and Tibet who practiced and preserved this liturgy and its realization for the benefit of future generations. They are our healing family. We acknowledge the human lineage partly because gratitude helps the grateful. This part also reminds us that just as this practice has helped countless ordinary people in the past, it will help ordinary people today, including ourselves. While these names may seem foreign, acknowledging these people helps to convey the power of this practice into our present-day experience.

9. Sukhavati is a place—experienced as a state of mind or a location—where the obstacles of stress and illness are minimized, which makes it easier to practice a spiritual path to its completion. Ordinarily, obstacles to health also make it difficult to pursue a spiritual path to completion; so reducing hassles is good. If we had good health without the benefit of good understanding and training, however, we might be tempted to simply live for the pleasure of the moment. In Sukhavati, we have the benefit of few obstacles and at the same time the recognition of the necessity of pursuing the long-term goal of waking up. Therefore, we have both the motivation and the opportunity to heal fully. We can clear our karmic accumulation from the past, activate our potential to be awake in the present and optimize our attitude toward a positive future. When these are clear, health becomes clear on a long-term basis. It is also easier to help others from the stable base of Sukhavati.

10. This section consists of two parts. The first is called Taking Refuge, which itself has three parts. In each of these parts you relate as fully as you can to the sense that: a) the most fundamental healing power of all is just being awake. You have a sense of trust in the wakefulness of others who have realized that wakefulness, and in the potential for you to do that as well, b) you trust in the workability of your life and in the methods given by those who have realized wakefulness and passed those methods on to help you do the same, and c) wakefulness is not just your personal path but also part of a wider path of social interaction.

Traditionally, taking refuge is done in a formal ceremony that includes making an offering to a teacher and receiving what is called a refuge name. If you are Buddhist, you may have already done this. If not, it can be just a sense of commitment to being as open as you can to what the
practice is about and to being as present as you can while you are doing it. On the surface this might seem a religious gesture that has nothing to do with your problem. This practice may seem religious, but is beyond religion. It is a way to help you experience the relative health of a good human life and the deeper, ultimate health beyond concept.

The second part of this stanza is called the Bodhisattva Vow. This refers to a vow that would also be offered in a formal ceremony committing to the idea that health—or any good circumstance—has ultimate meaning by being dedicated to the long-term benefit of self and others. This intention seals the benefit of doing this practice as not just a support for the immediate relief of your current problem, but as a support for health for all time. This stanza is traditionally done three times with palms joined at the heart if possible.

11. Here you call to mind Menla as the example of awakened health, as mentioned above, and offer hospitality to that example as a way to further your connection with all healing energy. In this and other visualized interactions with Menla—whether in a supplication, offering, requesting to stay and so on—you call on the historical Menla and all the Menlas there have ever been or ever can be. As you do so, you recognize that you are not only contacting what might seem to be energies outside yourself, but also your own inner healing energy that has been there all along; moreover, while you may not yet have full confidence in your healing potential, just saying these words gets you started.

12. Here again we state our ultimate intention as furthering the ultimate health and happiness of every single sentient being in all places and at all times. This statement is not only an aspiration that beings be well, but it is a wish that the causes of all illness be eliminated, the causes of health and happiness be firmly established and that this benefit include every single sentient being, whether we like them or not. Benevolence is great medicine for everyone. We all have this medicine; it is just that, in most cases, our benevolence is focused on those we like. This limits the healing power of good intentions. Here we remind ourselves of the power of benevolence, which is pure medicine and the true nature of our heart.

Following this is the Emptiness Mantra shown in bold type and said in Sanskrit, the language that first exalted emptiness. Here you acknowledge that in all experience, there is no solid, permanent inner core to cling to. Nothing is solid, by itself and forever. Yet this empty fluidity is not mere blankness, but the ground of the constantly evolving display of experience you have moment by moment in your daily life. Ordinarily even a hint of this openness inspires fear. You might think, “Oh my gosh. There is nothing to cling to. No friends. No family. No
theory. No body. Nothing.” Just the thought might stop you in your tracks. But here we see that this is good, not bad news. Since all ordinary things in life have no rigid core, fear and illness are amenable to the power of our practice that takes us beyond the ordinary. Seeing this emptiness is the doorway you must pass through on your way to true health. Here, mantra—or conscious speech—heralds and celebrates this fluidity, escorts you into the great healing universe that holds it and releases your mind from the bonds of ordinary concerns so that you can start your healing journey.

13. Here you have just walked through that doorway, and the emptiness you celebrate opens as a moment of freshness beyond concept. It is as if the constant rumbling of thoughts that we are all so used to has come to a natural stop: and instead of returning to things as usual, we see our world as the Menla that we really are sees it—bright, pure and healing. This pure view arises through the sound and shape the symbol, HUM (a calligraphy of which is in your practice booklet). HUM opens your eyes and ears to life.

14-15. In these stanzas you describe Menla’s appearance and the arrangement of helpers surrounding him. You focus on two Menlas: yourself as one, and the Menla in front, who is both your sense of Menla and the actual energy he still embodies. There are countless other Menlas from all time around you as well, while at the same time we are all one in spirit.

The description in the text and commentary may seem complicated or unreal at first. You may think you do not look at all like Menla—you may not be male, blue or sitting on a lotus—but the ways we usually see ourselves are ultimately more arbitrary than the view of ourselves as Menla. Because the ways in which we see ourselves are based on concept, our usual self-symbols eventually lead to more insecurity and illness. Here you see yourself as the health beyond every ordinary, limiting characteristic. You and your universe are whole together.

16. Here, we see, within each of the two Menlas, a set of three symbols: of body, a white OM, speech, a red AH, and finally mind—a blue HUM. These symbols radiate white, red and blue light respectively. These lights invite lots of Medicine Buddhas to come from space and time and wake us up.

17. In this stanza and with the speech and visualization practices that follow, we confirm that we see the fundamental purity of the five basic energies in our world and ourselves as described in Getting Back to Wholeness. If you pull back from these energies, you experience the five
faces of fear. When you know their pure nature, you enjoy them as the five wisdoms or ways to experience and express health. Again, light invites human forms of the five wisdoms that pour these five forms of confidence back into you as clear, beautiful fluid.

18. Here we offer all good things—including food, music, light, incense and other good things—to the Menla in front—again with the realization that these offerings are not directed just to an external agent, but to the power of wakefulness and health everywhere, personified here as Menla.

19-22. Here we recognize and celebrate all the factors that were part of the life and enlightenment of the Buddha of our time, Buddha Shakyamuni, and which are also part of the journey of all other Buddhas. By recalling the ordinary human beings who have passed this practice down to us and by recognizing details of the Buddha’s history, we continue the power of this practice as one in which all people can attain wisdom and use that wisdom for healing.

23-25. In these stanzas we symbolically bathe, dry, and clothe our sense of the front Menla, not because he would need any of this but because doing so helps you prepare your mind for the core of the practice.

26-27. Here you celebrate the connection you have made with this practice and your confidence in the ultimate wholeness and health in yourself and others. You might be expressing something like, “I appreciate what you have done to realize health and your help for me to realize it too. I know that you don’t want anything from me, but, by acknowledging your example, I seal and multiply these gifts for all.”

28. Again, you are becoming part of the human lineage of both ordinary and ultimate healing.

29. There are several different ways of working with the visualization as described in the practice guide in the audio series. Working with visualization shows how having problems—painful as they may be—helps you to connect with the energy of healing, and how ultimately even the slightest inspiration in and from this practice may be the greatest benefit and exactly what you need.

You can hold all your life, even the difficult parts, in the begging bowl of your big mind. You can see through the masks of fear to the courage always in your heart. You can see Menla’s healing light washing away your illness, the cause of your illness, or any hesitation you have to see your illness as part of your healing life. And even better, you can dedicate all this and the health you do have to the benefit of others.
If you are very ill, just the inspiration of this practice may be enough, but if you are well enough to say the mantra and/or see even a flash of the visualization, it is good to do so as consciously and with as much heart as you can. Say each syllable audibly. Hold whatever part of the visualization you can in your mind’s eye, even if the part you see changes from moment to moment. This is how you and Menla bring out the health in your life.

When you hold any sense of Menla in your heart, see any part of him in your mind’s eye, or touch on the sound of his name and mantra, you join the power of undivided goodness in the world at large to the goodness within yourself. This enlists the spirit of healing and makes it yours for all time. Now it works for you. Whatever aspect of this practice that you connect with is a doorway to wholeness in your life,

30. This stanza acknowledges that most of our illnesses don’t heal on the spot, and sometimes we just want quick, personal relief. Here we are saying something like, ‘Even though I am not sure if I really get this, even though my mind is still often wild and I often think about me first, even though I am not sure what awakening could be, and even though I have missed the mark so many times, just by having tried, I am open to something in me that is bigger than fear. I voice the aspiration and dedication that my less-than-perfect practice helps me and others in any way it can, as much as it can and for as long as it can. At least I offer that.’ That sentiment alone can be a powerful healer.

31. This is the dissolution of the visualization. You rest in the space of knowing you have invoked the ultimate forces of healing to benefit yourself and everyone. You may not feel immediate joy in this space; you may feel uncertainty or not even know what you feel, but whatever you feel in this practice, you will be more awake and further along the path to the healing you need. This is a good time for sitting meditation if you have had instruction in it.

In both the Menla and general dedication, you multiply and seal the benefit of doing this practice by saying that—even in the depths of your most intense pain—you remember how others suffer as well—often more intensely than yourself—and you recall how, in spite of that, they have so often cared for you. Therefore, you offer everything you may have gained from doing this practice in the hope that all may be well.

You can do any version of this practice you like or that suits your circumstances; you can just remind yourself of Menla’s story, name or
appearance. I often do this in difficult spots throughout my day in addition to my regular morning practice session.

**RESOURCES**

- *Medicine Buddha Teachings*, His Eminence, Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche, at www.rinpoche.com
- *The Sanity We Are Born With—a Buddhist Approach to Psychology*, Chogyam Trungpa
- *The Collected Works of Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche*
- *Turning the Mind Into An Ally*, Sakyong Mipham
- *Boundless Healing*, Tulku Thondup
- *Getting Back to Wholeness*, by myself, available at Amazon as ebook and at my website, www.thishealinglife.com. There I discuss the four wisdoms of the body present even in times of illness, the five wisdoms of mind present even in confusion, and the unstoppable healing power of spirit, all as background of and support for the practice of Medicine Buddha.

I have been completely inspired by Menla and by the great teachers I have known, all of whom exemplify Menla in their own way. I have seen those teachers live with grace, dignity and cheer in all kinds of circumstances, as Menla would do. They have smiled at fear, illness and death. In particular, I am extremely grateful to His Eminence, The Very Venerable Kenchen Thrangu Rinpoche for making Menla available to all who need healing in this age. If you work with Menla I am sure you will find what you need in your universe of healing. Other materials may be available at www.thishealinglife.com.

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