

# GREEN TARA

**An Excerpt from “Awakening the Buddha Within” by LAMA SURYA DAS**

Buddhism has always had a strong feminist spokesperson in the form of Tara, the liberated female principle of enlightenment. Many people refer to this female Buddha as Green Tara. In fact, however, like all mothers, Tara has so much to do, so much to give, and is so responsive to the needs of beings that she has many forms and is imaged in twenty-one different colors symbolizing twenty-one aspects and modes of activity. As White Tara, she is a peaceful presence who heals disease and pacifies discord; as Red Tara, she is a passionate presence who devotes her inexhaustible energy to others' needs. As Green Tara, she personifies the qualities of the protective nurturing earth. It is taught that Tara helps us help ourselves. Tara has special meaning in Tibet where she is known as its protectress and is called Mother Tara. Children are taught to invoke Tara's aid through prayer whenever they feel fearful or anxious. Every monastery chants her beautiful “Twenty-one Praises of Tara” liturgy every morning as a group in the meditation hall. As a fully enlightened Buddha, Tara personifies the sacred feminine side of all of us—male and female.

Legend has it that one day many centuries ago, Tara was meditating and chanting her mantra in her Lotus Buddha Field, when some monks happened by. They felt her powerful vibrations and profound meditational energy, and they said, “Oh Yogini [female practitioner], you are such an excellent spiritual practitioner. In the future may you be reborn as a man and become a Buddha.” And Tara replied to those arrogant macho monks, “May I throughout all my lifetimes always take female form. Until all beings realize the nirvanic peace, bliss, and freedom of full enlightenment, may I always embody the sacred feminine and be a female Buddha.”

In images of Tara, she's not sitting in the full lotus position. She has one leg and one hand down because she is reaching out. She is putting legs on her prayer. She is actually enacting enlightenment, bringing it forth and manifesting it to the world.