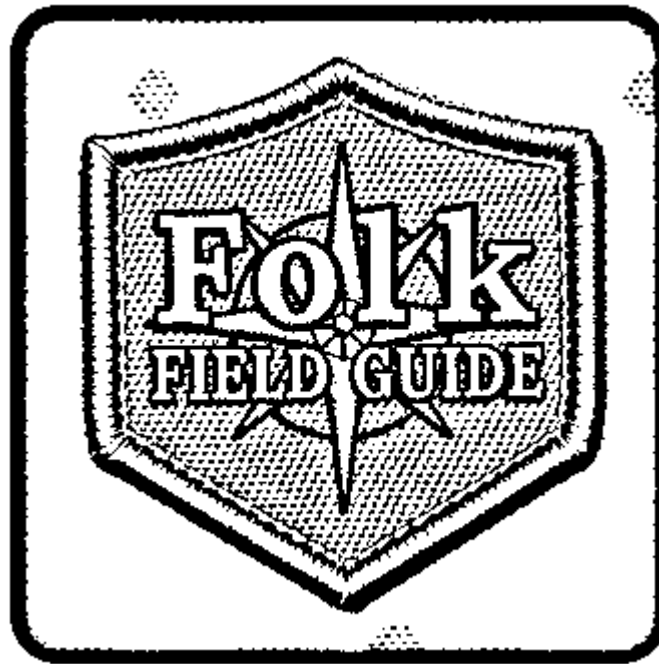


Folk Field Guide

For Folk Practice



Issue: 22

Absorbing the Essence of Water

Curated & Compiled by Bub

Folk Field Guide for Folk Practice is devoted to the living heart of folk practice. My aim is not only to preserve stories, but to practice with them—to listen to and practice with our family, the land, and the magic in our own homes. In these field guides, you'll find the stories, the prayers, offerings, and practices that have shaped our own folk practice for generations.

May these stories nourish your imagination, connect you to the land and lineage they arise from, and remind us all that folk practice is not just a record of the past, but a practice still relevant for our lives and relationships today.

What is Folk Practice?

There is a path that doesn't belong to any belief system, any special religion, or any one tradition. It's not an "ism" nor does it have an official name. It's a path we can call folk practice, the practice of the people, the sacred threads that weave through ordinary life.

At its heart, folk practice is deeply rooted and shaped across generations by countless ordinary lives: bakers, farmers, tailors, fishers, lantern-makers, cooks, and builders. These weren't people detached from their world. They lived in intimate conversation with it. They shaped it, and it shaped them. The practices that came from this intimacy weren't rigid or static. They adapted and evolved alongside the communities that held them. They were shaped by countless influences, threads of old ways and new ideas spun together over time.

And one of the most vital truths about folk practice is this: it belongs to everyone. You can be Floridian, Vietnamese, Tongan, Greek, Scottish, or from anywhere else. Because folk isn't something outside or other that you have to be or become. You already are folk. It's who you are, and it's the people who surround you, and the people you come from. It is all of us. It requires no identity or label, it's simply you and your life however that manifests.

Folk practice belongs to everyone. It doesn't ask for a specific belief. It doesn't require allegiance to a particular god, religion, or dogma. You can be a Buddhist, a Christian, a Bonpo, or someone who simply feels the sacred threads of life. Folk practice is syncretic, drawing from many sources, shaped by time, place, and person. Its strength lies in its openness and its ability to evolve.

The old stories may tell of realms of spirits, of ancestors and unseen beings, but this is not some far-off place. It is closer than we imagine, just a subtle shift of perception away.

Importantly, this is not a path apart from life. It is life. In every era, across countless villages and families, it was woven seamlessly into the everyday. It was a technology of belonging and connection, a way to respond to life's needs, a way to support, heal, and protect a community. The folk practitioner was shaped by their people and place. They weren't set apart from the world. They worked within it, lived within it, and drew strength from belonging to the full catastrophe of life.

Folk practice teaches us that sacredness is not something you have to travel far to find. It's right here. It's how we speak to our neighbors. How we thank the plants that feed us. How we hold space for grief and joy, side by side.

In a time when the world feels increasingly disconnected, when so much of life is filtered through screens or systems that separate us from the source, there is deep medicine in turning toward the old ways; not to escape the present, but to meet it more fully.

In the end, folk practice reminds us of a profound truth. Spirituality is not about perfection, dogma, or rigid orthodoxy. It is about relationship. It is about respect. It is about responsiveness to the world around us. It reminds us that the sacred is always present, always available, because it lives within and around us every moment. Sometimes messy, but alive.

Folk Practice is an inheritance we can reclaim every time we open ourselves to the wonder of this life. In this way, folk practice is not a relic of the past, but a living, breathing path for now and for generations to come.

Five Elements Khandro

The Five Khandro of the Elements (Space, Air, Fire, Water and Earth) play a fundamental role in Bon. These five are understood as the underlying energies from which all experience arises, including the physical world, our bodies, our emotions and our minds. Each element is associated with a khandro (dakini in Sanskrit), or goddess. The khandros represent the pure, enlightened aspect of the elements. The central figure is the white khandro of space, the great mother from which all the other elements arise. In her right hand she holds ornaments and jewels, and in her left hand she holds a skull cup filled with essential nectar. The khandros of air (green), fire (red), water (blue) and earth (yellow) surround the central figure.

What Are Khandros?

Khandros (also called dakinis) are an archetype or symbol of enlightened beings who are not trapped in their intellect or their emotions but slide freely through the world inspiring others by their dance of freedom. It's a type of energy that has nothing to do with sex or gender. Khandros are inspiringly free. The symbol of the khandro is the sky.

So when we become a khandro, this has nothing to do with becoming a gender or sex. It's about re-inhabiting this energy and connecting with this natural quality that is already present within us. To become the khandro means to re-inhabit the qualities of our buddha nature - to generate and keep alive all the wholesome qualities that are and always have been present in our original nature.

In order to help us connect with our original nature, we symbolically divide up our natural state into five elemental qualities. We do this so we can focus one at a time on each of the different qualities of our true nature. It's important to remember that symbolisms are not real. We utilize symbolism to help us understand. We utilize symbolism to help us connect with the wholesome qualities of our natural state of mind. When you are connected with the natural state of mind you are transformed into the khandro. This is the deeper meaning of the internal visualization. Mind itself connects with its own self-knowing awareness.

Posture

Another thing to note is that each of the five practices below contain different sitting positions. But it's always an option to just practice in our five-fold meditative posture. It is better to sit stable and comfortable than to try to hold a position that strains your body. So sit in accordance to what your own body will allow.

The Five-fold Posture

1. Sitting in the cross-legged position.
2. Placing the two hands below the navel with the left one positioned above the right. Reversed for women.
3. Straightening up the vertebrae of your spinal column.
4. Hold the upper arms and shoulders high and back. Bend the neck slightly at the throat.
5. The eyes are slightly open and looking down to the tip of the nose. Leave a space between the lips and the teeth about the size of a barley grain. Let the breath be natural and undisturbed.

Preliminaries

It is traditional and beneficial to begin the practice with the nine-fold purification breaths and the five trul khor exercises at the beginning of a session.

Next, we always begin each meditation session with taking refuge, generating bodhichitta, and making an offering. We do this for each of the five elemental practices. If we are doing multiple rounds of practice in a single session, then we only do these preliminaries at the very start of a session. Likewise, at the end of a full session we dedicate the merit when we decide to end.

We do these three preliminary practices to set a context and orient our mind for why we are engaging in these practices. We can do this in a formal way, in which formal prayers can be found in the appendix. But we can also do this in a more organic and natural way unique to your own heart's intention and aspiration. So please experiment and find what works best to connect you to your heart's intention.

Why do we make offerings?

We make offerings to these enlightened qualities of our own natural state of mind – buddha nature – which are symbolized by these five elemental khandros. It's a way to show reverence to the vitality of life, and to our aspiration to become enlightened for the sake of all beings. And we offer up our own deluded body, speech, and mind. Because we aspire to take up the enlightened body, speech, and mind of all Buddhas right here and now, present in our own original nature – we no longer need our samsaric body, speech, and mind which have habitually been a source of so much suffering in our life. So we give it all away. All the problems, stresses, worries, concerns, and deep sufferings we lovingly let go of and give it away to the sky-like dancers. Sky-like dancers who are not trapped in their sufferings but slide freely through the world inspiring others by their dance of freedom. And if the thought of giving it all away is too much for now, perhaps we can simply put down all our “stuff” just for the meditation session.

Seed Syllables

In the following practices, seed syllables will be used. At the end of this section, you can find what they look like in Tibetan script. You can imagine them in Tibetan script, as English letters, or even just as a sphere of colored light. Use whatever is more natural to you. It is better to use what comes naturally than try to force or stress over “trying to get it right.”

Choosing an Element

We can practice with a single elemental khandro during a session. Traditionally, one learns and practices the space khandro first, as space is the first element in which all the other elements come from. So it is recommended we begin training with absorbing the essence of space before moving on to learn the others. However, during a retreat, we can practice all five in individual sessions throughout the day at the recommended times listed below. These suggested times are not hard rules, but just recommended times where the practice can be most beneficial. It is better to practice when we have the time, then to not practice waiting for the “perfect time.”

Absorbing the Essence of Water

Begin by sitting on your knees in seiza with your butt sitting on the heels of your feet, facing South. Sitting in the five-point posture is also an option. Let your spine be straight, and your body relaxed, yet alert. Close your eyes gently and take a deep, soothing breath in. Exhale slowly. Let go of any tension as you settle into the present moment.

Refuge, Bodhichitta, and Offering

Start by invoking refuge, bringing to mind the Three Jewels: the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Allow their presence to fill you with warmth and support.

Then, gently arise bodhichitta, the wish for the benefit of all beings. Feel that deep intention in your heart, like a flame that burns with compassion and wisdom, illuminating all sentient beings with love and peace.

Visualize the blue khandro and chant the seed syllable **MANG** three times and make the water mudra as an offering to the blue water khandro, *Ting Nam Tumo*.

Visualization of the Seed Syllable and Blue Khandro

Visualize the three channels. Now, bring your awareness to the center of your heart in the central channel. Visualize the syllable "**MANG TING**" or simply the syllable "**MANG**" in radiant blue light. If that feels distant, imagine a glowing blue sphere at the heart center.

Focus your awareness on this **MANG** in your heart. The **MANG** syllable melts into light and you arise as the blue khandro. Imagine that in your right hand you are holding a crocodile banner and in your left hand a vase of water essence. Your body is covered with beautiful ornaments and is in the posture of a dancer.

Gradually, imagine that you are becoming this blue khandro. Feel her energy flowing through your body, filling you with vitality and clarity. You are her, and she is you.

Retrieving the Essence of Water

Slowly, slowly find your kidney area in the body, particularly the channels of the kidneys that go from the heart to the kidneys. In this subtle channel, there are small water khandros—powerful beings of water energy. Each holding a small wish-fulfilling jewel and a vase filled with the essence of water.

As you inhale, feel the subtle water khandros moving within your kidney channels. Then, as you chant the syllable "MANG" or the mantra "MANG TANGRA HUNG", visualize these water khandros gathering, and with each exhalation, they travel out through your right nostril. Picture them moving far and wide, collecting the essence of the water in their sacred vases like bees sipping nectar.

As you continue to chant, feel the water khandros return, entering through your left nostril, carrying all the water energy with them. They bring the gathered essence back to your kidneys, filling the vase in your kidneys with the pure, nourishing water energy.

Now, visualize the full vase in your kidneys—filled with the essence of water. As the vase overflows, the nectar of this water element flows through your central channel, nourishing every cell of your body, mind, and spirit. Imagine that through that the entire body is filled with the essence of Water like a skin-sack filled with yoghurt.

Feel free to repeat this process for as long as you need to be fully nourished.

Resting in the Essence of Water

Let go of the mantra and posture now, and simply rest in the pure essence of water. Feel it moving freely throughout your body. Every cell is revitalized, filled with comfort and peacefulness. Let the energy of the water element settle deeply into your being.

Allow your mind to rest in this openness, free from distraction, connected to the vastness of the water that flows through you. Let it bring peace, balance, and wisdom into every part of your experience. If you cannot do that, simply be mindfully open to your empty central channel free of any negatives and obstacles. Sit for as long as you can.

If your mind starts to wander, gently bring it back to the image of a crystal stupa at the center of your heart. Focus on it with single-pointed attention. Allow your mind to calm naturally, letting the peacefulness envelop you.

Dedication of Merit

As you come to the end of this practice, dedicate the merit for the benefit of all beings. May the energy of water, wisdom, and compassion spread far and wide, helping all to find healing and transformation.

Rest for a moment in gratitude for the practice, knowing that through this meditation, you have purified jealousy and cultivated all-accomplishing wisdom.

When you are ready, slowly bring your awareness back to the room. Gently open your eyes, and take a moment to appreciate the peacefulness and ease within you.

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You can use this in a quiet space and practice at your own pace, especially between 11 am and 4 pm. This practice is good when feeling a lack of well-being, feeling out of tune, and feeling like something is “off.” This is a good practice for people also practicing guru yoga, tonglen, or meditations of loving kindness & compassion for all beings.

Results of Practice

The root text details the results or fruit through training in the five khandro practices listed above. We can allow ourselves to be inspired by these fruits. And we can also mindfully reflect on our own actions of body, speech, and mind, our own well-being, our relationships with ourselves, with others, and with the world to see how the fruits of these practices may be unfolding in our lives. Through diligent study and practice, may the fruits of awakening ripen in each of us.

From the root text:

Water: Through training like this: your life becomes long; your radiant luster increases; you can drink a lot; and you gain power over sentient beings. Having gained power over the wind of Water [element], kidney diseases, and the diseases of dropsy and phlegm will not occur.

Practice sessions: It is best to practice for 21 days. The second-best option is to practice for 14 days. At least seven days are necessary. Our place of practice must be quiet and undisturbed. It is best if we observe silence. Practice until you get signs of progress. After you receive signs you should do the practice at least once a day.