

Tara and Dorje Shugdan – Symbolism

Questions
Remember that each of these Buddhas represent different qualities of Buddha.

Look at Tara, then Dorje Shugdan. What do you notice and what do you think each part of their body/ gesture might symbolise?

Tara	What do you notice? <hr/> ▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ ▶	What do you think it might symbolise? <hr/> ▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ ▶
	Dorje Shugdan	What do you notice? <hr/> ▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ ▶

The Buddhas Tara and Dorje Shugdan

Dorje Shugdan

Dorje Shugdan is unique to Kadampa Buddhism. He helps Buddhists to remember the stages of the path to enlightenment. He is wearing robes of an ordained monk to show that the practice of moral discipline is necessary for those who seek enlightenment. In his left hand is a heart to symbolise compassion. The curved sword in his right, shows him cutting through ignorance – symbolising wisdom.

He is riding a snow lion to show that he is completely fearless. Perched in his left arm is a jewel-spitting mongoose to symbolise he has the power to bestow wealth - not ordinary, everyday wealth but inner, spiritual wealth.

He has an eye in the middle of his forehead to show that he has omniscient wisdom - he can see the past, present and future at the same time. Although Dorje Shugdan appears to look angry, Buddhists say that he displays a wrathful expression, indicating he has the ability to destroy self-grasping ignorance. He is called 'The Dharma Protector'.

Tara

Tara is a female Buddha. Like Dorje Shugdan, everything about her is symbolic. She epitomizes the Six Perfections. She sits on a lotus flower to symbolise that she has transcended suffering. Tara wears earrings showing that she has perfected patience, a necklace to show that she has perfected giving, a longer necklace with a jewel at level of her heart to show she has perfected concentration and arm and leg jewellery to show that she has perfected moral discipline.

Tara has a smiling, peaceful face showing that she is delighted to see everyone. She is also known as 'Mother Tara' because Buddhists turn to her for help and believe that by relying upon her they will receive guidance in their lives.

'Tara' means 'rescuer'. Her right leg is outstretched as if she is about to move. This is to show that she is swift to help when she is called.