

THE VAJRAYOGINI-TARA CAVE AND THE BIRTH CANAL

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By Michael Erlewine (Michael@Erlewine.net)

In 2004 Margaret and I were lucky enough to accompany our teacher Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche to Tibet and visit Thrangu Monastery, where he originally came from, along with a group of his retreat lamas and friends. In addition to Tibet (which is a story in itself), Rinpoche wanted to take us to one sacred place in China called Mount Wu-Tai-Shan, where we spent about a week doing puja and practices.

In a nutshell, Mt. Wu-Tai-Shan is a series of five mountains arranged in the shape of a die like the number five, with four mountains in a square and one in the middle. Legend has it that it was here that astrology entered this world through the magical blessing of the Bodhisattva Manjushri, who appeared as a youth. Out of his head poured the 84,000 teachings on astrology, which he then gave to mankind. I don't have space here to tell you the whole story, but I will include a link at the end for those who want to know more.

Here I just want to share what happened at an incredible place called the Mother-Buddha Vajrayogina-Tara Cave near Wu-Tai-Shan. Deep within the cave is a tiny opening about chest level that is shaped like a birth canal, through which (with some luck) one can, by extending your arms above the head be passed up through the birth canal into the womb of the cave. As you will see, not everyone is worthy of this feat.

This very special cave found us standing in line single-file with other pilgrims and very slowly moving deeper into the cave itself until we reached a solid wall in which was the one very small opening. This took a long time. You are said to literally walk between the legs of the mother Buddha to where her yoni is, a very small opening about the size of a flattened meditation cushion at an angle. You can't see through it because the opening extends upward into a small almost airless room, with no other ventilation or openings. It is dark in there. If you have the right karma, the yoni will open for you and you can crawl and be pulled up through the channel into the inner womb areas, where it is said you can see all of her inner organs and secrets. No matter what size you are, not everyone can pass through the opening.

It is said that those who can pass through the channel will be reborn in Buddha Amitabha's Buddha field called Sukavati. It took maybe an hour to even get to the opening, a line of people moving like molasses deeper and deeper into the cave. It was not long before the mouth of the cave was out of site. And now for the test.

My teacher Khenpo Rinpoche did not pass through the opening; he was just too big. He laughed and tried really, really hard to get through, but no go. As for me, I also tried but did not pass through, although I probably could have. It is not like there is a hole and you can put your arms or stick head through, look around, and see what is inside. Oh no, nothing like that.

Instead, this is a longish channel of several feet that like the birth canal extends upward (and at a sideways angle) about chest height from where you are standing. You have to put your arms over your head to make yourself narrower, turn sideways, and somehow wiggle up into the channel until you can get through. Actually, someone already inside needs to sort of pull you in. One of our group was already up in there and tried his best to help pull people through. I managed to get my arms over my head, my head and upper body into the channel, and could almost perhaps see someone at the end above me... I think. Then, claustrophobic as I am, I chickened out and decided I did not want to put all of my body through that passage, into that pitch-black cave, where there was perhaps a small flashlight, much less turn around and try come back. So I did not pass the test. I am sure this tells you something about me, but I don't care. I ain't goin' through that hole willingly. I guess I am one of those babies that doesn't want to go through the birth process.

However, my wife Margaret slipped through into the inner sanctum and back out easily and received that very special blessing. More power to her! She is, after all something of an expert, having home birthed some of our kids and I have never met any woman who loves babies more than Margaret.

In this photo I am in the lower-middle, left, with my face turned outward, and Margaret is behind me to the left. This is the entrance to the Mother Buddha Cave. The line extends deep within the cave.

For those who have time to read more about the trip, here is that link:

<http://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.459543472657.245141.587252657&type=3>