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Technical Style & Editing

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*Cover Piece for on Rhetorical Choices Made in Style Guide*

Before creating this style guide, I consulted all sangha staff of Katog Choling on whatever possible material I could write upon for style conventions. Having grown up on the US retreat center Katog Ri'throd, I was already well acquainted with the variety of published material represented in its Buddhist prayer booklets, spiritual guide novels, organization website, and email newsletters. Additionally, having grown up as a Buddhist and well-versed in meditation, dharma (another word for Buddhist teaching or doctrine), and Buddhist religious theory, I also knew how unique this style guide could be in not only attending to the usual formatting but also the unique format of Buddhist texts. These are texts that blend translation of multiple languages, heavily structured philosophy, sounds like instruments and rhythmic patterns, and vocabulary with deep roots in ancient Eastern linguistic structures. Despite being ethnically a Westerner, I've had the experience to appreciate the unique perspective and techniques these cultural texts can bring to life—and I knew that in writing this style guide I would not only help my childhood sangha (the word referring to a Buddhist community), but be able to write about content can blend with visual and textual formatting in interesting ways.

In creating this guide the foremost concern went to the potential users of this style guide, while I also considered Katog Choling's audience. In other words, while concerned with those who would read this guide, I was also concerned implicitly with the readers of our stylized material; I paid attention to what consistencies would matter to Katog Choling's audience.

The readers of this style guide needed to be informed not only of their own practices, but the needs of other members. The different documents and internal processes of Katog Choling involve members who need to work together despite occupational differences: almost every single volunteer has a unique role and project, such as brand coordinator, editor, programmer, technical writer, guru or Buddhist scholar, illustrator, meeting runner, etc. This manifested most in the sections on online material; often, due to scarcity of meetings, content creators and programmers could come across issues with formatting, not because the creators didn't know how to format content stylistically or because the programmers didn't know how to format coding, but rather because creators wouldn't know how to structure content for easy programming and because programmers wouldn't be aware of style choices. Thus, part of the challenge of this guide was to not only ensure stylistic consistency, but to also explain the why behind formatting for the Wordpress site's coded material.

Moreover, I sought to establish consistency and coherency for Katog Choling's readers, because otherwise errors or inconsistencies can appear due to projects being separated. For example, standard spellings for Tibetan or Sanskrit names and words needed to be established in the style sheet, as otherwise the organization risks using different spellings since different writers are usually more familiar with certain phonetic transliterations, like using bodhicitta versus bodhichitta. For prayer booklets, a similar issue occurs, in that these publications should share organizational translation conventions, like always pairing Tibetan paragraphs with an immediate English translation before listing the next paragraph. In other words, in writing this guide I had to point out to readers the translation conventions they ascribed to or the conventions that most reappeared in texts, so that any person that picks up any Katog Choling publication who is familiar past publications can navigate these translations easily.

Thus, there are three main audiences of Katog Choling's publications. The first, primary audience are prospective and new members of Khentrul Lodrö T'hayé Rinpoche's various sangha communities around the US. Then there are those who want to learn more about Buddhism or attend specific practices within Khentrul Rinpoche's Buddhist lineages of the Katog and Nyingma schools. The secondary audience would be members who already exist within Khentrul Rinpoche's various sanghas across the states, in Canada, the UK, Australia, Europe, South Africa, or Tibet, who can use Katog Choling's digital publications to coordinate and schedule teachings or practices between different sanghas and with teachers associated with Khentrul Rinpoche. A tertiary audience would be various people whom might want to find out more about Khentrul Rinpoche's Tibet monastery and US retreat center before choosing to donate funds supporting the two centers. I considered these audiences when thinking about elements that needed to stay consistent throughout prayer publications.

The primary goals in editing were to locate stylistic choices in past website and print publications as well as the recently published book, to choose unified methods in the organization's various kinds of styles, and put them into a coherent style guide. I quickly found out that every single publication had significantly different formatting, but internally these documents always had sets of specific elements put together in consistent ways, especially when it came to translation and transliteration. A secondary goal was to do the same with the layout and coding of the organization's newly updated website, so that any new member who might assist in website management could quickly and thoroughly learn the specific coding and design specifications for the new, and possibly old, versions of the website. A final goal was to consult with the staff who are currently creating the new online course, although at this moment no courses are published since they are still a work in progress.

The first rhetorical decision I made was to separate the style guide into two overarching sections: print versus digital publications. I did this knowing that the digital publications would mostly revolve around problems in HTML and coding formatting, in the context of being either in the Wordpress source code or the MailChimp program. As for print publications, I knew they differed significantly from digital, that they would all combine physical and visual formatting in a way differently than how Wordpress or MailChimp can be formatted, and that generally they lacked Tibetan phonetic transliteration except in certain cases such as online course vocabulary pages.

However, the largest rhetorical decisions occurred naturally, from things I began to notice when describing the structure of the content within texts.

I first discovered that some of the formatting in all documents started to revolve on how English, Tibetan, and Sanskrit phoneticization and terminology were connected in the visual and textual formatting. For example, Sanskrit transliterations occur traditionally in Tibetan Buddhist prayer only as mantra. Tibetan mantras, as a part of Buddhist prayer, have special rules when it comes to practice, which sometimes are explained in English in a prayer publication, but most times are not. Specifically, mantra is repeated for as long as possible or for a rough number of times (such as ten minutes or 1000 iterations), and in group practice often the *umdze* (the Tibetan word for the person who leads prayer practice, usually in terms of both melody and rhythm) will have the discretion of setting the amount of time and choosing whether the mantra is repeated aloud or silently. When the *umdze* leads mantra, often the only signal for the rest of the sangha to continue on to the rest of the practice will be them pausing, if the mantra has been said aloud up to that point, or repeating the mantra aloud once, if the mantra has been done silently up to that point. Thus, it becomes incredibly important that all Sanskrit is formatted visually in the

same way, such that a reader will understand instantly upon seeing that formatting that that part of prayer is a mantra, and that they should be on the lookout for verbal signals from the *umdze*. Similarly, the formatting of Tibetan transliteration paragraphs must indicate for practitioners the structure the *umdze* will follow. Namely, Tibetan transliteration paragraphs, which are usually in bold to differentiate from English translation, are always separated into rhythmic sections. That is, every transliteration paragraph will be separated into sections of equal syllables, equal so that every section can hold a repeating melody; for example, a transliteration paragraph might have sections separated by every seven or eight syllables, separated by a tab between sections. Thus, this formatting indicates to the sangha where the *umdze* will pause for breathing and where the melody will repeat, pausing at the end of each rhythmic section and repeating the melody either every section or every two sections. Clearly, formatting becomes very important in the context of translation following certain conventions, depending on whether it is Tibetan or Sanskrit, so that the publications indicate to practitioners how the prayer is structured melodically and rhythmically. In other words, formatting here serves a very unique purpose; it serves to unite transliteration with an implicit translation of Tibetan cultural practices.

Second, I found in writing about the website that the formatting of types of web pages and media types could be repurposed as also a kind of crash course in navigating the Wordpress options; that is, much of the formatting information for Wordpress involved not simply statements of “This is...” or “This should be...” but rather sequences of steps that must be completed for content to end up correctly on the page, since specific formatting steps were required for audio and images to end up on the site looking just as it should. Therefore, a rhetorical choice in these style sections became not only in describing style conventions, but to

also describe why those conventions were what they were and how those conventions interfaced with the website.

Finally, in the style guide I made the rhetorical decision to include compound nouns that were based in Tibetan translation; for example, “mind training” might seem in English a strange compound noun, but not so much when one realizes it’s significant in Buddhist publications because in Tibetan its represented as a single word, *lojong*. Moreover, this is an important compound-noun translation because it reoccurs thematically in Tibetan Buddhist theory; theory is best understood when consistent translation of Tibetan concepts is used, so such compound nouns become meaningful for style purposes. I then also chose to include in the style sheet the Tibetan term, transliterated, since discussion of theory also involves the actual Tibetan term in a linguistic breakdown of Tibetan words due to these concepts having certain connotations key to understanding. To show this rhetorical decision in my style sheet, any compound nouns that I added for this reason also had accompanying them a reference to the Tibetan word they’re based upon, to make clear what concepts they served as English translations of.

In a broad sense, in making this guide I was forced to make rhetorical choices pertaining to how language, format, and content interconnect, within the context that Tibetan Buddhist theory and prayer require unique stylistic constraints for proper practice and understanding. Rhetorical choices in style appeared in that different information, such as English translation, Tibetan transliteration, and Tibetan cultural practices, became an implicit part of how different sections were formatted. This style guide shows how style is not just visual or textual choices, but also content choices. It demonstrates how content and formatting are linked, with formatting depending on the structure inherent within the content. In short, I chose in this guide to give rhetorical weight to foreign language and its conventions as part of style.