## THE TIBETAN ALPHABET: THE THIRTY CONSONANTS or འ་བོད་

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ཁ།</th>
<th>བ་</th>
<th>བ་</th>
<th>ག་</th>
<th>ང་</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KA</td>
<td>K'A</td>
<td>GA</td>
<td>NGA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHA</td>
<td>CH'A</td>
<td>JA</td>
<td>NYA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA</td>
<td>T'A</td>
<td>DA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA</td>
<td>P'A</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSA</td>
<td>TS'A</td>
<td>DZA</td>
<td>WA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZHA</td>
<td>ZA</td>
<td>'A</td>
<td>YA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RA</td>
<td>LA</td>
<td>SHA</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**THE TIBETAN ALPHABET: THE FOUR VOWEL SIGNS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SIGN</th>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>POSITION</th>
<th>SOUND</th>
<th>EXAMPLE</th>
<th>PRONUNCIATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ဗ</td>
<td>GI-GU</td>
<td>ABOVE</td>
<td>ee (i)</td>
<td>[man; person]</td>
<td>&quot;me&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>SHAB-KYU</td>
<td>BELOW</td>
<td>oo (u)</td>
<td>[water]</td>
<td>&quot;chew&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ဗ</td>
<td>DRENG-BU</td>
<td>ABOVE</td>
<td>ay (e)</td>
<td>[that]</td>
<td>&quot;day&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ဗ</td>
<td>NA-RO</td>
<td>ABOVE</td>
<td>oh (o)</td>
<td>[flavor; corpse]</td>
<td>&quot;row&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Letters in parentheses indicate the English transliteration of Tibetan vowel sounds.
THE FOUR VOWEL SIGNS JOINED TO THE THIRTY CONSONANTS

|  ཤ  ས  ཧ  ཞ  |  ཨ  བ  ཨ  ཞ  |
|  ར  ཪ  ཨ  ཞ  |  ཨ  ས  ར  ཞ  |
|  ཨ  ས  ཨ  ཞ  |  ཨ  ཨ  ས  ཞ  |
|  ཨ  ས  ཨ  ཞ  |  ཨ  ཨ  ཨ  ཞ  |

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COMPOSITE LETTERS

Some letters can be combined in specific ways to produce new letters. These are called Composite Letters and they are formed by stacking letters. There are four Subscripts (which are written below other letters) and three Superscripts (which are written above other letters).

SUBSCRIPTS: The four letters that can be subscribed (or written below) are:

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
\text{yat} & \text{rat} & \text{lata} & \text{wa-zur} \\
\end{array}
\]

\(\text{\textbullet}^\circ\) can be subscribed to 7 letters in the form \(\text{\textbullet}^\circ\) This changes the pronunciation of the Root consonant as indicated below.

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
\text{ky} & \text{k'ya} & \text{gya} \\
\text{cha} & \text{ch'a} & \text{ja} & \text{nya} \\
\end{array}
\]

\(\text{\textbullet}^\circ\) can be subscribed to 14 letters in the form \(\text{\textbullet}^\circ\) in some cases changing and adding a subtle, almost imperceptible “R” sound to the Root consonant as indicated below.

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
\text{tra} & \text{t'ra} & \text{dra} \\
\text{tra} & \text{t'ra} & \text{dra} & \text{na} \\
\text{tra} & \text{t'ra} & \text{dra} & \text{ma} \\
\text{sha} & \text{sa} & \text{hra} \\
\end{array}
\]

SPELLING:

\[
\begin{array}{ll}
\text{\textbullet} & = \text{ka} \text{ ya-ta} & \text{ky}\text{a} \\
\text{\textbullet} & = \text{k'a} \text{ ya-ta} & \text{k'ya} \\
\text{\textbullet} & = \text{ga} \text{ ya-ta} & \text{gy}\text{a} \\
\text{\textbullet} & = \text{pa} \text{ ya-ta} & \text{cha} \\
\text{\textbullet} & = \text{p'a} \text{ ya-ta} & \text{ch'ya} \\
\text{\textbullet} & = \text{ba} \text{ ya-ta} & \text{ja} \\
\text{\textbullet} & = \text{ma} \text{ ya-ta} & \text{nya} \\
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{ll}
\text{\textbullet} & = \text{ka} \text{ ra-ta} & \text{tra} \\
\text{\textbullet} & = \text{k'a} \text{ ra-ta} & \text{t'ra} \\
\text{\textbullet} & = \text{ga} \text{ ra-ta} & \text{dra} \\
\text{\textbullet} & = \text{na} \text{ ra-ta} & \text{na} \\
\text{\textbullet} & = \text{ma} \text{ ra-ta} & \text{ma} \\
\text{\textbullet} & = \text{sha} \text{ ra-ta} & \text{sha} \\
\text{\textbullet} & = \text{sa} \text{ ra-ta} & \text{sa} \\
\text{\textbullet} & = \text{ha} \text{ ra-ta} & \text{hra} \\
\end{array}
\]
** can be subscribed to 6 letters in the form ।

It changes the pronunciation of 5 consonants to "LA"
but changes the pronunciation of झ to "DA"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>झ</th>
<th>झ</th>
<th>झ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LA</td>
<td>LA</td>
<td>LA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>झ</td>
<td>झ</td>
<td>झ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DA</td>
<td>LA</td>
<td>LA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** can be subscribed to 16 letters in the form झ (called Wa-zur).
It does not change the pronunciation of any consonant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>क</th>
<th>क</th>
<th>ग</th>
<th>च</th>
<th>न</th>
<th>य</th>
<th>त</th>
<th>द</th>
<th>ट</th>
<th>झ</th>
<th>छ</th>
<th>ज</th>
<th>न</th>
<th>त</th>
<th>द</th>
<th>श</th>
<th>स</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KA</td>
<td>K'A</td>
<td>GA</td>
<td>CHA</td>
<td>NYA</td>
<td>TA</td>
<td>DA</td>
<td>TSA</td>
<td>TS'A</td>
<td>ZHA</td>
<td>ZA</td>
<td>RA</td>
<td>LA</td>
<td>SHA</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** SPELLING EXAMPLES:** झ = KA WA-ZUR  \( \tilde{\text{KA}} \)  झ = ZHA WA-ZUR  \( \tilde{\text{ZHA}} \)

**SUPERSCRIBED:** The three letters that can be superscribed (or written above) are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>झ</th>
<th>झ</th>
<th>झ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>झ</td>
<td>झ</td>
<td>झ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>झ</td>
<td>झ</td>
<td>झ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RA-GO</td>
<td>LA-GO</td>
<td>SA-GO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These Superscripts do not change the sound of the Root consonant, except for झ which is pronounced "LHA."

** can be superscribed to 12 letters:

| क | ग | न | ज | य | त | द | ट | झ | छ | ज | न | त | द | श | स |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| KA | GA | NGA | JA | NYA | TA | DA | NA | BA | MA | TSA | DZA |

** can be superscribed to 10 letters:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>क</th>
<th>ग</th>
<th>न</th>
<th>च</th>
<th>भ</th>
<th>ज</th>
<th>न</th>
<th>त</th>
<th>द</th>
<th>ख</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KA</td>
<td>GA</td>
<td>NGA</td>
<td>CHA</td>
<td>JA</td>
<td>TA</td>
<td>DA</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>LHA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** can be superscribed to 11 letters:

| क | ग | न | ज | य | त | द | ट | झ | छ | ज | न | त | द | श | स |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| KA | GA | NGA | NYA | TA | DA | NA | PA | BA | MA | TSA | DZA | DZA |

** can be superscribed to 13 letters:

| क | ग | न | ज | य | त | द | ट | झ | छ | ज | न | त | द | श | स |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| KA | GA | NGA | NYA | TA | DA | NA | PA | BA | MA | TSA | DZA | DZA | DZA |
UNDERSTANDING SYLLABLES

**EXAMPLE:** bsgrubs

**SPELLING:**
- BA - "O"
- SA GA-TA GA
- RA-TA DRA
- Shabkyu DRU
- BA SA DRUP

**DEFINITION:**
Past tense of verb བསྒྲུབས་ sgrub-pa : To accomplish, complete, or attain.

---

**FINDING THE ROOT LETTER OF A SYLLABLE**

The Root letter (་) determines the initial spoken sound of a syllable, and is the letter under which a word is found in the dictionary.

1. **If there is a Composite letter** (i.e., one containing a superscript, a subscript, or both) in the syllable, then the Root letter is found within that Composite.

   **EXAMPLES:** དབ་ = RA GA-TA GA YA-TA GYA Shabkyu GYU DA GYU [Tantra] - མ is the Root.
   བྱིན་ = SA KA-TA KA YA-TA KYA BA SA KYAB [refuge] - བ is the Root.

2. **If there is a Vowel sign,** it is almost always found on the Root letter of the syllable.

   **EXAMPLES:** བུ་ = YA Shabkyu YU MA YUM [mother] - བ is the Root.
   སྤྱོན་ = GA - "O" SA Drang BU SE RA SER [gold] - ས is the Root.

3. **If there is neither a Composite letter nor a Vowel sign:**
   - **a) In a two-letter syllable,** the Root is the first letter.
     **EXAMPLE:** དབ་ = CHA NA CHEN [possessing, having] - ད is the Root.
   - **b) In a three-letter syllable, without a Second Suffix,** the Root is the second letter.
     **EXAMPLE:** དབྱིན་ = GA - "O" YA GA YAK [yak, a Himalayan ox] - བ is the Root.
   - **c) In a three-letter syllable, with a Second Suffix,** the Root is the first letter.
     **EXAMPLE:** བྱིན་ = SA NGA SA SANG [purified] - The first བ is the Root.

4. **In a four-letter syllable,** the Root letter is always the second letter.

   **EXAMPLE:** བྱིན་པ་ = A - "O" P'A GA SA P'AK PA: PAK-Pa [noble; noble one]

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The five letters that can be Prefixes are:

The five letters that can be Prefixes are:

Prefixes appear before the root, they are silent, and do not affect the pronunciation of the root.

SPELLING: Say the prefix and the sound “O” to indicate that it is a prefix, then spell the rest of the word as usual.

EXAMPLE: ཤ་ = A - "O" DA Gigu DI [this]

Exceptions:

1. When Prefix ས་ appears before ས་

   a) and ས་ has no Subscript, Superscript, or Vowel sign

      then ས་ is pronounced "WA"

      EXAMPLE: ས་ ཐར་ = DA - "O" WA NGA WANG [power]

   b) and ས་ has the Subscript ༦་ and/or a Vowel sign

      then ས་ is silent and the Subscript or Vowel is pronounced.

      EXAMPLES: ས་ ཐེ་ = DA - "O" BA Shabkyu U [head - hon.]

                    ས་ ཐེ་ ཐར་ = DA - "O" BA YA-TA YA Drengbu YAY WA:

                    YAY-WA [part, division; classification; distinction]

2. Prefix ས་ nasalization:

   In a two-syllable word, if the first syllable ends in a vowel sound, and the second syllable has ས་ as a Prefix, this causes a nasalization (or "N" sound) between the two syllables.

   EXAMPLE: ས་ ཐེ་ ཐར་ = DA Shabkyu Dü DA Dü.

   A - "O" QA RA-TA DRA Naro DRO:

   DÜN-DRO [animal]
THE TEN SUFFIXES

The ten letters that can be Suffixes are:

\[ \text{ṣ, ṭ, ḍ, ṇ, ḍ, Ṣ, ṭ, ṭh, ṭh} \]

- ṣ as a Suffix is sometimes silent and is sometimes pronounced with a slight “K” sound.
  EXAMPLE: ṣā = DA GA DAK (or DA) [pure]

- ṭ as a Suffix is pronounced like the final “NG” in the English word “sing.”
  EXAMPLE: ṭā = RA NGA RANG (pronounced like the English word “wrong”) [self; own]

- ṭh as a Suffix is silent, but it sometimes modifies the Vowel sound of the syllable.
  SEE CHART ON THE REVERSE OF THIS PAGE.

- ṭh as a Suffix is pronounced like the final “N” in the English word “pen,” but it also modifies the Vowel sound of the syllable. SEE CHART ON THE REVERSE OF THIS PAGE.

- ṝ as a Suffix is pronounced like “B” or sometimes like “P.”
  EXAMPLE: ṝā = YA BA YAB (or YAP) [father, hon.]

- ṝh as a Suffix is pronounced like the final “M” in the English word “him.”
  EXAMPLE: ṝāh = YA Shabkyu YU MA YUM (rhymes with the English word “room”) [mother, hon.]

- ṙ as a Suffix is silent, except when it takes a vowel sign. (See Appendix II)
  EXAMPLE: ṙā = MA - “O” K’A A K’AA (pronounced “kha”) [sky]

- ṟ as a Suffix is pronounced like the final “R” in the English word “car.”
  EXAMPLE: ṟṭh = DA RA DAK [silk]

- ṟh as a Suffix is pronounced like the final “L” in the English word “sell,” but it also modifies the Vowel sound of the syllable. SEE CHART ON THE REVERSE OF THIS PAGE.

- ṛh as a Suffix is silent, but it sometimes modifies the Vowel sound of the syllable.
  SEE CHART ON THE REVERSE OF THIS PAGE.
**CHART I - Suffixes ༠ and ༦**

༠ and ༦ are pronounced when used as Suffixes, but they also modify the Vowel sound of the syllable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pronounced Suffix</th>
<th>Inherent becomes “E” as in EDGE</th>
<th>༠ becomes “I” as in KIN</th>
<th>༦ becomes “0” as in LIEU</th>
<th>༠ becomes “E” as in EDGE</th>
<th>༦ becomes “OO” (O) as in BOOK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>༠</td>
<td>བོ་་ MENT</td>
<td>བོ་་ YIN</td>
<td>བོ་་ KUN</td>
<td>བོ་་ CHEN-PO</td>
<td>བོ་་ KYON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>༦</td>
<td>ས་ལོ་ PEL</td>
<td>ས་ལོ་ KYIL</td>
<td>ས་ལོ་ DUL</td>
<td>ས་ལོ་ DREL-WA</td>
<td>ས་ལོ་ DRÖL-WA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CHART II - Suffixes ༠ and ༦**

༠ and ༦ are silent when used as Suffixes, but they sometimes modify the Vowel sound of the syllable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Silent Suffix</th>
<th>Inherent becomes “AY” as in BAY</th>
<th>NO CHANGE</th>
<th>༠ becomes “0” as in LIEU</th>
<th>NO CHANGE</th>
<th>༠ becomes “OO” (O) as in BOOK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>༠</td>
<td>ས་ལོ་ DAY-PA</td>
<td>SEE-PA</td>
<td>ས་ལོ་ GYU</td>
<td>Tantra</td>
<td>ས་ལོ་ RAY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>༦</td>
<td>ས་ལོ་ LAY</td>
<td>NYEE</td>
<td>ས་ལོ་ Dü</td>
<td>time</td>
<td>ས་ལོ་ JAY</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SECOND SUFFIXES**

The only letters that can be used as a Second Suffix are:

༦ and ༦

They are silent and do not affect pronunciation.

༦ (༦༦) is no longer in use, but was formerly used in old Tibetan literary texts after words ending in First Suffixes ༠ ༼༦༽ ༦ Even though it is no longer written, it is regarded as implicitly present, and as such sometimes affects the spelling of certain particles following words ending in Suffixes ༠ ༼༦༽

༦ as a Second Suffix is very common, occurring only after First Suffixes ༠ ༼༦༽ ༼༦༽ If ༼༦༽ is the last letter of a 3- or 4-letter syllable, and the preceding letter is ༼༦༽ ༼༦༽ ༼༦༽ then that ༼༦༽ is a Second Suffix. EXAMPLES: ས་ལོ་༦༦༦ = CHA GA SA CH’AK, PA:

CH’AK-PA [attachment]

༦༦ = SA NGA SA SANG [purified]

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TIBETAN LANGUAGE BASIC PRACTICE DRILL

The order of the word elements as they occur in the Tibetan Dictionary is:
ROO T, SUFFIX, VOWEL, SUBSCRIPT, PREFIX, SUPERSCRIPT

The ROOTS: Any one of the 30 consonants can be a Root.

The 10 SUFFIXES are:

The 4 VOWELS are:

The 4 SUBSCRIPTS are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The 7 Ya-ta</th>
<th>The 14 Ra-ta</th>
<th>The 6 La-ta</th>
<th>The 16 Wa-zur</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>उ उ उ</td>
<td>उ उ उ</td>
<td>उ उ उ</td>
<td>उ उ उ</td>
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<td>उ उ उ</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The 5 PREFIXES are: न न न न न

The 3 SUPERSCRIPTS are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The 12 Ra-go</th>
<th>The 10 La-go</th>
<th>The 11 Sa-go</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>उ उ उ</td>
<td>उ उ उ</td>
<td>उ उ उ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>उ उ उ</td>
<td>उ उ उ</td>
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<td>उ उ उ</td>
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<tr>
<td>उ उ उ</td>
<td>उ उ उ</td>
<td>उ उ उ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Prefix Drill:** 墀  before 墀

- གཤི [head]
- གཤི [center]
- གཤི [classification]
- གཤི [space]
- གཤི [summer]
- གཤི [melody]

**Suffix Drill:**

- ཞི [medicine]
- ཞི [is, are]
- ཞི [all]
- ཞི [great]
- ཞི [fault]
- ཞི [glory]
- ཞི [middle]
- ཞི [subdue]
- ཞི [connection]
- ཞི [to liberate]
- ཞི [faith]
- ཞི [existence]
- ཞི [Tantra]
- ཞི [is, are]
- ཞི [Tibet]
- ཞི [karma]
- ཞི [two]
- ཞི [time]
- ཞི [after]
- ཞི [Dharma]

**Second Suffix Drill:**

- Second Suffix ཞི occurs after First Suffix ཞི ས་ བོ
- Second Suffix ཞི occurs after First Suffix ས་ ས་ བོ

**Vowel Signs with Suffix ས་ Drill:**

- ས་ [Lama's]
- ས་ [of this]
- ས་ [whose]
- ས་ [the lord's]
- ས་ [king's]