



The
EXCELLENT PATH TO ENLIGHTENMENT

❖ DILGO KHYENTSE RINPOCHE ❖

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**Oral teachings on the root text
of Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo**

by Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche

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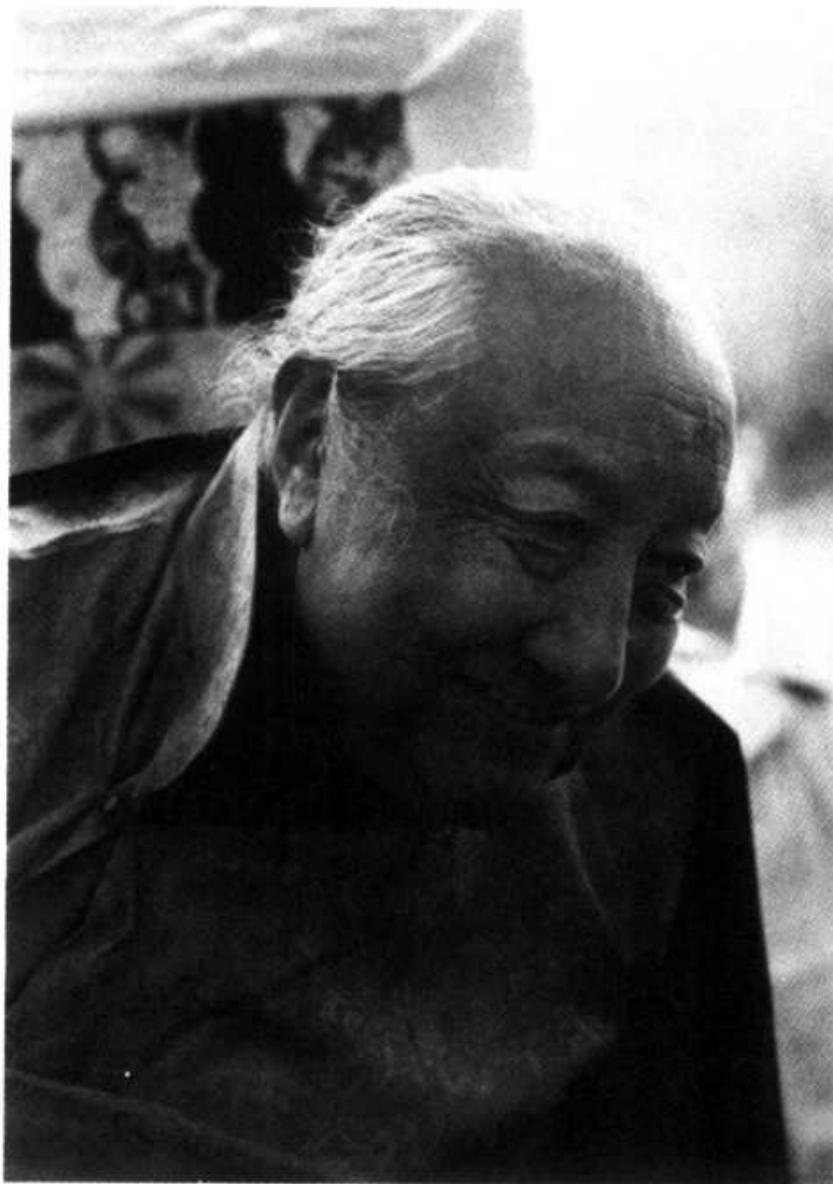
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THE GENERAL PRELIMINARIES



Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche

Introduction

in response to the needs and aspirations of beings of different capacity, the Buddha gave a great variety of teachings, which can be divided into two principal categories: the Lesser and Great Vehicles. The second of these includes the first, and the two are not in any way contradictory; they both lead to liberation and ultimate enlightenment.

The teachings of the Great Vehicle, limitless as they are, have been condensed by spiritual masters into instructions that are at once profound and easy to practice. The essential point of these teachings is to put an end to the hatred, attachment and ignorance that bind us to suffering, and to dedicate all our acts to the ultimate happiness of beings.

The vow to perfect oneself in order to perfect others is called the thought of enlightenment, or bodhichitta. This implies that every single action, word or thought, even the most trivial, is dedicated to the good of all beings. When a genuine altruistic wish arises in you, the thought of enlightenment will be born effortlessly, and when this becomes stable, you will have in your possession the root of all vehicles. Whatever practice you embark on-whether Madhyamika, Mahamudra or the Great Perfection-it will ripen naturally and bear fruit.

Immerse yourself in the meaning of the teachings, day after day, month after month, and the spiritual qualities of a Bodhisattva will develop without difficulty, like honey collecting in the hive as the bees go from flower to flower, gathering nectar.

Before giving or listening to a teaching, master and disciples need to engender the thought of enlightenment and to pray that they may receive the blessings of all the past, present and future Buddhas and of all the spiritual masters of India and Tibet.

It is our motivation that directs our acts, just as an irrigation channel makes water flow where it is wanted. If our acts are constantly inspired by the desire to relieve others of their suffering, in the end this desire will be fulfilled. But if we ignore this great ideal, and instead limit ourselves to achieving a long, comfortable and prosperous life, we may well get it-but certainly nothing more. It is essential not to devote our lives to vain or unimportant goals.

When we take our first steps on the Path, we are not yet capable of helping others. To accomplish the good of others, we must first perfect ourselves, by purifying and transforming our minds. This is the aim of what we call the preliminary practices, which establish the foundations of all spiritual progress. You may feel like dispensing with these foundations in order to practice teachings that you think are more profound, but if you do so, you are building a palace on the surface of a frozen lake.

Here is an explanation of these preliminary practices. There are two parts: (1) the outer or general preliminary practices; and (2) the inner or particular (extraordinary) preliminary practices.

The General Preliminaries

The main source of progress on the path is devotion, so begin each session by visualizing in the sky before you, or above your head, your root teacher in the form of Guru Padmasambhava, resplendent with wisdom and smiling compassionately, seated in the midst of a mass of rainbow light. Then with fervent devotion say three times, "Lama kyeno!"-"Guru, you know everything! I am in your hands!"-and ask him to bless you so that you achieve complete realization of the profound path in this very life. Rays of light emanate from the Guru, removing the veil of ignorance and filling you with blessings.

Then reflect on the six topics which make up the outer or general part of these preliminaries. First, reflect upon the rarity of human existence; this will turn your mind towards the Dharma. Second, contemplate death and impermanence; this will make you realize how urgent it is to practice the Dharma, and will spur your endeavor. Next, reflect on the third topic, the law of karma, of cause and effect, actions and their results, so that you understand clearly how this law works. After that, reflection on the fourth topic will help you recognize that the deluded condition of samsara is never without suffering. With the fifth, you should recognize that through receiving and practicing the teachings you can free yourself from samsara and ultimately reach the unsurpassable level of omniscience, or enlightenment. Finally, you should recognize that in order to achieve that level you have to rely on the blessings and instructions of a spiritual teacher.



King Trisong Detsen (790-844), Ngagyur Nyingma lineage

(1) The rarity and preciousness of a human birth

Ask yourself how many of the billions of inhabitants of this planet realize how rare it is to have been born a human being. How many of those who realize this think of using this chance to practice the Dharma? How many of these actually start to practice? How many of those who start continue to practice? How many of those who continue attain ultimate realization? The number of those who attain ultimate realization is like the number of stars you can see at daybreak compared to the number you can see on a clear night.

There are various kinds of human existence. Some are wasted in ordinary pursuits and some are used to progress towards enlightenment. Human birth can only be called precious when one is free to practice the Dharma and has met all the favorable conditions for doing so. So to have the opportunity to practice the Dharma we need to be free from the eight unfavorable conditions. These are: to be born in the hells, the realm of the pretas or hungry ghosts, the animal kingdom, among barbarians, among the long-lived gods or among those with erroneous views, or in a dark age where the Buddha

has not appeared, or as someone who is mentally deficient and incapable of understanding the Dharma. But simply to be free from these is not enough. We also need ten favorable conditions, five that depend upon ourselves and five that depend on others.

The five intrinsic conditions arising from our own situation are: to be born a human being, to be in a place where we can find the Dharma, to have all our faculties, not to live and act in a completely negative way, and to have faith in those worthy of faith.

We need to be born a human being, as this is the only state of existence in which there is enough suffering to give us an acute desire to be free from samsara, yet not so much suffering that we no longer have the opportunity to free ourselves through the practice of Dharma.

We need to be born in what is called a "central land," meaning a place where the Buddha's teachings exist. Otherwise we have no chance of encountering these teachings and progressing along the path.

We need all our faculties so that we can study, reflect on and practice the Dharma. If we were blind, for instance, we would not be able to read the teachings; if we were deaf, we would not be able to hear them.

We need to lead our lives in a positive way. If our lives are dominated by negative actions-if, for example, we are hunters or thieves, or spend our lives fighting wars-that naturally leads in the opposite direction from the positive conditions needed for Dharma.

We need to have faith and confidence in those who can guide us along the path to enlightenment, namely the Three Jewels and a spiritual teacher.

The five external conditions that depend upon others are: a Buddha must have appeared in the kalpa or aeon in which we are living; the Buddha must have taught the Dharma; the teachings must still be present; they must be practiced; and we must have a spiritual teacher to guide us.

All this constitutes a human birth endowed with all the freedoms and favorable conditions for practicing the Dharma. That is what we call a precious human birth. Why is it precious? Because, by using this human birth, enlightenment can be achieved in this very lifetime. All the great accomplished beings of the past were born ordinary beings, but, by entering the door of the Dharma, following a realized teacher and devoting their whole lives to practicing the instructions they received, they were able to display the enlightened activities of great Bodhisattvas.

If we examine the six realms of samsara one by one, we can see that, except in the human realm, the obstacles to Dharma practice are too strong. In the inferior realms such as the hells, suffering is so intense that it is impossible for the mind to contemplate and practice the teachings. In the celestial realms, where beings can fly through the sky, feed on ambrosia and enjoy all sorts of pleasures, the conditions might seem more favorable. But because the beings there are so enticed and distracted by these things, and their suffering is so minimal, they never get tired of samsara and therefore never think of practicing the Dharma. So if we do not use the precious opportunity of a human existence, we cannot but go downwards, like a stone rolling down a hill.

(2) Death and impermanence

To have obtained this human birth is not enough: at any moment death may take it away from us. How and when we shall die are completely uncertain. No one can say, "I will live this many or that many years and months." Any of the daily events in our lives, like walking, eating, playing, crossing a river and so forth, could turn out to be the cause of our death.

Impermanence affects not only living beings but the outer universe as well. The world seems very solid to us, but at the end of the kalpa it will be destroyed by fire and water. Throughout the seasons of the year, we can see how the mountains, forests, and the various features of the landscape change from day to day, from month to month. Every hour of every day the weather, the light, the river flowing before our eyes are never the same-as each instant passes everything changes. Nations are powerful for a period of their history and later are conquered by other nations. Within a single lifetime, people who are immensely rich can end up utterly destitute. So no aspect of the outer phenomenal world is permanent or certain.

Why do we need to reflect again and again on impermanence? We have a strong tendency to think that we and all the conditions in which we live will last, to think that there is some inherent permanence in them. Because of this, we cling strongly to outer phenomena. This is a mistake. If, instead, we constantly reflect on impermanence, we will have a powerful incentive for turning to the Dharma. We need to be constantly aware that from the very moment we are born, we come closer and closer to death. There is no way to avoid death. With every day that passes, our lives are running out. When the time comes for us to die, even if we are very powerful, we cannot possibly persuade death to wait. However rich we are, we cannot bribe it. The mightiest of generals cannot send an army against it. Even if we are very beautiful, we cannot seduce it. Whatever we do, death cannot be stopped.

At the moment of death, nothing but the Dharma will be of any use. Of all the fears we experience in this life there is none greater than the fear of death. So to be ready for death, we should not wait until the last moment to practice the Dharma. If we want to practice the Dharma now, we can; but at the time of death, we will not be able to. We will be overwhelmed by physical pain and mental anguish. That is not the time to start thinking of practice. So, like an intelligent person who plans ahead, get ready right now to face death with the firmness that comes from mature practice. Do not waste a single moment, like a warrior who, pierced to the heart by an arrow, knows that he has only a few minutes to live. It is now, while we are in good health and in possession of all our physical and mental faculties, that we should practice the Dharma. We must not postpone it, thinking, "I will practice later." We should realize that death is a very frightening event for those who are not prepared for it. We must not think, "I have so many years ahead of me..." The food we have just eaten could turn out to be poisonous and make us die tonight. Examples of the causes of unexpected death are many. We can see them all around us.

Impermanence can be found in all aspects of life. People who have attained high status can suddenly find themselves in humble positions. Many of those who have amassed a lot of money will later lose it. No one remains wealthy forever. Those who have formed strong attachments to family and friends will be separated from them sooner or later, if not now then certainly at the time of death. Once we are aware of the constant threat of death, we will not want to continue the meaningless activities in which we have been so heedlessly engaged, day after day.

(3) Karma, the law of cause and effect

If death were simply like a fire going out or like water drying up, everything would be fine. There would then be little use in practicing the Dharma. But this is not what happens. When the mind and the body separate, the body is left behind, but the mind goes on to take many more rebirths. At that point, only one thing determines where our next life will be, that is, the balance of positive and negative actions committed in the past that are embedded in our consciousness. If negative actions predominate, we will experience the suffering of rebirth in the lower realms. If positive ones predominate, we will experience rebirth in the higher states of existence.

It is not on our deathbed or in the bardo' that we should start to think about positive and negative actions. We may very well recognize at that time that negative actions are the cause of our suffering, and that we would be happier if we had done positive deeds. But when we are dying there is nothing

much we can do-our karma has already built up. It is now, when we have the freedom to choose between what we should do and what we should not, that we must consider the law of karma. It is a serious mistake to think that we can do whatever we want, good or bad, and that by practicing a little Dharma on the side we will be taken to enlightenment as though by airplane.

In the bardo, even if we regret all our negative actions, it is too late: karma has been accumulated and nothing can stop us falling, like a stone thrown into the air. We cannot reverse the process. So it is now that we must be able to recognize and discern positive and negative actions. Even if a positive action seems insignificant, we should do it. Even if a negative action seems trivial, we should avoid it. Water dripping for a long time can fill a huge basin; a single spark can set fire to a mountain of grass. Likewise, every action has its result. Never think that a minor action leaves no trace.

On the other hand, we should not think that the negative actions we have done need mark us forever. However heavy our negative actions may be, they can be purified. There is nothing that cannot be purified. So we must regret and repair all our negative actions. As we have said, since small drops of water can fill a huge vessel, we must constantly endeavor in daily life to use our body, speech and mind for positive actions. This will build up an accumulation of merit and virtue that will help us when we are faced with the fear of death.

The magnitude of positive and negative actions does not depend upon how they appear from outside. It is easy to accumulate great positive karma or great negative karma with a small action. It all depends upon our intention or attitude. For example, to help someone in a small way, but with great loving-kindness, will accumulate a lot of positive karma. Likewise, a single word, easily uttered, may accumulate boundless negative karma if, for instance, it is used to criticize a Bodhisattva.

The general condition of beings in samsara is one of delusion, a state that always produces suffering. So if we ignore our negative actions, and do nothing to purify, confess and repair them, we shall gradually accumulate negative karma. We shall not be able to receive the blessings of the Buddhas and spiritual teachers, neither shall we be able to develop spiritual experience and realization. We need, therefore, to be constantly aware and mindful of the difference between virtuous and non-virtuous actions, to cultivate the former and avoid the latter.

When you wake up in the morning, think: "Not only have I the good fortune to have been born a human being, but I have entered the door of the Dharma, I have met a spiritual teacher and received his instructions. So today I shall do my best to follow the Dharma and practice only what is positive. This I shall do not only for my own sake, but for the benefit of all living beings, without a single exception."

When it is time to rest in the evening, examine everything that you have thought, said and done during the day. If you have done something positive for yourself or others, you should rejoice, dedicate the merit to all sentient beings and pray that by this merit they may all attain enlightenment. Make a wish that the next day you may cultivate even more virtuous actions. If you realize that you have lapsed into negative action, think: "I have this precious human birth, I have met a teacher, and yet this is how I behave!" You must feel strong regret and determine not to make such mistakes again.

To acquire mindfulness, we need to constantly examine our intentions and actions. It does not even occur to ordinary beings who are going round and round in samsara that their negative actions are negative, that they will have harmful consequences. Even if they do realize this briefly, they do not keep it in mind, and hardly any of them put into action the means for counteracting these negative actions. This is the very reason why they stay in samsara. So we have to make an effort to be acutely mindful of our intentions and actions. We need first to remember clearly which actions should be avoided and which should be carried out, and, second, to observe whether or not we are acting in accordance with what we know to be right or wrong.

In order to develop steadfast and diligent mindfulness, we have to realize that our present condition, our suffering in samsara, is nothing but the result of our negative actions. If we do not stop these negative actions, and just carry on as before, we will continue to experience suffering. By cultivating positive actions, words and thoughts, we are earning our own happiness. Once we know this, we will naturally be alert and diligent in watching our minds.

(4) Suffering

What is the reason for cultivating virtue and avoiding nonvirtue? In the ordinary samsaric condition there is nothing but suffering. This is evident if we look at the various realms of samsara. The three lower realms are all conditions of the utmost misery. In the hell realms, as a result of anger and hatred, beings suffer unbearably from heat or cold. As a result of greed and miserliness, tortured spirits do not even hear of food or water for many years. Animals experience the fruit of stupidity, the lack of discernment between virtue and nonvirtue: they are blind to the path of liberation and have no way of recognizing what will bring them happiness or suffering; domestic animals are used as slaves and slaughtered for their meat and skin.

Then there are the realms of the human beings, demigods and gods. These are called the three higher realms because the suffering there is less oppressive. Human beings have eight different types of suffering. They suffer from birth, sickness, old age and death. They suffer when they meet enemies, part from friends, encounter circumstances they do not want and are deprived of the circumstances they like.

Demi-gods are constantly tormented by jealousy and animosity towards the gods, or celestial beings, because the wish-fulfilling tree is rooted in their realm but bears its fruit in the realm of the gods. When the demi-gods see the gods enjoying this fruit, and also the lakes of ambrosia and all the other perfect and pleasurable things they cannot have themselves, they burn with unbearable jealousy. They try to attack and fight the gods, but they are always defeated.

Even the celestial beings, who seem to have everything one could desire-magnificent palaces and gardens, forests filled with flowers and birds, beautiful companions, delicious food and so forth-are far from being beyond suffering. Once they have enjoyed these, the fruits of minor positive actions, and their karma has been exhausted, they will be reborn again in the most sorrowful states of samsara.

(5) The unsurpassable qualities of liberation

If you think about all the different states you can experience in samsara, and realize that nothing is beyond suffering, strong feelings of weariness and sadness will arise in you. You will wonder, "How can I ever free myself from this suffering?" This is called the feeling of renunciation, the desire to get out of samsara. It is the basis and starting point of Dharma practice. When someone is thrown into prison by a tyrant, night and day he will think, "How miserable I am! How can I get out of here? Who can help me?" These will be his only thoughts. In the same way, once you recognize that there is no satisfaction in samsara, but only suffering, you will think, "How can I get free? Who can help me? What are the means to obtain liberation?" When you reflect on this very deeply, it will become clear that you need the help of a spiritual teacher, that you must avoid the kind of actions that lead to suffering, and that you must cultivate those that bring happiness. This is the way to tread the path of the Dharma.



Dromtonpa (1004-1064), Kadam lineage

Crossing the threshold of the Dharma does not mean outwardly adopting different manners and appearance. It means becoming aware of the shortcomings and endless misery of samsara and of the unchanging qualities of liberation.

Otherwise, if you fail to recognize the suffering inherent in samsara, and lack the incentive to get out of it, however interesting you may find the teachings, you will be more concerned with how to become richer, how to increase your status, how to become more powerful, and so on. With this sort of motivation, any seemingly good actions you may do will have little effect in freeing you and other beings from samsara.

You must realize that, just like yourself, all living beings are subject to suffering. Have the courage to think, "I have to be able to free all sentient beings by myself. In order to do this, the first step is to free myself, to achieve perfection and attain enlightenment." This must be the root motivation for practicing the Dharma. With such an attitude, you will gradually deepen your spiritual experience, achieve realization and thus become truly able to help other beings.

(6) The need to follow a spiritual master

Parents, friends and ordinary teachers cannot help you achieve liberation, for they are not free from samsara themselves. To attain enlightenment you must have the guidance of an authentic spiritual master. Without a spiritual master you will get nowhere, like a passenger in an airplane without a pilot. So do not overestimate your capacities. Having sought and found a qualified master endowed with wisdom, compassion and ability, follow him with confidence, receive his instructions and practice them with diligence.

The contemplation of these six topics, and the practices that follow, are commonly known as ngondro or "preliminary practices," but "preliminary" does not imply that these practices are of lesser importance. A solid foundation is essential if the house is to be sound. The same is true of Dharma practice.

Although we do a hundred thousand prostrations and the same number of recitations of each of the five ngondro sections, practicing the ngondro is not simply a question of counting up numbers. The real point of these preliminaries is to appreciate that this human life offers a rare opportunity for one to achieve liberation, to realize the urgency of doing so, to generate a strong conviction that the ordinary samsaric condition produces only suffering, and to realize that suffering comes about through karma, and is the effect of negative actions. When we have a genuine understanding of these four points, the main point of ngondro has been realized. You should not merely think about them, but experience them in your very being. The correct practice of the preliminaries is to make this experience part of yourself.

Do not think that the ngondro is a sort of simple beginner's practice, or that it is not as profound as Mahamudra, the Great Seal, or Ati Yoga, the Great Perfection. In fact, the preliminary practice comes at the beginning precisely because it is of such crucial importance and is the very basis of all other practices. If we were to go straight to the so-called main practice without the preparation of the ngondro, it would not help us at all. Our minds would be unprepared and untamed. It would be like building a beautiful house on the surface of a frozen lake-it simply would not last.

The purpose of generating a strong feeling of renunciation or disgust towards samsara is to lead one gradually to the state of Buddhahood. Dharma practice is a little difficult in the beginning, but as one progresses it becomes easier and easier. Worldly activities, on the other hand, are very easy and enjoyable to start with, but in the long run they bring more and more suffering.

In all the stages of the practice, we must always remember clearly that we are practicing for the sake of all sentient beings. "All" sentient beings is not a definite number, for the number of sentient beings is boundless and infinite, like space. If we dedicate every one of our actions to the welfare of all beings, the benefit of these actions will remain and grow until we achieve enlightenment. In fact, the aspiration to practice for the sake of all others is the very root of attaining enlightenment.

The preliminary practice includes the recitation of verses in the text. Here, for this first part, recite the following:

Lama kyeno! Now that I possess these freedoms and endowments, so difficult to obtain, and of such importance, May I arouse my mind by remembering the impermanence of the universe and beings. To free myself truly from the ocean of suffering of the three worlds,' Without confusing what is to be adopted and what is to be abandoned, may I persevere in the path.

In some other ngondro practices, the Longchen Nyingthig Ngondro for instance, the text one recites is far more detailed than this. But however long or short it is, to recite the text without being aware of its meaning and purpose is completely useless. What must change is the way we perceive the outer world. We must become truly convinced that in the ordinary state of samsara there is nothing but

suffering. We must constantly keep in mind impermanence, the relentless passage of time, and the imminence of death. We need to be careful of our actions and should never dismiss the law of karma, or cause and effect, as unimportant. We must recognize the need to achieve liberation, and the need to rely upon a spiritual teacher to do so. Then the meaning of the teachings will truly become a part of ourselves. This is very important.

THE EXTRAORDINARY PRELIMINARIES



Guru Padmasambhava and the Refuge Tree

Taking Refuge

The inner part of the ngondro, or preliminary practice, starts with the teachings on refuge, the gateway to the path.

In whom do we take refuge? In the Three jewels, known to Tibetans as the "Three Rare and Supreme Ones." They are the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. It is important to recognize the value of the Three Jewels.

The first jewel is the Buddha. His qualities are displayed in the three kayas: the Dharmakaya or absolute body, the Sambhogakaya or body of perfect enjoyment, and the Nirmanakaya or manifested body. The Dharmakaya expresses itself as five wisdoms: the wisdom of the absolute expanse, the mirror-like wisdom, the wisdom of equality, the all-distinguishing wisdom, and the wisdom of allaccomplishing action. These five wisdoms appear as the Sambhogakaya Buddhas of the five families, who continually turn the Wheel of Dharma³ in the Buddhafields for their perfect retinue of Bodhisattvas. The Sambhogakaya Buddhas manifest in forms that can be perceived by ordinary beings, called the Nirmanakaya Buddhas. Buddha Shakyamuni is the preeminent example of a Nirmanakaya Buddha.

The second Jewel is the Dharma, the expression of the Buddha's wisdom for the sake of all sentient beings, enabling them to escape from the suffering and ignorance in which they are immersed.

The third Jewel is the Sangha, which includes all who practice the path shown by the Buddha.

The Three Jewels have an inner aspect, known as the Three Roots: the Guru (or Teacher), who is the root of blessing; the Yidam, who is the root of accomplishment; and the Dakini, who is the root of enlightened activity. Although their names are different, these three do not in any way differ from the Three Jewels. The Guru is the Buddha, the Yidam is the Dharma, and the Dakinis and Protectors are the Sangha. And on the innermost level, the Dharmakaya is the Buddha, the Sambhogakaya is the Dharma and the Nirmanakaya is the Sangha.

To take refuge, visualize an object of refuge in front of you. You should not perceive your environment as the ordinary or "impure" world, but as a pure Buddhafield in which all is perfect, with its golden ground, wish-fulfilling trees, lakes of nectar, and jewel mountains. All the sounds there, even the songs of birds and the rustling of leaves, are the sounds of mantras and praises to the Buddhas. Merely tasting the nectar-like water induces deep states of meditation.

In the center of this Buddhafield visualize an immeasurable wish-fulfilling tree in full bloom. It is made of precious substances: the trunk and branches of jewels, the leaves of gold, and the fruits and flowers of different gems. Between the branches hang garlands of coral, pearl, amber, turquoise and so forth, with tiny bells, their clear tones voicing the teachings of Dharma.

The tree has a central trunk and four main branches. Upon the central trunk is a throne made of various jewels and supported by eight fearless lions. On the throne is a multicolored lotus, and on the lotus, a sun disc and moon disc. Upon the moon disc, seated in a luminous expanse of rainbow light, smiling radiantly, full of wisdom and compassion, is your root teacher-the one for whom you have the strongest natural devotion-in the form of the precious Lotus-Born Guru, Guru Rinpoche.

In the sky above are all the teachers of the lineage of the three transmissions,' one above the other, beginning with the primordial Buddha Samantabhadra at the top, all the way down to Guru Rinpoche himself. On either side are all the great teachers of the Nyingma, Kagyu, Sakya, and Geluk lineages for whom you feel devotion.

Of the tree's four main branches, the front one bears Buddha Shakyamuni, surrounded by the one thousand and two Buddhas of this fortunate aeon, dressed in the three monastic robes, glorious and radiant with the thirty-two major and eighty minor marks of an enlightened Buddha: the protuberance on the crown of his head, the wheel markings on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet, and so forth.

On the right branch are the heart-sons of the Buddha, the eight great Bodhisattvas—Manjushri, Avalokiteshvara, Vajrapani and so on—and all the other Bodhisattvas of the Mahayana, the Great Vehicle. They are adorned with the five silken garments' and the eight jewelled ornaments' of the Sambhogakaya. They are standing, facing forward in readiness to benefit beings.

On the left branch is the noble community, the Sangha of the Lesser Vehicle, led by Shariputra and Maudgalyayana, Lord Buddha's two principal disciples, with the sixteen Arhats, the eight great Sthaviras and the whole Sangha of the Lesser Vehicle sitting in different meditation postures and holding begging bowls and mendicants' staffs.

On the rear branch are all the scriptures of the three vehicles,' stacked upon a jewelled shrine, their titles facing us. They spontaneously emanate the sounds of the Sanskrit vowels and consonants, as well as the teachings of the Transcendent Wisdom and all the Mahayana sutras. These scriptures symbolize both the Dharma of transmission, the written teachings themselves, and the Dharma of realization, the qualities of enlightenment.

All around in the sky, and in between the branches, are the Herukas of the six classes of Tantras, gathering like clouds, together with the Dakas, Dakinis and Protectors of the Dharma. The male Protectors, like Gonpo Maning, Lekden, the Four-Armed Mahakala, the Six-Armed Mahakala, the guardian of Samye (Dorje Lekpa), Rahula and others, face outwards to ward off obstacles to your practice; the female Protectors, such as Ekajati, Tseringma and the others, face inwards to prevent the blessings and accomplishments from being lost to the outside.

All these deities and spiritual teachers fill the whole of space, just like bees swarming from a hive that has just been broken open. You should visualize them very clearly, transparent and vivid, as though made of rainbow light, radiating wisdom, compassion and strength.

Consider that you are standing in front of the object of refuge, facing it, with your father in this life on your right and your mother on your left. Behind you and to the sides are all the beings in the six realms, while in front are all those whom you perceive as enemies. Imagine that all these beings follow your lead. With their bodies they show respect by prostrating together to the object of refuge, with their speech they recite the refuge prayer, and with their minds they generate complete confidence and faith in the object of refuge.

We should take refuge with the vast attitude of the Mahayana, taking refuge not only for this lifetime, but until we attain enlightenment—not only for our own sake, but in order to bring all sentient beings to enlightenment.

The verse one actually recites is:

Homage! Until the enlightenment of myself and all beings, I take refuge in the Three Roots.

Recite the refuge prayer a hundred thousand times while doing the same number of prostrations. (In practice, as explained in the instructions with the root text, one recites here the four-line verse which also includes the two lines for generating bodhichitta.)

At the end of each session, visualize rays of wisdom light emanating from the entire object of refuge, touching you and all sentient beings, purifying all your suffering and obscurations and bringing about

the birth of wisdom in your minds. Then, like a flock of birds startled by a stone thrown into their midst, you all fly up towards the refuge and dissolve into Guru Rinpoche. The lineage gurus, yidams, dakinis and protectors melt into light and dissolve into Guru Rinpoche, who becomes even more radiant, the dazzling embodiment of all the Buddhas, present in space. Finally, like a rainbow vanishing in the sky, Guru Rinpoche himself dissolves into luminous, empty space. Remain for a while in this state.

This expanse of void luminosity is nothing but the nature of your mind. Remaining in that state of utter simplicity will bring you to the realization that the void nature of mind is the Dharmakaya; that its expression, luminosity or wisdom, is the Sambhogakaya; and that its manifestation, all-pervading compassion, is the Nirmanakaya. You will realize that the object of refuge, the Three Jewels, is not something outside you, but naturally present within your mind. This is the ultimate refuge.

When we take refuge, just as for any other practice or action we may perform, we need to apply three supreme methods. First, as a preparation, we should have the intention to do the practice for the sake of all sentient beings; second, we must concentrate fully on the practice itself; lastly, we should dedicate the merit for the sake of all beings.

Here, as the preparation, we think that we are going to take refuge for the benefit of all sentient beings. As the main part, we take refuge with full concentration, having total confidence in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and in the Guru, the Yidam deity and the Dakinis. "Confidence" means that even if we suffer from heat or cold, or are struck by illness, unhappiness or other suffering, we will always rely only on the Three Jewels and the Three Roots. We will not renounce them under any circumstances, even if we risk losing our lives. At that point our taking refuge has become genuine.

Once you have taken refuge in the fully enlightened Buddha, do not seek refuge in celestial beings, gods of wealth or power, elemental forces, spirits, stars, mountains and the like, for none of these transcends samsara. As statues and paintings are the representations of the Buddha's form, treat such images (even a fragment from a broken statue) with respect, and keep them in a clean, elevated place.

Once you have taken refuge in the Dharma, you should give up all forms of violence towards other sentient beings, for the root of Dharma is the wish to benefit others. As the scriptures are the support of Dharma and can lead us to enlightenment, never step over books, and avoid even stepping on any kind of writing—even a single letter of the alphabet—for it can form part of a Buddha's name.' You should not treat written material in a casual way or put it anywhere dirty, but keep it somewhere high up. If you have to dispose of it, burn it in a clean place.

Once you have taken refuge in the Sangha, you should avoid associating with people whose views and way of life are completely contrary to the Dharma. Respect the Hinayana Sangha of monks and nuns and the Mahayana Sangha of Bodhisattvas, and have confidence in them.

In short, the essence of taking refuge is to have complete confidence in the Three Jewels, regardless of life's circumstances, good or bad. If conditions are pleasant or favorable, we should think that this is purely due to the kindness and blessings of the Three Jewels. Be grateful, and dedicate this happiness to all sentient beings, wishing that they too may enjoy such happiness. If we come across difficult circumstances, if we fall sick or lose everything we have, or are criticized or derided, we should bear in mind that the misdeeds we have committed during countless past lives would normally cause us to be born in the lower realms of samsara; yet, through the kindness of the teacher and the Three Jewels, and through the power of our confidence in them, the sickness and difficulties we are experiencing now are giving us a chance to purify this karmic potential for rebirth in the lower realms. We should also pray, "Through this suffering of mine, may I take on the suffering of all beings who are enduring similar difficulties. May this difficulty help me to progress on the path to enlightenment."

Maintain your reliance on the refuge in all your everyday activities. For instance, when you walk, think that the object of refuge is above your right shoulder and that you are walking around it respectfully. When you eat, think that you are offering the first part of the food to the Three Jewels and then eat the rest as if it had been given back as a blessed substance. When you wear new clothes, first offer them mentally to the Three Jewels. At night, think that the object of refuge is above your head, bright and vivid, and fall asleep with your mind filled with devotion.

If you have complete confidence, it is not difficult for the blessings of the Three Jewels to reach you. If you do not, you close yourself to these blessings. The rays of the sun shine on everyone in the world, but they can only set fire to dry grass when concentrated through a magnifying glass. Similarly, if you have the magnifying glass of faith and devotion, the Guru's blessings will blaze forth within you.

There are different levels of faith. First, clear faith refers to the joy and clarity and change in our perceptions that we experience when we hear about the qualities of the Three Jewels and the lives of the Buddha and the great teachers. Longing faith is experienced when we think about the latter and are filled with a great desire to know more about their qualities and to acquire these ourselves. Confident faith comes through practicing the Dharma, when we acquire complete confidence in the truth of the teachings and the enlightenment of the Buddha. Finally, when faith has become so much a part of ourselves that even if our lives were at risk we could never give it up, it has become irreversible faith.

Faith is the foundation underlying all Dharma practice. There is no practice, even Mahamudra or Dzogchen,⁹ which does not rely on faith in the Three Jewels. Refuge is the foundation and starting point. When its meaning is more deeply understood, it is also the ultimate goal, the realization of the Buddha within. Therefore, from now until you reach enlightenment, taking refuge should be an integral part of your practice.

Bodhichitta, the Thought of Enlightenment

Bodhichitta is the thought of achieving enlightenment for the sake of all beings. It is this great and all-embracing attitude that distinguishes the Great Vehicle or Mahayana (which is what we are practicing) from the Lesser Vehicle or Hinayana, and that gives it the name "great."

There are two levels of bodhichitta: absolute bodhichitta and relative bodhichitta. Relative bodhichitta also has two aspects or stages, which are bodhichitta as aspiration and bodhichitta as action.

Absolute bodhichitta is the realization that the ultimate nature of all phenomena is emptiness. But this is not easy to understand in the beginning. So in order to realize absolute bodhichitta one needs first to cultivate relative bodhichitta.

To take the Bodhisattva vow, to generate bodhichitta, one needs a witness, such as one's teacher or an image of the Buddha. In this particular practice, one takes the Bodhisattva vow in front of Guru Rinpoche, surrounded by the refuge assembly as described earlier. In the presence of the object of refuge, visualize yourself alone this time (because it is you who are making a promise, the promise to work for the sake of all beings), and recite:



Gampopa (1079-1153), Kagyu lineage

To obtain Buddhahood for the benefit of others, I generate bodhichitta, as aspiration, as action, and in its absolute meaning.

What is the essence of bodhichitta, and why do we need it? Sentient beings circle endlessly in the three realms of samsara because of three obscuring emotions: attachment or desire, aversion or hatred, and ignorance. Buddhanature, tathagatagarbha, is naturally present in every sentient being, but beings fail to recognize it and fall into delusion. This is ignorance, the very root of samsara.

The chief manifestation of this ignorance is the ego, the thought of "I." Once such a thought has occurred, one conceives of "my body, my mind, my name." But actually the thought of "I" assumes the existence of something that does not exist at all.

At present we have this aggregation of various elements which we call "the body." As long as the mind and the body remain together, the various sense-consciousnesses perceive outer phenomena. Thus we see forms, hear sounds, smell odors, taste flavors, and feel objects. Conceiving of an ego, we

cling to the concept of a self-existent individual. Perceiving the outer world, we cling to the concept of self-existent phenomena. While we are alive, the mind and body operate together. We also have a name. But when we start examining these three-body, mind, and name-we can easily see that these are mere labels devoid of any intrinsic reality.

Let us examine the body first. It is made up of different components: skin, blood, bones, flesh and organs. If we separate these components, putting the skin on one side, the bones on another, and so on with the blood and organs, we cannot then call the skin alone the body. We can not call the blood alone the body. None of these constituents alone can be referred to as the body itself. None of them can even be said to contain any kind of essential "body-ness." So the body is merely a label attached to an aggregation of disparate elements that remain together for a while. It is not something with a real existence of its own. There is no such entity as a body. Yet, because one believes it is "my body," one feels greatly attracted to what it finds pleasurable, and tries at all costs to avoid what it finds unpleasant.

One also clings to the notion of "my mind." But if one attempts to search for this mind, one cannot find it anywhere. It is not located in the brain, in the heart, in the skin or anywhere else in the body. It has no particular shape: it is not round, square, or oblong. It has no particular color. It is neither solid nor insubstantial. So again, "mind" is merely a name attached to endless thoughts which constantly follow one after the other, just as "rosary" is a name given to a hundred beads threaded together.

The same is true for the notion of "name." For instance, we say "person" to designate a human being. The word "person" is just a collection of letters: "p," "e," "r," "s" and so on. But if we separate the "p," the "e," the "r," the "s," the "o" and the "n," the idea of "person," or human being, completely disappears.

Once this system of false imputations has taken root, we go on to consider some beings and things to be our relatives and friends, who are kind to us and to whom we feel strongly attached. We cannot bear to be separated from them even for a few moments. We are ready to do any kind of action, positive or negative, to please or defend them. This is called attachment or desire.

There are other beings whom we somehow perceive as causing us harm, and we decide that they are our enemies. We are ready to harm them in return as much as we can. This is called aversion or hatred.

When the ignorance from which attachment and aversion arise pervades the whole mind, the cause is present for wandering endlessly in samsara. In fact, attachment and aversion are just a failure to recognize that "enemy" and "friend" are fleeting and highly unreliable concepts. We have been born countless times in samsara. In each of our births we have had parents, friends and enemies. There is no certainty at all about who might have been our parents, friends, or enemies in our past lives, or who will be so in our lives to come. Our greatest enemies in this life might be our children in the next. Our parents in this life might be our enemies in the next. We have been through innumerable lives, not just a few. Through our string of lives we have had so many different parents, not always the same ones in each lifetime. Indeed, there is not a single sentient being in this universe who has not been our father or mother at some time or another. It is senseless, therefore, to have strong aversion or attachment to any of them, to consider them as enemies or friends. We only do so because we are utterly deluded and lack the ability to see how we have been related to other beings in countless past lives.

When we see someone and think, "He is my enemy," that thought is simply a projection of the mind. If someone were to call us a thief, or perhaps even attack us with a stick, anger might suddenly well up in our minds; we might go red in the face and think, "I must fight back and hit him even harder than he hit me." So we pick up a bigger stick and rush at him. Our anger might be so violent as to lead us to such extremes. But if we look at the anger itself, it is just a thought. If we look at that thought

there is really nothing to it: it has no shape, color, location, or any other characteristic. It is empty. To recognize the empty nature of mind is absolute bodhichitta.

If we reflect carefully, we can see that there is not the slightest reason to be angry when someone hits us. It would be ridiculous to be angry with the stick itself-but it is even more ridiculous to be angry with the person who hits us. He is a victim of his own mental poisons, and deserves all our compassion for all the extra suffering he is building up for himself by acting in such a way. How could we be angry with a sick person whose mind is so disturbed?

We must rid our minds completely of exaggerated attachments and aversions. If we have hitherto considered certain people as our enemies, we should now wish to benefit them as much as we can. If we have been strongly attached to some people, we can continue to benefit them, but we need not be caught up in our attachment. We must make our feelings of love and compassion equal for all beings. There is no enemy to fight; there are no friends to hang on to. All beings deserve the same love and kindness from us as our parents in this present life. We should reflect on how grateful we ought to be to our parents. First of all, they gave us life. Then, from our earliest years they fed us, dressed us, educated us and loved us. We should extend this feeling of gratitude to all the infinity of sentient beings. The mutual love between parents and children is something very natural. Even a very fierce animal like a tigress has great love for her cubs. She is ready at any moment to give her life to save them. But this sort of love is very one-sided, limited to only a few beings. We should feel it for all living beings.

There is nowhere in samsara which is beyond suffering. All sentient beings, without exception, even the tiniest insect, want only to be happy. Yet all they do is perpetuate their own suffering. The reason for this is that they do not recognize negative actions as the cause of suffering and positive actions as the cause of happiness. Animals, out of a desire to be comfortable and contented, kill other animals for food. By doing this they create further suffering, both for themselves and for the other animals. A madman who sticks a knife into his body, or who runs around naked in winter, is basically someone who wants to be happy. But unwittingly he does all sorts of things that bring him suffering. In this way sentient beings cause their own suffering by failing to recognize that the only way to achieve happiness is to increase their positive actions and to give up all their negative ones. When we reflect on this, we will begin to feel an intense compassion for all beings caught in delusion.

To have compassion for all sentient beings, however, is still not enough. Compassion alone cannot help. We have to put it into practice and really help beings. Someone who has done well in life and takes care of his parents in their old age is respected by everyone; but if he neglects his parents, people will despise him. How much more despicable is it to fail to help all the infinite beings who have been our loving parents throughout our countless lives. We must be determined to do whatever will benefit them.

If we set out to benefit others, giving them food, clothes and ordinary affection will help to some extent, but the benefit is limited and only temporary. We have to find a way to bring them absolute and unchanging benefit. This is something that ordinary acts of kindness to family and friends cannot do. Only the Dharma can do that. The Dharma can help sentient beings to escape from the lower states of samsara, and ultimately to achieve enlightenment. Of course, in the beginning, in our present state, we do not have the same ability to help others as have the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, such as Manjushri and Avalokiteshvara. The very reason for practicing the Dharma is to achieve such ability. This is why we need to follow a spiritual master, to receive his teachings and put them into practice.

Anyone can attain Buddhahood, even an insect, if they make the effort and have enough confidence and devotion. We should begin, first of all, by being resolutely confident that we can attain enlightenment. We need also to have a vast, courageous mind, thinking that we will be able to bring all sentient beings to enlightenment as well. It is a very limited attitude to think simply, "May I be rid of my difficulties, be protected from fears and be happy and comfortable," and only care about

oneself. We should wish unlimited happiness for the unlimited number of beings. The only way to fulfill this wish is to practice the Dharma and attain enlightenment. If, from the very beginning, you dedicate your efforts to the welfare of all beings, your practice will be immune to negative influences such as anger and pride. Moreover, its benefit will endure from now until we reach enlightenment.

The practice we do may involve the body, speech and mind. Of these three, the most important is the mind. The benefits from practicing with the body, doing prostrations and circumambulations, and with the speech, reciting prayers and mantras, are, it is true, considerable, but unless the mind is directed fully towards the Dharma, these benefits will be limited.

Take the object of refuge as your witness, and firmly make this promise: "From now on, I will not have a single selfish thought. Even if I recite OM MANI PADME HUNG just once, I shall do it for the sake of all beings. If I have a single thought of devotion to my teacher, that too will be for the sake of all beings." This promise to work for the sake of all sentient beings is called "bodhichitta as aspiration." The positive actions one does to fulfill this aspiration constitute "bodhichitta as action."

Bodhichitta has boundless benefits and very few dangers. Why? Because if one is practicing solely for the sake of all beings, one's motivation is so pure that it becomes invulnerable to obstacles and aberrations. It is a profound practice and, at the same time, a simple one. In essence, bodhichitta is the aim to become enlightened in order to help others attain enlightenment.

When you undertake the actual practice of bodhichitta, again recite the four-line prayer combining refuge and bodhichitta a hundred thousand times (this time without doing prostrations), and concentrate mainly on the meaning of the Bodhisattva vow. At the end of each session, pray to the object of refuge in the sky before you: "May bodhichitta take birth in my being just as it is in Guru Rinpoche's wisdom mind." Then, all the lineage teachers and deities melt into light and dissolve, from the periphery towards the center, into Guru Rinpoche. Guru Rinpoche himself melts into light and dissolves into you. At that moment, think that Guru Rinpoche's fully manifested bodhichitta has become inseparably united with your own mind. Finally, conclude with this wish:

May precious bodhichitta take its birth In those in whom it has not taken birth. And where it has been born, let it not decline, But swell and increase ever more and more.

We should remember that the main obstacle which prevented us from generating bodhichitta before was the distinction we made between friends and enemies. When we realize that all beings have in the past been our loving parents, it is meaningless to regard any of them as enemies. It is equally meaningless to be attached to friends. Not only in past and future lives, but even within this lifetime, there have been people who were once very close to us but who later became our enemies. It does not make sense to cling rigidly to the concepts of friend and enemy. Once we completely give up attachment on the one hand and aversion on the other, we will regard all sentient beings with perfect equanimity, like a pair of scales that balances when the weight on each side is the same.

The four boundless qualities

To develop bodhichitta we need to cultivate four boundless qualities: loving-kindness, compassion, joy and equanimity. Of these four, the most fundamental is boundless equanimity, where no distinction is made between friend and enemy, and it is with this that we should begin our meditation. Boundless equanimity leads to the wisdom of equality, one of the five wisdoms of an enlightened Buddha.

To illustrate how a Bodhisattva puts the welfare of others before his or her own, we may recall one of Lord Buddha's previous lives in which he took rebirth as a turtle in the ocean. When five sailors were thrown into the sea from their wrecked ship, the turtle came to the surface and, using human words, said to them, "Get on my back, I will take you to dry land." With great difficulty the turtle carried the

five sailors to the shore of an island. They were saved. But the turtle was completely exhausted and needed to rest on the beach. It fell asleep. While it was sleeping, eighty thousand small insects came upon the turtle and started to eat its body. The turtle awoke in great pain, but it thought, "If I go into the water now, all these insects will be killed." So it decided to give its own flesh and blood for them. The eighty thousand insects and worms ate up the whole turtle. Just as it was about to die, it made the following wish (for it was a great Bodhisattva), "When I finally become a fully enlightened Buddha, may these five sailors and eighty thousand insects be the first to whom I teach the Dharma and thereby set on the path of enlightenment." Such was the power of this prayer that when Buddha Shakyamuni attained enlightenment, it was for the five excellent disciples, the five bhikshus who had previously been the five sailors, that he turned the Wheel of Dharma for the first time. And this first teaching, in the Deer Park at Sarnath near Varanasi, was also attended by eighty thousand celestial beings who had previously been the eighty thousand insects. This is an example of ultimate compassion, the ability to put the welfare of others before one's own.

Bodhisattvas never feel hatred towards those who cause them suffering; they experience only compassion for them and the desire to help them. As to friends and family, they regard them as illusory beings, encountered in a dream. No emotional ties affect the equanimity of their love or hinder their practice of Dharma. Freed from the chains of hate and attachment, they show kindness to all beings impartially.

Loving-kindness is the wish that others will experience happiness and find the causes of this happiness. All beings long for happiness, but hardly any achieve it. So to wish them as much happiness as possible and to wish that they may find the causes of happiness is called "lovingkindness." Loving-kindness has immeasurable qualities. If you have this love deep within your being, you naturally benefit others. And there is no way that any kind of evil influence can harm you, for compassion is the most powerful weapon against negative forces.

In another story about Lord Buddha's previous lives as a Bodhisattva, he was born as a king named "Power of Love." It happened that five fierce ogres, or rakshasas, entered his kingdom. They reached a place where some shepherds were herding sheep and other animals. The rakshasas thought that they would easily be able to kill them, with their sharp nails and teeth like iron. But they could not inflict the slightest injury on either the shepherds or the animals. Enraged, they exclaimed, "Why is this? Anywhere else in the world we can easily kill anybody. But here we cannot even make a scratch on your skin." The shepherds replied, "It is due to the power of our king, who meditates constantly upon loving-kindness in his palace." The rakshasas were amazed to hear of such an exceptional being, and asked the shepherds if they could meet their king. So the shepherds took them to the king, where they cried, "We need flesh to live, but we cannot kill even the smallest creature in your realm." The king thought, "If they find nothing to eat, these rakshasas will die, but I don't want to sacrifice any lives: I can only nourish them with my own flesh." And so this is what he did. The moment the rakshasas tasted the king's flesh, love for those around them filled their hearts and all desire to harm others disappeared.

Boundless compassion is the wish that all beings without exception maybe free from suffering and the causes of suffering. This feeling is born from contemplating the suffering of others and wishing to do something about it. There are many realms other than just the human realm. The hell realms, for instance, are filled with endless suffering. Imagine that your parents have fallen into these hell realms and are being set upon and stabbed with thousands of weapons and burned by intensely hot fires: you will feel a strong impulse to do something to relieve their suffering and rescue them from their torment. This is the basic feeling of compassion. Beings are suffering everywhere in samsara. They are suffering from being burnt or frozen in the hell realms, from thirst and hunger in the realm of hungry ghosts, from being enslaved and slaughtered in the animal realm, from birth, old age, sickness and death in the human realm, from jealousy and conflict in the realm of the demi-gods, and, in the god realm, from losing their pleasurable lives and falling back into lower existences. If you reflect on all these, you will feel, "How wonderful it would be if I could free them all from their suffering!"

Boundless joy is the joy you should feel when you see gifted and learned beings who are happy, famous or influential. Instead of feeling uneasy and envious of their good fortune, rejoice sincerely, thinking, "May they continue to be happy and enjoy even more happiness!" Pray too that they may use their wealth and power to help others, to serve the Dharma and the Sangha, making offerings, building monasteries, propagating the teachings and performing other worthwhile deeds. Rejoice and make a wish: "May they never lose all their happiness and privileges. May their happiness increase more and more, and may they use it to benefit others and to further the teachings."



Jetsun Trakpa Gyaltsen (1147-1216), Sakya lineage

Pray that your mind may be filled with boundless equanimity, loving-kindness, compassion and joy-as boundless as a Bodhisattva's. If you do so, genuine bodhichitta will certainly grow within you.

The reason these four qualities are boundless, or immeasurable, is that their object-the totality of sentient beings-is boundless, their benefit-the welfare of all beings-is boundless, and also their fruit-the qualities of enlightenment-is boundless. They are immeasurable like the sky, and they are the true root of enlightenment.

In this, as in any other practice, we should apply the three supreme methods: to wish that what we are going to do may benefit all beings; to do it with full concentration, maintaining the understanding of the empty nature of all phenomena; and to conclude it by dedicating all the merit of the practice for the sake of all beings. This is the best way to please the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. And it is the best way to develop meditative experience and realization without falling prey to the obstacles that arise from anger, attachment and pride.

Vaj rasattva

At the beginning of our practice we reflected on how rare and precious this human existence is. To spur our endeavor we reflected upon impermanence. To increase our mindfulness we reflected on the way actions lead to their results. Finally, we saw how the ordinary condition of samsara is never beyond suffering, and, realizing the unchanging benefit of liberation, we understood the need to find and rely upon a spiritual teacher. Then we continued with the main part of the preliminary practice, first crossing the threshold of the Buddhadharma by taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. After that, we developed bodhichitta, the wish to attain enlightenment for the sake of others, which is the root of the Vehicle of the Bodhisattvas. Now, as we enter the Vajrayana, we come to the meditation and recitation on Vajrasattva (in Tibetan, Dorje Sempa), the purpose of which is to remove hindrances on the path to enlightenment. These hindrances are the obscurations and negative actions we have accumulated in the past.



Vajrasattva

Vajrasattva is the sovereign lord of all the mandalas of the Vajrayana, or Diamond Vehicle. To meditate on Vajrasattva is the same as to meditate upon all the Buddhas. His hundred-syllable mantra is the quintessence of all mantras.

The main obstacles to progress along the path to enlightenment are the obscurations that come from our past negative actions. There are various kinds of negative actions. Some, like killing, stealing, lying or cheating are obviously intrinsically unvirtuous. Others are transgressions of vows and precepts that the Buddha or one's teachers have taught to help one progress spiritually.

The main purpose of Vajrasattva practice is to purify these obscurations. It is said, "The only virtue of sin is that it can be purified." In fact, there is nothing that cannot be purified, even the most apparently heinous deed.

The four powers

In order to purify negative actions completely, one needs four powers or strengths: the power of support, the power of regret, the power of the antidote, and the power of resolution.

Purification requires a support for us to express our remorse, make our confession and repair the effects of our past negative actions. In this case, the support is Vajrasattva. Visualize him above your head, utterly peaceful and smiling, brilliant white like a dazzling snow mountain illuminated by the rays of a hundred thousand suns. He is sitting in full vajra posture, upon a thousand-petalled white lotus and a moon disc. In his right hand he holds a golden vajra at his heart center, and in his left, a silver bell resting on his hip. Vajrasattva is wearing the thirteen Sambhogakaya adornments-the five silken garments and the eight jewelled ornaments. He is in union with his consort, Vajrat6pa,10 who holds a curved knife in her right hand and, in her left, a skull cup filled with amrita, the nectar of immortality. Visualize Vajrasattva not as someone made of flesh and blood, but like a rainbow in the sky, vivid yet empty. Unlike a rainbow, on the other hand, he is not simply something perceived physically, for he is pervaded with the wisdom and compassion of all the Buddhas. Think of him as your kind root teacher, appearing in the form of Vajrasattva.

The second power is the power of deep, intense remorse for one's past actions. If you had swallowed a virulent poison without realizing it, you would certainly feel desperate when you found out you were going to die. Similarly, up to now you have not been aware of the devastating power that has accumulated from the negative actions you have committed throughout many past lives. Today, realizing that these negative actions are the very cause of your wandering in samsara and of all your suffering, you feel a strong regret at having acted so carelessly. If you did not feel this regret, you would simply continue to accumulate negative actions and perpetuate your suffering. But now you realize that you need to purify yourself, so you turn to Vajrasattva to request the means to do so.

Why is it Vajrasattva that we choose for this purification? When he vowed to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all beings, he made this wish: "When I become a fully enlightened Buddha, may all beings be purified of their obscurations, their ignorance and their negative actions simply by hearing my name, seeing my form, thinking of me, or reciting the mantra that contains my name."

Regret alone is not enough: we have to put into action the means for purifying ourselves. This is done through the power of the antidote. Direct your whole mind towards Vajrasattva, confident that, since he is the all-encompassing sovereign of all mandalas, the union of all the Buddhas, he has the power to purify your obscurations. Visualize Vajrasattva above your head as previously described, with a moon disc in his heart center, upon which is a white letter HUNG surrounded by the hundred-syllable mantra. Recite:

Ah! On the crown of my head, on a lotus and moon, Sits Guru Vajrasattva in union with his consort. From the mantra in his heart falls a stream of nectar, Which purifies illness, harmful influences,

negative actions and defilements.

Then recite the hundred-syllable mantra as many times as you can.

While reciting, generate strong devotion towards Vajrasattva, thinking, "Because of my past actions in this life and in all my previous lives, I am in this miserable situation in samsara. Grant your blessings now so that I can purify myself, or I will continue to circle in samsara forever."

This fervent supplication, offered with hands folded and tears of devotion in your eyes, invokes the wisdom mind of Vajrasattva to purify your negative actions. By the force of your prayer, from the letter HUNG in Vajrasattva's heart, luminous nectar starts to flow, containing all his wisdom, loving-kindness and power. This nectar completely fills the bodies of Vajrasattva and his consort and flows out from the point of their union, from their toes and from all the pores of their bodies into the thousand-petalled lotus upon which Vajrasattva is sitting above the crown of your head, and down through its stem, the end of which penetrates the opening in the top of your head, the Brahma aperture. Through this aperture the nectar descends and fills your body, completely washing away all your obscurations and impurities, which pour forth from all the pores and apertures of your body. Your illnesses come out in the form of pus and blood, negative influences in the form of insects, scorpions, and snakes, and mental obscurations as dark, smoky liquid. The cleansing stream of nectar is so powerful that it washes away all your obscurations like a river in flood carrying away all the trees and rocks in a valley. As these obscurations flow out of your body, the earth below you opens, down to seven levels below the surface. There, in the form of a red bull with mouth gaping open, is Yama, the Lord of Death. The dirty liquid enters his mouth, and, as he swallows it, turns into nectar. Now all your karmic debts, your past actions, have been totally purified and transformed into wisdom. Similarly, not only is your body purified, but even the ordinary aggregates and elements your flesh, blood, bones and skin are no longer gross material substances; they become transparent, as if made of light. You are completely clear and luminous inside and out. Then you consider that this red bull, and all those to whom you have past karmic debts, are completely satisfied. The earth beneath you closes again and you are completely purified, your body pure and transparent like crystal.

The amrita from Vajrasattva still continues to flow down, progressively filling your body. As it fills your head, you receive the blessings of Vajrasattva's body, and all the negative actions you have committed physically, such as killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct, are purified; you receive the vase initiation and the seed is planted for realizing the Nirmanakaya, the manifested body of the Buddhas. When the nectar reaches your throat, you receive the blessings of Vajrasattva's speech, and all the negative actions you have committed verbally, such as lies, idle chatter, slander, and harsh words, are purified; you receive the secret initiation and the seed is planted for realizing the Sambhogakaya, the body of perfect enjoyment. Then, as the nectar flows down to your heart level, you receive the blessings of Vajrasattva's mind, and all your negative thoughts, such as animosity, envy, and false views are purified; you receive the third empowerment, the wisdom initiation, and the seed is planted for realizing the Dharmakaya, the absolute body. Finally, as the nectar reaches your navel center, throughout your body you receive the fourth initiation, the initiation of word, which indicates the absolute nature; all the subtle defilements of body, speech and mind are purified, you receive the blessing of the adamant wisdom of Vajrasattva, and the seed is planted for realizing the Vajrakaya, the unchanging adamant body of all the Buddhas.

After this, conclude by reciting the supplication to Vajrasattva:

Protector, I have been ignorant and foolish, and I have broken and spoiled the samaya. Guru and protector, be my refuge! Sublime Vajra Holder, embodiment of great compassion, supreme among beings, I take refuge in you. I repent and confess all deteriorations, breaches, faults and downfalls of the root and branch samayas related to body, speech and mind. Cleanse and purify all negative actions, obscurations and habitual tendencies.

As soon as you have said this, think that not only your own defilements and obscurations, but also those of all beings, are completely purified. Imagine that Vajrasattva is pleased by your supplication. He smiles and says, "Noble child, you are now purified of all obscurations." After that say:

Vajrasattva melts into light and dissolves into me.

The moment Vajrasattva dissolves into you, you no longer have your ordinary form, but become Vajrasattva, united with his wisdom consort. In your heart center is a white moon disc, upon which there is a blue letter HUNG surrounded by the six-syllable mantra, OM VAJRA SATVA HUNG (pronounced om benzar sato hung in Tibetan). In front, which should be thought of as being to the east, is the white syllable OM; on the right, to the south, are the yellow syllables vAJRA; behind, to the west, is the red syllable sA; on your left, to the north, is the green syllable TVA.



Six-syllable mantra OM VAJRA SATVA HUNG

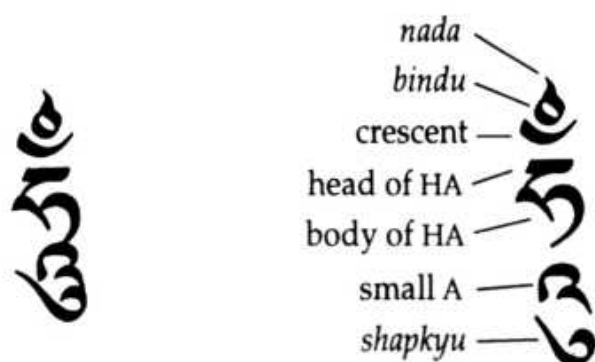
From the HUNG, and from the syllables of the mantra, boundless rays of multicolored light emanate to the Buddhafields of the ten directions, making infinite offerings to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Think that the Buddhas, having accepted your offerings, send back their blessings, all their wisdom, loving-kindness and power, in the form of rays of light which dissolve into you. Like a lotus bud opening as the rays of the sun touch it, Vajrasattva becomes even more brilliant and perfect.

Then visualize that from your whole body and from the syllables of the mantra, boundless rays of light emanate, filling the whole universe around you. The universe is now no longer an ordinary, impure place, but the perfect Buddhafield of Vajrasattva, the Buddhafield of Pure Joy. The sentient beings in it are also no longer ordinary: all the males have the form and nature of Vajrasattva, and all the females the form and nature of Vajratopa, his wisdom consort. To the east all beings become white Vajrasattvas and Vajratopas of the Vajra or Diamond family; to the south they become yellow Vajrasattvas and Vajratopas of the Ratna or jewel family; to the west, they become red Vajrasattvas and Vajratopas of the Padma or Lotus family; to the north they become green Vajrasattvas and Vajratopas of the Karma or Action family; and in the center, they become blue Vajrasattvas and Vajratopas of the Tathagata or Buddha family. All these beings are continuously reciting the hundred-syllable mantra, the sound of which fills the whole of space.

In this way, appearances, sounds and thoughts are no longer ordinary, but appear as the sheer display of wisdom. The external world is a Buddhafield and the beings in it are manifestations of Vajrasattva

and Vajratopa, all sounds are the resonance of mantra and all thoughts are the spontaneous display of bliss-emptiness.

Now recite the six-syllable mantra as many times as you can. At the end of the session, the whole outer universe together with the beings in it, starting from the periphery, dissolves into you as Vajrasattva and consort. Then the consort dissolves into Vajrasattva; Vajrasattva melts into light and dissolves into the mantra in your heart center. The syllables of the mantra dissolve into each other one by one, and then into the central letter HUNG. The HUNG, starting from the bottom, dissolves upward, melting into light, until finally it vanishes like a rainbow in the sky, leaving only the vast expanse of luminous emptiness. Sit for a while, simply remaining in that state of utter simplicity, free from all concepts and clinging. It is the innate wisdom, the immutable mode of being, the true face of the absolute Vajrasattva.



The Tibetan syllable HUNG and its parts

After a while, when you start to come out of this meditation and thoughts again arise in your mind, you should think that all outer appearances are a Buddhafield, all beings are deities, all sounds are mantras, and all thoughts are wisdom. As the mirror of your mind has been wiped clean through the practice of Vajrasattva, all phenomena are clearly reflected in it according to their true nature.

In order to make your purification last, you now need to apply the fourth power, the power of resolution. This means to have the unwavering determination that even if it costs you your life you will not revert to negative action, which, as we now know, causes all our suffering and keeps us circling in samsara.

Conclude by wholeheartedly dedicating the merit of this practice for the sake of all beings, saying, "By this merit, may all sentient beings swiftly achieve the level of Vajrasattva himself," and offering all the benefits from this practice completely to all beings. You should not think that the merit is divided up among them, but that each and every being receives all the merit in its entirety. When dedicating the merit, however, you should remain free of clinging and concepts, mindful that in absolute truth there is no one who dedicates, no object of dedication and no act of dedicating.

The hundred-syllable mantra has to be recited a hundred thousand times, and the six-syllable mantra six hundred thousand times. Until you have completed the number of recitations of the hundred-syllable mantra, spend most of each practice session on that, and then recite the shorter mantra a few times at the end. Once you have completed the hundred thousand recitations of the hundred-syllable mantra, recite it just a few times at the beginning of each session and then concentrate on the recitation of the shorter mantra.

We should remember that meditating upon Vajrasattva is the same as meditating upon all the Buddhas. To achieve the realization of Vajrasattva is to achieve the qualities of all the Buddhas.

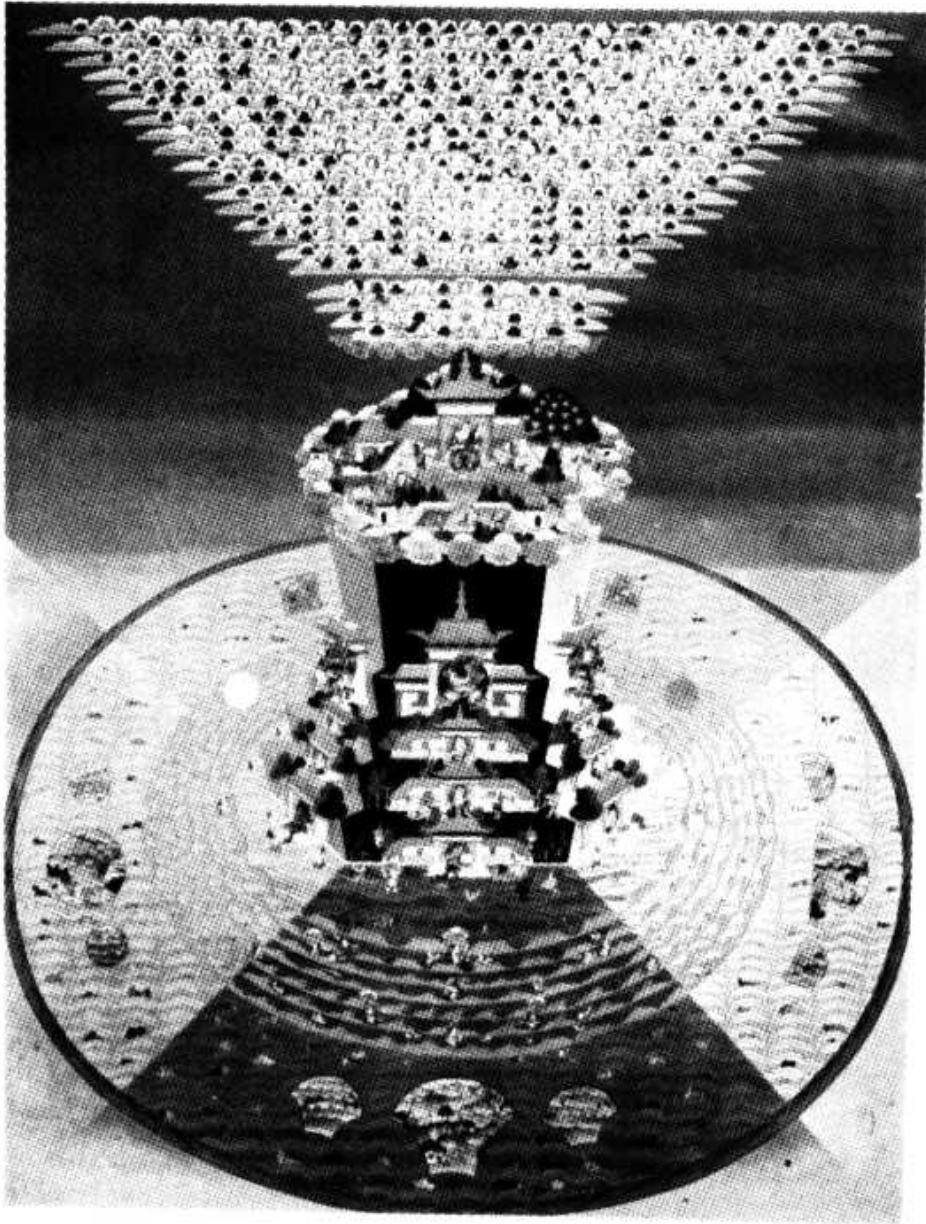
Moreover, the mantra of Vajrasattva, the hundred-syllable mantra, is the hundred peaceful and wrathful deities in the form of sound; it embodies all the wisdom and power of Vajrasattva himself. If you recite the hundred-syllable mantra twenty-one times every day, concentrating completely on the visualization of the nectar pouring down and the purification, no breaches of vow or samaya and no obscurations will be left unpurified. If you recite the hundred-syllable mantra one hundred times without distraction, you can even purify a "crime with immediate retribution"¹² quite easily. If you do this practice, all the Buddhas will think of you as their own child, and everything that obstructs your spiritual experience and ultimate realization will be dispelled.

Mandala Offering

Of all practices, the offering of the mandala is the most profound and skillful way to accumulate the essential provisions of merit and wisdom, without which we cannot travel swiftly along the path.

If we develop a strong feeling of revulsion with regard to samsaric concerns, if we are constantly aware of impermanence and if we accumulate merit and wisdom, it will be quite easy to obtain true and direct realization of the Great Seal and the Great Perfection. But if we say, "Merit is for the followers of the lower vehicles; I am only interested in practicing the Great Perfection," and sit staring at the sky, without thinking of impermanence or the defects of samsara, we will not have real endeavor, and genuine meditative experiences will not develop.

We may wish to progress in our spiritual experience and achieve ultimate realization through the Vajrayana path. But without accumulating merit and wisdom, we will not reach that goal. Just like a king who accepts an invitation to attend a function if a magnificent feast has been prepared, the king of experiences and realization will enter our beings only if we prepare the feast of the twofold accumulation of merit and wisdom.



Mandala

There are many ways to perfect this accumulation, but the swiftest, and at the same time the easiest and most profound, is the offering of the whole universe in the form of a mandala.

Depending on which of the different ngondro traditions we are following, we make either the thirty-seven element mandala offering or, as here, the seven-element offering. The seven-element offering of the universe as a mandala is the offering of Mt. Meru, the four continents, the sun and the moon. According to the tradition of the Ancient Translations, the Nyingmapa, we also make the offering of the three kaya mandalas-the mandalas of the Dharmakaya, Sambhogakaya and Nirmanakaya.

For the actual offering, we use a mandala plate, which symbolizes the golden ground of the universe. If you are wealthy, you may use a plate made of gold, silver or copper. If you are a practitioner of humbler means, living in a mountain retreat, you may use whatever you can find, such as a flat stone or wooden plank.

To symbolize the universe that we are offering, we pour grains onto the plate-wheat, corn, peas or rice. This creates the appropriate conditions for all countries to enjoy prosperity and good harvests. We also offer medicinal grains and plants¹³ in order to create the appropriate conditions for dispelling epidemics and diseases throughout the world. We offer precious gems and metals such as amber, pearls, coral, turquoise, gold and silver, in order to create the appropriate conditions for the wealth of our meditative experiences and realization to increase.

We usually use two mandala plates. One is placed on the shrine and symbolizes the object of refuge, to whom we make the offering. The other is held in the hand and symbolizes the universe that we are offering.

When you use rice or any other kind of grain, you should wash the grain very carefully and remove all stones, pieces of wood and dirt. Then rinse it with saffron water and dry it in a clean place. The grain is now ready to be offered.

Hold the mandala plate in the left hand. With the right hand, put a drop of saffron water on the plate. Holding a pinch of grain between the thumb and ring finger, clean the mandala plate with the underside of the wrist, using a clockwise circular motion, and recite the hundred-syllable mantra while making the following wish: "May all my obscurations and those of all sentient beings be purified." You may also recite the Mantra of Perfect Discipline¹⁴ in order to purify yourself before making the offering.

For the offering itself, begin the session by reciting the Thirty-seven Element Mandala Offering (see Appendix, section 4), and offering thirty-seven piles of rice. Do this three or seven times, then concentrate on the offering of the three-kaya mandala while reciting the following verse, each time offering seven heaps of grain.¹⁵

OM AH HUNG

I offer the Buddhafields of the three kayas, riches, And clouds of offerings, outer, inner and secret, To the Three Jewels and the Three Roots. Accept them, and grant the supreme and common accomplishments.

OM AH HUNG GURU DEWA DAKINI SAPARIWARA RATNA MANDALA PUJA MEGHA AH HUNG

The three syllables OM AH HUNG symbolize the Body, Speech and Wisdom Mind of the Buddhas, as well as the three kayas: the Body of the Buddhas corresponds to the Nirmanakaya, their Speech to the Sambhogakaya and their Mind to the Dharmakaya.

The Dharmakaya is the absolute nature of the Buddhas. From this nature emanate the five wisdoms of the Sambhogakaya. The Nirmanakaya is the omnipresent compassion that manifests itself in various aspects, according to the needs and aspirations of beings.

The external offerings are purifying water, flowers, incense, light, perfume, nourishment, music, and all that pleases the five senses. The internal offerings are the three offerings of amrita, rakta and torma (which correspond to the three poisons transmuted-hatred, attachment and ignorance), and the various sacred substances which constitute the support of the blessings and serve to repair and preserve the vows of samaya. The secret offerings are those of the sixteen offering goddesses: the pleasures of the senses in union with the realization of emptiness.

Our offerings are intended for the Three Jewels and the Three Roots, who joyfully accept them. In return they grant us their blessings, with joy and compassion because they see that by receiving our offerings they give us the means to accumulate merit and wisdom, and consequently to liberate

ourselves from samsara.

The mantra which concludes the offering prayer begins with OM AH HUNG. These three syllables represent the Body, Speech and Mind of the Buddhas, the Three Roots and the Three Bodies. GURU (Tib. lama) refers to the masters of the spiritual lineage, who are the root of blessings. DEWA (Tib. lha or yidam) refers to the deities, who are the root of accomplishment. DAKINI (Tib. khandro) refers to the female Buddha-principle, the root of activity. SAPARIWARA means "accompanied by their entourages" and RATNA means "jewel." MANDALA is the mandala of the universe. PUJA means "offerings" and MEGHA, "clouds." AH multiplies the offerings infinitely. HUNG is the request that the Three Jewels and the Three Roots accept our offerings and pour their blessings upon us.

The Nirmanakaya mandala

Begin by offering first the mandala of the Nirmanakaya, the body of manifestation. This is a symbolic offering of the universe, with Mount Meru at its center. In the east is the continent Purvavideha, made of pure crystal; in the south, our own continent, Jambudvipa, made of blue sapphire; in the west, the continent Aparagodaniya, made of red ruby; and in the north, the continent Uttarakuru, made of gold. The four sides of Mount Meru are made of the same precious substances as each of the continents facing them. The substance particular to each continent gives its color to the sky above it. Thus the sky is white over the eastern continent, blue over our own continent, red over the west and yellow over the north. On either side of each of these continents is a subcontinent. The eastern continent has Deha and Videha on either side, our southern continent has Camara and Aparacamara, the western continent has Shatha and Uttaramantrina, and the northern continent has Kuruva and Kaurava, making in all twelve continents and subcontinents. On the four continents, east, south, west and north, are the mountain of jewels, the wish-fulfilling tree, the bountiful cow and the spontaneous harvest.

Then there are the seven emblems of royalty,¹⁶ and the treasure vase. In front of the mountain of jewels is the precious wheel of a thousand spokes, made of fine gold from the river Jambu, and shining like the sun. In front of the wish-fulfilling tree is the precious jewel, an eight-faceted sapphire the size of a man, lighting up the space around for a hundred leagues; its rays relieve and protect beings from heat and cold, dispel the causes of harmful acts and fulfill all wishes. In front of the bountiful cow is the precious queen, beautiful as the sun, free from the five faults and rich with the eight feminine qualities that ravish the mind; the mere sight of her causes the realization of emptiness and Great Bliss to dawn. In front of the spontaneous harvest is the precious minister, of noble presence, strong, skillful and wise.

In the four intermediate directions there are the precious elephant, gray, and strong as a thousand ordinary elephants, bearing the ruby of power on his head; the precious horse, blue as a peacock's throat, and capable of circling the world three times in a day; the precious general, brave and expert in combat, and the equal of the guardians of the universe, so awesome and resplendent that one scarcely dares to lift one's eyes to look at him; and finally the vase of great treasure, which grants all wishes.

In the eight directions are the eight offering goddesses: the goddess of charm, the goddess of garlands, the goddess of song, the goddess of dance, the goddess of flowers, the goddess of incense, the goddess of lights and the goddess of perfume.

In the sky to the east, in front of the goddess of charm, shines a sun of fire crystal, and to the west, in front of the goddess of song, a moon of water crystal. In the south, in front of the goddess of dance, floats the white parasol with its golden handle, and in front of the goddess of garlands to the north, the multicolored banner of victory.

Filling the whole of space, like the countless snow flakes in a blizzard, are all the dazzling riches of gods, human beings and nagas."

Inside Mount Meru are the six realms of the world of desire, on its summit the seventeen levels of the world of form, and above it the four levels of the world of formlessness. In the celestial realms are lakes of pure nectar, wishfulfilling trees, mountains of gold and jewels, and beautiful gardens and forests. Seven ranges of golden mountains, separated by seven oceans, surround Mount Meru, the whole bounded on the periphery by a circle of mountains of blazing iron.

Finally, you should visualize within each atom of this universe another complete universe, possessing offerings inconceivable in number and magnitude. This vast offering includes all the perfect, beautiful and precious things that can be found in the universe-below, upon and above the earth-such as the wish-fulfilling gem of the nagas, which illumines the entire naga world in the depths of the great oceans. Make this offering of the whole universe as if you were its owner, the universal monarch.

We practice the mandala offering so that we are able to give without clinging. At present we are strongly attached to what we possess. We cannot bear to give our possessions away, and sometimes we do not even dare make use of them ourselves, for fear that they will be used up or spoiled. So in order to cut through clinging and attachment to material things, we offer to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas all that we have: our possessions, good qualities, learning and all the merits we have accumulated in the past. We do not offer only the little we have in this life: the offering we make is limitless, the entire universe-and not only our own universe, but a billion such universes. All this we offer to the object of refuge for the benefit of all beings, and especially for those whom we think of as our enemies, who create obstacles and difficulties for us. We pray that through the merit of this practice these beings will be led on to the path of liberation and ultimately achieve Buddhahood. Unless we have this attitude, our practice will not be genuine Mahayana practice.

The Sambhogakaya mandala

Above the Nirmanakaya mandala, visualize and offer the Sambhogakaya mandala, the body of perfect enjoyment, which is the offering of the Buddhafields of the five Buddha families. Visualize these five Buddhafields high above you in the sky. In the center is the Densely Arrayed Buddhafield of the Buddha Vairocana. In the east is Buddha Akshobhya's Buddhafield of Pure Joy. In the south is the Utterly Beautiful Buddhafield of Buddha Ratnasambhava. In the west is the Blissful Buddhafield of Buddha Amitabha, and in the north is Buddha Amoghasiddhi's Buddhafield of Perfectly Fulfilled Action.

The Dharmakaya mandala

Thirdly, offer the all-pervading Dharmakaya mandala, which is your realization of the absolute nature, without any concept whatsoever of a subject who offers, an object to whom offering is made, or an act of offering. To relate this symbolically to the structure of the other mandalas, consider that the universally void nature is the ground of the mandala, while the qualities of Buddhahood, such as the four fearlessnesses, the ten powers and the eighteen correct discriminations, correspond to the different elements of the universe offered in an ordinary mandala.

Make this offering of the three-kaya mandala and recite the verse that accompanies it a hundred thousand times, and offer the seven heaps of grain the same number of times. If you prefer, instead of the verse quoted above you may recite the four-line verse commonly used when requesting teachings and expressing gratitude for them. This verse is found both in Guru Padmasambhava's Stages of the Path of the Secret Mantras¹⁸ and in Lord Atisha's Stages of the Path:

The ground is sprinkled with scented water and strewn with flowers, It is adorned with Mount Meru, the four continents, and the sun and moon. Thinking of it as a blessed Buddhafield, I offer it So that all beings may enjoy the happiness of the perfectly pure Buddhafields.

You can also use the more elaborate recitation of the Thirty-seven Element Mandala, which was

composed by the great Sakyapa teacher Drogon Phakpa, the Noble Protector of Beings. The text you choose will depend on how elaborate you want your offering to be.

At the end of your session of offering, consider that the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the ten directions of space have accepted your offering and have granted the means for progressing on the path to ultimate realization.

Guru Yoga

In the so-called preliminary or foundation practice, the most extraordinary section is Guru Yoga, or "union with the Guru's nature." It is through this practice that primordial wisdom can arise instantly in one's being.

Guru Yoga is the way to pray to an authentic teacher and express our deep and unchanging devotion. Through devotion, our minds and the Guru's mind become one. Why is this practice necessary? Because there is not a single Buddha in the past, present or future who has achieved or will achieve enlightenment without relying on a spiritual teacher. Whichever of the nine vehicles¹⁹ of the Buddhist teachings we practice, we have to rely on a spiritual teacher, receive his or her teaching and practice according to his or her instructions. There is no other way.

Even if we have met a teacher and received his instructions, however, we will never be able to receive his blessings if we do not have fervent devotion and complete confidence in him and his teachings. And without his blessings we will not progress along the path. First of all, therefore, we need to generate devotion.



Guru Padmasambhava and Vajrayogini

Devotion rarely comes spontaneously in the beginning. We have to generate and nurture it. First, for example, when we hear about the teacher and his life, we think about his marvellous enlightened qualities. Then, when we meet him, we see that those qualities are authentic, and our confidence and faith grow stronger and stronger. Our prayers become more and more profound, and his blessings begin to penetrate us more and more deeply.

All accomplishments are due to the Guru's blessings. We are not referring here to minor accomplishments like obtaining good health, long life or wealth, but to the supreme realization of the Guru's enlightened nature, which is none other than our own Buddha nature.

The visualization

As an aid to generating devotion, the text contains the following verse:

Before me in the sky, in an expanse of rainbow light, Is my root teacher, Pema Thotrengtsal, Surrounded by the ocean of Knowledge Holders of the three transmissions. He is the union of all objects of refuge.

Visualize your root teacher in the form of Guru Rinpoche, referred to here by one of his many names-Pema Thotrengtsal. Alternatively you may visualize him in the form of Vajradhara, or just as you usually see him. The main point is to visualize whoever inspires in you the strongest and most spontaneous devotion.

Imagine that the place where you are is no longer an ordinary place, but Guru Rinpoche's Buddhafield, Zangdopelri, the Glorious Copper-colored Mountain. In the middle of this Buddhafield, in which everything is made of jewels and precious substances, is the immeasurable Palace of Lotus Light, made of pure light-transparent and filled with rainbows. You yourself are not in your ordinary form, but that of Vajrayogini. She is standing in the center of the palace, upon a lotus, sun disc and corpse. She is bright red, like a ruby, brilliant as the sun. She is peaceful and stands on her left leg in the dancing posture, with her right leg drawn up. She is wearing the silken, jewel and bone ornaments of the Sambhogakaya deities. In her right hand she holds a curved knife, which symbolizes cutting through ego-clinging, and in her left, a skull cup filled with amrita, the nectar of immortality. In the crook of her left arm, resting upon her shoulder, is the khatvanga, which represents Guru Rinpoche in hidden form. She is performing a graceful and peaceful dance. Her expression is deeply compassionate, and at the same time she has a slightly wrathful smile, revealing her sharp canine teeth to symbolize her victory over delusion. While her form is that of Vajrayogini, her nature is that of the supreme consort, Yeshe Tsogyal, the Queen of the Ocean of Wisdom.

Above your head, in a mass of rainbow light, upon a throne supported by eight fearless lions on top of which are lotus, sun and moon discs, is the Lotus-Born Guru as Pema Thotrengtsal. Visualize him very clearly, not made of gross material substances like a statue, or flat like a thangka 20 but transparent, vivid and clear. You should visualize even the most minute details, like the black and white of his eyes and the golden designs upon the brocade of his robe. (For all these different parts of the visualization it may be helpful to refer to a painting or image of Guru Rinpoche.) He is transparent like a rainbow, but he is not merely a visual image, for he is permeated with the wisdom, compassion and power of all the Buddhas of the three times and the ten directions of space.

Guru Rinpoche himself promised, "Whoever meditates upon me meditates upon all the Sugatas." Through Guru Rinpoche, we receive all the blessings of all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. In particular, praying to Guru Rinpoche as being inseparable from our own root teacher is the surest way to receive boundless blessings. Simply by praying to our root teacher, we will gather the blessings of all the Buddhas, Manjushri, Avalokiteshvara, Vajrapani and so forth, in the same way as a gutter collects all the rainwater that falls on the roof. The Guru himself is the sovereign of all mandalas, the lord who embodies outwardly the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma and Sangha), inwardly the Three Roots (Guru, Yidam and Dakini), and secretly the Three Kayas (Dharmakaya, Sambhogakaya and Nirmanakaya).

Devotion

Guru Rinpoche said, "I am present in front of anyone who has faith." Simply through the strength of our faith, the blessings and presence of Guru Rinpoche, of our Guru and of all the Buddhas, will be with us all the time. Devotion is therefore of fundamental importance.

When you pray to Guru Rinpoche, visualizing him above your head, you should not think that as a result of your prayer Guru Rinpoche will appear sometime in the future and bless you. Think that, because of your devotion, he is truly present, right now, with all his wisdom and compassion. Guru Rinpoche himself said, "Give me your heart and mind. I will always be near you." If you consider that he is inseparable from your root guru, you will receive infinite waves of blessing.

Of the many prayers that can be used as a support for our devotion, the one known as the Seven-Line Prayer is the one we recite here. It is this prayer that the dakinis used when they requested Guru Rinpoche to appear from the dharmadhatu, the absolute expanse, and manifest in this world for the sake of all beings. Every sadhana of Guru Rinpoche includes this prayer, which was hidden by Guru Rinpoche himself as terma, or spiritual treasure, for the sake of future generations. It is said that just as a mother cannot help but respond when her child calls her, so too, Guru Rinpoche will come from the glorious Copper-colored Mountain to anyone who chants the Seven-Line Prayer:



Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo (1820-1892), non-sectarian lineage

HUNG!

Born in the northwest land of Uddiyana On the pollen bed of a lotus stem, Wondrously, you attained supreme accomplishment. You are renowned as the Lotus Born, Surrounded by retinues of many dakinis. Emulating you, I will perfect myself Come then, I pray, bestow your blessings.

GURU PEMA SIDDHI HUNG

Your devotion must be such that your Guru is always present in your mind. Whether you are happy or suffering, whether you encounter good things or bad, you will not rely on anything or anyone but him. If you find yourself in comfortable circumstances, you should realize that comfort and wealth have no essential reality; they have come to you simply as the blessings of your teacher. Offer them to the teacher as a mandala, and use them to help other beings and to further the teachings.

When continual difficulties, suffering, illness and slander befall you, be grateful that through the blessings of the Guru you are able to experience these sufferings now, when you have a means to purify them. You should think, "This is simply the consequence of my having harmed others in my past lives and of having committed all sorts of negative actions. If I do not purify these actions now, my fate can only be rebirth in the lower realms in many future lives. Through the kindness of my teacher, I am now able to purify my karma. I pray that by experiencing this suffering I may exhaust all similar sufferings that afflict other beings." So, do not let happiness make you proud. Do not let difficulties discourage you. At all times, keep your mind directed unwaveringly towards the Guru.

To think of nothing but the Guru means that when you walk, you should visualize the Guru sitting above your right shoulder and walk as if you were respectfully circumambulating him. When you are seated, visualize the Guru above your head. When you eat, visualize the Guru in your throat and offer him the first and best part of your food. When you rest at night, visualize the Guru in the center of your heart, seated on a four-petalled red lotus, and radiating light that fills the whole universe.

Keeping the Guru always in mind in this way enables us to transform every event in our ordinary life into spiritual practice. When we think of nothing but him, even if we experience great sadness or mental unease, the simple fact of remembering the Guru completely clears away all these difficulties and fills our mind with confidence and joy.

The Vajra Guru mantra

After the Seven-Line Prayer, recite the twelve-syllable mantra of Guru Padmasambhava. This mantra is the quintessence of the twelve branches of the Buddha's teaching. The twelve syllables of the mantra purify the twelve interdependent links, which perpetuate ignorance and suffering; they recall the twelve deeds displayed by Guru Rinpoche during his manifestation in this universe. This mantra is addressed not only to Guru Rinpoche, but also to the Three Jewels, the Three Roots, and the infinite number of peaceful and wrathful Buddhas.

OM AH HUNG, the first three syllables of the mantra, stand for the three aspects of Guru Rinpoche corresponding to the three kayas-Buddha Amitabha, the Dharmakaya; Avalokiteshvara, the Sambhogakaya; and Padmasambhava, the Nirmanakaya. VAJRA indicates Guru Rinpoche's unchanging, adamant wisdom. GURU means "heavy" in Sanskrit and refers to the enormous weight of the teacher's qualities. It also refers to the massive benefit one derives from following his instructions and the enormous harm one creates for oneself and others if one does not follow them. PEMA, or lotus, refers to Guru Rinpoche's name and to his immaculate birth upon the pollen bed of a lotus flower. SIDDHI refers to the common and supreme accomplishments, and HUNG is a call to Guru Rinpoche requesting him to bestow these accomplishments upon us.

Recite the Seven-Line Prayer a hundred thousand times and the mantra one million three hundred thousand times (one hundred thousand times for each of the twelve syllables, plus a hundred thousand more to compensate for any defects in the recitation). Alternatively, if you wish to do the recitation more briefly, you may recite the mantra four hundred thousand times.

Of all practices, Guru Yoga is the most profound, and yet presents no dangers or risks. It does not involve the complex and difficult visualizations of mandalas required in the generation phase. Neither does it have any of the risks involved in the meditation upon the channels, energies, and inner heat that is practised in the perfection phase. At the same time, if we practice Guru Yoga correctly, all the

qualities of the generation and perfection phases will arise in us naturally. On the other hand, without devotion to the Guru, even if we practice the generation and perfection phases for years, our practice will never be firm and we will never taste its fruit. As Jigme Lingpa said, "To have confidence in the teacher is the ultimate refuge."

It is also said:

Better to think of the Guru for a single instant
Than to meditate on a deity For millions of years: Pray
to your Guru and Lord.

Better to utter once the name of the teacher
Than to recite the names of the deities From the four
classes of Tantra: Pray to your Guru and Lord.

Better an instant uniting your mind with the Guru's
Than one hundred years of contemplation, Or a
hundred practices of the perfection phase: Pray to your Guru and Lord.

Devotion is the essence of the generation and perfection phases, Praying to the Guru is the essence of recitation, Constant union with the Guru's mind is the essence of spiritual practice: Pray to your Guru and Lord.

Receiving the four empowerments

After reciting the Seven-Line Prayer and Guru Rinpoche's mantra, you receive the blessings of his Body, Speech, Mind, and Wisdom through rays of light emanating from his three centers and his whole body. The letter OM in his forehead center emanates white light which is absorbed into a corresponding letter OM in your forehead, purifying the negative actions of the body. Similarly, the letter AH in his throat center emanates red light to purify negative actions of speech; and the letter HUNG in his heart center emanates blue light to purify negative actions of the mind. Finally his whole body emanates rays of five-colored light-white, red, blue, yellow and green-which are absorbed by your whole body, purifying all the subtle obscurations related to your body, speech and mind. Simultaneously you receive the four empowerments or abhishekas: the vase, secret, wisdom and symbolic empowerments, which sow in your being the seeds for realizing the four kayas. The text says:

Through the light rays from the three seed-syllables at the three places I obtain blessings, empowerments and accomplishments. The Guru melts into light and dissolves into myself. Inseparable from him, rest in simplicity.

At the end, the Guru above your head melts into a mass of light, which in turn dissolves into you. Think that your mind and the Guru's mind mingle completely. Then you too dissolve into light and remain in a state of utter simplicity, the absolute nature of mind. When thoughts arise again, you should perceive the phenomena of forms, sounds and recollections as the display of the Guru's body, speech and mind. All forms are the manifestation of the Guru's body; all speech and sounds are the Guru's speech and the natural resonance of the twelve-syllable mantra; and all thoughts are the play of the Guru's mind-no longer deluded thoughts, but the natural creativity of awareness, the non-conceptual wisdom that is the nature of Guru Rinpoche's enlightened mind. When we examine the mind closely, it is impossible to ascribe to it any color, shape, or location: this is its void aspect. Yet the mind can perceive and know everything in samsara and nirvana: this is its clarity aspect.

Conclusion

Your strong devotion and yearning must be combined with the wish to benefit all sentient beings. When you pray to the teacher, think that all sentient beings are praying with you, as if you were leading them in prayer. When you receive the blessings of Guru Rinpoche, think that all sentient

beings are receiving them with you. Pray to the teacher all the time, knowing that to offer even a single drop of scented oil to your teacher's body is more precious and beneficial for your progress towards enlightenment than to fill the whole of space with offerings to the Buddhas of the ten directions.

At the end, dedicate the merit of this practice to all sentient beings, so that they may meet Guru Rinpoche himself, hear his voice, realize his wisdom, and, as soon as they die, be reborn in the Buddhafield of the Glorious Coppercolored Mountain, where, meeting Guru Rinpoche in person, they may complete the rest of the path towards Buddhahood.

Guru Yoga is the most efficient way to progress along the path and to dispel any obstacles that you come up against. For this reason, from the very moment you enter the door of the Dharma until you achieve the ultimate realization of Ati Yoga or the Great Perfection, treasure it constantly in your heart and make it the center of your practice."

CONCLUSION

The Three Supreme Methods

The framework which gives this practice-as well as any other practice or activity we undertake-its strength, is that of the "three supreme methods": the preparation, in which we generate bodhichitta, the wish to act and practice for the sake of all beings; the actual practice, during which we remain free of distractions, clinging and concepts; and the conclusion, in which we dedicate the merit for the sake of all beings. These three methods must be applied to any kind of practice, whether generation phase, perfection phase, Great Seal, Great Middle Way, or Great Perfection. Without these three supreme methods, there is no point in doing any practice.

The preparation is the generation of bodhichitta. This is a skillful means that not only increases the value of our practice but is the very reason for our doing it. Modern technology, for example, uses very powerful machines to accomplish in one hour the same work that it would take a hundred people to do by hand. Similarly, when we undertake an action with the pure intention of benefiting others, that intention is the skillful means that makes the action infinitely beneficial and effective. As the mind has a far greater effect on the quality of an action than the body or speech, when you begin a practice, first turn your mind inwards and check your intention.

The correct way to think is as follows: "Of all living beings there is not a single one who has not been my parent in a past life. Now they are all immersed in the ocean of suffering. They all want happiness, but do not know how to get it. I wish to help them, but do not have the ability to do so. I must therefore progress towards enlightenment, so that I can gain the ability to free all sentient beings from their suffering and ignorance."

You should approach everything you do in this way, even actions that seem insignificant, like reciting a single mani, or walking once around a temple or stupa. Do everything with the thought, "May this be for the sake of all beings." To recite OM MANI PADME HUNG even once brings boundless merit: it will close the doors to the lower realms and lead to rebirth in the Buddhafields. But if that single recitation of the mani is reinforced with the attitude of bodhichitta, its benefit will increase continuously throughout many lives. The reason for this is that if we dedicate an action for the sake of all beings, the benefit of that action will be as infinite as is the number of beings. To recite a hundred million manis without dedicating them to the welfare of all beings would be of far less benefit than to recite just a hundred man is for the sake of all beings.

The main part, or actual practice, must be free of concepts and clings. Ideally this means to have full realization of emptiness, the void nature of phenomena. But this is not easy to understand in the beginning. The main point for us, therefore, is to concentrate fully on the practice, with body, speech and mind acting in accord. If we use our bodies to do prostrations, for instance, while carrying on an ordinary conversation, with our minds full of attachment and hatred, the movements we make will be merely mechanical and almost useless. Instead, we need always to combine body, speech and mind in our practice, using our bodies to prostrate, our speech to recite the refuge prayer, and our minds to concentrate on the meaning of prostrations. We should remember that when we place our folded hands at our forehead, we are paying homage to the body of the Buddhas. When we place them at our throat, we are paying homage to their speech, and when we place them at our heart, we are paying homage to their mind. Then, when we touch the ground with our foreheads, two hands and two knees, we pay homage to the body, speech, mind, qualities and activities of the Buddhas; at the same time the five poisons present in the minds of all beings, including ourselves, are transformed into the five wisdoms. It is this kind of precise mindfulness that we need to maintain. Even by ordinary standards, a good worker is someone who is always mindful of what he is doing. His body is concentrated on the job, he uses his speech to discuss what has to be done and what needs to be avoided, and he uses his mind to think carefully about the work he is doing. If we do not do likewise, we may well end up like the tailor who was always looking out of the window and chatting to everyone else in the workshop while he sewed: he found that he had stitched the garment he was making to his own clothes!

When we say that the actual practice must be "free from concepts and clings," this means that it must be free from attachment, self-infatuation, scattering thoughts and so forth. However vast an offering you might make, even ten thousand silver coins, you should never think, "Oh! I've made such a big offering! It will be enough for the rest of my life. I shall reap the fruit of my actions and enjoy their karmic result. I doubt whether anyone has ever made such a large offering." There is no point in making an offering with such a small-minded attitude; its value is extremely limited. You should wish that your offering be multiplied without limit. If you offer one million, make a wish that you will be able to offer two. At the same time, it is important to remain free of pride. There are four ways to waste a generous action: to hope for a reward, to boast to others about it, to regret having done it, and to omit dedicating its merit to all beings. In short, a good action must be completely free from second thoughts and expectation; ideally, it should be free of the concepts of a doer, an object and an action.

When you practice, your mind must be free of poisonous thoughts, or you will spoil the whole thing. However positive your actions, words and thoughts are, if they are adulterated with attachment, anger and pride, they will have as little benefit as delicious food mixed with poison. If you are able to purify your body, speech and mind together, you will become like a spotless garment, perfectly cut and stitched, or like a precious stone, a diamond or a sapphire, without the slightest irregularity or flaw.

The third of the three supreme methods, the conclusion, is the dedication of merit, which will cause the fruit of this merit to increase continually instead of being exhausted as soon as it is enjoyed. Whether you have done one prostration or a thousand, offered one butter-lamp or a thousand butter-lamps, you should pray, "I dedicate the merit of this offering I have made (representing all the positive actions I have done in the past, am doing now, and shall do in the future) for the sake of all sentient beings throughout space, especially those whom I perceive as enemies." When you make this dedication you must be very clear about what you are doing, as if you were handing a present to each and every living being. You should not think that this merit is divided up between all the beings, but that each and every being receives the full amount of it.

Any action that is associated with these three supreme methods, even if it is not an obviously great act like reciting hundreds of millions of mantras or offering huge sums of money, will nevertheless have real, immeasurable benefit.

It is because of the pure and vast intention of bodhichitta that the Great Vehicle or Mahayana is called "great." Without bodhichitta, we might call ourselves practitioners of the Great Perfection, the Great Seal or the Great Middle Way, but we will still be on the narrow path of selfishness.

If you have these three supreme methods, you have everything you need. If you do not have them, there is no way to progress. Genuine practice is something that has to be developed; it requires a sustained effort. We have to transform ourselves. If, from the very beginning, we were completely free from attachment and anger and constantly had the infinite number of sentient beings in mind, we would already be realized and would have no need to practice in the first place. But this is not the case. This is why we need to keep in mind the meaning of the teachings and to watch vigilantly over the actions of our body, speech and mind. If we practice in this way, we will progress along the path without much difficulty. Just as one can see from a child's behavior, when he eats and so on, that he has been well brought up, so too, the positive transformation of our minds will be apparent in our actions.

In our everyday activities we should be able to retain the understanding we have found in meditation. Otherwise, though we may think that we have reached a high level of meditation, we will stumble over the first obstacle we encounter, and we will be unable to deal with the various circumstances that beset us in daily life. Meditation and post-meditation periods should reinforce and complement each other. If they do not, it is hard to achieve liberation.

In the beginning, practice is not very easy; in the middle it is not really stable; but in the end it becomes quite natural. This is why it is when we first start on the path that we should make the greatest effort. It is important to remember this.

This concludes the explanation of this short ngondro practice composed by Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo. A more detailed explanation of the preliminary practices can be found in Patrul Rinpoche's *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* (Kunzang Lamai Shelung).²²

At the request of the Sawang Urgyen Osel Mukpo and numerous disciples who wished to practice the ngondro Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche gave these teachings over a period of six days in December 1987, at Shechen Tennyi Dargyeling Monastery, Kathmandu, Nepal.

The teachings were translated by Konchog Tenzin (Matthieu Ricard), transcribed by Nur and Shirin Gale, and edited by members of the Padmakara Translation Group, notably Bhikshuni Ngawang Chodron, Charles Hastings and John Canti. Michal Abrams and Steve Gethin of the same translation group revised and edited the text for this second edition.

Text and Outline of the Practice

THE EXCELLENT PATH TO ENLIGHTENMENT A SHORT PRELIMINARY PRACTICE

LAMA KYENO!

Lama kyeno!

[Recite this three or more times, with the visualization described on page III]

THE SIX CONTEMPLATIONS

[Then reflect upon the six topics as explained on pages 13 to 26. If you are beginning the full ngondro practice, spend one, three, seven, or more days reflecting on each topic until it permeates your thoughts. Later on, always start each session of practice with these six contemplations.]

DAL JOR NYE KA DON CHEN TOB DU DIR

Now that I possess these freedoms and endowments, so difficult to obtain, and of such importance,

NO CHU MITAK DRENPE GYU KUL NE

May I arouse my mind by remembering the impermanence of the universe and beings.

SI SUM DUNGEL TSO LE NGE JUNG CHIR

To free myself truly from the ocean of suffering of the three worlds,

LANG DOR MA NOR LAM LA TSON NU SHO

Without confusing what is to be adopted and what is to be abandoned, may I persevere in the path.

This was written by Mangala.²³

TAKING REFUGE

[Visualize the assembly of the object of refuge as explained on pages 29 to 36, and do full prostrations while reciting the following four lines, which combine the refuge and bodhichitta vows. In all you should do 100,000 prostrations accompanied by the same number of recitations.]

NAMO DA SOK DRO KUN CHANG CHUP BAR

Homage! Until the enlightenment of myself and all beings,

TSAWA SUM LA KYAP SU CHI

I take refuge in the Three Roots.

SHEN TON SANG GYE TOB CHE CHIR

To obtain Buddhahood for the benefit of others,

MON JUK TON DAM CHANG SEM KYE

I generate bodhichitta, as aspiration, as action, and in its absolute meaning.

[Dissolve the visualization as explained on page 33 and dedicate the merit.]

BODHICHITTA PRACTICE

[Start by reflecting briefly upon the six topics, and recite the verse for taking refuge three times. Then concentrate on the bodhichitta practice itself. Visualize the refuge assembly, and, taking it as your witness, recite the four lines above again 100,000 times, this time focussing on relative and absolute bodhichitta, as explained on pages 37 to 50.]

VAJRASATTVA PRACTICE

[Start the practice by going briefly through the previous stages of the preliminary practice. Then, following the instructions given on pages 53 to 61, visualize Vajrasattva and recite the hundredsyllable mantra.]

AH DA NYI CHIWOR PE DE TENG

Ah! On the crown of my head, on a lotus and moon,

LAMA DORSEM YAB YUM KYI

Sits Guru Vajrasattva in union with his consort.

TUK KE NGAK LE DUTSI GYUN

From the mantra in his heart falls a stream of nectar,

BAP PE NE DON DIK DRIP JANG

Which purifies illness, harmful influences, negative actions and defilements.

Recite the hundred-syllable mantra [see Appendix, section 1].

[At the end of the session, recite the confession prayer (see Appendix, section 2). Then say:]

DORSEM O SHU RANG LA TIM

Vajrasattva melts into light and dissolves into me.

[Visualize yourself as Vajrasattva, as described on pages 58 to 61, and recite the six-syllable mantra (see Appendix, section 3).

Until you have completed 100,000 recitations of the hundredsyllable mantra, concentrate on that for most of each session, and recite the six-syllable mantra just 108 times at the end. Once you have

completed the 100,000 recitations, begin each session by reciting the hundred-syllable mantra 21 or 108 times, and then spend the rest of the session concentrating on the recitation of the six-syllable mantra, with the corresponding visualization. You should recite the six-syllable mantra a total of 600,000 times.]

OFFERING OF THE MANDALA

[Begin each session by going through the previous stages of the ngondro, then visualize the assembly of those to whom you are making the offering. Recite the Thirty-seven Element Mandala (see Appendix, section 4) three or seven times. Then, as explained on pages 63 to 72, concentrate on reciting the following verse and mantra 100,000 times. Alternatively, you may recite the fourline mandala offering given in the Appendix, section 5. In either case, with each recitation, you should make seven heaps of rice on the mandala plate.]

OM AH HUNG

KU SUM SHING KHAM LONG CHO DANG

I offer the Buddhafields of the Three Kayas, riches,

CHI NANG SANG WE CHOPE TRIN

And clouds of offerings, outer, inner and secret,

KONCHOK TSAWA SUM LA BUL

To the Three Jewels and the Three Roots.

SHE NE CHOK TUN NGODRUP TSOL

Accept them, and grant the supreme and common accomplishments.

OM AH HUNG GURU DEWA DAKINI SAPARIWARA RATNA MANDALA PUJA MEGHA AH
HUNG

[At the end of the session, dissolve the visualization and dedicate the merit.]

GURU YOGA

[Having gone briefly through the previous sections of the ngondro, concentrate on the visualization and recitation of the Guru Yoga, as explained on pages 75 to 84.]

RANG DUN NAMKHAR JA O LONG

Before me in the sky, in an expanse of rainbow light,

TSAWE LAMA TOTRENGTSEL

Is my root teacher, Perna Thotrengtsal,

GYU SUM RIGDZIN GYAMTSO KOR

Surrounded by the ocean of Knowledge Holders of the three transmissions,

KYAP KUN DUPE NGOWOR SHUK

He is the union of all objects of refuge.

Endeavor in the recitation of the Seven-Line Prayer and the Vajra Guru mantra.

[First complete 100,000 recitations of the Seven-Line Prayer (Appendix, section 6), concluding each session by reciting the Vajra Guru mantra (Appendix, section 7) a few hundred times, and receiving the four empowerments as below. When this has been done, proceed to the 1,300,000 recitations of the Vajra Guru mantra. Begin each session by reciting the Seven-Line Prayer 7 or 21 times and spend the rest of the time reciting the Vajra Guru mantra.]

At the end [of each session receive the four empowerments and dissolve the visualization.]

NE SUM DRU SUM OZER KYI

Through the light rays from the three seed-syllables at the three places

CHIN LAP WONG DANG NGODRUP TOP

I obtain blessings, empowerments and accomplishments.

LAMA O SHU RANG LA TIM

The Guru melts into light and dissolves into myself.

YERME MACHO LHUKPAR SHA

Inseparable from him, rest in simplicity.

Dedicate the merits.

This was written by Khyentse Wangpo.

Appendix

(1) THE HUNDRED-SYLLABLE MANTRA

OM BENZAR SATTO SAMAYA MANUPALAYA

BENZAR SATTO TENOPATICH'TRA DRIDHRO ME BHAWA

SUTOKOYO ME BHAWA SUPOKOYO ME BHAWA

ANURAKTO ME BHAWA SARWA SIDDHI ME PRAYATSA

SARWA KARMA SUTSA ME TSITTAM SHRIYAM KURU HUNG

HA HA HA HA HO BHAGAWAN SARWA TATHAGATA

BENZAR MAME MUN TSA BENZI BHAWA

MAHA SAMAYA SATTO AH

(2) THE CONFESSION PRAYER

GONPO DA NI MI SHE MONGPA TE

Protector, I have been ignorant and foolish,

TAMTSIK LE NI GAL SHING NYAM

And I have broken and spoiled the samaya.

LAMA GONPO KYAP DZO CHIK

Guru and protector, be my refuge!

TSOWO DORJE DZINPA TE

Sublime Vajra Holder,

TUKJE CHENPO DANYI CHEN

Embodiment of great compassion,

DRO WE TSO LA DA KYAP CHI

Supreme among beings, I take refuge in you.

KU SUNG TUK DANG TSAWA YENLAK KI TAMTSIK NYE TUNG TAMCHE TOL SHING
SHAKSO

I repent and confess all deteriorations, breaches, faults and downfalls of the root and branch samayas
related to body, speech and mind.

DIK DRIP PAK CHAK TRIME TSO NAM CHANG SHING DAKPAR DZE TU SOL

Cleanse and purify all negative actions, obscurations and habitual tendencies.

(3) THE SIX-SYLLABLE MANTRA

OM BENZAR SATFO HUNG

(4) THE OFFERING OF THE THIRTY SEVEN ELEMENT MANDALA

OM BENZAR BHUMI AH HUNG

[the Vajra ground]

SHI YONG SU TAKPA WONG CHEN SER KYI SA SHI

The foundation is the utterly pure golden ground of vast strength,

OM BENZAR REKHE AH HUNG

[the Vajra fence]

CHI CHAK RI KHOR YUK KI KHOR WE U SU HUNG

The boundary is a ring of iron mountains encircling the syllable Hung.

RIT GYELPO RIRAP

Here are Sumeru, king of mountains [in the center],

SHAR LU PHAKPO

In the East, Purvavideha,

LHO DZAMBU LING

In the South, Jambudvipa,

NUP BALANG CHO

In the West, Aparagodaniya,

CHANG DRA MINYEN

In the North, Uttarakuru.

LU DANG LU PHAK

Deha and Videha [toward the East],

NGAYAP DANG NGAYAP SHEN

Camara and Aparacamara [toward the South],

YO DEN DANG LAM CHOK DRO

Satha and Uttaramantrina [toward the West],

DRA MINYEN DANG DRA MINYEN KI DA

Kurava and Kaurava [toward the North].

RINPOCHE RIWO

The Jewel Mountain,

PAKSAM KYI SHING

The Wish-Fulfilling Tree,

DO JO'I BA

The Bountiful Cow,

MAMO PE LOTOK

And the Spontaneous Harvest.

KORLO RINPOCHE

The Precious Wheel,

NORBU RINPOCHE

The Precious jewel,

TSUNMO RINPOCHE

The Precious Queen,

LONPO RINPOCHE

The Precious Minister,

LANGPO RINPOCHE

The Precious Elephant,

TACHOK RINPOCHE

The Precious Horse,

MAPON RINPOCHE

The Precious General,

TERCHEN POI PUMBA

And the Vase of Great Treasure.

GEKPA MA

The Lady of Charm,

TRENGWA MA

The Lady of Garlands,

LU MA

The Lady of Song,

KAR MA

The Lady of Dance,

METOK MA

The Lady of Flowers,

DUPO MA

The Lady of Incense,

NANGSEL MA

The Lady of Light,

TRICHAP MA

The Lady of Perfume.

NYIMA

The Sun

DAWA

And the Moon,

RINPOCHE'I DUK

The Jeweled Canopy,

CHOKLE NAMPAR GYELWE GYELTSSEN

And the Banner of Universal Victory.

LHA DANG MI'I PELJOR PUNSUM TSOKPA MATSANGWA MEPA DI NYI TSA WA DANG
GYUPAR CHEPE PELDEN LAMA DAMPA NAM DANG YIDAM KHYIL KHOR KYI LHA
TSOK SANGYE DANG CHANGCHUP SEMPE TSOK DANG CHEPA NAM LA BUL WAR
GY'O

The glory, wealth, and enjoyments of gods and men, with nothing lacking-all this I offer to the
glorious holy root master and the masters of the lineage, to the yidams, and the host of deities of the
mandala and to the assembly of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

TUKJE DROWE TON DU SHE SU SOL

Accept it with compassion for the benefit of beings;

SHE NE CHIN KYI LAP TU SOL

Having accepted it grant your blessing.

(5) THE SHORT MANDALA OFFERING

SA SHI PO KYI CHUK SHING METOK TRAM

The ground is sprinkled with scented water and strewn with flowers.

RI RAP LING SHI NYI DE GYENPA DI

Adorned with Mount Meru, the four continents, and the sun and moon.

SANGYE SHING TU MIKTE PULWA YI

Thinking of it as a blessed Buddhafield, I offer it

DRO KUN NAMDAK SHING LA CHOPAR SHO

So that all beings may enjoy the happiness of the perfectly pure Buddhafields.

IDAM RATNA MANDALA KAM NIRYATA YAMI

(6) THE SEVEN-LINE PRAYER

HUNG ORGYEN YUL KYI NUB CHANG TSAM

Hung! Born in the northwest land of Uddiyana

PEMA KESAR DONGPO LA

On the pollen bed of a lotus stem,

YAMTSEN CHOK KI NGODRUP NYE

Wondrously, you attained supreme accomplishment.

PEMA JUNGNE SHESU TRA

You are renowned as the Lotus Born,

KOR DU KHANDRO MANGPO KOR

Surrounded by retinues of many dakinis.

KHYE KYI JESU DA DRUP KYI

Emulating you, I will perfect myself-

CHIN KYI LOP CHIR SHEK SU SOL

Come then, I pray, bestow your blessings.

GURU PEMA SIDDHI HUNG

(7) THE VAJRA GURU MANTRA

OM AH HUNG VAJRA GURU PEMA SIDDHI HUNG

Glossary

Arhat (dgra bcom pa): Literally "One who has destroyed the enemies." The enemies referred to are the kleshas or afflictive emotions, which are vanquished through the practice of the teachings of the root vehicle or Shravakayana/Hinayana. Arhats achieve liberation from the sufferings of samsara, but because their realization of emptiness is not perfect, they are unable to remove the subtle veils of attachment to phenomenal reality, which are the obstacles to omniscience. They have yet to enter the Mahayana in order to progress towards the supreme goal of Buddhahood.

Bardo (bar do): Literally "between two," i.e., the intermediate state. There are several kinds of bardo, but most often the term is used to refer to the intermediate state occurring between death and rebirth.

Bodhichitta (byang chub sems): The mind of enlightenment. This is a key word in the Mahayana. On the relative level, it is the wish to attain Buddhahood for the sake of all beings, as well as the practice necessary to do this. On the absolute level, it is the direct insight into the ultimate nature of self and phenomena.

Bodhisattva (byang chub sems dpa'): A practitioner on the path to Buddhahood, training in the practice of compassion and the six transcendent perfections, who has vowed to attain enlightenment for the sake of all beings. The Tibetan translation of this term means literally a "hero of the enlightened mind."

Buddha (sangs rgyas): One who has removed the two veils (the veil of afflictive emotions, which is the cause of suffering, and the veil of ignorance, which is the obstacle to omniscience) and who has brought to perfection the two sorts of knowledge (of the ultimate and relative nature of phenomena).

Buddhadharma: The teaching of the Buddha (see Dharma).

Buddhafield (zhing khams): A Buddhafield is a dimension or world manifested through the enlightened aspirations of a Buddha or Bodhisattva in conjunction with the meritorious energy of sentient beings. Beings reborn in a Buddhafield are able to progress swiftly to enlightenment and never fall into the lower realms of samsara. It is to be understood, however, that any place, perceived as the pure manifestation of spontaneous Wisdom, is in fact a Buddhafield.

Circumambulation: A highly meritorious devotional practice, consisting in walking clockwise, concentratedly and with awareness, around a sacred object, e.g., a temple, stupa, holy mountain, or the house, and even the person, of a spiritual master.

Dakini (mkha'gro ma): The feminine principle associated with wisdom. This term has several levels of meaning. There are ordinary dakinis, who are beings with a certain degree of spiritual power, and wisdom dakinis, who are fully realized.

Dharma (chos): The body of teaching expounded by the Buddha Shakyamuni and other enlightened beings which shows the way to enlightenment. It comprises two aspects: the Dharma of transmission (lung gi chos), namely the teachings which are actually given, and the Dharma of realization (rtogs pa'i chos), or the states of wisdom, etc., which are attained through the application of the teachings.

Dharmakaya (chos sku): The absolute, or truth, body; the aspect of emptiness.

Dzogchen (rdzogs chen) (Skt: mahasamdhī, atiyoga): The Great Perfection, the highest view according to the Nyingma tradition.

Kagyupa: One of the new schools of Tibetan Buddhism, founded by Marpa the Translator (1012-1095).

Kalpa (bskal pa): Term given to immense periods of time as conceived in the traditional cosmology of India. A great kalpa, which corresponds to the period of formation, duration, disappearance and absence of a universal system, comprises eighty small kalpas. An intermediary kalpa consists of two small kalpas taken together, in the first of which the duration of life increases, while in the second it decreases.

Karma: Sanskrit word meaning "action," understood as the law of causality. According to the Buddha's teaching, all actions, whether of thought, word or deed, are like seeds which will eventually bear fruit in terms of experience, whether in this or future lives. A positive or virtuous act will result in happiness, while the definition of sin or negative action is that which is the cause of suffering for the agent later on.

Kaya (sku): Literally "body"; used in reference to the nature of a Buddha. See Dharmakaya, Nirmanakaya, Sambhogakaya.

Lower Realms: See Samsara, Six Realms.

Mahamudra (phyag rgya chen po): The Great Seal, the highest view according to the Kagyupa tradition.

Mahayana: The Great Vehicle. See Shravakayana.

Mani: The mantra of Chenrezig, the six syllables OM MANI PADME HUNG.

Mantra (sngags): Formula consisting of words or syllables associated with specific meditational deities, the recitation of which forms an essential part of tantric meditation.

Ngondro (sngon 'gro): Literally "preliminary." Practices which establish the foundations of spiritual progress.

Nirmanakaya (sprul sku): The manifestation body, the aspect of compassion and means, whereby a Buddha may be perceived by unenlightened beings and therefore can communicate with and help them.

Nirvana (myang ngan las Was pa): The Tibetan translation of this Sanskrit word means "gone beyond suffering" and indicates the various levels of enlightenment gained according to the practice of the Shravakayana or Mahayana.

Nyingma (rnying ma): The earliest school of Tibetan Buddhism, founded in the eighth century by the Guru Padmasambhava.

Pratyekabuddha (rang sangs rgyas): One who attains enlightenment alone, without the aid of a master, and who does not transmit teachings to others.

Rinpoche (rin po che): Literally "most precious one," a form of address used in Tibetan Buddhism for incarnate lamas, abbots and respected teachers.

Sadhana (sgrub thabs): A ritual, or text of a ritual, serving as a support for meditation in the Mantrayana.

Sambhogakaya (longs sku): The body of perfect enjoyment, the spontaneously luminous aspect of Buddhahood, directly perceptible only to highly realized beings.

Samsara ('khor ba): The wheel or round of existence; the state of being unenlightened in which the mind, enslaved by the three poisons of desire, anger and ignorance, evolves uncontrolled from one state to another, passing through an endless stream of psycho-physical experiences all of which are characterized by suffering. See Six Realms.

Shravakayana/Hinayana: The practitioners of Dharma are identified as belonging to two different sets of teaching or "vehicles", according to the nature of their aspirations. These are known as the Hinayana, or Root Vehicle, and the Mahayana, or Great Vehicle. The Root Vehicle is subdivided into the way of the Hearers (or Shravakas), disciples of the Buddha, and the way of those who seek enlightenment relying only on themselves, or Pratyekabuddhas. The goal of the Shravaka and Pratyekabuddha paths is nirvana, conceived of as definitive liberation from the sufferings of samsara. The Great Vehicle is that of the Bodhisattvas, those who, while accepting the validity and efficacy of the other vehicle, aspire to the full enlightenment of Buddhahood for the sake of all beings. The term Hinayana is frequently taken to be pejorative and for that reason is often avoided. Numerous masters, e.g., His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Nyanaponika Mahathera, suggest that "Shravakayana" be used instead, even though, at least here, the category is understood to include the Pratyekabuddhas as well.

Six Realms ('gro drug): The experience of beings in samsara is traditionally schematized into six general categories, referred to as realms or worlds, in which the mind abides as the result of previous actions or karma. None of these states is satisfactory, though the degree of suffering in them differs from one to another. The three upper or fortunate realms, where suffering is alleviated by temporary pleasures, are the heavens of the mundane gods, the realms of the asuras or demigods, and the world of human beings. The three lower realms, in which suffering predominates over every other experience, are those of the animals, the hungry ghosts, and the hells.

Sugata (bde bar gshegs pa): Literally "one who has gone to happiness." A Buddha. Someone who, using the happy path of the Bodhisattva vehicle, reaches the happy fruit, perfect Buddhahood.

Sutrayana: The Mahayana has two subsections: the sutrayana, i.e., the teachings based on the sutras and propounding the practice of the six transcendent perfections; and the mantrayana, the teachings and practices based on the tantra texts.

Tathagatagarbha (de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po): The Buddha-nature, the potential for Buddhahood, present in the mind of every sentient being.

Three jewels (dkon mchoggsun): The Buddha, the Doctrine (Dharma) and the Assembly of disciples and practitioners (Sangha). These are the three objects of refuge.

Torma (gtor ma): A sort of ritual cake of varying shape and composition, used in practices and rituals of the Mantrayana. Depending on the circumstances, it is considered as an offering, a representation or mandala of the meditational deity, or even a kind of symbolic weapon in ceremonies to remove obstacles from the path.

Wheel of Dharma: The symbol of the Buddha's teaching. The Dharma is divided into three broad categories, traditionally known as the Three Turnings of the Wheel of the Dharma. The First Turning of the Wheel corresponds to the Buddha's first teachings on the Four Noble Truths of suffering and the release from suffering. The Second Turning consists of teachings on emptiness: the doctrine that all phenomena are devoid of self-entity and true existence. The Third Turning comprises teachings on the Tathagatagarbha, or Buddhanature inherent in the minds of all sentient beings.

Yidam deity (yi dam): A form of a Buddha used as a support in visualization and meditation in the Mantrayana. Such deities may be masculine or feminine, peaceful or wrathful, regarded ultimately as being inseparable from the mind of the meditator.

Notes

1. Bardo: the intermediate state between death and the next life.
2. The three worlds of samsara: the worlds of desire, of form and of formlessness.
3. To "turn the Wheel of Dharma" is to teach or explain the Buddha's teachings. See also Glossary.
4. The lineage of the three transmissions: the mind lineage of the Conquerors, the symbol lineage of the Vidyadharas and the hearing lineage of ordinary beings.
5. The five silken garments are: ribbons hanging from the diadem, long scarf, upper garment, skirt, and belt.
6. The eight jewelled ornaments are: diadem, earrings, three necklaces, armlets, bracelets, and anklets.
7. The three vehicles are the Shravakayana; Pratyekabuddhayana (these two comprising the Hinayana or Lesser Vehicle); and the Bodhisattvayana, which is equivalent to the Mahayana or Great Vehicle.
8. This point is rarely understood by Western students. To step over a book, whether it be a holy scripture or not, is a transgression of the refuge vows. One should even try to avoid walking on anything written on the ground.
9. Respectively the Great Seal and the Great Perfection.
10. Vajratopa (Skt.); rDo-rje snyems-ma (Tib.).
11. Samaya: the sacred bond created between the disciple and his or her teacher.
12. The five crimes with immediate retribution are: (1) to kill one's father, (2) to kill one's mother, (3) to kill an Arhat, (4) with evil intention to draw blood from the body of a Buddha, and (5) to cause a schism within the spiritual community. When someone who has committed any of these five dies, he or she is immediately reborn in the Hell of Ultimate Torment, without first going through the experiences of the bardo, or intermediate state.
13. Traditionally these include Arura or myrobalan (*Terminalia chebula*), the universal medicinal plant, and Pharura (*Terminalia belerica*).
14. The mantra of perfect discipline is OM AMOGASHILA SAMBHARA SAMBHARA BHARA BHARA MAHASHUDHA SATO PEMA BIBHUKSHITE BHUDZA DHARA DHARA SAMANTHA AVALOKITE HUNG PHET SOHA.
15. For the Nirmanakaya mandala, the seven heaps of grain represent Mount Meru, the four continents, and the sun and moon.
16. The seven emblems owned by a Chakravartin, a universal monarch: the wheel, jewel, queen, minister, elephant, horse and general.
17. The inhabitants of the three worlds (Tib. sa gsum): gods above the earth, humans on the earth and nagas (serpent-like beings with miraculous powers) below the earth.
18. gSang ngags lam rim, found in volume 60 (I) of the Rin chen gter mdzod chen mo.

19. The Nyingmapa tradition divides the Buddhist path into nine vehicles: the Shravakayana and Pratyekabuddhayana, which belong to the Hinayana; the Bodhisattvayana; the three external tantras (Kriya, Charya and Yoga) and the three internal tantras (Mahayoga, Anuyoga and Atiyoga), these last six belonging to the Vajrayana.

20. A Tibetan scroll painting.

21. For an extensive teaching on Guru Yoga by Dilgo Khyentse, see *The Wish-Fulfilling Jewel* (Boston: Shambhala, 1988).

22. *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* (Kunzang Lamai Shelung), Patrul Rinpoche, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, San Francisco: International Sacred Literature Trust/Harper Collins, 1994.

23. These four lines were written by Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, Tashi Paljor (Skt. Mangala Shribhuti).