LONGCHEN NYINGTIK PRACTICE MANUAL
advice on how to practice

by Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche
based on Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo’s Short Preliminary Practice
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Short Preliminary Practice

Edited by Chanel Grubner

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Foreword

This small, insignificant book is in reality the product of the collection of a lot of blabbering. But somehow, due to the karmic debt that a sizeable number of sentient beings have with me, they happen to have interpreted this blabbering as a teaching. Whatever the case, the gathering place for the discussions contained within these ensuing pages was mainly Silz, Germany, during August of 2001.

At the beginning of the Bodhicaryāvatāra, the great Shāntideva aspired that through the writing of that text, benefit might be brought to beings like himself. Likewise, if there happen to be, and no doubt there are, many confused beings like myself, who by encountering this text receive benefit, then I will take this as a source of merit for myself. Eventually may this also be a cause of merit for others.

The physical existence of this text is mainly due to the relentless hard work of Chanel Grubner. Of course, readers must take notice that this is not meant to be a complete and finished work and thus, there may be many mistakes both in meaning and wording. While one should not hoist the banner of intellectual pride and jump to critical conclusions, with good motivation and intention to help the buddhadharma, any comments are very much welcome.

Dzongsar J. Khyentse Rinpoche
Introduction

First and foremost, I would like to thank Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche for the opportunity to study and contemplate these precious, profound teachings more deeply. Personally, I am entirely grateful to have been able to muddle through and edit this book. I can compare it to being handed this beautifully cut diamond and being asked to polish it. To begin with, it turned out to be much like creating smudges on a diamond, and the more I rubbed away, the more smudges there were. But thankfully, a diamond is simply a diamond.

This teaching is based on the short preliminary practices of the Longchen Nyingtik and is essentially derived from transcripts of teachings given during an eight-day retreat in Germany. The text of Khyentse Wangpo’s short preliminary practice in Tibetan, phonetic Tibetan and English translation, along with associated liturgies and commentary by Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche may be found in “The Excellent Path to Enlightenment” (translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, published by Snow Lion, 1996). One other important companion text is Patrul Rinpoche’s classic commentary on the Longchen Nyingtik Ngöndro: the ‘Kunzang Lama’i Shelung’, also known as ‘The Words of My Perfect Teacher’ (translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, published in 1994).

In the process of bringing these retreat teachings into book form, as much as possible, the attempt has been made not to detract from Rinpoche’s unique style and manner of communicating. At the same time, the contents have undergone various changes both in wording and structure. To enhance the overall flow for the reader, the original sequence has been somewhat reorganized, and many of the questions have been regrouped into particular heading sections. On the whole, the headings themselves, which are hyperlinked in the electronic version of this document, aim to highlight some of the more important points rather than categorize according to subject. Also, those broader discussions, not so directly related to this practice, have been largely omitted since Rinpoche has expressed that the main purpose is to provide students and practitioners with a kind of manual for ngöndro practice.

Throughout the text there is regular usage of Sanskrit and Tibetan terms, mostly with diacritical marks added. Rather than make all transliterated terms into italics, most of the less common terms have been italicized. For instance, terms such as duḥkha and ḍākini are in italics, whereas the more frequently cited Sanskrit and Tibetan terms such as ‘nirmāṇakāya’ and ‘ngöndro’ haven’t been italicized and nor have personal names.

For any errors or inconsistencies I take sole responsibility and regret that owing to my own confusion, there is likely room for improvement. Since this compilation is meant to be an ongoing project, comments and suggestions will certainly be much appreciated.

Acknowledgements

A special thanks to Doris Wolter who transcribed and edited several of the transcripts and also provided invaluable support in those crucial early stages. It was also Doris who suggested and contributed to the headings in their current mode. Thanks also, to all who transcribed the teachings, and especially to Arne, for all his thoroughness. There are many others who have contributed in numerous ways; but in particular, the editor would like to thank Claudia, Steve, Suzanne, Maree, Derek, Douglas, Cynthia, Daniel and last but not least, Kelly, who has kindly provided the artwork and the drawings of the maṇḍalas.

Chanel Grubner, editor
As we all know, the Buddha’s teachings aim to liberate us from all kinds of delusion, and that is what we call enlightenment. Now when we speak of liberation, we are not only trying to be released from temporal delusion, but also from the very root of delusion, so that delusion will never again occur. And in using this term ‘delusion’ not only does it refer to some of the more gross delusion it also includes the subtlest of delusion, as well. Some of the aspects we consider to be path, or that we treasure as wisdom, or some of the things we think of as virtuous are eventually the very things that also need to be purified.

To enable us to release ourselves from all the delusion, the Buddha taught numerous different methods. Traditionally, the teachings speak of more than 84,000 methods. Each is intended to meet the needs of different kinds of sentient beings, with varying kinds of motivation and determination. There are those who are determined to completely renounce themselves from samsāra and that is their main aim. Because of this, the Buddha taught the whole srāvaka vehicle.1 And then, there are certain types of sentient beings who have an even greater kind of determination. Not only do they have the resolve of escaping from samsāra but there is also the determination of not dwelling in nirvāṇa. In other words, there is the determination to escape from all kinds of extremes not only for oneself but for the sake of all sentient beings. For these beings, Buddha taught the greater vehicle, generally known as the mahāyāna. In either case, whether it is the greater or the lesser vehicle, each of the methods, and both these paths liberate us from delusion.

Escape or liberation from delusion is difficult, because of our many strong habits. These habitual patterns are something we have developed over countless lifetimes, over so many years. So one could say that the buddhi-dharma is a systematic method of peeling back the layers of these habitual patterns. It is as though the habitual patterns are a skin and through our study and practice we begin to peel off this skin. Each time we peel off one layer of skin we discover an inner skin, and think of it as the real fruit. Soon enough, however, we realise that it is yet another skin, and then we peel off that layer. But this is quite difficult because we have the tendency to get stuck with the inner layer of skin, thinking that it must be the fruit. We do not immediately comprehend that this is but a more stubborn and subtle delusion. For this, we need mind training.

Both in the mahāyāna and in the srāvakayāna, there is a complete structure of mind training. Within the srāvaka tradition, one’s training of the mind is based on disciplining the body, speech, and mind. This is accomplished through the whole vinaya structure, from shaving the head, wearing robes, and basically renouncing the worldly life physically. In the mahāyāna, we try to tame or train our mind, with even more vigorous methods. Besides contemplating on renouncing worldly life, we also try to train our minds to understand the general situation and the varying stages of other sentient beings. In other words we practise compassion and generate the so-called bodhicitta mind so as to enlighten all sentient beings.

This practice falls within the mahāyāna path. Again, because of differing determination, two categories of methods are found: there is the mahāyāna that teaches the cause as the path, and the mahāyāna that practices the result as the path. With this ngöndro you are practicing within the second category, which is to take the result as the path. This is also known as the vajrayāna path. On this path, we train our mind not only through the renunciation of worldly life, and by generating compassion and bodhicitta, but also, we try
Some Crucial Aspects to Begin the Ngöndro

to train our mind by transforming impure experiences into pure vision. That is the forte of the vajrayāna; there is a specialness about it because of this difference in attitude.

The vajrayāna way of looking at the world is quite different. A prātimokṣa attitude’ is to see this samsaric world as something impure, and this is what they call the “Truth of Suffering.” So in following this to its logical conclusion, the world is something to be gotten rid of and something to escape from. That is the śrāvaka attitude. In the mahāyāna, samsāra is also thought to be imperfect, but instead of trying to escape, the aim is to practice compassion and bodhicitta. In the vajrayāna, we try to understand the reality – impure phenomena is also pure and has been pure all along. This is what we try to contemplate.

Unfortunately the term ‘ngöndro’ has misled a lot of people. Literally translated, it actually holds the meaning of ‘preliminary practice.’ So somehow, we have developed the idea, “It is something not as important” or that “it is not the main practice.” We think it is something ‘required’ before you actually do ‘the real thing’ or ‘the main course.’ That is sad because as your study deepens, you will realise that apart from the whole ngöndro practice, you will not find anything more distinctive in the vajrayāna. Still, I can understand why in the past, the lamas have mainly identified the ngöndro as a preliminary practice; not only does it tend to encourage practitioners, but also it is sort of structured that way.

Anyhow, as I go through and explain the practice of ngöndro, rather than going much into the technical side, I’d like to convey more of the crucial points. As for the visualisations and other technical details, you can always find instructions in the great commentaries, such as the “Words of my Perfect Teacher.” Alternatively, you can even receive tips from other students on how to do prostrations and things like that.

The Structure of the Ngöndro

There is refuge, then there is bodhicitta and following on from this, there are the three exclusive vajrayāna practices. Refuge is the first preliminary. Refuge diverts you from the wrong path to the right path, and in this way, it is actually a prātimokṣa practice. Then within the right path, we have the greater path and the lesser path, although of course, both are right path. In order to encourage practitioners to practice the greater path we have bodhicitta, which is the embodiment of the entire mahāyāna path. And when using methods such as visualisation, substance and mantra, which are methods not found in the śrāvakayāna and the mahāyāna traditions, we are then talking of the vajrayāna. There is the Vajrasattva mantra recitation and the manḍala offering where we use substance as a support to practice. Then finally, in order to dismantle this cocoon of delusion, we have the most profound path of guru yoga. So these three, Vajrasattva, manḍala offering and guru yoga are essential to the vajrayāna path. Thus, all three vehicles are contained within the ngöndro: refuge as a prātimokṣa practice, bodhicitta as a mahāyāna practice and the rest as a vajrayāna practice.

Ngöndro practice is not a kindergarten practice – it is actually a main practice. As Patriul Rinpoche said, “In many different ways, ngöndro is much more important than the main practice, because it is a foundation.” Being with some of the great masters such as His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche and Dudjom Rinpoche, I know this to be true from my own experience. One would think if this were only a preliminary, or prerequisite practice, then we would not find great masters practicing ngöndro; surely, such a great master as Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche would not need to practice Nyingtik Ngöndro, but I
have seen this with my own eyes; even towards the end of their lives, I found them practising ngöndro. This alone should indicate why ngöndro practice is so necessary.

**Distinguishing the Theory from the Pith Instructions**

In the study and the practice of Buddhism, you may have noticed the fact that we tend to find two terms. There is what we refer to as ‘the actual theory,’ which in the mahāyāna is sūtra or shāstrā and there are also the pith instructions. Similarly in the vajrayāna we have tantric texts such as the Kālachakra, Chakrasaṃvara or Hevajra and then, we also have what we call pith instructions. While there is quite a big difference between theory and pith instructions, at the same time, they also have to complement each other a lot.

It is quite strange, but I have noticed that both in the East and in the West, when studying the mahāyāna, people tend to fall too much on the theory side. Many people seem to put more emphasis on the theory and forget about the mahāyāna pith instructions. This even happens with madhyamika texts such as the *Bodhicaryavatāra*, which is maybe more of a pith instruction in any case. In the vajrayāna, it is the other way around. I have been to many dharma centers, and have met a great number of dharma students who seem to value the pith instructions, and yet they have completely forgotten the tantric texts, and the study of the tantra. Yet the theory and the pith instructions are equally pertinent. Especially if you seriously want to pursue the path of the mahāyāna or the vajrayāna, this is something you should really keep in mind.

The distinctions between the theory and the pith instructions are straightforward. To use the analogy of learning to drive, there is a driving manual that comes with the car, which is something you can read from the first to the last page. This manual is synonymous with the tantric texts and that is what we call theory. That part is very important. So the text itself is very logical, and rational. But as for the pith instructions, these are quite flexible, and at times, quite dramatic and outrageous.

Suppose there are fifty people wanting to learn how to drive, each with different kinds of paranoia and with different physical abilities. Perhaps some are unable to use their right foot properly, or have some other kind of irregularity. Each person has his or her own unique and distinctive kind of physical and mental condition. Now of course, when teaching someone to drive, the text itself, the driving manual is standard, and for that matter, it is the same car. So I would give you the same materials. Some of the instructions such as ‘if you steer to the right, the car goes to the right’ are also standard. For the non-standard instructions, it all depends individually, on things like how much time you have. Some of you may not care how fast you learn. Others may really want to learn intensively, within three days for instance.

Sometimes I might have to teach something that appears to have absolutely nothing to do with the text. I might say, “Drink a cup of coffee first, before you drive.” The context could simply be that you have not woken up properly yet. The text will never say, “You have to drink a cup of coffee before driving.” That is only my own judgment: This student needs to wake up a little so they should first drink a cup of coffee. This is what we call pith instructions. They are very versatile, colourful, unorthodox, and sometimes not so logical, just like when the Zen masters say, “What is the sound of one hand clapping?” It is a question that seems completely ridiculous, but depending on when, where and with whom you are using such a method, it works, individually.

Which category does the ngöndro teaching fall into? Is it theory or is it pith instructions? Maybe for some of you it will come as a surprise but it is actually mainly pith instructions. It is not theory. For instance, both the whole practice of prostrations and the
mandala offering are pith instructions. If you want to know the theory behind this, you have to study something like the “Guhyagarbha Tantra” or a similar kind of text. What I’m saying is please, at least, have the aspiration that one day you can go and study why you have to do such and such a practice. By learning tantric texts like the Guhyagarbha, you will then know why prostrations works or does not work.

It is of even more importance that we learn how to interpret the theory. To return to our example of learning to drive, I am sure there must be some mention in the car manual of what you need to be cautious about. Probably on the first page it says: “Exercise caution. Don’t drink and drive, and remember to be alert.” The theory is like that; it is not completely spelled out. You simply have to be careful when you drive. That is all the theory can say. In effect, ‘be careful’ is open to a lot of interpretation. Different people need to be careful in different ways. With this in mind, you will relate to why doing one-hundred-thousand prostrations works for some, and yet for someone like Milarepa it wasn’t necessary, because he was building a nine-storey house. Or why, for some students, the lama might say, “There is no need to do prostrations,” because that person might be doing something else like confirming the lama’s flight tickets. Otherwise, there is the danger of thinking that certain things are almost mandatory and that as a vajrayāna student one has to follow the Tibetan way of doing prostrations. In other words, you would have developed the misunderstanding that every driver needs to drink a cup of coffee before they drive.

On the first page of the manual, having read that one has to be careful when driving, it is very important to learn how to interpret that. Maybe for someone like you it means, “drink a cup of coffee” then perhaps for someone else, drinking coffee might make them nervous, or agitated, so maybe a sip of margarita is better to relax them! It is totally the opposite!

Again, please keep in mind that most of the vajrayāna rituals, and all the methods such as mandala offering, and especially guru yoga are pith instructions. Also, you should know that there are many different layers of pith instructions. Certain pith instructions are more generic in nature, such as “do one-hundred-thousand prostrations,” and then there are exclusive pith instructions given to different individuals.

So as I am explaining, I will be referring to both the theory and some of the pith instructions. I’ll try hard to be as loyal as possible to the actual text, the ngöndro, and the whole vajrayāna concept. When I give the pith instructions, most of the time I will be repeating what I have heard from my teachers, because in practice, I rely on their pith instructions. That is to say, I have not so much experience since I have not done so much practice. However, with the little practice that I have done, I have managed to gain some obscured experiences. Based on some of this understanding, I will also give instructions.

**Three Pith Instructions to Start the Ngöndro**

This pith instruction I have heard from my masters and it also comes a little from my own experience. As stated in many of the teachings and as I have heard numerous times from my masters, every time we begin practicing, it helps not to plunge into the practice right away. This especially applies, if you are a very busy person, with only five minutes for your daily Longchen Nyingtik Ngöndro or whatever practices you might be doing. Even ordinarily, we have this constant train of thoughts. But suppose you had been quarrelling with your fiancée just before the practice. More than likely, there will be this chain of thoughts of what to say to your partner, and these thoughts will be coming one after another. You then see that it is time for your ngöndro practice. If you start your practice
right away, it is not going to go so well. To instead, just for a few moments, put a stop to this chain of thoughts, I have found this to be very, very useful. There are actually countless methods on how to stop the chain of thoughts. But for me, before I practice I just sit for a while and every time the thoughts come along, I try to stop that by bringing in the notion of renunciation mind, over and over again.

I think of how I am now forty years old and if I lived to be eighty that would be quite a long time. In this dangerous, unhealthy world, to live until eighty years of age is quite an achievement, and yet out of eighty, half is already gone. So all I have is the other half and if I continue to live in this way, this next forty years is going to go ‘just like that.’ Things are like that. I think of what Guru Rinpoche has said and how “Out of this forty years remaining, I am going to sleep the equivalent of twenty years,” because half the time we are sleeping. So now there are only twelve hours a day that could actually be termed living. Out of these twelve hours, judging from my own attachment, let’s say I watch at least one movie a day. That ends up taking at least a few hours, which leaves perhaps ten hours out of the day. Anyhow, when you go and watch a movie, you have to wait until it starts. That is quite sad, because we are waiting for something totally ridiculous to happen. Sometimes we wait for quite a long time, perhaps up to fifteen minutes during the advertisements. Then eating of course, especially if you go to a French restaurant with a six or seven course meal, that’s really going to take up so much time. And at least every other day we will gossip. So now we have maybe five hours or so left. Out of forty years that means eight years remaining but most of that will go into paranoia, anxiety, and so forth. There is very little actual time for practice.

So anyway, this should give you an idea of how to stop the chain of thoughts. Try not to immediately throw yourself into the practice; instead you just watch yourself, and watch your life. Watch what you are doing. If you are doing say ten minutes of practice every day, for at least two to three minutes of that time, you should do what we call stopping the chain of thoughts. In doing this, we aim to transform the mind. We do so by invoking the renunciation mind, by thinking in terms of “I am dying. I am coming closer to death” and so forth. It really helps.

Among the various traditional methods to transform our ordinary perception, one very good one is what we call ‘clearing the stale air.’ After doing several minutes of stopping the chain of thoughts, you sit straight and breathe in quite strongly. You then block your right nostril as you breathe out from the left. On the out breath, you can use incredible vajrayāna methods, such as visualising that all your passion, and desire in the form of dark red light goes out, in the same instance. Then you breathe in from the same nostril, and if you want to elaborate on this, you can think that all the buddha’s and bodhisattvas wisdom and compassion dissolves into you, in the form of light. Then block the left nostril and as you breathe out, think that all your aggression in the form of dark colour flows out. Again breathe in and out from both nostrils, and this time, think that all your ignorance in the form of dark light, comes out in a kind of dark cloud.

I would not linger too much on the details of the visualisations. Just think that whatever you are visualising is happening. On this, there is one further pith instruction. When you do a visualisation, do not linger on one form, by questioning: what kind of white light, or to what diameter is the light? The whole purpose of the vajrayāna visualisation is to occupy the ordinary thoughts with extraordinary thoughts and that is the vital aspect here. If you rely too much on one detail, you are opening the door for more obstacles. As soon as you think it is fine, don’t linger on it, just immediately go on to the next step of the visualisation. That is one very common pith instruction.
There is another aspect to clearing the stale air. In the vajrayāna, we find these terms prāṇa, naḍī, and bindu, which are terms that are not even found in the śrāvakayāna and the mahāyāna tradition, let alone the meaning. It is in the vajrayāna, that there is a complete path to achieve enlightenment in this very ordinary body. In the śrāvakayāna and the mahāyāna, in order to achieve enlightenment you have to actually get rid of this body. Only then do you reach the parinirvāṇa. So ordinarily, this prāṇa, or the wind, is like a blind horse, and our mind is the handicapped rider. Thus, when beginning your practice by clearing the stale prāṇa, it has properly created this inner atmosphere. And, I think, it is a good one to use. That is one method.

The next is not a must, but I would suggest doing it. Suppose you are practising at home, what you do is completely convince yourself that the place where you are is not just ‘home in Germany’ or wherever you happen to be. This place is not ‘this house or this apartment’; it is a pure realm. Truly that is so important. Especially since the vajrayāna is a path that transforms impure vision into pure vision.

When we say ‘impure vision’ this is not in the sense that there is something dirty, like you might find in Kathmandu. It has nothing to do with that. It is impure because we think in the way of “a ceiling is only a ceiling and a floor is only a floor.” We are stuck with these notions. It is impure in that we think, “One thousand people won’t possibly fit into my bedroom.” It is impure in that we think, “This can’t be used as a bedroom.” There are all these dualistic distinctions, where we imagine that such and such can be used only for a certain purpose, or is too white, too dark, too hot, too cold, and the like. Likewise, when we say ‘the buddha realm’ we are not talking about something you might see in some science fiction film, and nor is it some kind of really happy heaven. We are talking about a realm of non-dualism. But this in itself is difficult to understand right now. This realm of non-dualism, how does it appear? For the beginners, since this is Longchen Nyingtik Ngöndro and since Guru Rinpoche seems to be the main figure, we can visualise this realm as the Copper Coloured Mountain. Of course, that does not mean the ceilings and walls are made of copper and all of that. Basically, what we are doing is getting rid of this ordinary perception that we have. Even by thinking, “This is not what I think it is” that alone will change ordinary perception. So that is the third of the three pith instructions to start the ngöndro.

The Theory of Visualisation

Here, I will bring in the theory a little, because it is necessary. When you think, “This is not truly existing in the way I see it,” from an ordinary point of view that is being kind of crazy or irrational. Yet from the theoretical point of view of the vajrayāna, it is correct because everything you see is your own perception. What you see is not what it is. It is only your perception. If there are several people looking at the same girl, one person may be thinking, “That girl is beautiful” and then, another person may think the very same girl is ugly. What they see is not what she is. Based on that theory, when we look at ‘this house’ and think hot, cold, white, black or whatever, we know all of this is only what we see, and is not what it is. So you see the theory and the instructions always come together, and complement each other. For now, the only way to practice this is through transforming our ordinary perception.

When it comes to the visualisations, quite a few people tend to have problems. I have actually noticed this and think it is because Tibetan teachers like myself who come to teach, assume the whole world has to process things in the same way that Tibetans do. We teach you how the Buddha looks in accordance with the Tibetan way, adorned with certain
Some Crucial Aspects to Begin the Ngöndro

ornaments and so on and so forth. In reality however, a pith instruction is like a doctor’s advice to their patient. It is a piece of personal advice, and depending on the nature of the patient, there is a suitable diagnoses and prescription given. It would not be right were a doctor to tell all their patients exactly the same thing. That would indicate that the doctor was not well equipped. So in all likelihood, if you begin to understand the theory in a little bit more depth, you will also become quite comfortable with the visualisations.

The main purpose of doing the visualisation is to purify this impure vision, the ordinary perception. So in that case, what is pure perception? It is not to say we have to see things just as they are painted in the Tibetan thangkas. For many people pure perception should be somewhat similar to how Tibetan thangkas appear. Yet that is not right, and is not at all the point. In fact, if you manage to transform everything so that it duplicates the thangka, it will only have become even worse. In the paintings, they don’t blink their eyes, have no backs, are flat, frozen, and their clouds don’t move. The whole point is to destroy this impure perception. Anyway, personally for me, the Tibetan paintings, and pictures have no real vibrancy.

So what do we mean by impure perception? Impure perception at the moment is basically everything that we see, perceive, and label. This is not because something is wrong out there, and that’s why everything is impure. Instead, it is because at the moment, our being is covered either by desire, jealousy, pride, ignorance, or aggression. So whenever we perceive something it is always through these five emotions. When looking at a person, we may look at them through the filter of passion, and therefore, will see them as very desirable. Looking at another person, and seeing them through the lens of aggression, will cause us to see them as very ugly and hideous. When perceiving others through our own insecurity, we make judgements, refer, and compare, so that we finish up either trying to defend or boost our pride, which is a result that is stemming from ignorance. The list goes on and on. All the different perceptions we have are only arising from our very own minds and are coming through these emotions. So that is why everything we experience always ends up being some kind of a disappointment. Regardless of whether it is felt in a big or a small way doesn’t really matter, the point is there is always a little bit of disappointment. This is what we are trying to purify.

It is all a matter of training the mind. In the prātimokṣa tradition they train their minds by disciplining the body, and speech – through shaving the head, by begging alms, by wearing saffron robes, and by refraining from all kinds of worldly activities, such as getting married and all of that. In the mahāyāna, on top of that they train their minds by meditating on compassion, bodhicitta and so forth. In the vajrayāna, over and above these two, we try to transform the impure vision into something pure. How do we learn to do that? It is through doing the ngöndro, step by step. So our very first step is to stop the chain of thoughts. We then clear the stale air through doing a little bit of visualisation, and bring in the notion that the very place where we are is no longer an ordinary place. Already we have begun transforming the impure vision.

The Three Wholesomeness’s

The next three points are what Patrul Rinpoche taught as the three wholesomeness’s. In whatever you do, and in whatever dharma practice you might be doing, always begin with this motivation of benefiting all sentient beings. Now when we say benefiting, this not only refers to ordinary help, such as giving food or ordinary assistance, it is also the wish to enlighten all sentient beings. The first wholesomeness is so important, because without
that our practice will become self-oriented, and will be just another act of selfishness. So always have this mind of “I shall practice for the sake of all sentient beings.”

Even with a simple act of lighting a lamp, always begin with the bodhicitta. When you light a lamp simply to make the room beautiful that represents a very ordinary, worldly kind of thinking. If, in lighting the lamp, you do so to accumulate merit and think that your doing so will destroy saṃsāra – this is then a prātimokṣa attitude. Then again, if you light the lamp and think, “With this merit may all sentient beings achieve enlightenment” that is the mahāyāna attitude. On top of that, if you think: “This light is not an ordinary light. It is a wisdom light that illuminates all sentient beings.” To have the aspiration, “As the light shines, everything becomes the maṇḍala” – that is a tantric attitude.

In the midst of performing any good deeds, or even as you are practising the Longchen Nyingtik Ngöndro, you should also remember, “All this is only an interpretation of my mind.” This second wholesomeness is actually what we call the practice of nonduality. You need to repeatedly convince yourself: “My mind is doing this. I am just imagining this. None of this is truly existing.” Let’s say you are doing prostrations. Under the very act of doing them, we then think: “This is me, I think, and feel that ‘I’ am doing prostrations. ‘I’ feel that ‘I’ am having some sort of pain, but in effect, this is my mind.” All this is basically just mind. The benefit of thinking in such a way is incredible since you will not cling to your dharma deeds. This is also a direct antidote to your pride and your ego. And as much as the dharma is supposed to be an antidote to our ego, it can also build up the ego through our having this idea of being a good dharma practitioner. While practicing, we should always try to recognise, “This is only my mind.”

You might then question, “If it is only my mind, does that mean there is no merit?” Even the notion ‘there is merit,’ or ‘there is no merit’ is only an interpretation of our mind.

Then, for the last point, at the end of the practice we always dedicate the merit. Again, even the merit we have accumulated is not kept for ourselves. We dedicate the merit for the sake of all sentient beings. So these are the three points we call ‘the three wholesomeness’s.’ This introduces some of the crucial aspects to begin the ngöndro practice.
The Special Preliminaries
Next, is the explanation of the refuge. Now the longer length Longchen Nyingtki Ngöndro was composed by the great Jigme Lingpa and edited by Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo. In this long length version, just after chanting ‘Lama khyemo…’, there is a “Calling of the Guru.” It is so beautiful. Not only are you calling the guru, but you will see, there are also these parts where it reveals the weakness’s of a dharma practitioner. It is so valuable to read and comprehend that. You might think it is a cultural difference, but I have been thinking about this a lot, and actually, it is not. Certainly, in the West, people are used to encouragement, and are accustomed to hearing things like: “You are doing well. You should do more of that. Keep up with this.” In Eastern cultures there is more critical reflection: “You are not doing this so well,” and so on. And with Buddhism originating from India, you might think, perhaps this critical reflection is an influence coming from Eastern culture, but this is not the case. Indeed, the whole purpose of the dharma is to dismantle this protective system of the ego. So for this very reason, every word of the dharma, and each and every dharma method must go against the ego.

By reciting such liturgies as the “Calling of the Guru” by Jigme Lingpa, and if you read and contemplate on the stanzas, it will at least poke some holes in the ego. And this poking a few holes in the ego’s cocoon is what we call “the dawn of a dharma practitioner.” Though most of us, including myself, are not really dharma practitioners – we are dharma students. We are interested and inspired by dharma, and the dharma makes sense at times, although not all the time, of course. But to be a practitioner of the dharma is entirely different from this. A practitioner is someone who has seen the futility aspect of the eight worldly dharmas, or at least attempting to give them up. That is really, really, really difficult. But having said this, it is not unachievable. I have definitely seen it being achieved among Westerners. With only 30 – 40 years of history in the West, the dharma is quite new, so for me, it is quite a surprise. Yet for many of us, already the dharma is poking some holes in these eight worldly dharmas.

**Differing Levels of Fear**

There is one immediate motivation that prompts us to take refuge. In the ordinary theistic way of taking refuge, that trigger is most often a fear – one that is usually very mundane and related to loss and gain in this life. Something like, if you fear getting wet you take refuge to a raincoat or an umbrella. Slightly better than this, is the *prātimokṣa* attitude to practice, which is triggered by fear of samsāra. There is a fear of going to hell, hence one takes refuge to god or even Buddha, and then prays for the release of heaven, or something of a similar nature. Surprisingly, although we think we are vajrayāna orientated, many of us actually take a śrāvaka approach. Very few of us are practicing the vajrayāna. Then again, if we have a *prātimokṣa* attitude, we should think ourselves lucky. Śrāvakans are very high in the scheme of things. Their attitude is so sophisticated because at least *they* are completely revolted by samsāra. Are we? I don’t think so. On the contrary, we are in love with samsāra. In this sense, śrāvakans are extremely precious. Their primary fear is being caught in samsāra and dwelling in it.
Refuge

The farmers are fearful that perhaps there will not be timely or sufficient rainfall. So out of fear, they go along to the Tibetan temple and pray to the Buddha for rain. In the śrāvakā tradition, whether or not there is an abundant rainfall is not the main concern. Saṃsāra is their main fear; saṃsāra is bad. Then, for the bodhisattva, there is a higher fear: aside from fearing saṃsāra, they are also afraid of nirvāṇa. In the vajrayāna, there is an even more sophisticated fear. Not only is there fear of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, they are also afraid of impure perception. They know, as long as you have this, the root of extreme duality will never be dismantled. It is for this reason, that we take refuge in the Buddha, dharma, and the saṅgha. So depending on the varying levels of fear, there are different ways of taking refuge. For the farmer, Buddha is the creator of rain or you could say, the guardian against hail. That is what they pray for. It is the farmer’s way of taking refuge and it is a very obscure kind of refuge. For the śrāvakan, Buddha is a tutor, who will coach them on how to escape from saṃsāra. Although this is much better than a theistic approach, still, it is a lesser approach.

*Without Knowing the Essential Theory, Refuge Is Theistic*

In the mahāyāna and the vajrayāna, the refuge is more advanced. Of course, we say similar things when reciting the refuge liturgy: “I take refuge to the Buddha, dharma, and the saṅgha,” or in the case of the Longchen Nyingtik, “I take refuge to prāṇa, nāḍī, and bindu” or “I take refuge to the guru, deva, and the ḍākinī; I take refuge to the dharmakāya, sambhogakāya, and the nirmanakāya.” It doesn’t matter how you take refuge, the most essential part of the theory of refuge exists both within the mahāyāna and especially, in the vajrayāna. When we say, I take refuge to the Buddha, the ultimate meaning is “I accept that I can be enlightened and that I have the buddha nature.” This is very important to understand. Without knowing the essential theory, if you just follow the pith instructions, you may be just like one of the many vajrayāna practitioners who think the Buddha is ‘there,’ and then prays. It is very theistic. If taking refuge in this way, there is not such a big distinction to be made between Christianity and Buddhism. After all, apart from the name differentiation of Buddha and Jesus Christ, what is the difference? It is like treating the Buddha as a god. This is why you need to know the theory of refuge. When we say, “I take refuge to the Buddha,” we mean, “I accept that I can be the Buddha,” that “I am Buddha,” actually. Well, there is a difference. “I can be Buddha” is the mahāyāna attitude. “I am Buddha” is the vajrayāna attitude. This example is one I have given many times, for it is important.

*Knowing the Dirt Is Washable*

Take for example the act of washing a cup. Although we say we are washing the cup, what is in fact being washed, is the dirt. The pith instructions coming from your mother are, “Go and wash the cup.” No mother or father would go so far as to explain in detail, “The dirt and the cup are different, but go ahead and wash the dirt.” They would never say this. Otherwise, there would be too much conversation and it would be too confusing. So the pith instructions are simple. Then, what you need to understand from the theory side is: “You are not washing the cup. You are actually washing the dirt.” If you managed to truly wash the cup, the cup would disappear. This tells us so much. It tells us the cup and the dirt are two separate entities. It also tells us the dirt is washable and that the dirt itself is not the cup. That is the quintessence of the refuge.
Refuge

If you don’t have an insight into the quintessential refuge, you will have no confidence in taking refuge to the Buddha. For example, when a mother, who happens to have housekeeping experience, tells her son or daughter to wash a cup, this mother has confidence. She knows the dirt and the cup are separate entities. That is why a mother or father has this confidence to say, “Go and wash the cup.” Likewise at the vajrayāna and mahāyāna level, the theory tells us we are the Buddha, and the buddha nature is within us. This dirt that we have is only temporal. Accepting and knowing that is the quintessence of the refuge. That is the theory of refuge.

Separating the Pith Instructions from the Theory

So what is the pith instruction? It is the washing machine, or the dishwasher, made by Blaupunkt, or Sanyo. Some say German-made is better, but for someone in India, this might not apply, because if the machine were to break, finding the parts to fix it could be a bit of an ordeal.

The pith instructions vary. For the śrāvaka the pith instruction is: take refuge to the Buddha as a tutor. In the mahāyāna, it is very similar, yet we also have this view, “I can be the Buddha.” There is also a different kind of fear. Not only is there fear of saṃsāra, there is also fear of nirvāṇa. In the vajrayāna, the pith instruction is “You visualise the guru.” Now, do you visualise the guru in the way that he or she appears to you? In fact, most pith instructions tell us we should visualise the guru as a buddha or as Guru Rinpoche. Basically, we are advised to visualise the guru, in some kind of an unordinary form, not in an ordinary form. Of course, we then visualise the guru surrounded by all the retinue: dākas, dākinis, buddhas, and bodhisattvas. All of the objects of the refuge tree, this is what you visualise in front of you.

The Theory of Why the Guru Is So Important

With the theory and the pith instructions, I will explain so as to make it easier to distinguish between the two. So once again, let us shift back to the theory. Now the question is why do we visualise the guru as a buddha or in some kind of other form? And also, why do we visualise the guru, why not Shakyamuni Buddha? First of all, we have a hard time relating the buddha nature with ordinary human beings, and secondly, for us to see the guru as a buddha is very difficult. The guru yawns, and basically, he does everything that we conceive of as ordinary. He sometimes seems to be quite ignorant, or quite spaced out, and at times, does things that are absolutely irrational. Then at other times, we think he is okay. We think he is sort of intuitive, and so on and so forth.

On this question, I will quote from Jamyang Khyentse Chökyi Lodrö, from his explanation of the guru yoga. In the mahāyāna and the vajrayāna, we believe the buddha nature is manifesting all the time. However, when not refined by merit, this manifestation is usually expressed as pride, jealousy, anger, aggression, or passion. On the other hand, when accompanied by merit, it is visible as devotion, compassion, love, understanding, and tolerance. This devotion (our perception) is like a reflection, and it is also through this devotional door that we are able to see someone worthy to follow: someone whom we call “guru.” This is entirely a production of the merit accompanying your buddha nature.

Why are there these human gurus who were born and died at such and such a time? There is a very good theory on this. It is said, “Even though countless buddhas and bodhisattvas have come and gone, most of us lack the merit to meet them.” You wouldn’t have sufficient merit to see them as buddhas and bodhisattvas, even if you encountered
them. Take the example of Devadatta, who was a cousin of the Buddha. He was travelling and living with Shakyamuni Buddha all of his life, yet didn’t gain one good thing out of his cousin, because he was constantly so jealous of the Buddha.

What you shouldn’t forget is the guru is an expression of your devotion and merit. By now, as a reflection of this merit and devotion, you see this being as someone worthy, and wholesome. At the same time, the guru is also someone who pokes holes in your pride and your ego. After all, this is our objective, isn’t it? At least, as a dharma practitioner you are supposed to want this to happen. Wanting to keep your ego intact while going ahead and asking a guru to destroy the ego is not only painful it is also criminal. For that matter, this just won’t work. Thus, in the refuge, we are essentially saying, “From now, until attaining enlightenment not only will I destroy surface delusions, I will go right to the root, and completely uproot this delusion.” And what is the root of delusion? It is the ego. You then ask a person to do this, and this person happens to be the guru. Actually, this is why in the Longchen Nyingtik Ngöndro it is said: “The guru is equal to the Buddha in quality, and yet his kindness surpasses the buddhas of the three times.”

So many buddhas have come and gone, yet you have neither met them, nor have they talked to you, or at least, you have not understood. But this guru – this buddha – has talked to you, upset you, disappointed you, hurt your pride, and all. And since that is what you need, there you have it. Theoretically, this is why the guru is so important.

There is one more point to add to this. Before we questioned why we have to visualise the guru as Guru Rinpoche. We think in terms of “Shouldn’t I just visualise him the way he is? Having seen and walked with him, it is much easier for me to think of him, as I have seen him with my own eyes. Yet in my entire life, I have never once laid eyes on Guru Rinpoche. The only thing I can refer to are these Tibetan paintings and statues. Why make things more difficult?” There is a very important theory for this. First of all, the whole purpose of the vajrayāna is to transform the impure vision into pure perception. To think of the guru in the way you have seen or experienced is your own impure perception. It is an impure perception that we need to be rid of right away. If you can’t immediately destroy the impure perception of ‘ceiling is ceiling,’ ‘wall is wall’ and ‘floor is floor’ that is fine. What is more important is discarding the impure perception of the guru. This is first and foremost. It is all your own interpretation that he yawns, sleeps, has ordinary thoughts, or acts strangely. That is your perception. That needs to be transformed.

Again, I will quote from Jamyang Khyentse Chökyi Lodrö, who said, “If you treat the guru as an ordinary person, and then pray to him, you will have a corresponding result.” So if you think of the guru as a good, compassionate man that is as much blessing as you will have. If you think of the guru as an arhat, you will have the equivalent result and blessing. If you think the guru is a great bodhisattva on the first or tenth bhūmi that is the kind of blessing you will receive. Similarly, by thinking “the guru is the Buddha” you will receive enormous blessings corresponding to that kind of attitude. So it all depends on your own attitude, and keep in mind that in any case, it is all your own perception. Really, you should try to understand this aspect of guru devotion, because there have been so many misunderstandings, both around devotion and the guru-disciple relationship in general.

Nowadays, many in the West have begun to think in the way of, “this whole guru system is a bit like a dictatorship.” Also, in the East, where we tend to find societies which are often very Confucianist in their way of thinking, there is always this notion that the leader is always right. Even if the leader says, “this wall is black,” when it is actually white, all the subjects, and the whole social group will have to agree the wall is black. If you look at China, this kind of thing is still going on. Whatever Jiang Zemin says goes –
with how many millions of Chinese. At least in the West, with someone like President Bush, he can say something and the whole of America just laughs at him. But in China it is the other way around – whatever the boss says is right.

The guru concept is beyond dictatorship. It goes beyond “what the leader says is always right.” Guru is totally different from this notion, and by understanding the theory it should really clear away many doubts. There is one very important reason that clarifies this. Please make a mental note, highlight it, print it in your book in bold, and keep it constantly in your head. *Within the entire vajrayāna, you will never, ever see a guru yoga practice without the guru dissolving into you.*

If you were to find such a practice, I can confidently say it would either be wrong, or it would be a text taught by a phoney teacher. Never would there be a practice not requiring the merging of you and the guru. This tells you that guru is beyond this concept of dictatorship and the Confucian idea of worshipping the leader. When you worship the leader, the leader is always the leader. It is *they* that are better or the big guy while you are always secondary.

In the vajrayāna, the whole purpose of the guru yoga, the whole purpose of the guru devotion practice is to recognise that your mind is the Buddha. Your mind is the ultimate guru. And to reach that understanding, we have the outer guru. We have the dissolution, and there is this merging of your mind and the guru’s mind. There is no ultimate dictator ‘up there’ directing your everyday life. This is absolutely not the right way to understand it. The most quintessential thing one needs to finally realize is, “your mind is the Buddha.” That is the theory. Thus, the guru who actually comes about as a reflection of your devotion is unquestionably important. I have never denied this. Paying homage and respect to whatever your qualified master has said is very crucial. Nonetheless, please don’t forget the theory.

*Instructions for Prostrations and Why We Count*

Visualise the objects of refuge right in front of you. If unable to be so elaborate, you visualise the guru in the form of Guru Rinpoche or Vajradhara and simply do that as best as you can. There is really no need to dwell too much on the details of the visualisations. Just have confidence and think that he is there, surrounded by all the buddhas and bodhisattvas. You are in front of the object of refuge doing prostrations.

Prostrations are an immediate means of taking refuge and also a method of destroying pride. As a gesture of surrender, and as an expression of the intent to totally give up and expose our pride, we throw ourselves at the feet of the guru. To symbolise this, we prostrate, placing the five points of our body – our forehead, hands, and knees – down on the floor. That is the theory.

To return to the pith instructions, generally speaking, there is a tradition of doing one-hundred-thousand prostrations. It is actually quite important to have this target. Yet some people argue that keeping track of the amount doesn’t matter. The fact is our minds are very strange. Whenever it suits, we manage to bring in this non-duality theory of “counting doesn’t matter,” but it is only because there is this resistance to doing it. Counting does matter. For us, since we are ordinary human beings, it encourages and disciplines us. Doing one-hundred-thousand or two-hundred-thousand prostrations is necessary. So for those physically able, and for those who have the time, you should do it. What I will say is: your pace in completing this is relatively unimportant. Finishing one-hundred-thousand prostrations faster than someone else does not necessarily mean you will achieve enlightenment sooner. It is more in the attitude, and in your motivation.
Refuge

Personally, I would say you should do one-hundred-thousand prostrations. If you were to do one-hundred-fifty prostrations a day, which usually takes about half an hour at most, then within three years you will finish one-hundred-thousand prostrations quite comfortably.

For many of us, being quite worldly people, if we only think about the merit and our practice, the motivation for doing prostrations does not come that readily. We might encourage ourselves by thinking, “well, I should do prostrations because it is good for the health.” I certainly do not discourage these kinds of thoughts. Basically, in this time and age anything that takes you towards the practice of dharma is quite important. Doing prostrations saves money since you don’t have to go to the gym. It accumulates merit and muscles. So at the very least, have this kind of motivation. And while doing the prostrations, after every twenty-five or even after every ten prostrations, you should regenerate this motivation of “I want to do this for the sake of sentient beings.” At the same time, think that the guru is there. So then, by regularly bringing in the bodhicitta mind, you are also taking care of the merit side of things.

As you take refuge, visualise your friends, family, and countless sentient beings all around you. For those you find annoying, visualise that these people are right in front of you. They are also doing prostrations. This is a very mahāyāna attitude. Not only do you take refuge, all sentient beings also take refuge along with you. Then, towards the end, if you are accumulating prostrations and want to end the session, you dissolve the objects of refuge into you. Otherwise, if you are doing the ngöndro as your daily practice, what follows next is the bodhicitta. In this case, you do not need to dissolve the refuge objects. You can let them just remain, since when practicing the bodhicitta there should be a witness of bodhicitta anyhow. As you are finishing your session, think that all the objects of refuge dissolve into light, and come towards you, dissolving into you. Or if you wish, the refuge objects don’t even have to dissolve into light. You can imagine that they come towards you slowly and then dissolve into you.

[Student]: When we prostrate and take refuge, how do we count?
[Rinpoche]: Count the prostrations. Upon finishing the prostrations, you will have completed roughly two-hundred-thousand repetitions of the verse. You count whatever is the most difficult.

Inseparability with the Object of Refuge

Many people have the idea that as the object of refuge dissolves into us, somehow we are like a big bag, and along comes this object, something like an apple being put inside the bag. That is not a good way to think. If you are like a bag, and the refuge object is like an apple, it is not really a true dissolution. The reason being you still see the apple and bag as separate. Many people dissolve in such a way. They think to themselves, “I am an ordinary, worthless, useless, ugly, stupid sentient being, and now, the guru and the buddhas come and sit somewhere inside of this.” It is not like that. To better understand the concept of dissolution, take the example of a broken pot. Say we have this pot. Both inside the pot, there is space, and outside the pot, there is space. If you break the pot, the space inside, and the space outside, then becomes inseparable. You cannot really tell which is which. You cannot say ‘this’ or ‘that’ make up the space of the pot. It is impossible to distinguish between the two. Likewise during the dissolution, you and the object of refuge become inseparable. Understanding in this way is so important.
Refuge

So you remain in that state as much as you can. In fact, in the vajrayāna, this is considered to be the essential practice. Therefore, if you have the time, you should once again, do the front visualisation and again dissolve it, watching that dissolution over and over again. Just watch that state of oneness between self and the object of refuge over and over again. What does it do? This is a bit like throwing in the fishing rod with the bait so as to hook the wisdom. You can see the appearing of this wisdom and there is a considerable amount of non-duality there. Why is this? Remember, there you were thinking of yourself as a pathetic ignorant sentient being, and all of a sudden the object of refuge is there, this wholesome, great, beautiful buddha. Now you and the object of refuge have become inseparable. Watching that state will definitely bring the inner wisdom.

An Example Practice Session of the Refuge

In doing the practice, the first thing in the morning is just to sit and stop the chain of thoughts. You can continue to sit for as long as you like, and when you are ready, you then do the clearing of stale air. It is done in three sets, which ends up being nine exhalations. After that you do the prayers, and recite the refuge, three times. Actually, you should memorize the refuge liturgy, because when doing the prostrations, you are supposed to be simultaneously reciting the refuge.

After stopping the chain of thoughts, we then invoke renunciation mind. We do so by reflecting on impermanence, the precious human body, the futility of this life, and the essence-less aspect of the eight worldly dharmas. Essentially, we are contemplating the futility aspect, and the never-ending cycle of all these samsaric engagements that we have.

Next, we clear the stale air.

After that, we transform the ordinary place where we are into a pure realm. To assist in doing this, we invoke Guru Rinpoché and recite the Seven Line Prayer, three times.

Again, remain for a while, and sit straight.

There are many ways to do this. You can recite the verses out loud or do it silently. If you like, instead of reciting it, you can contemplate and meditate on the meaning.

Visualise the object of refuge in front of you, with the guru in the form of Guru Rinpoché, surrounded by all the retinue. There are buddhas, bodhisattvas, srāvakas, deities such as, Chakrasaṃvara and Vajrakumāra, as well as dākinīs, and dharmapālas. You are in front of the object of refuge, along with all sentient beings. As you take refuge, think:

*From now until enlightenment:
I take refuge in the Buddha, dharma, and the saṅgha.
I take refuge in the three roots, the guru, deva and dākinī.
I take refuge in the three essences, prāṇa, nāḍī, and bindu.

While reciting this, bring to mind the theory of refuge, knowing that the guru, and the object of refuge are an expression of your buddha nature. There, in the presence of the objects of refuge, think that you are taking the vow to enlighten all sentient beings. Thinking in this way, recite the refuge and the bodhicitta. Lastly, visualise that the object of refuge dissolves into you and remain in that state, as much as you can.

Like Space Dissolving into Space

[Student]: Normally, after the refuge, I dissolve all the refuge objects into me and then dissolve all the sentient beings that were in front of the refuge tree with me. Is that correct?
Refuge

[Rinpoche]: That is good. If you want, you can think that the objects of refuge dissolve into you and all sentient beings. No longer are there any ignorant sentient beings - all the sentient beings have become buddhas and have dissolved into you. There is no longer any ‘you’ existing apart from ‘them’ as an independent entity. There is no ‘them’ in the sense of the sentient beings and the buddhas. It is like space dissolving into space.

[Student]: Is the notion of visualising and dissolving, the same as the concept of the developing meditation?

[Rinpoche]: Yes, actually, there is already a little bit of developing and completion meditation. But the developing meditation is more on the outer level, and until the guru yoga, it is not really a practice of developing yourself. In the longer version of the Longchen Nyingtik, during the guru yoga, you have to develop yourself as Vajrayogini but you don’t do this in the shorter version.

[Student]: I was wondering about the importance of doing the practice in order, or if we can do sections at a time?

[Rinpoche]: If you are doing this ngöndro as a daily practice, yes, this is the order. Also, it is generally the same order if you are doing the accumulations of one-hundred-thousand prostrations, and so forth. What tends to happen is whatever part of the practice you are up to, that is where you spend more time accumulating. So once you have finished one-hundred-thousand prostrations and are focusing on Vajrasattva, then you would do the refuge or bodhicitta three times and go on to the Vajrasattva, concentrating more on that. Once you have completed Vajrasattva, you would then do seven times of that mantra and then concentrate on the mandala. That’s how it works.

[Student]: Aren’t there two sections in the ngöndro where you need to prostrate?

[Rinpoche]: Now you are talking about the long length version. If doing the long length Longchen Nyingtik Ngöndro, not only do you prostrate during the refuge, but also during the guru yoga. After the refuge, bodhicitta, Vajrasattva, and the mandala, you come to the guru yoga. Within the guru yoga, in addition to the Seven Line Prayer, there is something we call the Seven Limb Prayer. Traditionally, as you recite the Seven Limb Prayer, you should do another one-hundred-thousand prostrations. It is something you can do. Mind you, one-hundred-thousand prostrations may sound difficult, but for most of us, it is not really.

[Student]: What does Copper Coloured Mountain mean?

[Rinpoche]: It refers to the colour of the heart, which is also red. It is supposed to be the heart, and this again is a symbolic term for the buddha nature.

[Student]: In practicing loving kindness, I have always thought of this as the seed of bodhicitta.

[Rinpoche]: Yes, loving kindness is a sort of seed, but until there is a mind to enlighten all sentient beings, it is not bodhicitta.

[Student]: The third jewel in the object of refuge has always been very obscured for me. I don’t understand what sangha is.

[Rinpoche]: Saṅgha is the refuge companion. On what basis don’t you understand? Do you mean in the ultimate sense?

[Student]: Well, the saṅgha doesn’t seem to be enlightened.
Refuge

[Rinpoche]: In the mahāyāna sense of the term, the saṅgha are enlightened beings, but then again, the saṅgha is also more like a companion. Buddha is like a tutor, or a coach, and dharma is the path. The saṅgha is the supporter, someone who supports. When you say saṅgha, what exactly are you referring to?

[Student]: I am not sure.

[Rinpoche]: Well, I don’t know how much we qualify as the object of refuge. I guess we do, since we are followers on the path. But the saṅgha we are referring to in this particular refuge liturgy are actually those who possess the qualities of the bodhisattvas.

The Concept of Đākinī

[Student]: And the đākinīs?

[Rinpoche]: The concept of đākinī is very complex. Prāṇa, which is the wind, movement, energy, or activity is the đākinī. So the wind is the outer form, or the outer expression of the đākinī. Ordinarily, when talking about the đākinī, we always seem to have in mind a beautiful lady. I guess that is a fairly limited understanding of the đākinī. In fact, the đākinī is the activity aspect of the buddha nature. The purity aspect is the nādi, which are the veins or channels. And the essence aspect of the buddha nature is bindu, which is guru. In other words, guru, deva and đākinī are one essence, three aspects. But this is something you will come to learn slowly so there is no need to worry.

In the ngöndro, there is a tendency to briefly mention words like this. Later on down the track, in the more elaborate teachings, and when you receive teachings on the developing meditation, then you will understand. Anyhow, it is good to put these terms in your head so that you get used to them. Of course, this is not the only purpose, since in the Longchen Nyingtik Ngöndro you are also taking refuge to prāṇa, nādi, and bindu.

Different Terms to Describe the Buddha Nature

[Student]: In the bodhicitta verse, there is the term ‘self-existing awareness.’ Is this buddha nature?

[Rinpoche]: Yes, it is buddha nature. There are all these different terms for the buddha nature. It is as though each term is a slightly different language, yet this is very necessary, and eventually, you will get to know them. In fact, ‘self-existing awareness’ is one term we use when the guru introduces the nature of the mind. It is when we are establishing the view that we mainly refer to the buddha nature. In other words, the term buddha nature is more of a theoretical language. When talking more on the result level, we tend to use the term dhammakāya. Then with the pith instructions, we use terms like rigpa, and self-existing wisdom, etc. For different occasions, there are different terms. Similarly, even for everyday objects such as ‘spoon’ for instance, within certain circumstances, we might also use different terminology. Normally, we would say, “bring me the spoon,” however, for a student at a science institute, there would be all this different naming sequence, with different atoms, and metals, instead of simply using the reference of ‘spoon.’

The Eight Worldly Dharmas

[Student]: What are the eight worldly dharmas?

[Rinpoche]: The eight worldly dharmas are: wanting to be praised, not wanting to be criticised, wanting to be happy, not wanting to be unhappy, wanting to gain, not wanting to lose, wanting to be famous, not wanting to be ignored.
Translating the Dharma

[Student]: How important is language? What is the difference between doing the practice in our own language as opposed to doing the practice in Tibetan?

[Rinpoche]: So far, in western languages, generally, translation is still undergoing a process of development. Take for instance the translation of Sanskrit, and this word ‘tathāgatagarbha,’ which, when translated into Tibetan is ‘deshek nyingpo.’ Now with this, no matter whether you go along to the Sakypas, Nyingmapas, Kagyupas, or Gelugpas, all Tibetans speak the same language. In the West, within the scope of English translation at the present time, some may call it, ‘buddha nature,’ some call it, ‘buddha within,’ and others call it, ‘basic human goodness.’ The translators from the West are still in the process of developing the terms. Not only with the texts, but also with Buddhist literature in general, or with anything that is translated, there is always this kind of drawback.

Tibetan dharma comes from India. Indeed, when you hear of the Tibetan scholar Gedun Chophel criticising the Tibetan versions for not always being correct, it is quite frightening. Just imagine how much you can lose, since English is like a third-hand translation. So when it comes to the question of doing it in English, or Tibetan, or translating it into your own language, basically, it is up to you individually. Practice has to hit your heart. It has to inspire you.

Having said that, let’s not forget that Buddhism is not a theistic religion. Evoking the emotion is definitely not the only purpose to Buddhist practice. In fact, this aspect of the practice is not anything like going to church and singing hymns. When you read Buddhist chants, not only should it penetrate your emotion, and bring up devotion or inspiration, it should also destroy the ego. To achieve this, usually, you need to understand the meaning of what you are chanting. Of course, you could always say it in Tibetan and read along in your own language to follow the meaning. I guess this works for some people. And actually, if you were to go along to some of the older Tibetan lamas, they would say you should chant in Tibetan. You might even be taught Tibetan, and be told to visualise in Tibetan right down to the heart syllable, the six syllables. Some of the more orthodox, more traditional Tibetans would say this. Even with the younger generation, we hear a similar thing, but surprisingly, I oppose some of their reasons, having been more or less based on habit.

Among the lamas, these methods have been practiced for hundreds of years, which is why it is said we should practice in this way. But a number of others have put forward some very good reasoning, and I have something to add to this. Since Buddhism has decided to blossom in the West, and since this is through the prayers, aspirations and karmic deeds of people like yourselves, you should really develop the courage to integrate Buddhism within your culture. It is your children who are going to be first generation Buddhists. Of course, Buddhism and culture will always have certain differences, but to develop Buddhism within your system, culture, and language is quite important. Otherwise, there is the necessity of learning another language and culture in order to get into it.

Language is quite important, since it really determines the meaning. Right now, in this age, we can sort of get by with these poor translations into English, German, and French, or whatever language it might be. Even so, we should still work hard. Please, study Tibetan, or, if it happens to be your second language, study English, so as to better use the language. Also, you should try to be lyrical. There are many great writers around the world, like Herman Hesse, for instance. There is this use of such beautiful language, from German writers, and also from many other great writers. Just think of the possibilities.
in terms of translating. There are not only śādhanas such as the Longchen Nyingtik, but also, there are the sūtras, with many volumes, as well as the śāstras, with many more volumes. All this needs to be translated into each different language.

What amazes me is the sheer volume of work that the Tibetan translators managed to accomplish during the Sixth and Seventh centuries. In this day and age, with computers, email, and websites, everything is so simple. In the past, simply to get to India, Tibetans had to walk six or seven months, only to find a totally different climate, food, and culture upon arriving. They nonetheless put so much attention into their efforts.

So for this generation of Buddhists, it is a kind of crucial turning point in the West. We should try and translate the dharma into our own languages, and should definitely try to relate the words properly. This is my own judgment in a way, but I think that relying only on Tibetan is very short sighted. When I teach in the West, sometimes we talk for hours about one word, and I have never felt it to be a waste of time. I feel it is good to discuss this kind of thing. Take for instance, the term ‘duḥkha,’ which is a Sanskrit word. At the moment, it is translated as suffering. Saṃsāra has suffering. Now, what is suffering in the German language?

[Student]: Leiden. It means pain, grief, or sadness.

[Rinpoche]: Pain, grief, sadness. You see, this is why we need to discuss the words. The term ‘duḥkha’ is so rich in meaning. It has the connotation of ‘uncertainty’ and ‘not knowing’ or even: of ‘never being sure what will happen next.’ There is the implication of impermanence, and the knowing that everything is going to change. The only certainty is things are going to change. And besides that, it also has a connotation of pain, as with something unbearable, and as with something unwanted. So when we say things like: one must ‘abandon’ or ‘escape’ the suffering of saṃsāra, we always tend to be looking down at a minor suffering. The suffering we are generally referring to is something like the pain of a headache, or the grief of depression. It is something we don’t see as part of the impermanence. We are not looking at the uncertainty aspect. If you truly have a feel for this word, you should know how to apply it to a very ordinary situation. Like when you are having a delicious ice cream, which is quite an enjoyable moment, even at such a time, you can reflect how that too, is duḥkha. You realise it is uncertain, and changeable. And who knows? Perhaps this ice cream is going to make one sick, or perhaps, it is going to be the sole cause of one’s death.

[Student]: When chanting in languages other than Tibetan, there is no magic at all. There is no real rhythm, or any kind of symphony.

[Rinpoche]: In Chinese Buddhism there is the saying, “A foreign monk always reads the sūtra better.”

Many people like Tibetan culture, but personally, when it comes to the painting and the music, for instance, I cannot stand Tibetan art, and I don’t like Tibetan songs. What I do like is Indian music. And even though I do not understand one word of what they are saying, I also like European operas. It is just the rhythm and the emotion that makes an impression on me. I find Tibetan music to be quite boring. In this sense, we are the same. I also find other cultures more interesting, but that’s just the way things go.

Anyhow, when it comes to practicing in a group, in some instances we might meet up perhaps once a year, and then we are given this text that we are not so familiar with. So I would suggest sticking with one chanting style. It takes time to learn a rhythm, so it becomes a choice of ‘more practice’ or ‘getting the rhythm.’ Why dedicate so much time on choir class? There is this perfectly good, monotone style that is still being utilised, both by the Tibetans, and also by those practicing Japanese Zen.
But in choosing the language that you want to chant in, it is really up to you, especially if you are practicing individually. There are two things you might want to consider: do you want emotion or do you want to penetrate your mind stream with the meaning? I think it is good to opt for the second of the two.

**Bringing Forth the Inspiration**

We don’t have that much inspiration. Of course, I don’t blame you. Even I, myself, although I am rolling around in the dharma all the time, still I forget about practicing the dharma. Still I forget that I am getting closer and closer to death. So for you guys, who are tending to babies, have a job to do, or some sort of appointment to keep, you have a much harder go of it. But even so, when there is time, we don’t have the inspiration, and nor do we put that much attention into having it. We wouldn’t even give it the same degree of energy that we might put into watching a football game, for instance. And many people say to me: “I am so lazy! Rinpoche, what should I do?” Of course, there is a general antidote for this situation. To read dharma books, and listen to the stories of the great masters of the past, will certainly inspire you. Reading something like “Milarepa’s Songs” really does bring forth some inspiration. But eventually, after a while, because your mind is so clever, you will know how to escape from that also. I have read songs composed by Milarepa many times, and on many occasions, it has worked. Definitely, you should read such works as “Milarepa’s Songs” and the “Words of my Perfect Teacher.” There are so many beautiful books, which can inspire us. Do what will inspire you. What I am saying is, you can’t solely rely on this. If you rely only on these methods, after a while, you will become so jaded, and this is how we end up becoming callous. How do you say this in German?

**[Student]:** Hornhaut [in German, this translates as horned, or thick skin].

**[Rinpoche]:** We have become such a ‘hornhaut’. If the Buddha Shakyamuni himself had decided to spend time with you for one whole month, for the first week, it would be quite inspiring. He would inspire you. But perhaps after one week, he would start to get on your nerves. I have a feeling about this. For instance, we might end up thinking, “He is too perfect” or “he doesn’t make any mistakes,” and that alone will get under your skin. Every time you look at him, he is perfect. And then, in our stupidity as ordinary human beings, we always finish up comparing: “He is so good. How come I am not like him?” We have this habit of comparing and of wanting to be good. For this kind of problem, for this laziness, and for loss of inspiration, again we take refuge to the Buddha, dharma, and saṅgha. We say, “Please, protect me from the menace of laziness, and the loss of inspiration.” Then, if it helps, you can also light incense or candles. Bringing forth the inspiration is really quite necessary. So this is a basic pith instruction and advice, on how to practice the refuge.

**The Value of Individual Practice**

If you are doing the ngöndro as your practice, you should really do it individually, because in a group, especially where the group is being led, you don’t learn so much. Now in doing it individually, you will tend to have a lot of questions, and a lot of doubts. Having said this, not all doubts need answering. You should know that the doubt is here from now until enlightenment. Anyhow, knowing how to practice the dharma thoroughly and then practicing is just as unlikely as having a complete understanding of how to drive, and then
driving. By the time you really know how to drive, you have already been driving for some time. It is not that you first learn how to practice the dharma and then practice.

So try to practice individually and don’t rely too much on group practice. You should be able to practice without the teacher, and without the sangha.

[Student]: But what if there’s a lot of delusion going on? Shouldn’t I ask other people who are more experienced for direction?

[Rinpoche]: Yes, of course. But what I’m saying is, don’t rely too much on the sangha and the teacher to practice.

Ngöndros of the Same Tradition

[Student]: What’s the difference between the Dudjom Tersar and this ngöndro?

[Rinpoche]: On the whole, they are the same. The Longchen Nyingtik is like the mother of all Nyingma ngöndros. Of course, the words are really different. But the Dudjom Tersar has refuge; it has bodhicitta; it has Vajrasattva; it has manḍala and it has the guru yoga. In any case, it is of the same tradition; it is of the Guru Rinpoche and dzogpa chenpo tradition.

Whether you choose to do the long, or short version of the Longchen Nyingtik, all depends on how much time you have. This short version is made for busy people. If you decide to do a Longchen Nyingtik retreat, then at times, you should also do the long version, because it includes many teachings. There is much more information. The shorter it becomes, of course, the easier it is to do, but then the information also gets reduced down too.

It is excellent that the long version of Longchen Nyingtik has been translated into German. It is really beautiful, and the “Calling the Guru” part is especially poetic. This is one of the stanzas:

To have little remorse, lack the richness of faith,
To be bound by the lasso of desire and attachment, be prone to coarse
behaviour.
Not to have qualms about what is unvirtuous and evil, but to actively engage
in it,
To violate one’s vows and to break one’s samaya
Are the eight unfortunate conditions of an unfavourable mind.
When these conditions contrary to dharma, befall us:
O guru, turn our minds to the dharma.
Do not let us lose our way,
O kind guru, inseparable from the omniscient lords.3

I would suggest doing the long version at times. Alternatively, if you want, you can do the short version, and then insert parts from the long version, such as the “Calling the Guru.”

Each lama has a slightly different ngöndro. As to which one you choose, it is totally up to you and your intention. You might want to practice the Dudjom lineage in the future. Or if you want to practice the trekchö and tögal based on Yeshe Tsogyal, there is Yeshe Tsogyal’s “Khandro Thugtik.” And for those wanting to practice the Khyentse lineage, in something like “Chetsün Nyingtik,” there is also a trekchö and tögal practice. Of course, these two practices are slightly different, but they do not conflict. In the Chetsün Nyingtik, Vajrasattva is actually red and instead of nectar, Vajrasattva sends you fire which burns
and cleanses you. I would suggest the Dudjom Tersar ngöndro for some of you, especially for those following the Rigpa curriculum. This short version, I would also recommend, as it is compact, yet also good. In any case, I can assure you that there is no conflict. All being followers of Longchenpa and Jigme Lingpa, how could there be?

[Student]: If you have a different version of the S even Line Prayer that you’re already used to saying, is it alright to continue with that one?
[Rinpoche]: That doesn’t matter.

Practice for the Sake of Enlightenment

[Student]: I think you said before that we should not strive to become good people. This is irritating for me because now I am hearing it’s more about our determination.
[Rinpoche]: Actually, these two aspects fit together very well. What I am saying is one should practice the dharma for the sake of enlightenment. Especially in the mahāyāna, our aim should be to become enlightened, not only for oneself, but also for the sake of all sentient beings. Becoming a kind, or good human being in the ordinary sense, like some kind of philanthropist, is not our intention. Nor are we aiming to win some kind of a prize; enlightenment is the prize.

Take the Highest View While Applying the Subllest Action

[Student]: But somehow our actions are to be hīnayāna and should be very strict, yet our view should be unlimited?
[Rinpoche]: We should be very strict with our actions, but on the view, one should adopt a vajrayāna-like view. When we say something like, “Who cares about being good and bad,” we are talking about the view. It is this attachment to being perfect that we really have to get rid of. I am not saying we should forget about being good or that we should not care about being bad. I am saying you should go beyond that. It shouldn’t be our aim to be good and nor should we have this fear of being bad. This is very related to the view. Our actions should always be very subtle. So you practice the dharma as much as possible, as perfectly as you possibly can.

The more classic way of putting this is “Take the outer form as the hīnayāna, the inner mind as the mahāyāna and then secretly, practice the vajrayāna.” How can you do all of this at once? You should always take the highest view and apply it to the subllest action. The subllest, in this case, being a śrāvaka-like action. Many of the prātimokṣa actions to refrain from harming, such as not eating meat, or not drinking alcohol, are very wholesome actions. If people look at you and see your actions are wholesome, they feel inspired by you. So you apply that action, but always have the vajrayāna view. What you also need to keep in mind is one should not get carried away by the action. In other words, the action should not take over the view and visa versa. Apart from the three non-virtuous deeds of the mind, if of benefit to sentient beings, all other actions are allowed and encouraged.

On top of not harming sentient beings, and helping them, for the vajrayāna practitioner, there is also a responsibility to be genuine. Sometimes you try to act in a good way and behave nicely, but then, the very act of inspiring people becomes stifled. By placing so much emphasis into being an inspiration, you end up getting carried away by the action. You, the practitioner, then become contrived. In fact, the act of inspiring, then gets tainted by one of the eight worldly dharmas, such as wanting praise and not wanting
to be criticised. That is where the mahāyāna and especially, vajrayāna practitioners pursue this genuineness and are as natural as possible.

So always apply the highest view while using all kinds of actions, including those that may be considered to be the lowest actions. Were you to apply only the highest view and the highest methods, you would be turfed out and turned away. You simply would not be able to get through to anyone. You are a bodhisattva, and have to be able to effectively communicate with people, just as Shakyamuni Buddha was able to in his time.

Nowadays, many people in the West have this idea that the Buddha was unfair to women, since in the prātimokṣa teachings, he is reputed to have spoken lowly of women. But in fact, this is a very good example of the Buddha having applied the highest view and the subtest action. What you have to realise is the Buddha was in India two thousand five hundred years ago. India has long had this Brahmanic, Hindu-dominated culture. Then there is this strong cast system, with high cast, low cast, and untouchables. Also, at the time the Buddha appeared, there was this strong cultural background of hierarchy between men and women.

As a matter of fact, the Buddha is considered to be one of the greatest reformists. It was like a time of revolution, with much to reform. To make these reforms acceptable to the public, deconstructing the view of an ultimate, truly existing, permanent creator, and refuting the notion of cast system, happened to be outwardly more important than the man and woman issue. Furthermore, if one can establish the view of non-duality, then the male/female issue, which is another immense duality, is included automatically. Were he to have gone against all of these issues at the same time, nobody would have wanted to listen.

There is another thing to add here. Among the three vehicles, the Buddha’s highest teaching is the vajrayāna and it is in the vajrayāna that he went beyond saying men and women are equal. What he actually said was, “Women are more important.” This is something completely forgotten and ignored. Now in the vajrayāna, one of the most important points is the samaya. There are fourteen root samayas, which are like the fourteen most crucial things that a vajrayāna practitioner must heed. The last one is, “Women are the nature of wisdom.” If you ignore this, you are breaking the vajrayāna vow. And just to give a brief idea of the other fourteen, it is also breaking a vow, “If you don’t hold the bodhicitta or if you think your body is ordinary,” and things like this.

You see how skilful the Buddha was. Think about it. If you were a psychologist, how would you talk to your patients? Let’s say your patient has this strong liking for coffee. Would you, as a skilful, compassionate psychologist go and say, “No, don’t drink coffee.” Would you say that? Surely, you would say, “Okay, maybe decaffeinated; how about that?” You have to slowly work through this cloud of thought. And then, finally in the end, you say, “Coffee is bad for you.” This is exactly what the Buddha did, although many Western Buddhists seem to miss this point.

It’s easy for the French, the English and the Germans to come up and say, “He is being unequal.” But what we are talking about is a society in existence two thousand five hundred years ago. In particular, a Hindu society, one entirely dominated by Hindus for five thousand years. Within this society, there were those, such as the ‘ordinary untouchables’ who were even prohibited from standing up at certain places and locations. Were they to do so, the sun would have made their shadow fall in a particular way to the ground. After that it would be considered ‘an obscured place.’

Even today, men in society dominate more than women. It’s very unequal. It is very unfortunate but this is the human mind. Societies have always looked down on women. Then in America, we find one of the biggest organised groups of women, fighting for
women’s rights and liberation, but despite all this, it is the only country that has yet to produce even one woman with a really high status. The highest status that has manifested for a woman is secretary of state. In Asia, in a region thought to look down on and even abuse women, in some of these countries, women actually have such high positions. Sri Lanka, for instance, was the first country to elect a female prime minister. So if you are asking me whether the world has been more or less fair to women, the answer would have to be no.

In actual fact, sometimes this so-called democracy can be so dangerous. Take for instance sexual orientation. Just because most human beings are straight, it does not follow that we should look down on homosexuals. But we do. This happens so much. Prejudice is always there. For my part, I think of myself as being quite liberal about sexual orientation. I have really sat and meditated and questioned myself, “Do I have prejudice towards homosexuals?” I found that I could confirm, actually, I don’t have any prejudice. But then recently, a gay person asked me a question related to doing the Chakrasamvara practice. Now Chakrasamvara has a female consort, Vajrayogini, and so he asked, is it okay to visualize his consort as a male instead? I had to think for a few days. And then, I was amazed at how prejudiced I am, not to have the ability to answer, “Yes, you can.” I didn’t have that sort of confidence. Of course, I always have this Buddhist training foremost in my mind, which is honestly not an excuse, I must say. I told him that the whole Buddhist concept of consort has got nothing to do with a male organ or a female organ. It’s got to do with the union of emptiness and appearance. From the Buddhist point of view, when we refer to a deity, we are talking about appearance and emptiness. Emptiness represents the space, and wisdom represents the appearance.

Looking back to the origin of the vajrayāna, historically it was taught to King Indrabodhi, who made the request: “I want to have my queens, my elephants, and my palace. I don’t want to give any of this up. I want to be king. You are the Buddha; surely, you must know a method to enlighten me without abandoning this. You are omniscient. You must have the power to teach me the way.” It was then that the Buddha taught the vajrayāna for the first time.

**[Student]:** How could he become a student when he had no pure motivation?

**[Rinpoche]:** Well, this is a symbolic history. He must have had pure motivation. After all, he really wanted to achieve enlightenment. At the same time, he didn’t want to give up all the worldly pleasures. And as the Buddha said, “It is not these worldly pleasure objects that are binding you – it is your attachment.” He then taught the Guhyasamāja Tantra, the very first tantra ever taught. After receiving teachings on the Guhyasamāja Tantra, not only was Indrabodhi, the king benefitted, but also the entire kingdom. They all achieved enlightenment. It is written down in history. From the soldiers to queens to the kings, the whole kingdom became empty. As a matter of fact, it is this very place that is called ‘Uḍḍiyāna.’ And, we actually, refer to this place when reciting the prayer: “In the northwest of the land of Uḍḍiyāna...” Or as recited in Tibetan, “Hung, Orgyen yul gyi,...”

**[Student]:** But if the Buddha had come to France in the Middle Ages and said, “There is no God,” they would have burned him on the stake right away.

**[Rinpoche]:** Exactly, that’s the very reason that getting rid of the real problem is so important to the Buddha. Women and men can wait the two thousand five hundred years. The issue of God is the biggest problem, because it is your ego up there. Nobody would have listened. Just as there are some people, who are really, very good at criticising so that nobody listens. Being very skilful is entirely necessary. And when teaching the vajrayāna,
Refuge

he did say, women are very important. Again, this is something that the Western Buddhists, especially female Buddhists, seem to have missed.

First of all, there is the general audience, which consists of thousands of people. When talking to the general audience, you can’t reveal too much, only what is suitable. The Buddha taught the mahāyāna to a specific audience. For a very specific audience the Buddha taught the vajrayāna. So it is safe to say, since the more specific teachings need to be taught in a different manner, these teachings are taught more selectively. Obviously, it is quite difficult for the general audience to believe that the Buddha taught ‘this specific teaching.’ After all, it was done in their absence. As a result, there is some kind of dispute around this. Even today, if you go to Sri Lanka or Thailand, they think that Tibetan Buddhism is Hinduism, not Buddhism.

[Student]: Rinpoche, in the śrāvaka tradition wasn’t it said that women can’t achieve enlightenment…

[Rinpoche]: Yes. In the śrāvakayāna, they have that understanding. They say that in a women’s body you can’t achieve enlightenment. That’s what I am saying; the Buddha said that for the general vehicle.

[Student]: But I believe if I could attain enlightenment in this lifetime as a woman, it’s not because I am a woman, it’s not that…

[Rinpoche]: Now, you are talking about the vajrayāna. In that case, it’s possible, and is agreed. Buddha approves of that and Buddha supports you in that. No problem.
BODHICITTA: ONE OF THE MAIN FOUNDATIONS

In the short liturgy of the Longchen Nyingtik Ngöndro, the refuge and the bodhicitta are in one sloka or stanza. However, please be aware that the bodhicittais actually one of the main foundations. Usually, when we refer to ‘the four foundations,’ refuge is counted as the first, and bodhicitta as the second, and then, as the third and the fourth, there is the Vajrasattva, and the maṇḍala offering. When we talk about the five foundations, we add the guru yoga.

It is important to think about the bodhicitta – it is so essential. Older practising Buddhists may consider themselves less at risk of being distracted towards the wrong view. We think we are quite seasoned Buddhists, unlikely to ever get attracted by a wrong view or path. Many of us think in this way, but this is where we have to be careful. We might not obviously go against the Buddha or the buddhadharma, yet falling into the wrong view and getting attracted by the wrong path is quite easy and there are a number of reasons for this. First of all, most of us take a very theistic approach, and owing to the habit of being theistic over many life times, this also causes an eternalistic approach. So we see Buddhists, who are actually eternalists. And then, there is also the nihilistic approach, especially among those who believe they have understood a little of emptiness. The problem is they also have the wrong view. Although appearing to be Buddhist, they are actually more like nihilistic atheists. They may think of themselves as Buddhists and may not consciously go against the Buddha and his words, but still, it is a wrong path.

There are also a number of more obvious issues that we should be cautious about, especially in the vajrayāna and within Tibetan Buddhism in general. This being a degenerated time, there are many phony teachers and I have noticed many of us are getting distracted by these colourful methods. Despite their utilising of many colourful methods, there are certain teachings that neglect to teach the ground of view. There is not even a basic view as the ground, but not having realised this, there is belief in it as a genuine path. If you have fallen into such a path you have been trapped by the wrong path. We may feel that we are seasoned Buddhists, but falling onto the wrong path is a danger that lies in every moment of every day.

Having a Complete Picture of Bodhicitta

Assuming that we have managed to divert our attention from the wrong path and are following the right path, then within that – there is a lesser, greater, and greatest path. In order to enhance the determination of dwelling not only on the right path, but also on the greater path, we practice the bodhicitta. We are now talking about the mahāyāna path, which is a path of dwelling neither in saṃpāra or nirvāṇa. The quintessence of the mahāyāna path is the bodhicitta so it is a much, much greater path. For many of us, we have a vague idea the mahāyāna concept of bodhicitta has something to do with kindness, tolerance, and some sort of humanitarianism, such as with providing a certain social service. Although quite good, this understanding is really not good enough, as it is but one small aspect of bodhicitta. If your understanding of the absolute bodhicitta is limited to the notion of kindness, compassion, tolerance, humanitarian charity work, or even the sacrifice of your own life for the sake of others, you still do not have a complete picture of the
Bodhicitta: One of the Main Foundations

bodhicitta And to have a complete picture, one should not forget that there is a relative and an ultimate bodhicitta.

Of course, at an inter-religious conference, we have little choice but to speak diplomatically and say: “Christians talk about love and compassion. Judaism talks about love and compassion. We Buddhists talk about love and compassion. All religions talk about love and compassion and therefore, we all have the same goal, but different routes.” This is what inter-religious conferences are for. I am not trying to be chauvinistic. What I am saying is Buddhist compassion and the mahāyāna concept of compassion does not stop there. There is something further that is behind this compassion. If you don’t have that, the Buddhist compassion, love and tolerance are exactly the same as Christian compassion, Christian love and Christian tolerance. It can be the same as the very love, compassion and tolerance that makes you co-dependent and eventually backfires on you. The tolerance or compassion that does not have this ‘something more’ really victimises you in the end. You need a complete picture of the bodhicitta. And when we talk about the ‘complete picture of bodhicitta’ we are referring to the ultimate bodhicitta.

What is ultimate bodhicitta? It is an understanding of emptiness. It is emptiness in union with compassion. Christianity doesn’t talk about this, and nor does Judaism or Hinduism talk about this. Actually, this is an aspect that we touched upon briefly when talking about the three wholesomeness’s. You always begin your practice with this good motivation: wishing to enlighten all sentient beings, and then one should realise that whatever you do is your own idea and is your own mind’s manifestation. So already, we are approaching emptiness – the non-duality.

If missing the non-duality, our every act will lead to a disappointment. So how far do you go, if you are a therapist trying to help an alcoholic or drug addict? If this person has somehow decided to become a drug addict for the next five thousand lifetimes, as a bodhisattva, you must have the determination to be reborn wherever they are going to be reborn. You need this kind of determination. You might, for instance, aspire to be reborn at the proper time and place nearby him or her. Say for example, you are a bodhisattva, and have been trying to help this drug addict for over two thousand lifetimes. Now, somewhere in an obscure place, this 2421st rebirth is going to happen and although you need only appear for half a day, in order to do that you have to actually be reborn there. It is almost a waste of a complete whole life, just for half an hour or half a day, but as a bodhisattva you must do it. That is what we call the strength and quality of relative compassion. But now we come to the real quintessence of bodhicitta.

Why does a bodhisattva have this degree of compassion? Why can’t they give up? Where is the real base of this confidence coming from? It is because the bodhisattva realizes the notion of ‘drug addict, problem, healing,’ and ‘being healed,’ – all these notions around doctor and healer are all in the bodhisattva’s mind. The bodhisattva knows that none of this exists ‘out there’ somewhere, externally and truly. Based on this wisdom, the bodhisattva can develop compassion.

This helps a lot. My own experience is much like being a firefly in front of the sun. Even so, when I try to help people, and things don’t work according to plan, I say to myself, “Why is there frustration?” In the first place, I have set up and personally imputed a certain goal, which is of my own interpretation. In helping a person, I imagine that he or she should reach a certain level but this is entirely my own idea. After becoming just so obsessed with the idea of success, when the person is not there, I might lose hope and confidence in this person. Sometimes we do realise, “all this is something I imputed,” but most of the time, we don’t. Thinking: “This is how it should be. This is real success,” and not realising it has to do with our own interpretation, this is where we go blind. But when
you are helping, if you know this so called ‘your help,’ and ‘success as you help’ or ‘failure as you help’ is all in your own mind, you don’t get worn out. You don’t become tired because you realise that ‘all this’ is your mind’s doing. So this is a very general and somewhat gross example of the ultimate bodhicitta. If you have this picture of bodhicitta, you have complete bodhicitta.

To reiterate, ultimate bodhicitta is an understanding of emptiness. Only then is there a complete picture of the bodhicitta. Most of the time however, it is this aspect that is missing. When we talk about bodhicitta, usually we make reference to something simple, such as a kind compassionate heart, but that’s not it. This is something many people have. It does not necessarily make you a bodhisattva. Of course, this is not to deny there are very kind and very, very compassionate people. There are such people, and these people may even sacrifice their lives for others, but still, they may not be bodhisattvas. In fact, there is a danger they are acting out of their obsession and could end up being victimised by their goal-orientated mind. When too obsessed with a goal, there are a lot of other side effects, such as thinking, “this is how it should work.” With this kind of approach, when things do not work out, a bodhisattva can lose hope and determination and may even stop being a bodhisattva. But having said this, it does not mean a bodhisattva should just do things aimlessly.

For a bodhisattva, having an understanding of emptiness is not to say, whenever something hasn’t worked out they would then think, “oh, this is emptiness,” and stop there. This is not what we mean. As bodhisattva’s we still carry on. Especially if you are a beginner bodhisattva, you carry on in accordance with the instructions, such as those found in the Bodhicharyāvatāra, as much as possible. Having this determination is part and parcel of the relative bodhicitta. So as you can see, the relative bodhicitta and the ultimate bodhicitta always have to be brought together. In fact, they are one with two different aspects.

**Two Aspects of Relative Bodhicitta: Aspiring and Entering**

Relative bodhicitta itself also has two aspects: one being the aspiration and the other we refer to as the ‘entering,’ or the ‘action.’ The active part of the bodhicitta is to carry out some kind of act, like generosity, discipline, or basically, all of the six pāramitās. The aspiring part of the bodhicitta is practising or generating the motivation. It is the wish or the aspiration.

It might seem as though the aspiration bodhicitta is quite lowly, with the ‘entering’ bodhicitta as the higher and the ‘ultimate’ bodhicitta as the highest. But it is not like this. Each is equally ranked. In fact, Jigme Lingpa said, for beginners like us, it’s obvious that ultimate bodhicitta is only possible at an intellectual level.

Most of the time, in that moment when we think about emptiness, we are creating something totally the opposite of what emptiness actually is. But at least we have some kind of intellectual understanding, which is already good. Even the entering bodhicitta is difficult, for many beginners. For instance, within the six pāramitās, generosity is probably the easiest to practise but how much can we practise this? We are not spiritually and worldly endowed with wealth. We cannot feed and teach everyone and nor are we equipped with a tool for all situations. Maybe once in a while, we can throw some coins at the beggars. To really be able to completely engage in the entering bodhicitta is difficult. Can you imagine cutting off your own limbs and feeding a hungry tiger, as has been done by the great bodhisattvas of the past?
Jigme Lingpa said, for beginners like us, one must first learn and practise the aspiring bodhicitta. This we can do. This is something we can really practise. We can easily generate the aspiration, “I wish I were a king,” and then, while imagining ourselves as king, when all the beggars come to us, we give them everything. There are all kinds of aspirations we can make such as, “May all sentient beings have everything they need.” And it might be that as you are reading this, you start to think: “That is just a wish. Wishing is well and good but we’re not really doing anything.” To despise aspiration in this way is unwise, because the wishing or aspiring aspect is a very important training. Why is it that we are unable to perform the active bodhicitta and the higher bodhicitta? There is no strong determination, because our aspiration bodhicitta is very weak. We have so little aspiration that it would seem, the only aspiration we do have is when reciting the prayers.

For us, wishing to enlighten all sentient beings, and wishing for everyone’s happiness – this is something we can practise. So during the bodhicitta practice, we place greater emphasis on the ‘aspiring’ bodhicitta. We aspire so that we are also able to carry out the ‘entering’ and the ‘ultimate’ bodhicitta.

**Bringing the Different Aspects of Bodhicitta Together**

In effect, as you recite the bodhicitta liturgy, you can do all three together with your mind. To think, “May all sentient beings be happy,” is the aspiring bodhicitta. Then, for the sake of all sentient beings, you are actually doing prostrations. And in a way, having sacrificed at least five minutes of your precious time to recite the prayers – or half an hour, one hour, or eight days – this is the beginning of the entering bodhicitta. You are sacrificing time and practicing generosity. You are sitting up straight, and if doing so even briefly, what is happening? At least you are not harming anyone. Imagine the whole world and all of humanity sitting straight everyday for five minutes. If this were to happen, fifty per cent of worldly problems would disappear, just through sitting. So the sitting itself is a discipline, as is cutting the chain of thoughts. Then, by transforming our surroundings into a pure realm, all of this is **samādhi**. Thus, you can call this ‘entering’ bodhicitta. Towards the end of the bodhicitta and the refuge, you dissolve the guru into you, or in other words, you and the guru become inseparable. For however long it lasts, be it a few moments, minutes, or hours, you are watching the inseparability of guru’s mind and your mind. You just watch. You watch and watch without any fabrication. This is a way of meditating on the ultimate bodhicitta. Thus you have three bodhicitta in one end.

**The Highest Gift**

In generating the mind of bodhicitta, we really have to train our minds. For this, the relative bodhicitta is virtually the most crucial of all. Now what is the bodhicitta mind? Certainly, it is not simply a matter of thinking, “Those poor men need help.” Compared to the bodhicitta, the humanitarian mind is of a much lower class. Bodhicitta is literally the wish to enlighten all sentient beings.

Dismantling the delusion of sentient beings is the best gift you could ever give. What better gift could you offer? Make sentient beings see their own true natures. Make them see this endless net of delusion. What could be better than seeing sentient beings released from this endless cocoon that they themselves have formed? This is not a mere mind of wanting to ‘sort of help someone’ with a temporal problem.
During big public gatherings, on many occasions I have been asked why Buddhists are not doing things to contribute in the same way that Christians do. Why are there no Buddhist Hospitals, or Buddhist hospices? If answering in public, I would say, “Because Buddhists are lazy, and being lazy and selfish, Buddhists only talk about compassion.” Indeed, this is partially true. And then, in a more inner group, I would say: “We should really rejoice for those Christians, Muslims and Hindus. But even that we don’t do.” Then, if speaking to a smaller, more selective group, I might explain in the following way.

Suppose there is this religious group building thousands of childcare facilities or hospices. Again, this is a big generalisation, because perhaps among them there is a bodhisattva as a Muslim, a Christian or Hindu. But let’s say that although these religious workers are doing a lot of caring work, there is no wish to enlighten sentient beings. Their main aim is to provide food and education. Now imagine there is one hermit living somewhere in the mountains of the Himalayas who is doing none of this. In fact, within close range of him, there are a lot of babies dying, yet outwardly he is doing nothing about this. Inwardly however, he is actually meditating, “May all sentient beings be enlightened” and he continues to do this every day. I would say, purely because of the enlightenment aspect, this person is worthier of homage than the first group. Why? Because it is so difficult to truly and genuinely wish enlightenment for others. It is much easier to give people food and educate them.

Most of us don’t really appreciate this fact. We have never before genuinely wished for someone else to achieve enlightenment. Likewise, if someone were to come over and say to us: “Here you go, you have a ticket for enlightenment. There is only one ticket.” I don’t think we would even think about giving it to someone else! We’d grab it and go for it. Enlightenment is such a valuable thing.

 Actually, it’s much too large a subject, so let’s not take enlightenment as an example. Instead, let’s say someone comes along with a potion or formula, which promises you clairvoyance or omniscience. We would drink it ourselves, not even sharing half of it with others. Just think how often there is jealousy when someone is a better practitioner. How often do we get jealous when someone receives a better or a higher teaching than we do? If you have genuine bodhicitta, you should be happy, shouldn’t you? After all, isn’t that what you wished for? Their getting enlightenment means your wish is at last coming true. With their receiving higher teachings, or becoming better practitioners, this means that at last your aspiration is being realized! But instead, we feel jealous or we feel envious. Some of us are ‘sort of okay’ dharma practitioners, so we don’t really feel jealous, or envious, but still, we have this feeling of “I am being left behind.” Who cares? If you are a genuine bodhisattva you shouldn’t care about these things.

The Bodhisattva Concept

There are three kinds of bodhisattva: the ‘king-like’ bodhisattva, the ‘shepherd-like’ bodhisattva and the ‘boatman-like’ bodhisattva. Among these, the most popular is the shepherd-like bodhisattva. The king-like bodhisattva is a bodhisattva who wishes to become enlightened first, and then enlighten others. The boatman-like bodhisattva is someone who wants to bring sentient beings across together. The shepherd-like bodhisattva wishes to enlighten all sentient beings first, and then, if necessary, get enlightened themselves. The third kind of bodhisattva is the one we should be aspiring towards.

Enlightenment is a wish to enlighten all sentient beings. Wishing to give that wisdom is such a mighty offering. Just read the Bodhicharyāvatāra by Shāntideva, or out
of the ten chapters, at least read the first eight chapters. If you don’t have that much time, at the very least, read the first three chapters. Within, there are some of the most beautiful stanzas explaining why the bodhicitta is essential. And the bodhicitta is not merely a mind which is sort of kind, compassionate and humanitarian. It is much more than that. You can be compassionate, loving and tolerant and yet still have ego. Bodhicitta is a complete antidote for the ego. This is why it is so special.

Basically, if a social worker has this notion of destroying the ego, you are talking about a social worker doing social work with bodhicitta. But let’s say a social worker is doing a lot of work to heal temporal pain, but has no bodhicitta. Then there is this man in a cave, doing nothing, or at least, he is not helping in the physical sense. All he does is aspiration bodhicitta. Strictly speaking, our man in the cave is more worthy of homage. Though of course, for the general audience this is not easy to accept because the general audience does not understand the value of enlightenment. Shāntideva has actually taught on this, in the first chapter where he says:

*Could our fathers or our mothers
Ever have so generous a wish?
Do the very gods, the rishis, even Brahmā
Harbor such benevolence as this?*

If there is someone healing your pain, which is temporal, while another is not doing much temporal healing, but is genuinely planning on helping you permanently, it is that person you need to appreciate more.

[Student]: But many people are more ready to accept this temporal help, aren’t they?
[Rinpoche]: Oh yes, of course, this is what I am saying, the general audience wants all the pain relief and the painkillers; they cannot understand.

**The View or the Action, Which Is Higher?**

[Student]: But doing social work will destroy the ego kind of automatically, won’t it?
[Rinpoche]: Not necessarily. It can also create a lot of ego. In fact, for many social workers, not only have they not destroyed their egos, but also they have ended up abusing much of the funds being collected. It is a question of “which has the greater value, the view or the action?” I am saying the view has to be valued more.

[Student]: Isn’t the motivation more important than the action?
[Rinpoche]: Yes, but the motivation is usually triggered by the view. Depending on what view you have, you then have the corresponding motivation.

[Student]: Aren’t the motivation and the view almost completely the same?
[Rinpoche]: Yes, but this depends on the view. Not many people have the right view. Likewise, we think of Muslim terrorists as terrorists and identify them as such, but they consider themselves to be some kind of social worker. They believe they have good reason to think of themselves as holy humanitarians. Actually, I cannot entirely reject their reasons, simply due to their not being accepted by a massive legal system. This world is often unfair. Each of us harbors a multitude of ideas, and yet these are our own views. Who knows what is really happening? Bombarded with all this news of violence in the Middle East, once while I was in retreat, these newspaper reports really stirred up my emotion. But one can’t really respond in this way. It’s better to wish enlightenment for both the victims and the oppressors.
Methods of Generating Aspiration Bodhicitta

Now to generate the bodhicitta, two popular methods are: tonglen and what we call ‘the four immeasurable thoughts.’ In the short liturgy of the Longchen Nyingtik, the bodhicitta is brief and condensed so there is no mention of these practices. While it’s not as though you are missing something or have made a mistake by not practicing them, if you have time, I would suggest you do both.

Quite well known and practiced by many, tonglen meditation is one great method of generating aspiration bodhicitta. As with some of the other meditations, tonglen can also be combined with a breathing exercise. On the out-breath, without any partiality, you give happiness, virtue, and all kinds of valuable things to each and every sentient being. And then, while breathing in, you absorb the pain, suffering, problems, obscurations, and non-virtues of all sentient beings, not just one or two, but that of every being. That’s aspiration bodhicitta – and as a beginner bodhisattva, this is all we can do. Yet this is not to say aspiration bodhicitta is something simple. If you want to become courageous enough to cut off your limbs and give them to a hungry tiger, you have to first begin by tuning your motivation. Tonglen meditation is one very powerful method of tuning motivation.

The Four Immeasurables

What we refer to as ‘the four immeasurable thoughts’ is also another very popular method. I actually try to combine tonglen with the four immeasurables. With the first immeasurable thought think, “May all sentient beings be happy, right now, this very moment.” Let’s say somewhere, this instant someone is having a problem, or perhaps there is some sort of very strong depression. As the first immeasurable thought is loving kindness, we think, “May all sentient beings, have happiness.” We imagine that someone, somewhere, gets what he or she wants. At this very moment, they are receiving their wish, and they are free of what they were fearful of. We also think, “May they have the cause of happiness.” Meditate and think, “May all sentient beings at this very moment have compassion and love.” In addition to this, we think, “May sentient beings refrain from killing, stealing, lying and all kinds of negative emotions,” because these are the causes of unhappiness. Hence the first immeasurable thought is “May sentient beings have happiness and the cause of happiness.” Thus, this differs from the ordinary humanitarian sense of giving, because we are giving happiness and also the cause of happiness.

The second immeasurable thought is, “May all sentient beings be free from suffering.” Suppose a number of people are suffering from depression, we think: “May they be free from that depression. May they also be free from the causes of suffering: the emotions, and all these non-virtuous thoughts and actions. May they be freed of suffering in this very moment.” So you have given happiness, and the causes of happiness, and have also managed to separate them from unhappiness: from suffering and the causes of suffering.

Now they have joy. You then meditate on the third immeasurable thought, which is “May they remain in this joy forever.”

The fourth is: “May all sentient beings be free from hope and fear. May all sentient beings be free from passion and aggression. May there be no notion of relative, and no notion of enemy, may they all be neutral. Being neither aggressive towards enemies, nor attached towards friends, may all become equal.” You then remain with that.

One should really aim to better understand the benefits and purpose of compassion and bodhicitta. Please read, “The Words of my Perfect Teacher,” especially the section
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where Patrül Rinpoche sings the praises of compassion and bodhicitta. The bodhicitta is the cream of the dharma. And there are some very good pith instructions given by Patrül Rinpoche to arouse the bodhicitta within our minds. It is a shame that although we Buddhists talk about the greatness of bodhicitta and compassion a lot, we don’t always manage to put it into practice. So in every situation, one should try to develop kindness. After all, kindness is the key to love, compassion and the bodhicitta. Without the bodhicitta, every practice you do will become an addition to the ego.

An Antidote to the Ego

At the moment, the idea of applying the emptiness is too complicated to really enter our heads. Instead, for now, as a dharma practitioner, the best antidote to our ego is the bodhicitta. It is this mind wishing to enlighten all sentient beings – and of course, that includes each and every being. If you have really developed this notion of wishing to enlighten all sentient beings, to consciously wish someone unhappiness is almost impossible. You are aiming for the highest happiness, and even where sentient beings receive only a small happiness, still you rejoice. Now you see why this is an antidote for your ego. The practice of bodhicitta, just as the Kadampas have repeatedly told us – is always cultivating a manner or attitude of giving gain to others and adopting loss to oneself.

Some people might tend to assume, “It could cause a loss of confidence within myself.” Yet the bodhisattva attitude of giving gain and happiness to others, and not minding when loss or unpleasantness falls upon oneself is not at all an attitude of low self-esteem. In fact, it’s just the opposite. You are actually creating confidence. What does it mean to have low self-esteem? It means having a very, very high ego, which is why there is low self-esteem in the first place. There is so much ego, and it is ego that is always wanting to be good and worthy. Feeling that your ego is not good is what we call low self-esteem. With the bodhisattva attitude however, you give all good to others and are not bothered if the bad comes to you. Basically, there is no referential point. In this way, it is confidence that grows, while low self-esteem never gets a chance to occur. So don’t be afraid of applying the bodhicitta again and again.

During the practice itself, when coming towards the end of the session, mix your being with the guru’s and watch that moment. If thoughts come, just watch the thoughts. If you get distracted, as a beginner, immediately visualise the guru up there again, and merge again, watching that inseparability again and again. When I say watch, I am not asking you to recall the past mind, nor to plan and watch the future mind. I am talking about watching this very moment mind. But in order to do that, the key is to first dissolve the guru into you and then just watch that moment.

Just Do It and You Will Get the Gist of It

[Student]: I’m sure this applies to everyone, but I still have a real problem letting deities and gurus come into me. The way I see it, what you are really visualising is your potential and power. Have you got any tips?

[Rinpoche]: Really, the tip is: just do it. You just have to do it and after a while, you will get the gist of it. Sometimes certain pith instructions are exactly like this, “Just do it.” We can go on talking about the breaks, gears, steering and clutch forever. But somehow, sometime, you just have to drive, don’t you? You just turn on the ignition, press the gas and go. You just have to do it. That is the pith instruction. It might sound like it just won’t
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work right now. For a year or two, you might even go through a period where, in
dissolving the guru into you, it will be more like putting an apple into your bag. But that’s
the only way. Then, after a while, it will become more like inserting a glass of water into
your bag. It stains a bit and yet, you also understand the bag. Then you will already have
gotten the gist of this thing. After some time, you will come to realise it is like breaking a
glass pot and then trying to find the two separate spaces. So right now, this is the only
practical tip that works since we cannot help thinking of the guru or the Buddha, as an
independent separate entity from our self. We only know Intellectually, “this is my
perception.”

[Student]: But isn’t it just realising that you are the energy?
[Rinpoche]: Yes, but even in saying that you are still interpreting, aren’t you?

Your Imagination Itself Is a Visualisation

Everything is an interpretation. This is not only the base of Buddhist philosophy it is also
the very reason why visualisation works. When you refer to yourself as, ‘Louise,’ although
you don’t call it a visualisation actually it is. Similarly, in looking at your friend,
’Lucinda,’ for example, this is also a visualisation. For what you see is all stemming from
your own imagination. Your Lucinda and my Lucinda are different. It is on this basis the
visualisation works. It is a wonderful method.

Many people think of visualisation as a Tibetan thing. Since very few teachers have
put the effort into explaining the theory, this is kind of understandable. But as much as
there is the assumption that visualisation is a very cultural and theistic method, it’s not
really. It is just that the method always seems to get emphasized, and we are told to:
“visualise this, visualise that, visualise him as a guru Rinpoche.” Why it works, or why we
should do it in a certain way, never ends up getting explained. This is why we have such
difficulty.

It is also on this basis that I was saying earlier, to visualise Guru Rinpoche as we see
him painted in a Tibetan thangka is pretty much a waste of time. Even if everyone were to
use the same Tibetan thangka, as soon as each person looks at it, they have their own idea.
Your idea is only your idea. What is more, your idea is probably not even close to what the
original painter had in mind. So as you visualise Guru Rinpoche or any other deity, you
might as well be a little bit bold in your visualising. Guru Rinpoche is a superior, sublime
being, and in our ordinary minds, we think a sublime being has to look good. Our ordinary
mind thinks in such a way and that is fine.

The question is what exactly can be termed, ‘good looking?’ Again, you have a
certain interpretation of good looking, and I have another interpretation. So you had better
make use of your own interpretation. Surely, there is no need to learn my interpretation.
And even as I talk about this, it is you and your mind listening. You might think you have
understood good looking as I see it, but actually you have not. It is only your hearing of
this and you will end up having your own idea.

Some Rules of Visualisation

Visualisation is really based on personal interpretation. Given this fact, your next question
might be, “When visualising Guru Rinpoche, since I like walkmans, digital cameras, and
video cameras, is it okay if I visualise my Guru holding a digital camera instead of a vajra,
and a lap top computer instead of a kapāla?” Now it is here that we would have a bit of a
dispute. You are not really encouraged to do that. Not until a qualified master – a tertön
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and contemporary treasure discoverer – invokes a teaching where Guru Rinpoche is holding a digital camera in his right hand and a laptop in his left hand, and is giving you that transmission. Only then would you visualise in such a way. It is not out of convenience that we place a vajra in his hand, nor is it because it looks beautiful. In fact, there is a lot of symbolism involved. Why does he have even one face? Why not two? Why does he have a vajra in his hand? Why does he have a kapāla in his hand? Each aspect has it’s own significance, which is something that should always be kept intact. You must have all the right attributes.

Now as for how he really looks, if you were to search the entire works of Tibetan Buddhism, you still wouldn’t find anything saying, “This is exactly how Guru Rinpoche looks.” Interestingly enough, there is a photograph of Guru Rinpoche, which says: “It looks like me.” However, there are also a number of statues reported to be close likenesses of Guru Rinpoche and they all look different.

There is one further rule of visualisation. Not only should the visualisation be live, vibrant and clear, but also, it should always be sealed with the idea of non-duality. During ngöndro teachings this is something not generally emphasised, as it comes more when receiving the teachings on actual sādhana practice. Anyhow, to briefly give some idea, there are visualisations of Guru Rinpoche seated in his palace and instructions are given on how to get into this non-duality business. The palace of Guru Rinpoche is said to be as big as Mount Meru, or as big as this whole universe, and yet Guru Rinpoche is as small as a sesame seed. Even so, you neither find it to be an inconvenience, nor is it unesthetic. The container is neither too big nor are the contents too small. It is not as though there is too vast a gap between the sesame seed and Guru Rinpoche. There is no such problem. Then, for that very visualisation, and within that same state of meditation, you can also visualise the palace to be as small as a sesame seed, and Guru Rinpoche to be as big as the whole universe. Yet Guru Rinpoche is actually inside this small sesame seed-like palace and the palace is covering Guru Rinpoche. And all of this is an exercise in non-duality. Visualisation needs to have these kinds of characteristics. Of course, if you really wanted to you could practise by just thinking, “I am Guru Rinpoche,” and perhaps there is still some blessing. But it is kind of similar to simply thinking, “I am someone else.” In this case, you could always just think you are Tony Blair!

Right now during the ngöndro you do not visualise yourself as a deity. You’re still a practitioner, in your ordinary form and this is why it’s a preliminary practice.

(Student): I thought I read that instead of Guru dissolving into us we dissolve into Guru Rinpoche.

(Rinpoche): Oh, that’s fine. The Longchen Nyingtik Ngöndro does that. Your dissolving into him or him dissolving into you, it really doesn’t make much difference. You should do both. Actually, alternating in this way would be good, because it goes against the fixed thinking that ‘dissolve’ always means him coming to us.

(Student): Could you say something about merging your mind with the teacher’s? I feel like I can’t do this very well.

(Rinpoche): There is a whole method of visualisation to help with this kind of feeling. You visualise the guru, the teacher, in front of you in the form of Guru Rinpoche. To enhance the atmosphere and make you understand the true nature of your mind, the guru is not in his ordinary form. If the guru is visualised as an ordinary being, then it’s an ordinary approach. So this is why we make him special.
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[Student]: The energy of Guru Rinpoche is actually something timeless, isn’t it? It can come from within and disappear, or does it stay? It seems when we practice the energy can come and go.

[Rinpoche]: Of course, all the time. Doesn’t it?
[Student]: Yes, it does. I wondered if it should stay?
[Rinpoche]: Ideally it should stay, but it doesn’t, does it?

[Student]: When I do the practice, I try to ask that bodhicitta first comes into me, so that I can then transfer it out. You see, last year I lost my husband and house and felt so sad. During meditation practice I was trying to let go of all this. The husband and the house at the seaside, I removed everything and suddenly I felt really afraid. It was not easy. I also felt angry about the fact that I was the one who was there grasping on to shadows. When I visualise that he and his new wife are in front of me, I repeatedly have to struggle.

[Rinpoche]: How long have you been a Buddhist?
[Student]: Since 1985.
[Rinpoche]: So you have been around for some time. Do you seriously want to practice?
[Student]: I think I do.
[Rinpoche]: It looks like everything is going well. And I’m not joking in saying this. You really have to just go through it this way. After all, this guy has been your husband so many times in your past lives and will be again in future lives, as long as you carry on as a samsāric being that is. And this other wife, perhaps even she has been your wife over so many lifetimes.

The Benefit of Uncertainty

Of course, practically speaking, it is very difficult to accept. This I know. But I have to tell you honestly, this is the time to practice. It is difficult. But if you try to find an easier path, your path will linger, and only become longer. Just do it. I know it’s very hard, but pray to the objects of refuge. Ask them to protect you from losing determination. Ask them to protect you from noticing what your husband and his new girl are doing. Ask them to protect you from this burning desire of wanting to know what they are doing moment by moment. I’d admire you if you really kept this up. In this kind of situation, there is so much benefit, if you can apply yourself. For instance, the next time something happens, it will not shatter you. It is hard though. I will not say, “Ah, that’s easy.” No, it’s not easy. But if you are seriously wanting to practice the dharma and have a guru who is not a coward like myself, then this guru should not pat your shoulder and say, “It’s going to be alright.” He should not say that. Instead he should say, “We don’t know.” He should say, “Maybe it’s going to come right and maybe not.” It’s completely uncertain. Just at the moment you think in terms of: “I give up. He’s with someone else, and I’ve lost my house.” But he might come back. And that’s even more dangerous, isn’t it?

Admitting as Opposed to Pretending

[Student]: Suddenly I’m here at this place and I have to include them in the bodhicitta practice. And my question is do you know a trick to make it easier?
[Rinpoche]: Well, you were just saying that you try to forget. But I think you’re pretending to yourself that you’re okay, and assuming that you have forgotten. Actually your husband and his new wife are still very much on your mind. When you’re doing prostrations, they’re in front of you doing prostrations and when doing bodhicitta and giving to them, it
hurts you, because you still haven’t given them up. So I would say, don’t think so much about giving them up. Admit that you have not really managed to do this yet. Just keep on giving them happiness, and taking in their suffering. If you really want to practice the dharma, it is now that you have a perfect opportunity to do so. Things are very uncertain. And you might think: “This is the end of the relationship. I’ve had so many boyfriends but now I’m getting old. This must surely be my last.” Perhaps, you are mistaken, who knows? Even after turning sixty, you might still go out and find another man. There’s one thing you don’t have to worry about – the trap never ends! If not this, there will always be something else.

**Problems Are Also Compounded Phenomena**

Right now, you and I have a distant relationship, and that’s why it’s easy for me to convey it this way. If you and I were to become closer friends, I would not be able to talk like this. I would rather pat your shoulder and say: “Don’t worry. Everything’s going to go all right. I’ll pray for you.” So it’s better to keep our relationship at this distance. I will then answer you as honestly as I can. The good news is this situation happening in your life is a compounded phenomena. So what does that mean? It’s impermanent. At the most, it might last three years. That’s not so long, actually. How many years did you stay with him?

**Student**: Seventeen.

**Rinpoche**: Against three years! Knowing you, I think it will only last a year. Just give it one more year. People often like to say, “Time will heal.” In fact, it is not that time is healing the problem; it’s just that problems are compounded phenomena. They are impermanent. When people are not aware of this, there is the idea time is healing the problem.

**Bodhisattva’s Determination: Never Giving Up**

**Student**: What about the bodhisattva reincarnating to help a drug addict? After having helped this person for two thousand years, they are still not free, so how helpful is this?

**Rinpoche**: What makes you think this timespan of two thousand years makes him fall into the category of not being helpful? Time is meaningless to the bodhisattva. Taking two minutes to enlighten certain sentient beings would be considered late for some bodhisattvas. Their master would scold them with, “You took two minutes? How could you?” For other bodhisattvas, even if it takes two million years, their master will say, “good.” That’s how strong your determination should be.

**Student**: How helpful is this?

**Rinpoche**: Are you saying all bodhisattvas must manage to help sentient beings within a year?

**Student**: Yes. He’s not very skilful. It’s like you’re saying it doesn’t matter if it takes cons.

**Rinpoche**: No, that’s not it. Anyhow, what makes you think it’s not skilful? Being quick does not necessarily translate as skilful. There are some sentient beings that take time. Definitely. In any case, as you know, bodhisattvas are not really buddhas; bodhisattvas are practitioners.

**Student**: How can you enlighten other beings if you’re not yourself enlightened?

**Rinpoche**: You can always give the path and the directions.

**Student**: That’s like relative bodhicitta, then?
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[Rinpoche]: Yes. There are actually several questions within your question, so let’s just go one by one. The immediate question is “How can a bodhisattva, who is not an enlightened being, help to enlighten others?” First of all, when talking about a final or absolute enlightenment, of course, bodhisattvas have not reached that level. However, even on the first-bhūmi, the bodhisattva has abandoned samsāra and will no longer go to samsāra. As for bodhisattvas like us, for many of us, we are still on the path of accumulation, or perhaps not even there. Nonetheless, we can still help because we have information that we can share. For instance, if someone has given you a map to go to Paris, you can share this map with others, can’t you? That is considered help. Not only sharing, but also just giving things to others – this is the bodhisattva path. And as for the other question, it was about the timespan of two thousand years?

[Student]: It didn’t look very helpful to me. Because, two thousand lives from now he’s still on drugs.

[Rinpoche]: Well, when mentioning the two thousand lifetimes, I was using this as a metaphor. Why would I use such a metaphor? It clearly illustrates the determination of a bodhisattva. If this were an ordinary social worker helping a drug addict, they would not last that long. They would give up. Yet a bodhisattva has such great determination, even if they had to work two million lifetimes, let alone two thousand, they would not give up. That’s what you seem to have missed. Secondly, what makes you think that a bodhisattva is inefficient for taking this length of time? Suppose a patient is so stubborn, with such a strong addiction that it simply takes two thousand lifetimes. In fact, one would think we should admire them for not giving up. Even looking at it from an ordinary point of view, one could still ask, “Is being quick really more efficient?” It sounds like you have been dwelling too much in the modern world of painkillers and quick relief methods.

[Student]: Well, it’s just a question of seeing someone suffering. You want it to stop right away. You don’t want to see it go on for two thousand lifetimes, do you?

[Rinpoche]: No. But if you are unable to put a stop to it, you just can’t. Based on your logic one might as well just put a bullet in their head. That would take care of it in one second.

[Student]: Is it possible that buddhas or bodhisattvas are limited in being able to help and enlighten beings?

[Rinpoche]: If they are buddhas, no. A buddha has the power to do everything. But we are talking about bodhisattvas: beginner bodhisattvas like us, or maybe slightly better ones. We don’t have that kind of patience. You have proven this point very well. You said, “why let him suffer two thousand hours, let’s just give him something to make him sleep.” It’s like the decision of whether to let dogs suffer or whether to choose euthanasia. Certain people might come along and say, “Something is wrong with my dog’s tail. Is it okay, to jab him with an injection and put him to sleep?” It’s a very difficult question. To a bodhisattva, it would be like taking the easy way out.

[Student]: Recently while on holiday, I noticed there was so much suffering. You’re trying to have the idea you want to become an enlightened human being, and want everyone to become enlightened and happy. Well it’s my perception really, but all I could see was a lot of suffering, even though people were supposed to be out on a nice holiday. The mental suffering of not being present in the moment, not being able to appreciate what’s there, and constantly having a thought that must be chased off. Emotional suffering because you’re not on the beach with the perfect man or with the perfect woman.

[Rinpoche]: You should keep that awareness. That’s good.
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[Student]: The thing is I find it to be quite tortuous, because we want everyone to be enlightened, and it’s just not happening. What I mean is, it’s sad.

[Rinpoche]: Yes, but that’s exactly what I was saying earlier. You need the ultimate bodhicitta. After all, your saying, “They are suffering” is also your judgement. You have to bring these two together, the relative bodhicitta and ultimate bodhicitta.

[Student]: How do you do that?

[Rinpoche]: By doing the bodhicitta.

Dedications Can Be Done at Anytime

[Student]: Sometimes after the refuge and the prostrations, I do not dedicate the merit, because I want to continue doing prostrations in the evening after work.

[Rinpoche]: You can dedicate the merit right away. It does not mean that is the end of the session. We can dedicate at anytime. Even after every prostration you can dedicate. The dedication is kind of like a way of registering.

[Student]: I don’t know why it happens. I lose concentration and suddenly, out of frustration, I start to become angry.

[Rinpoche]: Yes, you’re too impatient.

[Student]: Yes, definitely.

[Rinpoche]: There’s no such thing as knowing how to practice and then practising. As you practice, you have to learn how to practice, and by the time you know it very well, by then, you have already attained some realisation. So don’t be afraid of making mistakes. Anyway, it’s just a kind of forgetfulness and is more of an obscuration than a mistake. You can even dedicate the merit you may have forgotten to dedicate in all your past lives. You can say: “I dedicate this merit I have just accumulated, which I know, have seen, and can observe. I also dedicate all the merit of the past which I have not known, and all the merit of the future which I may generate.” All of this can also be dedicated.

A Sign of the Dharma Entering Our Minds

[Student]: Before I thought I wouldn’t fall into the category of a theistic thinker, but now I feel that maybe in the visualisation I do put the deity outside of myself.

[Rinpoche]: That is an improvement. I’m glad that you have progressed. Remember that practising dharma is like peeling off a skin. Now your theistic skin is about to be peeled off. At first, you have no choice but to practice in a theistic way. But already, a non-theistic mentality has been planted in your head and this attitude will continue to grow. Then another layer of skin will be peeled off. This confusion is good. You know, of the many doubts that come up, not every doubt is bad. Certain doubts are none other than what we normally cherish as discriminating mind. Being critical can be helpful, especially where you find fault with your own ego’s interpretation. It is a sign of the dharma entering your mind. We don’t often adopt a critical attitude of our own ego’s interpretation. Instead we think, “for sure – it’s like that.” When the dharma is beginning to seep into our heads, we start feeling very critical about what we think and that’s a good sign. But don’t dwell on it. Try to go forward; try to go further.

[Student]: There is all this pain. I was wondering if it’s just energy or if it’s just an interpretation of the ego. I don’t understand what pain is.

[Rinpoche]: Pain is when ego gets something that ego does not wish to get. That’s pain.

[Student]: If the ego didn’t interpret it as pain, what would it be?

[Rinpoche]: Pleasure. For some people, kinky sex is pleasure.
[Student]: But what about emotional pain?
[Rinpoche]: It’s the same, although for some, emotional pain is what they call renunciation mind.

Mahāsukha: a Result of Renunciation Mind

[Student]: Is renunciation mind still pain?
[Rinpoche]: Renunciation mind has nothing to do with getting rid of pain itself. Renunciation mind is getting rid of the cause of pain.
[Student]: So to experience something as pain is an interpretation of the ego, but what is it, if we stop interpreting it as pain? What does it become?
[Rinpoche]: That’s a very good question. I hope it is not an accidental good question. If you stop interpreting something as pain, then that is called mahāsukha, or the great bliss. If you apply this method and stop interpreting things as pain, you also stop interpreting certain things as a pleasure.
[Student]: That’s different from the renunciation mind?
[Rinpoche]: That is a result. It is caused by the renunciation mind. Basically, as long as you still feel pain, you are interpreting. The pain is actually caused by your interpretation. For instance, if a light bulb were to fall on your head, you would have pain, right? But it would be even more painful were someone to deliberately hit you on the head. This is the power of interpretation. It is always like this. Why is it painful? It’s because you interpret this aggression and ask, “Why did he do this to me?” There is always interpretation. That’s what is meant by, “It’s your perception.” So these are good questions, because they are leading towards the ground of Buddhism, which is, “Everything is mind and all is but mind’s interpretation.” This is why Buddhists are only interested in taming, or training the mind.

Our Karma Makes Us Interpret

[Student]: Then is pain always a karma ripening?
[Rinpoche]: Karma is actually a mind’s action. Karma is what makes you interpret. In having good karma, a phenomenon considered painful by another, could be interpreted by you as pleasurable, or at least it wouldn’t bother you.
[Student]: Do you think it’s better if a situation just doesn’t bother you? If it felt neutral to you?
[Rinpoche]: No. Again, it depends on different karma. Let’s say there’s a serious crisis taking place. Everyone is suffering over the conflict, and all and sundry are fighting against each other. Say you have this certain karma from a past life, which keeps you from getting involved in the problem. Such karma is a kind of lower karma. If you have better karma, you may be following what’s happening, and yet not really be bothered by it. So it’s a slightly better karma. To have really good karma, there is the ability to transform the conflict into something more useful. This is even better. There are so many different levels of karmic interpretation and so many subtleties in every moment with each sentient being.

Now, the Buddha is an all accomplished being. So it is believed even if not a single being were remaining on this earth, and the Buddha were to beg alms, all he need do is hold his begging bowl out into empty space, and there would be gods ready to offer whatever he wished. But on one particular occasion, because the Buddha Shakyamuni wanted to teach the monks something about the interpretation of mind, he went along to Kosala. He and Ananda and all the monks continued going up and down for some time,
and still no-one had offered a thing. Finally, the king’s men in charge of the stables offered the horse’s leftovers to the monks and the Buddha. The monks felt disgusted, yet not being allowed to eat after midday, they had no choice but to eat these offerings. So they ate, and the Buddha also ate, and all the monks felt really bad. They felt sick and revolted. Then the Buddha asked, “Isn’t the lunch delicious?” And then of course, the monks complained saying, “It’s terrible.” Then the Buddha said, “Why don’t you try this?” Amazingly, although it was the very same thing, when the monks tried the leftovers from the Buddha’s bowl, it was like eating gourmet food of the god realms. This is what it’s like. Different beings have different karma. The Buddha was teaching karmic interpretation.

[Student]: If you have something to purify and you concentrate on that, how can you tell when a certain karma is finished? Or can you never tell?

[Rinpoche]: If there are not too many karmas, you can. But right now, it’s not so possible. It’s like when you hold a flaming torch, if you swirl the torch in a circular motion, it appears there is a ring of fire. In actual fact, there is no ring as such, since it’s all just the one fire. It’s all an illusion. For the time being, because there is a continuous string of so many karmas, you will not really be able to tell, but as the karma becomes less and less, you will begin to see big gaps between the karmas.

[Student]: Has it something to do with the guilt stops or emotional …

[Rinpoche]: Yes, of course.

[Student]: I always wanted to know the difference between the Western and the Eastern mind. Since everything is our own perception, do Western people see the same wrathful deities in the bardo? Or do we see what we find threatening, as in horror films?

[Rinpoche]: Westerners see what they interpret as scary. As a matter of fact, Tibetans have never really known how to paint horror. Even though Tibetan descriptions of the herukas are quite frightening, this tends to be a limited aspect within the thangkas. Also, whatever is being depicted is made more beautiful. Honestly, just imagine a heruka with a garland of fifty-one wet human heads and a garland of a hundred dried human heads. This is really quite scary. Even Hollywood hasn’t managed such a portrayal. Images of Dracula are not that scary. They have only four fangs, whereas in the Tibetan description of the wrathful deities, we hear of a mouth in the stomach, and stuff like that.

[Student]: What about a Westerner having a vision, this is also perception?

[Rinpoche]: Yes. We need not talk about the differences between Westerners and Easterners, even when it comes to you and me it will be different. This is why we talk about prāṇa, nāḍī, and bindu. It depends on the individual person’s perception. But the standard is the same. You have five emotions, two of which include aggression and jealousy and I have these too. All the emotions can be categorised into these five. It is not as though some people have something more or extra, such as a set of different emotions that can’t really be pinpointed. This is why there are five buddha families. Then, to elaborate this further, there are the fifty-eight wrathful and forty-two peaceful deities. It is related to the expression of the inner emotions. These figures have nothing to do with a Tibetan count. It’s all based on one’s own prāṇa, nāḍī, and bindu.

[Student]: I’m surprised about the five emotions, there’s fear, and fear is such an obstacle.

[Rinpoche]: Fear is definitely included within the five emotions. Of course, we have to generalise. If you want to categorise like that, then five is not enough. Five million is not enough.

[Student]: But fear is constantly an obstacle from birth until death.

[Rinpoche]: Among the five emotions is something called ignorance and within ignorance every other emotion is included, even the other four emotions. Of course, Buddhists talk about hope and fear all the time. But hope and fear are aspects of ignorance. We have to
generalise like this, or else it’s just endless. Otherwise, we would have to write a whole set of Buddhist texts for each person, for all the different kinds of fear. Some beings have ‘fear-fear,’ some have ‘hope-fear’ and others have ‘fear-hope.’ There are others who have jealousy-oriented fear, aggression-oriented fear, and some have pride-oriented fear. There are so many different versions of fear and hope, but all of these we can include within ignorance. Why does fear exist? It is because of ignorance; it is because you don’t know what’s there. That’s why you have fear. Pride is also a kind of fear. Jealousy is also fear. Passion is fear. Aggression is also fear. They are all related. It’s not as though you have just one and don’t have the others. We have to generalise a little. It’s like gauging a direction and asking, “Where is East?” You figure out where it is but when you head there, you still find South and West. It’s not as though, if you continue to go eastwards, the East is all you find. It’s not like that – you find other directions, too.

The Vajrayāna Method of Taming the Mind

[Student]: As we try to transform our surroundings into a pure realm, do I imagine all beings become buddhas?

[Rinpoche]: Yes. Or, you can think of all the males as dākas, and all the females as dākinis. This is the highest form of mind training.

“Avoid performing non-virtuous actions. Perform virtuous actions. Tame your mind.” These are the words of the Buddha. So this transforming the ordinary into a pure realm is also the vajrayāna method of taming the mind.

[Student]: I’m struggling with the idea of a pure realm based on non-dualism. Has this something to do with vipashyanā and sitting and doing shamatha?

[Rinpoche]: No. The pure realm has more to do with knowing. In Buddhism, two of the most frequently heard terms are the ‘relative truth’ and the ‘ultimate truth.’ To put this into simple, ordinary language, you should know that every time you are hearing, tasting, feeling, thinking and looking at something, there are always two aspects. Within each and every phenomenon there is always: how it appears and how it is.

[Student]: Is it all according to your perception?

[Rinpoche]: Well, there are two aspects. If you’re looking at a bottle, to you, it appears as a bottle. That’s one aspect of that phenomena. And then, there is another aspect of the phenomena that has nothing to do with how it appears, but has to do with what it is.

[Student]: Is this how it’s made?

[Rinpoche]: Yes, ‘the what it is’ aspect has more to do with reality. Let’s say you are looking at a man. Since you are a woman, let us say you are looking at a man, and thinking, “he’s good, and he’s beautiful.” What is that? That is just how it appears to you, but in reality, he could be another Jack-the-Ripper. That’s an example of how it is and how it appears. This always happens, all around us everywhere. That’s the logic of relative truth and ultimate truth. We look at each other, and everything seems to be like ‘this’ or ‘that,’ but actually it’s all our own mind’s interpretation. That’s just how it appears. To even say, “He appears to be a nice guy,” automatically you’re indicating there must be something behind how he appears. What is it? It is the ultimate truth. Now for ordinary beings like ourselves, we usually think how it appears is actually the way it is. You look at the man and think, “He’s very beautiful, and you also think, “that’s the reality.” That’s why you get this clinging and attachment, because you think, ‘the way it appears to you’ is ‘how it is.’
This is how we drift apart in saṃsāra. We regard the world as an ordinary realm and think, “I’m ordinary,” but this is only how it appears. We are trying to change this by inserting, *how it is*. During the practice we are trying to learn to transform this ordinary realm into a more pure realm. If I can think this is an ordinary realm, which is how it appears, then why shouldn’t I be able to change that aspect into something more pure? This logic is a little bit complicated, but it’s very, very important.

**[Student]:** Rinpoche, if it’s hard to imagine a pure realm at first, can I just meditate on the idea that the floor, the walls and everything is not as I think it is?

**[Rinpoche]:** Exactly. What one thinks of the world is not what it is.

**[Student]:** So, this is more than just imagining the world is very nice and clean? It’s more than dismantling.

**[Rinpoche]:** Yes. It’s the view. But as a method, and with the pith instructions, the lamas would say you should still try to visualise a beautiful land. Somehow it works because you then learn the ability to transform.

*Giving Attachment No Place to Live*

**[Student]:** Is that the tantric aspect?

**[Rinpoche]:** It’s like how you can look at a man whom you love and play with your thoughts. One minute, you can think, “He’s bad,” and actually see him as bad. The next minute you think, “He is good.” So you play with this. As you play with this constantly, the attachment has no place to live. You’re always transforming him all the time; it’s like a rainbow. It looks beautiful and yet it has no essence. That’s how you diminish your attachment. It’s a wonderful method. This is the view. Hold this view and still follow the pith instructions coming from the great gurus. You visualise the ground of the pure realm as soft and yielding. If you were to place your feet there, it would give a little. It has that cushion-like quality, a bit like a sofa seat. There are many beautiful descriptions. If you read the second chapter of Shāntideva’s *Bodhicaryāvatāra* or the mahāyāna’s sūtra *Alankara* for instance, there are descriptions of the wish fulfilling trees and even the sounds made by their branches as they are blown by the wind.

**[Student]:** It sounds drug induced, something like being on acid or mescaline or taking magic mushrooms.

**[Rinpoche]:** It is a bit like that. You are trying to dismantle the present perception. It’s very important. mahāyāna has the same view, but they don’t have that method.

The vajrayāna method is to transform this ordinary realm. For example, as I’ve said, we visualise the ground of the pure realm as soft and yielding, like a sofa seat of rainbow colours. As the branches of the wish-fulfilling tree are rustled by the wind, the branches give off the sound, (*Rinpoche chants*) “All compounded things are impermanent, all compounded things are impermanent.” Another gust of wind brings with it, (*Rinpoche chants*) “All emotions are pain.” Then a bird with rainbow wings comes, and instead of chirping, it says, (*Rinpoche chants*) “All compounded things are impermanent.” It is not my making things up, all this is actually in the description of the Sukhāvati. There is also water possessing eight different qualities, and elephants with six legs, and six tusks. There are all kinds of things, such as a lotus as big as a celestial mansion, where you can sleep or take a bath. If you want to know more, read the *Amitābha Sūtra*. In the Amitābha realm, in the Pure Realm Sect - there’s actually even one school in China, that’s called the Pure Realm Sect - all they ever do is think about the pure realm.

**[Student]:** Is there anything like the truth? If it’s all my perception and it’s conditioned by society, I want to know what is true.
[Rinpoche]: That’s a good question. The truth is: as much as what we see with our ordinary perception is not true, even the pure realm is not true.

[Student]: But relatively?

*Pure Perception: a Thorn to Remove a Thorn*

[Rinpoche]: No, even that is not true. This is why there is the ‘completion meditation.’ In the completion meditation everything dissolves. Right now, pure perception is used as a thorn to take out another thorn in your palm. That’s all. It’s very important.

[Student]: I find it difficult to see jewels on a tree.

[Rinpoche]: This is only an example. But you should just stick with that. After all, we have to come up with some kind of example. Right now you might think that leaves are beautiful, but the mind is very fickle. One day you’ll change and will think that leaves are too small. Anyhow, even jewels such as diamonds, are only pieces of stone.

[Student]: It’s coal.

[Rinpoche]: It’s worse than a stone then, isn’t it? But the human mind has made it into something precious and every year many lives are being destroyed because of that.

[Student]: I don’t seem to identify with the beauty of what you’ve explained. For me, it’s as though I’m really allowed to relax absolutely. Is this wrong?

[Rinpoche]: That’s fine. I don’t know you very well, but there are certain types of practitioners who are not what we call form-oriented. For them, there is another complete method, which is: just relaxing and watching this momentary mind. This alone does so much, as this alone transforms. That is, if you know how to watch, because again, it’s easy to say “watch your mind” but you can get distracted. So in general, with the developing meditation, which includes this visualisation, we are talking about a gradual path. Especially when explaining in a group, it’s as though I’m a driving coach, with a whole lot of people wanting to learn how to drive. I can only give a gradual path. I can’t give you personal instructions. But suppose you are formless oriented, if so, I might have to tell you to do something else, like vipashyanā, for instance. Or the four-mindfulness’s, which is also found in the four foundations.

[Student]: What about the notion that life is wonderful? The world is precious without me manufacturing it. Is this wrong?

[Rinpoche]: Well I can’t really say it’s wrong, but the thing is what do you mean by wonderful? If ‘wonderful’ is an interpretation that is romanticising life, then you’re not getting the first noble truth. The first noble truth is: “Know the suffering.” Life is full of suffering, because everything is a compounded phenomena. There is uncertainty, ageing, and dismantling all the time. What is so wonderful?

[Student]: It’s uncertain, with all this suffering aspect, but at the same time life is functioning in a wonderful way. For example, things grow.

[Rinpoche]: Things grow, yet the moment things grow, they are also growing towards their exhaustion. What happens is, we tend to deny the exhaustion part. This is why we need to apply such methods as ‘stopping the chain of thoughts’ and ‘bringing the renunciation mind.’ Just how many of us actually think about death at all and then if we do, how often do we do this? I plan, I work, and dwell in this world, as if I’m going to live for a thousand years! Half our lives were gone a long time ago, or probably even more than half, yet still we don’t really realise this. So you have to bring in more renunciation mind. Some might think our notion of life is very pessimistic, but Buddhists think of it as being realistic. You really have to choose. And actually, Buddhists think that being realistic will lead into being optimistic.
[Student]: In generating the pure realm, if one somehow experiences that the aura of Guru Rinpoche is really present, isn’t that sufficient?
[Rinpoche]: Yes. And that’s why we are bringing in Guru Rinpoche to change the realm. This is a good question. But after having said this, I have a little bit of a problem with the term ‘aura.’
[Student]: It’s just a word. I don’t know exactly what it means.
[Rinpoche]: Okay. As long as you trust this aura, that’s fine.

Not Becoming a Victim of Your Own Compassion

[Student]: To generate bodhicitta, why is it necessary to have an understanding of emptiness?
[Rinpoche]: Actually, let me ask some of the others. I want to know people’s general understanding of this. Why is emptiness important, in order to understand and have complete bodhicitta?
[Student]: Because otherwise you’re goal-oriented.
[Rinpoche]: Okay, that’s good. Someone else?
[Student]: Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche said bodhicitta has two faces, one is compassion and the other is emptiness. You understand the suffering of another person and see it, but you have the certainty the pain is also empty. For this reason, you have something to convey, a hope to convey.
[Rinpoche]: You have the certainty that pain is not permanent. Pain is not truly existent. Yes, that will do. If you think of the pain as truly existent, then your compassion will backfire on you. You will become a victim of your own compassion.
Vajrasattva

So we now begin the explanation of Vajrasattva. But before that, as is required in the tradition, I should remind you that the essence of the practice, not only of the Longchen Nyingtik Ngöndro but of any ngöndro – is training the mind. Generally speaking, this term ‘training the mind,’ refers to turning this rigid mind into something more flexible.

Now if we were to ask the question, “How come our mind is rigid?” Then of course, Buddhists would give various answers, corresponding to the three vehicles. Our mind is rigid, because we surrender too much to the emotions, and not only to the emotions, but also to the objects of the emotions: hope and fear. Almost everything we think and feel, or for that matter, almost everything interpreted through this mind is based on hope or fear. Therefore, for this reason, our minds are always bound by one or the other of the emotions, such as, jealousy, pride, passion, aggression, or ignorance. Constantly, for so long, have we operated in this way, and this is why, rather than having control over our minds, the emotions and the objects of the emotions, instead control our minds. This is what we mean by rigid mind. It is this rigid mind we are trying to train – or to tame.

There is actually an assortment of similar terms: ‘train’ ‘tame’ or ‘recognise’ – which are either applied at different stages or used separately within the different vehicles. For instance, prātimokṣa methods prefer to use such words as ‘tame.’ This wild, rigid mind needs to be tamed. The mahāyāna would whereas use the term ‘train.’ Rather than simply taming, we instead train this wild, rigid mind, so that it can be useful. And in the vajrayāna, because of the greater view and greater determination, we are going beyond ‘taming’ or ‘training’ and thus, we talk about ‘recognising’ the mind. So you see, each of the three vehicles has a slightly different approach. Yet this slight variation in approach is actually quite a big leap and makes a considerable difference.

Anyway, for now, and for the sake of easier communication, let’s refer to all that we are doing as ‘training the mind.’ In doing so, the first and most important step is to recognise the futility of samsāra. It is knowing the futility of this worldly life, and reflecting on this again and again. As long as you place some value in this worldly life, there is always going to be a loophole in your dharma practice. We must really manage to recognise this samsaric life as futile, and truly invoke this kind of mind.

Understanding the Dharma from All Angles

It is a tradition to hear the preliminary thoughts over and over again. I’ve noticed it is something we have to hear often. The dharma is just so vast, yet still there is merit in listening to these teachings again and again, because it brings to mind the futility aspect of samsāra. Now, in the study of Buddhism, we talk about three kinds of wisdom – there is the wisdom coming from hearing, the wisdom coming from contemplation, and the wisdom coming from meditation. Hearing the dharma over and over again – in Tibetan that is what we mean in saying "thos bsam sgom gsum." The first part of the term ‘thos’ means listening and hearing and yet, it also contains the meaning of study.5

Actually, I’ve noticed how for many people, there is somewhat of a lack, either in terms of reading up on or listening to the dharma. From some of the questions that arise it is apparent that things are often taken quite literally. Yet the ability to understand both the
dharma and the terms from all angles is quite important. Even as I speak of the importance of understanding the futility aspect of samsāra, I know there will be some who immediately think: “Oh, I know this. It is very true. My family life is useless and my job is pointless – I want to get out of this.” Some of you actually try to get out or even abandon these things. But what you haven’t understood is, that itself can be a samsaric thought. It can be – I’m not saying it is. It could be that you just want to have a long rest. You’re tired of your present family situation, tired with this phase of life and the dharma happens to provide an excuse. Renunciation happens to be just the pretext to create another form of life. If you have understood renunciation in this way, you have either misinterpreted or have not managed to interpret it completely.

**Renunciation Mind: Knowing It Is a Dream**

It’s like this. Suppose we are having a dream, and suppose our dream is a bad one. Instantly, there is the attitude of not wanting to have this bad dream but that in itself, is not renunciation mind. You just don’t want to be having a bad dream; you want to have a good dream. Renunciation mind is our knowing that it is a dream. That’s it – period, full stop. We don’t need to talk about whether something is good or bad. If it is bad, it is a dream; if it is good, it is a dream and to know that is renunciation mind. Sometimes it’s tough, so futilely tough, then at other times, it’s kind of nice. It’s futilely nice. We need to know that samsaric life is futile. That’s what we call renunciation mind. When we have pain, it’s easy for us to say: “Samsāra, it’s terrible” but we don’t say this when we are happy. When you know, no matter what happens in your life, whether it happens to be good or bad; when you recognize “This is essenceless, this is changeable, and this is impermanent,” it is then that you’re beginning to become a dharma practitioner, a spiritual person. Regardless of whether it is a good or a bad dream, as long as you know it is a dream, you will have no fear of waking up. Through knowing it’s a dream, you are ready to give up bad or good – equally.

In one sūtra the Buddha said: If a young girl dreams of a boy coming into her life, she is happy. But within the same dream, if the boy meets with an accident and dies, suddenly she is very unhappy. Then, upon awakening, she realises her happiness over meeting the boy, and her unhappiness over the boy’s death were both an elaborate dream.

The key point here is: through hearing and studying the teachings again and again, it really helps us to see the dharma from every angle, not just in a one sided way. Otherwise, our understanding is always from our side, or is based on how we like to see things. And as vajrayāna students, we tend to believe that we obey our guru, but it is a very dangerous thing to verbalize. Even including myself, I don’t think we obey the guru at all. It’s premature to believe we do whatever our guru says. We don’t. In fact if the guru says something, we always interpret first and then obey that. At any rate, this kind of thing is quite tough, so one should really keep it in mind.

It’s okay if you are not about to finish one-hundred-thousand prostrations. It’s acceptable not finishing your Vajrasattva in time. As long as you know and on a daily basis try to get used to this notion that everything you have, and aim for is futile, and then still go ahead with it. Really, you should go ahead with things, because until the dream is finished, you have to dream. Why? Because right now, you simply don’t have the power to wake up, and until the dream, or story has ended, you’ll have to go through it. By knowing it’s a dream, it will not bother you. Not knowing it is a dream, it bothers you, tempts you, traps you, and it really binds you.
Right now, what makes us a beginner? Even though we intellectually know “this is a dream” – in that instant of realising it, we still don’t know how to wake up from it. Yet for ordinary people walking about in Paris or Munich at this very moment, there is not even the intellectual understanding: “This is a dream.” As a rule, they honestly think: “This is real, this is it, this is terribly important.” In contrast, we are somewhat more fortunate, since we know intellectually, or at least, we have heard “this is a dream.” But then, in what sense are we practitioners? It’s a bit like being on a battlefield, surrounded by our enemies, with both our hands and legs chopped off, so that we are even unable to fight with the enemy. Your tongues being cut out, you are unable to even verbally abuse the enemy. You can’t run away, because your legs are chopped off. You have nothing to do but just – you know – watch. Even that is a much better outcome than what those people walking about in Paris or Munich experience. Surrounded by the enemy, they are cheated, trapped, constantly bothered by the enemy, and yet, they don’t even know the enemy. In doing whatever the enemy says, as a result, they continually get defeated. The enemies abuse them relentlessly, but for us, at least our enemies are a little afraid of us. Although unable to do anything much, the enemy knows that we know they are the enemy. So it’s very important that we develop this illusory notion. We should have this attitude of seeing things from all different angles. If you can really develop this, as Patrül Rinpoche said, the dawn of the dharma practitioner will come.

Cleansing This Vessel: Body, Speech and Mind

Now, when we talk about Vajrasattva, there is the aspect of cleansing. We have diverted our attention from the wrong to the right path by doing refuge. We have dwelled on the greater path, and diverted our attention from the lesser path to the greater path by practising bodhicitta. We have laid the two foundations. For the next foundation, the dharma is like the nectar to be poured into this vessel and so, we cleanse this vessel – we cleanse this body, speech, and mind.

In the vajrayāna, even the body is the vessel. But in the mahāyāna and the śrāvakayāna tradition, the body is not really the vessel, only the mind is the vessel. It is this mind that needs to be tamed, or trained. The body, on the other hand, is like a servant. As Shāntideva said in the Bodhicharyāvatāra:

Slaves unsuitable for work
Are not rewarded with supplies and clothing.
This body, though you pamper it, will leave you –
Why exhaust yourself with such great labor?

So pay this body due remuneration,
But then be sure to make it work for you.
But do not lavish everything
On what will not bring perfect benefit.6

We give this servant some wages, without giving too much and likewise, we are advised to treat this slave as a master would. If pampered, the slave will only take you over. In the vajrayāna however, the body is not a slave; it is very much a vessel and thus, even the body needs to be cleansed.

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Think of Vajrasattva as a Practice of Uncovering the Buddha Nature

This brings us to the subject of bad karma or rather, the obscurations, and defilements that need to be purified. The moment we hear of Vajrasattva, somehow there is this bell ringing in our head, telling us it’s something to do with purification and cleansing. Since we use words like ‘cleansing,’ this immediately implies there is some dirt to be found. Yet in communicating between student and teacher, there is no other human language to convey this in a better way; we have little choice but to use words like cleansing, purification, dirt, defilement and so forth. The real problem is when we practice Vajrasattva or talk about cleansing the defilements, it seems to bring along a lot of paranoia. It’s almost as though we have the attitude of not wanting to open that can of worms. We are unwilling to talk about our dirt, or our defilements. We just don’t want to be reminded. In fact, we’d much rather talk about our goodness instead.

I think this kind of attitude comes out of a certain misunderstanding. It is one that is present both in the East and the West, and is probably due to a particular religious or cultural upbringing. Whatever the case might be, the right attitude is this: when purifying the defilements, we are talking about uncovering the buddha nature. If there were no buddha nature, there would be no sense in purifying these defilements. This is quite an important point. When you purify, instead of getting so worked up with: “Oh I’m bad. This is terrible; this is dirty. I’ve so much anger, I’ve so much jealousy; this needs to be washed.” Instead of putting so much emphasis into such thoughts, how about putting an equal amount, if not more into: “I need to do uncovering.” Think of this practice as an uncovering of the buddha nature. All too often, people forget about the uncovering aspect, which is why there is an unwillingness to even talk about the dirt.

It’s like washing a cup. The cup is dirty, or stained by coffee and the like – but as we wash it, there’s this hidden desire to see the cup clean. This is what forces us on. As you sink the dirty cup into warm soapy water, and clean away with a soft sponge, there is considerable enjoyment. Especially when you know it’s becoming cleaner and cleaner. If it is forever going to remain a dirty cup with no aspect of uncovering, it’s really painful. And the pain itself stems from the idea that in spite of your trying from morning to night to do otherwise, not even one bit of dirt gets lessened. So I would suggest you really concentrate on the uncovering business. After all, that is the real purpose. Buddhism, and particularly the vajrayāna, has nothing against the dirt. Nor does the vajrayāna have anything against the emotions and all of that. We want to know the inner aspect, and this is the rationale behind the uncovering.

Guru: a Reflection of Devotion and Merit

To practice Vajrasattva, you are still in an ordinary form, and on the top of your head is your guru. Who is your guru? Guru is a reflection of your devotion accompanied by merit, and devotion itself is a manifestation of buddha nature accompanied by merit. Without merit, you do not recognise the guru.

Take the example of Devadatta and Buddha. Devadatta was the Buddha’s cousin, and they stayed together for a long time. Yet, since this man Devadatta was unable to see even one good quality in the Buddha, he therefore did not receive anything. For him the Buddha was just an ordinary cousin towards whom he had sibling rivalry, or in this case, cousinly rivalry. So merit plays an important role. Of course, devotion itself is a kind of merit, too. Where does the devotion or merit come from? Buddha nature. Basically, we’re talking about your own nature – that is the guru.
Different Aspirations but One Essence

During the refuge, the emphasis is protection. You are protected from saṃsāra, nirvāṇa, impure vision, from hale, storm, rain, bad health, lack of devotion, lack of inspiration and so on and so forth. Since there is this purpose of protecting, we therefore visualise our guru in the form of Guru Rinpoche. Somehow, in our dualistic minds, Guru Rinpoche is known and accepted as a great protector. Now this time, during the Vajrasattva practice, the guru has a different purpose.

The full power of protection is there as well, but in our mind Vajrasattva is recognised more as one who does the purifying. It’s a bit like the different roles that your mother takes in life. Your mother is a daughter to her mother, and serves the purpose of being a daughter; your mother is also a wife for her husband, your father, and she serves the purpose of a wife. Then your mother is a cleaner, when she goes and cleans somebody’s house. Different people have different perceptions of the same person. Likewise all the buddhas and bodhisattvas are one essence, but in our dualistic minds: name, colour, and appearance make a difference. Strictly speaking, you could visualise Guru Rinpoche on top of your head and chant the Vajrasattva mantra or the Guru Rinpoche mantra and still do the entire cleansing bit. I guess that is almost easier. Somehow, in the vajrayāna there are so many incredible methods and Vajrasattva is known to be the supreme practice of purification.

Having the power to purify is something that is historically linked to the buddha Vajrasattva. As a bodhisattva, he aspired that upon becoming a buddha, his name alone would be able to purify even the worst defilements of sentient beings. This is altogether a different subject, but aspiration is quite important. Buddhā’s have different aspirations. Shakyaumuni Buddha had the aspiration to be reborn in this human realm, at a time when a human beings’ lifespan is neither too short, nor too long. And for instance, out of the thousand buddha’s appearing in this eon, only four teach the vajrayāna; the rest don’t. This is also aspiration.

Vajrasattva: the Unity of Wisdom and Compassion

So we visualise Guru Vajrasattva on top of our head. Again, I repeat, the nature of your mind is the unity of wisdom and compassion. You visualise Vajrasattva as white in colour, adorned with all the sambhogakāya ornaments. Embracing the consort and holding a vajra at the heart level, he’s holding a bell with his left hand resting on his left thigh. In the centre of his heart visualise a small moon disc, in the centre of which there is the letter HŪM. Think that this letter HŪM – not only the letter HŪM, but also Vajrasattva – are the embodiment of all the buddhas, especially of the buddha’s mind. Then supplicate to Vajrasattva, saying:

Guru Vajrasattva, protect me, bless me;
Purify all my defilements of the past, present and future...

Then you chant the hundred seed syllable mantra. As you chant the mantra, first think that from this letter HŪM in the centre of his heart comes a lot of different light, which travels to the ten directions of the buddha field. From this light comes all kinds of different offering substances: flowers, incense, bathhouses, mansions, gardens, peacocks, elephants, or whatever offering substance you can imagine. Of course, it is basically all your interpretation. These offering substances travel to the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the
ten directions, before returning back to you. This time the light brings the blessings of all
the buddhas and bodhisattvas, and these blessings, all dissolve into the letter HŪM. Then,
nectar in the form of light or alternatively, since it’s related to cleansing, you can imagine
that a liquid, mercury-like or milk-like substance begins to flow from this letter HŪM.
During this sequence, you are still chanting the Vajrasattva mantra. The nectar completely
fills Vajrasattva’s body, travelling through his secret place, and goes inside the consort’s
body, also completely filling her body. Nectar continues to flow non-stop from the letter
HŪM, until it starts to overflow from each and every pore of both Vajrasattva and the
consort. The nectar cascades like a waterfall, especially from their secret place, and
dissolves through your head, slowly beginning to fill up to your forehead.

**Bodily Defilements: Obscuration of Nāḍī**

As the nectar continues to fill up to your forehead, it pushes down all the sickness,
obscurations, defilements, and bad energies. It pushes these downwards, until all this
comes down from your anus, from your secret place, and from your toes. Now these
defilements are mainly related to the physical acts. In other words, it is bad karma that is
related to the physical, such as your actually killing someone in a past life, or other acts
like stealing, or sexual misconduct. Then again, it also includes physical sickness, such as
headaches, or a stomachache, for instance. All of this is what we call ‘defilement of the
nāḍī’ and the nāḍīs themselves are actually the chakras and the channels inside your body.

Obscuration or defilement of the nāḍī can be caused by doing all kinds of odd things
like killing people, or even by eating strange foods, mixing with obscured beings, or
staying in an obscured place, for example. Due to having done this kind of thing, your
channels and chakras are blocked, and have become very rusty. All this needs to be
cleansed, just in the same way that it is necessary to have a strong powder or liquid to put
into the toilet, like bleach or Domestos. Especially as a vajrayāna practitioner, you should
concentrate more on cleansing the chakras and channels. Though this time, I’m using a
slightly different explanation, which is not one that is usually given in many ngöndro
 teachings.

**Being Creative and Flexible with the Visualisation**

The nectar continues to overflow non-stop from the letter HŪM. With the visualisation,
keep in mind that one should also be quite creative and flexible. What I do is: think that
even my body begins to change – as the nectar reaches my forehead, my body is white
from the top of the head up to the forehead and the rest is a little bit dark. So even our
body coloration changes. If it helps, you can do that. It is just enhancing the power of
visualisation. As for the details of the visualisations, do not expect to do all this in one
session, but then again, if you are able to do so, why not? From time to time, if you can,
you should try to do it in one session, or even with one round of the mālā, the rosary.

But suppose you are doing a Vajrasattva retreat or are at the stage of accumulating
one-hundred-thousand Vajrasattva recitations; in this case, you can alternate. For instance,
for one day you could just chant the mantra of Vajrasattva, and simply concentrate on
Vajrasattva’s form above your head. That is already very good. The next day, just focus
more on the letter HŪM in his heart centre while letting the rest remain a little bit
unfocused. Then the following day, you concentrate on the flowing of the nectar, and so
you can alternate this way, as well. And then, on the fourth day, you do all three. If you
have a lot of time, you could visualise the nectar flowing up to the forehead for an
extended period of time, for instance, for one month. Then during the second month, the nectar flows up to the throat. Then again on the other hand, you could do half an hour to the forehead, and another half hour to the throat, so that way it’s two hours, completely. Alternatively, you could try fifteen minutes, five minutes, or two minutes of this – it is entirely up to you, so please, be flexible. Really, it is not necessary to ask questions about this kind of thing. All these minor details can be endless: “How should the nectar travel? Through which channel should it go? Through the right channel or the left channel?” I feel like answering with, “Well, maybe it should travel with the train.”

Also, if you have time, though the main abisheka comes during the guru yoga, since we are purifying the bodily defilements, and the obscurations of the nādi, then at the end you can also think that you are receiving the vase abisheka. As the nectar flows to the throat, think you are receiving the secret empowerment, and then as the nectar reaches the heart, you can think you are receiving the third and the fourth empowerments, the wisdom initiation and the word initiation.

**Speech Defilements: Obscuration of Prāṇa**

Of course, the nectar flowing up to the throat is to purify all the defilements, but mainly it is to purify the speech defilements. This includes all the defilements related to the speech: such as lying, cheating, using harsh words, gossiping, and making mistakes when you recite mantras by missing or adding extra words or by not having the perfect pronunciation. It is also for speech related bad energy and disorders, such as when no matter what you say, people tend to misunderstand. For instance, if you say ‘right’ people think you said ‘left.’ Or it might be that whatever you say, even when you say something with a good heart, still it annoys people. Your words and commands are not powerful enough. They are not seductive enough, or perhaps they are too seductive – so much so that it is annoying.

It is especially important that vajrayāna students cleanse and deal with problems of the prāṇa. And when we say prāṇa, we are talking about the winds; it is the stale air, or rather, the stale wind that we cleanse. There are so many obscurations that have damaged our prāṇa. We may have collected these obscurations by breathing bad air, smoking hashish, smoking cigars, drinking alcohol, or for instance, by slandering vajrayāna masters, saying impure things about the pure, or even by smelling the wrong incense. Each and every day there must be so many obscurations that we are inhaling, and all of this needs to be cleansed. Now again, in order to develop the visualisation more strongly, as these things flow downwards, you can visualise most of the defilements coming out in the form of black liquids, from your anus and your secret place, or from your toes. You can then think that most of the disease is in the form of pus and blood, while most of the bad energy is in the form of all kinds of beings. For instance, visualise that the bad energy of the prāṇa and nāḍi is in the form of butterflies, scorpions, and various other insects and animals. You imagine that these creatures look part you and part animal; you might perhaps visualise dogs that have your hands and your feet, and fleas or frogs that have your lips and so forth. Anyhow, it is bad energy coming out, so they all look hideous, or dirty, however you choose to elaborate on this.

To briefly recap, there are many ways in which you can be creative with the visualisation. It is possible to go step by step from the top of the chakra, to the forehead level, and then the throat and so on, which is one way. Then again, if you prefer, you can also choose to complete the visualisation all in one go. Yet another way is to perhaps on one day simply visualise that Vajrasattva’s nectar overflows, dissolves into you, and
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washes down all the dirt, pus, and blood and you receive only the vase initiation. This purifies the body defilement and the obscuration of nāḍī. Then on the next day, you purify the prāṇa. So it is up to you. Also, it is really not that important, but if it somehow bothers you or if you are wondering about where this dirt goes, you can imagine that it dissolves into the earth. Or you can even think that it all disappears into emptiness.

Mind Defilements: Obscuration of Bindu

As you keep on chanting the Vajrasattva mantra, the nectar then comes down to the heart level. This time it cleanses all the defilements relating to the mind. This includes bad karma created by mind such as jealousy, competitiveness, aggression, selfishness, pride, or covetousness. Then there are things like wishing to harm others, having the wrong view, or extreme views such as believing in killing human beings in order to go to heaven. We must have done this kind of thing a lot in our past lives, and the stain must still be there. So there are all these diseases related to the mind, like depression, anxiety, nervousness, insecurity, or being overly excited, overly amused, never amused, never anxious, never nervous, or over-nervous. There are just so many things: mind disease, even lack of devotion, lack of inspiration, and this ridiculous endless sadness. And I think, bulimia that is also a kind of mind disease. Then there is this craziness, this being ambitious and wanting to become the best, having this desire to get enlightenment faster than anyone else – and stuff like that. We have so many defilements. As a vajrayāna practitioner, on this third level, you are trying more to cleanse the defilements of bindu.

We refer to bindu as the drop – bodhicitta. At this point, to further explain the concept of bindu is quite difficult, and maybe a little bit untimely. I can only describe some of the outer things. Anyway, it is very much mind related, since bindu is like the domain of the mind. It is also the most essential aspect; it is tiklé. Now in the tantric practice, as you keep it as simple as possible, and as unfinished as possible, the energy between female and male, the bliss becomes very intense and very vast. But human beings complicate this tremendously, and tend to fabricate this more and more. I can give you one good example. I may be wrong, but I think it is because people run out of ideas. Really, I think for human beings at this time, in this age, the problem is that many people need to be turned on. Their problem is being turned on or turned off, just like this oddity of needing to be aroused via chains and whips. This, I think, is a bindu problem. The reason I’m saying, perhaps I’m right perhaps I’m wrong is that most of the ancient texts were written before the chain and whip problem. But in such a situation, you are obscuring your bindu so much that in order to invoke a certain experience, you have to do all kinds of gross things. Who knows? Within the next twenty years or so, maybe there will be a need for chain saws in order to be turned on.

[Student]: Rinpoche, is it the bindu that travels up the central channel?
[Rinpoche]: Yes. That’s the visualisation bit. And then lastly the nectar travels all the way unto the toes, completely filling your body. It purifies all the remaining defilements – if there is any remaining residue that is. So this includes body, speech, and mind: nāḍī, prāṇa, and bindu, altogether. At this stage, especially if you are a vajrayāna practitioner, what you are trying to do is purify the ālaya. Basically, you are trying to purify this so-called mind, because as soon as you purify the mind, that is when the wisdom appears.
Talking about the Fourth Defilement and Defilements in General

Understanding the fourth defilement is somewhat complicated. That is to say, when we spoke of the first and second defilements — there were specific examples given such as killing, which is bad karma related to the body, and telling lies, which is the defilement related to prāṇa. Then there is wrong view, for the defilement related to the mind. But when it comes to obscurations related to the fourth defilement it’s very difficult to explain. The reason being that in order to understand, you have to be familiar with dzogchen. Anyway, for now, what we are trying to do is purify anything that is contrived, or anything that is fabricated.

[Student]: I’m just wondering what sexual defilements actually are. Is it like sleeping with somebody’s husband?
[Rinpoche]: What you are talking about is sexual misconduct. That’s – sort of – the body defilement. It is different to the example I gave on whips and chains when talking about bindu defilements. As I was explaining earlier, bindu defilement is obscuring your inner energy by just not simplifying it.

[Student]: And sexual misconduct?
[Rinpoche]: There are different kinds of sexual misconduct. Take for instance, someone under the upāsikā. There are certain things you must not do if you have taken an upāsikā vow or even if you are married and have taken a vow. Now, I don’t know exactly what kind of vow you take in the West but there is a general sort of acceptance that when you are married to someone, you are only going to have sex with this person. Isn’t this how it is in the West, too? So, if you’re doing it with someone else, then basically, you are lying, aren’t you? You’re cheating someone; it is something like that. Then again, this is a very outer one. Some of the upāsikās take a certain vow not to undertake sexual activities at a certain time, so they must abstain within that period of time. Also, it would be sexual misconduct if they were to do it in front of a stupa, or a statue of a buddha. Then there are other things like rape, for instance, which is obviously sexual misconduct. It seems that what you want to talk about is abuse, or more specifically, sexual abuse?

[Student]: Yeah. It’s a little bit confusing for me.
[Rinpoche]: Actually, there’s a long list of actions relating to sexual misconduct. Though it is mainly directed at men, in the abhidharma there are even things like when a man has sex with a woman, neglecting to put a soft cushion or something like that underneath them is also considered sexual misconduct. That’s also very cultural, you know. Maybe nowadays, women would scoff at a soft cushion; perhaps, instead they would want a bed of nails.

Also if a woman has taken a vow, like for instance a nun, then if a man were to have sex with this woman – the man would be guilty of sexual misconduct. Of course, for the woman, if she were doing it willingly, not only would she have the bad karma of sexual misconduct, even worse, she would also have the bad karma of breaking the vow.

[Student]: Is this the fourth defilement?
[Rinpoche]: No, it is more related to the first one, bodily defilements.

Dissolving Vajrasattva: Watching the Inseparability

Towards the end, we dissolve guru Vajrasattva into us, and actually, this is something you can do again and again. This is something very unique to Buddhism. You do not leave the deity ‘up there’ as something pure, while you are left remaining as something impure. At
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the end of the practice, so as to understand you are also a buddha and to know that right from the beginning, right from the primordial state you have always been so, you always mix the two. In order to make you realise this inseparability: you dissolve into each other again and again. Likewise during each session or even if you just feel like doing it, whenever you finish one rosary you can dissolve Vajrasattva and then, as you continue, you can re-visualize Vajrasattva all over again. It’s really good to do that. Then at the end, Vajrasattva melts into you.

Lastly, just before you end the session, you supplicate to Vajrasattva saying:

Oh, protector Vajrasattva! I am an ignorant being;
I have violated all kinds of samayas.
Protect me, guru Vajrasattva!
You are the Vajra holder.
You are a compassionate being.
To you, the supreme leader, I take refuge!

To you, I confess and expose all downfalls, misdeeds and the samaya breakages of body, speech and mind! Please dispel and purify the obscurations and defilements that are covering my buddha nature at this very moment!

After having said that Vajrasattva dissolves into you, and as a result you then become Vajrasattva. In this state you remain – and you should watch this inseparability of you and Vajrasattva, over and over again. You then chant, OM VAJRASATTVĀ HŪM. This time you are Vajrasattva.

[Student]: We finish the Vajrasattva as Vajrasattva. There is no dissolution after that?
[Rinpoche]: No. Just remain in the state of Vajrasattva.
[Student]: Then you go on with the maṇḍala offering as Vajrasattva?
[Rinpoche]: Yes. You don’t have to really worry about dissolving that. Automatically, it will be dissolved. If you are lucky, it might stay for half a second.

Vajrasattva Related Questions

[Student]: I would like to know if this purifying practice could also be done with Guru Rinpoche’s image?
[Rinpoche]: Yes, you can do that. On the face of things, you could even chant the Vajra Guru mantra instead of the Vajrasattva mantra. But bear in mind that visualising a particular deity, with particular attributes, is a vajrayāna method. It’s also what we call "tendrel" – that of interdependent reality. We have developed so much of this dualistic mind that we naturally think of: Mañjushṛi for wisdom, Avalokiteshvara for compassion, Jambhala for wealth, and the Medicine Buddha for health, and so forth. Likewise, we have a certain trust in Vajrasattva as somehow being more special in the act of purifying. Due to our having this dualistic mind, we have the dualistic path. That’s how it works. Nevertheless, it’s good to know that guru Vajrasattva and guru Padmasambhava are not different. Keep this in your head and use both methods. Why not? The more methods, the better it is.
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[Student]: When I visualise Vajrasattva how should I visualise the body? Is it empty like a vase or is it like a person’s body, somehow full with something?
[ Rinpoche]: It is as a reflection, like a reflection of the moon in a lake.
[Student]: But if I visualise like that it’s so empty and lifeless.
[Rinpoche]: Very good. That’s good. At the moment, you have to get used to it. At first, it’s a bit empty, but slowly, slowly that ‘empty’ will become more alive. It is just a reflection. Take a look at your reflection in the mirror. You move, it moves. It is like that: breathing.

[Student]: When chanting the short Vajrasattva mantra, isn’t there rainbow light...
[Rinpoche]: That’s in the longer version. In this shorter version, as you chant OM VAJRASATTVA HŪM, now that you have been cleansed, you remain in the confidence of being Vajrasattva.
[Student]: Visualising with the consort?
[Rinpoche]: Yes. With the consort, of course.

[Student]: There are so many possibilities for us to fall down. Is there some sort of security to stop that?
[Rinpoche]: There is the Vajrasattva, the bodhicitta, and the refuge.

Exposing Deeds of the Past, Present and Future

[Student]: You said something about past lives’ defilements?
[Rinpoche]: In actual fact, when we talk about defilements and obscurations – or obstacles if you like – not only does it encompass past lives, we should also include future lives. Even those defilements you have not yet collected are taken into account.

As such, there is no need to be aware of all the defilements we have collected in the past. It is said if you were to collect all the tears shed in your past lives, out of your aggression, jealousy, or out of your passion – it would amount to a thousand times more than the four oceans put together. It is almost endless and it is not necessary. What you can do is expose whatever defilements of the past you can remember. Basically, Vajrasattva purification is very much to do with exposing your pride, and not allowing yourself to hide it. You are revealing everything in front of the buddha Vajrasattva. When you think about it, there’s almost no point of exposing your pride to someone who is not omniscient because there is always a chance there will be something they don’t know. If that is the case, there is still a possibility that you can hide certain things. But with the buddha Vajrasattva, he knows everything, whether you hide things or not. So this is what we call "tengyi thob" the power of the object of purification.

[Student]: Sometimes during the Vajrasattva, I feel like I haven’t done anything wrong.
[Rinpoche]: There are all the past and the future mistakes. There are also those things that you don’t remember in your past life, as well as those things that you may forget in the future.

[Student]: It seems I have forgotten everything, or that I don’t want to remember, because I cannot imagine anything.
[Rinpoche]: That’s possible. It is like the great master Nāgārjuna, who was a great philosopher and a saint. There was this king who was born at the same time as Nāgārjuna, although to a different family. A great master blessed them both together, saying that as they were born together they would both die at the same time. Now, Nāgārjuna had a long
life, so the king was also destined to live for a long time. But the king’s son, the crown prince, was getting old, and realised that he would never have the chance to become king. In fact, the prince, who would likely die before his father, asked his mother, “My father is not going to die until Nāgārjuna dies, what can I do, if I want to be king?” Then his mother answered him, “Why not go to Nāgārjuna and ask him to give you his head?” So the prince went and asked for his head, and Nāgārjuna said, “It’s time now that I die, so please, be my guest, cut it and take it.” Yet no matter how many times the prince waved his knife, it was like waving it in thin air. There was no blood, nothing; it was like Nāgārjuna couldn’t die. “I don’t think it’s going to work like this,” said Nāgārjuna. “Why don’t you cut a small blade of grass and hit the back of my neck with it,” he said to the prince. “In my previous life as a grass seller I killed an insect that I had forgotten to dedicate my merit to – this I remember today, and I want to pay this karmic debt.” The prince followed these instructions, and this time Nāgārjuna’s head fell. So you see, there are countless things we may have forgotten, small insects and things like that.

[Student]: I can just assume I have done all kinds of things?
[Rinpoche]: Yes, and that’s why in the Vajrasattva practice you always have this act of purifying all the past, present and future bad deeds.

**Dissolving Pride and Jealousy**

[Student]: What is the best method to dissolve jealousy and pride?
[Rinpoche]: There are many different methods. If you are a beginner, the single best method for dissolving pride is to expose it. In a more general sense, the best method of dissolving jealousy is to rejoice.

[Student]: Exposing the pride in what way? Can you explain that? It sounds very interesting.
[Rinpoche]: Exposing the pride means to let it get somewhat hurt by someone else, there is a little bit of that. Basically, when you are exposing your pride, you are not defending it. To start with, as you communicate with people, you can make the effort to use the words ‘if’ and ‘but’ much less. Usually, we defend our pride a lot. In most cases, we defend it by always trying to bring in an interpretation. That’s what I mean when I say try not to use ‘if’ and ‘but.’

**No Place to Hide – a Big Relief**

Why should we visualize the guru as Vajrasattva? You see, if you visualize the guru as an ordinary human being and then try to confess, there is always a tendency to think: “I can expose this and this, but not that. Because he doesn’t know.” Your ordinary guru has demonstrated on many occasions that he doesn’t know of things you have done. There is always this small comfort; the reassuring thought that he doesn’t know. Right now, having strong guru devotion, and thinking of the guru as the Buddha is quite difficult. Just take a look at our minds! There are certain things we do in front of our Lama, and then, culturally, or out of politeness, there are other things we try not to do. There is always this thinking that some things in particular should be done without him knowing. This is why we visualize the guru in the form of the buddha Vajrasattva, who knows everything: back, front, past, present, future – basically, there is nowhere to hide. So expose everything, it’s a big relief. It’s really a big relief!
Some Aspects of Prāṇa, Nāḍī, and Bindu

[Student]: Is the appearance of deity coming from bindu?
[Rinpoche]: Yes, and it is also from prāṇa and nāḍī, as well. Bindu is basically mind. It is just as I have been explaining: all the deities are mind’s perception.

[Student]: I was just wondering why it seems that practising works better in some environments than in others. Has that something to do with bindu?
[Rinpoche]: It can be related to bindu, but most of the time, it’s just our fickle minds making this distinction. I will have to take the liberty to tell you that you and I have not reached that level of judging a place based on an interpretation of bindu. Right now, our minds are very fickle. Sometimes you like a certain place, and it inspires, and yet with that same place, if you stay too long, it bores you. Having said this, for now, you must still try to choose whatever kind of place inspires you. As you practise more and more, one day this kind of habit, this fickle mind will just go. Then you will search for the bindu interpretation of the right place, and according to the classic tantric texts that is usually what they call the “eight great charnel grounds.” So then, you have to go to a cemetery, especially to one of the eight cemeteries. There, under a tree, in the charnel ground, wearing a tiger skin skirt, holding a kapāla and having this indifference between relatives and enemies, indifference between food and shit, you will practise. Then your bindu will flow. At that time, you will know how to have intercourse between emptiness and appearance. When you understand how to have intercourse between appearance and emptiness, you will have no burden of foreplay and no anxiety over having or not having a climax.

Entering Vajrayāna Completely

As I mentioned earlier, since the teachings on bindu are very high teachings I must speak metaphorically. I am a bit worried that some people will take it very literally but I guess you have to learn the metaphoric language. There is no direct language to teach these things.

In a very metaphoric way, without going into much detail, all I can do is introduce a few general things about bindu. If you want a more in depth understanding, practise this ngöndro for a year or two and then request teachings such as "Lamrim Yeshe Nyingpo", "The Light of Wisdom" by both Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo and Chokgyur Lingpa, or "Guhyagarbha" or "Vajrakumāra." There are all kinds of ways to approach this.

But once you do that there is no way out. Then you will be like a snake in a tube. You can either go up or down. Even during the initiation, they do the ritual eight times. First a vajra master will hold his vajra on your head and say: “From now on I am your heruka. Whatever I say, you should do, and you should never despise me. And if you do, there is only one place to go.” And then, they let you go for a few days to think. The next time you come back, he will give you a conch with some water in it. After pouring the water, they let you drink from it and the vajra master says: “May this drop of water dwell in your heart. By practising this, by keeping the pure vision, may it grow as nectar and overflow and enhance your bliss. But if you ever break a samaya, may it become a blood sucking scorpion, and throw you into the vajra hell.” That’s the second command. As for the third and the fourth, at this point, I can’t even divulge these. Only after taking the second command, are you allowed to hear the third and fourth, which are really dangerous.
Actually nowadays, it’s quite easy to take an initiation. You know, you just go and sit there, you read something, and the lama pours something over your head.

Insertions Are Printed Separately, Out of Respect to the Original Author

Just to clarify a few things, you might wonder why the texts are not printed in order. Why are there pages printed separately – like A, 1A and so on? This is a Tibetan tradition, which is actually quite a good tradition. These pages are what we call insertions. Ideally, out of respect to the original author, wherever there is an insertion, it’s never printed as part of the text. This is why you will frequently find that with the Tibetan sādhana, or pūjās, the ritual liturgies are very, very confusing. As the guru lineage grows, there is always a little bit of insertion here and there, and those parts are usually printed separately.

Within the pith instructions, the teacher is almost always allowed to shuffle the theory pages around, depending on the time and the situation. If I am teaching someone how to drive, I don’t necessarily have to start with page one. I could be teaching from the last page and then go back and forth. In fact, not all this outline I am giving was invented by me – these are authentic methods with a guru lineage background. All too often nowadays, people have the habit of wanting to claim originality, saying things like: “This is my idea, copyrighted by me.” Well, I would rather be a plagiarist than a thief.

An Outline of the Ngöndro Practice

This is an outline of the practice up as far as the Vajrasattva practice. Of course, it’s not really part of the actual text and outlining these points is only for your convenience. It is a sort of easy guide. If you try to look for a similar reference in some book, you will never find it.

The first of these points is stopping the thoughts, and by this I mean bringing in the renunciation mind. Like just before, I was thinking – this beautiful place that we are in – after five days we might never see it again in our lives. That’s the nature of life. This gathering that we have at this moment, after dispersing some of us will not even exist in this world. That’s the nature of life. And some of us might end up in a wheelchair or in a hospital. I hope not! I pray not! But that’s how it is. Then again, some of us, or more likely, many of us might just end up in the mental hospital.

The second point is to clear the stale air, and then we transform the atmosphere with the invocation of Guru Rinpoche. After that for the fourth, we chant “Lama khyeno...” and then contemplate on the ‘four thoughts’ that turn the mind to the dharma. These are: the precious human body, impermanence and the certainty of death, the futility of samsāra and the power of karma. Following on from that for the fifth, we visualize the object of refuge, while at the same time taking refuge. In this case, since this is the short version of the Longchen Nyingtik, the refuge is combined with the bodhicitta.

In fact, we can mark some of these points as optional. If you are catching a plane or need to do a big weekly laundry, then you know which ones can be omitted. So in our outline, tonglen and the four immeasurable thoughts correspond to points six and seven, and you can put an asterisk beside these two to indicate optional. Even clearing the stale air can be optional.

In this particular liturgy, we are also dissolving the witness of bodhicitta. But in the long version of the ngöndro, the object of refuge and the bodhicitta are separate. In that case, we use the same visualisation object, one of which we take refuge to and then during the bodhicitta, we imagine this same object as a witness.
Then, for the Vajrasattva part of the practice there are five main steps, beginning firstly with the visualization of Vajrasattva while reciting the liturgy. After that we chant the hundred syllable mantra with four sub-categories. Thirdly, we pray to Vajrasattva. Then Vajrasattva dissolves into us. And lastly, you remain as Vajrasattva, while reciting the six syllable mantra.

But any time there is any significant doubt, please just look at the long length Longchen Nyingtik Ngöndro. Also as part of the first point, which is ‘stopping the chain of thoughts’ another option is to read the “Calling of the Guru” of the long version of the Longchen Nyingtik.
**Māṇḍala Offering**

The fourth foundation practice is the māṇḍala offering. In order to divert our attention from the wrong view, we took refuge. In order to divert our attention from the lesser view, we practice bodhicitta. In order to cleanse our being, which is this vessel – we have the Vajrasattva practice. And among the many methods of purification, the Vajrasattva cleansing is the most supreme. This is because through the method of visualization, chanting mantras and so on, you are actually using your buddha nature directly.

Now, the next thing is to become well equipped, and endowed with the right apparatus. That’s what we mean by merit. It’s the equipment. It’s our tools. Let me ask, what does merit mean for you?

**[Student]**: It’s coming from good deeds and gives you a little room to decide what to do.

**[Rinpoche]**: That will do. That’s acceptable.

**Merit Is an Ability**

Merit is also ability and by this, we mean all kinds of abilities. Though my words are not like the great masters of the past, such as those of His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche – at least, as stated by Patrul Rinpoche, remember the dog’s tooth. Now I am sure you know the story of the old lady and the dog’s tooth. It is because the old lady had the ability to think of the tooth as the Buddha’s tooth that there were relics. Likewise merit is an incredible thing. I don’t have much experience, but the little that I have has really told me a lot. Try reading the “Words of my Perfect Teacher” once and then go and do one-hundred-thousand māṇḍala offerings. Not just doing it with limited motivation, but try doing it, as best as you can. If you then read the “Words of my Perfect Teacher” again, never mind getting the gist of certain chapters or even the entire book, your ability to understand, or even to interpret each word, will become really different! You could even try reading along to a teaching by that very same teacher, giving all those endless, boring, repetitive teachings. After completing one-hundred or two-hundred-thousand māṇḍala offerings, go and listen again. After this, your ability to hear will be poles apart. Alternatively, try doing a shamatha meditation and see how much you can really settle your mind; observe what a wanderer you are! Then, do some māṇḍala offerings and do the meditation again. You will notice how the ability to remain and watch is really different.

Merit is an ability. For instance, when it comes to the word ‘impermanence’: for now, you only have the ability to interpret this word in terms of death. Or as a gross interpretation, ‘impermanence’ means the change of seasons: from spring to summer, summer to autumn, and autumn to winter. Yet after generating a little bit of merit you will manage to interpret the meaning of ‘impermanence’ much more subtly. Let’s say you’re feeling some kind of happiness in your being right now. As the happiness arises, your ability to interpret this ‘impermanence’ is already there; you are therefore able to watch the change, so that it actually becomes visible. When attending a teaching, whether it is because of my voice, this irritable voice, or due to the fact you have heard these things so often, most of the time you are missing it, or are not even really listening. Your mind is everywhere. That capacity of listening intently is not there. Even if you have the ability to
listen, you have no ability to hear. You are unable to interpret, or approach it from
different angles, and end up taking it literally most of the time. So this happens.

**Obstacles as a Good Sign**

The lamas tell us: the dharma is so precious – it is like a diamond to pierce through all
kinds of dualistic nets, rocks, and fences. We are like a destitute beggar, lacking in any
enterprising mind at all and suddenly this diamond has fallen into our hands. We don’t
know what to do with it. In our ignorance, we might trade it for a piece of hotdog. Then
it’s a big loss! Or someone might even steal it from you! These things happen, quite a lot.
Where there is precious dharma, there are also lots of obstacles.

As I have said before, if there are obstacles it is actually quite a good sign. It means
you are doing okay. The obstacles know it, which is why they have come. The obstacles
are there because you are worthy of being obstructed. If you are not doing well, then you
are your own obstacle. Why go and bother you? But the fact is many of the obstacles are
quite strong! They can really disturb you. At such a time, you need the ability to be
offensive, to be defensive, to manipulate the obstacles, cheat the obstacles, seduce the
obstacles, transform the obstacles, or the ability to ignore the obstacles. Actually, there are
so many ways! Then again, the ability to take the obstacles as a blessing – that’s the
highest! So anyhow, in order to have that kind of ability you need merit. There are
numerous, truly incredible ways of accumulating merit yet for beginners like us, the most
profound way of accumulating merit is through the maṇḍala offering.

**The Meaning of ‘Maṇḍala Offering’**

In Tibetan for ‘maṇḍala,’ we say ‘dkyil khor,’ and ‘dkyil’ means ‘dimension’: the whole
dimension or the whole circle, which includes basically everything. In this case, it is your
body, speech and mind, and particularly, your prāṇa, nāḍī, and bindu, although for now,
we know of these only on an intellectual level.

Of course, when making offerings, you want to offer something that is good. It is a
concept very much like giving someone a present. The very best, most precious thing that
you have is your prāṇa, nāḍī, and bindu or the buddha nature. So in essence, what we are
trying to do is offer body, speech, and mind, or prāṇa, bindu, and nāḍī, or the buddha
nature. We try to do this by thinking in terms of all these realms; we think of Mount Meru,
and the different planets as a kind of container-maṇḍala – not as an ordinary realm, but as
a buddha realm. All this is very much related to transforming the atmosphere, just as we
do right in the beginning of the practice.

[Student]: I have a question about offering. What does it really mean?
[Rinpoche]: It is to offer, and to detach from your body, speech, and mind actually, but in
the form of more beautiful things. What you are really offering is your body, speech, and
mind, prāṇa, nāḍī, and bindu, your buddha nature. But how do we offer buddha nature?
It’s kind of invisible at the moment. In order to train our mind, we give it some form.

Actually, if you want to practice dzogchen in the future, or for that matter with any
kind of practice to accumulate merit, it is good to offer lamps. Offering has a lot to do with
interdependent reality, and in fact, all these concepts of offering are based on the Buddhist
philosophy of interdependence. For instance, by offering a lamp, there is the auspicious
interdependent reasoning that understanding the true nature of mind will be enhanced.
Since mind itself is like a lamp, it knows everything and knows itself. Just like a lamp,
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mind illuminates everything and also illuminates itself. So there is that auspicious link. The lamas tell us that offering lamps is an auspicious thing to do. Whatever you have is fine; you can offer a lot of butter lamps, candles or even electric light. You should try to do this because it is really good.

**Being Creative with the Offering Substance**

When it comes to the offering substance, again you should be quite creative. If the idea of Mount Meru, the southern planet, the eastern planet, or whatever, if all this is really unable to come to you easily, then, offer for instance a big mountain instead. Or offer Asia, South America, North America, and Australia, adorned with all the beautiful places, all the national parks, beautiful waterfalls and the wealth of human beings. Include such things as the Deutsche Bank, forests, human wealth, steel, and also the wealth of gods, such as carpets that can fly, or parasols that can fly. Then there is all the nāgas’ wealth, such as a conch that can wage war, and a shell that can transform itself into a domain, and into palaces. You can offer wish-fulfilling trees and cows, or even beautiful ladies. All this is mentioned during the explanation on offering the thirty-seven heaps maṇḍala in the “Words of my Perfect Teacher.” Anyhow, you can elaborate on this as much as you want. And in order to enhance your visualisation, you can make use of different substances, such as rice. Actually, rice is something used by Tibetans a lot. You can use rice a little bit and also coins, copper, gold, and silver.

To do the maṇḍala offering, you should have a maṇḍala plate, and although a small one is fine, according to Deshung Rinpoche it should be of a substantial size. It can be made of stone, sandalwood, copper, iron, steel or even gold if you wish. It all depends on how much you can afford. There are offering substances like sandalwood-powder, which are readily available in the West, at least, much more so than in places like Bhutan or Nepal. Compared to these places, you have so many things at your fingertips, like dried and fresh flowers, for instance. Though in any case, all this is simply intended to enhance the practice, and act as a concentration object. In fact, each and every grain of rice can be visualized as those things just mentioned: the Deutsche Bank, palaces, bathhouses and so on. And personally, it’s a very Indian thing but I always like to visualize bathhouses with dancing girls or dancing boys – to be politically correct. For that matter, if you want, you can even offer political correctness or football pictures, video cameras, and all of that.

*Mandala Offering in Retreats*

Suppose you are doing a Longchen Nyingtik retreat, where you are intending to do one-hundred-thousand maṇḍala offerings in one go. Let’s say you have taken leave and are aiming to finish in a month or two, which is quite good actually, since this is the tradition. If this is the case, you will need two plates for your maṇḍala. One of the maṇḍala plates is placed on the shrine. Instead of seven heaps, there are five heaps to represent the five buddha families, and this five-heaped one is what you place on the shrine. It is going to be used as the maṇḍala in which your object of offering dwells.

Now, you are beginning to accumulate merit. Never, during the refuge, the bodhicitta nor the Vajrasattva, did I ever mention that you need a shrine. Of course, it depends on the situation. Were you doing a daily practice of perhaps one-hundred-maṇḍala offerings and going to work in between, or if you take a long break and then restart, in this instance, it might be a little difficult to have a maṇḍala on the shrine. But what I’m saying is if you are doing a long retreat, since it is accumulation-of-merit time, one should really
have that object of offering, along with all the ‘seven offering bowls’ and all the other various offering substances.

**Why We Count**

By the way, once you start the prostrations, you should count whatever you do. Even if you were to only do ten prostrations a day, you should also write that down. Don’t give me this hokum. “Nah, I hate counting.” You should just count! Unless you happen to be one of these hidden buddhas, for us, as ignorant beings, we are usually driven by a target. It’s good to count; I’m counting. I’m trying to finish at least three-hundred-thousand prostrations in this lifetime. And because of being either too busy or too lazy, I don’t have much time to do them. So as I do prostrations, I pledge to myself, “If I do only twenty-five, it doesn’t count, but if I’ve done twenty-six or more, it’s in this computer!” (Rinpoche points to his notebook). As stated by Patrül Rinpoche: “When practicing the dharma, one should follow the example of a horse being ridden hard by a rider.”

Whenever a horse sees one or two leaves of grass, they eat. There is very little time, because their owner is whipping them constantly. They have to go on! So every time they get a chance to eat, they eat. For them, there is no designated time for lunch or dinner. That is how we should practice and each time we practice, we should accumulate.

**Student:** I have a very ego compounded question. It’s like a sadness within me, but somehow I’m not really interested in counting. I think to myself: “Why do I need to track this progress? We all have the same job to do anyway.”

**Rinpoche:** That’s fine. It depends on the person. You don’t have to count. It is fair enough if you feel that counting does not necessarily encourage you. Don’t count. But the fact remains that counting is a major support for many of us. For me, it is very much an encouragement. Of course, the most superior method of all is to do the practice until you have a sign. But then again, it is a very dangerous thing to judge. After all, we mostly interpret the signs incorrectly. Some people practise for one day and after hearing a crow make a noise they think, “ah, there’s a sign,” and then they stop! Then there’s what we call the indicator of time, which is usually something like: “I will practice until I die.” It’s good, but that’s second best, because there are still a lot of loopholes there. You tend to relax a little too much. Then the last method is to count. Now for many practitioners, what they try to do is combine the second and the third, because it acts as a kind of discipline. In other words, they try to rely on the time aspect, as well as counting. When you think to yourself, “I’m to finish one-hundred-thousand,” you have a guideline. Without that target, you might end up just doing whatever you like. On the other hand, for some people, a target is completely unnecessary, because they would practise anyway. If that’s the kind of person you are, there is no need to count. There is not really any need.

**Doing Things with and without a Purpose**

**Student:** I have another question, that’s also about time. I know that in eight years, I will be sixty. I have a little fear that I’m not going to be able to complete this practice. I really work a lot, so this is my first holiday in years. And maybe I have ten years left to work. I can do something that is effective.

**Rinpoche:** I see, you are talking about having a purpose or not. You should do both. It’s quite important. This is something that I really like about Zen. It’s amazing, sometimes the Zen style of technique is that much more pristine and clear than that of Tibetan Buddhism.
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When the Japanese do things, they are always so small, short, and clear, and they make their point. It’s like looking at the difference between a Japanese samurai movie and a Chinese Jackie Chan film. When you watch a Jackie Chan film, there are all these striking actions and sound effects. It is like the hero not only has to kill the boss of the gangster, but just about everyone, right down to the dog. He even has to kill the pet dog of the gangster! The bloodshed and hair-raising fights, these are a constant feature, so much so that you almost don’t feel anything. With the Japanese samurai however, the hero is escaping from almost everyone, and remains in hiding. Then all of a sudden, when he meets up with the real enemy, in just one go, this enemy is gone. Somehow when it comes to the Japanese, I really like the way they express things. Even with flower arrangements, there isn’t much complication, just one flower with some dry leaves surrounding it.

In Zen Buddhism, when you go to a Zen temple, the master will tell you to clean the toilet. So you have to clean, but then, they will say to you, let me know when you finish. When you go and tell the master, “I have finished,” after coming to take a look, the master will say, “yes, clean again!” You might go back again, and again and within that one or two hours, you end up cleaning the same toilet about twenty times. Should you ask the Zen master why you have to continue when it’s already clean, they will say: “I didn’t ask you to clean because it was dirty. I’m asking you to just clean.” Sometimes you have to do things without any purpose. I think that’s such a good idea – it’s like a samurai sword. So I think you should do both.

[Student]: If I give something away is it possible to then use my imagination and immediately visualise the maṇḍala plate? Would that be the same?

[Rinpoche]: That’s fine, but with the maṇḍala, mainly it’s accumulating the merit through offering your body, speech, and mind, it is not so much about the substance. When you help people, or when you do your job, you can visualize that the people whom you are working for are your gurus. That’s your maṇḍala offering.

[Student]: Yes, I even pay an educator, so you feel it’s good to see the money as rice?

[Rinpoche]: Well actually, it’s the other way round. We are supposed to see the rice as the money and the wealth.

How to Do the Maṇḍala Practice

Let’s say you are doing a maṇḍala retreat, in which case, you would have two maṇḍala plates, with the five-heaped one for the shrine. Now since this one on the shrine is going to remain for a long time, you should mix the grains with some butter or something that glues it together. Of course, you can change it once in a while. If your retreat were to take one year for instance, then maybe it’s better to change it.

Now with the offering that you are making and visualising, for this, you should have some saffron water, or rose water is also fine. There is no need to chant the Vajrasattva mantra. Somehow, there has been a mixing of tradition. Usually only certain traditions chant the Vajrasattva mantra during this part, but in the West it has gotten all mixed up; it seems that in every dharma centre, when cleaning the maṇḍala plate, there is the habit of first chanting the Vajrasattva mantra. I don’t know why. But if you do this, it also doesn’t do any harm.

As you clean the maṇḍala plate you visualize and first of all, you simply use your wrist, without adding water. If you really want a lot of detail, you can think that you are cleansing all these offering substances. And the real offering substances are our body, speech, and mind; so in effect, you are cleaning your body, speech, and mind.
Think that the object of offering is in front of you: Guru Rinpoche, surrounded by all the retinue. If you want to elaborate further on this, there is a whole description of the refuge tree in the long version of the Longchen Nyingtik Ngöndro. Guru Rinpoche is in the centre and in front of that are the buddhas, on the right the bodhisattvas, at the back the dharma texts and so forth. So visualize the object of offering. It’s one and the same object but we name it differently. During the refuge we call it the ‘object of refuge,’ whereas with the bodhicitta, we call it the ‘witness of the bodhicitta,’ and now during the maṇḍala offering, we call it the ‘object of offering.’

At this point, you can sprinkle a little bit of scented water – you probably wouldn’t do this all the time, otherwise it would take quite a while. Anyhow, as you splash water on the plate, you should think: ‘bodhicitta.’ You are applying the bodhicitta. Meaning that you are doing this maṇḍala offering for the sake of all sentient beings and for their enlightenment. That is what bodhicitta is. Now in order to symbolise the profundity of this vajrayāna practice, and to go beyond the idea of merely throwing rice over a plate or a stone, you add what we call the ‘moisture of bodhicitta.’ Practically speaking, it also helps the rice to stick to the plate.

We then have the seven heaps, which is what we are accumulating. First, we do one heap in the center, then there are two alternative ways to place the next heap. One is to put it right in front of you; the other way is to put it in front of the central heap [Rinpoche points towards the side facing away from him]. It’s up to you to choose whichever way you feel is more convenient. I always put the second heap right in front of me and then go clockwise from that. The third [Rinpoche puts it left from the central heap] and then the fourth [away from him] and then the fifth [right side of the plate] then the Sixth is in between the middle and the left, while the Seventh is between the middle and the right.

So for those who like to put the second heap right in front of you, what we call ‘the heap of Jambudvīpa’ is then the third heap on your left. Jambudvīpa is this planet, where we now reside. Since the sun must rise at this earth, the Sixth should therefore be next to that [between the middle and the left]. If you are among those placing the second heap in front of the central heap [at the side away from you], for you, Jambudvīpa is at the 3 o’ clock-position [vice versa the other positions]. That’s your Jambudvīpa. That’s why the sun is next to that [between the middle and the right]. The sun and the moon are the Sixth and the Seventh heap.

If you are doing the long length Longchen Nyingtik Ngöndro, and want to do it in a conventional way, it’s slightly different. The actual traditional method is to first do five heaps, and then three heaps, and then lastly you do one heap. But since most of you are not really doing that, I would stick with the ‘seven heaps.’

In any case, that’s what you offer. Each time you finish, you do this [brushing off the rice], and that is counted as one. And you do one-hundred-thousand of that. It is easy. For me the Vajrasattva is the most difficult. If chanted properly, with the right pronunciation, it seems as though you will just never finish. Doing prostrations and maṇḍala practice might sound and look difficult but actually they are not. Vajrasattva is difficult as it really twists the tongue.

[Student]: Could you say something about the maṇḍala offering liturgy? There are two.
[Rinpoche]: There is one that ends with the mantra, (OM ÅH HŪM GURU DEVA….) and that is what you do. The one that begins with, “The ground is purified…..” is the standard short maṇḍala offering that all the Buddhist schools do. I would say, do the first one, because that’s what you are doing, the Longchen Nyingtik Ngöndro. At times, you can add this standard short one, once or three times, if you want. But more importantly, each time
you finish one-hundred-manḍala offerings, or depending how you want to elaborate this, perhaps every twenty-five times, you should do a thirty-seven heap manḍala offering once.\textsuperscript{12} For me, after completing one-hundred, I then offer the thirty-seven heaps. The diagram showing how to place the thirty-seven heaps is actually quite clear. All the same, in trying to accumulate the manḍala offerings, I don’t know how much time should be spent scrutinizing the diagram, looking at the manḍala and not getting it right. I would just chant the long liturgy and simply place thirty-seven heaps on top of each other.

As for the rings, these are a Tibetan invention; you can use them if you like but they are not crucial. Personally, I never use the rings. Their whole purpose is to make the offering look good, there is really no other reason. It looks really beautiful. So there are certain things Tibetans do that have nothing to do with the dharma; it’s just cultural. But I believe some of you are more of a Tibetologist than a Buddhist. Careful though, aside from the dharma, Tibetans tend to teach their garbage too, and are very well known for that. They teach you how to be Tibetan, and might even teach you how to have Tibetan emotions, as well.

[\textbf{Student}: For the thirty-seven heaps do you still go clockwise?]

[\textbf{Rinpoche}: Yes, it is always clockwise. It is the same concept as always. At the end of the session, you dissolve the object of offering into you. You then remain in that state as much as you can.]

[\textbf{Student}: In the long version, there is no mantra at the end of the manḍala offering.]

[\textbf{Rinpoche}: The short manḍala offering has a mantra. In any case, mantra does not necessarily need to be recited again and again. Actually, with some mantras you just recite them once. The mantra of the short manḍala offering is a bit like part of the liturgy; it is not to be chanted over and over.]

[\textbf{Student}: Can you explain what the mantra means?]

[\textbf{Rinpoche}: It means something like, “I offer these gems, these precious substances, and this wealth to you and the three sublime jewels.”]

\textbf{Mount Meru, the Planets, the Sun and the Moon – a Concept of the Universe}

Each heap represents a planet, with the third heap representing the earth. Somehow our mind thinks of the sun as being much better than the moon. I guess, because it shines during the daytime. So usually we try to put the sun, which is the Sixth heap, somewhere next to the third heap. For that matter, you could even place it on top! And, I have one thing to add here; usually I include an eighth heap, which represents everything. It is the embodiment of all the wealth of the gods – from the Deutsche Bank, to the Bois de Bologne, Pigalle and so forth. You don’t have to do it. It’s my invention.

Then, as you finish the heaps you go like that, \textit{[Rinpoche turns the plate on it’s side]}
clean it, and do it again.

[\textbf{Student}: What are the fourth and the fifth heaps?]

[\textbf{Rinpoche}: They represent the other planets, the eastern planet, and the southern planet; \textit{[Rinpoche shows different ways of offering the rice.]} Really, I would not get so hung up with details or techniques! The main thing is the visualisation here. Also there is no need to think too much, because here, we are touching on Buddhist cosmology, which I myself have some problem with anyway. What you should know is, all of this is a concept of the universe.

Just briefly, the central heap represents Mount Meru. It is said that Mount Meru is made up of four kinds of jewels.\textsuperscript{13} Square shaped at the base, it is in the centre of the ocean, with half of it above the ocean, and the other half under the ocean. At the top is the
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palace of king Indra. Somewhere near the middle of Mount Meru is the palace of asura, the demigods. To the eastern side of Mount Meru is the planet Pūrvavideha and it is believed that the people there have a different colour, shape and look. At the southern side of Mount Meru is Jambudvīpa, which is this planet and of course, we are familiar with how we look. As for the other planets, to the west is Aparagodāniya, and in the north is Uttarakaṇuru. Actually, since each of the large planets are accompanied by two other smaller planets, there are so many other planets! But this is just to give some background and an idea of what the heaps represent.

Some Advice on How to Treat Texts

Now for one piece of advice: please try never to step over your offering substance or tread on your dharma books, and make sure to wash your hands. Basically, you should try to make your surroundings as clean as possible. All this might sound very Indian yet it’s something really nice to do. I mean, if you observe the Indians, and go along to a Ravi Shankar concert, it’s just so touching: they would never tread on their instruments. They pay homage to the instrument, and to do so is really from the heart. So even though these texts may be photocopied and bound with all this plastic, it is still this path that will liberate you. It is what is written in this text that’s going to release you from these delusions. Putting some effort into not stepping on dharma books and not stepping over the offering substance, that alone has so much merit. And that merit you dedicate again. You dedicate by thinking: “May all sentient beings be enlightened” and “may all dharma practitioners never tread on their dharma books.” It requires a bit of conditioning, but it is really good to do.

Talking about Resistance and Habit

[Student]: I’m a bit worried about the concept of actually having to do so many prostrations. I have a lot of resistance to that. How can I get rid of my resistance?

[Rinpoche]: After a while you will have no more resistance. With the Tibetan monks, they love chanting and reading but skip the meditation a lot. If you go along to a monastery, you will see the monks chanting but they never sit and meditate, which is a really bad habit. All the lamas keep on saying it’s a bad habit, but somehow, this habit hasn’t been broken. As Jigme Lingpa said:

Doing lots and lots of pājās is good;
Chanting prayers and mantras is good,
But it would be much better to do a retreat.

And then he goes on to say:

If you do lots of retreats that’s good,
But to do a meditation – even one as brief as five to ten minutes,
The time needed to drink a cup of tea – that is much better.

He says: “Even a meditation lasting as long as a cup of tea is much better than twenty years of retreat.” That really penetrates. Now since you are saying you want to get rid of this resistance towards prostrating so many thousands, and thousands of times, what you should do is meditate in between prostrations. So then, it is about being clear and
Mandala Offering

present. Of course, it takes a little while to get into it, but after a month or so, you will. If you do meditation in that way, the time goes very quickly. Amazing! It is like reading a good novel. If you do a clear and present meditation, you will not know how the time went. Then again, until you are introduced to some of the higher dzogchen meditations, if you don’t keep it up, you will lose it. So it’s a bit like exercise. But once you have been introduced to the nature of the mind and if you get it, if something clicks, you won’t lose it. Then you will have experienced that taste of meditation. You will just do it. You will just keep on doing it.

I’ve seen this happening with many of the older students, like with His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche’s students. And there are some nuns, you should watch. Sometimes in the restaurant after finishing dinner, an ordinary person would think they are spaced out but actually they are not. They will do it for a few minutes, a few moments of just being in the present. Once getting a taste of that you really like it and the world opens up more and more. But it’s a new habit, so you have to get used to it.

[Student]: Rinpoche, I was just wondering if there’s any point in trying to remember one’s previous lives or if that’s just an ego trip.
[Rinpoche]: You can if it interests you.
[Student]: How do you remember?
[Rinpoche]: Think about events from yesterday and the day before yesterday and then... Actually, there are some bodhisattva prayers that say, “May I remember past lives.” It can aid in generating the renunciation mind.
[Student]: What stops me from remembering?
[Rinpoche]: Well, it’s the ability to remember that stops. That’s all. There are all sorts of distractions, of course. You may have watched a good football match in between. That stops a lot of memory for me.

Everything You Offer Is Also Your Perception

[Student]: I feel it is very difficult to relate to offering the three bodies, the continents, the sun and the moon. In what I am reciting and doing, I don’t see the connection really.
[Rinpoche]: What do you mean?
[Student]: I don’t feel that I am offering something that belongs to me.
[Rinpoche]: Your perception belongs to you.
[Student]: Why can’t we just make three heaps?
[Rinpoche]: That’s also your perception. And it’s a very limited perception. Might as well offer everything.
[Student]: But what is the connection between the three bodies...
[Rinpoche]: Body, speech, and mind?
[Student]: Yes. And the continents, Mount Meru, the sun and the moon...
[Rinpoche]: In essence, it is none other than your mind that imagines continents, wealth, prosperity, and all of that. But right now, for ordinary beings like us, if asked to offer our minds, how would we do that? So in order to help with this, we give it a certain form. We visualize flowers and all of the other numerous offerings. There is really no contradiction, because whenever you think of flowers, it’s your mind that is creating your flower.
[Student]: Is it also a place where I can bring my confession in? With all of what I am offering?
[Rinpoche]: Yes, you can even offer your compassion. Everything. I said mind. Now that includes everything. Show me one object that is not your perception. Mount Meru, the
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height, the length, the width, everything, the entire universe, all of this is mind. We should
tell this to the physicists. The maṇḍala is a very, very good study of physics, and of the big
bang theory. Basically, we are saying even the big bang is your mind. It is some
physicist’s mind; it’s their mind. This universe, the atmosphere, the stars, the moon,
planets and just everything, as long as your mind is there, it is your mind that is creating
all these distinctions. But for the most part, this is only intellectual knowledge.

As I have been saying right from the beginning, there is the theory and there are the
pith instructions. According to the theory, once you know everything is your mind – your
mind is dharmakāya, sambhogakāya, and nirmāṇakāya – as soon as you know that you are
finished, you are enlightened. To do that is difficult, so there are pith instructions.
Sometimes, when you go to drive a car, your coach might say, drink a cup of tea, which
has got nothing much to do with driving. Nothing much at all. That is exactly the point. In
a sense we can say the rice, and the coins have nothing to do with enlightenment, but at the
same time, there is obviously a lot of linkage. After all, when you think about it, who made
the coins precious in the first place? It’s only our mind. Likewise with the banks, and the
jewels, it is also our mind that made these things precious. Through education and habit, it
is our mind that has been taught to believe: ‘money is precious,’ or ‘gold is precious.’ Of
course, I could understand if you were coming more from the stance of Mount Meru, and
so forth, is not part of our culture, but that is not really what you are saying. So somehow,
with this, I think you should visualize the whole thing, the planets and all.

[Student]: There was a question of giving away lifeless, abstract things like attachment
or...

[Rinpoche]: You can offer everything, body, speech, and mind.

[Student]: But attachment is not a good thing.

[Rinpoche]: It doesn’t matter. When you offer your mind it comes in a package. And after
all, the vajrayāna teachings say: the basic essence of attachment is discriminating wisdom.
The basic essence of aggression is mirror-like wisdom. So there is nothing that is bad. I
would think it is good.

Aiming for a Higher Attitude

[Student]: I just want to know if is it possible to do the maṇḍala offering with the wrong
attitude?

[Rinpoche]: As with everything, it is. As I mentioned before, there are three kinds of
attitudes. The first was the farmer like attitude, and we see an expression of this in
Thailand, Bhutan, and India, when people pray to Buddha for a good rainfall. People take
refuge to the Buddha for the sake of getting an abundant rainfall and that is the wrong kind
of attitude. Or at least, it is a very minuscule attitude.

[Student]: What I mean is it seems to increase my attachment when I bring these things
into my mind. It seems I become even more passionate and attached to the beautiful
things.

[Rinpoche]: Yes. That’s exactly the farmer’s attitude.

[Student]: So the maṇḍala offering isn’t exactly...

[Rinpoche]: No, it will give you some good results, but you should aim for a higher
attitude. At the very least, you should aim for a śrāvaka attitude.

[Student]: So you offer beautiful objects, but don’t relish them. You really want to give
things away.

[Rinpoche]: Yes, ‘to offer’ means ‘to give away.’
Kusāli Practice

If you are doing the long version of the Longchen Nyingtik Ngöndro, there is a section right after the maṇḍala, which is referred to as kusāli practice. It is both a preparation for the guru yoga, as well as being a sort of inner maṇḍala offering. So, if you have the time, the kusāli practice can be inserted right after the maṇḍala.

The short ngöndro composed by Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo is, of course, good but it’s also so condensed. Normally, even the practitioner is visualised as a deity, but in this short text, I believe there is actually no mention of that. This is because, being so concise, all these details are hidden. But if you want to seriously practice guru yoga, it’s important to also transform yourself. During the refuge and bodhicitta practice, you are an ordinary person, and remain so also during the maṇḍala and the Vajrasattva practice. But when it comes to mixing your mind with the guru’s mind, what you are trying to do is mix this ordinary person and this sublime person so that their minds meet.

Now presumably, you have already taken refuge, have taken the bodhicitta vow, have purified with the Vajrasattva mantra and have accumulated sufficient merit through the maṇḍala offering. If you wish, as another form of accumulating merit, you can then do the kusāli practice. By this stage, you have become slightly more than ordinary, and in order to represent that you transform yourself into Vajrayoginī or Krodhikālī. Then, as a dākinī, you try to mix your mind with the guru’s. In effect, what you are trying to mix is already that much more sublime. In fact, the sole purpose of the guru yoga is to catch onto the nature of mind, and thus, as an intermediary means, you are trying to become a vessel of the guru’s blessing. Basically, by visualising yourself in a more sublime form, somehow there is this interdependent auspiciousness, which better succeeds in invoking the blessing. In this form, visualised as a Vajrayoginī, as always, towards the end of the session, either you dissolve or alternatively, the lama dissolves into you.

You might well wonder, why in the guru yoga it is common practice to visualise oneself as a female dākinī. Of course, when we speak in terms of transforming ourselves into the feminine, we are not really talking about gender. What we are referring to is the emptiness and clarity aspect. The emptiness aspect is always symbolised by the feminine. Whereas clarity, or what is also described as compassion or the method is always symbolised by the male aspect. Although somewhat minor and technical in nature, it is quite necessary to understand this kind of detail.

If you are just doing the short sādhana, there is not so much mention of visualising oneself as Vajrayoginī. Right from the outset, we begin by trying to transform our surroundings into a pure realm, yet we still haven’t changed ourselves. We are still ordinary. But right before the guru yoga, it is good if you can transform yourself into something other than an ordinary being. At least, what we are trying to do is transform into something other than this name, form, and identity. Now your immediate question might be, into what are we transforming? My ultimate answer is of course, into something beyond form, colour, shape, identity, and as something beyond sex, gender, and nationality. As a rule, this is something we can vaguely comprehend, only intellectually. So when it comes to doing the practice, the pith instructions coming from the lamas, are to visualise ourselves as Vajrayoginī or Krodhikālī. It is easy to see the logic to this. Likewise, in visualising yourself as Vajrayoginī, rather than Mahākāla or another deity for instance, it also has it’s own purpose.
Kusāli practice

So if you have a little bit of time, it is good to bring in the kusāli practice. For those doing the long version of the Longchen Nyingtik, since the kusāli practice is there, you cannot really ignore it, but even if you are using the short text of this ngöndro, it is also not a bad idea. It is an excellent method of accumulating merit, in fact one of the best, and is much better than the outer practice of maṇḍala offering. The kusāli practice is a tsok, a fire pūjā, and is also what we call ‘paying the karmic debt,’ like with a sur (smoke offering), for instance. At the same time, it can also work to gradually create an atmosphere, and to build a situation where one can more easily arise as Vajrayoginī.

There is a reason why it is helping to build the situation. Right at the beginning of the kusāli practice, as we say PHAṬ, at that point, you visualise a complete separation of your body and mind. So you are actually doing a phowa. Your consciousness ejects from your body, and your body is left behind, there in front of you, in a collapsed state. It’s something similar to how this body becomes like a discarded empty bag after the soul is gone. The body is not even moving. Your body is like a collapsed heap; there is no blinking of the eyes, no breathing and no movement. There is just this completely deadstill body. At that moment, one should remain in the state of non-grasping.

You see, right now there is so much grasping. There is grasping onto all kinds of things, from oils, to moisturizers, right down to body-scrub and so on.

Conquering the Four Māras

In Buddhism, we talk about something called the four māras, or the four demons. First, there is the ‘māra, son of god.’ The second is the ‘māra of death.’ Then, there is what we call the ‘māra of the defilements,’ which is all the emotions. Lastly, there is the ‘māra of the aggregates.’

Now the moment the body falls in a heap, you are up there, just as the consciousness, no form. Looking at your body, you see this completely alien, rotten, useless body, and seeing it in this way is your understanding – this body is not the most important thing. Usually, whenever we have pride, it is developed through two factors: our mind and it also arises in connection with our body. We have a body, and then we have this pride. So it is actually the destruction of pride. You can therefore say this is a victory over the first māra. In other words, having no attachment to your body is the destruction of the māra, son of god. The body is being dismantled, as though this body is gone. Yet the mind is still there and is continuing. It is not like a lamp ending or a candle going out – hence, the very fact the consciousness is still there is victory over death. And it is this victory over the māra of death that we also call Vajrayoginī.

You now have another form, as Vajrayoginī, or as stated here in the Longchen Nyingtik, you can also imagine yourself transformed into Krodhīkāli. Appearing as a black woman, Krodhīkāli is beautiful, and adorned with all the heruka ornaments. These heruka ornaments include such attributes as crowns, and bracelets crafted out of bones, along with a tiger-skin skirt. She is holding a curved knife, which actually symbolizes the destruction of the third māra, the māra of emotion.

Lastly, she has to destroy the māra of the aggregates, so in order to do that, there is this cutting action; somewhat like Professor Hannibal Lector, she slowly cuts the skull away from this inanimate body. This is your scull, of course. After this, she lifts this kapāla, the scullcup, with your hair intact. If it is blond, see it as blond, if brunette, see it as brunette, if long, see it as long, if dyed, it is dyed, and if punk-style, it’s punk-style. Then think, as soon as it is in your hand, it becomes as big as three worlds; it is so enormous. In doing so, you are making this a practice of non-duality.
Kusāli practice

Instantly you also think, there is a tripod of three human skulls, which actually represents the three kāyas – the dharmakāya, sambhogakāya, and nirmanakāya. You place this kapāla on top of the tripod formation, and then return to cut the hands, the fingers, the skin, as well as slowly removing, the lungs, liver, and blood. Not a drop should be spilled, as it is so precious. Right down to the lips, nose, and eyes: each of these body parts, you extract separately with the edge of the curved knife, including the teeth, and everything. You place it all inside this kapāla. And then, with you as the dākinī, standing next to the kapāla, you then think a great wisdom fire blazes forth from beneath the hearth of three heads.

The Offering Feast: a Wish-Fulfilling Nectar

Then as you chant OṂ ĀḤ HŪṂ, you think that this body, or rather, what is now your ex-body, melts, and boils. For a more vivid image, the next time you are making a chicken or beef stew, take a look at the ingredients bubbling away in the pot and that should help. Of course, that is for the first part only, then after a while, you are supposed to visualise every drop as having the power of nectar. Each and every drop holds all the various pleasure objects you can imagine, such as lakes, gardens, food, drink, and so forth. It is a wish fulfilling nectar, thus, whatever the object of offering wishes it to be, it becomes that. This nectar is first offered to the buddhas, bodhisattvas and especially to Guru Rinpoche, since they are the VIPs. In this case, VIP means those who have destroyed the ego, so it includes all those from arhats to the Buddha.

If you really want to elaborate this, you can even think of it as a banquet party. Once you start cooking, you then send out the invitation cards, usually in the form of light coming from your heart. First, of course, there are the VIP cards to the Copper Coloured Mountain, the Amitābha realm, and the Aksobhya realm, as well as to all kinds of other realms. All the guests promptly arrive with their limousines, looking elegant in their finest. You can have red carpet, and all the trappings, whatever you wish. Next, you send forth invitations to the six realms. Some of the guests come riding on bicycles, some arrive riding on a broomstick, while others have come via public transport or via hitchhiking. They all take their seats.

The first portion should be offered to the VIP’s. In return, you receive the common and the uncommon attainments. The common attainments include such things as long life, as well as freedom from obstacles and sickness. In fact, this practice is really good to do when you have sickness. Then there are the uncommon attainments such as love and compassion, diligence, devotion, along with the power of recognizing the mind.

Once the VIP’s have been taken care of, you then give to the six realms. Each time these beings drink, eat, lick, chew, swallow, or suck at these offerings, you visualise that all their suffering disappears. Not only that, in turn, love and compassion, bodhicitta and devotion are nourished in their beings. Thereafter, they themselves are able to help many other sentient beings.

Settling the Score and Clearing Karmic Debts

There are also two special groups of guests. One group of these invitees includes all those who have been bothering you, or those you think of as your enemies. As you give them this offering, it makes them feel that the score has been settled. The other special group is made up of those whom we have karmic debts with and these guests are the largest in number.
Kusāli practice

We have karmic debts with lots of people. Like for instance, the space in which we choose to sit might well place us directly in front of someone, who has been desperately trying to look through our big head. It could be that you are always blocking their view. That’s a karmic debt.

Personally, I have a lot of karmic debts. Each time I enter the room, people stand up and that is a karmic debt. If I am an enlightened being, the more you rise to your feet, the better. It is still good for you, even if I am not an enlightened being, but for me, I would have to think about returning the favour for roughly five hundred lifetimes. Whenever you come into the room, I would have to rise to my feet. If there were fifty people present in the room, then that would be five hundred times fifty. It would mean that for twenty-five thousand lifetimes, I would have to stand up for people like you. So we are paying all this karmic debt.

The Host, the Guests and the Feast Become Inseparable

As the party draws to a close, foods and presents are distributed, until nothing remains. But the special thing about this party is the guests don’t leave – instead, they all dissolve into you. Of course, as always, the buddhas and bodhisattvas dissolve into you, but what I am saying is all the sentient beings also dissolve into you. So the host, the guests, and the feast, all become inseparable. Knowing that all are just a creation of your mind, remain in that state for some time.

This is a kusāli practice included in the Longchen Nyingtik Ngöndro long version. Doing this practice has so much blessing. Although it is said you can offer a maṇḍala with mere dust, the kusāli was originally intended for practitioners who are quiet poor – for those unable to afford maṇḍala plates, offerings, or all these special substances. As Patrul Rinpoche points out, kusāli literally means ‘beggar,’ which is why it is called poor people’s practice. From the mundane point of view, it is a practice made for less fortunate people, but from the dharma’s point of view, it is a higher teaching. In the vajrayāna, this is good thing to understand: for those practices somehow manifesting in an inferior way, the more outrageous, and the more there is usage of controversial words, or methods, the more this is considered to be the highest. It is always this way.

Moreover, as you can see, doing the kusāli practice provides a very good transition. From the ordinary state, you have become Vajrayoginī and remain as Vajrayoginī. Leading on from this, you then construct the guru maṇḍala, and having already transformed yourself, it works so much better. So if you want, in your short Longchen Nyingtik sādhana you can bring in the kusāli practice. There are two parts to it: one involving the cutting, and the other is where you do the actual offering. What you accumulate is six-hundred-thousand times of OM ÅH HŪM, which is quite easy to do. Given that you have the time, it is probably a six-day job, or otherwise, if you are going more slowly, it takes about twelve days.

Clarification on Kusāli Practice

[Student]: You talked about Krodhīkālli as well as Vajrayoginī, and I got confused.
[Rinpoche]: Yes, Vajrayoginī or Krodhīkālli whatever, it doesn’t matter. One is dark-blue and the other is red. That’s the only difference.
[Student]: Does the ÅH HŪM need to be visualised within the body?
[Rinpoche]: Yes, the ÅH dwells in the centre of the chakra that is situated at the navel, whereas the letter HŪM is located at the centre of the crown chakra. Apart from being
specific letters, ĀH and HŪM are also representative of a certain kind of energy. When the
time comes that they are no longer functioning at all, there is a joining together of the two
and they then sort of explode – that’s what we call death.

[Student]: The kusāli practice, talks about these demons.
[Rinpoche]: Which demons, the four demons? The four demons are actually a symbol of
one’s own aggregates: the pride, the emotion, death and so on. We just refer to these as a
kind of devil, since they don’t bring anything good.
[Student]: What about being possessed?
[Rinpoche]: It is a game of the mind. Your prāṇa and nādi are just functioning in a
different way. That’s why there is a so-called trance, and a so-called possession.
**Guru Yoga**

Now, we start with what we call the most profound yoga, the guru yoga. At present, as part of the ngöndro, you’re actually doing the outer guru yoga. In order to do the inner and secret guru yoga, you have to receive the respective initiations. Before that, you at least need to complete a little practice of the outer guru. Nowadays, since both the lamas and disciples seem to have limited time for dharma practice, in this age, we tend to find all these guru practices being done within a short period of time. This might not be so advisable to do; Not unless you are what we call a disciple of superior faculties or happen to have encountered a guru who is a mahāsiddha himself – meaning that he is able to transform everything. Of course, it all depends. The guru may not be that ‘qualified’ and the disciple may not have ‘superior faculties’ but if at least, there is genuine devotion, this kind of short cut might work. But if you are neither a person with strong devotion, nor possess any of these superior faculties, in the end, it will be that much more rewarding to take a gradual approach. In fact, as much for your own safety and comfort I would advise you to go step by step on your spiritual path.

**Taking the Guru Not Only as Teacher but as the Path**

The essential guru yoga is not a practice of worshipping the guru. It is not a mundane, ordinary practice of taking the guru as a teacher, guide, or even as a dictator, who would dictate your life, both spiritually and secularly. Guru, in the more profound sense, has to be taken as a path, not only as a teacher. In Tibetan, this is what we call "Lama lam khyer" – taking the guru as the path. It is something most essential. And, when I say ‘guru,’ I’m not only talking about the outer guru, I’m also referring to the inner and secret guru as well. Due to the karmic link between you and the guru, and due to the merit, which until now has been wait-listed, once this merit ripens, of course, anything can happen. That is a purely a decision between you – the individual being and the guru. Your guru might say stop everything. Do something else. And that is the path you have to pursue. Basically, we have to do whatever it takes to open this casket.

**Dislocating This Well-Crafted Samsaric Life**

You see, it is as though there is this casket. *(Rinpoche actually holds a casket in his hand.)* It’s a very well crafted casket, one created, and made by such a great carpenter that once closed even the joints are almost invisible. Being unable to see the joints, it doesn’t even begin to occur to us that it is openable. Owing to such fine workmanship, this casket seems to be entirely made of one single piece of wood. Our samsāric life is exactly like this; it’s so well crafted. Day by day, year by year, life after life, it has been carefully fashioned by our most experienced ego, which is the real carpenter. In our minds, even the notion there might actually be joints to this casket, not to mention the idea that it is openable – does not occur to us at all. Nor do we stop and think, if only we look carefully, we might actually see the joint. Even that thought does not enter into our heads.

Now before going any further, I should mention that there will tend to be a lot of metaphorical language from this point onwards. We are now talking about the most profound yoga. As much as I appear to be modern, deep down inside I’m still very
Guru Yoga

conservative and a traditionalist, hence I like using this metaphorical language as it is written in the texts. In any case, I’ll try to make it as understandable as possible.

So with this casket, once you locate the joint and manage to almost dislocate it, even if only a little, from then on the whole system gets disrupted. It cannot be properly joined again. It is half a step closer or perhaps even one step towards enlightenment. You still have a casket, which is probably not entirely opened, but it is now sort of disjointed and thus inexpressible things can occur. If only you have the merit, devotion, and the pure perception – it can happen anytime, anywhere. It can be triggered by the most ridiculous of situations. Though of course, it tends to be mainly through a remark, a comment, a gesture or even a message from the guru.

Patrül Rinpoche and Nyoshül Lungtok

There are so many stories in relation to this. For instance, there is the story of Patrül Rinpoche and Nyoshül Lungtok. For many, many years Nyoshül Lungtok had practiced, trying to understand the nature of mind but nothing at all happened. Still, he never once faltered in his strong peerless devotion towards the master. Every day all his dharma brothers and sisters would get something, somehow managing to seemingly disjoin this casket. But he was sort of stuck. Now, in order to appreciate this story, you should know that Nyoshül Lungtok was a great philosopher; being a Khenpo, and an abbot, he was very, very learned in the philosophy of mind. He had read thousands of books and was a great scholar. So it only goes to show that an intellectual understanding of mind has nothing to do with the nature of the mind.

Now Patrül Rinpoche knew that Nyoshül Lungtok was going through this problem. So Patrül Rinpoche approached him and asked, “What’s wrong with you?” And he said, “I cannot understand this nature of the mind.” Patrül Rinpoche then answered him by saying: “Oh, that’s easy, the nature of the mind is easy, why don’t you come along? I will show you.” So that night, Nyoshül Lungtok was led to some beautiful grounds near Dzogchen Monastery and Patrül Rinpoche told him, “Okay, let’s lie down, facing upwards.” At this point, both the disciple and the master laid down. Then, Patrül Rinpoche said to Nyoshül Lungtok: “Look at the night sky. Can you see the stars?” And Nyoshül Lungtok replied: “Yes, I can see the stars.” After this, there was a long pause before Patrül Rinpoche asked, “Can you hear the dogs barking near the Dzogchen Monastery?” His answer to this was, “Yes, I can hear the dogs barking.” And then, Patrül Rinpoche suddenly stood up and said: “That’s it. I have finished. That’s the nature of the mind.”

The Experience of Great Spontaneity

All those years he had studied and practiced, trying to discover the nature of the mind. Yet nothing had happened. Then on that night, there were these two comments the guru made, and right after that, everything essentially stopped. A so-called door is no longer simply a door; it can be a window. A so-called window is no longer merely a window; it can also be a door. A so-called ceiling is no more a ceiling, or not necessarily only a ceiling; it can simultaneously be a set of steps, as well. A so-called man is not necessarily only a man; he can be a woman, too. A so-called woman is not necessarily only a woman but also a child. Basically, every worldly rational system gets disjointed. In fact, for seven days the experience was so intense, that he, Nyoshül Lungtok didn’t really know how to handle the world properly. It was a totally new world, which is something we can only try to imagine. For us, a door is a door, and when we want to go to the bathroom that’s the only way. We
have all these kinds of hang-ups, and fixations. For us, a shirt is only meant for the top half of our bodies. We would never try to put our feet inside this shirt of ours. We are basically always fixated towards something or other. But for Nyoshül Lungtok, for seven days everything stopped. Or to put it in another way: everything becomes anything. Anything is everything. Nothing is solid. Man is woman; woman is man. Just all this fixation towards shape, colour, numbers, and ideas, all of this stopped. From then on he had what we call: the experience of great spontaneity.

Although it is a great dzogchen term, it’s not really the time to talk about spontaneity. For my part, I have read and have been along to listen to those people talking about dzogchen, and the experience of spontaneity. But the thing is, with many of the lamas, I do not have so much pure vision these days. I am especially very critical when it comes to some of the younger lamas. Honestly, to just look at some of the lamas and disciples intoxicated by the words ‘spontaneity’ and ‘unfabricated’ – it is a little bit of a laughing matter. We don’t even know what spontaneity is. For us, it is something that is somewhat more effortless, and that’s about it. Yet, when you come right down to it, spontaneity means a lot. As we can gauge from this story of Nyoshül Lungtok, when everything stops, and once things are no longer fixated that is spontaneity. One is no longer stuck with an idea. But for us, at this point in time, there can only be inferential logic. It’s like our attempting to describe what lies behind a mountain. All we can do is imagine by inference. By using some kind of reference, we imagine how there must be some trees, and some other cities. That’s about it. There is no direct cognition.

There is also another story set many years later, once Nyoshül Lungtok had become a great master himself. He had this disciple who was completely illiterate. His disciple had never read any of the great dzogchen texts, because he didn’t know how to read. The only thing he really knew was how to chant OM ĀH HŪM VAJRA GURU PADMA SIDDHI HŪM. Of course, there was also this strong devotion towards his master. After continuing to practice year after year, still nothing happened, but of course, his devotion was unshakable. Still not having reached any kind of experience, his guru Nyoshül Lungtok, in fact died, and yet, his devotion to the guru never wavered. Then one day, as he was making tea, suddenly a spark of fire hit his hand, and, he had this sharp pain of the fire burning his flesh. At that moment, he exclaimed out loud: “ah tza tza” – (Rinpoche makes a gesture). I have to do these sound effects and actions because that’s what Nyoshül Khenpo did when he told me this story. I believe that there must be a sort of lineage blessing of the gesture.

Anyway, at that very moment, as had been the case for Nyoshül Lungtok, again everything stopped. Previously, he had always been very fussy about tea, including everything from the number of tealeaves, right down to the exact temperature the water should be heated and so forth. Ordinarily, we are just so fixated and it is the fixation, which is doing all of this. Yet from then on, it no longer mattered to him. Someone could have put cow dung in his tea and he would have felt the same way; tea is tea. Everything stopped for him. Still when we say ‘everything stopped’ at the same time, it also means this was the start of everything not stopping. It is as though once the ordinary world stopped, the unordinary world began. But right now, for us to formulate a precise picture of this is difficult. It is something we can only talk about, and very vaguely imagine.

**Vajrayāṇa Methods Are so Fitting for This Era**

Such a great vajrayāṇa method awaits us. It is something you neither find in the śrāvakayāṇa, nor so much in the mahāyāṇa, either. Though I must say, in Zen Buddhism,
although I don’t have much experience, Zen masters seem to use this method quite a bit. For instance, they will ask you ridiculous questions like, “What is the sound of one hand clapping?” The disciple then ponders this over and over until they get something. They call it satori. I think it is something to do with the disjoining of the casket, which is the actual enlightenment. Yet enlightenment is not colourful in the sense that we might perceive it. When there is no longer any difference between tealeaves and cow dung, isn’t that the rainbow light? Isn’t that the experience of heaven? Isn’t that the celestial mansion? Isn’t that equivalent to the beautiful goddesses and gods? What more can one ask? Surely it is the supreme heaven. The vajrayāna has great methods on this.

The Buddha himself said, “As times degenerate, the teachings and especially the higher teachings will have an even greater effect.” We may be going through this experience of degeneration, yet it is also an age where some of the great methods such as dzogchen, mahāmudrā, and the non-duality of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa are actually working more than ever before. Our negative emotions have reached to the highest level and people do all kinds of negative things to the highest degree. Yet this is also the age where the teachings of the Buddha, especially the great mahāsandhi teachings, resonate with force. There is great vibrancy. Never before have these methods worked so effectively. Now that is something quite encouraging.

So what we are trying to do is disjoin or break this casket. If not entirely, we should at least make it a little disjointed so that it can no longer be locked again. That is also what we call ‘understanding the nature of the mind.’

‘Rest in the Nature of the Mind’

Indeed, nowadays, how often do we hear the words, ‘Rest in the nature of the mind’? Although easily enough said, it can be quite difficult. At first it may seem simple enough, after all, when we say ‘rest in the nature of mind,’ there are just five or six words. Yet in truth, these words are not really being understood. What do we mean by ‘rest’? It is easy for us to sort of gaze at the sky and blankly declare, ‘rest in the nature of the mind.’ Then we sit there, basically wasting a precious two minutes out of our precious human life, or sometimes, perhaps even up to twenty minutes! It is the biggest waste of time. What is rest? Is it to do something like: plunge onto the bed and stretch your legs out? And what is meant by ‘in the’? Likewise, we surely don’t appreciate the term ‘nature’ in any real sense, and definitely don’t comprehend what mind is. So in the end, we find that this term ‘rest in the nature of mind’ has almost no meaning at all.

Nonetheless, we see people going along to meditation centers and when the lama says ‘rest in the nature of the mind,’ most of the students make some kind of futile attempt to do so. I can’t help but ask myself, what are they doing? It is almost an embarrassment to see this kind of thing. But my belief in karma has improved quite a lot. It’s a bit similar to how leaders like Jiang Zemin, the former President of China, can announce something and billions of Chinese then believe whatever he has said. In our case, the guru will say, “Rest in the nature of the mind,” and somehow the disciple also buys it. Neither the disciple nor the teacher has a clue what they are talking about, most of the time.

But having said this, I should add that it is also just my being critical. It is also my own scepticism and impure vision, of course. From a different vantage point, it is encouraging just to have heard the words, ‘rest in the nature of the mind.’ Even if recited parrot-fashion, as a charade, just to have this phrase alive and kicking in this world – shows we have so much merit. We, as dharma practitioners, and followers of the vajrayāna path, have so much merit.
Guru Yoga

Now in relation to merit, from a mahāyāna level of explanation, I’d like to share an analogy given by His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche. One time in Bodh Gaya he said something incredible on this. He said, suppose there are these five hundred arhats coming from the śrāvakā tradition, needing to go somewhere. Now remember that arhats are enlightened beings; having destroyed the ego, they don’t have to go back to saṃsāra any longer. Anyhow, let us say that there is a chariot, but there is no horse to pull it. Should the Buddha happen to be passing by, he might consider dragging the chariot with his toe, but for all intents and purposes, these five hundred arhats wouldn’t have sufficient merit to allow the Buddha to do such a thing. And then His Holiness said, suppose there is also this one ordinary human being, who has heard the word of bodhicitta. Were this person to suddenly get into the chariot, the Buddha would have to drag this chariot with his own neck. There is so much merit.

So nowadays, during this degenerated time, it is really quite astonishing that we hear such profound words as ‘rest in the nature of the mind.’ Even to have this phrase coming from the lips of masters from time to time, never mind entering your eardrums, this alone is incredible. Regardless of whether it remains in your heart a split second or not, just to have heard that is already very, very fortunate.

Two Ways of Recognising the Mind

As I mentioned at the beginning, right the way through all the vehicles, and all the teachings of the Buddha, there is one main purpose and that is to train our minds. Now at last, we have reached a level where we try to rest our mind in it’s nature, which is the highest form of training. We aim to recognize the nature of mind. Not only to recognize, but also, our aim is to dwell in it, and by dwelling in the nature of mind, thus be able to manifest from it. That’s what we’re trying to do. And to have a complete recognition of the mind is what we call nirvāṇa. It is the disjoining of this casket.

All along, the buddhas, bodhisattvas and the past mahāsiddhas and gurus have repeatedly told us that recognition of mind is only possible via two means. The first way is through merit, and the second is through the blessing of the guru. Without one or the other of these, even after years and years of contemplation, let alone a detailed study of Buddhist philosophy, the nature of mind will remain a mystery. Intellectual academic studies will only serve to give you a vague idea. Rather than giving you the real picture, it’s more like a picture of a picture, or a hundredth-generation photocopy. The real picture comes when you meditate. Or at least, recognition of the real form of that picture, upon which you have been meditating, comes as a result of the meditation. For these very reasons, of all the methods, the two most important are the accumulation of merit and the blessings of the guru.

Two Ways of Accumulating Merit

The next question is “How do we accumulate merit?” In the vajrayāna, once again, there are only two ways: compassion towards sentient beings and devotion to the guru. The latter of the two, having devotion to the guru is that much more practical and feasible. Compassion might come for one or two days, or one or two hours, but for ignorant beings like ourselves, it is difficult to have this compassion towards sentient beings at all times. To have devotion towards the guru, to a being, to this one person whom we have chosen or for that matter towards – one or two or three – this is so much more feasible.
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Some say, “One should have only one guru.” But sometimes, what was initially intended to be advice somehow becomes a tradition, which is not so good. It is only every now and again that the lama will say, “It is better to have one path and follow one guru.” This advice must be given to certain people. For instance, there are certain people who tend to do a little bit more window-shopping than necessary. Likewise for certain people who don’t have much time, for these people, perhaps it’s better to stick with one guru and thus, the guru might tell them so. But some opportunists have used this advice as a means of campaigning. Then it becomes a kind of political tool, where you tell your group of people, we had better follow only our guru, and our lineage. Well I can assure you with a great deal of confidence, if you can manage, you can follow as many gurus as you like. Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo had one hundred and fifty gurus; Jamgon Kongtrul Lodrö Thaye had almost a similar number and Chogyur Lingpa, the same. Jamyang Khyentse Chökyi Lodrö boasts more than seventy gurus. Even this very man, even though I have not reached any realization or anything like that: recently, I was counting my gurus and worked out that I have over twenty, at least. On the other hand, if you wish to handle only one guru that is also fine. It is what used to be commonly done in India. The Indian masters would have only one guru and only one deity practice. Having just one practice, they would still manage to achieve attainments. In fact, Atisha Dīpamkara criticized Tibetans, by saying, “In India, practitioners can achieve hundreds and thousands of attainments with one deity, whereas in Tibet, Tibetan practitioners end up getting destroyed by the one hundred deities.” So that is a bit of a Tibetan habit.

Outer, Inner and Secret Guru

As part of the method to accumulate merit, devotion towards the master and the teachings seems to be quite crucial. What do we mean by devotion to the guru? To whom are we having devotion? Well first of all, when we say, ‘guru,’ we should understand that there are actually three levels: the outer, inner and secret guru.

As the great Sakyapa master Könchog Lhundrup, said:

*The outer guru is the embodiment of all the buddhas; the one you can see and communicate with, and is also the one you receive teachings or instructions from. The inner guru is the nature of the mind. The secret guru is the emptiness of all phenomena.*

For this next quotation, I don’t know who originally said this, but it was quoted by Deshung Rinpoche, one of my Sakyapa masters. He said:

*First we try to meditate that the outer guru is the Buddha. Secondly we see the guru as the Buddha. Thirdly we see or recognise our own mind as the Buddha.*

That is the speciality of vajrayāna teachings. So now, we are talking about the outer, inner, and secret guru being one. It is actually one and the same thing.

The Outer Guru as a Bridge

The concept of the outer guru is actually very vast. Yet as deluded beings, even to comprehend the outer guru is somewhat ahead of us. Likewise, for the moment, it’s also
not so possible to recognize the inner and secret guru. It is only at the intellectual level that we have some kind of vague idea. To truly understand, what we need is a bridge, one that extends between the inner and the secret guru and you. With you on this shore, and the secret and inner guru on the other, there is a bridge or boat to take you across to the other shore. Via this process, this thereby introduces you to the inner and the secret guru – and that bridge is the outer guru. It is this tangible, visible guru, whom you can share experiences with that we refer to as the outer guru.

The outer guru is entirely a manifestation of your devotion. Should you approach this outer guru with your ordinary perception, naturally, this person will be just a normal human being. They are simply someone who likes pizza with anchovy – like you do, or someone who likes strong coffee – which you don’t like. So there is that human aspect. He is someone who yawns when tired, someone who gets angry when you make a mistake, or to put it better, someone whom you think gets angry when you don’t do something right. Not having come from your neighbourhood, he is also someone thought to be quite exotic, the slightly more foreign the better. It is even more preferable if he is someone with a different skin colour altogether. So we expect someone with these kinds of qualities. This is especially so, if you are a person who happens to be quite gullible, or naive towards colours, shapes and races – be they Tibetan, Eastern, or otherwise.

**Our Feeling Uncomfortable with a Too Perfect Being**

There is this necessity of the guru being slightly more special than you. That’s what you anticipate. He has to know the dharma. He’s more learned and has done more meditation. He has greater intuition, a little clairvoyance, and omniscience, and has a certain measure of power to take care of things. But from the guru’s point of view, he can’t afford to be too special. Suppose you have this guru and happen to invite him to a restaurant. What if he were to enter by means of floating or flying? Or what if he were able to order without looking at the most elegant menu, and without going through the pretense of not knowing what wine to choose? If this were to happen, we wouldn’t like it one bit. When he is completely omniscient and manifesting in an enlightened way, we don’t like it, because we prefer our gurus to be slightly human. Of course, we think he should be more special than an ordinary human being but at the same time, we also hope that he is not too special. Otherwise it becomes very annoying for us. There are certain things we do behind his back and it’s comforting to think he doesn’t know. Just imagine having a guru who knows of every single thing you do! What if he knew all kinds of things: from how many times you masturbate during special Buddhist days, right down to what size underwear you wear, or how many moles you have on the top of your penis? It would be terrible. You don’t want him to know all that. You don’t want him to have that kind of knowledge. It would feel so uncomfortable to be with this kind of person.

When you have a too perfect being, sometimes it just feels uncomfortable. We’re a bit like a thief in a large prison complex where all the other prison cells are empty. You are the only thief in this world and you have been caught. You feel so bad, and very guilty, not because you have stolen something but just because you are the only one. Suddenly the prison door opens and in comes another thief, and you feel much better. “Ah, well I’m not the only guilty guy.” In a similar way, we think it’s good to have the guru making mistakes sometimes. This is how complicated our human life and minds are.
Guru Yoga

A Master’s Great Display of Compassion

Can you see why the guru is so kind? I’m not talking about gurus like myself, of course. I don’t even have to pretend; I am like this. Yet when it comes to great masters like Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, it was always amazing to watch him say, “Oh, I didn’t know that.” It was astounding he actually got flu from time to time, or that he even got sleepy. We knew that His Holiness hardly slept at night. He was just going day and night, but now and then, during the pujas he would appear to be sleeping. It’s inspiring, because it is such an immense display of compassion. He wouldn’t really lie down, or stretch out his legs and actually sleep and when we went to him in the middle of the night, perhaps at two in the morning, he was either meditating or writing something. It makes you feel so bad, “Wow, I shouldn’t go back and sleep.” Indeed, sometimes during the daytime when he was dozing, it would make us feel, it is okay to be sleepy. This kind of mind, we have.

In any event, I’m still continuing on with introducing the outer guru. As you can see, the guru yoga is going to take some time.

The Guru Lineage as a Staircase

Now earlier on during the mandala explanation, I was quoting Jigme Lingpa. He said, “Even a meditation that is as short as the period we would normally need to drink a cup of tea: that will really penetrate your mind.” But he then went on to say, “Years of meditation is good but that is nothing compared to a momentary calling to mind of the outer guru.” So as you see, in the vajrayāna, the guru is really a big deal.

On this point, I will give another example from the perspective of the guru lineage. We can think of the guru lineage as something similar to a set of steps, or a staircase. Usually, right at the top of the guru lineage is the primordial buddha, the Adi Buddha – Samantabhadra for the Nyingmapas and Vajradhara for the Kagyupas, Gelugpas and Sakyapas. So who is this blue guy? The primordial buddha is actually a symbol of your own mind; the nature of your mind. The guru lineage is the staircase leading you towards your own nature, and it is the very first step that is most important. And that is your immediate guru.

So the outer guru is like a boat, or a bridge, or as in this example, like a staircase – leading you to the other shore. When you finally reach the other shore, you will know that the outer guru has all along been none other than your own mind, and is not other than this emptiness aspect of all phenomena. At that point, you will have no burden of someone watching over you. There will no longer be any burden of someone breathing heavily down your neck. No longer will there be any notion of someone correcting or criticizing you or even dictating your life. You will then know that all this is your own mind. This is what we are trying to achieve. Right now, on the path, this is what we call mixing the guru’s mind and our mind.

Somewhere Between Fabrication and Not Faking It

At times, through lacking a proper understanding of the guru notion, we think of the guru as a dictator. But in the end, what you need to know is: the outer guru is not an independent, externally existing, or truly existing entity. The outer guru is not truly independent from you. To think of him as someone more sublime, the perfect being, or as someone who is something you can never be, nor could ever even dream of being is not the right kind of attitude to have. As Deshung Rinpoche said, in the final outcome the
whole purpose of the guru yoga is to understand the nature of the mind. This is really theorte of the vajrayāna. In Deshung Rinpoche’s quotation, what did he say? The first thing
he said was “You should meditate on the guru as a buddha.” What does that mean? That
means fabricate; it means pretend, make believe, visualize. So the path is a little bit
contrived, and is slightly fabricated or forced. All the same, this is necessary because right
now, we are merely fumbling around the outside of this casket. We have not yet found this
joint. In fact, this casket has been so well created, we are not even aware there is a joint.
To us, it’s as though there is one single piece of wood. We don’t yet know there are two
pieces of wood joined together.

The effort of actually thinking the guru is the Buddha – this trying to visibly train
our minds to think, “He is the Buddha,” that is so important. Now the question is “Are we
just faking it?” No, and in fact, there are many reasons for this. That is the beauty of the
vajrayāna. First of all, by his very nature, the outer guru is the Buddha, but for now, due to
our own delusion, to think in this way takes a bit of discipline on our part. It requires some
effort to think that he has four arms rather than two arms, and he is green with extra eyes
and so on and so forth. Likewise, in the Longchen Nyingtik case, he’s Guru Rinpoche.
Even though all of this is necessary as a path or as a method, in reality he is the Buddha.
His nature is the Buddha, so in that way, we are not faking it. That’s one reason.

Dualistic Perception Is a Construction of Our Minds

The second reason is: not only does this apply to the guru it is also the same with every
perception that we have. Whenever we look at another and see something imperfect, the
imperfection is not ‘out there somewhere’ but rather, it is a creation of your mind. Whether
you see someone as beautiful, ugly, imperfect, or perfect, all this is simply created by your
mind. From a philosophical point of view, all this dualistic perception is a complete
construction of your mind. Obviously, this also applies to the guru. If you see the guru as
someone imperfect, as someone making mistakes, as someone who has too big a nose, as
someone too short, or too tall – with all of this, what one has to know and learn is: “This is
my perception. That is how it appears to me.” In reality, he is adorned with the thirty-two
major marks, and eighty minor marks. He is the Buddha. Thus, we contemplate in this way,
again and again, and try to visualise and meditate on him as the Buddha.

It will definitely purify much of your defilement to do this. As the defilements
lessen, your perception, and your slant on things will also undergo change. Then you will
slowly come to see him as the Buddha. By then, you will already have reached the second
stage. Yet you still won’t think that is you since there is still this distinction ‘he’ is the
Buddha. There is the notion of “I can see ‘him’ as the Buddha” because ‘he’ is thought of
as a separate entity from you. So at this point, you are still on the second stage. Upon
reaching the third stage, even that differentiation is no longer there. By then, you have
purified all the defilements, so that there are absolutely none remaining. As a result, you
perceive things from an utterly different angle and thus, there is no longer any independent
external guru ‘out there.’ It is then that you see the nature of the mind – as the Buddha.
Again, this is the forte of the vajrayāna. I have merely gone and taken several different
approaches in explaining this.

Devotion As Trust in Cause, Condition and Effect

The guru is also like a mirror. Why is it that one uses a mirror when putting lipstick on? It
is to see our own reflection, and to be better able to apply the make up to our lips.
Guru Yoga

Similarly, to actually see this inner buddha, which is none other than the true nature of our mind, we are using the outer guru as a mirror. As part of this process, we try to always keep this mirror clean in the form of practising devotion.

Now again, what is guru devotion? What is devotion? As Saraha said, “It is trust in cause, condition and effect.” Such trust naturally occurs when you’re cooking an egg. To put it another way, when you cook an egg there is devotion. The trust itself comes from trusting in cause, condition and effect. There need only be a certain amount of water, heat, and cooking time, and these factors combined will determine whether the egg will be cooked or not. That is devotion. Devotion is not some kind of make believe. It’s not like placing an egg on a plate and leaving that plate on the table, all the while pretending the egg will be cooked without water or heat. That is what we call idiot’s devotion.

Devotion is trust in cause, condition and effect. As can be inferred by the example of cooking an egg, where there is a really good understanding of karma, an awareness of devotion will increase simultaneously. If you lack a thorough understanding of karma, you might erroneously believe that the philosophy of karma and devotion are opposites. You say certain things like: “Oh, it’s my karma. It’s his karma” – “you can’t really do much, it’s his karma.” Understanding karma is somewhat different from the defeatist argument of, “It’s his or her karma, so there is no point in having devotion.”

Basically, if there is a cause and condition and effect, then the egg can be cooked. Now in this example, the egg is you, isn’t it? I’m not talking about the exterior, the shell and all of that, what I am referring to is the cookable aspect. The egg is not you – an egg is just an egg – the cookable aspect is you, which means, if simply left alone, nothing is going to be cooked. But with the right cause, condition and effect you are cookable. Actually, I think what we are saying here probably contradicts certain theories coming from Christianity. For instance, were you to believe in original sin, Buddhists would say you are not cookable. So it is really important to understand this changeable aspect. Indeed, to accept the fact, ‘I’m cookable,’ is something we also refer to as the ultimate form of taking refuge.

**Everything Is Emptiness**

The fact that we are cookable is quite significant. If we were not cookable, devotion wouldn’t work. Were we uncookable, nothing would work; we would be stuck. Yet in reality, we are not stuck. After all, the sole reason an egg can be cooked is simply because it’s cookable – that is the cause. The conditions themselves are the water, and fire, or in our case, it is the renunciation mind. Not to mention, one-hundred-thousand prostrations, one-hundred-thousand maṇḍala offerings, compassion, devotion, all of these factors also constitute the conditions. Then as for the effect, it is the act of being cooked. Now this is where the egg comes in. Whether the egg is cooked or not, an egg is still an egg, isn’t it?

As the Buddha said, “Whether the buddhas of the past, present, and future come or not – the nature of phenomena will remain as it is.” This is such a great quotation. It is not as though after Shakayamuni Buddha came to this earth and taught, only then did everything become emptiness. Everything has always been emptiness right from the very start, regardless of whether or not Shakayamuni Buddha had said, “Everything is emptiness.” And on that note, we have completed chapter one of the guru yoga teachings.

From here, there will be short introduction of the inner and secret guru yoga. Though at this stage, it is not possible to say so much on this, since first of all, there is the outer guru yoga to finish. There will also be quite detailed teachings on the four abhishekas,
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which are like the bones of the guru yoga. Then following on from this we will discuss
mixing your mind and the guru’s mind, which is the marrow of the guru yoga.

Guru Yoga Related Questions

[Student]: When the guru’s mind and my mind are mixed, I am always asking what is it
that is mixed, because mind has no form, no taste, or anything.
[Rinpoche]: That is excellent, and that’s one skin, which you have already seen, so just
keep on practising that.
[Student]: So I always try to find something...
[Rinpoche]: Yeah, that’s good.

[Student]: I find it strange that the intention in the guru yoga is ‘unity’ and yet we need to
go through all this separating of form, colour, and shape. It seems so counterproductive
when you compare it to something like: a feeling in the heart.
[Rinpoche]: What do you mean by ‘a feeling in the heart’?
[Student]: Having a strong connection and remembering the guru.
[Rinpoche]: You see, the connection is not the only thing we are looking for. There is this
path where it looks as though the guru is another being, but then, the path itself also
reminds us all the time that this is not the case. That’s the skilful aspect of the path. In fact,
it is not the path’s fault or the path’s doing that the guru is thought of as a separate entity.
It is our minds. It is our very own habit. To unequivocally know the inseperability of the
guru with one’s own being, would of course, make the guru yoga unnecessary. On the
other hand, the very concept of having a connection means there is another being to
connect with. So basically, you are still being bound by the notion of a separate entity,
when you think in this way.
[Student]: What if we were to just remember the other being for producing that sensation
in our hearts, and then feeling some kind of love or completeness?
[Rinpoche]: What do you mean? Can you clarify that?
[Student]: A strong feeling in the chest.
[Rinpoche]: Well it is true that these kinds of feelings can come, but again, feelings are
also very fickle. That is just another skin, which will peel off. Whereas the inseparability
of the guru and your being, once realised, is something that can never peel off. It will
remain because that’s the real you. Then you see the secret and inner guru, and that’s you!
Feelings are only temporal.

[Student]: In the long version, there’s a prayer, which begins: “Jetsun Guru Rinpoche you
are the glorious embodiment...” It says to recite that as many times as you can. Does this
mean one-hundred-thousand times?
[Rinpoche]: No. Actually you can do that prayer as many times as you want. It is made up
of two sections. I do it all the time – just that first bit.

[Student]: With the Vajra Guru mantra, can you do it anywhere? Does it have to be a
sitting practice?
[Rinpoche]: That is a personal question. Different people will need different instructions.
For those roaming around the streets of Kathmandu, smoking hashish and looking at a
half-empty cup of cappuccino the whole day, I would tell them, “Sit and do ten-million,”
or even more than that, “do one-thousand-million while sitting.” Then again, for someone
from London, New York, or Paris who is working hard, I would say, “Yes, do it on the
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train, while you are waiting for the bus, and while the train or bus is moving.” It depends on how disciplined people are. That’s what the dharma is for.

[Student]: You said it’s possible to have more than just one guru. And I noticed there is a verse in the Longchen Nyingtik Ngöndro that says, “From the root guru…”
[Rinpoche]: Well, there are many roots. That is to say a tree has many roots. Then again, you can have one root guru and many branch gurus. There could be branch, fruit, flower, and leave gurus.

[Student]: In the “Words of my Perfect Teacher” it says that you should really examine the guru before choosing. And from what I currently understand, how you see the guru is actually your own perception.
[Rinpoche]: There is no contradiction in that. In fact, it really complements a lot. Basically, you should always examine your own perception.
[Student]: But what about the example of the old lady, where she was able to take a dog’s tooth as being the Buddha’s?
[Rinpoche]: That is an instance of having unshakable faith. For now, we don’t have that. The old woman never thought for a moment perhaps the tooth was merely a dog’s tooth. We don’t have that kind of conviction. Instead, we have a tendency to swing back and forth, sometimes thinking it’s a dog’s tooth, and then at other times, thinking it is the Buddha’s tooth.

Examining Both the Guru and Our Own Agenda

As long as the vajra master is qualified and has an authentic lineage blessing, guru devotion works. But the problem is when we say ‘qualified master’ what do we mean by that? Just as Jigme Lingpa said, “It is so important to examine the guru.” At the very least, the guru must have compassion, and as a minimum, the guru must work for you, not for himself. So you examine the guru, but should also realise that by the time you know the guru is qualified you are already quite good. Thus, as we can see, this path is quite confusing. And a qualified master is in fact, very rare. Even during Jigme Lingpa’s time, he was lamenting over the rarity of qualified masters, and this was several hundred years ago. Nowadays, this is an age supposedly very, very degenerated – everyone also seems to have his or her own personal agenda.

This catchphrase ‘to have an agenda’ is quite important when it comes to examining the guru. For his part, the guru must be interested in your enlightenment. If you happen to meet a person who can teach a little, maybe not so much, but a little bit, and if this person is genuinely interested in enlightening you, then you are quite safe. On the other hand, were you to encounter a guru very learned in sūtras, śāstras, and mantras but not very interested in your enlightenment that is a different story. If the guru’s interest in you is mainly for the sake of expanding disciple membership, for your wealth, looks, skill, or for your energy to slave away for him – then in that case, there is a considerable danger there.

These two problems from the teacher and the student, feed each other a lot. For instance, if a student comes along solely wanting the guru’s attention, and yet, the guru is interested only in the enlightenment of the student, again sometimes, the guru’s method does not work. The guru might do something that will end up driving away a potential practitioner, especially if the guru is unskilled. It is an even sorrier story when the students pursue the guru’s attention or some sort of personal relationship, with no interest in the actual enlightenment, while at the same time, the guru is merely interested in publicity,
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fame, power, and money. In that category, it works, but it becomes very sad. It works because they feed each other’s ego’s.

Undoubtedly, it would be that much simpler if we could say, “These are the qualifications of the guru, and these are the steps you should follow.” But what is really required is a much deeper process of reflection, and we should especially rely on the wisdom coming out of hearing, contemplating and meditating. So to reiterate, it is really good to hear and study the teachings over and over again. In particular, the first of the three wisdoms, the wisdom from hearing is so important.

Examining the Path

Long before modern civilization celebrated free speech, the Buddha himself stressed great respect for reasoning, and emphasized that a path should be examined rather than followed blindly. Whilst it is important to examine the path and its authority, at the same time, we must also watch out for the cultural baggage that accompanies it. Now, in relation to this, I would like to share something that I recently experienced. You see in a sense, the world is becoming much smaller and one thing that democracy does is to make things become much more transparent. But of course, this is not necessarily something that happens in a good way. In fact, there has been a lot of criticism especially from the West, with regard to some Tibetan lama’s behavior. There was recently this one lady in particular, who wrote something on this subject. At first glance you naturally feel defensive, but after having read it over, you see that there is some truth to what she is saying. She reports that Tibetan lama’s often say to Western students, “You Westerners are so materialistic.” And she responds by saying, “Well, how about you guys? You come to the West, bring in the money, then go back to Nepal or India, and buy the latest brand cars, and watches.” It is very true that this kind of thing is happening. She is saying it occurs so much that spiritual materialism has now reached to the highest level, even to the point where the dharma has become something of a commodity. To look at things from a very narrow perspective, one might go so far as to say: if some of the high lama’s were to sell their silver and gold teacup holders, it would surely feed five hundred children in Ethiopia for about a month.

Genuine Humility

There is also a whole other side to this, we should try not to forget. What appears to us as simplicity, humility, and humbleness, can instead be another form of hypocrisy. There are some, not only lama’s but also laypeople as well, who are so paralyzed about losing their image of being simple and humble that it really becomes a major source of suffering. From this point of view, I admire some of these people who simply do what they want to do; those who just go ahead and wear four Rolex watches, one on each ankle, and one on each arm. What I am saying is one should not come to a conclusion based on any old rational system.

Personally, I come from a tradition, in which there are great examples such as His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, who for me is a great buddha. At times, when I reflect on him and his qualities, it is just amazing to even imagine that his feet truly touched this earth. To think that at some time or other, he actually walked through the airport at such and such a place. Once, for example, when we were all at Frankfurt airport waiting in the transit lounge, the pilot and the airline staff all came over and asked us if they could just touch him – his hand or his feet or something. Yet in spite of his greatness, not even on one occasion had he ever claimed that he was something special. He always, constantly
said he was the most worthless. For me, that is the highest teaching because it is obvious 
he is the greatest and yet he shunned all praise or recognition of any sort. Usually, with 
most of us, whenever we happen to notice we have some sort of worthy quality, we can’t 
wait to show it off.

A Wanderer’s Attitude

[Student]: What is khatvānga?
[Rinpoche]: The khatvānga is quite a beautiful object, which looks kind of like a walking 
stick with three upward pointing prongs. An explanation of the khatvānga is very difficult. 
Suffice to say, the kapāla and the khatvānga are considered to be two of the greatest 
substances in the vajrayāna, especially if you are one of the highest vajrayāna 
practitioners.

In a metaphorical sense, the khatvānga is also an attribute of a wanderer. It 
symbolises the practice of a wanderer: a tantric practice whereby the world is always 
looked on as a strange world, as though it were a place never before encountered. It is as if, 
it is your very first time to visit this earth. In short, having the attitude of a wanderer is also 
similar to being someone with no food, no mat, no Lonely Planet book in your bag, let 
alone credit-cards, or a mobile phone to call home with. And as tantric practitioners, it is 
quite important that you always try to develop the attitude of a wanderer in looking at the 
world.

One very beautiful story of a well-known wanderer is that of Thangtong Gyalpo. 
Epitomizing what we refer to in Tibetan as, "nyeme kyi nanjupa," he was a true wanderer. 
No-one would ever know where he was, or what he was up to next. And not many dared 
ask him any questions, since he would seemingly get so easily irritated. If you were to 
meet him along the way, you couldn’t ask him, “Where are you going?” If you were to do 
so, he would answer by saying: “Can’t you see where I am going? I am going ahead.” This 
is all. Then you might venture to ask, “Where did you come from?” And he would say, “I 
came from behind.” That’s it – it’s the only answer he would have. Yet, his abrupt style of 
answering really had nothing to do with thinking of it as an invasion of privacy. He was in 
fact such a great compassionate being. Actually, he was the one to first initiate the Tibetan 
opera. It started out that everywhere he went he would build bridges and he built so many 
in Tibet, in Bhutan, and all over the place. One day, after all his money had run out, he 
asked the bridge builders to begin performing operas. It was so popular that many people 
would come to watch and would toss money to the actors in appreciation. It was with this 
money that the bridge building could begin again.

So in all respects, the practice of a wanderer is a very profound practice, 
involving some really excellent methods. But if you try and truly apply this practice 
for just one hour, you will probably find it a little scary. Try looking at your husband or 
wife and thinking, who is this? Go to the toilet and when you are urinating, suddenly just 
stop and take a look at this. What is this? Really get into this notion of being a wanderer. It 
is as though you have literally reached a strange land. Who are these people? Where is this 
country? Careful though, to do this practice does not mean to become hippy-dippy. That 
would only be falling into another type of pattern, and within such a pattern there is still a 
degree of principle to hold onto. The quintessence of the wanderers practice is to 
constantly destroy all these principles and hang-ups, until there are no longer any 
whatsoever remaining.
Guru Yoga Visualisation

Now for the guru yoga visualisation, if you are following on from the kusāli practice, simply remain in the confidence of being Vajrayogini. In the short sādhana however, the guru yoga practice comes right after the maṇḍala offering. So if doing the short sādhana, it would be best to remain seated and after a brief pause, you instantly visualise yourself as Vajrayogini or Vajravārāhī. Now in the Longchen Nyingtik text, it mentions ‘Vajrayogini, red in colour,’ but you can actually visualise either. Except for the fact one is red and the other is black, they are the same.

As you look around, think that the place where you are is transformed into a pure realm, none other than the Copper Coloured Mountain. Although more elaborate, this is similar to what we referred to earlier as ‘transforming the atmosphere.’

In your right hand, you are holding a curved knife and in your left hand you are holding a kapāla, a skullcup. Semi-wrathful, beautiful, and slender, you have three eyes, and are adorned with exquisite ornaments; tiger-skin skirt, bone ornaments and so forth. Your stance is as though you had been walking and had suddenly stopped. It is as if you are about to take a step forward. Gazing skywards with your three eyes, you see a lotus of one-hundred-thousand petals, on the top of which is a sun-disk and on top of that is a moon-disk.

Seated on the moon-disk is the root guru, lord of the saṅgha, the embodiment of all the objects of refuge, the essence of all the buddhas, and the leader of all the bodhisattvas. In essence, he is one’s own root guru, but in form he is Padmākara, the Lotus-born. His complexion is white, with a slight tinge of red to his cheeks. By no means does he have an old, wrinkled, ordinary sort of form; quite the opposite, he is young, majestic, vibrant, and adorned with all the royal objects. He is sitting, in the manner of a king with his right hand holding a vajra, and his left hand holding a kapāla. At his left shoulder, he is holding a khaṭvāṅga, symbolizing his consort Mandārava. Though in this case, since it is the ngöndro we are doing, Mandārava is temporarily hidden as one of his tools. Upon completing the outer guru yoga, it is possible to begin the secret guru yoga, and it is at that time that the form of Mandārava comes out.

You visualise that Guru Rinpoche is sitting amidst millions of rainbow spheres of light. Within the biggest of these spheres is Guru Rinpoche, and surrounding the space around him are his twenty-five disciples, led at the forefront by King Trisong Detsen. In the space above Guru Rinpoche are all the mahāsiddhas of the dzogchen lineage, such as Vimalamitra, Jñānasūtra, Śrī Śīha, and Prahevära, none other than Garab Dorje. Wherever there is any remaining space, this space is filled with all kind of deities of the different lineages, dākinīs, and dharma-pālas. Basically your entire surroundings, especially the space in front of you, are filled with the objects of refuge like a thick cloud.

As you behold the objects of refuge, bring in this notion that they are completely clear and vivid, while at the same time knowing that not one of them has anything of an externally, truly existent nature. It is like looking at a lake during a full moon, the reflection of the moon is clear, vivid and very vibrant, yet you know it is just a reflection. Likewise, all the refuge objects of the guru yoga are seated before you like a reflection of the moon on water. This is what you visualise. And then, giving rise to strong devotion from the heart, you chant the Seven Line Prayer. After a while, you then chant, OM ÂH HŪM VAJRA GURU SIDDHI HŪM.

As a matter of fact, there is quite a tradition of doing one-hundred-thousand recitations of the Seven Line Prayer. When it comes to the Vajra Guru mantra, it is one-
hundred-thousand times one hundred, so it is actually ten million recitations. Though that is quite easy. If you have the time, it tends to be a two month long job.

[Student]: When we are chanting the Vajra Guru mantra what are we actually doing?

[Rinpoche]: Just concentrate on the mañḍala. With Guru Rinpoche sitting there in a sphere of light, you simply gaze at his face. When tired of this, fix your eyes downwards a little. King Trisong Detsen is seated there like a great Mahañāsā and at the same time, he is also in the form of a Tibetan king. When you find yourself becoming distracted, notice how seated to the right, there is this beautiful lady Yeshe Tsogyal. When you are tired with that, next fix your gaze on the translator Vairochana who is working away hard at translating something. Somewhere there behind him is Gyalwe Chogyang. At the crown of his head, there is a horse head that is neighing. As it neighs the first time around, the whole world shakes. With the second neigh, the entire world dismantles, and on the third, in the absence of this impure world, everything actually becomes Hayagrīva’s realm. Then there is Matok Rinchen who is another of the twenty-five disciples of Guru Rinpoche. He is very hungry, and since there is nothing else to eat he is eating rocks, and doing so very deliciously. Somewhere next to him, there is Kichung Lotsar who is actually another translator. He is young and quiet. Each time a bird flies past, he effortlessly catches it.

Above Guru Rinpoche is Vimalamitra seated in a cave, wearing a blue shirt. Actually, this cave exists right this very minute on this earth, located in China at a place referred to as Mount Wutai. Anyhow, right on the tip of his nose is a letter ‘A’ and this is the guru of Guru Rinpoche. From this A streams forth a lot of light. Then, similarly you can turn your gaze to Śrī Siṃha, Jhānasūtra, and so forth. Then there is Prahevajra, or in Tibetan, Garab Dorje, he is the greatest of the greatest. Seated above him, there is Vajrasattva and Samantabhadra. So when you chant the vajra guru mantra, for now, you concentrate in this way. Again, when you get bored with that – just concentrate on the khaṭvāṅga of Guru Rinpoche. When that becomes tiring simply visualise Guru Rinpoche’s vajra.

[Student]: I’ve got this really dualistic mind. It is very rigid, as you know, and this is a really silly question, but I have to ask it. When visualizing Guru Rinpoche, should I think of my teachers face or should I create the face?

[Rinpoche]: Create? That’s what I’m saying, you don’t visualize him as your ordinary teacher that you can see and feel.

[Student]: The other question is: during the refuge, if I want to visualize the Dalai Lama, where should he be?

[Rinpoche]: Rather than visualising him in an ordinary way as we see him, he should be above Guru Rinpoche in the form of Avalokiteśvara. It’s better this way! Even when it comes to the Dalai Lama, to visualise his ordinary form still has this impure aspect. He is aging, and he doesn’t speak Spanish; there are such limitations as these. What’s more, even Avalokiteśvara, even in all his greatness, he is still but a teardrop of Amitābha. Still I guess it is understandable that we like the present Dalai Lama.

**Guru Yoga: the Most Essential Practice in the Tantra**

In the Vajrayāna, for us to release ourselves from this endless delusion, or to put it another way, to be able to crack open this casket, the key is to understand the nature of the mind. For this, there are only two choices, we either receive the blessings of the guru or we accumulate the merit. Likewise, by and large, there are two main ways in which we
accumulate merit. One approach is to have impartial compassion towards sentient beings, and the other is to have pure devotion towards the guru. So all of this tells us that the guru yoga is the most essential practice in the tantra.

Though in a very general sense the guru yoga is a practice of devotion, the heart and marrow to the practice is the mixing of your mind and the guru’s mind. Not only does this practice of mixing extend to the mind, it also includes your entire being, as in your body, speech, and mind: everything from your identity, form, sound – right down to your sense of taste. You are mixing the entire dimension of your being with that of the guru’s whole being. In fact, the term ‘mixing’ is misleading because it automatically indicates there are two things to mix. Still, we have little choice but to make use of this language. As Samantabhadra said, “In aiming to express some of the highest truths, the words and phrases of human beings are simply not sufficient.”

The essence of your mind is emptiness – which is actually the very essence of everything. Within this vast phenomena, we may talk as though there are these two separate entities but as I have mentioned many times, the outer guru is none other than a reflection of your devotion. Thus as it were, it’s that much more than mixing. It is the understanding of there never having been a separate entity. Or in other words, what we have to know is the two have never been apart. It’s also a plain fact: the actual guru, the inner and the secret guru are none other than the nature of your mind. The path is such that for beginners like us, we can’t help but have someone there as a model. We need this person as a certain source of inspiration, as an object of refuge and offering, or even as an object to whom we can express our emotion.

Whining, complaining, supplicating, begging, and praying, is the only way we know how to communicate. Yet honestly, it is okay to use such methods. In the vajrayāna, always remember that confusion is accepted as path – path is confusion. Thus eventually, path is something we also need to discard. Of course, to the outer guru, we try to offer our devotion, admiration, and unchanging pure vision, until slowly step by step, we are ready to try and mingle our being with this inner and secret guru. We then come to realise that our inner and secret guru have never been apart from us: it is there – all the time.

**The Secret and the Inner Guru**

There is this song by His Holiness Dudjom Rinpoche called the “Song and the Dance of Pure Motivation.” Each of the five or six parts to this song is dedicated to a different guru. First, he dedicates the song to the Guru Amitābha who is symbolic of the dharmakāya. Next, there is Avalokiteśvara for the sambhogakāya and then, Guru Padmasambhava for the nirmanakāya. It is such a beautifully written song. I don’t remember the song in its entirety but just to quote some of it:

*I supplicate to the Guru Amitābha, the embodiment of the dharmakāya.
Bless this fortunate being, now, in this instant:
May the essence of all things, which is none other than śūnyatā, be understood.*

Then he goes on to say:

*This emptiness aspect of mind – isn’t that you Amitābha?
This continuous display of emptiness – isn’t that Sukhāvati?*
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In Sanskrit, ‘Sukhāvati’ is Amitābha’s realm. This is the realm that people practicing pure land wish to be reborn in.

In his song he also remarks:

*This ‘unobstructed display of emptiness,’
Isn’t that Sukhāvati?
In knowing this, Amitābha dismantles, and Sukhāvati disappears.
It is then that I realise the trap of this so-called prayer and yearning.*

Then, in the last verse of praise he announces:

*But to even understand this much, comes from the blessing of my guru.
May you always remain in my heart.*

It is not only a very beautiful song, it also points out the inner and the secret guru very thoroughly.

Thus I have very briefly introduced the secret and inner guru. We can discuss how to relate with the outer guru and can talk about form, such as what to hold with the right hand and the left hand and all of that. Yet when it comes to the secret guru and the inner guru, this is something that needs to be discovered. Though of course, you are given a little assistance through reading and maybe receiving teachings.

Doubtless to say, I should try my best not to reveal more than necessary. Nowadays, many of the lamas, like myself, have this tendency to disclose too much on these things. To be sure, one of the great qualities of the Buddha was that he never, ever taught simply because he knew the subject – that was never the reason. So you should not feel discouraged or look down on yourself. Really, it has got nothing to do with not being qualified or anything like that. Broadly speaking, it is like this: if it is my job to give you assistance in discovering your inner and secret guru, then I must watch you – I can only watch you. That’s of course, if I’m good at this. I can only watch and see whether you are getting sidetracked. Now when I say it is the only thing we can do, I’m not inventing or exaggerating this in any way. To know more on this aspect, just read Rigidzin Jigme Lingpa’s, “Questions and Answers of Meditation.”

If I tell you something I have discovered, it will only create a concept in your head – unless I know exactly what I’m doing, which honestly speaking I don’t, since I’m still on the path. It would then be ‘this concept’ you would be looking for, and that is not enlightenment. If, after ten years of your practicing, all you have discovered is Dzongsar Khyentse’s concept, that is not such a big discovery, is it? But more importantly, I have seen with my own eyes how practitioners get themselves trapped.

When we were young our group of teachers would say, “You know, you have to study.” We really studied hard. Compared to the young Rinpoches of today, we can be quite proud of the amount of Buddhist study accomplished. In this day and age, the young Rinpoches have toys, they have Saturdays and Sundays, and even winter holidays, which is something we couldn’t even have imagined. Nowadays, there is American political correctness and this notion that children should not be beaten, but in our day, we got beaten and we really got punished.

Back then, after having done this really intensive study, just as we were trying to shut ourselves away to practice and meditate, then we would hear from the great lamas. We would receive scoldings from masters like Nyoshül Khenpo or even His Holiness,
although His Holiness never really scolded us, as such. Sometimes he would use very skilful sarcastic words. Day after day, he would just criticise, and he would laugh at the very fact that we had studied. He would point out how the study itself had become the main obstacle to our progress and would remind us that we ourselves had created this. He would say: "It is the books we have read, and the things we have heard from our teacher’s mouths that have now created a concept in our heads."

To recapitulate, if the student and the teacher have the patience, great care should be taken with this. There is a certain danger for people like myself, who love to demonstrate their knowledge, and tell you all the amazing stuff. It’s like a kind of talk show. It’s like a situation of whatever makes people inspired, or happy – whatever people want to hear. People like us, seem to enjoy talking about these things. What is less obvious is just how much it is actually going to become the biggest obstacle to your practice. It is the truth, and I’m telling you this from the bottom of my heart.

Above all, even if you understand that a certain piece of information is of utmost significance, you should never get fixated on it. There is this seemingly contradictory element. We are told to take what the guru says very seriously, and thus, there is most likely this clutter in your head of, “I have to do whatever the guru says.” So, it is quite conflicting, isn’t it? We are told to obey the guru, and whatever he says is to be taken as profound and precious, but at the same time, you are now hearing ‘don’t get fixated on this.’ If you think of the sūtras however, the logic is clear. Having read some of the mahāyāna or śrāvakayāna sūtras, you would be aware that most begin with, “Thus I have heard…” They never begin with, “Thus Buddha said…”

Sooner or Later, This ‘Patch’ Is Going to Fall Off

We have heard, “You have to do whatever the guru says.” There are also such remarks as, “Whatever your master says should be taken seriously.” And now, you hear, “Whatever it is you have heard, imagined, learned, or read, you should not have fixation towards this.” What you need to realise is whenever you hear, read or contemplate on something you will always have a certain understanding in your head. Yet whatever this understanding might be, it is just a ‘patch’ and sooner or later this patch is going to fall off. In a way, it is all right for you to have this fixation because sooner or later it’s going to fall off. But you should be aware that it’s going to prolong your path, a lot. I mean, how much time do we have, perhaps twenty more years? Given that what you have understood is actually nothing but a patch, are you prepared to spend another ten years believing it to be reality?

So always be prepared to peel off this outer skin. As you come to see the inner one, you might initially think, “This is the real fruit,” but always be ready to accept that in fact it is only another skin. This is not only something to apply when hearing, contemplating or reading, it is also even more relevant whenever you meditate. That’s the real meaning of the saying, “experience is like a mist in the morning.”

The Experience of ‘Nyam’

Since the guru yoga is so much of blessing it also stirs your mind. It can change your mood, and can altogether stir up your life. So be prepared for such things. But more than any of this, it invokes nyam – an experience. Well, experience might not really be the best translation, but I guess it will do. There are three sets of experience that come: sometimes it is very blissful and no matter what happens there is this feeling that you can accept anything and everything. In the same way a saucer fits a cup, it is as though everything fits
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just right, and strangely enough, you feel as if you could almost place a table on the cup. Everything is acceptable and tolerable. Should you hear some news like, “Right now Frankfurt is upside down,” the experience is almost like, “Yeah, why not?” So there’s this complete acceptance and then physically, there is so much bliss – that is one kind of nyam. For most of us, it is not an experience we even go through but somehow, people actually want this. The fact that we long for nyam is so sad and pathetic.

Another kind of nyam is the experience of nonconceptualisation, which may go on for a few minutes, hours and sometimes, even for days. You will have no thoughts, no aggressions, no obvious passion, or judgemental mind, no comparison, and no insecurity, yet everything is so vivid, and so present. That much is all I can say right now. I shouldn’t say more, otherwise you will idealise this. You will again look for an experience as described by Dzongsar Khyentse, and that’s where you are barking up the wrong tree. You have to discover it for yourself.

Then at times, there will be an experience of clarity where everything is crystal clear. It is as though you could tell how many leaves a tree has. Your intuition grows so you can almost tell what is going on in someone else’s head and stuff like that. All of these experiences are what we call nyam.

Again, the great masters of the past have told us – nyam is like a mist, sooner or later it is going to go – it is not your final destination. Let alone when it comes to nyam, for so many of us, to even have a good dream is something we aspire after. We should really be prepared to give all this up. Especially when it comes to the secret guru, the emptiness, this is something that can’t really be verbalized. So I may not be able to talk so much about the inner and the secret guru, but there is some good news though. You have to discover this with your self-awareness, and you will!

**Giving Our Buddha Nature a Chance to Manifest**

This is the greatness of your buddha nature, if you only let it grow – and give it a chance to function. Right now, your buddha nature doesn’t have much of an opportunity to even wiggle the toes, because you are invariably busy with something. You are constantly busy with this and that, yet the buddha nature is nonetheless vibrant. Everything is intact, from all the thirty-two major marks, to the eighty minor marks. As the masters of the past have said, “We are like beggars, living in a shantytown.” It is like being in a very poor household where we have this really worn out old bed, in which we have been sleeping for twenty years. All we have to do is dig perhaps two inches beneath the bed and we would have a kilo of diamonds. Preoccupied with our task of begging, we are entirely oblivious to its existence. This is how we are at the moment. And through the practice, we give our buddha nature the opening to manifest.

*Mingling Your Mind with the Guru’s Mind*

Just a bit of practical advice here: uniting one’s being with the guru’s being is something that can be done over and over again. When you visualise and as you’re chanting VAJRA GURU PADMA SIDDHI HŪM, every ten, twenty or hundred mantras, you can have Guru Rinpoche dissolve into you. More frequently is good, so perhaps every ten or twenty mantras, Guru Rinpoche dissolves into you – so that you and Guru Rinpoche become one. You should just watch that. Watch and then ‘such and such’ will happen – the details of which I really shouldn’t convey.
Guru Yoga

To simply watch the guru and yourself being one, my goodness, the world that opens with this key! It’s like a television with one thousand channels! It’s endless. Needless to say, it also stirs up your life a little. After all, some of these channels have horror movies showing, don’t they? It’s a bit like that. As Jigme Lingpa said, “Enough of this show we have watched over so many lifetimes.” It is so boring – breakfast, lunch and dinner – a job in between and this trivial changing of husband and wife how many billions of times. All this eating of one’s own children and parents as fish, as prawns, sometimes grilled or barbecued, sometimes shredded and stir fried, enough is enough! Let’s watch the other show, it is one that costs much less. So you watch your mind, and the key to doing this is to mingle one’s own mind and the guru’s mind, again and again. This is so important.

It’s a pity that in spite of having this information I don’t seem to do it often enough but when I do it’s amazing. Sometimes for instance, when I am in London and I remember to do this, I make a pledge. As I’m riding the escalator to catch the subway, I might promise to myself, “I will mix my mind and the guru’s mind until the escalator reaches the very end.” It takes just a split second, or a few moments. Then of course, you have to go back to watching movies and all the many other important things to do. So always take these little moments to mingle your mind with the guru’s mind and just watch that, for a few minutes. It really has the effect of everything becoming less of a big deal. Mind you, it should be done without expecting the result right away. Don’t be impatient – remain patient.

Being Patient and Not Expecting the Result

Of course, due to your habitual patterns, hang-ups, and distractions, in the beginning nothing will happen. You shouldn’t complain. To do so would be something similar to putting an egg on the table and then complaining because it’s not getting cooked. The egg needs to be placed in water, and you must turn on the flame for at least a few minutes – all depending on the strength of the fire. Having barely put the egg inside the pot, or not even having done that much, you have already started complaining that it’s not getting cooked! This is what I call not understanding cause, condition and effect. Of all people, how can you be griping? You guys go to the moon. You guys realise the world is round when Tibetans still think it’s flat. Being so scientific oriented in culture, you should not complain. After all, it is quite plain that science is very much a doctrine of cause, condition and effect. To some extent, you just have to divert that into a more inner world.

So always take cause, condition and effect into consideration. Indeed it may take some time to see the effect, but what is perhaps ten years? When compared to the billions and billions of lifetimes spent without even having taken this egg out of the carton, it is not long at all. Now at long last, you at least know there is an egg that needs taking out, which is already quite good. That’s already an improvement – in simply having that information there is so much merit.

Praying to the Guru

If you want, besides being very patient, on top of that you should pray. Prayer is good and it works. This is almost like taking a theistic approach, except for the fact, as a Buddhist, there is this fundamental view: the view of emptiness. So this is yet another possibility in answer to the question, what are you thinking when chanting, OM ᾹḤ HŪṂ VAJRA GURU PADMA SIDDHA HŪṂ? As you chant the mantra, you can be making these prayers.
Guru Yoga

And so, with the guru seated at the crown of our head, we pray:

_Bless me guru so that my mind enters the dharma – and the dharma enters my mind_
_Bless me so that my dharma won’t meet with such a bumpy ride._

In other words, that is to say, “May the dharma manifest how it should.”

_Bless me so that the defilements of the path are cleared away._
_Bless me so that all this confusion and delusion may arise as wisdom._
_Bless me guru so that all this non-dharmic thought stops right this instant._

There are so many beautiful prayers, such as these. When due to my strong habitual patterns and karma of the past, a hideous or bad motivation arises: “Bless me me guru so that it will not come to fruition.” Rather than wishing ‘this and that be accomplished’ as we normally do, with this one, it is the opposite, as if to say, may it not be accomplished.

_Bless me so that love, compassion, and bodhicitta grow in my being._
_Bless me so that relative and ultimate bodhicitta grow in my being._
_Bless me so that genuine devotion grows in my being._
_Bless me so that I will not lose inspiration._
_Bless me so that the next distraction will not distract me, whatever it might be._
_Bless me so that I will not be overpowered by past karmic deeds or habits._
_Bless me so that I will not be deceived by a seemingly good result._

When practicing the dharma, sometimes a result that appears on the face of things to be good can instead deceive us, by leading to our getting carried away.

_Bless me so that I have good health, so as to be of benefit to many people._
_Bless me so that whatever enters my mind, may eventually lead to the dharma._

This last wish is a particularly beautiful one. You are basically saying, “Even though my thoughts and actions appear to be very mundane and non-dharmic, bless me so that these too, may eventually lead to something meaningful.”

It could be a thought that starts out, “Oh, I want to go and have a pint of a beer.” Perhaps, you are thinking of an Irish Guinness or something similar and there is that strong desire to pursue it. Although you might initially be led to a bar it could sort of lead to something completely unexpected. Perchance, you meet up with a stranger, end up discussing the dharma a little, and then somehow this person becomes interested in knowing more. One thing leads to another and you suggest, “Why don’t you go to this center, or that center…” At the end of the day, you have been instrumental in creating a karmic link between this person and the dharma.

There are actually so many prayers we can make. You can think up as many prayers as you want.

_Bless me so that I have prosperity – may I be spared having to go through all this poverty._
Guru Yoga

Bless me so that I am able to live a long life – and by these means, may I have the freedom to practice the dharma.

How Do We Take the Guru as the Path?

If these prayers become a little boring, visualise that you are beneath Guru Rinpoche, and as you continue to chant OṂ ĀḤ HŪṂ VAJRĀ GURU PADMA SIDDHA HŪṂ, there is this uninterrupted overflowing of nectar, which dissolves into you. The choices are beyond measure. You can visualise Guru Rinpoche is seated on a lotus in your heart – though this is usually a method applied when retiring at night. If you have some sort of obstacle, such as a dispute in the family, a depression or sadness, you can visualise Guru Rinpoche above your shoulder, and think that he becomes very wrathful, even to the point of his fangs coming out a little. While seeing Guru Rinpoche in this wrathful way, you imagine that fire and scorpions flow forth from his vajra and come toward you, your obstacles, and obscurations. These scorpions snap at all the obstacles and swallow them up until each and every obscuration is destroyed. There are just so many endless methods. For instance, if you feel as though you are coming closer to death you would visualise Guru Rinpoche in an Amitābha like form, red in colour, but still with these similar attributes. Although he is holding the kapāla in the Guru Rinpoche way, he’s none other than Amitābha. And at such a time, you should try to transfer yourself into his heart over and over again.

After a while, there is this tendency for boredom to set in. We are never just happy with one channel, and always end up having to switch to the next one. So you switch – and on this one, Guru Rinpoche is everywhere, filling every inch of space. As you continue to chant OṂ ĀḤ HŪṂ VAJRĀ GURU PADMA SIDDHA HŪṂ, you look around in all directions. Suppose that right in front of me, I see six spheres of light, in an instant these spheres are effortlessly transformed into six Guru Rinpoches. A blue banner appears before me and within the blink of an eye there is another Guru Rinpoche. Seeing below me this multitude of human beings, I transform them all into Guru Rinpoche. As I look more closely I see a thermos, pen, pencil, watches, books, handkerchief, diapers and Kleenex, and all of these are also transformed into the form of Guru Rinpoche. Then I direct my gaze outside, and trees, mountains, lakes, are also now all in the form of Guru Rinpoche. Also, if for example, you are feeling hot and suddenly, along comes this breeze to cool you down, you should think of this as a Guru Rinpoche manifestation.

So to answer the question, “How do we take the guru as the path?” – It is a matter of taking everything, to be none other than Guru Rinpoche – whatever that might be. Even should you hear the sound of coughing, or farting, that sound is taken as Guru Rinpoche’s voice, mainly in the form of mantra: OṂ ĀḤ HŪṂ VAJRĀ GURU PADMA SIDDHA HŪṂ. That’s one way.

Emptiness: the Example of the Mirage

These methods might sound very theistic but there is a distinction to be made. Theistic-minded religious people may talk in a similar way, but what is missing is the notion of mixing one’s mind with the guru’s mind. The real guru is your inner nature of mind, which is the emptiness aspect and this is what makes things different. When you have the view of emptiness as a base and then go ahead with applying these theistic methods, it works. For those who can accept emptiness, for them, everything is possible.

It’s like the example of the mirage. If you are in the desert, and see a mirage, if you know it is a mirage, it’s completely up to you how you take it. Whether you approach,
escape or divert your path is of little consequence, since each of these acts will give you a certain result. Once you know it is only a mirage, to approach is merely for the sake of doing so and not because you think there is any real water there. Similarly, to divert your path is not due to the non-existence of water, but simply because you know there is a mirage there. The non-existence of water and the mirage are different.

[Student]: Could you say something about how the mirage and the non-existence of water are different from each other?

[Rinpoche]: Non-existence means it has once existed and then it has become non-existent. It’s the water in the mirage that we are talking of here. The water in the mirage has never existed: not as a mirage nor as water. It’s a total illusion.

[Student]: So is it the seeing, the actual view that becomes existent – non-existent?

[Rinpoche]: No, if you see a mirage as a mirage then you are not wrong. It is when you see the ‘water of the mirage’ as water.

_Persevering with One Path_

For those without any particular practice, this ngöndro is your practice. Unless your personal teacher has designated you with a certain practice, I would urge you to keep on doing this one. It is fine to go along to all kinds of teachings, but if you want to go to initiations, perhaps you had better ask whether doing page after page of sådhanas is a requirement. If the answer is ‘Yes,’ you should definitely think twice. You might even be told, “It’s not so much,” but in reality, it all adds up to quite a lot. It depends on whether or not you have the time. Of course, if you have that kind of leisure at your fingertips, please go ahead and do it – our path is wonderful. If receiving initiations, and collecting a lot of commitments makes you feel good, and you’re the type of person who doesn’t particularly feel guilty about not really keeping the commitments, then fine!

Usually at first, practitioners are eagerly following the path and then, after proceeding along for some time, it becomes slightly boring. It is this ‘human mind’ that always gets bored with the path. It is like having too much omelette. Now you want fried eggs, which is something reasonably new. There are also obstacles along the way as well. And actually, what is happening is you’re getting closer to being a master of this path. Just as you are drawing near, you tend to get bored and then you want to change. Naturally enough, a new practice is always somewhat inspiring for the first few days, but what you don’t realize is you’re only going back to square one. What you might gauge as an exciting practice right now, will eventually also come to be boring. My suggestion is this: please meet as many lamas, and hear as many dharma teachings as possible. For those who truly want to pursue the path of dzogpa chenpo, and the Longchen Nyingtik, it is especially good to do this. It is also good to meet the same lineage people. But I would suggest you do not allow yourself to get distracted by all those ‘attractive practices.’

Once you have finished the ngöndro, I’m sure there are many masters you can go to if you want to receive the dzogchen teachings. Personally for me, I have had the best, so I’m very spoiled.
ABISHEKA & THE FOUR EMPOWERMENTS
IN THE GURU YOGA

In the mahāyāna, the introduction of the buddha nature is usually presented through philosophical and contemplative analysis, in a thorough and gradual manner. After having just a glimpse of an idea, though not really having discovered the buddha nature in any absolute sense, then what do we do? We try to contemplate and practice so that we will discover it more fully. Our main means of doing so is to engage in the *six pāramitās*, for three countless eons. In the vajrayāna however, there is a path, and method where one can practice these within just one session of practice. In fact, in the vajrayāna, the buddha nature is one of the first things to be introduced. It comes via what we call the first door of the tantric path, that of the abisheka.

It is because of this contrast in method that the vajrayāna way of introducing the buddha nature is quite different to that of the mahāyāna. Of course, as we compare, one should not have the attitude of thinking in terms of one or the other as somehow good or bad. Nonetheless, there is quite a big distinction to be made here. For the mahāyāna practitioner, the mind is the sole emphasis, but in the vajrayāna it is not only mind that we are concerned with but also our body, and speech as well. Thus through the abisheka, we invoke the buddha nature, and the body, speech, and mind are all introduced as a manifestation of our buddha nature. The abisheka is saying to us, “You have *that*.” Of course, in order to express this we use different names like Tārā, Mañjuśrī, and so forth. Based on merit, which is created by your devotion, the buddha nature is mainly introduced or discovered via the guru’s introduction. As for the result, that all depends on the receiver of the abisheka, the giver of the abisheka, and their connection.

*Devotion Generated Out of Seeking Enlightenment*

Perhaps, the receiver of the abisheka has immovable trust in the giver of the initiation, and the path itself – but then again, to have such devotion is altogether not easy. I have often told practitioners, nuns and monks, whilst they may think there is devotion to their guru, most of the time it is more like admiration. It is comparable to seeing the guru as a party leader: upon having decided you like your party leader, you then choose to vote for them. Not only is that not devotion, it is actually something quite dangerous. Should the party leader ignore you or do something slightly inane, even just once, the following year you will not vote for him. Thus we find party leaders campaigning from town to town, giving out bottles of beer and other paraphernalia, not to mention offering a variety of special treatment.

Though I do think admiration and liking are necessary to begin with – true devotion to the guru is not simply a matter of liking this person. Now the question is how do we go beyond admiration and instead develop something akin to the real devotion? I think firstly, the most important thing is your motivation. Your motivation should be for the sake of enlightenment. For a moment, let us forget about enlightening all sentient beings, at the very least, you should have this motivation of seeking your own enlightenment.

Having gone along to a restaurant, it naturally follows that a person with a strong appetite would want to eat. Your motivation is straightforward. As long as you get the food, the rest is extraneous. It certainly doesn’t matter whether the font on the menu is in italic or bold, because such detail is merely secondary. Yet for many of us, when we approach the guru our motivation is not really enlightenment-oriented. Sometimes,
Abisheka and the Four Empowerments

perhaps once in a blue moon, we might have the right motivation and here, I’m also including myself by the way.

Why is it that so many students suffer when the guru ignores them? It is because your agenda is to have the guru’s unwavering attention on you. That is your motivation. Your motivation was not for enlightenment. So the guru, this poor guru who has five hundred students, will eventually have to direct his attention towards someone else and it is then that you end up suffering.

To have this motivation where you are interested in enlightenment is so important. If such motivation is present, then fifty per cent of our problems are resolved, if not ninety per cent actually. You get what you need, which is the teaching or the instructions, and it is farewell until next time – unless he says to hang around.

Unless he says to hang around. It is here that we encounter a slight dilemma. Interpreting an instruction is not always that easy. What is more, an instruction from the guru is not something that should be taken in black and white terms. There is that whole predicament of not knowing how real it all is. We think the guru is testing us or that the guru is doing such and such, for a given reason. But in many instances, the lion’s share of these gurus are quite often as passive and inert as a vegetable. In spite of the fact the guru is not doing anything at all, the student is saying ‘oh, oh,’ he knows, ‘oh, oh,’ he is testing. Thus they create their own paranoia. All too frequently students think that I know, that I am omniscient and all of that. I have to confess that on many occasions I have let them think so. But sometimes I categorically reply, “No, no, I didn’t know,” I actually tell them outright. But the more I say, “I didn’t know,” they just say, “You are now being humble.” So it seems the guru is placed in a win-win situation.

There is in fact, this entire network, which is quite difficult to maneuver. In the same way that an ice skater really has to know how to slide and stop at the right time, one has to be quite skilled in walking through this. Clearly, the main thing is your motivation, and for the rest, you come to learn that as you progress along. It should be that you are seeking the guru for the sake of enlightenment, not for this person’s attention, inclusion or whatever.

So as I was saying, you enter through the door of the abisheka. You have devotion towards the initiation bestower, or at any rate, there is a devotion that is generated out of seeking enlightenment, if not for everyone, at least for yourself.

The Meaning of Abisheka

‘Abisheka’ is actually a Sanskrit term. Now, especially when it comes to the nuances of each individual word, Sanskrit is an exceptionally rich language. Seeing as one word can contain several levels of meaning, we can end up with quite different interpretations. That’s the beauty of Sanskrit. For instance, with a word like ‘candra,’ it has at least three alternative meanings. Candra can mean moon, yet it also has the meaning of thief, and then again it also refers to a rat or mouse. As a result, the poets can write poetry, and after reading one sloka or stanza, three readers might interpret in entirely different ways, despite having read the very same thing. In one way, you could read that ‘the moon is peeping through your window,’ in another, ‘the thief is entering through the window,’ while a more literal interpretation might be ‘a mouse is entering through the window.’ So there is this richness to the language.

There are two main meanings to the term abisheka. In Tibetan we say, ‘torwa’ and ‘lugpa,’ which can be translated respectively, as dismantling and pouring. Torwa refers to dismantling the ignorance, the wrap, the cocoon, or the shell. Lugpa, on the other hand, either refers to pouring the blessing, or pouring/discovering the buddha nature. In fact,
when it comes to understanding the implied meaning of the abisheka, these terms we use can actually be somewhat misleading.

Especially with the term ‘pouring,’ and even when we use the expression ‘receive an initiation,’ it can inadvertently lead us to think we are being given a certain power previously not within our possession. It seems the initiation almost has this connotation of conferring something, not unlike a knighting, for instance. Yet thinking in this way is far from the true spirit of the tantric initiation. What is being introduced through the initiation is actually something within oneself. It is just that now you recognise it. That very aspect of activating this recognition is what we refer to as the initiation.

There are various kinds of initiations with numerous subdivisions. Yet according to the highest yoga tantra, there are four main types. Referred to as the ‘four empowerments,’ each one corresponds to one of the four types of defilements to dismantle. These four defilements include firstly, the defilement of the nāḍī, which is in relation to the veins, chakras, or channels. Then secondly there is the defilement of prāṇa, which coincides with the speech, or the wind-energy. The third is the defilement of bindu, which is a defilement of mind. And then, lastly, there are two ways to explain the fourth defilement: one is to say it is the residue of the three combined, or in other words, something similar to an ālaya. Alternatively, it can be described as ‘the ground of everything,’ but this second way of explaining is quite difficult to understand, thus we will not dwell so much on this.

Generally when you receive an initiation, the empowerment ritual is performed using certain implements and substances that hold symbolic attributes. The lamas will come along with this vase, which he will first place on your head, and then pouring some liquid into your hand he will say, “Drink this saffroned water.” Then the next implement the lama will use is the kapāla, which is traditionally to be filled with nectar. In tantric language, this substance is actually a mixture of the father and mother consort’s essence. Though in actual fact, these days, when the initiation is given in Europe, as a representation of this, I think most of the lamas use Bordeaux, or Chianti, whereas when given in America, they might use Tequila. With the third initiation, usually the substance is related to the consort. Nowadays the lamas will flourish a picture of a dākinī or something like that. And lastly, for the fourth, this is normally referred to as the word initiation, and although technically speaking it is no longer a necessity, sometimes Nyingmapas or Kagyupas will use a substance like crystal. Its purpose is to symbolise ‘this is the nature of your mind.’

Each individual part of the initiation can be very elaborate. On the vase initiation alone, one could talk for ages about why it works, and why the lamas use water, for instance. To start with, the Buddhist teachings originated in India, where there is a customary habit of purification through water. Yet even in our ordinary lives, whenever we wash, it is also habitual for our mind to associate washing with cleansing. At the very least, we understand that when washing, we are not making more dirt.

Using Water as a Tantric Substance

In fact, there are so many reasons why the vajrayāna has confidence in using water as a tantric substance. First of all, the vajrayāna always incorporates ordinary human habits as path. If you have an article of clothing that needs washing, you would not think to wash it with soil, you would use water. So there you go, the vajrayāna is using that. Then the vajrayāna would say, when we look at this one entity that we call ‘water’ we see it has many manifestations. When water is in the sink it’s washing water, when in the toilet bowl
it’s dirty water, and upon flowing out of the shower nozzle, it has become clean washing water. Similarly, when placed in the offering bowl, it has then become offering water. Even though there is this one entity we call water, by associating certain attributes with it, our perception changes in accordance. We have drinking water, washing water, bottled water, and natural water. These days it is even more over the top, to the extent where there is carbonated or non-carbonated mineral water, giving us the choice of having our water with or without bubbles. If we habitually manifest it in such a variety of ways, why not use water as a tantric substance?

When there is logic that is making use of our own language it is always a prāsaṅgika method. 16 Generally this is something so beautiful about mahāyāna Buddhism and especially the vajrayāna. You can never go and tell a vajrayāna practitioner, “This is your own superstitious stuff.” If you were to do so they would only say, “This seemingly superstitious stuff is based on your own logic that you yourself created.” All the responsibility will end up being placed on your head. They will ask, “Why can’t I use water as an initiation substance? With this very same water, it is possible for you to think of at least ten different substances, isn’t it?” After all, it is our own logic that regards water as pure or ordinary. When water is bottled and packaged properly, you might pay a considerably high price for it, perhaps almost two pounds. If you were to go to Bhutan and explain that in Europe you have to buy water, let alone mention the price, they already think it ‘strange.’ It’s like that.

So anyhow, in the course of the initiation, and with tantric practices in general, we use so many different methods. We use different substances, mantras, mudrās and we use samādhi. As part of the method, this water in the vase is packaged very well, and is in fact, much better than expensive bottled water like Evian. Within every drop, it has been visualised there are million’s of cities. Keep in mind that here, we are talking about entire cities, like Hamburg, Frankfurt, London, and in addition to this, there are also vast cities of dākinīs. This is already quite extensive and yet, that’s but one kind of packaging – That’s samādhi only! We then have mudrā, which is the gesture to bless it, and that’s just another phenomena altogether.

‘Twenty-five Substances Coming from the Cow’

There are certain substances we use in the initiation, which are very special. For instance, there are special substances that embody water with the power to purify. Take for example what is referred to as the ‘twenty-five substances coming from the cow.’ Even to gather these together is a real headache and nowadays, not many people have the patience for it. First of all, you have to have a red cow. Then you need to collect the milk of five hundred cows, which you then take and offer to this red cow. Not only that, we wash this red cow with milk every day, and after trimming off just the tip of the grass, we then offer it to the cow. We continue to do this for about a month. Finally, on a full moon day, as the cow defecates and urinates, before it has the chance to even touch the earth, we must take this up with our very own hands. Now this substance we have in our hands is one of the twenty-five cow substances, and it’s considered to be one of the most powerful cleansing substances. Actually, this entire ritual is stemming from Brahmanic culture, yet it is something the Buddhists have also adopted as well.
‘Initiation of the Child Entering the Manḍala’

During a major initiation, the vase initiation itself has seven subcategories, which include the water initiation, crown initiation, vajra initiation, bell initiation, name initiation, Vajrasattva initiation and the vajracarya initiation. In fact, during the vase initiation we are emphasizing the aspect of cleansing this body, thus it is also the most gross or in other words, it is the most outer form.

To begin with, all the initiation substances are set out on display. To the front of the room, the guru will be seated on the throne, and gathered all around are the disciples. Of course, first and foremost, you, the disciple, need to have the buddha nature, which you do, so not to worry!

The initiation ritual itself is quite a complicated procedure, commencing with the guru blessing the water. For instance, each drop of water is blessed as Akṣobhya Buddha. This is what we first visualise. Then the guru will invoke Akṣobhya Buddha from the pure realm – and this invocation becomes indivisible with the water. You then have complete confidence that each drop of water is Akṣobhya Buddha. The guru will then turn his focus on the disciple, who is sitting there with these five aggregates. First, the guru will single out consciousness, blessing this as Akṣobhya Buddha. During this sequence, the guru will ask the student to visualise the guru, the bestower of the initiation as Akṣobhya Buddha. Thus, both the student’s consciousness and the guru, the bestower are Akṣobhya Buddha.

Who is Akṣobhya Buddha in actuality? On an inner level this is your consciousness. Secretly it is your aggression. Most secretly it is mirror-like wisdom and then most, most secretly it is the buddha nature. Once again, let us not forget this factor of inseparability. Right from the very beginning, the student’s buddha nature, and the guru’s buddha nature have always been in union, they are neither one nor two entities.

To reinforce this understanding, first the student supplicates to the guru, Akṣobhya, by saying, “Mahaguru, please bless my consciousness, this innate Akṣobhya. May you make me realise this very moment mind has been Akṣobhya right from the beginning.” With millions of Akṣobhya Buddhas as his retinue, Akṣobhya Buddha then comes towards you, and asks, “Is your consciousness ready?” And you say, “Yes, I’m ready.” The substance of the initiation being water, the guru will place this vase on top of your head, pouring some water onto your head and some into your hand. As you drink this water, you think that your consciousness, which is the Akṣobhya Buddha, and the initiation substance of water, which is also the Akṣobhya Buddha, thus become inseparable.

As the initiation continues, all your five aggregates are transformed into the five Buddha families. For feeling, Amitābha Buddha is symbolized by a vajra. For karmic formation, there is Amoghasiddhi, and a bell, and then for form, there is Vairochana and so on. On top of that, in order to stabilise this transformation, along comes Vajrasattva, and again this is a whole different phenomena in itself. Last of all, there is the vajracarya initiation and with that you complete the first cycle of the initiation, which is what we call the ‘initiation of the child entering the manḍala.’ It is similar to the kind of initiation that His Holiness the Dalai Lama usually gives during the Kālachakra initiation.

That first whole cycle is simply for the body. So you continue to practice and practice. As your mind comes to have less and less hang-ups, inhibitions, and principles, or in other words, once you have become very open-minded – you are then ready for the second initiation. You go along to the lama, and this time, you no longer make a regular, outer form of mandala offering. For the second initiation, you make a symbolic manḍala offering of your blood, bone and all the inner aggregates. As a gesture of that same aspect, you also offer up a consort as a part of this same offering. You then visualise this consort
Abisheka and the Four Empowerments

as a dākinī, and the guru as the deity. The guru, in the form of the deity and his consort, in the form of the dākinī will be in union, overflowing with bliss. Right before placing the nectar that comes as a result of their union on your tongue, the guru will ask, “Is your inhibition still there? Are you still bound by hang-ups?”

After having received that initiation, once again, you continue with your practice. You keep on practicing until there are no longer any more inhibitions or at least until there are not so many. What is however remaining is a little bit of this dualistic mind. There is still a trace of this habitual way of thinking. “I shouldn’t do this, because this is the guru, and I am that.” Anyhow, finally, you request the wisdom initiation.

Lastly, for the fourth initiation what you are offering is the buddha nature. At this point, all the guru does is say something, perhaps one word. In this way, you will be introduced to the final wisdom, the absolute wisdom.

The Self-initiation of the Guru Yoga

By now, perhaps you think the initiation sounds very complicated, and long-winded, or maybe even very ritualistic. There is some good news though. In the Longchen Nyingtik, or for that matter in any ngöndro, it is possible to take all these initiations within one stanza, just by doing the visualisation in the guru yoga, for instance. Actually, in the long length Longchen Nyingtik, the explanation of the four initiations is quite elaborate. So if you are doing the short ngöndro and feel like it, you can always supplement by inserting the self-initiation from the long version. The self-initiation is mainly a visualisation and a meditation. The visualisation itself is not that complicated. What was discussed earlier, with regard to all the intricate details relating to the five Buddha families, and the substance of water – all of that is the theory. What we find written in the Longchen Nyingtik Ngöndro are the pith instructions. So again, since it is the pith instructions, it is all made as simple and as practical as possible.

Just for your information, normally the initiation comes at the end of the guru yoga practice. If you like, as you are chanting the Vajra Guru mantra, you can take the self-initiation over and over again. You could do so, for instance, each time you complete one round of the rosary.

So the four abishekas can be taken one after the other within the one session, or alternatively, as I’ve seen my father teaching his students in East Bhutan, you can also concentrate on each initiation one by one, dedicating about a year to each. For instance, for the first year, you just visualise the white light and then during the second year, there is the light coming from the throat and so forth. I guess doing it in this latter way, makes it very thorough.

Opening the Door of the Developing Meditation

To begin, you visualise a white letter OM at the forehead of the guru. If you are not really able to get a clear image of these letters that is also fine. Think that a strong, vibrant, white light issues from the guru’s forehead and dissolves into your forehead. In a similar fashion to the Vajrasattva practice, this cleanses all the defilements. Think that this white light cleanses the defilements of the body, as well as the obscurations, and karmic deeds mainly created by the body. In turn, it also cleanses the obscurations of the nāḍīs, such as the three channels, and the five chakras. As this light fills your body, think it is planting the seed of the nirmāṇakāya within your being. You should also think that the guru’s body and your body become inseparable. Or another way of putting it is to think that your body
becomes an indestructible vajra body. So with this first visualisation, you can say that you have received the vase initiation. This first initiation also opens the door of the developing meditation.

**Student**: What’s the difference between Vajrasattva and the guru yoga in this case?

**Rinpoche**: In the guru yoga, there is a greater emphasis on mixing the mind, and our whole being with the guru’s being, whereas in the Vajrasattva practice the emphasis is on cleansing. You are cleansing the defilements. Of course, all of this is very interrelated. After all, strictly speaking, we could also ask what’s the difference between the refuge and the guru yoga? There are slightly different aspects to each part of the ngöndro practice. The refuge is to divert you from the wrong path to the right path, which is placing more of a focus on protection. And then with the bodhicitta, determination is more paramount.

**The Second Initiation Opens the Door of the Completion Meditation**

For the second initiation, you visualise the letter Āḥ at the throat of the guru. From this letter Āḥ, brilliant rays of red light stream forth and dissolve into your throat, thereby cleansing the defilements of speech, or what we also call the defilements of prāṇa.

As this red light dissolves into you, your speech becomes vajra speech, inseparable with the guru’s speech. You have now planted the seed of the sambhogakāya. You have received the secret initiation. In addition, this second initiation opens the door of the completion meditation.

**Developing and Completion Stages**

**Student**: What is completion meditation?

**Rinpoche**: In the vajrayāna, there are two main types of meditational practice: the development and the completion stage. The developing meditation is a practice of developing yourself as a deity, and at the same time, each and every phenomenon is also developed as deity along with you. In the completion stage we are dissolving that deity. Now that is the most straightforward way to explain. Included within the developing meditation, you will find all these various methods, such as visualising oneself as a deity, lotus, sun and moon disk, as well as visualisations where the light is flowing back, and forth – all of which is basically tantric in nature. With the completion stage, there are actually two kinds of completion meditation: one is what we call completion meditation of form, and the other is referred to as formless completion meditation. In the completion meditation of form, you have all these anuyoga practices, such as meditating on the chakras and channels, and controlling the prāṇa by trying to insert it into the centre of the avadhūti the central channel. There is also the dream yoga, as well as the bardo, and the kundalini practices. All of these come within the form completion stage. And then there is the formless completion stage, which is the highest vipashyanā.

**Opening the Door for Trekchö**

With the third initiation, visualise that from the letter HŪṂ at the center of the guru’s heart, there comes this dazzling blue light, which dissolves into your own heart center. This light expels all the defilements of mind, or rather the obscurations of bindu. It also opens the door for trekchö practice, which is the first of the two formless completion meditations. Through receiving the wisdom initiation, the seed of the dharmaśīya is
planted and your mind thus becomes a vajra mind. In other words, your mind is now inseparable with the guru’s mind.

*The Fourth Initiation Dispels any Remaining Residue of Defilement*

Now again, visualise that from the letter HŪM at the guru’s heart, comes one more round of blue light. This blue light dissolves into you everywhere, at your forehead, throat, and heart, thereby dispelling all the defilements, the residue of the defilements, as well as any remaining habitual patterns. Through this, you receive the word initiation, which destroys the ālaya, the mind, basically. You receive the blessings embodying the guru’s entire body, speech and mind. As a result, the whole of the guru’s being and your being become inseparable. And again, watch that.

*Clarification on Points of Practice*

**[Student]**: When we do vipashyanā meditation and sit in this natural state, is it good to train in this practice of dissolving the guru in us?

**[Rinpoche]**: Yes, that is excellent! Dissolving the guru into oneself and remaining in that moment is the highest form of vipashyanā. When doing the vipashyanā earlier on, we were just watching our body, that’s all. That’s the lowest form of vipashyanā.

**[Student]**: I was just wondering if it were possible to do two practices at once? Like for instance, when doing the maṇḍala, you could be merging your mind with the guru’s mind. It is like doing guru yoga at the same time as the maṇḍala offering.

**[Rinpoche]**: You can do that slowly, but not now.

**[Student]**: When I’m doing hatha yoga, I do this breathing sequence. Then during the mantras and visualisation, for example when I’m doing Vajrasattva, I try and absorb my breath into my spine and visualise Vajrasattva above my head. I imagine this nectar comes down, and it’s not going into my spine itself, but into the very centre of the spine. I try and absorb my breath along with doing the visualisation, and then sometimes I hold my breath and imagine I’m absorbing. Is that all right?

**[Rinpoche]**: Yes. In the beginning stages, there is this necessity of getting used to the practice, and in order to do that one has to turn to a little bit of ‘custom-made’ Vajrasattva. That is what is happening.

**[Student]**: Then also when I do yoga, sometimes I imagine I’m doing guru yoga at the same time. Particular postures are supposed to be quite good for different chakras. Anyway, I imagine the guru is there, and I hold that breath. I’m still making it up, really.

**[Rinpoche]**: At least it is reminding you of the maṇḍala of the guru. It will do for now, but this skin is something that soon needs to be peeled off. It will take you somewhere and then, this skin will peel off all by itself. You will find another way. So be prepared to see this ‘skin’ peeling off.

**[Student]**: If I have the thoughts, “This might be bad or this might be good, or I hate this person or that person,” is thinking in this way a defilement of speech or a defilement of mind?

**[Rinpoche]**: Of course, basically it is mind. Mind is the main culprit in this situation but you may be using the speech to express these thoughts, so you can say both.
Explaining the Four Kāyas

[Student]: Can you tell us a little more about the different kāyas? Is the sambhogakāya like a bridge between the nirmāṇakāya and the dharmakāya?

[Rinpoche]: No. The concept of kāya is very difficult to explain. At the moment, the best we can do is to interpret the word kāya in terms of a body. Body, in this sense, refers to a mass, something similar to a dimension. For instance, you are over there and I am over here. There is this separateness. That aspect is not unlike the nirmāṇakāya, which is very much from the point of view of the other person.

[Student]: Like duality?

[Rinpoche]: Well, not necessarily. Since nirmāṇakāya has the meaning of manifestation, it indicates there is also a manifester. There is an audience to which the manifestation is being manifested for. Thus, this is the audience’s point of view. So let’s say a dancer, in one of his plays, happens to wear a prostitute’s clothes and then, during the next act, he’s a king. In the following act, he’s a hunter – all of this is a display, and the nirmāṇakāya is something like that. So the audience thinks, “Ah, a different being.” But then, there is a certain oneness as well and that is the dharmakāya. So the dharmakāya is the quintessence, or in other words, it is the emptiness aspect of phenomena.

[Student]: Do you mean the actor, or the dancer?

[Rinpoche]: The dancer is the sambhogakāya. Since the dance itself is from the audience’s point of view that is the nirmāṇakāya. The dance and the dancer neither being a separate entity, nor one entity is the dharmakāya. It’s quite difficult if we take these distinctions too literally. Take for instance, the many ways in which ‘the sun’ manifests. The light shining forth from the sun is the sun. When the rays of the sun fall upon the ground, we say, “It’s sunny, today.” Then in the mornings, we say, “The sun is rising now,” but that does not mean the sun has entered through the window and is sitting there beside us. That’s one way to understand this.

Another way of understanding is the complete emptiness aspect. If you were to try and search, you would not find even one entity to which you could point and say: this is mind. But it’s not a negation. Never forget that even emptiness is empty. So in fact, emptiness is actually fullness, and thus, the two terms mean exactly the same thing. Second of all, who is there to know that this is empty? There is the self-awareness, and that is the sambhogakāya. And thirdly, arising out of the union of emptiness and clarity, there is a continuous display as emotions, as compassion, and as devotion. That’s the nirmāṇakāya. All four of these combined are what we call the svabhāvikakāya. So as you see, there is a fourth kāya.

[Student]: Isn’t there also a rūpakāya?

[Rinpoche]: Rūpakāya is a common name for the nirmāṇakāya and the sambhogakāya. To refer to the rūpakāya is classic Theravadin language, it is not mahāyāna language.

[Student]: Is the practice of this initiation harmful for the root lama?

[Rinpoche]: No. Why? Do you think that he will exhaust in some way? Actually, you have raised an interesting point. It can’t be harmful because of the nirmāṇakāya aspect. It is your show! This is why the three kāyas are incredible. You see, you and I share the dharmakāya, and to a certain extent the sambhogakāya. But your nirmāṇakāya is your nirmāṇakāya and my nirmāṇakāya is my nirmāṇakāya. Right now, we don’t share this.

Now, suppose that I am looking at an object. I can see it and you can see it. Without trying to be clever, just answer me in a regular way, as a human being. Do you think that I see what you see?

[Some students]: Yes.
[Some students]: No.
As an ordinary human being, the answer is yes. Otherwise how could I possibly say, “Can
you give me that cup?” and then you actually give me that very cup. When you do that you
are presuming that what we see is one and the same thing.
[Student]: It’s just the general action that one recognises…
[Rinpoche]: Yes, but we think we are looking at the same cup. In reality, what you
perceive is something I will never see. This is a very important point in Buddhism! Do you
realise that all you see, hear, and feel, at this very moment is something that no other can
see, hear, or feel? You are totally, alone! Absolutely alone! You are the lone perceiver. If
you really think this through carefully, it is quite scary. Having said this, there is
something you should know. What you see, and what an omniscient being sees will be the
same and will happen in exactly the same moment, the same dimension, and the same
form. So who is this omniscient being?! There are these layers to this omniscient being.
One is the dharma-kāya. Who or what is this? It is the nature of your mind. So again, it’s
not really another separate being. As for the sambhogakāya, it is slightly grosser than this.
With the nirmāṇakāya, of course, Shakyamuni Buddha is an omniscient being, so he
knows exactly what I am thinking at this moment. But again, who is doing this? It’s your
mind doing this.

Now you can see the interconnectivity and why these three work so well, which is
also the reason why ‘blessing’ is possible. It is believed that if one were to disrupt the
order of the three kāyas, no-one would be able to give or receive blessings. The whole
Buddhist philosophy works based around this amazing tripartite!! For instance, even with
karma, if I am teaching and suddenly you get some sort of inspiration, this is thanks to
your karma. It is your karma and your devotion that is doing the interpreting, and that is
creating the capacity to awaken you. You have nobody else to thank. As the Buddha said,
“Since you are your own wisdom teacher, no-one can really be your teacher.” But having
said that, you should still offer thanks to your teacher, because by doing so you accumulate
merit.

All is made possible because of the dharma-kāya, sambhogakāya and nirmāṇakāya.
Who is the nirmāṇakāya in this case? It is me. This person whom you think is giving a
certain teaching. This one who inspires you, or bores you, whatever your interpretation
happens to be in the moment; this is your nirmāṇakāya. And where is this nirmāṇakāya
coming from? It is coming from your sambhogakāya and your dharma-kāya. Moreover,
since this person teaching is none other than your perception, your sambhogakāya and
nirmāṇakāya and this person’s sambhogakāya and nirmāṇakāya are exactly the same.

This is why the dissolving of the guru and yourself is working. If Buddhists were
ever to formulate a conception of the guru as being a separate independent entity from you
– then that would be it! No blessing could ever be given or received. How can there be two
within one? The meaning of unity would be lost forever. Unity is there because your face
and the reflection in the mirror are somehow connected, since it is your face reflecting
there. You cannot say that the reflection you see is not your face and at the same time, nor
can you say the reflection is your face, because it is not possible to have two faces. It is
like that. So in exactly the same way, as you listen to me talking, it is only you that can see
what you see.

You can share notes, and discuss things over with others, and they might come up
with similar ideas, but again that is your interpretation. You might think, “Our notes are
kind of similar.” Yet Buddhists have so many answers for that. They might answer by
saying, “You guys, all share the same group phenomena.” In a past life, when I was a
nomad in Tibet I must have eaten a piece of rotten meat, within which, there must of been
close on fifty-five germs that all got killed, and now here I am forever karmically in debt with you. Along the way, fortunately, I may have met a great master who taught me the art of aspiration. I may have prayed: “whatever I have done in my past lives – be it creating bad karma with sentient beings, may it benefit them eventually.”

**Doing a Tsok Offering as a Ngöndro Practitioner**

Tsok practice is quite a big deal. I thought, since it is a Guru Rinpoche day and we are doing the ngöndro, we ought to do a tsok offering in the way that a ngöndro practitioner would do one.

Nowadays tsok practice has become somewhat of a monthly feast, but in actual fact, it is much more than that. As you know, we have been discussing prāṇa, bindu, and nāḍī. When we refer to the prāṇa, usually, what we are talking about is the air, or the wind-energy. It is not that there is something so amazing about the wind-energy that makes it special. It is because this is where the dākinīs dwell. In other words, the very essence of the prāṇa is the dākinīs. The prāṇa goes up and down the nāḍīs, the channels.

To be exact, there are five chakras, and three nāḍīs. And within these chakras travel these dākinīs, which is something that we also refer to as the prāṇa. Within the top chakra alone, there are thirty-two spokes and within each spoke there is a lead dākinī. Then, the lead dākinī is surrounded by many other dākinīs. So what we are basically saying is there are so many dākas and dākinīs camping in our system. And a tsok offering is actually making an offering to these inner dākas and dākinīs.

Likewise, there is a reason for practicing on special days, such as on Guru Rinpoche days and dākinī days. It is believed that during this time, our inner astrological system and the outward astrological system intersect in a certain way. Since the inner astrological system is actually that of the dākinī’s, on these particular days, dākas and dākinīs gather more than on other days. This is why it is considered to be a special day. I’m just explaining this very briefly, as I’m not permitted to say much more than this.

But what are we doing here? Don’t misunderstand and think that we are feeding some kind of spirit inside ourselves. That is not the idea at all. The tsok offering is yet another very, skilful practice of the vajrayāna. After all, what are prāṇa, nāḍī, and bindu? These three are the non-dual display of the buddha nature. They are the guru, deva, and dākinī, and are non-dual – not a separate sort of entity. As is stated by Khyentse Chökyi Lodrö: wisdom enjoys wisdom. Thus, in the tsok practice, both the object of offering and the substance are the wisdom deity. In other words, the substance we offer is wisdom, the object to whom we offer is wisdom and the person who is performing the offering is also the wisdom. So clearly, it is yet another form of non-duality practice.

Having accepted confusion as the path, this is how the vajrayāna works. You think there are these differences and at first, you are permitted to think in this way. There is a guru as the one who gives you blessings, and you as a receiver of the blessing. At first, the method is to allow us to think that there are two separate beings, with you as this impure, not so perfect being and the guru as a pure sublime being. Then gradually you are compelled to understand that they are one. Slowly you are lead to the understanding that they are neither different, nor the same. That is the whole purpose.

Now, when it comes to making a proper tsok, it is quite difficult. Even to gather the appropriate substances could present somewhat of a problem. For instance, in the proper tsok, we talk of the five kinds of meat and the five kinds of nectar. And the five nectars alone are things that you would not even want to imagine such as puss, blood, urine, mucus, and stuff like that. It is always the case that the highest teachings of the Buddha
contain the most outrageous things. Now, in India, Brahmins are the highest class and are also considered to be the most prestigious class. Coming from a time when the Buddha taught to a Brahmanic dominated society, meat was considered the worst of the worst. Even today, a person belonging to a strict Brahmin family would never invite someone like you or I, to a meal. We eat meat and wear leather products, like leather jackets, and shoes. They think we are like animals. So they really look down on us. Especially with the methods of the Buddha’s highest teachings, the aim is to completely go against such habits. This is why, from the point of view of Brahmanic culture, all the worst substances are mentioned in the tsok substance.

These days, in many dharma centres, each time there is a tsok offering, there is a bottle of champagne and meat and so forth. This is where we have to be careful. Firstly, since Western society is not a Brahman society, there is none of this tendency to despise meat and thus, the ancient Buddhist practice of using this, as an undesirable substance, is not really applicable. Ideally, we should offer a plate of shit, because bacteria, or something of a similar nature is what Western scientific minded people would generally regard as dirty. That substance should then be eaten without any sort of preference between the food and the shit. That is the whole idea. Secondly, in performing the tsok, sometimes it can get overly wild and perhaps that is not such a good image for the vajrayāna. It is already the case that in the vajrayāna, practitioners are suffering a soured reputation, due to a certain lack of discipline on the part of masters and disciples alike.

So for those only just beginning to practice, while you might not get into the actual tsok offering straight away, keep in mind that as a ngöndro practitioner, there is a very beautiful way of practising, and doing the tsok. As I explain I will try to make it as simple as possible. If we were to arrange things in a very elaborate way, it might make you think that you could not do this practice yourself at home. But it really is something you can do on your own steam. You can even do the practice just before lunch or dinner, and then that particular lunch or dinner can be used as a tsok substance. If you have forgotten, then just a few biscuits and some fruit are really all you need.

First of all, we will do three times of refuge, and then go straight to the guru yoga, and after a little bit of chanting, and supplicating, we will then do the kusāli. It is not required that you do the kusāli practice here, but if you want to do a short tsok offering – it is good to do because you are offering your body, which is the best tsok substance.

So, sit straight. First is refuge (three times).

Instantly you become Vajrayoginī or Vajravārahī. In front of you, as much as you can, visualise all the details of the refuge objects for the guru yoga. There are rainbow colored lights, a lion throne, a one-hundred-thousand petalled lotus, and a sun and moon disc. On top of that is the embodiment of the outer, inner, and secret guru, the essence of all the buddhas, in the form of Guru Rinpoche.

You then chant the Seven Line Prayer. Please recite that as many times as you can.

As you chant the mantra, you pray to Guru Rinpoche as we talked of earlier, and to begin with, just concentrate on his form. You can then alternate between chanting the Seven Line Prayer and the mantra.

And then, as we start the kusāli practice we say ‘PHAT’ and visualise, thinking that our consciousness shoots straight up in the sky, and remains there.

Now transform your consciousness into the form of Vajravārahī; this time we will use Vajravārahī. She has one face, two hands and two legs. Her right leg is stretching downwards, and her left leg is bent. In her right hand she is holding a curved knife, and the left hand is holding a scull cup. Have this confidence that you are not this ordinary being: you are Vajravārahī. Standing in the midst of fire, you are dancing. You have three eyes
and your mouth is slightly parted, giving a semi-wrathful expression. You now begin
cutting at the forehead of this lifeless body that you have left behind in a heap on the
ground. Still you are in the form of Vajravārāhī and after cutting away the skull, it
instantly transforms into a skullcup that is both infinite and vast. You then start to cut up
all the other parts of the body.

At this point, for those who have it, please read the liturgy.

By casting aside cherishing this body... by the power of the three syllables.
OM ĀH HŪM...

Now still visualising yourself as Vajravārāhī, you imagine that from your heart
comes this light. The light travels to all the ten directions and invokes the guests. The first
group of guests are the tathāgatas, buddhas and bodhisattvas, gurus, devas, dākas, dākinīs,
and the dharmapālas. Trust that they are all sitting or standing, gathered right in front of
you, up there in the sky. Immediately, this light from the heart, again invokes the second
set of guests, the lower beings from the six realms. This summons all the gods, asuras, the
remaining human beings, bardo beings and the hungry ghosts, animals, and hell beings.
Visualise that they all gather and surround you.

For the first part, you visualise that you are making offerings of all your belongings.
You offer firstly to the buddhas and bodhisattvas and then to the six realms, especially to
those with whom you have karmic debts. This time, you are merely focusing on offering
your belongings, such as your car, clothes, house, and so forth. Thinking that, chant, ‘OM
ĀH HŪM.’

Now, with this, I am elaborating a little. Visualise that from your heart, there comes
many more Vajravārāhīs. Each of these visualised Vajravārāhīs is you, yet ‘you’ are now
numerous in quantity. They all become the servers, in the form of Vajravārāhī and from
the kapāla, these servers offer nectar, which is your flesh, blood, and bones transformed.
Vajravārāhī first offers this to the sublime beings. Thinking this recite ‘OM ĀH HŪM.’

After having made offerings to the sublime beings, you visualise yourself receiving
from them, the initiations and blessings of wisdom and compassion. Again, you then make
offerings to all the lower beings. As you do this, think that as soon as the lower beings
receive the offering substance, their ignorance, passion, and aggression dissolves. All these
beings now possess love, compassion, bodhicitta and so on.

‘OM ĀH HŪM…’

To further elaborate, imagine you also make an offering of all your friends and
relatives. They actually fall within the second group of guests, the lower beings. Your
relatives, friends, and basically all those you like, you offer to the buddhas and
bodhisattvas, and to the gurus, devas, dākas and dākinīs. You then pray, asking for
blessings so that your attachment will dissolve.

‘OM ĀH HŪM…’

Now make an offering of all the beings that you dislike, those you consider your
enemies, people who have upset or annoyed you, people whom you fear and those you feel
bad about. Offer them to the sublime beings, and ask them to accept them as their retinue.
You then ask for blessings, so that your hatred, and aggression dissolves.

‘OM ĀH HŪM…’

Lastly, you offer all those beings you are unfamiliar with, such as strangers, those
you ignore, and those who are neither your friends nor enemies. Offer them to the sublime
beings, and ask them to also accept them as their retinue. And pray for blessings so that
your ignorance will dissolve.
‘OM ĀḤ HŪṂ…’
That’s it! For those who are practising ngöndro, it is a very handy way of doing the tsok offering. There is no need to keep a remainder or anything like that. Here at this point, you simply eat the tsok you have offered and if it is your lunch or dinner you eat that.

[Student]: Rinpoche, what should we do with the rest?
[Rinpoche]: In this case, you can give it away to other people! If you were doing a special Vajrayoginī feast offering, unless the person has been initiated, you couldn’t do that. There are all these kinds of problems. This is why I’m not suggesting that you do something quite so complicated right now. But if you want the complication and have the time for it, I have so many methods.

So now, after having enjoyed the tsok, we follow on with the initiation part of the practice.

Visualise that all the retinue gradually dissolves into the guru. The maṇḍala such as the celestial mansions, rainbow, and everything else also dissolves into the guru. Though actually, during your ngöndro, you don’t really need all these elaborations.

Right before taking the initiation, you can read the liturgy, which begins with, “From the three places of the guru…” This is also found in the short ngöndro. Think that from the guru’s forehead, there comes this dazzling white light, which hits directly at the crown of your head. Slowly that light-filled your body. All the defilements of the body are purified. Think that the guru’s body and your body become inseparable. Remain in that or watch that.

(pause, for about two minutes)
Next, you visualise that from the guru’s throat comes this red light, which dissolves into your throat, and purifies the defilements of speech. Your speech and guru’s speech become inseparable.

(pause, for about two minutes)
Now visualise that from the guru’s heart comes blue light, which dissolves into your heart center, and purifies the defilements of your mind. The guru’s mind and your mind become inseparable. And again, watch that.

(pause, about two minutes)
Now again, visualise that from the guru’s heart comes more blue light, which dissolves into you everywhere, at your forehead, throat, and heart. This light dispels all the defilements, the residue of the defilements, and the remainder of these habitual patterns. Thus, the guru’s whole being, and your being become inseparable. And again, watch that.

(pause, about two minutes)
After receiving the four initiations, if you are doing the expanded Longchen Nyingtik Ngöndro, there is a special prayer here. If you are not doing that, then here, once again, we can pray to Guru Rinpoche with the Seven Line Prayer.

You are still in the form of Vajravārahī. Now, think that from the guru’s heart comes a further round of red light. Having the quality of fire, it is warm, even slightly scorching. This red light comes towards you and the moment it touches your heart center, you melt into light. You are now in the form of a ball of red light. This ball of light slowly approaches the guru, and gradually dissolves into the guru’s heart. Remain in that state.

(pause, about one-half minute)
You can now dedicate the merit by thinking:

May I never be apart from the great master;
May I always follow the vajrayāna path;
Abisheka and the Four Empowerments

May I bring benefit to all sentient beings;
May I be the doctor, medicine and the nurse as well as the method of
treatment for all sentient beings, again and again until all beings’
enlightenment.

General Questions Relating to Ngöndro

[Student]: When doing the ngöndro practice, can we sort of pick and choose, or must we
stick with the one practice in a progressive way?
[Rinpoche]: You can do both. The aim is to try and finish the ngöndro. You can go in order,
or when you have more time, you can do prostrations and manḍalas, then when you feel
like sitting or not doing so much, you could choose to do Vajrasattva, for instance. You
can alternate like that. But always begin with refuge and bodhicitta and end with the
dedication.

[Student]: Can you explain why human life is so precious?
[Rinpoche]: It is because human beings have the greatest intellectual capacity to
understand: what is suffering and what is not.

[Student]: If I have a body, can I still have omniscience? Isn’t the human body an obstacle
to omniscience?
[Rinpoche]: It is not an obstacle according to the vajrayāna, although according to the
srāvakayāna and the mahāyāna, it is.

[Student]: Sometimes during prostrations, I have the feeling I can’t really mean what I’m
saying. I was just wondering if I’m not really feeling anything and just doing it, does it still
work?
[Rinpoche]: Yeah, you should just keep on with it! At least it’s better than nothing. You
had better not wait until the right feeling comes along; otherwise you end up wasting a lot
of time. This right feeling hardly ever comes to me. It comes perhaps just once a year.

[Student]: Can you accumulate refuge and bodhicitta at the same time, if you’re doing the
long version?
[Rinpoche]: Not in the long one, to do so is a bit difficult because there is too much to
read.

[Student]: How should we relate to the refuge name?
[Rinpoche]: It’s just symbolic. Once you have taken refuge everything changes, even your
body changes. To represent the change, we snip a small scrap of hair, although this is just
symbolic. It is as though there is a transformation, especially in terms of identity. You
have the buddha nature and to accept this is the ultimate refuge. The main idea is you have
accepted the fact that you are cookable, and that alone is a big turnaround. This change in
view is what makes the biggest difference. By analogy, in taking a hike, your view is you
are simply walking along towards a mountain. Then if along the way, you decide you’re
going to build a house at the summit your view about that mountain subsequently changes.
In the same way, when you take refuge, there is a change of your view, so the formal
refuge ritual is just to symbolise that. Some people use their dharma name and, some
don’t.
[Student]: I don’t know what *vidyādhara* means. Is it a realisation?

[Rinpoche]: Well *vidyā* means ‘*rigpa,*’ which is awareness, and *dhara* has the meaning of ‘the one who holds.’ *Vidyādhara* is therefore a very profound term. I guess you could feasibly designate your dog with such a name. Generally though, it is most often reserved for a good and realised being. At any rate, it is just a form of address, after all.

[Student]: I thought there were four lineages, but in one of the stanzas there is mention of ‘three lineages:’

_In the space in front, in the midst of rainbow light,
Is the root guru, Thötrengsal,
Surrounded by oceans of *vidyādharas* of the three lineages,..._

[Rinpoche]: Within the Nyingma tradition, there are three main lineages: the mind lineage – the *Tathāgata*, the *vidyādhara* sign lineage, and the oral lineage.

[Student]: During the visualisation, when I am tired I can only pretend that I visualise.

[Rinpoche]: That’s fine.

[Student]: Sometimes it is present, there’s a kind of visualisation. But if I try too hard, it doesn’t work.

[Rinpoche]: Just relax and don’t try too hard. That’s one of the methods of meditation, you need not tune too much.

[Student]: At the end of the guru yoga, when we pray to remain in a non-dual, non-fabricated naturalness, are we still Vajrayogini or have we become our ordinary selves?

[Rinpoche]: You remain as Vajrayogini for as long as possible.

[Student]: When I visualise myself as Vajrayogini and later when I am supplicating to Guru Rinpoche, I often feel myself returning to my normal form.

[Rinpoche]: It’s more powerful if you pray as Vajrayogini. You just have to get used to it. The fact that you have imagined yourself, as Vajrayogini, does not immediately put a stop to all the karmic formations. It’s like visualising that Vajrayogini is looking at a mountain. You know you have to go towards the mountain because just seeing it is not enough. You have to walk, and you have to get closer and closer and closer.

[Student]: I have read in Patrül Rinpoche’s the “Words of my Perfect Teacher” that masturbation is considered to be a kind of sexual misconduct and I wonder why?

[Rinpoche]: Did he say that? In the śrāvakayāna anything related to sex is kind of looked down on. From the vajrayāna point of view, it is taught that within each semen there are millions and millions of *dākinīs.* It would be like killing millions of *dākinīs.*

[Student]: What about for women?

[Rinpoche]: The same thing applies. For women, it is the climax instead of semen.

[Student]: What’s the difference between masturbation and sex? When you have sex with someone else are you still using up your *dākinīs*?

[Rinpoche]: Yes, if you are not doing it properly. You need an *anuyoga* teaching now.

[Student]: But surely it would be very beneficial if you could tell us, Rinpoche?

[Rinpoche]: Right. Well, for now visualise yourself as a Vajrayogini.

[Student]: For a ngöndro practitioner, what can we read to study a little bit more of the theory side?
Abisheka and the Four Empowerments

[Rinpoche]: There is the “Words of my Perfect Teacher,” which is actually more like a set of pith instructions, and then you can read the mahāyāna Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra, or Shāntideva’s Bodhicharyāvatāra.

[Student]: What’s the watcher or the intelligence that visualises and watches the visualisation, is it consciousness? Is it something we have attachment to and do we impute it? Is it ego?

[Rinpoche]: Yes, it is ego. It is consciousness. It is your mind.

[Student]: Is it the sum of perceptions and aggregates coming together?

[Rinpoche]: Yes, for now, that’s the only way we can understand it. That is the path. In the same way, if you aim to journey from the plains to a mountain’s peak, you have to walk along the path, and while the path is important, we also know the path is not the mountain. It’s like that.

[Student]: Does the ngöndro practice have to do with dismantling the ālaya?

[Rinpoche]: According to the Nyingma tradition, all practice leads to dismantling the ālaya.

[Student]: What is the fourth empowerment. Can you say that again, very quickly?

[Rinpoche]: The theory is to destroy the ālaya, and to receive the blessings of the guru’s body, speech, and mind, taken in unity. The practice is to visualise that from the letter HŪM comes one further round of blue light. That’s according to the Longchen Nyingtik, which is slightly different from the Dudjom Tersar. Though many of you are doing the Dudjom Tersar Ngöndro, please remember there really is no contradiction at all. If that is what you have been doing, just keep on doing that.

[Student]: Could you maybe say something more about ālaya? Is ālaya just emptiness?

[Rinpoche]: No, it is mind. That’s it.

[Student]: Rinpoche, is it possible to mix it a little bit? Can we do the Dudjom Tersar Ngöndro with for example, the maṇḍala offering from the Longchen Nyingtik Ngöndro?

[Rinpoche]: Yes.

[Student]: On the last line in the guru yoga, it says that the guru dissolves into light and then melts into us. But the way you taught us is a little different …

[Rinpoche]: Yes, a condensed text is always like that. Since this is an important part of the practice, I was just trying to elaborate, by basing it on the long version.

Samaya Is Like Fencing

[Student]: Rinpoche, during the Vajrasattva when we recite the text, there is mention of samaya. Could you talk a little bit about samaya and perhaps say something regarding whatever the samaya is for this practice.

[Rinpoche]: With this practice, you have some general samayas, and that’s about it. Basically, there are three: not harming others, trying to help others, and trying to have pure vision towards everything, including the guru. These are the three samayas you have received. Now samaya itself is a bit like the fencing. When you are following a path, and going from here to that mountain, the samaya is there so that you will not sidetrack, and will not fall. When you practice the vajrayāna, you are practicing all three vehicles, the śrāvakayāna, mahāyāna, and vajrayāna. That’s the greatness of the vajrayāna. But you have to know the theory, at least to some extent. For instance, in the śrāvakayāna, their system of fencing is mainly based on not harming others. In application, this fencing
prompts us not to kill, and not to lie or to steal. Then in the mahāyāna, because of the view, or this greater attitude, there is also a greater fencing. It is therefore explained that if by your stealing something, if this act were to benefit hundreds of people, to not steal would be breaking the samaya. So the mahāyāna is much more motivation oriented. Now in the vajrayāna, the fencing is even more sophisticated – it’s entire basis is not getting caught by impure vision.

To keep Vajrayāna samayas perfectly is so difficult. If you look at a girl and think, “She is beautiful” and then look at another girl and think, “she is not so beautiful,” you are already breaking a samaya. You are breaking what is known as the samaya of vajra body. Essentially, you not supposed to have any kind of dualistic mind at all. If you read the fourteen root vows of the vajrayāna, you will see that one is relating to the body. Since your aggregates are in essence the five buddha families, to not treat the body nicely, would also be breaking one of the root vows. Likewise, when you really look down on yourself as a worthless, useless being, in doing so, you are also breaking a samaya.

One should understand that the prātimokṣa vow is like a clay pot, once broken it is difficult to mend. This is because the emphasis lies mostly on the form. If you are a monk from the śrāvaka tradition, and have not offered back your vow, to go ahead and sleep with a woman, just out of desire, would mean that for this entire lifetime you would be unable to renew your monk’s vow. At least, that is how it is for the Mūlasarvāstivādins, in their tradition. However in the vajrayāna and the mahāyāna, the vow is often referred to as a golden pot. Although you may be breaking one or more vows repeatedly, with care and with constant maintenance, each time you restore your vows, you can make this ‘broken’ golden pot more and more beautiful. It might well be tough to maintain samaya, but at the same time, there are these solutions that can be applied. There are these various higher methods of resolving and restoration. For instance, you can always restore samaya, by doing the Vajrasattva mantra.

It is purely because one has this higher view that there are higher solutions as well as higher and easier methods. There are greater dangers but more solutions. It’s always like that. Thus, it is easier to break the samayas. In the mahāyāna for example, eating meat is not allowed, but in the vajrayāna you should not have this dualistic mind of being vegetarian or non-vegetarian, so it’s much more view oriented. As a mahāyāna practitioner, you should not eat meat at all.

Now, the second of the fourteen root vows of the vajrayāna says you have to obey the Buddha. Here we are speaking about Shakyaumuni Buddha. In the prātimokṣa tradition, Buddha told the monks not to eat after lunch. Then, in the mahāyāna, we are told not to eat meat, which more or less directly contradicts the vajrayāna vow of not harming your aggregates. For instance, not eating after lunch is almost like making your aggregates starve. Now the question is which one do we emphasize? Always emphasize the greater view. Many people think that in the vajrayāna, people are allowed to eat meat and drink wine. No permission is given for this, not at all. The vajrayāna only says you should not have any preferences between meat and no meat. That is misinterpreted as a free reign to eat meat. But actually, it is solely because the vajrayāna is much more view or wisdom oriented, so you can’t have preferences. Many Tibetans have abused that by saying, we are vajrayāna practitioners, let’s eat meat, drink wine, and have women, or even men, to be politically correct.

[Student]: What about choice?
[Rinpoche]: There should be no choice, and no preference.
[Student]: How do we ever get anything to eat without choosing?
[Rinpoche]: Just take whatever comes.
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[Student]: That’s a bit impractical. After all, you have to go to the shop and buy something.
[Rinpoche]: That’s okay.
[Student]: That does not make sense.
[Rinpoche]: Well, with all of that you are breaking samaya. There is no such thing as reaching a point of never breaking samaya, or never breaking the rules and then following the path.
[Student]: So you make a prayer as you are buying meat? Is it that sort of thing?
[Rinpoche]: No. You see, it is a bit like this. It is as though the fence is very narrow. You are bumping against the sides of the fence all the time, even though you are being as careful as possible. That is what the fences are for. Once you no longer break any samayas that means you are already there.
[Student]: So you are constantly breaking samayas all the time?
[Rinpoche]: Yeah, and constantly restoring. That is what we call practicing the dharma.
[Student]: How do we restore?
[Rinpoche]: In this case, you do the Vajrasattva mantra.
[Student]: How about eating clean food and how about the channels? How does that fit in?
[Rinpoche]: That’s a good question, and to hear this might shock you, at least, if you are quite fresh. In the highest tantric practice of the vajrayāna, to do any other practices, whether it be visualisation, recitation of mantra, breathing, prāna, bindu, nāḍī, all of this is breaking samaya. It is amazing, isn’t it? Each and every path is breaking samaya, simply because you should not be on the path. If you are going to the other shore, once you reach there, the boat should be abandoned.
[Student]: It seems like it could be very easy to get confused about where you are on the path?
[Rinpoche]: No, this is what Guru Rinpoche said, “One’s view should be as high, deep, and vast as the sky, whereas one’s actions should be as subtle or as fine as refined flour.”
[Student]: Could you explain that a bit more? I don’t really understand.
[Rinpoche]: Try to obey the prātimokṣa rules as much as possible, and try your best to obey the mahāyāna rules, and then, try at least to understand the vajrayāna vow. Right now, especially for the beginners, the vajrayāna vow is not really something you can practice. That’s what I was telling you. All you can do right now is try not to harm others, and try to help others. We have not yet reached the highest level, but when it comes to that it is quite different.

Vajra Hell: a Symbolic Term for Impure Vision

[Student]: Rinpoche could you talk about vajra hell, how do we get in and how do we get out? After all, if we are going to practice the vajrayāna, it’s a kind of risk, isn’t it?
[Rinpoche]: Vajra hell is a symbolic term for the lowest of the lowest kind of impure vision. Getting in is somewhat easy. You only need receive an initiation from a master with the deepest, worst motivation and impure vision. Creating disharmony among your vajra brothers and sisters is also another big misdemeanour. Then, there are things like, if you think or say the vajrayāna maṇḍala is fake, is a shamanist thing or the mantra has no result. So you see, it is quite easy.

Getting out is quite difficult. Though to hear it is difficult should be of some consolation. At least, I am not saying you will never get out. After all, even the vajra hell is a compounded phenomena; it is impermanent. It’s not as though there is no method for getting out. It’s just that you are caught in the momentum and have no time to practice that
method. So it’s something like shooting an arrow up into the sky. There is this continuum where it has to exhaust that energy. So you have to remain for some time and allow everything to exhaust. Once that has happened, you will come back, of course.

Vajra hell comes about when impure vision is too strong. It has got nothing to do with a truly existing hell or anything like that. It is simply this very strong impure vision. It is not trusting oneself, not trusting others, and all of that. It is suffering all the time.

[Student]: I read something, which seemed to say that beings in vajra hell are beyond compassion. That really confused me.

[Rinpoche]: I do not know in what context it was said, but that is going too far. Even those beings in vajra hell, also have the buddha nature.
Practice in Daily Life
Practice Does Not Necessarily Mean Sitting

Again, we will start with the traditional approach of reminding you to practise the dharma. The lamas tend to repeat these preliminary thoughts again and again, so much so that students almost do not listen. To hear these preliminary teachings is almost painful, because basically, there is not much of a sidetrack. This exotic element that we find in the main profound teachings is decidedly absent. There are none of the colourful attractive details of visualizations, prāṇa, nāḍī, and so forth. The fact is when we hear of the chakras and the channels, all those details of visualisation and the experience of meditation – then, it’s almost a trip. It is as though just hearing about these aspects is kind of exciting or blissful. Yet I implore, request, and plead with you, as all the lamas of the past have done: not to pay less attention to these preliminary thoughts. Especially for beginners like us, this is what will drive our minds towards the dharma.

I see this fault of our minds not being entirely on the dharma. Quite a few of us, like myself, have been in the dharma for a long time, and yet our minds are still very rigid. We easily become happy for some very mundane stupid reason. Likewise when we are faced with the most trivial, ridiculous of circumstances, many of us, somehow end up feeling hurt. That is not a good sign! It means the dharma is going in one ear and out the other. It’s just not hitting us in the way that it should. Really, it has to hit here, (Rinpoche thumps his heart) and penetrate!

Another thing to remember is you do not necessarily have to go away somewhere to practice. You should not get discouraged or think, “I will never be able to practice the dharma properly because I am not able to go to a cave for three to six years …” It has got nothing to do with this!

How to Let the Dharma Penetrate

There are people who have lived in Kathmandu for thirty years and are still the same! I’ve seen it with my own eyes. They’re as rigid as ever, if not more so. In fact, some of these people have become even more rigid. Not only is there all the ordinary mundane human garbage, now they are also in disguise, wearing what I call the camouflage of a dharma-practitioner. Once others begin to see through this camouflage, these so called dharma-practitioners find it unbearable, and they really lose it.

Now I am not saying this just to encourage you. Really, the focal point of dharma-practice has nothing to do with chanting more mantras or spending more hours sitting. It has got a lot to do with simple everyday things. As you walk and talk with people, as you sit next to your friends, or your enemies – I doubt that we have any obvious enemies, but with those people whom you can’t get along with, or can’t deal with easily, whoever happens to annoy you – you should be with them! Like Atisha Dipankara, he – with a lot of effort – brought an Indian guy along to Tibet and that man had no other task apart from annoying him. That was the whole purpose of bringing him.

In this day and era, it is our worldly, day-to-day lives that we really have to watch, like for instance when something is not going according to our liking, or if our mood suddenly changes. You know, our mind is so fickle. One minute we are okay, the next minute for some ridiculous reason, such as a breeze from the north, we are invoking all kinds of past emotions. After bringing up all these things you have done or regret, you
then brood for days, perhaps you even cry. It is all right if nobody is around, and if you continue crying and brooding to yourself, but then you usually like to exhibit that to someone else. You’re longing for attention, and because of this, you bother others. This person, your friend or relative, whoever it is that you call, gets bothered. His or her moods also go up or down. What’s the point? Especially as a bodhisattva, if you want to suffer, suffer alone! Why drag another person into this? Particularly, if you are a tonglen practitioner, you are supposed to bring in other people’s suffering, not seek someone to share the suffering with. So especially for older dharma practitioners like myself, it is due time we let the dharma really penetrate. Do not ever let the dharma become something you can pin an excuse on.

**What It Means to Say: Dharma Bearing Fruit**

As Kongtrul Rinpoche says here:

*Damchö taru chinpar jingyi lob.*
Grant your blessings so that I completely accomplish the holy dharma.

*Kyoshey tingney kyewar jingyi lob.*
Grant your blessings so that I give birth to deep sadness.

*Longmey lona tungwar jingyi lob.*
Grant your blessings so that my worthless schemes are curtailed.

*Chiwa nyingney drenpar jingyi lob.*
Grant your blessings so that I take to heart the certainty of death.

*Lleyla yichey kyewar jingyi lob.*
Grant your blessings so that conviction in karma arises in me.

*Laaml barchei maypar jingyi lob.*
Grant your blessings so that the path is free from obstacles.

*Drubla tsöndri nišpar jingyi lob.*
Grant your blessings so that I am able to exert myself in practice.

*Kyemmg langedu longwar jingyi lob.*
Grant your blessings so that unfortunate circumstances are brought to the path.

*Nyepo rangtsuk tubpar jingyi lob.*
Grant your blessings so that I continually apply my antidotes.

*Chönmin mögö kyewar jingyi lob.*
Grant your blessings so that genuine devotion arises in me.

*Neyluk rangzhai jalwar jingyi lob.*
Grant your blessings so that I glimpse the natural state.

*Rang-rig nyin-ü seypar jingyi lob.*
Grant your blessings so that insight is awakened in my heart.

*Trülhang zhtsa chöpar jingyi lob.*
Grant your blessings so that I uproot confusion.

*Tsechik sangye drubpar jingyi lob.*
Grant your blessings so that I attain buddhahood in one lifetime.18

I am extracting from the verses belonging to Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Thaye’s long length “Calling the Guru.” Actually, this is another “Calling the Guru,” which you really should do. It’s so wonderful. When doing it every morning, I try to dwell on at least one stanza each day. It’s very piercing! It’s like a constant digging of the faults. The dharma is like that. Not so much, the theoretical dharma but the pith instructions are particularly this way. Theoretical dharmas are: ‘everything is emptiness,’ ‘everything is interdependent’
and all of that business. But when it comes to the pith instructions, as Patrul Rinpoche says, if you feel that a certain instruction is digging, scraping or fishing out some of the worst things inside of you, this is a good sign. It means this pith instruction is working.

Nowadays, you go along to these teachings, and it is hard to tell whether they are Buddhist or New Age. To listen to these New Age masters or even with some of the Buddhist masters, it makes you feel good. It validates the manifestation of your ego, and confirms certain feelings that you have. If that’s what you want, you might as well go and have a good massage. It’s at least more tangible. Alternatively, you could accomplish the same end, just listening to a piece of good music, something like Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony, for instance. These things cheer you up. Pith-instructions on the other hand, should really make you feel bad.

As you read the “Words of my Perfect Teacher,” the more it depresses you, the more you are at last beginning to understand the dharma. I call the “Words of my Perfect Teacher” a book of depression, because it is a book that rattles you. It tells us almost disconcerting things and this is something quite important. In any case, not all depressions are bad. Without ever letting this defilement surface, you would be oblivious to it. You would not be aware it is a stain. If you have no knowledge of it, how can you even begin to have the motivation of cleaning it? So this digging of the faults should really bring things out in the open. And as I was saying, we should try to have the dharma penetrate our minds. As Kongsrol Rinpoche said: “Our practice of the dharma should really bear fruit.” This has nothing to do with good dreams, a certain sensation after sitting for a long time, or even some sort of ecstatic feeling, clairvoyance or enhancement of intuition. These outcomes are not necessarily the fruit that we are looking for. What Kongsrol Rinpoche meant was: as we practise, once we begin to put less emphasis into some of the things that had previously been such a big deal, that is what we call ‘bearing the fruit.’

In the past, after receiving a compliment, “Your hair looks good! The color is nice,” you could become easily moved. For half a day, it sort of intoxicates you, doesn’t it? And then, during the second half of the day after someone else has said: “It’s not good,” you feel depressed. If after doing some dharma practice, these things begin not to make any difference that is the bearing fruit. This is far preferrable to millions of good dreams, even if the Buddha himself has appeared to you in a dream, placed his hand on the top of your head and blessed you! We don’t know whether these so-called good dreams are a good or a bad sign. I say this very strongly, because – as Patrul Rinpoche said – sometimes when a practitioner has a good dream it can actually be what he calls a ‘devil’s manifestation.’ First of all, it blocks the practitioner’s urge to practice further because they think, “I have reached somewhere;” and secondly, it develops pride.

So as Patrul Rinpoche said, if last night you dreamt that the Buddha was having dinner with you, “Treat such dreams, as you would the saliva you spit on the ground.” You shouldn’t even look twice at it. When we spit, do we check to see how it has landed or how much is there? Likewise, your dream should never, ever be mentioned, nor even written down in your notebook. In fact, you should even feel a little bit wary of it! Otherwise, when you notice that your compassion towards sentient beings is growing a little, or that devotion towards the path and the teacher is increasing, you might just become more relaxed. So whenever a different situation occurs, then that’s a good sign! That’s the fruit!
Dharma Attitudes: ‘a Race Against Time’ and ‘the Genuine Heart of Sadness’

Kongtrul Rinpoche also says: "Kyoshey tings nyewar jingyi lob." "A genuine heart of sadness" is what Chögyam Trungpa calls it, and I think this is quite a good term. This ‘genuine heart of sadness’ is really important. Let’s say you are dreaming and happen to be having a good dream. You actually enjoy whatever dream it is that you are going through. At the same time, you know that you are going to wake up, because it is a dream. Deep down, somewhere in your mind, you know that sooner or later you are going to wake up. That is what we call the ‘genuine heart of sadness.’ Sooner or later, our relationships, our health, or whatever other circumstances we happen to face – all this is going to change! We are going through this situation now, but it is not going to last. No matter what, change is inevitable.

While not necessarily obvious, that constant bell ringing somewhere in your head is always there – this is the ‘genuine heart of sadness.’ You should always have the attitude “You don’t have so much time.” This is so important. It is as though someone were chasing you: it is like a race against time. And one should not leave aside dharma practice as: “I will do it some other time.” Never part from this ‘race against time’ kind of attitude, especially when it comes to practice. By no means should you ever start to think in the way of, “I will practice the dharma next July – tomorrow – the day after tomorrow.” It never eventuates! This is also my own experience. Like when we say, “I will practice this week,” more often than not, it just doesn’t happen.

Now that you know dharma practice has less to do with sitting and chanting, and more to do with really going against your pride and ego – and accepting things: that you can do at any time, so you should begin right away. It could be that you are on a beach looking at the sunset, and nothing is terribly wrong. Suddenly there is this alarm-bell ringing in your head, saying “ting, ting, ting, ting, practice the dharma” or something like that. At that very moment, you can always think: “I’m looking at this sunset. I’d better take a good look, because I might never see another. This might be the last sunset in my life.” Who knows, “in the next life I might become an insect,” a being that has no knowledge of sunset or sunrise, let alone the capacity to comprehend the idea. You will have a totally different interpretation of what a sunset is.

Complaints Show Our Lack of Understanding of Cause, Condition and Effect

In the next stanza Kongtrul says: "Chiwa nyingney drenpar jingyi lob." Death, dying, the continuity of death: constantly getting closer and closer to death – that needs to be brought to mind again and again and again. Next to that we must have a strong trust, belief and devotion towards cause, condition and effect. This is something that needs prompting from time to time; otherwise it goes completely out of our mind. How do we forget? In many different ways! You should listen to your complaints – we complain a lot! We complain to the Buddha, to the guru, to husbands, to wives, and to friends. If you listen to your own complaints and contemplate them, you will realize that most stem from a lack of understanding on cause, condition and effect. It is a bit like this: you are driving towards a cliff, the road is really bad and you have been warned that it is dangerous. Going ahead with this course is fatal and you know this. What is more, despite having been told not to drink, you go ahead and drink anyhow. Not being careful, as you are driving towards this cliff and speeding very fast, you fall – and still you complain. That’s how we are. Listen to your own complaints! If you think back, you always find that the cause and conditions have been systematically organized by you alone! For years you have learned, practiced,
and gathered the causes and conditions so carefully, but when the unpleasant result occurs, you complain. This is usually how it is. You lack the understanding. Further illustrative of this failure to understand cause, condition, and effect is the lack of trust in the triple gem, the Buddha, dharma and the saṅgha. These are what we call preliminary thoughts.

_Dharma Is No Therapy - Dharma Stirs Up Your Life_

Sometimes daily, for seven months in row, with no weekend breaks, we listened to His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche. In the morning he would teach one subject, in the afternoon another and at night, yet another, but whatever the subject, it always began with these preliminary thoughts. He would spend at least forty-five minutes to an hour talking about the preliminary thoughts. The main teaching usually lasted five to ten minutes, or at the longest, half an hour. Indeed, it is quite important to hear the preliminary thoughts again and again. Even though it will unsettle you a little, the purpose of dharma is just that. Never should you think, through practicing the dharma you will be able to settle your life down properly. This is why the dharma is not a therapy. In fact it is just the opposite. I tell you: the effect of the dharma is to really stir up your life. It is meant to actually turn your life upside down. If that’s what you have asked for, why complain? If the dharma is not turning your life upside down, the dharma is not working. With that kind of dharma it becomes just another one of these New Age methods, ‘Deepak Chopra’ ‘12 steps’, ‘Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus.’ Dharma should really disturb you.

_The Ultimate Craziness: Going Beyond All Conceptions_

If you really want to practice the dharma that means you aim to achieve enlightenment. Striving to be happy, or to be a good person is not your main objective. Of course, it is not as though you intend to be unhappy or become a bad person. As a rule, in wanting to fit into society, you try to be polite, and gentle. You have etiquette, and you are respectful. Many people think, “As a dharma practitioner…” and when we look at another who may seem to be doing things a little inhumanely, we think: “How can he be a dharma practitioner! He is so arrogant!” Yet it is very difficult to judge another, because for the genuine dharma practitioner, fitting in is not really their aim. If some of the great masters of the past, like Tilopa or Nāropa, were to walk into this room right now, I don’t think we would allow them entry! We would regard them as homeless, street beggars or intruders even. Imagine Tilopa, almost completely naked – perhaps partially covered with something like a g-string, if we are lucky. His hair has never been shampooed, and there is this live fish protruding from his mouth, with its tail still quivering. Alive! “He is supposedly a Buddhist, how can he do such a thing?” We tend to have this very theistic, judgemental mind. Our attitude is very śrāvaka-like. Of course, śrāvaka judgement is already good but we are talking about the vajrayāna here. We are talking about going beyond all kinds of conceptions.

Milarepa, for instance, was considered one of the worst looking, most annoying of guys. He had this habit of going around naked, and when his sister gave him a piece of cloth – intending that he would make some clothing – instead of making a proper shirt or pants, he sewed a cloth to fit his penis like a sock. He made these socks to fit his hands and feet and to fit his penis! He wasted a piece of cloth! And, he wasn’t even doing that deliberately. From an ordinary point of view, we would regard such a person either as completely childish or as beyond human.
We should really have this aspiration. We should pray that one day we reach a stage where we have enough courage to become just like these eccentric people. Right now, we can only afford to be slightly nonconformist. A little bit of craziness is okay. It’s a kind of character building activity. But we are very scared of going beyond that! We would be outcast and all that. So we should pray that someday, we really become crazy. Not in the sense of becoming something like a lunatic from one of these asylums. The craziness we are referring to means going beyond the “eight worldly dharmas”: truly not caring whether you are being praised or criticised is the ultimate craziness. From the mundane, worldly point of view, whenever you are praised, you are supposed to be happy; when you are criticised, you are expected to be unhappy. However, the sublime beings are not moved – that’s why we think they are crazy. This is what you have to aim for.

Don’t do this right now, because it will backfire on you! Just aspire. If you tried doing this now, it would not only fail to help your practice it would also upset others. So continue in a way that any decent human being would want you to behave. But at the same time, let this alarm continuously sound in your head: “All of this is useless.”

**Always Remember the Three Wholesomeness’s**

Lastly, pay attention to the three wholesomeness’s because that will make the practice. We may be seasoned dharma practitioners, but always remember that in order to make an action worthwhile and beneficial, these three are crucial. As I said earlier, when I say practice, it does not necessarily mean sitting down and reciting mantras or doing meditation or something like that. In everything we do, gradually, or eventually at least, we should try to turn that into something beneficial. If not for the sake of sentient beings at this very moment, at least we should have aspirations: “whatever we do, may it benefit sentient beings, at some time in the future.”

So in whatever you do, always do it with the motivation of helping sentient beings. This is the first point of the three wholesomeness’s or what is also known as the three supreme methods. When it comes to dharma practice, we need to be almost ambitious in generating the proper motivation. It is not enough to merely settle for simple kindness or a good attitude. We should try to have the bodhicitta mind.

Even if it is a minor act of offering a small candle, try and remember to do it with the motivation of enlightening all sentient beings. As His Holiness Dudjom Rinpoche actually said: “Dharma practice is quite easy. It’s all a matter of motivation.” It all comes down to our attitude. The only problem is that on many occasions, we just don’t remember these crucial instructions. On top of that, we always end up trying to adopt something more complicated, which is totally unnecessary. So when you are offering a candle, or if you are perhaps offering a bouquet of flowers to your teacher, at that very moment, you should try to seal it with the motivation of bodhicitta.

Thus, you begin everything with the motivation of bodhicitta, and that motivation should then be permeated with the attitude of non-duality. This is something that can be a little difficult in the beginning. In fact, we may not be able to constantly meditate on emptiness, but at least, we should have the notion, “This is just my perception.” Even with the most simple of acts, be it lighting a candle or doing three prostrations, you should have the understanding, “Although I am accumulating merit, and doing something good – it is my mind that is doing this.” And as I advised right from the start, you need to get used to this idea. Try to know that whatever you are offering, or doing, whether it is dharma practice or a simple good deed, all this is something your mind is interpreting. There is no truly existing holy act. It’s just your mind.
Practice does not Necessarily mean Sitting

This really releases you from countless defilements. For one, it releases you from the pride of having done something. Should this person whom you are offering a bouquet of flowers, sort of squash or discard them without a second glance, you don’t care so much. If however, we are lacking in this attitude of non-duality, we will remain attached to the object we are meant to be giving away. We still like to hear of how this person is going to use or not use it. Things like this should indicate to us, there is a strong clinging towards our every act.

At the end, you conclude whatever you do with a dedication. Dedicate this merit to all sentient beings. So that’s the three supreme methods. It’s really important. If you can remember these three in all your actions, and in your day-to-day life, very soon you will become a great dharma practitioner. It won’t take long, just a month or two.

Abandoning, Transforming and Knowing

Now to conclude, I will share three very important points of Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Thaye that are based on the slogans of abandoning, transforming and knowing. This is not only giving you some practical advice on how to practice the dharma, these points will also very clearly define the three yānas: the śrāvakayāna, mahāyāna and the vajrayāna.

Let’s say there is this person who happens to be going through some sort of desire or aggression. According to Jamgön Kongtrul’s instructions, there are three principle ways to deal with the situation. Firstly, in taking the śrāvaka way of dealing with it, we abandon the emotion. You do so by suppressing, dismantling, and discouraging it. Basically, you are getting rid of the emotion. Secondly, in the mahāyāna, the method is to transform the emotion. With this approach, we are not necessarily abandoning it, and nor are we allowing the emotion to manifest as it likes, in a wild, untamed and harmful way. There is this act of actually transforming. Thirdly, in the vajrayāna, the means is to simply know the essence of the emotion. It is a method that is perfected by not really doing anything, at least not in the sense of either abandoning or transforming the emotion, as in the śrāvakayāna or the mahāyāna way. In the secret mantra, we are simply not fabricating anything, and in the state of the unfabricated situation, we aim to simply recognise. That’s how the vajrayāna would deal with it.

The Śrāvakayāna Method: Meditation upon Impermanence and Ugliness

Within the śrāvakayāna, whenever desire, passion or aggression arises, regardless of whatever emotion you happen to be having, you try to discourage and abandon it. To apply this method, you summon to mind the futility aspect of samsaric life and then analyse the results these emotions will bring. It is a matter of knowing that passion, aggression, ignorance and so forth, are only going to result in pain. To give over to these emotions is definitely not going to bring us any real pleasure in the end. Thus, by giving rise to revulsion, we are bringing in this renunciation mind.

In effect, much of the passion and aggression that we go through gives us pain right from the very start. Quite often, even as the emotion first begins, already it’s bringing us pain and suffering. At other times, certain emotions arise and although they may not seem painful at first, eventually we are going to bear the fruit of suffering. Emotions such as desire might well bring us bliss or satisfaction, but that experience is only going to breed more hope and fear. In the end, suffering is what you finally end up with.

So what would a śrāvaka practitioner do? They would abandon these emotions through applying such methods as impermanence meditation and ugliness meditation. As
you experience a growing desire towards an object you consider beautiful, you look and see the reality of that. If, as it were, you happened to be looking at someone and had developed this desire towards them, step by step you would begin to analyze this person. Mentally, you go through and break down each and every particle of their existence, from his or her hair, skin, blood, pus, mucus, right down to their intestines. You will soon learn that there is not a single entity out there that escapes such analysis. Moreover, by carefully analysing in this way, you will no longer feel that this particular substance is something inherently precious. This is what we call ugliness meditation. Not only is it helpful, it is also a path free of risk because it’s dealing with raw truths.

Usually an infatuation with a particular person is anchored in a thought, ‘I really like her’ or ‘I really like him.’ It’s a very vague idea. This is how it was in the story of Utpala, who was a very famous nun during the Buddha’s time. She was so beautiful that she was named after the Utpala, which is an exquisitely beautiful flower. Owing to her beauty, there was this one man who was so attached to her that he would follow her everywhere she went, until finally Utpala asked him, “Why do you chase me, all the time?” And this man said: “I think, I’m infatuated. I’m just so madly in love with you.” Utpala responded by asking, “Which part of me is it that you like the most?” He had to think for a while before finally answering, “Your eyes are the most attractive.” Utpala then said, “Well, that’s easy,” and she took out her eyes and gave them to him. It was because of this she actually became blind. As she offered her eyes to him, she said: “Take these. After all, these are what you like the most.” Yet, with these two dead, staring eyes in his hand, he felt so much revulsion that he renounced and later also became an arhat, a realised being. So that is a prātimokṣa attitude. It’s very riskless.

The śrāvakas are in many ways much more appropriate for us than the secret mantrayāna or the vajrayāna, which can be full of risk. The śrāvakayāna is not only simple, straightforward and honest, it also deals with day-to-day truths. Nothing can change the reality that life is impermanent and every emotion is painful. These are the facts.

It is like when Shakyamuni Buddha went travelling outside his palace and saw death, old age and sickness for the first time. Never before had he experienced such things, and nor had he known the misery of the world. Up until that point, he had been living in seclusion in a beautiful palace. In fact, his father had made certain that he be sheltered from the ugliness of the world. So being fairly naive and inexperienced, when he first saw death, old age and sickness, he asked his chariot driver, “What is this?” And the chariot driver sort of accordingly answered, “This is death, old age and sickness.” Quite innocently, Prince Siddhārtha then asked, “Is this going to come to me, too?” And Channa his chariot driver said, “Yes, Your Majesty, it is also going to come to you.” This is a śrāvaka teaching. It is true, whether we like it or not, death is something that is going to happen to all of us. The śrāvaka teachings are so profound. In this way of practice, through completely discouraging the cause and conditions of the emotions, there is a dismantling of the emotions.

**The Mahāyāna: the Aspiration**

Of course, no mahāyāna master has ever gone and said: “The śrāvakas are wrong. Men and women are actually beautiful. Shit is actually not dirty,” and nor has there been any claim such as, “there are those who may not be able to die.” The mahāyāna completely accepts what is said in the śrāvakayāna. But in addition to the prātimokṣa method of dealing with the emotions, there is an emphasis in the mahāyāna to transform. How are the emotions
transformed? It is by generating this motivation and aspiration: “May all sentient beings jealousy come to me. May all beings be free of jealousy.” Through the practice of giving good things to others and bringing bad things to oneself, the emotions are thus transformed. It is an incredible method.

First of all, let us consider the fact that having become Buddhists we have surely heard how aggression is bad. So it is our immediate reaction to think: “I don’t want this.” When we are going through a certain jealousy or aggression, due to our being in love with this self, as an egoist, as someone who has an ego, we don’t want to have that badness, right? We think in the way of: “I don’t want to have jealousy or aggression.” Yet according to the mahāyāna, owing to this greater view, for us to have such an attitude is thought to be a kind of weakness. If there is this desire of not wanting the bad and only wanting the good, there is still this stain of the ego – there’s still a clinging to the self. Instead, in the mahāyāna we would say: “This is bad. It really is terrible, but all sentient beings also suffer in such a way. May the aggression, jealousy and pride of all sentient beings come to me.”

From the relative point of view, what is happening when we are doing that? It’s going against the ego. It is ego wanting to be holy. Ego wants to be the best, the sublime being, and to go beyond. It is ego wanting to boast: “I have no desire. I have no jealousy.” So this method is totally going against that ego. By continually applying this, the ego becomes smaller and smaller and smaller, until ego has no place to live. Once that has happened, what will be remaining of the emotions? By then, the emotions will have become as unreal as a scarecrow, and much like a mirage. It’s like asking, “How would it be if you didn’t have a you? If there were no ‘you’ and no ‘I,’ then just imagine what would become of the passion? What would you do with it? So that is the great transformation.

On an ultimate level, a bodhisattva knows that the emotions are a compounded phenomenon, and thus will exhaust. Likewise, since an emotion is not a truly or permanently existing entity within itself, it is true to say the emotions themselves hold this characteristic of emptiness. Essentially, these emotions are also something that can be transformed. Without this quality of emptiness, there could not be any transformation, since in that case, the emotions would be real. The bodhisattva understands these very facts. Armed with this knowledge, bodhisattvas are able to transform the emotions.

**The Vajrayāna: Not Fabricating, Just Watching**

In the vajrayāna, we find this incredible method. Of course, both the śrāvakayāna and the mahāyāna methods are also accepted, but on the top of that what does a vajrayāna person do? Nothing. When the emotion comes, just watch that. I think this is where many people get misled. When the emotion comes, you do not fabricate. Now what does that mean? To put it in very simple terms: you stop doing things. But that does not mean to say, if you happen to be walking down the street you immediately come to a halt. If an emotion suddenly appears, when the vajrayāna says ‘do not fabricate’ that does not mean you stop walking, plonk yourself down somewhere on a bench, sit cross legged and then watch. It is nothing to do with that.

Of course, on average whenever an emotion comes along, most people also watch. Yet ordinarily, most of us don’t really watch, we just let go. We follow the emotion. Desire comes and we then follow the desire. Anger comes and we then follow the anger. It might happen that after receiving a little bit of teaching some of us develop this habit of watching, yet as we do so, we watch with, “Where does it comes from?” or “why was it
there?” But to search for the emotion’s source can actually mislead you, because you are fabricating. When you ask: “Why was I angry?” of course, there are a hundred thousand reasons in answer to that and you are always right. The reasons you pinpoint will tend to confirm your belief and you will say to yourself: “I have a right to get angry. I was in the right.” You know how it is, “I should get angry otherwise these people are going to step all over me.” Due to the fact that you are fabricating so much, none of the methods will be able to work with this situation – not the vajrayāṇa wisdom, nor the mahāyāna’s transformation nor even the śrāvakayāṇa’s abandoning.

You should simply not fabricate anything. You just watch and the moment you watch, the emotions disappear right there and then. Of course, for the beginners the emotions reappear, but what is more important, the moment you watch – they disappear. Even if it is only for a split second, that very disappearance of the emotion is also an arising of wisdom. To recognize this naked awareness is the third slogan, it is that of knowing.

Knowing the emotion is to understand that having no root, there is nothing there. The emotion does not stay. It’s not as though these desires are some sort of hideous satanic or evil being that has decided to come and park itself within you. It’s just not like that. Even the word ‘disappear’ is not really the right term, but for now, we have no choice but to use this word. So the moment you have this anger, you watch – not the cause of the anger, or the result of the anger – you just watch the emotion. As you watch, you will find there is nothing that you can point to and say, ‘this is anger.’ That understanding is the wisdom.

**Practicing All Three Points Together**

Now according to Jamgön Kongtrul Rinpoche we must try to practice all three at the same time. We practice the vajrayāṇa, mahāyāṇa and śrāvakayāṇa methods, all in one go. For example, should you be walking down the street, and suddenly experience some sort of aggression, you then apply abandoning, transforming and knowing simultaneously. How is this possible? First you have to know: “Aggression is not good. It is only going to lead to more suffering, and anyhow, there is no point in getting angry, after all this is my own perception,” and so on and so on. Once you have this understanding, you are already practicing the śrāvakayāṇa. In that brief moment of realising the futility of the emotion, you have practiced the first yāna. Second, you think: “May all sentient beings anger come to me. May all beings be free of anger.” In this way, you are practising the mahāyāṇa. And third, you watch and as you just watch, you are then practicing the vajrayāṇa.

**Further Pith Instructions of Jamgön Kongtrul Rinpoche**

After some experimentation with abandoning, transforming and knowing, especially if you are a beginner, you may find that you keep on having this emotion. You continue to have this desire, anger, jealousy, depression or whatever emotion it is that you happen to be going through. So as an additional piece of advice, there is this particular pith instruction coming from Jamgön Kongtrul Rinpoche that I think is one of the most incredible methods. Let’s say it is passion that is the problem. In this method, you visualize yourself as a deity with a consort and you perform the act of unity with the consort. Of course, there is an ordinary sort of passion that will arise. And then, at the center of the heart, you visualize your guru seated on a lotus and moon disk, and as the passion arises, think that your passion, your being a deity, and the guru, all become inseparable, and then just
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watch. You watch that inseparability over and over again. As Kongtrul Rinpoche said, “If that does not heal the passion, then nothing will.”

For passion related problems, you can visualise yourself as a deity such as Chakrasamvara. If it is aggression you are experiencing, visualise yourself as a deity, such as Vajrakīlaya. So you know, you can be creative with this. For different emotions, you can actually visualize a different deity, although that’s not crucial. In fact, in the ultimate sense any deity’s fine, since all the deities have the ability to combat all the emotions anyway. Generally speaking though, for passion, visualise Chakrasamvara; for aggression, Vajrakumāra; and for ignorance you can visualise Yamantaka or Mañjushrī. Or perhaps for aggression, maybe you can also visualize Avalokiteśvara. But particularly when it comes to passion or desire, it is good to visualize a deity with consort.

So these are the three incredible pith instructions coming from Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Thaye, who was truly one of the greatest – Chögyam Trungpa has called him the Leonardo da Vinci of Tibet. So we began with the three supreme methods and have concluded with Jamgön Kongtrul Rinpoche’s three pith instructions and the three slogans of abandoning, transforming and knowing.

[Student]: Did you say that the passion and the guru become inseparable?
[Rinpoche]: Yes, the passion, you, Chakrasamvara and the guru become inseparable. You see, in reality the passion is Chakrasamvara.

[Student]: Who is that?
[Rinpoche]: Chakrasamvara is a deity

[Student]: Couldn’t you visualize Guru Rinpoche?
[Rinpoche]: Well, usually a deity with a consort is encouraged, so Guru Rinpoche with a consort is also fine.

[Student]: Guru Rinpoche with Yeshe Tsogyal?
[Rinpoche]: That’s also fine, but I’m quoting from Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Thaye so I’m trying to be loyal to his words. And Chakrasamvara is such a beautiful deity.

[Student]: What does Chakrasamvara look like?
[Rinpoche]: In appearance, somewhat similar to Kālachakra, but actually, Chakrasamvara is one of the most beautiful deities. Dark blue in color, he appears in a standing posture embracing Vajrayoginī. In this case, Vajrayoginī is the husband, or sort of like the boyfriend. Even the name Chakrasamvara is beautiful. In Tibetan we say ‘khorlo demchok,’ which means the wheel of bliss. This is a practice done by many passion-oriented beings. You see, in the pure aspect, the passion is Amitābha, or Chakrasamvara.

[Student]: Rinpoche, when one watches an aggression and can’t find anything, is it gone, or can one just not find it?
[Rinpoche]: It’s gone for that moment, and that’s what Milarepa said, between the past and future mind there’s always buddhahood.

[Student]: After an aggression is gone, if one continues in trying to find something, is this searching for something only a fabrication?
[Rinpoche]: Yes. That’s a good question. Right now that’s how you have to hear it, otherwise there is no communication. So basically, this is something you have to expand on and that’s what dzogchen teachings are for.

[Student]: Could you please say again, when passion, aggression or ignorance arises we visualise ourself as a deity?
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[Rinpoche]: You visualize yourself as a deity, and inside your heart is the guru. You think that the emotion, the guru and yourself become inseparable, and then watch that.

[Student]: We do all three methods when the emotions come up, but it seems the emotions come up, and go down so quickly that there isn’t time to do all three.

[Rinpoche]: Well, there are so many emotions that you will always have a chance. It doesn’t matter.

[Student]: I don’t understand how it works doing all three at the same time. In my head they’re kind of separate.

[Rinpoche]: You are just not used to it at the moment so you have to think in a sequential way. Once you get used to it, you no longer have to do that. Why worry?

Karmic Connection to a Particular Practice

[Student]: It is often written that you must have something of a karmic relationship with a guru or an yidam. What does karmic connection mean? Is there another relationship possible, other than a karmic one?

[Rinpoche]: No. Though that’s actually quite a big question. To explain this briefly, buddha nature has five immediate manifestations. When these five manifestations are not recognised, they appear as passion, aggression, jealousy, pride, and ignorance. Let’s say you’re more of an angry, or an aggressive person. That would mean you also tend to create karma more linked to aggression. Now let us imagine that in one of your lifetimes, somehow you got inspired and moved by the dharma. That has created a certain amount of merit. Due to that merit and as a result of your defilement, this aggression, you would be more suitable for a practice such as Vajrakumāra. So as you can see, it is kind of a complicated procedure.

[Student]: But how can I recognize this?

[Rinpoche]: Usually, we tend to think, first you should recognise and then practise. In this case however, as you go along with your practice you recognise – and you continue to practice.

[Student]: Do each and every one of us have a special connection with a certain practice?

[Rinpoche]: Yes, and this connection that you have will always throw you back to what is there. For instance, let’s say you’re connected to a vajra deity such as Akṣobhya but somehow you ended up with the padma family, and are perhaps practicing a deity like Amitābha. So you go ahead with this practice and then, through the blessing of Amitābha, it will lead you to Akṣobhya. This has happened in many instances.

[Student]: So we don’t have to search for the right kind of karmic connection?

[Rinpoche]: You should still search. But having said that, it doesn’t mean you stop what you are doing and then search. You just go ahead and continue to practise, and practise, which in itself is already a way to begin searching. That will lead you, definitively.

Dream Yoga

[Student]: I do not want to lose time so I have been trying to work on my practice during sleep. I am trying to become aware of dreaming when I’m dreaming. I’ve been doing this for two months now and not once has it ever happened. What can I do?

[Rinpoche]: When you sleep you should visualize Guru Rinpoche in the center of your heart. Concentrate your mind there. That is the sleeping yoga. By doing that it will take
Practice does not Necessarily mean Sitting

care of your problem. Then, in the morning, Guru Rinpoche rises and sits there. In the long version of the Longchen Nyingtik it says:

From the blooming lotus of faith in the center of our hearts,
Kind guru, our only protector, please arise.
To protect us in this degenerate age
In which we are tormented by intense kleshas and karma,
Remain on top of our heads...

As the verse says, you are inviting from the heart. This idea of letting that guru dwell in your heart as you sleep, it’s so beautiful. It is again, such a symbolic teaching. It tells you that the outer guru is actually your mind; this is your buddha nature. The next day as we awaken, since we are such dualistic practitioners, we still think of the guru as being outside ourselves. The vajrayāna lets you think that. Okay, he’s outside, but where? He’s dwelling in your heart. So you say, ‘please come’ and then he comes out, and you pray again.

Group Practice should inspire Individual Practice

[Student]: I tried to practice without a schedule many times but failed. For me it seems even when I am in retreat it is better to practice with a schedule.

[Rinpoche]: Of course, for some, to have something like a bell ringing, and to think, ‘Oh, I must go’ I guess it works. When I was in Australia, we did it in this way for one month during the Longchen Nyingtik Ngöndro retreat. But I deliberately went away for about seven, or eight days because I wanted to see how the practice would go. I think it makes a difference. Actually, I went completely out of Australia to Canada; it was just timed like that. It is not so good if it is like a kindergarten, where if the teacher is present then all the students behave. This is dharma practice. You are not practising for the lama. You are practising for yourself.

Group practice like this is important. But group practice is also meant to inspire individual practice, isn’t it? How often can we expect to meet like this? It is just not possible all the time. Although nowadays, in the West, people seem to meet together for practice quite a lot. It is not unlike weekend football or a weekend picnic. Weekend ngöndro they call it.

So if you have the time, you should do the ngöndro in retreat form, three or four sessions a day. Otherwise, do it in the daily way, as a daily sādhana, and as a daily practice, and if you want, you can count the numbers and accumulate. You can do the prostrations first, and when you complete the required amount of accumulations, you then go on to the practice that follows. Or if you feel like it, you can do something like 20 thousand prostrations, and then start to focus on the Vajrasattva. After doing perhaps 20 thousand of the Vajrasattva, you then go back to doing the prostrations. Or alternatively, if you want to you can do all the foundations together, whatever you choose to do. I would suggest that you meditate more, always in that period of dissolution. After merging the guru’s mind and your mind, remain there as much as possible.

Communicating Is Not a Life and Death Matter

[Student]: Sometimes I talk about the basic principles of Buddhism to people following some other spiritual path and when I get in touch with them, it’s difficult to communicate.
[Rinpoche]: Well, you should really keep in mind that communicating with them is not a life and death matter. Sometimes in talking with so many people in so many different parts of the world, it’s difficult to communicate. Personally, I have to ring this bell in my head and remind myself that it’s not the end of the world. After a while, you have to give it a rest, but that doesn’t mean you should stop communicating. You just keep on with it, but don’t be rigid.

I think the Tibetans have taught Westerners quite a lot about how to be rigid. It seems to occur almost regularly in the dharma centres. Actually, I’m almost thinking of writing a book about it. Like when it comes to comparing the older dharma students with the younger ones, the older dharma students have learned this certain rigid mind. “When you see Rinpoche, you have to do three prostrations, and you can’t show the right side of your bum,” and there is so much of that kind of behavior. Firstly, you are so attached to doing that, and secondly, even though it’s incomplete, there is this pride of knowing a little of this broken culture. You then pass this on to the new student so that the poor newcomer just ends up getting paranoid. It’s like, “What to do next?” I have seen the older students do this kind of thing, quite frequently, and sometimes, it actually causes young fresh people to lose some of their inspiration towards Buddhism.

The Two Obscurations

[Student]: I’d like to understand more about the selflessness of phenomena and the selflessness of the person. How can these be integrated with life?
[Rinpoche]: Well, this is a very big question. It is corresponding to the two obscurations\(^\text{21}\) that we distinguish between the two vehicles: the śrāvakayāna and the mahāyāna. The śrāvakas are not interested in abandoning the self of phenomena, because this does not obstruct us from enlightenment. What obstructs our enlightenment is this clinging to the self – clinging to this notion of ‘I.’

When we say ‘I’ there is this belief in the existence of personal self, but what you are actually looking at is the five aggregates. You infer the idea of a subjective ‘I’ and yet, there’s no actual, substantial object found to be ‘I.’ In other words, this ‘I’ is entirely an imputation. Nonetheless, we cling to this imputed self, and this is the root of saṃsāra.

[Student]: But we are also attached to what we believe.
[Rinpoche]: Yes. But upon destroying that clinging to the self, although you have not reached the final enlightenment, you do escape from saṃsāra. You no longer go to saṃsāra. Yet for the bodhisattva, due to the greater attitude, this is not sufficient. First of all, it is not nirvāṇa they seek. What interests them is omniscience, which in other words, is an understanding of non-duality, complete non-duality.

For the bodhisattva, it is considered very important to also get rid of the obscuration that causes attachment to phenomena. This is what they meditate upon. Prātimokṣa practitioners meditate and look at the self and give rise to the conviction that this self is not existent. They do this over and over again, until they are able to completely deconstruct the self. Finally, there is no longer any selfishness and therefore no saṃsāra. But for a mahāyāna bodhisattva everything needs to be deconstructed. They deconstruct nirvāṇa, including the path, until each and every aspect of phenomena is deconstructed, even enlightenment.
Ego Is Like a Cat and Our Insecurity Is the Tail

[Student]: Can you talk a little about vulnerability and it’s connection with pride. Mostly I do not recognize the pride or how one can transform this.

[Rinpoche]: Well, ego is like a cat. It is the main culprit. Ego’s insecurity is like a swift and agile tail. As I was saying, ego is this notion that arises when you look at the five aggregates. When you’re looking at the body and your being, there is this thing called ‘I.’ This thinking: “that is something real” is ego. It’s totally baseless, but can’t really be disregarded because this ego is also the very thing that has caused all our problems. What is more, our ego knows this ‘I’ is actually baseless, and that gives rise to tremendous insecurity. Ego knows that it does not exist. So day and night, ego tries to prove its existence, and that’s what we call insecurity. As part of this process, we try to make friends and try to have enemies so as to prove that ego exists. Basically everything from wearing a certain t-shirt, having a certain haircut, hair-dye, to crying, or practising dharma, and having a big guru or a small guru, all of this, is an effort to try and confirm that ego exists.

This insecurity of ego is manifesting all the time, though it actually comes in different forms. There are five main forms: aggression, passion, jealousy, pride, and ignorance. The pride, which is quite a major one, is also something that is quite useless. Ignorance is kind of sweet, and at least with passion, it gets things done, as can aggression. But pride and jealousy are real losers. These two are really destructive.

So there is always this pride, and how does it manifest? It is there once we use too much reference. You’re comparing too much. When comparing yourself with someone great, you feel miserable for not being equal to them. When you set yourself against another who is considered your equivalent, you begin to feel egotistical, and have this feeling of wanting to be better than this person. Then when you’re looking down on someone who is lower than you, this boosts the pride so that you feel, “Ah, I’m somebody!” There is this competitive mind. It’s like that.

[Student]: But if none of these things happen, does that mean I have no pride?

[Rinpoche]: If it does not happen, then of course, this means there is no pride, but it’s always happening. Strictly speaking, even trying to have a friend is an expression of vulnerability. Because of this basic insecurity, ego always wants a little confirmation from others. So it invites friends in, and then when the friends get too close, ego doesn’t want all the space to be occupied. There is always this vulnerability.

Chandrakirti’s Seven Chariots Method

[Student]: Could you say more about how ego is always acting in jealous and angry ways because the ego feels non-existent?

[Rinpoche]: For that, as you study, your understanding will become deeper and deeper since it is one of the main subjects of Buddhism. If you read the writings of Chandrakirti, you will see he is very good at explaining this. He uses a very famous analytical method, called the seven chariots method. Traditionally, there is this example of a chariot, although for us, a ‘car’ might be more appropriate, since a chariot is not something we use nowadays. So when we think ‘car,’ we are looking at something, and imputing this idea of car, right? But in fact, there is no basis to this characterisation. If you go through the parts one by one, from the steering wheel, engine, seat, to the brakes, you know that not one of these items has any such set of attributes that can be referred to as ‘car.’ Similarly, nor is
there any one entity that can be said to be ‘car.’ So we now realise that it is only an idea, of course.

Chandrakirti is not going against the function of the car in anyway whatsoever. What Chandrakirti is going against is our habit of imputing. We impute something that is totally non-existent. This in itself is not so bad, but things really go wrong when we have attachment to that imputed object. When we think, this is my car, your car, a good car, a bad car, then that is where all the samsaric problems start. It is the same with our being. We look at the five aggregates. If you look at them separately, you find nothing that can be referred to as ‘I.’ For instance, if we take a look at form, we know that your nose is not you, and your toe is not you — a toe is a toe. Even right down to our toes, it is possible to dissect this part of our anatomy into nail is nail, skin is skin, blood is blood, and flesh is flesh. So you continue to divide and break everything down until you no longer find anything that you can refer to as ‘toe.’ This is a mahāyāna way of analysing the twofold selflessness of phenomena. So basically, what these mahāyāna masters are saying is self and attachment to self is purely a habit. Self is not a truly existing entity and there is nothing valid to it.

**Various Questions on Practice in Daily Life**

**[Student]:** Rinpoche, in our daily lives, living closely with our families and relatives, such as our parents and grandparents, when trying to take such things as path, somehow it can create difficulties. When we actually have to relate with them, sometimes as the problem’s coming up, I don’t know whether it’s better to stay a little bit more ordinary or...

**[Rinpoche]:** This is a good question. Basically, you should never rely on one specific skilful means. When it comes to giving or not giving toys to babies, one should not be limited to one method. If you were to depend on only a single method, it would not be skilful. This afternoon you should be straight, and tomorrow morning crooked.

**[Student]:** I think Dzigar Kontrul Rinpoche told us, when he goes to India he feels there is so much tradition and so much convention that it’s good to leave.

**[Rinpoche]:** It is good to leave? At times it is, at times it’s not, and for myself it is the same. When I go to India or Bhutan I have to act like a god and it’s terrible to do that, but at the same time I also go there because it disciplines me.

One should not stick with one particular kind of thing. Basically, you should never be rigid. The older dharma practitioners have this rigid tendency. So don’t be rigid. Be flexible.

**[Student]:** How do you know when you are being rigid?

**[Rinpoche]:** It is very difficult. To begin with, never imagine that what you think is always right.

**[Student]:** When we have different samayas with different teachers around specific practices, how can we prioritise?

**[Rinpoche]:** Whomever it is that you think you are the closest to.

**[Student]:** Who is your living teacher, the one whom you have the most devotion towards?

**[Rinpoche]:** His Holiness Sakya Trizin. There are actually several, but I think His Holiness Sakya Trizin is the most representative. And then there is His Holiness Sakya Trizin’s sister who I also received the complete Vajrayoginī teachings from.

**[Student]:** What is her name?
[Rinpoche]: Jetsün Chime, or else they also call her Reverend Chime or Jetsün Gushok. ‘Reverend’ has this connotation of immortal and ‘Gushok’ is bit like a title.

[Student]: If we receive instructions from two or three different masters, can these instructions be shared among one another?

[Rinpoche]: Unless you are instructed not to do so, yes. Some masters will say don’t tell anyone, and in that case, not a single word of those instructions should be spoken, not even to the Buddha.

[Student]: If you’re in a position where you have to give advice to people who are not Buddhist, what kind of advice can you give?

[Rinpoche]: All compounded things are impermanent, all emotions are pain, all phenomena have no inherently existing nature and nirvāṇa is beyond fabrication.

[Student]: Somehow I relate to Christian belief, although not so much to Christianity, but I also feel attracted by Buddhism. I would like to have some advice on how to deal with this.

[Rinpoche]: That’s quite a difficult one. Relatively speaking, if this were an inter-religious or an inter-faith conference I would have said: all religion leads to the same thing, but strictly speaking there is quite a fundamental difference. First of all, as you can see Buddhists do not believe in a self, which in itself is quite a major conviction. The key aspect here is not believing in a self, as a truly existing entity, meaning that there is no truly existing soul or self that needs to be saved, or that goes to heaven. So there is a little bit of a conflict there, but there is a way out. If you are a mahāyāna bodhisattva, there is no real predicament. As a bodhisattva practice of helping sentient beings, you can be anything, and for that matter you can manifest as a Christian, if that is your preference. When it comes to the vajrayāṇa however, it would definitely present somewhat of a problem. I have to tell you this honestly.

[Student]: You said our children will be the first real Buddhist generation, but in my case, with my two children five and six, I’m observing a big mess of confusion. They are being raised in a Christian culture, and then at the same time, they are having this Rinpoche input as well. They’re really mixing up the whole thing, though it is actually happening in a very nice way.

[Rinpoche]: Then?

[Student]: Well it is very poetic, but my son, Paul, has always thought of churches as Rinpoche’s home, so he always wants to go inside each one. He was convinced of this for a long time, and only now is he beginning to understand. I’m trying to explain to him that priests are following Jesus Christ, and Rinpoche’s are following Buddha. Seriously, I’ve found it’s very difficult to deal with this.

[Rinpoche]: Well as a mother or a father it’s your duty to also put your children onto a right path, because you’re supposed to save all sentient beings. At the same time however, they have their own destiny. One day, everyone must choose their own path, and when they do, even if they choose to be a Shiite Muslim, you shouldn’t say so much. You should just pray: whatever it is they choose, may it benefit sentient beings.

[Student]: Paul’s cousin has just had his ‘first communion’ and so Paul wants to receive this ‘communion’ from you. He doesn’t understand the difference between Rinpoches and priests. What if he really insists on having this? If he insists on going to Catholicism out of confusion, out of not knowing it is not the same path, should I just let him receive this?

[Rinpoche]: Yeah, why not? Depending on the different children, I guess. I think, Buddhism is so young in the West, and that means there are a lot of disadvantages. We
don’t have a good school for kids, although many people are trying to do something. The Shambhala people are the most successful, I must say. Even the children of non-Buddhists go to the Shambhala elementary school because it is a very good school. It doesn’t really teach so much on Buddhism directly, although of course, there are the Buddha’s sayings. It’s secular, and at the same time, it’s very love and compassion oriented. There should be these kinds of schools created for kids but it’s difficult because all the Buddhists are so spread out.

[Student]: What can you teach them at this young age? Christianity is so easy to teach children. There’s a God and there is Jesus, it’s very easy.

[Rinpoche]: I think rather than teaching Buddhism itself, we should focus on those things that are very related to Buddhism. With every act, there are consequences. This is not only something we can tell our kids, it is also something to share with non-Buddhists in general. Teaching this is also very practical. If for instance, we want to express the idea that eating a hamburger is not so good, it is not very helpful to simply say, “You should not eat that hamburger.” I think it’s kind of an old, worn out message. It would be much better to say, “Eating that hamburger is your choice, but each time you do so, there are consequences.” Especially if it’s fast food, something like Macdonalds, then as an indirect consequence of your having that hamburger, there is also going to be deforestation and environmental pollution. Whatever you do there is always a consequence added. For a more direct consequence, just think about what happens as a result of your going to a Chinese restaurant and using these disposable chopsticks. I think it is this kind of thing that we should put in the kids heads when they are young, because normally, we seem to talk of ecology or environment as an issue. It’s not really touching us in any direct way. So we should try and make them realize there is always a consequence. For instance, when you are driving what is happening? “Of course, it is making things easier and more convenient but at the same time…” They should know both the positive and the negative side of things. That’s what I was thinking.

[Student]: Sometimes, if my daughter is being really selfish with her brother and not sharing, I try to explain and give her a choice. I try to explain what the results of both ways could be and how she might act. If she listens, and understands but then still decides to be horrible and selfish, should I just let her choose or should I force her to do the right thing?

[Rinpoche]: Those are very big questions, and on each particular day, there will be a different way of dealing with them. One thing you can do is to teach your children the Jātaka Tales. It is also called the “One Thousand Tales of the Buddha.”

[Student]: Could you please give advice for an elderly person: Should such a person still go to summer schools or shedras, or would it be better to just focus more on practice?

[Rinpoche]: Should they go to shedras? Why not? Upon being reborn, such a person will be better prepared, so really why not? As Sakya Pandita said, “Even when you have confirmed that you will die tomorrow, you should still study today.”

[Student]: If one hasn’t finished one’s ngöndro, should one still study…

[Rinpoche]: Yes, definitely, study is good.

[Student]: For the visualization against pride, what kind of deities do we visualize?

[Rinpoche]: Vajrasattva.

[Student]: And jealousy?

[Rinpoche]: For jealousy there is Amoghasiddhi and for miserliness, Ratnasambhava.

[Student]: Can one call visualization a complete projection?
**Practice does not Necessarily mean Sitting**

[Rinpoche]: Yes, of course.
[Student]: And that’s okay?
[Rinpoche]: That’s the only way.
[Student]: Is there anything real coming into it?
[Rinpoche]: There’s nothing more real than the perception, and there’s nothing in this world that exists, beyond perceptions. What you see is basically all that you have. To borrow a more ordinary phrase, one could almost say what you see is what you get.

[Student]: You know how you’ve been talking about peeling back the skin? Well I think this applies to everybody, but in my practice if you can call it that – every now and then I come to a point, where metaphorically speaking, it is really like hitting a brick wall. I can’t go any further and then I feel like I’m going all the way back to square one and that I don’t understand any of it.
[Rinpoche]: That’s good.
[Student]: Do you think it’s kind of like peeling back the skin? Is it that you can’t go any further than where you’re going and then it changes?
[Rinpoche]: You just have to be stubborn a little bit there.
[Student]: Be stubborn?
[Rinpoche]: Just pierce that wall.

[Student]: It seems that once this casket is opening a little it is a similar experience to tripping or taking other kinds of drugs. So I was wondering, if for example, a person takes something like mushrooms, can this be helpful or is it just misleading?
[Rinpoche]: That’s a good question. Tulku Orgyen Rinpoche, one of the past great masters, was offered all kinds of things such as LSD, cocaine, heroine, and so forth. After trying these various substances, he concluded if it is a good practitioner taking these things, it can help in enhancing the practice. If someone who is not really a good practitioner should take these things, it is a different matter. It could then become an addiction, and you don’t want to have a tripping dependence on a substance. Becoming dependant on a substance means you then become a slave of the substance. It’s far better to have to depend on your mind.
[Student]: How about if you just do it once?
[Rinpoche]: I think it can help but that all depends. I mean, with many of the dharma students I have met, they seem to have had their introduction to the dharma by taking drugs. This is not so true nowadays, though. But for the older generation, many have come to the dharma out of being hippies or out of their experiences with drugs. So in such circumstances, before you do one-hundred-thousand prostrations to Guru Rinpoche, you should do at least half a prostration to the drug.

Our karma is incredible. Even your asking this question, this alone must be your great merit. In a past life, let’s say you were born in a very rigid puritanical family, or in some similar kind of situation to that. Then one day, perhaps after reading a book or something, somehow you give rise to this feeling, “I would like to experience the effects of a drug.” Now as much as this is the start of your samsaric life, such a mentality suddenly popping into your head can also be due to your merit. Then you pursued it – you went through all this struggle of breaking through all these concepts of what is proper, what is pure, and what is the right thing to do. Then that experience opened up your mind a little bit further, until you eventually became not so interested in the drug anymore. Perhaps you become more focused on the practice, and in the meditation. Thus, it can be a manifestation of your inner guru. I can confidently tell you that. Definitely.
SHAMATHA AND VIPASHYANĀ: A DOORWAY TO KNOWING THIS ‘UNFABRICATED’ STATE

As it is stated in the text, towards the end of the guru yoga, after receiving the four abishekas, you remain in this natural unfabricated state. Yet most of the time we don’t comprehend what that means. What is non-fabricated? I mean, just about the only thing we really know is fabrication. We don’t know anything about non-fabrication. So in order to generate some understanding of non-fabrication I thought the vipashyanā should be introduced. If you want to know the unfabricated state then I think you have to get it through doing the practice of shamatha and vipashyanā. It is then you will really know.

The vipashyanā based on the śrāvaka system, actually compliments our practice quite a lot. There are two kinds of mindfulness that we will focus on at this point: mindfulness of the body and mindfulness of feeling. Mindfulness of the body includes the sound and the taste along with anything visual.

So anyhow, I want you to remain sitting until I ring the bell. Scratch your legs, cough, and clear your throats now, because once we’ve started, there should be no movement at all. The śrāvakas might do ten hours of this practice. And please, of course, you’re allowed to swallow. That’s the only way to keep your blood circulation flowing. Apart from this, there should be no other movement, whatever happens! Should you feel as though your nose is running, or there is mucus in your nostrils, don’t even attempt to clean it. Even if there is some sort of itch to the throat, still no coughing! If you feel like scratching, or like moving a little, do not give in to that feeling! If some insect is crawling towards you, and getting closer and closer, still nothing, still no reaction.

What you are aiming to do is heighten the sensation of your body as much as possible. So when you feel something, you should just look at that. Also, if possible there should be no movement of the eyes, and no yawning. No movement at all! If you happen to do one of these things accidentally, you should stop there and wait until the next session. So if you start, and then within one minute, you forget your mindfulness, and move even a little bit, don’t attempt to continue and do the meditation over again, otherwise, this will become a bad habit.

[Student]: When are you going to ring the bell?
[Rinpoche]: We don’t know!
[Student]: When we close the eyes...
[Rinpoche]: You had better not close your eyes. It is better not to escape! Closing the eyes is escaping.
[Student]: When you stop blinking…

TheEye.and/Tögal

[Rinpoche]: You are not really supposed to allow yourself to blink, but right now you have no control, so you will. As you get better and better, not only won’t you blink, you won’t even move. But for now, the eye is akin to mercury; it moves the most. Just to briefly explain, togal has so much to do with the eye, and if you understand something of togal, you’ll then see why the sight is so important. And that’s why I’m asking you not to close your eyes.
[Student]: Is it better to breathe through the mouth?
[Rinpoche]: It doesn’t matter. Likewise, with the sitting posture, you can sit however you want. The only thing is you can’t lie down. Once you start sitting though, that is it. Whether you are sitting in a stretched out position or cross-legged, you must stay with that. It’s the only way.

**The Four Mindfulness’s**

When we are doing shamatha, by focusing on the breath, we are using an object to enhance our concentration. In the vipashyanā, you’re being aware of four things: awareness of the body, feeling, dharma and mind. Out of the four, right now, we are learning the most outer one, which is the body.

[Student]: Before I found it uncomfortable to sit like this, but now that I’m comfortable, I fall asleep.

[Rinpoche]: Each time you feel something that’s actually good! If you’re feeling sleepy, you should really look at that. As it happens, you usually have no idea how the body is when you fall asleep and are sleeping. So you should watch this body, then you’ll really know. After a while, even when your eyes move a little bit, you almost feel that your whole body moves. Right now, the only instructions you have for the body mindfulness are to sit straight and not move. Then, when you have a bodily pain or a bodily sensation, you just watch that.

[Student]: You don’t make the body the object? You know, like watching the body all the time...

[Rinpoche]: No. Just make sure that your body doesn’t respond to a feeling – like for instance, the urge to scratch.

[Student]: What happens if you space out, I always thought that was really bad…

[Rinpoche]: You’re jumping ahead. For that, there is dharma mindfulness and mind mindfulness. Since in this case, dharma means phenomena, it is actually phenomena mindfulness. Then mind mindfulness is referring to being conscious of the mind. Only when we talk of mind mindfulness, do we then talk about spacing out and all of that. Anyhow, phenomena mindfulness and consciousness mindfulness are included during the initiation, during the guru yoga, so there is no need to worry so much about this. What we have been doing is the body mindfulness.

Basically, you should forget about dharma and mind mindfulness for now. It is not something that you will do this year, nor in all likelihood, the following year. Maybe it is not even necessary at all. Yet on the other hand, body mindfulness and feeling mindfulness, you should really do a little bit of these.

So with this first chapter of the vipashyanā, in doing the body mindfulness of just watching, it will almost force you to develop your shamatha. When there is pain, it just doesn’t go. Even when you try to think of something else, still it returns. It won’t go, so you just watch and watch and watch. That’s all you can do.

[Student]: Does one have to just watch the body? Or when it’s uncomfortable is it alright to use shamatha?

[Rinpoche]: It is better to just apply the pain, and to watch that. This is much faster. Why go and do the shamatha? If you do that you are taking it one further step than you need to.

[Student]: But what is the difference between shamatha and vipashyanā?
Shamatha and Vipashyana

Vipashyanā Triggers an Understanding of Emptiness

[Rinpoche]: There is a big difference! The vipashyanā has a view, but the shamatha doesn’t. In doing vipashyanā we are trying to understand emptiness, but with shamatha we are not concerned with emptiness. Shamatha is only concerned with generating non-distraction, that’s the whole purpose.

[Student]: Doesn’t the view automatically arise when you sit?

[Rinpoche]: Well, that’s the whole idea, you watch that and then after a while that triggers an understanding of emptiness. It is the view that makes the difference, otherwise you can almost query, what is the difference between shamatha and guru yoga? In the shamatha, they don’t teach you the view, and it is the view of egolessness that makes a difference. Shamatha doesn’t care about your body. Here we care, because the body is one of the aggregates. The body, the aggregates are the cause of attachment to the self, and so on and so on. With shamatha, all we concentrate on is this mind that is constantly distracted. You don’t want the mind to do that, and this is what shamatha is for.

Having said that this is already quite an achievement. I tell you, if a person truly does shamatha properly, the shamatha guy can actually achieve certain results that might make you think there is complete enlightenment. They call it shyin yang – perfection. This person will even have light issuing from their body. In addition to that there will be clairvoyance, a bit like omniscience. There is also destruction of the emotions, as well. The reason being, shamatha calms the mind totally.

[Student]: But they still have karma?

[Rinpoche]: Yes, although they don’t really care about karma. And mind you, they don’t create as much karma as ordinary people do, because for a shamatha person, their mind is very calm.

[Student]: If, during the meditation, whenever a thought arises I let the thought go, it would mean I was watching my thoughts, wouldn’t it? Would that mean I’m doing it wrong?

[Rinpoche]: No, that’s fine. That’s an added bonus. You’re leaping ahead towards the consciousness mindfulness.

[Student]: You see, I don’t know if I could just do the body…

Mindfulness Itself Is a Strong Discipline

[Rinpoche]: Well, that’s the whole purpose. In a way, it’s as though the first mindfulness, the mindfulness of body is a trick. We know there will be a certain result achieved by hauling this body into a cage, with this discipline of don’t move, and don’t stretch! It leads to many other things. For a start, it disciplines you, since mindfulness itself is a very strong discipline.

You should really do this! Even if you don’t manage to do the four foundations, just doing the four vipashyanā, there is so much blessing in that alone! Moreover, if you have a non-Buddhist friend, who shows interest and asks you, what do you Buddhists do? Then you should teach them shamatha and vipashyanā. It’s totally non-theistic, and at the same time, it’s totally Buddhism. If somebody walked into the room while you were doing the maṇḍala offering, they would really wonder: “What is happening? Why is this bunch of people throwing rice onto a plate over and over again?” But on the other hand, if you ask them to sit and do vipashyanā or shamatha even just for few minutes, they will know there is something to this. Unless for some obscure reason they are pretending otherwise, they would have to know. What they might say is “Nothing seems to be happening.” Then, the
first thing you should say is, “That is it!” That is the result. Really, vipashyanā is quite important! I’ve done this in Taiwan and we went on for almost six days.

[Student]: Was it a whole day?
[Rinpoche]: It was two hours in the morning, and two hours in the afternoon. Then every hour we had a break, where we just sort of sat on the mat for about fifteen minutes or so.

[Student]: I am sitting very calmly, and then I have the feeling of losing connection to the body. Maybe it's a sort of escape.

[Rinpoche]: That’s good! Lose more connection! You should lose connection with the body. Then slowly the feeling goes, and slowly the dharma, and finally you should lose connection with the mind. It is then that rigpa, the awareness, will come in.

[Student]: When trying to sit I sometimes use one technique that I have learned, which is to imagine being under the sea or ocean. It’s a kind of meditation.

[Rinpoche]: That’s fine. You just can’t move that’s all. In this case, the discipline is you’re not allowed to move. You can try to bring in all kinds of creative imagination, but after a while none of this works. After a while, the pain will force you to pay attention, and then you should just pay heed to that. Just keep on focusing on that pain again and again. Of course, I should not tell you the result, because otherwise it will become a concept in your head and then you will be looking for it. Each of you will have a different result.
Appendix I:

*The Excellent Path to Enlightenment*

**The Abbreviated Practice of the Preliminaries**

NAMO
Until I and all beings attain enlightenment,
I take refuge in the three roots.
To attain buddhahood for the benefit of others,
I arouse aspiring, entering, and absolute bodhicitta.

A
Above my head, on a lotus and moon,
Is guru Vajrasattva with consort.
From the mantra in his heart centre flows a stream of amrita,
Which purifies sickness, dôns, evil deeds, and obscurations.

Recite the hundred-syllable mantra.

Vajrasattva melts into light, which dissolves into me.

OM ĀH HŪM
The Buddha fields of the three kāyas, enjoyments,
And clouds of the outer, inner, and secret offerings
We offer to the three jewels and three roots.
Having accepted them, please bestow the supreme and ordinary siddhis.

OM ĀH HŪM GURU-DEVA-ḌĀKINĪ-SAPARIVĀRA RATNA-MANḌALA-PŪJA-
MEGHA ĀH HŪM

In the space in front, in the midst of rainbow light,
Is the root guru, Thötrengsal,
Surrounded by oceans of vidyādhāras of the three lineages,
He is the embodiment of all refuges.

With exertion, recite the Seven Line supplication and the vajra-guru mantra.

At the end:

The light rays from the three syllables in his three centres
Bestow blessings, abhisheka, and siddhi.
The guru melts into light, which dissolves into me.
Uncontrived and inseparable from him, I rest at ease.

Then dedicate the merit.

This was written by Khyentse Wangpo.

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Appendix II:

An Outline of the Ngöndro
(from the Refuge Through to the Vajrasattva Practice)

Points 1: First is "stopping the chain of mundane thoughts."

2: Clearing the stale air (*).\textsuperscript{22}

3: Transforming the atmosphere with the invocation of Guru Rinpoche.

4: "Lama khyeno" and contemplation of the Four Common Thoughts.

5: Visualizing the object of refuge, and then actually doing the refuge. In this case, the refuge with the bodhicitta.

6: Tonglen (*).

7: The Four Immeasurable Thoughts (*).

8: Dissolving the refuge and bodhicitta.

9: Visualization of Vajrasattva and reciting the liturgy.

10: Chanting the 100-syllable-mantra with Four sub-categories.

11: Prayer to Vajrasattva.

12: Vajrasattva dissolves into you.

13: You as Vajrasattva, reciting the six-syllable-mantra.
Appendix III:

Diagram of the Seven Point Maṇḍala

[Diagram of the Seven Point Maṇḍala with labels for various points and directional arrows.]

- W: Aparagodāṇīya
- S: Jambudvīpa
- E: Purvavideha
- N: Uttarakuru
- Sun: 6
- Moon: 7
- Mount Meru: 1

The diagram illustrates the arrangements of the points in the Maṇḍala with arrows indicating their positions relative to each other.
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Endnotes

1 The Buddhist vehicle that is also referred to as the Theravada.

2 Someone who follows the śrāvaka tradition.

3 From An Elucidation of the Excellent Path to Omniscience: A Liturgy for the Preliminaries of the Heart Essence of the Great Expanse, the Longchen Nyingthik Ngöndro compiled and composed by Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo. Translated by the Vajravairochana Translation Committee. © 1996-2000 by the Vajravairochana Translation Committee, 1619 Edward Street, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada B3H 3H9. All rights reserved.

4 Excerpt from Chapter 1, Stanza 23, Shantideva’s, The Way of the Bodhisattva (Bodhicharyāvatāra), translated by the Padmakara Translation Group.

5 thos bsam sgo sm gsun - Hearing, reflection and meditation. ‘Hearing’ in this sense means ‘learning’ as it includes receiving oral teachings and studying scriptures in order to clear away ignorance and wrong views. ‘Reflection’ is to eradicate uncertainty and misunderstanding through carefully thinking over the subject. ‘Meditation’ means to gain direct insight through applying the teachings in one’s personal experience. Rangjung Yeshe Translations & Publications, Electronic Dictionary.

6 Excerpt from Chapter 5, Stanza 68, Shantideva’s, The Way of the Bodhisattva (Bodhicharyāvatāra), translated by the Padmakara Translation Group.

7 According to Sogyal Rinpoche’s Tibetan Book of Living and Dying, tiklé are points or balls of light of different sizes.

8 Female lay practitioner; the vows of a female lay practitioner.

9 dur khrod brcyad - Eight charnel grounds: 1) Cool Grove, Sitavana (bsil ba tshal), in the east. 2) Perfected in Body (sku la rdzogs) to the south. 3) Lotus Mound (pad ma bṛtsegs) to the west. 4) Lanka Mound (lan ka bṛtsegs) to the north. 5) Spontaneously Accomplished Mound (lhom grub bṛtsegs) to the south-east. 6) Display of Great Secret (gsang chen rol pa) to the south-west. 7) Pervasive Great Joy (he chen brdal ba) to the north-west. 8) World Mound (jig rten bṛtsegs) to the north-east. There are also numerous other lists of charnel grounds. Source: Rangjung Yeshe, Electronic Dictionary.

10 See Appendix I: Outline of the Ngöndro Practice.

11 See Appendix II: Diagram of the Seven Point Mandala.

12 See Appendix III: Diagram of the 37 Point Mandala.

13 The four kinds of jewels are crystal, sapphire, ruby and gold.

14 In HH Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche’s The Wish-Fulfilling Jewel, it is explained that the eight bone ornaments symbolise the transmutation of the eight conciousnesses. Set with jewels, the eight bone ornaments are listed as: diadem, earrings, three kinds of necklaces, bracelets, anklets and belt.
The ‘four empowerments’ otherwise known as the four initiations or the four abhishekas include: the vase initiation, the secret initiation, the wisdom initiation and the word initiation. For an in-depth study see: Tsele Natsok Rangdrol, Empowerment and the Path of Liberation.

Of the four main philosophical schools found within Buddhism: the sautrāntika, the vaibhāṣika, the citmatāra and the madhyamika, the fourth, can be further divided into two: the prāsaṅgika and the svātantrika. Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche, The Madhyamikāvatāra teachings, France, 1996-2000.

The system of monastism and ethical rules, as practiced in the Tibetan tradition.

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The two obscurations are also referred to as the emotional veil, and the cognitive veil. The emotional veil is the belief in a truly existing self; this gives rise to all the emotional afflictions. The cognitive veil, refers to conceptual thinking and the division of phenomena into subject, object and action. Treasury of Precious Qualities, A Commentary of the Root Text of Jigme Lingpa by Kangyur Rinpoche.

Those points marked with an asterisk can be optional.