

HOW TO PRACTICE



Instructions on the Common Great Perfection Preliminaries of the Heart Essence of the Vast Expanse

JIGMÉ LINGPA

Homage to the buddhas and bodhisattvas!

This text presents the common preliminaries of the Great Perfection: Heart Essence of the Vast Expanse, condensing these teachings into a practical set of instructions containing six topics:

- 1) The rarity of the freedoms and riches
- 2) The impermanence of life
- 3) The shortcomings of samsara
- 4) The principle of karmic causality
- 5) The benefits of liberation
- 6) How to follow a spiritual teacher

THE RARITY OF THE FREEDOMS AND RICHES

This topic entails four steps:

- ▶ A contemplation of the essential freedoms
- ▶ A contemplation of the specific riches
- ▶ A contemplation of the metaphors that illustrate their rarity
- ▶ A contemplation of their relative improbability

The Eight Freedoms

When you are born into one of the eight restricted states, you will lack the power to practice the Dharma, and in this sense you will not be free. This occurs in the following way: If you are born in the hell realm, you will suffer relentlessly from agonizing heat and cold, and therefore have no opportunity to practice the Dharma. As a spirit, you will be unable to practice due to painful experiences of hunger and thirst. As an animal, you will be kept from Dharma practice by the suffering of enslavement or by being preyed upon. Likewise, if you are born as a long-life god, your time will be passed in a blank state of mental dullness, and you will have no opportunity to practice. If you are born in a borderland, you will be unable to practice the Dharma due to the absence of the Buddha's teachings. If you happen to be born in the unfortunate position of one who practices non-Buddhist faiths or one who has a similar outlook on life, your own mind will be tainted with distorted beliefs that will keep you from practicing the Dharma. If you are born in a dark age, you will not even hear the words "Three Jewels," nor will you be able to tell virtue from vice. Thus, if you are born at such a time, you will be unable to practice the Dharma. If you are mentally retarded, your consciousness will be unfit to practice the Dharma. Not being born into any of these eight states is what we mean by the term "opportunity," and since one will then have the chance to practice the Dharma, the word "freedom" is used.

Therefore, begin by taking refuge and cultivating bodhichitta, and then rejoice in the fact that right now your mind hasn't taken birth in one of these eight restricted states. Think to yourself, "In essence, these eight freedoms will be extremely difficult to come by in the future, so if I don't apply myself diligently to the Dharma now, my human existence will be rendered useless!" Reflect on this again and again. To conclude, dedicate the virtue you've accumulated to all sentient beings, and do the same for the topics that follow.

To supplement this contemplation, carefully examine your mind to see if it has fallen prey to any of the eight incidental circumstances or eight factors that cut one off from the Dharma. All of these will restrict you from practicing. Exposing your own faults in this manner is extremely beneficial.

Concerning the two sets of eight incidental circumstances that restrict Dharma practice, the *Precious Wish-Fulfilling Treasury* states:

Disturbed by the five poisons, ignorant and stupid, caught in
Mara's grasp,

Lazy, bursting with an ocean of negative karma, being dominated by others,
 Practicing out of fear, and being a spiritual person only in appearance—
 These are the eight incidental circumstances that restrict Dharma practice.

And:

Bound tight, with extremely degenerate behavior,
 No disenchantment with samsara, without even a shred of faith,
 Engaging in nonvirtue and negativity, with no interest in the Dharma,
 Lax when it comes to keeping the vows and samayas—
 These eight will cut your mind off from the Dharma.

These two sets of eight circumstances can befall one very easily. Therefore, if you fail to approach them with some sense of discernment, merely attaining the essential freedoms will not necessarily prevent you from eventually falling into a situation where you will not have the opportunity to practice the Dharma. Keep in mind that this kind of freedom is simply the ordinary leisure one might experience in old age.

The Ten Riches

The five personal riches are as follows: You will not encounter the Dharma without being born as a human. That you have such a human form at present is the *richness of support*. Neither will you encounter the Dharma if you're born in a borderland or some other location where the Dharma doesn't exist. Since you have been born into a central location where the Dharma is present, you have the *richness of place*. Not having a full set of correctly functioning sense faculties is an obstacle to practice. Now that you are free of such problems, you possess the *richness of the quality of sense faculties*. If you lead an immoral life and continually engage in nonvirtue, you will effectively be turning your back on the Dharma. That you are now inclined toward virtue is referred to as the *richness of a special attitude*. However, if you don't place your faith in the right place, meaning the teachings of the Buddha, your mind won't be directed toward the Dharma. That you are now able to direct your mind to the Dharma is the *richness of faith*. Since the presence of all five of these factors depends on you, they are referred to as "the five personal riches."

The five circumstantial riches are as follows: If you haven't been born in

an enlightened age, in a world where a buddha has appeared, you won't even hear the word "Dharma." That you now find yourself in an age where a buddha has appeared is the *richness of a special teacher*. However, even if a buddha does appear, if he or she doesn't teach the Dharma, it won't be of any benefit. That the Buddha has turned the wheel of Dharma three times is the *richness of Dharma*. Nevertheless, if these teachings have been given but then enter a state of decline, they won't be able to help us. Since the period in which the doctrine will remain has not yet ended, we have the *richness of time*. If you don't practice the teachings, they won't do you any good, even if they are still present. Having entered the door of the teachings is the *richness of your own good fortune*. Once you've entered the teachings, if you haven't met with conducive circumstances for practice, meaning that you have not been accepted by a spiritual teacher, you won't gain a true understanding of the Dharma. If you have been accepted by a teacher, this is the *richness of superior compassion*. As the presence of all five of these factors depends on other conditions, they are referred to as "the five circumstantial riches."

When complete, these eighteen factors form the support for practicing the sacred Dharma, hence the term "precious human body." On the other hand, if just one of these is missing, you will be unable to genuinely traverse the path to liberation. If this is the case, what you have is called an "ordinary human body." Therefore, from today onward, you should rejoice in the fact that you now have what can truly be called "a precious human body." Still, since immoral activity, the waning of faith, and other such conditions can lead to the loss of these eighteen factors, you must be on guard. This is an important point! A situation like this will not be found again.

If you don't do something meaningful with your freedoms and riches now, you will end up in the unfortunate position of having fallen into the lower realms, where you won't be able to tell right from wrong. Even if you do manage to be reborn in the higher realms, it will be difficult to meet a spiritual teacher. Whatever you do will end up creating negativity, and it will become impossible to be freed from the sufferings of samsara. In a heartfelt manner, think to yourself, "What a fool I've been not to see this problem!" Even when you're in the city or the middle of a large market, you should carefully examine your situation to see if you have this precious human body with all of these eighteen factors. Then, using your own existence as the basis for your considerations, ponder again and again how difficult it is to find such a fortunate situation.

A Metaphor

The Buddha likened the rarity of finding such a precious human existence to the following situation: Imagine a wooden yoke with one hole floating on the surface of an ocean churning with huge waves. In the depths of this ocean, there is a blind turtle. This wooden yoke doesn't stay still for even a moment, and the turtle comes to the surface only one time every hundred years. The support of a human body, the Buddha said, is even more rarely met with than the turtle putting its neck through the hole of the yoke.

The Probability of Obtaining the Freedoms and Riches

Likewise, if you observe the various numbers and types of sentient beings, you'll see that obtaining a human body is virtually impossible. If you equate the number of hell beings to the stars seen in the night sky, for example, spirits are as rare as a star seen in daylight. Likewise, when the number of spirits is compared to the stars in the night sky, animals are no more numerous than the number of stars seen during the day. And again, the same can be said of the number of animals compared to a rebirth in the higher realms. This latter point is a fact that we can directly perceive: Just examine how many parasites live on or inside a single human body.

Furthermore, if you consider the number of people who have no interest in the Dharma or who have fallen away from it, you'll see that those who lead a spiritual life are extremely few in number. Therefore, obtaining a mere human existence, and especially a Dharmic human existence, is extremely difficult. Contemplating this over and over again, cultivate a sense of certainty regarding the difficulty of obtaining the freedoms and riches.

THE IMPERMANENCE OF LIFE

The External Universe

To begin, meditate on impermanence by contemplating the external universe. The four continents, Mount Meru, and the heavenly realms, with their firm and stable enclosure, last for an entire eon. Nevertheless, one day these too will perish, at which point they will be completely destroyed by seven fires and one flood, with not even a bit of ash left behind. Contemplate this process and cultivate a sense of sadness.

THE APPLICATION OF MINDFULNESS



Instructions on the Unique Great Perfection Preliminaries of the Heart Essence of the Vast Expanse

JIGMÉ LINGPA

Homage to the self-occurring primordial sphere!

Once your mind has been made open and receptive through the seven-point mind training of the common preliminaries, the unique and specific preliminaries will enable you to establish yourself at the exalted level of the Luminous Heart Essence of the Natural Great Perfection, the supreme king of vehicles.⁴¹

The multitude of approaches to teaching the stages of these practices that have emerged over time has made the Heart Essence teachings seem like a mere painting of a butter lamp. Saddened by this state of affairs, I hereby pledge to establish a foundation for the teachings by setting forth the enlightened intent of the lord of victorious ones, Longchen Rabjam, the master of the teachings of this exalted vehicle.

TAKING REFUGE

The topic of taking refuge addresses 1) a delineation of the different motivations for taking refuge, 2) how to take refuge, and 3) a contemplation of its benefits and advantages.

Differences in Motivation

Those who fear the sufferings of the three lower realms and take refuge in the Three Jewels to pursue the pleasures of higher, pleasurable states of existence are known as *lesser individuals*. They do not pursue any goal aside from a mere temporary pleasure. Those who fear the sufferings of samsara and take refuge in the Three Jewels to pursue a state of peace and bliss for themselves alone are known as *middling individuals*. Their goal is a mere individual liberation from samsara. Those who see the suffering of other sentient beings throughout limitless samsara and take refuge to free them from their plight are known as *superior individuals*. They focus on the desire to attain buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings. Of these three, reject the motivations of the lesser and middling individuals and form the correct motivation by thinking to yourself, “For the sake of all sentient beings, I will now train following the example of the superior individual!”

How to Take Refuge

The approach of the common vehicle is to take refuge by regarding the Buddha as one’s teacher, the Dharma as one’s protection, and the Sangha as one’s companions while practicing the path. Generally speaking, the unique approach of the Secret Mantra Vehicle is to take refuge by offering one’s body, speech, and mind to the guru, relying upon the yidam deity, and taking the dakinis as one’s companions. In the tradition of the Vajra Essence, with its extraordinary and exalted methods, one takes refuge in the swift path in which one utilizes the channels (*nadi*) as the nirmanakaya, refines the energies (*prana*) into the sambhogakaya, and purifies the essences (*bindu*) into the dharmakaya. Finally, the ultimate and undecieving refuge is the true vajra nature, the wisdom that dwells in the enlightened minds of these objects of refuge. This wisdom is empty in essence, clear in nature, and all pervasive in its compassion. Here one aims to bring the great indivisibility of these three qualities into one’s own being and resolve them once and for all.

To acquaint yourself with the principles outlined here, visualize as follows for the main practice of taking refuge: Imagine your surroundings to be a beautiful and enchanting pure land made of various jewels. In the center of this land is a wish-fulfilling tree, its five branches filling the entire sky. Its perfect leaves, flowers, and fruit are ornamented with webs of jewels,

tiny bells, and the like, and in its center is a jeweled throne supported by snow lions and stacked with a multicolored lotus, sun, and moon. Upon it sits your root guru, the essence of all buddhas, in the form of the Vajradhara of Oddiyana and his spiritual partner. Seated in tiers above him are the gurus of the Great Perfection lineage, with the yidam deities, warriors, and dakinis surrounding them. On the front branch of the tree are Buddha Shakyamuni and the buddhas of the ten directions and three times. On the right branch are the Eight Close Sons, the Sangha of bodhisattvas. On the left branch are the assembly of realized beings, the supreme pair, and the rest of the Sangha of listeners. On the branch behind the throne is the Jewel of the Dharma, represented by a stack of texts humming with the natural sounds of the vowels and consonants of the Sanskrit alphabet. Every gap between all these beings is filled with a virtual ocean of oath-bound Dharma protectors, both those arisen from wisdom and those produced by karma. All these beings possess qualities of knowledge, love, and power that defy the imagination. Looking upon you with love, they now dwell before you as your great guides.

You and all sentient beings, including your parents and those who have caused you harm, are gathered together on the ground before the jewel tree with joined palms, thinking, “From now until we attain the very essence of enlightenment, we rely completely on you! We offer ourselves to you! We have no one in whom we can place our hopes, no one to whom we can turn for refuge, aside from you!” As this thought occupies your mind, stirring up intense feeling, recite the following lines:

In the true Three Jewels, the sugata, and Three Roots; ॐ
 In nadi, prana, and bindu, the nature of bodhichitta; ॐ
 In the essence, nature, and compassion mandala, ॐ
 I take refuge until the heart of enlightenment is attained! ॐ

Once you have recited this prayer as many times as possible, imagine that you and all sentient beings dissolve into the Three Jewels and the other objects of refuge, all of which then dissolve into the central figure of the guru, who embodies all three sources of refuge. Finally, the guru as well dissolves into the dharmakaya, the primordial state free from elaborations. To conclude, simply rest evenly in the true nature as long as you are able; this is the ultimate act of taking refuge.

The Benefits of Taking Refuge

Taking refuge is the foundational support for all of the Buddha's teachings. The mere act of taking refuge plants the seed of liberation, distances one from the accumulation of nonvirtue, and causes virtue to develop. It is both the basis and support for all vows and the source of every excellent quality. Even on a temporary level, taking refuge will prompt beneficial divine forces to offer their protection, bringing success to whatever one aims to achieve. It ensures that one will never be apart from the presence of the Three Jewels and that one will recollect one's past lives. Hence, as it leads to happiness here and hereafter, and ultimately to the attainment of buddhahood, the virtues of taking refuge are simply too numerous to count.

As a related topic, I will also summarize the defining characteristics of the precepts associated with taking refuge, as these ensure that the refuge vows remain present in one's mind stream. Once you have taken refuge in the Buddha, you should no longer look to worldly gods, fickle and malicious tyrants, and other such individuals for protection and refuge, as they themselves are still caught up in samsara. In addition, always maintain an attitude of reverence for any representation of enlightened form, even a broken piece of a statue. Once you've taken refuge in the Dharma, avoid thinking of harming another sentient being, even in a dream. You should also cultivate respect for any representation of the Dharma, even for a tiny part of sacred script. Having taken refuge in the Sangha, you should no longer associate with those who adhere to non-Buddhist philosophies and others whose beliefs and conduct are misguided. You should also show reverence for any representation of the Sangha; avoid stepping on even a piece of yellow fabric.

To sum up, in this Vehicle of the Supreme Secret, the guru is the main object of refuge: The guru's enlightened mind is the Buddha, the guru's enlightened speech is the Dharma, and the guru's enlightened form is the Sangha. Therefore, if you displease the guru, you will have abandoned all objects of refuge. Apply yourself diligently to the vital points of taking refuge, as this is the foundation and support of all the Buddha's teachings.

CULTIVATING BODHICHTTA

Cultivating bodhichitta lies at the root of the Great Vehicle. In this section there are three subtopics: 1) training the mind with the four immeasurables,

2) cultivating bodhichitta, and 3) maintaining the precepts of aspiration and application bodhichitta.

The Four Immeasurables

For equanimity, the first of the four immeasurables, meditate as follows: In our present circumstances, we are extremely attached to our parents, relatives, friends, and other loved ones, while we feel intense aversion toward our enemies and those associated with them. The problem here is that we have not examined the situation clearly. In previous lives, our enemies have undoubtedly been our friends, and vice versa. Though we may now think of some people as our enemies, there is no definitive proof that they will be able to harm us. It is even possible that if we know how to get along with them, they may end up helping us as a friend would. Moreover, we can also see with our very own eyes that sometimes loved ones ally themselves with those who oppose us, rob us of our wealth, create disputes, and so on, like a child who deceives his parents. Even if someone may appear to be a close friend, when that person doesn't get his way, he may end up creating suffering for us as well.

This will not only destroy whatever temporary happiness you may have, it will ultimately create a great flood of obstacles to your virtuous endeavors and cast you into the lower realms. What could be a worse enemy than that? In the future, your enemies could become friends and your friends, enemies . . . there's no way to tell. To think otherwise is simply insane! Therefore, practice remaining in a state of equanimity, free from attachment and aversion to those near and far. Start with one being, then two, and then gradually expand your equanimity toward all beings in the entire universe.

Next, meditate on love. Take all sentient beings as your focal point. Cultivate an intense desire for them all to be happy and prosperous. Your desire should be as intense as the love that parents feel for their small children and their willingness to tolerate ingratitude. With this wish, meditate on compassion and advance your practice by thinking to yourself, "By any means necessary, I will help all sentient beings!"

To meditate on compassion, take as your mind's object someone who is afflicted with intense suffering, such as a criminal who has been thrown into a dungeon and is soon to be executed, or an animal that is about to meet its death at the hands of a butcher. Make this being the object of your love as

though you are a mother and this being is your own child. Meditate with such unbearable compassion that tears well up in your eyes, as you think, "I would do anything! If only this being could be freed from this suffering soon. Now. This very instant!" Then meditate on the lower realms and all those who are creating the causes to be born there. Finally, rest in a state free of any reference point.

Next, meditate on joy. As the object of your meditation, focus on a being in the higher realms, someone who is happy and content, with a long life, a large retinue, and great wealth. Without feeling competitive or envious, think to yourself: "May this person continue to dwell in the higher realms and acquire prosperity even greater than this! May he or she be secure, wise, and acquire other magnificent things! How wonderful it would be if other sentient beings were to live in such a state!" In particular, completely uproot any negative attitudes you may have toward those who have wronged you or those whom you envy; do away with your inability to tolerate the wealth and prosperity of others. Cultivate extraordinary joy for all who are happy. To conclude, rest in a state free of any reference point.

The Cultivation of Bodhichitta

One's mind-set determines the type of bodhichitta that should be cultivated. The wish to establish other beings in the state of liberation having first attained such a state for oneself is the *guidelike cultivation of bodhichitta*. The wish for oneself and other beings to be liberated simultaneously is the *ferryman-like cultivation of bodhichitta*. Not wishing to attain liberation for oneself until all other sentient beings have done so first is the *shepherdlike cultivation of bodhichitta*.

The cultivation of bodhichitta can also be described in terms of the levels of the spiritual path. On the paths of accumulation and connection, bodhichitta is cultivated through devoted conduct. From the first through seventh levels, one cultivates the bodhichitta of superior, completely pure intention. On the three pure levels, fully matured bodhichitta is cultivated. Finally, at the level of buddhahood, one cultivates the bodhichitta in which all obscurations have been abandoned.

These conventional designations notwithstanding, relative bodhichitta is attained through ritual practice, while ultimate bodhichitta arises through the power of meditation on its characteristics. The beginner, however, must rely on the first of these two; you may consult other sources for the ritual conferment of the cultivation of bodhichitta.

THE QUINTESSENTIAL NECTAR OF THE PROFOUND MEANING



*A Concise Explanation of the Great Perfection Preliminary Practices
of the Heart Essence of the Vast Expanse*

JAMYANG KHYENTSÉ WANGPO

Homage to the guru!

What follows is a guide to the various stages of the Great Perfection preliminary practices of the Heart Essence of the Vast Expanse.

PREPARATION

To begin, when it is time to get up at dawn, imagine your guru in the space before you in the form of Padmasambhava, surrounded by a group of dakas and dakinis. With their damarus resounding with the sound of mantra, they rouse you from your slumber. As you get up, imagine your body [to be the deity] and your environment to be a pure realm. Next, visualize the guru in your heart center. He then ascends through the central channel to the space above the crown of your head, where he dwells with obvious delight. Following this, sit in the correct posture, exhale the stale breath nine times, and then rest for a few moments, simply letting your consciousness settle into its natural state. These steps will prepare you for deep meditation.

To practice the blessing of speech, recite the lines that begin, “OM AH HUM. Burning fire emerges from the syllable RAM, incinerating my tongue . . .” If you like, you may insert the supplication that begins, “You, whose immense kindness brings great joy . . .”⁵⁰ prior to *Calling the Guru from Afar*.⁵¹

THE MAIN PRACTICE

The Common Preliminaries

The main practice contains two sections: the common preliminaries and the unique preliminaries. The first section is broken down further into six topics:

- ▶ The precious human birth
- ▶ Death and impermanence
- ▶ The principle of karma
- ▶ The suffering of samsara
- ▶ The virtues of liberation
- ▶ The guru principle

To practice all six topics one after another, recite the lines from the liturgy that begin, “From the blossoming flower of faith in the center of my heart . . .” as you contemplate the following.

There are eighteen factors that constitute a precious human existence: the eight freedoms, which are the opposites of the eight restrictions, and the ten riches. Of these two groups, the freedoms are the essential qualities of the precious human existence, while the ten riches are its specific attributes. An existence with these eighteen qualities is exceedingly rare and inconceivably advantageous. Indeed, you can see this for yourself by considering this situation from the point of view of its causes, the analogies that demonstrate its rarity, and the probability of its attainment.

Nevertheless, while you may have such an existence right now, you are sure to die one day. Even the world around us, solid and stable though it seems, will eventually be destroyed by seven firestorms and one flood, until not even ash remains. Similarly, all the beings that are born into this world will one day pass away; no one can escape this fate. In fact, not only will you die, there is no way to be certain that death will not strike this very evening!

When you pass away, nothing will do you any good except for the pure Dharma. You will not simply disappear when you die. Rather, what happens next will be dictated by your previous actions. Negative actions will bring you a rebirth in one of the three lower realms, where the suffering of suffering is intolerable. Tainted virtuous actions, on the other hand, will cause you to be reborn in one of the three higher realms, where you will still be subject to the suffering of change and the universal suffering of conditioned existence.

For these reasons, you should exert yourself by whatever means necessary to free yourself from samsara, which is nothing but a vast ocean of suffering! To do so, you need to rely upon a qualified spiritual teacher of the Great Vehicle, pleasing him or her in the three ways. Practice your teacher's guidance concerning what to do and what to give up to the letter, without falling under the influence of immature friends or bad influences. To the best of your ability, incorporate this genuine teaching on the certainty of death into each and every day.

Keeping all this in mind, arouse faith in the Three Jewels so that you will be able to practice in this manner, thinking to yourself, "Think of me, Three Jewels!" At the same time, be sure to generate an intense sense of renunciation and subdue your mind stream.

The Unique Preliminaries

The unique preliminaries also contain six sections:

- ▶ Refuge
- ▶ Bodhichitta
- ▶ The meditation and recitation of Vajrasattva
- ▶ Mandala offering
- ▶ The offering of the simple beggar
- ▶ Guru yoga

REFUGE

To take refuge, adopt the attitude of a great being, thinking to yourself, "I now take refuge in the guru and Three Jewels to free all sentient beings, both myself and others, from the terrible sufferings of samsara." With this mindset, envision your surroundings as a beautiful pure realm with a ground made of jewels. In the midst of this enchanting environment is a wish-fulfilling tree that fills the entire expanse of space, its five branches filled with leaves, flowers, fruit, garlands of precious jewels, and small bells. In the center of the tree is your root guru, the embodiment of all the buddhas, in the form of the Vajra Master of Oddiyana.⁵² He sits upon a jeweled throne held aloft by snow lions, resting upon a multicolored lotus and sun and moon discs. Blue in color, he holds a vajra and bell and embraces his spiritual partner, Yeshé Tsogyal, who holds a curved knife and skull cup. They are both clad in silk and wear bone ornaments. He sits in the vajra posture, while above his crown, the gurus

of the Great Perfection lineage are seated one above the other. These gurus are surrounded by the realized root and lineage masters, the yidam deities associated with the six major classes of tantra, and an inconceivable number of the dakas and dakinis of the three abodes. On the branch in front of the guru are Shakyamuni and the rest of the buddhas of the three times in their nirmanakaya form. To his left and right are the assemblies of realized beings: On the right branch is the sangha of the Great Vehicle, including the Eight Close Sons, and on the left, Shariputra, Modgalyayana, and the sangha of listeners. On the branch behind the guru sits the Jewel of the Dharma in the form of stacked books, red in color and emitting the sounds of the vowels and consonants of the Sanskrit alphabet. All the space between these figures is completely filled with a veritable ocean of oath-bound Dharma protectors, both wisdom protectors and karmic guardians. Since all of these possess the infinite qualities of wisdom, love, and power, they accept you lovingly and are now actually present before you as your great guides.

You stand before them, with your father to your right, your mother to your left, and those who have done you harm in front. Surrounding you are the sentient beings of the six realms. Joining your palms as a physical gesture of respect, you all chant the refuge liturgy and think, "From now until we attain the essence of enlightenment, we take the guru as our guide, the yidam deities and buddhas as our teachers, the Dharma as our path, and the dakinis, Dharma protectors, and sangha as our companions along the way. We rely on you; we offer everything to you. We have no other refuge or hope but you. Whatever we do, please care for us!" With intense yearning, take refuge as many times as you can.

At the end, light rays stream out from the heart centers of the sources of refuge, entering the bodies and minds of you and all other sentient beings. Imagine that this completely purifies the two obscurations and their habitual patterns, extends your lifespan, increases your merit, and causes the qualities of learning and realization to evolve. Finally, rest for a short time in a state free from mental fixation.

BODHICHTTA

Start by cultivating the four immeasurables. Begin with equanimity, arousing an attitude free from attachment to loved ones or aversion to those you do not like. Consider the fact that there is no telling whether someone will be a friend or enemy, whether in this life or a future life. Indeed, our relationships with others are never set. In all our lifetimes, which stretch back

infinitely into the distant past, the limitless number of sentient beings have played different roles in our lives. Our friends have harmed us, our enemies have shown us kindness, and so on. You can then take this one step further by considering how all of these beings are none other than our kind parents. On this basis, cultivate the wish to repay their kindness: Arouse love, the wish for them to be happy; compassion, the wish to free them from suffering; and joy, the delight you would feel were they never to be parted from such a state.

With the objects of refuge dwelling before you as witnesses, cultivate aspiration bodhichitta with the following thought, “By all means, I must attain the precious state of perfect buddhahood to bring all sentient beings the perfect happiness of complete liberation.” Next, cultivate application bodhichitta, thinking, “To this end, I will train in bodhisattva activity on a vast scale, as represented by this profound path, working diligently until not a single sentient being remains in samsara!” Without losing sight of these motivations, recite the bodhichitta liturgy three or another suitable number of times.

If you are unable to do this as a regular practice, simply cultivating aspiration and application bodhichitta will suffice. On the other hand, if you prefer, you may train your mind in equalizing and exchanging self and other. In particular, you can imagine sending out happiness with the out breath and taking in the suffering of others as you breathe in. You may also cultivate ultimate bodhichitta, the union of tranquility and insight, prompted by a definitive understanding of the twofold absence of self.

To conclude, imagine that both you and sentient beings dissolve into the objects of refuge. The objects of refuge, in turn, dissolve into the guru at the center. Finally, dissolve the guru into the primordial space of the dharmakaya, beyond elaborations, and then rest in meditation.

THE MEDITATION AND RECITATION OF VAJRASATTVA

During the meditation and recitation of Vajrasattva, chant the lines that begin, “AH. On the crown of my head, in my ordinary form . . .” At the same time, imagine yourself in your ordinary form, with an eight-petaled white lotus on the crown of your head. The stem of the lotus, four finger-widths in length, is inserted into your crown aperture. At its center is a white moon disc, equal in size to the lotus’s orange anthers. Resting upon the disc is a white HUM syllable. In an instant, the HUM syllable transforms into guru Vajrasattva, brilliant white in color and radiating light. Peaceful, smiling,

and replete with all the marks and signs of buddhahood, Vajrasattva wears five garments: a white silk upper garment, a multicolored lower garment, a crown with silk ribbons, and sleeves like those depicted in ancient paintings. He is also wearing eight jewel ornaments: a jeweled crown, earrings, a necklace, bracelets, anklets, a waistband, a long jeweled necklace that hangs below the navel, and a shorter necklace that hangs to the breast. With his right hand, he holds a vajra at his heart. With his left, he holds a bell at his hip. He sits in vajra posture in union with his spiritual partner Vajratöpa, who is white, holds a curved knife and a skull cup, and sits in the lotus posture.

As you imagine all this, practice the meditation and recitation of Vajrasattva with the vital points of the four powers. For the power of support, think the following with intense devotion, “Please purify all the negativity and obscurations in my mind stream! Think of me!” As the power of remorse, generate an overwhelming feeling of regret for all the negativity that you have carried out in the past. For the power of restraining negative behavior, think to yourself, “I will not engage in such activities in the future, even if it costs me my life!” Finally, as the power of applying the antidote, do the following to remedy what you have done in the past: Imagine a HUM syllable sitting on a moon disc in the heart center of Vajrasattva. A strand of letters that form the hundred syllable mantra circle clockwise around the HUM syllable. The letters are white and so fine that they appear to be written with a single strand of hair.

As you visualize this, recite the letters of the mantra for a short while as if you are reading them. This will cause the nectar of great bliss to flow forth, white and radiating light. The nectar flows through the bodies of the male and female deities, emerging from their point of union before it winds down the stem of the lotus and enters your body through the crown aperture. Like trash carried away by a great flood, all illness flows out of your pores and two lower orifices in the form of pus and blood, negative forces emerge as insects, and negativity and obscurations pour out as black liquid. Flowing out, all of this falls into the gaping mouth and down into the stomach of the Lord of Death, who awaits nine stories below in the form of a red bull. This averts untimely death.

Imagining this, recite the hundred-syllable mantra. Ideally, you should recite the mantra as many times as possible. Second best is to recite it one hundred times. At the very least, recite it twenty-one times.

Next, imagine that the nectar completely fills the abodes of the four chakras, thereby purifying the negativity and obscurations of the three gates

in equal proportion. The wisdom of bliss-emptiness, the four joys, arises in your mind stream, causing undefiled bliss to permeate your body and mind.

Following this, offer confession and pledge to restrain yourself in the future. With intense devotion, request Vajrasattva to grant you refuge by reciting the lines that begin, “Protector, under the sway of unknowing and ignorance . . .” Guru Vajrasattva, delighted that you have purified the negativity and transgressions present in your mind stream, laughs with a broad smile. “Fortunate child,” he says, “All of your negativity, obscurations, breaches, and transgressions of samaya are now purified!” With these words, he absolves you, whereupon he melts into light, as the essence of great bliss-emptiness, and dissolves into you.

This sets the stage for you to manifest instantaneously as Vajrasattva in union with his spiritual partner, with all their color, implements, and ornamentation distinct and complete. In the heart center of your body, which should be imagined to be apparent, yet empty like the reflection in a mirror, is the syllable HUM. Surrounding it in the four directions are the seed syllables of the mantra: OM, VAJRA, SA, TVA. An infinite number of white light rays stream out from these syllables, making offerings to the realized beings. Gathering in all their blessings and spiritual attainments, the light then reconverges and dissolves into you. Next, the light radiates out once again and purifies all of the negativity and obscurations of sentient beings. This transforms the entire external universe into the Unsurpassed Realm of Complete Joy and brings all sentient beings of the three realms to the state of Vajrasattva and the five buddha families. Imagine that you and all these beings then recite the quintessence mantra in unison as much as you are able. This purifies the obscurations by specifically utilizing the development stage.

To conclude, gather the elaborations of deity and mantra back into the basic state of luminosity and look at the original face of the true Vajrasattva—the empty awareness that is primordially and naturally unestablished, where the discursive thoughts of something to purify and something that purifies do not exist. Settling into this state is the supreme way to purify the obscurations. Here, one utilizes the ultimate completion stage.

MANDALA

Fourth is the mandala offering. Begin by imagining the field of merit in the space before you, as you did when taking refuge. Clean a mandala plate

ADVICE ON THE LONGCHEN NYINGTIK PRELIMINARY PRACTICES



DZONGSAR JAMYANG KHYENTSE RINPOCHE

INTRODUCTION

The Buddha's teachings aim to liberate us from all forms of delusion. That is what we call enlightenment. Liberation is not only a release from temporary forms of delusion, but also from the very root of delusion. In using the term "delusion," not only are we referring to some of the more gross forms of delusion, but also the subtlest forms of delusion. Even some things that we consider to be wise and virtuous are eventually the very things that need to be purified.

The Buddha taught numerous methods that we can use to release ourselves from delusion. Traditionally, the teachings speak of more than eighty-four thousand methods. Each of these is suited to the needs of a different kind of being and to the variations in motivation and determination that beings possess. Some individuals are determined to completely renounce samsara, for example. That is their main aim. For them, the Buddha taught the Shrivakayana. Others are determined, not only to escape from samsara, but also to avoid dwelling in nirvana. In other words, their aim is to escape all extremes, not only for themselves, but also for the sake of all sentient beings. For them, the Buddha taught the Mahayana, or Great Vehicle. In either case, the methods the Buddha taught are intended to liberate us from delusion.

Escaping delusion is difficult because of the deeply ingrained habits that we have developed over countless lifetimes. One could say that the Buddhadharma is a systematic method that we can use to peel back the layers of

these habitual patterns, which are like the skin of an onion. Through study and practice, we begin to peel off this skin. Each time we peel off a layer, we discover a new layer inside and think we've reached the core. Soon enough however, we realize that it is just another layer, and then we peel off *that* layer as well. The difficulty here is that we have the tendency to get stuck when we reach the inner layers. We do not immediately recognize that this is just a more stubborn and subtle form of delusion. This is why we need to train our minds.

Both the Shrivakayana and Mahayana have a complete system of mind training. In the first, training the mind is based on physical, verbal, and mental discipline. This is accomplished through the whole structure of the vinaya, starting with shaving the head, wearing robes, and basically renouncing the worldly life in a physical sense.

Within the Mahayana there are two further approaches, one that takes the cause as the path and one that takes the result as the path. The latter of these two is also known as the Vajrayana. On this path, we train our mind, not only through renunciation and bodhichitta, but also by transforming impure experiences into pure perception. That is the forte of the Vajrayana; it is unique because of this difference in attitude.

The Vajrayana way of looking at the world is quite different. The shravakas see this samsaric world as something impure; this is what they call the "Truth of Suffering." Following this to its logical conclusion, the world is something to be gotten rid of and escaped from. That is the shravaka attitude. In the Mahayana, samsara is still thought to be imperfect, but instead of trying to escape, the aim is to practice compassion and bodhichitta. In the Vajrayana, we try to understand that all these seemingly impure phenomena are, in reality, pure and have been all along.

Ngöndro practice is rooted in the Vajrayana approach. Unfortunately, the term "ngöndro" has misled a lot of people. Literally translated, it actually means something like "preliminary practices." From this, we somehow develop the idea that this also means "not as important" or "not the main practice." We think of it as something that we have to do before we get to the "real" or "main" practice. This is quite sad because as our study deepens, we will realize that there is nothing more distinctively Vajrayana than ngöndro practice.

In the following explanation of these practices, I will focus on crucial points rather than technicalities. The visualizations and other such details can always be found in the great commentaries, such as *Words of My Perfect*

Teacher and the translations of Jigmé Lingpa's writings included here. Alternatively, you can also receive tips from students who are doing these practices, who can show you how to do prostrations and so forth.

The Structure of the Preliminary Practices

The preliminary practices begin with refuge and bodhichitta, after which there are the three practices unique to the Vajra Vehicle. Refuge is the first preliminary because it diverts one from the wrong path onto the right one. Within the right path, we have the Mahayana and the Shrivakayana. To encourage practitioners to practice the first of these, we have bodhichitta, which embodies the entire Mahayana path.

When we use methods like visualization, substances, and mantras, which are not found in the Shrivakayana and Mahayana traditions, we are practicing the Vajrayana. Included here are the practices of Vajrasattva mantra recitation and mandala offering, where we use substances as a support for practice. Finally, to dismantle the cocoon of delusion that surrounds us, we have the most profound path of guru yoga. These three—Vajrasattva, mandala offering, and guru yoga—are essential parts of the Vajrayana path. Thus, all three vehicles are contained within the ngöndro: refuge as Shrivakayana practice, bodhichitta as Mahayana practice, and the rest as Vajrayana practice.

Ngöndro is not a kindergarten exercise; it is actually the main practice. As Patrül Rinpoche said, "In many ways, ngöndro is much more important than the main practice because it lays the foundation." Being with some of the great masters, such as His Holinesses Dilgo Khyentsé Rinpoche and Dudjom Rinpoche, I know this to be true from my own experience. If ngöndro were only a preliminary or prerequisite practice, one would think that clearly we would not find great masters practicing it. Surely a great master like Dilgo Khyentsé Rinpoche would not need to practice the Nyingtik ngöndro, for instance. But I have seen this with my own eyes; even toward the end of their lives, I found them practicing ngöndro. This alone should indicate why ngöndro practice is so necessary.

Theory and Pith Instructions

The distinctions between theory and the pith instructions are quite straightforward. To use an analogy, when learning to drive there is a driving manual

that comes with the car. This manual is similar to the tantric texts and what we call theory. Such texts are very straightforward, logical, and rational. Pith instructions, on the other hand, are quite flexible and, at times, dramatic and outrageous.

Suppose there are fifty people wanting to learn how to drive, each with a different kind of paranoia and with different physical abilities. Perhaps some are unable to use their right foot properly, or have some other kind of abnormality. Each person has his or her own unique and distinct kind of physical and mental condition. When teaching someone to drive, the text itself, the driving manual, is standard. It is the same car, so each person gets the same materials. Some instructions are also standard. Everyone needs to know, for instance, that the car will go to the right when the steering wheel is turned right. Nonstandard instructions depend on the individual, on how much time one has to learn, for example. Some people may not care how fast they learn. Others may want a crash course.

Sometimes one might be taught something that appears to have absolutely nothing to do with the text. The teacher might say, “Drink a cup of coffee before you drive.” The context could simply be that you have not woken up properly yet. The text, however, will never say, “You have to drink a cup of coffee before driving.” That is just the teacher’s own judgment. That is what we call a pith instruction. Such instructions are very versatile, colorful, unorthodox, and sometimes not so logical. Zen masters, for example, say, “What is the sound of one hand clapping?” On the face of it, this question seems completely ridiculous, but depending on when, where, and with whom the method is used, it may work on an individual basis.

Of these two, the ngöndro teachings are pith instructions. This may come as a surprise to some; they are not theory. For instance, the practices of prostrations and mandala offering are pith instructions. If you want to know their underlying theories, you have to study the *Guhyaagarbha Tantra* or some other such text.⁵⁴

It is even more important that we learn how to interpret theory. To return to our example of learning to drive, there must be some mention in the car manual of what you need to be cautious about. It probably says on the first page: “Exercise caution. Don’t drink and drive, and remember to be alert.” 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. “Be careful” is actually open to a lot of interpretation. Different people need to be careful in different ways.

With this in mind, you will see why doing one hundred thousand prostrations works for some, but not for others. For Milarepa, prostrations weren't necessary, because he was building a nine-storied house. To 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. Without this understanding, there is a danger of thinking that certain things are almost mandatory and that, as a Vajrayana 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. It is very important to learn how to interpret what one reads on the first page of the manual. When it says that one has to be careful when driving, for one person this may mean, "drink a cup of coffee." Perhaps for someone else drinking coffee might make them nervous or agitated, so maybe a sip of a margarita is better to relax them . . . It could be the complete opposite!

It is also important to note 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. In the explanation that follows, I will be referring to both the theory and some of the pith instructions. In terms of theory, the explanations will stay loyal to the actual ngöndro text and to the Vajrayana system in general. As for the pith instructions, most of the time I will be repeating what I have heard from my own teachers.

Three Pith Instructions

Every time we begin to practice, it helps not to plunge in right away. Instead, take a few moments to stop your ordinary chain of thoughts. This is especially relevant if you are very busy and have only five minutes for your daily practice, but even ordinarily we have this constant stream of thoughts. Suppose that just before practice you have a fight with your fiancé. This will probably trigger a chain of thoughts about what you want to say to your partner. If you start your practice in the midst of all this, it is not going to go so well. This is why it helps to put a stop to this chain of thoughts for just a few moments.

I have found this to be very, very useful. There are actually countless methods for stopping the chain of thoughts, but for me, before I practice, I just sit for a while. Every time a thought comes along, I try to stop it by cultivating a

sense of renunciation, and I do this over and over again. I think about how I am now forty-years-old and, even if I live to be eighty, I only have half of my life left. I think that out of this forty years, I am going to sleep the equivalent of twenty years. So now there are only twelve hours a day that could actually be termed living. If we then factor in watching at least one movie a day, eating, and gossip, we have maybe five hours or so left. Out of forty years that means eight years remain, and most of that will go to indulging our paranoia, anxiety, and all that. . . . There is actually very little time for practice!

This should give you an idea of how to stop the chain of thoughts. Don't immediately throw yourself into the practice; instead, just watch yourself, watch your life, and watch what you are doing. If you are doing ten minutes of practice every day, you should try to stop the chain of thoughts for at least two to three minutes. We do this to transform the mind by invoking a sense of renunciation. When we think, "I am dying," "I am coming closer to death," and other such thoughts, it really helps.

Of the various traditional methods used to transform our ordinary perception, one very good one is what we call "expelling the stale breath." After doing several minutes of stopping the chain of thoughts, sit straight and breathe in quite strongly. You then block your right nostril as you breathe out from the left. On the out breath, visualize that all your passion and desire are expelled in the form of dark red light. Then you breathe in through the same nostril, thinking that all the buddhas' and bodhisattvas' wisdom and compassion is dissolving into you in the form of light. Then block the left nostril. As you breathe out, think that all your aggression flows out in the form of dark vapor, then breathe in as before. Finally, breathe in and out from both nostrils, this time thinking that all your ignorance is being dispelled in what looks like a dark cloud.

Do not linger too much on the details of the visualizations. Just think that whatever you are visualizing is actually happening. On this point, another pith instruction states that you should not linger on one form when visualizing by asking questions about its details. You shouldn't ask "What kind of white light is it?" or "What diameter is the light?" The whole purpose of Vajrayana visualization is to occupy the ordinary mind with extraordinary thoughts; *that* is the vital aspect here. If you focus 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 visualization. This is one very common pith instruction.

The next step I strongly recommend. Suppose you are practicing at home, what you do is try to completely convince yourself that your environment is not just your ordinary residence; it is a pure realm. This is particularly important because the Vajrayana is a path that transforms impure vision into pure vision.

When we say “impure vision” this is not meant to imply that there is something dirty. It has nothing to do with that. Our vision is impure in the sense that we are stuck with all sorts of notions. For example, we might think, “One thousand people can’t possibly fit into my bedroom,” or, “*This* can’t be used as a bedroom!” We have all these dualistic distinctions. We imagine that such and such can be used only for a certain purpose, or that it is too white, too dark, too hot, too cold, and so on.

Likewise, when we say “buddha realm,” we are not talking about something you might see in some science fiction film, nor about some kind of really happy heaven. We are talking about a realm of nondualism. In itself, this is difficult to understand right now.

How does this nondual realm appear? For beginners, since this pertains to the Longchen Nyingtik ngöndro where Guru Rinpoche is the main figure, we can envision ourselves in the Realm of the Copper-Colored Mountain. Of course, this does not mean the ceilings and walls are made of copper. Basically, what we are doing here is getting rid of our ordinary perception. Just thinking, “This is not what I think it is” is enough to transform ordinary perception. That is the third of the three pith instructions we use to start the ngöndro.

The Theory of Visualization

The thought, “This does not truly exist the way I see it . . .” seems quite crazy from our ordinary point of view; it seems kind of irrational. From the theoretical point of view of the Vajrayana, however, this would be correct because everything you see is your own perception. If there are several people looking at the same girl, for instance, one person may be thinking, “That girl is beautiful” while the other may think that the very same girl is ugly. What they see is not what she is.

What we *see* is not what *truly is*. It is only our perception. That is the theory here. For now, the only way to practice this is through transforming our ordinary perception. So you see, the theory and the instructions always come together and complement each other.

When it comes to the visualizations, quite a few people tend to have problems. Once you begin to understand the theory in a little bit more depth, you will also become quite comfortable with the visualizations. The main purpose of visualizing is to purify our impure vision, our ordinary perception. If this is the case, what is pure perception? The principle of pure vision is not meant to teach that we have to see things just as they are painted in Tibetan thangkās. This is how many people think of pure perception. Yet that is not right, and not at all the point. In fact, if you manage to transform everything so that it duplicates a thangka, the problem will only get worse because in paintings they don't blink their eyes or have backs; they are flat, frozen, and their clouds do not move! Anyway, for me personally, Tibetan paintings and pictures have no real vibrancy.

The whole point here is to destroy impure perception. So what do we mean by impure perception? Impure perception is basically everything that we see, perceive, and label at the moment. It is not that something is wrong out there and that's why everything is impure. Instead, it is because, at the moment, whenever we perceive something, it is always filtered through our emotions, our desire, jealousy, pride, ignorance, and aggression. When we look at a person, we may see him or her through the filter of our passion, and will therefore see him or her as very desirable. We may look at another person through the lens of aggression, which will cause us to see him or her as very ugly and hideous. When perceiving others through our own insecurity, we make judgements, refer, and compare, and end up trying to defend or boost our pride, which all stems from ignorance. The list goes on and on.

All the different perceptions we have arise from our very own minds and are coming through these emotions. That is why everything we experience ends up being a disappointment. Regardless of whether it is felt in a big or a small way, the point is that there is always a little bit of disappointment. This is what we are trying to purify.

This all comes down to training the mind. In the Shrivakayana tradition, one trains the mind through physical and verbal discipline; by shaving the head, begging for alms, wearing saffron robes, and refraining from worldly activities, such as getting married. In the Mahayana, on top of that one trains the mind by meditating on compassion, bodhichitta, and so forth. In the Vajrayana, over and above these two, we try to transform our impure vision into something pure.

We learn to do this by going step-by-step through the ngöndro. Our very first step is to stop the chain of thoughts. We then expel the stale breath

along with a bit of visualization. Finally, we cultivate the notion that the very place where we are is no longer an ordinary place. With these steps, we have begun to transform this impure vision.

The Three Sacred Principles

The next three points are what Patrül Rinpoche taught as the three sacred principles. In whatever you do, and in whatever Dharma practice you might be engaged in, always begin with the motivation to benefit all sentient beings. When we say benefit, this not only refers to ordinary help, such as giving food or ordinary assistance, but also the wish to enlighten all beings. The first sacred principle is extremely important because without it our practice will become self-oriented; it will be just another act of selfishness. For this reason, you should always be thinking, “I shall practice for the sake of all sentient beings.”

Even with a simple act of lighting a lamp, always begin with bodhichitta. Lighting a lamp simply to make a room beautiful represents a very ordinary, worldly kind of thinking. Doing so to accumulate merit and thinking that it will destroy samsara is a Shrivakayana attitude. The Mahayana approach would be to light the lamp and think, “With this merit may all sentient beings achieve enlightenment!” With a tantric attitude, on top of that you would think: “This light is not an ordinary light. It is the light of wisdom that illuminates all sentient beings. As the light shines, may everything become the deity and mandala!”

In the midst of performing any good deed, or even as you practice the preliminaries, you should also remember that whatever you do is only an interpretation of the mind. This second sacred principle is what we call the practice of nonduality. You need to repeatedly convince yourself of this with the thought, “My mind is doing this. I am just imagining this. None of this truly exists.”

Let’s say you are doing prostrations. In the very act of doing them, you can think: “It seems like ‘I’ am here doing prostrations. ‘I’ feel that ‘I’ am experiencing some sort of pain, but in reality, this is all in my mind!” Since this will eliminate any clinging you may have toward your Dharma deeds, the benefit of thinking in this way is incredible. This will also directly counteract your pride and ego. The Dharma is supposed to be an antidote to our ego, yet it can also reinforce the ego if we get the idea that we are “good Dharma practitioners.” Hence, whenever you practice, you should always try to recognize

that everything that is happening is all in your own mind. You might then wonder, “If it is only my mind, does that mean there is no merit?” Even the notions “there *is* merit,” and “there is *no* merit” are interpretations of our minds.

For the last point, at the end of our practice, we always dedicate the merit. The merit we have accumulated is not kept for ourselves. Instead, we dedicate it to all sentient beings. It is important to keep in mind that you can dedicate the merit you gather right away. It doesn’t necessarily have to be at the end of a session. 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, this merit that I am aware of, have seen, and can observe. I also dedicate all the merit of the past that I am not aware of, and all the merit that I will generate in the future.” All of this can be dedicated. These three points are called “the three sacred principles.”

THE UNIQUE PRELIMINARIES

Refuge

Next is the explanation of taking refuge. The longer-length Longchen Nyingtik ngöndro was compiled from the writings of the great Jigmé Lingpa and edited by Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo.⁵⁵ In this version, after chanting, “*Think of me, o guru!*” we recite a truly beautiful *calling the guru from afar* song. With this prayer, not only do we call upon our guru, we also chant lines that reveal the weaknesses that we as Dharma practitioners may have. This is extremely valuable to read and comprehend.

You may think that this critical perspective reflects a cultural difference, but it does not. Certainly, in the West, people are used to being encouraged and hearing things like: “You are doing well. Keep it up!” While in Asian cultures, the outlook is more critical. With Buddhism originating in India, you might think that this critical reflection has been influenced by its roots in Asian culture, but this is not the case. The whole purpose of the Dharma is to dismantle the protective system of the ego. For this very reason, every word of the Dharma, and each and every method the Dharma employs, must go against the ego. Reciting and contemplating liturgies like Jigmé Lingpa’s “Calling the Guru from Afar” will poke holes in the ego. This is what we call the “dawn of the Dharma practitioner.”

Most of us, including myself, are not really Dharma practitioners; we are

THE SUBLIME PATH TO OMNISCIENCE



*A Liturgy for the Preliminary Practices of the
Heart Essence of the Vast Expanse*

COMPILED BY JIGMÉ TRINLÉ ÖZER

Blessing of Speech

OM AH HUM

Emerging from the syllable RAM, fire consumes my tongue,
Turning it into a vajra of red light with three prongs.
In its center is the essence of dependent origination,
Strung like a string of pearls around the Sanskrit alphabet.
An offering of light flows out to the buddhas and their heirs.
Pleasing them it returns, bringing all blessings and siddhis,
And purifying verbal obscurations into vajra speech.

Recite the following seven times each:

A A I I U U R I R I L I L I E A I O A U A M A H

K A K H A G A G H A N A C H A C H A J A J H A N A T A T A D A D H A N A T A T A D A
D H A N A P A P A B A B H A M A Y A R A L A V A S H A S H A S A H A K S H A

OM YÉ DHARMA HETU PRABHAVA HETUN TESHAN TATAGATO
HYAVADAT TESHAN CHA YO NIRODHA EVAM VADÉ MAHASHRAMANAH
SVAHA

Essence of all the buddhas throughout the three times, embodiment of the
 four kayas, glorious guru, I pray to you!
 Please grant your blessings that I may receive empowerment!
 Please grant your blessings that the extraordinary realization of this
 profound path may take birth in my being!
 Please grant your blessings that I may realize the view of the true nature
 of original purity!
 Please grant your blessings that I may perfect the wisdom of the
 spontaneously present four visions!

*Though you have been a buddha from the very beginning, your emanations
 appear ceaselessly to guide beings according to their needs.
 You display various illusory manifestations, yet are free from dualistic fixation,
 the aggregates, sense sources, and elements.
 Though you appear in human form, in truth you are a buddha, radiating
 with a thousand light rays of wisdom and love.
 I rely on you as my refuge forever, not only for this life! Please grant me your
 blessings!*

*Enclosed herein is the liturgy for the Great Perfection preliminary practices of
 the Heart Essence of the Vast Expanse.*

I. GURU SUPPLICATION

*To begin, recite the following words three times to arouse the glorious guru's
 wisdom mind:*

Think of me, o guru!

Then offer the following prayer with intense feeling:

From the blossoming flower of faith in my heart,
 Rise up, o kind guru, my sole source of refuge!
 I am plagued by my karma and the kleshas it creates.
 O guru, please protect me from this terrible plight!
 Remain upon my crown on the chakra of great bliss.
 With all my mindful awareness, to you, my guru, I pray!

I am not in hell or in the realm of spirits or animals,
 A long-lived god, barbarian, or someone with wrong view.
 This is not a realm without buddhas, nor am I mentally impaired.
 Indeed, now I am free from these eight restricted states.

I am human with all my senses; I have been born in a central place.
 My way of life is not corrupt, and I have faith in the Buddhadharma.
 These five personal riches I now possess in their entirety.
 A buddha has come and taught the Dharma; it survives and is practiced.
 Likewise, I am now cared for by a true spiritual guide.
 These five circumstantial riches I now possess as well.
 Yet when some unforeseen circumstance will be my end, I do not know.
 One day this life will be over, and it will be time for me to move on.
 Think of me, Guru Rinpoche, turn my mind toward the Dharma!
 Omniscient masters, don't let me stray onto wrong or inferior paths!
 Think of me, kind root guru, you who are one with these masters!

If I don't do something worthwhile now that I have this human life,
 In the future such a support for liberation will not be found.
 Once the merit that led me to this pleasurable state has run out,
 After death I will find myself wandering as a being in the lower realms.
 Not knowing virtue from vice, nor hearing the sound of Dharma,
 I won't meet my spiritual teachers; what fate could be worse than this?
 To think of the classes of sentient beings, and how numerous they are,
 Is to know that the chances of getting a human body are slim to none.
 And when I see all the people living immoral, unspiritual lives,
 It is clear that a truly spiritual life is as rare as a star in the day.
 Think of me, Guru Rinpoche, turn my mind toward the Dharma!
 Omniscient masters, don't let me stray onto wrong or inferior paths!
 Think of me, kind root guru, you who are one with these masters!

Though I've made it to the sanctuary of this precious human life,
 This sublime form will not be fit to serve as a basis for liberation
 Should the mind that dwells within it be completely out of control.
 Especially if I'm gripped by demons, with the five poisons raging inside,
 When negative karma overwhelms me, or laziness distracts my mind,
 If I fall under another's control, if my practice is superficial or fear based,

Or if I am simply ignorant; these circumstances that can suddenly strike—
 Should these eight restricted states befall me, blocking my Dharma
 practice,
 Think of me, Guru Rinpoche, turn my mind toward the Dharma!
 Omniscient masters, don't let me stray onto wrong or inferior paths!
 Think of me, kind root guru, you who are one with these masters!

If I am not fed up with samsara, or if I lack the jewel of faith,
 If I am bound by my own attachment, or behave like a degenerate,
 When I don't shy away from evil and my way of life is corrupt,
 With vows completely broken and samaya torn to shreds—
 All of these factors will cut my mind off from the Dharma.
 Should these eight restricted states befall me, blocking my Dharma
 practice,
 Think of me, Guru Rinpoche, turn my mind toward the Dharma!
 Omniscient masters, don't let me stray onto wrong or inferior paths!
 Think of me, kind root guru, you who are one with these masters!

Right now I'm not stricken with illness or plagued with suffering,
 I'm not beholden to another, in servitude, or with another such fate.
 So now that I have the right conditions and my freedom of choice,
 If I waste these freedoms and riches in a state of indolence,
 Not only will I lose my wealth and family, my friends and all I hold dear,
 I will part with my own body, which I treasure above all else!
 One day it will be taken from bed and thrown in some desolate spot,
 Where wolves, vultures, and dogs will devour it piece by piece,
 As I wander the intermediate state, experiencing horror beyond
 compare.
 Think of me, Guru Rinpoche, turn my mind toward the Dharma!
 Omniscient masters, don't let me stray onto wrong or inferior paths!
 Think of me, kind root guru, you who are one with these masters!

Led by the ripening of my virtuous and negative deeds,
 I may one day wake to find myself reborn on the planes of hell:
 On a ground of molten iron, I'll be decapitated with weapons,
 Dismembered by saws and beaten by hammers blazing with fire;
 Imprisoned in a doorless iron house, screaming for my life,