

A COMMENTARY ON THE
DUDJOM TERSAR NGONDRO
THE PRELIMINARY PRACTICE OF THE
NEW TREASURES OF DUDJOM

BY
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༡༡། །བདུད་འཛོམས་གཏེར་གསར་སྔོན་འགྲོའི་ངག་འདོན་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས།

Dudjom Tersar Ngondroi Ngak Dön Düpa Zhuk

**A CONCISE RECITATION OF THE PRELIMINARY PRACTICES
OF THE NEW TREASURES OF DUDJOM**

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༡༡། བདུན་འཛོམས་གཏེར་གསར་སྡོན་འབྱོལ་ངག་འདོན་བསྐྱེད་པ་འདིའི་གོ་དོན་ས་བཅད་ལ།

A CONCISE RECITATION OF THE PRELIMINARY PRACTICES ACCORDING TO THE NEW TREASURES OF DUDJOM

དང་བོ་སྦྱར་བ་སྦྱོང་བ་ནཱ་བཞིའི་ངག་འདོན་ནི།

A. The Preparation: Reciting the Four Contemplations which Turn the Mind

ན་མོ། བསྐྱེད་པ་ཏན་གྱི་མགོན་པོ་སྤྲུལ་མཁུན་ཅེས་།

NAMO: LU MED TÊN GYI GÖN PO LA MA KHYEN

Homage, Wisdom Lama, my eternal, infallible and true protector, be aware of me.

དལ་འབྱུར་འདི་ནི་ཡིན་ཏུ་རྟོག་པར་དགའ་ཅེས་།

DAL JYOR DI NI SHIN TU NYED PAR KA

The freedoms and endowments of this precious human birth are extremely difficult to find.

སྤྱིས་ཆད་མི་ཏུ་གནས་པའི་ཆོས་ཅན་ཡིན་ཅེས་།

KYEY TSHAYD MI TAK CHHI WAI CHHÖ CHÉN YIN

All sentient existence is conditioned by impermanence and death.

དགེ་སྤྱི་ལས་ཀྱི་རྒྱ་འབྲས་བསྐྱེད་པ་མེད་ཅེས་།

GE DIK LAY KYI GYU DRAY LU WA MED

The cause and effect of positive and negative actions is absolutely certain.

ཁམས་གསུམ་འཁོར་བ་སྤྱད་པ་སྤྱལ་གྱི་མཆོའི་ངང་ཅེས་།

KHAM SUM KHOR WA DUK NGAL GYA TSHOI NGANG

The three cyclic realms have the nature of an ocean of suffering.

བློ་ནས་བདག་སྦྱོར་ལ་འབྱུར་བར་ཕྱོགས་།

DRËN NAY DAK LO CHHÖ LA GYUR WAR SHOK

May these contemplations turn my mind towards the path of enlightenment.

ཅེས་ལན་གང་མང་བཞེད་ལ་སྦྱོང་།

Reciting these verses many times trains the mind properly.



གཉིས་བསྐྱེད་འགྲོ་དངོས་ལ།

B. The Main Preliminary Practices

དང་པོ་སྐྱབས་སུ་འགྲོ་བ་ནི། མདུན་གྱི་ནམ་མཁའ་སྐྱབས་ལུལ་མཆོག་གསུམ་ཀུན་འདུས་ཀྱི་ངོ་བོ་ཙམ་པོ་སྤྲུལ་ཉིད་གྲུ་རུ་རིན་པོ་ཆའི་ནམ་མཁའ་མངོན་སུམ་དུ་བརྟགས་པར་མོས་ལ།

1. Taking Refuge

With faith that your Root Lama, who essentially embodies the field of refuge of the Three Jewels, appears in the sky as Guru Rinpoche:

འདི་བཟུང་བྱང་ཆུབ་སྤྲིང་པོ་མ་ཐོབ་བར་མཆོག་པོ།

DI ZUNG JYANG CHHUB NYING PO MA THOB BAR

From this very moment until attaining the heart of enlightenment,

སྤྲུལ་དགོན་མཆོག་གསུམ་ལ་སྐྱབས་སུ་མཆི་མཆོག་པོ།

LA MA KÖN CHHOK SUM LA KYAB SU CHHI

I take refuge in the Lama, the embodiment of the Three Jewels.

ཞེས་ཐུག་དང་སྐྱུག་སྟེ་ཅི་རུས་སུ་བཞེད།

Combine with prostrations and recite as much as possible.

གཉིས་བསམས་བསྐྱེད་བཞི། སྐབས་ལྷུ་དབང་པོར་གསོལ་གྱི།

2. Bodhicitta: Developing the Mind of Awakening

With the field of refuge as your witness, pray:

ད་ནས་བཟུང་སྟེ་འཁོར་བ་མ་སྟོང་བར་ཅུ།

DA NAY ZUNG TE KHOR WA MA TONG BAR
From now until cyclic existence is emptied,

མ་གྱུར་སེམས་ཅན་ཀྱི་ཕན་བདེ་བསྐྱབ་ཅུ།

MA GYUR SEM CHEN KUN GYI PHEN DE DRUB
I shall accomplish the benefits and happiness of all motherly sentient beings.

ཅེས་བྱང་རྒྱུ་གི་སེམས་ལ་སྟོས་ཅུ།

Thus the mind of awakening is developed.

གསུམ་བཅོགས་བསགས་མཐུལ་འབྱུང་བ་ནི། མཐུལ་ཚུལ་གྱི་དངོས་སུ་བཤམས་བ་དཔེར་མཚོན་ནས།

3. Offering the Mandala which Accumulates Merit and Wisdom

With an actual heaped mandala that symbolizes the offering, recite:

ཆོར་བས་ཀྱན་གྱི་ལུས་དང་ལོངས་སྟོན་དཔལ་ཅུ།

TSHE RAB KUN GYI LÜ DANG LONG CHYÖD PAL
I offer my bodies, possessions, enjoyments and glories from all my lifetimes

ཆོགས་གཉིས་ཇོགས་ཕྱིར་དཀོན་མཆོག་གསུམ་ལ་འབུལ་ཅུ།

TSHOK NYIY DZOK CHHYIR KÖN CHHOK SUM LA BUL
To the Three Jewels in order to complete the two accumulations.

ཞེས་མཐུལ་གང་མང་འབུལ།

Offer the mandala many times.

ཨོཾ་བཛྲ་སརྩ་སམ་ཡེ་མ་རྩ་སྤྲལ་ཡེ།

OM VAJRA SATTVA SAMAYA MANU PALAYA

བཛྲ་སརྩ་ཏེན་པ་ཏིཏྲ་ཌིཊྲ་མེབ་མེའུ།

VAJRA SATTVA TENOPA TITHRA DRIDHO MEBHAWA

སུ་ཏུ་མེབ་མེའུ།

SU TO KHAYO MEBHAWA

སུ་པོ་མེབ་མེའུ།

SU PO KHAYO MEBHAWA

ཨུ་རཱ་ཏོ་མེབ་མེའུ།

ANU RAKTO MEBHAWA

སརྩ་སིཊྲི་མེ་པ་ཡེ་ཙཊྲ།

SARWA SIDDHIM ME PRA YATTSA

སརྩ་ཀརྨ་སུ་ཙཱ་མེ།

SARWA KARMA SU TSA ME

ཙཊྲི་ཤྲི་ཡེ་ཀུ་རུ་ཧུང་།

TSITTANG SHRI YANG KURU HUNG

ཧ་ཧ་ཧ་ཧ་ཧོ།

HA HA HA HO!

ཧྲ་ག་ལྷ་ནེ།

BHAGAWAN

སརྩ་ཏ་སྤྲལ་ཏ་བཛྲ་མེ་མུཊྲ་བཛྲི་མེབ་མེའུ་སརྩ་སམ་ཡེ་སརྩ་ཨུ།

SARWA TATHAGATA VAJRA MA ME MUNTSA VAJRI BHAWA MAHA SAMAYA SATTVA AH

ཞེས་བདད་ཅི་འཕེབ་སྤྲོད་གི་དམིགས་པ་དང་བཅས་ཡིག་བརྒྱ་དང་།

Recite the hundred syllable mantra visualizing the descending stream of purifying nectar.

ཨོཾ་བཛྲ་སརྩ་ཧུང་།

OM VAJRA SATTVA HUNG

ཞེས་ཡིག་བརྒྱ་ཅི་རྩལ་སྤུ་བརྒྱས་མཐར་།

Recite the six syllable mantra as much as possible. To finish:

འོད་ལྷ་བདག་སྤང་དང་འབྲེས་རོ་གཅིག་གྱུར།

ÖD ZHU DAK NANG DANG DREY RO CHIK GYUR

Vajrasattva melts into light, blending into oneself, becoming one taste.

ཞེས་རྫོང་སེམས་རང་ལ་བསྐྱེད་ཏེ་མཉམ་བར་བཞག་།

Rest in meditation with Vajrasattva gathered into oneself.

ལྷ་བཅིན་སྒྲུབས་སྐུར་འཇུག་སྒྲ་མའི་རྣལ་འབྱོར་ནི།

5. The Swift Blessings of Uniting with the Mind of the Guru



རང་ཉིད་དོན་རྣལ་འབྱོར་མདུན་མཁའ་རུ།

RANG NYID DOR JE NAL JYOR DUN KHA RU
I am Vajrayogini and in the sky in front of me,

ཅུ་བའི་སྒྲ་མ་བཞུགས་སྐུར་བཞེངས་གྱུར།

TSA WAI LA MA PEMAI KUR ZHENG GYUR
My Root Lama arises in the form of Padmasambhava.

དུས་གསུམ་སངས་རྒྱལ་མ་ལུས་འདུས་པའི་སྐུ་

DÜ SUM SANG GYAY MA LÜ DÜ PAI KU

The embodiment of all the Buddhas of the three times, without exception,

ཙ་པའི་སྤྲ་མ་མཆོག་ལ་གསོལ་བ་འདེབས།

TSA WAI LA MA CHHOK LA SOL WA DEB
Sublime Root Lama, I pray to you.

འདི་ཕྱི་བར་དོ་གསུམ་དུ་ཐུགས་རྟེན་བྱངས།

DI CHHYI BAR DO SUM DU THUK JEY ZUNG

Now, in future lives, and in the bardo, hold me with your compassion.

དུས་གསུམ་རྒྱུ་ཆད་མེད་པར་བྱིན་གྱིས་སྦྱོབས།

DÜ SUM GYUN CHHAYD MED PAR JYIN GYIY LOB
Bless me unceasingly throughout the three times.

ཨོཾ་ཨཱ་ཏཱ་བཛྲ་གུ་ཏུ་པདྨ་སིདྲི་ཏྲཱི་

OM AH HUNG VAJRA GURU PADMA SIDDHI HUNG

ཞེས་བརྒྱ་ལྔ་སྟོང་སྟོགས་གང་མང་མཐར།

Recite many times, one hundred, one thousand, and so forth.

སྐུ་གསུང་ཐུགས་ཀྱི་དབང་བྱིན་ཡོངས་རྫོགས་ཐོབ་པུ།

KU SUNG THUK KYI WANG JYIN YONG DZOK THOB

The empowerments and blessings of enlightened body, speech and mind are completely and fully received.

བརྗེ་གུར་ཀླ་ཡ་ལྷ་ཀའི་ཅན་སྒྲིལ་བྱུང་།

VAJRA GURU KAYA WAKA TSITTA SIDDHI HUNG

ཞེས་དབང་བཞི་སྒྲུངས་མཐར།

Thus receive the Four Empowerments. To finish:

སྤྱ་མ་འོད་ཟེར་ཐིམ་པའི་མེད་ངང་།

LA MA ÖD ZHU RANG THIM YER MED NGANG

The Lama melts into light and dissolves inseparably with my own state of being.

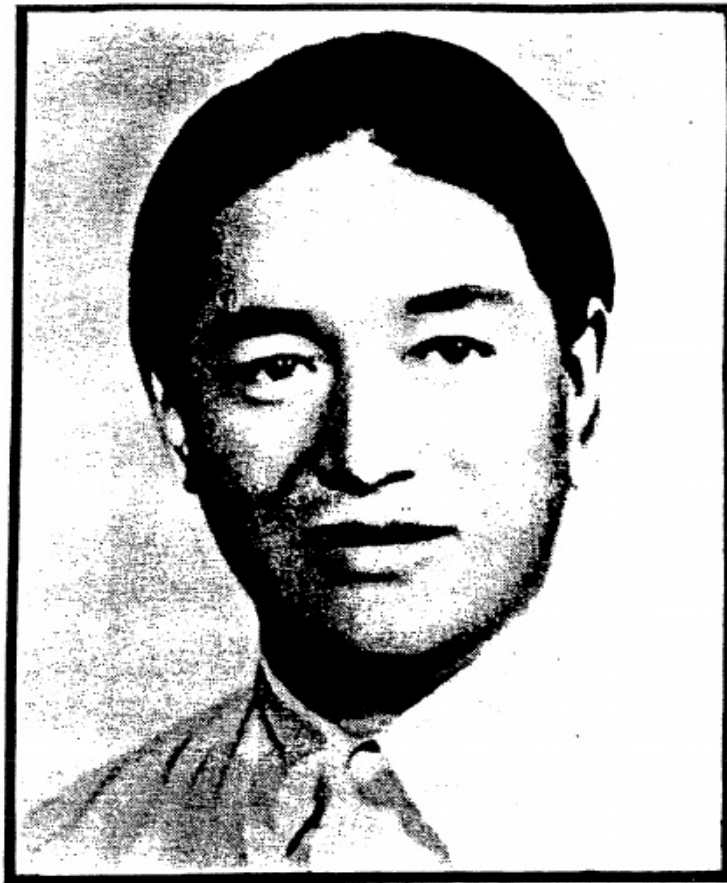
རིག་སྟོང་དོན་གྱི་སྤྱ་མའི་རང་ཞལ་བལྟ།

RIK TONG DÖN GYI LA MAI RANG ZHAL TA

Behold Emptiness-Awareness, the true face of the ultimate Lama!

ཞེས་སྤྱ་མ་རང་ལ་བསྐྱུས་ཏེ་མཉམ་བར་བཞག། |

Rest in meditation with the Guru absorbed into oneself.



H.H. DUDJOM JIGDRAL YESHE DORJE

དཔལ་ལྷན་ཅ་བའི་སྤྲུལ་རིན་པོ་ཆེ། །

PAL DĒN TSA WAI LA MA RIN PO CHHE
Glorious one, precious Root Lama,

བདག་གི་སྤྱི་བོར་བསྐྱེད་གདན་བཞགས་ལ། །

DAK GI CHYI WOR PEMAI DĒN ZHUK LA
Sitting on the lotus seat on the crown of my head,

བཀའ་ངོན་ཆེན་པོའི་སློན་སྐྱོལ་ཐུང་སྟེ། །

KA DRIN CHHEN POI GO NAY JEY ZUNG TE
Hold me through your great kindness.

སྐྱབས་ལུང་ཐུག་ཀྱི་དངོས་གྲུབ་སྤྱལ་དུ་གསོལ། །

KU SUNG THUK KYI NGÖ DRUB TSAL DU SOL
Please bestow the accomplishments of enlightened body, speech and mind.



དུག་པ་འཛོལ་ནི།

6. The Transference of Consciousness

མགོན་པོ་འོད་དཔག་མེད་ལ་གསོལ་བ་འདེབས།

GÖN PO ÖD PAK MED LA SOL WA DEB

I pray to Amitabha, the lord Protector of Infinite Light,

ཟབ་ལམ་འཛོལ་བ་འབྱུང་བར་གྱིན་གྱིས་སྒྲོབས།

ZAB LAM PHO WA JYONG WAR JYIN GYIY LOB

Grant your blessings that I may accomplish the profound path of the Transference of Consciousness.

ཞེས་ལན་གང་མང་བཤྲོད་ལ་འཛོལ་བའི་འདུན་བ་བྲ།

Recite many times to intensify the intention to transfer your consciousness.

བདུན་པ་ལུས་སྤྱོད་དགོ་བསྐྱེད།

7. The Charity of Giving One's Body and the Dedicating the Merit

ད་ནི་ལུས་དང་ལོངས་སྤྱོད་དགོ་ཅུར་བཅས།

DA NI LÜ DANG LONG CHYÖD GE TSAR CHAY

Now, my bodies, possessions and the source of my virtue gathered together,

མ་གཏུར་འགྲོལ་ཕངས་པ་མེད་པར་བཏང་།

MA GYUR DRO LA PHANG PA MED PAR TANG

I give, without clinging, to all motherly beings.

འགྲོ་དོན་རྒྱ་བས་ཆེན་གོགས་མེད་འབྲུབ་པར་ཤོག།

DRO DÖN LAB CHHEN GEK MED DRUB PAR SHOK

May I accomplish great waves of benefit, unobstructedly, for all beings.

ཅེས་སོགས་སྒྲོན་ལམ་ནན་ཏན་དུ་གདབ་གོ།

Thus, make fervent prayers of aspiration, etc...

ཞེས་གཏེར་གསར་སྒྲོན་འགྲོའི་ངག་འདོན་རྒྱས་པ་མི་ཤེས་ཤིང་མི་སྣོག་བའི་རིགས་ལ་ཕན་ཕྱིར་སྒྲོན་འགྲོའི་ངག་འདོན་བསྐྱེད་པ་འདིའི་གནད་དོན་གོ་བའི་གསལ་འདེབས་ས་བཅད་ཅུ་འཛིགས་བྲལ་ཡི་ཤེས་དེ་ཇིས་སོ། །

This is a concise recitation of the preliminary practices by Jigdral Yeshe Dorje that clearly elucidates the essential meaning and is intended for those who do not understand or are unable to recite the extensive preliminary practices according to the New Treasure.



INTRODUCTION

Namo Guru Bhaye. I pay homage to the Guru and request permission to write a brief commentary on the profound Dudjom Tersar Ngöndro.

The text was written by Garwang Dudjom Lingpa. H.H. Jigdral Yeshe Dorje (Dudjom Rinpoche) clarified the text into its present form. It is the preliminary practice for the Dudjom Tersar lineage.

According to the vajrayana path, there are three types of lineage: the longer lineage called Kama, the shorter lineage called Terma, and the Profound Lineage of Pure Vision called Daknang. Each lineage has its own Ngöndro practice. In particular, the Dudjom Tersar Ngöndro belongs to the lineages of the short Terma and the Profound Lineage of Pure Vision.

Within the Terma tradition, there are thousands of treasure finders or tertons who discover hidden dharma treasures. These dharma treasures or termas can take many forms, including substances, ritual implements and supports for visualization such as phurbas and relics, dharma texts, and so on. Among these treasure finders, Dudjom Lingpa was one of the most famous of the past century (1835-1904). He was the body emanation of Kheuchung Lotsawa, one of Padmasambhava's twenty-five main disciples. He was the speech emanation of the wisdom dakini Yeshe Tsogyal, and the mind emanation of Padmasambhava. His incarnation was prophesied for centuries by many sublime beings, including Padmasambhava himself. These prophecies were very precise. They included such details as in which country he would be reborn, what the name of his father and mother would be, the direction the door of his house would face, what he would look like, any birth marks he would have and so on. They also

revealed that Dudjom Lingpa would be an emanation especially powerful for these degenerate times and would reveal teachings so profound that enlightenment could be attained within one lifetime. All of these prophecies confirmed his incarnation, and his birth was accompanied by many auspicious signs. Displaying numerous miraculous powers, he went on to reveal a great many termas, including a number of texts and twenty-two volumes of teachings. These teachings were so powerful that thirteen of his disciples attained rainbow body, meaning that when they died their bodies dissolved into space, leaving no corpse behind. Thousands attained the level of rigdzins (awareness holders). Dudjom Lingpa established new generations and lineages of mahasiddhas and realized beings, accomplishing many other wondrous feats as well.

Before passing away, Dudjom Lingpa prophesied the site of his own rebirth, a province of Eastern Tibet called Pema Kōd. This incarnation was my own Root Teacher, His Holiness Dudjom Rinpoche, Jigdral Yeshe Dorje (1904-1987). Prophecies about His Holiness's life had been made for centuries. His family lineage was from the dharma king Trisong Detsen. He too, was born accompanied by many auspicious signs. Although he had no formal education, by carrying his memory from his past life, he became one of the greatest and most famous scholars in Tibet. Not only was he a great scholar, he also manifested as a completely realized being. Utterly inseparable from Guru Rinpoche, Dudjom Rinpoche was his representative for his generation. During his lifetime he headed the Nyingma sect of vajrayana buddhism.

His Holiness Dudjom Rinpoche embodied a great power, making it possible for anyone connecting with him--be it through seeing, hearing, touching or becoming his student--to attain liberation. Dudjom Rinpoche's activities grew while he traveled and taught spreading dharma throughout the world. By revealing multitudes of mind-treasure teachings, compiling and restoring many old termas, and creating volumes of texts, he repaired and expanded the Nyingma lineage which had become dangerously thin. His texts included profound sadhanas and teachings, spanning the complete path of vajrayana from beginning to end.

The Dudjom Tersar Lineage includes both Dudjom Lingpa's and His Holiness Dudjom Rinpoche's cycles of teachings. The Dudjom Tersar Ngöndro is the foundation practice for both the Dudjom Tersar Lineage and the entire vajrayana buddhist path.

Establishing a strong foundation is the only way to create something which will ultimately produce a lasting result. When building a house, the foundation is not only the beginning, but also the most important part of the finished building. When you are initially introduced to dharma, you may feel enthusiastic and inspired. However this feeling may only be temporary since by nature our emotions and feelings are constantly shifting and unstable. Without a strong foundation, when fluctuations occur, dharma may temporarily appear irrelevant or unimportant. You may want to give up, while in actuality dharma is the only thing that can ultimately help. Not establishing a strong foundation is like building a house on a frozen lake that is sure to melt in the spring. That is why Ngöndro is so extraordinarily important.

To understand Ngöndro within a larger context, it is helpful to understand why it is a preliminary practice and for what it lays a foundation. Ngöndro is called a preliminary practice because it lays a foundation for the two main stages of vajrayana practice: the CREATION stage (kyerim) and the PERFECTION stage (dzokrim). The creation stage falls under the category of MAHAYOGA. The goal of mahayoga is the realization of the inseparability of form and emptiness. It uses visualization of deities, recitation of mantras, and the recognition of the correct philosophical view as the method for realizing that all form is the deity's body, all sound is mantra, and all thought is the enlightened mind of intrinsic awareness. The perfection stage has two levels of practice: ANUYOGA and ATIYOGA. Anuyoga is the method for realizing the inseparability of great bliss and emptiness. It is the yoga of nerves, channels and vital essence (nadi, prana and bindu in Sanskrit or tsa, lung and thigle in Tibetan). Atiyoga is Dzogchen or the Great Perfection and is the method for realizing the inseparability of awareness and emptiness

through the practices of trekchö and thögal. Ngöndro serves as the preparatory practice for both the creation and perfection stages of vajrayana practice.

The only difference between sentient beings and buddhas is that the first has obscurations while the other does not. We are sentient beings because we have temporary "defilements" or obscurations to our wisdom mind. All sentient beings are inherently buddhas, temporarily defiled by gross emotional obscurations and by the subtle obscurations of habit. When these are removed, the buddha within naturally manifests. According to the vajrayana path, only two methods exist for removing these two obscurations: first, the accumulation of merit and wisdom, and second, the direct transmission from the Guru's mind to the student's mind. Ngöndro uses both methods and includes the essential practices of the THREE YANAS (vehicles): HINAYANA, MAHAYANA and VAJRAYANA. The essence of hinayana practice is refuge. The generation of BODHICITTA (enlightened attitude) is the essence of mahayana practice. Accumulation, purification and the mind transmission of Guru Yoga are the essence of vajrayana practice. Ngöndro is a preliminary practice containing all paths, including the creation and perfection stages of the vajrayana practice.

Since it contains all paths to the realization of enlightenment, then, every effort should be made to complete the Ngöndro in order to fully cultivate and realize its profound benefits.

It was my good karma and great fortune to have spent much of my life with His Holiness Dudjom Rinpoche. I met him when I was only eight years old and was with him until his passing in 1987. I received empowerments, teachings and did many retreats with him as my heart teacher. Great teachers such as Dudjom Rinpoche have written many profound teachings about Ngöndro, so it is unnecessary for me to write anything more. However, since these have not yet been translated into English and my dharma friends have requested it, I have written this commentary.

In writing these few words, it is my intention to benefit those who may be new to buddha dharma or who want to develop an ongoing practice. I am not presenting this commentary in the classical style or decorating it with fancy, scholarly words. Instead, my aim is to help my dharma friends in a straightforward and simple way. For this reason, I am generating pure motivation and the wish that these few words may be of some benefit.

CHAPTER 1 GETTING STARTED

In order to practice Ngöndro, it is imperative that you receive transmission and teachings from a qualified Lama. The transmission can ripen your innate buddha nature, while the teachings support your understanding of the practice which ultimately leads to liberation.

You will need a few items to get started: a mala for counting mantras, a cushion for sitting, a prostration board, a mandala pan with cloth, and some grain or precious stones.

A basic shrine, set up in a high clean place, should include the supports of the buddha's body, speech, and mind. As a support of the buddha's body, you may use a statue, thanka, or picture of Guru Rinpoche. You may also use any other pictures of wisdom deities, your Guru, or the refuge tree. A support of the buddha's speech is in the form of a holy dharma text. A support of the buddha's mind may be placed on the shrine in the form of a stupa containing relics from the buddha or other enlightened beings, or a ritual implement such as a phurba.

A shrine with this kind of holy support is a field for the multiplication and accumulation of merit and wisdom. When you have set up these supports, make offerings to the wisdom beings by placing seven offering bowls filled with water to one grain's distance from the top. Offer candles or lights, flowers and incense. With a pure mind, respectfully make the offering to the symbolic representations of buddha's body, speech, and mind with the understanding that buddha has no desire for any of these offerings. Instead, recognize the offering as a support for your own accumulation of merit and wisdom.

The Seven Point Posture

Begin by creating an atmosphere conducive to meditation in front of your shrine or in a quiet and peaceful place, free from distractions. Sit on a comfortable cushion. Place your body in the seven point posture, cleanse your speech with the nine breaths, and place your mind in an uncontrived natural state of relaxation.

The seven point posture [*Figure 1*] consists of sitting in the cross-legged position with the left foot on top of the right thigh and the right foot on top of the left thigh. This is called the "vajra posture." The hands rest in the lap with the right hand over the left, thumbs lightly touching. The spine is straight, the shoulders slightly raised, the chin gently tucked and the tongue touching the roof of the mouth. The eyes remain open and focused downward in the direction of the nose. If you find this position too uncomfortable, at least straighten your spine. Then perform the practice of cleansing with the nine breaths.



Figure 1. The Seven Point Posture

Cleansing with the Nine Breaths

This practice purifies the energy in the nerves and channels. Both ignorance and wisdom nerves exist within the channels, holding both emotional and wisdom energy. We are trying to purify the emotional energy and transform it into wisdom energy. The practice of the nine breaths purifies the emotions as well as sickness and demonic influences. I recommend that you do this practice when you wake up each morning.

Begin by sitting in the seven point posture and making a "vajra fist" [Figure 2] with both hands. Press the base of your ring finger with your thumb. This seals a special nerve where life support energy can exit from your body and negative influence can enter. Raise your shoulders and place your fists in the crease between the top of your thighs and abdomen. Straighten your elbows. This posture straightens the spine and central channel.



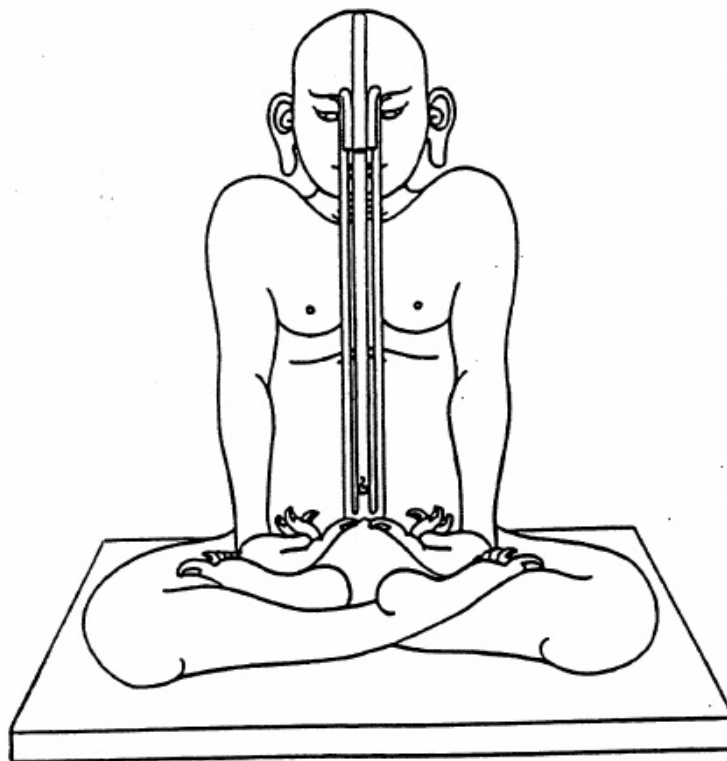
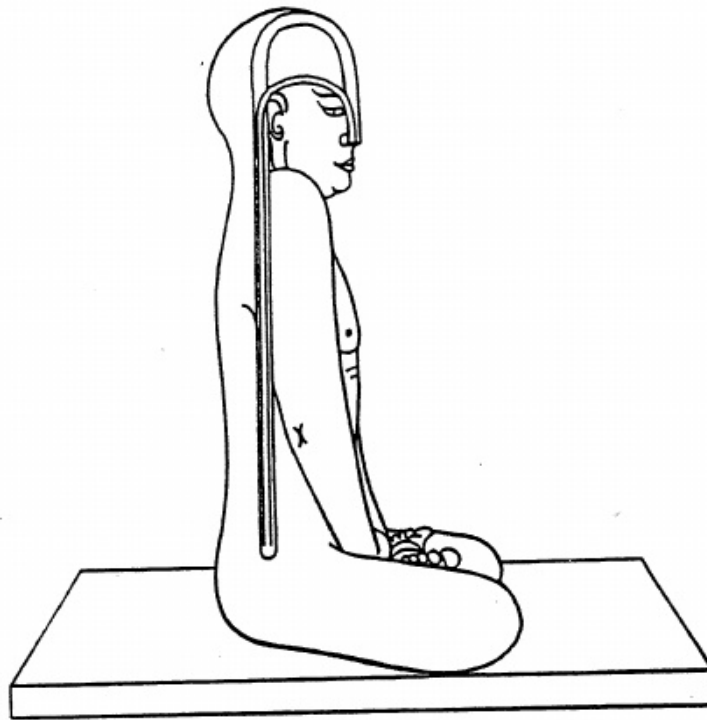
Figure 2. Vajra Fist

Visualize the central channel, starting four fingers below the navel chakra, going up to the crown of your head, and then curving over to exit out the tip of your nose. The central channel or *uma* is blue and has four qualities: it is straight, made of light, is the size of a medium arrow with a hollow interior, and its walls have the thickness of a lotus petal. On either side of the central channel are two other channels. All of these channels [Figures 3 & 4] open into each other four fingers below the navel. The *roma* is on the right side in men and the left side in women and is white. It comes up next to the central channel and passes behind the level of the ear, exiting through the nostril. The *kyangma* is red and on the left side in men and the right in women. It, too, exits through the other nostril. Each of these channels are half the diameter of the central channel.

With the fists in the crease at the top of the thigh and with the elbows straight, visualize the air as wisdom air. Using the hand from the same side as the *kyangma*, draw the wisdom air into the nostril opening of the channel. The mudra draws in the wisdom air from the dharmadhatu, and as you inhale you receive the blessings of the buddhas of the ten directions and three times, the three roots, awareness holders and lineage holders. When the air is drawn in, seal the nostril on the *kyangma* side. The air which has traveled in through the nostril goes down through the *kyangma* and then forces the air into the base of the *roma*, up and out the channel, and through the opposite nostril as you forcefully exhale. Repeat on the other side, using the other hand (women and men will be different because their channels are reversed). The third time, use both vajra fists to draw the air into both nostrils, down through both the *roma* and *kyangma*, forcing the wisdom air into the central channel and out through the tip of the nose. This completes three breaths. Repeat twice more.

Inside the *roma*, the white channel, is the male energy which is visualized as ashen in color and in the form of a snake. *Roma* is the essence of anger. It is symbolized by Podön Gyalpo, king of the male demons. When you breathe out through this channel you expel diseases--wind, bile, phlegm and so on--and dissolve all negativity into space. Similarly, inside *kyangma*, the red channel, is the female energy, dark red, in the shape of a rooster. It is the essence of desire and is symbolized by the female demon, Senmo. When you breathe out through this channel, you expel diseases such as hepatitis, jaundice, urinary infections, kidney diseases and so on, dissolving them into space. Inside *uma*, the central blue channel, is Ma-ning, the master of non-dual male and female energy, who is the color of smoke and shaped like a pig and is symbolized by a naga called Lüdön. The essence of this energy is ignorance. In this channel, all diseases from countless lifetimes are collected, as well as accumulations of defilements, impure energies, and especially poisons of the nerves and energy. When you breathe out through this channel, all these accumulations, as well as obstacles of any kind, are expelled and dissolved into space.

Feel that with each breath you are washing the channels, then rinsing them, until finally, they are completely cleansed. This is a healing practice and helps one's meditation. As the three poisons (anger, desire and ignorance) are purified, the three demonic influences (Podön Gyalpo, Modön Senmo, and Lüdön Sadak) are expelled and the three diseases (wind, bile and phlegm--the root of the four hundred and four diseases) are removed. Upon completion of the nine breaths, sit while feeling the pure state that remains. Release the hands and return to the seven point posture. Allow your mind to remain in a state undisturbed by any thoughts related to the three times, past, present and future. This meditation position allows the body, speech and mind to relax into a completely natural state.



Figures 3&4. The Energy Channels

CHAPTER 2

THE OUTER NGÖNDRO: THE FOUR CONTEMPLATIONS WHICH TURN THE MIND

The Ngöndro text has two sections: The OUTER Ngöndro and the INNER Ngöndro. The outer Ngöndro consists of THE FOUR CONTEMPLATIONS WHICH TURN THE MIND. It begins with the line:

NAMO: LU MED TĒN GYI GÖN PO LA MA KHYEN

Homage, Wisdom Lama, my eternal, infallible and true protector, be aware of me.

Recite this line, at the beginning of any meditation session as a preparation for receiving the blessings. Visualize Guru Rinpoche appearing in the sky in front of you. Generate strong faith and devotion, recognizing his essence to be the same as your Root Guru's. The power of your devotion invokes Guru Rinpoche's mindstream. Descending through the crown of your head, he dissolves into you and empowers you with the blessing of primordial wisdom and the realization of liberation. Your own body spontaneously transforms into a Vajra body of rainbow light. Your speech becomes Vajra speech and your ordinary mind transforms into pure Vajra mind. In this way, your ordinary three doors or gateways of experience are blessed by Guru Rinpoche's three Vajras: his indestructible Vajra body which is the same as the buddha's body, beyond the states of birth and death; his Vajra speech, completely pure enlightened wisdom speech; and his all-pervasive wisdom awareness Vajra mind. This first stage prepares you for a meditation session by transforming you into a pure vessel for receiving the blessings of the practice.

Guru Rinpoche again appears in the sky in front of you as a witness while you recite and contemplate deeply the next four lines of the text, The Four Contemplations Which Turn the Mind. Thorough examination and reflection upon these Four Thoughts can, without doubt, completely turn your mind toward the dharma. Pray that your practice will be of the highest quality and that Guru Rinpoche will give you the blessings and power to deepen your dharma practice. Then thoroughly examine and reflect upon each thought. At the end of your session, mix your mind with Guru Rinpoche's mind by realizing there is no separation between them, and remain in that state.

Now contemplate the first thought, the reflection on the rarity of a human birth. In the text, the line reads:

DAL JYOR DI NI SHIN TU NYED PAR KA

The freedoms and endowments of this precious human birth are extremely difficult to find.

In considering the preciousness of a human birth, realize how difficult it is to actually obtain a human body. Recognize how lucky you are to have been born in a civilized country where the buddha doctrine is being taught. Understand your good fortune in being born as a human, rather than into the

three lower realms where the experience of suffering is unbearably intense. Born with all your faculties, senses, and mental alertness intact, in an aeon when the buddha taught, where dharma exists and is flourishing, you have had the opportunity to make a connection with the teachings. How wonderful that you have the extraordinary opportunity to do something with this precious body. Your human rebirth is the result of the ripening of past positive karma, yet who knows when the opportunity to meet with and practice dharma will occur again? It is said that meeting dharma in this lifetime is more rare than the chance a blind tortoise has, rising to the surface every hundred years, of putting its head through a single wooden yoke floating on the vast surface of the ocean. Once born, normal human beings are as common as rocks. In comparison, someone who practices dharma is like a pure diamond.

Knowing this, pray for Guru Rinpoche's blessing to appreciate the meaning of a precious human birth. Thinking about your incredible fortune, pray for the power to extract some essence from your life, vowing to do something of lasting benefit by establishing dharma in this lifetime. First, contemplate deeply. Then mix your mind with his mind and remain in a state of meditative samadhi.

Now contemplate the second thought, the reflection on impermanence. In the text the line reads:

KYHEY TSHAYD MI TAK CHHI WAI CHHÖ CHËN YIN
All sentient existence is conditioned by impermanence and death.

Contemplating impermanence and death intensifies the motivation to practice dharma. Truly understanding impermanence means recognizing both the nature of change inherent in all phenomena and the extraordinary opportunity to train your mind toward liberation. Reflecting, you begin to see that you must not waste precious time. As soon as you are born, it is guaranteed that you will eventually die. This inevitable death will deprive you of any further opportunity to practice. Begin to realize clearly that, instead of putting off practice until some future time, you must begin right now to extract some meaningful essence from your human birth. The point of understanding impermanence is not to feel sad about it, but to use it as an incentive to overcome laziness.

The nature of SAMSAARA (cyclic existence) is like a dance which is continually moving and changing. On the inner level, the state of our mind is in a state of constant flux. Sometimes we are happy, but that never lasts. Then we are sad, but that doesn't last either. Then we become angry and that changes, too.

On the outer level, samsara is a reflection of our own inner deluded mind which never stays the same. Clearly, the outer level is also in a continual process of change. In relation to time, impermanence is reflected in the four seasons of the year. Summer changes to autumn, autumn changes to winter, winter changes to spring, and spring again changes to summer. We may feel the universe is unchanging, by virtue of its vastness, but it too is impermanent. The outer universe changes four times within each aeon. First, there is only emptiness, and from this emptiness the universe is born. Then it exists, and finally it dissolves back into emptiness. This whole process is called one aeon.

Realize, then, that time does not stop even for an instant, that our death is certain, and that every being born is sure to die. Almost every human being alive right now will be dead within a hundred years. No one will survive much longer than that. Having no idea when death will come, we become completely involved and lost in our hopes and fears about the future, without realizing that, however much and no matter what we accumulate in this life, eventually it will be exhausted. Whatever we build will sooner or later fall down. Nothing will last forever, not even this earth or the universe. The very nature of gathering is separation. The very nature of life is death. Everything which we perceive as solid, real, and permanent is actually impermanent and illusory in its very existence. Death is unpredictable and can occur at any moment. When you go to sleep tonight, you do not really know if you will wake up in this life or the next.

Truly comprehending and actualizing an understanding of impermanence will dispel all laziness and hesitation to practice. So pray to Guru Rinpoche from your heart. Pray for the blessings to realize the nature of impermanence. Contemplate this point and, at the end of the session, rest and meditate on open space.

Now contemplate the third thought, the reflection on the result of the accumulation of positive and negative karma. In the text, the line reads:

GE DIK LAY KYI GYU DRAY LU WA MED

The cause and effect of positive and negative actions is absolutely certain.

Karma is actually produced by mental habit. When such habits are repeated over and over again within samsara, karma--cause and effect--is created. Repetition of mental habits is the cause; the effect is our experience of happiness or suffering. Karma is the result of anything you think, say, or do, either positive (virtuous) or negative (non-virtuous). By reflecting on cause and effect, we come to understand that our karma, both positive and negative, is the only thing we actually take with us when we die. For this reason, it is extremely important to pay close attention to everything you think, say, and do. It is crucial to cultivate positive actions and to try to abandon negative ones, with the understanding that even the smallest negative action has the potential to cause an entire forest to burn down. In the same way, do not consider the smallest virtuous action unimportant. Every single beneficial action is like adding a drop of water to a large vessel. It may seem insignificant, but eventually the vessel will be full.

There are ten virtuous actions which are the cause of happiness and ten non-virtuous actions which are the cause of suffering. The ten non-virtuous actions to avoid are divided into three categories:

The three non-virtues of the body are:

- 1) Killing
- 2) Stealing, or taking by force or with deceit
- 3) Sexual misconduct

The four non-virtues of speech are:

- 1) Lying
- 2) Slander and divisive talk
- 3) Harsh words
- 4) Meaningless talk

The three non-virtues of the mind are:

- 1) Covetousness of others' possessions
- 2) Ill-will, or wishing to harm others
- 3) Holding the wrong views of nihilism or eternalism. Either of these two wrong views can create the heaviest karma. A nihilistic point of view--the belief that neither dharma nor karma exist--creates the most negative karma.

Instead of committing negative actions, practice the ten virtuous actions:

- 1) Give up killing, and instead protect the lives of sentient beings
- 2) Practice charity, instead of stealing
- 3) Practice morality, instead of engaging in sexual misconduct and immorality
- 4) Speak the truth, instead of lying
- 5) Reconcile those who oppose each other, instead of engaging in divisive talk
- 6) Speak gently, instead of harshly
- 7) Recite prayers, instead of gossip and idle talk
- 8) Meditate joyfully about others' possessions and qualities and practice generosity
- 9) Practice loving kindness, while giving up ill-will toward others
- 10) Believe and trust in dharma and karma, rather than holding wrong views

Then pray to Guru Rinpoche to give you blessings and the strength to always be aware of your actions and karma. Pray that your negative karma decreases while your positive karma increases. Take a strong vow to never again accumulate negative karma, and vow to create only positive karma from this time on. Pray to Guru Rinpoche to give you the strength to accomplish this. Then at the end of your session of contemplation, sit and meditate.

Contemplate the fourth thought, the reflection on the suffering of cyclic existence which is samsara. In the text, the lines read:

KHAM SUM KHOR WA DUK NGAL GYA TSHOI NGANG

The three cyclic realms have the nature of an ocean of suffering.

Until wisdom is perfectly accumulated and realization has been attained, negative and positive karma are generated unceasingly. The result of accumulating negative karma is the cycle of suffering we all experience known as samsara. Accumulating positive karma and practicing dharma are our only hope for being released from continual and inescapable suffering.

There are six realms of cyclic existence within samsara, three lower and three upper realms. As our karma ripens, we are continuously reborn in these realms. Determined by the heaviness or lightness of the ripening karma, we experience both suffering and happiness in all realms. However, as our heavier positive karma ripens we attain good rebirths in the three upper realms. As our heavier negative karma ripens, we are reborn to experience terrible suffering in the three lower realms. Accumulating merit through virtuous action can cause happiness within the upper realms, and the generation of non-virtuous action can cause suffering in the lower realms. For example, a heavy accumulation of miserliness can be the cause for rebirth in the hungry ghost realm. A lighter accumulation, even if you are born human, can still be the cause of your being poor.

Completely at the mercy of the winds of karma, we have no control over where we will be blown next. As a good rebirth comes to an end and our negative karma ripens, we may be reborn into a realm with torturous suffering. For countless aeons, we have gone around and around, all due to our own delusion, ignorance, and lack of recognition of the wisdom nature of mind. Instead, we generate anger and deep hostility, causing rebirth in the hell realms. We grasp with miserliness and create avarice, the cause for a rebirth in the hungry ghost realm. We are blinded by ignorance, the cause for rebirth in the animal realm. We are consumed by desire, the cause for a rebirth in the human realm. The habits of jealousy and fighting cause rebirth in the demi-god realm, and arrogance and pride cause rebirth in the god realm.

At this time, we have the great fortune of having been reborn in the human realm, the middle of the six realms. Our suffering as humans is not nearly as great as the inescapable and intense suffering of hell beings, hungry ghosts, or animals. Yet in the human realm, there are still four main inevitable sufferings: birth, aging, sickness, and death. In the three upper realms of humans, demi-gods and gods, there is some temporary happiness. Still, varying degrees of suffering exist. Your karma may appear to be positive now, but eventually it will exhaust itself and karmic suffering will once again manifest. For certain, there is no permanent or lasting happiness in samsara, and yet this is exactly what all beings desire. All beings want permanent and unchanging happiness and release from suffering. Without grasping how intense is the inevitable suffering in samsara, it is not possible to appreciate the true quality of dharma. Only through practice can lasting peace and happiness be found by training our normally deluded mind to realize pure and stainless wisdom mind, beyond all dualistic concepts and habits.

Realize that, other than dharma, no lasting essence can be gained from the six realms of samsara or this human birth. Beyond dharma there is no essential meaning to your life. The only truly permanent happiness to be found is the attainment of buddhahood. Contemplate this and then mix your mind with Guru Rinpoche's mind, meditating on open space. Recite:

DRĒN NAY DAK LO CHHÖ LA GYUR WAR SHOK

May these contemplations turn my mind towards the path of enlightenment.

By reflecting on each of the Four Thoughts, we are engaging in a kind of analytical meditation. As insight and experience increase through using these contemplative practices, our realization deepens. To know the nature of everything is wisdom. The opposite is ignorance. Strive to understand the true meaning of the Four Thoughts by remaining in a wisdom state. Only through genuine, heartfelt reflection on these as essential truths can your mind be resolutely turned towards the dharma.

Contemplative meditation can begin to release attachment to worldly matters, eventually leading to renunciation as aversion and disgust for samsara arises. This is a natural result of practice because pure dharma practice does not grasp onto samsaric phenomena. Your conviction to practice for the attainment of liberation will increase as you turn away from a normal perception of worldly phenomena. Resolutely vow to practice pure dharma and pray to Guru Rinpoche to give you the strength of conviction to accomplish the path and receive the nectar of his blessings. In our normal life as a sentient being we have the potential for great realization. Through the blessings of the Guru, recognize your own mind to be inseparable from stainless wisdom mind. With this view, remain in formless meditation without analyzing or fabricating for as long as possible. This concludes the OUTER NGÖNDRO.

CHAPTER THREE TAKING REFUGE

The main body of the Ngöndro, the INNER NGÖNDRO, has seven parts:

- 1) Taking Refuge - *shelter or protection from the perils of samsara*
- 2) Bodhicitta: Developing the Mind of Awakening
- 3) Offering the Mandala which Accumulates Merit and Wisdom
- 4) The Meditation and Recitation of Vajrasattva which Purifies Obscurations
- 5) The Swift Blessings of Uniting with the mind of the Guru .
- 6) The Transference of Consciousness
- 7) The Charity of Giving One's body (chöd) and Dedication of Merit

Why do we go for refuge? We go for refuge in order to escape from the endless cycle of suffering within samsara. Totally powerless to shield ourselves from inescapable suffering, we need a protector. We are in great danger and ultimately unable to help ourselves. The danger is our own ignorance with its inevitable result of suffering. We take refuge in the recognition that wisdom mind is the only refuge that truly exists.

To whom do we go for refuge? We go for refuge to the THREE JEWELS: buddha, dharma, and sangha. We go for refuge with the right view and motivation. A BUDDHA is one whose mind is completely purified. A purified mind has no faults; it is stainless, completely omniscient wisdom, displaying only pure qualities. The only protector from samsara is buddha. The DHARMA is the method or way to purify the mind. It is the path. The SANGHA are your spiritual friends on the path who are trying to purify their own minds and who help support your spiritual growth. buddhahood is our point of destination, dharma is how we get there, and sangha are the friends traveling with us. This is the right view and motivation with which we go for refuge.

Many different Ngöndro practices and teachings exist within the various buddhist lineages. In Ngöndro, there are two styles of visualization practice taught for the refuge tree: the expanded and the essentialized versions. The expanded version is very detailed. Briefly, visualize Lake Dhanakosha in front of you. In the center of the lake sits a wish-fulfilling tree with five branches. Guru Rinpoche sits in the center branch: above his head are the Lineage Gurus, on the branch to his right are all buddhas, behind are the teachings and dharma texts, the sangha are on the left branch and the YIDAMS (personal chosen deities) are in front. In the space around these five branches are the DAKAS AND DAKINIS (male and female enlightened beings who move through dharmata, the space of ultimate truth) and DHARMA PROTECTORS (beings who have vowed to protect buddha's teachings). More extensive Ngöndro teachings contain description in even greater detail.

Instead of the expanded style, however, this refuge practice uses the essentialized style of visualization. Here, Guru Rinpoche is a wish-fulfilling jewel within which everything is contained. Begin by visualizing your Root Guru appearing in the form of Guru Rinpoche in the sky in front of you. He is

surrounded by all the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten direction and three times. He is the essence of the THREE JEWELS, the THREE ROOTS, and the THREE KAYAS. Guru Rinpoche's body is the sangha, his speech is the dharma, and his mind is the buddha. These are the Three Jewels. His body is the Guru, his speech is the Yidam, and his mind is the Dakini. These are the Three Roots. Guru Rinpoche's body is nirmanakaya, his speech is sambhogakaya, and his mind is the dharmakaya. These are the Three Kayas.

Visualize Guru Rinpoche's body as white with a reddish hue representing wisdom and skillful means. He sits in the posture of "royal ease" with his right foot slightly extended. His right hand holds a vajra, representing indestructible wisdom, in the position called "suppression by splendor." His left hand holds a skullcup in which sits a long-life vase filled with deathless wisdom nectar, symbolizing the giving of ordinary and supreme siddhis. The stopper of the long-life vase is a wish-fulfilling jewel. He wears four layers of clothing. His pure white inner robes represent a secret vajra and an unstained garment. On top of this, he wears a blue long-sleeved cloak, representing a tantric practitioner's clothing. On top of this, he wears a monk's robes, red with a gold design. His outer garment is a king's robe. He wears a lotus-shaped hat made of fawn skin, topped by a half-vajra and a vulture feather. He holds a khatvanga (trident) in the crook of his left arm, symbolizing his inseparability from his wisdom consort. Clearly visualize his three-dimensional pure wisdom form made of rainbows and light. A wisdom form is a form that appears, yet is non-substantial like a rainbow. All buddha fields, the inconceivable phenomena of wisdom, are perfected within his body; and his body unobstructedly pervades all buddha fields.

Then visualize yourself with your father to your right, your mother to your left, and your enemies in front of you. Surrounded by all sentient beings completely covering the earth, feel that you lead all sentient beings in taking refuge in the buddha, dharma, and sangha until all beings have attained buddhahood. Show deep respect by offering your body, speech, and mind to Guru Rinpoche with total conviction. Offer prostrations with your body, recite the refuge prayer with your speech, and generate unshakable faith and devotion with your mind, reciting:

DI ZUNG JYANG CHHUB NYING PO MA THOB BAR
From this very moment until attaining the heart of enlightenment,

LA MA KÖN CHHOK SUM LA KYAB SU CHHI
I take refuge in the Lama, the embodiment of the Three Jewels.

Prostrations can be performed as you recite the two refuge lines. To do a prostration, stand with your feet together. The arms come up from both sides and the hands join together in the "lotus bud" mudra of faith and devotion. With this mudra, touch the top of your head, throat, and heart center. Touching these three places with the lotus bud mudra purifies the defilements of the three doors (body, speech and mind), and you receive the blessings of the Three Vajras: the enlightened aspects of Guru Rinpoche's body, speech, and mind. Then touch the five points of your body to the ground. These five points are the forehead, the two hands, and two knees. Touching these five points to the ground can seal the doors for rebirth in samsara. Bend down, touching the hands and knees to the ground, sliding all the way out until you are prone, bringing the hands together overhead while touching the forehead to the ground. Prostrations purify the defilements of the body, tone the muscles, purify the organs, increase life span and merit, and subdue pride. To complete this portion of Ngöndro, you must do one hundred thousand prostrations. Generally, ten percent should be added to each accumulation of one hundred thousand to repair any mistakes, making a total of one hundred and ten thousand prostrations. Taking refuge is the entrance to the path of buddhism and is the foundation of all other vows. Although there are many vows within the buddhist system, refuge is the first and most fundamental. When you take this vow, you actually begin on the path of buddha dharma. The vow has many details, but the main point

is to avoid harming all sentient life. buddhism recognizes that all suffering is caused by hurting others. By giving up a harmful mind and negative action, the causes of suffering are removed and pacified. Taking the vow of refuge is infinitely beneficial. Buddha said that any being who even hears the name of the Three Jewels will gain so much merit that the sky will be too small to contain it. When someone with all their heart truly takes refuge in the Triple Gem, the merit gained is inconceivably vast and indescribable.

The essence of the refuge practice is unshakable, unchangeable faith and devotion. Without this kind of faith and trust, your mind cannot open. When your mind opens, it becomes soft and receptive. Buddha's compassion is like a hook which catches the ring of your faith and devotion. Without faith, there can be no real connection to dharma--not blind faith, but rather intelligent faith, free from any doubt or confusion. Because dharma is pure and faultless, buddha's mind is like the sun shining on a snow-covered mountain. With devotion, the rays of your faith can melt the snow of buddha's nectar of blessing. So with pure faith and devotion, recite the two lines of refuge. During each prostration recite both the two lines of refuge and the two lines of bodhicitta which follow in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

BODHICITTA: DEVELOPING THE MIND OF AWAKENING

While refuge is the essence of the hinayana path, bodhicitta practice is the essence of the mahayana path. It means "great enlightened attitude" and has two dimensions. The first, **RELATIVE BODHICITTA**, is the great heart of compassion. The second, **ABSOLUTE BODHICITTA**, is great openness and emptiness. When you have attained true realization, these two are inseparable because the essence of emptiness is compassion.

Relative bodhicitta has two aspects. These are **ASPIRATIONAL BODHICITTA** and **ENGAGED BODHICITTA**.

ASPIRATIONAL BODHICITTA is the wish that all sentient beings attain buddhahood, that they be released from suffering and never be separated from happiness. Aspirational bodhicitta includes the **FOUR IMMEASURABLE ATTITUDES**:

- 1) Loving kindness
- 2) Compassion
- 3) Joy
- 4) Equanimity

Meditating upon **EQUANIMITY** means recognizing all sentient beings as equal in nature. This attitude must be generated in order to develop bodhicitta. To prevent a biased and partial view, always begin your practice by meditating on equanimity. A biased focus is caused by our mind's creating limiting concepts such as friend-and-enemy or like-and-dislike. This biased focus perpetuates dualistic phenomena which are synonymous with samsara. If we limit our ability to perceive all beings as equal, how can we develop the vast and directionless attitude of loving kindness, compassion, and joy for all sentient beings? The root of the problem is dualistic mind, the mind which constantly chooses sides, separates friends from enemies, and rejects or accepts others. In truth, there is no reason to create these limited concepts. We have to recognize that all sentient beings have already been in every conceivable relationship with us. They have been our parents, our friends, and our enemies. At this moment, they may be our enemies. Yet we have already determined that everything is impermanent, so it is very possible that in the future our enemies will again become our friends.

Within a larger perspective, while enemies are considered to bring harm, they can also help. Through their kindness, they can point out our faults. By honestly examining what they say, we may find some truth. If someone tells the truth, then why be angry or reject them? By recognizing and accepting our faults, we gain the qualities of wisdom. This is also what a teacher does for us. The teacher's job is to point out faults and show ways of removing them. This is the way to achieve wisdom. So begin your meditation by establishing the even-mindedness of equanimity which produces the ability to love without limit or direction. Recognize how much these beings have helped and loved you in the past. The desire to return their loving kindness naturally unfolds.

The attitude of **LOVING KINDNESS** is the result of recognizing that all sentient beings have

been our parents at some time during our countless rebirths. They have given us a body and taken care of us. Think of their kindness, feel their love and in turn evoke a genuine loving feeling for them. Meditate on those who have been most kind to you in this life. They are the same as all beings who have been with you in past lifetimes. Create equal loving kindness for all beings as you recognize their gift. If someone is this kind, then you have to return their kindness. You can repay them by truly giving rise to an attitude of immeasurable loving kindness.

Now generate immeasurable COMPASSION for all beings. They have no idea what causes their suffering and at the same time their only real desire is for happiness. Sentient beings have no idea what the difference between virtuous and non-virtuous actions is and, therefore, continuously create more negative karma. Through ignorance and out of the desire for happiness, everything they do only creates more and more suffering. The wish that all beings be freed from suffering arises naturally and spontaneously from contemplating the suffering of others and its causes. Recognize how inconceivably great their suffering is, and have mercy on these poor sentient beings who have no idea how to escape this endless cycle. Give rise to a feeling of infinite compassion for them. Realize how lucky you are to have met a path with the potential to lead you out of this cycle.

Generate an immeasurable feeling of JOY as you reflect on the good qualities of other sentient beings. Acknowledging their happiness, feel joyous for them. Make a wish that they may attain buddhahood. Try to see the positive qualities in others, developing the wish that their positive qualities increase even more and that others would emulate them. Meditate on a person who has wonderful attributes and then expand that observation to include the wish that all beings could have those same wonderful characteristics. Pray for these qualities to grow and increase in all beings. With the same motivation, wish that all beings never be separated from the supreme happiness of buddhahood and the cause of that happiness. Then pray that sentient beings be permanently separated from suffering and the causes of suffering, and that they experience supreme happiness utterly beyond any suffering whatsoever. Then reflect on the positive feelings that arise when we know that sentient beings are without suffering and meditate on this joyfulness. These are the Four Immeasurables.

ENGAGED BODHICITTA is the action of actual accomplishment of bodhicitta. Aspirational bodhicitta is similar to wishing that someone had one thousand dollars, but engaged bodhicitta is similar to going out to earn a thousand dollars with the intention of giving it to someone. The only way you can truly help sentient beings is to attain buddhahood. Only then will you have the power to create some lasting benefit for others.

The action of engaged bodhicitta is the practice of the SIX PARAMITAS:

- 1) **Generosity**, or the giving of material things--this means the giving of dharma, the giving of protection, and saving of lives.
- 2) **Morality**, or the accumulation of virtuous actions, the abstention from non-virtuous actions, and the motivation to always benefit others.
- 3) **Patience in practice**, patience with others, and patience when listening to dharma.
- 4) **Diligence**, or the courage and belief that you can accomplish your buddha potential, and the diligence to practice immediately because the future is uncertain.
- 5) **Meditation**. All sentient beings experience the three poisonous emotions of anger, desire and ignorance. On the path, as you meditate, these three poisons transform into the three experiences of clarity, bliss, and emptiness or non-conceptuality. On the level of the result, these three experiences transform into the three kayas. On the path, there are three stages of samadhi or experience. This is like the meditation of a small child. During the second stage, the attachment to experience vanishes, but there is still a subtle attachment to emptiness. During the third stage of meditation, even the subtle attachment to emptiness has been cut and the meditator rests in the

profound, non-conceptual awareness of the absolute nature. Here, experiences may come and go like clouds in the sky, but realization is unchanging like the sky itself. The three kayas are recognized as inseparable because they have never been separate from the beginningless beginning. The paramita of meditation has this kind of powerful result.

6) **Wisdom**, which can be divided into three categories: education, contemplation, and meditation.

The *first*, that of education, refers to the wisdom acquired by gathering knowledge according to samsara and nirvana. Education according to the samsaric view involves intellectual learning such as languages, medicine, mechanics, computers, and so on. Wisdom knowledge according to nirvana includes all dharma teachings, commentaries, sutras and tantras. One must educate oneself thoroughly by listening and understanding without error. Learn as much as possible about dharma by listening to teachings, by reading, and by listening to others who are knowledgeable. This is the wisdom of education. Until you reach a state free from doubt, study is important. Otherwise, misunderstanding can arise in regard to dharma which itself is faultless.

The *second*, the wisdom gained by contemplation, allows a faith born of intelligence to arise. Believing something to be true simply by being told, without having looked at it for yourself, can cause blind or stupid faith. This kind of faith lacks wisdom. So reflect deeply on buddha's pure teachings until your realization ripens and all doubts are removed. When you have established an understanding beyond any confusion as to the infallibility of the teachings, this is the wisdom of contemplation. Until that time, you must continue to contemplate the teachings.

The *third*, the wisdom of meditation, is achieved by applying your understanding of the words and meaning of the teachings. Do this without intellectualizing and without error. Through meditation, you gain realization which is the true manifestation of the wisdom nature of your mind.

To summarize, the sixth paramita of wisdom means to educate yourself about dharma without misunderstanding even one word, to contemplate the teachings deeply without making a mistake in understanding, and then to meditate, applying your understanding. This results in the achievement of pure enlightenment without any fault.

The first five of the six paramitas belong to the category of skillful means. Wisdom, the sixth paramita, is the perfectly pure state of buddha's mind and is the opposite of ignorance. The result of the perfect realization of wisdom is, in fact, the accomplishment of ultimate bodhicitta because one has attained buddhahood.

ABSOLUTE BODHICITTA is the ultimate realization of great emptiness, the heart-essence of compassion. This emptiness is not like a corpse. It has the quality of the unobstructed radiance of compassion. Emptiness and compassion are completely inseparable. This is the essential point of the motivation of bodhicitta and is the most essential point in all dharma practice. While reciting the lines below in front of Guru Rinpoche, take a strong vow from the heart to truly liberate all sentient beings into the state of buddhahood. Traditionally, these are recited one hundred thousand times. The main point is not the counting, however, but the natural rising and development of genuine compassion. In this case, the following two lines are recited with the prostrations:

DA NAY ZUNG TE KHOR WA MA TONG BAR

From now until cyclic existence is emptied,

MA GYUR SEM CHÈN KUN GYI PHÈN DE DRUB

I shall accomplish the benefits and happiness of all motherly sentient beings.

At the end of the session, visualize clear white light having the nature of nectar coming from Guru Rinpoche. It blesses and touches you and all sentient beings, purifying all defilements of body, speech, and mind. Instantly, you and all beings, like a flock of birds rising up, dissolve into Guru Rinpoche, who then dissolves in the great expanse of dharmakaya, the ultimate space of truth. Remain in that state, the ultimate bodhicitta of great emptiness.

CHAPTER 5

MANDALA OFFERING

The mandala offering is made in order to accumulate merit and wisdom, and is an antidote to miserliness. All sentient life, including human, has two "defilements" obscuring buddha nature. These obscurations are the gross emotional states and the subtle habits of the emotions. Merit and wisdom are the two methods of accumulation which purify these two obscurations. On the path, the accumulation of merit and wisdom result in the attainment of the Two kayas (the dharmakaya and the rupakaya--the latter includes the sambhogakaya and the nirmanakaya). The accumulation of merit and wisdom also results in the attainment of the two purposes: the attainment of enlightenment for oneself and the attainment of enlightenment with the intention of benefiting others. It is not possible to accomplish the enlightened state of buddhahood without accumulating these two.

When offering the mandala, visualize giving everything you can imagine and more to the Three Jewels. This includes all of the wealth and qualities accumulated in past, present, and future lives. Visualize the offering as Mount Meru surrounded by the four continents. Between each of these four continents are two subcontinents, totaling twelve. The continents, the subcontinents, and Mount Meru are completely surrounded by seven golden mountains. In turn, this is encircled by seven oceans. A border surrounds the entire visualization. All this is called one universe.

Now multiply this visualized universe one thousand times to create a one-thousandfold universe. Multiply this one-thousandfold universe by one thousand again to create the second thousandfold universe. Multiply this again by one thousand to create the three-thousandfold world system (1000 x 1000 x 1000). The three-thousandfold world system is completely filled with everything the mind can conceive and more, including mountains of jewels, wish-fulfilling trees, wish-fulfilling cattle, unplanted grains, and treasure vases; sixteen offering goddesses who offer the five desirable qualities: form, sound, smell, taste and touch; flowers, incense, lights, perfume, food and so on; all eight auspicious emblems: the umbrellas, golden fishes, vases, lotuses, white conch shells, endless knots, banners of victory, and wheels. It also includes the seven precious aspects of universal monarchy: the wheels, wish-fulfilling gems, queens, ministers, elephants, excellent horses, and generals. The wealth of gods, nagas, and humans, and every conceivable quality of abundance are all offered. The outer universe is completely filled with all these qualities. Make the offerings with pure devotion and without clinging. In this way, the OUTER MANDALA OFFERING is given to the Three Jewels.

The INNER MANDALA OFFERING is the offering of your body, possessions, and all merit accumulated in the three times: past, present and future. Your body is the same as the outer world or universe. Your torso symbolizes Mount Meru; your arms and legs, the four continents; and your eyes, the sun and moon. In offering your body, think of all the other bodies you have had throughout countless lifetimes, the body you now have, and all the bodies you will have in the future. Think in the same way about all your possessions from past lifetimes, in this life, and all of the possessions you will have in the future. Look at how much merit you have accumulated in the past, are accumulating now, and will accumulate in the future. Then consider not only yourself, but also the accumulations of others, such as buddhas and bodhisattvas. The amassing together and offering of all that has been accumulated

throughout the three times is the inner mandala offering. Since there is no wisdom in an offering made with attachment, offer these things without any expectation that you will get anything in return.

In the SECRET MANDALA OFFERING, the three kayas of buddha fields are offered to the Three Jewels. The three kayas--the dharmakaya, sambhogakaya, and the nirmanakaya-- are the display of buddha's body and wisdom, manifesting as buddha fields. These buddha fields are offered to the Three Jewels, the buddha, dharma, and sangha.

The perfectly pure state, utterly pure from the beginningless beginning, is DHARMAKAYA. It has the unobstructed potential to manifest clear luminosity, the display of the SAMBHOOGAKAYA, inseparable from the dharmakaya. Spontaneously perfect, this aspect with rich joyful qualities manifests as the buddha field of the Five Certainties: the certain time, place, teacher, teaching, and retinue. This great display of joyful phenomena is the state of the sambhogakaya. From the sambhogakaya, an inconceivable display of pure phenomena arises unobstructedly, pervasively manifesting as form. That unobstructed pervasive energy which manifests as every possible positive form is the NIRMANAKAYA. Realize that these three kayas are completely inseparable. All relative outer, inner, and secret offerings are perfected in the three kayas, the state of ultimate truth. Here, the one who makes the offering, the object of offering, and the offering itself are not seen as separate from the three kayas. In a non-conceptual state, offer with this understanding and realization of non-duality. This secret mandala offering is the unsurpassable and supreme offering. The outer and inner mandala offerings accumulate merit, while the secret mandala offering accumulates wisdom.

To make the mandala offering, you will need two mandalas. The first, called the "mandala for the support of accomplishment," is placed on the shrine and visualized as a refuge tree. This support is made by filling three rings placed on a mandala pan with piles of offerings, totalling thirty-seven. If you do not have these rings, then put a mandala pan piled with rice on the shrine. The second is the offering mandala [Figure 5] which is held in your lap. In addition, you will need rice, seeds, grain or precious stones. Precious stones are the best. If you use rice or grain, color it with saffron. Visualize each single grain of rice as one three-thousandfold world system, as was described before. Sit with a cloth draped across your lap to hold the pile of rice. Hold a bit of the rice and the pan in your left hand. Your right hand, formed into the mudra of the vajra fist, holds a small amount of rice between the thumb and middle finger. Recite the hundred syllable mantra while rubbing the underside of your right wrist on the mandala pan in a clockwise circle until you complete one recitation. Then drop the rice from between the fingers of your right hand back into the pile on your lap. With the same hand, pick up a handful of rice and make seven piles on the surface of the pan. The first one, in the center of the pan, represents Mount Meru. Then make a pile above the center one, another to the right, one below, and one to the left of the first pile. These four represent the four continents. Make the sixth pile in the same place as the second pile and the seventh pile in the same place as the fourth. These last two represent the sun and moon. After you finish making the piles, wipe the pan clean with the underside of your right wrist in a clockwise rotation. (The offering will fall into the cloth.) Think of the mandala plate as symbolizing the purity of your mind. As you rub your wrist on the pan, the action of rubbing the bodhicitta nerve, which passes through your wrist, purifies your mind's obscurations.

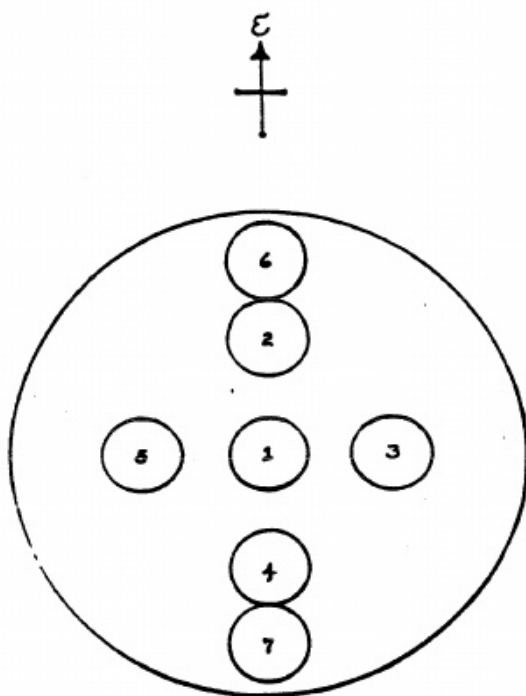


Figure 5. Top of the Mandala Pan

As you make the mandala offerings, recite the following two lines:

TSHE RAB KUN GYI LÜ DANG LONG CHYÖD PAL

I offer my bodies, possessions, enjoyment, and glories from all my lifetimes

TSHOK NYIY DZOK CHHYIR KÖN CHHOK SUM LA BUL

To the Three Jewels in order to complete the two accumulations.

One recitation of these two lines is one offering. Accumulate one hundred thousand of these mandala offering recitations to complete this part of the Ngöndro. (During daily practice when you are not working to accumulate, the "mandala" mudra can be used [Figure 6]). At the end of each session, visualize Guru Rinpoche dissolving into yourself and all sentient beings, and feel that you have accumulated vast merit and wisdom. This is the skillful means or method used to accumulate merit and wisdom.

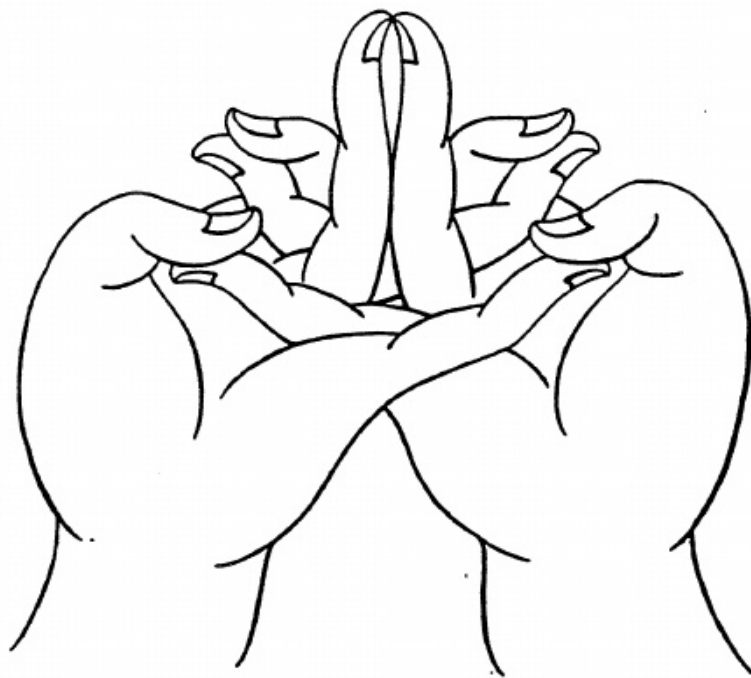


Figure 6. Mandala Mudra

CHAPTER 6

VAJRASATTVA

The Vajrasattva practice acts to purify all past accumulations of negative karma. It is a confession practice which uses Four Powers to complete the purification:

- 1) The deity, as the support
- 2) The feeling of regret
- 3) The method, which is the descent of the nectar
- 4) The vow to never again repeat these negative actions

CHYI WOR LA MA DOR SEM YER MED PAI

Above the crown of my head is Vajrasattva, inseparable from the Lama.

KU LAY DUD TSII GYUN BAB DRIB JYANG GYUR

From Vajrasattva's body, a streaming flow of nectar descends, purifying my obscurations.

Vajrasattva sits on a thousand-petaled, multicolored lotus. On top of the lotus is a moon disc. A white HUNG sits on top of that. The HUNG transforms into Vajrasattva in union with his consort, Nyema Karmo. Visualize Vajrasattva four fingers above your head. He witnesses your confession and is the essential aspect of all five buddha families. His essence is your own Root Guru in the form of Vajrasattva. The lotus stem is like a funnel and touches the opening of the central channel at the crown of your head. Vajrasattva is white in color and has two hands. In his right hand, he holds a gold vajra to his heart, and in the left, a silver bell to his hip. Visualize his body as clear and pure like a reflection of wisdom. Although you can see his body, its qualities are not heavy and solid; rather, it appears transparent and empty like a rainbow. Visualizing his clear luminous form is the first power, the power of the support.

Generate strong devotion, recalling the negative acts you have committed throughout all your numerous lifetimes due to ignorance. Feel regret for these actions and pray to Vajrasattva to purify you. This is the second power, the power of regret.

In Vajrasattva's heart is a five-pointed vajra. In its center on a moon disc is the seed syllable HUNG, surrounded by the hundred syllable mantra (which follows), circling clockwise:

OM VAJRA SATTVA SAMAYA MANU PALAYA
VAJRA SATTVA TENOPA TITHRA DRIDHO MEBHAWA
SU TO KHAYO MEBHAWA
SU PO KHAYO MEBHAWA
ANU RAKTO MEBHAWA
SARWA SIDDHIM ME PRA YATTSA
SARWA KARMA SU TSA ME

TSITTANG SHRI YANG KURU HUNG
HA HA HA HO!
BHAGAWAN
SARWA TATHAGATA VAJRA MA ME MUNTSA VAJRI BHAWA MAHA SAMAYA
SATTVA AH

While you recite the mantra, white nectar begins to flow from the HUNG and the encircling mantra, filling the bodies of Vajrasattva and his consort. The nectar comes from their secret place out through their point of union into the lotus stem, and down through your central channel, filling your entire body. It comes like a powerful wind or shower that washes away the three poisons (anger, desire and ignorance), the three diseases (wind, bile and phlegm), and the three demonic influences (Poden Gyalpo, the manifestation of anger; Modön Dremo, the manifestation of desire; and Ludön Sadak, the manifestation of ignorance). The three poisons wash out in the form of ink, smoke, coal, or dirt; the three diseases wash out in the form of blood and pus; and the three demonic influences wash out in the form of poisonous insects, scorpions, snakes, spiders, and frogs. Enormous quantities of all of these are cleansed from your body. As these impurities are washed out, the earth opens up below, and the Lord of Death appears in the form of a red ox. He is surrounded by all your past karmic debtors who are repaid and totally satisfied in this way.

Then visualize the nectar washing and rinsing you until you are completely clean, purifying all damaged and broken samaya, obstructions, and defilements. Feel you are being totally purified as you recite the hundred syllable mantra. This is the third power, the flow of nectar. Recite the hundred syllable mantra as many times as possible, eventually accumulating one hundred thousand.

Feel with total confidence and without doubt that you are completely purified. Vajrasattva confirms and warmly acknowledges that indeed this is true. At this point, take a strong vow to never again accumulate negative karma. Feel that you would rather die than choose to create negative karma. This is the fourth power, the vow and final decision to absolutely cut any possibility of committing sinful actions again in the future. These four powers are the OUTER PURIFICATION.

After reciting as the hundred syllable mantra as many times as possible, Vajrasattva melts into light, dissolves into you, and you yourself become Vajrasattva. It is important to generate confidence and "vajra pride," a feeling that from the beginningless beginning, on an ultimate level you are none other than Vajrasattva. Recite the six syllable mantra:

OM VAJRASATTVA HUNG

In this state all forms and appearance are Vajrasattva's body. All sound is mantra and all thoughts are inseparable from Vajrasattva's wisdom mind. This is the INNER PURIFICATION.
Recite the lines:

ÖD ZHU DAK NANG DANG DREY RO CHIK GYUR

Vajrasattva melts into light, blending into oneself, becoming one taste.

Vajrasattva then dissolves like a rainbow and disappears into the sky. Remain with your mind and Vajrasattva's mind inseparably mixed. Meditate in the formless state, the ultimate state of Vajrasattva's mind. This is the SECRET PURIFICATION.

Each day, recite the hundred syllable mantra at least twenty-one times and the six syllable mantra one hundred and eight times. To complete this portion of the Ngöndro, you must complete one hundred thousand recitations of the hundred syllable mantra. The six syllable mantra is not counted.

The power of this purification practice is inconceivably profound and beneficial. Through the wisdom and skillful means of the vajrayana path, even one thousand aeons of negative karmic accumulation can be purified through Vajrasattva practice.

CHAPTER 7

GURU YOGA

GURU YOGA is the method for receiving the direct blessing of the Guru's mind. As explained before, there are two methods for attaining enlightenment. The first is the accumulation of merit and wisdom along with purification practices; the second is direct transmission of wisdom from the Guru's mind to your mind.

Transmission really means receiving the taste of enlightenment. By analogy, when you think of a person, you get a direct feeling of that person's qualities. These may be either positive or negative, within the limited concept of "personality." Guru Yoga is the method for feeling and tasting the Guru's realization of ultimate wisdom. This realization is beyond personality and is always positive—the experience of totally faultless enlightened mind. As you experience the purity of the Guru's wisdom mind, it may appear to be coming from outside yourself. Actually, you are tasting the true nature of your own mind. Then develop and deepen this experience until you attain complete liberation. By thinking of pure buddha-mind, you will eventually develop the habit of recognizing your own wisdom. By training in this way, you will attain buddhahood.

According to the vajrayana view, Guru Yoga is the quintessential practice for attaining liberation. All buddhas became enlightened by following their teacher's precious instructions. So the Guru is considered even more important than the buddha because without the Guru there is no way to achieve buddhahood. When the Guru's instructions have penetrated the student's heart, this is the same as finding a precious wish-fulfilling jewel in your hand. Someone who has received the Guru's mind transmission has no choice but to attain enlightenment, just as someone falling down a steep mountain totally out of control, has no choice but to fall all the way to the bottom.

The eighty-four Mahasiddhas in India and Guru Rinpoche's twenty-five main disciples in Tibet, the treasure finders, awareness holders and accomplished enlightened sublime beings, all became enlightened through the mind transmission of their Gurus. This unbroken lineage has been passed from the primordial buddha, Samantabhadra, to our own Root Lama who is the essence of all the buddhas of the ten directions and the three times. All siddhis and blessings are carried and passed through this lineage. Because the path of Guru Yoga is so deeply profound, there is no doubt that if you practice it, you will become enlightened.

There is no way to realize the true nature of mind through analyzing or intellectualizing. This is the same as trying to get butter by churning water. The realization of ultimate truth is not intellectual, nor is it related to dualistic mind. By practicing Guru Yoga purely, without doubt, recognition of your wisdom mind will dawn. First, see the Guru as a buddha and then feel the energy of wisdom mind. Second, seeing the Guru as buddha, the feeling begins to grow. Then, through the power of the Guru's blessings, you too become a buddha.

Have pure faith, devotion and confidence in this as a practice. This means genuinely feeling the Guru's inconceivable qualities of kindness and wisdom. Direct instructions from the Guru can reveal your

own buddha nature which has been obscured in samsara for countless lifetimes. Open your heart and trust in this. Thinking of the Guru's qualities, how amazing and extraordinarily fortunate you are to have met a teacher like this, you may feel the hair on your body stand up or you may cry without control. Experiences will arise and suddenly your mind will change to pure Awareness. All normal phenomena will cease. Meditation experiences will arise effortlessly and spontaneously. So when practicing, do not mouth the words mindlessly or without feeling, but rather generate devotion, the heart essence of Guru Yoga. Then recite:

RANG NYID DOR JE NAL JYOR DUN KHA RU
I am Vajrayogini and in the sky in front of me,

TSA WAI LA MA PEMAI KUR ZHENG GYUR
My Root Lama arises in the form of Padmasambava.

While doing Guru Yoga practice, visualize yourself as the wisdom dakini Vajrayogini. She is red, has three eyes, and stands in the "dancing posture" with her right leg drawn up. She holds a skullcup filled with blood in her left hand, symbolizing the giving of siddhis; a *drikuk* (hooked knife) in the right, symbolizing the cutting of grasping to an ego and a *khatvanga* (trident) in the crook of her left arm, symbolizing union with her secret consort. She appears slightly wrathful. Inseparable from each other, Vajrayogini symbolizes wisdom and Guru Rinpoche symbolizes skillful means.

We visualize ourselves as Vajrayogini for three reasons. First, this solid and gross corporeal body is an impure vessel for receiving empowerments and blessings. Through visualization we are creating a pure container free of obscurations, necessary for receiving the Guru's mind transmission. Secondly, we visualize ourselves as Vajrayogini in order to gain the realization of expanding emptiness and great bliss as inseparable from realized wisdom. Thirdly is the auspicious magnetizing and interdependent connection between male and female. Feminine wisdom energy magnetizes Guru Rinpoche's display of skillful means through his blessings and empowerments. This transcends dualistic concepts such as male and female since there actually is no separation between skillful means represented by the masculine and wisdom represented by the feminine.

Visualize Guru Rinpoche in the sky in front of you and recite the four line prayer with devotion:

DÜ SUM SANG GYAY MA LÜ DÜ PAI KU
The embodiment of all the buddhas of the three times, without exception,

TSA WAI LA MA CHHOK LA SOL WA DEB
Sublime Root Lama, I pray to you.

DI CHHYI BAR DO SUM DU THUK JEY ZUNG
Now, in future lives, and in the bardo, hold me with your compassion.

DÜ SUM GYUN CHHAYD MED PAR JYIN GYTY LOB
Bless me unceasingly throughout the three times.

Your faith magnetizes the blessings of Guru Rinpoche's pure wisdom and compassion toward you. It is the opening and softening of the heart. Without faith, your heart can be closed and hard like stone. If your mind is open and devotional, you can receive the Guru's blessings like rain falling onto the soft ground. Rain never chooses where it will fall, yet wherever it touches receptive ground, it is absorbed. However, not even one drop will penetrate stone. Everything grows from the earth, but

nothing grows from rock. The same is true of our mind. Qualities grow from a mind that is soft like the earth, but will never grow from a mind that is hard and impenetrable like stone. With devotion, Guru Rinpoche's blessings will dissolve directly into your heart, like the rain into the earth. All qualities of wisdom will grow from this mixing of the Guru's mind with your own mind.

The Guru is no other than your own pure wisdom aspect of mind which is awakened through devotion. When your wisdom mind is awakened, all phenomena is recognized as the display of your own awareness. Recalling Guru Rinpoche's presence can open up your heart revealing your true nature and Guru Rinpoche's as exactly the same. The only difference is that he has completely manifested his enlightened qualities while ours are as yet unmanifested.

At this point, recite the Vajra Guru mantra at least one hundred and eight times each session.

OM AH HUNG VAJRA GURU PADMA SIDDHI HUNG

OM, AH, and HUNG are the three essence seed-syllables of all the buddhas. OM is the essence of buddha's body, AH the essence of buddha's speech, and HUNG the essence of buddha's mind. VAJRA means indestructible dharmakaya. GURU is the spontaneously accomplished qualities of wisdom, purity, bliss and emptiness which is the sambhogakaya. PADMA means "lotus" and is the name of Padmasambhava, the nirmanakaya form. SIDDHI is spiritual accomplishment, both ordinary and extraordinary. HUNG is the request to grant siddhis or realization of the inseparability of the three kayas.

While reciting the Vajra Guru mantra, keep pure vision. This means viewing all phenomena as a pureland, all sentient beings as dakas and dakinis of the Lotus Family, hearing all sound as mantra, and recognizing all thoughts as Guru Rinpoche's mind. During the recitation of the Vajra Guru mantra, inconceivable emanations taking many forms and sizes (symbolic of his body), different seed syllables (symbolic of his speech), and ritual implements (symbolic of his mind) emerge from Guru Rinpoche's heart and dissolve into your body. In this way, you are receiving the blessings of Guru Rinpoche's body, speech and mind.

When you finish reciting the mantra, say the two lines after the Vajra Guru mantra as you take the **FOUR EMPOWERMENTS**:

KU SUNG THUK KYI WANG JYIN YONG DZOK THOB

The empowerments and blessings of enlightened body, speech and mind
are completely and fully received.

VAJRA GURU KAYA WAKA TSITTA SIDDHI HUNG

As you receive the four empowerments, understand the meaning of this mantra: VAJRA GURU means the Vajra Master; KAYA is body; WAKA is speech; TSITTA the mind; SIDDHI is accomplishment; and HUNG means to receive all of these.

From the OM on Guru Rinpoche's forehead, white light strikes a corresponding OM on your forehead, bestowing the vase empowerment. The vase empowerment purifies all defilements of the body, giving you the blessings of a vajra body and empowering you to practice the creation stage on the path. The creation stage practice is the visualization of deities and recitation of mantra. This empowerment prepares you for the future attainment of nirmanakaya buddhahood.

Red light comes from the red seed-syllable AH at his throat to a corresponding AH at yours, bestowing the secret empowerment, purifying all defilements of speech. You receive the blessing of Vajra speech and are empowered to practice TSA LUNG, a physical yoga of the winds and channels. This empowerment prepares you for the future attainment of sambhogakaya buddhahood. Blue light comes from the blue seed-syllable HUNG at his heart and enters the corresponding HUNG at your heart. You

receive the third empowerment, the wisdom empowerment which purifies all defilements of the mind. You receive pure wisdom mind and are empowered to practice TABLAM the path of skillful means which trains the mind and vital essence. By receiving this empowerment, you are preparing for the future attainment of dharmakaya buddhahood.

From Guru Rinpoche's heart, the essence of his non-conceptualized pure wisdom mind in the form of a five-colored sphere comes to your heart, bestowing the fourth empowerment. This is the word empowerment which introduces the symbolic meaning of realization beyond any ability to verbalize. The subtle defilements to enlightenment are purified, and you are empowered to practice the Great Perfection or secret Dzogchen practices of trekchö and thögal on the path. Through this empowerment you receive all perfected qualities and activities of the buddhas. This prepares you for the future attainment of Svabhavikakaya buddhahood (the three kayas as inseparable).

Recite the last two lines of Guru Yoga:

LA MA ÖD ZHU RANG THIM YER MED NGANG

The Lama melts into light and dissolves inseparably with my own state of being.

RIK TONG DÖN GYI LA MAI RANG ZHAL TA

Behold Emptiness-Awareness, the true face of the ultimate Lama!

Generate a genuine feeling of devotion for Guru Rinpoche who in turn smiles and looks lovingly at you, displaying exalted compassion and kindness. He is drawn to the crown of your head, where he dissolves simultaneously from the top and bottom into his own heart. He dissolves into the clearlight essence of great bliss in the form of a five-colored sphere the size of a thumb-nail. His mind, pure wisdom essence of great bliss, enters and descends down your central channel where it dissolves into your heart. You, in turn, dissolve into the light in your heart, mixing your mind inseparably with the Guru's mind. Like pouring water into water, there is no difference between you and Guru Rinpoche. Remain in this state and meditate, experiencing and tasting the stainless wisdom energy of the Guru's mind. By experiencing the taste of the Guru's wisdom mind, we begin to know the Guru as none other than our own true nature. When we become a realized being, this is known as the fully-manifested, ultimate secret Guru.

There are actually three Gurus: the outer Guru, the inner Guru and the secret Guru. The outer Guru is the same as Guru Rinpoche who took form. The inner Guru is the teaching he gave which arose from his realization. These instructions can lead us to the discovery and unveiling of our own buddha potential. As practice is established and the fruition begins to materialize, the realization of the secret Guru dawns as none other than our own all-knowing, wisdom awareness mind. Our own buddha nature has fully blossomed. At the end of your formless meditation session, Guru Rinpoche reappears above your head. Recite this four line prayer:

PAL DĚN TSA WAI LA MA RIN PO CHHE

Glorious one, precious Root Lama,

DAK GI CHYI WOR PEMAI DĚN SHUK LA

Sitting on the lotus seat on the crown of my head,

KA DRIN CHHEN POI GO NAY JEY ZUNG TE

Hold me through your great kindness.

KU SUNG THUK KYI NGÖ DRUB TSAL DU SOL

Please bestow the accomplishments of enlightened body, speech, and mind.

To complete the Guru Yoga practice, you must accumulate at least twelve hundred thousand recitations of the Vajra Guru mantra. Guru Rinpoche said that there are three different degrees of completion of the Vajra Guru mantra in Guru Yoga. The first is the completion of twelve hundred thousand recitations of the mantra which has the power to destroy the seed for being reborn in samsara. The second is the recitation of thirty-six hundred thousand mantras which results in attaining the level of a awareness holder. Guru Rinpoche said that by reciting one hundred thousand mantras one hundred times, you will reach his same level of realization.

CHAPTER 8

PHOWA, CHÖD AND THE DEDICATION OF MERIT

In Ngöndro, PHOWA is the prayer of aspiration to be liberated into Amitabha's pureland at the moment of death. Recite these two lines three times each session:

GÖN PO ÖD PAK MED LA SOL WA DEB

I pray to Amitabha, the lord Protector of Infinite Light,

ZAB LAM PHO WA JYONG WAR JYIN GYTY LOB

Grant your blessings that I may accomplish the profound path of the Transference of Consciousness.

The two levels of practice, the creation stage and perfection stage, are actually a preparation for the moment of death. If you are an accomplished practitioner, when you die you will recognize the Clear Light state of the first bardo. This results in the attainment of dharmakaya buddhahood. If you miss this opportunity, then due to the dissolution of the constituents of your body, the deities begin to appear in the bardo. If you are accomplished in the creation stage practice, you will recognize the deities as they arise to be the very display of your own mind. You will then attain sambhogakaya buddhahood. For a practitioner who has not completed these two levels of practice, phowa is the third opportunity to be liberated in the bardo. The practice of phowa at the moment of death is the cause for a practitioner to be reborn into a pureland where there is the opportunity to complete the dharma path. If someone has not completed the two stages of the path, then phowa can carry them to liberation.

There are four different types of phowa. The first is the perfection stage practice. In this phowa, there is no need to wait for death to be liberated since you are already enlightened. The second phowa is the realization of the inseparability of the creation and perfection stages. With this realization, you can be liberated in the bardo. The third phowa is the transference of the consciousness into a pureland at the moment of death. With the phowa of the transference, three reference points are used. The first is the pureland of Amitabha called Dewachen, the second is your own consciousness as the traveler, and the third is the central channel as the path. Normally, when you die, you exit through any of the nine doors leading to various types of rebirth into the lower and upper realms. The exit through the central channel is the entrance into a pureland. Phowa seals the other doors which lead to rebirth in samsara. To accomplish the phowa practice, you must complete a seven-day retreat to receive the signs. Phowa is considered the quick path since even without the experience of meditation you can still be liberated. In the phowa section of Ngöndro practice, visualize Amitabha above your head. Amitabha, red in color, is a dharmakaya buddha of the Lotus Family. Pray that when this life is finished you will immediately be reborn in Dewachen, Amitabha's pure realm. The fourth phowa is "the hook of compassion" to liberate others. When you have accomplished the phowa for yourself, you can help liberate others at their moment of death.

Amitabha vowed, when he attained enlightenment, that anyone connected to him would be reborn in Dewachen through four causes. The first cause is remembering Amitabha every day; the second is

reciting the mantra of Amitabha, OM AMI DEWA HRI; the third is visualizing all phenomena as a pureland; and the fourth is dedicating one's merit to be reborn in Dewachen.

A pureland does not have any direction or location. When your mind is purified and ignorance and attachment no longer have control, then duality does not exist. That state itself is the pureland. The pure appearance of one's perceptions is the Vajra Realm of Great Bliss. That is what Vajra Realm or pureland really means. Milarepa said, "Dewachen is right next to you if you have the skill to travel within the central channel." Pray to Amitabha to give you the blessing to accomplish the path of phowa.

The first two lines of the dedication prayer is the practice of CHÖD. Recite:

DA NI LÜ DANG LONG CHYÖD GE TSAR CHAY

Now, my bodies, possessions and the source of my virtue gathered together,

MA GYUR DRO LA PHANG PA MED PAR TANG

I give, without clinging, to all motherly beings.

Chöd means "to cut" attachment to the solidity of grasping at self and reality. There are three levels of chöd: OUTER, INNER, and SECRET. The OUTER CHÖD is done in graveyards, charnel grounds, or fearful places. Practicing in a scary place can cause fear to arise. Use this fear as the practice. Cut it by examining who is experiencing it. Who is there to be afraid of? Who is afraid of whom? Cut the dualistic concept of who is having fear and who is being feared. Feel and recognize fear as the self-grasping of ego. On the ultimate level, there is no duality and nothing to be feared. In this way, mind is liberated into a fearless wisdom mind.

In the INNER CHÖD practice, we give away our body. Because we hold our body as our most precious possession, it is our ultimate attachment. Visualize offering the body, transformed into a feast of wisdom nectar, to all beings including all the buddhas and bodhisattvas, all those with whom you have past karmic debts and those who create all kinds of obstacles. This is considered the greatest act of charity. The main point of the inner chöd is cutting through self-cherishing mind into the state of the wisdom of selflessness.

The SECRET level of CHÖD cuts through dualistic self- or ego-grasping and liberates it into the state of ultimate truth, the nature of the dharmadhatu.

Chöd is a practice for the accumulation of merit and wisdom. The generosity of giving the body creates tremendous merit. When attachment and grasping to self is severed, the wisdom of selflessness is attained. In chöd practice, we cut ego-grasping with the realization of selflessness. When that attachment to "I" is cut, then our small piece of mind is naturally liberated into the vast sky-like nature of buddha's omniscient, all-pervasive wisdom mind.

The DEDICATION OF MERIT is the final dedication and wish that all of the virtuous activity you have accumulated be for the benefit of all sentient beings. Recite the line:

DRO DÖN LAB CHHEN GEK MED DRUB PAR SHOK

May I accomplish great waves of benefit, unobstructedly, for all beings.

By dedicating the merit, you are accumulating it in a lasting way. Without dedication, any positive accumulation can easily be destroyed. For example, if you become angry, this can destroy all the positive accumulation of one aeon. Dedication of merit is like planting a seed in the ground or depositing all your

accumulation of merit into a bank. It will grow until you reach enlightenment. It is extremely important to dedicate the merit of any dharma activity you perform.

In whatever practice you do, there are three things to remember. First, establish the motivation to benefit all beings. Second, apply your concentration to the practice or activity. Third, dedicate the merit. Without the motivation of bodhicitta, your practice will never go beyond the realm of samsara. It will never be connected with nirvana or enlightenment. Without concentration, your meditation session will be taken over by obstacles. Without dedication, your wild emotions can immediately destroy your accumulation of merit. If you always carefully check these three points, then any practice you do will be blessed.

COLOPHON

Personally, because I love all my dharma friends very much, I want to encourage you to do the Ngöndro practice. There is no doubt that the practice of Ngöndro will give you the realization of buddhahood. It has been proven by all past, present, and future buddhas who have used this faultless, great single path to attain enlightenment and who have taught it to their followers. Please have faith and do practice. In this way, realization will arise naturally in your heart. This is my personal request to all of you who are my dharma friends.

Actually, there is no need for me to write this down because many wonderful Ngöndro teachings written by many sublime teachers, already exist. In comparison to other teachers' Ngöndro teachings which are like the sun, my teaching is just a little gossip like a firefly. But my dharma brothers and sisters asked me to describe this practice in simple language, so I wrote this with my pure motivation. It is possible there are many mistakes due to my not having wisdom and not knowing the English language. Any mistakes that have been made in the meaning or words, I confess to my Guru. If there is some resulting benefit, then I dedicate that merit to all sentient beings.

I pray that this simple teaching may benefit many practitioners and accumulate inconceivable merit and wisdom. I make the wish that we be reborn in Guru Rinpoche's pureland of Lotus Light and that we all attain enlightenment in the same mandala. This was requested by the vajrayana Foundation sangha who are inseparably bound together through their pure intention, motivation and samaya. This was spoken by the old beggar, crazy yogi Tsedrup Tharchin and written down by his heart friend, Chöying Wangmo. May all be auspicious. Sarwa Mangalam.

GLOSSARY OF DHARMA TERMS

ABSOLUTE BODHICITTA [dön dam chang chub kyi sem (don dam byang chub kyi sems)] Great openness and emptiness.

ABSOLUTE TRUTH [dön dam denpa (don dam bden pa)] The essence of all existence and phenomena. Great openness from the beginningless beginning.

ACCUMULATION OF MERIT [sönam kyi tsok (bsod nams kyi tshogs)] Virtuous actions and concepts.

ACCUMULATION OF WISDOM [yeshe kyi tsok (ye shes kyi tshogs)] Virtuous actions embraced by the discriminating knowledge (shes rab) of insight into emptiness.

AMITABHA [Öpagme (od dpag med)] The buddha of Limitless Light and dharmakaya buddha of the Lotus Family.

ANUYOGA [jey su naljyor (rjes su rnal 'byor)] The second of the three inner yogas. Trains the nerves, energy and vital essence. This is a practice "with characteristics," stressing wisdom rather than skillful means and the perfection stage rather than the creation stage practices.

ASPIRATIONAL BODHICITTA [mön pa'i changchub kyi sem (smon pa'i byang chub kyi sems)] The wish that all sentient beings attain buddhahood, that they be released from suffering and never be separated from happiness. It includes the Four Immeasurable Attitudes.

ATIYOGA [shintu naljyor (shin tu rnal 'byor)] The third of the three inner yogas. The Great Perfection practices of trekchö and thögal, which introduce the ultimately pure awakened state of the nature of mind. It is a practice "without characteristics."

BARDO (bar do) Literally, intermediate state; here bardo is the intermediate state between this life and the next life.

BODHICITTA [changchub kyi sem (byang chub kyi sems)] The mind of enlightenment. It has two aspects, relative and absolute. Relative Bodhicitta means having great compassion. Absolute Bodhicitta is great openness mind.

BODHISATTVA [changchub sempa (byang chub sems dpa')] One who has purified all stains of selfishness and perfected all positive qualities with inconceivable courage to liberate all sentient beings.

BUDDHA [sangyay (sangs rgyas)] Someone who has completely pacified and purified their emotional mind into the state of stainless and awakened wisdom mind.

BUDDHA FIELD [shing kham (zhing khams)] A pureland of a buddha.

CONTEMPLATION [samten (bsam gtan)] Reflecting on the meaning of the teachings one has received so as to clear away misconceptions. There are many subjects for contemplation, such as the preciousness of human birth, impermanence, karma, samsara, etc.

CREATION STAGE [kyerim (bskyed rim)] Falls under the category of mahayoga and uses visualization of deities, recitation of mantra and correct philosophical view of emptiness-appearance inseparable as the methods for realizing Pure Vision, i.e., that all form is the deity, all sound is mantra, and all thought is the enlightened mind of intrinsic awareness.

DAKA [pawo (dpa' bo)]; **DAKINI** [khandroma (mkha' 'gro ma)] Warrior and "Sky Goer" or enlightened beings who move into the space of ultimate truth, the nature of dharmata. daka is male and dakini is female.

DAKNANG (dag snang) The profound lineage of pure vision. Termas that came from the pure vision of tertons (treasure finders).

DEWACHEN (bde ba can)] Amitabha's Pureland of Great Bliss.

DHARMA [chö (chos)] The path which uses pure and stainless teaching and methods for attaining enlightenment.

DHARMADHATU [chö-ying (chos kyi dbyings)] Pure openness, pervasive expanse; the source of all phenomena.

DHARMAKAYA [chö ku (chos sku)] The first of the three kayas. dharmakaya is formlessness, free from all elaboration and is pure from the beginningless beginning. It is the great state of all-pervasive openness, space, and unobstructed potential, and is the source of all phenomena.

DHARMATA [chö-nyid (chos nyid)] The true nature of all phenomena.

DHARMA PROTECTORS [chö-kyong (chos skyong)] Already enlightened emanations of wisdom beings, worldly beings, and ma-nings who vow to protect buddhist teachings, dharma holders and practitioners on the path. The worldly beings and ma-nings are themselves on the path and part of the sangha. Their action of protection is their practice for enlightenment.

DRIKUK (gri gug) A deity's implement. A hooked knife, representing the cutting of grasping to the self.

DZOGCHEN (rdzogs chen) The Great Perfection. The method for realizing that samsara, nirvana, the path, and all phenomena are perfected into one bindu, the true nature of mind. Dzogchen teachings reveal all phenomena as the display of mind and perfected in mind.

EIGHT FREEDOMS [dalwa gyay (dal ba brgyad)] The conditions which allow one to practice dharma: 1) not being born in the realm of hell-beings, or 2) in the realm of hungry ghosts, or 3) in the realm of animals; 4) not being born as a barbarian, or 5) as a long-lived god, or 6) as a heretic with wrong views, of nihilism and eternalism; 7) not being born in a time devoid of buddhas, or 8) not being born as a mute.

EIGHTY-FOUR MAHASIDDHAS [drubtob gyay-chu-tsa-shi (grub thob brgyad bcu rtsa bzhi)] Persons who received and realized ordinary and extraordinary siddhis. In India, there were eighty-four

famous buddhist practitioners who became enlightened beings in this manner.

ENGAGED BODHICITTA [jukpa'i changchub kyi sem ('jug pa'i byang chub kyi sems)] The process of accomplishing bodhicitta, which is the practice of the six paramitas.

ENLIGHTENMENT [nam khyen (rnams mkhyen)] Total realization of buddhahood, the ultimate true nature of mind.

FIVE CERTAINTIES [ngeyba nga den (nges pa lnga ldan)] The certain place, time, teacher, teaching, and retinue.

FIVE MISAPPREHENSIONS [mi dzinba nga (mi 'dzin palnga)] When listening to the dharma there are five possibilities of misunderstanding: 1) To understand the words but not the meaning; 2) to understand the meaning but not the words; 3) to understand the words with a wrong interpretation; 4) to understand the words in the wrong order; 5) to understand the wrong meaning of the words.

FIVE POISONS [duk nga (dug lnga)] Desire, anger, ignorance, pride, and jealousy.

FIVE WISDOMS [yeshe nga (ye shes lnga)] dharmadhatu Wisdom, Mirror-Like Wisdom, Equanimity Wisdom, Discriminating Wisdom, and All-Accomplishing Wisdom.

FOUR ASSUMPTIONS [dushey shi ('du shes bzhi)] 1) Assume you are the patient; 2) assume the dharma to be the medicine; 3) assume the spiritual teacher to be the doctor; and 4) assume the practice of dharma to be the cure of the disease.

FOUR CONTINENTS [ling shi (gling bzhi)] The four human worlds surrounding Mount Meru. The round-shaped Eastern continent, Lupakling, is the home of humans with very large bodies. The Southern continent, where we live, is Dzambuling; here karma ripens very quickly. The Western continent is Balangchö; its characteristic is that of wealth. The Northern continent is Drami-nyen; its characteristic is unpleasant sound. Each continent has two subcontinents on either side.

FOUR IMMEASURABLE ATTITUDES [tsay me shi (tshad med bzhi)] Loving kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity.

GREAT PERFECTION See Dzogchen.

GURU RINPOCHE (gu ru rin po che) The embodiment of all the buddhas known as the "Lotus Born" or as Padmasambhava and is called the second buddha. It was Guru Rinpoche who was responsible for establishing buddhism in Tibet in the eighth century.

GURU YOGA [lama'i naljor (bla ma'i rnal 'byor)] A method of obtaining the Guru's genuine wisdom mind, the state of ultimate truth.

HINAYANA [tek men (theg dman)] One of the three yanas (vehicles). The lesser vehicle; the goal is that of individual liberation.

IMPERMANENCE [mi takba (mi rtags pa)] The fundamental condition of change. Generally, phenomenal existence and time have traditionally been perceived as permanent, whereas in reality they are

subject to impermanence.

KAMA (bka' ma) Long lineage; the unbroken oral lineage of the Nyingma, transmitted from teacher to disciple; coming directly from the source of dharma, i.e., the buddha, Guru Rinpoche, and others.

KARMA [lay (las)] The repetition of the mental habit of dualist thought and action, both positive and negative. The same as cause and effect. The result of karma, created by mind, is suffering and happiness within samsara.

KAYA [ku (sku)] Body: the embodiment or source of wisdom and qualities.

KHATVANGA (kha trang ka) An implement of the deities. A trident symbolizing the secret consort.

LAKE DHANAKOSHA (dha na ko sha) The lake where Guru Rinpoche was born. Located in Oddiyana in the Swat Valley in present-day Afghanistan.

LAMA (bla ma) "Unsurpassable one" teaching wisdom and compassion. The life support of all buddhas. A spiritual teacher who guides us towards the enlightened state.

LOTUS FAMILY [pema rik (pad ma rigs)] One of the five buddha families, the manifestation of all buddhas' speech.

LUDON SADAK (klu gdon sa bdak) A naga demon, the master of a local area.

MAHAYANA [tek chen (theg chen)] One of the three yanas. The great vehicle of bodhisattvas whose goal is enlightenment for oneself and all sentient beings.

MAHAYOGA [naljyor chenpo (rnal 'byor chen po)] The first of the three inner yogas. Emphasizes the creation stage rather than the perfection stage practices.

MANTRA [ngak (sngags)] The life essence of enlightened beings in the form and sound of syllables. These sounds can transform normal speech into wisdom speech.

MODÖN SENMO (mo gdon sren mo) Female demons; manifestations of desire.

MOUNT MERU [ri rab; ri'i gyalpo ri rab (ri rab; ri'i rgyal po ri rab)] The central metaphysical mountain of Tibetan cosmology. Said to be the king of mountains. It grows from the earth into the god realms and has four levels. It also has four sides. The eastern side is made of crystal; the south, lapis lazuli; the west, ruby; and the north, gold. These colors are reflected in the sky of each respective continent, and its inhabitants perceive this as the sky's color. For instance, we inhabit Dzambuling and perceive the sky to be blue.

NAGA [lu (klu)] One of the three realms of existence. Located under the earth, a naga is a serpentine manifestation of ignorance.

NIRMANAKAYA [trulpa'i ku (sprul pa'i sku)] The third of the three kayas. The compassionate manifestation form, the expression of the dharmakaya.

NIRVANA [nya ngen lay dayba (mya ngan las `das pa)] Great peace beyond suffering.

PADMASAMBHAVA [Pema Jyungnay (pad ma `byung gnas)] See Guru Rinpoche.

PERFECTION STAGE [dzogrim (rdzogs rim)] The perfection stage falls within the categories of anuyoga and atiyoga. Anuyoga is the perfection "with characteristics," training with the nerves, energy and vital essence; the view is that of emptiness-bliss inseparable; atiyoga is the perfection "without characteristics," training with the self-originating awareness wisdom mind; the view is emptiness-awareness inseparable.

PHURBA (phur pa) *Sanskrit: kilaya* A three-pointed dagger, wisdom deity's implement which penetrates the three poisons.

PODÖN GYALPO (po gdon rgyal po) King of male demons, a manifestation of anger.

PURELAND [dakpa`i shing kham (dag pa` i zhing khams)] Pure phenomena unstained by any dualistic separation of subject and object.

RAINBOW BODY [ja-lü (`ja lus)] The dissolution of the physical body after death; the sign that a completely accomplished practitioner of the Great Perfection practice of thögal has attained buddhahood at the level of dharmakaya.

RELATIVE BODHICITTA [kun dzob changchub kyi sem (kurdzob byang chub kyi sems)] The great heart of compassion.

RELATIVE TRUTH [kun dzob denpa (ku rdzob bden pa)] The manifestation of all existence and phenomena.

RIGDZIN [rig `dzin] Awareness holder; one who holds the state of intrinsic awareness continually without distraction.

RINPOCHE (rin po che) Literally, "Precious One." The term is used in reference to a Lama or guide on the spiritual path. Traditionally, the Lama is never referred to by his or her surname. Instead, Rinpoche is used as a very polite and respectful form of address.

ROOT GURU [tsa wa`i lama (rtsa wa`i bla ma)] The teacher who is followed from the beginning of the path to its end (as distinguished from a lineage lama), who gives transmission, empowerments and teaches the most essential point, the introduction to the true nature of mind.

ROOT LAMA See Root Guru.

RUPAKAYA [zuk ku (gzugs sku)] The form kaya, as distinguished from the formless kaya, dharmakaya. It includes both the Sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya.

SADHANA [drup tab (sgrub thabs)] A method used to accomplish deity practice, generally in the form of a text.

SAMAYA [damtsik (dam tshig)] A vow or commitment to reach the goal of enlightenment. For

example, the essence of the hinayana vow is not to harm any sentient beings; the essence of the mahayana vow is to benefit all sentient beings; the essence of the vajrayana vow is to always keep pure vision, the inseparability of skillful means and wisdom.

SAMADHI [ting nge dzin (ting nge `dzin)] Meditative concentrations.

SAMANTABHADRA [Kuntuzangpo (kun tu bzang po)] The primordial buddha who was never deluded from the beginningless beginning.

SAMBOGHAKAYA [long chyö dzogpa'i ku (longs spyod rdzogs pa'i sku)] The second of the three kayas. The unobstructed manifestation from the dharmakaya which is the spontaneously arising energy-expanse of the Five Certainties. It has inconceivable qualities which are spontaneously perfected.

SAMSARA [khorwa (`khor ba)] The manifestation of all positive and negative karma. Literally, it means the turning of cyclic existence. Samsara arises from the dualistic perception of phenomena.

SANGHA [gendun (dge `dun)] One of the Three Jewels, the sangha are all those who are traveling the path of dharma toward the goal of enlightenment.

SENMO See Möden Senmo.

SIDDHI [ngö drub (dngos grub)] The ordinary accomplishments of miraculous powers and extraordinary accomplishments of complete enlightenment.

SIX REALMS [drowa rik druk (`gro ba rigs drug)] The three lower and three upper realms within samsara. The lower realms are the hell realms, hungry ghost and animal realms. The three upper realms are human, demi-god, and god realms.

SIX STAINS OF A VESSEL [trima druk ni (dri ma drug ni)] Arrogance, lack of faith, lack of interest, external distraction, inward withdrawal, and listening with regret.

SVABHAVIKAKAYA [ngowo nyi kyi ku (ngo bo nyid kyi sku)] The fourth kaya, the "essence of suchness"; the inseparability of the three kayas.

TABLAM (thabs lam) The path of skillful means.

TEN ENDOWMENTS [jyorwa chu (`bjor ba bcu)] Without gaining these ten qualities, it is not possible to practice dharma. Five endowments are found in oneself and five endowments are found in others. The five endowments found in oneself are 1) to be born a human being; 2) to be born in a place where dharma exists; 3) to be born with perfect mental and physical faculties; 4) to not have a perverted livelihood; and 5) to have faith in the dharma. The five endowments found in others are 1) to be born when a buddha appears; 2) to live when a buddha teaches; 3) to live when dharma abides; 4) to live in a time when there are followers of dharma; and 5) to live in a time when the teachers have the kindness to teach.

TERMA (gter ma) The short lineage. dharma teachings and substances (treasures) hidden by Guru Rinpoche and his twenty-five disciples during Guru Rinpoche's stay in Tibet, to be discovered at later times by their emanations for the benefit of future generations.

THÖGAL (thos rgal) "To leap over." One of the two levels of Dzogchen practice in which the practitioner "leaps over" to the state of enlightenment rather than traveling a gradual path. Generally, vajrayana is the "quick path," as it is possible to attain enlightenment in one lifetime rather than the three aeons it takes on the sutrayana path. Thögal, however, is particularly quick—it is said that one can accomplish enlightenment in only one week.

THREE DISEASES [nay sum (nad gsum)] Wind, bile and phlegm (the root cause of the four hundred and four diseases).

THREE DEMONIC INFLUENCES [dön sum (gdon gsum)] Male gylapo, female senmo, and naga demons of the local protector.

THREE DOORS [go sum (sgo gsum)] Ordinary body, speech, and mind of sentient beings.

THREE EXCELLENCIES [dampa sum (dam pa gsum)] Any spiritual practice should consist of three parts: the excellent beginning is the generation of bodhicitta; the excellent main part is non-conceptualization; the excellent conclusion is the dedication of merit. By missing any of these three parts, one's practice will belong only to the realm of samsara.

THREE FAULTS OF A VESSEL [nō kyī kyön sum (snod kyī rkyon gsum)] 1) To be defective like an upside-down vessel, by not listening; 2) to be defective like a leaking vessel, by forgetting what you have heard; and 3) To be defective like a vessel contaminated by poison, by having wrong views.

THREE JEWELS [könchok sum (dkon mchog gsum)] The buddha (the final goal of the enlightened state), the dharma (the teaching and method for attaining enlightenment), and the sangha (those who practice the methods of dharma).

THREE KAYAS [ku sum (sku gsum)] nirmanakaya, sambhogakaya, and dharmakaya.

THREE POISONS [duk sum (dug gsum)] Anger, desire, and ignorance.

THREE REALMS [kham sum (kham gsum)] The form realm, formless realm, and desire realm; all exist within samsara.

THREE ROOTS [tsawa sum (rtsa ba gsum)] The Lama, who is the root of receiving blessings; the Yidam, who is the root of realizing all ordinary and extraordinary siddhis; and the Dakini, who is the root of all activities.

THREE YANAS [tèkba sum (theg pa gsum)] hinayana, mahayana, and vajrayana.

TREKCHÖ (khregs chod) "Cutting through"; one of the two levels of Dzogchen practice, a method for cutting through the solidity of mind.

TSA LUNG (rtsa lung) A physical yoga which trains the nerves, channels, and vital essence. It is the same as anuyoga.

TSA, LUNG, AND TIGLE (rtsa, lung, thig le) Sanskrit: *nadi, prana, and bindu*. Channels, wind and

essences, the constituents of a vajra body.

TSOK [tsok kyi khorlo (tshog kyi `khor lo)] *Sanskrit: ganachakra*. "A collection or gathering." A collection of food for offering or a gathering of yogis and yoginis that is a profound method for accumulating merit and wisdom. A very advanced and powerful sadhana.

TULKU (sprul sku) Emanation form. Enlightened beings can take many forms. They can take living forms or forms symbolic of the buddha's body, speech, and mind such as ritual art objects.

TWENTY-FIVE DISCIPLES [jebang nyer nga (rje `bang nyer lnga)] The main heart students of Padmasambhava in Tibet.

TWO KAYAS [ku nyiy (sku gnyis)] dharmakaya (the formless body) and rupakaya (the form bodies).

TWO PURPOSES [dön nyiy (don gnyis)] To attain the dharmakaya state of enlightenment for yourself and to attain the state of the form kayas in order to benefit others.

VAJRA [dorje (rdo rje)] Indestructible, diamond-like nature of the dharmakaya.

VAJRASATTVA [dorje sempa (rdo rje sems dpa`)] "Vajra" is indestructible wisdom; "sattva" is one with the mind of a fearless warrior. Vajrasattva is a wisdom deity who is the Lord of all Buddha families.

VAJRAYANA [dorje tekba (rdo rje`e theg pa)] One of the three yanas. The indestructible and unsurpassable vehicle. The goal is the same as mahayana, enlightenment for oneself and all sentient beings. It is distinguished from hinayana and mahayana by the methods of skillful means and wisdom. This path is for those of the highest capacity.

VAJRAYOGINI [Dorje Nalgyorma (rdo rje nal `byor ma)] A wisdom deity in the form of a female buddha.

YIDAM (yi dam) Your personal chosen deity, the root of receiving all siddhis.

Commentary on
Ngöndro Practice
according to
The New Treasure of Dudjom

Düd jom ter sar ngön drö ngag dön dü pa zhug



BY

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RINPOCHE

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Padma Shugchang
(Craig Bialick)
11/26/99

❧ FORWARD ❧

Homage to the gracious root teacher, who embodies the masters of the three lineages. Please pour down a shower of blessings.

Buddha Shakyamuni, the supreme, unequalled teacher, taught the Dharma on many different levels. The teaching most essential, accesible, and easy to practice is the ngöndro, or preliminary practice. Patrul Rinpoche, the great scholar and siddha, said that even though it is called "preliminary practice", there is no other practice which is more profound than ngöndro. Many great masters of antiquity accomplished the primordial wisdom of enlightenment through this secret and profound path.

The ngöndro presented here originated as a terma of Dudjom Lingpa. Later, it was written down with technical clarification by his succeeding reincarnation, H.H. Dudjom Rinpoche, Jigdral Yeshe Dorje, prophesied by Guru Rinpoche himself as his own regent, and renowned as the sun and moon. Through his unlimited transmission, initiations and pith instructions as well as historical background, all of which, like a potent seed, will mature in our minds and liberate us.

Therefore, this ngöndro is one of his teachings that we receive which is full of blessings and power. Among its many different versions, this one, being highly condensed, is especially suitable for our busy modern times. By taking support of a foundation practice such as this, all our dharma practice can result in our realization of the primordial wisdom, and all the great lineage masters will be our witness. Therefore, we should accept this practice with joy, respect and appreciation.

*Through the power of this virtue
May the Vajrayana teachings of the ancient translation school endure
May the life force of all the noble lineage holders remain firm
and their activities increase;
May the world be free of disease, famine, war, and natural disasters,
and be filled with love and joy and peace;
May a golden age be upon us, and all beings swiftly attain enlightenment.*

Khenchen Palden Sherab Rinpoche
Khenpo Tsewang Dongyal Rinpoche



❧ INTRODUCTION

Today, I am going to talk about Ngöndro and the related practices. This is truly the essence of all the different teachings of the Buddha, from the Hinayana up to the great Dzogchen teachings. Ngöndro Practice contains the heart teachings of all those levels. This technique was condensed by the great tantric master, Guru Padmasambhava. He arranged it in such a way that any student can apply and practice every single teaching of the Buddha towards the discovery of inner wisdom, the realization of enlightenment.

The Buddha Shakyamuni came to this world over two thousand five hundred and thirty-eight years ago. After his enlightenment at age thirty-five, he taught for forty-five years, offering many levels of instruction relative to individual capacities, and opening the door to great awakening for anyone interested in accomplishing the highest good for themselves as well as all others. All of the Buddha's teachings lead to the realization of Buddhahood and can be generally divided into two categories: the philosophical systems and methods of practical application.

Buddhist philosophical views are as deep as the ocean and boundless as the sky. The philosophical traditions include many branches such as Sravakayana or Hinayana, Mahayana, Mind Only School, Madhyamika tradition, the Vajrayana lineages and others. These schools are all concerned with the true meaning of experience and accurate descriptions of phenomenal transformations, such as how everything is constantly changing and working together in interdependence.

However, philosophy itself is only a prelude to practice. Effective inquiry and analysis lead to meaningful application. The Buddha wasn't trying to create an intellectual society or an academic system. He was intent on communicating the ultimate state of our true nature. Philosophy has a necessary function and serves to exercise our inner wisdom so that we can begin to understand; however, this level of knowledge alone will not lead to the fullness of enlightenment or the ultimate realization of love, compassion, wisdom and joy. Great equanimity and transcendent insight never come through intellectual pursuits alone.

The ngöndro practice is a condensed form of the entire Dharma expounded by the Buddha, including the teachings of Guru Padmasambhava and many other lineage masters. Nothing has been left out. The ngöndro encompasses all of the essentials which lead to enlightenment and the actualization of this practice is of great benefit for everyone. It is a skillful method, an easy way to apply the views clarified by philosophical inquiries into mind and life, so that these understandings can transform our activities. As we practice, our interest and devotion quite naturally awaken, encouraging us to deeper commitment. In this way, we can have a direct connection with the core of our true nature, a practical means of embodying profound love, genuine compassion, perfect wisdom and joy. Ngöndro practice will ground our body, speech and mind in the true nature so that we can begin to mature the two benefits. It is of vital importance for those who seek enlightenment.

To take up the ngöndro, you must become familiar with the actual practice. Beyond learning about the form and meaning, we must know how to implement it. Without that knowledge, mere interest will not actualize the fullness of the ultimate result. Therefore, it is necessary to know how to practice. Ngöndro introduces us to the Vajrayana methods; it is full of insight, inspiration and subtle instructions which tell us

exactly how to apply ourselves. This form has been handed down through generations of great masters, so it is not as though we have to struggle and create something new. This is a well-established highway and if you simply follow the signs, you can begin moving with confidence and joy. This highway goes directly there. Many accomplished masters, both male and female, arrived at the final destination and discovered their Buddha nature in this way. So it is said to be rich with inspirational advice and pith instructions. Hence, there is no need to hesitate, take detours or make u-turns. Just go ahead, joyfully. This is how the precious lineage teachings have been continually preserved in unbroken succession. We too, can adopt the ngöndro as our practice to develop the necessary courage, commitment and inspiration as we work toward our own enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.

THE NINE YANAS

'Yana' is Sanskrit for vehicle. In the Nyingma Schools they list nine yanas or vehicles of practice. The first three are known as the Sravakayana, the Pratyekabuddhayana and the Bodhisattvayana. These three are known as the causal yanas [*S. hetuyana*]. The other six yanas are all Vajrayana teachings or tantras. The three outer tantras are called Kriyayoga, Upayoga and Yogatantra. They are known as the three external tantrayanas. The three inner tantras are Mahayoga, Anuyoga and Atiyoga. Atiyoga, Mahasandhi and Dzogchen are synonyms: one meaning, different names. These six tantric teachings are known together as the fruition or result yanas [*S. phalayana*].

Guru Padmasambhava's clothes symbolize these nine yana teachings. I am sure you have noticed that he is wearing many different robes. This doesn't mean he felt very cold in Tibetan weather and would wear whatever he could find. Everything that he wears is a symbol of these different teachings. According to Dzogchen and the Nyingma lineage of Guru Padmasambhava, we are not to discriminate against any of the teachings. All are either support, ornamentation, or part of the Dzogchen teaching. Don't reject any of these saying, "Oh, that is just Hinayana, that is only a Bodhisattvayana practice, that is merely an outer tantrayana exercise. I don't care about that, I don't need any of this, because I only practice Dzogchen." That is not the right way to look at it.

All of those teachings are like the ornamentation, or branches of Dzogchen, as in one tree. Dzogchen is the fruit, but all the other teachings support the highest branches of the tree. Every one of the practices in those vehicles helps to remove obscurations and reveal our enlightened nature. For example, Hinayana teachings are a support for the Mahayana teachings and Sutra Mahayana teachings are a support for the Vajrayana teachings. The three outer tantras are a support for the three inner tantras. It is like a staircase where the first step supports the second, the first and second support the third and the rest. Every one of those teachings is a support for the Dzogchen transmission. Therefore, we should accept them all and we should not reject some out of hand, thinking we are superior practitioners. "I don't need that," is a wrong attitude.

THE MEANING

Ngöndro is a word made of two parts: *ngön* and *dro*. In Tibetan, *ngön* means ahead or before and *dro* means going. Sometimes it is translated as "preliminary," but that is not an exact translation. It's more like going before or going forward. When you're traveling with a group in new territory, there's often a guide who helps out by bringing news of what's ahead. Similarly, our path must be guided by wisdom. Anyone who wants to get enlightened should "go ahead" and practice the ngöndro.

Many people tend to think that ngöndro practice is just an appetizer, or a pre-

school for beginners, but this is not the case. At this point, you must start to comprehend the importance of the ngöndro. Even though there are more advanced practices, there's nothing more essential and necessary than what we encounter right here. These practices not only allow us to go ahead and begin; they are also essential in the middle of the path as well as after the goal has been reached. To take up the ngöndro ensures that the whole endeavor is fully spiritual, qualified Dharma practice.

☞ THE BENEFIT

Ngöndro practice will help us develop confidence and joy in our efforts to become enlightened for the sake of all beings. By applying the practices and understanding the meaning of the words, you feel inspired and encouraged. You become more aware of how valuable this opportunity is. We've all inherited the Buddha seed, everyone of us. The ngöndro practices help us appreciate this in ourselves as well as in others. A new understanding begins to take root as our obscurations are gradually purified, giving rise to the wisdom which recognizes all beings as equals. Everyone has an opportunity to work joyfully and courageously for their own as well as other's enlightenment. Diligent application of this practice will totally remove deep-seated karmic obscurations and neurotic habit-patterns acquired in this life, while simultaneously revealing our Buddha nature.

☞ THE TREASURE

There have been many ngöndro practices revealed by great masters and tertons. They all follow a similar structure although their length varies. This particular version of the ngöndro practice is very condensed. It was revealed by His Holiness Dudjom Rinpoche, a great terton and the head of the Nyingma school, who passed away in 1987. The text is based on works revealed by his predecessors with some technical instructions added by His Holiness. It is an especially good practice for this busy generation.

☞ THE SECTIONS

- I: The Four Reflections which Reverse the Mind
- II: The Actual Preliminaries
 - A) *Going for Refuge*
 - B) *The Generation of Bodhicitta*
- III: The Accumulation of Merit: *Mandala Offering*
- IV: The Purification of Obscurations: *Vajrasattva*
- V: *The Swiftly Penetrating Blessings of the Guru Yoga*
- VI: The Transference (*Phowa*)
- VII: *Chöd Practice and Dedication Prayers*

The actual preliminaries are preceded by the four renunciations. These are also known as the four reversals which turn the mind toward the Dharma. Contemplating the meaning of each of these statements is a powerful technique which can change our attitude toward samsara and clarify our understanding of the phenomenal world. These four thoughts are generally associated with the Hinayana teachings, and in particular, they correspond to the Four Noble Truths which the Buddha Shakyamuni first taught to five human students, 80,000 celestial beings and many animals, in a small park on the outskirts Varanasi, India 2500 years ago.

The Buddha explained that in order to be liberated, you must understand the

nature of suffering. Pain and suffering are never random or accidental; there is always a cause. Everyone would like to be liberated from suffering, but to do so we must first look into its origins. To recognize and remove the cause of suffering one must have a reliable method. This is called the path. The path indicated by the Buddha leads us beyond suffering into the joy, peace and love, of nirvana. Understand the causes of suffering, then follow the path and you will attain nirvana.

The four noble truths consist of:

1. suffering
2. the cause of suffering
3. nirvana
4. the cause of nirvana, which is also known as the path

On the basis of these truths, we can develop insight into our feelings and individual experiences so that complete realization becomes possible.

The next section is the refuge. Going for refuge is the primary condition for practice and begins the preliminaries. Without it there's no growth or true realization of the profound meaning. After taking refuge, the focus turns to developing bodhicitta. This is a term indicating the mind of infinite love, compassion and wisdom in relation to all beings, oneself included.

Mandala offering is the third section of the ngöndro. There are many different varieties of mandala, but in this case we are making what is called an offering mandala. We visualize, meditate, and then present imaginary offerings to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas.

The fourth section focuses on the Buddha Vajrasattva. This practice purifies obscurations and removes obstacles.

The fifth part in this sequence involves practicing guru yoga on Guru Padmasambhava. See him as the embodiment of all of the buddhas and bodhisattvas and as a skilful display of the Three Jewels. To feel the presence of Guru Padmasambhava and practice on merging with him is known as guru yoga.

The sixth section is related to the transference of consciousness, the *phowa* practice. This does not mean that we need to effect transference at this time, but we're preparing for that inevitable moment when the mind will separate from the body. At that point this practice will enable us to easily transfer our consciousness to the pure land of the Buddha Amitabha. [*T. bde wa chen*]

The last part of the ngöndro is called the charity of the body. This is a very brief *chöd* practice combined with the dedication of merit. These are the seven sub-divisions of the ngöndro.

ALIGNMENTS

The ngöndro is a complete practice which embodies the whole of the Buddha's teachings. This is very useful because every word that the Buddha taught had a reason and purpose relating directly to the recognition and transcendence of all possible states of mind and emotion, both gross and subtle. These practices give us the power and confidence to recognize and release each emotion. In this way we can begin to purify

and transform the mind until our Buddha nature is completely revealed. Our understanding becomes more powerful and profound, and the view more vast and spacious. There is no need to limit ourselves to a single method. The Buddha offers us many different techniques which all work toward the same end: they either remove, purify, or transform the emotions. Of course, these methods must be applied relative to our capabilities.

If you can, practice the ngöndro in the early morning. That's how most great masters did it. If that's not convenient, don't be discouraged; just find a time when you can fit it in. Do it at midnight rather than skip it.

When you practice, sit comfortably on a cushion (or chair) so that you can relax your body. Be quiet and calm your mind. Stop all discursive thinking, just let thoughts be and dissolve in their own place, wherever that is. Disengage. Don't dwell on the past or think about the future and don't follow your current thoughts. Let the mind be. Do not try to work with the thoughts themselves; leave them on the side. Keep awareness in the present moment. This is referred to as a state of freshness. This momentary, instant state of the mind is the most precious condition. In Dzogchen, it is called "the primordial mind, the originally pure, naked mind." It is free of obscurity, and undisturbed by emotions or thoughts.

From that crystal clear mind, love and compassion for all sentient beings arise spontaneously and unceasingly, filling one with joy, respect and appreciation for the preciousness of our situation, for the gifts of the teacher, the teachings, and many other things.

All of this has not come about by accident. Everything has causes and supportive conditions, everything has a reason. This beautiful moment of experience is not arbitrary and meaningless; therefore, we should look into the deeper meaning, learn to appreciate the way it is, and have respect for others. This is very important. So sit down, relax and cultivate this awareness for one or two minutes before you begin.

Reflect on the preciousness of the teaching, the teacher, and the lineage until you feel tremendous devotion. This warm feeling of closeness is indispensable: Buddha often said that devotion is the door to enlightenment. Without devotion, realization and enlightenment will not develop. Devotion consists of love, compassion and inspiration, all joined together. It is not based in hope and belief; you actually learn to value this view and are able to make good use of the teaching situation. Practice without devotion is like trying to drink from a tea-strainer; everything good passes through and one is left with nothing but the old leaves. Devotion, love, and compassion, inspiration, closeness and warmth of feeling are extremely important. They help us overcome any obstacles and bring forth our best qualities, the essential attitudes necessary to become enlightened and realize benefits for others. True devotion is completely the opposite of the tea-strainer, it catches everything good and thoroughly removes what we don't need.

Love, joy, the power of inspiration and many more beautiful qualities are unified and perfectly reflected in the form of Guru Padmasambhava. Guru Padmasambhava is the embodiment of the wisdom, love and compassion of all the buddhas and bodhisattvas. Their essence is integrated and displayed in the form of Guru Padmasambhava, even as he historically existed. Guru Padmasambhava represents all true masters, and anyone with whom you have felt this kind of connection. He symbolizes all the Buddhas, the Dharma and the Sangha, and in the higher tantras, the


guru, deva and dakinis.

Guru Padmasambhava appears seated in front of you in the posture of royal relaxation, bright with the energy of love, compassion, wisdom and divine inspiration. His body radiates with the power of blessings in the form of the five wisdom lights (white, yellow, red, blue and green, or multiple lights). This is the luminosity of love and compassion, the all-pervading light of perfect wisdom, which removes all obscurations and instantly awakens the Buddha nature of every single sentient being, transforming the whole universe into the pure land, a state of total love, compassion and wisdom. Open yourself, feel the power of these radiations and let this blissful awareness deepen. Guru Padmasambhava is surrounded by many buddhas and bodhisattvas, both male and female, or as they are referred to in the tantras, dakas and dakinis. They are all here, right in front of us, smiling, blissful, radiant and ready to assist us on our journey, encouraging us to explore our Buddha nature.

With an awareness of their presence, begin to chant:

NAMO! LU MED TEN GYI GONPO LAMA KHYEN

Homage lama, infallible constant protector, (you who) know!

 **FIRST: The Preparation—**

The Recitation of the Four Reflections which Reverse the Mind

The Tibetan word *khyen* is often translated as you who know, and sometimes as “you who are aware,” or “you who watch,” but actually it means, “Please, watch over me, help me, regard me. You know my motivation, my inspiration, my bodhicitta commitment, so help me to explore my Buddha nature and fulfill my visions and wishes.” That’s the basic meaning of “you who know.” *gonpo lama* means “infallible, constant protector.” The condensed ngöndro contains all of this in one line, but many longer forms of this prayer exist. In Tibet, it is called *Lama Jang Bö* [T. *rgyang 'bod*] which means “Calling the Lama from Afar.” We call on the lama to help guide and assist us in removing obscurations and revealing our Buddha nature so that we may attain Buddhahood for the sake of all living beings.

The next four lines are called the four renunciations or the four attitudes which turn the mind from samsara toward the dharma. These four statements express a clear understanding of the nature of samsara.

DAL JOR DI NI SHIN TU NYED PAR KA

The freedoms and favorable conditions are extremely difficult to obtain.

This line refers to the special qualities and endowments of this unique human rebirth. The Tibetan *dal jor* has many explanations in the philosophical teachings. Eighteen specific qualities make our present condition very, very precious. It is said that a body endowed with these eighteen qualities is extremely rare and difficult to obtain. Among these, there are eight freedoms: not having been born in hell, not being a hungry ghost or an animal, not having taken birth as a long-lived god. According to the Buddha, there are many levels of the god realm and although they all tend to have extremely long lives, their minds are very dull. They hibernate beyond sensation where there’s nothing to do, as if they were convalescing in a nursing home. Very little

progress or change happens in that environment. Their lives go on for ages but such a situation is not that useful for spiritual growth, so we don't want to be born in that realm. We have not taken birth as savages, nor are we dominated by many negative, violent actions. Finally, we have the good fortune of being free of serious physical or mental handicaps such as muteness or imbecility.

Then there's the ten luxuries or favorable conditions: to be born as a human being, with all your critical faculties, to be free of extreme views, to be in a place where the teaching is available, to have an interest in and devotion to the dharma. These five luxuries are associated with oneself. Five more are related to external conditions: the Buddha has been here, he gave teachings which still remain, there are practitioners following the path and a teacher is available.

Together, the eight freedoms and ten favorable conditions comprise the eighteen precious qualities associated with this human rebirth. Such an opportunity is not easy to come by. Actually, it's very special. The verse reads, "The freedoms and favorable conditions are extremely difficult to obtain." Consider how precious life is and learn to respect and appreciate the present. This situation didn't arise by accident; all these beautiful qualities, opportunities and freedoms are not just abstractions, or easily acquired. Of course we are all familiar with the relative difficulties of life, but overall, every one of us has plenty of good reasons to feel joyful and happy, to appreciate the preciousness of our situation. We are surrounded by so many beautiful things.

First we have to recognize that such good fortune is difficult to come by, then we have to appreciate and value this opportunity in a meaningful way. Simply to be aware of this is not enough. We have to use this precious occasion as the cause for an even greater result.

The second line is:

KYE TSHED MI TAG CHI WAI CHO CHAN YIN

Everything born is impermanent and bound to die.

Consider the precious gift of this human body and the special opportunities it represents. How long is it going to last? There's no guarantee or certainty about it. Everything in this world is constantly shifting and changing. This is called impermanence. Movement and change are the natural law pervading the whole phenomenal universe. The sun and moon, our inner state, and everything external, from galaxies to the cells of your body, is in constant motion and incessantly changing. It never stops, not even for one second. If it did, there would be a big disaster; or maybe a surprise so great we couldn't handle it. Understand that the nature of all phenomena is impermanence. This is very important to contemplate.

While you still have a precious human body, it is yours to do with as you will. You have to bring the bright light of clear vision into play. Be aware of the value of this moment. You have all your functions and basically, you can do what you want to. Before things have changed too much and the circumstance degenerates, learn to use this life for a greater purpose. Make these endowments the cause for a higher result.

Awareness of impermanence is important for our own peace of mind, so we aren't shocked when things change. Through observation and contemplation, we are able to see how change is natural. This applies to everything. If we understand that

change and movement are the law, we can accept what is happening and not be neurotically obsessed with false explanations. Reality is right in front of us, in each and every one of our experiences. You don't have to be a sophisticated physicist to understand this, you don't have to be a highly realized master, it's right here all of the time, immediately in front of us. This is good to know and good to reveal.

The visual representation of the Wheel of Life depicting the six realms surrounded by the twelve links comprising the system of interdependent coordination was actually designed by the Buddha Shakyamuni. He asked his disciples to paint this illustration on the wall outside the temples so that everyone would always be aware of our situation. The wheel is always turning, it constantly moves, it is not locked or fixed in place. The outer rim is grasped by a three-eyed monster who represents impermanence. Through the Buddha's metaphor, we can see how everything and everybody is subject to change, without any exceptions.

"Everything that is born..." Another way to put it is that everything which appears is impermanent and bound to change. This can be understood generally or in particular. Everything is constantly changing and moving in time and space. By understanding that our human body is difficult to obtain, we learn to appreciate and value it because it is not going to stay like this forever. Things are not even the same from one moment to the next. We will eventually come to the end of our present situation and move on to another state. Everything is always in flux and flowing, moving and shifting.

The third line reads:

GE DIG LE KYI GYU DRE LU WA MED

The results of virtuous and unvirtuous actions are inexorable.

To help us understand the relation between causes, conditions and their results, the Buddha taught the law of karma. Karma is a Sanskrit word meaning action. Whatever you see in this world, whether it is good or bad, beautiful or ugly, has particular causes and supportive conditions which have led to its present manifestation. Hence good action results in goodness and bad deeds yield negative results. Nothing appears without causes and conditions and the systematic relation between causes and effects is known as karma.

When we study natural systems, we can clearly discern how the principle of karma operates on the relative, phenomenal level. The continuity of the cause does not alter, change or lose its original energy. It maintains an identity and the integrity of the pattern never changes. Seed from sweet fruit will continue to produce sweet fruit. If the seed is from bitter fruit, you can be sure it will still be bitter when it ripens. If the seed is a cross of sweet and sour together, the fruit will be similar. If it's from red fruit, the new fruit will be red. Like these flowers here; if you replant their seeds in good soil and water them, you will soon see a similar color and shape appear once again. So the nature of karma never really changes; it inevitably has its way in ordering the transformations and changes which come about in the world. The rhythm and echo of past actions are communicated and extended throughout the generations across centuries of time.

The karmic system never fails or gets things mixed up. If you plant iris bulbs, these will not produce roses! This continuity is reflected in the pattern of our minds: positive seeds bring positive results, negative seeds bring negative harvests. Actions performed in love give rise to more love, angry vibrations bring about more anger. A joyful effort gives rise to more joy. Similar rhythms continue endlessly from beginningless time, throughout the aeons. The law of karma is very profound, steady and continuous. We don't have to get abstract and philosophical to understand this, we can actually see these workings displayed in the world, in simple patterns which are easily observed. Similarly, if we promote more love with this mind, we will realize more love. Love means joy, peace, and happiness; if we are more compassionate, it will be easier to relax, to be calm and peaceful. Therefore the great masters have taught that in order to realize joy, peace and happiness for ourselves as well as for all other sentient beings, we must learn to be loving and compassionate. If we love others, we will receive love ourselves. The quality of the energy we send out echoes back and forth. If we are angry, we are planting seeds for more discomfort and irritation. If we give love, we will receive love.

Whatever you do will reflect back to you. The effects never miss the target. They will not come to me. Whatever you do, you alone will experience. The effects will not be experienced by the elements or by any other people. No one will experience what you do aside from yourself, even if it takes a hundred million years; sooner or later it will echo back to you in the form of experience. Therefore you must be aware of the value of positive activity and create good causes and conditions. This recognition of impermanence is the subject of the third phrase used to turn the mind toward the Dharma.

The fourth line in Tibetan is:

KHAM SUM KHOR WA DUG NGAL GYA TSHOI NGANG

The three realms of cyclic existence have the nature of an ocean of suffering.

In samsara there is no ultimate satisfaction. Perfect happiness cannot be obtained by manipulating or optimizing conditions. Guru Padmasambhava compared efforts to attain worldly happiness with the scratching of a leper; although it seems to promise relief, it only opens more wounds and gives rise to more itching and bleeding. Whatever we acquire or experience in this world offers no final satisfaction or lasting comfort. Even if it appears to be the best of objects or situations, there will be some unanticipated aspect of it which does not meet up to our vision and turns everything upside-down. This does not imply something negative about you or others, it is just the nature of samsara. There's always a measure of dissatisfaction and discomfort in the conditional world because everything's constantly changing. It never stops. Our attachments and clinging result in suffering, misery and all the other trouble that arises. Misfortunes follow one after another. This is part of life in samsara and not just some aberration, for such problems are part of our everyday reality. The abhidharma teachings list eleven different types of suffering. Among those are three root forms known as the suffering of suffering, the suffering of change, and all-pervasive suffering. Contemplation of the four reversals is the primary means of gaining a clear understanding of the suffering which creates samsara, without resorting to abstract reasoning, logic and philosophical arguments. Rather, we see, know, and feel the truth of the situation before us. This clarity is the path itself. Therefore it is sometimes called "clearly knowing the image of samsara, both externally and internally."

These four thoughts describe all that we have, and offer a critical awareness of the conditional world. This knowledge will give us a better understanding of samsara, so that we're not just taken in by appearances. These thoughts develop our insight into the nature of the whole world. In the teachings they say you must accept whatever arises and continue to move on courageously as part of the game. Learn how to work well with your situation and carry on in the spirit of bodhicitta. Maintain a deep commitment to the practice to realize benefits for both yourself and all other beings.

The last line reads:

DRAN NE DAG LO CHO LA GYUR WAR SHOG

Remembering this may my mind turn towards the Dharma.

Through deepening our comprehension of the meaning of these four verses, we can begin to practice the Dharma effectively, which means cultivating good causes and conditions, and initiating positive resonances which will echo throughout time and space, not merely for ourselves but for every living being. This is a request for inspiration and support, beseeching the kindness of the lama, the buddhas and bodhisattvas, so that we may benefit all beings. "May my mind, body and speech be totally transformed, may I realize myself as non-separate from the Dharma."

The four reversals constitute the first stage of the ngöndro practice. Now we'll move on to the refuge.

SECOND: The Actual Preliminary Practice:

A. Going for Refuge

In order to explore our Buddha nature and begin the journey toward enlightenment, you must understand the meaning of taking refuge. To take refuge daily is the most essential practice of all schools of Buddhism.

The Tibetan word for refuge is *skyabs* which actually means having a sense of closeness, full confidence, a warm feeling and trusting attitude toward the Buddha, his teaching and those who are devoted to making the teaching a living experience.

In the ngöndro practice we recite the refuge vow right after chanting the four thoughts which clarify the nature of samsara; in the light of this understanding, we take refuge. The Indian Dzogchen master Vimalamitra said, "Knowing clearly the situation in samsara as well as the qualities of enlightened beings, we can go for refuge." First we must know the nature of samsara. There is nothing here we can rely on, take comfort in or plan to stay with. Everything is always changing and moving. Troubles follow one after another continuously, as if you're in a tunnel which you have to dig by hand. Discouraged by the situation, the mind becomes unstable. In the face of this, we learn to take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. This has many levels of meaning, but the act of going for refuge should always be accompanied by a feeling of closeness, warmth, and confidence. That's the basic nature of taking refuge.

Love, faith and a sense of intimacy in relation to the Three Jewels open us to their influences which are of great assistance in removing our obscurations. Ignorance,

attachment, anger, jealousy, doubt and pride are all obstacles which create uncomfortable situations for us throughout our lives. We must work to remove, transform, or purify them: we can't just leave them like they are. They are the source of all our difficulties, bringing imbalances and troubles constantly. We have to look at them and deal with them. On the external level we can call on experts, people who can really help us change, those who have trod the path. All the buddhas and bodhisattvas were originally the same as we are. They were not higher or lower than normal sentient beings. However, through their extraordinary motivation, courage, commitment, and joyful efforts, they have become free of all negative emotions and mental obscurations, revealed their Buddha nature, and realized total enlightenment. When we seek assistance on the relative level, the buddhas have the knowledge and skills to purify our emotions and solve our problems so that we may become like them. That is the external aspect of taking refuge.

What is the nature of the Buddha? The Buddha nature is totally enlightened, completely free of all obscurations and habit patterns, radiant with love and compassion, and full of wisdom. That reality is known as the Buddha. When you are liberated from emotions, and are without mental obscurations, you are already naturally loving, compassionate and wise. These qualities are inherent in our being, as the Buddha clearly demonstrated. Buddhahood is not some novelty which the Buddha developed. He became enlightened through the destruction of all fetters and obstacles. That is the meaning of Buddha.

The Dharma is the method or body of techniques which help us awaken true love, genuine compassion and wisdom free from ego-clinging and neurotic games. Universal, unconditional love, selfless compassion, and transcendent wisdom pervade all samsaric beings, no matter their situation. The dharmic point of view is without divisions into higher or lower, close or distant. Everyone has the Buddha nature, everyone needs love, compassion and wisdom and nobody enjoys being subject to anger, jealousy, pride, pain and so on. This knowledge is called the Dharma. It is a message of freedom which offers us techniques to purify all obscurations and totally reveal the ultimate state of the Buddha nature, the perfection of love, compassion, wisdom and peace.

The Sangha refers to those who practice the Dharma, who carry it in their hearts and minds, applying it according to their capabilities, joyfully, with courage and commitment. Some sangha members have a high degree of love, compassion and wisdom and some are only beginners, but all are motivated toward enlightenment, dedicated to the realization of benefits for all sentient beings. Also, the sangha can take the form of an individual who has some realization and begins to share and inspire other beings. That too is sangha. These companions serve as a source of inspiration and joy, setting examples for others to follow on the path toward enlightenment.

In English:

I take refuge in the Buddha
I take refuge in the Dharma
I take refuge in the Sangha

In Sanskrit:

Buddham saranam gacchami
Dharmam saranam gacchami

Sangham saranam gacchami

In Tibetan:

Sangye la kyab su chi-o
Chö la kyab su chi-o
Gendun la kyab su chi-o

The objects of refuge are the Three Jewels or the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. Who is taking refuge? Individuals are motivated to take refuge on the basis of their own interest, feeling of warmth, closeness, and confidence in the Three Jewels. No one can be pressured or forced into taking refuge. It only happens through individual joyful effort, by opening your heart and mind to the Buddha as your teacher, the Dharma as your path and the Sangha as your community of spiritual friends. That's the true meaning of taking refuge and the way we should perceive the Three Jewels. We take refuge out of love for the teacher, the teaching and our companions. By means of this endeavor, we begin to explore and reveal our Buddha nature.

How long will we take refuge? Until we are enlightened. At that point, we will no longer need to take refuge externally. We'll actually embody the objects of refuge. The notion of taking refuge is transcended when you become enlightened. That's the general meaning of taking refuge as defined in the Buddha's teachings.

In the special terminology employed in the Vajrayana, the inner objects of refuge are called the guru, deva and dakini or the *lama*, *yidam* and *khandro* and are referred to as the Three Roots. According to the inner tantra, we can distinguish three levels; externally we take refuge in the Three Jewels, internally we take refuge in the Three Roots and secretly we take refuge in the *rtsa*, *rlung* and *thig-le*, or the channels, winds and essence elements of the body.

To unite subject and object requires effort, so you must generate some activity when going for refuge in the most external sense. However, from the Dzogchen point of view, there is what is known as "refuge without effort." This is also known as the ultimate or most secret object of refuge which is to take refuge within one's own true nature of mind, to abide in the union of emptiness and clarity. To do this, we need a sense of being very close to the objects of refuge and to feel the energy of love and happiness in that relationship.

As sentient beings, we do not live in harmony with our original nature. Having wandered for a long time in samsara, we are unfamiliar with the truth. Enamored by our projections, we do not have much insight into our own mental events. Through actions based in dualism we separate ourselves from the true nature and become confused and deluded. In one way, taking refuge is returning to your own home, to the essence of who you really are, so you can learn how to be at ease here. Of course you can come and go as you please, it's just that you've finally arrived at your permanent address. Knowing where you live inspires great confidence and joy, freedom beyond doubt and the cycle of hopes and fears. You have realized the ultimate state of democracy!

This is the prayer to say when you take refuge:

DI ZUNG CHANG CHUB NYING PO MA THOB BAR
LAMA KON CHOG SUM LA KYAB SU CHI

**From now until attaining the heart of enlightenment,
I take refuge in the Lama and the Three Jewels.**

Initially, the objects of refuge appear to be external. This is the ground and foundation. At first we need to get oriented on the ground, the earth; then we can begin to move. Do not just gaze off into the sky. We must learn to combine the realities of the sky and earth together; we cannot just deal with one half of the world. If you fixate on the sky you will stumble and hurt your self.

Taking refuge is important. All of the Buddha's teachings are contained within the practice of taking refuge. What exactly did the Buddha teach? All his teachings relate directly to the realities of the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. The whole teaching is subsumed by these three topics! The Three Jewels are the embodiment of his entire communication. It is necessary to open ourselves with joy and confidence, to make an intimate, heartfelt connection with the objects of refuge, and then maintain this bond throughout all our daily activities.

The great master Atisha came to Tibet around the 11th century. Externally, his foremost practice was taking refuge. He recited the refuge formula all of the time and offered this teaching to many Tibetans. Because he chanted these lines constantly, many people thought this was all he knew. So they called him the Refuge Teacher. But long before Atisha came to Tibet, he already understood all of the Buddha's teachings. Moreover, he knew many of the sciences of his time. He was the headmaster of Vikramashila monastic university which was like a twin to Nalanda. Given all of that, why did he focus on the refuge? Because he was fully aware of its importance in firmly establishing sentient beings on the ground of practice. Therefore, in communicating with the Tibetan people, Atisha emphasized the supreme virtue of taking refuge.

Another famous Tibetan master who lived around the 15th century, was a renowned Nyingma yogi whose name was Grub-thob Than-stong rGyalpo whose name means "the king of empty land." Having constructed one hundred and eight iron bridges spanning big rivers throughout Tibet, he was also known as the "Iron Bridge Builder." Modern scientists have investigated his work and believe that he was the first man to build iron bridges on such a scale. He was also a famous tertön, who sported a long white beard and top-knot. He is depicted holding a vase and an iron chain in his right hand. Nobody knows how he was paid or what sort of techniques he used, but the bridges have not rusted, and some of these structures are still in use. Even the communist regime has expressed their appreciation of his efforts, citing him as one of the only practitioners who actually worked for the common welfare. They like to promote him as an example of their socialist philosophy. His main teachings and practice consisted of taking refuge and reciting the six-syllable mantra of Avalokitesvara. He also added one more to the three objects of refuge—the Lama—so that it now reads: I take refuge in the Lama, the Buddha, the Dharma and Sangha. This style of taking refuge grew very popular, with the result that all of the lay people in Tibet now say, "I take refuge in the Lama and the Three Jewels."

According to the Vajrayana, these Three Roots, Three Jewels and Three Objects of Refuge are all present in the form of Guru Padmasambhava. The body of Guru Padmasambhava represents the Sangha. His speech represents the Dharma. The realization state of Guru Padmasambhava represents the Buddha. In this way Guru Rinpoche is the embodiment of the Three Jewels as well as the Three Roots. Guru

Padmasambhava is our root teacher, like the lama. The realization state of Guru Padmasambhava, his love, compassion, kindness and wisdom, all represent the deity or yidam. His beneficial activities for all sentient beings of the ten directions and three times are known as dakinis, while those aspects which continue to protect and remove obstacles, are known as dharmapalas. In a very simple and convenient way, Guru Rinpoche alone is enough to take as our object of refuge.

THE REFUGE TREE

In the space before you, visualize that there is a very beautiful lake, called Danakosha. The water is clean, cool and soothing. It is surrounded by beautiful meadows, trees, hills and mountains. Right in the center of Danakosha Lake is the Wish-Fulfilling Tree. It appears like a large lotus with five branches, one in each of the directions, including the center. It has many different flowers, leaves and numerous small branches and twigs. Each flower and leaf has a beautiful fragrance that pervades in all directions, bringing peace and happiness to sentient beings. The flowers also radiate light.



Guru Padmasambhava is seated on the central lotus upon sun and moon disks in the royal relaxation posture as you see in thangkas, embracing his consort, the Wisdom Dakini, Yeshe Tshogyal. This form is sometimes known as Guru Padmasambhava Vajradhara. Both figures are radiating the light of the five wisdom colors. Their presence is full of love, skillful means and compassion for all living beings. They are looking right at you and smiling. Guru Padmasambhava and Yeshe Tshogyal are not solid form bodies, but wisdom-light bodies, like rainbows.

On the branch in front of Guru Padmasambhava is Buddha Shakyamuni. On the right side of Buddha Shakyamuni is the past Buddha, Dipankara. On his left side is the future Buddha, Maitreya. All three Buddhas are seated on lotuses surmounted by moon disks, radiating wisdom lights and regarding you compassionately with a half-smile.

On the branch to the right of Guru Padmasambhava are all the Bodhisattvas like Avalokitesvara, Manjusri, Vajrapani and Akashagarbha. All these great Bodhisattvas are compassionately smiling at you, wearing different colored silk Sambhogakaya robes, long hair, and jeweled crowns. They are a display of wisdom.

On the branch to the left of Guru Padmasambhava, visualize all the great arhats like Ananda, Kashyapa, Sariputra, Maudgalyayana, Mahakashyapa and Subhuti. They all have monks robes and regard you with a half-smile. On the branch behind Guru Padmasambhava, are all the Dharma teachings of the nine yantras. Each text is magically self-reciting and luminous. The different self-sounding voices of the vowels and consonants radiate wisdom light. This represents the Prajnaparamita teachings which are also known as the Mother of All the Buddhas.

In the sky above Guru Padmasambhava, visualize the whole Dzogchen lineage of the Nyingma School. There are many, many great masters, like the twenty-five students of Guru Padmasambhava and the eight Vidyadharas. From the root teachers all the way up to Samantabhadra, all are sitting in a rainbow in the sky, radiating wisdom-light and lineage blessings while smiling at the practitioner.

Between the branches, in the forks, all the other wrathful and peaceful deities, Buddhas and Mahaherukas surround Guru Padmasambhava, and below them are all the different dharmapalas. The herukas are beings like Vajrakilaya, Hayagriva, Yangdak and Shincho Heruka. The peaceful deities are the Dhyani Buddhas such as Amitabha and Vairocana. The most powerful and special dharmapala of the Dzogchen teachings is Mama Ekagrati. She is standing in front of the lineage in the lake, surrounded by many other dharmapalas, like Rahula, Dorjeloka and Mahakala, all radiating wisdom light and ready to remove the obstacles and obscurations of practitioners. They are on duty twenty-four hours a day like the Fire Department, ready for action as soon as you dial the hotline. All these objects of refuge are aspects of the lineage teacher, Guru Padmasambhava.

The refuge tree comes right out of the center of the lake. There are also many beautiful birds and swans singing Dharma songs and dancing, making every kind of gesture and movement expressing love, peace and bliss. They are also performing the mudras of all the different teachings of the Buddhistharma. There are beautiful animals in the meadowlands and valleys and many different trees and flowers. In the sky there are rainbows, celestial voids, beautiful clouds and small fogs rising. That is the visualization. It is said that the moment you think of it, it should bring peace and happiness to your mind.

We should take refuge in front of this tree with deep respect, devotional longing, happy thoughts and the Three Homages honoring the body, speech and mind. The gesture of respect pertaining to the body is prostration. The gesture of respect in honor of speech is the chanting of words such as these refuge lines. The attitude of respect honoring the mind consists of devotion, confidence and happiness. While prostrating, it is also good to visualize that every single sentient being is doing prostrations with you. In the teaching, it is said, at your right side is your father and on your left side is your mother. You are surrounded by your friends. Even your enemies are doing prostrations and taking refuge. With this thought in mind, we should chant these lines.

Taking refuge is a very important practice for all Buddhists, whether Hinayana, Mahayana or Vajrayana. Every Buddhist practitioner should take refuge.

All Three Jewels are embodied in the person of the lama. The lama is no other than the Three Jewels. With joy, a warm feeling of closeness and deep confidence, take refuge in the Lama, the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. Visualize all the buddhas, bodhisattva and lineage masters, the entire collection of Dharma texts, the Noble Sangha, and the supreme emanation of all the Buddhas of the three times, in the space directly before you. Guru Padmasambhava appears surrounded by wrathful and peaceful Buddhas in union as well as male and female bodhisattvas. Each one is distinguished by a specific form, color, mudra, and expression, yet each represents true love, the fullness of compassion and non-dual wisdom, radiating a host of beams in all directions. The entire assembly is welcoming you into the family of enlightened beings. You experience a warm, loving feeling, with the faith of confidence in the refuge objects from the bottom of your heart, so that you are moved to say, "From now until attaining the heart of enlightenment, I take refuge in the Lama and the Three Jewels." The commentary reads; *Thus, with prostrations, recite as much as one can. Recite the refuge mantra at the same time that you do prostrations.*

Prostrations serve as an antidote to pride and arrogance while instilling respect, gentleness and appreciation. Begin standing with your hands held together at the heart center. This gesture is called *phyagya*, in Tibetan, which translates as mudra in Sanskrit. This particular mudra is called the "lotus blossom mudra." It is neither fully open nor completely closed; it's like a bud just before it blooms. Hold this to your heart center.

Mudras are symbols and this one indicates that we're opening our heart, which is full of love, compassion, devotion, and confidence. By placing this opening bud at the center of your chest, you symbolize the opening heart. Now, move this mudra up to your crown chakra, and chant, "Namo Buddhaya," Then bring it down to your speech center, saying "Namo Dharmaya." Return the mudra to the heart center once again, chanting "Namo Sanghaya." Then bow down.

There's two kinds of prostrations: short ones and long ones. The short prostration requires you to touch five points to the ground: the forehead, two palms, and two knees. Do this three times. Besides chanting the refuge formula, you can also do the bodhicitta mantra at the end of each prostration.

To do long prostrations, begin by touching the five points to the ground, and then stretch out to your full length with your arms and legs extended fully upon the ground. In either case, begin and end each prostration by standing with your feet close, holding the lotus blossom mudra at your heart center.

✿B. The Generation of Bodhicitta

DA NE ZUNG TE KHOR WA MA TONG BAR
MA GYUR SEM CHAN KUN GYI PHAN DE DRUB

**From now until samsara becomes empty,
I shall accomplish the benefits and happiness of all sentient parent
beings.**

The third section of the ngöndro practice is the generation of bodhicitta. Although each part of the ngöndro has great significance, the bodhicitta aspiration is particularly important. It allows us to see that every sentient being is special. In the view of true bodhicitta, there is no partiality or prejudice. No one is worthless, nobody is higher or lower, everyone is valuable and beautiful. You don't attach to transient manifestations which may appear ugly, bad or unimportant.

Without bodhicitta there is no buddha, no bodhisattvas, and no enlightenment. There is only confusion. All that remains are ego games in a realm of selfish involvement. If you don't have bodhicitta you are not actually taking refuge even if you go through the motions. There is no reality to this type of practice. To sincerely take refuge in the Three Jewels and feel close to the truth they embody, you must have bodhicitta. Without it, your efforts are forced, uptight and meaningless. With it, we acquire skillful means; we become kind and gentle and our practice becomes more powerful, beneficial and beautiful.

When the Buddha Shakyamuni was alive, there was a famous king known as Prasenajit who ruled much of northern India from his capital in Sravasti. He was very devoted to the Buddha but didn't have a lot of time to put into the practice because of all of his worldly duties. His heart was with the Buddha, but being preoccupied with external affairs, he couldn't connect too deeply with the Dharma. This made him worry. So one day he asked the Buddha what to do about it. The Buddha said, "If you can observe just one practice, you will be applying yourself all of the time."

"Oh, and what is that?" asked the King.

"The bodhicitta," said the Buddha. "You must bring bodhicitta into each of your daily activities, whether you are standing, walking, sitting, or sleeping. While you're governing the kingdom or wherever you are, if you keep bodhicitta in your heart, it will transform all of your actions into the practice of the Dharma."

What is the meaning of bodhicitta? It is commonly translated as the mind or thought of enlightenment but more specifically, it stands for the union of love, compassion and wisdom. Love means that you have a warm feeling of kindness toward every single sentient being. Compassion means that when you see any of these loved ones having difficulties, you immediately do whatever you can to help comfort or release them. This is compassion. Wisdom is quite different, but must always be combined with love and compassion. Love and compassion are wonderful and good, but without wisdom, you can't come up with what sentient beings really need.

Wisdom involves learning to apply love and compassion with skill, courage and commitment, free of ego-clinging. Ego-clinging tends to turn love and compassion into negative emotions which are inherently frustrating. Eventually, you can no longer stand it and you're knocked to the ground by attempting to practice love and compassion without wisdom. So wisdom is indispensable. Another name for it is emptiness. Love and compassion equalize in emptiness and from there you can conduct more powerful forms of love and compassion. Continually adjust your efforts in relation to the beings who are to be served, and transform any tendency to cling to phenomena. These are basic wisdom activities inseparable from the love and compassion of bodhicitta.

All beings are special and we all share common goals. This is the basis on which to begin the practice of bodhicitta. We are all very much the same. I want happiness, joy

and peace and do not appreciate being hurt by anyone. In the same way, all other sentient beings prefer happiness, joy and peace. We share the same fundamental desires and have a common ground. There's no difference between any of us at these levels, so in evaluating the real situation, we must learn to acknowledge the equality of ourselves and all others. This is a vital consideration. Sometimes it is difficult to have this attitude, as emotions and old habit patterns do not support us in this effort and conjure more ego-tricks in our mind. To seriously begin, we must be aware of these obstacles and continue to practice, mindful of the equality of all beings.

Exchanging practice is another bodhicitta application, also known as *tong-len*. In this exercise we give our peace and joy to others and remove their pain and suffering. As your mental capabilities grow and you're a little more unified in yourself and established in the reality of the bodhicitta, you will have many opportunities to exchange your happiness for the sufferings of others.

When you grow strong in applying the exchanging practices, the third stage of cultivating bodhicitta is considering that others are more dear than your own self. Every sentient being develops according to their own karma, but given the opportunity, the mental attitude of bodhicitta can become so strong that you learn to feel that others are more important than yourself. This completely reverses our present habit of ego-clinging.

These are the three primary aspects of bodhicitta practice. In the beginning we need to expand our capacity for love, compassion and wisdom. Fully opening to this opportunity is very important. To bring the beauty of love, compassion and wisdom to others, we have to open our heart right away. If we don't do this now, we will be shut down today, tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, on through the years. Open the door to love, compassion and wisdom now, immediately, according to your capacities.

Opening this door to all beings will not decrease your inner peace and happiness, rather it will expand the joy and sense of well-being in your life. Caring enough to love well, will initiate a completely new vision of the world. Presently, we're only looking at it from one side of the coin; that's how it is here in samsara. When we develop bodhicitta in our mind, we begin to see the whole panorama. The entire universe arises with a sense of great openness, joy, and peace. We learn to relax. The bodhicitta attitude creates such a beautiful atmosphere that everyone becomes your friend and you feel at home wherever you are; you're never a stranger. Beauty follows wherever you go.

Bodhicitta brings a new understanding of the world. This is the perfect place for you to learn. The text says, "From now until samsara becomes empty, I shall accomplish the benefit and happiness of all sentient beings." You have finally found a permanent career; you don't have to worry about losing this job! It's going to last forever, so you may as well do it with joy, inspiration, vision and a peaceful heart. In Sanskrit, practitioners of the bodhicitta are called bodhisattvas. *Sattva* means one who is courageous in relation to the pursuit of enlightenment. Courage is primary. To carry the bodhicitta, we must know its value and importance, but to continue to develop it we must have both courage and commitment. Don't make the mistake of thinking that the moment you begin to practice the Dharma, everything will become simple, and be easily taken care of. Life does not instantly become a pure land or an eternal *grooving on a Sunday afternoon!*

To practice the Dharma does not mean running away from samsara. Since we are already engaged in this world, we should observe everything closely. Until we begin to

practice, we're always trying to hide, trying to run away. This is futile because we always end up unhappy. By practicing the Dharma we can begin to be free in this world. We can engage it creatively. Look closely, discover the meaning, the inner pattern so that you don't have to run and hide all of the time.

This doesn't mean we should settle for simply enduring samsara and being abused. Therefore Buddha encouraged us to be brave and committed to our own enlightenment. When we do this, everything is transformed and purified. We learn to move with the situation, full of joy, vision and confidence, whether here or in the bardo. With this understanding, we are able to enjoy and appreciate our position. The future Buddha Maitreya teaches that this realization lets us move from life to life as if we were strolling from one garden to another, from park to park.



First we considered the four attitudes that reverse the mind, the four thoughts of renunciation which bring a clear understanding of samsara. Then we talked about taking refuge. Together, these summarize the first teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni. These are known as the foundation or ground teachings and are primarily associated with the Hinayana vehicle although they lead all the way to the Vajrayana. In this third section, we have focused on the bodhicitta, the essential teaching of the Mahayana. These three practices serve as the basis for the Vajrayana teachings. The practice is structured in this order to develop our understanding step by step, in a natural way.

THIRD: The Accumulation of Merit—Mandala Offering

Now we're going to examine a section of the ngöndro called mandala practice. The first two sections represent Hinayana and Mahayana levels of instruction. Mandala practice corresponds to Vajrayana teachings. Mandala is a Sanskrit term which has several meanings and can be understood on various levels. Mandala has two roots: *man* means mind and *dala* refers to a circle, as well as to maintain. The term indicates a primary pattern reflected through various techniques which help us maintain our minds in a dynamic balance. This is popularly expressed through diagrams symbolizing the state of full realization which are used as supports for meditation and visualization.

In Vajrayana Buddhism, there are many different types of mandalas. They may be visualized, painted on a *thangka*, a temple wall, or drawn on paper. Sand mandalas are created for various purposes, and there are even some three-dimensional ones. Regardless of the specific style, they all represent the mandala of awakening to the one true nature. By looking at the relationships that comprise the mandala, by meditating and concentrating on the meanings it embodies, one is enriched and illumined by the light of primordial wisdom. What is expressed externally through these symbols is to be understood inwardly. Each line and color used in a mandala relates to a different aspect of mind and awareness. That's why there's such a rich display of form and energy in *thangka* art; it is an emblem of primordial awareness. This is a general explanation of the mandala principle.

The mandala we use in the ngöndro practice is called an offering mandala although it is also referred to as the wisdom mandala. By making mandala offerings we begin accumulating merit and wisdom. Merit energy is necessary to actualize our Buddha nature. To understand why this is so, consider how everything develops according to the quality of our activities. Our karma echoes back to us through our experiences. This is consistently true. It never varies, or gets things mixed up. All change proceeds on the basis of specific causes and conditions. The first movement gives rise to the second, effects follow causes and in turn become causes for similar effects in the future. Events manifest continuously, one after another.

There are many other ways to understand mandala. The entire physical cosmos is part of a basic, naturally existing mandala. This cosmic mandala contains all phenomena. The luminosity aspect of the true nature gives rise to all observable qualities as well as the wisdoms; everything is complete within this great circle, nothing is missing. This natural configuration is the site of the manifestation and transformation of all things, continually displaying new patterns. The ceaseless activity of the cosmic mandala pervades the universe. In the Vajrayana, this is known as the basic, spontaneously inherent mandala.

A second form of this mandala is known as the wisdom mandala, and this refers to the primordial nature of mind. The true nature is already perfect, the two accumulations of merit and wisdom are primordially complete; there's nothing to be added or taken away, there's nothing we have to establish or purify. Love, compassion, wisdom, understanding, knowledge, all these beautiful qualities are fully present. Everything we say, feel, and think appears within the perfect wisdom mandala of true awareness. Even external phenomena arise within the radiance of this mandala. It is the source mandala for all vision, insight, compassion and beneficial activities. It is called complete because there is nothing missing. It remains exactly as it is all the time, regardless of the transitions and changes in the external or internal environments. By knowing this mandala clearly, you can understand the subtle working of phenomenal

relationships and discover the true nature of all things. This level of vision is developed through regular meditation and practice. Like ascending a staircase or a ladder, you will progressively gain insight into all forms and aspects of the world through the mandala principle. This is known as the wisdom mandala or the mandala of the path.

By understanding the complete wisdom mandala, you connect with the primordial nature. This is the third level of mandala and is known as the awakened mandala. You see the entire universe as a display of the three vajra states: vajra body, vajra speech and vajra mind. Whatever you see is the indestructible display of the wisdom body and whatever you hear, whether words or other sounds, are all forms of the indestructible speech of the Buddhas. All manifestations of space and awareness reveal the deathless nature of the mind of all the Buddhas. When you perceive things in their wholeness and totality, that is a vision of the awakened mandala. By contemplating the true nature through the mandala we can understand all aspects of realization. Our meditation becomes free of dualistic notions such as meditation and meditator and we are enlightened to the singularity at the root of appearances through the mandala of awakening.

Buddhahood is the embodiment of love, compassion and wisdom. We have to realize that this is our true nature. In order to awaken such an understanding in our lives we require competent assistance and auspicious conditions. When the right causes and conditions come together there's no need to be in doubt about actualizing the fruit. You will definitely achieve the right result if your practice is empowered with the appropriate causes and conditions. You will reap exactly what you have planted. If you consider it, you already have the perfect cause, which is your Buddha nature. Now we have to manifest supportive conditions through the accumulation of merit. Buddha refers to these positive activities as the six paramitas. Skillfully applying the paramitas, we can merge all our activities with the primordial nature of mind. This is the way to cultivate our buddha-seed, so that our Buddha nature flourishes and blossoms into Buddhahood.

Among the six paramitas, the first is called generosity, or in Sanskrit *dana paramita*, which translates as "the practice of transcendental generosity." Generosity means giving and sharing. Why do we need to give and share? To counter the habit of ego-clinging, which is always grasping, always holding on or holding back. Through the practice of generosity we're loosening that tendency, releasing that tightness and making everything flow more smoothly so that this openness is available to everyone.

When you offer mandala, visualize Guru Padmasambhava as the embodiment of all of the Buddhas, the Dharma and the Sangha, or of all gurus, devas and dakinis. Feel deeply into the presence of Guru Rinpoche, Buddha Shakyamuni, Tara, and all of the enlightened beings who appear before you, and then make the mandala offering. Understand this offering as a gift to all enlightened beings and chant the following lines:

TSHE RAB KUN GYI LU DANG LONG CHOD PAL
TSHOG NYI DZOG CHIR KON CHOG SUM LA BUL

**The bodies, enjoyments, possessions, and glories
Of the succession of all my lifetimes
I offer to the Three Jewels,
In order to complete the two accumulations.**

The mandala is a complete and total offering. Nothing is held back. It is a gift in which you really open your heart and share that fullness with all sentient beings without reservations. You share everything, not only your possessions or earthly things, but the entire universe, including all the galaxies, the sun, moon and stars, and the earth itself. Offer everything internal as well; all sentient beings, especially your own body, speech and mind. And not simply the vehicle of this lifetime, but "the bodies, enjoyments, possessions, and glories of the succession of all my lifetimes." Think about all this while making the mudra which symbolizes these things and then do the visualization. This is called the simple mandala mudra with five points: a center and four directions symbolizing the whole universe. The abhidharma explains that our world system has four continents situated in the four directions around Mt. Sumeru. This is symbolized by the basic mandala mudra, but when visualizing this you can also imagine the sun in the east and the moon in the west. This is known as the seven-point mandala offering and it is the briefest form. More detailed versions such as the twenty-one point, twenty-three point, the thirty-seven point mandala and others may include whole sadhanas and prayers.

The mandala mudra has a lot of meanings. On the external level, it symbolizes the cosmology which the Buddha presented in the abhidharma. Inwardly it symbolizes the five active organs; eye, ear, nose, tongue and body, as well as the five consciousnesses and their five objects; form, sound, fragrances, flavors and feelings. Further, there's five elements, five psycho-physical aggregates, five colors, and five poisons. On a deeper level, there are the five wisdoms. In the Vajrayana teachings, all of this is called the vajra body. When we look at the vajra body, it has five points; two legs, two arms and a head. This symbolizes and contains the whole universe, and is realized according to your understanding and the strength of your meditation. So the mandala is an all-inclusive offering. You're giving to all of the buddhas, bodhisattvas, dakas, dakinis, and arhats, until there is nothing left to be offered. By including it all, the entire universe, you too, are completely transformed. Make this offering again and again.

To practice mandala in the most common way, hold the mudra, chant the verses and then make the offering. This is a form of generosity practice but it also contains the other five paramitas. To continually abide in that transcendental understanding is known as discipline or morality, the second paramita. To be courageous in your commitment so that it is a steady path, requires tolerance or patience. If your practice is full of love and joy, you have aroused the joyful effort paramita. To clearly visualize the objects of refuge, including all the buddhas and bodhisattvas, and contemplate the profound meaning behind the mudra without losing your focus, is the practice of transcendent concentration. Keep your mind on the target. To understand all of this as a display of the true nature, an ongoing manifestation of the wisdoms, without holding or grasping, is the practice of transcendental wisdom. Mandala practice enables us to perform all six paramitas at once. This is an example of the skillful means available through the Vajrayana teachings. There is no need to separate the paramitas, or think, "Today I'll practice generosity, tomorrow discipline, and next year I'll practice patience." We can merge them all together into one practice which is whole and continuous in or out of meditation.

The more complex mandala offerings involve the use of a ritual mandala plate which may be made of various materials. Metals such as bronze, copper, brass or silver are popular. If you can afford solid gold, or one ornamented with diamonds, rubies and emeralds, that is better yet. Use the best one you can afford. If you are a poor wandering yogi and haven't been able to acquire anything fancy, you can use stones,

ceramic tiles or even smooth pieces of wood. Make the offering material of whatever your situation allows, but in these modern times, many of you have access to beautiful glass tears, polished or semi-precious stones, jewels and metals, cardamom seeds, or grains like washed rice, which may be gently sprinkled with saffron-colored water, and other nice things. The mandala plate symbolizes the ground of the universe, as well as the *alaya*, the eighth consciousness or "subconscious storehouse" where all of our habit patterns are kept intact. We've dumped a lot of junk in that closet and it needs to be cleaned up. Well, through the mandala practice, the clean-up will begin.

Having prepared saffron-colored water, dip the tip of the ring finger of your right hand into it and transfer this drop to the center of the mandala plate which is held in the left hand. Rub the mandala plate with the inside of your bare right wrist, three times in a clockwise direction. This symbolizes the cleaning up of your subconscious which actually comes about through the power of the accumulation of merit and the practice of the six paramitas. After this, use your right hand to take the offerings which have already been washed and prepared and arrange them on the plate in the form of the seven-point mandala as you begin chanting the verses. When the arrangement is complete, offer it up to the objects of refuge with both hands. Having chanted the verse, lower the plate and tilt its contents back into the cloth on your lap. Repeat this again and again. That's the basic form of mandala practice.

If you have time and want to do something more elaborate, you can create various mandalas which involve visualizing the body, speech and mind, the five aggregates, and everything else in the universe. With all this in mind, make the mandala offering. Mandala is an extremely simple but special Vajrayana technique for the accumulation of merit, which is a very necessary and important aspect of the path.



The first time that Gampopa came to meet Milarepa, he was told to wait for about two weeks. Milarepa didn't usually do this kind of thing to his students. As an old man, he was often hanging out in his cave and would casually meet whoever came to see him. But this time, he postponed the meeting for awhile. The day finally came and they met in the open air outside the cave. Milarepa sat upon a big boulder. Gampopa made prostrations and approached respectfully, offering gold and tea leaves. Milarepa put them aside and asked, "What is your name?"

Gampopa said "Sodnam Rinchen." *Sodnam* translates as merit and *rinchen* means very precious.

When Milarepa heard this he mumbled the name a number of times, and finally said, "You have a very good name. Merit dispels obstacles and transforms ignorance so that you can actualize enlightenment and become *precious* to everyone. Merit is one of the two accumulations, the other being wisdom. When the accumulations of merit and wisdom are complete, you will become *precious* to all sentient beings." He paused and looked at the things Gampopa had placed before him. "I see that you offer me gold and tea leaves, but for an old man like myself, gold is not really a good friend, and I know that we aren't going to get along. Leave here with it while you can, before we get upset at each other; please take it back. And tea is really good, I like tea, but I don't have a pot to make it in, so I really can't use that either; please take the tea too, thank you." For Gampopa, all of this was an indication that in order to achieve enlightenment he would need to accumulate a lot of merit!

That was Milarepa's first message to Gampopa, but it applies to everyone. Those who want to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all beings must strive to accumulate merit. In the effort to dispel obscurations and reveal our Buddha nature, merit energy makes a big difference. Merit arising from virtuous actions is the source of supportive conditions necessary to actualize our Buddha nature. We have the cause, but we need the special assistance of merit energy to get enlightened. There's a famous quotation by Nagarjuna, "Awakening to the dharmakaya is the result of the accumulation of wisdom, awakening to the rupakaya comes from the accumulation of merit."

Positive activities such as generosity, discipline, compassion, tolerance and concentration, which involve concepts and the exercise of speech, thought or motion, are all considered part of the accumulation of merit. The accumulation of wisdom is beyond all activity; the mind simply relaxes in the primordial sphere, bright within the fullness of the Buddha nature. Activity applies to motion in the mundane world, to the relative changes which appear on the surface. But the surface itself is only an aspect of a deeper level, so it doesn't make much sense to separate things too much. We need both merit and wisdom and there is no need to isolate these aspects or swing back and forth, alternately accepting one and rejecting the other. We have to embrace the totality and bring all action into the sphere of enlightenment. This is why we need the two accumulation practices.

Mandala offerings accumulate merit through the observance of the first four paramitas; through mental concentration we begin to accumulate wisdom and actualize our Buddha nature. After making offerings, meditate for a moment on Guru Padmasambhava and all the lineage masters. Then simply relax in the natural state without holding to any particular thought or image. Allow every activity to transform into the free play of the true nature. This is the accumulation of wisdom. By merging the two, we are practicing the union of the two accumulations. In truth, merit and wisdom are never separate from each other, so to practice in this way reflects the nature of their non-dual union.

Accumulation practices are really necessary. The true nature is like a mirror which reflects relative, conditional appearances. The phenomenal level is a reflection of the true nature. That's why Buddha taught that form is emptiness, and emptiness is form; they are never really separate from each other. We want to know the true nature as it is in its entirety not just a little corner of it. Without depreciating or exaggerating, we must discover it as it is. Therefore it is important to combine the accumulation of

merit and wisdom through meditation on the true nature. Conjoined with wisdom, the merit accumulated by acts of generosity, love, compassion and bodhicitta, resonates with the primordial nature until it almost begins to shine. A very famous Dzogchen quotation says, "Awareness of the primordial state comes about through the practice of the accumulations." Even the highest Dzogchen teachings pointing beyond activity and effort, require some energy in order to accelerate the full, clear and perfect realization of self-originated awareness.

❧FOURTH: The Purification of Obscurations-The Meditation of Vajrasattva

Vajrasattva is called the all pervasive sovereign of both the outer and inner tantras. He is also known as the Lord of the Body, Speech, Mind, Qualities and Activities of all the Buddhas. Vajrasattva is the supreme embodiment of the whole tantric mandala and lord of all the buddha families. The buddha families display the aspects of primordial wisdom which pervade the world in every direction. The major radiations are known as the five wisdoms, which are symbolized by the five buddha families.



Vajrasattva is a Sanskrit name. *Vajra* means "diamond" and symbolizes the innermost essence of love, compassion and wisdom which is indestructible. *Sattva* is one who is heroic or courageous. The union of wisdom and compassion describes the nature of Vajrasattva and all the buddhas. All of the extraordinary powers and qualities of our Buddha nature derive from this indestructible, vajra-like essence. Those who discover this vajra nature, are enlightened. To practice on Vajrasattva is a reflection on

the external level signifying that we are striving to awaken. On the inner level we are developing unyielding courage, so that in trying to bring a clear understanding of all this to sentient beings, we actually begin to radiate and communicate the transcendental beauty of these qualities.

Having discovered the indestructible courage of bodhicitta, the perfect union of love, compassion and wisdom, or the non-duality of skillful methods of activity and emptiness-awareness, we can begin to apply ourselves. If this was not our true nature, it would be futile to practice. We would just be wasting our time. Without this vajra essence, all efforts would be completely useless. No matter how much you try to make charcoal white, it will remain black. The indestructible attributes of our true being are hidden behind all these habit patterns. To go beyond them, we must evoke vajra courage and a firm commitment. This is why we need to practice on Vajrasattva as Guru Padmasambhava instructed.

The visualization of Vajrasattva is a support for the realization of our Buddha nature. Why do we need support? Because we are so habituated to our conceptions that we continually relate to the world as if there were an inherently existent dualism of subject and object. We need to work with the mental attitude which characterizes our present experience. When we move beyond duality and merge with Vajrasattva in the true nature as it is, there will no longer be any need for external supports to invoke the intrinsic reality of indestructible courage.

There are two ways we employ this practice. Both are designed to help us discover our hidden Vajrasattva nature. The first is to visualize Buddha Vajrasattva above the crown of your head. This is practicing according to the system of the outer tantras. According to the inner tantras, visualize yourself as having completely merged and become one with Vajrasattva.

These two forms are called visualizing the deity in front of you or *mdun-gyi*, and self-emanated or *dag-kyi*, which is to see yourself in the form of the deity. The ngöndro practice makes use of both forms. First, visualize Buddha Vajrasattva one arm's length above your head, seated on a white lotus with one thousand petals. To be specific, the center of the lotus connects to the central channel via a luminous stalk which runs through the top of the head. Your crown chakra is wide open and surrounded by a halo of light. A white moon disc covers the pollen bed of the lotus, upon which Vajrasattva sits in the vajra posture. Vajrasattva is luminous and semi-transparent. His body is not solid but made of wisdom, loving-kindness and compassion. He has one face, two arms, two legs, and is a rich white color, shining like a mountain glacier reflecting the light of a thousand full moons. The very embodiment of compassion and wisdom, he is actually no other than Guru Padmasambhava and the heart of all lineage masters, appearing in this sambhogakaya form. Visualize Vajrasattva in union with his wisdom consort, who is known as Dorje Nyema in Tibetan or Vajra Garvi in Sanskrit. In his right hand, he holds a vajra vertically at the level of his heart center. His left hand is leaning on his hip and holding an upside-down bell. Dorje Nyema is the same color as Vajrasattva and she also has one face, two arms, and two legs. Both of them wear sambhogakaya ornamentation. Her right hand holds a curved knife and in her left is a skullcup filled with wisdom nectar. Her left arm embraces Vajrasattva around his neck. Both are in the primordial state of great blissfulness, radiating the light of wisdom, compassion, love, and peace to beings in all directions. This bliss helps magnetize our power of concentration and deepens our feelings of devotion to the teacher, the teachings, and all sentient beings.

Begin by chanting these lines:

CHI WOR LAMA DOR SEM YER MED PE
KU LE DUD TSII GYUN BAB DRIB JANG GYUR

**Above the crown of my head is Vajrasattva,
Inseparable from the lama.
From Vajrasattva's body a nectar stream descends,
Purifying my obscurations.**

Recite this once and then begin to chant the Hundred Syllable mantra of Vajrasattva. Vajrasattva's mantra is one of the longer ones. If you're just beginning you might say it once, seven, or twenty-one times. If you have time, do a mala, which is 108 mantras. Do even more if you can.

While reciting the mantra, hold this visualization. In the heart center of Buddha Vajrasattva, visualize a five-pointed crystal dorje which stands upon a small moon disc. In the center sphere of the dorje there is a small HUM syllable, white in color, bright with wisdom light. Again, the moon, the dorje and the HUM are not solid objects. The upright vajra is surrounded by the letters of the one-hundred-syllable mantra. Each syllable stands independently and is self-resounding as the garland rotates around the edge of the moon disc. It's good to visualize this, but if it proves too difficult, don't worry about it. Everything that is explained in the sadhana is there from the beginning, so with that understanding, you can just go ahead and recite the mantra.

During this practice, do not be too concerned about details such as the precise size of the vajra or the exact number of petals in the lotus. Don't get too intellectual. Put the analytical scholar business aside, and concentrate with devotion on the warm and loving presence of Vajrasattva and his consort. Practice feeling their blissful immanence. That will take care of everything.

While chanting and visualizing the self-reciting syllables circling clockwise around the moon-disc, the mantra echoes from the hearts of both Vajrasattva and his consort Dorje Nyema. This initiates a blazing forth of love and wisdom energy which arises spontaneously out of their completeness, as white light radiates from their bodies and descends through the halo around your crown chakra into the central channel. This starry nectar is not contained inside the central channel; your whole body becomes soaked in Vajrasattva's wisdom light. This light completely purifies all of our obscurations, obstacles, disease, and sicknesses. That's why Vajrasattva is known as the purification buddha. This is very special. Meditate on the form of Vajrasattva and repeat the mantra as more and more of the luminous nectar descends, filling your chakras and totally purifying all emotional and mental obscurations until eventually your whole body is saturated with the pure energy of wisdom, love and compassion. This is the light of Buddha Vajrasattva. Through the practice, you become similar to him. With this understanding, continue to recite the mantra as much as you can.

Recite it as much as you can and finally, imagine that both Vajrasattva and his consort smile your way and say joyfully, "O noble son or daughter, now you've completely purified your obscurations." Then they both dissolve into a small circle of white light, which enters through your crown chakra and descends through the central channel until it reaches the heart center. At that moment, you are transformed into the Buddha Vajrasattva.

To assume the form of Vajrasattva, you must have an understanding of the mandala of awakening, which means seeing this entire universe as the display of the mandala of Buddha Vajrasattva. All form is recognized as the body emanation of indestructible Vajrasattva. All vibrations, from the sound of the ocean to ambulance sirens, are the song of the indestructible hero communicating his message of true bodhicitta. The open, unobstructed nature of mind and space reveal the adamant courage of the bodhisattvas. If we have a clear understanding of these three aspects of reality, we can meditate with confidence for a few minutes and then recite one mala of the short mantra which consists of six syllables:

OM VAJRA SATTVA HUNG

If you cannot do all of this as elaborately as I have described, just try to relax without thinking and analyzing. Remember that everything is primordially pure and that it is all arising in the mandala of awakening. Be confident in that understanding as you concentrate on the practice. To analyze or indulge in intellectual activities during a session is a form of doubt and hesitation. Reverberating with negative qualities won't leave you any energy for meditation. Just apply yourself courageously, with full confidence and devotion. This is the way to connect directly with the healing, cleansing power of indestructible reality.

Recite the six-syllable mantra for as long as you have time, then chant:

OD ZHU DAG NANG DANG DRE RO CHIG GYUR

**Vajrasattva melts into light
And becomes mingled in one taste
With one's own perceptions.**

Finally then, Vajrasattva is dissolved. This means we're returning to the basic ground of mind and recognizing that everything is a reflection of the primordial source. The phrase, "pure from the beginning, free from all extremes and complexities," describes the true nature of mind. Everything arises as a relative transformation of that pure, absolute condition. So when we dissolve the deity, it is like returning back to the original state which is all-pervading. Here there are no longer any divisions into times, directions, outer and inner. There is no partiality in the heart of perfect wisdom. Dissolution in the primordial nature represents a more serious step forward on the profound path of indestructible heroism. It is free of all dualisms such as birth and death or existence and non-existence. All limitations are transcended in the innate condition as we practice merging back into that nature, relaxing into it. This is known as practicing on the absolute Vajrasattva. Relax your mind and meditate this openness for as long as you have time. If thoughts come up, don't pursue them; just let them go without suppressing or grasping them. That is known as the great Dzogchen meditation.

❧ FIFTH: The Swiftly Penetrating Blessings of the Guru Yoga

The fifth section of the ngöndro is called the *lamai naljor* [*blamai 'byor*] in Tibetan or Guru Yoga in Sanskrit. Guru and lama express the same meaning in these two languages. Two roots comprise this term: one means full, heavy or rich. The other means "higher one" or "extraordinary one," which refers to a teacher who embodies the highest realization of love, compassion, and wisdom through awareness of the true nature. One who is wealthy in love and compassion, and heavy with wisdom. In other

words, having awakened to the fullness and power of the bodhicitta realization, he or she has become extraordinary.

According to the Buddha, the teacher must possess two qualities: first, this individual must have a good understanding of the entire Dharma, from the sutra, vinaya and abhidharma levels, up through the tantrayana, plus a working knowledge of all phenomena on the relative levels. The second quality refers to an understanding of the true nature, and at least some degree of realization of bodhicitta. This is the central message expressed throughout the Buddhadharma. Whether it is stated directly or indirectly, the final goal is reached by awakening to the ultimate meaning of bodhicitta. That's the bottom line of every teaching, from the Hinayana up through the Vajrayana and Dzogchen. All are designed to awaken us to the absolute bodhicitta, which is also known as the Buddha nature, tathagatagarbha, and buddha-seed. To be a qualified lama or teacher, one must have a fair measure of these two qualities or at best, a complete realization, in which case you would expect a super lama!

The Buddha taught that right relationship with the teacher or lama is really important, for he is the one who connects you to all Buddha's teachings. He opens the door of the Dharma so you can enter the path of enlightenment. The lama is considered particularly important in the Vajrayana tradition. This is expressed through the descriptions of the Three Roots or objects of refuge wherein the guru or lama is known as the "root of blessings." The entire process of realization depends on his or her influence. Without the guru the lineage teachings would not be preserved and transmitted in a fluid, unbroken continuity. If there's no lama, the teaching situation does not arise. This is why it's said that the lama is so important. In the inner tantra, it is stated that the lama is the Buddha, the lama is the Dharma and the lama is the Sangha. He's considered lord of the entire Vajrayana family.

In the process of opening to the truth of the teachings, the lama is invaluable. He puts you into direct contact with the body, speech and mind of the Buddha. Even though there are books, written words alone will not rouse your enlightened nature. Only a master can clarify the true meaning and reveal the transcendent essence of the printed word. A truly qualified teacher has knowledge of many liberating techniques and transmits these with the warmth of the lineage blessings.

The works of the great masters of ancient India and Tibet express the highest regard for the teacher. They're not just trying to glorify individual beings; they are illuminating a principle. On the basis of personal experience and realization, they are openly acknowledging, for our sakes, that the lama is the only true access to the lineage teachings. Since the times of the Buddha Shakyamuni, those individuals who attain to the highest realization have done so through devotion to a true teacher.

Even if you are a great scholar with knowledge of all of the teachings, if you don't practice under the auspices of a qualified lineage master, you won't gain enlightenment. All the schools tell stories of great students who have not yet discovered their Buddha nature because they lack a connection with a qualified guide. Philosophical knowledge alone will not enlighten.

In India, the famous Dzogchen master, Manjushrimitra was originally a teacher at Nalanda University. Academically he was one of the most intellectually developed scholars of his time. But to awaken the pristine awareness of primordial wisdom, he had to link up with a qualified master. He had become blocked at the threshold of awakening and couldn't go on. Manjushri appeared and told him, "If you want to gain

enlightenment in this lifetime, go see the young Dzogchen master Garab Dorje." Manjushrimitra received Garab Dorje's teachings and thereby became enlightened.

Manjushrimitra's foremost student was Shri Singha, another highly developed scholar who had to meet a qualified master in order to attain full realization. Shri Singha was told by Avalokitesvara, "If you want to be enlightened within this lifetime, you must contact the master Manjushrimitra." So he went and met Manjushrimitra and received the final instructions which instantly sparked his full awakening to the Dzogchen state.

Naropa was a great Indian scholar who served as the northern gatekeeper at the monastic university of Vikramashila. However, to come to final realization he had to meet his guru. Instructed by a wisdom dakini, Naropa left the monastery and after considerable hardship, finally found Tilopa. At first Tilopa ignored him, and even seemed to torture him by putting him through twelve difficult and sixteen smaller ordeals before he was finally given the teachings. Most great practitioners do not connect with their gurus for scholarly knowledge. They may even be more educated or widely renowned than their masters. This was the case with Naropa. It required the blessing of Tilopa, however, to bring him to full realization. This is the value in contacting a truly qualified lineage teacher.

Having the good fortune to encounter and recognize this situation, a student should devote himself to the teacher and the teachings with complete trust and confidence. As their minds merge, the devotee comes to the same realization as the teacher, sparkling with the wisdom of all the lineage masters. This is how the teachings have been transmitted right up to the present. And that's a brief overview of the importance of the lama.

In practicing guru yoga we focus on Guru Padmasambhava, the true embodiment of all of buddhas and bodhisattvas. There have been buddhas in the past and there will be others in the future, but the Buddha of the present is Guru Padmasambhava. To begin the practice, visualize yourself as Vajrayogini and chant these verses:

RANG NYID DORJE NALJOR DUN KHA RU
TSAWAI LAMA PEME KUR ZHENG GYUR

**Oneself is Vajrayogini and in the sky in front,
the root teacher manifests in the form of Padmasambhava.**

Vajrayogini is a wisdom dakini, a totally enlightened being, a female Buddha. Why do we visualize ourselves as Vajrayogini? According to the Vajrayana, Vajrayogini represents the profound wisdom or clarity of the true nature which is Prajnaparamita, Samantabhadri, the basic ground or reality of all phenomena. Our absolute condition is reflected in her form. She is known as the Mother of all Buddhas. Enlightenment comes about by knowing our true nature and merging with wisdom. This union will transform ignorance and dispel all darkness. Presently, we have thick mental and emotional obscurations which keep this from happening.

The conception and birth of a buddha child requires that there be a mother, so we invoke the primordial power of our absolute nature through the great mother of transcendent wisdom, Buddha Vajrayogini. She is visualized with one face, two arms

and two legs. Her body color is ruby red, she is naked and semi-wrathful with bone ornaments and a third eye in her forehead. Her right hand holds a curved knife and her left holds a skull cup. A three-pointed katvanga, symbolizing the power of the three wisdoms, lies across her left shoulder. She gazes slightly upward at the guru and wears a necklace of fifty-one skulls. Like Vajrasattva and all the other tantric deities, Vajrayogini is not a substantially existent form but appears in a transcendental body of rainbow-wisdom light standing upon a lotus base surmounted by sun and moon discs. She is leaning to her left, as if about to walk. She tramples a demon under each foot. A halo of wisdom fire surrounds her body while the sun and moon shine in the sky above. This is how we should visualize ourselves.



In the space before us we see Guru Padmasambhava as the root teacher, the embodiment of all buddhas, the dharma, the sangha, all gurus, devas and dakinis. He represents all enlightened masters and possesses all the skillful means which lead to perfect realization of our true nature. Having visualized yourself as "wisdom", Guru Padmasambhava is "skillful means." You're going to merge these two in order to awaken your Buddha nature.

Guru Yoga is the most important practice in the Vajrayana path. The Four Reversals we recite at the beginning of ngondro invoke the blessings of Guru Padmasambhava and develop into Guru Yoga. The essence of ngondro is Guru Yoga, although this practice is not limited to the ngondro. Guru Padmasambhava is known as the Buddha of the Degenerate Era. As the degeneration proceeds, if we invoke his blessings and meditate on Guru Padmasambhava, obstacles can be removed very easily and we will have a realization that can benefit other sentient beings. Therefore, it is very important to do this practice. Always

mingle your mind with the mind of Guru Padmasambhava. Invoke your Buddha Nature in absolute union with Guru Rinpoche all the time.

The Nyingma are not the only ones who practice on Padmasambhava. He is the Buddha or Guru for all schools of Tibetan Buddhism, such as the Sakya, Kagyu and Gelugpa. If we read the books, the biographies and lives of the great masters of the different lineages, there is hardly anyone who didn't receive teachings and blessings from Guru Padmasambhava in their visions, dreams or in the state of direct perception. Nearly every one was blessed by him, and thereby came to realization.

In Tibetan Buddhist history, Guru Padmasambhava is the founder of Tibetan Buddhism. He established the first schools of Vajrayana Buddhism in Tibet and blessed every part of the land. It is said in the teachings that there is not even one square inch of ground that was not blessed by Guru Padmasambhava. With the assistance of Wisdom Dakini Yeshe Tshogyal, he hid termas, lineage teachings and ritual objects throughout Tibet, in rocky mountains, in lakes, rivers, trees, in the sky, and many other places. He gave many prophecies and explained how to use the termas to benefit all sentient beings from generation to generation until now.

Guru Padmasambhava is not only for Tibetans. He worked for all sentient beings. For example, among the eight emanations of Guru Padmasambhava, only two occur in Tibet. The rest happen in different parts of the world. He has always been blessing practitioners throughout all of history. As Guru Padmasambhava himself said, "Those who pray with confidence, concentration and bodhicitta are always heard by me."

There are many important reasons to practice on Guru Rinpoche; for the purpose of overcoming degeneration, for the removal of one's own obscurations, as well as to help sentient beings and to bring peace and harmony to the world. Therefore, practicing Guru Yoga is important.

Guru Padmasambhava is visualized with one face, two arms and two legs, seated in the posture of royal ease upon a sun and moon disk. His right hand holds a five pointed vajra while the left makes the equanimity mudra near his navel center. In the palm of his left hand, he holds a skull cup filled with long-life nectar and a small vase filled with blissful amrita. Wisdom light radiates from these objects. Like Vajrayogini, a trident staff or katvanga leans across his left shoulder. Guru Padmasambhava appears in a wisdom body, brilliant with the energy of love and compassion. Wisdom lights radiate in all directions. Feel a very strong sense of presence and closeness between yourself and Guru Padmasambhava. In that disposition, see the entire universe as the mandala of the guru. Recognize that everything is a display of Guru Padmasambhava.

Now, full of confidence, devotion, closeness, warmth and presence, chant the following prayer three times:

DU SUM SANGYE MA LU DU PAI KU
TSAWAI LAMA CHOG LA SOL WA DEB
DI CHI BARDO SUM DU THUG JE ZUNG
DU SUM GYUN CHED MED PAR CHIN GYI LOB

**The embodiment of all the Buddhas of the three times,
without exception.**

Most excellent root teacher, I pray to you.

In this and future lives, and in the bardo, in these three,

**Hold me with your compassion
Bless me ceaselessly throughout the three times!**

Then chant the mantra of Guru Padmasambhava:

OM AH HUNG VAJRA GURU PEMA SIDDHI HUNG



Do this for as long as you have time, all the while concentrating on Guru Padmasambhava and continuing to visualize yourself as Vajrayogini. At times focus on devotional feelings and opening your heart to the presence of the lama. At other times, generate an appreciative awareness of how precious this relationship is. Shift your concentration to various aspects and feel the resonances of this bond while continuing to recite the prayers.

Then begin reciting the Vajra Guru Mantra as many times as you can. Don't skip or add any syllables to it and chant it to a beautiful tune. Try to recite at least one mala of this mantra per session. When you are done, chant the following lines:

**The blessings and empowerments of body, speech, and mind
Are completely and perfectly obtained.**

While chanting this, visualize three radiant syllables in Guru Padmasambhava's three places; a white OM at his forehead, a red AH in his speech center, and a blue HUM at his heart. If you find these difficult to visualize, simply imagine white, red and blue lights glowing in those three places. Near the end of the mantra recitation, a small circle of white light flies out like a shooting star from Guru Padmasambhava's forehead and enters directly into your own, transferring all the body blessings of Guru Padmasambhava and removing your physical obscurations. This light actualizes the nirmanakaya.

From the red syllable AH at Guru Padmasambhava's throat, a point of red light emanates and enters your speech center, removing all obscurations associated with speech and actualizing the sambhogakaya. A strong blue light emanates from the syllable HUM at the heart of Guru Padmasambhava, penetrating your heart center, transferring the blessings of his wisdom mind. This removes your mental obscurations and actualizes the dharmakaya of Buddhahood. Finally, lights radiate out from Guru Padmasambhava's forehead, throat and heart. Simultaneously, the lights enter your three centers, transferring the complete blessings of his realization, purifying all residual habits. This fourth radiation actualizes full realization of Buddhahood, which is also known as the svabhavikakaya. Finally, the guru dissolves into light. These phases are a condensed version of the four empowerments.

When you receive the blessings of Guru Padmasambhava, do not expect that he will appear in this colorful costume with a trident, holding a skull cup and dorje and wearing a special hat. But if you practice focusing your love and devotion in this way, you will definitely experience clarity, a sky-like awareness and a calm, joyful mind. That is the light of Guru Padmasambhava, the first stage of his blessing. Then you can develop higher and higher and really remove obscurations and obstacles. You may even have experiences in visions, dreams or the waking state. But don't expect that he will appear anything like he does in thangkas. To help sentient beings, Guru Rinpoche works through many different forms and mediums.

As the guru dissolves into lights which are absorbed into your three places, chant these words:

VAJRA GURU KAYA WAKA TSITTA SIDDHI HUM

Kaya means body, waka means speech, tsitta means mind, and siddhi in this case, means completed. This means that all spiritual accomplishments are complete.

LAMA OD ZHU RANG THIM YER MED NGANG
RIG TONG DON GYI LAMAI RANG ZHAL TA

**The teacher dissolves into light, is absorbed into oneself,
And becomes inseparable with one's own state of being.
Behold the emptiness-awareness, the true face of the lama!**

Guru Padmasambhava dissolves into multi-colored points of light about the size

of peas, which shower out of his crown chakra into yours and descend through your central channel, concentrating in your heart center. This symbolizes the union of skillful means and wisdom, which have completely united. You are now in the domain of absolute truth, the unconditional, ultimate reality of the guru. From this viewpoint, there is no difference between Guru Padmasambhava and Vajrayogini or subject and object. Everything is merged into the singularity of true awareness or *rigpa*. To let your mind relax in that state is known as "beholding the emptiness-awareness, the true face of the lama," which is the union of skillful means and wisdom, the merging of guru, dakini, and deity with one's own non-conceptual awareness.

The guru embodies skillful means, the dakini is wisdom and the yidam is their union. In one session of guru yoga, you can attain union with all Three Roots. Absorbing the guru into oneself, remain in meditation as long as you have time. This is the highest form of meditation and is no different than what is practiced in the Dzogchen or Mahamudra traditions. Relax into this absolute state without succumbing to mental activities. To maintain ourselves in the pure and simple state of our true nature is the highest form of meditation and practice.

Continue to meditate in this way for as long as you can. At the end of the session, when everything arises, hold the vision and observe phenomena from the primordial state; see all things as they are, including your body and identity, as transient forms of reflected light or as the flow of surface waves and tides on the ocean. Observe without grasping or holding on to any of it, let things arise, and let them go. Don't block the movement of the true nature. Learn to perform all your activities within this awareness. Even if you have a high realization, always respect and appreciate the patterns of phenomenal existence.

Begin the ngondro practices focusing on Guru Yoga. Start by taking refuge and generating bodhicitta briefly, then go to the Guru Yoga and practice it as I said. If you are somehow very busy and don't have enough time, then just do the Seven Line Prayer three or seven times, recite the mantra of Guru Padmasambhava and receive blessings before meditating. Always practice with concentration and confidence. If we do that, there is no need to doubt that we are going to achieve great results.

This completes a brief look at the practice of guru yoga.

SIXTH: The Transference (Phowa)

The sixth section of the ngöndro is the practice of *phowa* or the transference of consciousness after death. Briefly, we have a body, the power of speech, and the mind. In the common view, mind is the occupant and the body is the residence. On the deeper levels of Buddhist philosophy, the body and speech are both considered temporary residents of the mind. In either case, we're leasing this home for a short time and the landlord is not very helpful. If anything breaks, you have to fix and pay for it yourself! One way or another, sooner or later, the body and the mind are going to have to separate. We are not going to stay like this forever.

Phowa or transference is relevant because of the inevitability of the body-mind separation. Buddha gave many different teachings on this pivotal transition. Before you leave home, you have to consider the manner of your departure. Should you rent a truck or carry the luggage on your back, as is done all over Asia? Will you go by bus or train, fly coach or hire the space shuttle? And where should you go? Phowa practice is designed to lead the mind to the pure land of the Buddha Amitabha. That's where we

plan on going. In Sanskrit this is known as 'Sukhavati' or in Tibetan as 'Dewachen' which translates as great bliss. Buddha Shakyamuni said that this is the place where all enlightened beings reside; Green Tara, White Tara, Avalokitesvara, Guru Padmasambhava and all the buddhas and great bodhisattvas. Knowing this should fill you with confidence and joy, as you contemplate going there yourself. Simply think, "When the time comes, my consciousness will go to Buddha Amitabha's pure land."



In preparation for the ejection, there are a number of visualizations involving the movement of syllables in the channels and other exercises. Phowa is an entire system of practices designed to establish this connection so that we can easily transfer our consciousness to the pure land of Buddha Amitabha at death. It is with that intention that we approach this practice as part of the ngöndro.

The simplest application of the phowa is to remain as you normally appear while visualizing Buddha Amitabha one arm's length above your crown chakra. Imagine your consciousness concentrated in your central channel, which is wide open at the crown. This open window is a direct conduit to the heart of Amitabha.

GONPO OD PAG MED LA SOL WA DEB
ZAB LAM PHO WA JONG WAR CHIN GYI LOB

I pray to the protector Amitabha, the Buddha of limitless light.

**Grant me the blessings to perfect the Transference of Consciousness,
in the profound path of Phowa.**

Chant these lines while you hold this intention with strength and sincerity. Imagine your consciousness ascending to the heart center of the Buddha Amitabha and then returning. It is not really necessary to visualize consciousness leaving the body. Simply think, "When the time comes, this is what I will do; I am definitely going to transfer my consciousness to the heart center of Buddha Amitabha." Practicing in this way opens us to this possibility, and prepares the passage for the transference of consciousness to Dewachen. Although it is not mentioned here, you can conclude the practice by envisioning Buddha Amitabha dissolving into light, which is absorbed into your heart center and merges with your awareness. Meditate for a short time in that union.

SEVENTH: Chöd Practice and Dedication Prayers

The seventh and final section of the ngöndro is a combination of the *chöd* practice and dedication prayers.

There's three lines:

DA NI LU DANG LONG CHOD GE TSAR CHE
MA GYUR DRO LA PHANG PA MED PAR TANG
DRO DON LAB CHEN GEG MED DRUB PAR SHOG

**Now, my body, possessions, and the source of my virtue, all together,
I give without clinging to all beings who have been my parents.
May I accomplish great benefits, unobstructedly, for all beings.**

What is the meaning of the Chöd? Like Phowa, Chöd is also an elaborate Vajrayana teaching involving a whole system of practices. Chöd means cutting through. What is it you are cutting through? Ego-clinging, self grasping, fear and the holding of dualistic thoughts. To begin this practice, we focus on dualistic thoughts and ego-clinging. This attitude of self-grasping is the root of all our illusory fabrications. It is the source of all of our difficulties. So we cut it immediately, giving ego-clinging a blow to the head.

How do we make this cut? In the disposition of profound equanimity, knowing that our true nature is as vast as the sky. We must have a basic realization of great openness. The unshakeable equanimity of the true nature is beyond hope and intimidation, so be fearless and confident in your approach.

In a sadhana called the "Bellowing Laugh of the Dakinis" by the famous Nyingma master Jigme Lingpa, he wrote-

"I am a fearless yogi who practices crazy wisdom activity. Through realization which encompasses samsara and nirvana as equal, I dance and trample upon the demons of ego-clinging and grind samsaric, dualistic thinking into dust."

With such thoughts, we make a gift of ourselves and share everything that we have, including the body, with all beings without any exceptions or partiality. That's the way to cut off ego-clinging and the basic idea behind Chöd practice.

The third and last line is a dedication of merit to all beings combined with an aspirational prayer. In English it says: "May I accomplish great benefits, unobstructedly, for all beings." This aspirational-dedication prayer concludes the whole ngöndro practice, not just the Chöd section. You're sharing whatever merit you have accumulated from performing the ngöndro for the joy, peace and complete enlightenment of all beings. You are also expressing an aspirational wish to be a continual source of benefit to all sentient beings until they all reach enlightenment. As Longchenpa says in another prayer, "May I not become bored and tired of accomplishing the benefit of others. By my own tremendous, impartial service to others, may everyone attain Buddhahood together."

Now I have completely opened the ngöndro practice to you and explained many different aspects of it so that you can begin to engage it with a good understanding of what you are doing. There is one last important point you should know. Each of the major sections is to be practiced one hundred thousand times. The refuge practice, prostrations, generating the bodhicitta, the mandala offering, Vajrasattva's one-hundred-syllable mantra, and the mantra of Guru Padmasambhava are all performed one hundred thousand times. And, of course, as good practitioners you'll want to add more onto each of those. But it's not just about numbers. Each time that you practice you should merge your heart and mind with the true meaning of the prayers, visualizations and meditation. That's the right spirit in which to practice the ngöndro. In this way, it becomes the completion stage practice for all the Buddha's teachings. This is very special.

In the nineteenth century, the famous Nyingma master Patrul Rinpoche made ngöndro one of his main practices. He was a great Dzogchen yogi, a very highly realized being, and a leading lineage master of his day. Nonetheless, he completed the ngöndro again and again.

When you begin, only do as much as you can. You don't have to finish the accumulations in six months or even a year, but keep it up. Make the ngöndro the main part of your practice and complete it as soon as you can.

Questions and Answers:

Q: The Seven Line Prayer [*tshig bdun gsol 'debs bzhugs so*] appears not to be a part of the ngöndro; do you recommend doing it as part of the guru yoga section anyway?

A: Yes definitely, if your time permits. It is good to include three repetitions of the Seven Line Prayer as part of the ngöndro practice and to follow it with the mantra of Guru Padmasambhava. It can be added into the section of guru yoga after the four lines that begin with DU SUM SANGYE MA LU DU PAI KU. This is very good to do. If you don't have time to do the whole ngöndro practice, then simply begin with the guru yoga. Visualize yourself as Vajrayogini gazing upon Guru Padmasambhava and then, full of devotion, love, compassion and a feeling of closeness, chant the Seven Line Prayer three times, and recite a mala of the Twelve Syllable Mantra. Do as much as you have time for. Receive the blessings as Guru Padmasambhava dissolves back into the natural state, meditate for a few minutes and dedicate the merit.

Q: How long does it take to go through the whole thing?

A: It depends, but a good average might run about 30-40 minutes. If you put more time into the visualizations, chanting or emptiness meditation, it might be longer. When you

start, don't engage the practice for a long time, make your sessions short. As you get comfortable with it, you can add more time.

Q: Can you say more about the winds, drops and channels in relation to the inner aspect of refuge?

A: There's numerous teachings in the Vajrayana, but according to the inner tantras, the channels correspond to the nirmanakaya as do the dakinis, the wind systems correspond to the sambhogakaya as do the deities, and the essence elements of the body are dharmakaya, which also appears in the form of the lama or guru. In the tantric teachings, there are meanings and correspondences at many levels. The channels, winds and essence elements of the body are part of the dynamics of the true nature. Because of them, we are aware of the entire universe of phenomena. Without these three, nothing will arise. They reflect the subtle energy of our true nature which is projected out into many coarser forms and conditions. On the absolute level, the *rtsa*, *rlung* and *thig-le* are no other than the three kayas or the three objects of refuge.

According to Dzogchen, in the ultimate state everything is complete within *rigpa* or the true nature. Emptiness, clarity and their union are the three kayas, the three roots and the three jewels; *rigpa* itself embodies everything we've just explained: the winds, drops and channels and the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha are all complete within this singularity. It's sometimes called the one-bindu state or zero condition.

