Jean~Luc Achard

The Instructions on the Primordial A





A Khrid Studies, Volume 1

The Fifteen Sessions of Practice, Guru-yoga,
Instructions without Characteristics, and Phowa Teachings
By Jean-Luc Achard

This volume is mostly based on the French translations and abridgements that have been prepared as private complements to the teachings of HH Menri Trizin Rinpoche (Lungtok Tenpai Nyima) given in the USA and which have been transcribed for the Bonpo Foundation. The present work is actually a very humble contribution to the knowledge of the A khrid system of teachings dedicated to the long life of His Holiness and to support his activities in respect of the tradition and the continuity of its principles.



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by

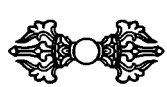
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Acknowledgments

This volume is mostly based on the French translations and abridgements that have been prepared for publication by the Khyung-Lung Editions. The present work is the second edition of the original book published by the Naldjor Institute. It has been augmented with a section of biographies containing, in abridged form, the life-stories of four of the most important lineage holders of *Atri* (*A khrid*): 1. Dampa Ritröpa Chenpo, the founder of the lineage; 2. Yorpo Mepel, the 5th lineage holder, who was probably the first to use the expression *Atri* to characterize these teachings; 3. Kündröl Drakpa, the 26th lineage holder, who elaborated a fascinating set of complementary instructions associated with the original instructions of *Atri*; and 4. Shardza Rinpoche, one of the most important recent masters of Bön who reached Rainbow Body in 1934.

I would like to thank all the people who have helped in one way or another in the production of this book, starting with Marianne Ginalski, Michael J. Hunt and Windsor Viney who have kindly agreed to read the final draft of this work. Their help has been decisive in bringing this book to light. I would like to also thank M. Gerd Manusch of the Naldjor Institute who published the first edition of this book (minus the biographical section), back in 2008, as well as M. Bidur Dangol, director of Vajra Publications, for his invaluable patience during the production of this second edition.

Jean-Luc Achard,
April 2012

Introduction

The *Atri* (*A khrid*) tradition of Dzogchen is one of the most important spiritual lineages of Bön, together with the *Zhangzhung Nyengyü* and the *Dzogchen Yangtse Longchen*[1]. Unlike the cycle of the *Nyengyü* which is an oral transmission and the *Yangtse Longchen* which is a Terma (*gter ma*), the *Atri* system is a composition elaborated by Me'u Gongdzö Dampa Ritröpa Chenpo (1038–1096). Dampa Ritröpa had received the transmission of a series of texts belonging to the Mind Series (*Sems sde*) but felt quite uneasy at putting them into practice because of the lack of a practice manual able to support his meditation. He therefore decided to compile such a manual and to arrange it in specific sessions (*thun mtshams*) of practice. Some have suggested that he based the manual on the corpus of the *Six Tantras of the Wrathful Ones* (*Khro bo rgyud drug*) but this is a mistake. He actually based it on the collection known as the *Nine Lower Works on Mind* (*Sems smad sde dgu*)[2] which contain some of the most important *Semde* texts of the whole Dzogchen tradition. That collection is divided into three parts :

— the *Cycle of the Nine Secrets of the Pure and Perfect Mind* (*Byang sems gab pa dgu skor*), of which several important commentaries are still extant and form a part of the root texts to be studied in the Dzogchen Program when starting an *Atri* retreat;

---

[1] *Atri* means Guidance or Instructions (*khrid*) on the [primordial state symbolized by the letter] *A*. It would seem that the name was given to this set of teachings by the 5th lineage holder, Yorpo Mepel, or that it became in use during the lifetime of this master.

[2] Discovered in 1017 CE in Dritsam Thakar by the famed *tertön*, Shenchen Luga (b. 996), the most important Treasure revealer of the whole Bönpo tradition.

— the *Cuckoo of Awareness* (*Rig pa'i khu byug*) which is different from the work with the same title in the Nyingma tradition and which contains hidden Thögel instructions;[1] and
— the *Seven Minor Works on Mind* (*Sems phran sde bdun*) which completes the collection of the nine root works.

Each of these texts comes up with a table of contents, a root treatise and a commentary. It is from these works that Dampa Ritröpa elaborated his system of meditation. However, it seems it was not put into an elaborate written form nor given the name *Atri* before the time of the fifth lineage holder, Yorpo Mepel (1134–1169). At that time, it seems that the collection had eight or ten sessions (not eighty, as is often thought). Later, Dru Gyelwa Yungdrung (1242–1290) expanded these instructions and produced a system of fifteen sessions which is summarized in the present volume. This system was then transmitted in an uninterrupted lineage down to our time. In the 18th century, the first Kündröl Rinpoche (b. 1700) elaborated his own system containing the core essential instructions of Dzogchen in the *Atri* context, called *Pointing out at the Essentials* (*dMar mo mdzub tshugs*). Another lineage was then elaborated in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by Shardza Rinpoche with his famed *Ocean of Oral Instructions of Atri* and his even more famous *Natural Arising of the Three Bodies* (*sKu gsum rang shar*). Yongdzin Rinpoche also informed me that his own master, Yongdzin Tsültrim Gyeltsen Rinpoche (1893-1967), compiled a set of instructions on the preliminaries of *Atri* but it seems there was only a single manuscript (the original) which was lost during the havocs of the invasion of Tibet. We are now fortunate to have access to the transcripts of teachings given by HH Lungtok Tenpai Nyima Rinpoche which are an authentic source of inspiration.

*

[1] The french translation of this text as well as those of the *Seven Minor Works on Mind* have been accepted by the Khyung-Lung editions, together with their respective commentaries. These texts are probably the most important sources for the practice of *A khrid*.

With the exception of the biographies included in the next section, the present work contains four main chapters :

— an abridgement of the root text of the *Fifteen Sessions of Atri* (*Thun mtshams bco lnga pa*) by Dru Gyelwa Yungdrung;

— the practice of Guru-yoga in its very elaborate form as transmitted by Shardza Rinpoche according to his *Ocean of Oral Instructions of Atri* (*A khrid bka' lung rgya mtsho*);

— the translation of the practice without characteristics (*mshan med*) coming from a recently discovered manuscript in the possession of Yongdzin Rinpoche, followed by an original commentary; and

— instructions on the practice of *Phowa* (*'pho ba*) or transfer of consciousness at the time of death.

As usual, it is necessary to receive the proper transmission from a qualified master before starting the practice of these instructions. It is also necessary to receive full explanations on the procedure to follow and to practice these teachings during isolated retreats.





Me'u Gondzö Dampa Ritröpa Chenpo (1030-1096), the founder of the Atri system.

Biographical sketches of Four Lineages Holders of the Atri Instructions

1. Dampa Ritröpa Chenpo (Me'u Gongdzö, 1030-1096)

Me'u Gongdzö is the master who codified the original teachings of *Atri* and who transmitted them orally to his disciples. These teachings were later compiled, organized and written down by Yorpo Mepel in the first collection known to us as the *Yeru Atri Chenmo* (*g.Yas ru'i a khrid chen mo*) or *The Great Atri Teachings of Yeru* [*Ensakha*]. This compilation was the first one to use the expression *Atri* (*A khrid*), although it may no doubt have been used orally as a nickname by previous followers of the lineage. This point would actually need more research.

a. *Birth and meeting with his masters*

Me'u Ritrö Chenpo was born in 1038, in the place called Gurzhok, located in the Shongs (or Shangs) district of Yeru in Central Tibet. His father was called Shakya Ten of the Me'u (or sometimes Mi'u) clan while his mother was called Dorje Tso. He was the elder of four brothers. Due to the good fortune of his previous births and training in religion during these life-times, he was from childhood onwards genuinely indulging in virtues and shunning away from non-virtues. When he grew up, his parents forced him to marry and made him a house-holder at the age of eighteen. However, disgusted with worldly life, he tried to hurt his own body, faking painful wounds and thus he forsake his wife through this method.

At that time, he met Lama Kyese Chenpo from whom he received numerous tantric and Dzogchen teachings in which he trained faithfully. Moreover, he listened to the minor sections of Mind, including works like the *Gabpa* (*Gab pa*) or *Arcanum*, in the presence of Drutön Yungdrung and Drölwa Shengyel who was a "son of Zhu" (*zhu'i sras*).

Together with these two masters, he traveled to Upper Nyang to visit the master Takpa Khache from whom the little group lis-

tened to teachings on logic (*tshad ma*). Thereupon, Me'u Gongdzö reflected that the two masters would take up abbatial responsibilities and would maintain the tradition of explaining the Original Words of the Master (*bka'*), all activities in which Gongdzö had no interest. He rather wanted to spend his time practicing meditation in seclusion. He reflected that since he took this rare and precious human birth, the study of logic would prove meaningless for this life and he therefore decided to indulge into virtuous meditation practice only. He thus requested consecrations from his two masters and received from them both minor ordination vows, as well as the name of Yungdrung Gyeltsen.

Later, he traveled to Karpö Drak in Shangs and he met there Drötön (*a.k.a* Tretön Gocha) and Jetsün Trotsang Druklha (956-1077) from whom he received several oral instructions. He trained diligently according to these teachings, until an unsurpassed realization spontaneously arose in him. He thought :

« — I have a special practice here, together with those treatises. If I become a monk, then it will bring benefit to beings ! »

So he went to Ü (Central Tibet) and attended Khenpo Daryupa and Lopön Joyung before taking full monk vows at the age of twenty-four.

That same year, Khenpo Daryupa went to Tsang where he entered an intensive retreat in a hermitage. Me'u Gongdzö decided to follow his example in order to benefit sentient beings, remaining in his hermitage on Karpö Drak for twelve years. He meditated there in complete solitude, having cut all links with other people. He practiced meditation without distraction and with great zeal, day and night. Ultimately, he saw all illusory appearances liberate in and as the Space of Reality (*bon nyid kyi dbyings*). He obtained the Body of Immaculate Wisdom (*zag med ye shes sku*), while the supreme accomplishment (Buddhahood) instantaneously arose in him.

While he was residing in Kyarmolung, he clearly saw the faces of the deity Namdak, together with his Son, Wife and Attendants. Moreover, he could walk in the sky, pass through rocks, tread down pebbles as if they were dough, leave his feet and hand prints on rocks and display numerous other miracu-

lous activities. Those are described in details in his long biography (*rnam thar rgyas pa*).[1]

b. The manner in which he strove for liberating beings

Dampa gave his teachings to a group of four main disciples, instructing each of them in different matters. He gave the transmission of the teachings regarding View and Meditation of Dzogchen to Gomchen Barwa (the second lineage holder of *Atri*). He taught the practice of Secret Formulas (*gsang sngags*, i.e. Tantras) to Nüden Drupshen. He taught the practice of monastic discipline to Namdak Tsünpa, and he gave the teachings of the Great Vehicle to Jangchub Sempa. Moreover, he had thousands of qualified practitioners who attended his teachings on meditation and many of them reached the highest stages of accomplishment. Also, his compositions helped a lot of beings, leading them to the perfection of the two aims.[2]

c. The manner in which he passed into Space

When he was 59, he was invited by Sönam Gyel of the Trotsang family, to strive for the welfare of all beings and as he was going back home, he began to feel ill. For fourteen days, he nevertheless gave teachings and oral instructions to his attendants and on the 14th of the middle month of winter, in the Fire mouse year (1096), early at the break of dawn, his contemplation (*dgongs pa*) dissolved into the Space of Reality, amidst sounds, rays and lights.

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[1] The only biographies of Me'u Gongdzõ that have come down to us are the present one included in the *White Lotus* (pp. 3-8), the one included in *A tri thun tsam co nga pa* (pp. 8-14), the *Dam pa ri khrod pa'i rnam thar* in *Sources for a History of Bon* (pp. 326-344) and that included in the *Yeru Atri Chenmo* by Yorpo Mepel (*Bla ma'i rnam* thar, p. 1-7). This last reference is certainly the most ancient one. It will be discused elsewhere.

[2] *Don gnyis*, to practice for one's own good (*rang don*) and for the benefit of others (*gzhan don*).

As supports for guiding beings of future generations, many relics appeared during the cremation of his body, such as statues, seed-syllables, etc.

His main disciples continued his teachings and thus maintained his special tradition of practice. They were his four mind-sons (*thugs sras*), his two wives (*lcam gnyis*), his eight younger brothers (*gcung brgyad*), his two young sons (*tha chung*), the 58 Siddhas (*grub thob nga brgyad*), the 300 hermits wandering in the mountains, and thousands of disciples to whom he imparted guidance in meditation. Having begun teaching meditation guidance in a simple hermitage, the lamp of his teachings spread far and wide. In particular, he diffused the outer teachings of monastic discipline, the inner teachings of the Great Vehicle (Mahâyâna) and the secret teachings on the practice of View and Meditation (*lta sgom nyams len*).

His disciples diffused the teachings in the four directions of Tibet : Zhakgom Barwa (the same as Gomchen Barwa) in the east ; Phogom Zhikpo in the north ; Kyeme Drangsong in the west; and Yardrok Metön in the south. The master who received the *Atri* transmission and was to be the next lineage-holder was Tokden Gomchen Barwa.

Me'u Gongdzö was prophecized as being an emanation of the Buddha Tseme Öden in the text called *Kyangphak Nejang Drukcu* (*sKyang 'phags gnad byang drug cu*) where he is named Me'utön Dampa Ritrö and endowed with Kuntuzangpo's contemplation. He is said to have had hundreds of disciples who reached full and perfect enlightenment. In the *Dülwa Lingdrak* (*'Dul ba gling grags*, a historical work on monastic discipline) he is known as an emanation of Serthok Chejam and as belonging to the Me'u clan. However, in the *Magic Key of Drogön* (*'Gro mgon 'phrul lde*), he is regarded as an emanation of Sene Ga'u and known under his ordination name of Yungdrung Gyeltsen.



2. Drogön Yorpo Mepel (1134-1169)

Drogön Yorpo Mepel was born in the village of Döl in Yorpo province. His paternal clan was that of Mé. Owing to the good karma he had collected from past lives, the young Yorpo Mepel was endowed with capacities which enabled him to learn to read and write without any difficulties. In his late teens, he took the novice vows from Drutön Nyima Gyeltsen with whom he later studied teachings in depth, training in the art of listening, reflecting and meditating on the instructions he received from his master. He would soon show that he actually was gifted for Bön teachings since he promptly became an erudite expert in numerous tantric cycles and their oral transmissions.

He then took the complete vows of monk from Shentön Namkha Gyeltsen and kept his conduct pure without ever breaking a single commitment. One day, he met Dampa Tsülshé (Drilungpa Tsültrim Sherab, the preceding *Atri* lineage holder) and requested from him the direct introduction to the natural state and the teachings of *Atri*. After the transmission, Yorpo Mepel went into retreat and practiced the corresponding instructions with an immutable concentration. One day, he sung he following verses:

« — I, myself, Yorpo Mepel (The Glorious One from the Mé clan of Yorpo),
I have devotion for spiritual masters in general
But I pray in particular to the three benevolent ones ;
I have drank the flow of nectar of their oral instructions
And thus experiential realizations have been born in me.
However, I was wondering if these were to stabilize.
For that, I followed the Emanation Body named Nyima Gyeltsen
And have trained in listening and reflecting on three cycles of Tantras.
I have thus found that there is no object to purify or purifying agent
Because the Contemplation of the Buddhas truly abides in me.
At the feet of Shentön Namkha Gyeltsen,
I have taken the vows of profound purity.
I have thus found that there is no object to preserve or preserving agent
Because the Contemplation of the Buddhas truly abides in me.

Then, I have followed Zhang Dampa Tsulshe
And meditated in one-pointed, immutable absorption.
I have thus found that there is no object on which to meditate and no meditating agent
Because the Contemplation of the Buddha truly abides in me.
In the hermitage of Uri Nagpo, the Central Black Mountain,
I have performed the practices of the tutelary deities.
I have thus found that there is no object to accomplish and no accomplishing agent
Because the Contemplation of the Buddha truly abides in me.
When I practice in this way,
The experiential master arises from within.
I have thus found that there is no object arising and no agent causing this arising
Because the Contemplation of the Buddha truly abides in me. »

Yorpo Mepel practiced intensively in various holy places, such as Uri Nagpo and the Yarlha Shampo mountain range. There, in the wilderness, he was able to recognize the true nature of his mend and to realize the union of the Base (*gzhi*) and Awareness (*rig pa*). When his contemplative experiences reached an ultimate threshold, he is said to have eventually obtained the state of Buddhahood.

Had he had time, he would certainly have largely contributed to the development of Bon literature (most of his works have not come down to us) but he passed away in 1169, at the age of 35, in Nyimo Rutsam. It is reported that at the time of his passing, the sky was filled with rainbows, lights, etc. For the benefit of future generations, he left relics in the ashes of his cremations, as well as his heart and tongue which were not consumed during the funerals.

Despite his young age, he attracted numerous students, starting with Drogon Dutsi Gyeltsen who became his heir in the lineage of *Atri*.



3. Kündröl Drakpa (b. 1700)

Kündröl Drakpa was the twenty-sixth lineage holder of the *Atri* system. He was born in Golam in the Dreshö district of Khyung-

po, within the Mutsa Ga clan. His father was called Mengyel Drungmu Wer (Yungdrung Gyelpo) and his mother, Takza Tsering Tso. Until the age of four, he did not utter a single word, when one day, as he was at the entrance door of his house, he saw a yogi. He went straight back inside the house telling everyone that an old man was at the door. Everybody was amazed to hear him talk for the first time. Some have reported that the yogi he saw at that time was probably the famed ancient immortal Tonggyung Thuchen who lived centuries before the Yarlung dynasty. On another occasion when he was five, he was scold by his father as he kept playing with a group of other children. The young Kündröl replied: "Father, if my body delights in playing with other children, my own mind, being the Absolute Body (bon sku), remains immutable ('gyur ba med)!" Everyone who attended the scene was astonished by the child's premature intelligence.

During his early childhood his parents moved twice in between Kongpo and Khyungpo which did not help in getting him a proper education. He thus learned to read and write quite late, at the age of nine but he did it with such mastery that it did not take him very long to memorize the rules of writing, grammar, etc.

Later in life, Kündröl Drakpa took the vows of monk from Geshe Yungdrung Tenzin and received the ordination name of "Namkha Yeshe". From the Geshe, Kündröl received all initiations (dbang), reading authorizations (lung) and instructions (khrid) associated with outer, inner and secret teachings of Bön. It is from this very same Geshe that he received for the first time the direct introduction to the natural state (gnas lugs ngo sprod), enabling him to improve his realization which became as vast as the sky.

Some time after that, he travelled to Central Tibet where he met Rinchen Özer, the then Abbot of Menri, receiving from him the full vows of monk, as well as the new ordination name of "Gyelwa Özer". While he was in Central Tibet, he took the opportunity to study with the lineages holders of the most famous Bönpos clans, such as the Dru, Zhu, Pa, Me'u and Shen clans. His knowledge became encyclopedic and his yogic capacities were so enhanced that, even during winter, he was able to wear only a thin cotton dress, as a sign of his mastery over channels

and winds (rtsa rlung). He spent a lot of time in retreat with little food and tea, surviving on a few bowls of light tea and a small amount of Tsampa every day.

The date of Kündröl's passing is still unknown but it is certain that he lived at least until 1769. According to the later tradition reporting his demise, Kündröl's passing was accompanied by many marvels, such as rainbows appearing spontaneously in the sky, rains of flowers, etc., signs indicating his mastery over the entire set of Bön teachings.

Kündröl's interest in *Atri* instructions led him to elaborate a system of teachings based on the "Red Guidance" (*dmar khrid*) that were earlier handed over by earlier lineages holders, starting with Tagu Nyigyel (the 21st master of in the line of transmission). Kündröl compiled and organized these instructions in a cycle known as *Pointing at the Essentials* (*dMar mo mdzub tshugs*). The great characteristic of this "new" cycle associated with Atri is that it incorporates instructions which are generally associated with the Precepts Series (*Man ngag sde*) of Dzogchen, such as dark retreats (mun mtshams), daylight Thögel (thod rgal), but also yogic techniques such as "the swift path of the Messenger" (*pho nya'i mgyogs lam*) which is based on consort practice, etc. These teachings were to have a tremendous influence on the later masters of the lineage, starting with Dechen Lingpa (1833-1893) from whom a special Atri lineage branched out of the main line of transmission, and also Shardza Rinpoche (1859-1934) for whom Atri teachings became central.

Shardza Tashi Gyeltsen (1859-1934)

Shardza Tashi Gyeltsen was born in 1859 in the Shardza district of Kham (Eastern Tibet) and was the 31st lineage holder of the original *Atri* line of transmission. From an early age, he studied with Ratrül Tenzin Wangyel Rinpoche, an important local *tertön* from whom he received the Refuge vows. Later, he met another famous *tertön* of his time, Kündröl Sangtsel (*a.k.a* Dechen Lingpa 1833-1893) who gave him the transmission of an important line of *Atri* teachings initiated by the first Kündröl

Rinpoche, which had been handed over by lineage holders in Eastern Tibet.

After receiving minor ordination vows from the Rablek Yungdrung Ling abbot, Shardza went to Taktrül Shengyel Tenzin from whom he took the complete vows of monk. After that, he met Gyelse Tsewang Gyurme (Dechen Lingpa' son) and received from him the special *Atri* teachings associated with the latter's paternal transmission. He then had the opportunity to study with important masters from Eastern Tibet, such as the 5th Kündröl Rinpoche, as well as with Taktse Yungdrung Wangyel and the famed Metön Nyima Gyeltsen. From these masters, Shardza Rinpoche received all outer, inner and secret initiations (*dbang*), as well as countless reading authorizations (*lung*) and guidance instructions (*khrid*).

There exist numerous miraculous stories about Shardza Rinpoche covering his entire lifespan. It is reported that when he was doing his *Yidam* practice, his meditation cell blazed with lights, projecting *tsatsas* and sparks of light, and that the water contained in his ritual vase boiled during the practice. His control of the Eight Classes (*sde brgyad*) and Bön Protectors (*bon skyong*) is also described in his standard biography by Ratön Pa ita. One day, after he had gone to Menri Monastery in Tsang, he had a vision of Nyamme Sherab Gyeltsen and in the course of the night he was guided through pure realms where he met Knowledge-Holders (*rig 'dzin*) and where he received their oral instructions. He also performed several retreats based on the purification of the seeds of the six realms within the body, as well as dark retreats (*mun mtshams*) during which he had visions of Clear-Light corresponding to the complete display of the Thögel (*thod* rgal) visions.

His biography reports that he received many oral transmissions (*snyan brgyud*, during visions), as well as Contemplation Treasures (*dgongs gter*) but it is said that, except for some compositions based on such inspirational teachings, he kept them secret and did not diffuse them.

Following the advice of two of his masters — Dechen Lingpa and the latter's son, Tsewang Gyurmé — Shardza wrote an extensive treatise on the preliminaries of *Atri*, entitled *The Ocean of the Oral Instructions on Preliminaries* (*sNgon 'gro bka' lung brgya mtsho*), based on the Dru tradition. Later, he received the

transmission of one of the most important Tantras of the entire Bön tradition, *The Tantra of the Principles of the Three Bodies* (*sKu gsum don rgyud*) from the *tertön* of the text, Welter Sangngak Lingpa (1864-?). Using this Tantra as his source, as well as the *Oral Transmission of Zhangzhung* and other texts, he elaborated a complex set of teachings known as *The Natural Arising of the Three Bodies* (*sKu gsum rang shar*). This work has become one of the most important Dzogchen cycles of the entire tradition of the Great Perfection.

Shardza Rinpoche kept a very strict schedule of practice and, except during his travels and teaching programs in various monasteries, he mostly stayed in retreat or in intensive daily practice, however allowing time for transmissions and advice to his disciples. He said himself:

« — Since I reached the age of seventeen,
I have never stopped the practice of virtues.
Without falling under the evil power of distraction,
I have performed strict retreats and practices,
So much so that each time, I reached success in accomplishments.
I have maintained this method throughout years
And even when it was time for sleep, I kept on practicing.
Therefore, within my experiences, I have found complete certainty
And everything has been exhausted within the Base of my natural state.
If I were to die now, I, the mendicant, I would have a happy mind
And if I am to live on, I, the mendicant, I will have a happy mind. »

At the end of his life, and in consequence of his mastery of the practice of Clear-Light (*'od gsal*), Shardza entered an ultimate retreat and reached Buddhahood while manifesting a sign of his realization of Dzogchen: the Rainbow Body (*'ja' lus*). A few days before that manifestation, he stayed in a small tent and asked that it be sewed. After some time, sounds and lights started to come from the tent and his disciples realized that the master was manifesting the Rainbow Body. One of them decided to enter the tent and took hold of Shardza Rinpoche's body which

had reduced to the size of a one year old child. His hair and nails had already fallen in the folds of his robes. After that the remains of his body were kept in a shrine in the college below his hermitage.

Shardza Rinpoche's influence of the later Bön tradition has been considerable and down to the present day, his tradition remains one of the most active, not only in terms of Dzogchen teachings, but also in terms of Sutras and Tantras. One of his manuals, *The Heart Drops of Kuntuzangpo* (*Kun bzang snying thig*), has been the first public book in a western language to reveal explicit Thögel instructions to a large audience. His *Atri* teachings are also well-known in Tibet and in Exile but they are less famous among western practitioners, despite the recent diffusion of complete transmissions of *The Natural Arising of the Three Bodies* in France and selections of it elsewhere.





Shardza Tashi Gyeltsen (1859-1934)

Abridged Instructions for the Practice of the Fifteen Sessions of Atri

[*A khrid thun mtshams bco lnga pa'i nyams len khrid kyi mdor bsdus*]

Homage to the masters of the lineage!

The teachings of the *Fifteen Sessions of Atri* will be described here in three parts:

1. the preliminaries,
2. the main practice, and
3. the instructions on the ultimate Fruit.

The preliminaries cover sessions nos. 1–4, the main practice, nos. 5–10, and the teachings on the Fruit, nos. 11–15.

The Preliminaries

The preliminaries cover the first four sessions of instructions, and concern: 1. the reflection on impermanence, 2. the practices of generating *Bodhicitta* (Pure and Perfect Mind), taking Refuge and confessing vices, 3. the *mandala* offering, and 4. the prayer to the master or the practice of Guru-yoga by which the blessings of the lineage are obtained.

— Session no. 1 — The Entrance into the Practice of the Path: the Reflection on Impermanence

[1]. First sit in the fivefold position and suddenly shout *Phat!* in order to induce the entrance into an absorption state (*samadhi*) in which there is no attachment whatsoever.[1]

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[1] 1. The legs are crossed in the lotus position; 2. the hands are joined in the equipoise mudra; 3. the back is kept sraight; 4. the neck is slightly bent forward; and 5. the gaze is directed along the line of the nose. See pp. 31-32.

[2]. Then, reflect on the human body has having the nature of a corpse, as being similar to a bubble appearing on a lake, etc The time of death is totally undetermined, as well as the place where death will occur, the circumstances that will characterize it, etc. The only thing that one can be certain of is that death is ineluctable. When the moment has come, riches and relations are of no use and are actually causes leading to further suffering.

[3]. You should ponder upon these reflections on impermanence, so that a deep feeling of renunciation from the world dawns naturally within your mental continuum. Outer manifestations will appear as illusory and unreal, and all attachments will naturally disappear, to the extent that the sole reflection that should arise in your mind is the concentration on the principle of the Great Vehicle (i.e., the natural state of the Great Perfection),[1] which is explained in the sessions of the main practice.

[4]. Meditate in this manner for a duration of five to seven days These reflections are the first of the fifteen sessions of Atri.[2]

— Session no. 2 —
Bodhicitta, Refuge, and Confession

[1]. Generating the Pure and Perfect Mind (*bodhicitta*) — Sit in the fivefold position or in the crouching Rishi posture[3] and concentrate your gaze between the eyebrows. Then, generate an inner altruistic condition with the aim of helping all sentient beings who, at one time or another, were your mother. To help them means aspiring to guide them on the Path to Liberation and to install them in a condition free from all suffering. Mentally generate this inner state by reciting the relevant verses

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[1] In this context of Dzogchen teachings, the Great Vehicle (*theg chen*) refers to the Great Perfection and not to the Mahâyâna as one would expect.

[2] All these meditations are to be understood as performed during retreats in an isolated place.

[3] Crouching with the soles of the feet on the ground and the knees surrounded by the arms.

and train in this practice until Samsara has become entirely exhausted.

[2]. Taking Refuge — In the same posture as before, join the palms of the hands and visualize in the space before you the master sitting on a throne. Imagine that the Master dissolves into lights and that these transform into Künzang Shenlha, of white complexion and adorned with the ornaments of peaceful deities. Imagine that all the masters that you have followed and studied with dissolve into him. Then, imagine that rays of light burst out of his Body, Speech and Mind in order to invite the hosts of Yidams, Buddhas and their sons, Dakinis and all the Masters of the lineage. All these emanations come to stand around him. Behind Künzang Shenlha, visualize the supports of the Body (statues), of Speech (texts in pecha form) and Mind (stupas).

Then, project myriads of emanations of yourself who will guide beings with compassion and imagine that all bow down in the direction of the central Buddha. Recite the corresponding verses of Refuge and pray that the Buddhas grant you their protection in this life, during the bardo and in the following rebirth. Imagine that rays arise from the heart of the Buddhas, dispelling all obstacles and bringing you under their protection.

[3]. Confession — In front of these Objects of Refuge, confess all the non-virtues and evil deeds that you have committed since time without beginning, throughout all your lifetimes, including the evil deeds that you prompted others to commit, those you rejoiced in, those that have reached or not reached their fruition, as well as all subtle and gross negative actions.

Generate an inner feeling of deep regret for these activities and offer your confession in this way. Then, imagine that rays of light, similar to a flow of water, arise from the heart of the deities and enter you through the crown of your head. At that time, imagine that all your evil deeds and karmic traces are expelled through the two lower doors and the nails of the feet in the form of a darkish melted butter. Imagine that all evil deeds and karmic traces are thus purified, and take the resolution to avoid all kinds of vicious activity while inwardly exhorting others to do the same. Moreover, rejoice in the virtuous activities performed

by others and recite the corresponding verses.

[4]. These instructions are explained according to the tradition of Dülwa Rinpoche, who was a master of Dru Gyelwa Yungdrung.[1] They have to be practiced during a retreat of seven or nine consecutive days, and form the second of the fifteen sessions of *Atri.*

— Session no. 3 —
Mandala offering

[1]. The support used for the offering of the Mandala can, at best, be of gold or silver, or bronze or a similar metal, or at worst of wood or earth. For the offering substances, precious stones, seashells, or even just grains can be used.

[2]. First, generate *bodhicitta,* take Refuge and confess evil deeds. Then, purify the support itself. After this, recite *Drum Riti Garma La Ho* and put a handful of the substances of offering in each cardinal direction, starting with the Eastern direction which is located in front of you, and proceeding to the right. Then, put handfuls in the secondary directions. Then recite *Chöphur Sale Halo Seng* and place four further handfuls in the center.

[3]. Then, in the space before you, visualize the root master in the form of the yidam Shenlha Ökar, with all the lineage masters above him. Behind him are all the supports of the Body, Speech and Mind, while before him are the Buddhas of the ten directions, the divine hosts of Yidams, the Knowledge Holders, Mind Heroes, wrathful Sky Dancers, Protectors and Guardians bound by oath, etc., all filling the limits of the sky, like myriads of stars spread out in space.

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[1] For the biographies of Dülwa Rinpoche and of Dru Gyelwa Yungdrung as given in the context of the history of *A khrid,* see Achard, *Les Instructions sur le A Primordial,* volume I, pp. 58-61 and pp. 61-64.

[4]. Then imagine that the mandala is transformed into its cosmic counterpart, with Mount Meru in the center, above the golden layer that forms the base on which it stands, surrounded by the seven mountain ranges, the seven oceans, the four great continents and the eight islands and the ultimate iron mountain range encircling the whole universe. Within this perfectly organized pure realm, imagine that the clouds of offerings are multiplied in myriads, manifesting as the eight auspicious substances, golden flowers, melodious sounds, ravishing smells, etc.

[5]. Then project infinite emanations of yourself in the form of beautiful divines entities which spread out in the ten directions[2] and the six destinies[3] in order to exhort sentient beings to make this mandala offering with you. Proceed with the concrete offering which is presented to the Blissful Ones in the space before you and recite the corresponding verses.

[6]. Finally, dissolve the mandala, starting with the outer sections and bring the substances toward the center, turning from the right to the left side. Imagine that all the divine manifestations of your visualization dissolve into the central deity (Shenlha Ökar) and that it transforms into lights which eventually dissolve into you. Then imagine that the pure realm and all the substances you have visualized during the practice now dissolve into the sky. This offering must be performed in a retreat lasting ten or fifteen days.

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[1] There are various lists of these, including the following one containing : 1. a mirror; 2. curds; 3. some grass coming from a tomb; 4. a wood-apple fruit; 5. a right-coiling conch; 6 some elephant bile; 7. vermilion powder; and 8. some white mustard grains.

[2] The four cardinal directions, the four intermediary directions, the zenith and nadir.

[3] The destinies of denizens of hell, hungry ghosts, animals, human beings, semi-gods and gods.

— Session no. 4 —
The Prayer to the Master and the transmission of Blessings

[1]. First clearly visualize the master in the form of Shenlha Ökar, sitting on a throne made of a lotus, a sun and a moon. This throne, located above your head, is supported by a lion, an elephant, a horse, a dragon and a garuda. Imagine that all the masters from whom you received transmission manifest in yidam form and dissolve into Shenlha.

Above Shenlha Ökar, visualize the masters of the lineage up to the Primordial Buddha Kuntuzangpo. Just as in the previous sessions, also visualize the Yidams, the Buddhas of the ten directions, the Knowledge Holders, all the Lamas that you venerate, the Protectors, Sky Dancers, etc.

[2]. Then, imagine that, together will all sentient beings, you prostrate before this field of merit and ask the Buddhas to dispel obstacles and to purify evil deeds and obscurations. With concentration, also request the transmission of blessings.

[3]. Then imagine that rays of light arise from the hearts of these Buddhas and that they instantaneously purify your obscurations. In particular, imagine that an ambrosial nectar pours from the heart of Kuntuzangpo, passing through the hearts of all masters, down to that of Shenlha Ökar in the center of the visualization. Then, rays arise from Shenlha's heart and enter your body and that of all beings, purifying all karmic obscurations, impurities, etc., so that the materiality of your aggregates has now been destroyed. Imagine that you have consequently obtained a body made of fivefold lights. At that time, pray fervently for the realization of your own natural state.

[4]. Again, imagine that a flow of nectar arises from Shenlha Ökar's heart, entering into your body before dispersing in the ten directions in order to purify all sentient beings. At that time, chant the invocation to the masters of the lineage.

[5]. Finally, all the visualizations dissolve into lights which enter into the masters of the lineage. In their turn, they dissolve into

lights which enter the root master in the form of Shenlha Ökar in the center of the field of merit. The master then dissolves into lights which enter into you and into all sentient beings, bestowing all the blessings of the Body, Speech and Mind of the Lama. Then, conclude the session by reciting the dedication prayer.

This practice must be performed each morning and evening, while during the afternoon you should practice *Bodhicitta*, Refuge and offering of the mandala. This Guru-yoga should be practiced during a one-month retreat, fifteen days or at least ten days.

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The Main Practice

The main practice covers the following six sessions : 5. the practice with characteristics, based on the control of mind; 6. the practice of Access-to-Equality without characteristics; 7. the Union of Calm Abiding and Superior Insight; 8. the direct introduction to the principle of the natural state; 9. the methods to get rid of mind-produced stains; and 10. the arising of Immaculate Wisdom during the practice of the Path.

— Session no. 5 —
The practice with characteristics and the control of mind

[1]. This practice consists in concentrating on a white *A* placed on a meditation support in front of you. It has three parts: i. the key point of the body; ii. the key point of the gaze; and iii. the key point of the vow.

[2]. As to the key point of the body, sit in the fivefold position as follows :

1. the legs are crossed in the lotus position;
2. the hands are placed one on top of the other (with the left hand above the right), palms up, with the thumbs pressing the base of the ring fingers;

3. the spine is kept straight and the shoulders are straightened up;
4. the neck is slightly bent forward; and
5. the eyes gaze directly in front, concentrated on the meditation support (the white *A*).

Do not move, do not blink, and let saliva and other secretions flow naturally without trying to hold them back. This posture helps in harmonizing the inner humors of the body, in controlling consciousness and in relaxing the joints of the limbs. It also helps in controlling channels (*rtsa*), winds (*rlung*) and seminal essences (*thig le*).

For the key point of the gaze, it is said to harmonize the mind and the eyes. This means that you concentrate on the A before you, as if you were carefully aiming at a target. Do not become distracted by the potential arising of thoughts, but firmly concentrate your mind without distraction on the white A before you.

For the key point of the vow (*dam tshig*), do not blink the eyes, do not move the body, do not swallow saliva, and keep the session for the required duration. This duration should first be equal to the time necessary to recite 200 *Sale Ö* mantra. Then gradually increase the length to 300, etc. Train in this way until you reach signs of stability.[1]

[3]. The support on which you concentrate can be a statue of a Buddha, a *thigle* (painted on a piece of paper), a white A, a svastika, etc. The best disciples will reach signs as soon as they start concentrating, while others will need two or three days to train themselves.

[4]. If concentration on a support is performed without success, train on sounds, by concentrating your mind on a sound like

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[1] Here the "vow" means to apply the instructions correctly and for the required time, until signs indicating stability arise. Among these signs are the capacity to concentrate without effort, the notable diminution of discursive thoughts, etc.

Hûm or *Hrî*. For instance, chant long *Hûm* sounds, hundreds and thousands of times, concentrating your mind on the sound itself, just like you would have done on the material support. This practice based on sound is perfect for those who are blind, old people and lazy practitioners.[1]

[5]. Numerous signs will arise by practicing in this way, such as the eight signs of mind stabilization,[2] the calming of all kinds of agitation, immobility of the body or, on the contrary, involuntary movements, trembling, etc. In people for whom water and earth elements are predominant, signs will come late but will then be very beneficial, while for those whose fire and air elements are preponderant, signs will come quickly but will later turn into obstacles.

Practitioners who have experienced signs are then instructed in the quest for the mind (*sems 'tshol*), with the reflection on its source, abiding place, destination, form, etc. You should train in this session for three or four consecutive days.

— Session no. 6 —
The Practice without characteristics

[1]. This practice is called "Access-to-Equality" (*mnyam bzhag*) which means accessing (*bzhag*) or entering the state of equality (*mnyam*), namely the natural state itself. It has four key points and it is precisely through these four points that the equality of the natural state is accessed :

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[1] On the practice of sound, see also Achard, "The Practice of the Sound of Awareness", *Dzogchen Training Notes*, no. 16, reprinted in *id.*, *The Dawn of Awareness*, pp. 110-112. The tradition followed in these references is that of the First Kūndrōl Rinpoche (Jatsōn Nyingpo, 1700-?) which is probably the best for this kind of practice.

[2] 1. One feels unable to move, just like a tortoise inside a small basin; 2. one shivers like a little bird hit by a freezing wind; 3. one remains in a physical and mental blissful state; 4. the mastery of the mind fluctuates between states without control and states with control; 5. one then remains in a state of continuous inner peace; 6. one does not wish to give up the concentration; 7. discursive movements may arise but do not affect the state of concentration; and 8. the mind is stable and free from attachment to outer objects.

a. The key point of the body (*lus gnad*) consists in adopting the fivefold position.
b. The key point of the gaze (*lta stangs kyi gnad*) consists in gazing straight in front of oneself, without blinking, moving the eyeballs, the eyebrows, etc.
c. The key point of the mind (*sems gnad*) consists in remaining in the present freshness of Awareness (*rig pa*), without desires, hopes, fears, conceptions, etc.
d. The key point of the vow (*dam tshig gi gnad*) consists in conforming to the duration of the sessions: if these are too long, agitation will certainly start to affect practice sooner or later; if, on the contrary, they are too short, the state of quietness will not arise in one's continuum. Therefore, the first sessions should have a duration equivalent to the time necessary to recite 100 *Sale Ö* mantras. Then, each day, gradually increase this number, until it reaches the time equivalent to 400 mantras.

[2]. During this session and during periods between sessions, try to remain perfectly mute, moving the body as little as possible. Also avoid remaining near a fire, in a windy place, drinking alcohol or eating vegetables (because these greatly disturb the equilibrium of the physical elements). Also, avoid doing any practice at midnight and noon but rather choose the early dawn, morning, afternoon and evening for your sessions.

[3]. Meditating in this way, you will first be confronted with a mind-created calm abiding, then with a natural calm abiding and eventually with the ultimate calm abiding. This practice should be performed for a retreat of fifteen days, twenty-one days or a whole month.

— Session no. 7 —
Union of Calm Abiding and Superior Insight

[1]. Sit as before in the fivefold position and use the Lion's Gaze (*seng ge lta stangs*) by concentrating your mind on the eyes and the eyes on the empty sky before you. In this way, your consciousness will be promptly clarified, conceptions will disap-

pear and you will experience the Translucency (*zang thal*) of Awareness, free from all grasping. Remain in this state for as long as you can.

[2]. Keep on practicing in this way until all conceptions which arise in your continuum are exhausted. At that time, you will experience Awareness effortlessly, as being naturally free of defects such as torpor, agitation, mental opacity. It is said that the practice will then make decisive and instantaneous progress. The Wisdom of realization (*rtogs pa'i ye shes*) will naturally dawn in you, while obstacles all gradually disappear. A feeling of inner Clarity will dawn in your continuum and will appear as an ornament of the previously reached state of calm abiding.

[3]. Still sitting in the same position and using the same Lion's Gaze, concentrate intensely on the sky before you, so that the sky and your Awareness mix together undifferentiately. At that time, you should receive instructions from your master on the Example (*dpe*), Meaning (*don*) and Sign (*rtags*), as they are described in the *Cycle of the Nine Secrets* (*Gab pa dgu skor*).

The Example is that of the sky free from characteristics, form, etc., which is used to illustrate the true empty nature of mind. The Sign is that of the inner realization of Awareness through which one sees the reality of mind in all its nakedness. The Principle is illustrated by the Example and explained by the Sign: it is the natural state itself or Absolute Body (*bon sku*) which is the great non-dual Equality of Mind, similar to the limitless sky.

You must train in this sky-gazing contemplative practice for eleven or fifteen consecutive days in retreat.

— Session no. 8 —
The direct introduction to the principle of the Natural State

[1]. Stay in the fivefold position and visualize inside your body the three main channels extending from the top of your head down to the secret place (*gsang gnas*). The two lateral channels

join below the navel, above the secret place. At that place where they enter the central channel, their junction takes the form of the lower part of the Tibetan letter *Cha*. These two lateral channels are visualized as being the size of an arrow, while the central channel is slightly larger. It is of blue color, the right channel being white and the left, red. Imagine that the upper extremity of the three channels opens at the top of the head.

[2]. Above the upper openings of the right and left channels, visualize a *A* and a *Ma* letter respectively. Then breathe in and out three times to purify the stale air inside your lungs, imagining that the obscurations and karmic traces associated with the three poisons are purified. Then, breathe Wisdom wind in, and by doing so, imagine that the two letters dissolve into light and transform into Khala Rigpai Gyelpo and Kökyi Nyima Zhatsam. Both then dissolve into lights again and transform respectively into a white *thigle* and a red *thigle* having the size of a pea. As you breathe in, the two *thigles* go down into the right and level channels and enter the central channel at the level of the navel where they fuse into a single *thigle*. At that time, press down the upper wind and pull up the lower one. When you cannot hold the breath anymore, exhale through both lateral channels imagining that the *thigle* rises inside the central channel up to the top of the head. As soon as it comes out of the upper opening of the central channel, imagine that the *thigle* separates into two *thigles* which now simply remain above the upper opening of the two lateral channels.

Repeat this exercise three, five, seven, nine, eleven, fifteen, seventeen, nineteen, or twenty-one times. When your session is over, imagine that the *thigle* remains in your heart (not at the top of the central channel) and that it disappears there. Then utter *Ha!* or *Phat!* and remain in the experience of the natural state, without following mental projections liable to arise after the practice. After several sessions of this meditation, remain in the sitting position with the eyes fixed on the sky before you.[1]

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[1] Keep your body perfectly immobile, breath naturally through the mouth or the nose and keep your eyes open without moving them or blinking. Do not pay attention to the visions that may appear and do not follow them. Just remain in the fresh experience of the natural state, as long as you can, without affecting it by any antidotes, etc.

[3]. Train in this practice at twilight, at dawn, during the morning and in the late afternoon or early evening. Beginners should train in this practice with the gentle breathing technique until they become more familiar with the procedure. Then, they should train with the wrathful breathing which brings more benefits. It is very important to understand clearly how to perform these breathing exercises because though their benefits are great, their risks are also great when the practice is wrongly performed. You should thus ask a master or a qualified yogi for all the complementary instructions which should enable you to perform it correctly.

[4]. After having performed this practice in retreat and having reached stability in the control of your mind by remaining absorbed in the experience of the natural state, you should then meet your master and receive from him the direct introduction (*ngo sprod*) to the nature of mind.

By training in the yogic practice as described above, purity and impurity in consciousness will separate from one another. Consequently, mind will radiate with lights and rid itself of its discursive gangue. At that time, Awareness will arise in all its nakedness.

Within such a state, you will no longer have any thoughts associated with past or future and you will not be disturbed if thoughts should suddenly arise. You will no longer fall into the deviations of meditation (such as torpor, etc.) — on the contrary, you will remain absorbed into the natural clarity of Awareness without grasping. This experience is called "Simultaneously Born Wisdom" (*lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes*), "Ultimate Natural State of the Great Vehicle" (*theg pa chen po don gyi gnas lugs*), "Contemplation of the Buddhas of the three times" (*dus gsum sangs rgyas kyi dgongs pa*), "Mind or Self-Arisen White Shen-Deity" (*sems rang byung gi gshen lha dkar po*). There is nothing else upon which to meditate.

You should train continually in this practice of Channels, Winds and Seminal Essences for ten or fifteen days.

— Session no. 9 —
Methods to get rid of mental stains

This practice has three parts : 1. access (*'jog*) to the natural state, 2. destruction (*bshig*) of the aspect of calm and attachment to the flavor of meditation, and 3. cultivating (*skyong*) the authentic experience of Contemplation.

[1]. Remain in a luminous state of inner calm corresponding to the access to the real nature of mind. This access is made possible owing to the practice described in the preceding session, and owing to staying relaxed in this natural condition. Do not try to search for anything intentionally and do not let yourself be carried away by inner chatter, but remain quietly absorbed in the experience of your true nature.

[2]. Remaining in this state during meditation is however not sufficient in itself: you have to transcend all kinds of dependency on specific conditions that help to generate this state and to integrate the experience of the natural state into the subsequent state of consciousness (*rjes shes*, i.e., the state of consciousness outside the formal sessions of meditation). In this way, the flow of the grasping subject who meditates is cut off, in consequence of which the practice can be performed without any distraction whatsoever.[1]

[3]. Finally, you must cultivate the experience of Non-Meditation, namely the state of Contemplation free from the objects of

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[1] This point is of utmost importance and many practitioners training in Trekchō practice fail to understand that remaining in this state is not sufficient in itself. Provided the conditions are collected during retreat, it is actually fairly easy to enter this state and to cultivate it without antidotes. What is more difficult is to integrate it to post-meditation sessions, which is the core of the practice of Dzogchen. Thus, remaining in this state and "not doing anything, not correcting anything" is certainly a good advice for beginners who lack familiarization with this state, but it will never lead to realization. It will not even intensify the experience of the state because the state itself is beyond such intensifications. It will also not lead to Liberation if the integration of the natural state into the subsequent state of consciousness (*rjes shes*) is not perfectly mastered.

meditation and the latter's ordinary supports. Thus, beginners should first apply the key points of the body and the gaze in order to access the equality of the natural state, which means accessing the real abiding mode of Awareness free from artifices. Then they will have to destroy this access or fixation on this access by directly contemplating the nature of the meditating subject. Finally, they will have to cultivate the state of Contemplation without meditating intentionally, and without deviating outside the experience of Awareness by becoming deluded again in the meanders of ordinary consciousness.

[4]. The three phases of access, destruction and cultivation are thus extremely important. But beginners should first privilege access and cultivation and do a brief "destruction".[1] Then, they should train to practice the stage of cultivation in much longer sessions than the two other aspects (access and destruction). Finally, they should train only in cultivation, access and destruction being at that stage unnecessary. It is said that at this level of practice practitioners have reached the ultimate term of Meditation in Sessions (*thun sgom*).[2]

This threefold practice should be performed in retreat lasting ten or fifteen days.

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[1] Precisely because they need to have an experience to access and to cultivate, before "destroying" any kind of fixation on it.

[2] This stage of cultivation implies cultivating the experience of the natural state while :

1. integrating the activities of the three doors (*sgo gsum*);
2. integrating the activities of the six associations of consciousnesses (*tshogs drug*);
3. integrating the hords of concepts (*rtog tshogs*); and
4. integrating diversity (*sna tshogs*), namely, the various yogic conducts (*spyod pa*) to be practiced on the Path.

For instance, the first kind of integration implies integrating the virtuous, non-virtuous and neutral activities of the three doors (body, speech and mind), etc., without regressing from the experience of the natural state itself. Witout these integrations, the practice will not lead to Liberation but rather to a deviation (*gol sa*) which has nothing to do with the teachings of Dzogchen. The special practice for integration in the *A khrid* system is explained in the next session.

— Session no. 10 —
The Arising of Immaculate Wisdom during the practice of the Path

[1]. First is the key point of the body (*lus gnad*): in the state of cultivation of the natural state as it has been described in the preceding session, sit in the fivefold position and train yourself in directing the gaze upwards, downwards and to the side. Then, undo the posture and check if this affects your experience of the natural state. Then, stand up and check again similarly. If you can (and if it does not affect your experience), try to do some prostrations and circumambulations. When you are capable of keeping the experience of the natural state in such conditions, you can then train to do so while running, jumping, etc. Then, you should train in a similar way while generating emotions such as anger, etc. In other words, you first try by integrating pure actions (prostrations, etc.), then neutral actions (running, etc.) and then impure ones (anger, etc.). In this way, all the actions of the body can be integrated into the Path.

[2]. Then train in a similar way with the key point of speech (*ngag gnad*) by integrating pure actions (such as recitations of texts, mantras, etc.), neutral actions (ordinary discourse, etc.) and impure ones (lies, gross language, etc.). By training in this way, you are actually training to integrate all the activities of speech into the Path, all this occurring within the very experience of the natural state itself.

[3]. For the key point of mind (*sems gnad*), visualize yourself as the yidam Shenlha Ökar and proceed with the various steps of the Creation Stage (*bskyed rim*) with its specific absorptions.[1]

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[1] It has basically three main absorptions or samadhis: 1. the samadhi of Suchness (which implies that one remains in the experience of the natural state), 2. the all-illumating samadhi with the display of the Four Immeasurables, and 3. the causal samadhi which starts with the seed syllable of the deity and gradually develops into the full visualization. For a detailed explanation of these three samadhis, see Achard, *The Dawn of Awareness*, pp. 113-118.

You thus enter Samadhi in which you gradually integrate neutral thoughts and discursive analysis, etc. Then try to integrate thoughts associated with the three and five poisons. In this way, the state of Contemplation is integrated into all the various states of mind.

[4]. Then train in integrating the experience of the natural state into all kinds of circumstances, such as situations in which you are frightened, anguished, carried away by desire, doubts, hopes and fears, etc. Mental evocations and dualistic grasping are thus similarly integrated into the practice of the Path and, in the end, spontaneously eradicated. In fact, you should train in this kind of integration of the state of Contemplation without being limited by dualistic notions such as good and bad, etc., even if you should always act for the benefit of others (and never harm anyone or yourself).

Beginners should train to integrate the activities of the three doors one after the other. This means that they should first train with the activities of the body, then those of speech and finally those of the mind, before trying to integrate them simultaneously. In this way, everything that you do can be perfectly integrated into the practice of the Path and into the direct experience of the natural state.

You should train in this integration practice during a retreat of ten or fifteen days.[1]

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Instructions on the Obtainment of the Ultimate Fruit

The instructions dealing with the Obtainment of the Ultimate Fruit cover the last five sessions of the cycle, namely : 1. crushing karmic traces during the night, 2. dynamically training on manifestations during the day, 3. integrating conceptions to the

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[1] As for all the sessions of this training, the duration of retreat is always indicative: one should actually not reduce this duration but rather increase it if necessary, in order to reach proper signs of success in the practice. Stopping before reachings these signs would result in a totally meaningless practice.

Path during morning and evening sessions, 4. being continuously confronted with Awareness, and 5. the instructions on Transparent Wisdom.

— Session no. 11 —
Crushing karmic traces during the night

[1]. The first practice in this session is the mastery or control (*bzung ba*) of sleep. In order to succeed in this yoga, you should lie down in the sleeping Buddha posture. Visualize yourself as Shenlha Ökar sitting on a throne made of a lotus, a sun and a moon, and supported by a lion, an elephant, a horse, a dragon and a garuda.

In the throat *chakra*, visualize a white, blazing A symbolizing your Awareness. Imagine that it projects rays of light which fill up your channels, your eyes and your whole body with lights and *thigles*. While doing this visualization, concentrate on the A in the throat. Fall asleep in this state of clear Emptiness in which there is never any instant of discursiveness.[1]

The most advanced yogis will integrate Concentration into their sleep and will thus never be separated from their practice by the sleep of ignorance. On the contrary, they will see the arising of the Clear-Light of the natural state arising in a profound or deep way if their sleep is deep, or in a subtle way if their sleep is light.[2]

Yogis of medium capacities will recognize the dream manifestations for what they are (illusions) and, being now capable of remembering their daytime practice, they will be able to intensify it during the night.

By training repeatedly in this way, yogis of lower capacities will eventually recognize the nature of their dreams and will be able to resume their practice during nighttime.

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[1] This may not be the case when one first tries to practice this night yoga. However, with proper familiarization, the practice will deepen and be performed in the required state of mind.

[2] Reaching such a state is of considerable importance for the time of the Bardo because it ensures the practitioners that he will recognize the arising of the visions of the Bardo of Clear-Light (*'od gsal gyi bar do*) after his death.

Lack of faith in the master, lack of confidence in the precepts (*man ngag*), lack of zeal, etc., are obstacles which will prevent perfect control of one's dreams. Unbalanced food (in excess or in too limited quantities), as well as luxury, etc., are also obstacles preventing such mastery. Beginners should concentrate slightly longer on the throat *chakra* in order to fall quickly into deep sleep as soon as they fall asleep. Before dreams arise, you should also be careful not to move your eyes but slightly pressing down the lower wind. You should then be able to integrate the state experienced during your daytime practice into the nighttime.

At dawn, twilight and during the other periods when you do not sleep, you should recite devotional prayers to the Master, Yidams and Dakinîs, asking that your dream practice be successful. During the day, you should apprehend all appearances as illusions similar to dreams. This daytime training should greatly enhance your potential to recognize the nature of dreams.

[2]. After this mastery (*bzung ba*) comes the training or purification (*sbyang ba*) during which you visualize yourself as a deity, while all people around you are imagined as transfigured into deities, and external objects, such as houses, valleys, etc., as Citadels and Pure Realms.[1] This is the key point of the visualization. The key point of the mind here consists in keeping the experience of Emptiness in one's continuum.

Then, you should train in order to change or "reverse" things, imagining that you jump above a precipice or that you fly instead of walking, that you quarrel with friends, etc. — all this is done in order to recognize the illusory nature of things, their dream-like appearance.

[3]. Then comes the practice of increasing (*rgyas pa*) during which you imagine that you display myriads of emanations of yourself, that you transform Nâgas into Garudas, fire into water, etc. Thus, you first project emanations and then change them (fire into water, etc.). Then, you train in controlling these emanations

[1] All this is performed during the dream practice.

and transformations by guiding them mentally as you wish. Finally, you generate the capacity to concretely change the nature of dream events by turning them into religious or spiritual dreams, for instance.

[4]. If these practices are not successful, sit in the fivefold position or in the Rishi posture and press the Bliss arteries while remaining concentrated during Samadhi. In this way, you should be able to destroy karmic traces. However, this pressure on the arteries is dangerous and should be performed with great care, after having been shown by a qualified master.

Otherwise, at the time of falling asleep, you can concentrate on the heart *chakra*. This should in the end (after repeated training) prevent the arising of dream manifestations during the Bardo of dream.

This eleventh session should be practiced until one obtains specific signs indicating the true integration of Concentration and sleep.

— Session no. 12 —
Dynamic training on manifestations during the day

[1]. This training consists in not letting ordinary consciousness obscure again the experience of the natural state.[1] For that reason, you should train in not following, analyzing, accepting or rejecting the objects of the five sense-doors (forms, sounds, smells, tastes and tactile sensations). Simply remain in the natural state without being carried away by discursiveness, ordinary grasping, etc., which are the characteristics of mind (*sems*, in the sense of ordinary mind).

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[1] Usually, if one fails to properly cultivate this experience of the natural state during specific retreats, sooner or later, ordinary consciousness will take over again and obscure the translucency of Awareness. This is precisely what happened to the second lineage holder of the *A khrid* system; see Achard, *Les Instructions sur le A Primordial*, volume I, pp. 40-41. This means that realization, especially in its earliest stages, has to be cultivated during retreats in total seclusion. Nowadays many so-called Dzogchenpas totally miss the point of the practice by imagining that a simple glimpse of Awareness is sufficient in itself to ensure Liberation. This is the path of ignorance and not that of the Great Perfection.

Yogis of superior capacities should succeed in this practice by simply remaining in the state of the View,[1] the arising of the manifestations of sense objects within consciousness being for them similar to snow flakes falling on a lake.

Yogis of medium capacities should succeed in this practice owing to their Meditation, by recognizing that these manifestations are "like somebody one already knows": this means that, through their Meditation, they are able to directly recognize the nature of these manifestations and that it is unnecessary that someone explains to them the meaning of this nature, just as when one knows somebody, it is not necessary to be introduced to that person again.

Yogis of ordinary capacities will succeed in this practice by mentally reflecting on the nature of manifestations, in order to recognize this very nature, and by applying antidotes when required. Their training should be similar to a flow of water guided into an iron pipe, which means that they should practice gradually, and regularly without being carried away by distractions.[2]

[2]. Concretely, the practice consists in examining the nature of appearances in order to realize that they are unreal, that they exist only in interdependency, that they are of changing nature and are thus impermanent. You should train in this way until saturation, in order to enter the second step, which consists in apprehending these manifestations as illusory or dream-like and as fundamentally false. They arise like the marvels of mind and pertain to mind's natural dynamism (*rang rtsal*). It is said

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[1] This state is that of the lived-through experience of Emptiness and Clarity (*stong gsal*). Emptiness here refers to the primordial purity (*ka dag*) of the natural state, and Clarity to its Spontaneity (*lhun grub*) or Awareness aspect (*rig cha*). Remaining in this state demands total stability and perfect familiarization, and this is for this reason that the example is given here for yogis of superior capacities (*dbang po rab*). The medium and ordinary levels described below demand a lesser familiarization, even though they necessitate an authentic experience of Awareness (and not a mental projection of what one thinks it is).

[2] Such a practice is to be conceived of as performed during specific retreats in order to concretely reach some signs of success.

that appearances *are* mind and that mind *is* appearance. It is then possible to recognize the non-differentiation of mind and appearances in the direct experience of Emptiness, but this Emptiness is not a nihilistic state, because it is naturally endowed with a manifestation aspect (*snang cha*). This means that appearances and Emptiness are expressed as undifferentiated. It is precisely in this way that one reaches the realization of Emergence-Liberation (*shar grol*), in which the emergence of appearances and their liberation are simultaneous.

However, training in this way is not sufficient. You should first reach an experience in which appearances are no longer a nuisance. But this step is in itself not sufficient either: you have to reach a stage in which appearances manifest as friendly. However, it is said that even this is not sufficient either: you must reach a level of realization in which you directly experience the non-dual flavor of mind and appearances.

You will have to train in this way for five, seven or more days.

— Session no. 13 —
Integrating concepts into the Path, during morning and evening sessions

[1]. Once the stage described in the previous session has been reached, you should train in the morning and in the evening to integrate all thoughts arising in your continuum. In this way, you should realize that mental events (*sems 'byung*) arise and dissolve within the nature of Mind itself (*sems nyid*). In order to reach such a state, you should not apply antidotes to these mental events but simply let them arise, abide and disappear naturally within the nature of Mind. In this manner, through the sole experience of the Sublime Knowledge realizing No-self (*bdag med rtogs pa'i shes rab*) — i.e., the direct knowledge of the natural state — all conceptions are neutralized by a single antidote (that of the realization of the nature of Mind), in the same way as a single panacea cures all diseases.

[2]. Eventually, all that 'happens' within one's continuum will arise as Wisdom, a state in which the object that is to be aban-

doned and its antidote share the same, unique flavor. You will then be like the fortunate one who reaches the Golden Island on which there is only gold and not a single ordinary stone. Thus, as discursive thoughts are gradually appeased, the Clarity of Wisdom intensifies progressively.

You should train in this session for five or seven days, or even more, if necessary.

— Session no. 14 —
The continuous introduction to Awareness

This continuous introduction (*rgyun gyi ngo sprod*) is threefold : 1. recognizing that manifestations are the mind, 2. recognizing that the mind is free from limitation, and 3. recognizing that this freedom from limit is the real expression of the Three Bodies (*sku gsum*).

[1]. First, as to the recognition that manifestations are the mind, your master will tell you that there does not exist anything except the mind and that everything is marvels produced by the mind. Indeed, all that manifests "occurs" within mind itself, which is empty and without source. Since phenomena manifest within the inner scope of mind, they are similarly devoid of any source and are basically empty.[1]

Thus, obtaining power over mind means obtaining power over appearances and to realize the capacity to transform them. If you fail to realize the non-differentiation of mind and appearances, karmic traces will continue to affect your mind and you will always be potentially subject to delusions owing to the deceptive nature of appearances. You will still be trapped in wrong apprehensions, such as seeing two moons in the sky or viewing a cord in the grass as a snake, etc.[2]

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[1] What this actually means is that when one realizes the true, empty nature of mind, then one realizes that manifestations are similarly empty and without a base.

[2] This image of the cord seen as a snake in the grass is of course that used by Nagârjuna in his *Prajñâpâramitâ* works.

However, such distorted perceptions are important because they show that appearances only exist within mind (the example of the appearance of two moons is more than clear here). Karmic traces and sensory consciousnesses thus give a perception of things which induces a delusion producing the feeling that outer appearances exist by themselves.

Our mind is corrupted and affected by the action of ignorance since time without beginning, and this ignorance affects the mind of all beings within the six destinies in such a way that each sees water, for instance, in a different way. There is thus no "existent" entity of water, just the projection of what our mind thinks water is. By understanding that the mind and phenomena share the same flavor — that of Emptiness — one is able to pierce the nature of appearances and to recognize that deluded manifestations pertain to the nature of mind and have no inherent existence.

[2]. Then, you have to realize that mind is free of limits (*mtha' bral*), which means that it is not expressed according to the two extremes defined as existence and non-existence. Indeed, if one says that mind is existent, we have to define its form, color, dimensions, etc., that is, a whole set of specific characteristics able to be grasped by the senses and recognizable as pertaining to mind itself. But mind does not possess any of these characteristics and is not produced from anything whatsoever. It cannot be blocked by anything and actually appears as being totally impossible to identify in a discursive way.

Alternatively, if one says that mind does *not* exist, then one has to explain its present expression within the continuum of our mental consciousness, the fact that it possesses indeterminate characteristics (starting with discursiveness), that its inherent qualities (cognitive capacity, for instance) arise in a spontaneous manner, and that it is by nature unborn (*skye med*). In fact, endowed with unceasing displays and a non-dual essence, mind appears as free from all kinds of limit. It is translucent and transcends both the capacities of speech and intellect.

[3]. Thirdly, you have to realize that this absence of limit is in fact the real expression of the Three Buddha-Bodies. The actual direct introduction (*ngo sprod*) goes as follows : the nature of

Mind (*sems nyid*) is not affected by the conceptions of the three times, nor by obstacles appearing during Meditation. It is free from any dependency on sensory consciousnesses and on the six associations of consciousnesses. Present in all sentient beings, from the primordial Buddha Kuntuzangpo down to the smallest of insects, it abides naturally within us, in the center of our heart, within what is designated as the Expanse of the Universal Base (*kun gzhi'i klong*). In the very center of this Expanse, it abides as the Three Bodies : its emptiness aspect is the Absolute Body (*bon sku*), its discerning or clarity aspect is the Perfection Body (*rdzogs sku*), and its dynamic aspect is the Emanation Body (*sprul sku*).

These Bodies represent the Three Bodies of the Base (*gzhi'i sku gsum*). Their arising during the practice is the Three Bodies of the Path (*lam gyi sku gsum*), and their eventual perfection at the end of the Path is the Three Bodies of the Fruit (*'bras bu'i sku gsum*).

Thus, the Emptiness of the Essence of the natural state corresponds to the Absolute Body, its unceasing Clarity expresses the Perfection Body, and its manifold marvels striving for the benefit of all beings correspond to the Emanation Body. Similarly, the Emptiness in which conceptual movements arise within mind is the Absolute Body, the manifestation or coherent expression of these concepts is the Perfection Body, and their Clarity (perceptible by consciousness) is the Emanation Body.

In order to obtain freedom from conditioned existence, you have to become familiar with this state by integrating these principles through your practice of Meditation. You should then be able to reach ultimate realization and liberating experiences characterizing the obtaining of the Fruit of Full Buddhahood.

Such are the precepts forming the fourteenth session of instructions, which is to be practiced until the ultimate Fruit of Liberation is obtained.[1]

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[1] The realization of the ultimate Fruit is expressed in terms of Buddha-Bodies (*sku*) and primordial Wisdoms (*ye shes*). The Bodies refer either to the three Bodies or to the five Bodies, by adding the Body of Essence itself and the Body of manifest enlightenment (*mngon par byang chub sku*). The primordial Wisdoms refer to the five Wisdoms such as the Wisdom of Emptiness, the Mirror-like Wisdom, etc.

— Session no. 15 —
Instructions on Transparent Wisdom

This fifteenth session is not described in the text, which simply says that it corresponds to the practice of Transparent or Translucent Wisdom (*ye shes zang thal*), that is to say, the practice of the Transfer (*'pho ba*) of consciousness. The precepts describing this Transfer also include instructions on the nature of sounds, lights and rays (arising in one's continuum during life and at the time of death), as well as instructions on how these manifestations arise according to the three categories of practitioners: those of superior capacities, of medium capacities and of ordinary capacities.[1]

These practices, as well as each of the sessions described above, should be completed with the chanting of the dedication prayer and aspiration prayers.

Thatsen Mutsul Marro!

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[1] On these instructions, see *infra* pp. WW-WW.

The Practice of Guru-yoga according to the A khrid Instructions of Shardza Rinpoche

Introduction

This practice of Guru-yoga is taken from the *Atri kalung gyatso* (*A khrid bka' lung rgya mtsho*), whose complete title is *The Ocean of Oral Advices, Instruction Phases of the Preliminaries specific to the Fifteen Sessions of the Precious Precepts from Atri.* This text by Shardza Rinpoche (1859–1934) is the most important work dedicated to the preliminaries of *Atri* in both their ordinary and extraordinary forms.[1] There are four ordinary preliminaries, concerning 1. impermanence, 2. the difficulty of obtaining a human body, 3. the unsatisfactory nature of Samsara, and 4. the inevitable results of karma.

The extraordinary preliminaries are :

— the development of the Mind of Perfect Purity (*byang chub sems bskyed*) or *Bodhicitta*,
— Refuge (*skyabs 'gro*),
— the purification of obscurations through the confession of sins (*sdig bshags*),
— the Offering of the Mandala (*mandal 'bul ba*),
— the practice of Guru-yoga (*bla ma'i rnal 'byor*), and
— prostrations (*phyag 'tshal*).

To these are added the recitation of the Three Essences (*snying po gsum*) that complete the total of the nine extraordinary preliminaries.[2]

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[1] The text was written in 1894 and was published in printed form for the first time in 1904.

[2] These are the three mantras *A Akar Sale Ö Ayang Om Du; Akar Ame Dutrisu Nakpo Zhizhi Melmel Soha;* and *Om Matri Muye Sale Du.* In the tradition of Shardza Rinpoche, the first is associated with the Absolute Body Kuntuzangpo; the second with the Perfection Body Shenlha Ökar; and the third with the Emanation Body Tönpa Shenrab. Yongdzin Rinpoche recently informed me that this is not a "standard" or canonical approach in Eternal Bön.

In order to show the importance of the practice of Guru-yoga, Shardza Rinpoche quotes from the *Immaculate Sūtra* (*Dri med*),which is another name of the most extensive biography of Tönpa Shenrab, the *Zibdji* (*gZi brjid*):[2]

« — If the Lama does not teach, the Buddha's Speech will not be proclaimed;
If the Lama does not come in person, the Buddha's face will not be seen;
If the Lama does not explain, one will have no precepts;
Therefore everything depends on the Lama. »

Therefore, when one follows a master (implying a qualified one), and does everything he teaches in order to reach the Fruit (*'bras bu*), one will undoubtedly reach enlightenment within this very lifetime, the most important thing being to keep the master in one's heart.

In particular, when one enters the Porch of the Secret Formulas of the Vehicle of the White A, in order to make the request of supreme and ordinary accomplishments, one visualizes the master as being inseparable from the Yidam. It is thus extremely important to pray to him fervently. In this way one will undoubtedly reach Full Enlightenment with a single body and within a single lifetime. But if one opposes the master, one will be reborn in the hell called The Unbearable (*mnar med*) and will endure terrible torments for numerous kalpas. It is thus crucial to pray to him with all one's heart and even more so in the practice of the supreme peak of Vehicles, i.e., Dzogchen. It is indeed the master who, by virtue of his benevolence and his direct introductions (*ngo sprod*), induces blessings in one's continuum and gives birth to the Wisdom of Realisation (*rtogs pa'i ye shes*) within oneself. One should therefore view him as a fully enlightened Buddha. Nothing is more potent than to pray to him.

Guru-yoga is a real panacea and is compared to *karpo chiktup* (*dkar po gcig thub*), the White Panacea which is the antidote to all illnesses. Therefore, by praying to the master with great

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[2] This biography of Tönpa Shenrab was revealed by Tulku Loden Nyingpo (1360-1385).

fervor, one will realize that there is no other method enabling one to unmistakenly generate the principle of the Void of the natural state in one's continuum.

Consequently, when this principle of the natural state is born within oneself, it is the antidote to all passions. Therefore, it is said that the practice of Guru-yoga is a method of meditation styled "sufficient in itself" (*gcig chod*).

At best, the power of the blessings received through the meditation of Guru-yoga allows the practice to emerge as a natural flow and, if not, the practice still has the effect of turning the mind away from Samsâra, of giving rise to the yearning for liberation, and of letting all manifestations appear as an unsubstantial mist.

The practice of Guru-yoga as a panacea is done through generating unlimited devotion for the master, remaining united with him in mind and praying to him fervently without ever growing weary.

The Profound Path of Guru-yoga

The real practice of Guru-yoga is made up of three parts:
— the supplication to the Lama,
— the offerings in seven branches, and
— the way to request his blessings in order effectively to receive them.

1. The supplication to the Lama

Visualize in front of you the field of merits or Refuge Tree as follows:

At a distance of an arrow's length above your head appears a large and precious throne supported by eight majestic lions. In the centre of the throne opens a multi-coloured lotus, above which a sun disc and a moon disc rise in tiers.

On these, visualize your precious root master and imagine that he is the essence of the Buddhas of the three times. Imagine him as Shenlha Ökar, the Revealer of Compassion, white and blazing like a hundred thousands suns shining on a glacier. He

has one face, two arms and two legs: his legs are crossed in the posture of the svâstika and his hands are joined in the gesture of meditation. He is endowed with the nine aspects of purity and adorned with the thirteen ornaments of the Body of Perfect Rapture.[1]

Above the master, visualize lineage holders up to Dru Gyelwa Yungdrung Rinpoche (1242–1290) above whom rise in tiers the eight Lamas from the Experiential Transmission,[2] the Patriarchs of the Dru and Zhu lineages, the Treasure Revealers, the eight Shen Translators, the four Knowledgeable Men of the southern lineage, the thirteen Patriarchs of the median heir lineage, the six great Lamas of the western lineage and the masters of the Contemplative Transmission of the Blissful Ones up to the Primordial Buddha Kuntuzangpo.[3]

All these masters are visualized like a garland of turquoises linked with a golden thread. Each of them is adorned with his own ornaments and specific attributes. Visualize them on top of each other without touching each other. All around are the Yidams, the Dâkinîs, the Yungdrung Sempas, etc.

Within the outer fence are the Protectors of Bön looking wrathfully outside the Mandala in order to clear away circumstances creating obstacles. They are visualized as being immaterial, endowed with the nature of the body of light (*'od kyi sku*). They are

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[1] The nine aspects of purity (*tshang pa'i tshul dgu*) refer to the following modalities : 1. his body is young; 2. he is blazing ; 3. he projects lights ; 4. he is peaceful ; 5. his limbs are supple ; 6. his joints are supple ; 7. he is thin ; 8. he is beautiful ; and 9. he is endowed with a blazing glory.
The thirten ornament of the Body of Perfect Rapture (*longs spyod rdzogs pa'i sku'i rgyan bcu gsum*) are : 1. a crown, 2. earrings, 3. a short necklace, 4. a longer necklace reaching below the navel, 5. a middle-length necklace, 6. two armlets, 7. bracelets, 8. anklets, 9. a throne, 10. a mantle, 11. a lower garment, 12. a back curtain, and 13. an umbrella.

[2] These are: 1. Me'u Gongdzö Dampa Ritröpa, 2. Tokden Gomchen Barwa, 3. Jo Yung, 4. Drilungpa Tsültrim Sherab, 5. Drogön Yorpo Mepel, 6. Drogön Dütsi Gyeltsen, 7. Azha Lodrö Gyeltsen, and 8. Drutön Dülwa Gyeltsen. See Achard, *Les Instructions sur le A Primordial*, volume I, pp. 33-61.

[3] On these lineages holders, see Achard, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-32.

not mindless entities but beings endowed with Knowledge (*mkhyen*), altruistic love (*brtse*) and spiritual power (*nus*).

Address prayers to this field of merit with great fervor. Concentrate your body, speech and mind untill you shiver and tears come to your eyes. Concentrate the mind between the eyebrows and then focus Awareness on the Lama, praying to him fervently.

While doing so, think that all beings including yourself have no other source of Refuge than the precious master; from now on and untill you achieve enlightenment, the root Lama is your sole Refuge. Ask him to purify you of the sins accumulated since time without beginning and to cleanse you from the subtlest breaking of oaths. Ask him to dispel outer, inner and secret obstacles, to grant your wishes and help you accomplish virtuous deeds. Particularly, ask him to prevent you from going astray and to free you from all *Geks* (*bgegs*), i.e., those who create obstacles, who hinder the altruistic practice of the Mind of Perfect Purity (*byang chub sems*).

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2. The offerings in seven branches

These offerings consist in:

— Prostrations (*phyag 'tshal*),
— Confession of sins (*sdig pa bshags pa*),
— Offerings (*mchod pa 'bul*),
— Rejoicing (*rjes su yi rang ba*),
— Supplication not to depart for Nirvâna (*mya ngan las mi 'da'bar gsol ba 'debs pa*),
— Request or Exhortation to turn the Wheel of Bön (*bon gyi 'khor lo bskor bar bskul ba*), and
— Dedication.

2.1. The Prostrations

The Prostrations involve body, speech and mind.

2-1-1. The Prostrations of the body

In a minor *Sûtra* (*mDo phran*), it is said:
« — Prostrations accomplished with the body consist in bending the four limbs;
Prostrations accomplished with speech consist in melodious praises;
Prostrations accomplished with the mind consist in developing exaltation and faith. »
In that way, prostrate with the purity of the three doors.

First join your hands, palms touching each other, leaving no space between them. Just when you are about to bring them to the forehead, curve them slightly so as to give them the shape of a lotus bud. Hands are joined with touching palms at the heart level, then raise them toward the head level and touch the forehead, the throat and the heart.

Then, prostrate by putting the five limbs on the ground, i.e., the two hands, the two knees and the forehead. Then stand up upright. Perform this slowly while paying homage to the Lama.

2-1-2. The Prostrations of speech

They consist in the prayer to the master or the Refuge formula.

2-1-3. The Prostrations of the mind

They include three aspects:

a. When you join palms at the forehead level, you pay homage to the Body (*sku*) of the Lama. While doing this, imagine that all your physical obscurations as well as those of others are purified.

b. While joining hands at the throat level, you pay homage to the Speech (*gsung*) of the Lama and imagine that all obscurations linked with speech are being purified.

c. Joining hands at the heart level, you pay homage to the mind or Heart (*thugs*) of the Lama and imagine that all obscurations linked with mind are purified.

When the five limbs touch the floor, imagine that the five poisons (*dug lnga*) are purified.

Producing numberless emanations of yourself, prostrate together with all sentient beings.

It is unsuitable not to join the hands properly, to position them incorrectly, not to touch the floor with the forehead, not to stand upright, etc. Indeed, for Shardza Rinpoche the real process of prostration should avoid these defects, for if one does not proceed properly, it will be comparable to a meandering river.

2-2. The Confession of sins

Confess all the sins perpetrated since time without beginning, the sins you have induced others to do, the sins you have delighted in, etc. Without holding back anything (including the forgotten sins), confess them in front of the Lama, the Buddhas and the Yungdrung Sempas who are the witnesses of your confession. Commit yourself to never again perpetrate such obnoxious deeds. Then, in order to purify what has been confessed, recite the hundred-syllable Mantra.[1]

2-3. The Offerings

Then proceed with various kinds of offerings to the Lama, concrete or emanated from your mind through visualization.

The offerings emanated by the mind may consist of any kind of object that delights the senses, such as butter lamps, flowers,

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[1] On this mantra and its real meaning according to the traditions of Sula Kelzang Tenpai Gyeltsen and of Shardza Rinpoche, see Achard, *Le Miroir Abrégé des Formules*, pp. 4-8. How does one confess forgotten sins ? Concretely, one just confesses that we have undoubtedly done sins that we have now forgotten.

incense, perfumed waters, dishes, auspicious symbols, conches, umbrellas, precious stones, which are attributes of spiritual royalty, and divine and human offerings such as music, dances, etc. These offerings are carried to the Lama through visualized deities.

Also present him with worlds filled with jewels, mountains of lapis lazuli, deserts of gold powder, forests of medicine trees, the fruits of harvests, plains of flowers, saffron meadows, bowls of water, groves that inspire joy, deer with lovely bodies, birds with melodious voices, etc. Moreover, imagine that you offer your own life and wealth to the Lama, as well as to the Buddhas of the ten directions and their Sons. If you don't possess anything concretely, project these offering mentally, expanding them to infinity.

At that moment, proceed with the offerings in the same way as for the Mandala offering and present them to the master above your head. On all occasions, offer him mentally whatever lovely thing you see.

2-4. The Rejoicing

This section consists in rejoicing in all virtues. Rejoice in the fact that Buddhas have come into the world to preach to sentient beings the three Wheels of Bön.[1] Rejoice in the great virtuous conduct that the Buddhas, their Sons and the Yungdrung Sempas have manifested, as well as in the more simple merits accomplished by ordinary beings. Rejoice in the teachings peculiar to the two truths (*bden gnyis*) and their union. Rejoice with all your heart in the merits accumulated by others. The fact of sincerely rejoicing in merits accumulated by others has the effect of equaling theirs.

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[1] During the first Turning of the Wheel of Bön, Tönpa Shenrab taught the Nine Vehicles (*theg pa dgu*). During the second Turning, he transmitted the teachings of the Four Portals and the Treasury as the Fifth (*sgo bzhi mdzod lnga*). Finally, during the third Turning, he transmitted the three Revelations (*bstan pa gsum*). In all these three Turnings, the transmissions consisted of Sûtra teachings, Tantric teachings and Dzogchen teachings. See also § 2-6.

Here Shardza Rinpoche relates an edifying story that illustrates the importance of rejoicing in merits accumulated by others:

« —Long ago, in the kingdom of Zhanzhung, lived a very wealthy king. This king had an extraordinary priest to whom he gave unstintingly, thus potentially accumulating great virtuous merits. Yet he thought to himself that nobody matched him in terms of the offerings he made and the ensuing virtues he accumulated. Therefore pride was born within him. At the same time, a poor woman, seeing the deed but not the intention, used to rejoice in the king's accumulations of great virtues. Therefore, at dusk when the priest was dedicating, the king was receiving according to his pride while the poor woman received the fruit of virtues ensuing from her rejoicing. »[1]

2-5. The Supplication asking that the Lama not to depart for Nirvâna

Then pray the Lama not to depart for Nirvâna in the same way that in the olden days Yidkyi Khye'uchung (*yid kyi khye'u chung*) knelt and joined hands in a gesture of supplication to ask the Buddha Tönpa Shenrab not to depart for Nirvâna. To this end, he multiplied into myriads of emanations and repeated his request, asking the Buddha to stay for the benefit of beings untill Samsâra is emptied.

2-6. The Request or Exhortation to turn the Wheel of Bön

The Three Wheels of Bön revealed by Tönpa Shenrab are:
— The Nine vehicles,
— The Four Portals and the Treasury as the Fifth, and
— The Three outer, inner and secret Teachings.

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[1] On the contrary, the viperine hate that someone might have for another person is just affecting the agent of this hate, never the person who is the object of such a repulsive attitude.

These various Wheels aim at converting beings according to their spiritual capacities. On this subject, Lama Lha has said:

« — For the multiplicity of beings to convert,
The Wheel of Bön
I ask you to turn. »

Thus each teaching revealed by Tönpa Shenrab was aimed at specific beings according to their spiritual dispositions.

In the context of this practice of Guru-yoga, present the Lama with offerings of jewels, wheels set with precious stones, svâstikas adorned with turquoises, etc., setting them in myriads of emanations at his feet, hands joined in a gesture of supplication.

Ask him to consent to turn the Wheel of Bön, keeping in mind that the Perfect Authentic Buddha of one's Tradition, Tönpa Shenrab Miwo, has unfolded countless precepts and turned the Three Wheels of Bön for the sake of beings. Ask him to do the same and to teach profusely.

2-7. Dedication

Just as Buddhas and Yungdrung Sempas of the past have dedicated their virtues for the benefit of all beings, you should dedicate your virtues, no matter how small, untill you achieve Perfect Enlightenment.

Me'u Gongdzö Dampa Ritröpa Chenpo (1038–1096),[1] the first compiler of Atri, has said that one should dedicate the virtues accumulated by means of formulas of dedication without ever delaying. He has also specified dedicating any virtue no matter how small. In the *Abridged Sûtra* (*mDo'dus*, the shortest biography of Tönpa Shenrab), it is said that the virtues that are not dedicated are dispersed and that the ones that are not properly dedicated are scattered. The *Abridged Sûtra* also stipulates that if one only dedicates for one's sole benefit, the virtues are less.

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[1] See his biography in Achard, *Les Instructions sur le A Primordial*, volume I, pp. 33-39.

One should therefore dedicate the source of virtues to the benefit of all sentient beings, infinite as the sky. If one dedicates for the benefit of Unexcelled Enlightenment, then the source of virtues is immense and their fruit immeasurable.

In particular, you should dedicate the virtues of your practices to your father, mother, brothers and sisters. You should also share these virtues with the deceased. Indeed, virtues dedicated to the deceased have the effect of expanding the merits for both the deceased and yourself. In brief, conclude all practices with dedication and aspiration (*smon lam*) prayers.

3. The Request of Blessings

Then, proceed with the request of Blessings which is the third main part of Guru-yoga. Imagine that from the heart of Kuntuzangpo, who is seated at the top of the Refuge tree, comes forth the white water of Wisdom (*ye shes kyi chu*) that gradually flows out of all the masters of the Lineage to finally melt into one's root lama.

Imagine that this white water of Wisdom flows out of the master's heart and enters your fontanelle as well as that of all sentient beings surrounding you. As it enters into you, imagine that it purifies all your impurities as well as the very materiality of your aggregates. This purification transforms you as well as all beings into bodies of light (*'od kyi sku*). Then, in their turn, all the deities and Lamas of the field of merit melt into lights which dissolve into the Lama (still in the form of Shenlha Ökar) above your head.

Imagine that your root Lama is the source of the Three Jewels (the Buddha Tönpa Shenrab, the Bön he taught, and the Community of Shens), the very incarnation of the Three Roots (Lama, Yidam and Khandro) and the fusion of the Three Bodies, i.e., the Absolute Body, the Perfection Body, and the Emanation Body.

The Lama also embodies the fusion of the Hundred Clans of the Peaceful and Wrathful divinities (*zhi khro rigs brgya*) of the Mandala.

Then imagine that all the lights melt into the Lama and that you concretely realize that he represents everything that has

just been enumerated (the Three Jewels, the Three Roots, The Three Bodies, and the Zhitros).

After that, recite the following prayer:

« — Lama Rinpoche! Lama Rinpoche! Lama Rinpoche!
I beg of you, turn my mind toward virtue!
Have me travel the path of virtues!
Have me reach the ultimate limit of the path!
I beg of you, give birth to a special realization in my mind
At this very moment and in this very place! »

Then one recites the *Chitsuk Dewa*, the short invocation of the Guru-yoga, that ought to be recited one hundred thousand times in order to accomplish the complete practice of Guru-yoga.

Chitsuk Dewa Chenpö Phodrang Du
Drinchen Tswai Lama La Sölwa Dep
Sangye Semsu Tönpa Rinpoche
Rang-ngo Rang-gi Shepar Jingyi Lob

« — On the crown of my head, palace of great bliss,
Abides the benevolent root Lama whom i supplicate:
Ô Precious One who reveals the Buddha as being my mind,
Grant me the blessings to recognize my own true essence! »

Whether you receive the blessings from the master and from the entire lineage depends solely on the state in which you recite the prayer: if you yawn, are distracted or lack sincerity, blessings will not permeate your continuum.

After you have recited the Guru-yoga prayer, you should receive the Four Empowerments (*dbang bzhi len pa*):

— the Empowerment of the Body (*sku yi dbang*), which corresponds to the Empowerment of the Vase (*bum pa'i dbang*);
— the Empowerment of Speech (*gsung gi dbang*), which corresponds to the Secret Empowerment (*gsang ba'i dbang*);
— the Empowerment of the Mind (*thugs kyi dbang*), which corresponds to the Empowerment of Knowledge-Wisdom (*shes rab ye shes kyi dbang*) and
— the Special Empowerment of Wisdom (*khyad par ye shes kyi dbang*), which corresponds to the Verbal Empowerment (*tshig dbang*).

3-1. The Empowerment of the Body

First, recite the following prayer:

« —Lama Rinpoche! Lama Rinpoche! Lama Rinpoche!
I beg of you, grant my body the Supreme Empowerment of Body! »

Then imagine that on the Lama's forehead appears a white A, as pure as crystal. This A emanates from his forehead to merge into your own head. Imagine at that time that the three negative bodily actions (i.e., killing, stealing and sexual misbehavior) are purified. Once these karmic activities have been purified, clearly imagine that the blessings of the Master's Body enter you and that you have obtained the Emanation Body (*sprul pa'i sku*).

3-2. The Empowerment of Speech

Then recite the following prayer:

« — Lama Rinpoche! Lama Rinpoche! Lama Rinpoche!
I beg of you, grant my speech the Supreme Empowerment of Speech! »

Imagine that in his throat appears a ruby-red Ôm that melts into your throat. It purifies the four negative actions accomplished through speech, i.e., lying, slandering, rude language and chattering. Once these actions are purified, imagine that the blessings of the Lama's Speech permeate you and that you have obtained the Perfection Body (*rdzogs pa'i sku*).

3-3. The Empowerment of the Mind

Recite the following prayer:

« — Lama Rinpoche! Lama Rinpoche! Lama Rinpoche!
I beg of you, grant my mind the Supreme Empowerment of Mind! »

Imagine that from the Lama's heart appears a sapphire-blue Hûm that enters your heart, purifying obscurations and the

three negative actions of the mind, i.e., bad intentions, noxious mind and wrong views. Imagine you have received the blessings of the Lama's Heart and obtained the Empowerment that will enable your mind to realize the Absolute Body (*bon sku*).

3-4. The Special Empowerment of Wisdom

After this, recite :

« — Lama Rinpoche! Lama Rinpoche! Lama Rinpoche!
I beg of you, grant me the Supreme Special Empowerment of Wisdom! »

Then imagine that the master (together with his throne) enters your fontanelle (the head chakra) and descends the central channel. His size is about a span; his body is extremely luminous, he is smiling and his eyes sparkle (the visualization should be extremely precise). Stay concentrated on this visualization for a while.

Then, imagine that he descends to the throat chakra, where he settles. His thumb-sized body is still extremely luminous, he is smiling and his eyes sparkle. Also remain concentrated on this visualization for a while.

After that, imagine that the master descends to the eight-petalled lotus chakra of your heart. His size is now that of a mustard seed. His body is still extremely luminous, he smiles and his eyes sparkle. Stay concentrated on this visualization for a while.

Eventually, imagine that the master's body becomes smaller and smaller until he merges undifferentiatedly with your mind. Imagine that the totality of the karmas gathered in the *Alayavijnana* is purified and that Self-Arisen Wisdom (*rang byung gi ye shes*) dawns within you as you obtain the Empowerment of the ultimate Fruit (*mthar thug gi 'bras bu*), i.e., the Essence Body (*ngo bo nyid kyi sku*).

Remain in a state uncorrupted by the thoughts of the three times, similar to the sky or to a lake that is never rippled by the wind. Relax within your own spontaneous flow, at the very heart of the natural state, and contemplate the face of the inner Lama

(*nang gi bla ma'i zhal*) who is the true, ultimate source of Refuge.When the practice is over, just as Buddhas and Yungdrung Sempas of the past who have dedicated the totality of their virtues, proceed with the dedication of merits for the benefit of all beings infinite as the sky.

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The practice of Guru-yoga during the four activities

The four activities consist in 1. walking, 2. sitting, 3. eating and drinking, and 4. sleeping.

When practising Guru-yoga while walking, imagine that the Lama is in the space above your left shoulder.

When sitting, imagine that the Lama abides in the space above your head and pray to him.

When eating and drinking, visualize the Lama at the centre of your throat and offer him the first fruits of everything you consume.

When going to sleep, visualise the Lama at the centre of your heart and proceed with the night practice that consists in drawing consciousness into the vase (*shes bya bum par gzhug pa*).

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Guru-yoga as universal vision

To complete the practice of Guru-yoga, imagine that the place where you happen to be is the Pure Field of the Lama (*bla ma'i zhing khams*), that all formal visible manifestations (*gzugs snang*) represent the Lama's Body (*bla ma'i sku*), that all sounds represent the Lama's Speech (*bla ma'i gsung*), and finally, that all your thoughts and evocations (*dran pa*) arising within the mind form the Mind of the Lama (*bla ma'i thugs*) in which you now abide evenly and free from artifice.

If you are able to practise as described, integrating these principles into all your activities, you will reach the ultimate key point of practice. In the text entitled *Dzöpai Rangsharma* (*mDzod pa'i rang shar ma*), it is said:

« — When sitting, sit in the ease free from artifice,
For such is the way of abiding in the Principle of the Essence.
When laying down, lie down in the state of Clear-Light,

For such is the way of lying down without (fluctuation) of clarity or obscurity.

When drinking, drink from the flow of evocations,
For such is the way to drink from an infinite flow.
When eating, delight in the great savor of Absorption,
For such is the way to eat without attachment.
When contemplating, contemplate the state of the Mind,
For such is the way to contemplate the forsaking of dualistic graspings.
When going, continue with the Wisdom of one's Awareness,
For such is the way to go on without union or separation. »

*

The importance of Guru-yoga

The reason the practice of Guru-yoga is stressed in the cycle of Atri is because the master is the swiftest source for obtaining blessings. Therefore, when one enters the main practice of the Path, one should not consider Guru-yoga as a preliminary practice and think that from now on it is irrelevant. On the contrary, Guru-yoga is the practice one does every day, as soon as one wakes up, even before the reflection on the four Dharmas that turn the mind away from Samsâra.

Each day one should train in practicing every conceivable virtue in order for oneself and all sentient beings to achieve the state of Perfect Buddhahood. Likewise, every day one should train in forsaking, as much as possible, all vicious actions leading to negative karma. Indeed, if every day one links all activities to the practice of Guru-yoga, one will mentally train to see through the insubstantiality of the world and to realize its illusory nature.

In the *Treatise on the Conventional Meaning* (*Drang don*), it is said:

« — He who is not distracted during sessions will penetrate the Principle;
The Supreme Shen, endowed with such methods,
Will divide every day as well as every night into four parts. »

If one has not gained mastery over one's mind for lack of practice, or because of not having respected one's samayas and bro-

ken one's oaths, one should recite the hundred-syllable Mantra with an extremely repentant mind and then proceed with the dedication of even the slightest virtue so that all beings might achieve full Enlightenment.

When one is falling asleep, one imagines that the Lama merges into one's heart and that his Mind and one's mind merge together in an undifferentiated way. One falls asleep with this visualization, which has the capacity to eradicate one's karmic imprints. In this way, one practises Guru-yoga in all circumstances.

*

Conclusion

One may practise the meditation phase (*sgom rim*) without recitation, or do them altogether (*sgom bzla zung 'jug*). In order to become familiar with the practice, in the beginning one does only the meditation sessions. Once one has perfectly mastered the diverse phases of meditation, one may unite meditation and recitation.

The order of the practices is as follows:
1. taking Refuge,
2. generating the pure and perfect Mind,
3. confession with the hundred-syllable Mantra,
4. mandala offering and accumulation of merits,
5. prayer to the Lineage (i.e., Guru-yoga), and
6. prostrations.

To these Shardza adds three practices, which are:
7. the practice of *Künzang Akor* (*Kun bzang a skor*) with the recitation of the Sale Ö mantra,
8. the practice of the *Matri Rinchen Drönma* (*Ma tri rin chen sgron ma*) with the recitation of the Matri mantra, and
9. the practice of Dribjang (*sGrib sbyang*) enabling one to purify obscurations with the recitation of the Akar mantra.

The addition of these three mantric practices completes the total of the nine phases of the preliminaries according to *The Instructions on the Primordial A* (*A khrid*). Each of these phases should

be accomplished one hundred thousand times in order to reach a total of nine hundred thousand preliminaries.

According to *The Oral Transmission* (*sNyan rgyud*), it is said :
« — When one devotes oneself to these diverse branches of the preliminaries, it is important not to fluctuate but to evenly unite the three doors and to practise with concentration of body and mind. »

Shardza Rinpoche adds that some people think that the practice of the preliminaries is not very important. They always boast about the depth of the main practice (*dngos gzhi*) and say they do not have much time for the meditations and recitations of the preliminaries. They think they have the capacities of the Great Sages from the past who devoted themselves to the Development and Perfection Phases (*bskyed rim* and *rdzogs rim*), etc. For all that, these people deprive themselves of redeeming teachings, and cannot renounce the samsaric throes and concretely realize the Mind of Perfect Purity. Shardza Rinpoche wonders how one can hope to make any progress without taking these preliminary practices to heart. Indeed, if these preliminaries are not previously accomplished, how can one hope to make swift progress on the Path and develop redeeming experiences?

As said in *The Oral Transmission of Tsewang Rigdzin* (*Tshe dbang snyan rgyud*):
« — If one has not previously trained the mind
With preliminaries such as impermanence,
One may boast about a high view but
One's flesh will nevertheless be burned by demons. »

On the same subject, Dampa Ritrõpa has said:
« — It is through gradual ascent
That the summit of the mountain is reached;
That is why one's continuum must be purified in a gradual way. »

Shardza Rinpoche comments on this excerpt saying that if one does not start at the bottom of the mountain, one will never reach its summit. Therefore one should train the mind with the

preliminaries and truly integrate them within oneself because they are the very base of the practice that led the Sages of the past to Ultimate Achievement.

This practice of preliminaries is advocated by the most eminent Patriarchs of our Lineage, such as Dampa Ritrōpa Chenpo, his son, and Nyamme Sherab Gyeltsen, who granted them considerable emphasis in their daily practices.[1]



[1] This version was translated from the French by Marianne Ginalski (of the Tsewang Ridzin Translation Committee).

Instructions without characteristics

[*mTshan med kyi khrid*]

Having revealed the gradual instructions of precepts,
I now prostrate at the feet of the blissful masters!

Instructions without characteristics

a. Preliminaries

The first of the three (subdivisions of the text) deals with the preliminaries which are identical with those described above.

b. The main practice

Second, the main practice has three parts : the key point of the body, the key point of the gaze, and the key point of the vow.

b-1. The key point of the body

On a comfortable cushion, sit in the position of the five natural seals. Lachen (Drenpa Namkha) has said that the ring fingers should be curved inwards.

b-2. The key point of the gaze

As to the key point of the gaze, the *Agama* (*Lung*) says:
« — The yogi who does not close his eyes
Is the most excellent of all yogis
And enjoys what is designated as the "Lion's Gaze". »

One harmonizes Awareness with the eyes and one remains relaxed (while contemplating) the intermediate space before one.
One leaves the body and the mind (relaxed), without paying attention to them,
One leaves the five doors in their natural ease
And one leaves Awareness without support.

b-3. The key point of the vow

(The practice) should be performed according to a fourfold division of time (centered on) twilight, dawn, morning and afternoon.

c. Conclusion

Then, thirdly, as for the concluding activities, signs will be induced owing to the duration of sessions,

And finally one proceeds with the dedication (of virtues to the obtaining) of unsurpassable enlightenment.

Thus, the sessions should be performed a great number of times

And, just like unruffled water remains pure, it is said (of mind):

« — The consciousness accessing the abiding mode of mind,

The consciousness accessing the natural purity similar to a cloudless sky,

The consciousness accessing the absence of all support, similar to the traces left by a bird in the sky, and

The consciousness accessing the unceasing flow (of Awareness), similar to a waterfall —

Such are (the experiences) that must arise first. »

In conformity with the Contemplation of Past Sages,

These gradual instructions without characteristics

Were, by me, Yorpo Mepel, put into written form.

May they bring benefit to all beings!

The gradual instructions without characteristics are (here) completed.

Marzhi Uya emaho !

[Auspicious Omens, Secrets and Marvels !]

❖

Commentary on the Instructions without Characteristics

The root text composed by Yorpo Mepel is commented upon here according to its meaning, not to its wording. The text contains four parts: the author's homage, the instructions proper, the conclusion, and the colophon.

1. The author's homage

> *Having revealed the gradual instructions of precepts, I now prostrate at the feet of the blissful masters!*

After having explained the various stages of the instructions on the quintessential instructions of *Atri*, Yorpo Mepel intends to describe the oral instructions making up the practice without characteristics (*mtshan med*). He therefore seeks the necessary blessings from the lineage holders, in order to bring his explanation to completion.

2. Instructions without characteristics

The instructions without characteristics are comprised of three main parts : 1. preliminaries, 2. the main practice, and 3. the conclusion (which actually forms the third and last main division of the text).

2-1. Preliminaries

> *The first of the three (subdivisions of the text) deals with the preliminaries which are identical with those described above.*

As they are described in the *Clarification of Precious Confrontations* (*Ngo sprod rin po che gsal 'debs*), there are four kinds of preliminaries :

i. the transmission of the blessings of the lineage though the practice of Guru-yoga ;
ii. the generation of Pure and Perfect Mind or *Bodhicitta* ;
iii. the examination of the vessel which receives the instructions and which mut have specific qualities; and
iv. the gathering of the accumulations.

The details of these preliminaries are explained in the *Clarification* (*gSal 'debs*) mentioned above, as well as in the first sessions of the standard manual of practice (see above pp. 12-18). It would be advisable to approach these preliminaries though *The Swift Path to Liberation* (*Thar Lam myur bgrod*) by Shardza Rinpoche, as well as through his *Ocean of Oral Advice of Atri* (*A khrid bka' lung rgya mtsho*).

The three subdivisions of the text mentioned in the quotation are those established by Yorpo Mepel and consist in the preliminaries, main practice and conclusion.

2-2. The main practice

> *Second, the main practice has three parts : the key point of the body, the key point of the gaze, and the key point of the vow.*

The main practice (*dngos gzhi*) thus consists of these three key points.

2-2-1. The key point of the body

> *On a comfortable cushion, sit in the position of the five natural seals. Lachen (Drenpa Namkha) has said that the ringfingers should be curved inwards.*

One sits on a comfortable cushion in the fivefold position which consists of the following five "seals":

1. First seal : the legs are crossed in the lotus position (or in the half-lotus if one cannot adopt that of the full lotus) ; this symbolizes the contemplation of Künnang Khyabpa (the central Buddha of white complexion); it allows the purification of delusion and ignorance and helps in realizing the Wisdom of the Space of Reality.

2. Second seal: the hands are joined in the equality mudra, with the left hand above the right one, the thumbs pressing the base of the ring fingers. According to the instructions of Lachen Drenpa Namkha, the ring fingers should be curved inwards (as if covering the tip of the thumbs). This seal symbolizes the Contemplation of Jedrak Ngöme (the red Buddha of the western direction), purifies desire-attachment and leads to the realization of the Discriminating Wisdom.

3. Third seal: the spine is kept straight, while slightly pulling up the neck in order to align the vertebrae without, however, undue strain. This symbolizes the Contemplation of Selwa Rangjung (the yellow Buddha of the eastern direcion), purifies anger and leads to the realization of the Mirror-like Wisdom.

4. Fourth seal : the shoulders are straightened while the neck is slightly bent forward, with the chin pulled inwards. This seal symbolizes the Contemplation of Gelha Garchuk (the green Buddha of the northern direction), purifies pride and leads to the realization of the Wisdom of Equality.

5. Fifth seal : the eyes are directed slightly downwards, along the plane of the nose, while breath is done through the mouth. This last seal symbolizes the Contemplation of Gawa Döndrup (the blue Buddha of the southern direction), purifies envy and leads to the realization of the Wisdom of All-accomplishing Actions.

The mastery of this posture will help to harmonize the elements of the body, and neutralize the five corresponding poisons.

Thus, when one has become sufficiently familiarized with it, the five Wisdoms will spontaneously arise without any effort and the five Bodies of the Buddha will appear in all their plenitude.

Such are the quintessential instructions on the five seals of the body's posture. When established in this posture, one should remain supple and relaxed (this may not be easy at first, but after a while it should become easier). One should remain quite relaxed but vividly alert, in a state of presence (*shes bzhin*) and perfect mindfulness (*dran pa*).

2-2-2. The key point of the gaze

> *As to the key point of the gaze, the Agama (Lung) says:*
> *« — The yogi who does not close his eyes*
> *Is the most excellent of all yogis*
> *And enjoys what is designated as the "Lion's Gaze". »*

In our tradition, it is said that if one meditates with closed eyes, mind will be easily disturbed by the movements of discursive thoughts, by imagination and by the identification with the inner discursiveness which describes to itself what it is actually doing. On the other hand, if the eyes are too wide open, the mind may grasp at outer objects and engage in its habitual process of description, appropriation and possible rejections of what it grasps. The correct way of gazing is called the "Lion's Gaze" which means that the eyes are half-open, without fixing upon anything in particular and without being directed in a specific direction.

> *One harmonizes Awareness with the eyes and one remains relaxed (while contemplating) the intermediate space before one.*

In order to apply this Lion's Gaze, one should keep the eyes open and concentrate the mind on them. Simultaneously, one leaves the eyes fixed on the intermediate space (*bar snang*), na-

mely the blue, empty sky spread out before one. The eyes should also be perfectly immobile, a key point which cuts off the flow of discursive thoughts as well as that of subtle analytical grasping. This immobility is of utmost importance if one wants to keep on practising until specific signs of success arise in the three doors.

> *One leaves the body and the mind (relaxed), without paying attention to them.*

The body and the mind are left in their natural state, without any artifice. One keeps the posture without tension, with great suppleness and one leaves the mind concentrated on the sky, without being carried away by the potential flow of thoughts. The main point here is to remain concentrated "in the state of the sky".

> *One leaves the five doors in their natural ease*
> *And one leaves Awareness without support.*

The doorways of the senses are left in their unalterated state: the eyes do not blink, saliva and nasal mucus are allowed to flow without restraint, while the mind is not paying any attention to noise, etc. In this way, the winds which serve in the functions of the senses will gradually resorb owing to these key points and those of the posture. This will intensify contemplation in a very notable way. Awareness is not fixed on any outer object, but remains concentrated "without support" on the infinite, blue sky. When one reaches perfect mastery of this practice, one is then directly introduced to the nakedness of Awareness and its celestial immensity.

2-2-3. The key point of the vow

> *(The practice) should be performed according to a fourfold division of time (centered on) twilight, dawn, morning and afternoon.*

The practice of sky-gazing in the fivefold position should be performed at twilight, dawn, during the morning and the afternoon. Sessions should last for the duration equivalent to the time necessary to recite two hundred *A Akar Sale Ö Ayang Om Du* mantras. Their length should then gradually be increased, as one becomes more familiar with the experience of the natural state (sessions tend naturally to be longer but should be interrupted before they deteriorate).

3. Conclusion

> *Then, thirdly, as for the concluding activities, signs will be induced owing to the duration of sessions*

As just stated, sessions should be lengthened gradually until the arising of specific signs indicating that the practice has been perfectly accomplished. It is also said that the middle of the day and of the night are not favorable to practice since these are periods of both inner and physical torpor.

The specific signs of success vary according to practitioners, but if the practice is performed regularly and with much concentration, first of all one should experience a mind-created calm abiding. Then, one will experience a natural calm abiding and eventually an ultimate calm abiding in which one remains in the unshakeable stability of the mind. It is said that it is best to dedicate a whole month's retreat to this sky-gazing practice.

> *And finally one proceeds with the dedication (of virtues to the obtaining) of unsurpassable enlightenment.*

After each session of practice, one recites the dedication of virtues, in order to seal their efficaciousness for oneself and others. In the *A-tri* tradition, this dedication is as follows:

« — All the sources of virtues of the three times collected throughout Samsara and Nirvana, such as the pure sources of

virtues that my donor and I have collected, I dedicate them to the benefit of all beings so that we reach the supreme and unsurpassable enlightenment. When these merits are transformed into infinite sources of virtues and merits, may all sentient beings and I swiftly obtain the unsurpassable Fruit that is Perfect Buddhahood! »

If one does not dedicate the virtues this way, the smallest passion arising after the practice will irremediably destroy merits and virtues accumulated though meditation. Dedication is one of the Three Excellences (*dam pa gsum*) which must be applied in all our practices. Thus, first of all, one should develop an altruistic attitude at the beginning of each practice (this is the first Excellence). Then, during the sessions themselves, one should remain in the founding experience of Emptiness (this is the second Excellence). Finally, at the end of each session, one should dedicate one's practice by sharing the merits with all sentient beings (this is the third Excellence).

> *Thus, the sessions should be performed a great number of times and, just like unruffled water remains pure, it is said:*
> *« — The consciousness accessing the abiding mode of mind, the consciousness accessing the natural purity similar to a cloudless sky, the consciousness accessing the absence of all support, similar to the traces left by a bird in the sky, and the consciousness accessing the unceasing flow (of Awareness), similar to a waterfall— such are (the experiences) that must arise first. »*

First sessions should be performed for relatively short periods (regularly increased when you become more familiar with the practice); these should, however, be numerous in order to avoid distraction or torpor. Your contemplation should thus be like pure and limpid water, free from the discursive stains of the intellect. At that time, you will have four decisive experiences:

1. first, you will access the real abiding mode of your mind;
2. then, you will enjoy its natural purity which is similar to the immaculate and cloudless, blue sky ;
3. then, your mind will manifest in a state devoid of any support, similar to the absence of traces left by a bird flying in the sky;
4. and finally, you will access the unceasing flow of the natural state by remaining continuously absorbed in its sapiential marvels.

4. Colophon

> *In conformity with the Contemplation of Past Sages, these gradual instructions without characteristics were, by me, Yorpo Mepel, put into written form. May they bring benefit to all beings!*
> *The gradual instructions without characteristics are (here) completed. Marzhi Uya emaho ! [Auspicious Omens, Secrets and Marvels !]*

Following the oral instructions of the previous lineage holders, Yorpo Mepel (1134-1168) composed this short root text on the practice of the instructions without characteristics, in order to guide beings on an errorless path. The present commentary was first written in French for the adepts of the Dzogchen Training Program conducted under the guidance of Lopön Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche in 1997. Mutsuk marro!



IV. Phowa Teachings of Dru Gyelwa Yungdrung

The teachings of Phowa (*'pho ba*) have been described by Dampa Ritrõpa as special methods for leading sentient beings to full Buddhahood. These methods are actually divided into four parts: 1. gradual Phowa; 2. instantaneous Phowa; 3. Phowa for others; and 4. signs of success.

1. Gradual Phowa

This first method has three parts : 1. the key point of the body and the visualization of the channels; 2. the key point of the visualization; and 3. the actual way to practise.

1-1. The key point of the body and the channels

The posture that is used for training in the Phowa practice is the fivefold position which has been described above. Sitting in this posture, visualize the central channel inside your body: its lower extremity reaches the secret place (*gsang gnas*), while the upper one opens in the Brahma aperture on the top of the head. The size of this central channel is that of a bamboo cane, becoming slightly larger from the heart level upwards and eventually opening like a cone on its upper part.

1-2. The key point of the visualization

Visualize three A letters, one above the other, as follows :

— directly at the level of the heart, visualize one A having the size of a thumb-phalanx;
— visualize another A on the top of the head; and
— visualize a third A in the space above your head, at approximately a distance equal to a fingers' span.

Then, by uttering the sound *Hik!* briefly and powerfully, imagine that the A in the heart — symbolizing the Essence of your own Awareness — is transformed into a luminous *thigle* which dissolves into the A at the Brahma aperture in the head. After this, with a long *Ki* sound, imagine that you then bring the A down to its source in the heart.

1-3. The actual way to perform the practice

Practise as described above hundreds or thousands of times, with this cycle of the *Hik!* which throws the *thigle* up in the central channel and the *Ki* which brings it down. Practise in this way at dawn, twilight, morning and afternoon, etc. You should practice as much as you can, gradually increasing the length of the sessions until you become tired of this training.

When you conclude a session, imagine that the *thigle* goes back down into the heart while you utter three long A sounds :

— first, utter a long A sound and imagine that the A in the space above your head dissolves into the A at the top of your head;
— then, with the second long A sound, imagine that the A on the top of your head dissolves into the *thigle* in the heart;
— finally, with the third A sound, imagine that the *thigle* in your heart dissolves there, as the pure, unborn nature of your mind.

Also, imagine that, at that time, the door of the upper extremity of the central channel in your head closes.

Such are the instructions to be followed during your lifetime. When you have sufficiently trained in this way, some signs will appear, such as itching at the level of the Brahma aperture, an abscess oozing pus, etc. Practise every day; do not skip any session.

2. Instantaneous Phowa

Second, as to the instantaneous Phowa, when the time of death has come, the best yogis just sit in the posture with the legs crossed, those of medium capacities stay in the crouching position, while ordinary yogis lie down in the sleeping-lion posture.

Meditate as before on the visualization of the channels and the *A* at the top of the head and then utter three or twenty-one *Hik!* sounds. If you cannot speak at the time, simply imagine you do so.

Then imagine that the A at the heart, symbolizing the Essence of your mind, gradually moves up in the central channel and that it dissolves into the A at the Brahma aperture. During that visualization, while the A of the heart slowly goes up, imagine that below it, the cavity of the central channel closes itself irreversibly.

After that, while uttering *Hik!* a further twenty-one times, imagine that the A at the top of your head moves up and dissolves into the A in the space above you. Then imagine that that last A dissolves into the Space of Reality as you reach full Buddhahood. At the same time, you should also reflect on the teachings associated with the dissolutions of the elements. The clarification regarding these dissolutions can be made orally by an attendant, or by the master if he is present at the time.

3. Practicing Phowa for others

This practice is of utmost importance for beings at the time of death. Consequently, at the time when the outer breathing has stopped but when the inner breathing has not yet ceased, it is important that the dying person lies on his or her right side, with the head directed toward the south and the face toward the east. The left arm is placed on the left side of the body, while the right arm supports the head. The two legs are placed one on top of the other and are slightly bent. One should then apply the special instructions of Phowa as described above and while saying the following to the dying person:

« — O Fortunate Son of Noble Clan! The true meaning is

about to be revealed to you: listen and concentrate your senses!
Bound by karma, your body and mind
Are now going to separate because the time has come to forsake this aggregate.
From the depth of your heart, generate the immaculate and rootless Awareness;
Let your consciousness be relaxed and calm
And leave your senses clear and vivid.
Do not be attached to food, possessions, country, houses or even to your family.
Since attachment is the cause of Samsara,
In order to cut off the doorways to the birth and death of sentient beings in the Three Realms,
You must now forsake this illusory, physical aggregate
And, after having forsaken it,
You should swiftly obtain the state of Buddhahood.
Generate the Bodhicitta with which you guide sentient beings
And visualize in the sky before you the masters, the Buddhas and the divine throng of Yidams.
Generate a deep and intense devotion toward them
And, thinking about all the sufferings that the beings of the Three Realms have to purify,
Generate for them an intense compassion!
Your illusory body being the base or support of impurities and the cause of Samsara,
Generate joy, thinking about the bliss caused by your forsaking this aggregate of obscurations!

Then, imagine that from the top of your head down to your secret place, your body is empty and luminous.
Above the upper extremity of the central channel in your head, in the sky before you,
The master in whom you have faith or your Yidam appears with his specific colors, emblems and throne.
Visualize a white A in the secret door of your head
And visualize another white A, symbolizing the essence of your mind, in the central channel at the level of your heart.

In this state, utter a powerful sound *Hik!*[1]
And imagine that the A in your heart is gradually elevated as you utter twenty-one *Hik* sounds;
It eventually dissolves into the A located in the secret door of your head.
While you are projecting the A of your heart upwards,
Imagine that the cavity of the central channel below closes up.
Therefore you imagine that you contract this channel so that the A is directed upwards.

Again utter twenty-one *Hik!* sounds
And imagine that the A at your head rises into the sky:
Imagine that it dissolves into the heart of your master or the Yidam in which you have faith and that you have visualized in the sky before you.
Then, think that you reach full Buddhahood in the Space of Akanishtha heaven,
At the speed of a lightning streaking across the sky.
If your mind remains fixed at the top of your head, destroy this fixation with a powerful *Hik!* sound.

Now, your Awareness, similar to a butter-lamp inside a vase,
Remains perfectly clear, blazing and luminous;
Therefore, do not be attached to anything,
And do not create any projections and resorptions associated with the numerous thoughts of the past and future.
Leave your Awareness in its immaculate and rootless nakedness!

You will then have visions which will appear with multi-colored lights
And will arise in manifold ways;
However, they do not arise from anywhere (other than yourself):
They simply form the natural light of your own Awareness.

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[1] If the dying person is unable to do so, the assistant can utter it for him or her.

You should recognize that such a luminosity, which is the arising of the Clear-Light Bardo of Reality,
Is a natural manifestation similar to an illusion
And you should thus not create any attachment to it!

Your own visions have rays similar to those of the sun
Or like rainbows appearing in the atmosphere,
Displayed like a piece of brocade laid out, and so on,
Arising with a deep and intense colored radiance.
(Again,) these visions do not come from anywhere (other than yourself):
They are the natural rays of your own Awareness.»

This is how one proceeds with the direct introduction at the time of death.

Furthermore, these visions will appear in the midst of droning sounds and roaring lightning,
Similar to mountains crashing down,
To earthquakes, and to rocks being shattered.
You should not fear any of these manifestations
Because they are the natural resonance of your Awareness.

Moreover, since it is necessary to perform at that time virtuous practices such as
Generating faith, devotion, respect, love and compassion,
Generating Bodhicitta, taking Refuge, and so forth.,
You should proceed with the necessary clarification by whispering (words) like the above into the ears of the dying person.

4. Signs of success

Among the signs indicating that the Phowa has been effective,

Seeing an abscess appearing at the location of the Brahma aperture,

Having the sensation that bones are breaking inside the skull,

Or seeing a hot vapor rising up from the head — these are authentic signs.

If such signs appear, the best yogis will reach Buddhahood without going through the Bardo states, at the speed of lightning in the sky.

Even those of ordinary capacities will be swiftly propelled into a good rebirth in a noble family

And, throughout their rebirths, they will follow authentic teachings and eventually reach full Buddhahood.

The clarification of the Phowa composed by Drutön Gyelwa Yungdrung is hereby completed. Virtues!



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