Illuminating the Path to Liberation: A Preliminary Practice (Ngöndro)

by Jamgön Mipham Rinpoche

lama khyen
O guru, care for me!

Three times

daljor nyé ka udom wara dra
The freedoms and endowments are difficult to find, like the uḍumbara flower,

nyé na dön ché yishyn nor lé lhak
And, when secured, are of immense significance — greater even than a wish-granting jewel.

dindra nyepa dari tsam shiyik la
Yet now that we have this unique opportunity,

dön chen ten gyi dümna mi drubpar
We fail to accomplish what is of long-term value

dönmé chü zar gyurpa dakchak la
And instead waste our time in frivolous pursuits—

köncok kündü lamé tukjé zik
O guru, embodiment of the Three Jewels, look upon us with compassion!

daljor dönyö jepar jingyi lob
Grant your blessings and inspire us to make the most of the freedoms and endowments!
This was the first contemplation phase.

All conditioned things are as transient as lightning in the sky.

Consider the environment or its inhabitants: everything perishes in the end.

We thus deceive ourselves in the belief that things endure.

Grant your blessings and inspire us to be mindful of impermanence and death!

This was the second contemplation phase.

The results of positive and negative deeds do not go to waste.

It is through the infallible operation of cause and effect.

That all the phenomena of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa come about.
Although we are sure to experience the effects of our own actions,

Still we are incapable of acting and refraining from actions accordingly.

O guru, embodiment of the Three Jewels, look upon us with compassion!

Grant your blessings and inspire us to adopt virtuous action and abandon harmful deeds!

This was the third contemplation phase.

We face so many sufferings that are difficult to endure,

And apparent pleasures deceive us with their transience.

All defiled aggregates are but the cause of suffering.

Samāra’s three realms are just like a pit of flames,

Yet in our failure to understand this, we remain attached.

O guru, embodiment of the Three Jewels, look upon us with compassion!
Grant your blessings and inspire us to develop an attitude of renunciation!

This was the fourth contemplation phase.

**Uncommon Preliminaries**

**Taking Refuge**

In the space before me is a great wish-fulfilling tree with five main branches;

In its centre is the guru Vajradhara of Oddiyāna,

Surrounded by the lineage gurus, yidam deities and ḍākinīs.

In front of him is the supreme teacher together with the buddhas of the three times.

To his right are the eight close sons and the noble assembly of the Mahāyāna.

Behind is the word of the Buddha in the form of scriptures.

To his left are the eight supreme disciples and saṅgha of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas.

Surrounding them all are the wisdom dharma-protectors,
chok chu dü sum kyabul tab ché kün
And all the sources of refuge of the ten directions and three times

ma tsang mepa til gong tar salwé
In their entirety with none missing, like a mass of sesame seeds.

dündu rang dang ma sok tò ché dang
Before them all, I, my mother and other close relations,

khakhyab semchen kün gyi gü tü dé
And all beings who pervade the whole of space bow down together in devotion

dü di né zung changchub nyingpö bar
And consider that from now until we attain the essence of awakening,

yiché chok gi kyab su drowar sam
We take refuge with the utmost confidence and trust:

namkhé né su namkha gangwa yi
I and all beings of the six classes respectfully take refuge

lama yidam khandrö tsok nam dang
In the gurus, yidam deities and hosts of dākinīs,

sangye chö dang pakpé gendün la
And the Buddha, Dharma and noble Saṅgha,

dak dang dro druk güpé kyab su chi
Who fill the expanse of space at the level of the sky.
Generating Bodhicitta

Then, to generate bodhicitta in the presence of these sources of refuge, first train the mind in the four immeasurables, recite "May all beings have happiness...etc." as many times as possible.

Ho, just as the victorious buddhas and their heirs throughout past, present and future

Generate the intention to attain supreme awakening,

Now I too set my mind upon supreme and unsurpassed enlightenment,

So that I may liberate all beings who extend throughout the whole of space.

Accumulate one hundred thousand recitations.

Then there is the special method of generating bodhicitta according to the resultant mantrayāna:

I and other sentient beings, infinite in number,

Have always been buddhas from the very beginning.

In acknowledgement that this is how things are,

We generate the mind of supreme awakening!
Recite this as many times as possible.

**Maṇḍala Offering**

Arrange heaps on the maṇḍala plate and recite:

**ཐོས་ོག འོ་**

om ah hung
Oṃ āḥ hūṃ

chöying nyamnyi chökü shyingkham su
Within the dharmakāya pure realm, the dharmadhātu expanse of equality,

rang nang magak longku rik ngé shying
Are the self-appearing, unending sambhogakāya realms of the five families,

khakhyab tulkü shying gi köpa nam
And an array of nirmāṇakāya realms pervading the whole of space—

kunzang dechen chöpé trin du bul
All this I offer as the delightful offering clouds of Samantabhadra!

**ཨˆ་ར་མལ་་ཛ་་གྷ་ས་་་་ར་ཎ་ས་མ་་ཿྃ།**

oṃ ratna maṇḍala pūja megha samudra spharana samaye āḥ hūṃ

With this, make the offering.

**Vajrasattva Visualization and Mantra Recitation**

**དཔལ་ན་ོ་ེ་མས་དཔའ་་བ་མདོག**

ā. Above the crown of my head, upon a lotus and moon-disc seat,
ཡུལ་ལུལ་ཚེ་སེམས་དཔའ་བོ་མདོག
palden dorjé sempa dawé dok
Is glorious Vajrasattva, the colour of the moon.

དོན་དཀོན་དཔོན་པ་དབྱིན་ལོས་བརྒྱུད།
dorjé dril dzin nyemma yum dang khyü
He holds a vajra and bell and embraces the consort, Vajragarva.

སེམས་དཔའ་བོ་བདེན་པོ་པོ་བཀོད།
lonkū ché dzok dorjé kyilrung shyuk
In full sambhogakāya attire, he is seated in vajra posture.

འབུད་དི་ལོང་ཞིང་ལག་སྐོ་གྲོས།
dütsi gyün bab dikdrib dakpar gyur
Amṛta nectar flows down to purify misdeeds and obscurations.

Recite the hundred-syllable mantra with all four powers complete while visualizing the descent of nectar and process of purification.

At the end of the session, recite:

གོན་པོ་དབེན་ཏུ་མི་ཤེ་མོང་པ་ཡི།
gönpo dak ni mi shé mongpa yi
O protector! In my ignorance and delusion
I have gone against and corrupted my samaya.

Guru protector, be my refuge!

Chief of all the mandalas, vajra holder,

Embodiment of great compassion:

Foremost of all living beings, in you I take refuge!

I and all sentient beings openly acknowledge and confess all impairments of the root and branch samayas related to body, speech and mind.

We implore you: let our misdeeds, obscurations and faults of transgression—all our flaws—be completely cleansed and purified!

In response to this plea, Vajrasattva says, "Son/daughter of an enlightened family, your negative actions, obscurations, wrong doing and downfall are all purified." Granting his forgiveness, he dissolves into me. Through this, I and all other sentient beings become Vajrasattva. Recite the six-syllable mantra:

**om benza sato hung**

**om vajrasatva hūṃ**
Then, at the end of the session:

དགེ་བ་འགོ་བས་གཞི་ནས།
gewa di yi nyurdu dak
Through the positivity and merit of this, may I swiftly

དོན་སོགས་གདབ་པོ།
dorjé sempa drub gyur né
Attain the realization of Vajrasattva, and thereby

ད་བྲེ་མ་དཔའ་འབར་ནས།
drowa chik kyang malüpa
Every single sentient being

འོབ་བ་གེག་མང་མ་སེལ་པ།
dé yi sa la göpar shok
Reach his state of perfection too.

དམ་གཉམ་ཉམས་ཆགས་དག་དང་།
damtsik nyamchak kün dak ching
May all impairments and breakages of samaya be purified!

དམ་གཉམ་བོམ་པར་དག་པར་ཤོག།
damtsik nampar dakpar shok
May our samaya commitments remain entirely pure!

Offer aspiration prayers such as these.

Guru Yoga

འོབ་དོན་ཞེས་རབ་འོར་པ།
emaho
Emaho!

Guru Yoga
In the naturally appearing realm of infinite purity,

My own body appears clearly as Vajrayoginī.

At my crown, on a thousand-petalled lotus, sun and moon,

Is the embodiment of all sources of refuge, the Vajradhara of Odḍiyāna,

White with a tinge of red, smiling peacefully, and holding vajra and skullcup containing a vase of immortality.

In full saṃbhogakāya attire, he embraces the consort Yeshe Tsogyal.

Complete within his body are all the self-arisen tantric maṇḍalas.

All the root and lineage gurus, dākinis and oath-bound ones

Amass like a vast outpouring of sesame seeds.

The wisdom counterparts arrive from Cāmara (Ngayab Ling),

Showering down like rain and dissolving into the visualized forms.
Seven-Line Prayer

Hūṃ! In the north-west of the land of Uḍḍiyāna,

In the heart of a lotus flower,

Endowed with the most marvellous attainments,

You are renowned as the ‘Lotus Born’,

Surrounded by many hosts of ēkānikīs.

Following in your footsteps,

I pray to you: Come, inspire me with your blessing!

By reciting the Seven-Line Prayer either three or seven times, invite the deities, who then dissolve into you.

Seven-Branch Practice

Ho. With bodies as numerous as atoms, I bow down and prostrate in devotion.
The whole of appearance and existence arisen as the ground, I present as Samantabhadra's offering.

All the misdeeds and downfalls I have committed throughout my lives, I confess.

In all virtuous deeds throughout samsāra and nirvāṇa, I rejoice.

I implore you: remain in the vajra-kāya for as long as beings and realms remain, and turn the wheel of the Dharma that is profound and vast.

All virtues without exception I dedicate towards the attainment of awakening.

Invocation and Prayer

To the west, in Oḍḍiyāna's palace of power, you appeared as an emanation of the sugatas' body, speech and mind, and came to this world of Jambudvīpa for ordinary beings' sake, surrounded by a retinue of many vidyādharas and ḍākinīs—
Assembled deities of Padmasambhava, to you I pray!

Padmasambhava of Oḍḍiyāna, to you I pray!

Grant me empowerment and inspire me with your blessings, I pray!

Pray with fervent devotion and consider that you receive empowerments and blessings as a stream of light-rays and nectar enters your crown. Alternatively, you can practise guru yoga with the Oḍḍiyāna Guru inseparable from any yidam deity. In the case of Hayagrīva for example, you would visualize him as being the Great Oḍḍiyāna Guru in essence and Hayagrīva in appearance. Then, following the six lines that begin, "The dark red triangle, the powerful..." you would add "Grant me empowerment and inspire me with your blessings, I pray!" and pray with these seven lines. Similarly for Yamāntaka, you would do the same using the lines that begin, "Out of the dark blue..."

### Receiving Empowerment

Then at the end of the session receive the four empowerments with:

From the three syllables at the guru's three centres

Stream out rays of white, red and blue light,

Which dissolve into my own three centres, infusing me with blessings.

Then the guru and retinue melt into light,
tsangpé lam né nying gi tikler tim
And, having entered the brahma-path, dissolve into the core of my heart.

lamé tuk dang rangsem yermé pa
Then, with my own mind inseparable from the guru's wisdom,

lamé tuk dang rangsem yermé pa
Then, with my own mind inseparable from the guru's wisdom,

semnyi nyukma chökü ngang shyakpé
I rest in an experience of mind's genuine nature, dharmakāya.

dribpa shyi dak wang shyi yeshe tob
This purifies the four obscurations, and I obtain the wisdom of the four empowerments.

lam shyi jong shing ku shyi ngöngyur pé
With mastery of the four paths and realization of the four kāyas,

jinlab wangkur malü tobar gyur
I receive each and every form of blessing and empowerment.

Amã húm vajra guru padma siddhi húm
Reflect in this way and recite the Vajra Guru mantra as many times as possible, then conclude with:

kyewa küntu yangdak lama dang
In all my lives, may I never be separated from the perfect guru,

dralmé chö kyi pal la longchö ching
And having benefited fully from the splendour of the Dharma,

sa dang lam gyi yönten rabdzok né
May I perfect the qualities of the five paths and ten bhūmis,
dorjé chang gi gopang nyur tob shok
And swiftly attain the sublime level of Vajradhara!

Recite prayers of aspiration such as this.

This preliminary practice was arranged by Mipham Jampal Gyepa. May virtue and goodness increase!

| Translated by Adam Pearcey, 2019. |

1. ↑ Although Vajrāṭopā is sometimes given as the Sanskrit name of Vajrasattva’s consort, whose Tibetan name is Dorje Nyemma (rdo rje snyems ma), it seems that the correct Sanskrit name, which is attested in several extant sources, is Vajragervä.

2. ↑ This famous verse, beginning with 'In my ignorance and delusion...' is frequently recited during confession practices. Its source is the Abhidhānottaratantra, The Appendix to the Discourse Tantra (D 369, mngon brjod rgyud bla ma). The Abhidhāna is an 'appendix' to the Laghuśaṃvara, The Smaller Samvara (D 368, bde mchog nyung ngu), the root tantra of Cakrasaṃvara.

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