

Pith Instruction of Daily Meditation Practice

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The Ultimate Means of Visualizing the Buddha

If we can visualize and make offerings to the Buddha Shakyamuni, who is endowed with immeasurable good qualities, it equates with visualizing and making offerings to all the Tathagatas. In the *Sutra Requested by the Magician Wonderful Worthy*, it is said,

*Wonderful Worthy,
If one has made offerings to one buddha,
He has made offerings to all the buddhas of the ten directions.
Because all the Tathagatas, I, and the dharmadhatu,
Are inseparable and in all times are no different (from one another).*

*The other Tathagatas will thus also accept his offerings,
Thus his merits will increase.
He will realize the purity and equality
Of the nature of all the Buddhas.*

It is recounted in *the Avatamsaka Sutra*¹,

*If sentient beings see the Buddha but once,
They will surely purge themselves of all karmic obstacles
And forever abandon all demonic karma, so that none remains.*

Also, it says²:

*If one recalls an iota of the Thus Come One's meritorious virtue,
Or produces even one thought of devoted admiration,
The terrors of all evil paths will forever be dispelled.*

¹ http://www.cttbusa.org/avatamsaka/avatamsaka1_3.asp

² http://www.cttbusa.org/avatamsaka/avatamsaka1_3.asp

All benefits and happiness of sentient beings

Arise because of the Buddha.

Supreme and unparalleled is the Buddha's meritorious virtue.

It also mentions that, the Buddhas pervade the dharmadhatu, wishing to benefit sentient beings, they manifest numerous emanations in order to preach the Dharma to them. Also, it is mentioned in the sutra that (with his real body) as pervasive as the space and (with his appearance) like a reflection on the water, the Buddhas, for the benefit of all sentient beings, appear in the world. And also³,

The meritorious virtue within a single pore of a buddha

Could not be measured by the united efforts of all beings in this world.

It is boundless and inexhaustible as space.

...

Therefore, we should find conviction in the Buddha by understanding his merits, and one-pointedly visualize him, chant his name and mantra diligently and constantly. If one fails to constantly visualize the Buddha from moment to moment, one can concentrate on visualizing him for a short period of time, such as seven days. In this way, one will also accumulate great merits. In *The Cloud of Jewels Sutra*, it is said, "If one can, with a strong devotion and full attention, visualize the Buddha who is possessed of inconceivable virtues for seven days, then at dawn of the eighth day, he can dress properly, make offerings and chant the sadhana, so that he will see the Buddha that night; if the sadhana is not chanted completely or

³ http://www.cttbusa.org/avatamsaka/avatamsaka1_4.asp

dedicatedly, with such merit, he still will see the Buddha when death is approaching.”

Similar teachings can be found in *the Samadhi of Direct Encounter with the Buddhas of the Present*⁴. Below are some abstracts:

“Bodhisattvas, whether they be householders or renunciants, go alone to a secluded spot and sit down, and in accordance with what they have learned they concentrate their thoughts on the Tathagata, Arhat and Perfectly Awakened One Amitayus; remaining flawless in the constituent of morality and unwavering in mindfulness they should concentrate their thoughts on him for one day and one night, or for two, three, four, five, six, or seven days and nights. If they concentrate their thoughts with undistracted minds on the Tathagata Amitayus for seven days and nights, then, when a full seven days and nights have elapsed, they will see the Lord and Tathagata Amitayus. Should they not see that Lord during the daytime, then the Lord and Tathagata Amitayus will show his face to them in a dream while they are sleeping.”

It also mentions that, upon hearing about the presence of Buddha Amitabha in the Pure Land, one should repeatedly contemplate and visualize Amitabha in the above-mentioned way, in a similar way that at the mention of a prostitute of unrivalled beauty in some place, a lustful man will immediately yearn for her without even having seen her yet. He will even dream of making love with her and feel contented.

⁴ Paul Harrison (1990), *The Samadhi of Direct Encounter with the Buddhas of the Present*. Tokyo: The International Institute for Buddhist Studies

“In the same manner, Bhadrapala, bodhisattvas who possessed this samadhi of Direct Encounter with the Buddhas of the Present, heard of the Lord, the Tathagata, Arhat and Perfectly Awakened One Amitayus, while they were in this very world-system. Having simply heard of the Tathagata's name, appearance, and qualities, with undistracted thoughts they called to mind the Lord, the Tathagata, Arhat and Perfectly Awakened One Amitayus.” And they can ask questions directly in front of him.

“Obtaining a vision of the Buddhas is the natural outcome of this samadhi. Bodhisattvas who are established in this samadhi see the Tathagatas, and they appear to them, through the combination and concurrence of these three things: the might of the Buddha, the application of the force of their own wholesome potentialities, and the power [which is the result] of attaining samadhi.” And this, as the sutra tells us, is just like when we see our face appearing in the mirror; although our physical body doesn't enter the mirror, when the right conditions come together our reflection is visible within it. In the same way, by practicing diligently according to the aforesaid methods, one can see the Tathagata, listen to his Dharma teachings, and be joyful as a result of receiving prophecy from him.

As is pointed out in the sutra, in reality, the Tathagata has not come here from anywhere, nor has anyone left here to go to where the Tathagata is. It is due to having a pure mind that the Tathagata appears in one's heart. Likewise, all phenomena in the three realms are created by mind. The essence of mind cannot be found either within or outside of the mind. The mind, which arises out of causes and conditions, has a dreamlike nature and is devoid of intrinsic existence. That which has no substantial existence is considered to

be unborn and that which is unborn is not apprehensible as an object. Anyone who can thoroughly understand this truth will obtain the wisdom which is free from all provisional concepts.

“Bhadrapala, if they possess the four dharmas, bodhisattvas and mahasattvas obtain the samadhi of Direct Encounter with the Buddhas of the Present. What are these four dharmas? They are (1) faith that cannot be shaken; (2) the vigor never to turn back; (3) wisdom that others cannot lead astray; and (4) attendance upon good friends. If they possess these four dharmas, Bhadrapala, bodhisattvas and mahasattvas obtain the samadhi of Direct Encounter with the Buddhas of the Present.”

If we can diligently practice by these four methods, which are the causes of samadhi, as a result we will attain the samadhi of Direct Encounter with the Buddhas of the Present. After achieving the samadhi, one can easily behold the buddhas of the ten directions, and are able to obtain such immeasurable merits as learning, wisdom, realization, six paramitas, samadhi, dharani and supernatural powers, etc. Moreover, one will never regress from the supreme path to enlightenment, and will “become (one of) those who are not reborn in any of the benighted states, and who remember their rebirths. Furthermore, they will become those who, even in their dreams, are not deprived of the vision of the Tathagatas. They will become fair of form, beautiful, handsome, and endowed with the highest excellence of splendor and beauty. They will receive high birth and noble lineage, and have personal followings that are numerous and inseparable; ...” More details about this can be found in *the Samadhi of Direct Encounter with the Buddhas of the Present*.

In this sutra, it is also said that in the future when a terrifying situation occurs, anyone who, after learning the methods, can practice this samadhi, which equates to making offerings to the Buddha and all the buddhas in the past and future. A bodhisattva once asked Bhadrapala, “How should mahasattvas cultivate this samadhi?” The Tathagata answered, “Bhadrapala, how then should bodhisattvas and mahasattvas cultivate this samadhi? Bhadrapala, just as I am at present sitting before you and teaching the Dharma, in the same way, bodhisattvas should concentrate on the Tathagatas, Arhats and Perfectly Awakened Ones as sitting on the Buddha-throne and teaching the Dharma. They should concentrate on the Tathagatas as being endowed with all the finest aspects, being handsome, beautiful, lovely to behold, and endowed with bodily perfection. They should look at the bodies of the Tathagatas, Arhats and Perfectly Awakened Ones with their Marks of the Great Man, each one of them produced by a hundred merits.”

“Having apprehended them they should train themselves in this way: ‘Oh how marvelous is the beauty of those Tathagatas, Arhats and Perfectly Awakened Ones! I too at a future time shall be endowed with such bodily perfection and shall perfect such marks.’” There are many instructions in this sutra about how to contemplate and visualize the Buddha.

After focusing your mind, you must develop conviction in the nonexistence of the so-called “I” and bodhisattvas. The merits of contemplating the illusory nature of all phenomena are also elaborated in this sutra. You can read it through to gain a comprehensive understanding.

In the *Perfection of Wisdom in 700 Lines*⁵, it says:

“Manjushri, there is a concentration called ‘One Single Array.’ When he courses in it a bodhisattva, a great being, will quickly know full enlightenment.”

Then, it says:

“‘One single array’, of nonproduction is a synonym. A son or daughter of good family who wants to enter into concentration on ‘one single array’ should first of all ask questions about the perfection of wisdom. After that he will enter into the concentration on one single array. And why? Manjushri, it is because nonproduction is immaterial, undisturbed, unshakeable, unthinkable, beyond all reflection, inconceivable.

“Manjushri, a son or daughter of good family who wants to enter into the concentration on one single array, must live apart, must become one who is not fond of company; he must sit down with his legs crossed without paying attention to any sign; but he should pay attention to the Tathagata, and to all dharmas by way of non-observation. When he pays attention to a Tathagata, he should grasp his name and when he has heard that name and apprehended it, he should sit down facing the direction in which that Tathagata is. When he pays attention just to that Tathagata, through that attention to him, all the past, future and present buddhas and Lords are attended to. And why? One single is this Tathagatahood. Just as one single Tathagata has immeasurable Buddha-qualities and immeasurable eloquence, just so, when one has arrived at the

⁵ With some minor changes based on the English version of Edward Conze

concentration on one single array, from one single non-production, immeasurable spheres of discourses on dharma must be expected, which proceed from it, and which have been taught by the Tathagatas. Just as many as have been kept in mind by Ananda, so many discourses on dharma should be expected for him. And when he has accomplished this concentration on one single array, he would abide until the end of his lifespan preaching the Dharma to sentient beings living in the four continents. And if again it occurs to some of those who belong to the vehicle of the bodhisattvas, ‘which (of the many concentrations) then is this concentration on one single array,’ one should say to them: It is that which has been proclaimed as being of unthinkable qualities. If you can teach it to others and ask them to uphold it, realization of all dharmas could be expected for them. This concentration can only be accomplished by those who don’t have a fragile or doubtful state of mind towards the teaching.”

It’s also said in this sutra:

“The concentration cannot be accomplished by those who have conceptual thoughts or wrong views (a view that things have existence). It is as if someone had a priceless precious jewel, unpolished and someone asked him: ‘What is that jewel of yours, and what are its qualities?’ In reply he might say, ‘The qualities of this jewel are measureless. Polish it and then you will know.’ Thereupon giving it to the other person so that he might polish it to find out himself what qualities it possesses. Once he has polished it, its great worth is revealed. It is to the extent that one would put out the effort to polish the jewel, that one would see its qualities...Similarly, just as there is no boundary beyond which disk

of the sun does not radiate its rays, and just as all the water of the boundless ocean has the same salty taste, just so, does the concentration on one single array proclaim the one single taste of all demonstrations of the dharma, i.e. the taste of nonproduction and of nonexistence.”

In the seventeenth chapter of *The Noble Sutra of Adopting Virtuous Roots*, there are also discourses on the concentration on one single array and in the *Lion’s Roar of Maitreya Sutra*, it is recorded:

Countless eons ago, the Tathagata, the Fully Enlightened One, Buddha Starlight appeared in the world and turned the wheel of the Dharma. After his parinirvana, there was an impressive-looking bodhisattva named Great Exertion born to a prestigious Brahmin family as their son. At that time, there were many bhikshus drawing the Thatagata’s forms in different ways, and one of them painted the Buddha’s image on a silk brocade, which looked extremely stately and exquisite.

Since the father of Bodhisattva Great Exertion had become the king, the bhikshu took his painting to the palace. When Great Exertion saw it, he couldn’t help thinking that if the Buddha’s painted image was so dignified and splendid, the actual form of the Buddha must be even more impressive! How wonderful if I could have such a form. With this in mind, he developed great faith in the Buddha and felt extremely happy.

From then on, Great Exertion generated a strong sense of renunciation towards marriage and career, and thought to himself, "It will be impossible for me to have the Buddha’s form so long as I

still have a family! Instead, I must get ordained and pursue the path to enlightenment!"

When he reached the age of sixteen with all of his sensory faculties well developed, he bowed at the feet of his parents and said, "Please allow me to become a Buddhist monk." His parents were quite anxious and attempted to dissuade him, "My son, please don't say this again. You are our most lovely single son, if you leave us we will surely die of grief." Great Exertion firmly answered, "It's not my intention to hurt your heart, but I must become ordained!" The parents felt puzzled and asked him, "My prince, what on earth is it that you want?" In order to show his determination, Great Exertion hardheartedly replied, "From now until I'm allowed to take ordination, I will no longer eat food, practice the Dharma, sleep on a bed, apply butter to my body, or say any words, neither good or bad." With that said, he went to a place that hadn't been swept clean and sat there without speaking.

On the first day, he drank not even one drop of water. Although his father brought delicious food and drink to him and tried to persuade him to eat, he uttered not one word throughout the entire day. On the second day, he still refused to eat anything. When his mother's 500 relatives and friends brought him delicious food and drink and beseeched him to eat, he didn't look at them, nor did he talk to them. On the third day, once again, he didn't drink or eat and when his father's 500 relatives and friends begged him to eat, he refused as silently as the day before. On the fourth day, he continued to eat nothing, and when 500 Brahmins came to beg him, he paid no attention to them. After five consecutive days of Great Exertion taking no food, his parents piled before him all of the

conches, gold and silver jewelry, sapphires and fine quality clothes that they had, and brought 84,000 of the best-dressed girls who were as beautiful as goddess to attempt to persuade him. All in all, Great Exertion's parents brought before him all of the best things in their palace, and in addition, every day the 500 relatives of his father and the 500 relatives of his mother respectively, as well as the 84,000 beauties, brought plenty of delicious food to him and begged him to eat. Many people suggested to him, "Being a lay person, you still can continue to practice generosity and accumulate merits. What's more, you can enjoy sense pleasures with these women. How can you so casually abandon all of the pleasures of a palace in which there is such a wonderful environment?"

Although there were exhortations from every side, the mind of Great Exertion was not disturbed. He neither looked at nor spoke to them, and still refused to take any food on the sixth day. His attention was on nothing other than visualizing the Buddha, let alone the desire for food. His parents, relatives, friends, those beautiful ladies and other folks all cried sadly. They beseeched him again and again but he just ignored them.

Just then, one of the palace deities began to demonstrate supernatural powers in the sky, and a loud voice said, "The mind of that person, who seeks enlightenment, is as firm and unshakable as the king of mountains. The earth could be shaken, and fire could be turned into water, yet his aspiration will never be changed. Don't displease him, and don't do evil toward him or you will wander like the blind in countless future eons. For the benefit of sentient beings, he wants to enter the path to enlightenment. If he gets ordained and practices diligently, it won't be difficult for him to attain

enlightenment because he would rather pursue the path to enlightenment than enjoy sense pleasures and possessions. His happiness derives from seeking the Buddha's wisdom in order to benefit sentient beings. Even if the entire trimegachiliocosm were filled with fine clothes and the possessions of gods and humans, he would have no attachment to them. You should repent for the bad karma accumulated due to your ignorance. The wise will purify their own bad karma through confession, not letting the bad karma staying in their minds for long."

Hearing the advice of the deity, the parents and relatives of Great Exertion, as well as the others all repented for their faults, and pleaded with their prince, "Since you have made the decision, you can follow your heart to take ordination. But please eat something first, otherwise you will starve to death." Although Bodhisattva Great Exertion hadn't eaten anything for seven consecutive days as he had been visualizing the Buddha with undivided attention, the deity had secretly protected him, so that his fresh complexion was not changed and all sensory faculties had not been impaired. In this way, by fasting for seven days and paying no attention to all the family affairs, Bodhisattva Great Exertion showed his great determination.

Thereafter, he abandoned the throne like someone discarding their spittle. Amid the cries and wails of his parents and the 84,000 beauties, he left the palace with a painting of the Buddha's image and settled down in a tranquil place where there were no humans but only wild beasts. He set up a shelf in front of him and put the Buddha's image there, then he sat on a straw mattress in the cross-legged posture, kept his back straight and focused his mind

continuously on the Buddha's form. In his practice, he kept thinking, "The Buddha's image is so stately, his actual form must be beyond words. The noble marks of the Tathagata are so rare that anyone who can see him must have accumulated great merits which are beyond verbal description." He also thought, "One day, I might be able to see the Tathagata's form with my own eyes."

A deity in the forest knew the thoughts of Bodhisattva Great Exertion, and especially came to tell him, "My friend, as for your desire to see the Tathagata's form, this discursive thought itself is already the Tathagata's form. The image in front of you is in fact no different than the actual form of the Tathagata. If you were aware of this, you would realize that you are actually seeing the body of the Tathagata." Bodhisattva Great Exertion immediately got the point and thought: "The actual form of the Tathagata is indeed not different than the image." He also thought: "The Tathagata's image doesn't have any thinking or discursive thoughts, neither do all phenomena including the body of the Tathagata; this image merely has a nominal existence, and all phenomena are provisional concepts and lacking true existence. The nature of the so-called name must be empty and this essence is unshakable, as is the Tathagata's body; the image is without attainment, without realization, without contemplation, without direct cognition, without fruition, without accomplishment, without abiding, without reliance, without coming, without going, without arising, without ceasing, without contamination, without purification, without sound, without rationality, without irrationality, without elimination of desire, without elimination of hatred, without elimination of ignorance, without skandhas, without dhatus, without ayatanas, without past, without

future, without present. The same is true for all phenomena and the body of the Tathagata. The image is without movement and action, the same is true for all phenomena and the body of the Tathagata; the Tathagata's image has no sight, no hearing, no smell, no taste, no touch, no thinking, no sleep, no wake-up, no breath, and no attention. Neither do all phenomena and the Tathagata's body; the image of Tathagata doesn't belong to the desire realm, or the form realm, or the formless realm. Neither do all phenomena and the Tathagata's body; the Tathagata's image has no inside, no outside, no middle, no beginning, no ending, no going, no action, no adoption, no rejection, no creator, no creation, no degeneration, no true, no false, no truth to be realized, no greed, no worry, no samsara and no nirvana. The same is true for all phenomena and the body of the Tathagata."

Bodhisattva Great Exertion kept reflecting on the Tathagata's form in the cross-legged posture. Day in and day out, he persisted in practicing the five kinds of supernatural powers, the four abodes of Brahma, unobstructed eloquence, and the samadhi of universal manifestation. After successfully accomplishing these practices, he obtained the clear perception of divine eyes with the ability to see numerous Tathagatas of the ten directions beyond this world; he also obtained the clear perception of the divine ear to effortlessly hear the wonderful sounds of all Tathagatas' Dharma teachings concurrently, and these sounds did not interfere with each other. Listening to the Dharma in this way, Great Exertion had pleased all the Tathagatas.

Within seven months, Great Exertion sat with legs crossed in the vajra posture all day long. Except for taking the visualization on

the Buddha as food, he didn't eat anything else. The deities knew his pure motivation and all came to bestow blessings to his body, so that he could keep in high morale. Great Exertion didn't wear the monastic robe at that time, and he hadn't seen the Tathagata or taken any vows yet, but he had already obtained the Tathagata's wisdom. We should emulate him and follow his great example by practicing in the same way.

The World-honored One later told Mahakashyapa, "All the bodhisattvas should venerate the Tathagata's form like Bodhisattva Great Exertion, knowing that the Tathagata's dharmakaya has no increase or decrease. If such realization is attained, a peerless great wisdom will be generated, numerous Tathagatas of the ten directions can also be seen directly, and the Buddhas' wonderful Dharma teachings can be heard."

After leaving the forest, Great Exertion went to the big and small cities, the palace and other places to preach the Dharma to the public, thus enabling 20,000 people to generate the supreme bodhicitta and for countless sentient beings to enter the Shravaka yana. In addition, the congregation including the parents of Great Exertion and the king's consorts all developed unsurpassed bodhicitta.

Our peerless teacher Buddha Shakyamuni, in his causal stage, was once born as Bodhisattva Great Exertion, and we, his followers, should copy his actions. The pure actions and aspirations of other great bodhisattvas are also worthy of our imitation.

(Making offerings to the Buddha will accumulate great merits, but it is unreasonable to do only this and abandon all the other

virtuous activities, as this would give rise to pride and arrogance.) It is said in the sutra, “In the last 500 years of the degenerate times, some sons and daughters of good families will not be versed in Mahayana Buddhism, on the contrary, they will breed greed inwardly. They hope to attain accomplishment and supernatural powers merely through making offerings to the Buddha’s images. They assume that no one else except themselves will make offerings to the Buddha’s images and as a result, they praise themselves for their tiny amount of accumulated merit and denigrate the others. Except for making offerings to the Buddha’s images, these people will not listen to the Dharma or seek transmissions, nor will they chant the sutras, or practice samatha and vipassana. Monastics and lay people practicing in this way will still receive possessions such as monastic robes offered by others.” The Buddha earnestly instructed, “Mahakashyapa, Mahayana practitioners should practice in this way: by observing pure precepts, by hungering for the sublime Dharma, and by broadly listening to and studying the Dharma. However, the above-mentioned people do not observe precepts or yearn for the true Dharma. They are satisfied with spending their time making offerings to the Buddha’s images.” The World-honored One also explained this before, “Mahakashyapa, I tell the truth for the benefit of these sons and daughters of good families. Hearing my teaching, they should know their faults and correct them.”

Yoga of Samatha and Vipassana: Visualizing the Buddha⁶

When training in the yogas of samatha and vipassana by

⁶ The translation of this and the next part *Daily Practice of Visualizing the Buddha* are from *The Sage who Dispels Mind’s Anguish*, see www.lotsawahouse.org/tibetan-masters/dilgo-khyentse/sage-who-dispels-minds-anguish

focusing on the body of the Teacher, Buddha, infuse your mind with precious bodhicitta—the wish to attain buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings—and think:

“At this time when I have obtained the support of the freedoms and riches and met the Tathagata’s teachings, I will put aside all worldly activities which only bring about negative results. Although such practices as making offerings to the Tathagata’s form and so on do generate immeasurable merit, these accumulations of merit based on material wealth are something that the Tathagata advised mainly for householders. As something far superior, for renunciates, those following in his own footsteps, he praised discipline and genuine inward resting. In accordance with the Tathagata’s words, therefore, I will practice these as much as I can.

“In particular, throughout the course of beginningless time, we have been disturbed day and night, without break, by all kinds of conceptual thoughts, rather like the stirring of wind, or clouds, or waves on the ocean, and have been brought low. Not only have we failed to accomplish a single remarkable quality, we are afflicted by all manner of suffering. Since that is so, I will now free myself however I can from the mire of these different conflicting thoughts, and, even if just for a single instant, focus on the Tathagata’s body, which is of such great merit and significance. In so doing, I shall achieve the yogas of samatha and vipassana in the proper way.”

With an intense pledge of one-pointed yearning think: “Guru, Victorious Ones, and your descendants, I supplicate you: grant your blessings so that I may succeed!” Remove yourself, first of all, from hustle and bustle; in a place without impediments to meditative

concentration, such as people moving about during the day or hubbub at night, sit on a comfortable seat in meditation posture. Then thoroughly mix your mindstream with the preliminary dharmas.

Place in front of you, at whatever height and position is comfortable, a beautiful and pleasing image of the Tathagata, the King of Shakyas, which has been drawn correctly by a skilled artist. With the power of aspiration recall the Tathagata's blessings and by reciting the Essence of Causation mantra consecrate the image. Having done this, place it at whatever distance is right for you to look at, neither too close nor too far away.

Look at the image with admiration as if it were the Tathagata's actual form, and think: "Like an udumbara flower, which appears in this world only every few hundred years, the Tathagata, arises from the cause of boundless accumulations of merit and wisdom beyond imagining. Since the Tathagata is fully adorned with the thirty-two excellent marks and eighty excellent signs, seeing him is without disharmony. In the world of gods, the extremely clear and steadfast noble rupakayas are seen in common by all the sentient beings of that world at that time. These rupakayas also teach the Dharma there, and they display all kinds of miracles. For the benefit of those to be tamed they also perform various actions including staying, departing, getting up, and sleeping, bringing immeasurable sentient beings' sources of virtue to fruition. Our Teacher, Shakyamuni, Lion of the Shakyas, was born into the royal line of Shakyas and eventually attained enlightenment, after which he taught the Dharma to bodhisattvas, shravaka, and many other gatherings of beings at Vulture Peak and elsewhere."

While keeping in mind these qualities and attributes, think, “This is what the Tathagata’s form is like in shape and appearance.” The Tathagata is the embodiment of discipline, of samadhi, supreme knowledge, complete freedom, the gathering of the wisdom and seeing of complete liberation and so on; he is endowed with immaculate qualities that are beyond imagining and cannot be adequately conveyed even unto the very limits of space itself.

He closely embraces us all with his great love. For our sake he underwent immeasurable hardships; as you should learn from the supportive teachings for the *Treasury of Blessings*, which tell, for instance, of how the Brahmin Samudrarāja generated bodhicitta. In such ways, for three immeasurable aeons by practicing the six paramitas he gathered inconceivable and inexpressible accumulations of merit and wisdom, and was freed from all obscurations. By conquering the four maras he completely perfected all excellent qualities without exception, and having obtained the kaya of the great wisdom of omniscience he became the refuge, protector, and friend of all sentient beings until the end of time. The virtues of recalling this unsurpassable Bhagavan, the Transcendent Conqueror, paying homage to him, uttering his name, seeing his bodily form and resting the mind one-pointedly upon it and so on, no matter how small, will become the cause for supreme awakening. Think: “Since that is due to the power of the Tathagata’s past aspirations and inconceivable wisdom, how fortunate we are!” And generate great faith by recalling the Buddha.

Then, without your attention being too tightly or loosely focused, but in a leisurely manner, without letting your mindfulness and attentiveness decline, focus your mind continuously on the

appearance of the Tathagata's form. Distancing yourself from any thought other than the object of focus, settle your attention solely on the Buddha's form. Eventually you should focus one-pointedly without interruption as much as you can.

In short, practice progressively the nine methods of mental-abiding until you achieve the 'one-pointedness of a mind of the desire realm'.

You can look at and focus upon the body in general, or, in order to obtain the noble Dharma and pacify dullness, focus particularly on the ushnisha, the crown on the Buddha's head, the limit of which is impossible to see. Alternatively, in order to obtain samadhi and pacify agitation, you can concentrate directly on the enlightened mind's glorious knot (which is at the Buddha's heart center). Or, to accomplish great merit and gain happiness, you can concentrate on the appearance of the coil of hair between the Buddha's eyebrows, which is white as snow or conch and curls to the right. In order to make the great melodious sound of Dharma pervade the whole world and to benefit sentient beings by teaching the Dharma, fix your mind on the form of the throat, the source of the sixty qualities of melodious speech, at the conch of Dharma with its three lines and so on. Wherever it is you feel inclined to focus, concentrate your mind there unwaveringly.

When focusing your mind like this, at the very beginning it is like catching a snake; the mind is so wild and untamed that the first stage of meditation is called the experience of movement, like a waterfall. At this stage you have the impression that your mind is in constant motion. From the *Sutra Requested by Suhahu*:

*This mind is like lightning, wind, and clouds,
Like the waves of a giant ocean,
Cunning, indulging in everything it desires,
Moving, straying—I must certainly tame it.*

Think: “Since all sentient beings have fallen under the sway of this completely distracted mind, I will persevere without giving into laziness come what may! For if one perseveres there is nothing one cannot accomplish.” Then endeavor to maintain the focus for as long as you can.

By persevering in this way, discursive thoughts, which were so apparent and rough, wild and turbulent, will settle down slightly after a while. But there will still be the busyness of many different thoughts—a bubbling stream of restless mental activity. That is called the second meditation experience of ‘attainment, like a river flowing through a narrow canyon.’ The example is used because although a river running through a narrow canyon is still very turbulent and noisy, it is a little slower than a waterfall.

If you keep persevering and continue the practice, then you will feel that inwardly the mind’s thoughts are slowing down and you are able to remain with the object of focus. However, if you examine carefully you will see that you are still involved in a continuous stream of many subtle conceptual thoughts. This is the third experience, called the experience of ‘familiarization, like a gently flowing stream.’ When you look at a stream from afar it seems to be still and you cannot tell that it is moving, but when you get up close you see that it is moving a little and rippling.

From this point on, if you don’t stop persevering, but keep on

striving, you will have less hardship and suffering than before—so exert yourself continuously! By practicing like this, even the movement of subtle conceptual thoughts will be pacified and as long as you have the conditioning for the focus you will be able to remain as long as you like. Yet this does not mean that you are completely impervious to circumstances. This is the fourth meditation experience, called the experience of ‘stability, like an ocean free from waves’, since the mind abides and is stable.

Having reached this far, without having to undergo great hardships, the fifth meditation experience, ‘perfection, like a mountain’, will arise as long as you continue to familiarize yourself with this state over time. This is synonymous with effortless engagement. The mind naturally mixes with whatever you focus on and, without the need for any effort, remains steadily wherever you want; conceptual thoughts no longer have the power to shake the mind. This is the accomplishment of what is called the ‘one-pointedness of a mind of the desire realm’.

At this time, various experiences resulting from the mind’s abiding will also arise. When you have become familiar with this state, mind and body are said to become supple. As body and mind become workable in this way, whatever object of focus you settle the mind upon, even if you remain for several days, there is no sense at all of either the body or the mind being unable to cope; the body feels as light as cotton wool and the mind is pervaded by the bliss of vivid clarity.

This suppleness is rough and heavy at first and has a sense of solidity. But with familiarity the heaviness fades and there arises an

unwavering samatha that is extremely fine and clear, like a shadow, a mind of meditative concentration that is in accord with the main part of practice. This kind of meditation has the name “samatha”, since it is a mind endowed with suppleness. It also corresponds to the aspect of the first meditative absorption’s capable preparatory stage. There is nothing that this kind of meditative concentration is incapable of—be it meditation with a conceptual focus, or meditation without concepts, as in the meditations on emptiness and the like.

There are several ways of counting the stages of accomplishing samatha, such as the four mental engagements⁷ or the six powers⁸, but essentially they are all included in the following: the mind remains totally concentrated, with mindfulness and attentiveness, for as long as possible on the object of focus, and as you familiarize yourself with this the five meditation experiences (explained above) will arise.

When you have accomplished samatha in this way, the strength of the mind’s workability gives the body a gleaming complexion and makes it comfortable and strong. The mind too becomes clear and lucid and settles on any object of your choice. Body and mind are ‘saturated’ with immeasurable joy and bliss, the afflictions are reduced, and you have an experience concordant with the extraordinary joy of inner solitude.

By the strength of the merit of practicing samatha with this focus on the form of the Buddha, and through the Buddha’s blessings, you will come to see the Buddha, either in actuality or in dreams. You

⁷ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Four_mental_engagements

⁸ http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Six_powers

will receive Dharma teachings and so on—all sorts of different excellent qualities will arise in your mind.

Once you have accomplished samatha in this way, begin the practice of vipassana. How should you do so? When first practicing samatha, you rest the mind using an image of the Buddha's form as a support. Even when not using such a support as the focus, the Buddha's form can still arise as a mental object on which you rest the mind. When, having practiced in whichever way you wish, you finally accomplish samatha, the Buddha's body appears vividly even without any support as the characteristic form of samadhi.

At first this form shines vividly and steadily as an object of the mind, like a reflection in a mirror. Then, as you familiarize yourself with it more and more, it manifests as an object of your senses as well, like something that is actually present. If you continue to familiarize yourself with it yet further, the image you are focusing on becomes perceptible even to others' senses in the same way. So, it is said that the first clarity appears as a mental object; the second as an object of the senses; and the third as an object of touch, as is taught in all the Early Translations' textbooks on approach and accomplishment.

When you accomplish just the first level of clarity, from then on you should practice vipassana. Consider the way the form of the Buddha endowed with the marks and signs—beautiful, delightful, vivid, and steadfast—now appears as a mental object as if actually present. This is just the appearance of habitual imprints in your own mind: it has not come from anywhere, nor does it go anywhere. When examined it is isolated. It is not found anywhere at all, inside

or out. It depends on the mind and appears entirely as a result of the mere interdependent arising of habit. The mind to which it appears too, when examined, is not found anywhere, inside or out; since it is devoid of any basis or root, what need is there to speak of what appears to it? This appearance, therefore, does not possess even the slightest trace of any true nature.

In the same way, the appearance of buddhas in the world is due to the power of the interdependent arising of sources of virtue based on beings' pure intentions, together with the buddhas' great aspirations made in the past; just as when someone's reflection appears in a clean mirror. Although in worldly beings' domain of experience it does indeed appear undeceiving, the Tathagata does not have any ordinary aggregates, elements or sense-sources—not even to the slightest degree—since he is the utterly unfathomable wisdom kaya equal to the dharmadhatu, the basic space of phenomena. In the *Sutra of the Ornament of the Appearances of Wisdom* it says:

*The Tathagata, by inexhaustible virtue,
Is a reflection of dharmas;
Since there is no thusness (tathata), there is also no Tathagata.
In all worlds he appears only as a reflection.*

Also, from the *Samadhi in which the Present Buddha Abides Directly*⁹:

*Buddhas are analyzed by bodhisattvas.
Mind as well is completely pure, naturally luminous,*

⁹ Another translation of the name of the sutra *The Samadhi of Direct Encounter with the Buddhas of the Present*

Stainless, not merged with conceptual thoughts.

Whoever knows this will attain supreme awakening, buddhahood.

We must examine this with supreme knowledge and understand it.

Having understood this, just as it is with the Tathagata, we will see that all the phenomena of appearance and existence that are contained within the aggregates, elements, and sense-sources also appear in the world and are experienced as they are through the force of interdependent origination. Yet all these phenomena are no more than mere appearances coming about due to the interdependent arising of their individual causes and conditions. And when they are properly examined, we don't find even so much as a single atom's worth of true nature. Just as with magical illusions and appearances during a dream, in reality there is no going or coming, arising or ceasing and so forth at all.

Nevertheless, childish ordinary beings, who cling to appearances as existing the way they appear and who have forsaken individual analysis, cling to arising and ceasing and the rest as existent. It is as if a person with cataracts has no notion that the falling hairs which affect their vision should be removed. Throughout beginningless time our minds have been tainted by the 'cataracts' of ignorance, as a result of which we do not know how things genuinely are.

Those who have realized the way things genuinely are, meanwhile, do not need to be rid of appearances, because they can see that although things appear, they are not real at all. Having seen

this, they realize that all phenomena are naturally and primordially unborn. The *Sutra Requested by Anavatapta* says:

*Whatever was born from conditions was not born;
It is essentially devoid of birth.
Whatever relies on conditions is empty, it is taught.
Whoever knows emptiness is careful.*

Also, in the Mother of the Victorious Ones, the *Prajnaparamita*, it says:

*All phenomena are like illusions and dreams.
Nirvana as well is like an illusion and dream.
If there is any dharma superior to nirvana, it too is illusory and dreamlike.*

Furthermore, from the *King of Samadhi Sutra*:

*Just like mirages, cities of gandharvas,
Like magical illusions, like dreams,
Conceptual meditation is essentially empty.
Understand all phenomena to be like this.*

And in the *Root Knowledge of the Middle Way* it is taught:

*Like a dream, like a magical display,
Like a city of gandharvas, just so—
Both arising and dwelling and, likewise,
Destruction—all were taught to be like this.*

No matter how the Buddha's body appears to the mind, therefore, all acts of focusing on it are non-existent from the beginning. And all phenomena are the same, ourselves included.

Whatever is one's own nature, is the nature of the Buddha. Whatever is the nature of the Buddha, that is also the nature of all phenomena. From the *Sutra of the Ornament of the Appearances of Wisdom*:

*Permanently unborn phenomena are the Tathagata.
All phenomena are like the Sugata.
Those with childish minds who grasp at characteristics
Interact with phenomena that do not exist throughout all worlds.*

From the *Condensed Prajnaparamita*:

*Understand all sentient beings to be like oneself.
Understand all phenomena to be like sentient beings.
Not conceptualizing things as either unborn or born—
This is the practice of the supreme Prajnaparamita.*

And from the *Root Knowledge of the Middle Way*:

*Whoever forms mental constructs about Buddha,
Who is beyond constructs and inexhaustible,
Will be brought down by their constructs.
They will not see the Tathagata.*

*Whatever is the nature of the Tathagata,
That is the nature of these wanderers.
The Tathagata is without self-nature.
These wanderers also lack self-nature.*

In the natural state, the ultimate nature, all phenomena are perfectly equal in the dharmadhatu, the basic space of phenomena, that is beyond all the webs of mental constructs, such as the notions

of being born, unborn, and so on. From the *Sutra Requested by Sagaramati (Ocean of Intelligence)*:

*This dharma is stainless, pure, virtuous, naturally luminous;
Like the sky, equal, and primordially unarisen.
Unborn, unarisen, without abiding, and without ceasing—
This is the victorious ones' stainless, unwavering seal.*

From the *Avatamsaka Sutra*:

*Fine and crystalline, the path of great sages,
Non-conceptual, not the conceived, difficult to look at.
Naturally peaceful, without ceasing, without arising,
It is realized by the wise who clearly understand.*

*Empty of essence, peaceful, devoid of suffering,
Free from the continuum, equal nirvana,
Free from center and extremes, inexpressible,
Free throughout the three times, like the sky.*

From the *Sutra Spoken in the Presence of Noble Rahula*:

*Inconceivable, inexpressible, the Prajnaparamita,
Unborn, unceasing, the nature of space,
Object of the wisdom of individual self-awareness—
To the mother of the victorious ones of the three times, I
prostrate!*

The protector Nagarjuna taught:

*Not known from other, peaceful, and
Not elaborated by elaborations,
Free from concepts, devoid of plurality—*

That is the definition of suchness.

Accordingly, the yogi who resolves thusness—that which is beyond all expressions, elaborations, and objects of focus—at first by means of the samadhi that realizes all phenomena to be like illusions rests in equanimity on the Tathagata’s illusory body. He or she should look at the body of the Tathagata and then when listening to Dharma and so forth train in the manifestations of illusory objects of experience.

If the yogi then rests in inexpressible equanimity, the emptiness that is to be individually recognized, in that manner he or she will attain the patience towards the dharma that is concordant with dharma. And owing to that there is no doubt that before long the yogi will attain in actuality the wisdom of the path of seeing. This is clearly explained in the pith instructions for taking into experience the meaning of the *Samadhi in which the Present Buddha Abides Directly* and the *Same Arrangement Samadhi*.

Daily Practice of Visualizing the Buddha¹⁰

Even those who are not able to practice like this should engage in the yoga of continually recalling the Teacher, Lord of the Sages, as is taught in the *Treasury of Blessings*. Bring to mind the visualization for taking refuge and generating bodhicitta, and with a firm and confident pledge recite the following three times:

In the Buddha, the Dharma, and the supreme assembly

I take refuge until enlightenment.

By the merit of my generosity and so forth

¹⁰ www.lotsawahouse.org/tibetan-masters/dilgo-khyentse/sage-who-dispels-minds-anguish

May I attain buddhahood for the benefit of beings.

After meditating on the four abodes of Brahma, from the illusory state of the unity of emptiness and interdependently-arisen appearances say:

Ah

Like the illusory display of the unity of unborn emptiness... etc.

Actualize the visualization as it is described in the *Treasury of Blessings* chant text. Thinking that the Buddha is present in person, practice with longing and steady faith that by which the bodhisattvas, those expert in skillful means, gather together the accumulations of many aeons in a single instant of mind: the condensed key point that accumulates, purifies, and increases, the seven branches of homage, and the rest. To avoid squandering your hopes, supplicate the Buddha with confidence and make aspirations for the desired aims as taught in the root text.

Then, with one-pointed faith bow down to the Buddha Bhagavans with as many bodies as there are motes of dust in the universe and make offerings with all appropriate gifts. With the one-pointed aspiration of thinking, “Until obtaining unsurpassable enlightenment, I and all sentient beings go for refuge!” recite the Buddha’s names with, “Guru, Teacher, Transcendent Conqueror...”, as many times as you can.

Finally, by reciting the dharani mantra in the manner of invoking the Tathagata’s enlightened mindstream. Consider that light-rays shine out from the Tathagata’s body and fill the entire expanse of space. Imagine that by dissolving into you and all sentient beings all

obscurations and suffering are cleared away and you come to possess every happiness. All the excellent qualities of the Mahayana path, such as faith, dharani, samadhi, courage, supreme knowledge, and wisdom and the like, arise properly in your mindstream. You become someone with the fortune of attaining enlightenment, from the level of a non-returner up until final, unsurpassable great awakening. Recite the mantra as many times as you can.

From the *Jewel Mound Sutra's* eleventh, "Radiating Light" chapter:

*Now, by the causes and conditions
Of inconceivable virtuous actions
I have completely abandoned all delusion
And accomplished manifold light-rays.*

And:

*By the power of non-doing
Lights of infinite colors stream out,
Fulfilling the hopes
Of those aspiring accordingly.*

From a single ray of light two colors shine out, and so on. Thus, there are immeasurably different kinds of light-rays, all radiating: the light-rays Shining Clean Cloud, and Pristine Eyes, Pristine Ears, ...etc., up to Pristine Mind. Similarly, there are Pristine Form, etc., up to Pristine Phenomena; Pristine Earth, etc., up to Pristine Space; Pristine Aggregates, etc.; Pristine Truth etc.; Pristine Courage etc.; and those named after colors such as White, Yellow,

etc.; as well as Supreme Excellent Quality, Naga's Splendor, Elephant's Splendor, Prosperous Lion, Prosperous Supreme Naga etc.; Tamed Naga, Tamed Yaksha, etc.; Vajra Strength, Empty etc.; and Completely Pure Past Virtue, each arising individually.

The light-ray called Dharmata makes ten million buddhafiels quake. The one called Taming Maras terrifies the maras. Holding in mind the name of the light-ray called Merit Victory-Banner overcomes harm. Holding in mind the name of the one called Mighty Victory-Banner overcomes enemies. Holding in mind the name of the one called Completely Pacifying Victory-Banner overcomes desire, and so on. Merely holding these names in mind is enough to overcome all faults, including sexual misconduct, corrupt discipline, and the like. Moreover, taking the name of any of the light-rays is also enough to perfect discipline, samadhi and so forth and annihilate all the afflictions such as delusion. Similarly, happiness is obtained, one is freed from anguish, transcends all mental constructs, and gives birth to excellent qualities such as knowing the three times.

Each light-ray, such as Sorrow-Free, has as well a retinue of eight thousand billion. In such ways it is said that by means of the different light-rays the Tathagata has, the number of which goes beyond the count of particles in the buddhafiels, sentient beings are brought to fruition and their individual hopes are fulfilled completely.

In the bodhisattva pitaka it also says:

The buddhas' infinite light,

A web of light beyond imagining,

*Pervades an infinite ocean
Of buddhafiels in all directions.*

Furthermore, you should also consider the meaning of what is taught in the *Avatamsaka Sutra* and the “Excellent Splendor” chapter of the *Precious Palm Tree Sutra* and similar texts.

In this context as well, by putting into practice in whatever way is appropriate the yogas of samatha and vipassana as taught above, you will accomplish something that is at least an approximation of genuine samatha and vipassana.

During a session, make mandala offerings, praises and supplications, and dedicate the virtue and make different aspirations in whichever way is suitable. There is no need to request the Buddha to come and dissolve, since wherever you visualize the Buddha’s body, he is there; in the space-like kaya of equanimity there is no coming, going, arising, or decreasing. You can recall the Buddha in any place or time.

In the breaks between sessions exert yourself in the sources of virtue as much as you can, by reading different sutras, or doing prostrations, making offerings, circumambulating, and so forth. Even if you are unable to do any of these, recall the Buddha as much as you can and bring to mind repeatedly the concepts of impermanence, suffering, emptiness, and selflessness, as well as the concept of nirvana, or peace.

When lying down, continue your practice for as long as you are not overwhelmed by sleep. When you do fall asleep visualize light radiating out from the Buddha’s body and pervading everywhere,

and meditate on the concept of light. From the dharma text known as the *Completely Certain Meaning*:

“Bhikkhus, if you wonder how one attains the wisdom of seeing by training thoroughly in samadhi meditation, bhikkhus, the bhikkhu thoroughly takes hold of the concept of light and so on.... Bhikkhus, it is like this: for example, during the last spring moon the sky is cloudless, and on a cloudless day the sun’s form appears completely pure, completely white, and luminous; it is not dark. Bhikkhus, likewise the bhikkhu thoroughly takes hold of the concept of light. He keeps it perfectly in mind. He perfectly encounters it. He perfectly realizes it. Having truly abided in the concept of the sun and meditated on its light in the mind, just as in the day so also in the night, just as in the night so also in the day, just as early on so also late, just as late so also early on, just as below so also above, just as above so also below. Like that, with mind free from all divisions and cycles truly abiding in the concept of the sun he meditates on its light in the mind. If you cultivate this samadhi meditation at all times and deeply familiarize yourself with it, you will obtain the wisdom of seeing!”

Likewise, constantly endeavor as much as you can in the practice of recollecting the Lord of Sages, and with sincere intentions dedicate all sources of virtue for the sake of unsurpassable perfect awakening. All those who exert themselves like this and, by resting in equanimity in the manner of the illusory relative and the absolute, free from elaborations, accomplish samatha and vipassana will obtain extraordinary qualities of the

path, such as seeing the Buddha, hearing the Dharma and so forth. Even those who practice a mere semblance of this will gain all kinds of blessings and accomplishments. Wonderful signs, such as seeing the Tathagata in dreams, will also arise.

Moreover, with regard to good and bad signs in dreams, the *Sutra Called Accomplishing the Fourth Noble One* says:

The Youthful Manjushri said to the devaputra Bhadvika: “The four dreams of dusty obscurations are as follows: seeing a moon-disk inside a dusty well; seeing a moon-disk at the bottom of a dirty pond or well; seeing a moon-disk in a sky obscured by large clouds; and seeing a moon-disk in a sky shrouded by smoke and clouds of dust.

“Moreover, the four dreams that correspond to karmic obscurations are: falling into an abyss from a huge precipice; approaching an undulating road; approaching a narrow road; and seeing polluted places and many frightening things.

“The four dreams that correspond to the obscurations of the afflictions are: being upset by fierce poison; hearing the sound of mostly ferocious wild animals; staying in a fraud’s home; and seeing one’s own body as filthy and wearing stained clothes.

“The four dreams that correspond to obtaining dharani mantra are: seeing a place full of all sorts of precious treasures; seeing a pond totally filled with blooming lotus flowers; finding a set of white clothes; and seeing a deity holding a parasol above the crown of one’s head.

“The four dreams that correspond to obtaining samadhi are: seeing a lovely girl adorned with fine jewelry offering scattered flowers; seeing a flock of white and grey geese in the sky hooting and then flying off; seeing the Tathagata place his hand, beautified by many lights, on the top of one’s head; and seeing the Tathagata sitting in a lotus flower in meditative concentration.

“The four dreams that correspond to seeing the Tathagata are: seeing a moon-disk rising; seeing a sun-disk rising; seeing a blossoming lotus flower; and seeing Lord Brahma in an extremely peaceful posture.

“The four dreams that correspond to the bodhisattva’s own qualities are: seeing a large sala tree filled with all sorts of leaves, flowers, and fruits; seeing a bronze vessel filled with gold; seeing the face of the sky filled with parasols, victory-banners, and standards; and seeing a great cakravartin king.

“The four dreams that correspond to taming the maras are: seeing a great athlete defeating all other athletes, hoisting a standard, and going; seeing a great hero win a battle and leave; seeing someone being empowered as king; and seeing oneself in Bodhgaya taming the maras.

“The four dreams that correspond to the signs of a non-returner are: a white skull being tied on one’s head; making unstinting offerings; sitting on a large dharma seat; and seeing the Tathagata staying in Bodhgaya and teaching the dharma.

“The four dreams that correspond to obtaining the essence of enlightenment are: seeing a vase; seeing a chicken encircled by Indian jays; witnessing all the trees rising up, bowing down, and making prostrations wherever you go; and seeing a vast golden light.”

Having also understood the good and bad signs of dreams as described, rely on the skillful means for clearing away faults and accomplishing excellent qualities. In [Buddha Vairocana’s] *Chökyi Gyamo* it is taught that:

“Signs of true purification through remorse are seeing the Buddha come, rub his hand on the crown of one’s head, and lights radiating out; and seeing flowers and so on.”

In other sutras it is also said that if you see lotus flowers in dreams your aim has been accomplished. From the *Liberation Sutra*:

“The dream signs of having purified negative actions are wanting to cross an enormous river and then going over a bridge, being washed, and rain falling on your body. These are all signs of complete purification. Joining and sitting in a row of many ordained sangha members, and entering a stupa or temple and seeing all the images of the buddhas and bodhisattvas are signs of following in the footsteps of the Buddha and Dharma. If you dream of finding fruit and eating it, you will actualize the accomplishment of the fruits of excellent qualities in this life.”

It is taught that just one such dream marks the purification of one of the five evil deeds of immediate fruition, while five such

dreams indicate the purification of all five evil deeds. This should also be understood according to the dreams chapter of the *Jewel Mound Sutra* and other such texts.

Although there are many different bodhisattva practices for the time of death, including the eleven concepts taught in the sutras, the crucial point is taught and contained in the *Noble Wisdom of Passing Sutra*. There it is taught that at the time of death bodhisattvas meditate on the wisdom of passing as follows: whenever you think, “I am dying!” visualize the Guru, Lord of Sages, on the crown of your head and generate intense faith. Then think: “It is not only me: all sentient beings are subject to the law of death, no-one is exempt. Although we have repeatedly undergone countless births and deaths here in samsara, we have only ever known the suffering of death and all these births have been entirely devoid of meaning. But now I will make sure that this present death of mine is meaningful!”

Having contemplated in this way, reflect that there is not a single conditioned phenomenon included within the internal or the external, or the past, present, or future, that is immune to impermanence, the nature of arising and ceasing, even for a single instant. Within the category of the conditioned there are those things whose continuum ceases after a short time, such as water bubbles and bolts of lightning, and there are also those whose continuum ceases after a much longer period of time, such as the realms of this world. But whether they abide for a long time or a short time, all conditioned things must cease in the end; there is not one that is unchanging. The entire world of the ‘vessel’ and its ‘contents’—the environment and its inhabitants—will also disintegrate, and if even the Tathagata, the Transcendent Conqueror, demonstrated death in

the manner of passing into nirvana, what need is there to speak of the likes of us? As the Tathagata said, “Everything conditioned is impermanent.”

“Not understanding the nature of conditioned things like this, being averse to separation and death and delighting in gathering and birth, sentient beings remain in samsara, circling around again and again. Yet I shall take my own death when it comes as a teacher, a virtuous spiritual friend, and will realize from the depth of my heart how all conditioned things are impermanent! I will decide on this with certainty!” Think earnestly like this at the time of death: “In all future lifetimes too until I attain the essence of awakening, by understanding everything conditioned to be impermanent may I not become attached to conditioned objects of experience! Guru, Lord of Sages, victorious ones and your heirs, I supplicate you! Grant your blessings that it may be so!”

Then, as it is said in the Mahayana sutra, the *Noble Wisdom of Passing*:

*Since all phenomena are naturally pure,
Meditate on the concept of non-entities.
Fully endowed with bodhicitta,
Meditate on the concept of great compassion.*

*Since the nature is unseeable luminosity,
Meditate on not being attached to anything at all.
Mind is the cause for the arising of wisdom.
Do not search for buddha elsewhere.*

First consider how the principle illustrated by one’s own death

applies throughout the infinite reaches of space. Focus on all sentient beings, who cling to impermanent conditioned things as permanent and to painful samsara as pleasure, and experience death and endless varieties of suffering. Generating a mind of great compassion, think: “In order to free them from the sufferings of birth, old age, sickness, and death and lead them to unsurpassable perfect awakening, may I become the protector of the three worlds, a buddha, a transcendent conqueror, and free all sentient beings from their endless suffering!” Then meditate on the concept of great compassion endowed with bodhicitta.

Similarly, when you examine all phenomena, as exemplified by this death, you find that they are by nature void, and yet, by conceptualizing, through the force of mere imputation, we create happiness and suffering, benefit and harm. If these phenomena really existed, there would be no so-called death and suffering at all! Think: “All phenomena are unreal!” Decide that this is the case, and reflect.

Likewise, all these phenomena, including death, have no established identity whatsoever, yet like illusory appearances their expression is completely unobstructed. When analyzed, they cannot be expressed in terms of the extremes of existence or non-existence. They are naturally non-conceptual and luminous. Therefore, one’s own mind that does not abide as any entity or non-conceptual thing whatsoever is primordially luminous; in the state of present direct awareness all the phenomena of samsara and nirvana are totally equal. Decide, therefore, that the enlightened mind of the Teacher, Lord of Sages, and your own mind are indivisible within the nature of mind, the state of self-existing wakefulness. If without getting

distracted from that state you come to possess confidence and develop certainty in it, that is the realization of the true nature of your own mind. Other than that there is no so-called 'buddha' whatsoever.

In that state there is neither death nor birth. Death and the like are mere concepts; in the truth of the innate nature of mind free from concepts, birth and death are not established in any way. If you were to pass away while resting evenly in such a state, you would be reborn in a buddhafiield without experiencing the deluded appearances of the intermediate state.

If you do not have that level of confidence however, but still remember only the Guru, Lord of Sages, at the time of death and throughout the intermediate state, without forgetting, then that will be enough to lead you to a pure realm. Moreover, no matter what terror and suffering you face in this life, if you remember the Buddha you will certainly be liberated from any trouble. Whatever happiness and excellent fortune you enjoy, know it to be the great kindness of the Buddha, and, visualizing the sources of pleasure as an offering-cloud of Samantabhadra, present them to the Buddha.

Constantly reflect on the meaning of the three liberations and the six paramitas and other topics the Buddha taught. With great compassion for all sentient beings generate the mind of supreme enlightenment and train as much as you can in the conduct of the bodhisattvas. Recalling the Teacher like this is extremely important, for it is by recalling the Buddha that we first set out on all the bodhisattva paths. It thus has immeasurable benefit, as it generates all the excellent qualities of the path.

These days, when everyone believes their own school's tenets

to be the most important, only a few people pay much attention to the Teacher, the Lord of Sages. But anyone who has embraced these teachings and yet still has no notion of faith in the Teacher as supreme must surely lack intelligence. Why? Because it is solely due to the Teacher's compassion in demonstrating his enlightened deeds in this place and time for us wandering beings of the degenerate age that the teachings have appeared—and that means not only the three pitakas, but all the teachings, up to and including those of secret mantra Vajrayana, the path that can bring about the unified state of no-more learning in one short lifetime in this degenerate age. It is also solely due to his compassion that there are beings who hold these teachings, those who have entered the teachings of sutra and mantra, the sangha of noble beings.

If the Teacher had not radiated the light of the teachings here in this realm at this time, we would not hear even so much as the sound of the Three Jewels. What need to speak then of practicing the paths of sutra and mantra? Therefore, whichever tradition we practice, whether it is from the New Schools or the Old School, to have the intense faith that holds the Teacher as especially important is indispensable at all times. We must therefore be especially devoted to the Teacher and persevere in this form of yoga!

Some others may think, "Even if it is not the Teacher, Lord of Sages, but the Buddha in another form, as a renunciate free from attachment, for example, or a peaceful or wrathful yidam and so on, what difference does it make as long as we feel devotion?" Essentially there is no difference, since all buddhas are the wisdom kaya, perfect equality, and there is no distinction in their qualities of abandonment and realization. Yet from the perspective of the

relative level of mere appearances it is due to the Teacher's compassion that the visualizations and recitations of the yidam deities of the different schools in all their peaceful and wrathful forms and the paths and trainings emerged in the first place.

Therefore, just as the source of all the water in the world is Lake Manasarovar, all appearances of the greater and lesser teachings of the practices of the paths of sutra and mantra are certainly a result of this Teacher's compassion. Just as when you supplicate your own root guru you receive more blessings than by supplicating other gurus, because of the power of your connection, supplicating the Teacher, Lord of Sages, brings swifter blessings than supplicating any other buddha.

You might then wonder, "Well, does that mean I should focus solely on the Lord of Sages, and stop supplicating other buddhas?" But it is not like that: understand that whichever yidam you might supplicate is no different in reality from the Teacher, Lord of Sages, since it is taught that all buddhas are equal in the dharmakaya. You must understand this point. Think: "The supreme Teacher, manifesting different bodily appearances as this and that yidam deity, showed himself to be a refuge and friend to us all, the wandering beings of this degenerate age." If you nevertheless separate the Teacher and your yidam, and, giving up on the Teacher, believe the yidam to be somehow separate, this will make it difficult for accomplishments to arise.

Similarly, in the tradition of unsurpassable secret mantra, the guru who is the vajra master is in essence inseparable from all the buddhas of the three times. The guru's manifestation is of even

greater kindness than the buddhas of the three times, since without the guru, even though the buddhas of the three times are present, you will not receive blessings and accomplishments. This means that even if you make an offering to just a single pore of the guru's body it is much more noble than making offerings to the buddhas of the three times. All the vajra tantra scriptures state repeatedly that simply by succeeding in pleasing the guru, you will please all the buddhas of the three times and receive their blessings. For these reasons, the guru is known as the complete embodiment of the Three Jewels, or as the Fourth Jewel. Understand, therefore, that the guru is more powerful than the buddhas of past, present and future.

You might wonder if there is anything superior to guru yoga and such practices. The answer is that there certainly is not. Although in the tradition of secret mantra there is no practice for entering the door of blessings, no dharma superior to the profound path of guru yoga, the guru who teaches us the secret mantra is in fact an emanation of the Teacher, the Lord of Sages. In the section of sutras about nirvana it is said:

Do not despair, Ananda.

Do not lament, Ananda.

In the future,

I will manifest as virtuous spiritual friends

And act for your own and others' benefit.

Since they have practiced the paths of sutra and mantra that were taught out of the compassion of the Teacher, the Lord of Sages, the gurus are also offspring born from Shakyamuni's speech. The

guru endowed with experience and realization is the heart-son (or heart-daughter) who has received the blessings of the relative and absolute bodhicitta of the Teacher's enlightened mindstream. This means that whatever guru yoga you practice, you must understand the guru to be inseparable from the Teacher, Lord of Sages. Not only that, you must understand that the guru is not separate from whichever yidam you meditate on. The guru and yidam are not separate from each other; nor are they separate from all the buddhas of the three times. In those who have concepts of high and low, or adopting and abandoning with regard to the buddhas, accomplishments will not arise.

Acknowledge the great kindness of the Teacher of the past and be supremely devoted to him. Having understood the gurus, yidams and so on to be inseparable from Shakyamuni, whichever yoga of visualization and recitation you practice, be it the guru or yidam, it is certain that you will gain great accomplishments.

When you visualize and recite based on the practice of recollecting the Lord of Sages, then, you must visualize and recite with the devotion of understanding that not only the sublime gurus who teach the Dharma of sutra and mantra, but all the Three Jewels of the three times too are actually embodied within the Buddha. Although here in the context of sutra, merely recollecting the Buddha is considered most important, it is also quite alright to meditate on the Buddha as being indivisible from the guru. Yet this is not absolutely necessary, because simply recalling the Buddha will accomplish the aim.

When reciting the Buddha's names, Buddha is called 'Guru,

Teacher', because Buddha is the guru of the three worlds. That is why it is an appropriate name for the Buddha, but if you understand it as a sign that the Buddha is indivisible from whichever guru you have faith in that is also alright.

In any case, even if you practice in the manner of guru yoga in which the guru himself, the source of the unsurpassable secret mantra tradition, is in the form of the Lord of Sages, do as explained above. Since the guru him- or herself is the essential embodiment of all the buddhas, then whichever buddha you meditate on, and in whichever form, there is no contradiction. It is in the nature of things that blessings too will arise in accordance with your own devotion.

Tangled in afflictions,
An abject person as I am,
My words are virtuous
For they accord with the Tathagata's teaching.

As the Buddha, He Who Spoke the Truth praised:
“Those who hear the name Buddha Shakyamuni
Will all reach the irreversible stage and obtain bodhi.
How fortunate they are to follow the path!”

Appear by the power of the Tathagata,
The Treasury of Blessings is
The unimaginable source of merits.
Please practice it diligently if you are wise.

With pure intention I create this treatise,
And I dedicate this merit to all sentient beings,
May they all step onto the path of Mahayana
And attain the omniscient Buddhahood.

May all beings in the universe
Be freed from fear and other suffering.
May great masters abide in the world and Buddhadharma thrive.
May sentient beings be peaceful and happy and auspices increase.

These three parts are adapted from the last chapter of *White Lotus*, the supportive teaching for the *Treasury of Blessings—A Practice of Buddha Shakyamuni*, composed by Jamgon Mipham Gyatso. May all be auspicious!