Illuminating the Path to Liberation

A Preliminary Practice (Ngöndro)

by Jamgön Mipham Rinpoche

 Lama khyen
O guru, care for me!

Three times

Common Preliminaries

Freedoms and Advantages

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

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

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

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

donmé chü zar gyurpa dakchak la
And instead waste our time in frivolous pursuits—
Impermanence and Death

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

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

Death is inevitable, yet the time of death is uncertain.

We thus deceive ourselves in the belief that things endure—

And spend our time without due care and attention—

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

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

This was the first contemplation phase.

This was the second contemplation phase.
Actions and Their Effects

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 samsāra 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.

Trials of Saṃsāra

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.

Saṃsāra'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 ēākinis.

In front of him is the supreme teacher together with the buddhas of the three times.
yé su nyesé tek chok papké tsok
To his right are the eight close sons and the noble assembly of the Mahāyāna.

gyabtu sung rab lek bam nampachen
Behind is the word of the Buddha in the form of scriptures.

yön du chok gyé nyen rang gendüñ dang
To his left are the eight supreme disciples and saṅgha of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas.

takor yeshe chökyong tsok nam té
Surrounding them all are the wisdom dharma-protectors,

chok chu dü sum kyab yol 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 tö 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
In the gurus, yidam deities and hosts of dākinīs,
And the Buddha, Dharma and noble Saṅgha,
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.

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:

Om ah hung
Om āḥ hūṃ

Within the dharmakāya pure realm, the dharmadhātu expanse of equality,

Are the self-appearing, unending sambhogakāya realms of the five families,

And an array of nirmāṇakāya realms pervading the whole of space—

All this I offer as the delightful offering clouds of Samantabhadra!

Om ratna mandal pudza megha samudra sparana samayé ah hung
Om ratna maṇḍala pūja megha samudra spha rana samaye āḥ hūṃ
With this, make the offering.

Vajrasattva Visualization and Mantra Recitation

ah, dak gi chitsuk pé dé den tengdu
A. Above the crown of my head, upon a lotus and moon-disc seat,

palden dorjé sempa dawé dok
Is glorious Vajrasattva, the colour of the moon.

dorjé dril dzin nyemma yum dang khyū
He holds a vajra and bell and embraces the consort, Vajragarvā.

longkü ché dzok dorjé kyiltrung zhuk
In full saṃbhogakāya attire, he is seated in vajra posture.

tukkar da teng hung la yikgyé kor
On a moon-disc at his heart is Hūṃ, encircled by the hundred syllables.

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:

Om benza sato samaya | manupalaya | benza sato tenopa tiṣṭha dṛḍho mé bhava |
sutokhayo mé bhava | supokhayo mé bhava | anurakto mé bhava | sarva siddhi mé |
prayaccha | sarva karma su tsa mé | tsittam shreyang | kuru hung | ha ha ha ha ho |
| bhagavan | sarva tatagata benza ma mé muntsa benzi bhava maha samaya sato ah |

At the end of the session, recite:

Gönpo dak ni mi shé mongpa yi
O protector! In my ignorance and delusion

Damtsik lé ni gal zhing nyam
I have gone against and corrupted my samaya.

Lama gönpö kyab dzö chik
Guru protector, be my refuge!

Tsowo dorjé dzinpa té
Chief of all the maṇḍalas, vajra holder,

Tukjé chenpö daknyi chen
Embodiment of great compassion:

Drowé tso la dak kyab chi
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 downfalls 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:

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om benza sato hung
om vajrasatva hūṃ
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Then, at the end of the session:

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gewa di yi nyurdu dak
Through the positivity and merit of this, may I swiftly
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dorjé sempa drub gyur né
Attain the realization of Vajrasattva, and thereby
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drowa chik kyang malüpa
Every single sentient being
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dé yi sa la göpar shok
Reach his state of perfection too.
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For me and all sentient beings,

May all impairments and breakages of samaya be purified!

From now until we attain the essence of awakening,

May our samaya commitments remain entirely pure!

Offer aspiration prayers such as these.

Guru Yoga

emaho
Emaho!

In the naturally appearing realm of infinite purity,

My own body appears clearly as Vajrayogini.

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 sambhogakāya attire, he embraces the consort Yeshe Tsogyal.

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

All the root and lineage gurus, dakinis 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 ḍākinīs. 
Following in your footsteps,
I pray to you: Come, inspire me with your blessing!

guru pema siddhi hung 
guru padma siddhi hūṃ

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

Seven-Branch Practice

ho, dul nyé lü tü güpé chaktsal lo
Ho. With bodies as numerous as atoms, I bow down and prostrate in devotion.

nangsi zhir zheng kunzang chöpé chö
The whole of appearance and existence arisen as the ground, I present as Samantabhadra’s offering.

tserab né sak diktung chichi shak
All the misdeeds and downfalls I have committed throughout my lives, I confess.

khordé gé tsok kün la jé yi rang
In all virtuous deeds throughout samsāra and nirvāṇa, I rejoice.
dro kham jisi dorjé ku zhuk né
I implore you: remain in the vajra-kāya for as long as beings and realms remain,

zabgyé chö kyi khorlo kor du sol
And turn the wheel of the Dharma that is profound and vast.

gé tsok malü sangye tob chir ngo
All virtues without exception I dedicate towards the attainment of awakening.

Invocation and Prayer

nubchok orgyen wang gi podrang du
To the west, in Oddiyāna's palace of power,

deszhek ku sung tuk kyi trulpa té
You appeared as an emanation of the sugatas' body, speech and mind,

dzambuling du drowé dön la jön
And came to this world of Jambudvīpa for ordinary beings' sake,

rigdzin khandro mangpö khor gyi kor
Surrounded by a retinue of many vidyādharas and ḍākinīs—

pema jungné kyi lhatsok la solwa deb
Assembled deities of Padmasambhava, to you I pray!

orgyen pema jungné la solwa deb
Padmasambhava of Oddiyāna, to you I pray!

dak la wang kur jin gyi lab tu sol
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 Oddiyāṇa Guru inseparable from any yidam deity. In the case of Hayagrīva for example, you would visualize him as being the Great Oddiyāṇa Guru in essence and Hayagrīva in appearance. Then recite:

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damr naṅ gong dang sázha yas nsa
mar nak drusum wang gi zhalyé na
In the dark red triangular mansion of power,
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du nak pomo dzipé den tengdu
Treading on the dark māra demons, male and female,
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wang gi gyalpo pema heruka
Arises Padma Heruka, king of power,
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pema rik kyi trowo nam kyi kor
Surrounded by the wrathful deities of the Padma family
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tamdrin wang gi lhatsok la solwa deb
To you, mighty Hayagrīva and all your deities, we pray!
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orgyen pemajungné la solwa deb
To the Lotus-born Guru of Orgyen, we pray!²
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dak la wang kur jin gyi lab tu sol
Grant me empowerment and inspire me with your blessings, I pray!
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**And pray with these seven lines.**

Similarly for Yamāntaka, you would use the following:

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tingnak é lé drakpö zhalyé na
In the wrathful mansion that arises from the dark blue syllable é,
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² For Yamāntaka, an alternative is:
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jang naṅ gong dang sázha yas nsa
tingnak é lé drakpö zhalyé na
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The wrathful mansion that arises from the dark blue syllable é,
shinjé chu lang dzipé den tengdu
Trampling on Yama, the water buffalo,

jampal yamantaka shinjé shé
Is Mañjuśrī in the form of Yamāntaka, slayer of the Lord of Death,

shepo trowo drekpré khor gyi kor
Surrounded by his horde of wild and wrathful slaughterers:

shinjé shepö lhatsok la solwa deb
To you, Yamāntaka and all your deities, we pray!

orgyen pemajungné la solwa deb
To the Lotus-born Guru of Orgyen, we pray!

dak la wang kur jin gyi lab tu sol
Grant me empowerment and inspire me with your blessings, I pray!

Receiving Empowerment

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

lamé né sum yigé dru sum lé
From the three syllables at the guru’s three centres

özer kar mar ting sum jung né su
Stream out rays of white, red and blue light,

rang gi né sum timpé jin gyi lab
Which dissolve into my own three centres, infusing me with blessings.

lar yang lama khor ché ó du zhu
Then the guru and retinue melt into light,
And, having entered the brahma-path, dissolve into the core of my heart.

Then, with my own mind inseparable from the guru's wisdom,

I rest in an experience of mind's genuine nature, dharmakāya.

This purifies the four obscurations, and I obtain the wisdom of the four empowerments.

With mastery of the four paths and realization of the four kāyas,

I receive each and every form of blessing and empowerment.

Reflect in this way and recite the Vajra Guru mantra as many times as possible, then conclude with:

In all my lives, may I never be separated from the perfect guru,

And having benefited fully from the splendour of the Dharma,

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.

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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 Vajragarvā.

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 Śaṃvara (D 368, bde mchog nyung ngu), the root tantra of Cakrasaṃvara.

3. ↑ These six lines are taken from Le’u Dünma, The Prayer in Seven Chapters, chapter two.

4. ↑ These six lines are also taken from Le’u Dünma, The Prayer in Seven Chapters, chapter two.