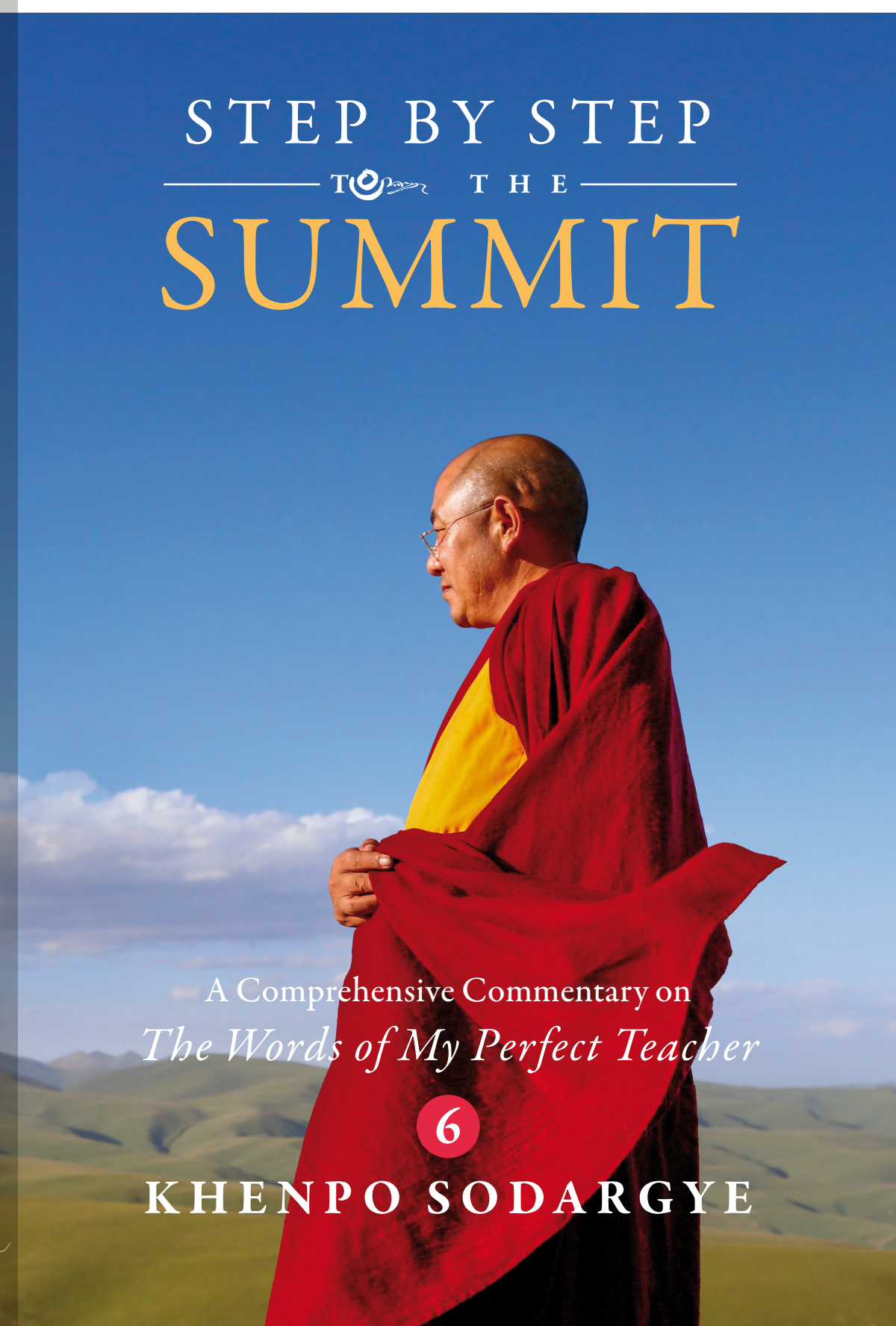




STEP BY STEP — TO — THE — SUMMIT

A Comprehensive Commentary on
The Words of My Perfect Teacher

6

KHENPO SODARGYE

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— T O — T H E —
SUMMIT

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TRANSLATED BY
*The Wisdom and Compassion
Translation Group*



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BUDDHA SHAKYAMUNI



THE FIELD OF REFUGE



GURU RINPOCHE
PADMASAMBHAVA



PATRUL RINPOCHE



WRATHFUL BLACK TRUE MOTHER
(SKT. KRODHAKALI)



VAJRASATTVA

Homage to the fundamental teacher Buddha Shakyamuni:

With great compassion, you embraced this turbulent and
degenerate world,

And made five hundred mighty aspirations.

You are as exalted as the white lotus; whoever hears your name
shall never return to samsara—

Most compassionate teacher, to you I pay homage!

Homage to the omniscient Longchenpa:

At the neck of the treasury Gangri Thökar,¹

Is the blissful grove of perfect virtues.

Omniscient Longchen Rabjam,

The secret yogin with the essence of the twofold goal,²

To you, I prostrate.

Homage to the omniscient Mipham Rinpoche:

The wisdom of Manjushri, Lion of Speech, arose in your heart,

And you trained in the infinite aspirations of Samantabhadra,

Performing the enlightened actions of the buddhas and their
heirs:

Jampal Gyepé Dorje, to you I pray!

Homage to the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche:

In the pure realm of the great sacred site, the Five-Peak Mountain,

The blessings of Manjushri's wisdom ripened in your mind—

Jigme Phuntsok, at your feet I pray!

Inspire me with your blessings: transmit the realization of the
wisdom-mind lineage!

In order to liberate all sentient beings from samsara, may we all
generate the supreme Bodhicitta!

¹ Gangri Thökar, literally “The White Skull Snow Mountain,” is a famous peak in Central Tibet, approximately twenty-five km south of Lhasa. It was here, in the hermitage of Orgyen Dzong, that Longchenpa taught and composed many of his most important writings. (Source: Rigpawiki.org)

² The twofold goal: bringing benefit to oneself as well as to others.

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Lesson 105

“The first five of the six transcendent perfection—generosity, discipline, ... you will be capable of actually giving them away.” [page 234–236]

Previously, we have studied training in the precepts of the bodhicitta of aspiration. This includes considering others as equal to oneself, exchanging oneself and others, and considering others more important than oneself. Today, we will begin studying the section on training in the precepts of the bodhicitta of application.

Once the bodhicitta of application has arisen in one’s mindstream, one’s merit will increase day and night. As stated in the first chapter of *The Way of the Bodhisattva*:

A great and unremitting stream,
A strength of wholesome merit,
Even during sleep and inattention,
Rises equal to the vastness of the sky.¹

Once the bodhicitta of application has arisen in us, from that moment onward, even if sometimes we are not deliberately thinking of benefiting others—for example, during sleep and inattention—our wholesome merit will still be increasing, its amount as boundless as the sky.

I believe those who have received the teachings of *The Way of the Bodhisattva*

¹ Shantideva, *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Shambhala, 2011.

tva have all generated the bodhicitta of intention. Training in the precepts of the bodhicitta of application involves putting the six transcendent perfections into real practice, enabling one to truly benefit living beings. The practice of the six transcendent perfections is the Buddha's only way of benefiting beings. Not only Buddha Shakyamuni, but all the infinite buddhas benefit beings through this approach. Now let's begin to learn the section on training in the precepts of the bodhicitta of application.

2.2.2.3.2. Training in the Precepts of the Bodhicitta of Application: the Six Transcendent Perfections

The first five of the six transcendent perfections—generosity, discipline, patience, diligence, and concentration—are all aspects of the practice of skillful means. The sixth, wisdom, pertains to the accumulation of primal wisdom.

2.2.2.3.2.1. Transcendent Generosity

Generosity can take three forms: material giving, giving Dharma, and giving protection from fear.

2.2.2.3.2.1.1. Material Giving

There are three kinds of material giving: ordinary giving, great giving, and exceptionally great giving.

♦ Ordinary giving

1) The key points of ordinary giving

Ordinary giving refers to the act of offering anything material, whether it is just a pinch of tea leaves, a bowl of barley or rice, a bag of flour, a piece of cloth, a few cents, or more.

If given with perfectly pure intention, the amount is not important. Thus, even if a person does not give much, the merit is still great. Conversely, if a person gives a lot without pure intention, the merit is very limited. Therefore, the merit of giving does not depend on the quantity of items given but rather on the intention behind it. If the act of giving is motivated by greed, anger, stinginess, or rivalry, the intention is impure, resulting in minimal merit.

Meanwhile, the gift must also be pure. As stated in *The Precious Garland of the Middle Way*, giving tobacco, alcohol, weapons, and other harmful items not only generates no merit but also results in significant faults. This applies to the act of buying meat and offering it to others as well. Offering meat is inappropriate except in very rare and special circumstances. There are various situations in ordinary giving.

It is essential to give with a pure intention. Even giving a mere mouthful of food to a cat or dog carries immeasurable merit if we give with a pure intention and dedicate it accordingly. *The Confession of Downfalls* speaks of “the positive effect for the future, of giving a mere mouthful of food to an animal.” It also says in the sutra:

It's not through giving abundant wealth
That one attains the great fruition;
It is only with supreme kindness
That one gets the great fruition.

Therefore, the merit of material giving is not related to the quantity of the giving. Some people donate tens of thousands of dollars to the sangha or to pedestrians and beggars on their way to India or Lhasa. On the surface, it seems that such a person may have accumulated great merit from these actions. However, if they do this with the intention of showing off, no matter how much they give, it will hold little meaning.

On the other hand, some people can only afford a small act of material giving. But if such a person does it with bodhicitta or a kind intention, their merit can far exceed that of the former person.

After an act of generosity, be sure to dedicate the merit. By doing so, our generosity will accumulate great merit. Take giving Dharma as an example: whether we teach or listen to others' teachings, we should dedicate the merit in the end. Regarding giving protection from fear, when animals are freed, we should complete the action by reciting a dedication prayer.

Similarly, when giving material things, we cannot simply give them away without dedicating the merit. Nowadays, when some Buddhists organize a charity event, they often document the entire process by taking photos and videos without reciting the dedication prayer. This is a great pity!

Of course, it is understandable if a non-Buddhist does not dedicate merit. But we Mahayanists should not forget to dedicate merit after having conducted a good action. I have emphasized this repeatedly when teaching you the three supreme methods. I hope you will pay attention to it.

2) The power of mantras when making material giving

The Buddha is the embodiment of skillful means and great compassion. With his unobstructed wisdom, he has left us many dharanis² and mantras.³ Through the blessing power of the mantra, even offering a single drop of water or a grain of rice can bring true benefits to countless pretas, ākṣasas, yaksas, and other non-human beings.

We can go to a river and recite the Avalokiteshvara mantra or other powerful mantras over a glass of water, then pour it into the river. Alternatively, we can recite mantras over a handful of rice and then scatter it into the sea. In doing so, aquatic animals, the water gods, and beings connected with the water will receive benefits, directly or indirectly. Of course, it is only the Buddha who fully knows which beings receive what benefits. Not only can we ordinary beings, but also arhats and bodhisattvas, not know for certain.

With the help of the mantras, the white and red burned offerings can bring great benefits to pretas that move through space. Many people get confused between “burned offering” and “fire offering,” which, in fact, differ significantly. “Fire offering” or “fire puja” refers to making offerings to the buddhas and bodhisattvas by burning offerings in a fire, which is a common practice during the tantric tsok offering.

During his visit to Nepal, the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche revealed the mind terma of *The Neck Pouch Vajrakīlaya*, which includes a specific sadhana for fire offering. This sadhana was not revealed on the spot in Nepal; rather, when Rinpoche was traveling in North India, it suddenly appeared in his wisdom mind. A master in the present immediately noted down this sadhana.

Fire offering is an offering to the buddhas and bodhisattvas, whereas burned offering is for beings of the lower realms. What we typically perform is burned

² A type of long mantra found in the sutras.

³ Such as the Avalokiteshvara Mantra, the Buddha Shakyamuni Mantra, the Great Compassion Mantra, the Shurangama Mantra, and many other mantras listed in Mipham Rinpoche's *One Hundred Mantras that Purify Karmic Obscurations*.

offering instead of fire offering; that is, we burn food as an offering to pretas and non-humans that move through space.

When some Tibetan masters visit the Han region of China, they like to gather laypeople and practice “fire puja” together in the suburbs. However, what they do may not be a true “fire offering” but rather a “burned offering.”

It turned out that the fires they created attracted the attention of firefighters. I heard that a person in Shanghai could not find anywhere to make a burned offering, so he practiced it on the roof of a building dozens of stories high. People thought there was a fire, so they called the firefighters. The firefighters hesitated to climb the tall building, so they parked their fire trucks at ground level and tried to extinguish the fire using a fire hose. However, the water could not reach the top of the building.

In fact, what the person did was inappropriate. As I mentioned yesterday, the practice of any Buddhist ritual should be in accordance with local norms. If a practice is not suitable in a big city, do not do it; rather, one can perform it in a skillful manner.

For example, if a Buddhist wants to make a burned offering, they may burn a small amount of food in a container or on a stove. When a light smoke begins to rise, simply recite the sadhana and visualize beings receiving the offering. There is no need to create heavy smoke for the practice.

Some people believe that denser smoke makes the practice more effective. They may even become so emotional when they hear someone playing drums or blowing a conch shell during the offering, exclaiming, “What a great guru! What a big flame! This shows that the guru must be an accomplished master, a manifestation of all buddhas and bodhisattvas.” Alas!

Of course, I am not suggesting that there is no meaning in engaging in such a Buddhist ritual. Rather, I want to remind you: Please do this properly; otherwise, more is less.

In fact, a burned offering generates great merit. During your practice, you may perform this ritual when you are in poor health, experiencing nightmares, or feeling harmed by non-humans. However, you do not need to invite a master to do so. You can simply recite the sadhana yourself. This practice differs from giving precepts, which must be administered by a monastic and not by a householder. Regarding

the names of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, as well as the mantras, anyone who recites them can receive benefit.

In brief, we should not fall into two extremes: either we think these rituals are completely unnecessary, or we perform them daily and stop studying the Dharma. Neither extreme is correct. It is explained in the *Biography of Padmasambhava* that tsok offerings should only be performed when necessary. According to Nyingma tradition, tsok offerings occur on the tenth and twenty-fifth days of each month, according to the Tibetan lunar calendar. This frequency is also observed by monasteries.

However, I have heard that some lay practitioners perform a tsok offering every Sunday. Although it is referred to as a “tsok offering,” it is essentially their skillful way of having more fruits and drinks. Eventually, I discovered their “secret.” (*The audience laughs.*)

3) How to benefit beings with burned offerings

Spirits that otherwise feed on the lives of others can be temporarily satisfied by the smell of burned food offerings, and their minds are liberated by the gift of Dharma. As a result, they no longer harm others, and many beings are thus protected from the danger of death.

Originally, malevolent spirits feed on the lives of other beings. By performing burned offerings that allow them to enjoy the scent of smoke, we can temporarily satisfy these spirits. Additionally, by reciting the rituals and giving other forms of Dharma, we help liberate them from their vicious mentality, so they no longer bring harm to others. This will protect many beings from the danger of death, which is a form of “giving protection from fear.”

Thus, the burned offering practice includes all three forms of generosity—burning food is material giving, reciting sadhanas is Dharma giving, and having them not harm others is giving protection from fear.

Since the merit of performing burned offerings is so great, and like offering water tormas, it is also a simple and effective practice that yields significant benefits with minimal effort, it is extremely important that we offer one hundred thousand water tormas every year and consistently make both water tormas and burned offerings in our daily lives.

Burned offerings are particularly better practiced every afternoon because

spirits, pretas, and non-humans gather during this time. As stated in some retreat instructions, it is best to recite the sadhana of burned offerings in the late afternoon, especially around dusk.

When performing the ritual of burned offering, we should first prepare biscuits⁴ and water. Sprinkle some water on the biscuits, recite the blessing mantra seven times: *Namah Sarva Tathagata Avalokite Om Sambhara Sambhara Hum*. Then, recite the following four tathagatas' names:

Homage to the Tathagata Bountiful Riches. Reciting this name can eliminate the pretas' karma accumulated from stinginess and bring them the perfection of merit.

Homage to the Tathagata Sublimely Handsome. Reciting this name can remove the pretas' ugly appearance and bring them good looks.

Homage to the Tathagata Unbounded Body. Reciting this name can enlarge the pretas' throats, so they can freely eat food.

Homage to the Tathagata Deity of Total Fearlessness. Reciting this name can rid the pretas of fear and free them from the torments of the lower realm. [People who are constantly anxious and fearful should also recite this name.]

All recitations below are from Freedom from *All Adversity: A Sur Offering to Harmful Influences, Obstacle Makers and Elemental Spirits*. Here is the pronunciation of those names in Tibetan:

deshyin shekpa rinchen mang la chaktsal lo
 deshyin shekpa zuk dzé dampa la chaktsal lo
 deshyin shekpa ku jam lé la chaktsal lo
 deshyin shekpa jikpa tamché yongsu dralwé lha la chaktsal lo

The sadhana brings great benefit, so if possible, we should recite it often.

4) Material offering without stinginess

Some individuals hold onto their possessions tightly once they gain a bit of wealth. They are reluctant to use it for purposes meaningful for this life or the next, never willing to give to others or even spend it on themselves. They often lament, "I really do not have any money; I am so poor!" Although these people may not be

⁴ It can also be barley or wheat flour.

pretas, or hungry ghosts, they are nevertheless experiencing the karma associated with that state.

Here is a relevant fable:

Two pretas were about to be reborn in the human realm. Yama, the Lord of Death, told them, “Now that you are about to be reborn as humans, there are two options: one is to give to others for your entire life, and the other is to receive from others. Which do you prefer?”

One preta immediately knelt down and said, “Dear Yama, I want to be a person who receives from others.” The other preta remained silent, waiting for Yama’s arrangement.

Yama tapped his judge’s ruler and said, “The first preta will be reborn as a beggar, so he will beg to receive from others; the second preta will be reborn in a wealthy family, so he will often give to others.” Hearing this, the two pretas were startled and left speechless.

This fable reflects the difference between “giving” and “receiving.” Those who are obsessed with “I want” typically receive little and end up in poverty, while those who give generously often receive much in return. When one gives, one will receive, and one’s wealth will naturally grow.

Those who are very stingy and unwilling to give anything may live a miserable next life, even if they are super rich in this life. Here is a story in the *Ekottaragama Sutra* about a rich man:

Bhadrika was super rich, but since he had no children, his wealth was confiscated after his death. Because of this, King Prasenajit went to see the Buddha.

“What happened? Why do you come to see me in such a hurry?” the Buddha asked.

King Prasenajit explained it was about Bhadrika’s wealth being confiscated, saying, “When I went to collect his properties and possessions, I found, among other things, forty thousand kilograms of pure gold. However, in the course of his life, Bhadrika lived on poor food, wore shabby clothes, and rode skinny old horses.”

The Buddha said, “This happened because Bhadrika’s mind was obscured by stinginess when he was alive, so he didn’t know to make offerings.”

King Prasenajit asked, “Where has he been reborn?”

The Buddha answered, “His merit was exhausted, and now he is in the Howling Hell.”

King Prasenajit asked again, “Is there any merit left in him?”

The Buddha answered, “None. He had exhausted all his merits accumulated from actions in previous lives, but he did not commit any new positive actions in this life. Therefore, no merit was left in him. He has no choice but to suffer in hell.”

Likewise, some people today enjoy wealth and happiness due to the merit accumulated in previous lives. However, if they do not accumulate any merit in this life, they will have no choice but to fall into a lower realm in the future when their merit is exhausted, just as Bhadrīka experienced.

This is similar to the example of recharging a mobile phone. You can use your mobile now because you charged it yesterday. You continue to use the mobile until there is no power left. If you do not recharge it, you will not be able to use it tomorrow. Therefore, to enjoy happiness in future lives, you must accumulate merit in this life. Otherwise, if you do not have any merit, even the Buddha himself cannot protect you.

Sometimes I encounter people who are extremely wealthy but unwilling to give anything or make an offering. They boast of their financial achievements. However, they do not realize that wealth is no different from a water bubble or a rainbow, which can soon vanish. What we have today may no longer be with us tomorrow. Moreover, even if we accumulate a lot of wealth, we cannot take a single penny with us at the moment of death.

As we know, all of us will die, and it is uncertain when that will happen. If we knew we were to die a few hundred years from now, it would make sense for us to have a deliberate plan just for this life. However, we may not even outlive the duration of a piece of cloth. Once we die, there’s nothing left but our good or bad karma, which will follow us like shadows.

Thus, we should avoid adopting attitudes like Bhadrīka’s stinginess and instead strive to be generous by engaging in activities such as making offerings to the Three Jewels and giving to beggars. As Milarepa wisely advises:

“Dig out food from your own mouth and give it as alms.”

For instance, when we are at a restaurant and a few beggars come to us reciting

the Avalokiteshvara Mantra or Amitabha's name, we should follow Milarepa's advice and share our food with them.

It is also said in *The Sutra of Mahakashyapa Liberating a Poor Old Woman*:

If you can reduce your own provisions,
And give shares to others,
You will be liberated from the long nights of samsara,
And become wealthy in future lives.

The beggars or poor people we encounter today live such a life due to their lack of accumulated merit in previous lives. When we are fortunate enough to possess some wealth, we should share it with others who are suffering while also enjoying it ourselves.

Conversely, if we allow ourselves to become enslaved by our own selfish attachment, we may reach a point where, despite having all the wealth in the world, it still feels insufficient. In this mindset, we may hesitate to part with what we have, convincing ourselves that any resources we use for offerings or to help the needy will still have to be found later or sourced from somewhere else.

Many people are like this. When they have ten million dollars, they think, "Dear guru and the Three Jewels, please grant me blessings to make more money. When I have thirty million dollars, I will definitely practice generosity!"

But when they manage to make thirty million dollars, they then think they will practice generosity only when they have sixty million dollars. They have been making vows but never putting them into practice. They are unwilling to take money out to make offerings or to give to the needy. Very often, they think, "I will do so when I am richer." This is the problem faced by many stingy individuals.

5) Monastics and material giving

The Buddha taught about material giving primarily for lay practitioners. *The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom* also states:

Generosity consists of giving Dharma and giving material possessions, with the former primarily applicable to monastics and the latter to laypeople.

Of course, this principle is intended for most practitioners. If a layperson has no money, they can always emulate a monk or nun by giving Dharma instead.

For a monk or nun, the key focus is to reduce desires, cultivate contentment with whatever they have, and diligently practice the threefold training of the higher path in mountain hermitages and solitary places, embracing all hardships with gratitude.

However, many monastics today seem to confuse their primary duty, focusing largely on accumulating merit through material giving. To do this, they often solicit donations from lay practitioners. Unfortunately, unpleasant experiences can arise during these alms rounds because some monastics do not act solely for the benefit of all beings; they may have their own selfish agendas.

Conversely, some donors are so naive that they place complete trust in the monastics without discerning the truth of their claims. In addition to giving away their own possessions, these donors may also encourage others to contribute. When they eventually realize they have been deceived, they may resort to legal action over financial matters with the monastics, causing them significant distress and pain.

This should not have happened. In Buddhism, one's faith must be established through a long-term examination. It is like when a parent tries to find a teacher for their child; they will not act in haste. Instead, they will first inquire about the teacher's qualities. The same is true when following a spiritual teacher. If you do not engage in any examination beforehand and offer all your wealth to them on impulse, you may regret it when you notice the teacher's faults in the future. If you can abide in the state of Great Perfection, you will have no regrets; however, most people have not achieved that state yet.

However, things are getting slightly better because many people are not as gullible anymore after studying the Dharma. In fact, what is happening today in the Han region of China is very similar to what occurred in the past in Tibet. During the period when Venerable Atisha was in Tibet, Tibetans liked to make offerings to Indian monks. Although Tibetans were not wealthy at that time, according to historical accounts, they were still better off than Indians. When an Indian master came to Tibet, Tibetans would bring gold and grain to make offerings to him without examining him. Atisha criticized this behavior in his works.

Of course, a true offering brings great merit. Many Chinese people donate money to Tibetan schools and monasteries out of pure faith, which is commend-

able. However, some donors later regret their contributions after realizing their donations went to monastics with inappropriate conduct, and I have heard such stories. As I often say, when inappropriate things occur, we should not blame Tibetan Buddhism or Chinese Buddhism per se, because Buddhism itself is faultless. It is the individuals who are responsible for the faults in their behavior.

As I mentioned earlier, the fact that laypeople make monetary offerings to monastics who engage in inappropriate conduct can be attributed to two factors: first, the monastics do not behave in accordance with the Dharma; second, the laypeople make monetary offerings without examining the quality of the monastics due to their lack of discernment.

It is meritorious to make offerings to monastics, but if a person offers to a charlatan, no matter how much they provide for the false teacher, it benefits neither the donor nor the recipient. Therefore, we should understand what to do and what not to do by studying the Dharma. Otherwise, it is a great pity when we make meaningless offerings.

Some practitioners abandon their spiritual practices to engage in trade, agriculture, or other means of livelihood, often accumulating wealth through cunning and trickery. They claim to be practicing Dharma by making monetary offerings with their gains. However, such offerings hold little real meaning. On the surface, it seems they are performing virtuous actions, but in truth, both their methods and motivations for accumulating wealth deviate from the goal of benefiting sentient beings.

Especially if a person introduces Dharma into a business transaction or profits in the name of Buddhism, they are committing negative actions that may lead them to the lower realms for tens of thousands of kalpas. As Padma Sangye says:

When Dharma is not practiced in accordance with Dharma,
Dharma itself can cause a bad rebirth.

This is something to which we should pay extra attention. For example, if a person solicits donations under the pretense of building a stupa but is actually collecting money for personal use, this is reprehensible. Such individuals exist among both laypeople and monastics. They may act this way because they lack an understanding of Buddhist tenets, do not take the law of karma seriously, or are so stubborn that they have no concern about falling into the hell realm. As a result,

due to their lack of wisdom in distinguishing good from bad, Dharma itself can lead to their bad rebirths.

Using the Three Jewels to amass wealth for oneself can have very serious consequences. Even if one's riches reach towering heights, they are still impermanent. So, why should we accumulate negative karma in pursuit of them? The *Sutra of the Right Mindfulness of Dharma* says:

Even if worldly wealth piles as high as a mountain,
But everything is impermanent.
Why should you commit wrongdoings
For the sake of gaining such wealth?

Thus, please be extremely careful when using wealth donated to the Three Jewels, and do not use it carelessly. For example, materials or money donated by faithful donors should be used for their designated purposes rather than for arbitrary reasons. If the funds are for printing a sutra, they must be used for that purpose. If they are for building a stupa, they must be used accordingly. Otherwise, if we use the stupa funds to build a house, even if the karmic results do not arise in this life, they will certainly arise in future lives when we will have to repay with our own flesh and blood. The karmic consequences of misusing donors' contributions are particularly severe.

In summary, monastics should find contentment in what they possess, actively engage in listening, contemplation, and meditation, and share the Dharma when possible. Their primary focus should be on benefiting others through the teachings they have received rather than constantly soliciting donations. If a monk or nun speaks mostly about money rather than the Dharma, it can cause significant harm to Buddhism. Constantly soliciting donations makes it challenging for a Buddhist to effectively spread the Dharma, as our observation over the years has shown.

While monetary offerings are indeed meritorious, they should be given voluntarily by laypeople without any reluctance. No one should pressure others to donate with statements like, "You must offer money! Come on, give me all your money so I can offer it on your behalf..." It is essential to be considerate when encouraging others to engage in virtuous acts, such as making financial contributions. Respect for others' free will is crucial, and many inappropriate behaviors in this regard should be addressed.

♦ Great giving

Patrul Rinpoche defines great giving as the act of offering to others something rare or personally precious, such as one's own horse, elephant, or even one's son or daughter.

It is crucial that we avoid interpreting this definition out of context and do not focus exclusively on its literal meaning. There are many stories about the Buddha, in his previous lives, making great giving. However, some scriptures state that unless a special secret intention is involved, such as a bodhisattva vow of benefiting others altogether, as in the story of King Jewel Crest, one must receive approval from their family members before offering them to others.

♦ Exceptionally great giving

Exceptionally great giving refers to the act of giving one's own limbs, head, eyes, brain, body, or even life. For example, Prince Great Courage offered his body to a starving tigress, Nagarjuna gave his head to the son of King Surabhibhadra, and Princess Mandabhadri fed a tigress with her own body.

However, Patrul Rinpoche notes in the text that the practice of exceptionally great giving should be undertaken only by individuals who have reached at least the first bodhisattva level. Ordinary beings are not capable of actually practicing such giving.

Prince Great Courage was one of the previous lives of Buddha Shakyamuni. The story in which he gave his body to a starving tigress is covered in *The White Lotus: The Great Biography of Buddha Shakyamuni*, the *Sutra of the Wise and the Foolish*, and *Jatakamala: A Garland of Birth Stories*. Here is the story:

One day, Buddha Shakyamuni came to a forest and asked his monks, "Do you want to see the precious relics of my previous incarnation?"

The sangha said, "Yes, we do!"

The Buddha pressed the ground with his hand. After the ground vibrated in six manners, a stupa adorned with seven jewels arose. The Buddha got up, paid homage, and circumambulated the stupa clockwise. Then he asked Ananda to open the stupa's door and take out a chest adorned with seven jewels, which contained white relics. The Buddha showed the relics to his sangha and recited a verse:

The bodhisattva has supreme qualities,

Practices the six transcendent perfections with great diligence,
Pursues enlightenment with great courage,
Makes exceptionally great giving and never becomes weary.

Ananda asked, “As the Buddha who surpasses everyone in the three worlds, why did you pay homage and circumambulate the relics clockwise?”

The Buddha answered, “My actions in that previous life were crucial to my attainment of Buddhahood. To express my appreciation and gratitude, I pay homage by circumambulating the relics clockwise.” Later, the Buddha shared his stories from that previous life with the sangha, saying:

“Many kalpas ago, there was a king who had three princes. One day, the three princes were playing in a forest when they encountered a starving tigress. The eldest prince said, “The tigress has to guard her seven cubs, so she cannot search for food elsewhere. She is starving and will likely eat her cubs.” The second prince said, “The tigress is about to die soon. Is there any way to save her life?” At that moment, the youngest prince had the idea of sacrificing himself to save the tigress, so he told his two brothers, “Will you leave first? I will follow you soon.”

After his brothers left, the young prince, driven by compassion, hung all his clothes on the tree branches and lay down beside the tigress to feed himself to the starving animal. The tigress, however, was too weak to take a bite of him. Then the prince pricked a vein in his neck with a piece of bamboo, allowing the tigress to regain her strength by licking his blood. At that moment, the ground vibrated in six ways, and many beautiful flowers and incense fell from the sky. After drinking his blood, the tigress gained more strength and was able to eat the prince’s flesh. When the two brothers returned to check on their youngest brother, they found that he had offered all his flesh, leaving only a pile of bones.

The Buddha said, “Prince Great Courage, the youngest prince, was my previous life. The two brothers were the previous incarnations of Maitreya and Manjushri, respectively.”

The place where Prince Great Courage sacrificed his body to the starving tigress is now called “Namo Buddha” in Nepal. The exact spot where this exceptionally great giving took place is a site referred to as the “Den of Tigress.” I once visited there with the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche. At the nearby stupa called “Namo Buddha Stupa,” some verses and instructions arose from the wisdom mind of Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, which I noted down. Though concise, they carry

great blessing power. I intended to translate them but have not managed to do so. It is been twenty years. Time flies!

There are some murals at Namu Buddha that depict Prince Great Courage feeding himself to the tigress. You should pay it a visit if you go to Nepal one day. It takes more than three hours to get there from the Great Stupa of Boudhanath in Kathmandu. The road was unpaved and full of twists and turns when we visited. I was told that it has since been paved with cement.

From Namu Buddha, you can go directly to the Asura Cave, where Padmasambhava had a retreat, and the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche revealed the terma on Vajrakilaya. On the way back from the Asura Cave, you can also see a hill where the prince's palace once stood.

This story truly happened many kalpas ago during a previous life of Buddha Shakyamuni. According to historical accounts, after the bones of Prince Great Courage were cremated, some of his relics were used to build stupas, while the rest were the relics that Buddha Shakyamuni presented to his sangha.

The Buddha offered his body to a starving animal in his previous life, whereas some of today's Mahayanists hate and even harm suffering beings, which is hard to believe. Compared to the inspiring deeds of the Buddha in his previous lives, his followers and Mahayanists like us should indeed feel ashamed.

The great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche taught the *Sutra of the Wise and the Foolish* in 1986, and the story of Prince Great Courage in the sutra deeply impressed us. At that time, I made a wish in my mind that I could visit the place where the prince fed himself to the tigress. Later, my wish was fulfilled. The place is just a cave in the forest, which is now a historic site in remembrance of the prince's great deed. I heard that Thrangu Rinpoche, a teacher of the seventeenth Karmapa, built a monastery near the site. Please do visit the place of Namu Buddha when you visit Nepal in the future. The bus fare for the three-hour trip should not be an issue for a pilgrimage visitor.

Here, I have offered a detailed story on Prince Great Courage giving his body to a starving tigress. I will skip the stories of Nagarjuna giving his head to the son of King Surabhibhadra and Princess Mandabhadri feeding a tigress with her own body. You may find those detailed stories in my teaching on *The Way of the Bodhisattva*.

Of course, unless it is a sublime being who has attained a bodhisattva level,

an ordinary person is not capable of such exceptional generosity. However, we can think, “I will generously offer my body, life, and all provisions to all living beings.” Especially when we are sick, we can visualize offering our body, merit, and everything else to those in need and engage in the practice by reciting the Kusāli’s instruction. This can be considered an offering of the body.

Meanwhile, we should make such an aspiration as, “Though I cannot offer my body now, when I have attained the sublime levels, I will emulate Buddha Shakyamuni, Manjushri, Maitreya, and Nagarjuna, and will directly offer my body to living beings without any reservation or clinging.”

Even if we cannot offer our bodies to sentient beings since we have not attained sublime levels, we must not harm or kill any being for our own benefit. Bringing harm to others is not what a Buddhist should do, and we must understand this very well. We should do our utmost to avoid harming or killing any being for any reason and to help them as much as possible.

Helping others is the best reflection of a person’s practice. We should not adopt a superior attitude, thinking, “I am a practitioner. I am a teacher. I should not engage in this or that.” The essence of a buddha or bodhisattva is to treat all beings with impartiality and help them all. For instance, if we see a senior struggling to walk down the street, we should offer our help. At that moment, a monastic should not hesitate to support an elderly layperson simply because of the concern, “How can a monastic hold the arm of a householder?”

Ultimately, our truest identity is that of “the servant of all beings.” I refer to a genuine servant, not one who merely holds a title. Our intention in helping others should not be to seek recognition. It should not be the case that we offer help only when the guru, chief monk, or others are watching while choosing to do nothing when no one is watching.

As long as our actions are beneficial to living beings, we should engage in them, regardless of the scale of the benefit. This is the essence of what a Mahayanist should embody.



Lesson 106

“The means leading others to spiritual practice by ...
Always practise the four kinds of generosity.” [page 236–238]

Previously, we studied three kinds of material giving, namely ordinary giving, great giving, and exceptionally great giving. Today we will move on to the section on giving Dharma.

2.2.2.3.2.1.2. Giving Dharma

Giving Dharma means leading others to spiritual practice by giving empowerments, Dharma teachings, transmissions, and so forth. This kind of giving refers to guiding a non-Buddhist onto the Dharma path or helping a Buddhist progress along that path. Through such giving, one can help plant the seed of merit in their mindstream and convey the profound meaning of the Dharma.

As I have mentioned over and over again on various occasions, while certain Buddhist practices—such as offering incense, prostrating to the Buddha, taking refuge, and receiving the bodhicitta vow—do bring benefits, the most crucial aspect is to understand the Buddha’s teachings. Only by grasping the meaning of the Dharma can we effectively abandon vice and practice virtue. Ultimately, through practicing the Dharma, we can achieve liberation for ourselves and others. Therefore, the merit of listening to or teaching the Dharma is extraordinary. Whenever possible, we should propagate the Dharma, as it provides significant benefits for all beings.

- ♦ The merit of teaching and listening to the Dharma

Strictly speaking, a Dharma teacher must possess qualities that correspond to the Dharma and is preferably a monastic. The criteria for being a qualified Dharma teacher are quite high. From a practical point of view, we may not be able to find many highly qualified monastic teachers to guide us. If it is truly difficult to find a monk or nun teacher to follow, a layperson with less self-interest can fulfill that role as well.

Of course, it is very challenging for an ordinary person to completely eliminate selfishness. However, if such a teacher can master the meaning of the teachings they deliver and teach with pure intention rather than for their own benefit, then their teachings will bring great merit without creating any negative consequences.

It is said in the *Mahasangha Vinaya (The Great Canon of Monastic Rules)*:

The merit of filling hundreds of thousands of Jambudvīpa
With real gold, and giving it to others,
Is not comparable to the merit of giving one verse of the Dharma
And making one understand this verse and practice accordingly.

The *Sutra of the Great Heap of Jewels* also says:

The merit of offering seven precious substances to all the
buddhas in the three-thousand-fold universe is not comparable to
the merit of hearing and assimilating one verse of the Dharma.

Thus, it is very important to hear and teach the Dharma over the long term. If you have the opportunity, you may receive teachings from a teacher in person. If that in-person instruction is not feasible, you may also receive the teachings from a qualified teacher through recorded audio or video, live streaming, and the like.

Many people lead busy lives, but what exactly are they busy with? They are focused on making a living, working hard for what often amounts to mundane pursuits. Few individuals dedicate their efforts to addressing the deeper issues of life and death, or, in other words, to seeking liberation in future existences. To shift their focus from pursuing only temporary benefits in this life, it is essential for them to continually listen to and contemplate the Dharma.

♦ The true benefit of the Dharma

The blessing power of the Dharma is incredible. Therefore, when I teach,

I primarily explain the meaning of a Dharma text directly and quote sutras or instructions from eminent masters of the past. I understand that in a Dharma teaching, modern people may prefer up-to-date news and social issues over scriptural evidence, Buddhist stories, and traditional pedagogical approaches. Nevertheless, because you are all Buddhist practitioners, it is better for you to receive the original meaning of the Dharma directly.

Even if you can only understand one verse, one paragraph, or one layer of meaning each day, as the drops of right views gradually accumulate and form an ocean, your wrong views or unwholesome thoughts will naturally vanish.

Thus, a Dharma teaching should not be intertwined with too many mundane affairs. Dharma teachers should pay attention to this. Mundane content may temporarily inspire curiosity in Dharma students, but it can hardly uproot the sources of their afflictions. In my own teaching, I will always strive to find good instructions and scriptural evidence, which are vajra words with extraordinary blessings. If you can recite them or read them several times, these vajra words will take root in your mindstream as seeds of virtue, which will ripen in the future. Therefore, I hope you will listen to each Dharma class with an attitude of appreciation and eagerness.

When the Dharma truly reaches into a practitioner, they are able to transform any adversity onto the path, anytime and anywhere. Recently,⁵ Akhyuk Rinpoche appeared very ill, so Khenpo Tsultrim Lodrö, Tulku Tenzin, and I went to Yachen Gar⁶ to supplicate for his longevity. During the supplication, Akhyuk Rinpoche did not mention his illness at all. Instead, he spoke only about topics such as the rigpa⁷ of the Great Perfection and how we should collaborate on propagating the Dharma and benefiting living beings.

If a worldly person gets sick, they may only complain about their illness and

⁵ It refers to the late 2000s.

⁶ Yachen Gar is a Tibetan Buddhist monastery of the Nyingma school, with an educational institute and residential community in western Sichuan, China. It was founded by Akhyuk Rinpoche in the summer of 1980.

⁷ Rigpa (Skt. vidyā; Tib. རིག་པ།, Wyl. rig pa) is a Tibetan word that generally means 'intelligence' or 'awareness'. In Dzogchen (the Great Perfection), however, the highest teachings in the Buddhist tradition of Tibet, rigpa has a deeper connotation: 'the innermost nature of the mind'. The whole of the teaching of the Buddha is directed towards realizing this, our ultimate nature, the state of omniscience or enlightenment—a truth so universal, so primordial that it goes beyond all limits and beyond even religion itself. (Source: Rigpawiki.org)

pain or comment on how they sleep or eat during a conversation. However, what Akhyuk Rinpoche talked about is actually the attainment of his lifelong practice.

Akhyuk Rinpoche promised us he would try his best to remain longer in this world. However, we all know that the longevity of a sublime master relies on the merit of living beings and the master's compassionate aspirations. As the merits of living beings continue to decline significantly, we remain uncertain whether our supplications will be answered.

Nevertheless, we do not necessarily have to go here and there, engaging in all kinds of Dharmic rituals for his longevity. We all know the seven-branch practice, through which we can pray for the longevity of Akhyuk Rinpoche and all the other eminent masters who propagate Sutrayana and Vajrayana teachings. In fact, all these great masters have achieved mastery over birth and death. Take Tibetan master Gyalse Tokme Zangpo, for example. Before he passed away at the age of 75, his disciple asked him, "To which pure realm are you going?" He answered:

If I can benefit living beings, I am even willing to go to hell. If I cannot benefit living beings, I am not willing to go to a pure realm.

Therefore, even after a great master has left this world, they will manifest in different forms and continue to benefit beings in this world or other worlds. For such a great master, wherever they are reborn, they are always benefiting sentient beings. Having attained mastery over life and death, they take rebirth solely out of compassion and the power of their vows. However, for us ordinary beings, we feel deep sadness when our beloved master departs for another realm.

The winter of January 2004 marked a poignant and unforgettable time for me when the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche left us. I still vividly remember the moment when Rinpoche last departed from Larung Gar. On that day, sangha members lined the road to bid him farewell. With the dense crowd making it difficult to catch a glimpse of Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, fellow disciple Khenpo Chimey Rinchen and I walked to the residential area for laypeople, hoping to see his car pass by. That was the last time I saw him. Since then, this scene has been indelibly etched in my mind, whether I am awake or dreaming.

The scenes of seeing the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche for the first time and the last time are the most memorable for me. Although many things happened in my life, my memories of my root guru are the most extraordinary because his

kindness in bestowing the Dharma upon me was unparalleled by anything in this world.

As practitioners, the external appearance of virtuous deeds is not what matters most; what truly counts is the spiritual progress we achieve from practicing the Dharma during our brief time in this life.

However, practicing the Dharma is not an easy task. It differs from other Dharma activities, which are relatively easier. For instance, memorizing a scripture can often be accomplished within a few months with some dedicated effort. Reciting mantras is also achievable; with diligent daily practice, we can complete several million repetitions. Similarly, writing or translating a few books can be manageable if we invest enough time and consult multiple references.

For us, the most difficult task is practicing the Dharma, as it requires us to reduce our greed, anger, and ignorance, and ultimately to uproot all our afflictions, which is challenging to achieve. However, since we have encountered the supreme Dharma, we should regard our practice as the most important thing to pursue in this life.

After all, we humans typically live only a few dozen years. Even if we reach the age of a hundred, our lifetime amounts to just over thirty-six thousand days. But how many people actually live that long? A quick reflection reveals that our time is indeed short. This prompts us to consider what level of Dharma practice we can truly achieve in such a brief life.

Of all virtuous deeds, I always believe that hearing or teaching the Dharma, as well as living the Dharma every day, is the best practice in itself. If a practitioner deviates from the Dharma path, they are merely being themselves, and the Dharma remains just the Dharma. They may initially think they have embarked on a path of brightness, but it may turn out that they are actually on a perilous single-plank bridge. Therefore, it is crucial to engage with the Dharma in our daily lives. For most of us, the best way to achieve this is by studying the Dharma together in a group.

♦ The qualities of a Dharma teacher

Strictly speaking, in the context of group Dharma study, the teacher must be a bodhisattva who has attained a sublime level or certain level of realization. There are two main reasons for this:

First, as stated in *The Ornament of Clear Realization*, the teacher who can truly turn the Dharma wheel is the Buddha. If the current teacher has not attained perfect enlightenment as the Buddha did, they can still eliminate the afflictions of other beings and transmit the authentic Dharma within their mind to others, as long as they have reached the first bodhisattva level. In contrast, if the teacher is an ordinary person, they can only plant the root of merit in others and temporarily suppress their afflictions rather than eliminate them. Therefore, it is preferable for the teacher to be a realized bodhisattva.

Second, in the past, many people in the Tibetan region used the pretext of spreading the Dharma to engage in worldly affairs. Since they had not eliminated their selfish motives, even if they appeared to have accomplished some seemingly altruistic endeavors, it was merely a facade and did not genuinely benefit sentient beings. Therefore, to prevent such misconduct, higher standards were set for those who teach the Dharma.

Once, Atisha's disciples asked him, "When can we start to teach the Dharma to others? When is the right time to engage in Dharma activities to benefit others? When can we perform the transference of consciousness for the deceased?"

◉ Q1: When can one teach the Dharma to others?

Atisha replied:

Only when you have realized emptiness and developed clairvoyance can you start to take disciples.

Longchenpa also says in *Finding Rest in Meditation*:

Unless the bird is fully fledged it cannot fly;
So too, unless you have clairvoyant knowledge,
No help can you provide for others.⁸

Often, I was approached by a sangha member who asked, "I want to build a temple outside Larung Gar. Can you tell me when I will be able to take disciples?"

Here, Atisha has already provided the answer: when you have realized emptiness and developed clairvoyance, such as having divine eyes or knowing

⁸ Longchenpa, *Finding Rest in Meditation, The Trilogy of Rest*, Volume 2, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Shambhala, 2017.

others' thoughts." Of course, these high qualifications are difficult to attain within this life for us ordinary people.

◉ Q2: When can one engage in activities to benefit others?

Atisha answered:

Only when the selfish mindset is completely eradicated can you truly engage in activities that benefit others.

This is the highest standard regarding when one can work for the benefit of others, which is still beyond our reach. However, if we want to benefit others, we should first examine ourselves by asking, "Regarding what I am about to do or say, is it for myself or for others?" If, after careful examination, we are certain that our actions or speech are not motivated by selfishness, we may proceed to act or speak for the benefit of others.

◉ Q3: When can one perform the transference of consciousness for the deceased?

Atisha answered:

Only when you have entered the path of seeing can you perform the transference of consciousness for the deceased.

It is not easy to transfer the consciousness of a deceased person. The individual performing the transference must have attained one of the sublime bodhisattva levels. However, we should not underestimate the impact of deathbed chanting assistance provided by ordinary Dharma fellows. Even if the chanting does not successfully transfer the consciousness of the deceased, it can still prevent them from falling into a lower realm and help them regain a human life, both of which are highly beneficial.

Recently, when a team of laypersons was providing deathbed chanting assistance, a person who had been declared dead by the hospital suddenly sat up and vomited a mouthful of blood before falling backward and gasping his last breath. Witnessing this, the laypersons believed the corpse was possessed by a demon, so they no longer dared to offer deathbed chanting assistance to other deceased individuals. However, I do not think this phenomenon had anything to do with a

demon. The sudden movement may have been caused by the release of remaining gas in the deceased's body.

Anyway, such a seemingly horrible incident also provides a skillful way to examine one's self-clinging. There was a tradition in India where some practitioners, who felt they had uprooted their self-clinging, would assess their state of practice by visiting a place of horror or danger to see whether the "I" would abruptly reappear.

For example, some vidyadharas often visit a charnel ground⁹ and sleep near a decaying corpse, especially in summer. By doing so, they can examine the arising or cessation of their self-clinging. If they do not have any particular feelings and sleep soundly, it indicates they may have achieved the state of no-self. If they feel scared and find it hard to fall asleep, it means their self-clinging still remains.

Therefore, those practitioners who believe they have attained the state of no-self and are devoid of selfish motives can adopt this method of self-testing to determine whether they are indeed purely altruistic.

Yesterday, I went to give teachings to a group of villagers. On the way there, the car had to navigate a very high mountain pass with a steep abyss on one side. It was raining, causing the car to slide a lot. At one point, I felt the car was about to plunge into the abyss, which filled me with fear. When the car finally returned to flat ground, I suddenly realized that although it seems I do not cling much to the "I" when nothing special occurs, during the entire trip, I had clung to the "I" quite strongly. How embarrassing!

Therefore, as practitioners, we should neither boast nor be arrogant, because

⁹ Charnel ground (Skt. śmāśāna; Tib. རྒྱུ་ཁྱོད་, durtrö; Wyl. dur khrod) — on the ordinary level, the charnel ground is simply a place where bodies are disposed of, either by cremation or burial. From a spiritual point of view however, the charnel ground is full of significance. It represents the death of ego, and the end of:

- attachment to this body and life
- craving for a body and life in the future
- fear of death
- and aversion to the decay of impermanence.

They are terrifying places, full of roaming spirits and hunting ghosts. There are bodies everywhere: fresh bodies, decaying bodies, skeletons and scattered bones. There are rivers of blood, poisonous waterfalls, and dangerous wild beasts. But they are also peaceful places of solitude. There are pleasant groves, wildflowers and fruit, song-birds, tame lions and tigers, and the vast open sky above. There are no conventions to conform to and no distractions to be seduced by. Dakas and dakinis gather there to celebrate ceremonial tsok "feasts" (Skt. ganachakra). The roar of Dharma discourses resound, and the light of the inner joy of bliss radiates. (Source: Tulku Thondup, *Masters of Miracles and Meditation*, note 72, pages 366-367.)

when confronted with terrifying situations, we will discover our true state of practice, which may not be as high as we thought.

Speaking of the transference of consciousness, Atisha's reply was that only those who have entered the path of seeing can actually transfer the consciousness of the deceased. This does not imply that those offering deathbed chanting assistance must be bodhisattvas who have attained sublime levels; otherwise, they would not be qualified to offer assistance. As I often tell you, a Dharma student must know how to properly integrate what they have learned. It is not right for them to interpret verses or instructions out of context and use them as excuses to neglect other virtuous deeds.

In fact, Buddhist scriptures and the instructions of eminent masters are tailored to different beings and occasions. We need to understand the meaning with skillful wisdom. Otherwise, we may form a biased view after reading Atisha's reply on this issue and start telling others, "Atisha said only those who have entered the path of seeing can perform transference for the dead. Therefore, you are not qualified to provide deathbed chanting assistance!" Such an interpretation is biased and misses the point.

This assistance is a tradition in both Tibetan Buddhism and Chinese Buddhism. Does that mean no one knows who can properly transfer the consciousness of the deceased? It is only through profound wisdom that one can grasp the true intention of the Buddha's teaching.

Speaking of Atisha, I recalled an instruction from one of his teachers, Avadhadaḡba. This teacher was quite unique; when Atisha requested a teaching, he would usually decline. However, when Atisha did not ask, he would impart teachings to him.

Once, while crossing a very narrow wooden bridge, Avadhadaḡba suddenly turned to Atisha and said:

Do you know? The most essential aspect of one's practice is to be extremely careful in choosing actions based on the principle of cause and effect, especially before realizing emptiness.

Atisha took this instruction to heart. Not only did he apply it throughout his life, but he also shared it with his disciples whenever possible.

However, nowadays some people are doing exactly the opposite. After

receiving a bit of teaching on emptiness or tantra, they immediately neglect the principle of cause and effect. There was once a person who compiled many books on the Great Perfection and claimed to be the author, but I was told that he did not even believe in the principle of cause and effect. How terrible!

♦ **Atisha's suggestions to Dharma teachers**

Atisha also provided the following instructions to his disciples:

In this evil time of the five turbidities, it is no time for pretense,
but rather for determination and diligence.

During this degenerate time, people pay more attention to external appearances than to internal achievements. However, a practitioner should not put on airs and focus solely on their image to others. Instead, they should encourage themselves and practice the Dharma with great diligence day and night.

It is no time for seeking a high position, but rather for remaining
in a humble one.

Some people seek fame, status, and recognition through teaching the Dharma, which is inappropriate. It is a time for maintaining a humble position, wearing plain clothes, living a simple life, and practicing the Dharma in a secluded environment.

It is no time for having attendants and taking disciples, but
rather for living in a secluded place.

Before practitioners have gained mastery of the Dharma, they should avoid leaving solitude for the bustling city and taking on disciples there. Otherwise, the outcomes may diverge from their original intentions. Instead of benefiting others, they risk becoming “tainted” by the negative influences of their disciples’ afflictions.

Once, a master living in a foreign country said with tears, “There was a practitioner who had been pursuing a geshe degree. Once he was awarded the degree, he immediately set out to various cities to take disciples and teach them. However, very soon he chose to disrobe and fell into the traps of worldly life.”

This is indeed a very sad thing. Therefore, a practitioner should live in solitude, as it can help perfect their mindstream with great qualities.

It is no time for training and guiding disciples, but rather for taming one's own mind.

Before a practitioner has tamed their own mind, it is very hard for them to train and guide disciples. Therefore, it is time to tame one's own mind instead of others'.

It is no time for analyzing the words, but rather for contemplating their meaning.

This is not the time for analyzing the words. Whether the composition is beautiful or not is not as important. What matters most is to contemplate and reflect on the meaning of the text. A person who lacks practice may speak fluently and act properly. However, if their mindstream is not in line with the Dharma, they have nowhere to seek refuge at the moment of death.

Therefore, we should meditate over and over again on the fundamental truths such as "the difficulty of finding freedoms and advantages," "the impermanence of life," and more. By doing so, we will develop a solid foundation and conviction for our practice.

It is no time for wandering about, but rather for remaining settled in one place.

Some practitioners are always on the move. They travel to India today and Lhasa tomorrow. They visit one monastery and then another temple. They have an interview with one teacher and pay a visit to another. They receive an empowerment here and ask questions there... They keep on wandering here and there.

Once they become accustomed to this lifestyle, it is difficult for them to settle down and practice the Dharma. When the time comes for them to leave this world and face death, can they handle the situation well?

Many great masters of the past followed only one or two teachers. They settled down and practiced the Dharma steadily. We should emulate their approach to

practice. If a person has neither faith nor pure perception in their teacher, no matter how many other teachers they follow, it may be in vain. Additionally, a practitioner should avoid going to cities where there are too many temptations. It is very rare for a practitioner to shield their mind from distractions and maintain diligent practice after visiting such a city. Please pay attention to this matter!

♦ Which is more important, practicing the Dharma or teaching the Dharma?

Once, the Three Brothers asked Dromtönpa, “Which is more important, practicing in solitude or benefiting others through the Dharma?”

- ◉ The situation when the teaching brings no benefit to oneself or others

Dromtönpa replied:

It is futile for beginners who have neither experience nor realization to attempt to benefit others with the Dharma. Such a person can hardly offer any blessing, much like an empty vessel that cannot pour out anything. Their guidance is bland and insubstantial, akin to insipid wine made from unpressed grape pomace, lacking the taste of a pure brew.

Many beginners have never practiced the Dharma, and worse yet, they may not even believe in the principle of cause and effect. However, such beginners often like to offer teachings here and there, which brings no benefit to themselves or others. Because they have never contemplated the profound meaning of the Dharma and thus have cultivated no great qualities in their mindstream, their teachings, however eloquent, are meaningless.

Just as a worldly teacher must acquire certain credentials before beginning to teach students, a Dharma master must first possess certain qualities before offering Dharma teachings. If a Dharma teacher was not born with innate qualities, it is essential for the teacher to make appropriate preparations before teaching; otherwise, the teaching may be a waste of time for the listeners. As we know, time is precious, and everyone’s life is finite. It is not the case that listeners have nothing else to do. If they gain nothing from attending the teaching, it would be better for them to engage in something more important instead.

Therefore, I dare not waste anyone's time. During my class, except on very rare occasions, I normally do not mix my teaching with issues irrelevant to Buddhist topics. Meanwhile, I always read the teaching material at least once or twice in advance. Otherwise, it would be irresponsible to preview nothing and simply read the text while teaching.

However, some worldly teachers do not take their responsibilities seriously. For instance, they may stay out late at a bar and sleep in the next morning, arriving at the classroom unkempt and rambling incoherently while clutching a textbook. Others are scheduled to teach at 9 a.m. but show up at 9:30 a.m., having not even washed their faces. I have encountered teachers like this, and it is disheartening. In contrast, despite my limited wisdom, I cannot afford to neglect my duties as a Dharma teacher.

- ◉ The situation when the teaching brings benefit to others but not to oneself

Dromtönpa continued:

Even practitioners at the aspiration stage, who possess the warmth of the practice but have not yet solidified their realization, are unable to work for the benefit of others. Their blessings can be likened to pouring water from one vessel to another: while they may fill up others, they leave themselves empty. Their teachings are akin to passing a torch to others: they illuminate others but leave themselves in darkness.

This is a middling practitioner who can bring benefit to others but not to himself. As is said in the *Sutralankara*:

It's like when a blind man is holding a lantern,
He can illuminate for others but not for himself.

However, it also says in the *Flower Ornament Sutra*:

Always aspire to benefit living beings
Without seeking happiness for oneself.

Therefore, even though the middling practitioner empties themselves, it is still commendable that their teachings and blessings benefit others. For instance,

consider my teaching: Even though I am not a good practitioner, the Dharma I teach is sublime in itself and can definitely benefit others, so it does not concern me if I am left empty.

Someone told me, “You do not practice the Dharma well! You don’t teach well!” Hearing this, I was actually rather happy. Why is that? Because he saw me for who I really am. If someone tells me, “You are a great accomplished master! You are a great practitioner!”, I will actually feel embarrassed because he does not know who I really am. I know how I have practiced, so all those praises are not in accord with my true qualities.

Anyway, when a middling practitioner teaches Dharma to others with altruistic intention, even though teaching may consume their time for personal Dharma study and practice, they can still benefit others.

- ◉ The situation when the teaching brings benefit to both oneself and others

Dromtönpa said:

Only practitioners who have reached at least the first bodhisattva level are ready to work for the benefit of others. Their blessings are comparable to a wish-fulfilling vessel: they can fill up others while remaining abundant within themselves. Their teachings are like a central butter lamp that can illuminate other lamps without diminishing its own brightness.

That is, those who have attained one of the bodhisattva levels are the best candidates for Dharma teachers. Their teaching is also the most beneficial for others and for themselves.

In this degenerate age, ordinary practitioners should strive to cultivate love and compassion of bodhicitta in quiet, secluded places. This is not the time for them to directly benefit others but rather the time to eliminate their own afflictions.

Just like a precious medicinal tree needs time and protection to grow from a shoot before it can be of maximum benefit, ordinary practitioners should focus on nurturing their own qualities before attempting to give pith instructions or bestow empowerment based on limited practical experience and realization. Rushing into teaching too soon can hinder their own spiritual growth.

♦ **Do not use the Dharma as merchandise**

For these reasons, it is quite difficult for many of us to directly benefit others with the Dharma. To expound a teaching to others without having experienced it oneself will bring little benefit to those listening. Moreover, if one seeks wealth and material gains by teaching the Dharma, it becomes, as Padampa Sangye called it, “using the Dharma as merchandise to get rich,” which is a case of downfall.

In such a case, Dharma teachers who teach for offerings are no different from worldly teachers who teach for a salary. The Dharma becomes nothing more than the teacher’s merchandise. Therefore, we must not have such a wrong intention. Monastics and laypeople must not teach the Dharma for the sake of acquiring offerings and wealth.

A few months after I arrived at Larung Gar, I accompanied the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche to Nyarong County in the west of Sichuan Province. One day, Rinpoche said, “I just had a wrong thought that maybe I would receive offerings by teaching Dharma at Nyarong. Because of this, I have decided not to accept even a khata offering when giving teachings.”

During his teachings at that time, Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche often emphasized, “Due to my wrong thought, please refrain from making offerings to me for my Dharma teachings.” After that, the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche never accepted offerings for his Dharma teachings.

So, however difficult your life is, please do not use the Dharma as merchandise to get rich. The *Sutra of the Great Heap of Jewels* also says:

You should regard profits and honors
As filthy excrement;
Do not pollute your pure mind
With the stains of profits and honors.

The *Sutra of Upholding the Roots of Virtue* also says:

If a person teaches Dharma to others
For the sake of acquiring profits and honors,
He will be harmed by his teaching
Because of his pursuit of worldly benefits.

As we know, the Dharma is the medicinal nectar that is good at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end. It is supposed to bring benefit to oneself and others, but when used wrongly, it will bring harm to oneself and others. How unnecessary!

Thus, before we have overcome our self-centric mindsets, we should not rush to benefit others with the Dharma. Instead, we can make aspirations while reciting sutras, mantras, or reading Buddhist texts, saying, “May the minds of those spirits inclining to virtues be liberated when they hear my recitation or reading.” At the end of rituals for water tormas or Chö offering,¹⁰ we should also recite,

*Avoid all evil,
Cultivate all good,
Purify one’s mind:
This sums up the Buddha’s teaching.*

Simply giving Dharma in this way is enough for many of us.

♦ The time to devote oneself entirely to others

When selfish desires are completely eradicated, one does not, even for a split second, have concern for one’s own peace and happiness. This signifies that the time has come to devote oneself entirely to benefiting others.

Then, regardless of others’ opinions or comments, whether they are slanderous or insulting, all one desires is to benefit living beings day and night. A person with strong altruistic intentions pays no heed to criticism from others because their priority is benefiting others rather than focusing on themselves.

Everything that a bodhisattva does aims to protect living beings, and they have no regard for their own well-being, even in life-and-death situations. Their sole focus is on the Dharma and living beings. This is exemplified in numerous life stories of esteemed masters from the past and present. In contrast, a worldly person seldom considers others and acts solely for their own benefit. This starkly distinguishes an ordinary person from a bodhisattva.

2.2.2.3.2.1.3. Giving Protection from Fear

Giving protection from fear is to relieve sentient beings from their fears and

¹⁰ Chö involves practitioners visualizing to make offerings of their own bodies.

anxieties. This includes offering refuge to those without safety, protecting those without any protector, and being present for those who lack companionship.

The Buddha has said that of all good actions, saving a being's life creates the most merit. Therefore, when living beings' lives are in danger, we should try our very best to rescue them. As Nagarjuna says in the *Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom*:

Of all the negative deeds,
Taking life is the worst;
Of all the positive deeds,
Not killing is the best.

There are various positive deeds, such as prostrating, making offerings, dedicating merit, circumambulating a sacred object, reciting mantras, meditating, and more. But among all of them, rescuing and protecting a living being accumulates the greatest merit.

As far back as twenty years ago, I started placing great importance on releasing captured living creatures. I have always believed that even if I can only save a few animals, I should always do my best. Many of you may have been influenced by social norms and worldly perceptions that led to the killing of living beings in this life, with some of those memories still fresh in your minds. To make amends for such actions, here are my suggestions:

First: Hang prayer flags with prints of the Vajrasattva mantra or the Avalokiteshvara mantra.

Second: Recite the Vajrasattva mantra and the one-hundred-syllable mantra.

Third: Release captured living creatures, especially of the kind that you hurt before. If you have killed frogs, try to rescue more captured frogs; if you have eaten a lot of seafood, try to release more captured sea creatures in this life. If you cannot afford the expense, you can persuade others to also practice life releasing. The creatures you save should outnumber the living beings you have killed; this is a way for you to pay back the lives you took. For example, if you killed two dogs, then you must rescue at least two dogs in this life. I dare not say whether such an action can entirely offset your faults, but it is nevertheless a good way to repent.

Since the merit of releasing living beings is so great, it is hoped that those in positions of power and influence should issue orders to prohibit fishing and

hunting. Others should also do their best, based on their abilities, to rescue cows and sheep being taken to slaughterhouses, as well as fish, insects, and flies on the brink of death.

Indeed, saving a life generates significant merit. At times, one may witness in the same lifetime the karmic result of saving lives. Here is a tale about a fox rescuing a person during the Tangshan Earthquake:

Once, a man saved a fox. A few weeks later, just a few minutes before the 1976 earthquake struck Tangshan, China, the fox unexpectedly arrived at the man's home and scratched at the door. When he opened the door, the fox bit the upper part of his shoe and pulled him outside. Following the fox to the front yard, the earthquake commenced, and the man was spared from his collapsing house.

The man remains forever thankful to the fox, often stating, "All creatures on the earth constitute a vast family, with many animals closely connected to humans. While animals may not communicate as we do, they share similar thoughts and conscience with us."

Of course, we do not expect animals to repay our kindness, but rather we should consider rescuing animals our responsibility. We should release captured creatures whenever possible. Sometimes we do not need to spend money to rescue a living being. For example, saving earthworms on the road on a rainy day or placing bugs in a cool and safe place on a hot day are also acts of providing protection and care to living beings.

Many Tibetans highly value life. When they witness the suffering of living beings, they show great sympathy, which stems from their loving-kindness and compassion nurtured through the teachings of Mahayana Buddhism. I hope we can all embody this kindness. Whenever we see a being's life in danger, we should do our utmost to save it. This is the responsibility of a Mahayana practitioner.

The three forms of generosity we have studied also constitute a most essential part of the tantric samaya vows. As stated in *The Vows of the Five Families*:

As the samaya vows of the Jewel Family,
Always practice the four forms of generosity.¹¹

¹¹ Four kinds of generosity refer to material giving, giving Dharma, giving protection from fear, and giving compassion.

Knowing this, we should, by all means, devote ourselves entirely to benefiting others through the act of generosity.



Lesson 107

“Transcendent discipline consists of avoiding negative actions ... “most sublime” views or “most profound” meditations which do no good to the mind.” [page 238-241]

Training in the precepts of the bodhicitta of application refers to the practice of the six transcendent perfections. Today we’ll study “transcendent discipline,” or “Śīlā Pāramitā” in Sanskrit.

Śīlā means discipline, also ethics, and it is the foundation of all great qualities. There exist the Shravaka discipline and the Mahayana discipline. The bodhisattva vow of Mahayana Buddhism is established upon the vows of pratimoksha, or vows of individual liberation, which is the Shravaka discipline. As stated in Atisha’s *The Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*, one can only have the bodhisattva vow after taking one of the seven types of *pratimoksha* vows,¹² otherwise one’s bodhisattva vow is baseless.

Nowadays, some people have wrong understandings about Buddhist discipline. Some tantric practitioners pay no attention to precepts, saying a practitioner of

¹² The seven types of pratimoksha vows are the vows of:

- 1) a fully ordained monk (Skt. bhikṣu; Tib. དགེ་ལྷན་, gelong)
- 2) a fully ordained nun (Skt. bhikṣuṇī; Tib. དགེ་ལྷན་མ་, gelongma)
- 3) a novice monk (Skt. śrāmanera; Tib. དགེ་ལྷན་པ་, getsul)
- 4) a novice nun (Skt. śrāmanerikā; Tib. དགེ་ལྷན་མ་, getsulma)
- 5) a female novice in training for full ordination (Skt. śikṣamāṇā; Tib. དགེ་ལྷན་མ་, gélobma)
- 6) a male lay practitioner (Skt. upāsaka; Tib. དགེ་བསྐྱེན་, genyen)
- 7) a female lay practitioner (Skt. upāsikā; Tib. དགེ་བསྐྱེན་མ་, genyenma) (Source: Rigpawiki.org)

the Great Perfection or Yamantaka¹³ should cling to nothing, so they can just do whatever they want. This thought, in fact, is wrong.

From the biographies of the Dzogchen lineage masters, we learn that those great masters consistently uphold the vows of individual liberation after receiving empowerment. Therefore, it is imperative for us, given our distance from their achievements, to hold these vows with even greater dedication.

Some individual Dharma masters in the Pure Land School believe, “One may just engage in the chanting practice, which in itself consists of taking refuge and precepts, so one does not have to specifically take precepts. After all, taking precepts is just a formality in Buddhism.” This is not right either. Practitioners in the Pure Land School should also take discipline as the foundation of their practice, as stated in *The Sutra on the Contemplation of Buddha Amitayus*:¹⁴

Take the three refuges,
Observe all disciplines,
Abide by the code of deportment.

Discipline is the foundation of all great qualities. It is said in Nagarjuna’s *Letter to a Friend*:

Keep your vows unbroken, undegraded,
Uncorrupted, and quite free of stain.
Just as earth is the base for all that is still or moves,
Upon discipline, it is said, is founded all that’s good.¹⁵

It is also said in the *Flower Ornament Sutra*:

Just as the earth is the base for the growth of all living beings
and plants,
On the earth of supreme śīlā, it is said, are founded the roots of
worldly and transcendental merits.

Therefore, whether you are a Sutrayana or Vajrayana practitioner, you must

¹³ Yamantaka is a wrathful form of Manjushri.

¹⁴ It is one of the three Pure Land sutras and is considered the most important scripture of the Pure Land school.

¹⁵ Nagarjuna’s *Letter to a Friend*, with commentary by Kyabje Kangyur Rinpoche, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Snow Lion, 2013.

not ignore discipline. Without observing discipline, you will lose the base for all great qualities. Even if you are a lay practitioner, you should start by taking the three refuges and observing the five lay vows.¹⁶ If it is impossible for you to observe the five lay vows, you should at least take refuge; otherwise, it will be very difficult for you to be reborn as a human in the next life.

2.2.2.3.2.2. Transcendent Discipline

Transcendent discipline involves avoiding negative actions, engaging in positive actions, and benefiting others.

2.2.2.3.2.2.1. Avoiding Negative Actions

Avoiding negative actions means rejecting all ten negative actions of body, speech, and mind that are not directed toward benefiting others, as if they were poison.

Poison must be abandoned because it harms our health. The ten negative actions of body, speech, and mind should be avoided because they harm others, leading to the transgression of our bodhisattva vow.

2.2.2.3.2.2.2. Engaging in Positive Actions

Engaging in positive actions refers to always wholeheartedly undertaking virtuous deeds at any time and place possible, regardless of how insignificant they may appear.

The word “always” means that we should undertake positive actions all the time, not just for a day or two. Some Chinese laypeople do nothing at home but, during Dharma assemblies, continuously recite mantras and turn prayer wheels in the presence of their gurus. This is merely performative, a temporary act. In contrast, a bodhisattva’s positive actions are not limited by time or place.

♦ Do not take lightly small deeds

As a Tibetan proverb says:

¹⁶ The five lay vows are: not to kill, not to steal, not to lie, not to commit sexual misconduct, and not to take any intoxicants.

Positive actions just happen when our hands or mouths are free, while negative actions take place as we move around or sit.

When a person seeks to engage in positive actions, they can find opportunities in everything they do. For example, while walking or sitting, they can recite mantras or contemplate the Dharma; while speaking, they can communicate with compassion; even during a group dinner, they can benefit others and deepen their practice through their words.

An ill-minded person acts in an opposite manner. Their actions of body, speech, and mind are unvirtuous. When they are at a group dinner, they complain about this or that. They are filled with greed, anger, and jealousy, which lead to wrongful behavior. In a very short period of time, they can accumulate countless negative karma.

It is hard to tell the difference between two persons from their appearance, as everyone has two eyes and two ears. It seems we are all very similar, but in fact, we can be very different.

Because it is easy to do good and equally easy to commit evil, a wise person will always examine their mind with mindfulness and vigilance, asking themselves: “What am I doing? What am I saying? What am I thinking?” They will carefully discern between good actions and evil ones. If one lacks mindfulness and vigilance in daily life—whether during games or casual conversations—they may unknowingly accumulate significant negative karma.

Why do people often commit wrongdoings? It is because they have not been properly taught to do good and avoid evil since childhood, which leaves them unsure of what to do and what not to do.

Therefore, I believe that schools truly need the Dharma—the education of the mind. Without such education, young children will not learn how to discipline themselves and may eventually stray from the virtuous path. As they grow up, they may seek happiness through the pursuit of material possessions, which is not a significantly higher pursuit than that of an animal.

A yak spends its entire life eating grass and drinking water to survive, hardly pursuing anything greater. If we humans focus solely on material achievements without pursuing higher goals, we are no different from a yak in terms of life pursuits. Therefore, we must understand what we should and should not do and strive for something at a higher level.

However, some people, who can avoid major negative actions, take lightly small misdeeds such as killing a bug, bad-mouthing others, being rude, becoming jealous and angry, and the like. They think these small misdeeds are no big deal, which is not right. As said in the *Sutra of the Wise and the Foolish*:

Do not think that small misdeeds
Are insignificant and dismiss them lightly:
Even a spark of fire, though tiny,
Can set ablaze a mountain of hay.

There is a similar verse in the *Udānavarga*:¹⁷

Don't underestimate small misdeeds,
Believing they can do no harm:
A drop of water is small,
But it can eventually fill a giant pot.

Therefore, we should be mindful of small misdeeds and never regard them as insignificant. Only by avoiding negative actions and undertaking positive actions bit by bit can we, ordinary beings, eventually become sublime ones.

A person who understands how to perform virtuous deeds can easily accumulate incredible merit. For example, upon seeing a pile of mani stones by the roadside, they immediately remove their hat, circumambulate respectfully in a clockwise direction, and apply the three supreme methods. This action can lead unerringly to perfect enlightenment.

In the Tibetan region, there are many stupas, Buddha statues, monasteries, monastics, piles of *mani* stones, and prayer flags where people can pay their respects. In contrast, areas where Buddhism is less prominent are often filled with trickery, quarrels, violence, and traffic, with few representations of the Three Jewels. However, whenever you come across an object of veneration, remember to remove your hat and pay homage with sincerity, just as the Tibetans do.

¹⁷ The *Udānavarga* is an early Buddhist collection of topically organized chapters (Sanskrit: *varga*) of aphoristic verses or “utterances” (Sanskrit: *udāna*) attributed to the Buddha and his disciples. While not part of the Pali Canon, the *Udānavarga* has many chapter titles, verses and an overall format similar to those found in the Pali Canon’s *Dhammapada* and *Udāna*. At this time, there exist one Sanskrit recension, two Chinese recensions and two or three Tibetan recensions of the *Udānavarga*. (Source: Ānandajoti, 2007, pp. vi, n. 5, vii-viii.)

However, this good Tibetan tradition can only be seen among older Tibetans. Many young Tibetans have adopted Chinese lifestyles and values. These young Tibetans often do not believe in Buddhism, and after spending four years at a university located in a Han area, they retain little veneration for the Three Jewels. What a change!

But no matter what, positive actions, no matter how insignificant they may seem, should always be carried out, as said in the *Sutra of the Right Mindfulness of Dharma*:

Good deeds should be done,
Bad deeds should be avoided.
Good deeds lead to supreme bliss,
Bad deeds lead to suffering.

Also, while undertaking good deeds, do not take lightly small good deeds, thinking they are of no meaning. It is said in the *Sutra of the Wise and the Foolish*:

Do not think that small good deeds
Are hardly helpful and dismiss them lightly:
Just as drops of water accumulate,
They will gradually fill a large vessel.

It is also said in the *Udānavarga*:

Don't underestimate small good deeds,
Believing they can hardly bring any merit:
The drop of water is small,
But it can eventually fill a giant pot.

Therefore, we should place importance on small good deeds. I have noticed that some Dharma masters and laypeople always hold mala beads and recite mantras. They were doing this ten years ago, and they are still doing it today. This is a vivid example of “Do not take lightly small good deeds.”

Some other people recite mantras for two or three consecutive days or when they are in a good mood, but soon they stop the practice and even set their mala beads aside. Those who take small good deeds lightly and only pay lip service may eventually lose control of their behavior, which can lead to terrible consequences.

♦ Two relevant stories

◉ The story of Shrijata becoming a monk

During the time of the Buddha, an old man named Shrijata wished to take ordination, but after examining him through clairvoyance, the arhats rejected his request because they found no cause for him to become a monk. Shrijata was deeply disappointed, so he went to see the Buddha. Buddha Shakyamuni, perceiving the situation through his own clairvoyance, recognized that the man did possess a root of virtue for ordination, linked to events from many kalpas earlier. Here are the details:

On one hot day, a pig was chased by a dog and unintentionally circumambulated a stupa once, keeping the stupa to its right. At that time, the pig did not deliberately run around the stupa, but this unintentional root of merit was planted in its *alaya*, or all-ground consciousness. The pig was a prior rebirth of Shrijata. The Buddha then gave ordination to Shrijata, who soon attained Arhathood.

It is said in other scriptures that Shrijata's root of merit came from his reciting "Homage to the Buddha" once, which ultimately led him to liberation. In any case, any good action related to the Three Jewels, whether it be circumambulation or recitation, can yield significant positive results, even if done unintentionally.

Some people think, "My mind is too distracted, so it may be of no merit for me to meditate on a Buddha statue." This is not the case. Even if your mind is distracted, meditation still brings merit. A good action performed without intention or with a distracted mind can still be meritorious; however, a positive action done with virtuous intention will definitely yield great merit.

◉ The story about the Seven Men for testing

Here is another story:

When Padmasambhava was in Tibet, King Trisong Detsen wanted to test whether Tibetans could take ordination. He asked Shantarakshita to select seven men to be ordained as monks. These men became known as the "Seven Men for Testing," and one of them was Vairotsana, the greatest of all Tibetan translators, who made enormous contributions to Buddhism. What events in their previous lives led to this supreme opportunity?

Many kalpas ago, seven caterpillars fell from their leaf into a stream, where they were carried around a stupa clockwise by the current. They circumambulated the

stupa seven times, which eventually led them to liberation. This is the cause that provided the “Seven Men for Testing” with the opportunity to be ordained later.

When we circumambulate a stupa, turn a prayer wheel, or recite mantras as part of our daily lives, our motivation far exceeds that of the caterpillars because we understand that these actions can accumulate merit. Therefore, it is reasonable for us to believe that the results are also extraordinary.

The two stories both mention the act of circumambulating a stupa. One might wonder, “*The Sutra on the Merits of Circumambulating Stupas Clockwise* covers all the corresponding merits. But does circumambulating a Buddha statue hold merit as well?” Yes, it does. The text includes phrases such as “circumambulating the Buddha three times.” Although the Buddha’s physical body has vanished, the Buddha’s statue serves as a representation of the Buddha, and thus, circumambulating a statue also generates merit.

The Sutra on the Teachings to King Prasenajit says:

He who, with a pure intention,
Circumambulates stupas and Buddha’s statues,
Will be respected by his enemies in future lifetimes,
And become a worthy Dharma vessel with great qualities.

In fact, “being a worthy Dharma vessel” is a very important quality. It is like boiling milk: If the pot is rusted, the boiled milk is not drinkable, no matter how good the milk is. The same is true for receiving the Dharma: If a person is not a worthy Dharma vessel, the teaching can bring no benefit or may even cause harm, regardless of how supreme the Sutrayana or Vajrayana teaching is. The issue does not arise from the Dharma, but from the Dharma recipient. Some may think it is the teacher’s problem. While this may be true in certain cases, I can assure you that the Dharma itself has no fault at all.

Therefore, we should circumambulate stupas and Buddha statues so we can always be worthy Dharma vessels life after life.

♦ Avoid all misdeeds and undertake all good deeds

Knowing all this, when possible, we must always try our very best to avoid all misdeeds and to undertake all good deeds, however small they may be. That is, as

long as the act is positive, we should participate in it bit by bit; as long as the act is negative, we should strive to avoid it.

Of course, it is very difficult for an ordinary person to entirely avoid misdeeds. Sometimes we clearly know something is a harmful act, but we cannot help but do it. However, no matter what, we are fortunate enough to have encountered the Dharma and followed a qualified teacher in this life; we must engage in good deeds with great diligence, which is the choice of a wise person. The *Sutra of the Great Heap of Jewels* says:

The wise always practice on the pure path with great diligence;
Then, they get liberated from suffering and attain happiness,
And are praised by all buddhas.

Therefore, as Mahayana practitioners, it is essential for us to abandon misdeeds and undertake good deeds, no matter how insignificant they may seem, and dedicate all the merit to the benefit of all sentient beings. This, in fact, encompasses all the precepts of the bodhisattva vows.

2.2.2.3.2.2.3. Bringing Benefit to Others

When we have eradicated selfishness and self-interest at the root, it is time for us to work directly for the benefit of others, using the four ways of attracting beings.¹⁸ This is the discipline of bringing benefit to others.

Of course, there is no problem at all for bodhisattvas who have attained sublime levels to directly benefit others through the four ways. As for beginners, even if they have not fully overcome selfishness, they can still practice the discipline of bringing benefit to others. Specifically, whenever they avoid harmful actions and engage in virtuous deeds, if they dedicate those merits to all sentient beings using the three supreme methods, it can also be viewed as “benefiting others.”

As mentioned in the previous text, strictly speaking, one must have attained a bodhisattva level before bringing benefit to others. However, here the qualifi-

¹⁸ Four ways of attracting beings (Tib. འཇུག་བཞི་དོན་པོ་བཞི་, duwéngöposhyi, Wyl. bsduba'idngos po bzhi) — the qualities of the teacher that enable him to gather fortunate students, namely:

- that he should be generous,
- his language should be pleasant,
- he should teach each individual according to that person's needs, and
- he should act in conformity with what he teaches. (Source: Rigpawiki.org)

cations are “loosened up” a bit: one can bring benefit to others by using the three supreme methods in virtuous deeds and dedicating the merit to them. Otherwise, if only bodhisattvas who have attained the sublime levels can teach the Dharma, many people may miss the opportunity to listen to teachings in this life.

In this world, it is already very hard to find someone who is on the path of accumulation or preparation, let alone a realized bodhisattva. In fact, not to mention someone on the path of accumulation or preparation, it is challenging to find even a relatively perfect teacher who can observe precepts, study and practice diligently, has a good character, and is attuned to others.

Therefore, the purpose of the previous section in Patrul Rinpoche’s text is to dissuade people from using the Dharma as merchandise to get rich for their own benefit. Although only a realized bodhisattva can truly bring benefit to others, a beginner with pure intention can still benefit others by giving teachings in their spare time from studying and practicing the Dharma.

2.2.2.3.2.3. Transcendent Patience

Patience includes three aspects: patience when wronged, patience to bear hardships for the Dharma, and patience to face the profound truth without fear.

2.2.2.3.2.3.1. Patience When Wronged

This aspect of patience should be practiced whenever we are attacked, robbed, defeated, insulted to our faces, or slandered behind our backs. Rather than allowing annoyance to provoke an angry reaction, we should respond with positivity, loving-kindness, and compassion.

It is not easy to cultivate patience; nonetheless, we still need to practice and cultivate it because it is the supreme practice of all the bodhisattvas, as stated in the *Thirty-seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*. The Buddha also says:

Those who cultivate great love and compassion
Should practice patience toward others’ insults and attacks—
Those who can cultivate such an attitude
Are my disciples, and I am their teacher.

Therefore, when being slandered and attacked by others, we must remain patient. We should not get annoyed easily when someone just bad-mouths us.

♦ **The severe consequence of anger**

The *Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom* says:

Anger is the root of all poisons,
Anger wipes out all sources of merit.
The Buddhas praise the slaying of anger,
And once anger is slain, there will be no sorrow.

This is a really great verse. A great master of the past collected over a hundred verses of scriptural evidence, and this verse is one of them, which I wrote down in my notebook. However, some people choose not to eradicate or “slay” anger, which should have been eradicated or “slain.” Instead, they yell angrily at others, including even their vajra brothers, whom we should get along well with, saying, “I am going to kill you!” However, killing others is not so easy. Sometimes, those who constantly think of killing others may instead be harmed by others. It is hard to say.

Anger is the worst emotion for Mahayanists. If we lose patience and succumb to anger, a single outburst can undo the positive effects of countless good deeds accumulated over a thousand kalpas, as noted in *The Way of the Bodhisattva*:

All the good works gathered in a thousand ages,
Such as deeds of generosity,
And offerings to the Blissful Ones—
A single flash of anger shatters them.¹⁹

However, some people’s anger is not as brief as a flash; instead, they remain angry for days. Their resentment does not melt away like ice in winter and emits poison like a venomous snake. Therefore, we must know how to antidote anger; otherwise, the effects of our good actions will be entirely undermined by our outburst of anger, especially when we are wronged.

In this world, there are many cases where an outburst of anger led to tragedy. Here is story that happened in Fushun, Liaoning Province, in 2005:

¹⁹ Shantideva, *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Shambhala, 2011, chapter 6, verse 1.

A 23-year-old woman drove a Mercedes Benz into a residential area and knocked down a bicycle while passing a bike repair booth. She was very angry that her car was scratched, so she got out and insisted that the booth owner, a man in his 50s, pay for the damage. The man argued that it was primarily her responsibility for what had occurred. The young woman became angrier and pushed the man, demanding monetary compensation. The man tried to block her and inadvertently stained her designer clothes. The woman became aggressive, demanding 3,000 yuan from the man as compensation for her clothes, and called her parents on her mobile phone.

Her parents lived in a nearby luxury residential property. When they arrived, her father was furious and struck the booth owner on the head with a bike pump. Immediately, the man's head began to bleed profusely. Her mother stood beside the booth, scolding bystanders who supported the booth owner. Meanwhile, the young lady simply sat in her air-conditioned car, observing it all with a smug expression.

The booth owner begged for pardon, but the father insisted on providing compensation. The man was enraged; he struggled to get to his feet and said, "Fine. I will pay you back. Let me go grab the money." Then, he walked back to his house in the nearby slum. When he returned, he took out a sharp knife instead of money.

He first stabbed the father several times, then the mother twice, and finally pulled the petrified young lady out of her car and stabbed her several times as well. The lady and her mother died on the spot. The father was severely injured, suffering from ruptured stomach, intestine, and liver. Later, the man surrendered to the police and was sentenced to death.

This tragedy started from something very trivial. Finally, several precious lives were destroyed because of anger. It attracted much media coverage and inspired discussions on education and morality at that time.

Without mindfulness and vigilance, a person may succumb to anger, possibly resulting in irrational acts right away, and even worse, one's positive actions accumulated over many lives can also be destroyed.

Some time ago in my hometown, a taxi driver accidentally broke the headlight of another taxi, which led to a physical fight. One driver was stabbed to death on the spot. As such, driven by anger, people commit many terrible wrongdoings. For the sake of our own happiness and that of others, we must cultivate patience.

Of course, it is very hard to cultivate patience. Of all misdeeds, nothing is more

severe than anger, whereas of all ascetic practices, nothing is more challenging than cultivating patience. Shantideva also says in *The Way of the Bodhisattva*:

No evil is there similar to anger,
No austerity to be compared with patience.
Steep yourself, therefore, in patience,
In various ways, insistently.²⁰

Some people would rather climb a mountain with a 50-kilogram rock on their backs than endure humiliation. We should keep in mind the negative effects of anger and strive to cultivate patience in all circumstances.

There are many Dharma teachings on how to cultivate patience. For example, one must first understand the faults of anger. It is not easy for those who are subject to rage to suppress this negative emotion. Nevertheless, however hard it is to antidote anger, we must know that angry outbursts will definitely result in severe negative effects, as said in the *Four Hundred Stanzas on the Middle Way*:

Anger is lasting and certainly
Makes one do grave non-virtues.²¹

In addition, we can use the teaching that the nature of hatred is empty just like an illusion to tame our minds, so that we can eliminate our anger. Padampa Sangye says:

Hating your enemies is a delusion brought on by karma.
Transform your harmful thoughts of anger, people of Tingri!

We should also understand that it does not make sense to hate those who harm us because they offer us the opportunity to cultivate patience. Atisha says:

Do not let anger toward those who harm you take hold.
If you allow yourself to become angry with them,
When will you be able to cultivate patience?

Shantideva also says:

²⁰ Shantideva, *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Shambhala, 2011, chapter 6, verse 2.

²¹ Aryadeva's *Four Hundred Stanzas on the Middle Way*, translated by Ruth Sonam, Snow Lion Publications, 2008.

If there was no one to be angry with,
Who could you practice patience on?

After all, we are able to practice patience when harmed by others, not when we remain unscathed. Whenever someone hurts, insults, or unjustly accuses us, the effect—provided we do not lose our temper or hold a grudge—can be profound. It allows us to exhaust many of our past negative actions and obscurations while accumulating significant merit. Hence, we should view all who wrong us as our teachers. It is also said in *The Eight Verses of Training the Mind*:

Whenever someone out of envy
Does me wrong by attacking or belittling me,
I will take defeat upon myself,
And give the victory to others.²²

Of course, this is the practice of a bodhisattva. When insulted or attacked by others, a bodhisattva will not complain, saying, “Ah! Something has gone wrong again!” On the contrary, he will be very happy, knowing this is a great opportunity for practice. Why did Venerable Atisha insist on keeping a bad-tempered attendant with him? It is because he would then have the opportunity to cultivate patience.

So, when recruiting volunteers for Dharma activities, instead of choosing someone easygoing, you may collaborate with someone who does not get along with you. A person who consistently opposes you is the best candidate. Therefore, every morning, at noon, and in the evening, you will have the opportunity to cultivate patience. The opportunity to practice patience is very precious for a great bodhisattva (*the audience laughs*).

♦ A teacher with a terrible temper is not a good teacher

Nowadays, we often hear that someone is a really good teacher or practitioner but has a terrible temper. However, anger is the worst fault one can have. How, then, can someone be considered truly good while also possessing such a terrible temper?

A person with a terrible temper is definitely not a good practitioner. Anger brings severe faults: on one hand, it can destroy the roots of merits; on the other

²² Rigpa Translations. Revised 2012.

hand, it makes those around them feel scared and insecure. A person who always holds onto anger is certainly not a good teacher.

Some may argue, “Without appearing angry, the teacher cannot transform their disciples’ minds.” However, a teacher does not have to appear wrathful to demonstrate that they have great qualities. If their anger is not well controlled, it may ruin their merit and that of others.

Padampa Sangye says:

The karma of a hundred acts of greed cannot compare to that of
a single moment of anger.

Shravaka practitioners pay special attention to desire because it not only accumulates bad karma but also leads to misdeeds such as the transgression of precepts and more. However, from the perspective of the bodhisattva vow, a momentary action arising from anger accumulates far more negative karma than a hundred actions arising from desire. Why is that? Generally speaking, desire may not lead to actions that harm others, while anger can result in harm through actions or speech. The latter is considered the more serious misdeed according to the bodhisattva vow. This is why Padampa Sangye emphasized that anger is so destructive.

If a practitioner has cultivated patience and truly assimilated the teachings, their actions, speech, and mind are as gentle as stepping on cotton and as mild as tsampa soup laced with butter. Such a practitioner, wherever they are, not only makes those around them feel comfortable but also remains in a state of constant happiness themselves. The *Sutra of the Right Mindfulness of Dharma* says:

He who cultivates patience
And eradicates all anger
Can always remain peaceful
At present and in the future.

Buddha Shakyamuni serves as an exemplary model in this regard. According to *The Compilation of Different Stories in Sutra and Vinaya*, a brahmin once insulted the Buddha with five hundred accusations, yet the Buddha remained unfazed. Later, when the same brahmin developed faith in the Buddha and praised him for

five hundred qualities, the Buddha showed no signs of delight. This demonstrates that the Buddha always abided in a state free from both bliss and anger.

By contrast, our state is not like that of the Buddha. When receiving compliments, some people feel delighted, exclaiming, “Wow! Who is praising me? What a nice person!” However, when faced with criticism, they become upset for an extended period. Others may initially appear indifferent to criticism, which may seem like a sign of patience. Yet, a few minutes later, they often come to realize what happened and erupt in anger, shouting, “Who said that?”

The state of the Buddha is beyond the reach of ordinary people. When praised, I would first remain unwavering but soon begin to feel joyful. When slandered, I would pretend to be indifferent but quickly start to feel angry. No matter how hard an ordinary person pretends to be in a state devoid of bliss and anger, they can hardly conceal their true quality.

Some individuals, after accomplishing a small virtuous act or upholding a minor precept, tend to inflate their self-worth and feel a sense of pride. When others make comments that touch a sensitive nerve, they might respond with claims such as, “They are belittling me! They are insulting me!” They become indignant, their expressions change, and they retaliate with harsh words. This indicates that the Dharma has already departed from their mindstream, suggesting that the Dharma has not transformed them in the least.

Geshe Chengawa says:

During the course of our listening to, contemplating, and meditating on the Dharma, if we notice our ego expanding, our patience becoming as fragile as a baby’s skin, and our irritability increasing to levels rivaling the demon Tsang Tsen, these are clear indications that our study and practice have strayed off course.

The similes in Geshe Chengawa’s statement are quite accurate. Some people can more or less control themselves when they first embark on the Dharma path. However, after studying the Dharma for an extended period, although they are supposed to have less ego, their ego often grows larger because they have not truly assimilated the teachings. As a result, they cannot endure even a minor offense. They become narrow-minded, and a small criticism from others can provoke intense anger.

Therefore, a practitioner should be patient, and as their practice progresses, everything they do, say, and think should be gentle and mild. It should not be the case that their ego grows larger as they study and practice more Dharma. Some people think, “I am just an ordinary person. It is no big deal that I do not practice well. What do you care if I go to hell?” In such cases, there’s nothing anyone can do to help them.

Over the years, I have indeed experienced the greatness of the Dharma. Although I am not a good practitioner myself, I still want to share the Buddha’s teachings with all of you. As a Dharma teacher, I hope you can progress on the path, but if you do not care, there’s nothing I can do about it.

♦ The most essential point of all practices

How should a true practitioner practice the Dharma? Here Patrul Rinpoche tells us:

Always be humble, dress modestly, and treat everyone, whether good, bad or mediocre, with respect. Tame your mind with the Dharma, taking the love and compassion of bodhicitta as your basis. Without any doubt, this is the most essential point of all practices. It is better than a thousand ‘most sublime’ views or ‘most profound’ meditations which do no good to the mind.²³

I hope we can all keep this paragraph deeply in our minds.

The most essential practice is to cultivate the love and compassion of bodhicitta and to train the mind to be peaceful and controlled. The *Sutra of the Great Heap of Jewels* says:

Have a gentle and mild mind,
Always act delightfully with love and compassion,
Be humble and joyful
When talking to others.

This verse resonates with me. A good practitioner definitely has a gentle mind and is not overly stubborn. They always act with love and compassion, presenting

²³ Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2011, page 241.

themselves as humble and pleasant when interacting with others. They strive to ensure that those around them are happy and comfortable.

In short, now that we have a precious human life and have encountered the Dharma, this is the karmic result of our past positive actions, as well as the blessings of the Three Jewels. However, no one knows exactly when this great opportunity will vanish.

Therefore, I hope we will all appreciate what we have and tame our minds with the Dharma, using the love and compassion of bodhicitta as our basis. This is the true essence of the Dharma.

In fact, every sentence of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* contains key points for our practice, and I can elaborate on each sentence in depth. Take this paragraph, for example; it highlights the most essential aspect of all practices. This essential point is more valuable than any lip service regarding the highest teachings, including primordial purity, the Great Middle Way, or recognizing the nature of mind. Regardless of how eloquently one can speak about these high teachings, if one lacks the foundation of preliminary practices, those teachings are of no use.

It would be better if we first tame our minds and avoid conflicts with others. If, by any chance, a conflict arises, we should pray to the guru and the Three Jewels to quell our anger. In fact, the lineage masters of the Great Perfection possess incredible blessing power, as do the Dharma protectors. Whenever we have a negative thought about others, we should pray and repent immediately and do our utmost to get along with everyone, which is also the act of a bodhisattva.

As you know, a bodhisattva never brings harm to living beings. *The Way of the Bodhisattva* says:

Buddhas are made happy by the joy of beings.
They sorrow, they lament when beings suffer.
By bringing joy to beings, then, I please the Buddhas also;
By wounding them, I wound the buddhas too.²⁴

For us, even if we cannot please all living beings, we should at least refrain from treating them with anger. If we are aggressive and hold grudges against everyone, how can this be considered the act of a Mahayanist?

²⁴ Shantideva, *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Shambhala, 2011, chapter 6, verse 122.

Therefore, we should treat others with the love and compassion of bodhicitta, as well as with a soft and humble attitude. We should try our best to treat others in this way; if we cannot, at least do not annoy others.

The great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche said:

In our Dharma center, vajra brothers and sisters must not have conflicts. You should get along with one another in harmony and always be responsive to others' needs because we are followers of the Buddha, and everything the Buddha did was in response to others' needs.

As Mahayanists, we should strive to behave better than those who are worldly. If some worldly individuals can manage various challenges with an open mind, then we should be capable of achieving even more.



Lesson 108

“For the sake of practising Dharma you should ignore heat, ... limitations of your own mind make you indifferent to them, never criticize them.” [page 242–245]

We are currently studying the section on training in the precepts of the bodhicitta of application, which consists of the six transcendent perfections: generosity, discipline, patience, diligence, concentration, and wisdom. Now, let us study the second kind of patience: the patience needed to bear hardships for the Dharma.

2.2.2.3.2. Patience to Bear Hardships for the Dharma

To practice Dharma, we must disregard heat, cold, and all other challenges. The tantras state:

Even amid scorching flames or seas of razor-sharp blades,
Pursue the Dharma until your last breath.

The Sutra of Excellent Bodhisattva Vows also says:

With a deep thirst for the Dharma,
One does not hesitate to sacrifice body and life.

Even a worldly person is willing to courageously commit themselves to mundane goals. So why shouldn't we dedicate ourselves with the same courage to the true Dharma? While pursuing the Dharma, it is natural to face hardships. We

should not become vulnerable or lose faith when confronted with these difficulties. Instead, we should embrace the four basic goals of the Kadampa.

♦ **The asceticism required for the Dharma practice**

The past Kadampa masters had these four basic goals:

Base your mind on the Dharma,
Base your Dharma on a humble life,
Base your humble life on the thought of death,
Base your death on an empty, barren hollow.²⁵

First, *Base your mind on the Dharma*: Base your mind on transcendental Dharma instead of on worldly dharmas.

Second, *Base your Dharma on a humble life*: Great masters of the past have lived a humble life. It is a simple lifestyle, rather than an affluent lifestyle, that brings successful practice in the end.

Third, *Base your humble life on the thought of death*: We practitioners should be living a humble life until the end of our lives, rather than only when we are Dharma students. It should not be the case that we switch to a different lifestyle after attaining fame.

Fourth, *Base your death on an empty, barren hollow*: We should live in a secluded place until our death.

These four basic goals are those set by superior practitioners.

Practitioners have different levels, which has always been the case. Practitioners such as Milarepa, great Kadampa masters, and accomplished Chan monks chose to live in a hermitage, a secluded woodland, or a makeshift hut, dedicating their lives to Dharma practice. Individuals like these are superior practitioners. Their sole goal is to attain liberation; therefore, they pay no attention to mundane affairs, renounce their worldly lives, and tirelessly engage in ascetic practices, wholeheartedly pursuing the Dharma without regret. The *Flower Ornament Sutra* says:

Head, eyes, hands, legs,
And flesh—a bodhisattva can offer them without regret.

²⁵ Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2011, page 242.

When seeking Buddhist scriptures,
And a bodhisattva will never feel weary.

Take Xuanzang²⁶ for example: He went through numerous hardships and obstacles with exceptional perseverance before he could finally obtain the true Dharma in India. Therefore, if you aspire to be a superior practitioner, you should renounce everything and spend your life in a secluded place. It is said there are many such practitioners in retreat in places such as the Zhongnan Mountains,²⁷ and Yunju Mountain,²⁸ in the Han area of China. There are also many hermits living in caves at Samye in the Tibetan region.

There is a hermit from my hometown who has been away from home for more than twenty years in retreat at Samye. Last year his mother passed away, so he went back home to give her a deliverance service. His family members asked him to stay home for forty-nine days,²⁹ but he declined, saying, “I’ll just stay seven days.” A week later, he returned to his cave. His family members did not stop him from leaving. They simply assume he has already died, and he also never contacts them. What a superior practitioner!

Some people start out as superior practitioners: they renounce worldly life and cut off contact with their families. However, after two or three years, they often find themselves reconnecting with family members and the outside world. In contrast, a true superior practitioner remains steadfast, willing to endure a solitary existence and to die in an empty, barren hollow, as Milarepa says:

To die here alone in this hermitage is everything a yogi could

²⁶ Xuanzang (602-664), born Chen Hui / Chen Yi, also known as Hiuen Tsang, was a 7th-century Chinese Buddhist monk, scholar, traveler, and translator. He is known for his epoch-making contributions to Chinese Buddhism, the travelogue of his journey to India in 629–645 CE, his efforts to bring over 657 Indian texts to China, and his translations of some of these texts. [Source: Li Rongxi (1996), *The Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Regions*, Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai and Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, Berkeley, ISBN 978-1-886439-02-3, pp. xiii-xiv]

²⁷ The Zhongnan Mountains, sometimes called the Taiyi Mountains or Zhounan Mountains, are a branch of the Qin Mountains located in Shaanxi Province, south of Xi’an, China, that extend from Wugong County in the east of the province to Lantian County. At 2,604 meters, the range’s highest point is Cui Hua Mountain. (Source: Bill Porter, *Road to Heaven: Encounters with Chinese Hermits*. Counterpoint, 1993.)

²⁸ Yunju Mountain is a renowned Buddhist site at Yongxiu County, Jiujiang, Jiangxi Province, China.

²⁹ The service primarily benefits deceased individuals who are still in the state of Bardo, within forty-nine days of their passing.

wish for.

But worldly people may view someone who dies alone as miserable if nobody takes care of their corpse. However, from the perspective of the deceased, once consciousness has left the body, it no longer matters how the corpse is handled.

Today, some young scholars visited the sky burial site, and after the trip, someone remarked, “The corpse was dissected into pieces and fed to vultures. It is so brutal! I don’t want to experience this when I die!” In fact, if sky burial is brutal, cremation is no better. When a corpse is burned in flames, its flesh sizzles, and soon the body becomes just a pile of ashes. Isn’t that more brutal?

In fact, sky burial is, in itself, an exceptionally great giving through which the deceased can accumulate great merit. Many people practice generosity throughout their lives, and when they die, they make an exceptionally great gift of their own bodies to the vultures. This is highly meritorious. It is only through in-depth study of the relevant teachings that one can truly understand the profound meaning of sky burial in a charnel ground. A quick visit and a few photos taken out of curiosity will not provide a complete understanding of the practice.

Exploring the practice in a charnel ground reveals valuable insights. In ancient India, many tantric hermits practiced at the eight great charnel grounds, and numerous inspiring stories surround these experiences. These narratives not only illuminate the cultural contexts of India and Tibet but also demonstrate how Buddhism was woven into daily life.

♦ Dharma practice and worldly life

Today, some people believe that practicing the Dharma can involve no hardship. They think it is possible to pursue worldly success, happiness, wealth, and fame while also achieving accomplishments in Dharma practice. Some even point to their teacher as the perfect example, claiming, “Look at my teacher! He excels in spiritual practice and is also highly skilled in worldly affairs. Whether he is engaged in charity or training disciples, he approaches everything with remarkable ease. Even during meals, he demonstrates his abilities in every aspect. It is truly impressive!”

How can one reconcile Dharma practice with worldly life? Those who assert they are achieving this may indeed live a good worldly life, but it is likely that they

are not practicing the pure Dharma. Those who practice the Dharma well are not likely to lead a good worldly life.

Those whom you believe can reconcile Dharma practice with worldly life—whether they are your guru, a Dharma friend, or any other practitioner—may simply excel only in worldly life. The reason you think they are succeeding in both areas is likely because they are attuned to your worldly habits, norms, and interests. However, if a person overly conforms to worldly norms, they may struggle to attain the profound qualities for liberation.

Anyone who wishes to achieve both worldly and transcendent goals at the same time is like someone who believes they can sew with a double-pointed needle, contain both water and fire in the same vessel, or ride two horses simultaneously moving in opposite directions. Clearly, such a situation is utterly impossible.

Could any ordinary person in this world ever possibly surpass Buddha Shakyamuni in wisdom, compassion, character, and other qualities? Yet, even the Buddha did not find a way to achieve both worldly and transcendent goals at the same time. Thus, he left his kingdom behind like spit in the dust and went to live on the banks of the River Nairanjana, where he engaged in asceticism for six years. During that time, he drank only a single drop of water and ate a single grain of rice each year. The Buddha also says:

In innumerable kalpas,
I have been practicing asceticism
And purifying karmic obscurations.
Eventually, I obtained the supreme wisdom and qualities.

Through his own actions, the Buddha shows us that attaining enlightenment is not easy and that it is unrealistic to obtain spiritual achievement while enjoying worldly life.

Since even the Buddha himself cannot reconcile Dharma practice and worldly life at the same time, who else can do so? Therefore, as practitioners, we should not become too lax in our Dharma practice, nor should we be so arrogant as to think that we can achieve something great on the spiritual path while indulging in worldly life.

Hearing this, some lay practitioners may become worried, saying, “If there is

no way to marry Dharma with worldly life, does it mean I can never practice unless I abandon my family and work?”

That is not necessarily the case. What I mentioned earlier applies to superior practitioners. If you cannot reach that level, you may set more modest standards for yourself. Yesterday at the symposium,³⁰ some college students expressed their admiration for monastics who have renounced worldly life and dedicated themselves to studying and practicing the Dharma in a sacred place. They also noted that laypersons could not devote themselves to the Dharma as monastics do, let alone to the extent of the Buddha. Nevertheless, in my opinion, it is already commendable for a layperson to practice the Dharma while pursuing a worldly diploma or building a career.

However, some lay practitioners do not like to consider themselves lesser practitioners, saying, “If I cannot be a superior practitioner, I would rather not be a middling or lesser practitioner, either. In fact, I’d prefer not to practice at all.” That is a bit extreme. Following the same rationale, if you cannot be a person with top qualities and are unwilling to accept being a person with middling or lesser qualities, does it mean you would rather not be a person at all? Or, if you cannot be among the top three best students, does that mean you will quit school? Clearly, you will not do that.

Even if you are not a top student, you should at least graduate from school. Even if you cannot be the best person, you should strive to be a decent person. The same is true for your Dharma practice. What is most important is that you do what you can do well.

Someone may ask, “If there is no way to marry Dharma with worldly life, how do we understand the Sixth Patriarch’s instruction that says, ‘The Dharma is here in the world; Enlightenment is not apart from the world?’”

In fact, there are two ways to understand his instruction.

First, when superior practitioners have attained high-level realization, they can fully renounce the mundane world. However, driven by compassion, they continue working for the benefit of all beings through the skillful means of worldly dharmas. This is a bodhisattva’s way of “not being apart from the world.”

Second, because we ordinary persons cannot fully devote ourselves to Dharma practice, we choose the path of middling or lesser practitioners. In doing so, we still

³⁰ Khenpo organized a symposium for young university students and scholars at Larung Gar.

engage in some worldly affairs. Though we may not attain liberation within this lifetime, we can still accumulate merit for the next life.

Therefore, we should analyze this kind of instruction from multiple perspectives. Those raised in the Dharma typically do not experience confusion, while adults who encounter the Dharma later often have many doubts due to the clash between their worldly views and the Buddha's teachings. In these instances, the systematic study and practice of the Dharma are crucial for dispelling doubts and confusions.

♦ The story of Milarepa

When Milarepa was engaging in his Dharma practice, he had neither food nor clothing. He survived solely on nettles, which left his body skeletal, covered in greenish hair, and infested with blood-sucking parasites. Those who saw him could not tell if he was a man or a demon.

Venerable Milarepa's body was covered in greenish hair because he had been living on nothing but nettles. Have you ever tried eating nettles? I remember tasting them myself while herding yaks as a child; they have a pleasant flavor. However, nettles are laden with tiny thorns, and it was quite painful when my hand was pricked.

Near Milarepa's hermitage, many nettles grew abundantly. After exhausting his food supplies, he chose not to go begging for alms; instead, he opted to live on nettles for a few years. Over time, Milarepa's clothes became ragged and eventually fell apart, and his body and hair took on the color of the nettles.

One day, several hunters came across Milarepa's cave. They were horrified by his appearance and exclaimed, "Are you a human or a ghost?" Milarepa reassured them that he was a man and a practitioner.

The hunters had not been able to catch any game and had gone a few days without food. They searched Milarepa's cave but found nothing except for some nettles. They demanded, "Where are your provisions? Give us some now, and we will return the favor later. If you refuse, we'll kill you."

Milarepa replied, "I consumed all my provisions long ago. All I have left are nettles. I have not yet received any offerings. You can search this hermit if you like; I have no fear of being robbed."

One hunter said, “We will not rob you. What would we gain by making an offering to you?”

“You will acquire merit,” Milarepa replied.

“In that case,” they said, “we’ll give you an ‘offering.’” The hunters grabbed Milarepa by the waist and repeatedly let him fall to the floor. Milarepa was already extremely thin and frail, and the falls caused him great pain. Nevertheless, he was filled with fierce, unbearable compassion for the hunter and began to weep.

One of the hunters, who had been standing by without causing any harm, spoke up: “Hey, everyone, he appears to be a true ascetic practitioner. Even if he is not, you do not prove your worth as a man by mistreating someone so frail. He has not made us go hungry. Let’s not do that!” After this, the hunters departed.

Milarepa did not consider using malicious mantras; however, the hunters eventually faced retribution from the Dharma protectors. It was reported that the governor punished them: the leader of the hunters was executed, and all the others—except for the one who advised against harming Milarepa—had their eyes gouged out.

We can see from what happened to the hunters that the law of cause and effect never fails. When people commit a misdeed, its effect may not ripen on the spot, but it has been stored in their “DNA of karma.” Once the result ripens, it is bound to bring them suffering.

Therefore, I hope you do not act like a daredevil in the face of the law of karma, saying, “No big deal! Let me steal! Let me take life!” Just as a person ingests poison, saying, “It is nothing! Let me give it a try!”—even if they seem fine at first, once the poison starts to take effect, they can do nothing but face the harmful consequences alone. Likewise, it is terrible to act against the law of karma. However, many people, including some practitioners, have yet to understand the power of cause and effect.

Of course, the story of Milarepa is not meant to explain the law of karma, but rather to illustrate how Milarepa renounced worldly life, persevered in his practice, endured hardships for the Dharma, and ultimately attained enlightenment through diligent effort. The *Sutralankara* says:

Without undertaking ascetic practices,
One cannot achieve the wisdom of omniscience.

Milarepa’s steadfast dedication to practicing Dharma and his willingness to

endure hardship demonstrate that it is impossible to simultaneously pursue both the Dharma and worldly life. If there were a way to achieve both, someone as wise as Milarepa—who easily mastered dark spells in his past—would have been able to do so.

Here is another story from Milarepa's biography:

After receiving teachings from his guru Marpa, Milarepa went back to his hometown and found his house collapsed, his mother dead, and his favorite scripture, the *Sutra of the Great Heap of Jewels*, damaged by rain and almost like a bird's nest. Stricken by sadness, he buried his mother's bones and gave her a deliverance service. He then decided to offer the copy of the *Sutra of the Great Heap of Jewels* to his teacher, who had taught him to read.

At his teacher's house, he was told the teacher had already passed away, so he offered the scripture to his son instead. The son said to Milarepa, "As the lineage disciple of Marpa, you should emulate your guru and also have a consort. Will it be good if you find a house here and marry Dzesé? By so doing, you will be following in the footsteps of your guru."

Milarepa replied, "My guru is a fully realized yogi. I do not have his level of realization. A lion can easily leap over a big gorge. But if a rabbit tries to emulate the lion and jumps over the same gorge, it will surely fall dead."

Nowadays, some people do not understand why Milarepa insisted on renouncing everything worldly and engaging in ascetic practices, so they sometimes make comments that are very biased. Those who know little about Buddhism dare to say whatever they want. This phenomenon is evident not only in critiques of Buddhism but also in various areas of society, where many individuals voice extreme opinions, particularly those who have misinterpreted the concept of "freedom of speech." They feel superior when presenting differing viewpoints or remarks. But what is the point of doing this when their statements cannot withstand scrutiny?

If you are not familiar with the life stories of Milarepa and other eminent masters or the valuable historical accounts, please refrain from making pointless remarks. Those accustomed to doubtful thoughts should pay extra attention to this. For symposium attendees, I hope you will remain open-minded and think twice before labeling anything related to Buddhism as superstition, as it is not right to blindly dismiss all Buddhist matters into the "garbage bin of history." Otherwise,

you may regret it in your old age. I hope you possess the wisdom to distinguish truth from falsehood.

♦ Stories of other great practitioners

The great siddha Melong Dorje achieved enlightenment after nine years of practice, subsisting solely on the bark of the lakhe tree.

Longchen Rabjam, the Omniscient Sovereign of the Dharma, survived for many months on just twenty-one pills of mercury³¹ while following his root guru, Rigdzin Kumaradza, at Samye Chimpu. During snowy weather, he would crawl into a rough sack that served as both his bed and clothing.

After undergoing many hardships for the Dharma, Longchenpa eventually attained extraordinary accomplishment. His works, such as the *Seven Treasuries* and the *Trilogy of Finding Comfort and Ease*,³² have guided many practitioners to liberation. Therefore, a true practitioner can only choose Dharma over worldly life; there is no way for him to choose both.

In fact, many masters of Chinese Buddhism are like this as well. Take, for example, Master Lianchi, the eighth patriarch of the Pure Land School. His lifestyle is summarized in one of his poems that says:

Eating grass is better than having an empty stomach,
Living in a grass hut is better than sleeping in the open air;
Being content with whatever comes in life,
All afflictions will be eliminated instantly.

In contrast to Master Lianchi, modern individuals lead overly complicated lives, resulting in distress, unhappiness, and fewer opportunities to genuinely practice the Dharma. Thus, we should strive to live a simpler life.

Here is another example: Chan Master Damei Fachang described his lifestyle with this verse:

³¹ Mercury is used in the practice of bcudlen (extracting the essence). Its toxicity is neutralized, and pills are made from it on which meditators live without having to eat ordinary food.

³² *Trilogy of Finding Comfort and Ease* refers to a trilogy of Dzogchen writings by Longchen Rabjam:

- *Finding Comfort and Ease in the Nature of Mind*
- *Finding Comfort and Ease in Meditation*
- *Finding Comfort and Ease in the Illusoriness of Things* (Source: Rigpawiki.org)

A pool of lotus leaves provides me with numerous clothes,
Many baby pinecones provide me with sufficient food.

He practiced in a secluded woodland for years before his Dharma fellows learned of his whereabouts and sent someone to invite him to visit. Master Damei Fachang wrote the verse to decline the invitation. Therefore, a true practitioner would rather die in a woodland than get trapped in worldly life.

The stories of these accomplished masters all include experiences of ascetic practice, which are truly admirable. Whether we are pursuing worldly knowledge or transcendental realization, we should emulate these great practitioners of the past and live a simple life. Otherwise, we'll become overly distracted by the constant barrage of information, and under such circumstances, there is no way for us to put the teachings into real practice. If we are unable to live a simple life, we should at least allocate some time to train the mind.

As for me, in the past three or four years, I have not had the opportunity to engage in ascetic practices. However, while I am at Larung Gar, I turn off my mobile for a few hours every afternoon to “detox” my mind. Just as a computer does not work well without freeing up drive space through disk cleanup, our minds may not function optimally without purging them of all sorts of junk information from time to time.

So, once in a while, we should calm the mind by reciting sutras or reading the works of eminent masters of the past and enjoy a more relaxed life. Even though we may not always have the opportunity to dwell in a secluded place and have no choice but to live in a city, as long as our minds can find tranquility for some time, we will at least experience peace for an hour or two each day.

In summary, numerous examples illustrate that it is impossible to practice the Dharma and lead a worldly life simultaneously. All the siddhas of the past achieved their accomplishments through unwavering determination, willingly embracing hardships and renouncing all worldly pursuits. None of them attained realization while indulging in the typical comforts, well-being, and fame of everyday life.

♦ The damage of worldly life to Dharma practice

Nowadays, some people are adept at paying lip service and frequently discuss the concepts of “letting go, releasing attachment, and being carefree.” In reality, very few individuals can truly attain this state, as the eminent masters of the past

did. It is not an easy task. However, even if we cannot become superior practitioners like those masters, we should strive to become middling practitioners. We should dedicate a portion of our time and effort to the Dharma, rather than pursuing worldly pleasures every day.

Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa says:

By the time you have secured a comfortable accommodation, ample food, warm clothing, and a generous benefactor, you have already nurtured the demon before even beginning to cultivate the Dharma.

What a piece of good advice from Jigme Lingpa! For a Dharma practitioner, it is fine to have some provisions, but having too many becomes an obstacle to practice. Some practitioners want plenty of food and clothing and a spacious place to live. They are not satisfied with a studio cabin, so they extend it to a two-room, three-room, four-room, or even five-room cabin. They arrange for construction today and renovation tomorrow. If they cannot find workers to help them, they do it themselves. They are busy working on their cabin every day, which is so unnecessary!

Some practitioners often receive monetary alms from their benefactors. Things have changed significantly in recent times. In the past, a practitioner at Larung Gar had to travel to a nearby county to claim donations, or their benefactor would come to Larung Gar to provide provisions in person. Due to technological progress, it is much easier to receive money now. A practitioner simply has to call their benefactor, who then directly deposits funds into the practitioner's bank account, making the money available very quickly.

For a dedicated practitioner, information technology can facilitate their practice, as they no longer have to spend days obtaining provisions, allowing them to focus on their Dharma practice. However, for those who are struggling in their practice, these conveniences can distract them from their Dharma practice. Consequently, they may cultivate the demon before even beginning to cultivate the Dharma.

What does “cultivating the demon” refer to? It is distraction, one of the major obstacles to one's Dharma practice. The *Sutralankara* says:

The fool is engrossed in provisions,

Not seeing their harm.
 Provisions lead practitioners away from the noble path,
 So good deeds vanish and stop arising.

A practitioner's greed for provisions signals the arrival of the degenerate age. I am often asked, "So-and-so practitioner owns a villa and a car. Is he a true guru?" It is difficult to say. I cannot assert that anyone who possesses such things is not a true guru because some are indeed great masters who, despite their wealth, have no attachment to their possessions. However, there are practitioners who are obsessed with their possessions without considering the karmic consequences. They desperately desire villas and cars, which ultimately leads to negative karmic effects for themselves and their benefactors, who are also their disciples.

The most unfortunate of all are the benefactors. Due to their lack of merit, they fail to encounter a qualified guru who is a true supreme object of merit. The guru they have met does not seek liberation himself, so how can he guide others to true liberation? Therefore, it has been emphasized repeatedly in scriptures that one must first examine the qualities of a teacher before following him.

Of course, if you are not a guru but an ordinary practitioner, you should also be content with whatever comes. This can greatly facilitate your Dharma practice. Otherwise, if you are engrossed in material abundance, it definitely does no good for your practice, no matter where you are. There is no doubt about this.

However, make sure you do not go to the other extreme of applying asceticism right away. Some novice practitioners are high-spirited at the beginning, saying, "I must become a superior practitioner. I will practice overnight meditation!"

Then they deliberately practice asceticism, throwing away clothes and provisions and eating poorly on purpose. It is fine if they can always remain like this, but it is very likely that their faith will wear off over time, and their ascetic practices will vanish as well, as the old saying goes:

Having pursued Dharma for one year, the Buddha is in the heart;
 Having pursued Dharma for two years, the Buddha is in the
 shrine hall;
 Having pursued Dharma for three years, the Buddha is in the
 far horizon.

I particularly admire those who have long-term commitments to Dharma

practice. For ten years, twenty years, or even a lifetime, their faith steadily grows; they cling to neither wealth nor fame, and they wholeheartedly devote themselves to protecting the Dharma and benefiting others. How great they are! A true Buddhist should reflect on the codes of living and the practices of these great masters and consider how to engage in their own practice.

In fact, not only clinging to wealth, but clinging to the body is also a constraint on our spiritual practice. Only by letting go of attachment can we attain accomplishment. Here is a story from *The Biographical Scripture of King Asoka*:

After practicing the Dharma for a long time, a practitioner still could not attain any accomplishments because he was too obsessed with the sensual pleasures related to food, clothing, and shelter. To rid him of his attachment to the body, Upagupta took him to a mountain where, through his supernatural powers, he created a tall tree under which was a very deep pit.

Upagupta said, “If you can obey all my instructions, I will give you the teaching.” The practitioner agreed. Then Upagupta asked him to climb up the tree and put his feet in the air. The practitioner did as he was asked. Then Upagupta instructed him to release one hand, and the practitioner did so. At that moment, the practitioner was hanging his entire body from the tree by one hand.

Then Upagupta asked him to release his second hand. The practitioner protested, “If I do, I will fall into the pit and be killed.” Upagupta replied, “You already promised to obey all my instructions. Why do you not accept my words now?”

Thinking of his reason for following Upagupta to the mountain, the practitioner closed his eyes and released his second hand, preparing to fall. At that moment, he felt no attachment to his body, and the tree and the pit immediately vanished. From then on, he no longer clung to his physical body and simply let go of everything. Upagupta then imparted the teaching. Through diligent practice, the practitioner soon attained Arhathood.

Therefore, it is only when we let go of our attachment to everything that we can achieve realization and see the true wonders of the world. Aside from possessions and the body, romantic relationships are also something that people, especially young people, tend to cling to. Yesterday, during the symposium, some teachers offered valuable suggestions to young people on issues related to romance and relationships. Beings of the desire realm are generally born with the desire for

romance, and if we cultivate this desire further, we will suffer more torments, sometimes even to the point of committing suicide.

Suicide occurs when a person cannot let go of things. If they understand the principle of impermanence—that everything is changing and no pleasure lasts forever—they may be able to let go. Without understanding this principle, when a negative change occurs, a person struggles to cope because they cling too much to the status quo. This mindset of being unable to face challenges will affect normal life, not to mention one's spiritual practice.

Geshe Shawopa says:

To devote yourself to practicing the Dharma, your life's ambition should be to embrace poverty. By the end of a life lived in poverty, you will be able to deal with your death. With this mindset, you can be confident that no god, demon, or human can cause you difficulties.

If you can let go of everything, you will be able to transform any unfavorable obstacle in your practice into favorable assistance. Historical accounts show that a true practitioner almost never starved or froze to death. A worldly person, on the other hand, is likely to die of hunger if they have no means of making a living. With the blessings of the Three Jewels and protection from the Dharma protectors, a true practitioner can be like Milarepa; as long as they persevere in their Dharma practice, they will not worry about food and clothing and may even attain supreme enlightenment.

♦ Milarepa's song on Dharma practice

Once in his mountain hermitage, Milarepa sang:

No one to ask me if I'm sick,
No one to mourn me when I die:
To die here alone in this hermitage
Is everything a yogi could wish for.³³

However, most people do not share the same perspective. If no one asks them if they are unwell, they feel upset; if no one mourns them when they die, they

³³ Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2011, page 243.

probably will not leave this world in peace. Due to their lack of faith in the Dharma, some parents of monks or nuns appear particularly sad, saying, “My child has left home and become a monastic. What should I do when I am sick? What should I do when I die?”

Living and dying are simply part of our lives. If life is not yet over, we should live it well; when life does end, we can only move on to the next existence. Additionally, after we die, our consciousness will depart from the physical body, so it is not a big deal if no one takes care of our corpses. Considering this, those parents should not worry too much. However, it is difficult for a worldly person to truly adopt such a perspective, not to mention the lifestyle of Milarepa.

No trace of feet outside my door,
 No trace of blood within.³⁴
 To die here alone in this hermitage
 Is everything a yogi could wish for.³⁵

Unlike Milarepa, who devoted himself entirely to his practice and possessed nothing at all, worldly people are plagued by many discursive thoughts, receive numerous guests at home, and accumulate various possessions.

One night, a thief came to Milarepa’s cave and began searching around. Suddenly, Milarepa burst into laughter and said, “I cannot find anything myself in this cave during the day. How is it possible that you find anything in the dark?”

As also noted in Milarepa’s biography, his sister could not help but cry upon witnessing his asceticism, while Milarepa laughed at the same time; the crying and laughter created a contrasting sound in the cave. Thus, people in such a state can always find happiness, no matter what has happened, even when they must face death in the hermitage.

No one to wonder where I’ve gone,
 No particular place to go.
 To die here alone in this hermitage

³⁴ This may mean that there is no doctor to practice bloodletting or simply that there is no meat in Milarepa’s frugal fare.

³⁵ Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2011, page 243.

Is everything a yogi could wish for.³⁶

We all like to live freely, enjoying the ability to go wherever we want and remain unbound by discipline, so there is no need to find an excuse for taking a day off. However, a Buddhist practitioner should ideally stay in the sangha until they have attained a certain level of realization.

Some sangha members want to emulate Milarepa while also living a free life. When they hear of another guru elsewhere who can guide their practice, they leave Larung Gar in pursuit of their desired lifestyle focused on practice. However, once they are away from the sangha, things may not unfold as they hope.

Eventually, they may find themselves wandering aimlessly. They might wish to settle down in another monastery but face rejection. They may want to return home, only to discover that their family no longer accepts them. Consequently, they live an aimless life as wanderers, making no progress in their practice.

My corpse can rot and be eaten by worms,
My gristle and bone be sucked dry by flies;
To die here alone in this hermitage
Is everything a yogi could wish for.³⁷

Milarepa was indeed an extraordinary practitioner, and his state is very difficult to attain. Although we have not yet reached his level of realization, we need not be disheartened. We should simply strive to practice according to our capacity.

During the symposium, many Buddhists expressed their intention to benefit others and to engage in practice, which is invaluable. It is worth our efforts to study the Dharma in this lifetime, to meditate for at least one hour a day, or, ideally, to alleviate a being's suffering. This is also the essence of Buddhism.

It is essential to let go of all the desires of everyday life and to practice without concern for heat, cold, or any other challenges. That said, we should first analyze our own capacity and situations. For things we can do, we should try our very best; for things we cannot do now, we should aspire to do them in the future.

³⁶ Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2011, page 244.

³⁷ Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2011, page 244.

2.2.2.3.2.3.3. Patience to Face the Profound Truth Without Fear

When encountering teachings on the profound true nature of emptiness, particularly the essential instructions of the Natural Great Perfection beyond any activity and effort, the *Twelve Vajra Laughs* beyond the karmic effects of positive and negative actions, or the *Eight Great Marvelous Verses*, it is crucial to avoid developing negative views. Instead, we should fully embrace their profound meaning without distortion.

It is hard for an ordinary person to accept the profound truth. It can even be terrifying for someone when such truth is elaborated, for instance, that a hell being's mind is inseparable from the wisdom of Buddha Samantabhadra, or that hell is no different from heaven.

In fact, many instructions in Chan Buddhism are this profound as well. For example, teachings on emptiness in *The Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* and *The Shurangama Sutra* may induce great fear in those who've never studied the Dharma.

Having wrong views about these teachings or criticizing them is known as “the harmful act of rejecting the Dharma.” This can lead one into the depths of hell for countless kalpas, as stated in a confession text:

I confess all the times I have committed an act even more pernicious than the five acts with immediate retribution: that of rejecting the Dharma.³⁸

Once upon a time, two Indian monks who embodied the twelve qualities of full training approached Atisha. They were pleased when Atisha explained that the ego lacks intrinsic existence.

However, when Atisha went on to say that phenomena also lack intrinsic existence, they exclaimed, “That is terrifying! Do not say such a thing!” When Atisha was reading the Heart Sutra, the two monks blocked their ears.

Saddened, Atisha told them, “Unless you cultivate the love and compassion of bodhicitta and develop confidence in these profound teachings, your pure vows alone will lead you nowhere.”

³⁸ Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2011, page 244.

♦ Please refrain from criticizing the profound teachings

The two monks' reactions revealed their fear of the profound truth. Nowadays, many people are fond of Buddhist topics such as merit, love and compassion, and peace. They feel good when hearing teachings on these subjects. However, when confronted with teachings on emptiness, they are no longer "at peace," which indicates that these profound teachings make them uneasy and apprehensive.

Of course, it is normal if one cannot accept the profound teachings, but if a person slanders these teachings, he has committed grave faults. A Taiwanese Dharma master claimed on internet platforms that Vajrayana mantras are not part of the Buddha's teachings, using quoted verses from the *Samyuktagama Sutra* and the *Patimoksa Sutra* to support his erroneous view.

I checked his arguments, and many of them are simply taken out of context. For example, there is a story in the sutra in which a group of six monks were begging for alms by reciting mantras to rid benefactors of their misfortunes. The Buddha stopped them and decreed that monks should not engage in such practices. The Taiwanese Dharma master quoted the Buddha's words from this story to negate the authenticity of mantras, without considering the context of those words. Backed by these invalid arguments, he proposed that mantras such as the Vajrayana mantras and the Shurangama mantra are merely human creations and not the true words of the Buddha; otherwise, the Buddha would have contradicted himself.

As we can see, a person lacking sufficient wisdom, whether a Buddhist or a non-Buddhist, can easily commit the misdeed of slandering the Dharma. In fact, the profundity of Mahayana Buddhism is beyond the reach of an ordinary person.

It is as if a first grader wanted to overturn theories in quantum physics; would he be successful? Absolutely not! Instead, he would be laughed at by others. Therefore, those who know nothing about Mahayana Buddhism should refrain from slandering the teachings carelessly; otherwise, they will be cast into the lower realms. *Entering the Way of the Great Vehicle* says:

Slandering the teachings in the Great Vehicle
Will surely result in rebirths in lower realms.

Nowadays, there are many secular individuals and Shravaka practitioners who have never truly studied Mahayana Buddhism yet constantly criticize Mahayana teachings and even the Buddha. Their arrogance arises from ignorance rather than

any genuine qualities they may possess. If they were presented with the opportunity to study even one chapter of *The Root Stanzas of the Middle Way*, they might find themselves completely lost.

Given their limited understanding of Buddhism, it is certainly impossible for them to identify any real faults in Mahayana teachings. If they believe they have solid evidence, they can always seek out a geshe or a khenpo for a debate, but I suspect they would be defeated in less than three minutes. Their slander will only accumulate negative karma for themselves and will never bring them any success in this life. Furthermore, driven by this negative karma, they are likely to fall into lower realms in future lives.

It is said that during the time of the Buddha, many grossly arrogant monks vomited blood and died upon hearing his teachings on profound emptiness, and as a result, they were reborn in hell. Several other stories recount similar occurrences.

Therefore, I hope no one will slander Mahayana Buddhism, because whoever slanders it will only end up being reborn in lower realms. Such a causality is as certain as the chemistry experiment of converting hydrogen (H₂) and oxygen (O₂) into water (H₂O). When the O₂ of their slandering the Dharma is combined with the H₂ of their malicious intention, the H₂O of their bad rebirth will be definitely produced.

Of course, the opposite is also true. If we transform the mind, we will attain happiness when the corresponding causes and conditions align. Some people doubt the blessing power of the Three Jewels. In fact, when we have faith and pray for the blessings of the Three Jewels, we may achieve something that seems coincidental.

How is it that someone has prayed yet failed to accomplish their goals? It is because the corresponding causes and conditions have not all come together. Some may have occurred, while others are still missing. For example, if I pray to the Three Jewels for the accomplishment of a task, the blessings of the Three Jewels are certainly present, but the effects of my negative actions from past lives may prevent me from completing the task. Anything related to cause and effect can be explained in this way.

It is essential to approach the profound teachings and their teachers with heartfelt respect and genuine interest. Even if we find ourselves indifferent due to the limitations of our own understanding, we should refrain from criticizing them.

The Dharma is beneficial to all living beings, but if it is poured into a tainted

vessel, the medicinal nectar of the Dharma will turn into poison. It says in *The Sutra of the Dense Array*:

Emptiness should be taught to those who can take it in,
And should not be taught to those inadequate recipients.
If it is given to an inadequate recipient,
The nectar (of emptiness) will turn into poison.

There are people who do not accept the profound teachings but choose not to criticize them, saying, “Well, you go ahead with the teachings. I don’t understand them, but I won’t say anything.” One lay practitioner’s husband holds this attitude; he never stops his wife from studying the Dharma, and in the meantime, he continues to smoke and drink. Although smoking and drinking are considered wrongdoings from a Buddhist perspective, he has made a wise choice by refraining from criticizing the Dharma.

The most pitiful ones are those with shallow intelligence who make ridiculous remarks about the Dharma and find faults in monastics. They really need to stop this, as such negative speech will only lead to adverse karmic consequences.

In short, our Dharma study should not be superficial. Instead, we should put the teachings into practice and do our best to avoid negative actions. In particular, we should refrain from slandering Mahayana Buddhism.



Lesson 109

“There are three kinds of diligence: armor-like diligence,
... sporadically, only when you have time.” [page 245–248]

Now let us continue to study the section on training in the precepts of the bodhicitta of application, which is about applying the six transcendent perfections. Today we will study the fourth one: transcendent diligence.

2.2.2.3.2.4. Transcendent Diligence

There are three kinds of diligence: armor-like diligence, diligence in action, and diligence that cannot be stopped.

Any of these three kinds of diligence is the antidote to indolence and the companion to the cultivation of wisdom. That is, diligent acts counter indolence, and wisdom can dispel ignorance. On the other hand, indolence will veil the virtue of a person, and ignorance will block the light of their wisdom. *Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom* says:

Indolence buries virtuous intentions,
Ignorance blocks the luminosity of wisdom.

You may have had such an experience: Initially, you want to do good deeds, practice the Dharma, and transform your mind, but when your indolence sets in, you procrastinate on your practice. When your afflictions of greed, anger, and ignorance arise, your wisdom is obscured. This happens to ordinary people.

Although it is challenging to overcome indolence, I hope that through the study of each class, you can become a bit more diligent.

However, the speed of one's spiritual growth depends on one's karmic affinity with the Dharma. People who cannot hold onto their affinity may have studied Dharma for years but still struggle to assimilate the teachings. Yet, if they one day encounter an extraordinary affinity, they may experience profound changes in a short period.

This is akin to great Chan masters who did not follow their teachers for long yet quickly attained accomplishment, or to how the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche followed his root lama, Thubga Rinpoche, at Sershul for a mere six years, yet his Dharma activities were vast. Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche was undoubtedly an extraordinary individual, but he still appeared to have attained accomplishment after following his teacher impeccably.

Therefore, if motivated, even listening to a single Dharma class or practicing for a short time can transform a person's mind. Once the mind is well-adjusted and one cultivates a kind heart and positive thoughts, their words and actions will naturally follow suit, as they are ultimately influenced by the mind.

2.2.2.3.2.4.1. Armor-Like Diligence

When hearing stories about the buddhas and bodhisattvas or reading the biographies of great Indian, Tibetan, or Chinese masters who endured immense hardships in their pursuit of the true Dharma, resist the temptation to think, "They are manifestations of buddhas and bodhisattvas, accomplished masters capable of such austerities; how could ordinary people like us possibly do the same?" Such thoughts breed laziness and lead to aimless time-wasting.

Instead, we should remember that it was simply by acting in this way that they all became so accomplished. Take Milarepa, for example: As described in his biography, he was initially an ordinary person burdened by heavy karmic debts. However, by following a great teacher and practicing asceticism, the teacher's instructions became ingrained in his mind, and he eventually emerged as one of the most accomplished practitioners in history.

In fact, there are many such remarkable practitioners in history, including Huineng, the Sixth Patriarch of Chan; Huiyuan, the First Patriarch of the Pure Land School; and the Omniscient Longchenpa. Therefore, we should reflect, "As

their followers, even if I cannot surpass them, through diligence I can certainly achieve the same level of accomplishment.”

Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom says:

With great effort and hard work,
 You dig the ground and a spring wells up.
 The same is true for diligence;
 Without pursuing it, you will gain nothing.

As long as we pursue the Dharma with great diligence, we will definitely attain accomplishment. This is evident with many practitioners. Given the differences in their diligence, practitioners attain different levels of wisdom, compassion, and realization.

Furthermore, even the most accomplished masters need perseverance and diligence. Given our heavy karma, ignorance, and afflictions, as well as our wandering through samsara without ever having practiced the true Dharma, why shouldn't we also commit to rigorous practice and diligence? Indeed, it is even more necessary for us! We must always remind ourselves of this.

Of course, novice monastics and beginning Buddhists are typically diligent, but their diligence often does not last long, so it may not have a lasting impact. True diligence does not mean sacrificing sleep for two or three days; rather, it involves persistence that can ultimately unveil wisdom and perfect all virtues.

Now that we have attained a human life with the eighteen freedoms and advantages, have the good fortune to encounter a qualified teacher, and have received profound Sutrayana and Vajrayana teachings, we have the opportunity to engage in the proper practice. At this very moment, how can we not endure hardship, be willing to risk even our lives, and practice the Dharma with genuine dedication? We should cultivate such courage and confidence—this is known as armor-like diligence.

Of course, not everyone has the causes and conditions mentioned above. Many people wish to become true practitioners, but some have never encountered the true Dharma and thus remain deluded. Others, although they have encountered the true Dharma, have not met a qualified teacher, leaving them feeling lost. Many more lack the freedoms and advantages of human existence or are constrained by the sixteen circumstances that leave no freedom to practice the Dharma.

Unlike them, we have already experienced the extraordinary causes and conditions for practicing the Dharma. Given this, why don't we practice with great diligence? If you are diligent, you can succeed in your practice.

♦ The story of Pārśva

Pārśva had an exemplary practice rooted in diligence. Having remained in his mother's womb for sixty years, his hair was already white at the moment of his birth. At the age of eighty, he took ordination and became a monk. Young men laughed at him, saying, "A monk must practice meditation and recite scriptures, but you are too old to do any of that. Aren't you just idling away your days, pretending to be part of the monastic community?"

Hearing this, Pārśva made a vow: "Until I have grasped the teachings in the Tripitaka, eliminated my desires for the three worlds, attained the six kinds of supernatural powers, and obtained the eight liberations, I won't lie down or put the side of my body in bed."

From then on, Pārśva only sat upright, reciting scriptures and practicing meditation day and night. After three years of ascetic practice, he understood all the teachings in the Tripitaka and attained the sublime state. People of later generations admired his ascetic act of always sitting upright and never touching the bed with the side of his body, calling him "Venerable Side of Body."

Those young men who laughed at him failed to grasp the Tripitaka, let alone attain realization. Pārśva surpassed them after studying and practicing the Dharma diligently for just a few years. Thus, since ancient times, a practitioner's diligence can make a significant difference in their fruition.

Of course, it is hard to attain the sublime state within one lifetime, but it should not be a problem for us to achieve a certain level of realization, such as the confidence to face death without fear, if we have practiced well enough. Additionally, if we engage in virtuous deeds with diligence, we will experience happiness life after life, and we will certainly attain nirvana in the future. The *Sutra of the Right Mindfulness of Dharma* says:

He who diligently undertakes good deeds without rest
Can always enjoy happiness and will attain nirvana later.

As living beings in the desire realm, it is unrealistic for us not to take any

rest. However, we should not always slack off, or we will no longer behave like practitioners. Some individuals neither suffer from a specific illness nor have engaged in any exhausting activities, yet they constantly complain, “I am so tired! This is so tiring!” In fact, even ants, bees, and earthworms must keep themselves busy to make a living, so why should we humans complain about being tired and exhausted, especially when we contribute so little to propagating the Dharma and benefiting others?

In fact, a practitioner ought to be diligent when undertaking positive actions. As stated in *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, the essence of diligence is to take joy in performing positive actions. If a practitioner has been binge-browsing the internet or binge-dancing and singing in a karaoke bar for three days and nights, what they have done is not an act of diligence.

Therefore, I hope we do not waste the freedoms and advantages of our human existence; instead, let us diligently practice for the benefit of our future lives and enlightenment, making the most of this precious human life. This is the action of a wise person!

As we know, only the wise undertake positive actions with diligence. Look at the people around us: many of them are busy every day, but what are they busy with? Meaningless worldly preoccupations. In contrast, a wise person engages only in meaningful activities that are beneficial for this life and future lives, both for themselves and for others.

Nowadays, people often discuss “making progress,” but having made progress in our own spiritual practice is not enough; as Mahayanists, we should also be mindful of others. People frequently talk about “sustainable development,” but if we focus solely on the short-term benefits of this lifetime, which lasts only a few decades, without considering the lasting liberation of future lives, we are not genuinely achieving “sustainable development” in terms of the continuation of life. Another hot topic is “feasibility,” but if our actions benefit only ourselves rather than other living beings, they are neither feasible nor reliable.

In contrast, the truly wise person always thinks of both themselves and others, and diligently undertakes positive actions accordingly. The *Sutra of the Great Heap of Jewels* says:

The wise are always diligent
In practicing the pure path;

They will be freed from suffering and obtain happiness,
And will be praised by all buddhas.

I really admire diligent practitioners and rejoice in their actions of hearing, contemplation, and meditation, as well as their volunteer work on Dharma activities.

Diligent practitioners and indolent individuals may appear similar on the surface: they both engage in daily routines such as eating and sleeping. However, even during a meal, diligent practitioners can meditate in action or cultivate bodhicitta. They also do not sleep excessively. Therefore, they differ significantly from indolent individuals.

If you do not believe it, consider sharing a room with a diligent practitioner. In the evening, you will notice they sit upright, meditating, and only sleep for a short while; in the morning, before you even get up, they have already settled on the cushion to practice. Why are they so diligent? Because they have developed conviction about the four thoughts—the difficulty of finding the freedoms and advantages, the impermanence of life, the principle of cause and effect, and the defects of samsara—and they are no longer willing to waste time.

All in all, diligence is the root of all positive actions. *Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom* says:

All positive dharmas, including anuttara-samyak-sambodhi,³⁹
are born from diligence and not from carefulness.

Having armor-like diligence means you first make a vow as your armor, saying: “I must try my best at hearing, contemplation, and meditation. I will never become indolent for the rest of my lifetime. I vow to undertake ascetic practices for the sake of attaining Buddhahood and benefiting all living beings.”

After having armor-like diligence, you should also have diligence in action.

2.2.2.3.2.4.2. Diligence in Action

Many people intend to study and practice the Dharma, but they often postpone it day after day, month after month, and year after year. As a result, they

³⁹ Sanskrit word meaning ‘unexcelled complete enlightenment,’ which is an attribute of every buddha.

never truly begin their practice and waste precious years of their lives, which is truly regrettable. Therefore, we must break this cycle of procrastination and commit to practicing the true Dharma now.

Druk Pema Karpo, a renowned Tibetan master of the Drukpa Kagyu school, said:

Life is like livestock in a slaughterhouse;
In an instant, death arrives.
Today turns into tomorrow, and time slips away,
Until finally, one cries out from the deathbed!

He compared a human lifetime, lasting a few decades, to the brief time an animal spends in a slaughterhouse, and that is not an exaggeration. I often use this analogy myself. Here is a similar verse in *The Sutra of the Collection of the Six Perfections*:

Human life is like an ox
Being pulled to a slaughterhouse;
With each step the ox takes,
It draws closer to death.

and

One day a human spends
Is like one step for the ox.
...
Death is approaching day by night,
And it goes swiftly without any pause.

On your birthday, people will sing, “Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you,” and present you with a cake, applause, and laughter. But if you acknowledge the aforementioned truth, the lyrics would be: “Happy death to you, happy death to you.” In fact, the passage of human life is no different from each step of the ox approaching a slaughterhouse. As far as death is concerned, we are one year closer to it as each year passes, one day closer as each day goes by, and each minute and second closer as that time elapses.

Therefore, we should not delay for even a moment in practicing the Dharma.

Our commitment to the Dharma should be immediate, akin to a coward facing a venomous snake in his lap or a beautiful woman's hair on fire—responding with the utmost urgency. We must entirely set aside the trivial concerns of this life, dedicating ourselves wholeheartedly and without hesitation to the teachings of the Buddha.

There are two analogies in the text above. First, a dancing girl appreciates her hair, so when her hair has caught fire, she definitely won't wait and think, "Let me put out the fire tomorrow." It is said in Nagarjuna's *Letter to a Friend*:

Give up your efforts trying to stop all this
As if your hair or clothes had just caught fire;
Just do your best to not be born again:
No greater goal or need is there than this.⁴⁰

It is also said in Nagarjuna's *Treatise on the Ten Bodhisattva Grounds*:

Practice diligently day and night
As if your hair has just caught fire.

Second, a coward would be terrified when just finding a bug on him, not to mention a snake. So, when finding a snake in his lap he will never say, "I will throw it away tomorrow," and continue to eat and drink happily.

[However, some individuals seem to like venomous snakes. They put a snake around their necks like a necklace and let the animal move around without feeling horrified. But this is an uncommon case.]

We should retain the same level of urgency about hearing, contemplation, and meditation, and avoid thinking "I will do it tomorrow," and then keep putting it off all the time. We must abandon worldly activities and practice Dharma with diligence in action.

Otherwise, the endless trivial matters of the mundane world go on and on; one worldly activity follows another, much like ripples on water, leaving no time for practice. They will only cease when we make a definitive decision to end them. As Longchenpa says:

Worldly trivialities have no end, even at the moment of death.

⁴⁰ Nagarjuna's *Letter to a Friend*, with commentary by Kyabje Kangyur Rinpoche, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Snow Lion, 2013.

But they end when we let them go—such is their nature.

and:

Our activities are like children's games:

They continue as long as we do, and they stop as soon as we cease.

There were many monastics in history who decided to take ordination after truly understanding the above-mentioned truth. Of course, some people also chose to become monks or nuns as a way to escape difficulties and obstacles in life. Therefore, you should not claim, "I do not take ordination to escape difficulties in life, nor do all other monastics."

Such reasoning is flawed; while you may not intend to be an escapist, others may not see it that way. Likewise, you should not conclude, "He became a monk to escape difficulties in life, and so did all other monastics," which also does not make sense. Many monastics take ordination because they have genuinely let go of worldly life.

After seeing through the essence of all worldly preoccupations and going through all the joys and sorrows in life, a person chooses to take ordination with great determination. This life choice is sound and solid. Worldly people may not understand this person's choice due to differing social environments, values, and perspectives on life, but that does not mean it is a wrong choice. In fact, through careful contemplation, we will realize that worldly preoccupations never end unless we let them go.

♦ The story of Shinran

Shinran was a Japanese Buddhist monk who founded what ultimately became the Jōdo Shinshū, or the Pure Land School of Japanese Buddhism.⁴¹ Early in Shinran's life, both of his parents died. At the age of nine, desperate to understand what happens after death, he renounced worldly life and requested ordination from Zen Master Jien.

Upon hearing his application statement, the master gladly agreed, saying, "Good! I am willing to take you as my disciple. But it is too late tonight, so let me give you the ordination tomorrow." Shinran replied, "Master, as a young child,

⁴¹ Shinran's contribution to Buddhism in Japan is equivalent to Huiyuan's in China. Huiyuan was the First Patriarch of the Pure Land School of Buddhism in China.

though I want to take ordination today, I am not sure whether I will still want it tomorrow. You are aged, and how can you guarantee that you will still be alive tomorrow morning?” The master was pleased and impressed by his words and gave him the ordination right away.

There are many similar stories in *The White Lotus: The Great Biography of Buddha Shakyamuni*, which focus on the urgency of practicing Dharma. Last night, a person waited at my door, probably for a long time, saying he wanted to take ordination. I told him, “It is late at night. Let me give you the ordination in a few days.” Unlike Shinran, he didn’t question, “How can you guarantee you will still be alive in a few days? How can I guarantee I will still want to take ordination then?” Instead, he was very obedient to my words and replied, “Ok, ok. I think so too.” Then he left happily.

According to regulations at Larung Gar, one must undergo a probationary period before receiving ordination. A Tibetan saying goes: “What you think at bedtime will vanish the next morning,” so it is essential for a prospective monk or nun to first complete this probationary period.

When people, especially those from bustling cities, first arrive at Larung Gar, they may feel liberated and completely relaxed, leading them to look forward to taking ordination. Some even shave their heads themselves, just as the Buddha did. Among these novice monastics, some continue as pure monks or nuns many years later, whereas others soon become afflicted by attachment to worldly life and disrobe.

In any case, if we wish to engage in genuine practice, we must let go of worldly preoccupations. Even if we cannot see through all worldly matters from a young age like Master Shinran, when we feel the desire to practice Dharma, we should not allow laziness or procrastination to take hold, even for a moment. Instead, we should start studying and practicing the Dharma right away, motivated by the awareness of impermanence. This is what is called diligence in action.

Simply put, when we have diligence in action, nothing can interrupt what we are doing, and we work hard on Dharma practice. Here the so-called practice doesn’t only refer to “meditation,” as in “hearing, contemplation, and meditation.” Instead, practice in the broad sense also includes observing precepts, propagating the Dharma, benefiting others, and the like. All these activities require diligence in action.

♦ Helping others is a Dharma practice in itself

Of all these practices, helping others is the most important for Mahayanists. Therefore, we should apply diligence in our hearing, contemplation, and meditation, as well as in working for the benefit of others, and integrate these two actions.

It is beneficial for a practitioner to dedicate themselves to hearing, contemplation, and meditation in a secluded place because they can focus on the Dharma. However, practicing in this manner is somewhat akin to the Eastern pedagogical approach that lacks hands-on experience. Consequently, one may know more but do less.

If we can adopt the Western pedagogical approach of experiential learning and apply our study and practice of the Dharma to our altruistic work, then in this short lifetime, the Dharma can enter both ourselves and society.

Recently, I invited some Dharma teachers to attend the World Youth Buddhist Symposium. Some of them accepted the invitation with an open mind, while others were reluctant to attend due to various concerns. I do not believe they should be worried. Given its inclusiveness, true Dharma can be integrated into various aspects of society; however, the issue is that practitioners confine themselves to solely studying and practicing, making the Dharma unreachable for others.

Take me, for example: during my early years studying and practicing the Dharma in the secluded Larung Gar valley, I was isolated from the outside world and reluctant to socialize with others. However, as I gradually began to mingle with society, I have not only maintained my study and practice of the Dharma but have also deepened my faith and compassion.

Therefore, in the pursuit of the Dharma, we should also strive to benefit other beings. Even if we can only plant the root of merit for one living being, it is worth our effort. Some may argue, “There are so many people in need and so many things to do. How can I be so capable? I’d better focus on my practice, which is more substantial.”

If a superior practitioner says this, I admire and commend their determination, as they will certainly follow through on their words. However, if an ordinary practitioner says this and turns a deaf ear to the desperate cries for help, they will miss many opportunities to engage in virtuous deeds that can benefit those in need.

Here is a touching story from the *Reader’s Digest*:

During low tide, many small fish are trapped in the small puddles on the beach. When the sun is out, the water in the puddles will evaporate and the fish will die. A young boy comes to the beach, picking up one fish after another, throwing them back into the ocean one by one. Someone laughs at him, saying, “There are fish everywhere on the beach. Can you finish picking up all of them? Besides, who cares if you save the fish or not?”

The young boy ignores him and keeps throwing the fish back into the ocean. For each fish he saves, he says, “This fish cares.”

I do share the same thought with the young boy. I understand that my capabilities are limited and that I cannot help everyone, but if I can assist ten people in a year, they will definitely care. I expect no return; I only hope that my small contribution can give them the chance to change their lives.

Think about it: Is it right to care only about our own study and practice of the Dharma while disregarding those who truly need our help? During the symposium, a college student remarked, “Even though we cannot help everyone in need, we surely can help some if we pool our resources together.” I completely agree with him. If a college student can have such motivation, how can we Mahayanists not strive to help other beings with great diligence?

In fact, being altruistic is a Dharma practice in itself. It is essential for us to integrate Dharma practice with daily life. Personally, I strive to apply the Dharma I have learned and practiced to benefit others.

Otherwise, if we withdraw from the real world and focus solely on practice, it becomes difficult to determine whether we can face death with confidence. When our karmic results manifest and we are tormented by illnesses, can we alleviate our suffering through our practice? I am not certain. Therefore, it is crucial to engage in various kinds of good deeds.

In particular, transcendent diligence is part of the training in the precepts of the bodhicitta of application. To practice diligence, we should not only study and practice the Dharma diligently but also strive to benefit others. While helping others, we may face challenges such as misunderstandings and criticism; however, these obstacles are minor in the grand scheme. I trust that we know how to address them effectively.

2.2.2.3.2.4.3. Diligence that Cannot be Stopped

Do not be content with having completed a short retreat, engaged in a few practices, recited some prayers, or performed a couple of good deeds. Instead, commit to practicing for the entirety of one's life, and resolve to maintain one's efforts with the steady force of a great river until one achieves perfect Buddhahood. This unwavering dedication is what we refer to as diligence that cannot be stopped.

Let alone long-term effort, just diligent practice for one day can be of great value. It says in the *Dhammapada*:

If a man lives one hundred years
And remains indolent and lacks diligence,
It is better if he lives only one day,
But practices with great diligence.

One day is very short. But if we make good use of it, such as by doing good deeds or diligent practice, it can still bring us great merit.

That said, you should stay motivated and refrain from slacking off while listening to teachings. Instead of constantly checking the time and wishing, "Dear Three Jewels, please grant me blessings so the class can be dismissed soon," you should remain engaged and make a vow: "I will try my best to receive this teaching, transform my mind, and benefit others with it." With such an attitude, you will study diligently in class, spend the whole day practicing, and ultimately live your life in a diligent manner. This is a meaningful way to live.

♦ Set a plan for our virtuous actions

We should set up a plan for our next positive action while still doing the present one. The great practitioners of the past advised that one should practice like a hungry yak grazing. Just as a yak pulls at one clump of grass while keeping its eye on the next, we too should remind ourselves that as soon as we complete our current Dharma practice, we will begin a new one.

While teaching you *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, I am starting to set up my next teaching plan. For example, while this teaching is still ongoing, I am also going to teach you the *Commentary on Valid Cognition*, and then I will teach you certain scriptures. I have many plans in my mind regarding teachings.

Some Dharma fellows at Larung Gar are very skilled at worldly planning, saying, "I will first build a cabin here and another one there. I will sell this one and

build another one here.” Well, what is the point of such planning? You come to Larung Gar to study and practice the Dharma, and it holds no meaning for you to come here to start a property development business.

If you insist on developing something, you should focus on the following three things: transforming your mind, propagating the Dharma, and benefiting living beings. Do as much as you can in these areas and make good future plans for them as well. The great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche said he had no plans regarding worldly issues but many plans for Dharma practices and propagation. He knew exactly what Dharma actions to take, for example, two or three years ahead.

These words of the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche are of great importance. Having a plan for Dharma activities is vital, especially in today’s society. I have visited meditation centers in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and America, and I noticed that these centers not only had extensive Dharma activities but also long-term planning.

I thought, “These incredible Dharma activities are successfully accomplished because a few great masters with vast aspirations take the lead and pool all kinds of resources together to enable their happening. Otherwise, nothing can be achieved without the necessary causes and conditions being established.”

Therefore, whether virtuous deeds are big or small, we should make an effective plan.

- ♦ **Do not “let go” of our volunteer work and of listening to the Dharma**

It is quite precious for an individual to encounter opportunities to work for the benefit of others. While we are volunteering for a Dharma activity, we should ensure that we do not quit or give up when minor problems arise. Some people find ways to stop volunteering, but while they “let go” of volunteering, they still cannot let go of their afflictions. Thus, their choice offers no benefit to their Dharma practice.

I do not believe volunteer work should be a burden for you. For example, some sangha members at Larung Gar spend fewer than four hours a day volunteering in Dharma activities, which amounts to twenty-eight hours per week. With 168 hours in a week, they still have 140 hours remaining. Therefore, volunteer work will not create an obstacle to your hearing, contemplation, and meditation.

Laypeople at the Bodhi Association complain they have too many lessons to

learn, which keeps them too busy and tired. On my side, I currently only teach three classes every week: *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, *Condensed Transcendent Wisdom*, and *The Aspiration to be Reborn in the Pure Realm of Sukhavati*. Each class lasts an hour, so you only have to spend three hours a week listening to teachings.

Thus, with 168 hours minus three hours, you still have 165 hours left each week. Those 165 hours are more than enough for you to sleep, eat, engage in worldly activities, and more. Of the three hours of Dharma teachings, one hour is for concentration, one is a complementary course, and the last one is optional, so you may even skip it. Therefore, how can you be so tired from listening to these teachings? I truly do not understand why you have so many complaints about receiving the transcendental Dharma teachings.

Now that we understand the benefits of the true Dharma, why do we continue to reject the opportunity to study and practice it? We should strive to make greater efforts each day and not allow our body, speech, or mind to slip into idleness or to separate from the Dharma, even for a moment. Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa states:

To practice with greater diligence as one approaches death is a hallmark of a Dharma practitioner who has not been caught by unfavorable conditions.

However, some practitioners are quite diligent at the beginning, but as time passes, they become indolent and may even give up their practices entirely. This shows that they have been “caught by unfavorable conditions.” In contrast, it would be better for them to start with a moderate level of diligence and, as they gain a deeper understanding of the Buddha’s teachings, become progressively more diligent in their commitment to the Dharma and volunteering for Dharma activities. Moreover, this diligence is long-lasting, and the closer they get to death, the more diligent they become in their Dharma practices. This is what a good practitioner should strive for.

♦ The guru has to practice as well

Not only an ordinary practitioner but also the guru has to practice Dharma with diligence.

Nowadays, individuals recognized as great practitioners or accomplished teachers often hear comments like, “You no longer need to perform prostrations, recite prayers, accumulate merit and wisdom, purify obscurations, and so on.”

Some disciples compliment their guru by saying, “You are the emanation of the Buddha,” “You are the reincarnation of so-and-so eminent master,” or “You are Manjushri, Avalokiteshvara, Mahastamaprapta, Maitreya, Ksitigarbha, or Yellow Jambhala.” These disciples further assert that, as a noble being, the guru no longer needs to engage in any practice.

When it is time to release captured animals, some disciples will not let their guru carry the fish basket, saying, “Please do not take it, dear guru. Let me do it,” or “Dear guru, you do not have to do this tiring work. You can stand there and watch us.”

These disciples do not fully grasp the meaning of the word “guru.” Before achieving Buddhahood, everyone must accumulate merit and wisdom. Therefore, the disciples should not exempt the guru from the necessity of gathering these accumulations. They should not say, “Dear guru, feel free to be lazy. It’s acceptable if you engage in wrongdoing while we, the disciples, practice diligence.” In truth, the guru must also practice the Dharma.

However, when receiving flattery, some gurus soon begin to believe it themselves, viewing themselves as very important and feeling that they no longer need Dharma practice. Yet, as the peerless Dagpo Rinpoche said:

Believing that one does not need practice often indicates a greater need for practice than ever.

This is also a pith instruction. *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* is truly vital to our practice. I hope you can read it once a year. My commentary is extensive, so it may be difficult for you to go through my teaching transcripts annually, but they may become references in the twenty-second and twenty-third centuries. During that time, the meaning and value of my commentary on the text may be discovered, which you may not fully realize now.

Nevertheless, you should consider *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* as your guide for practice and apply it accordingly. Recently, I have had the text printed and have given copies as prizes to some Dharma students. This is good.

As just mentioned, the guru also needs to practice Dharma. Let alone an ordinary guru, even a great guru like Atisha also appeared to engage in Dharma practices diligently.

Every day, Atisha would begin his work making tsa-tsas, quickly covering his hands with clay.

His followers remarked, “People are talking because a great teacher like you is working with mud. Furthermore, you are exhausting yourself. Why not let us handle it for you?”

Atisha replied, “What are you suggesting? Are you planning to start eating my food for me as well?”

Atisha’s answer may seem unpleasant, but it actually provides us with vital instruction. Followers who know little of the Dharma often try to prevent their guru’s diligent efforts to accumulate merit, believing it will spare the guru from exhaustion, which is not right.

If the guru is a true manifestation of the Buddha, there is no need to remind them, as they know what to do and what not to do. In this case, the guru will refrain from any actions that they should not undertake. How is it necessary for an ordinary person to dissuade a buddha?

If the guru is not a true manifestation of the Buddha, then of course they need to accumulate merit. In this situation, it is even more important that others do not dissuade such a guru from engaging in meritorious deeds.

Sometimes disciples compliment their guru, saying, “Dear guru, you have no issue eating meat. You are the manifestation of all buddhas and bodhisattvas, so you will undoubtedly transfer the consciousness of the animals by consuming their meat. If you take a bite, the animals will surely be reborn in the Land of Great Bliss.” Such a remark may lack genuine meaning.

Until we achieve perfect Buddhahood, we will have past actions and tendencies to overcome, and we will need to cultivate ever more spiritual qualities, even if we are already tenth-stage bodhisattvas. Therefore, we should avoid becoming complacent or practicing sporadically. Instead, we should engage in our Dharma practice with dedication from the depths of our hearts, always striving for more and never assuming that we have done enough.

Not feeling complacent, we should always look for opportunities to make progress. This is very important. However, many people only practice when they are under favorable circumstances; for example, when they are at ease or in a good mood, or when the weather is pleasant, then they sip some coffee while enjoying themselves with the Dharma.

When they encounter pain and obstacles, or even when the weather is bad, they put practice aside. True practitioners are not like this. Whether they are happy or unhappy, volunteering or running daily errands, at anytime and anywhere, the Dharma is always with them.

♦ Long-term diligence

Generally speaking, whether we can attain Buddhahood depends solely on our diligence. Therefore, we should strive to practice the three kinds of diligence. A person with exceptional intelligence but limited diligence will only be an inferior practitioner. In contrast, someone with limited intelligence but extraordinary diligence can become a superior practitioner. Without diligence, all other good qualities are rendered ineffective.

[You should carefully contemplate the instructions above; otherwise, no matter how much I discuss this topic, it will be in vain. Even if I were to emphasize the importance of diligence by flying to the sky, I cannot directly instill my understanding into your heart without your own internalization.]

Jigme Lingpa says:

“A person who lacks diligence cannot be saved, even if they possess wisdom, wealth, and power—much like a merchant who has a boat but no oars.”

Thus, a person without diligence may have everything else but still cannot attain Buddhahood.

Therefore, to maintain our Dharma practice, we should eat and sleep moderately and make our efforts steady and consistent. Our minds should be like a well-tuned bowstring: not too loose and not too tight. Some sangha members at Larung Gar stay up late to prepare for an exam, and once the exam is over, they set aside their Dharma books and sleep until the next afternoon. This is not ideal. Practicing sporadically, only when we have time, will not lead to progress.

I hope we will all keep in mind the vajra words of Patrul Rinpoche, as many people today tend to fall into indolent and sporadic practice. I do not mean to boast, but throughout the years—no matter where I am or what I am doing, whether studying the Dharma or engaging in practice—even though I have experienced moments of indolence, I dare say that I have been more diligent than many practitioners I know.

After attending this class, many people may wake up early tomorrow, resolving,

“I must practice with diligence! I have to be diligent!” However, a week later, many of them may stop being early risers. This is not acceptable. Rather than practicing sporadically, we should practice diligence steadily and consistently.



Lesson 110

“It is impossible to develop concentration without first ... importance. They cannot be dispensed with.” [page 248–250]

Of the six transcendent perfections, we have studied four. Now, we will move on to the fifth one: transcendent concentration.

2.2.2.3.2.5. Transcendent Concentration

2.2.2.3.2.5.1. Giving Up Distractions

The practice of concentration is important for both monastics and laypeople. If you cannot even remain in a state of concentration for one second and your mind is always distracted, even if you study theoretical teachings day and night, your mind cannot really be transformed. *The Treatise on the Provisions for Enlightenment* says:

All the afflictions of sentient beings arise from the distracted mind.

Therefore, those with supreme wisdom constantly cultivate meditative concentrations.

We can observe that those who practice meditation typically have a pure, peaceful mind and are free from afflictions, distress, and worries. This is because, when their minds are abiding in a pure state through the power of meditation, their perception of the external world becomes more beautiful and pleasant, leading

to a life filled with joy. In contrast, those who do not practice meditation are easily distracted and often overwhelmed by negative emotions such as uneasiness, anxiety, distress, and misery.

In particular, people nowadays are always busy chasing after something in the outer world and do not know how to reflect on their inner world. As a result, afflictions often arise within them, plunging them deep into the pit of suffering. Therefore, it is essential to practice meditative concentration.

♦ Stay in a solitary place

It is nearly impossible to develop meditative concentration without first renouncing excitement and distractions and spending time in solitude. Therefore, to cultivate concentration, it is essential to first eliminate distractions.

Most sangha members at Larung Gar have given up distracting circumstances, and they stay in a solitary place. Therefore, this instruction on renouncing distractions may resonate with them, making it seem possible for them to develop concentration. For those of you who are urban dwellers and cannot yet leave your residences, you may find alternative solutions for practicing concentration. For example, you could practice in your own room, create a shrine room, or go on retreat occasionally or regularly. By doing so, you create the conditions necessary for developing concentration.

Vasubandhu's *Treatise on Generating Bodhicitta* says:

Because you've practiced meditative concentration,
You will not encounter various unfavorable circumstances,
Your mind is always in the state of bliss—
This is the so-called benefiting yourself.

And

You educate living beings and make them practice mindfulness—
This is the so-called 'benefiting others.'

Some people believe that the practice of meditative concentration can only benefit oneself, which is not true. Through meditation, we can tame our own minds, which is "benefiting oneself." By visualizing a deity, making aspirations, dedicating

merit, and generating virtuous thoughts toward others during meditation, we can provide indirect help and benefit to others, which is “benefiting others.”

♦ Remain unattached to loved ones and friends

Those who practice meditative concentration should also be away from loved ones and friends. At this time, one should contemplate as follows:

Everything that comes together will eventually fall apart. Parents, siblings, spouses, friends, and relatives—even the flesh and bones with which we were born—are all destined to separate. Recognize the futility of becoming attached to transient loved ones and friends and strive to maintain a sense of solitude.

Worldly people may find it cruel and unkind that monastics leave their loved ones and friends. However, if we consider impermanence, we will realize that togetherness is ephemeral and that sometimes we must let go of our attachment to our loved ones and friends. Therefore, even if worldly people cannot always accept the choices of monastics, many great masters have left their loved ones and friends in the past to seek truth.

◎ The story of Monk Congjian

In the Tang Dynasty, there was a monk named Congjian, who took ordination in his early adulthood. During the Huichang Persecution of Buddhism⁴² (841-845), Tang Emperor Wuzong closed many Buddhist shrines, confiscated their property, and sent the monks and nuns home to lay life. Congjian managed to hide somewhere during the upheaval, and when Tang Emperor Xuanzong took the throne and reestablished Buddhism, he returned to his previous temple.

Once, Congjian’s son visited the temple to inquire about his father’s whereabouts. The father and son met at the temple’s front door. However, many years had passed since the son last saw Congjian, so he didn’t recognize him and asked, “Please, do you know where Master Congjian is?”

Recognizing the visitor as his son, Congjian pointed to the southeast, and his son set off in that direction. After his son left, he closed the door and never stepped outside the temple again. He never saw his son again.

⁴² The Huichang Persecution of Buddhism was initiated by Tang Emperor Wuzong during the Huichang era (841-845). Among its purposes were to appropriate war funds and to cleanse China of foreign influences.

Worldly people may find this heartless and cruel, but in fact, loved ones and friends are all destined to part ways, and eventually, one is bound to experience the pain of losing them. Knowing this, it is permissible for someone to leave loved ones in order to seek liberation.

Some may argue, “A person influenced by such a view may take ordination. Isn’t that harmful for them? They won’t get married!” However, regardless of what people think, the reality remains that one must forgo worldly pursuits if they choose to pursue the truth.

Choosing the monastic path is not an escape from life’s responsibilities. While some individuals may have become monks or nuns to avoid obligations, the majority of monastics embark on this luminous path after recognizing the true nature of worldly life.

◉ The story of Repa Shiwa Ö

After reflecting on the drawbacks of attachment to loved ones and friends, we should let go of these attachments and engage in Dharma practice in a solitary place. Repa Shiwa Ö says:

Practicing alone leads to Buddhahood;
 Practicing as a pair cultivates virtuous connections;
 Practicing in a group of three or four brings up attachment and
 anger.

Therefore, I dwell peacefully on my own.

Repa Shiwa Ö was one of the closest disciples of Milarepa. He distanced himself from his homeland to practice in solitude after understanding the nature of worldly attachments. He had been a wealthy man before following Milarepa. Once, when Repa Shiwa Ö was about to cross a river on horseback, Milarepa called out from the riverside, asking if Repa Shiwa Ö could take him along. Repa Shiwa Ö declined Milarepa’s request.

However, when Repa Shiwa Ö’s horse reached the middle of the river, he saw Milarepa walking across the water without touching the surface, soon reaching the opposite shore. Repa Shiwa Ö then developed great faith in Milarepa and apologized for his mistake. He also promised to offer his sister and his wealth to Milarepa, but the latter declined.

In fact, Milarepa had a dream the night before in which a dakini brought a young man in his twenties, told Milarepa that the man was his heart disciple, and asked Milarepa to teach him well. After taking Repa Shiwa Ö as his disciple, Milarepa provided him with teachings and instructions.

Repa Shiwa Ö also made a vow in Milarepa's presence: he would dress only in a cotton robe for his life, never wear leather boots, never return to his hometown, and only store enough food for two days. Repa Shiwa Ö lived by his vows and put the teachings into practice, and eventually became the disciple who was foremost in renouncing worldly life.

When Milarepa passed into parinirvana, Repa Shiwa Ö was among those who requested the dakinis to leave the stupa formed from Milarepa's relics for the benefit of all sentient beings. The details are as follows:

The dakinis were about to carry Milarepa's remains and relics away to the Pure Realm. Rechungpa said to the dakinis, "We must have a share of the relics. This will benefit disciples in the human realm."

The dakinis replied, "If the relics of the mind identified as the reality body are not enough for you, great son, you should pray to Milarepa, and he will grant you something out of his compassion. As for everyone else who regarded Milarepa as a firefly, even though he shone like the sun and moon, they shall receive no remains or relics. The relics belong to us."

When Rechungpa supplicated again, a relic the size of a hen's egg descended from the sphere of light within the dakinis' hands and rested above the cremation chamber, radiating five-colored rays of light. When the disciples attempted to grab the relic, it returned to the heavens, where it dissolved into the sphere of light in the dakinis' hands.

One part of the relic transformed into a crystal stupa, transparent inside and out. Repa Shiwa Ö thought he should ask the dakinis to leave the stupa as an object of worship for Milarepa's human disciples, and then he offered his supplications. Inside the stupa, a figure of Milarepa appeared and sang a song, stating that if the stupa were kept in the human realm, it would vanish.

After the figure of Milarepa in the stupa offered instructions to the assembled disciples, the dakinis lifted the stupa and brought it to the Pure Realm.

It is said that after Milarepa's parinirvana, Repa Shiwa Ö practiced in a

hermitage until he attained perfect enlightenment. In the end, he ascended to the celestial realm without abandoning his body.

What is the instruction from such a great practitioner? It is: “Buddhahood is within ourselves alone.”

◎ The story of Chan Master Weize

From history, we know that not only many Tibetan practitioners but also many Chinese practitioners stay and practice in solitary places. After his ordination, Chan Master Weize of the Song dynasty practiced in the Buddha Grottoes near Tiantai Mountain in Zhejiang Province. He lived in a hut with a roof made of fallen leaves, drank water from the hills, and ate wild berries for food. In this way, he continued his meditation practice.

One day, a woodcutter passed by and saw the old monk. He asked curiously, “How long have you been living here?”

The Chan master answered, “A few dozen years.”

The woodcutter asked, “Are you practicing here alone?”

The Chan master nodded and said, “In this forest, just one person is enough. What’s the use of more people?”

The woodcutter asked, “Don’t you have relatives and friends?”

Then the Chan master clapped his hands. Out from his hut emerged many fierce animals, such as tigers and leopards. The woodcutter was horrified.

The Chan master said, “Do not be scared,” and signaled to the animals, prompting them to return. The master continued, “I have many friends. The earth, mountains, trees, flowers, insects, snakes, and beasts are all my Dharma friends.”

The woodcutter developed great faith in the master and requested to become his disciple. The master imparted teachings to him. From then on, many people came to see the master, and eventually, Chan Buddhism developed a branch called Buddha Grottoes.

The great masters in the stories above all stayed away from loved ones and friends and practiced in solitary places, which is truly inspiring. Nowadays, if a practitioner, especially a female one, is hesitant to stay alone in a secluded forest, they may form a team of two. One person can support the retreat while the other

participates in it. A team of three or four would be too large, and if not managed well, could become a source of afflictions.

♦ Have no attachment to wealth

Apart from attachment to family and friends, the desire for wealth poses a significant barrier to meditation and is often considered the root of all evil. Many believe that poverty breeds stinginess while wealth fosters generosity. However, the truth is that no matter how much wealth one accumulates, true satisfaction remains elusive. In fact, as wealth increases, so does stinginess. As the saying goes, “He who possesses wealth is stingy,” or “Like the wealthy person, the more one has, the more one desires.”

Driven by greed, the wealthier a person becomes, the more impoverished they feel. This is akin to those who, despite their riches, hesitate to spend on themselves or share with others. Such a person, regardless of how much money and possessions they have, will eventually attract suffering, such as harm from enemies and robbers, as Nagarjuna says:

Amassing, guarding, and increasing wealth all bring suffering.

One should recognize wealth as an endless source of misfortune.

Essentially, aside from experiencing suffering, creating negative karma, and depleting their life-force, there is nothing else to gain from being attached to wealth. If a practitioner amasses, guards, and increases wealth, they will be distracted by various concerns, which will create obstacles to their liberation. *The Sutra of the Supreme Mindfulness of Wondrous Dharma* says:

The action of distraction is the root of samsara.

Therefore, to obtain happiness and liberation, we must be free from attachment to wealth. As the saying goes, “To lose your enemies, lose your wealth.” A person with abundant wealth may be distressed day and night, worrying that it will be taken away. However, after renouncing worldly life, all their enemies and robbers disappear, allowing them to live a pure and happy life thereafter. *The Sutra of the Supreme Mindfulness of Wondrous Dharma* says:

The action of purity is the basis of happiness.

As we know, liberation arises from a pure and peaceful state of mind. We can

never attain liberation while being overwhelmed by crowds, distractions, or wealth. Therefore, a person who seeks liberation should avoid pursuing wealth and should not live in a crowded place. They should distance themselves from worldly life, follow in the footsteps of past eminent masters, and remain in a solitary place. The *Buddhacharita* says:

He who seeks liberation
Should not rest in a crowded place.
Celestial beings including Indra
Venerate a person staying in solitude.

Of course, it may not always be possible for a layperson to avoid urban life, but it is already beneficial if one can maintain a pure mind and strive to live a simple life without excessive attachment to wealth and pleasures. Since wealth and pleasures often lead to suffering, we should not cling to them, as stated in the *Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom*:

When going after desires, one experiences distress;
When attaining desirable objects, one starts to have fears;
When losing them, one is frustrated—
There is no moment when one is truly happy.

Therefore, one can never obtain happiness through the pursuit of wealth or pleasures.

Some people may disagree. They believe money can buy happiness, saying, “If you do not know how to spend your money, just give it to me. A wealthy life is a happy life.”

However, this is not always the case. Take an ordinary person’s life as an example: If they have 100,000 yuan, which allows them to buy a car, they may think they will be happy. But after owning a car, they also have to spend on maintenance and parking. I have heard that a parking spot in some places can cost up to 150,000 yuan, and without a spot, there is no place to park the car. So, they end up paying significantly more for this car, which is a big headache for the wage-earning class. For a wealthier person, purchasing a parking spot may not be an issue, but they might have other, more troublesome concerns to worry about.

Today, as people accumulate more material wealth, they often find themselves

feeling increasingly uneasy and less happy. Meanwhile, it is important for practitioners not to adopt an extreme mindset, declaring, “I must renounce all wealth. I must have no desires. I must see it through and let it go.” Simply stating these ideas is not enough. The key is to recognize the drawbacks of wealth, avoid becoming overly attached to it, and strive to live a modest life. Completely abandoning sensory pleasures and cutting off sources of wealth is neither necessary nor realistic. Despite our best intentions to renounce wealth, how many of us can truly emulate the great masters of the past, living in a hut or a mountain hermitage? Perhaps one in a thousand, or even one in ten thousand? The number is undeniably very small.

Although we cannot completely renounce wealth and sensory pleasures as the great masters of the past did, we need to understand the truth taught by the Buddha—that wealth has no inherent meaning. This understanding will prevent us from becoming slaves to wealth and will help us become less attached to it.

Even if someone were to possess all the wealth in the entire world of Jambudvīpa, they would still only require enough to meet their basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter, as no other necessities are truly indispensable. However, some individuals, regardless of their wealth, are even reluctant to spend money on food or clothing for themselves. Blinded by greed and heedless of wrongdoing and suffering, they amass wealth while ignoring all criticism. This behavior not only jeopardizes their current lives but also puts their future lives at risk.

Human life is brief, yet some individuals, merely to acquire a small amount of wealth, choose to cast aside shame and remorse, moral principles, long-standing relationships, and any consideration of the Dharma or their samaya vows. They spend all their time pursuing food, wealth, and social status, like roving spirits in search of tormas. They miss out on peace, happiness, and a sense of freedom throughout their lives. Engulfed in ceaseless busyness, their life’s journey comes to an end—how pitiful!

The *Sutra of the Right Mindfulness of Dharma* says:

Having been coveting treasures,
He doesn’t realize death has arrived.

Even at the moment of death, such a person still has not realized that wealth

has no meaning! It is so sad to think that a person has wasted all their time and energy but gains nothing in the end.

Nagarjuna says:

Although wealth makes people happy,
Everything is impermanent.
Owned by five partners,⁴³
It distracts people,
Makes them uneasy.

Wealth is ultimately impermanent. History clearly shows that some wealthy individuals lose their entire fortunes during their lifetimes and end up impoverished, while others, though affluent throughout their lives, ultimately have their wealth inherited by others after their deaths. From the wealthy figures in history, we can clearly see that wealth is impermanent. However, some of these individuals disregarded any sense of shame and honesty in order to amass their fortunes. Given the number of wrongdoings they have committed, they will likely experience greater suffering.

Many people nowadays disregard everything, including morality and conscientiousness, for the most trivial material possessions, and they do not mind committing all kinds of wrongful deeds. But for what? When they die, they cannot take any wealth with them. The most valuable type of wealth to pursue is spiritual wealth, which is the true wealth. Unfortunately, many fail to recognize this, often fixating on temporary gains instead.

We should check the world around us: What are people's values in general? We should also reflect on ourselves: What is our genuine attitude toward wealth and life? Have we experienced any changes over time?

It is important to remember that we study the Dharma not to impress others, but to engage in self-reflection and cultivate our inner qualities. If we can achieve this, we will learn how to counteract desires and remain content, regardless of the circumstances we face regarding wealth or in chaotic situations.

Being content with whatever comes is a practice in itself. However, this practice is not limited to a few days or years, nor does it pertain solely to living a simple life. Instead, it is rooted in our internalized understanding of the nature

⁴³ Five partners refer to the king, the thief, the fire, the water, and the evil son.

of wealth. If one does not cultivate this understanding, they may stray from the Dharma path once they encounter wealth and opportunities. Such individuals cannot be considered true practitioners.

A genuine practitioner must steadily and consistently study and practice the Dharma. The initial attitude of “letting go” when embarking on the Dharma path is insufficient for achieving meaningful progress. The key to our practice is to ensure that we do not regress on the long journey of our Dharma practice.

While a sense of contentment with whatever comes is essential for practitioners, it is not necessarily required for worldly individuals. However, a wise worldly person may come to understand that the pursuit of wealth can lead to a life filled with busyness and exhaustion. Moreover, the quest for riches can put their lives at risk, exposing them to violence over their money. In the end, their hard-earned savings may be seized and squandered by enemies or others. As a result, much of their wealth is often wasted, and they may find themselves enjoying very little of it.

What can they ultimately gain? Nothing but a pile of evil deeds as high as Mount Meru, which they have committed while amassing wealth. The consequences of these evil deeds lie ahead, waiting, and will cause them to wander endlessly in the unbearable lower realms. Therefore, while we still have freedom in this lifetime, we should use the few possessions we have to accumulate merit for future lives.

I often use the analogy of “recharging a mobile” to explain this. For example, if your mobile was charged yesterday, you can use it today; and to ensure you can use your mobile tomorrow, you should recharge it today. If you do not recharge it today, you can still make calls, but you will not be able to use it tomorrow or in the more distant future. Likewise, the wealth, status, and provisions we have today are the karmic results of our positive actions from previous lives. What we’ll have in a future life depends on what we do in this lifetime.

Those who care nothing about future lives are extremely foolish. While it may be fine for such individuals to refrain from accumulating merit or engaging in good deeds in this life, their situation in the next life becomes dire if they spend their days committing wrongdoings. Just as those who impulsively commit crimes may face lifelong imprisonment, a careless approach to one’s actions in this life can lead to a ruined future life.

In contrast, truly wise individuals prioritize their future lives and actively work to accumulate merit for the days to come. In this lifetime, they find contentment

in a modest amount of food and sufficient clothing to shield themselves from the elements.

Volunteering for Dharma activities that benefit living beings can help us accumulate significant merit, so it is important not to give up this work. However, some volunteers start out with strong motivation, but after two or three years, they may lose the mindset of “I volunteer for the benefit of all sentient beings” and consider quitting their roles.

Some volunteers may think, “I am volunteering for so-and-so teacher or so-and-so center, but what I’m doing may not necessarily bring any benefit to living beings.”

They should not think this way. When I first came to Larung Gar, I had the thought, “The Larung Gar Five Sciences Buddhist Academy is the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche’s Dharma center. When I work for Larung Gar, whether teaching or staffing, it seems that I am only serving my guru’s center. It has nothing to do with other living beings.”

In fact, this is not the case, because many buddhas and bodhisattvas carry out their Dharma activities by establishing Dharma centers. Take Buddha Amitabha, for example: he also appeared to first establish his Dharma center, which then brought benefits to innumerable beings. Therefore, when we volunteer for the guru or for his Dharma center, we are working for the benefit of all living beings.

However, sometimes someone wants to work for the benefit of living beings but does not want to follow a particular temple or teacher. Instead, they wish to establish their own Dharma center or propagate the Dharma independently.

If they truly have the capability, then that is acceptable. However, as I have often witnessed, some individuals aspire to propagate the Dharma on their own but ultimately disappear from Dharma activities. Why weren’t their efforts successful? It is because they lacked sufficient merit, motivation, capability, resources, and more. Lacking many of these causes and conditions indicates that they do not yet possess all the causes and conditions needed to establish their own Dharma activities.

Without the necessary causes and conditions, one cannot accomplish even minor tasks, let alone major accomplishments. For instance, consider building a cabin: it may appear easy for others, leading someone to want to build one too. However, such a project requires specific resources and circumstances. If this

individual lacks the necessary support and conditions that others have, they may find it impossible to construct the cabin. As a result, the successes of others may not be relevant to their situation.

Similarly, take investing in the stock market. Seeing others amass wealth through investments might inspire someone to enter the market as well. However, without the right causes and conditions, they may not even recover their initial investment, leaving them with nothing but regret.

Anyway, we should persevere with both our practice and our volunteer work. However, many people lack perseverance. After volunteering for five, six, eight, or ten years, they feel they have done enough, saying, “I have been volunteering for all these years. How wonderful! Now I can quit.” In fact, this remark itself reflects whether they are fully committed to volunteer work.

Without steady and lasting determination, achieving success in any endeavor—be it volunteer work, practicing the Dharma, or retreating in solitude—becomes nearly impossible. Some individuals may believe that changing their Dharma center, guru, or lineage is a good idea. However, what are the consequences of making such changes?

While there may be rare cases, like that of Milarepa, who attained realization by switching from Dzogchen to the Mahamudra practice, most ordinary practitioners who frequently switch back and forth may find themselves lacking clear direction in their Dharma practice. Therefore, we should remain steadfast in our Dharma practice, cultivating patience and the capacity to remain in solitude.

As practitioners, we should not only be persevering but also avoid attachment to wealth, fame, and other worldly concerns. Letting go of these attachments is essential; otherwise, there is little hope for the success of our practice. Meanwhile, we should pray to the guru and the Three Jewels anytime and anywhere so that our minds can remain on the right track. Otherwise, those without sufficient merit may develop erroneous thoughts and eventually stray from the right path. Worse yet, they may even head toward a dangerous cliff!

♦ Stay away from “childish friends”

Those whose ambitions are limited to the present life are referred to in the texts as “childish friends.” Those seeking to cultivate meditative concentration should stay away from such friends. These individuals focus solely on this life and disregard

future lives, so befriending them can weaken a truth-seeker's devotion to liberation. *The Compilation of Different Stories in Sutras and Vinayas* says:

I would rather jump into a charcoal stove,
Fall into an abyss from a mountain,
And provoke a seven-step snake,
Than remain with a childish friend.

The chapter on “Meditative Concentration” in *The Way of the Bodhisattva* contains more extensive explanations about this.

Childish friends often show little appreciation for the help we provide and may even harm us in return. No matter what we do for them, they always seem dissatisfied. They are hard to please; if we have more than they do, they become jealous, and if we have less, they look down on us. The more time we spend with these friends, the more our negative behaviors increase while our positive ones diminish. Therefore, it is wise to distance ourselves from such friendships.

Will we transgress the bodhisattva vows by doing so? The answer is no. Shantideva exemplified the observance of the bodhisattva vows, and I believe no one can surpass him. In *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, Shantideva repeatedly emphasized the importance of staying away from childish friends.

How can we claim the ability to stay close to such individuals? Some practitioners, appearing compassionate, think, “This bad guy is so pitiful; that evil man is so wretched!” while intentionally approaching them. These practitioners are inviting venomous snakes into their laps, only to regret it when they are bitten. They will then lament, “Oh! I shouldn't have had such ‘compassion’ for a snake!” But by then, it will be too late.

If a person pursues worldly concerns, those childish friends may be helpful to them. However, if they seek Dharma practice and liberation, they must distance themselves from those who will only bring them harm. Only by staying away from these friends can one truly attain happiness and liberation.

♦ Do not get involved in social activities

Many people enjoy socializing, but they may not realize it can also be a hindrance. Involvement in fields such as agriculture, industry, commerce, academia, or culture often requires extensive social interactions, which can lead

to distractions amid numerous tasks. For those seeking meditative concentration, social activities can create distractions and agitation. While some genuinely enjoy meeting others, the benefits can be minimal, making even the most diligent efforts feel meaningless, especially if they spend the entire day engaged in socializing.

The process of overcoming rivals and favoring friends seems endless. Some countries are perpetually focused on defeating their “rivals” or “enemies.” This task is never-ending; even if one rival is defeated and its military neutralized, another adversary may emerge, ensuring that the cycle continues. The same holds true for favoring friends; we may assist one friend today and another tomorrow. Engaging in these friend-related matters can be exhausting, and offering help with worldly concerns often has little meaning.

♦ **Abandon endless activities**

A true practitioner must recognize that worldly concerns are endless; therefore, one should let go of trivialities and distractions as easily as discarding saliva. Leave home, travel to distant lands, reside in caves, and seek companionship only with wild animals. Concentrate on disciplining the body and taming the mind while relinquishing concerns about clothing, food, and reputation. Spend one’s life in the solitude of a deserted place, free from the presence of others.

Of course, these are the behaviors of a superior practitioner, which are beyond the reach of most. A person I know carried a backpack and went to stay in a mountain cave, but two days later, he returned due to his fear of tigers. In reality, no tiger had visited him. It was just that in the evening, when hares ran around the cave, he mistook them for a tiger or a gorilla. He was so frightened that he never revisited the cave.

Past eminent masters, on the other hand, were not like this. They left their homelands behind and resided in mountain caves for the rest of their lives, with wild animals as their only companions. They truly abandoned everything, including fame, social status, and wealth.

Many of us can only rejoice in their actions and aspire to follow their example. When I was young, I looked forward to emulating those past masters, but now it does not seem realistic to me, given the current circumstances. This is also true for many of you. It is very difficult for people today to live without material support. Practitioners might be able to stay in a hermitage for a few days or even a few

months, but very few can manage to remain in a mountain cave for more than ten or twenty years or even for the rest of their lives.

Nevertheless, even if a layperson cannot become a superior practitioner, they can still be a middling one by minimizing worldly preoccupations and dedicating time to Dharma practice. They can stay away from childish friends, work at necessary jobs, and attend to their responsibilities.

To laypeople: please do not impulsively get divorced or quit your job to immediately retreat to a mountain cave. Such actions are irresponsible. If you have thoroughly considered your decision to renounce worldly life and pursue liberation through monastic practice, then it is acceptable to leave behind work and family; this is also endorsed by the Buddha. However, many people make such decisions on a whim. They may appear to have renounced worldly life, but these commitments often do not last.

We must be prudent in our approach to practicing the Dharma. Although we may sometimes be overly cautious to the point that it affects our Dharma practice or our decision to seek ordination, this aligns with the teachings of Buddhist scriptures, which emphasize that our choices should be guided by careful reflection and wisdom.

♦ The advantages of staying in secluded places

Of course, when a true practitioner stays in a solitary place, many sources of merit will naturally arise. Milarepa said:

In a mountain cave in secluded valleys,
I always cultivate a heart of renunciation.
My teacher, who embodies the buddhas of the three times,
I have unwavering faith in you at all times.

Milarepa's faith in the guru never wavered, but some people are not like Milarepa. Their faith in the guru may appear one day and vanish the next. When they are faithful, they are kind to the guru, but during conflicts, they may slander, criticize, or even abandon the guru for another teacher. When the new guru fails to meet their expectations, they seek out a third. Although their relationship with the third guru may seem stable, it can falter at any moment, prompting them to leave once again for someone else. This is not the proper way to follow a spiritual

teacher. The great masters of the past would never behave this way. After following a qualified teacher, these esteemed masters had unwavering faith in their teacher at all times, in any place, and under any circumstances.

Secluded places offer numerous blessings. Living in solitude naturally nurtures faith, renunciation, bodhicitta, and various other virtuous qualities within us. From my personal experience, my external environment does influence the development of these wholesome qualities in me. In a crowded city, I notice my virtues fluctuate, and my faith in the Three Jewels, as well as my yearning for liberation, may weaken. I may struggle to concentrate while reciting prayers, sometimes even dozing off, making my daily practice feel more like a routine. In contrast, the experience is vastly different when I return to a solitary place.

My practice experience at Larung Gar is particularly profound. This may be attributed to the blessings of the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche or my unique connection to this place. In contrast, my practice at other solitary locations or mountain hermitages does not feel as fulfilling. As a result, after concluding my teachings elsewhere, I immediately return to Larung Gar, where I find that my Dharma experience gradually resumes.

Different people have different experiences, but generally speaking, when a person stays in a solitary place or a temple, they naturally develop faith in the Three Jewels and become strongly motivated to attain liberation. In contrast, when they stay in a crowded urban area, they are often overwhelmed by afflictions such as attachment and anger, and they rarely generate virtuous thoughts. Thus, it is better for us to stay in a solitary place for the sake of practice. We can see how Milarepa did this; with the faith of always seeing the guru as the Buddha, Milarepa remained in his hermitage cave until his parinirvana.

If we choose to practice in a secluded place, we may discover, as the saying goes, that “in places where we feel lonely, meditative concentration arises.” In the past, when I visited mountain hermitages such as Samye Chimpu, where Longchenpa and Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa did their retreats, I initially doubted my ability to stay overnight, let alone for an extended period. However, once I settled into the cave, I felt very comfortable and had an extraordinary practice experience. In contrast, had I opted for a luxury hotel room, I would have enjoyed the comforts, but I would not have experienced any meditative concentration during my stay.

In such secluded settings, all the positive qualities of the path—aversion to

samsara, determination for liberation, faith, pure perception, and meditative concentration—naturally arise. Therefore, we should do whatever we can to cultivate this way of living.

The secluded forests were where the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the past attained profound tranquility. In these serene settings, there are no distractions, no agricultural tasks, no commerce, and no childish friends. One lives in harmony with birds and deer, drinks pure spring water, and eats produce from nature. How peaceful it is! In such an environment, awareness naturally becomes clear, and meditative concentration develops accordingly.

Chan Master Huaizhi of the Song Dynasty obeyed his teacher's orders not to accept any invitations and practiced in a secluded forest for twenty years. He truly achieved the state of "seeing through everything and abandoning all things." His life story can be found in *The Record of the Exalted Acts of Buddhist Monks*. By reading the biographies of the great Chan masters and the tantric Mahasiddhas, one can develop deep faith. These masters resided in secluded places, subsisting on spring water and wild fruit as their ascetic fare, and practiced until the end of their lives.

It may be challenging for us to engage in such ascetic practices, but as practitioners, we should not be too picky about what we eat. Anything is acceptable, as long as the food is clean and satisfies our hunger.

However, some people do not even bother to wash their cooking and dining utensils, which is inappropriate. Personal hygiene is very important, especially for those responsible for cooking for sangha members at Larung Gar. If the cooks do not dress cleanly and their hands are dirty, diners will not have any appetite for the food.

When cooking for sangha members, the cook should not simply prepare whatever they desire. It is beneficial for the cook to have some knowledge of nutritional science to create balanced meals. Additionally, the cook should avoid serving the same dish every day; alternating dishes occasionally will not significantly increase costs. It is crucial for the cook to take into account the tastes and needs of the diners.

Today's practitioners should not only know how to maintain a nutritious diet, but also take good care of their physical health with the help of Tibetan Medicine, Chinese Medicine, or Western Medicine. Meanwhile, we should also pay attention

to weather changes. For example, we should know what to wear to keep ourselves warm on the Tibetan Plateau. Understanding all of this enhances our practice.

In summary, a practitioner should strive to maintain a balanced lifestyle and avoid extremes. Someone with a basic understanding of Chinese Medicine may become overly fixated on proper eating, for example, insisting that “red radish must be eaten with this and that.” This focus on food can detract from their practice and lead to obsessive and meticulous behavior. However, practitioners should not be careless about their diet either. Ultimately, maintaining balance is crucial for practitioners. Regardless of our activities, we must avoid falling into either extreme. We all study the Middle Way, a term that carries multiple meanings; in this context, it specifically refers to steering clear of extremes.

Without enemies or friends, we can free ourselves from the chains of attachment and hatred while staying in a solitary place. Such places offer every advantage. The *Sutra of the Right Mindfulness of Dharma* says:

If you often practice meditation under a tree or in the mountain,
You will obtain pristine wisdom and stay away from all faults.

What kind of meditation should we practice in a secluded place? It can be meditation on the difficulty of finding the freedoms and advantages, the impermanence of life, or the ultimate tantric teachings. As long as the mind is pure, wisdom can arise easily.

Some people often complain, “Dear guru, I am so dull-witted! My wisdom just cannot be unveiled. Please grant me some blessings!”

In fact, when a person can calm their mind and focus on the truth, their wisdom can naturally arise. In contrast, if their mind is filled with distracting thoughts, not only can they not unveil their wisdom, but they also become increasingly deluded.

In *The Moon Lamp Sutra*, the Buddha teaches that simply wishing to retreat to a solitary place and taking seven steps toward that direction holds greater value than making offerings to all the buddhas across the ten directions for as many kalpas as there are grains of sand in the Ganges. For instance, if a person in Chengdu desires to visit Mount Wutai and takes seven steps toward the sacred site, that action alone generates immense merit.

Someone said, “So-and-so arrived at the monastery with plans to take

ordination, but his family caught him and brought him back home in a taxi. What a pity!”

In fact, there’s nothing to pity in this situation. He had the desire to take ordination in a secluded monastery and had taken more than seven steps in that direction. He successfully reached his destination! What he accomplished already created great merit.

The Buddha also says:

In a perfect solitary place, deep in the mountains,
Everything one does is wholesome.

Even without deliberate practice, being in such an environment will naturally foster aversion to samsara, determination to attain liberation, loving-kindness, compassion, and other virtuous qualities. Consequently, whatever we do can become wholesome. The attachment, hatred, and negative emotions we struggled to manage in busy settings will begin to fade on their own, simply due to our solitude. This peaceful context makes it easier to cultivate all the qualities associated with the Dharma path.

I believe many of you can relate to this. One person was once filled with afflictions while living in a busy city and committed various wrongdoings. However, after he took ordination at Larung Gar, he eradicated all his negative behaviors, acted according to the Dharma, and became peaceful and disciplined.

In summary, everything discussed in this class pertains to the preliminaries for meditative concentration, which is absolutely essential and indispensable!



Lesson 111

“Concentration is of three kinds: the concentration practised ... of the transcendent perfections are therefore present.” [page 250–253]

The section we studied yesterday focuses on giving up distractions for the sake of developing concentration, which you should understand clearly. We beings in the desire realm cannot pacify our minds for even a split second. Constantly distracted by and attached to the outer world, we struggle to attain genuine happiness.

Chan masters of the past often took the bliss of meditation as their sustenance. If today’s people can also develop meditative concentration, not only will they become healthy and energetic, but they will also become more optimistic and unveil their wisdom, bringing many worldly and transcendental qualities.

Many individuals who do not practice meditation are busy making a living each day. They may appear human, but they are actually no different from pretas in terms of their intentions and actions. As the Buddha says in the *Compendium of the Essentials of Dharma*:

If one doesn’t practice meditation,
And only goes after food and drink,
You should know that such a person
Is like a hungry ghost.

Therefore, we should practice meditative concentration every day. There were many practitioners in the Tibetan region who stayed in forests, among boulders,

or in caves, practicing meditation for more than ten or twenty years, or even for their entire lives. In Chinese Buddhism, especially in the Chan School, many Chan masters also practiced in this manner.

While we may not be able to practice like those great masters, we can still dedicate some time each day to meditation. For instance, after waking up in the morning, we can meditate briefly to calm our minds and clear away the “trash” of ordinary thoughts. In the afternoon or at night, we can set aside ten minutes to half an hour for meditation.

If you find meditation too tiring and struggle to engage in it, you may practice recitations such as the Avalokiteshvara mantra, the Manjushri mantra, the Vajrasattva mantra, or the name of Amitabha Buddha, among others. These mantras and names hold great power, so it is of supreme merit if you can calm your mind and recite them.

At Larung Gar, we now have a specific time in the afternoon designated for meditation practice. As far as I know, many sangha members are engaging in this practice, but a few individuals during that time choose to carry water, shop, circumambulate a stupa, and more.

Their actions are not appropriate. It is very important to join the group practice and respect the scheduled time slot. As I mentioned, you may choose to recite mantras if you cannot meditate. If you really do not want to participate, please do not disturb those who wish to meditate and appreciate the time set for group practice.

Dharma fellows outside Larung Gar should also set aside specific time for practice. Please do not always postpone, saying, “I will practice next year or the year after that.” If you keep deferring your practice to a “tomorrow,” you will never accomplish anything. You should practice immediately when the opportunity arises, and the sooner you practice, the better.

Many people demonstrate perseverance when practicing preliminaries or reciting mantras, which is commendable. We must practice with diligence. As you know, life is as transient as autumn clouds. If we do not use our time wisely for practice, it will be very difficult to transform the suffering of illness onto the path when we are critically ill. However, if we have already made significant efforts in practicing the Dharma, we will find ourselves at ease at that time.

2.2.2.3.2.5.2. Actual Concentration

There are three kinds of actual concentration: the concentration practiced by ordinary beings, concentration that clearly discerns, and the excellent concentration of the tathagatas.

2.2.2.3.2.5.2.1. The Concentration Practiced by Ordinary Beings

Clinging to the experiences of clarity, bliss, and the absence of thought, and practicing meditation with the goal of achieving these states, is referred to as the concentration practiced by ordinary beings.

This type of concentration always involves a certain attachment. The practitioner is attached to the experience of clarity, the experience of bliss—a state of comfort beyond verbal expression, or the experience of the absence of thought. When in such meditative states, normally the practitioner does not want to rise from concentration. Regarding this, Longchenpa offered detailed explanations in *Finding Rest in Meditation*.

Actually, this kind of concentration is not a high state of practice because the practitioner is attached to the meditative experience. Therefore, we meditators should know how to discern our state. If we are resting in a state of concentration as practiced by ordinary beings, then our meditation is very likely to become the cause of being reborn in the form realm or the formless realm.

The meditation that brings us liberation does differ from the one that brings only worldly benefits. This difference is explained in Vajrayana teachings such as *The Great Chariot: A Treatise on the Great Perfection* and *Lama Yangtik (The Innermost Heart Drop of the Guru)*, as well as in Sutrayana teachings such as *The Discourse on the Stages of Concentration Practice* and *The Bodhisattva Stages*. Therefore, make sure you know what kind of concentration you are practicing.

Meditation is now practiced in many monasteries and temples, and various types of meditative practices are available. When choosing a practice, one thing we must be clear about is this: We should engage in true meditation that can uproot the source of samsara, rather than concentration as practiced by ordinary beings, which involves attachment to meditative experiences of bliss, clarity, and the absence of thought.

2.2.2.3.2.5.2.2. Clearly Discerning Concentration

Although the practitioner is free from any attachment to the meditative experiences, their meditation still clings to the emptiness of inherent existence as an antidote—this is referred to as clearly discerning concentration.

When the practitioner is in this kind of concentration, they meditate on the empty nature of all phenomena. This is a state devoid of anything, including the meditative experiences of bliss, clarity, and the absence of thought.

Such concentration is of vital importance to beginning practitioners because, from time without beginning, we have been clinging to the belief that all phenomena inherently exist, which has kept us trapped in cyclic samsara until this lifetime. To antidote our clinging to the inherent existence of everything, clinging to “nonexistence,” or the emptiness of inherent existence, is the best skillful method. Therefore, as Mipham Rinpoche says in his *Beacon of Certainty*:

Clinging to the emptiness of inherent existence is the errorless
way of entry for beginners. To say one must abandon this clinging at
the very beginning is a rumor spread by demons.

Then, is clinging to the emptiness of inherent existence the ultimate meditative state we should pursue? No, it is not. It is just a temporary step on our path to enlightenment.⁴⁴ As stated in *The Root Stanzas of the Middle Way*:

The conquerors have all declared that emptiness
Will extricate us from all views.
They said there is no cure for those
Who make of emptiness a view.⁴⁵

Therefore, if a practitioner is clinging to the emptiness of inherent existence,

⁴⁴ The progressive stages to enlightenment consist of four stages as follows: emptiness of inherent existence, unity, freedom from constructs, and equality. Mipham Rinpoche describes that during the first stage, emptiness and appearance are known in alternation. During the second stage, unity, the practitioner comes to understand the genuine unity of appearance and emptiness. During the third stage, freedom from constructs, the practitioner sees that there is actually no difference between appearance and emptiness. During the fourth stage, equality, all duality dissolves, and the practitioner comes to understand the meaning of equality beyond constructs. These four stages counteract the four extremes of existence, nonexistence, both, and neither, respectively. [Douglas Duckworth, *Jamgon Mipham: His Life and Teachings*, Shambhala Publications, 2011, page 103.]

⁴⁵ Nagarjuna, *The Root Stanzas of the Middle Way*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Shambhala, 2016

there is no medicine that can cure them, because the medicine itself has turned into poison. It is vital that we are aware that this kind of concentration, though indispensable on our progressive path to enlightenment, is not the ultimate stage we should pursue.

However, many meditators are resting in this clearly discerning concentration. Here is a story that the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche told us:

The Great Tertön Lerab Lingpa once said to Lama Yukhok Chatralwa, “Are you aware that many practitioners around Dokhok and Sertar are engaging in meditations that will lead to their rebirths in the form realm?”

Lama Yukhok Chatralwa replied, “Since you know it, why not stop them? How wonderful it is that they can abide in the natural state of reality?”

Lerab Lingpa joked, “I dare not offend them because many of my benefactors are living there. If I were to annoy them, who else would I rely on for my livelihood?”

Sometimes I encounter inappropriate meditation practices elsewhere as well, but I choose to remain silent because I do not believe it is necessary to offend a specific monastery or particular master. Some Dharma masters teach meditation to tens of thousands of people, but their practices may only lead to rebirth in the form realm and may hardly liberate those individuals from samsara. However, many people are unaware of this. Therefore, whether one is seeking transmissions or meditation guidance, it is crucial to discern whether what one seeks aligns with the authentic teachings of the Buddha. Only when it aligns can the transmission or meditation guidance help open the eye of wisdom and directly perceive the true nature of all phenomena.

Next, we’ll study the third kind of concentration, which we should strive to develop and abide in.

2.2.2.3.2.5.2.3. The Excellent Concentration of the Tathagatas

When the practitioner no longer clings to emptiness as an antidote and abides in a concept-free meditative concentration on suchness, or the true nature of reality—this is referred to as the excellent concentration of the tathagatas.

In this context, tathagata is synonymous with buddha-nature, Dharmata, suchness, or the true nature of reality. When a practitioner abides in the excellent concentration of the tathagatas, they are free from any attachment to the meditative

experiences of bliss, clarity, and the absence of thought, as well as the clinging to the emptiness of inherent existence. They are free from the attachment to the four extremes of existence, nonexistence, both, and neither. Instead, the practitioner remains in an incredible concentration on the union of clarity and emptiness, which is the quiescence of nirvana. *The Moon Lamp Sutra* says:

Remain in concentration on the nature of reality,
Be free from attachment to all phenomena—
For it is in the natural state, which is devoid of any attachment,
It is the concentration of quiescence.

The “quiescence” referred to here is not the same as the “attainment of cessation” that is explained in *Treasury of the Abhidharma*, as the “quiescence” rests upon the ultimate reality. When a practitioner truly abides in the excellent concentration of the tathagatas, they no longer cling to any of the above-mentioned four extremes. The practitioner abides in the reality as it is, clearly aware of what it is and cognizing what it appears. Because this meditative state is grounded in the nature of reality and free from any attachment, it is called the concentration of quiescence.

Typically, a practitioner must follow a specific sequence of practices to cultivate this kind of concentration. As Mipham Rinpoche points out, it is nearly impossible for an ordinary practitioner to immediately achieve concept-free concentration on the nature of reality. Instead, the practitioner should first develop an intellectual understanding that all phenomena are free from the four extremes. This involves negating the first extreme of existence, then the second extreme of nonexistence, and further realizing that the extremes of both and neither are simply our conceptual constructions. Next, the practitioner engages in sequential practices, and gradually, they are able to abide in the luminous, non-conceptual state that transcends all appearances.

♦ The meditation instruction

Then, in what posture should we sit when practicing concentration?

Whenever practicing meditative concentration, it is important to adopt the “seven-point posture of Vairocana.” We may find detailed instructions on how to sit in the Vairocana posture and how to expel stale breaths in *A Guide to The Words*

of *My Perfect Teacher* and the *Essential Points of Daily Meditation*.⁴⁶ This posture is very important, and we should sit accordingly during our meditation sessions.

The seven-point posture of Vairocana involves sitting with your legs crossed in either the full vajra posture or the half-vajra posture. You do not just casually sit cross-legged, which is not the right posture. When you first start to cross your legs in vajra posture, your feet may hurt and you may feel uncomfortable, but gradually everything will be fine. Then put your hands in the gesture of equanimity below the navel, keep your spine straight and still, bend your neck slightly forward, stretch your shoulders apart, direct your gaze softly in the direction of your nose, and let your tongue touch the palate.

This posture is outlined in both Sutrayana and Vajrayana scriptures. While there are a few uncommon practices, such as the Great Perfection, that introduce additional special postures, it is essential to sit in the Vairocana posture during meditation sessions.

This posture is not exclusive to Buddhism; it is also present in yoga practices from India. Indian yoga has become so popular that it attracts not only Indians but also individuals from other countries, including Americans and Chinese practitioners. These individuals often adopt the Vairocana posture during their meditation. A notable example of this posture is Buddha Shakyamuni, who sat in the Vairocana posture throughout his ascetic practices until attaining perfect enlightenment.

Besides the benefit of attaining liberation in a future life, the practices of sitting in the Vairocana posture and expelling stale breaths are also greatly beneficial for physical and mental health in this lifetime. This resonates strongly with those who have engaged in the practices. It is said that many wealthy individuals and officials in India practice yoga, with very few choosing not to. Some intellectuals around me have tried these practices, and they report feeling more relaxed, with many of their ailments seemingly disappearing. So, even if it is just for the sake of your health, you should try expelling stale breaths and meditating in the Vairocana posture.

Consider yoga practice, for example. Some non-Buddhist practices can also be beneficial. However, some individuals engage in black-and-white thinking, believing that “non-Buddhist practices are bad and only Buddhist practices are good.” Such a view can be misguided.

⁴⁶ Khenpo Sodargye Rinpoche gave this instruction in Lesson 2.

In fact, there is much to learn from non-Buddhist practices, like Tai Chi, which is gaining popularity both in China and internationally. This internal Chinese martial art harmonizes the body with nature and includes effective techniques. I practiced Tai Chi when I was a school student.

Therefore, while we should not accept the erroneous views of certain non-Buddhist traditions that reject the principle of cause and effect, it would be unwise to completely dismiss all practices from these traditions. For example, Mipham Rinpoche's book on divination includes instructions derived from other religions. Additionally, many great masters of Chinese Buddhism have drawn insights from Confucianism, Taoism, Christianity, and other non-Buddhist traditions to enrich their Dharma teachings. Thus, world religions can always learn from one another.

Back to the Vairocana posture. If we sit properly in the seven-point posture of Vairocana, it can surely bring great progress to our practice. Especially, the instructions on maintaining the appropriate gaze and keeping the spine straight and still are of vital importance. It is said:

When the body is straight, the channels will be straight;
When the channels are straight, the energies will be straight;
When the energies are straight, the mind will be straight.

When our body, channels, energies, and mind are straight, it is easy for us to develop meditative concentration. Therefore, when meditating, we should not lie down or lean against anything; it is important to first adjust into a proper sitting posture.

In fact, apart from meditation, even when we are reading, talking, walking, and engaging in other activities, our mannerisms and posture can reflect our thoughts and practical state. In Buddhism, we pay attention to manners and bodily gestures, including what we wear and how we look at someone or something. From these, one can infer whether a person is honest and holds the right views because our mind and body are interconnected.

The difference between the wise and the unwise can often be seen in small details. During my visits to great masters abroad, I observed that their rooms were impeccably clean and free from clutter. Mandalas, lamps, and water offerings were arranged perfectly on their shrine tables. Meditating in such a pure environment naturally fosters a sense of calm and tranquility.

Therefore, we should pay attention to these details and start by adjusting our sitting posture, and eventually establish our practice in an orderly manner.

♦ The essence of transcendent concentration

The body is straight and upright, while the mind abides in a concept-free concentration devoid of any attachment—this is the essence of transcendent concentration. If there is even the slightest conceptual thought during meditation, it is not true transcendent concentration.

Regarding the meditative state, here is a story about Sarahapa:

Sarahapa was one of the Indian Mahasiddhas, or great achievers. He took as his consort a fifteen-year-old girl from a poor background and then went to a forest to practice yoga. Thanks to her guru, Sarahapa, the poor girl was freed from her life of inferiority. Grateful for this, she vowed to serve him for the rest of her life, allowing Sarahapa to focus on his practice.

One day, Sarahapa said to her, “Can you bring me a plate of radish curry?” The girl cooked the dish and brought it to the guru. However, Sarahapa had entered a state of meditative concentration that lasted twelve years before he emerged from it.

[This “attendant” was incredibly patient. She remained present with the guru, no matter what she was doing. If it had been someone else, that person might have exclaimed, “My guru has passed away! He is no longer alive!”]

Twelve years later, Sarahapa finally emerged from his state of concentration. The first thing he said was, “Is my radish curry ready?”

The girl replied, “Dear guru, it is no longer the season for radishes. You requested the curry paste before entering your state of concentration. Now that twelve years have passed, the first thing you ask for is radish curry?” True concentration is free from any concepts, such as existence and nonexistence, bliss and non-bliss, and the like. That is why the girl wondered whether Sarahapa truly possessed transcendent concentration.

Hearing this, Sarahapa felt inspired. After exchanging a few more words with the girl, he attained realization and was able to remain in concept-free concentration on the nature of reality. Thus, he finally achieved true transcendent concentration.

2.2.2.3.2.6. Transcendent Wisdom

Transcendent wisdom has three aspects: wisdom that comes through hearing, wisdom that comes through reflection, and wisdom that comes through meditation.

Transcendent wisdom and the other five transcendent perfections complement one another. Some people believe that it is sufficient to possess wisdom alone, without the need to accumulate merit, while others place importance solely on accumulating merit and neglect wisdom. Neither perspective is appropriate. Sarahapa said:

Without unity with compassion, the view of emptiness
Will never lead you to attain the supreme path.
Yet if meditating solely on compassion,
How can you escape from samsara?

Therefore, to truly attain liberation, transcendent wisdom and the other transcendent perfections are all indispensable.

Some scriptures also explain this issue using similes involving eyes and feet. If you have eyes but no feet, you cannot reach your destination; whereas if you have feet but no eyes, you do not know where to go. Wisdom is like the eyes, while the other transcendent perfections are like the feet. In other words, if you have wisdom but have not accumulated merit through practicing the other five transcendent perfections, you will not be able to reach the other shore of liberation. Conversely, if you only practice the five transcendent perfections without transcendent wisdom, you cannot attain enlightenment. Only when all of them are integrated can you truly embark on the sublime path. This is the union of wisdom and skillful means.

Maybe it is because they engaged in different practices in a previous life, some people prefer teachings on emptiness, so they are quite engaged when attending teachings on *The Root Stanzas of the Middle Way* and *Introduction to the Middle Way*. However, these same individuals become disinterested when encountering teachings on *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* and the *Aspiration to be Reborn in the Pure Realm of Sukhavati*. Such individuals complain, “I only want to study emptiness! I am not able to practice the preliminaries.”

On the other hand, some people are exactly the opposite. When they attend teachings on emptiness, they react as if they are experiencing altitude sickness—

they are completely disoriented and only half-conscious. Then they murmur, “Well, I would better recite my mantras. I prefer to practice generosity, observe precepts, or volunteer for Dharma activities. How wonderful that would be!”

Yesterday, after listening to my teaching on the *Commentary on Valid Cognition*, a person came over and told me, “Throughout the class, I have been reciting the mantra of liberation. Thank you very much!” (*The audience laughs.*)

In fact, we should value both transcendent wisdom and the skillful means of practicing the other five transcendent perfections. As Sakya Pandita suggested, those who like to accumulate merit should make changes in this lifetime by practicing emptiness so they can accumulate wisdom. Likewise, those who are primarily interested in the wisdom aspect of Buddhism should engage more in the accumulation of merit. This is how one should integrate the two.

Now let’s move to wisdom through hearing.

2.2.2.3.2.6.1. Wisdom Through Hearing

Wisdom through hearing refers to thoroughly understanding the meaning of all the authentic Dharma teachings transmitted by a spiritual teacher after listening to them.

The basis of Buddhism should be hearing, contemplation, and meditation. Sadly, many Buddhists do not like listening to the Dharma; they just get involved in receiving empowerments, chanting prayers, releasing captured animals, and participating in the morning and evening chanting routines, as if these activities encompass the entirety of the Dharma. What they may not realize is that listening to teachings is of vital importance, and one should strive to learn the Dharma as extensively as possible. The *Sutra of the Great Heap of Jewels* says:

Hearing extensively, one comes to know the meaning of the
Dharma;
Hearing extensively, one will not commit wrongdoings;
Hearing extensively, one will abandon meaningless endeavors;
Hearing extensively, one will attain nirvana.

Therefore, you must place significant importance on hearing the Dharma. It is only when you have developed wisdom through hearing that you can subsequently obtain wisdom through reflection and meditation. Your practice will not succeed

if you start with reflection and meditation without first acquiring wisdom through learning as a foundation.

Not to mention the Dharma that can liberate us, even to master worldly knowledge we must start by attending classes at school. From kindergarten through elementary school, secondary school, undergraduate school, and then graduate school for a master's or doctorate degree—the whole process is centered on “hearing the teaching,” even though the subjects are worldly. Given that one must spend up to twenty years in the worldly educational system to gain mastery, it is unreasonable to think one might skip hearing the Dharma teachings, which are much more profound than worldly knowledge, and dive directly into the main practice of meditation.

One of my Dharma students left Larung Gar after listening to my teachings on just one shastra. When I asked about his whereabouts, his peers told me he was in solitary retreat. They mentioned, “He said, ‘I have already listened to the teachings of one shastra! That is enough for me. Now it is time to focus on meditation!’”

Sadly, this is not uncommon. These days many Buddhists enter retreat after receiving very few teachings. At least the Dharma student who left Larung Gar had heard one shastra in full. Some others do not listen to any teachings at all and go straight to solitary retreat. This is not the right thing to do. One verse from the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, which I really like, addresses this point:

When pursuing the Dharma,
[The bodhisattva] becomes increasingly diligent,
Listening to teachings day and night,
And never growing weary of hearing.

Some people, perhaps due to a lack of merit, listen to the Dharma teachings for a year or two and then disappear. What a pity! It is now very rare to find someone who has been studying the Dharma for twenty or thirty years. A true bodhisattva is very different. Just as said in the *Flower Ornament Sutra*,

[A bodhisattva] appreciates the Dharma, relies on the Dharma,
follows the Dharma, reaches the Dharma, dwells in the Dharma, and
cultivates the Dharma.

Because such a bodhisattva truly appreciates and relies on the Dharma, they

will never give up hearing the Dharma. In his previous lives, the Buddha was even willing to sacrifice his life for the chance to hear a single verse of the Dharma. Today, one need not risk their life in such a way for the teachings of the Dharma. So, why are some of us so reluctant to hear the teaching?

2.2.2.3.2.6.2. Wisdom Through Reflection

Wisdom through reflection requires more than simply listening to and understanding the teachings of a teacher. It involves continually reviewing these teachings in our minds to clarify their meaning through ongoing reflection, examination, and analysis. We should actively seek clarification for anything we do not understand, striving for deep comprehension instead of settling for superficial or partial knowledge. It is essential that when the time comes to practice in solitude, we are absolutely equipped to manage on our own, without needing to ask others for clarification on specific points.

To generate such wisdom, in addition to individual reflection on the teaching, you should also engage in group discussions. Also necessary are taking exams, attending symposia, and participating in group debates. Instruction on the *Stages of Buddha's Path to Enlightenment*⁴⁷ says:

The wisdom derived from reflection
Is the Great Wisdom,
Because it is a conviction [of the meaning]
Developed through analysis and reflection.

♦ Constant hearing and reflection is very important

Therefore, to attain this Great Wisdom, it is of vital importance to constantly hear and reflect on the Dharma. Recently, a Dharma master at Larung Gar said he had been participating in debates every day for over a decade, so the scars on his palms had never healed.⁴⁸ Upon hearing this, I rejoice in his diligence.

In contrast, some Dharma fellows in the group that delivers daily oral presentations about what they have learned in class after my teaching do not share the same

⁴⁷ Skt. Buddhābhūmyupadeśa

⁴⁸ Tibetan monks, who are the challengers during the debate, use a large, exaggerated, single-sound clap to emphasize their points. Sometimes the monks clap their hands so hard that their palms get chapped.

spirit. A few of them choose to leave the group when the presentations become too challenging for them to follow. Others depart due to a lack of motivation, expressing their struggles with statements like, “I am ill. I do not have the mental strength. Please let me quit!”

One may choose to leave the group, but doing so would be a great pity because listening to, reflecting on, and meditating on the Dharma requires long-term commitment. One or two years of effort is certainly not enough; even ten years may not be sufficient. It would be unfortunate to quit too soon.

During the course of studying the Dharma, some individuals start with great motivation, become indifferent as they progress, and eventually grow weary by the end. These shifts are evident in their eyes and actions. They begin to attend classes only sporadically and eventually stop coming altogether. A few sangha members who received graduation certificates last year showed great promise, yet for some reason, they no longer participate in classes.

One should not leave the Dharma study group because it is very difficult to be a solo practitioner during the stages of hearing and contemplation. This can be explained with the simile of a solo yak. Some Tibetan yaks retain traces of the wildness of their ancestors, which among other things means they like to wander off solo, beyond the control of their herders. Once freed from the herd, these yaks enjoy their freedom. However, this freedom also shortens their lifespan because, eventually, they are eaten by wolves.

So it is with leaving the sangha group on the Dharma path. A solo practitioner who leaves the sangha too soon without long-term engagement in learning the Dharma may fail to attain achievement regardless of hard practice.

The same applies to lay practitioners, particularly those who abandon their Dharma study midway. Many people pursue the Dharma with the goal of attaining liberation, but some seem to approach it as if they were practicing qigong, checking whether they “feel anything.” If they feel warmth or heat in their belly, they continue; but if they still need to eat and drink, they think, “Oh well, maybe this is not for me,” and find an excuse to quit. This is truly disheartening. Learning the Dharma should not be approached in this manner.

For me, it does not matter if it is one person or one hundred people who study the Dharma with me. I respect your choice to stay or leave my teachings. However,

for your own sake, I encourage you to stay close to the Dharma. Once you stray from the Dharma nectar, it becomes difficult to lead a truly meaningful life.

Perhaps I am overly “obsessed” with the Dharma, but I genuinely believe it deserves our dedication and effort. Many people often say that volunteering for Dharma activities is too exhausting, which prevents them from continuing their studies. In reality, that is not the case. Most of us here have engaged in Dharma activities in the past and know that volunteering does not hinder our learning of the Dharma. Regardless of the reasons, I find it unfortunate when anyone abandons their group study.

Leaving a group study can provide a sense of liberation, but what advantages does this newfound freedom offer? In today’s world, many advocate for freedom and equal rights, and some members of the sangha also express a desire for equality, stating, “Now I am equal to so-and-so master; thus, he can no longer supervise me, and I do not need to care for him either.” Is this a wholesome attitude? I encourage you to reflect on it.

Since I started teaching the five great treatises,⁴⁹ some Dharma fellows have been dedicating themselves to written exams, oral exams, and class discussions. I am very pleased that their interest in hearing and contemplating the Dharma has never dwindled. However, others struggle to maintain a steady attitude, which is the biggest issue for today’s practitioners. Those who lack this steady attitude find it difficult to commit to their volunteer work, hearing, contemplation, and meditation, and they often lack the patience to complete the preliminary practices. If we cannot even muster the patience to engage in these endeavors, how can we expect to sustain our efforts for as long as three asamkhyā kalpas to attain Buddhahood?

Consider the great masters of the past—how many years did they dedicate to studying the Dharma? How many years did they devote to practice? This highlights the vital importance of engaging in long-term listening and reflection.

I would like to share my personal experience of listening to teachings at Larung Gar. I do not mean to boast, but since 1985, when I began following the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, I have never missed a teaching offered by Rinpoche without a legitimate reason, right up to his parinirvana in early 2004.

⁴⁹ The five great treatises form the basis of all Buddhist philosophical studies, including Vinaya (precept), Abhidharma (superior knowledge of phenomena), Pramanavartika (the valid cognition), Madhyamika (the middle way), and Prajnaparamita (the perfection of wisdom).

During my early years at Larung Gar, I often stayed up very late to study, which led me to feel a bit sleepy in class on a few occasions. Nevertheless, from the very first day I followed Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, I always went to the Dharma hall for his teachings and listened attentively.

At one point, Rinpoche set up an internal radio system so that sangha members could listen to his teachings in their cabins. This was far more convenient and comfortable—no more climbing up and down the Larung valley to reach the Dharma hall.

However, I felt deeply the preciousness of having encountered Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche and the Dharma, and I wanted to show my appreciation and respect. Despite the convenience of the radio option, I still chose to listen in the Dharma hall, where I could always see my peerless guru in person. Not once did I listen to my guru's teachings by radio at home.

Of course, the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche is a truly enlightened master, and it is normal for a disciple to follow such a guru for ten years, twenty years, or even their entire life. I am not even qualified to be compared with Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, so I am not asking you to treat me in the same manner as I treat my guru. What I want to emphasize here, by sharing my experience, is that perseverance is very important! People lacking a steady attitude can never achieve anything. A practitioner, whether in a city or at Larung Gar, cannot succeed in hearing, contemplation, and meditation without maintaining a consistent and steady approach.

2.2.2.3.2.6.3. Wisdom Through Meditation

Wisdom through meditation involves, after intellectually grasping the teachings, gaining a genuine, unerring realization of ultimate truth through meditation practice. A firm and unwavering certainty arises, liberating us from the entanglements of doubts and hesitations. We gain direct insight into the nature of mind and perceive the true face of reality.

This true realization is the goal of our Dharma practice. It represents the ultimate outcome of our Dharma practice, which cannot be achieved solely through intellectual understanding and theoretical studies. We must gain practical experience to truly taste the flavor of true realization. As the Buddha says, those who have tasted sugar cannot adequately explain its flavor to those who have not.

Therefore, even with foundational teachings, such as the impermanence of life, we should put them into practice to gain practical experience, let alone the teachings on the nature of reality.

♦ Eight similes of illusion

Then, how should we engage in the practice? To begin, we should eliminate all our doubts through hearing and reflection. Then, we gain practical experience in meditation and recognize that all phenomena are empty by nature, devoid of any substantiality, as illustrated in the eight similes of illusion.

1) Dream: As in a dream, all appearances perceived through the five senses do not inherently exist; they only appear due to the perceiver's delusion. *The Moon Lamp Sutra* says:

See everything in the three realms as a dream.

2) Magical illusion: As in a magic show, things arise suddenly from the temporary coming together of causes and conditions. The *Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom* says:

All conditioned phenomena are like a magic show.

3) Hallucination: As in a hallucination, things appear yet there is inherently nothing there. The *Flower Ornament Sutra* says:

All appearances are like hallucinations.

4) Mirage: As in a mirage, things appear, but they are not real. This simile is elaborated in the fourth vajra point in *Finding Rest in Illusion*.

5) Echo: Like an echo, things can be perceived, yet there is nothing present, either externally or internally. *The Moon Lamp Sutra* says:

It's like in a valley when a person
Is singing, crying, talking, and laughing,
The echo can be heard, but cannot be grasped—
So too are all phenomena.

This scriptural evidence is very good. The echo can be heard, but its essence is nowhere to be found. All phenomena are like this without exception. If we understand this, we'll see through the true nature of many worldly preoccupations.

I often think that just one verse of the Buddha's teachings, if one truly accepts its meaning, can without question destroy the seed of samsara and bring the light of liberation, let alone all 84,000 teachings.

6) City of gandharvas: There is neither a dwelling nor anyone to dwell, just like such a city.

7) Reflection: As in a reflection, things appear but do not possess any reality of their own. *The Discourse on Meeting of the Father and the Son* says:

The wise see everything in the world as a reflection in the mirror.

8) Apparition: Like an apparition, there are various kinds of appearances, but they are not really there.

Through the eight similes of illusion, we first come to understand the illusory nature of all the objects of our perception, and that all their appearances are inherently insubstantial. Then, by examining the nature of the perceiver—the mind—those objects that appear to the mind continue to appear, but the concepts that once deluded us into believing that the objects truly exist subside. That the mind abides in the realization of the nature of reality, empty yet luminous, just like the sky, is transcendent wisdom.

This is consistent with the pith instruction in the Great Perfection. Objects appear but have no substance, and the subject that perceives the objects—the mind—also appears but has no substance. The state of appearing yet having no true existence, free from all elaborations, is the true nature of all phenomena. We should rest our mind in such a state.

This nature of reality cannot be refuted nor negated by anyone. Even if tens of thousands of scientists are arguing with you, the view that “both the objects and the mind are like dreams and illusions” is still well grounded. If the logical reasoning of this Buddha's teaching were presented in worldly language, I am sure many people would agree with it.

♦ The category of the six transcendent perfections

To explain the six transcendent perfections in detail, each is divided into three, resulting in a total of eighteen sections. The category of material generosity has three sections of its own, bringing the total to twenty. Adding transcendent means brings the count to twenty-one; transcendent strength to twenty-two; transcendent aspiration to twenty-three; and transcendent primal wisdom to twenty-four.

In greater detail, each of the six transcendent perfections can be further subdivided into six categories, resulting in a total of thirty-six sections. To understand this better, we can examine the section on the giving of Dharma in transcendent generosity.

◉ Giving Dharma consists in transcendent generosity

Some people may say, “I have no money, so how can I practice generosity?” No worries. In fact, as long as we listen to teachings or teach the Dharma, this in itself is a practice of generosity; more specifically, it is the generosity of giving Dharma. In fact, if conducted properly, all six transcendent perfections can be practiced together in the act of giving Dharma for both the teacher and the listener.

When the teacher, the Dharma to be taught, and the disciple receiving the teaching come together, the act of explaining the teaching embodies transcendent *generosity* from the teacher’s perspective.

From the listener’s perspective, listening attentively to the teachings is, in itself, an act of generosity, which includes both offering and giving. This is because listening to the Dharma is regarded as a superior form of offering to the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions. Meanwhile, dedicating the merit gained from listening to the Dharma to all beings in the three worlds is also an act of giving.

As we should know, the merit an ordinary Dharma listener accumulates by dedicating their good actions of hearing the Dharma to all beings, particularly through reciting *The King of Aspiration Prayers*, far exceeds that of giving a few thousand dollars to each sentient being in this world. This is because the money the listener gives, no matter how much, holds no ultimate value for the recipient in obtaining untainted happiness; it cannot truly address the greatest issue, which is attaining liberation from samsara. In contrast, giving Dharma can help the recipient achieve this, making it the most meritorious offering.

◉ Giving Dharma consists in transcendent discipline

That the teacher teaches the Dharma without seeking personal gain or recognition and by avoiding any actions tainted by self-promotion, criticism of others, or negative emotions is transcendent *discipline*.

Of course, when the teacher has a specific purpose, such as inspiring faith in disciples or correcting others' wrong views, they may exhibit certain negative emotions and so forth as a skillful means.

That the disciple refrains from ignorance, jealousy, and other negative emotions or unwholesome thoughts, and listens to the teachings properly, is also a form of transcendent *discipline*.

◉ Giving Dharma consists in transcendent patience

Even if the disciple is slow to understand, the teacher patiently reiterates the meaning of a phrase repeatedly, undeterred by fatigue or hardship and without irritation. This is transcendent patience.

That the disciple can endure the challenges of their health, mood, and the length of the teachings while listening with unwavering focus is transcendent patience as well.

From the explanation of transcendent patience here, we understand that it does not solely refer to the act of having patience toward those who harm you.

◉ Giving Dharma consists in transcendent diligence

That the teacher teaches at the appointed time without yielding to laziness and procrastination is transcendent *diligence*.

Dharma teachers at Larung Gar are diligent about respecting scheduled class times. However, some teachers in the secular education system in China do not adhere to this practice; occasionally, their students have to wait half an hour in the classroom before the teacher arrives, and by the time they finally show up, class time is nearly over. The teacher then simply announces, "Class is dismissed. I'll see you next time!" This is not acceptable. According to the rules at Larung Gar, a Dharma teacher cannot be late, not even by a minute.

That the disciple never shows up late or leaves early and always listens attentively in each class is transcendent diligence. Many Dharma fellows place great importance on listening to the Dharma, which is reflected in their behavior.

◉ Giving Dharma consists in transcendent concentration

When the teacher's mind remains focused on the words and meaning being conveyed—without distraction, errors, or the addition or omission of anything—this is transcendent concentration.

That the disciple concentrates on the teaching is also transcendent concentration.

◉ Giving Dharma consists in transcendent wisdom

During the process of teaching or listening to the Dharma, remaining imbued with wisdom free of all concepts of subject, object, and action is transcendent wisdom.

It is, of course, ideal to attain the state free of all concepts of subject, object, and action. But if this state is not attained, it is important for both the teacher and the disciple to avoid becoming overly attached to the thoughts, such as “I gave a teaching; the merit is great!” or “I listened to a teaching; the merit is great!” Instead, they should recognize that all activities and their associated merits are insubstantial, like dreams or illusions at the relative level, and lack any inherent nature at the absolute level. Viewing everything as a dream or an illusion while remaining free from inappropriate mental engagement—including habitual afflictive tendencies and attachment—is transcendent wisdom as well.

All of the six transcendent perfections are therefore present in the act of giving Dharma.



Lesson 112

“Now look at material giving—offering food or drink to a beggar, ... other quality, will benefit whoever comes into contact with him or her.” [page 253–257]

Currently, we are still going through the section on “Arousing Bodhicitta,” and after that, we will proceed to the section on Meditation and Recitation of Vajrasattva.

Recently, the sangha members have been reciting the one-hundred-syllable mantra of Vajrasattva, and the practice is progressing well. I have discovered that over 90 percent of the sangha members have completed the first few preliminary practices.

Among the staff who volunteer for Dharma activities, a few are too busy to practice, several are too lazy to practice, and the rest have been practicing diligently. Dharma fellows outside Larung Gar should also engage in the preliminary practices in alignment with the teaching progress.

Be it at Larung Gar or in the Bodhi Association outside Larung Gar, it is wonderful that you can participate in group study and volunteer work. However, to undertake this in the long run, you should set plans. Although everything is unpredictable and the timing of our death is uncertain, it is nevertheless necessary for us to make some plans for our practice.

Over the years, as I taught the Dharma to you, I often encouraged my volunteers to create plans for preparing transcripts and making DVDs of my teachings, ensuring that these resources could be completed in a timely manner

so that lay Buddhists outside of Larung Gar could learn from them. I would ask them not only to make plans for how many they should finish each semester but also to ensure that each functional department clearly understands its designated tasks, such as designing or manufacturing, and performs its job well. Of course, such operational management may be too formal and might put a bit of pressure on the volunteers as they need to complete their tasks within the required time. However, sometimes pressure is necessary.

The same is true for Dharma study and practice. Whether in each cohort at Larung Gar or in each study group of lay practitioners outside of Larung Gar, it is important to first have a plan; for example, how many texts will be studied this year and what the focus will be for this semester. Once the plan is established, appropriate regulations can be created to ensure it is executed as scheduled. By doing so, Dharma students will develop discipline.

This applies primarily to those committed to learning the Dharma through this systematic approach. However, for those unwilling to follow this path of Dharma training, it is a different story. Even during the Buddha's era, there were individuals who could not be tamed, let alone in the present day.

If you genuinely wish to study the Dharma, you must adhere to the established learning system and its corresponding rules. Since the "journey" is lengthy, some may choose to quit over time. However, to ensure that most people can learn the Dharma systematically and derive genuine benefits from it, it is essential to implement regulations for them to follow.

♦ **Material giving has all the six transcendent perfections**

Yesterday, we learned that each of the six transcendent perfections consists of six subdivisions. We have seen how this works by examining the section on the giving of Dharma in transcendent generosity.

In the practice of material giving, such as when we offer food or drink to a beggar, when the offering, the giver, and the recipient are brought together and the act of giving is actually accomplished, that is generosity.

Giving others what we would eat or drink ourselves, rather than giving bad or spoiled food, is discipline. Many people are unaware of this and give undesirable

items to others, resulting in little merit. We should give the desirable things, which we would also be happy to use ourselves.

Never becoming irritated, even when asked repeatedly for alms, is patience. This is difficult for an ordinary person. For example, when you are dining, a beggar approaches you for money, and you give them one dollar. Soon after, the beggar returns and asks for more. Typically, an ordinary person may become irritated, saying, “Didn’t I just give you money? Get out!” But a bodhisattva would not react this way. Bodhisattvas will continue to help the beggar without feeling irritated.

Giving promptly, without considering how tiring or challenging it may be, without delay or procrastination, is diligence.

Staying focused without letting other thoughts distract us is concentration.

Recognizing that the three elements of subject, object, and action lack inherent existence is wisdom. These three elements are like a dream or an illusion at the relative level, and at the ultimate level, they are empty by nature, beyond all elaboration. In this context as well, all six transcendent perfections are encompassed.

The same six subdivisions can be defined for transcendent discipline, patience, and so forth.

We can hereby see that although generosity is just one of the practices of the six transcendent perfections, it actually can consist of all six transcendent perfections, so we should practice it often. The *Mahapurusa Sastra* says:

All living beings come
And ask for different things.
A bodhisattva will give them all,
Without feeling weary.

Not feeling weary is important while practicing transcendent generosity. Nowadays, many people choose to release captured animals as a way to practice giving protection from fear. I sincerely rejoice in their acts of kindness. Some groups manage to release animals every month, every week, or even every day, and they have been doing this for more than ten years. There are such groups in Hong Kong and Guangdong Province, which release at least one fish every day. They made such an aspiration and have been doing it consistently. This is the so-called without feeling weary. How wonderful!

♦ Milarepa's words on the six transcendent perfections

The six transcendent perfections can be expanded to ten transcendent perfections.⁵⁰ Regarding the essence of the ten transcendent perfections, Milarepa says:

Apart from cutting off self-attachment,
There is no other generosity.

This is because when we give up belief in any inherent existence, we are no longer attached to anything, so there is nothing we cannot give away or offer to someone.

Apart from abandoning deceitfulness,
There is no other discipline.

The reason we fail to maintain discipline is that we have guile, deceit, and improper conceptual thoughts, which leads us to commit bad actions.

Apart from transcending all fear of the true meaning,
There is no other patience.

In Mahayana Buddhism, the true meaning often pertains to the profound truth of emptiness. If one bears no fear of emptiness, this is patience. Apart from this, there is no other patience.

Apart from remaining inseparable from the practice,
There is no other diligence.

If we can remain inseparable from the practice, no matter what we are doing, we are practicing diligence. Aside from this, there is no other diligence. This is certainly achievable for a superior practitioner like Milarepa, who could remain in the natural state both inside and outside his hermitage. An ordinary practitioner may be able to remain inseparable from the practice during their meditation session, but it is difficult to maintain this when they rise from meditative concentration. They may even quarrel with others or commit other wrongdoings.

⁵⁰ The transcendent perfections of means, strength, aspiration, and primal wisdom are added to the usual six to make what are called the ten transcendent perfections. (Source: notes in *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*)

Apart from abiding in the natural state,
There is no other concentration.

It is the state of never wavering from suchness.

Apart from realizing the nature of all phenomena,
There is no other wisdom.
Apart from acting in accordance with the Dharma,
There is no other skillful means.
Apart from subduing the four demons,⁵¹
There is no other strength.
Apart from accomplishing the twofold goal of benefiting oneself
and others,
There is no further aspiration.
Apart from recognizing the very source of afflictive emotions,
There is no other wisdom.

These words arose from Milarepa's state of realization. Milarepa did not appear to be skilled at expounding Buddhist doctrines, and his way of explaining the ten transcendent perfections seemed different from that of logicians; however, the meaning of his teaching is entirely consistent with authentic Dharma teachings. Moreover, Milarepa's teaching is the most ultimate compared to those scholarly explanations.

♦ **Atisha's teaching on the best of all the elements
of the path**

Once Khu, Ngok, and Drom inquired about the best of all the elements of the path, Atisha replied:

The best scholar is one who has realized the meaning of no-self.
The best monk is one who has tamed his own mind.
The best quality is a deep commitment to benefiting others.

To check whether a person has qualities or not, we may examine whether they

⁵¹ The four demons are the demon of destructive emotions, the demon of the sons of the gods, the demon of the Lord of death, and the demon of the aggregates.

have the desire to benefit others. If the answer is yes, they definitely have a good quality.

The best instruction is to always observe your own mind.

As Mipham Rinpoche says, “To observe a hundred external things is incomparable to observing one’s internal mind.” No matter how much knowledge we have gained through external observation, we are unable to pacify our afflictions. The essential instruction for obtaining liberation is to observe one’s own mind and to recognize its true nature.

The best antidote is to understand that nothing possesses inherent reality.

Of all the antidotes, the most ultimate one is to know that all phenomena are empty by nature. Once we have realized emptiness, any issues, including afflictions and sufferings, are no longer problems.

The best way of living is one that doesn’t align with worldly ways.

Worldly pursuits are endless, and worldly people are consumed by them. As practitioners seeking liberation, if we engage in these pursuits, we will inevitably be trapped in samsara, with no opportunity for liberation.

The best accomplishment is a steady diminishing of afflictions.

Some individuals claim to have had a vision of a deity or gained clairvoyance, but if they become more attached and angrier, it is clear they have not achieved true accomplishment.

The best sign of practice is a steady reduction in one’s desires.

The best generosity is to have no attachment.

The best discipline is to pacify the mind.

The best patience is to maintain a humble attitude.

The best diligence is to relinquish activities.

As said in *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, diligence means joy in virtuous ways.⁵²

⁵² Shantideva, *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Shambhala, 2011.

When a person has given up worldly preoccupations, they will naturally enjoy virtuous deeds.

The best concentration is not to alter the mind.⁵³

This means one does not deliberately try to alter the state of the mind or achieve a specific state of meditation; one simply abides in the natural state of reality. This is the best concentration.

The best wisdom is to recognize that nothing possesses inherent existence.

The most perfect wisdom is imbued with the ultimate views of the Middle Way and is free from any attachment. If one merely says, “I am not attached,” but constantly commits wrongdoings, it is not a state free from attachment. When we not only gain intellectual understanding but also realize the natural state of all phenomena through practice, we will no longer cling to anything, even if we are asked to do so. At that point, we will have already recognized that everything, including money, romance, fame, and status, holds no true meaning.

These profound instructions were given by Atisha to his three main disciples.

- ♦ **Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa’s instructions on the six transcendent perfections**

Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa says:

Contentment itself is generosity;
Its very essence is simply letting go.

The terms “contentment” here and “non-attachment” in Atisha’s instruction both refer to the essence of “simply letting go.”

Being blameless before the Three Jewels is discipline.

That is, a person behaves impeccably, and their inner nature and outer behavior correspond; thus, they have nothing to be ashamed of in front of the Three Jewels.

⁵³ This means neither suppressing thoughts nor following them, nor deliberately trying to alter the state of one’s mind or achieve a specific state of meditation. All deluded thoughts are, in a sense, alterations of the natural flow of awareness. (*The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2011, note 164.)

Not losing mindfulness and awareness is the best patience.

The engagement in any virtuous actions requires the support of diligence.

Seeing all appearances that one clings to as deities⁵⁴ is concentration.

This practice is the concentration with elaboration. We do not meditate on appearances as deities in the concentration without elaboration.

The self-liberation of attachment is wisdom.

When our attachment arises, whether to money or to a person, by seeing its true nature, the attachment will be liberated on its own. This is transcendent wisdom.

In it, there is neither perceiver nor object being perceived;

It is not ordinary, conceptual thoughts;

It is free from fixed convictions of extreme views.⁵⁵

This is the true nirvana, ultimate liberation, and supreme tranquility.

Do not tell these to everyone—

May you remember them in your own mind.

Especially regarding the nature of reality, in addition to the aforementioned great masters, other sublime practitioners have also left their words.

According to the biography of Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo,⁵⁶ one morning when he was sixteen years old, in his spontaneous vision, he went to the Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain, where he saw Padmasambhava surrounded by an ocean-like assembly amid clouds.

Padmasambhava was blissful and bestowed Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo with empowerment and blessings. Then Padmasambhava said this verse:

⁵⁴ Khenpo Sodargye noted that one sees all appearances as the guru, deities, buddhas, and bodhisattvas.

⁵⁵ It means extreme views, such as eternalism and nihilism, which state that phenomena definitively do or do not exist. (Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2011, note 167.)

⁵⁶ Mipham Rinpoche was one of the most important disciples of Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo.

Unblemished by the cognized object,
 Unaffected by the cognizing subject,
 Remaining in the naked awareness indivisible from emptiness—
 This is the very wisdom of all the buddhas.

Having said this, Padmasambhava and his assembly transformed into light and dissolved into Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo. It is said that from then on, he truly grasped the ultimate view of the Great Perfection.

Chan Master Hanshan wrote a poem that says:

My mind is like the autumn moon,
 Clear and bright, reflected on the jade-green water.
 Nothing can compare to it,
 So how can I describe it?

Therefore, the Great Perfection and the Chan School share the same ultimate view. When the distinction between the cognizing subject and the cognized objects dissipates in one's consciousness, and the nature of the mind—the union of emptiness and luminosity—is unveiled, it is referred to as “recognizing one's true nature” in the Chan School, and “primordial awareness” in the Great Perfection. In fact, this is the very wisdom of the buddhas of the past, present, and future, as well as the ultimate state to be realized by practitioners. Thus, Master Hanshan stated that it is indescribable.

♦ Emptiness with compassion as its core essence

To put it simply, the entire vast path of the bodhisattva teachings, such as the six transcendent perfections, can be summarized as “emptiness with compassion as its core essence.” Sarahapa says in his vajra song:

Without compassion, the view of emptiness
 Will never lead you to the sublime path.
 Yet meditating solely on compassion, you remain
 Within samsara; so how could you be free?
 But he who comes to possess both of these
 Will neither in samsara nor in nirvana dwell.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation

To dwell neither in samsara nor in nirvana is the “non-dwelling nirvana” of the level of Buddhahood—the completely perfect enlightenment.

Nagarjuna also says:

Emptiness with compassion as its core essence is only for those
who want enlightenment.

Regarding the union of emptiness and compassion, it means that emptiness is compassion, and compassion is emptiness. Whoever realizes the union of emptiness and compassion attains enlightenment.

Here is a story from the *Commentary on the Precious Garland of the Middle Way*.⁵⁸

A brahmin’s wife named Giving Flowers had a dream in which three swords grew out of her head; one sword fell to the ground, one lost its shine, and the third remained in the air, emitting great rays of light. Later, she gave birth to three sons. One son practiced only emptiness and eventually developed nihilistic views, leading to his rebirth in a lower realm. The second son practiced only compassion and eventually became a supreme being who embraced eternalism. The third son practiced the union of emptiness and compassion and eventually attained perfect enlightenment. As we can see, this union is the realized state of very few practitioners.

As it is said in *The Meanings Proclaimed in the Accompanying Subcommentaries to the Avatamsaka Sutra*:

Compassion without great wisdom will become afflictions.
And
Wisdom without compassion will often lead to serene
extinction.

Thus, the practitioner should practice the union of great compassion and wisdom, rather than adopting only one of them.

♦ Realization of emptiness is the antidote to all afflictions

Once, Dromtönpa asked Atisha, “What is the ultimate of all teachings?”

Group, Yale University Press, 2011, page 255.

⁵⁸ It is a commentary on Nagarjuna’s *Precious Garland*.

Atisha replied, “The ultimate teaching is emptiness with compassion as its core essence. It is like a potent medicine, a panacea that can cure all illnesses in the world. Similarly, realizing the ultimate truth of reality—emptiness—can serve as the antidote to all afflictions.”

Dromtönpa asked, “Then, why is it that some people who claim to have realized emptiness have no less attachment and anger?”

“Because their claims are merely empty words,” Atisha replied. “If a person had truly realized emptiness, their body, speech, and mind would be as gentle as stepping on cotton or as smooth as tsampa soup with added butter. Aryadeva stated that even simply questioning whether all things are inherently empty would dismantle samsara. Therefore, the true realization of emptiness is the ultimate panacea that encompasses all the elements of the path.”

This guru-disciple discourse illustrates that the realization of emptiness is the ultimate antidote. A practitioner who truly realizes emptiness possesses the qualities of all the elements of the path; therefore, such a person would never be arrogant or boastful.

- ♦ **Every element of the path is included within the realization of emptiness**

Dromtönpa continued to ask, “How can all the elements of the path be encompassed within the realization of emptiness?”

Atisha replied, “All the elements of the path are encompassed in the six transcendent perfections. How is this so? When you truly realize emptiness, you no longer have any attachment. Without desires or grasping for anything, whether internally or externally, you always have transcendent generosity. Free from attachment, you remain untainted by negative actions, so you always have transcendent discipline. Without clinging to the concepts of ‘I’ and ‘mine,’ you are free from anger, so you always have transcendent patience. Your mind is filled with genuine joy from the realization of emptiness, so you always have transcendent diligence. Being free from distractions arising from perceiving things as inherently existent, you always have transcendent concentration. As you are free from the conceptual distinctions of subject, object, and action, you always have transcendent wisdom.”

Therefore, when one has realized emptiness, one will naturally achieve all six transcendent perfections.

Dromtönpa continued, “Then, with regard to realizing the truth, can one attain Buddhahood simply through the view of emptiness and meditation?”

Atisha replied, “Everything we see or hear arises from the mind. To realize that the mind is awareness indivisible from emptiness is the *view*.”

Buddhism discusses view, meditation, action, and fruition. Anyone, whether a Sutrayana practitioner or a Vajrayana practitioner, including a practitioner of the Great Perfection, must begin by establishing the right view. The view that Atisha referred to involves observing the mind from which everything arises and recognizing that it is awareness indivisible from emptiness. This view serves as the foundation of our practice.

Atisha continued, “Maintaining this recognition in mind at all times, and remaining undistracted from it, is *meditation*.”

This is a very profound pith instruction. First, we recognize the nature of the mind; then we maintain the ongoing recognition.

To stabilize the recognition, it is important to repeatedly train ourselves to maintain the recognition. It is far from being enough to just have an initial recognition of the nature of the mind. For example, many practitioners in Vajrayana, Chan Buddhism, or the Middle Way initially attain the recognition, but due to their lack of lasting sustained practice, they fail to stabilize the recognition.

Once the view is truly established and stabilized, doing a solitary retreat or not makes little difference to some individuals, particularly to those good practitioners who never part from mindfulness and vigilance. For them, even if they are not in a solitary retreat, they can still remain in the view, because after recognizing the nature of the mind, simply maintaining the ongoing recognition at all times is *meditation* in itself.

Atisha said, “To practice the two accumulations as a magical illusion while remaining in the recognition is action.”

When accumulating merit and wisdom, if we do so like a dream or illusion, without any deliberate grasping or distinction, this is action.

Atisha said, “If you have a true and natural experience of realization, the state will persist in your dreams. If it comes in the dream state, it will continue at the

moment of death. And if it comes at the moment of death, it will come in the intermediate state. If it is present in the intermediate state, it is certain that you will attain supreme accomplishment.” This is fruition.

In a nutshell, recognizing that the mind is awareness indivisible from emptiness is *view*; remaining in this view is *meditation*; practicing the two accumulations as a magical illusion is *action*; and when the two accumulations are completed, the ultimate *fruition* will arise.

♦ The ultimate teaching

Of all teachings, the ultimate teaching is emptiness with compassion as its core essence. The 84,000 teachings that the Buddha has taught through his three turnings of the Dharma wheel are skillful means to cause bodhicitta—emptiness with compassion as its core essence—to arise within us. The *Vimalakirti Sutra* says:

Of the true bodhisattvas,
The mother is the transcendence of wisdom,
The father is the skill in liberative technique;
The leaders are born of such parents.⁵⁹

Therefore, a true bodhisattva sees transcendent wisdom as the mother and the skillful means—the other five transcendent perfections—as the father. All the buddhas, the true teachers, are born from emptiness with compassion as its core essence, which is bodhicitta.

Without bodhicitta, no matter how profound your view and meditation may seem or how advanced your state appears, it will be of no use in attaining Buddhahood. The supreme tantric practices, such as the generation and perfection phases, can bring Buddhahood in one lifetime if practiced within the context of bodhicitta. However, if bodhicitta is absent, such practices are no different from those of tirthikas’ paths.

Please do keep these words in mind! Nowadays, many people only go after high teachings and extraordinary practices without placing importance on bodhicitta. However, without bodhicitta, even if you practice the Great Perfection every day, you cannot achieve any spiritual accomplishment.

⁵⁹ Published at 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha. <https://read.84000.co/translation/toh176.html>

Some tirthikas also practice meditation on deities, recite mantras, and work with channels and energies; they may also reject nihilist views and follow the principle of cause and effect. However, their failure to take refuge or arouse bodhicitta prevents them from achieving liberation from samsara.

The reason Mahayana Buddhism can lead to enlightenment is that it consists of taking refuge, arousing bodhicitta, and practicing emptiness, of which compassion is the very essence.

♦ How to practice the Dharma correctly?

Geshe Kharak Gomchung said:

It is of no use to take all the vows, from those of refuge to the tantric samaya, unless you turn your mind away from worldly pursuits.

Some people delve into Buddhist vows every day, but it is difficult to determine whether they have truly assimilated the vows of refuge and bodhicitta. It is indeed beneficial to have proper manners and conduct, which may inspire faith in others. However, as far as liberation is concerned, it is pointless if you cannot renounce worldly concerns and pursuits, regardless of how impeccable your conduct may seem.

It is of no use to constantly teach the Dharma to others unless you can subdue your own pride.

The merits of teaching the Dharma are undoubtedly great, but if pride grows along with it, no matter how well one teaches, it becomes of little meaning.

It is of no use to practice diligently if you disregard the refuge precepts.

Some people always talk about the high teachings, ask for empowerment, and undertake tantric practices such as tummo, or yogic heat. Regardless of how diligent they may seem, if they lack faith and trust in the Three Jewels, they are no different from tirthikas. The first and foremost requirement for a Buddhist is to have steadfast faith and trust in the guru and the Three Jewels—the foundation of the Dharma. Otherwise, it is of no benefit to engage in any Buddhist practice.

It is of no use to practice day and night unless you do so within the context of bodhicitta.

Even if you undertake a pilgrimage to Lhasa by prostrating every three steps, get up at 3 a.m. to recite prayers, or focus on chanting practice daily, these actions yield little merit, even if your intention is to attain liberation, unless your practice is for the benefit of all living beings.

Similarly, whether you have spent twenty, thirty, or even fifty years—or your entire life—in solitary retreat, without bodhicitta, your practice is of no use.

Here, the wording “no use” does not mean these actions are not the source of merit at all. Instead, it means they cannot bring enlightenment and benefit all living beings.

The instructions above contain the vital key to our Dharma practice, which we should follow closely. Therefore, I hope you will not overlook *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. Some Dharma practitioners have distanced themselves from this text for many years. Although they have received the oral transmission and teachings, they have set it aside. In doing so, they have strayed far from the Dharma.

In short, we must grasp the vital key when practicing the Dharma, so our practice is meaningful.

♦ The importance of taking refuge and arousing bodhicitta

Nowadays, there are fewer teachers or Dharma centers promoting systematic hearing, reflection, and meditation. For those who undertake systematic studies of the Dharma, if they pay little attention to taking refuge and arousing bodhicitta, they may spend years on the five great treatises or engage in many virtuous actions, but their efforts may ultimately be of little meaningful use.

For example, some sangha members at certain Tibetan monasteries spend their entire lives debating. They begin debating as teenagers and continue to engage in it well into their 70s or 80s. Debate is beneficial because it can deepen one’s understanding of the Dharma. However, it is disheartening if a Buddhist only values theoretical studies and neglects the fundamental practices of refuge and bodhicitta.

Due to a lack of genuine faith in the Three Jewels, some well-known Dharma masters skilled in debating made statements such as, “Adopting a vegetarian

diet has no merit,” and “Taking life is not a major fault; sometimes, slaughtering animals should be promoted because it can spur economic and social progress.” Such remarks indicate that they lack real faith in the Three Jewels and show no compassion for living beings. Similar examples also exist in Chinese Buddhism.

Many academic scholars place importance on the intellectual understanding of the Dharma. University professors or teachers at Buddhist academies can present Buddhist doctrines very well. However, without genuine faith in the Three Jewels and true compassion toward living beings, their teachings hold little meaning, no matter how eloquently they speak.

Unless you establish a solid foundation with refuge and bodhicitta, no matter how intensively you study, reflect, or meditate, it will be as futile as constructing a nine-story building on a frozen lake in winter and decorating its walls with frescoes. Ultimately, it makes no sense at all.

We should place great importance on the refuge and bodhicitta practices and not view them as inferior or merely for beginners. We should complete the practices in full, within the framework of preparation, main practice, and conclusion that applies to any path.

It is not enough to simply complete a quantity of practices; the quality of those practices is key. For example, if after reciting the refuge prayer one hundred thousand times you still have not developed the conviction to take refuge, then you should undertake another round of one hundred thousand recitations, and if necessary, yet another round.

You should contemplate while reciting the prayer until you successfully cultivate the mind of refuge. Why is it that Atisha has promoted the practices of taking refuge and arousing bodhicitta? It is because these practices are of vital importance and encompass all the elements of the path.

It is crucial for people of all backgrounds, whether virtuous or flawed, of high status or low, to devote their utmost sincerity and effort to these practices.

♦ **Bodhicitta is also indispensable for rituals**

Especially for lamas and monks who accept donations from devotees, receive offerings on behalf of the deceased, or perform rituals to guide the dead, it is absolutely essential that they have genuine bodhicitta. Without it, their rituals of recitation and purification will hold no value for either the living or the deceased.

I heard that there is a deliverance service in the Han area of China. When donors request the sangha to perform a recitation service for a deceased person, their rebirth situation can even be determined by the amount of the donation. For example, a superior rebirth costs 50,000 yuan, a middling one 30,000 yuan, and a lesser 10,000 yuan. This is not good at all!

No matter how much money you offer to a lama or a monastic, if the service is provided without bodhicitta, then regardless of the amount paid, it is of little use.

On the contrary, those who possess true bodhicitta will naturally recite the mani mantra or the names of the buddhas for the deceased upon learning of someone's passing, even if they receive no offering from the family of the deceased. Guided by bodhicitta, even a single mantra recited by this practitioner will undoubtedly bring immense benefit to the deceased.

Whether you are a layperson or a monastic, as long as you do your utmost to overcome selfishness and recite prayers for others with altruistic motivation, your efforts are meaningful.

Otherwise, performing Dharma rituals becomes merely a superficial act of altruism. In essence, such an act is nothing more than an endeavor tainted by selfish motives. Those who engage in rituals without bodhicitta will be tainted by accepting those offerings and will incur countless faults that can only lead them to lower realms in their next life. One of the examples is the Black Horse Lama from Tsang,⁶⁰ who was reborn in an ephemeral hell due to his misuse of offerings.

♦ It is bodhicitta that can benefit oneself and others

Even someone capable of extraordinary feats—flying like a bird, tunneling underground like a mouse, passing effortlessly through solid rocks, leaving imprints of their hands and feet on stone, possessing boundless clairvoyance, and performing various miracles—without bodhicitta, such a person is merely a tirthika or someone under the influence of a powerful demon.

As a Mahayana practitioner, the most crucial element is to arouse bodhicitta. Whether you are a Dharma teacher or an ordinary practitioner, bodhicitta is of vital importance. When I first visited the Han area of China to propagate the

⁶⁰ The story about the Black Horse Lama is on page 69 of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2011.

Dharma, people there primarily sought health and wealth or desired divine visions and other supernatural powers. These were their goals in pursuing the Dharma.

However, after studying *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, many of them recognized the importance of arousing bodhicitta and adjusted their motivations accordingly. Now, when visiting sacred sites, they pray in front of a stupa or a Buddha statue to truly generate bodhicitta. This represents significant progress.

In fact, the supernatural powers of traveling underground or flying like a bird exist in tirthikas and, of course, in Buddhism as well. However, such accomplishments are not very important, because without bodhicitta, any miracles you can perform cannot lead to liberation.

A person who performs a miracle might initially attract some naive individuals who will be impressed and make offerings. However, in the end, this person can only cause harm to themselves and others. There are even charlatans who have no clairvoyance but pretend to possess such powers. They feign the divine ability to read others' minds, fake revealing termas, and fabricate prophecies for others, among other deceptions. What the charlatans do not only damages Buddhism but also greatly harms themselves and others.

Unlike charlatans, a person with genuine bodhicitta is typically so humble that others may not recognize any special qualities in them. However, even if this individual simply recites the mani mantra once or participates in a conversation, the incredible power of bodhicitta enables them to naturally provide extraordinary benefits to those connected with them.



Lesson 113

“You never know where there might be a bodhisattva. ...
That we may train in the sublime bodhicitta.” [page 257–261]

As said yesterday, those who possess true bodhicitta will benefit whoever comes into contact with them. Such a person is called a bodhisattva.

We never know where a bodhisattva might be found. It is said that many bodhisattvas, using their skillful methods, can even be found among butchers or prostitutes. Jetsün Taranatha’s work, *The Legends of the Great Mahasiddhas in Vajrayana Buddhism*⁶¹ covers remarkable achievers who, despite their low social status, planted the seed of liberation in whomever they had a connection with. As we see, bodhisattvas have various manifestations.

Therefore, a person who seems defiled and errant in our eyes may actually be a bodhisattva. So please do not belittle anyone, as it is difficult for us to discern whether someone has bodhicitta or not. The Buddha said:

Except for me and those like me, no one can judge another
person.

Nagarjuna’s *Discourse on the Ten Stages* also says:

The Buddha said, “Only myself and those like me
Can judge another person.”
Since the Buddha had said so,
Who else dares say, “I can judge others”?

⁶¹ Khenpo Sodargye Rinpoche translated this work from Tibetan to Chinese in 2004.

And

He who judges others' insides by their outsides
 And despises them,
 Will bring harm to himself, destroy his merit,
 And be reborn in a lower realm after death.

Some individuals are good at finding faults in others. When just having dinner with others, they point fingers, saying, "This person is not good," "That person sucks," "I am better," and the like. In their view, nobody but themselves is good enough. In fact, not to mention despising the guru or Dharma fellows, just denigrating an ordinary worldly person can already cause negative effects, both directly and indirectly. Of course, a person who has not assimilated and internalized the Dharma may view anything and anyone as improper, whereas a person who has assimilated and internalized the Dharma sees everything and everyone as impeccable because they have developed pure perception.

Therefore, it is of vital importance to have pure perception. Although we cannot discern whether someone is a bodhisattva, we should be grateful to anyone who has helped us. Additionally, we should regard anyone who arouses bodhicitta in us as a true buddha, whether they are a deity, teacher, Dharma friend, or anyone else.

Why is that? It is because bodhicitta is the foundation of Mahayana Buddhism. If a deity arouses bodhicitta in us, that deity is the kindest to us of all the deities. If it is a teacher who gives us teachings on bodhicitta and arouses bodhicitta in us through their blessings, this teacher is the kindest to us. If it is a Dharma friend who guides us and arouses bodhicitta in us, this Dharma friend is the kindest to us.

In short, just as Atisha would join his hands above his head and his eyes would fill with tears upon hearing the name of his guru Suvarnavipa, we should express the utmost gratitude to anyone who arouses bodhicitta in us. To us, whoever this person may be, they should be regarded as a true buddha.

♦ Bodhicitta and signs of progress on the path

Since bodhicitta is so important, it naturally acts as the criterion to judge whether one has really progressed on the path.

Whenever we perceive ourselves as having developed certain qualities as signs

of progress on the path—whether it be realizing the nature of reality, achieving clairvoyance, concentration, visions of the deity, and so on—we can confidently affirm that they are true qualities if they are accompanied by consistent and steady growth in the love and compassion of bodhicitta.

Mipham Rinpoche says in the *Beacon of Certainty* that whether meditation is right or wrong can be judged through the practitioner’s eradication and realization.⁶² In particular, if there is a decrease in afflictions and an increase in faith and bodhicitta, then the practitioner has truly progressed on the path, and their meditation practice is correct.

If a practitioner has lost their good qualities, leaving only the worthless ones, it is akin to filtering tea—the essence is drained away, leaving only the dregs behind. When a practitioner is left with dregs and has lost their essence, they have made no real progress, and their meditation practice is flawed. The connection between progress on the path and a practitioner’s eradication and realization is akin to inferring fire by smoke.

This is the best way to assess your progress. Very often, practitioners may claim, “I have dreamed this,” or “I have had a vision of that,” but most of these statements are self-boasting or untruths. Even if you seem to have acquired certain qualities, you may not need to confirm with your guru whether they are true qualities or not. You just need to check whether your conviction in the principle of cause and effect, your faith in the guru, and the love and compassion of bodhicitta have steadily increased within you. If the answer is yes, you have acquired true qualities on the path.

If your so-called practical experiences lead to a decline in the love and compassion of bodhicitta, you can be certain that what may appear to be progress on the path is, in reality, either a demonic hindrance or evidence that you are on the wrong path. In such cases, even if you have a vision of a deity every day, it is not a real deity, but a manifestation of a demon.

Demons do make such manifestations. *The Sutra on Arousing Bodhicitta can Defeat Demons* says:

⁶² The corresponding verse is:

Therefore, just like inferring fire by smoke,

The difference between these meditations

Is known from the dividend of abandoned defilement and acquired realization.

Mipham Rinpoche, *Beacon of Certainty*, translated by John W. Pettit, published by Wisdom Publications, Chapter 3, section 2.3.3.2.1.

Demons often find the weakness
 Of those who practice the good Dharma,
 And create all kinds of obstacles
 To sabotage their practices of the good Dharma.

Among those who engage in virtuous actions, there are two kinds of individuals who greatly displease Mara, the demon king, as said in *The Sutra of Great Compassion*:

There are two kinds of individuals who disturb Mara the most.
 What are the two kinds? One group consists of those who devote themselves to teaching the Dharma, and the second comprises those who listen to the teachings with single-minded focus.

Therefore, during a teaching, especially when a profound high teaching is given, Mara is particularly upset, so he tries to enter the listeners' minds, making them fall asleep, become distracted, or develop negative thoughts about the teacher. Worse yet, he may even stir up conflicts between the teacher and the listeners, leading to a breakdown in their relationship, which hinders the study of the Dharma. This has been covered extensively in my teaching of *The Condensed Transcendent Wisdom*.

When a conflict arises between two Dharma fellows or between a teacher and a disciple, it is important to remain vigilant, as the conflict may be instigated by Mara. This is one of his common tricks. Sometimes, he may also manifest as a deity or induce visions during your meditation, with the intent of inflating your pride and leading you to gradually lose your positive qualities. Notably, if you find that your love and compassion, which are central to bodhicitta, begin to wane after having a particular vision or experience, it is a clear sign that you are being possessed by a demon, and this does not require verification from others.

Are there better “test kits” for a practitioner’s progress on the path? All I can say is that the above-mentioned approach is the most effective one.

♦ When can one start to guide others?

When a practitioner attains true realization of the nature of reality, they will inevitably develop extraordinary faith and pure perception toward the guru and the Three Jewels. At the same time, they will naturally generate extraordinary love

and compassion for all sentient beings in the six realms. Moreover, as their realization deepens, their faith and compassion will grow ever stronger.

The love and compassion arising from true realization are spontaneous because compassion and the wisdom of emptiness are indivisible. That is, when emptiness is realized, great compassion naturally arises; when compassion arises, so does the wisdom of emptiness. With great compassion, one naturally starts to guide others.

Once, the peerless Dagpo Rinpoche asked Milarepa, “When will I be ready to guide others?”

Milarepa responded:

The time will come when you experience an extraordinarily clear vision of the nature of your mind—unlike any experience you have now and entirely free of doubt. In that moment, in a way far beyond the ordinary, you will see me, your old father-like teacher, as a true buddha, and a deep, natural love and compassion for all beings will arise within you. That will be the right time to begin guiding others.

Later, many great masters adopted Milarepa’s instruction to decide whether they were ready to guide disciples. Specifically, regarding faith, they had no doubt that the guru is a true buddha; regarding the nature of the mind, they had clearly recognized its true nature—the union of awareness and emptiness—that is indescribable yet vividly experienced. Meanwhile, they had fervent compassion for all beings in the six realms and were disenchanted with the eight worldly concerns. When one has these qualities, one can begin to offer teachings, and the disciples will benefit from the teaching.

Otherwise, when a person has not even developed the basic renunciation or bodhicitta, even if they have taken tens of thousands of disciples and offered teachings to them, it does not differ significantly from hosting a mundane party. Such a “party” can be found anywhere, but the so-called teacher cannot provide any true benefit to the disciples.

To bring true benefit to disciples, the teacher themselves must have the faith of seeing their own teacher as the Buddha, which is essential. The vast Dharma activities that eminent masters have accomplished are, in fact, closely linked to their extraordinary faith, which can be inferred from external signs.

Here is an example of what an external sign can be. There was a young monk at

Larung Gar whom some senior Dharma fellows may still remember. He portrayed the young prince in our theater program, “Buddha Shakyamuni.” During one class, the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche said to him, “I have heard that you are good at memorizing texts. But when I pass away, will you be tearful when you think of me? If your answer is yes, then you may begin teaching others.”

I was there when Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche said this. Although he directed his words to the young monk, I felt it was addressed to all of us Dharma teachers sitting near his Dharma seat at that time, so I took note.

The faith reflected through the external sign of “being tearful when thinking of the teacher” applies not only to the peerless Dagpo Rinpoche and us during our time in Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche’s class, but also to all of you listening to this teaching. Therefore, if you aspire to teach others, you should assess yourself using this criterion.

Some Dharma fellows had spent only four months at Larung Gar when they decided to take ordination. After the ordination was completed, they asked, “Can I leave here and go somewhere to teach?”

They might feel that having a shaved head qualifies them to become a Dharma teacher. What really matters are their qualities. If they have acquired the aforementioned qualities, they can start teaching the next day and take as many disciples as possible in large cities. Otherwise, they should focus on hearing, reflecting, and meditating on the Dharma.

♦ Hearing, reflecting, and meditating on the Dharma

Hearing and reflecting are the foundation of meditating on the Dharma. Without first resolving doubts through study, one will never be able to practice effectively. For a practitioner, the most reliable approach is to base their practice on the love and compassion of bodhicitta, uphold pure precepts, and integrate hearing, reflecting, and meditation without separating them.

If a practitioner focuses only on hearing and reflecting but pays little attention to meditating, or vice versa, they may deviate from the right path. While individual preferences may vary, for most practitioners, it is crucial not to dissociate one from the others.

Sakya Pandita said:

To meditate without having studied
Is like climbing a rock when you have no arms.⁶³

It is impossible to climb a rock without arms. Likewise, it is impossible to progress in meditation without hearing and reflecting the Dharma. It is very important to first eliminate doubts through study.

Eliminating doubts through study does not mean that we must master all the vast and countless topics that exist in the Dharma. In this degenerate age, achieving such knowledge within a single lifetime is impossible. Instead, it means that for the teachings we choose to meditate on, we must thoroughly understand how to put them into practice from start to finish. Any uncertainties should be resolved by reflecting deeply on the teaching until no doubts remain.

In summary: first of all, with so many Dharma teachings available, how do we decide which one to study and practice? The guiding principle should be to choose the teaching that, whether through a teacher's advice or your own insight and observation, is most suitable for your liberation. This teaching should then become your primary focus for hearing, reflecting, and meditating.

Next, eliminate any doubts related to practice by studying the corresponding teachings, and clearly understand how to do the practice from beginning to end without making a single mistake. Then, practice one-pointedly.

The Buddha Speaks of Mahayana Wisdom Seal Sutra says:

All beings in the worlds of ten directions
Should hear, reflect, and then put the Dharma into practice,
Which can dispel the heat of their afflictions,
Cooling their minds, just like having drunk nectar.

A British person once told me he really liked this verse. I asked him why, and he replied, "Because this verse covers the entire practical sequence on the path." I believe he truly understood the point.

Besides the practical sequence on the path, this verse also tells us that studying and practicing the Dharma truly benefits us. Not to mention that putting the teachings into practice, simply studying the Dharma can bring significant changes to a Buddhist. After hearing and reflecting on the Dharma, many Dharma students

⁶³ Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2011, page 258.

have developed genuine faith, which is grounded in wisdom and therefore unlikely to regress. Before undertaking systematic study, some people tend to be more driven by emotions; they may have faith, but that faith can waver. For example, when they see the guru, they cannot stop kowtowing, even to the point of bleeding, but a few days later their passion dwindles. This is not good.

Therefore, we should continually study the Dharma and put teachings into prolonged practice. It is only when we do not dissociate hearing, reflecting, and meditation that our pursuit of the Dharma can be truly beneficial.

♦ Reduce any practice to its essence

While Atisha was staying at Nyethang, Nachung Tönpa of Shang, Kyung Tönpa, and Lhangtsang Tönpa approached him with a request to teach them the systems of valid cognition, or the study of Buddhist logic.

As one of the most renowned Indian panditas, Atisha was undoubtedly very learned in Buddhist logic. However, he replied, “Both the non-Buddhist tirthikas and Buddhists have numerous systems that are all just chains of discursive thoughts. It is unnecessary to delve into all those countless ideas.”

Debating on logic is actually an action of the wise. However, from the perspective of Dharma practice, becoming overly engrossed in verbal debates holds little value. For instance, some monastics have engaged in debates from youth into old age. One scholar once posed a pointed question: “The geshe in the monasteries of so-and-so county participated in debates that lasted for days, yet many animals were butchered in the slaughterhouses nearby, and no one intervened to stop the killing. Why?”

This question underscores a critical issue. Buddhism emphasizes compassion, but those who become too preoccupied with words may miss the essence of truly practicing compassion.

Of course, I am not suggesting that studying Buddhist logic is of no use; in fact, it is a powerful tool for eliminating doubts and wrong views. For example, after studying the *Commentary on Valid Cognition*, we can develop genuine faith in the Buddha and the Dharma without doubt. Therefore, studying Buddhist logic is very important.

What Atisha mentioned in the text emphasizes the importance of meditation

but does not oppose the study of logic. It is essential for us to grasp the true meaning of a teacher's instructions.

For this reason, Atisha said, "Life is too short to explore all the systems in detail. Now is the time to distill everything down to their core essence."

Nachung Tönpa of Shang inquired, "How does one distill all teachings to its core essence?"

Atisha responded:

By cultivating the love and compassion of bodhicitta for all sentient beings as vast as space. By diligently working on the two accumulations for the benefit of all those beings. By dedicating all the merit thus generated toward the perfect enlightenment of every single one of them. And finally, by recognizing that all of these practices are inherently empty, like dreams or illusions.

This is the pith instruction! If we were to visit the great Dharma master Atisha, we would not only seek his blessing but also request a pith instruction from him. If we were to ask, his response would be the paragraph above. His aforementioned response is the essence of all practices.

It is necessary for a young Buddhist to eliminate doubts through the study of Buddhist logic or the Middle Way. However, if most of you can engage in daily recitation, diligently practice the preliminaries, perform good deeds, and commit to being reborn in the Land of Great Bliss, that is already a meaningful way to live your lives.

Among all good deeds, hearing the Dharma is a significant source of merit for Dharma students. When attending a Dharma class, you recite prayers before the class, concentrate on the teaching during the class, and dedicate merit after the class. Participating in a class allows you to spend your day meaningfully.

Personally, I feel more relaxed on days without scheduled teachings, yet I often sense that those days are not well spent. I find greater fulfillment in giving a teaching. After delivering a lesson and reciting *The King of Aspiration Prayers: Samantabhadra's Aspiration to Excellent Conduct* with everyone at the conclusion of the class, I feel that I have truly spent my day meaningfully and that my existence in this world is meaningful.

Therefore, we must reduce all teachings to their essence and practice them

accordingly. Otherwise, if we do not know how to distill everything to its essence, no amount of information, knowledge, or intellectual understanding will truly benefit us.

♦ **How to combine teachings when sitting down to practice?**

When Atisha arrived in Tibet, he received an invitation to visit the esteemed translator Rinchen Zangpo, who was highly respected in the region for his prolific work. At their first meeting, Rinchen Zangpo was eighty-five years old, while Atisha was sixty-one. Fluent in Hindi, Rinchen Zangpo quickly established a rapport with Atisha, who was delighted by their shared language.

Atisha began to inquire about the teachings Rinchen Zangpo was familiar with, naming one after another from an extensive list. To Atisha's satisfaction, it turned out that there was not a single teaching that Rinchen Zangpo did not know. This discovery brought Atisha immense joy.

"How wonderful!" Atisha exclaimed. "The fact that someone as knowledgeable as you already resides in Tibet makes my visit rather unnecessary."

Atisha was quite surprised to discover how well-versed Rinchen Zangpo was, especially since the messengers who delivered the invitation had insisted, "Nobody in Tibet truly understands the Dharma. Only you can help re-establish the Dharma for us!"

Curious, Atisha asked, "How do you integrate all these teachings when you sit down to practice?"

"I practice each one exactly as outlined in its respective text," said Rinchen Zangpo.

Rinchen Zangpo had three shrine rooms. In the morning, he would practice the Shravaka teachings in the room dedicated to the lesser vehicle; at noon, he would practice the bodhisattva path in the room dedicated to Sutrayana; in the afternoon, he would practice tantra in the topmost room dedicated to Vajrayana.

After seeing Rinchen Zangpo's shrine rooms, Atisha remarked in disappointment, "You were mistaken. It seems that my coming to Tibet was indeed necessary!"

Many practitioners have similar problems. They do not know how to view all the deities in the Sutrayana and Vajrayana practices as an indivisible whole.

After reciting the Manjushri mantra one hundred times, they might think, “Oh! Avalokiteshvara is still waiting for me. Now let me recite the mani mantra.” Upon completing the recitation of the mani mantra, they wonder, “Oh! Will Vajrasattva be upset? I will do the Vajrasattva practice.” Once that is finished, they might think, “Oh! Buddha Shakyamuni is also waiting...”

Even some renowned masters practice this way. Though they are very learned, they still hold fixations toward deities and think, “Did I upset so-and-so deity because I haven’t yet made offerings to him?” In fact, this reflects their mistake of seeing the deity as an ordinary person.

Another mistake in practice is that many people understand the teachings of different schools in isolation and have no idea how to integrate all the teachings and put them into practice by following the essential point.

It was because of such an issue that Atisha said his coming to the Tibetan region was necessary.

Then, Rinchen Zangpo asked, “What should I do instead?”

“You should identify the essential point shared by all teachings and practice accordingly,” Atisha advised him.

For example, when engaging in deity practice, we can integrate the practices of renunciation, bodhicitta, and nondual wisdom, so we do not have to practice each of them separately. This is of vital importance! Another example is Guru Yoga practice, which encompasses the essential point of all deity practices. Here is a pith instruction from the Kadampa lineage: There is no need to specifically practice the subjugation of evil, because as long as we pray to the guru and remain faithful to the guru, the 84,000 demons are unable to harm us.

Each demon has its own life-force mantra. When we visualize the guru or enter a state of guru devotion, the life-force of the demons is restrained, preventing them from harming us.

Therefore, a disciple with fervent devotion to their guru cannot be harmed by demons, even if the demons are as numerous as an army. This is the vital point! Those who do not understand this will struggle to gain experience in any practice.

♦ Pith instructions and actual practice

It is crucial to identify the vital point of the practice, based on the pith instruc-

tions we have received from the guru. Once the vital point is understood, we must put it into practice; otherwise, it will serve no purpose at all. Milarepa said:

The hungry cannot be satisfied by merely hearing about food;
they need to actually eat food. Similarly, merely knowing about the
Dharma serves no purpose—it must be put into practice.

The Moon Lamp Sutra also says:

I now have given you innumerable teachings,
But if you do not put the teachings into practice,
It is as if someone has great medicine in their hands,
But [without taking it] their illness cannot be cured.

Therefore, merely hearing and reflecting on the Dharma is not enough; it must be practiced. Whether or not you put the teachings into practice makes a significant difference. Take bodhicitta, for example. You have all heard the teachings and can discuss them, but a person who has truly practiced bodhicitta can be quite different. Such a person's mind is pacified, and they are willing to help others, whereas a person who has not practiced it may only pay lip service, or if they do attempt to help others, they may eventually give up due to minor obstacles.

Therefore, one must put the teachings into real practice.

♦ The sign for good practices

How can you tell whether someone knows and practices the Dharma well?

As we know, the purpose of Dharma practice is to counteract afflictions and ego-clinging. Milarepa said:

It is said that one can tell whether someone has eaten well by
how red their face is. Similarly, one can tell whether people know
and practice the Dharma well by how capable they are in antidoting
afflictions and ego-clinging.

Worldly people like to assess how good a person looks. If a person's face is red, people assume they must have been eating well, whereas if their face is dull and they appear drowsy while listening to the Dharma, people think they have not been

eating well. Some of you look too good— does that mean you have been secretly eating meat? (*The audience laughs.*)

Recently, a “vegetarian club” was established at Larung Gar to promote vegetarianism among Tibetan monks. I heard the club is growing, and so far, there are twenty staff members conducting door-to-door outreach, asking people, “Are you a vegetarian?” or “Do you want to follow a vegetarian diet?”

One person remarked, “What you are doing is truly inspiring. I feel compelled to be a vegetarian; otherwise, I would feel embarrassed. However, the way you promote this ‘no-meat movement’ feels a bit ‘scary’ to me!” (*The audience laughs.*)

Anyhow, recently there are indeed fewer Tibetan monks who eat meat, which is positive. As I often say, you should come to the Tibetan region to pursue the Dharma, rather than for “meat-eating.” I have also suggested that Tibetan Dharma masters adopt a vegetarian diet when teaching Dharma in the Han area of China.

November 25th is International Vegetarian Day. I used to tell the founders of the vegetarian society that they could establish it on that day, which is auspicious. I hope their movement continues to grow. However, the sangha members at the Victorious Mara-Subduing Land do not need such a movement because you are already vegetarians. Adopting a vegetarian diet is indeed a good thing, as reflected in the color of your faces (*the audience laughs*).

Okay, let’s return to Milarepa’s words. According to him, whether someone is a good Dharma practitioner or not depends on their ability to counteract afflictions and ego-clinging. Just as we can tell someone has eaten well by the flush of their face, we can discern when a practitioner has not been practicing well by how defiled and attached they are. No one can disguise their state of practice. Even if they claim to communicate with a “deity” in the same way they talk to a person, that “deity” is certainly not a real deity.

♦ The dividing line between Dharma and non-Dharma

Once, Potowa asked Geshe Tönpa, “What is the dividing line between Dharma and non-Dharma?”

Geshe Tönpa answered:

If it antidotes afflictions, it is Dharma; if it doesn’t, it is non-Dharma.

If it goes against worldly ways, it is Dharma; if it does not, it is non-Dharma.⁶⁴

If it aligns with Buddhist scriptures, it is Dharma; if it does not, it is non-Dharma.⁶⁵

If it creates a positive impact, it is Dharma; if it leaves a negative impact, it is non-Dharma.⁶⁶

- ♦ **Three kinds of view, meditation, action and one sign of warmth**

- ◉ **Three kinds of view**

Master Chegom says:

To believe in the infallible principle of cause and effect is the right view for practitioners with ordinary faculties. To realize that all internal and external phenomena are the union of appearance and emptiness, as well as the union of awareness and emptiness, is the right view for practitioners with higher faculties.⁶⁷ To realize that the view, the one who realizes the view, and the realization itself are indivisible⁶⁸ is the right view for practitioners with the highest faculties.

⁶⁴ Khenpo Sodargye Rinpoche further commented:

If it's about helping friends and harming enemies, or making money with worldly people, it is definitely non-Dharma. If it doesn't align with worldly ways and is focused on good practice, it is Dharma.

⁶⁵ Khenpo Sodargye Rinpoche further commented:

If it aligns with the Tripitaka and the twelve divisions of sutra, it is Dharma. If it does not align, then regardless of how pleasant the teaching may seem, it is non-Dharma.

⁶⁶ Khenpo Sodargye Rinpoche further commented:

If it brings benefit to other beings, it is Dharma. Otherwise, it is non-Dharma.

⁶⁷ Khenpo Sodargye Rinpoche further commented:

The view for those with ordinary faculties is to truly believe in the principle of cause and effect and the existence of rebirth. This is the foundational view that even those following the human and god vehicles, as well as shravaka practitioners, must accept. Unfortunately, even some Buddhists remain doubtful about this view, not to mention worldly people.

⁶⁸ Since the view is the realization of emptiness, the realizer, what is realized, and the process of realization are recognized as being without any intrinsic reality. They only appear as the illusory magical display of awareness, empty and naturally radiant. (Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2011, note 169.)

◉ Three kinds of meditation

Master Chegom says:

To remain in single-pointed concentration on its object is the right meditation for practitioners with ordinary faculties. To rest in the concentration on the four unions is the right meditation for practitioners with higher faculties. To abide in a state free from any concepts where there is no object of meditation, no meditator, and no meditative experience, is the right meditation for practitioners of the highest faculties.⁶⁹

◉ Three kinds of actions

Master Chegom says,

To be as careful about the consequences of actions as protecting one's eyes is the right action for practitioners with ordinary faculties. To engage in actions while perceiving everything as a dream or illusion is the right action for practitioners with higher faculties. Total non-action⁷⁰ is the right action for practitioners with the highest faculties.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Khenpo Sodargye Rinpoche further commented on the three kinds of meditation:

The meditation for those with ordinary faculties is to keep the mind fully concentrated on its object and nothing else. One can meditate in this state for quite a long time, without the need to eat or drink for the entire duration. They can simply sit there and remain undistracted, even when the house next to theirs collapses. However, just meditating in this way may not be beneficial for liberation.

The meditation for those with higher faculties is to rest in concentration on the four unions: the union of appearances and emptiness, awareness and emptiness, bliss and emptiness, and clarity and emptiness.

The meditation for those with the highest faculties is to abide in a state of non-conceptualization in which there is no object of meditation, no meditator, and no meditative experience. As described in *Finding Rest in Meditation*, this type of meditation involves abiding in the innate luminous nature of the mind within the primordial Dharmadhatu, or suchness.

⁷⁰ This means acting without conceptualizing, in the realization that the actor, the action and the object acted upon are all without intrinsic reality. (Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2011, note 171.)

⁷¹ Khenpo Sodargye Rinpoche further commented:

The right action for those with ordinary faculties is to act according to the principle of cause and effect, with the same care one takes to protect one's own eyes. For example,

◉ The sign of “warmth”

Master Chegom says,

A gradual reduction in ego-clinging, afflictions, and discursive thoughts serves as the sign of ‘warmth’ for practitioners of all levels, whether they possess ordinary, higher, or the highest faculties.

Here, the sign of “warmth” refers to the sign of accomplishment. Many people search for signs of progress on their path, such as, “Am I glowing?” “Is there a rainbow?” “What’s this sound?” and more. However, in my opinion, those “signs” are not particularly important. For a practitioner, it is acceptable to have or not have those “signs.”

What is the most important sign? It is to check whether we have lessened our afflictions. If we used to be hot-tempered in the past and now experience fewer negative emotions and less ego-clinging after practicing the Dharma—such as not feeling anything after being slandered—this is a sign of progress on the path. Although such a sign is not like a glowing beam that can be captured by a camera, it is indeed a true sign of one’s accomplishment. This is also the sign for any practitioner, whether they possess ordinary, higher, or the highest faculties.

It is not only Master Chegom who said so; similar words can be found in *The Precious Supreme Path* by the peerless Dagpo. The great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche also said the same words in his teachings. Therefore, a practitioner should constantly examine themselves accordingly.

Through the practice of bodhicitta, some individuals who were once quite ego-centric and selfish have undergone significant transformations, thanks to the blessings of Mahayana Buddhism and the power of consistent, sustained practice. For example, they can shift their focus away from wealth, fame, and physical appearance; they remain indifferent to others’ judgments, whether positive or negative; all they care about is propagating the Dharma and benefiting others. In fact, this is a true sign of accomplishment. While others may not recognize this

some shravaka practitioners remain cautious while walking to avoid stepping on insects. A practitioner’s outward conduct should be as careful as this.

The right action for those with higher faculties is to experience everything as a dream or an illusion, free from any attachment.

The right action for those with the highest faculties is to act without conceptualizing, realizing that the actor, the action, and the object acted upon are all devoid of inherent existence, as mentioned in the teachings of the Great Perfection.

progress, for the practitioner, it clearly indicates significant advancement on their path.

This is a very important instruction, which I hope all of us will always remember in the long course of our Dharma practice.

♦ Choose the teaching to practice for a lifetime

Another important instruction to remember in our practice is to choose one or two teachings as the main focus for our lifelong journey of practice. The texts some of you have studied, such as *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, and *The Precious Treasury of Pith Instructions*, cover many essential points. Reading a few pages each day will certainly benefit you. Of course, you can select one or two of the most meaningful texts and commit to the corresponding practice, much like focusing on your deity practice as a lifelong commitment. Regardless of where you are, it is essential to continue practicing the teachings throughout your life.

Take your routine recitation, for example. Some individuals recite the prayers compiled for the Larung Gar sangha while at Larung Gar, but when they go elsewhere, they change what they recite. By frequently altering their recitations and corresponding practices, they can hardly attain any real accomplishment. Therefore, it is essential to commit to whatever you are currently reciting and practicing for an extended period.

As for me, I am still reciting the prayers I recited twenty years ago, and the list only gets longer instead of shorter, because everything on my recitation list is already set. I am still reading the texts I read twenty years ago, and I maintain the deity practice I started back then.

I do not mean to boast, but since you have come to hear my teachings, I want to share aspects of my practice for your reference. I genuinely believe that a practitioner can learn very little if they constantly make changes throughout this brief lifetime.

Therefore, when pursuing the Dharma, it is essential to know how to grasp its core essence, as Longchenpa says:

The things to be known are as countless as the stars in the sky;
The knowledge to be learned is endless.

Now, we must seek the quintessential meaning of the
 Dharmakaya,
 And arrive at the unchanging stronghold of liberation.

Thus, starting now, we must focus on pursuing essential teachings, such as the Great Perfection, and put them into practice until we reach the unchanging stronghold of liberation—the fruition of the primordial Buddha Samantabhadra.

♦ **Do not dissociate hearing, reflection, and meditation**

Regarding the entire process of hearing, reflection, and meditation, Padampa Sangye explained it with a few analogies. Specifically, he said:

When seeking the guru’s teachings, one should be like a mother
 falcon searching for her prey.

A falcon is slightly smaller than a vulture. When a mother falcon hunts for prey, she continuously circles the area until she captures it. During this process, she flaps her wings and scans her surroundings. In my days of herding yaks, when my friends and I saw a falcon flapping its wings, we would say that the bird was performing “divination.” Once the divination was complete, the falcon would fly toward its target.

In a similar way, when seeking a teacher’s instructions, we must first look for a qualified teacher and examine their qualities. Once we have found a qualified teacher, we should no longer wander but commit ourselves to properly following them and receiving their teachings.

When listening to teachings, one should be like a deer listening
 to music.

When a deer hears a *vīṇā*, a stringed musical instrument, it stands still and concentrates on the sound. We should also listen to teachings attentively and complete the teachings in full. Some people do the opposite: they randomly attend a teaching without careful examination and leave halfway through to go elsewhere. They are behaving in contrast to the deer.

When meditating on the teachings, one should be like a dumb
 person relishing the taste of food.

Whichever practice we are undertaking, whether it be renunciation or emptiness, we must engage in the meditation to the extent that we can truly savor its essence.

When reflecting on the teachings, one should be like a northern nomad shearing sheep.

When a northern nomad shears sheep, he will not leave any spot unshorn. It is the same with contemplating the Dharma: we should analyze the teachings without leaving any word or meaning unattended.

When attaining the fruition, one should be like the sun coming out from behind the clouds.

When the clouds have cleared, the sun will fully emerge, and its rays will shine everywhere without obstruction. The same is true when we attain the fruition: we are free from all obscurations, and our great qualities are revealed.

We should carefully contemplate these analogies and make sure not to dissociate hearing, reflection, and meditation. Hearing the Dharma, reflecting on it, and meditating upon it should go hand in hand. The peerless Dagpo says:

To integrate hearing, reflection, and meditation on the Dharma in a harmonious and non-contradictory manner is an infallible essential point.

In my opinion, if you can study, reflect, and meditate on the Dharma every day throughout your entire life, you are a good practitioner. Conversely, if you focus on meditation after studying just one shastra, then take a pause and eventually stop studying and practicing the Dharma to return to a worldly lifestyle, this is not ideal. As far as I know, I can think of many such practitioners. Of course, there are also many great, accomplished practitioners that I know. It is fair for me to say this, isn't it?

♦ **Bodhicitta is the quintessence of all Dharma teachings**

The outcome of hearing, reflecting, and meditating on the Dharma should be a consistent and real growth in the love and compassion of bodhicitta, accompanied by a gradual and real reduction in ego-clinging and afflictions.

The teaching on how to arouse bodhicitta is the quintessence of all Dharma teachings and the core essence of all the noble paths. It is the indispensable teaching—having bodhicitta is entirely sufficient by itself, while lacking it renders all other efforts futile. In the 84,000 teachings expounded by the Buddha, the ultimate essence is bodhicitta. Even if one generates bodhicitta for just a single moment, the merit it creates is beyond comprehension.

The Sutra Spoken by the Buddha on the Courageous King of All Dharmas says:

Once bodhicitta is aroused,
The accumulation of merit it generates
Cannot be measured,
Even in the slightest fraction.

It is also said in a sutra:

If bodhicitta is aroused
And were to take a form,
The great oceans and vast space
Could not contain it in its entirety.

Regarding the aforementioned instruction on arousing bodhicitta, it is essential that we move beyond a superficial or vague understanding of it. We must put it into practice sincerely and wholeheartedly, as this is crucial.

The closing verse of this chapter is:

*Although I have aspired to arouse bodhicitta, it has not
yet arisen within me;
Although I have studied the six perfections, I am still
filled with selfish desires;
Bless me and all deluded beings like me,
That we may cultivate the supreme bodhicitta.*

Patrul Rinpoche humbly acknowledges that he has not yet developed bodhicitta and that he still grapples with a self-centered mindset. Therefore, he prays to the sublime ones for blessings for himself and for other ignorant beings like him. As practitioners, we must pray for the blessings and support of the gurus,

buddhas, and bodhisattvas to help us recognize and repent our faults, ultimately allowing us to cultivate true and supreme bodhicitta.

[This concludes *Arousing Bodhicitta*,
the Root of the Great Vehicle.]



Lesson 114

How to Practice the Hundred-Syllable Mantra of Vajrasattva

Today, I will briefly talk about how to practice the hundred-syllable mantra of Vajrasattva.

I will not cover this practice in detail today. I am providing the instruction in advance because some sangha members at Larung Gar have moved on to this practice in their preliminaries. According to the practical sequence in the liturgy for the preliminary practice by Mipham Rinpoche, the practice of arousing bodhicitta is followed by the practice of offering the mandala. However, according to the sequence in *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, the next practice is the hundred-syllable mantra of Vajrasattva. Therefore, those who have completed the preliminary practice of arousing bodhicitta may proceed to the hundred-syllable mantra.

The preliminaries include completing one hundred thousand repetitions of the hundred-syllable mantra, which may take a bit longer than the other four preliminary practices. If you are indolent, you may even find reciting the short Vajrasattva mantra ten thousand times a bit overwhelming, let alone one hundred thousand repetitions of the hundred-syllable mantra. However, it is a different story for a diligent practitioner.

For example, many disciples of Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu, the root guru of Patrul

Rinpoche, have followed their guru's legacy by reciting this mantra one million times, two million times, or even more. Therefore, completing a hundred thousand repetitions of the hundred-syllable mantra is not too much.

♦ **The importance of purifying negative actions and obscurations**

In the course of our succession of lives without beginning, or even just within this lifetime from our birth until now, each of us must have committed many wrongdoings. Some of these wrongdoings are driven by our afflictions, such as desire, anger, jealousy, and the like, making them inherently wrongful deeds. In fact, it is very easy to commit such wrongdoings. By simply reflecting on our thoughts over the course of a single day, we'll notice the constant emergence of our uncontrollable negative emotions, not to mention the entirety of our lives since time without beginning. Therefore, we must have committed innumerable inherently wrongful deeds.

Also, since we have taken refuge in Buddhism and received the three kinds of precepts,⁷² it is very likely that we have committed transgressions—the wrongful deeds as stipulated by the Buddha. Except for the sublime masters, ordinary people have certainly committed the two types of wrongful deeds: inherently wrongful deeds and the wrongful deeds stipulated by the Buddha. Therefore, it is extremely important to purify them through confession.

Some people believe they are untainted and have never committed wrongdoings, but this is simply impossible. Especially during the degenerate era, it is easy for individuals to develop wrong, biased, or perverted views, and hard for them to have right views, mindfulness, and vigilance. That is why practicing the hundred-syllable mantra and other preliminaries is indispensable.

Each preliminary practice is essential. Regarding the refuge practice, without a solid determination to take refuge, we cannot even be considered Buddhists. Therefore, completing one hundred thousand repetitions of the refuge prayer is not a daunting task. Instead, we should realize that to strengthen our determination for refuge, we ought to continue reciting the prayer even after reaching that number.

In terms of bodhicitta practice, many individuals speak of “benefiting living beings,” yet their actions often stem from a desire to benefit themselves. If the

⁷² The precept of individual liberation (pratimoksha), the bodhisattva vows, and the tantric samayas.

bodhicitta mind has not yet arisen, merely reciting the bodhicitta prayer one hundred thousand times will not suffice.

The recitation serves as a sustained practice to demonstrate to the guru and the Three Jewels that, despite our current progress, we are committed to benefiting others and are determined to complete the one hundred thousand repetitions of the bodhicitta prayer. This determination is invaluable. On the other hand, for those who are hesitant to recite the prayer that many times but still profess a desire to help others, their claims may be unrealistic.

That said, everyone should practice the preliminaries. Of course, those who are manifestations of bodhisattvas do not have to do so. For example, if a practitioner is Buddha Amitabha appearing as an ordinary person or a non-Buddhist, they may choose not to practice the preliminaries. However, as Buddhist practitioners, we should always reflect on our actual state, including our refuge and altruistic intentions. If we recognize that we are not yet firmly established in refuge and bodhicitta, we must stay grounded and practice the preliminaries diligently.

Many people often say, “My karmic debts are abundant,” and this may very well be true. Most of us have accumulated a significant number of negative actions. Why is this the case? If we examine our minds, we can see that we easily generate negative emotions like greed and anger, while it is often difficult for us to cultivate even a small amount of faith or compassion. As a result, we are motivated to commit wrongdoings and can do so easily, but we show little interest in positive actions. Such mental states arise from our obscurations. Therefore, it is essential for each of us to seize the opportunity to cleanse ourselves of these obscurations.

As the great masters of the past have stated:

There is nothing good about negative actions—except that they can be purified through confession.⁷³

Thus, negative actions can be purified through confession, but to do so, the confession should rely on the four powers. When an ordinary practitioner is meditating and reciting Vajrasattva, even if they cannot visualize the deity in great detail, they must still incorporate the four powers.

♦ The Four Powers

⁷³ The translation is taken from Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2011, page 264.

◉ The power of support

Support is provided by visualizing deities such as Buddha Shakyamuni, Amitabha, Padmasambhava, the Thirty-Five Buddhas, your root guru, or Vajrasattva in this specific preliminary practice and taking refuge. Then, in the presence of the deity, we sincerely confess, “I have committed countless negative actions. Now with my faith in you, I confess before you. Please have compassion for me! Please cleanse and purify me of all my negative actions and obscurations, so that not a single one remains!”

This is the support for our confession, which grants us the power of support. According to Patrul Rinpoche, before any confession, it is indispensable to arouse the bodhicitta of intention and application.

◉ The power of regretting having done wrong

A person who has taken poison will undoubtedly experience a sense of remorse when tormented by the toxin. The misdeeds we committed in the past, such as taking life, stealing, transgressing precepts, and more, are far more harmful than any toxin and will yield more terrifying karmic results. The lifestyles of many Chinese are built upon misdeeds. Take food, for example; they dare to eat everything, including fish, shrimp, frogs, monkey brains, and the like—activities that are inherently negative.

Therefore, we should recall all the negative actions we have taken in the past and confess them with sincere regret, saying, “Ah! I was so reckless in the past that I committed this or that misdeed with my misguided friends. If I do not confess them right away, they will accumulate and be stored in my alaya or all-ground consciousness. Then, I will go nowhere but to the hells in my future life.”

Such fierce regret is the power of regretting having done wrong.

◉ The power of resolution

Just as a person tormented by toxins will swear never to take poison again, when we understand the karmic consequences of negative actions, such as taking life, we should resolve never to kill again from this very day forward, even at the cost of our own lives.

Such a resolution to never commit any misdeed again is the power of resolution.

◉ The power of action as an antidote

This power of action as an antidote involves many positive activities, such as cultivating bodhicitta, which can eradicate all misdeeds. A state of non-conceptualization, in which there is no object of confession, no confessor, and no confessed experience, is also a way to confess for those with the highest faculties. Nevertheless, according to the tradition of lineage masters, the most supreme method of confession is the practice of Vajrasattva.

In short, the method of confession you adopt is the power of action as an antidote.

♦ Vajrasattva embodies the hundred deities in one

Of all the innumerable buddhas of the ten directions, Vajrasattva embodies the hundred deities in one.

What does “embodying the hundred deities in one” refer to? The teachings on *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*⁷⁴ cover a hundred peaceful and wrathful deities that embody all the buddhas, bodhisattvas, dakinis, and Dharma protectors, and all these deities are in turn embodied in one as Vajrasattva. Put another way: All tathagatas of the ten directions are embodied in one as Vajrasattva, and Vajrasattva manifests as all the tathagatas of the ten directions. This is akin to the relationship between the sun and sunshine: The sun emits sunshine, and sunshine comes from the sun. Therefore, as long as we perfect the practice of Vajrasattva, we obtain the great qualities of a hundred deities.

The reason Vajrasattva is considered the most supreme in terms of confession relates to the aspiration he made in his causal stage. Each bodhisattva has a specific aspiration during this stage; for example, Amitabha aspires to ensure that beings who’ve heard his name are reborn in the Land of Great Bliss. In comparison, Vajrasattva focuses on purifying negative actions, as he vowed in a previous life: “May all beings be purified of their negative actions accumulated since beginningless time simply by hearing my name, seeing my form, thinking of me, or reciting my heart mantra that contains my name. Otherwise, I won’t attain perfect enlightenment.”

⁷⁴ *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* was first translated into English in 1927. Its title was coined by its translator, the American scholar W. Y. Evans-Wentz, in imitation of the famous (and equally mistitled) *Egyptian Book of the Dead*. The actual name of the text is *Bardo Tödrol Chenmo* (བར་དོ་རྒྱལ་ཆེན་མོ་, Wyl. bar do thos grol chen mo), which means “*The Great Liberation through Hearing in the Bardo*,” a terma discovered by Karma Lingpa at the age of 15, on top of a mountain in Tibet. (Source: Rigpawiki.org)

Now that Vajrasattva has attained Buddhahood, anyone willing to undertake the practice can undoubtedly purify all their misdeeds and obscurations. Because of Vajrasattva's extraordinary aspiration, we should meditate on him and recite his mantra.

Of course, in the wisdom of Dharmadhatu, or the all-encompassing space, all the buddhas of the ten directions are indivisible. However, given our differing levels of faculty and karmic forces, if we wish to engage intentionally in enlightened activities such as pacifying or enriching, it is essential for us to meditate and recite on a specific deity.

For example, many eminent Tibetan masters like to recite *Chanting the Names of Manjushri* and the Manjushri mantra, because Manjushri embodies the primordial wisdom of all buddhas. Therefore, those who practice Manjushri can significantly enhance their wisdom.

The same is true for other deity practices. For instance, to cultivate compassion, we may pray to Avalokiteshvara and practice great compassion; to gain the power of wisdom, we may pray to Mahasthamaprapta; to purify negative actions and obscurations, we should meditate and recite on Vajrasattva.

♦ The actual meditation on Vajrasattva

It is better to first place a statue of Vajrasattva as a support in the shrine room. If that is not possible, we may at least put up a picture of Vajrasattva, in the same way that we would place a picture of the field of merit for our practices of taking refuge and arousing bodhicitta.

For the visualization that follows, we may visualize Vajrasattva in the form of the Sambhogakaya Buddha in inseparable union with his consort, Vajratopa, if we possess a strong understanding and faith in Vajrayana. However, if we have not yet cultivated confidence in the view, meditation, conduct, and fruition, and instead harbor ordinary thoughts about the union posture, we can visualize Vajrasattva alone. Whether choosing to visualize him alone or in union, Vajrasattva is seated above our heads, facing the same direction as us.

The teacher Vajrasattva, whom we visualize sitting above our heads, is identical in nature to our own root guru. Rather than embodying the essence of just one specific deity, Vajrasattva embodies the essence of all hundred deities in one. He is

known as “Vajrasattva, the single deity of the great secret.” Among the infinite array of peaceful and wrathful deities, there is none that he does not embody.

In our visualization, Vajrasattva is not a flat and static image like a thangka or a fresco, but a three-dimensional figure. We should visualize Vajrasattva neither as inert nor inanimate like a clay or metal statue, which is solid and material, nor as possessing the solid substance of flesh and blood. He is like a rainbow appearing in space—it appears but has no intrinsic existence. This is how we visualize a deity in the generation stage of tantric practice.

Also, we should have a clear visualization of Vajrasattva. Meditate on all the details, such as the eyebrows, the eyes, the ornaments, and more, and see them clearly in our visualization as they are depicted in the thangka. While doing so, we should remove any notion that Vajrasattva has substance of his own. In other words, we should be aware that Vajrasattva is empty in appearance, vividly present but without any inherent substance, like reflections of the moon in water or a rainbow appearing in space. As we all know, a rainbow is indeed beautiful but is merely an illusory existence; the same is true for Vajrasattva.

The description of Vajrasattva in *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* is neither too extensive nor too brief, and we should read it repeatedly before starting our practice. There are several termas in Tibet that cover the visualization of Vajrasattva, some of which are so extensive that a practitioner may struggle to make a clear visualization. The description in *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* is of the perfect length, so we should use it as a reference for our visualization.

♦ Reciting the hundred-syllable mantra

When the visualization of Vajrasattva is complete, we may proceed to the recitation of the hundred-syllable mantra.

Generally speaking, it is quite challenging for most practitioners to visualize these syllables arranged in a rotating circle, as this visualization requires training in the generation stage and involves more than just “rotation.”

Instead, we might simply envision the teacher Vajrasattva seated above us as one in essence with all the buddhas of the ten directions and our root guru. We take refuge in him, proclaiming, “From now on, you are my only refuge, my only protector, my only guide, my only shelter, and my only supreme teacher. In this world, I place all my trust and faith in you. I have no other refuge or protection but

you.” Then, we generate bodhicitta, stating, “From now on, I vow to make whatever efforts are necessary until not one being remains in samsara!”

After taking refuge and generating bodhicitta, we begin to reflect on all the negative actions we can recall from our countless samsaric existences throughout beginningless time. This includes actions such as taking life, stealing, engaging in sexual misconduct, lying, and others. Bring each of these actions to mind one by one, and as we do so, recite the hundred-syllable mantra while allowing tears of remorse to flow.

Very often, when we cry in the presence of others, the tears are caused by our negative emotions such as attachment and anger, making such crying meaningless. However, when we cry in the presence of Vajrasattva, driven by our deep regret for the misdeeds committed in the past, this crying is of great benefit.

Once, a thief regretted stealing and said, “I did something wrong. What a bad person I am! I will never do it again! If you can forgive me, I promise I’ll change from now on!” We should adopt the same attitude when reciting the hundred syllables. That is, we first acknowledge our past wrongdoings, then resolve never to commit misdeeds again, which is very important for this practice.

I also have great confidence in the practice of the hundred-syllable mantra. Perhaps because I have committed many negative actions, I always feel a sense of regret when reciting the mantra, whether in the morning or at night. Ordinary people may share this experience with me, so we should all recite this mantra.

Dharma practitioners differ in their practical experience. As far as I know, some practitioners began well but later regressed, while others experienced the opposite. These individuals started with many misguided thoughts, but after their negative actions and obscurations were purified, their positive qualities were revealed, allowing them to progress on the path.

Anyway, I hope all of us can treat this practice of confession seriously.

♦ Experiences arise after obscurations are purified

The great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche says in *The Heart Essence: My Heart’s Advice*:

When the crystal mirror of your own mind is covered completely
With the thick layer of dust that is the adventitious defilements,

It is difficult for the reflection of profound, clear samadhi to appear,
 So strive to clean it with the pure cloth of confession's four powers.⁷⁵

Some practitioners are upset, saying, “Why can’t I have a vision of the deity? How come I cannot visualize the content clearly? Why can’t I achieve success in my practice?” In fact, it is due to their karmic obscurations. When the mind is clouded by these obscurations, it is impossible for a practitioner to obtain any experience of the generation stage, the completion stage, or the Great Perfection if the obscurations are not purified.

Just as a mirror covered with a thick layer of dust cannot reflect any image, when our mind is obscured by the dust of our negative actions accumulated since time without beginning, we cannot even understand a general Dharma teaching or memorize a verse, let alone attain any experience such as profound samadhi—a state of meditative concentration.

Therefore, some teachers offer the instruction, saying, “If no experience arises during your retreat, you must confess and pray to the guru, which is of vital importance!” When praying to the guru, we receive blessings, either directly or through a dream, which can dispel our obstacles. By confessing through the recitation of the hundred syllables, our negative actions and obscurations are purified, allowing realization to arise.

Of course, we should pray to the guru with fervent faith and recite the hundred syllables clearly with the four powers and recall of our misdeeds.

♦ Four meditation sessions

It is best to have four or at least two meditation sessions each day. We can recite the hundred syllables while working on something else, but it is not as effective since we cannot undertake the visualization in great detail. Therefore, if possible, we should do the practice in distinct meditation sessions.

Those who listen to this teaching at Larung Gar are asked to complete one thousand daily repetitions of the hundred-syllable mantra this time. If one can manage four meditation sessions, one may recite it two or three hundred times

⁷⁵ Translated by Adam Pearcey, 2005, revised 2015.

during each session in the morning, before noon, after noon, and at night. This should not be too difficult.

If possible, we should visualize the entire process simultaneously; otherwise, we can alternate. As we recite the mantra, we can sometimes reflect on our negative actions, while at other times, we can focus on the body of Vajrasattva or his great qualities, think of benefiting living beings, visualize the purification of all obscurations, or work on the four powers, etc.

There are moments when we are unable to visualize anything, so we simply recite the hundred-syllable mantra: “*om vajrasattva samayam anupālaya vajrasattva-tvenopa-tiṣṭha dṛḍho me bhava sutoṣyo me bhava supoṣyo me bhava anurakto me bhava sarva-siddhiṃ me prayaccha sarva-karma śuca me cittam śreyaṇ-kuru hūm ha ha ha ha hoh bhagavān sarva-tathāgata-vajra mā me muñca vajrī-bhava mahā-samaya-sattva āh*”

Everyone may pronounce the mantra differently and display various facial expressions when reciting it, which is perfectly acceptable. In addition to completing the recitation as part of our preliminary practices, we should also recite the mantra daily. As stated in Patrul Rinpoche’s *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* and Mipham Rinpoche’s *The Qualities of One Hundred Mantras that Purify Karmic Obscurations*, repeating the hundred-syllable mantra twenty-one times while meditating on Vajrasattva constitutes what is called “the blessing of downfalls.” This practice helps prevent the negative consequences of those downfalls from developing or increasing. By reciting the mantra 108 times without interruption, one can remedy all violations and breaches, safeguarding against rebirth in the three lower realms.

- ♦ **Practitioners should place importance on the hundred-syllable mantra**

As previously mentioned, we can be certain that we have engaged in many negative actions, some of which we remember and acknowledge, while others remain unrecognized. In addition to the negative actions that we committed deliberately, the number of involuntary negative actions—such as accidentally trampling a bug or unintentionally harming others—is also countless. Therefore, practitioners must pay close attention to the recitation of the hundred syllables while meditating on Vajrasattva.

Once, the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche stayed in a residential building in

Chengdu, and a Tibetan security officer was responsible for protecting Rinpoche. Although he was Tibetan, the officer did not know how to read Tibetan, so he was reading the Chinese version of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*.

After learning from the book how powerful the hundred-syllable mantra is, he developed great confidence. The great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche had an extended stay in Chengdu, and the security officer had little to do, so he simply showed up in his uniform and recited the mantra every day.

While he diligently practiced Vajrasattva, a few young monks accompanying Rinpoche were busy being mischievous and playing around. Upon seeing this, I joked with him, saying, “A man in the uniform of a security officer is more diligent than monks!” He laughed and replied, “The hundred-syllable mantra is so powerful! What a pity I didn’t know it in the past!” He read *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* every day and focused on his recitation of the hundred syllables.

Like him, anyone who understands the power of the hundred-syllable mantra will place great importance on the practice. Many tantras state that Vajrasattva enables supreme confession and that the hundred-syllable mantra is the mantra of supreme confession. Now that we have encountered such a supreme mantra, we should truly appreciate it. Meanwhile, to strengthen our faith in the practice, we should learn more about it before proceeding to the recitation and meditation.

When having workers build their cabins at Larung Gar, some Dharma fellows supervise the projects. Why is this necessary? They want to ensure the quality of construction. The same principle applies to the recitation of the hundred-syllable mantra; we must ensure the quality of our practice and not merely complete the repetitions to qualify for tantric teachings.

If one practices solely to receive tantric teachings and mindlessly finishes the recitation, they may pass the review by the administrative person in charge or the Dharma master, thus managing to receive the teachings. However, this is of little use because one’s negative actions and obscurations are not yet purified. If they remain unpurified, no matter how many times one has received empowerment or how profound the tantric teachings might be, the benefits will be minimal. This situation is akin to a farmer who cannot harvest anything from an unplowed field, regardless of what seeds are planted there.

Therefore, a practitioner must first make their mind workable. To achieve this, on the one hand, you must observe precepts through mindfulness and vigilance,

and cultivate bodhicitta. On the other hand, you should purify misdeeds and obscurations through reciting the hundred-syllable mantra, while meditating on Vajrasattva with the four powers.

According to the *Secret Biography of Khenpo Nagwang Pelzang*, after receiving the teachings of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, he asked his guru which practice he should engage in, and his guru instructed him to complete the repetition of the hundred-syllable mantra one hundred thousand times. It took Khenpo Nagwang Pelzang fifty days to complete the practice.

When the recitation was complete, signs of misdeeds being purified appeared in his dreams, his body felt relaxed during the day, and he had a clear and lucid mind while meditating. Khenpo Nagwang Pelzang shared this with his guru, who was very pleased.

Of course, Khenpo Nagwang Pelzang was a great achiever with whom we cannot compare ourselves. However, in terms of the pace of practice, if it took him fifty days, we should be able to complete the recitation in one hundred days. In fact, the key is whether we pay enough attention to the practice. We will certainly focus on our practice if we understand how important Vajrasattva practice is for this lifetime and for many lives to come.

However, people value different things. Some consider buying a house or a car so important that they are willing to invest all their savings and energy into it. It is understandable if a worldly person chooses to do this.

But if we take a broader perspective on the infinite lives in samsara, we'll realize that the most worthwhile pursuit is to complete at least one round of the preliminary practices in this precious human body within this lifetime. If we achieve this, at the moment of our death, we can say that our human body was not wasted and that our life was not in vain.

So, I hope we can all make a sincere confession. Whether we are lay practitioners or monastic members, we know ourselves well; we may have committed many misdeeds in the past, and it is difficult to predict what we will do in the future. Therefore, we should strive to recite the mantra as much as possible.

In fact, let alone repeating the hundred-syllable mantra one hundred thousand times, simply reciting it once can bring incredible benefits and blessings. Moreover, as Mipham Rinpoche states in *Luminous Essence: A Guide to the Guhyagarbha Tantra*, while reciting a secret mantra, even if we do not know how to visualize

it correctly or understand its embedded meaning, we can still obtain supreme blessings by merely reciting it. This is because the mantra consists of words of truth.

Moreover, while practicing the hundred-syllable mantra, you may also recite *The Confession of Downfalls to the Thirty-Five Buddhas*. There are quite a few confession practices in Chinese Buddhism, such as chanting *Confessing to the Eighty-Eight Buddhas*, prostrating while following *One Hundred Thousand Buddhas' Jeweled Repentance*, reciting *Emperor Liang's Jeweled Repentance*, and others during the morning and evening routine recitations. Tibetan Buddhism also has practices with great blessing power, such as the *Ultimate Inexpressible Confession*. If time permits, we may undertake the practices listed above as well. Alternatively, we may simply recite a short prayer of confession, which is also good.

♦ The liturgy used for our practice of the hundred syllables

Which liturgy should we use for the practice?

We may choose to use Patrul Rinpoche's *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* or Mipham Rinpoche's *Illuminating the Path to Liberation*. Specifically, although Mipham Rinpoche's liturgy is brief, the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche remarked, "*Illuminating the Path to Liberation* is the essence of Longchen Nyungtik as it encompasses all the essential points of the practices. It serves as an extremely precious practical instruction for Indians, Tibetans, Chinese, and others." Consequently, we will be following Mipham Rinpoche's liturgy for our preliminary practices this time.

Regarding the verbal meaning of the hundred syllables, Lama Yuktok Chatralwa composed a work to provide an explanation. I wanted to write an explanation as well in the past, but I have not yet found the time for it. However, it does not matter that you do not have my explanation because your practice is to meditate on Vajrasattva while reciting the mantra.

The hundred-syllable mantra is in Sanskrit, so, like the Avalokiteshvara mantra and the Shurangama mantra, you are not required to meditate on the verbal meaning of the hundred-syllable mantra. At most, you are asked to visualize its syllables arranged around the hum in a circle. As mentioned earlier, you may visualize the circle rotating if you can, but other than this, you do not have to visualize anything else about the mantra.

Some individuals do not visualize according to the instructions. They skip what should be visualized and attempt to visualize what is not required. They ask questions such as, “What appears above Vajrasattva?” and “What’s on his back?” They have too many such thoughts. In fact, it is sufficient if you visualize according to the liturgy. It is good enough if you can do this well. There is no need to add more to your visualization.

♦ **Practitioners should constantly recite the hundred-syllable mantra**

In a few days, we’ll have the Vajrasattva Dharma assembly. I hope we will all take the opportunity to make a good confession.

As for me, I may be too occupied to complete the recitation of the Vajrasattva mantra four hundred thousand times during the Dharma assembly. However, for the past twenty years, I have practiced confession on a daily basis and have never missed a day of reciting the hundred-syllable mantra, the Vajrasattva mantra, and the confession prayers. Take *The Confession of Downfalls to the Thirty-Five Buddhas*, for example; I normally recite it three or four times a day, or at least once. No matter how tired or busy I am, I always finish the routine recitation, even if it is already very late at night. This is because I believe these practices are too important for me to miss.

As humans, we still have the opportunity to confess our misdeeds. Had we been reborn as animals or celestial beings, we would not have the chance to recite the hundred-syllable mantra even once.

The hundred-syllable mantra is the quintessence of all mantras. Those who have received the empowerment can refer to some tantric texts such as the *Guhyagarbha Tantra* and *The Qualities of One Hundred Mantras that Purify Karmic Obscurations* to understand the power of mantras, including the hundred-syllable mantra. By doing so, one can definitely develop solid faith. A devoted practitioner will appreciate this practice, and their practice will be effective.

You must not practice it mindlessly just for the sake of completing the required repetitions. We undertake the practice of confession not to deceive others or achieve some other goals, but to purify our minds so we can be true practitioners.

A true practitioner, like those great masters of the past, places the utmost importance on Dharma practices. When the great Jigme Phuntsok was still with

us, he would always recite the Vajrasattva mantra four hundred thousand times during the eight days of the Dharma assembly. He had been doing this every year.

There is not a single great master of Tibetan Buddhism who did not recite the hundred-syllable mantra. Some of them recited the mantra one hundred thousand times, two hundred thousand times, one million times, and even two million times. Why is that? It is because they all greatly valued this practice.

Yesterday, I invited Khenpo Rewazang to join an outing with other khenpos at Larung Gar, but he mentioned he was in the process of completing the repetition of the Padmasambhava mantra ten million times, so he might not be able to come. I sensed he was hesitant about the outing, so I spoke with him again this morning and finally managed to invite him to the event.

An experienced senior practitioner remains firmly grounded in their practice, which contrasts sharply with our approach. Many of us tend to pursue the Dharma as if we were grabbing fast food—seeking quick results. For example, we wish to swiftly attain great bliss after receiving the empowerment of the Great Perfection, so we request, “Dear guru, please grant me the easiest practice that can point directly to the nature of my mind, show me the luminosity and the essence-drop...,” “Let me look into the vast space... Wow, Samantabhadra, the Dharmakaya, has appeared in the space! I no longer need any practice!”

In this way, we oversimplify the Dharma practice. In fact, it is not so easy to obtain the signs of realization. If we really want to embark on the path of Dharma practice, the most important practice is the preliminaries, which we should undertake throughout our lives. It is incorrect to assume that we will be fine by merely receiving the tantric teachings. A rigorous guru will not grant any tantric teachings to a novice disciple who has not established a foundation through preliminary practices. Even if the guru teaches tantra to such a disciple, the disciple cannot receive any true benefit until their mind is truly workable.

Some Dharma masters and sangha members at Larung Gar have completed several rounds of preliminaries, so they are serious about Dharma studies, have developed great faith, have pacified and controlled their own minds, and exhibit exemplary acts of good practitioners. Upon seeing them, people would praise, “This person must have practiced the Dharma well.” Why is that? It is because they have established a foundation through preliminary practices.

As I have often mentioned, when Lama Yukhok Chatralwa trained his

disciples, he placed great importance on the preliminary practices. In his tradition, a disciple could occasionally receive some tantric teachings, but only after practicing the preliminaries for years. This tradition demonstrated its strength during the upheaval of the Cultural Revolution. At that time, many people abandoned the Three Jewels, but all the lineage disciples of Lama Yukhok maintained unwavering faith due to the solid Dharma foundation established through preliminary practices.

Thus, whether our faith is unwavering or not also depends on our practice of the preliminaries. Regardless of the practice we are engaged in—whether taking refuge, arousing bodhicitta, or meditating on Vajrasattva—we should not merely focus on the verbal meaning of the instructions but should put them into real practice.

While engaging in the actual practice, we must remain focused while reciting the mantra and ensure that our minds follow the content of the liturgy. Otherwise, it is of little use to practice without reflecting on our misdeeds and maintaining good concentration, even if we never stop reciting the Vajrasattva mantra—*Om Vajrasattva Hum*—on a daily basis.

Every time we recite the mantra and meditate on Vajrasattva, we should deeply regret our misdeeds, thinking, “Alas! I have committed so many misdeeds since time without beginning. Now that I have taken ordination, I still do not meditate or act well. How shameful! Dear teacher Vajrasattva, I sincerely confess all these misdeeds in your presence!”

This is how we should undertake the practice. In fact, Vajrasattva embodies all the gurus and the Three Jewels, so it is very precious that we can confess in his presence. Of course, the same is true for lay practitioners, who are often in greater need of confession. Please take full advantage of this opportunity.

Once, I went to the Nun’s Dharma Hall to attend the Vajrasattva Dharma assembly, where two Han Dharma fellows were sitting next to me. They began to chant the liturgy and recite the Vajrasattva mantra from early morning, devoting themselves wholeheartedly to making confessions. Throughout the eight days of the Dharma assembly, they focused entirely on confessing and rarely moved, as if they were glued to a column.

The confession is most effective when we remain focused. If we allow ourselves

to be distracted, we may not complete the ten thousand repetitions of the Vajrasattva mantra within eight days. What a pity that would be!

I heard that during the past two years of the same Dharma assembly, some lay practitioners who visited Larung Gar for the first time chose not to engage in conversation at all throughout the eight days. Instead, they dedicated themselves fully to reciting the mantra, wearing a sign that read “no talk” on their chests. This is truly commendable. However, some individuals wear a large sign saying “no talk” but still speak loudly.

In fact, we should consistently confess not only during the Dharma assembly but also in our daily lives. As mentioned earlier, the daily repetition of the hundred-syllable mantra twenty-one times while meditating on Vajrasattva constitutes what is known as “the blessing of downfalls.” This practice will not only prevent the consequences of those downfalls from developing or increasing but will also purify the obscurations of speech for that day. This will enhance the blessing power of our mantra recitation and allow our teaching of the Dharma to bring greater benefit to others.

How is it that a few words from certain gurus can bring enormous benefit to the entire world? Why are their words so valuable, while those of others are not?

In fact, this is due to the significant differences in the minds of the speakers. For instance, when an ordinary person and Manjushri both express the same idea, their words may be identical, but the power behind those words is entirely different. Thus, when an individual has purified their negative actions of speech, they can wield supreme power regardless of the content of their speech, whether they are reciting prayers or giving a talk.

Of course, reciting the hundred-syllable mantra can purify not only negative actions of speech but also those of the body and mind. Its countless benefits and effects cannot be fully covered in one class. Here is what I want to emphasize: It is an extremely rare opportunity for us beings deeply trapped in samsara to encounter the hundred-syllable mantra in this era. Therefore, it would be a great pity if we do not confess as soon as possible while we have the chance, lest we fall directly into a lower realm upon our death.

Therefore, even if we cannot fully emulate the great masters of the past who recited the hundred-syllable mantra millions of times, we can always incorporate recitation into our daily practice. For example, we can recite the hundred syllables

twenty-one times every morning over many years, or even for a lifetime. By doing so, we integrate confession into our everyday lives. It is quite meaningful to spend our entire life in this way.

Sometimes, I reflect on my life. When I was very young, I had faith in Buddhism, but I did not know how to recite the hundred-syllable mantra or how powerful it is. After I became a monk and received the teachings of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, I finally understood the true power of the hundred-syllable mantra.

Since then, I have placed great importance on this mantra and have engaged in its recitation. It has been twenty-five years since I first began reciting it. This is quite a long time, and I do not remember ever skipping a day of recitation. Moreover, I recite it not only in the morning but also at various times throughout the day.

In fact, if we want to discipline ourselves, we should engage in the practice that truly matters to us. Because this practice is important to us, it will not easily slip away from our lives. If we view the practice as merely optional, we may only engage in it occasionally and eventually set it aside.

Thus, I hope we will all value the hundred-syllable mantra and constantly practice it.

♦ Practice is the most important thing

Rationally speaking, practice is the most important thing in life. It is more important than eating and sleeping.

However, it is not yet possible for ordinary people to prioritize practice over life. The most some individuals can do is place life first and practice second. Nevertheless, any life in which Dharma practice plays a role is a valuable and meaningful life.

Nowadays, many people focus solely on accumulating wealth, which leads to a decline in moral and ethical standards. Even schoolteachers often neglect the cultivation of good qualities in their students, not to mention others. Teachers are supposed to be “engineers of the human soul” who inspire students, but many of these “engineers” fail to effectively “construct” their students because they have become too money-driven. The same is true for some doctors.

When people focus excessively on making money, they can hardly hold onto the basic good character expected of a worldly person, let alone achieve the transcendental purification and elevation of the mind.

As for practitioners who primarily focus on spiritual progress, many of us may consider ourselves Mahayanists, but merely identifying as Mahayanists is not enough. We must also engage in Mahayanist practices and confess negative actions for ourselves and others.

This time we are practicing preliminaries together. For some of us, this is our first time as well as the last time to do this. Life is too short to guarantee that we will have the time and opportunity to practice again in the future, even if we want to. Therefore, we should view the preliminaries we are practicing together this time as the most important thing in our lives. While worldly people consider career and family to be important, for a practitioner, Dharma practice is of utmost importance. Therefore, I hope everyone will prioritize the preliminary practices and complete the entire round with both quantity and quality.

This time you are asked to complete the practice of the hundred-syllable mantra within one hundred days. I believe most of you can finish it on time. I understand that some volunteer staff members are too busy to balance their volunteer work and preliminary practices. However, since you have vowed to contribute to these Dharma activities, you should continue to volunteer and devote yourself to the tasks that cannot be delayed, as they truly matter to the welfare of many living beings. Of course, in the meantime, you should also try your best to practice your preliminaries.

This time my teaching on *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* is quite extensive, and I have spent a considerable amount of time on the section about the common preliminaries.

Some individuals said to me, “Can you speed up the teaching of the text? Otherwise, we are about to leave. Is this what you want to see?” Well, in any case, I will try my best to complete the teaching, regardless of whether you leave or not. I believe most of you will stay to hear the teaching as well.

When teaching *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, I worried about whether I could finish the text, but later the teaching was completed. As mentioned in my book *Footprints on the Journey*, while I was undergoing medical treatment in Xiamen, Fujian Province, I was translating *The White Lotus: The Great Biography of Buddha Shakyamuni*. I often thought, “Can I finish it? What if I die before the translation is done?”

I even informed my companion about the location of the manuscript and how to handle it if I were to die. Fortunately, the translation was completed in the end.

Now that my work on *The White Lotus: The Great Biography of Buddha Shakyamuni* and *The Way of the Bodhisattva* has been completed, what I am now thinking about is *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. Once I am done teaching this text, a part of my wish list will be checked off. As for what my next teaching will be, well, we'll see.

Sometimes I worry about teaching a lengthy text because I do not know when the impermanence of life will catch up with me. However, as far as *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* is concerned, it is the most important text in my life. Also, considering your future life or lives, practicing the preliminaries should represent a pivotal moment in your spiritual journey.

I hope each of you will complete the entire round of preliminaries. Please avoid starting with a few prostrations and then giving up entirely, or worse, even making excuses to justify your actions. There is no need for that. If you choose not to practice Dharma, that is one thing. But if you do wish to move forward, undertaking the sequential practices is crucial.

Many sangha members, including some Han Dharma teachers, have come to understand this. In the past, many individuals were reluctant to practice the preliminaries. They would say to me, "I really do not want to practice preliminaries. Could you please exempt me from it? I want to achieve accomplishment as soon as possible. Can you give me the tantric teaching?"

While I did provide you with the tantric teachings in the past, isn't it true that you still need to undertake the sequential practices to attain any genuine experience or realization of those teachings? In fact, those who have completed the sequential practices find themselves in a completely different state of mind. They can easily cultivate kindness, and this kindness becomes irreversible. In contrast, those who disregard the sequential order may have a bit of experience through their practice, but these experiences are often fleeting.

At the end of this teaching, allow me to stress this again: Please engage in careful visualization when meditating on Vajrasattva. Although we have all accumulated countless negative actions, we are fortunate to be able to confess our misdeeds through the practice of Vajrasattva. It is impossible for someone without merit to encounter this practice, which is indeed true. Therefore, I hope none of

us will miss this opportunity and that we will all complete at least one hundred thousand repetitions of the hundred-syllable mantra.

If time allows, we should also aim to recite the Padmasambhava mantra ten million times. Praying to the guru is crucial; when the guru's blessings enter our minds, all of our Dharma practices will be perfected. If we have additional time, consider following the example of the Longchen Nyingtik lineage masters by reciting the hundred-syllable mantra as often as we can.

As mentioned in some teachings, it is highly beneficial to combine the practice of Vajrasattva with Guru Yoga. By purifying negative actions and obscurations, we also receive the guru's blessings and accomplishments. Therefore, this method of practice is the most supreme of all. Please remember these vajra words and practice accordingly.



Lesson 115

“You renounce evil and take up good ... be sure of at least one rebirth in hell.” [page 101–103]

Starting today, we will study the third uncommon preliminary practice.

2.2.3. MEDITATING AND RECITING ON THE TEACHER AS VAJRASATTVA TO CLEANSE ALL OBSCURATIONS

First is the prayer to Patrul Rinpoche’s root guru:

*Free from the stains of the two obscurations,⁷⁶ yet you appear
to still be purifying them.*

*Having reached the summit of the supreme path, yet you
manifest to still be learning.*

*Having transcended the extremes of samsara and nirvana,
yet you manifest to still remain in samsara.*

Peerless Teacher, at your feet, I humbly bow.

This prayer describes his guru’s great qualities and summarizes the content of this chapter. In terms of rhetorical method, the original Tibetan text employs a unique approach to create a sense of contrast.

⁷⁶ The afflictive obscuration and the cognitive obscuration. “Obscurations” means factors that cover and obscure our Buddha-nature.

In this prayer, Patrul Rinpoche praised his root guru in the following way:

Although you have transcended the afflictive obscuration and the cognitive obscuration, you still purport to diligently make confessions and purify misdeeds. In fact, many teachers are like this: they appear to do this or that solely for the benefit of others.

Although you have attained ultimate enlightenment, you still appear to undertake sequential studies and practices by progressing through the path of accumulation, the path of joining, the path of seeing, the path of practicing, and the path of beyond learning respectively, for the sake of guiding ordinary practitioners.

Although you have gone beyond the extremes of samsara and nirvana, you still manifest as a qualified teacher in samsara for the sake of liberating living beings, and you appear no different from ordinary people—you also walk, sit, and sleep, and you also experience birth, old age, sickness, and death.

Patrul Rinpoche prostrates with great veneration at the feet of such a peerless teacher.

We should emulate Patrul Rinpoche and also pay homage to all lineage masters, our vajra gurus of threefold kindness,⁷⁷ and the teachers we have built a connection with through the Dharma.

When we possess guru devotion, it creates an extraordinary dependent origination that allows the guru's wisdom, compassion, and other great qualities to merge naturally into our minds.

When Shatende, a renowned geshe in Tibet, gave a teaching on the *Seven Points of Training the Mind*, he cited abundant scriptural evidence to validate that the guru is inseparable from the Buddha. He also referenced instructions from lineage masters of both the old and new Kadampa traditions to support this statement. The geshe said, "Without guru devotion, a practitioner cannot purify his negative actions and unveil his wisdom..." He provided insightful elaborations, which I found very inspiring.

Guru devotion is the most vital aspect of our Dharma practice, but unfortunately, many people have overlooked it. If they set aside this crucial practice and seek a shortcut elsewhere, it is akin to discarding the root of a tree while holding

⁷⁷ Threefold kindness refers to conferring empowerment, explaining the tantras, and granting pith instructions in Vajrayana.

onto its branches and leaves. In doing so, they are unable to grasp the essence of Dharma practice.

So, whenever and wherever we are, I hope all of us can always maintain guru devotion. When wrong thoughts arise, we should confess immediately and consistently rest in the mindful state that “the guru is the Buddha.”

2.2.3.1. How obscurations can be purified through confession

Recently, our sangha members have been practicing the hundred-syllable mantra, and most of you are very diligent in the corresponding recitation and meditation, which is commendable. Before embarking on the Dharma path, we committed many misdeeds, including some serious wrongdoings. Even after entering the Dharma and taking the three precepts, we have also engaged in various serious misdeeds. Therefore, to purify all these negative actions, we should sincerely engage in confession.

As ordinary beings, it is impossible not to commit wrong deeds, which we must acknowledge. For this reason, the fourfold disciples at Larung Gar diligently recite the Vajrasattva mantra four hundred thousand times each year during the annual Vajrasattva Dharma assembly, doing so without any prompting from monastic disciplinarians.

Nubzur Monastery has a small Buddhist academy with more than one hundred monastics. An elderly khenpo named Drolwang is there, and he is a great practitioner. Khenpo Drolwang spent several years at Larung Gar.

During one of his teachings, he told the sangha members of his academy, “When the Vajrasattva Dharma assembly is held at Larung Gar, you must all go there and recite the Vajrasattva mantra one hundred thousand times.”⁷⁸ Khenpo Drolwang then provided an extensive explanation of why they should do so.

We are all familiar with the practice of Vajrasattva, so we should already recognize its importance. Although some of us may be more interested in other practices, we should place more importance on this one.

♦ The obstacles to our realization

⁷⁸ In the earlier years when the Vajrasattva Dharma assembly was held at Larung Gar, it was suggested that attendees recite the mantra one hundred thousand times. Now, it is four hundred thousand times.

Whether practicing the Sutrayana or the Vajrayana, the primary obstacles to the arising of extraordinary experiences and realizations are negative actions, obscurations, and habitual tendencies created by past actions. Just as it is essential to clean the surface of a mirror for it to reflect forms, it is crucial to remove our obscurations so that realization can arise, like a reflection in the mirror of *alaya*, or the all-ground consciousness.

Here, *alaya* is compared to a mirror. In this mirror, all qualities can appear as reflections, such as the signs of bindu or visions of buddhas that arise during trekchö or tögal meditation, the visions of buddhas and bodhisattvas that arise during the practices of generation and perfection stages, and meditative concentration along with the realization of emptiness in Sutrayana practice. However, for these qualities to be reflected in the mirror of *alaya*, we must first purify our obscurations, just as a clear reflection only appears in a mirror after the dust on it has been wiped clean.

The Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment says:

One should constantly and diligently confess the misdeeds one
has committed since time without beginning.
When all obscurations are purified, the state of the Buddha will
arise.

Just as the surface of a mirror reflects external objects clearly when it is cleaned, all extraordinary experiences and realizations will arise spontaneously when the obscurations are purified.

♦ **Bathing cannot purify misdeeds**

Of course, not all methods can purify misdeeds. Here is a story from *The Parables Sutra*:

Once upon a time, a son and his mother were the only family members living together. When the son grew up, he asked his mother, “What did my father believe in?” His mother answered, “When your father was alive, he would bathe himself three times a day, hoping to purify his negative actions and obscurations so he could achieve clairvoyance.”

The son refuted this, saying, “If water can indeed purify misdeeds, then people living on the north bank of the river, who have to go to the south bank to herd their cattle, are bathed twice a day, but why haven’t they obtained any accomplishment?

Moreover, there are fish, turtles, and other creatures living in the water; then why haven't they attained realization?" His mother felt that his argument did make sense.

The son continued, saying, "Only by bathing in the Buddha's pool of eight aspects of liberation and the water of meditation can our misdeeds and obscurations be purified." So, the son and his mother went to follow the Buddha and eventually achieved the sublime state.

Therefore, it does not make sense to believe that bathing can purify misdeeds. We must adopt the Buddhist method of confession, especially the practice of Vajrasattva.

♦ The practice of Vajrasattva in scriptures

The Buddha taught countless methods of purification which are recorded in sutras and tantras, but the best of them all is meditation and recitation on Vajrasattva.

The practice of Vajrasattva was first introduced to Tibet by Padmasambhava and Vimalamitra. Even today, Tibetans rely on the Vajrasattva practice for making confessions. As has been widely reported, many Chinese also engage in this method of confession.

Someone once said, "The practice of Vajrasattva originated from the Buddhist Academy at Larung Gar, and it cannot be found in the Tripitaka."

What he said is not correct. It is true that the widespread adoption of this practice can indeed be attributed to the mighty power of the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, but the practice does not originate from Larung Gar. The practice of Vajrasattva can be found in many tantras.

Just as Bhikkhu Dharmakara, the previous incarnation of Buddha Amitabha, vowed to establish the Land of Great Bliss, Vajrasattva also made a vow in a previous life. He said, "May all beings be purified of their negative actions accumulated since time without beginning simply by hearing my name, seeing my form, thinking of me, or reciting the mantra that contains my name. Otherwise, I won't attain perfect enlightenment."

Maybe someone would disagree and still believe Vajrasattva is from the tantric teachings of Tibetan Buddhism. In fact, the practice of Vajrasattva can also be found in the Chinese Tripitaka. I have gone through the section of the esoteric

canon in the Chinese Tripitaka and found quite a few explanations about the practice of Vajrasattva. For example, it is said in *The Liturgy for the Five Esoteric Practices of Vajrasattva of the Vajrasekhara Sutra*:

Vajrasattva is the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra, the eldest of all the tathagata's sons, the vajra mind of all the tathagatas, and the teacher of all tathagatas; therefore, all tathagatas venerate and supplicate Vajrasattva. As stated in the sutras, the samadhi of Vajrasattva, which encompasses all Buddhist methods, is the path to attain Buddhahood, and apart from it, there is no other way to achieve Buddhahood.

This Liturgy was translated by Amoghavajra of the Tang dynasty, who was one of the four prolific translators⁷⁹ in Chinese Buddhism, as well as one of the Three Great Masters of Kaiyuan.⁸⁰ This text he translated is actually a tantra. Given the credibility of the translator and this tantra, I believe nobody can still reject the practice of Vajrasattva.

Since Vajrasattva has long existed in the sutras and tantras of both Tibetan and Chinese Buddhism, why were the Han people not aware of it in the past? The reason is that many individuals are unaware of its existence in Chinese Buddhism. Just as a precious substance like gold, silver, or diamond is hidden in the ground so that no one knows of its existence, so too it is the case that the practice of Vajrasattva has always been there, waiting to be revealed by a person of merit. A person lacking merit will not have the good fortune to discover it.

Now that we have encountered this precious method of confession, we must cherish it.

♦ Misdeeds can be purified by confession

As mentioned earlier, every ordinary being inevitably commits misdeeds. However, there is no misdeed that cannot be purified through confession. *The Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* says:

There are two kinds of wise men:

⁷⁹ They are: Kumarajiva, Paramartha, Xuanzang, and Amoghavajra.

⁸⁰ They are: Śubhākarasimha, Vajrabodhi, and Amoghavajra. It is said that Esoteric Buddhism was established in or transmitted to China during the Tang dynasty by these three great masters who were all active during the Kaiyuan reign period of Emperor Xuanzong.

One never commits any misdeeds,
The other does commit misdeeds but has confessed.

Great masters of the past affirmed:

There is nothing good about negative actions—except that they
can be purified through confession.

In *The Converging Result of Myriad Good Practices*, Chan master Yongming Yanshou quoted verses in *The Sutra of the Great Assembly*, and said:

Just as a piece of dirty laundry set aside for one hundred years
can be cleaned in one day, all negative actions and obscurations
accumulated over one hundred kalpas can be purified in one day or
even one hour through the power of Buddhist confession.

All negative actions—whether they involve external breaches of the precept of individual liberation, internal transgressions of the bodhicitta vows, or secret violations of the tantric samayas—can be purified through confession. There are several stories in the sutras that illustrate this point.

◉ The story of Angulimala

The story is about Brahmin Atapa, also known as Angulimala, which means “Garland of Fingers.” He killed 999 people but later purified his negative actions through confession and achieved the state of Arhat within the same lifetime.

Here is the story in more detail:

Once, a brahmin teacher mesmerized Angulimala with a mantra and told him, “You can be reborn as a Brahma if you kill one thousand people within seven days.” Then, Angulimala started to kill like crazy. On the seventh day, he had killed 999, leaving just one more to go. However, everyone in the city was hiding, so he could find no one to kill.

It happened that his mother came to bring him food. Angulimala remembered his brahmin teacher’s words: “Killing one’s mother gains rebirth in the god realm,” so he decided to kill her.

The Buddha knew that the time had come to turn Angulimala’s mind to the Dharma, so he appeared in front of him, radiating light. Angulimala immediately

left his mother and chased the Buddha. Although the Buddha walked slowly, Angulimala just could not catch up with him, no matter how fast he ran.

He had no choice but to yell, “Bhikkhu, stop!”

The Buddha replied, “I have never moved at all. It’s you who can’t stop.”

Upon hearing this, Angulimala’s mind was transformed. He then received the Buddha’s teaching and blessing and came to understand he was committing misdeeds. Consequently, he discarded his sword, confessed in the presence of the Buddha, and requested ordination. The Buddha granted him ordination and took him back to the monastery. After receiving further teachings from the Buddha, Angulimala engaged in diligent practice and eventually attained Arhathood.

Then one day, he was on his alms round in the city when people saw him and exclaimed, “This is Angulimala who took many lives. How dare he come here for alms today!” So, they hit him with rocks and sticks and struck him with knives.

As a result, Angulimala was wounded and bleeding, and his robe was torn. He went to see the Buddha, who comforted him, saying, “You should practice patience. Why is that? Because initially, you would have had to experience the karmic effects of your negative actions over innumerable kalpas...”

None of you have ever killed 999 people in the past, nor do you have the intention or ability to do so. Soldiers may have killed one or two individuals in wars. Among all the negative actions of killing, taking a human life is the most severe fault, but this negative karma can still be purified if one repents sincerely.

Since it is possible for Angulimala to purify his misdeeds through confession and even attain Arhathood, we can also purify any negative actions, as long as we confess them wholeheartedly.

◉ The story of King Ajatasatru

There is also the story of King Ajatasatru, who committed the grave act of killing his father. However, through sincere confession, he was able to purify this karma and attain liberation, enduring the torments of hell for only the brief moment it takes for a ball to bounce once.

This story is covered in greater detail in *The Sutra on the Contemplation of Buddha Amitayus*. Since I will be teaching this sutra soon, I will skip the story here.

The Mahayana Sutra of Mental Contemplation During Earlier Births also says:

If one, with deeply earnest regret,
 Makes confessions wholeheartedly,
 Then all negative actions will be eradicated,
 Just as mountain forests are burned by fire.

◉ The story of a monk jumping in a fire pit

Here is a story from *The History of the Transmission of the Dharma Treasury*:

Once there was a monk in a monastery whose sister-in-law came to deliver him some food. Driven by lust, he engaged in sexual misconduct with her. As a result, he committed a grave transgression.

His transgression filled him with an intense sense of regret, and he thought, “How foolish to have committed such a misdeed! I am no longer a monk!” Overwhelmed with regret and shame, he hung his robe and bowl on his monastic trident and went to the sangha and many other places, crying out, “I am a sinner! I do not deserve to wear my robes anymore! I have broken my vows and will surely fall into hell. Where can I go for help?”

Then, the Honorable Śayata⁸¹ came to him and said, “If you follow my words, I can help you purify your misdeeds.” The monk was delighted and said, “As long as my negative actions can be purified, I will do whatever you ask.”

Through his magical power, the Honorable Śayata created a large fire pit and asked the monk to jump in. Without hesitation, he jumped, hoping to eliminate his misdeeds. However, at the moment he jumped, the fire transformed into knee-high water, so he did not get hurt at all.

The Honorable Śayata said, “Now that you’ve confessed with fervent regret, all your negative actions are purified.” Then he offered teachings to the monk, who attained Arhathood after undertaking the practices.

◉ The story of Sankara

Sankara was a man driven by desire. When his mother forbade him from dating a woman, he killed her. His hands were still shaking when he went to see the woman. She said, “Do not be afraid. No one is here but me.”

Sankara replied, “I killed my mother for you.”

⁸¹ One of the eighteen arhats in Mahayana Buddhism.

The woman felt a surge of fear, thinking, “If he can kill his mother, he won’t hesitate to kill me one day.”

So the woman said, “You stay here. I need to go upstairs for a while.” The moment she was upstairs, she yelled out loud, “Thief! There is a thief here!”

Upon hearing her, Sankara ran away. After he returned home, he threw a knife on the floor and also yelled, “A thief killed my mother! A thief killed my mother!” Those who came to check all believed it.

Later, he cremated his mother according to tradition. By that time, he had come to realize he had committed a grave crime. Disturbed, he searched everywhere for a way to purify his misdeeds. However, all the methods he encountered involved killing himself by jumping into water or fire, and nothing else.

Later, on his way to a charnel ground, he overheard a monk reciting a verse:

He who committed misdeeds
Can purify them through practicing virtue,
Thus illuminating the entire world,
Just as the sun emerges from the clouds.

Sankara thought, “It seems that Buddhism definitely has the method to eliminate all negative actions.” So, he took ordination and became a monk.

After his ordination, he studied the Dharma diligently, and soon he grasped the Tripitaka and was able to debate eloquently.

Someone asked him, “Why are you so diligent?”

He answered, “To purify my grave crime.”

“What crime have you committed?”

“Killing my mother.”

Hearing this, the person immediately informed the Buddha. The Buddha stated that a person who had killed his mother was not permitted to take ordination, so the sangha dismissed Sankara.

However, Sankara did not want to return to worldly life, so he maintained the appearance of a monk and established a Dharma center in a remote location. Because he was well-versed in the Tripitaka, he trained many disciples, many of whom subsequently attained Arhathood.

Because of his positive actions in teaching the Dharma and training disciples, Sankara was reborn in an ephemeral hell for a brief moment and then immediately ascended to the god realm. There he realized that it was the power of the Dharma that had purified his wrongdoing, prompting him to approach the Buddha to repay his kindness. After listening to the Buddha's teachings, he attained the fruition of sotāpanna, or stream-entrant.

There are many similar stories in *The Sutra of a Hundred Actions* and other scriptures.

Once a Dharma fellow said, "I am screwed if I do not practice well. Given all the misdeeds I did before my ordination, I was really a madman!"

No matter what we have done in the past, it is great that we are confessing now. Nagarjuna says in *Letter to a Friend*:

Those who formerly were careless
But then took heed are beautiful and fair,
As is the moon emerging from the clouds,
Like Nanda, Angulimala, Darshaka, and Udayana.^{82 83}

An Alternative Translation of the *Samyukta Agama* says:

He who has first committed misdeeds
But later stops doing so
Can illuminate this world,
Like the moon emerging from the clouds.

In fact, we are not the only ones who have committed misdeeds; even some great masters of the past have done wrong before. For example, Geshe Ben Kungyal, Geshe Potowa, and Great Tertön Lerab Lingpa all appear to have committed negative actions before embarking on the Dharma path. Of course, there are similar examples in Chinese Buddhism as well.

⁸² Nanda exemplifies someone with extreme attachment who attains liberation, while Angulimala represents extreme ignorance. Darsaka, also known as Ajatasatru, embodies extreme aggression, and Sankara illustrates the combination of extreme attachment and extreme anger. Nanda and Angulimala both became Arhats, Darsaka became a bodhisattva, and Sankara was reborn in a god realm before eventually attaining the path of seeing.

⁸³ Nagarjuna, *Letter to a Friend*, verse 14. Translated by Jeffrey Hopkins, 2006. Wisdom Publications, p. 34.

Therefore, please do not get discouraged by thinking that your negative actions are too abundant to be purified. This is not the case. As long as we use the four powers as antidotes and confess wholeheartedly, our negative actions can certainly be purified.

However, purification occurs only when we confess sincerely and correctly, utilizing the four powers as antidotes. The process will be ineffective if our eyes and mouth are distracted or if we simply recite, “I admit... I confess...” while our minds, devoid of genuine remorse, are focused on other thoughts. Believing, “In the future, if I do wrong, it will not matter because I can just confess later,” hinders purification, even if we do confess. Such superficial “purification” will not only fail to cleanse our misdeeds but will also contribute to the accumulation of negative karma.

Therefore, we must confess with fervent regret. Milarepa says:

Will confession truly purify our negative actions?

If our minds have positive thoughts, they can be purified.

If a practitioner wonders whether their negative actions can be purified, they may simply check if their thoughts have become positive during confession. If they experience thoughts of regret and repentance, their negative actions can be purified.

As mentioned in the stories above, regardless of the severity of our negative actions, by sincerely regretting our wrongdoings and firmly committing to positive actions, we can swiftly purify all negative actions through the repetition of the Vajrasattva mantra one hundred thousand times. Conversely, if we do not feel any remorse, even if the negative actions are mild and we recite the mantra many more times, our negative actions may not be purified. Thus, it is essential that we rely on the four powers during our confession.

2.2.3.2. The Four Powers

The four powers are the power of support, the power of regretting having done wrong, the power of resolution, and the power of action as an antidote.

Siksha Samuccaya: A Compendium of Buddhist Doctrine says:

The Buddha said, “Maitreya, when a bodhisattva accomplishes

the four dharmas, he can eliminate the misdeeds committed over a long period in the past...”

Here, the “four dharmas” refers to the four powers we are discussing.

No matter which lineage a practitioner belongs to or which method of confession they use, they can definitely purify all negative actions, as long as they apply all four powers as antidotes.

2.2.3.2.1. The Power of Support

In this context, support is offered through taking refuge in Vajrasattva and cultivating both the bodhicitta of intention and application.

♦ Vajrasattva as the support

To recite and meditate on Vajrasattva, a Tibetan first acquires a thangka or a statue of Vajrasattva as a support for refuge.

Although all the buddhas and bodhisattvas are indivisible in nature, when practicing confession, there is an extraordinary dependent origination if we use a particular deity as the support of our practice. Of course, in other cases, we may also adopt other objects of support. For example, when we recite the confession of *The Sutra in Three Parts*, the power of support is provided by the Thirty-Five Buddhas. This power may also come from a teacher or a representation of the body, speech, or mind of the buddhas. Essentially, it can be anyone or anything in whose presence we confess. [Some Dharma fellows recently made thangkas of the Thirty-Five Buddhas, and I found them very nice.]

Some people like to address their confession to scriptures such as *The Condensed Transcendent Wisdom*, tantras, or the Tripitaka, which are also regarded as supreme objects of support. For example, there is a copy of the Tripitaka in this Dharma hall, so if we want to confess, we may prostrate in front of it while making confessions.

Of course, we may also confess in the presence of the guru, saying, “Dear guru, I confess to you: I’ve taken lives in the past, I’ve done this or that in the past...” This is also a good way to confess.

However, some disciples only tell the guru that they need to confess without

clarifying why. They say, “Dear guru, I confess to you. I have committed a great crime!”

The guru is curious, asking, “What crime?”

The disciple responds, “Oh, I cannot tell you.”

Since this is a confession, the disciple may feel embarrassed and hesitate to tell the guru. He might then say, “Dear guru, isn’t it true that you can read others’ minds? Since you are a buddha, please use your wisdom of omniscience to find out. I don’t feel comfortable telling you.”

The guru would then find themselves in an awkward situation. If they say, “I do not know,” they risk losing their “role” as a buddha. Therefore, they would simply respond, “Okay, okay, I know it.” (*The audience laughs.*)

♦ The bodhicitta of intention and application

Before making any confession, it is essential to generate the bodhicitta of intention and application. The Buddha taught that confessing our misdeeds and downfalls without first arousing bodhicitta may lessen our faults, but it will not fully purify them. In contrast, sincerely generating bodhicitta will, in itself, purify all past misdeeds, regardless of their nature.

In *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, Shantideva says of bodhicitta:

As though they pass through perils guarded by a hero,
Even those weighed down with dreadful wickedness
Will instantly be freed through having bodhicitta.
Why do those who fear their sins not have recourse to it?
Just as by the fire that will destroy the world,
Great sins are surely and at once consumed by it.⁸⁴

What do we place trust in? It is bodhicitta. In fact, bodhicitta has many more great qualities than this. These qualities are explained extensively through similes in the *Flower Ornament Sutra*. Therefore, we must arouse the bodhicitta of intention and application before any confession.

Meanwhile, it is very necessary to practice in the presence of a buddha’s image,

⁸⁴ Shantideva, *The Way of The Bodhisattva*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Shambhala, 2011, chapter one, verse 13.

a scripture, or a stupa. This is because it is quite challenging for an ordinary person to practice only through visualization without tangible support for practice.

What is more, if we feel too embarrassed to express something in the presence of our guru, we may instead speak to a statue of the Buddha. No matter what we say or how we say it, the statue will remain there, smiling at us, without revealing our words to anyone else.

The great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche once advised, “Even if you wish to share something with a teacher, first consider whether the teacher can keep it confidential. If there’s a possibility that your confession could be shared with others, it’s better to refrain from telling the teacher.” Therefore, the safest option is to confide our misdeeds to Vajrasattva.

The above teaching is about the power of support.

2.2.3.2.2. The Power of Regretting Having Done Wrong

The power of regretting having done wrong arises from a sense of remorse for the negative actions we have taken in the past. Purification is impossible unless we acknowledge our misdeeds as wrong and confess them with genuine regret, without hiding anything.⁸⁵

It is crucial to acknowledge our misdeeds as wrong. By doing so, we will pay sufficient attention to them, develop a strong sense of remorse, and feel regret for our actions. A practitioner may ponder, “Why did I kill, steal, engage in sexual misconduct, or lie? Why did I breach my vows?” and similar questions. With such a feeling of remorse, we will have the power to destroy the negative actions. As said in *The Sutra in Three Parts*:

I sincerely confess them all,

85 In *A Guide to The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang speaks of six things to be contemplated for the practice of regret: 1) Time: regretting all the negative actions that one has done from time without beginning until now, during this life, in a particular month, or day, or moment, and so on. 2) Motivation: regretting all acts committed under the sway of desire, aversion and confusion. 3) Accumulation: regretting whatever negativity one has accumulated physically, verbally, or mentally. 4) The nature of the action: regretting both acts which are negative in themselves (such as the ten negative actions, the five acts with immediate retribution, etc.) and particular faults, transgressions of one’s vows and so on. 5) Object: regretting all wrong actions, whether directed towards samsara or nirvana. 6) Karma: regretting all harmful acts and downfalls which have earned one a short life, many illness, poverty, fear of enemies and endless wandering in the lower realms.

Without hiding or holding back anything.

If we hide or hold back our misdeeds, they will proliferate, as stated in the *Mahaparinirvana Sutra*:

If one hides or holds back misdeeds,
Then their misdeeds will proliferate.

So, if we have committed wrongdoings, we must confess to a qualified teacher or to others. As the great teachers of ancient times affirmed:

A good practitioner always makes confessions and refrains from boasting about their achievements. Boasting about achievements will deplete the sources of merit; confessing negative actions will eradicate negative karma.

Therefore, we should confess often. However, some people appear complacent when confessing, saying, “I’ve done this or that; I was like this or that...” as if their actions were not misdeeds but something admirable. If they intend to elicit admiration from others, they are not genuinely regretting their wrongdoings, so it is not a true confession.

Others exhibit the exact opposite attitude toward their misdeeds. When asked, “What have you done wrong?” such a person may feel embarrassed, saying, “Alas! Nothing is worth mentioning. I was truly an evildoer. I did not deserve to be human. I was totally insane!” This is a commendable attitude. They recognize that what they did was wrong and feel aversion toward their actions. In this case, there is a chance for them to purify their misdeeds.

The great accomplished master Karma Chagme Rinpoche said in *Aspiration to be Reborn in the Pure Realm of Sukhavati*:

Without regret, confession cannot purify;
Past misdeeds remain like having ingested poison.
So one must confess with remorse, shame, and trepidation.

Without feeling regret, we cannot purify our misdeeds simply by mouthing the words, “I admit...I confess...” or by merely acting to confess. We must cultivate a sense of shame and remorse, reflecting, “My past misdeeds are like poison. How could I have ingested poison? I will surely be reborn in the hell realm and cannot

be freed. What should I do?” With such fervent remorse, shame, and trepidation, our misdeeds will be purified. If we have committed negative actions such as killing, stealing, and transgression, we need to practice harder.

Only the truly wise can cultivate a genuine sense of shame and remorse. Unwise individuals, however, do not experience regret for their actions; they might think, “It does not matter! If I have to fall into hell, then so be it; if I am breaching my vows, then let it be.” This mindset is quite dangerous. Thus, true wisdom lies in recognizing one’s misdeeds and feeling remorse for them.

2.2.3.2.3. The Power of Resolution

The power of resolution involves acknowledging the misdeeds we have committed and making a firm commitment to never commit them again from this day forward, even if it means sacrificing our own lives.

It is said in *The Sutra in Three Parts*:

From this day onward, I will stop [misdeeds] and uphold the
vows.

Karma Chagme Rinpoche said in *Aspiration to be Reborn in the Pure Realm of Sukhavati*:

Without a disciplined mind, purification is impossible;
Therefore, one should vow that from now on,
Even at the cost of one’s life, no negative actions will be
committed.

The key principle here is to refrain from committing misdeeds, even if it costs one’s life. By making such a vow, our confessions become more powerful. Some individuals may have committed a lot of negative actions in the past, but after receiving ordination, they firmly resolve to end all misdeeds, declaring, “I will not commit any negative actions, even if it costs me my life!” As a result, their misdeeds will undoubtedly be purified.

The Sutra on the Ten Wheels of Ksitigarbha praises two kinds of people: one is those who never commit misdeeds, and the other is those who have committed misdeeds but feel regret and make confessions. The two kinds of people are called “warriors who have attained purity.”

As the saying goes, “Any man can make a mistake; only a fool keeps making the same one.” This is well said, and we should behave accordingly. If an individual has killed someone before and feels no remorse for their actions, and even continues to kill, they will not be exempt from trial from a worldly perspective, let alone from a transcendental perspective. This also applies to taking the lives of other beings. Worldly people may disagree, but after embarking on the Dharma path, we should no longer kill animals; to do otherwise is illogical.

Therefore, in the course of our confession, we should first feel regret for having done wrong, and then resolve never to commit those misdeeds again. By doing so, our misdeeds can be purified.

2.2.3.2.4. The Power of Action as an Antidote

The power of action as an antidote involves performing as many positive deeds as possible to counteract past negative actions. This includes specific practices such as prostrating to the buddhas and bodhisattvas, rejoicing in others’ virtuous deeds, requesting teachings of the Dharma, dedicating accumulated merit toward enlightenment, cultivating the bodhicitta of intention and application, and abiding in the essence of the unaltered natural state.

One day, one of the peerless Dagpo Rinpoche’s disciples confessed to Rinpoche that he regretted having once made a living by selling sacred books.

“In that case, print books,” Dagpo Rinpoche advised.⁸⁶

The disciple began printing books but soon found himself overwhelmed by various distractions that arose from the task. Feeling disheartened, he returned to Dagpo Rinpoche and said, “Printing these texts brings too many distractions. Isn’t it true that the most profound method of confession is simply to remain in a state of recognition of the nature of mind?”

Dagpo Rinpoche, pleased with his words, affirmed, “You are absolutely right. Even if your negative actions were as immense as Mount Meru, they can be purified in an instant by recognizing that nature.”

♦ The story of Pradhanashura

⁸⁶ Printing and distributing sacred texts is regarded as a powerful practice for gathering merit and cleansing obscurations, as long as it is carried out with pure intentions and without seeking any financial gain.

Here is the story from *The Purification of Karmic Obscurations Sutra*:

A monk named Vīradatta once went to the city for his alms round. When a merchant's daughter saw him, lustful feelings were stirred within her. Consequently, the girl became deeply distressed by her desire for Vīradatta and eventually fell ill.

The girl's mother felt sorry for her daughter. When the mother learned what was happening, during Vīradatta's next alms round at the merchant's house, she told him, "My daughter has fallen so ill because I forbade her from listening to the Dharma. Can you teach her the Dharma?"

The monk believed her, and every day came to teach her daughter the Dharma. Because they saw each other so often, Vīradatta eventually became ensnared by his lustful intentions toward the girl and committed a root downfall.

Later, the suitor who had previously asked for the girl's hand learned that Vīradatta had been sleeping with her. Thinking about how the monk Vīradatta had been with the girl again and again, he decided to seize Vīradatta and kill him.

When Vīradatta heard that the girl's suitor intended to kill him, he thought, "I must send some poison with the girl to bring death to the suitor." He passed some poison to the girl and said to her, "If you love me, kill your suitor with this poison." The girl complied.

As soon as Vīradatta learned that the suitor had died, he felt deep distress, thinking, "I have committed a horrific deed. I have indulged in pleasure, and moreover, I have caused a man to die. What kind of creature am I? What will I become in a future life? I will fall into the hell realms."

Reflecting thus, he wondered, "Is there anyone who can liberate me from this misery?"

He wandered from temple to temple and would collapse to the ground like a felled tree, weeping, "Oh no! Oh no! I have become a sentient being in the hell realms."

When the bodhisattva Liberator from Fear knew why the monk Vīradatta behaved this way, he said to him, "Monk, do not be afraid. I shall bring an end to your fear." Upon hearing these reassuring words, Vīradatta was filled with joy and happiness.

The bodhisattva Liberator from Fear led him into a dense forest and then

hovered in the air at the height of a palm tree, asking Vīradatta, “Monk, do you trust me?”

The monk joined his palms and replied, “I have met the Bhagavan. I have met the Sugata.”

At that moment, the bodhisattva Liberator from Fear entered the samadhi called the Exalted Wisdom Mudra of the Tathagatas, the Entrance Gate to the Domain of All Buddhas. No sooner had he entered the samadhi than golden forms of tathagatas, endowed with the thirty-two marks of a buddha, emerged from his body. The forms of those tathagatas pervaded the entire forest. Those tathagatas spoke these verses that accord with enlightened speech:

All these phenomena are like reflections,
Just as the moon appears in water, yet is not there.
Immature minds have become dim and afraid,
Thus, creating toxic thoughts of lust and hate...

Upon hearing these verses, the monk Vīradatta became completely free of fetters and attained patient forbearance in seeing all phenomena as non-arising.⁸⁷

This story, along with the previously discussed benefits of bodhicitta, clearly shows that the most profound way to purify our past misdeeds is through meditating on bodhicitta and by remaining in the unaltered natural state. As we explore the details of Vajrasattva meditation—such as purification through the stream of nectar and the recitation of the hundred-syllable mantra—we should always keep these two principles in mind.

⁸⁷ The translation of this story has referred to *The Noble Mahayana Sutra “Purification of Karmic Obscurations,”* translated by the Garchen Buddhist Institute Translation Group under the patronage and supervision of 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha.



Lesson 116

“For the visualization that follows, see yourself ... his mouth and hands and lowers his arms. The earth closes again.”
[page 267–270]

Currently, the sangha members are all practicing the preliminaries. The primary goal of undertaking this practice should not be to attend tantric teachings, but to become true Dharma practitioners. The preliminaries are the foundation of our Dharma practice. If we complete the entire round with quality, we will certainly become good practitioners.

Therefore, a practitioner should not rush to complete the preliminaries in quantity. Completing the practices carelessly cannot bring great benefit. It is particularly unnecessary for a practitioner to fake the quantity of their practices merely to meet the requirements for receiving tantric teachings. Great importance should be placed on quality. In fact, each of the preliminaries—taking refuge, arousing bodhicitta, reciting and meditating on Vajrasattva, mandala offering, and Guru Yoga—is indispensable for practitioners. I hope we can all practice the preliminaries well.

♦ Issues related to translation

I want to take the opportunity to talk about the Chinese translation of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*.

Other Chinese versions of this text are now available, titled *The Instructions of My Teacher Samantabhadra*. I have seen two versions under that name. Of course, I am pleased to see there are different translations of the same text. For example,

many Buddhist scriptures, such as the *Diamond Sutra* and *The Infinite Life Sutra*, have been translated into several versions. However, it is inappropriate for a “translator” to merely modify and alter an existing translation done by someone else and claim the altered version as their own original work.

Of the two versions of the Chinese translation that I just mentioned, one was published by Tibet People’s Publishing House, and the other by Religion Culture Publishing House.

The first version is slightly better and does not alter my translation significantly; it is essentially the same as my original translation, including my typos and errors. Those typos, errors, and some quoted verses were corrected in my updated translation, but they remain unchanged in this published manuscript. In short, this version simply attributes the translation to another person.

Later, I happened to meet the “translator” of the first version. Upon seeing me, he felt embarrassed, but I did not mention his “plagiarism” of my translation because I did not want to embarrass him. He also did not change much of my translation in his version. Since he did not alter the Chinese translation significantly and managed to obtain an ISBN,⁸⁸ it is acceptable to have the translation published. I heard it was someone from Taiwan who negotiated that translator’s book projects with the publisher and paid for the ISBN. However, even though they managed to secure the ISBN, it is still not right to publish a book by copying someone’s work, is it?

A few days ago, I had the chance to review another version of the translation. I did not read it thoroughly but skimmed through a few pages. I noted phrases such as, “This version has made improvements based on the two previous translations,” and “The translator is the reincarnation of Patrul Rinpoche,” along with other similar statements. Overall, it sounds quite “credible” and “authoritative.”

Of course, I will rejoice and feel no jealousy if the translation is good. It is perfectly acceptable for a Buddhist text to be interpreted differently. However, modifying others’ work and claiming the altered version as one’s own is somewhat improper.

My principle is that a translator should carry their own work instead of

⁸⁸ In China, obtaining an International Standard Book Number (ISBN) is a regulated process managed by the National Press and Publication Administration (NPPA). The process involves several steps and can be challenging due to strict regulations and the necessity of working through authorized publishers.

modifying others' work and claiming it as their own. If they are to plagiarize from others' work, they should not engage in the translation at all.

When I was translating *The Chapter of Valid Cognition, Treasury of Valid Reasoning* and other texts, there were other versions by different translators, but I still chose to translate them myself.

Longchenpa's *Finding Rest in Illusion* and *Finding Rest in Meditation* had been translated into Chinese by someone else, but I chose to create my own version. The work I am currently translating, Dudjom Rinpoche's *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism: Its Fundamentals and History*, has also been translated by another individual, but I opted to produce my own translation. I will not merely modify someone else's translation and then claim it as my own.

My translations are based on my own understanding of each text. However, when I come across a sentence or quoted verse that proves difficult to translate, I refer to the work of others to see how they handled it. I sometimes notice that they may have misinterpreted certain words or provided literal translations, possibly because they were unable to convey the intended meaning. I only consult other translations in these instances. You can see this by comparing my translations with other versions.

Throughout my years of translation, I have never copied the works of others. While I do not see myself as a great translator, many people bestow lofty titles upon me that I feel I do not deserve, and this makes me embarrassed.

In the seventh chapter⁸⁹ of *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism: Its Fundamentals and History*, Dudjom Rinpoche quoted the following statement from Rongzom Chökyi Zangpo regarding the charlatan translators of that time:

When the doctrine of the Buddha was at its zenith, the emanational translators established [the texts of] the transmitted precepts without error. Then, they adorned those doctrines in many ways which served to complete them, and which established the actual condition of the knowable. But the charlatan translators of the present day made various reforms in the ancient translations, saying, "I am the better translator. My sources are more venerable!" And so, misrepresenting the transmitted precepts of the Buddha and the teachings of their gurus, they all compose their own doctrines.

⁸⁹ The seventh chapter is "A rectification of misconceptions concerning the Nyingma school".

They heap abuse upon one another for their faults. Their doctrines are such that those of the father do not suit the son. [In all of this] they are unlike [the ancient translations].⁹⁰

Words from other sublime teachers are also quoted in this book to criticize the charlatan translators of that time.

Of course, today's translators who plagiarize others' work may not be as bad as those described in Rongzom Pandita's words; they may have their own particular agendas. However, when I notice misinterpretations of certain scriptural evidence and content, I still feel saddened. The translator did not interpret the meaning correctly, perhaps due to language barriers. For example, some Tibetan translators struggle to use certain Chinese expressions properly, which can make their translations difficult to understand or easily misunderstood by Chinese speakers. Even though the language may appear beautiful and smooth to Chinese readers, the meaning conveyed is incorrect. What a pity!

Perhaps the charlatan translators seek to showcase their "accomplishments" and take pride in having a renowned book published under their name. This is merely my personal opinion, out of a fair mind. Anyway, from this, we know that even published translations can contain errors.

Some sangha members at Larung Gar volunteer for certain gurus' Dharma activities and attempt to translate Dharma teachings. It is commendable that they are willing to engage in this volunteer work. I would be particularly pleased if they could translate great works in Tibetan Buddhism.

However, please reflect carefully during the translation process. If someone has never studied the five great treatises and lacks knowledge in Sutrayana and Vajrayana, or if they have studied but only attained a superficial understanding, their translation work, which may be unprofessional, will be fraught with mistakes.

While Tibetan Buddhism is widespread today, there have been some negative developments in the translation and propagation of Dharma. As a result, the current state of Dharma exchange appears to mirror the conditions that existed between India and Tibet during Atisha's time in Tibet.

At that time, Rongzom Pandita was still alive. During the summer, some

⁹⁰ Dudjom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism, Its Fundamentals and History*, trans. and ed. Gyurme Dorje (Boston: Wisdom, 1991), page 890-891.

Tibetan translators would go to Mangyül Gungthang,⁹¹ and during the winter, they would go to Nepal to study the Dharma. However, these translators were quite different from those of the past, whose work was rooted in original sources. The translators of the past would offer bags of gold to their teachers, and their translations were accomplished in temples or other established doctrinal centers.

In comparison, translators of more recent generations were not as competent as their predecessors. Some of them translated because they desired to become scholars, hankered after the possessions of others, sought to win fame, or were jealously competing with their own gurus or with spiritual benefactors of similar fortune.⁹² For these reasons, they would insist on walking to Nepal carrying one or two gold bits under their arms as an offering, following an ordinary teacher, and the like.

Rongzom Pandita said that the translators of the past were superior to more recent translators in six ways: the greatness of the benefactors who introduced them, the locations in which they translated and established, the distinctions of the translators, the distinctions of the scholars, the distinctions of the provisions offered as the basis for commissioning the translators, and the distinctions of the doctrine itself.

You may refer to the corresponding section in *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism: Its Fundamentals and History* and check how rigorous and superior those original translators were. It would be great if we could emulate them even just a little bit.

I do not mean to brag about how great my translation is, but over the years, what I have translated reflects the Dharma I have received as transmission and teaching from my gurus. Additionally, my translation has rarely been guided primarily by aesthetic or literary considerations; I simply aim to convey the words of the sublime beings in their true essence, using my own translation style. This is my pursuit and principle in translation. Anyway, I have dedicated significant time and effort to translating, and I will continue to do so.

Of course, knowledgeable readers can compare the manuscripts of different

⁹¹ Also known as Ngari Me (Lower Ngari), it is the name of a Tibetan kingdom established under Sakya overlordship in Southwest Tibet around 1265.

⁹² Dudjom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism, Its Fundamentals and History*, trans. and ed. Gyurme Dorje (Boston: Wisdom, 1991), page 892.

translators. If one has studied the Dharma, one will recognize which manuscript has been translated by a professional Dharma translator.

This is a point I wanted to make before the class.

2.2.3.3. The Actual Meditation on Vajrasattva

As already mentioned, of all the methods of confession, the practice of Vajrasattva is the most supreme. Although we have committed enormous misdeeds in the past, as long as we confess sincerely, those negative actions can be purified.

The Sutra of the Sublime Golden Light says:

If a person has committed grave crimes for hundreds of kalpas,
By confessing within a short period of time, all their negative
actions can be purified.

The grave misdeeds a person has committed—not just over a year or two, or even a few dozen years, but over tens of thousands of kalpas—can be purified through sincere confession that lasts only a short time, such as a few months or years. These are the Buddha’s vajra words.

Of course, the confession has to be done in the right way; otherwise, it can hardly be effective.

♦ The story of Deve

The Buddha Speaks of Unprecedented Causes and Conditions Sutra has a story about Deve:

Deve’s husband died, leaving her widowed. Although she was wealthy, she lived a lonely life without children or parents.

Once, Deve asked a brahmin who visited her frequently, “What should I do to accumulate merit so I can purify my misdeeds?”

The brahmin answered, “There are two ways to eliminate negative actions. For misdemeanors, you may make food offerings to one hundred brahmins, give them cows, and the like. For grave crimes, you should give all your wealth to five hundred great brahmins and burn yourself on a pile of firewood by the Ganges. By doing so, you may purify all negative actions.”

Deve knew she had committed grave crimes, so she decided to burn herself.

She sent servants to the forest, asking them to collect ten loads of firewood for her self-immolation.

A monk named Vāgmaya heard about Deve's plan and felt great sympathy for her. He went to Deve's house and asked, "May I know why you are collecting all this firewood?"

Deve said, "I want to burn myself to eliminate my grave crimes."

Vāgmaya replied, "The karmic effect of your negative actions follows your consciousness and is separate from your body. How can you eliminate your negative actions by burning the body? Moreover, when you experience the torment of burning, you will become more distressed in a future life because of the afflictions generated by that suffering. If you die in such a manner, you will endure greater suffering in a future life. This is the rule of cause and effect. Therefore, even if one burns his body tens of thousands of times, he still cannot purify his misdeeds. For example, those beings who were burned in the hell of ultimate torment experience eighty thousand cycles of life and death in one day. Those beings will only have their negative actions purified one kalpa later. Compared to them, how is it possible that you can purify all your misdeeds by burning your body just once?"

Hearing this, Deve understood at once and gave up her plan to burn herself.

Then Vāgmaya taught the method of confession to Deve and her retinue of five hundred people, saying,

"Negative actions are caused by your body, speech, and mind. If you commit ten negative actions, you will experience the negative karmic results. Now you must confess wholeheartedly, saying, 'If I have committed negative actions in the past or in this life, I confess all of them. To admit I've done wrong and to eliminate misdeeds, I now vow to never commit them again from this day forward.'"

After teaching them how to purify negative actions, Vāgmaya also taught them how to commit ten positive actions. Deve was overjoyed upon hearing the teachings, so she offered delicious food to Vāgmaya and promised to serve him all her life.

But Vāgmaya said, "You have abandoned the wrong dharma and embarked on the right path. Now you should perform ten positive actions and become the heir of the right Dharma. If you can teach others to engage in these ten positive actions, you will repay my kindness. Now that you have turned your mind to the

Dharma, I do not need to stay here any longer. I will wander elsewhere to liberate other beings.”

Deve knew her teacher Vāgmaya would not stay, so she offered him jewels and treasures, but Vāgmaya did not accept them. Deve had no choice but to say farewell to Vāgmaya with gratitude and tears. After that, Deve and her retinue of five hundred people taught the ten positive actions everywhere and brought innumerable beings onto the Dharma path.

Vāgmaya’s method of confession says, “I confess all my negative actions,” and “I vow to never commit them again from this very day on,” which respectively corresponds to the power of regretting having done wrong and the power of resolution.

Then, how do we recite and meditate on Vajrasattva, using the content of the four powers as antidotes?

- ♦ **The power of support in the practice of Vajrasattva**

- ◉ **The visualization of Vajrasattva**

While keeping the four powers in our mind, we may now proceed to the actual meditation on Vajrasattva.

First, rest our body and speech naturally and comfortably, and visualize our body in its normal, ordinary form (not visualizing ourselves in the form of a deity). Then, visualize a thousand-petaled white lotus in the space about one arrow’s length (approximately one foot) above the crown of our head. Atop this lotus is a full moon disc. Note that “a full moon” does not refer to its size but to its completeness—every part of the moon is whole and flawless, resembling the moon on the fifteenth day of the lunar month, perfectly round without any curves or irregularities.

Next, visualize a brilliant, white seed syllable hum on the moon disc. While in other traditions, the syllable radiates and reabsorbs rays of light, the Nyingtik tradition does not include such visualizations.

In an instant, the hum transforms into our glorious root guru, the incomparable source of compassion, who embodies the essence of all the buddhas throughout the three times. He appears in the form of the Sambhogakaya Buddha Vajrasattva, radiantly white like a snow-capped mountain illuminated by ten thousand suns.

He has one face and two arms. In his right hand, he holds the five-pronged vajra, symbolizing awareness and emptiness, close to his heart. In his left hand, he holds the bell, symbolizing appearance and emptiness, resting at his left hip.⁹³ His legs are crossed in the vajra posture, and he is adorned with the thirteen Sambhogakaya ornaments: the five silken garments and the eight precious jewels.

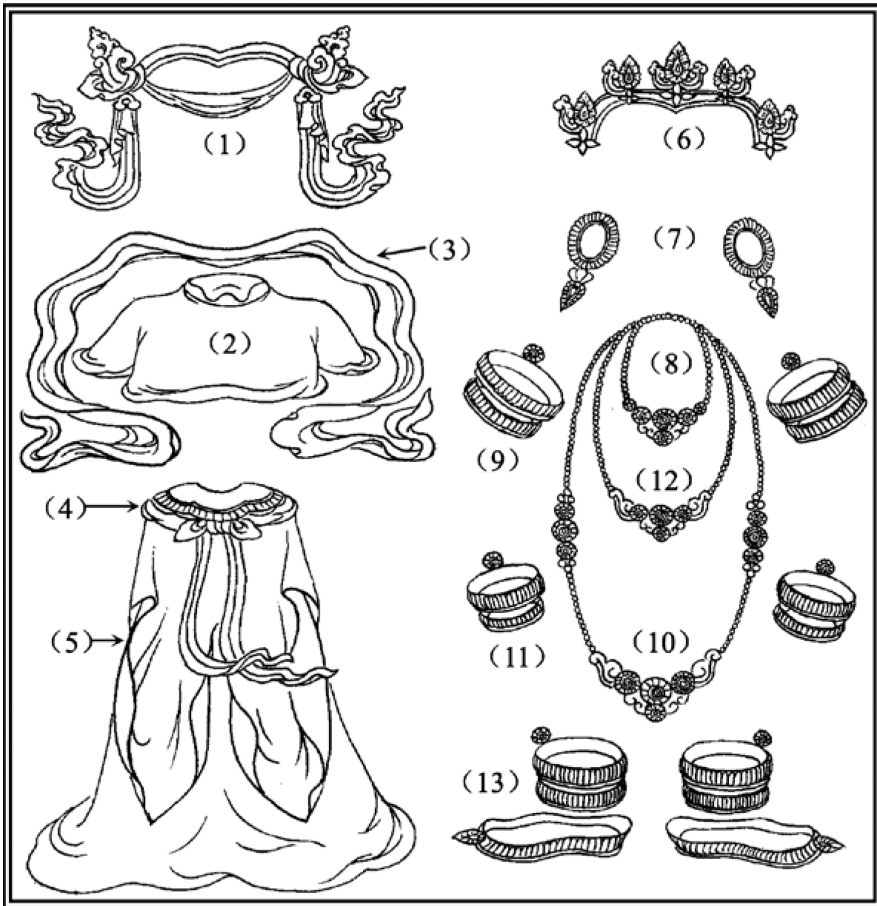


Vajrasattva in the form of the Sambhogakaya Buddha

⁹³ Here, the vajra and bell symbolize skillful means and wisdom, respectively.

The five silken garments are: 1) a headband, 2) an upper garment, 3) a long scarf, 4) a belt, and 5) a lower garment.

The eight jewels are: 1) a crown, 2) earrings, 3) a short necklace, 4) armlets on each arm, 5) two long necklaces, one longer than the other,⁹⁴ 6) a bracelet on each wrist, 7) a ring on each hand, and 8) an anklet on each foot.



- | | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| (1) a headband | (6) a crown | (11) a bracelet on each wrist |
| (2) an upper garment | (7) earrings | (12) short necklace |
| (3) a long scarf | (8) a short necklace | (13) an anklet on each foot |
| (4) a belt | (9) armlets on each arm | |
| (5) a lower garment | (10) long necklace | |

⁹⁴ The shorter necklace reaches the chest, while the longer one extends down to the navel.

It is difficult to visualize Vajrasattva without relying on the imagery of these ornaments. When working on the illustration, I consulted a few painters and teachers, but opinions diverge regarding the details of the ornaments. Some painters even add or omit certain elements when depicting Vajrasattva. However, strictly speaking, no element should be added or omitted; otherwise, it creates a fault.

◉ Vajrasattva with or without his consort

In the Nyingtik tradition, Vajrasattva appears in the yab-yum form, embracing his consort Vajratopa in inseparable union, both radiating white. Their bodies appear vividly, yet without any inherent solidity, like the reflection of the moon on water or images seen in a mirror.

Most practices of Vajrasattva are based on the yab-yum form. A deity in the yab-yum form with his consort is a common symbol in Tibet, and Tibetans do not have inappropriate or negative thoughts about it.

A capable tantric practitioner who has fervent faith in their deity can directly visualize the yab-yum. However, if a practitioner lacks faith in the wisdom of the union of emptiness and bliss, or worse, perceives the yab-yum as a worldly male and female pair and generates impure lust or thoughts during the visualization, they should visualize Vajrasattva in his form without a consort instead of in the yab-yum form.

During the practice, we visualize Vajrasattva, whether in the yab-yum form or not, seated above our head, facing the same direction as us. For example, if we are facing east, Vajrasattva is also facing east.

◉ Being visible but insubstantial

We visualize Vajrasattva as a three-dimensional presence rather than a flat image like a thangka or fresco. Unlike a clay or gold statue, which is solid and material, Vajrasattva is dynamic and vibrant, not inert or inanimate.

If our visualization involves a solid bronze statue, we may have discursive thoughts like “Will its edge hit my head?” Therefore, when practicing the generation stage, we should not visualize the deity as solid and material.

Then what should be the visualization?

As for his appearance, we should visualize Vajrasattva, along with his consort,

appearing vividly, with every detail—down to the pupils and whites of the eyes—clear and distinct. Yet, what appears is empty: it lacks even a single atom of solid substance, such as flesh, blood, or internal organs. It resembles a rainbow in the sky or an untainted crystal vase. In short, the deity in our visualization is visible yet insubstantial. Although it appears clearly, it is inherently empty, much like the moon on water, an image in a mirror, a rainbow in the sky, an untainted crystal vase, and the like. Such a visualization should not be too difficult for a practitioner who has studied the doctrine of emptiness.

This is the power of support.

♦ **The power of regretting having done wrong, in the practice of Vajrasattva**

With heartfelt devotion, we begin to pray, “Vajrasattva, the great protector who is identical in nature with my own compassionate root guru, may you, with great compassion and loving-kindness, hold me and all sentient beings in your care!” Then, in Vajrasattva’s presence, we reflect on all the negative actions we have accumulated throughout countless lifetimes since time without beginning, including the ten negative actions of body, speech, and mind, the five crimes with immediate retribution, the four serious faults, the eight perverse acts, all breaches of the external precepts of individual liberation, the inner bodhisattva vows, and the secret samayas of the vidyadharas, the unkept promises, lies we have told, and any actions that were shameful and dishonorable. With a deep sense of shame, fear, and remorse, we confess all of these in the presence of Vajrasattva, feeling our entire body overcome with goosebumps as we lay bare our regrets.

◉ **The negative actions to be confessed**

What we need to confess are not just the negative actions we have committed in this life, but all the negative actions we have accumulated since time without beginning. Of all the negative actions, each of us has accumulated some or all of the ten negative actions of body, speech, and mind. We may not have committed the five crimes with immediate retribution per se, but we may have engaged in actions similar to these five crimes, such as insulting parents or being disrespectful to sublime beings, etc.

Regarding the four serious faults, *A Guide to the Words of My Perfect Teacher* lists the four serious faults as the following:

- 1) The serious fault of taking the head of the row of scholars.⁹⁵
- 2) The serious fault of appropriating the wealth of a tantrika—one who practices tantra.
- 3) The serious fault of accepting the homage of a fully ordained monk.
- 4) The serious fault of eating a practitioner's food.⁹⁶

The eight perverse acts are cited in *A Guide to the Words of My Perfect Teacher* as:

- 1) Maligning those who are on the white side, who practice virtue;
- 2) Praising those who are on the black side, who practice evil;
- 3) Creating obstacles and preventing the virtuous from accumulating merit and wisdom;
- 4) Speaking unpleasantly to those who have faith and are practicing positive actions, and thus upsetting them;
- 5) After entering the mandala of Vajrayana, engaging in disputes, speaking harsh words, quarreling continuously within the assembly, and forsaking the teacher;
- 6) After entering Vajrayana, forsaking the deity;
- 7) After entering Vajrayana, forsaking the vajra brothers and sisters;
- 8) After entering Vajrayana, forsaking the sacred mandala.

Regarding the external precepts of individual liberation, there are precepts for lay practitioners and those for monastics. Every lay practitioner or monastic may have more or less transgressed the precepts.

Regarding the inner bodhisattva vows, there are the traditions of the Profound

⁹⁵ That is, to assume a higher rank than one has.

⁹⁶ The fourth refers not to the food in general of anyone who is a practitioner, but to a situation where eating the provisions of a practitioner who is short of food and who has decided, "With this amount of food I can practice x number of months," will make his or her food run out prematurely. [Source: Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang, *A Guide to the Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by Dipamkara and the Padmakara Translation Group, Shambhala, 2004.]

View and the Vast Activity, and each tradition has many vows to observe. We may have more or less transgressed the vows.

Regarding the secret samayas of the vidyadharas, there are many vows to observe for the common and extraordinary tantric samayas. It is very likely that we have transgressed some of them.

Regarding all the ordinary promises, if we have promised to do this or to avoid doing that but we did not keep our promise, it is also a kind of negative action. Negative actions also constitute all the lies we have told and everything we have done that is shameful or dishonorable. We must confess all these negative actions in the presence of Vajrasattva. Also, we can be sure that during all those infinite lives in samsara, we have committed many negative actions that we cannot remember, so we should confess them as well.

◉ Confessing without hiding anything

We must wholeheartedly confess all the aforementioned negative actions, saying, “I hold nothing back and hide nothing. I confess openly and sincerely ask for forgiveness. Please show your compassion for me! Here and now, in this moment and place, please purify all my negative actions and obscurations, leaving not a single one behind!”

We can confess while reciting the hundred-syllable mantra. For example, while confessing, we may think, “Now I am fifty years old. Before my refuge or ordination, I committed such-and-such negative actions; after my refuge or ordination, I committed such-and-such negative actions. There are many negative actions I cannot remember; I may have committed such-and-such negative actions in this life and since time without beginning.” We should strive to confess each negative action one by one.

When we confess without hiding anything, our negative actions can be purified directly. *The Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* says:

If negative actions are hidden,
They will proliferate;
If negative actions are confessed,
They will be eliminated.

Therefore, we must hide nothing during confession. As long as we hide

nothing and confess in the presence of Vajrasattva while reciting the hundred-syllable mantra, we can definitely purify all negative actions accumulated since time without beginning.

If we confess in this manner every day and make it part of our daily practice, it will undoubtedly bring great merit. *The Essential Ornament Tantra* states:

Reciting the hundred-syllable mantra twenty-one times a day while meditating on Vajrasattva is referred to as “the blessing of downfalls.” This practice helps prevent the consequences of those downfalls from developing or increasing. Completing one hundred thousand recitations will completely purify all of one’s misdeeds, including violations of the root downfalls, ultimately leading to the realization of one’s pristine mind.

This is the power of regretting having done wrong.

♦ The power of resolution in the practice of Vajrasattva

After confessing, we may think, “In the past, I committed countless misdeeds due to my ignorance of the principle of cause and effect, my heavy afflictions, and the ripening of my karmas. This was true both before and after my pursuit of the Dharma and my refuge. Until now, I have accumulated negative actions because of my ignorance and delusion. However, through the compassion of my guru, I have come to understand what is beneficial and what is harmful, and I resolve never to commit negative actions again, even if it means sacrificing my life.”

This is the power of resolution.

The Great Collection Sutra says:

He who confesses in the presence of the Buddha,
Regretting having committed wrong actions,
Will be freed from wrong views,
And reach the other shore of birth and death.

It is essential to confess with the four powers. In short, when we practice Vajrasattva, visualizing Vajrasattva corresponds to the power of support, revealing and confessing our negative actions in the presence of a buddha or a deity like Vajrasattva corresponds to the power of regretting having done wrong,

and resolving never to commit those actions again corresponds to the power of resolution. Simply put, we should acknowledge and confess our wrongdoings in front of Vajrasattva, and then resolve to correct them and never commit them again. In fact, this practice is not entirely disconnected from worldly norms and principles. When someone in the secular world makes a mistake, they typically begin by admitting their fault and then working to correct it. Once they have taken steps to rectify the situation, they can seek forgiveness. However, if a person made a mistake but refuses to admit it, or worse, tries to hide it by saying, “I did not do anything wrong because of this or that,” they miss the opportunity to correct their error and, consequently, cannot be forgiven.

In the next step of the practice, we start to recite the following root text of the Longchen Nyingtik tradition:

*Ah! I am in my ordinary form. Above my head
On a white lotus, in the center of a moon-disc seat
Is hum, which becomes the Lama Vajrasattva:
Brilliant white, with complete Sambhogakaya adornments,
Holding vajra and bell, and embracing the consort
Vajragarva.
I take refuge in you and pray—purify all our negative
actions!
With the deepest regret I acknowledge them all, and ask your
forgiveness:
From now on—even if my life is at stake—I shall refrain from
indulging in them again.
In your heart, upon a full moon
Is the letter hum, encircled by the mantra.
Reciting the mantra invokes your wisdom mind, and
From the point of union of the blissful play of yab-yum
A cloud of bodhicitta nectar
Flows down like a shining stream of milk. Through this,
For me and all sentient beings of the three worlds*

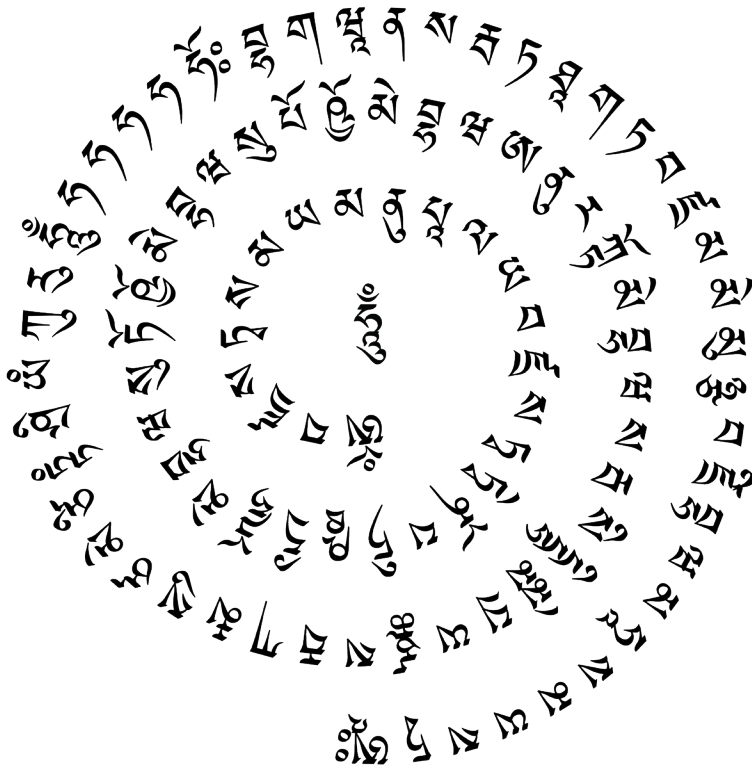
*May our negative karma and destructive emotions—the
causes of suffering—*

*Illnesses, harmful influences, negative actions and obscura-
tions, along with wrongdoing, downfalls, and blockages
due to breakages of samaya,*

Be purified, till not a single one remains!⁹⁷

Many of us are practicing Mipham Rinpoche's *Illuminating the Path to Liberation* for the preliminary practice of confession, which involves visualizing as we recite the liturgy, followed by the recitation of the hundred-syllable mantra. According to this Longchen Nyingtik liturgy, we should first visualize Vajrasattva, then recite the liturgy, and finally proceed to the hundred-syllable mantra.

2.2.3.4. The Recitation of the Hundred-syllable Mantra



⁹⁷ Source: <https://www.lotsawahouse.org/>

Next, visualize at the heart of Vajrasattva, who is indivisibly united with his consort, a tiny lunar disc no larger than a flattened mustard seed. Upon it rests a delicate white hum, as finely detailed as if drawn with a single strand of hair. We can enhance visualization by referencing the video illustration or the verbal meaning of the prayer, aiming for a clear visualization.

While reciting the hundred-syllable mantra,⁹⁸ visualize its syllables arranged in a circular formation around the central hum. Each syllable remains distinct and does not touch the others, similar to how the horns of cattle stay close without becoming entangled. With this visualization, recite the hundred syllables as a prayer.

♦ Reciting the hundred-syllable mantra as a prayer

There are many ways to recite mantras: praying, resting in a state of mind, subjugating,⁹⁹ and more. Here, we should adopt the manner of praying. When doing so, we may join our palms together, but the most important thing is to pray in our minds, wishing that Vajrasattva grants us blessings so that all our negative actions are purified. During the pre-class recitation, I observed that some Dharma fellows would close their eyes, join their palms together, and focus intently while reciting the hundred-syllable mantra. They may experience mixed emotions: at times, they feel joy at having discovered Mahayana Buddhism and the good fortune of practicing Vajrasattva; at other times, they might feel a sense of shame for the enormous negative actions they have committed. Aware of their wrongdoings, they worry about the possibility of falling into a lower realm after death. This urgency to confess their negative actions before it is too late can greatly enhance their practice of confession.

In fact, the effectiveness of our confession also depends on our practice of the common preliminaries.

For example, consider the practice on the impermanence of life. When we recognize that everyone dies and that the timing of death is uncertain—we could be corpses by tomorrow morning, or we are humans today but may fall into hell

⁹⁸ om vajrasattva samayam anupālaya vajrasattva-tvenopa-tiṣṭha dṛḍho me bhava sutoṣyo me bhava supoṣyo me bhava anurakto me bhava sarva-siddhiṃ me prayaccha sarva-karma śuca me cittam śreyaṃ-kuru hūṃ ha ha ha ha hoḥ bhagavān sarva-tathāgata-vajra mā me muñca vajrī-bhava mahā-samaya-sattva āḥ

⁹⁹ When reciting the mantra of a wrathful deity, one should do so in a wrathful and fervent manner.

tomorrow—we are motivated to confess. We then think, “Before I die, I must finish reciting the hundred-syllable mantra so that I can purify my negative actions.”

Also, by meditating on the defects of samsara and the principle of cause and effect, we will understand that negative actions will inevitably lead to suffering. We will realize that when we die, our negative actions will follow us into a future life, resulting in nothing but endless suffering. By practicing these preliminary instructions, we will become diligent and strive to purify our negative actions to the best of our ability.

Some might argue that certain scriptures suggest a person can be reborn in the Pure Land while still carrying their karmic debts from negative actions, indicating that they would never suffer again. This could lead to the belief that confessing and purifying those negative actions is unnecessary. However, if a practitioner’s karmic debts are too burdensome, it may not be possible for them to be reborn in the Pure Land. Therefore, it is crucial for us to engage in confession and purify our negative actions.

♦ Visualization while reciting the mantra

After visualizing the hundred syllables clearly, begin reciting the mantra as a prayer. Imagine a stream of nectar, filled with compassion and wisdom, dripping from each syllable—one radiant drop after another, like melting ice dripping near a fire. This nectar flows through the body of Vajrasattva, emerging from the union of Vajrasattva and his consort, and enters through the crown of our head, flowing into us and all sentient beings.

Like dust swept away by a rushing flood, all our physical illnesses are expelled as rotten blood and pus, while negative forces are driven out in the form of spiders, scorpions, toads, fish, snakes, tadpoles, lice, and similar creatures. All harmful actions and obscurations are purged as black liquid, dust, smoke, clouds, and vapors. All of these impurities are carried away by the unstoppable flood of nectar, exiting our bodies through the lower orifices, the soles of our feet, and the pores of our skin in a torrent of blackness.

This visualization is very important. By doing so, we may also expel negative forces and spirit possessions, except when the fixed karma from our previous lives has ripened, making it impossible to change and resulting in corresponding suffering.

Then, we continue our visualization: the ground beneath us splitting open, revealing Yama, the Lord of Death, surrounded by all the male and female beings to whom we owe karmic debts since time without beginning, as well as those who seek retribution against us. As we recite the hundred-syllable mantra, we visualize all impurities flowing down into their eagerly open mouths and into the hands and arms they extend toward us in anticipation.

If able, we may visualize the entire process simultaneously. I do not know about you, but it is not easy for me to visualize everything at once, as the visualization consists of images of Vajrasattva or his consort Vajratopa, along with their ornaments, clothing, and the syllables of the mantra within them. The visualization also includes rotten blood and pus, small creatures emerging from the body, and the like. Without having achieved a certain level of practice in the generation stage, it is difficult to clearly visualize everything all at once.

Once, a practitioner struggled to visualize the whole image of Padmasambhava during his Guru Yoga practice. Feeling very sad, he went to see his guru and said, “Dear guru, when I visualize Padmasambhava, if I focus on the upper part of his body, I forget what the lower part looks like; if I focus on his right side, I forget what his left side looks like. I have been doing my visualization like this every day. It is so painful! I really cannot continue my practice!”

The guru replied, “Then you do not have to visualize all the details. Simply remember that Padmasambhava is right in front of you—that will suffice!”

In my book *Footprints on the Journey*, I introduce a simple practice, which is a pith instruction from Karma Chagme Rinpoche’s Mountain Dharma. Visualize Vajrasattva seated above your head, emanating countless Vajrasattvas who are above the heads of all sentient beings, both dead and alive. Thus, each being has a Vajrasattva seated above them. After reciting the hundred-syllable mantra, visualize nectar dripping down from every Vajrasattva, dispelling and eliminating your negative actions and obscurations, as well as those of all living beings. After reciting the hundred-syllable mantra one hundred and eight times, visualize the Vajrasattvas dissolving into yourself and all beings. In the end, all beings rest in the state of emptiness for a while.

This practice is quite simple. I have been practicing it for some time and feel very positive about it. Ideally, we should visualize all the details described in the Longchen Nyintik liturgy, as it embodies the blessings of the lineage masters.

However, if that proves difficult, we can alternate our visualization: sometimes envisioning Vajrasattva's body, face, and hands; at other times, his ornaments and clothing; occasionally focusing on the nectar flowing to purify illnesses, negative forces, harmful actions, and obscurations; and at other times reflecting on our regret for past misdeeds and our firm commitment to never repeat them.

[Some people find it difficult to remember their past wrongdoings, often feeling overwhelmed with emotion when they do. However, it is important for us to reflect on all the negative actions we have accumulated in order to cleanse ourselves of them.]

At the end, visualize that Yama, the Lord of Death, along with all the beings beneath the earth—all our karmic creditors and those seeking retribution for our actions—are now appeased and satisfied. Previous grievances have been resolved, debts repaid, and the desire for vengeance quelled. We are cleansed of all past negative actions and obscurations. Then, Yama and others close their mouths and lower their arms, and the ground beneath us closes again.

This practice can help purify our negative actions. For example, if someone has taken another person's life in the past, this practice allows them to repay that being's debt of life.

Some of you might have felt confused: "I have never harmed that person in this life; then why is he harming me?" Now that you understand you are in karmic debt to him, you can use this method to repay that debt. Once your karmic debt is settled, all feelings of vengeance are resolved, and you will no longer owe anyone.



Lesson 117

“Imagine that your body has now become transparent ...
the same. For these two attributes are both indispensable.”
[page 270–276]

Now let's continue to study how to recite and meditate on Vajrasattva.

Recently, some Dharma fellows asked me to teach a bit faster, which is fine. There are several theoretical teachings in the previous sections, so I had to provide extensive explanations. Now that we are covering instructions on practices, a brief teaching will be sufficient for you to understand how to undertake the practices.

Last class, we learned that while reciting the hundred syllables, nectar pours down through the body of Vajrasattva, expelling all our negative actions and obscurations, and satisfying all our karmic creditors. Then, the ground beneath us closes again. Now, we continue our visualization.

♦ Visualize our channels filled with nectar

Visualize our body as completely transparent, glowing with light. Inside it, imagine the central channel running vertically, with four energy centers, or wheels, positioned along its length where smaller channels radiate outward like the spokes of an umbrella. At our navel is the wheel of manifestation, with sixty-four channels extending upward, and each radial channel is like a leaf that has more branches of smaller channels. At our heart is the wheel of Dharma, with eight channels branching downward. At our throat is the wheel of enjoyment, with sixteen channels extending upward. Finally, at the crown of our head is the wheel of great

bliss, with thirty-two channels turning downward. Once this visualization is clear, imagine the nectar flowing downward again, as described earlier.

There are practices in which one visualizes a syllable *hang* (ཨ) at the crown of one's head, with nectar cascading down from it. But here, in this practice, nectar first pours down through the body of Vajrasattva and starts to flow down into the wheel of great bliss at the crown of our head, then goes further down to the other wheels. When the wheel of great bliss is filled with nectar, we have received the vase empowerment, we are purified of karmic obscurations, we have obtained the wisdom of joy, and we are established at the Nirmanakaya level.

In the Guru Yoga practice of the Palyul¹⁰⁰ lineage, there is a step where the practitioner receives empowerment through Guru Yoga. In this context, it is a pith instruction that combines the practice of Vajrasattva with Guru Yoga. There are different ways to receive empowerment. We may receive empowerment directly from our guru in person or by visualizing deities such as Vajrasattva, Manjushri, or our root guru granting us empowerment. The latter is referred to as path empowerment.

The empowerment begins with the wheel of great bliss at the crown of our head until it completely fills the central channel and each of the four wheels. Specifically, the nectar first fills all the radial channels, each of which has more branches of smaller channels, of the wheel of great bliss. Thus, we receive the vase empowerment. Sequentially, the nectar fills the wheel of enjoyment in our throat, and we receive the secret empowerment; the nectar then fills the wheel of Dharma at the level of the heart, and we receive the wisdom empowerment; the nectar then fills the wheel of manifestation at the level of our navel, and we receive the precious word empowerment.

Then, the nectar spreads outward, filling the entire body to the tips of our fingers and toes. The whole body is then filled with white nectar, like a crystal vase filled with milk. At this moment, we have received all four empowerments.

We are also purified of the four kinds of obscurations: karmic obscurations, obscurations of negative emotions, conceptual obscurations, and obscurations of habitual tendencies. The wisdom of the four joys arises within us: joy, supreme joy, extraordinary joy, and innate joy. The levels of the four kayas are established within

¹⁰⁰ The Palyul lineage was founded in 1665 by Kunzang Sherab (1636-1699). It is based out of Palyul monastery, one of the six mother monasteries of the Nyingma lineage. (Source: Rigpawiki.org]

us: the Nirmanakaya, the Sambhogakaya, the Dharmakaya, and the Svabhavikakaya.

Having been cleansed by nectar, we become qualified Dharma vessels, have received four empowerments, are purified of the four kinds of obscurations, and have the wisdom of the four joys arising within us. We have established the levels of the four kayas in ourselves, and all the necessary causes and conditions for attaining the four kayas are now ripened in us.

♦ **Visualize our negative actions are purified**

Then, we recite the prayer:

O protector! In my ignorance and delusion

I have gone against and corrupted my samaya.

Lama protector, be my refuge!

Chief of all the mandalas, vajra holder,

Embodiment of great compassion:

Chief 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.

*I implore you: let my negative actions, obscurations, wrongdoing and downfalls—all my flaws—be completely cleansed and purified!*¹⁰¹

The above prayer is similar to the corresponding section in Mipham Rinpoche's liturgy for the preliminary practice—*Illuminating the Path to Liberation*, as it also serves as a prayer to Vajrasattva for the purification of our negative actions and those of other beings.

Right after reciting the lines, we should visualize that Vajrasattva is delighted and smilingly grants our prayer with these words:

Fortunate one, all your negative actions, obscurations, violations, and breaches are purified.

¹⁰¹ Source: <https://www.lotsawahouse.org/>

It is said in a tantra:

If the ultimate king of all mantras¹⁰²
Is recited even just once,
It can eliminate all negative actions,
And accomplish all Dharma activities.

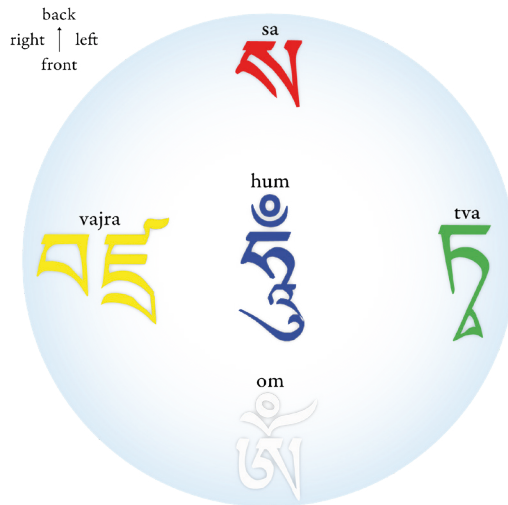
Therefore, the power of reciting the hundred-syllable mantra is immense. If we recite it while attentively visualizing according to the instructions provided here, our negative actions will undoubtedly be purified.

♦ We are transformed into Vajrasattva

After granting our prayer, Vajrasattva melts into light and dissolves within us, transforming us into Vajrasattva, just as we visualized him earlier.

Visualize a moon disc, as small and flat as a mustard seed, resting in Vajrasattva's heart, which has merged with our own heart. At the center of the moon disc stands a blue hum (ॐ). Surrounding it, visualize a white om (ॐ) in front, a yellow vajra (ॐ) to the left, a red sa (ॐ) behind, and a green tva (ॐ) to the right.

There are many components in this confession practice. The component mentioned above is actually a practice of the completion stage, which generally requires empowerment before it can be practiced. In the past, some gurus have



¹⁰² It refers to the hundred-syllable mantra.

advised practitioners to receive empowerment before learning the teachings of the uncommon preliminary practices. However, according to the tradition of my gurus, including Khenpo Depa and the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, it is not mandatory for practitioners to receive empowerment before learning this section of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. I have attended teachings on the preliminaries multiple times, and in each instance, empowerment was not a prerequisite. Therefore, I do not request that you take empowerment either.

Of course, it is best to have received the empowerment, as this practice of Vajrasattva includes some uncommon practices of the highest yoga tantra that cannot be found in the practices of Sutrayana and the outer tantras.

♦ The Vajrasattva mantra can be found in the Tripitaka

Someone has said, “The hundred-syllable mantra can be found in the Tripitaka, but not the Vajrasattva mantra—*Om Vajrasattva Hum*.”

In fact, the Vajrasattva mantra is found in the Tripitaka. In the scriptures translated by Dharmadeva, Prajna of Kubha, and other translators, this mantra appears, although the pronunciation varies slightly.

Therefore, if you have not found the mantra in certain scriptures, it does not mean it is fabricated. Similar situations have occurred in the past in the Tibetan region. For instance, some translators from the New Translation School believed that certain tantras in the Nyingma lineage were fabricated because they could not locate the corresponding tantra in Sanskrit scriptures during their time in India.

Soon, these translators’ opinions were refuted by some learned scholars. They pointed out that the translators had only visited eastern India once and had not traveled throughout the entire country, which meant they had not thoroughly examined all the sutras and tantras available in India. Consequently, the translators were not in a position to assert that there were no corresponding Sanskrit texts or to dismiss the Nyingma tantras as inauthentic. Therefore, the absence of a discovery does not prove that something does not exist.

When Atisha arrived in Tibet, he believed he was well-versed in the tantras. However, upon visiting the grand pavilion of scriptures at Samye Monastery, he was astonished to find many sutras and tantras he had never encountered. These Sanskrit texts, along with their Tibetan translations, had been brought to Tibet

by great masters and translators from pure realms like Oddiyana and Shambhala, as well as from various regions in India.

In great awe, Atisha praised the collection, stating, “I believed I knew all the tantras. Also, once dakinis revealed to me countless palaces in the sky, and I explored all the tantras found there. However, what I have seen today is truly unprecedented and unparalleled, even when compared to the collections from India’s heydays. The tantras are indeed boundless.” Following this, Atisha’s pride was humbled.

If there are tantras that even Atisha had never heard of or seen, there must be many more things we have yet to discover. Therefore, we should not reject certain Dharma teachings or practices simply because we have never encountered them, as this can hinder our engagement with those specific teachings or practices, especially the practice of the Vajrasattva mantra. As noted in the tantras and the commentaries of eminent masters from the past, this mantra possesses incredible, boundless power.

- ♦ **Connections through which we benefit ourselves and others**

- ◉ **Making offerings to the buddhas to benefit ourselves**

In this preliminary practice, we primarily recite the hundred-syllable mantra. At the end, when we visualize Vajrasattva melting into light and dissolving into us, transforming us into Vajrasattva, just as we visualized him before, we visualize the Vajrasattva mantra in the heart of Vajrasattva and begin to recite it.

As we recite “*Om Vajrasattva Hum*,” five rays of light—white, yellow, red, green, and blue—stream upward from their corresponding syllables. At the tips of these rays stand the Lady of Beauty and the other offering goddesses, from whose hands countless offerings appear. These offerings include the eight auspicious symbols, the seven royal emblems, parasols, victory banners, canopies, thousand-spoked golden wheels, and right-spiraling white conch shells, among others. They bring joy to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas in the infinite and inconceivable pure realms of the ten directions, aiding in the completion of our accumulations and the purification of our obscurations.

Next, visualize that all the buddhas’ compassion and blessings flowing back to us as rays of light in various colors, which merge completely into us. Envision

that, through this, we attain both the common and supreme accomplishments, progress through the four vidyadhara levels¹⁰³ associated with the path of learning, and ultimately reach the state beyond learning.¹⁰⁴ This visualization creates the conditions necessary for us to realize the Dharmakaya and bring benefit to ourselves.

According to Nyingma views, some masters believe the four levels of vidyadhara are on the path of learning, whereas others believe that the last level of vidyadhara occurs on the path of no-more-learning. This is covered in greater detail in *Luminous Essence: A Guide to the Guhyagarbha Tantra*. But here, it states that the four levels of vidyadhara are only related to the path of learning.

This is the visualization of making offerings to the buddhas and bodhisattvas.

◉ Giving to all living beings to benefit others

Next, visualize countless rays of multicolored light streaming downward from the five syllables. These rays touch all sentient beings across the six realms of the three worlds, cleansing them of their negative actions, obscurations, sufferings, and habitual patterns, much like sunlight dispels darkness at dawn. The entire universe transforms into the Buddha-field of Manifest Joy, and all beings within it take the form of Vajrasattva in white, yellow, red, green, or blue, with each color representing one of the five buddha families.

As we recite the mantra, visualize all these beings also chanting “*Om Vajrasattva Hum*,” creating a vast, resonant humming sound. This visualization establishes the connections necessary for us to achieve the Rupakaya¹⁰⁵ and bring benefit to others.

We visualize making offerings to the buddhas and giving to all living beings not only when reciting the Vajrasattva mantra but also when practicing the generation stage and completion stage while reciting other mantras, such as the Manjushri mantra and the Avalokiteshvara mantra. This visualization can establish the connections through which we can attain the accomplishment of benefiting ourselves and others. Those who are capable of visualizing should do so in their daily practices.

¹⁰³ Four vidyadhara levels include matured vidyadhara, vidyadhara with power over life, Mahamudra vidyadhara, and spontaneously accomplished vidyadhara.

¹⁰⁴ It denotes Buddhahood—the state of completely perfect enlightenment.

¹⁰⁵ The form body, which includes the Nirmanakaya and the Sambhogakaya.

Regarding this type of visualization, it is said in *The Dharma Practice that Spontaneously Liberates Habitual Clingings*:

By emitting and reabsorbing light to bring benefit to oneself and others, one purifies conceptual obscurations.

It means that by visualizing that light emitting and reabsorbing, we make offerings to all buddha of the ten directions and satisfy all living beings of the six realms. As a result, one has attained the accomplishment of benefiting oneself and others and has purified all negative actions and obscurations.

Through these visualization practices, the skillful means of Vajrayana allow one to swiftly accumulate vast amounts of merit and wisdom while also benefiting all beings across the universe. For this reason, we should immerse ourselves in the visualization and recite the mantra as many times as possible.

♦ Skillful means in our practice

The effect of mantra recitation is subject to the differences in our faith, concentration, wisdom, and more. Some practitioners do recite the mantra, but in the course of their recitation, they are either drowsy or involved in chatting, so their recitation practice is filled with distractions. Other practitioners recite the mantra single-mindedly, and they can even clearly visualize everything required in the practices of the generation stage and the completion stage.

According to his biography, Mipham Rinpoche spent many years in retreat and was never distracted while reciting mantras, even when repeating them only a hundred times. Upon learning this, I felt quite embarrassed about my own practices. When I recite mantras, I can begin with focus and recite without distraction, but gradually the quality of my recitation deteriorates as thoughts begin to arise incessantly.

As ordinary beings, we may not recite mantras with the same focus as enlightened masters. However, by applying the proper methods of practice and relying on the blessings of skillful means in Vajrayana, even a single moment of concentration in our practice can lead to boundless accumulations of merit.

Understanding how to apply skillful means can greatly benefit us by enabling the rapid accumulation of merit and the purification of obscurations. This foundation allows us to further benefit others effectively. If we do not achieve

self-benefit, we may remain overwhelmed by karmic obstacles, afflictions, and suffering, making it challenging to manage our own lives, let alone benefit others. Therefore, we should first adopt these skillful means to achieve personal benefit swiftly. At the same time, we can apply the skillful means to directly or indirectly benefit sentient beings. For example, even when we have no opportunity to directly benefit others, engaging in visualization practices can still provide immense benefits to countless beings.

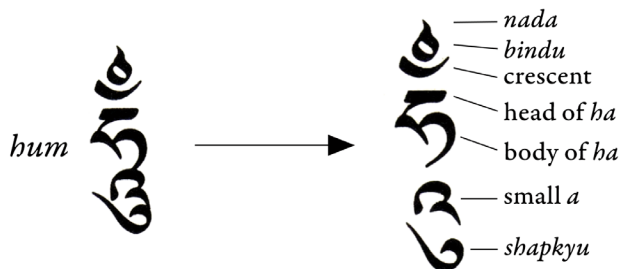
By practicing Vajrasattva with the aforementioned visualization, we can engage in the accumulation of wisdom through making offerings to the buddhas and bodhisattvas, while simultaneously accumulating merit by giving to beings in the six realms. This makes it a profound practice.

♦ Dedication

Recite the mantra as many times as possible. At the end of our session, visualize the entire universe—seen as the Buddha-field of Manifest Joy—dissolving into the beings within it, the Vajrasattvas of the five families. These Vajrasattvas gradually transform into light and merge with us. Envision ourselves melting into light from the outside inward, which then dissolves into the om at our heart center.

The om (ॐ) dissolves into the vajra (འཇིག་རྒྱུ་), the vajra (འཇིག་རྒྱུ་) into the sa (ས), the sa (ས) into the tva (ཏ), the tva (ཏ) into the shapkyu of the hum, the shapkyu into the small a, the small a into the body of the ha, the body into the head, the head into the crescent moon, the crescent into the bindu, and finally the bindu into the nada. The nada, like a rainbow fading into the sky, dissolves into a state free of concepts or elaborations. Rest naturally and relaxed in that state for a while.

The visualization for Guru Yoga is almost the same when it comes time to conclude the session. We visualize the guru gradually melting into five-colored



light and dissolving into our heart from our crown. Then, we rest in a state free of any concepts and elaborations, in which the guru's wisdom is indivisible from our own mind. Remain in this state for a while.

To summarize, the sequence of reciting the hundred-syllable mantra while meditating on Vajrasattva is as follows:

First, see ourselves in our ordinary form and confess our negative actions with this impure body in the presence of Vajrasattva that we have visualized;

Then, after the confession, we transform into Vajrasattva, and there is no ordinary "me" left.

Then Vajrasattva, which is now us, is transformed into syllables, which eventually dissolve into the Dharmadhatu,¹⁰⁶ or the essence of phenomena, and everything, luminous and empty, is free from any concepts and elaborations. Then, if able, we may remain in the non-conceptual state of the Great Perfection or the Great Middle Way. Or we may simply sit for a while without any clinging.

Then, when thoughts begin to arise again, we clearly perceive the entire universe and the beings it contains as the Buddha-field of Vajrasattva. Dedicate the merit with these words:

*Through the positivity and merit of this [practice],
May I swiftly attain the realization of Vajrasattva,
And thereby every single sentient being
Reach his state of perfection too.*

We may dedicate the merit, make aspirations, and sincerely wish for each and every living being to swiftly achieve the state of Vajrasattva.

Then, in all our actions after arising from the Vajrasattva practice, we should clearly perceive what we hear and see as the nature of Vajrasattva, recognizing everything as pure. This is the basic visualization practice of the generation stage, which serves as the essential instruction for transforming all our actions onto the path.

If we practice Guru Yoga during the meditative session, when we arise from

¹⁰⁶ Dharmadhatu (Skt. dharmadhātu; Tib. མཁའ་འགྲིལ་ཁྱིལ་, chö ying, Wyl. chos kyi dbyings) — literally 'the essence or expanse of phenomena.' All-encompassing space. Dharmadhatu can be synonymous with buddha nature. (Source: Rigpawiki.org)

the state of concentration, we should perceive all appearances as manifestations of the guru, all sounds as the voice of the guru, and all thoughts as the wisdom of the guru. It is essential to practice in this manner.

♦ **Concentrate on our recitation**

During any meditation and recitation practice, including this Vajrasattva practice, it is crucial to maintain focus and avoid letting the mind wander away from the practice. Additionally, we should refrain from interrupting the recitation with casual conversation.

◎ **The quality of our recitation**

It is said in a tantra:

Reciting without concentration
Is like soaking a rock in the depths of the sea;
Even after an entire kalpa, it will yield no result.

Some esteemed masters suggest that the phrase “no result” in the verse actually means “small result” instead of “no result at all.” As I mentioned earlier, it is acceptable if one is unable to visualize properly while reciting the Vajrasattva mantra, the hundred-syllable mantra, and others, as the act of recitation itself generates merit. However, it is important to note that the results of recitation with concentration are significantly greater than those of recitation without concentration.

How much greater is the difference? The tantra also says:

Purity surpasses impurity by a thousand-fold,
Concentration excels non-concentration by a hundred
thousand-fold.

Therefore, great practitioners of the past always remained concentrated and did not interrupt their recitation with ordinary speech during their practices, including their daily prayers.

An esteemed master once visited Larung Gar to request financial assistance for building a monastery. The great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, recognizing the importance of his request, arranged for the master to stay in the VIP room on

the top floor of the International Study Hall. Although the Larung Gar Buddhist Academy was low on funds, Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche allocated some money based on the Academy's capacity. He then asked Razang, the chief monastic disciplinarian, and me to deliver the money to the master.

When we were about to enter the master's room, his attendant stopped us and said, "My guru does not see anyone during his recitation. Would you please wait outside?" We had no choice but to wait, and we waited for over an hour.

Many esteemed masters recite prayers and mantras with great concentration. Many young monastics and lay practitioners struggle to do the same; they interrupt recitation with casual conversation or even telephone calls. In fact, we should cultivate the habit of pure recitation. For example, when reciting *The King of Aspiration Prayers: Samantabhadra's Aspiration to Excellent Conduct*, we should maintain our focus. It is natural for thoughts to arise during recitation, but we should strive not to mix recitation with ordinary speech.

◉ Do not mix recitation with ordinary speech

Gold or silver that contains even trace amounts of brass or copper is considered "not true gold" or "impure silver." Similarly, blending ordinary gossip with mantra recitation compromises the purity of the mantra. That is why Padmasambhava said:

Reciting for a year while mixing it with worthless chatter
Is not as effective as reciting for a month without it.

As you see, ordinary speech such as worthless chatter brings great fault. The *Forest of Gems in the Garden of the Dharma* says:

All worthless chatter brings no benefit to oneself and others,
[Chatter] only grows indolence, cultivates unvirtuous karma,
And leads to rebirth in the three lower realms.

Therefore, when reciting mantras or prayers among a group of practitioners, it is very necessary to refrain from ordinary speech. As of this year, Larung Gar has implemented this regulation. During the Dharma assembly, such as the recent Ksitigarbha Dharma assembly, every attendee carries a sign that reads, "no talk."

Some monks comment, "With this sign on me, I would feel embarrassed if I talked." Each of us should wear the sign during a Dharma assembly. However, some

individuals' signs are rather "flexible": the sign is hidden away when they wish to talk and reappears when the conversation is over. This is not acceptable.

When recitations are tainted by ordinary speech, they entirely lose their meaning. This is particularly crucial during ceremonies held for someone who has passed away. In the fear and distress of *bardo*—the intermediate state, the deceased instinctively seeks guidance and support from the invited monks and the officiating lama. This also applies to laypeople who are praying for the deceased.

Beings in the intermediate state can perceive the thoughts of others. If those conducting the ceremony lack concentration, fail to uphold their vows and samayas, or allow attachment and hostility to influence their speech and thoughts, the deceased may harbor resentment or negative feelings toward them. This could unfortunately result in the deceased falling into lower realms.

Beings in the intermediate state possess clairvoyance. The bardo instructions indicate that these beings are nine times smarter than ordinary people and clearly know what we think, speak, and act. Therefore, we should pay extra attention when offering recitation services for the deceased.

It is best if one has the capability to practice the generation stage and the completion stage when offering the service for the deceased, as this brings the greatest benefit. If one cannot do so, they may still recite with compassion and faith in the Three Jewels, which can also bring great benefit. Otherwise, if beings in the intermediate state fall into lower realms because one's failure to provide pure recitation, then, as Patrul Rinpoche says, "One would be better off without the services of such officiants."

Without the services of such officiants, beings in the intermediate state would at most wander aimlessly and would not fall into the lower realms. However, due to the officiants' inappropriate services, those beings may experience a bad rebirth. How ironic!

The ceremony represents a pivotal moment for the deceased. However, some invited monks and officiating lamas make phone calls during the ceremony, ignore monastery regulations, neglect their duty to recite prayers, and focus on their trivial personal matters.

In the twenty-first century, many traditions, including those within the Buddhist community, have faded due to the influence of technological advancements on every aspect of life. We should make an effort to uphold these traditions

by turning off our phones and refraining from conversation during the recitation. We can speak once the recitation has concluded.

The wise will understand this after a single reminder and will act correctly for the rest of their lives. However, for some individuals, even repeated reminders may not have an effect—perhaps this is related to their karma.

In summary, we should engage in pure recitations by not only avoiding ordinary speech but also visualizing according to the texts in the liturgy and staying focused. It is said of Vajrayana rituals that “to recite the visualization texts of the generation stage is to use words as a means of access.” Just as an agenda guides discussions in worldly meetings, the words of the visualization serve to remind us of the details of the generation stage as we practice deities such as Vajrasattva and Amitabha.

However, during the ceremony, some people focus only on the tone, mouthing words such as “visualize,” “meditate,” and “concentrate” with powerful, rhythmic intonation. Yet, they fail to visualize as instructed and remain unfocused during the practice. Furthermore, after completing the liturgy, during the most essential moment of reciting the mantra, they immediately relax and no longer make an effort to sit up straight. According to Patrul Rinpoche, some people during his time would even start to smoke tobacco—the source of hundreds of wrongdoings¹⁰⁷—and engage in useless chatter. Meanwhile, they absentmindedly counted by pushing the mala beads through their fingers, as if they were making sausages. Toward late afternoon, they look up at the sky, feeling it is time to conclude the ceremony. With a huge clattering of cymbals, they begin chanting, “Vajra puspe dhūpe...”¹⁰⁸ and complete the recitation of the ritual text.

This does not even come close to resembling a proper ritual, not even a shadow of one. It is clear that simply reciting the *Confession of Downfalls to the Thirty-Five Buddhas* or *The King of Aspiration Prayers: Samantabhadra’s Aspiration to Excellent Conduct* once, with perfectly pure motivation, would be far more valuable.

Things are going well now. During the Dharma assemblies of Vajrasattva and Ksitigarbha, many of you participated actively and with great commitment. Lay practitioners outside of Larung Gar are also practicing in sync. I have heard that

¹⁰⁷ Smoking pollutes the system of subtle channels and energies and thus causes harm to the mind at a deep level.

¹⁰⁸ The words of the offering section of the sadhana, which are repeated after the recitation of the mantra and before the conclusion.

they stay focused during the recitations and do not speak until the recitation of *The King of Aspiration Prayers: Samantabhadra's Aspiration to Excellent Conduct* is complete. Regardless of what we recite, it is essential not to mix recitation with ordinary chatter.

Otherwise, lamas or monastics who, through impure recitation and superficial rituals, may not only lead the deceased to lower realms but also cause more harm than benefit for the living with their ceremonies. Moreover, abusing others' offerings in such a way is akin to "swallowing red hot metal balls."¹⁰⁹

♦ Recite with bodhicitta

◉ Never part from bodhicitta

Lamas and monks who receive offerings from the faithful and the possessions of the deceased must always ensure their recitations are pure and guided by bodhicitta, the key principle. They should not concern themselves with the specifics of the offerings—such as the quantity of meat or the thickness of the fried bread—but instead devote themselves wholeheartedly to benefiting the sick or the deceased. These individuals are at a critical juncture, suffering greatly and lacking support. Mahayana practitioners should approach them with the love and compassion of bodhicitta, focusing on the recitation of the generation stage and the perfection stage.

If the lamas and monks have not yet reached the practical states of the generation and perfection stages, they should recite the ritual text accurately while contemplating the meaning of the words. At the same time, they should direct their body, speech, and mind toward love and compassion for those who are suffering. Through the unwavering power of the Three Jewels, the compassion of refuge, the infallible power of the effect of actions, and the boundless benefits of bodhicitta, they can undoubtedly bring significant benefits to the sick and the deceased.

One must remember this well! Especially when performing the ritual for the deceased, it is acceptable if one is neither a tulku nor a guru, or if one is unfamiliar with the practices of the generation and perfection stages; the key is having pure motivation. As long as one's motivation is pure, as stated in the sutras, even if only

¹⁰⁹ It suggests that accepting such offerings carries significant karmic risk and could result in rebirth in the hell realm.

one person offers recitation services for the deceased, they will not fall into the lower realm.

For those who are sick, we can recite the mantra of Medicine Buddha, the *Heart Sutra*, the *Diamond Sutra*, and the like. Except for someone's fixed karma, which even the Medicine Buddha cannot change, our recitation can definitely bring benefit to the sick. For those who have already passed away, we can recite the Avalokiteshvara mantra, the name of Amitabha, and other sutras, which will certainly alleviate their fear and suffering.

No matter what we recite, we should understand that when the three types of power—the power of our pure bodhicitta, the power of the compassion of the Three Jewels, and the power of the principle of cause and effect—merge, just as three ingredients combine to create good medicine, our recitation can undoubtedly benefit all living beings.

◉ Dissolving our own obscurations on someone else's cushion

Any practice performed with the intention of helping others will benefit not only them but also us who engage in the practice, as expressed in the phrase “dissolving our own obscurations on someone else's cushion.” Such practice will fulfill the twofold accumulation for both ourselves and others simultaneously. We will also guide all those who come into contact with us on the path to liberation.

What does “dissolving our own obscurations on someone else's cushion” mean? It means that when we sit on someone else's cushion and recite prayers for them, we also purify our own obscurations. This is a precious instruction that practitioners must know. There are many teachings as valuable as this one in *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, but we may miss them if we go through the text mindlessly.

Of course, most people tend to prioritize their own interests. Even some lamas and monks—individuals who are expected to be more virtuous and knowledgeable about the law of cause and effect—shy away from accepting offerings for fear of the defilements they might bring. As a result, they refuse to offer blessings or recite dedication prayers for the sick or deceased. This behavior undermines the very foundation of bodhicitta, severing its love and compassion at the root.

But there are many practitioners nowadays who claim, “I do not touch money,” or “I do not build connections with others through receiving offerings,” and similar statements. Unless they do so for a special and legitimate reason, their actions suggest that they have severed their bodhicitta. If a Mahayana practitioner knows

that living beings are suffering and need blessings, but still remains in a secluded place and sees no one, it may not be appropriate.

Having excessive self-protection is not necessarily a sign of a good practitioner. In particular, there is no need for a Mahayanist to always maintain distance from others. As long as one accepts offerings without greed or attachment, it is beneficial and harmless for them to grant blessings or offer help to others. Otherwise, if a Mahayanist remains solely focused on their own practice, it is difficult to determine whether that is a good thing or not.

Of course, this does not mean we must fully dedicate ourselves to the benefit of others. Only the great bodhisattvas can entirely commit to helping others. Take the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, for instance; he continued to caress the crowns of people's heads and grant blessings even when he was very sick. There was a long line of people waiting to see him during his hospitalization. Such spirit of a bodhisattva is truly remarkable. Those who have the chance to connect with such a great bodhisattva, even just through a single encounter, can receive incredible benefits.

For us, it is worthwhile to build connections with others, even if we can provide only a small benefit to those we engage with. Establishing connections with others also offers us a distinct advantage: socializing can help reveal some of our minor, hidden problems. If we isolate ourselves, believing we have achieved certain states of realization, we may eventually confront significant issues related to our practice or mental well-being.

There was a case in the past of a practitioner who spent many years in retreat. Upon completing his practice, he found it difficult to connect with others. In such circumstances, it would have been more beneficial for him to have built connections with others and made an effort to benefit them. In fact, the opportunity to benefit others is hard to get, so had he known the merit of benefiting others, he would not have missed the chance.

◉ Those focused solely on self-interest gain no true benefit

Many people abandon altruism because they believe only what is done for themselves, such as recitation, meditation, and circumambulating stupas, counts as their own merit.

Those overly concerned with self-interest are often unwilling to help others. Even when participating in ceremonies at the request of their benefactors, they ignore the prayers needed by the families. Instead, they pull out their own worn

prayer books, insisting that their personal practice must not be interrupted, and they chant from those books while the rest of the group recites the appropriate prayers.

When reciting prayers for their own benefit, they are meticulously careful, asserting that they are purifying their own obscurations or rectifying their misuse of offerings. However, when it comes to prayers in large gatherings for the benefit of benefactors, they view it as a burdensome task. They are often distracted, saying whatever comes to mind, and give no real consideration to the living or deceased individuals they are meant to help.

Those who concentrate excessively on their own benefit exhibit this behavior. For instance, some Dharma fellows here at Larung Gar view their volunteer work merely as obligations to the guru or others, leading to a careless approach to these tasks. In contrast, they place significant emphasis on their own recitation and meditation practices, perceiving these as personal pursuits that are more important and deserving of serious dedication.

Their actions are completely misguided. By refusing to recite prayers or act for the benefit of others, they undermine the very foundation of bodhicitta, severing its love and compassion at the root. Additionally, if they later try to purify themselves of the misuse of offerings, their selfish and harmful mindset will create significant obstacles to achieving true purification.

From the outset, we should ground ourselves in the love and compassion of bodhicitta, steadfastly maintaining our aspiration to benefit others. We should strive earnestly to apply all we know about the generation and perfection stages in practice to the fullest extent possible. Whether meditating on these stages and reciting mantras in our own homes or someone else's, the essential requirement remains the same: to be free from selfish thoughts and genuinely focused on helping others. Both of these attitudes are equally vital and cannot be neglected. Therefore, when engaging in recitations, volunteering for Dharma activities, and participating in other virtuous actions, we must do so within the context of bodhicitta.



Lesson 118

“If you stay undistracted and do not mix your recitation ... That we may extract the essence of the generation and perfection phase.” [page 276–280]

Most Dharma fellows at Larung Gar have finished reciting the hundred-syllable mantra one hundred thousand times and will soon proceed to the practice of offering the mandala.

Now, let’s continue to study the chapter on meditation and recitation on Vajrasattva.

2.2.3.5. The Benefit of Confession

It is difficult to predict when we will die. However, for a practitioner, the greatest regret is to pass away without having confessed their negative actions.

The Way of the Bodhisattva says:

It may be that my death will come to me
Before my evil has been cleansed.
How then can I be freed from it?
I pray you, quickly grant me your protection!¹¹⁰

Every practitioner should be mindful of using “death” to motivate their practice. Whether young or old, a person’s time of death is uncertain. Therefore,

¹¹⁰ Shantideva, *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Shambhala, 2011, chapter 2, verse 32.

it is most meaningful to complete the recitation of the hundred-syllable mantra as soon as possible.

♦ **The benefit of the hundred-syllable mantra**

Then, what is the result of reciting the hundred-syllable mantra?

By maintaining focus and refraining from ordinary speech, reciting the hundred-syllable mantra 108 times without interruption will surely purify all our negative actions, obscurations, and violations of vows and samayas. This is the promise of Vajrasattva.

The Practice of Manjushri according to the Vajrasekhara Sutra says:

Recite the hundred-syllable mantra in your heart [as a way] to
bless yourself;
If in past lives you have committed all kinds of evil actions,
The five crimes with immediate retribution and other
obscurations,
Because of the blessings you receive from the hundred-syllable
mantra,
All the negative actions and obscurations will be cleansed.

The Tantra of Immaculate Confession says:

The hundred-syllable mantra embodies the essence of the wisdom mind of all the buddhas. It can purify transgressions of vows and the obscurations of conceptual thoughts, earning its title as the king of all confessions. If recited 108 times without interruption, it can restore all broken vows and prevent one from falling into the three lower realms. Any yogi who commits to reciting it as their daily practice will not only be regarded by the buddhas of the three times as their most excellent child in this life and receive their protection, but will also, without a doubt, become the most exceptional heirs of all the buddhas after death.

This is the benefit of reciting the hundred-syllable mantra 108 times without interruption. Many of you, the Dharma fellows at Larung Gar, have committed to reciting it 108 times every day. By doing so, you will become the finest heirs of

all the buddhas and avoid falling into the three lower realms. What an incredible benefit! The assurance from all the buddhas serves as the best guarantee for you.

While worldly people often seek insurance, health insurance cannot prevent illness, and pension plans do not stop aging. Moreover, insurance fails to provide protection in dangerous situations. In contrast, the recitation of the hundred-syllable mantra serves as the most reliable “insurance” for this life and for many lives to come.

If a practitioner clearly knows they have committed many negative actions and is worried about the karmic results, why not confess as soon as possible? Reciting the hundred-syllable mantra 108 times every day until death brings immense benefits for this life and future lives. Knowing this, why not recite it?

Furthermore, after embarking on the tantric path, individuals who have violated either the root or branch samayas can prevent the ripening effects of these transgressions from developing or increasing by daily reciting the hundred-syllable mantra twenty-one times while meditating on Vajrasattva. This practice is referred to as “the blessing of downfalls.”

If one recites the hundred-syllable mantra one hundred thousand times, all their downfalls will be completely purified, as stated in *The Essential Ornament Tantra*:

Visualize clearly the honorable teacher Vajrasattva
 Seated on a radiant moon disc atop a white lotus.
 Following the liturgy for practicing the hundred-syllable
 mantra,
 If one recites it twenty-one times,
 The recitation can bring “the blessing of the downfalls”,
 Preventing downfalls from developing or increasing.
 This is taught by enlightened masters,
 So, one should practice it consistently.
 If one recites it one hundred thousand times,
 One will undoubtedly realize the pristine nature.

When practicing, we may follow Mipham Rinpoche’s *Illuminating the Path to Liberation*, the Longchen Nyingtik liturgy as we are learning here, or the liturgy from the Kagyu or Geluk lineage. All lineages of Tibetan Buddhism have the

liturgy of Vajrasattva, and even Chinese Buddhism places great importance on the practice of Vajrasattva. For example, the Dharani used to amend recitation flaws at the end of *The Dharani Spoken by the Buddha to Liberate Flaming-Face Ghosts* is actually the hundred-syllable mantra.

Regarding the importance of reciting the hundred-syllable mantra, I have emphasized it many times. We recite it neither to complete the required repetitions nor to gain the qualification to attend the tantric teachings; we do so to purify the negative actions and obscurations accumulated since time without beginning. The primary goal of this practice is to purify negative actions and obscurations!

As far as purifying negative actions and obscurations is concerned, Vajrasattva is the “most competent” deity. There is no negative action or obscuration that cannot be purified by Vajrasattva. Even just hearing his name or seeing his image can bring incredible benefit. *The Unexcelled Yoga of the Nonduality of Sameness: Great King of Tantra* says:

Those who hear the name of Vajrasattva and see his image will
attain the ultimate accomplishment in seven lifetimes.

One needs merit to see the image of Vajrasattva, to hear his name, his mantra, and the hundred syllables. Those who lack merit will not have the opportunity to see or hear him.

The security officer I mentioned earlier recited the hundred-syllable mantra daily while beside the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche in Chengdu, which is truly impressive. This experience often leads me to ponder, “If a security officer can engage in confession, why do so many people disregard this practice? Some individuals have amassed significant negative actions yet perceive their behavior as intriguing and a mark of success. How misguided this is!”

It is understandable for a worldly person who has not received teachings to believe that their actions are justified and that they have nothing to confess. However, why do some Buddhists dismiss this practice? Many individuals enjoy discussing high teachings but show little interest in preliminary practices, such as the hundred-syllable mantra. When the topic of preliminaries is brought up, they often dismiss them as inferior and unnecessary. This is a big mistake.

Without purifying negative actions and accumulating merit, a person cannot reach a higher level of realization. Even if they do attain some experience, it is often

unstable. This instability arises because the luminosity of great qualities cannot arise while heavy karmic obscurations remain.

As mentioned earlier, our alaya, or all-ground consciousness, is like a mirror, while our negative actions are like dust on that mirror. Until we purify the negative actions we have accumulated in this life, as well as those from beginningless time, the states of the generation and perfection phases will not be reflected in the mirror of alaya.

When can the reflections appear? They appear when we wipe the mirror of alaya with the cloth of the four powers, and cleanse all the dust of the defilements, conceptual obscurations, and obscurations of habitual tendency. At that time, all the inner and outer great qualities will clearly arise.

Therefore, after knowing the benefit of the hundred-syllable mantra, we should confess with great diligence by applying the four powers. Tantric practitioners should particularly practice confession frequently.

♦ Tantric practitioners and confession

In modern times, it can be said that most lamas, monks, and laypeople—both men and women—across the Tibetan region have received empowerments, thereby entering the tantric path. I observe a similar trend now emerging in the Han regions, where many Buddhists, perhaps out of curiosity, attend any empowerment offered. Most of you present in this teaching have likely received empowerment as well, which means you have already entered the tantric path and become a tantric practitioner.

◎ Two routes for tantric practitioners

After entering the tantric path, one must uphold the samayas. By doing so, one can attain Buddhahood, the completely perfect enlightenment. Conversely, those who have received empowerment but fail to keep the samayas will inevitably fall into the hell realm. This situation is akin to a snake inside a bamboo tube: it has only two ways out—straight up or straight down, with no other options available. Similarly, a tantric practitioner has only two outcomes—attaining perfect Buddhahood or descending into hell—and there is no third alternative. Jigme Lingpa states in *The Treasury of Precious Qualities*:

Once entering the Vajrayana path, one can only either go to

lower realms

Or attain Buddhahood; there is no third direction.

Although some eminent masters explain that the above statement is from a strict perspective, a tantric practitioner should nevertheless pay attention to the issue of keeping the samayas.

◎ The tantric samayas are numerous

The tantric samayas are subtle, numerous, and very difficult to keep. Even a great master like Atisha acknowledged that, after taking the precepts of individual liberation, he never breached any of them; after receiving the bodhisattva vows, he occasionally made transgressions; however, after embarking on the tantric path, he found himself committing faults one after another in quick succession. Nowadays, we have few antidotes at our disposal. Our mindfulness is weak, and our vigilance is virtually absent. We are often uncertain about what the various downfalls entail. Consequently, it is likely that we have committed countless transgressions.

As for me, I have taken the precepts of individual liberation, the bodhisattva vows, and the samayas. I have received empowerments of the Kriya tantra, the Charya tantra, the Yoga tantra, the Kalachakra, and the Chetsün Great Perfection. Each empowerment has specific samaya vows to uphold.

Sutrayana has its own precepts to observe, such as the precepts of individual liberation and the bodhisattva vows. Vajrayana has its own samaya vows to observe, including the fourteen root downfalls, the twenty-five precepts of the *Kalachakra Tantra*, and the five root vows of the *Guhyagarbha Tantra*, which are discussed in the commentary on the *Ascertaining the Three Vows*. Now that I have received so many precepts and samayas, is it beneficial or harmful if I do not uphold them properly? Reflecting on this, I feel frightened.

◎ Recite the hundred syllables twenty-one times every day

Therefore, we should vow to continuously practice Vajrasattva to purify these transgressions. From now on, at the very least, we should recite the hundred-syllable mantra twenty-one times every day without interruption.

This is extremely important! Whether one is a Sutrayana practitioner or a Vajrayana practitioner, it is quite easy to undertake this practice. Many Tibetans are doing this. As for me, I have also formed a habit of reciting the hundred-syllable mantra twenty-one times the moment I open my eyes in the morning. Sometimes, I

fall asleep again while reciting the mantra and forget how many times I have recited it, so I recite it again when I wake up.

This practice is easy to adopt. Once we become accustomed to it, it will become second nature and offer us significant benefits. As ordinary beings, we often find ourselves engaging in negative actions. Before we began our journey on the Dharma path, nearly all our thoughts and actions were negative. Even after entering the Dharma, we likely have violated many of the three types of precepts, both major and minor.

Thus, in addition to dedicating ourselves to confessing our negative actions this time, we should also cultivate the habit of daily confession. This practice will prevent the accumulation and escalation of our negative karma. If we commit misdeeds but refrain from confessing them, allowing them to linger in our mindstream, they will inevitably become significant obstacles to our liberation over time.

In fact, it is not difficult to recite the hundred-syllable mantra twenty-one times daily. Though very simple, this practice has been emphasized by Patrul Rinpoche and the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, making it truly significant. For this reason, I have been practicing it since receiving the teaching of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* from Khenpo Depa.

The first Dharma teaching I received was *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. At that time, I had just quit school and received no support from my school or family, but I did not think too much about it and still managed to take ordination. This was due to my faith in the Dharma, especially in *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. I have always felt a special connection to the text. I often carry it with me and read a few pages from time to time.

I hope you also carry with you a copy of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* that you read from time to time, as it can greatly benefit your practice. If you do not revisit the text and use its teachings as guidance, they may fade from your memory, leading to a resurgence of negative thoughts. This is a key reason why many individuals find it difficult to maintain a stable practice and progress on their spiritual journey.

Unlike us, the sublime beings are very stable in their faith and practices; they never waver. For example, when a negative thought arises, they immediately confess it and consistently practice this approach.

Therefore, if we want to emulate the sublime beings, we should discipline ourselves by adopting skillful means, such as reading a few pages of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* and reciting the hundred-syllable mantra twenty-one times each day. If we form such a habit, it is considered a stable practice.

♦ **Avoid any contact with samaya breakers**

As mentioned earlier, it is extremely important for a tantric practitioner to keep the samayas. This not only refers to maintaining the purity of our own samayas but also involves one crucial issue: avoiding any contact with someone who has violated the root samayas.

◉ **The fault of “violation through contact”**

Even an experienced practitioner of the generation and perfection stages, who maintains their samayas through mindfulness and vigilance, must still commit to regular confession and purification. This is because any interaction, whether through speech or action, with someone who has broken the root samayas—even something as simple as sharing water from the same valley—can result in what is termed “violation through contact” or “occasional violation.”

Thus, a person who has violated the root samayas can cause significant damage. It is actually very difficult, if not impossible, to avoid “sharing the water from the same valley.” For example, if a person who has violated the root samayas has drunk the water in the Larung valley, no one else should drink that water anymore; otherwise, this will result in the fault of “violation through contact.” However, there is no way to avoid drinking the water at Larung Gar.

Why is it difficult for today’s practitioners to attain experience and realization? On one hand, they carry heavy karmic debts that obscure their buddha-nature; on the other hand, they may have contact with someone who has violated the root samayas, which creates obstacles that hinder their accomplishment.

Therefore, we must confess with great diligence and purify our negative actions and obscurations. It is said in the *Tantra of Unspeakable Meaning of Confession*:

By associating with transgressors or fulfilling their wishes,
By teaching the Dharma to transgressors or unfit Dharma
vessels,
Or by failing to distance oneself from all transgressors with

vigilance,
 One will inevitably be tainted by the obscurations of their
 transgressions,
 Leading to adversity in this life and obscurations in the next.
 Thus, one should confess with deep remorse for these mistakes.

This confession prayer addresses the following mistakes that need remedy:

First, the mistake of associating with transgressors. Here, “transgressors” refers specifically to individuals who have broken their samayas, particularly in a recognized and evident manner. For example, a transgressor may have developed serious conflicts with their vajra guru—not merely minor disagreements, but severe discord. Associating with such a person requires confession and remedy.

Second, the mistake of teaching the Dharma to transgressors. The great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche established the rule that anyone who violated the root samayas is prohibited from attending any tantric Dharma assembly or empowerment. This rule has been in effect since the founding of our Buddhist Academy.

Despite this, some individuals believe they should practice compassion toward the transgressors by saying, “Poor you! You are also a living being. Come here; I will teach you the Dharma. If nobody else will take you as a disciple, I will.” However, this approach constitutes the mistake of explaining the Dharma to a transgressor. Because of these mistakes, along with the failure to avoid all transgressors, they too have become contaminated. They should confess these mistakes, which create hindrances and obstacles in this life and in many lives yet to come, in the same way that one confesses negative actions committed in the past.

◉ Transgressors will contaminate those who keep their samayas

Moreover, in an assembly of practitioners, even if there is just one person who has broken their samayas, their transgression will contaminate everyone present. Thus, the hundreds or thousands of samaya keepers in the gathering will receive no benefit from their practice.

Thus, the consequence of violating the samayas is horrifying! Certain people have shown a tendency not only to slander their guru but also to deliberately create obstacles for them. The result of such actions is very dangerous! If the guru is their root guru of threefold kindness, deliberately slandering the guru is a grave fault.

When dealing with certain issues, if a guru and their disciple or two Dharma

fellows have a quarrel due to conflicting opinions, this does not constitute a violation of the samayas if they have confessed and purified the conflict before midnight. A transgression of samaya is akin to a single drop of sour milk turning an entire pot of fresh milk sour, or one sore-infested frog infecting all the others nearby. Therefore, one transgressor can contaminate all those who keep the samayas in the assembly and even destroy all the merit in an empowerment or a Dharma assembly. As it is said:

Just as a single drop of sour milk
Can turn all the fresh milk sour,
One samaya breaker
Can spoil all the samaya keepers.

Therefore, the Larung Gar Buddhist Academy has been paying special attention to this issue, and the rule established by the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche has been implemented strictly. Before each Dharma assembly, the monastic-in-charge will scrutinize attendees, and those who have violated the root samayas will be excluded from the Dharma assembly.

We must remain especially vigilant about our own actions. Even if we have never violated the root samayas before, there is a possibility that we may do so in the future. Violating the samayas carries much greater severity than breaching the root precepts of individual liberation or the bodhisattva vows. In fact, violating the samayas of Vajrayana is fundamentally different from breaking the precepts of Sutrayana. If a person reaches this point and fails to purify the violation within three years, they will become an enemy of the entire Buddhist community, as they would perpetually bring negative energy and contaminate wherever they stay and whoever they associate with. How distressing!

Therefore, we should watch out not only for the transgressors but also for the thoughts and actions of ourselves.

◉ Transgressors can contaminate a great lama

Not only ordinary practitioners but even a teacher, a great lama, or an accomplished master cannot escape being contaminated by samaya violations.

Here is an example from the great teacher Lingje Repa:

While Lingje Repa was practicing in the sacred place of Tsari, local spirits

created obstacles for him. At midday, the spirits cast such deep darkness that stars appeared in the sky as if it were night. Despite this, Lingje Repa persevered and reached the shores of the Dark Red Blood Lake, where he danced to a vajra song, leaving his footprints in the solid rock, still visible to this day. However, later in life, Lingje Repa encountered a disciple who had violated the samayas. Even a master of his attainment was not immune to the contamination of samaya violations. As a result, he became delirious and lost his ability to speak.

This is a true historical account. Despite being a highly accomplished master, he became delirious after being contaminated by a transgressor of samaya. Therefore, when some elderly gurus are in poor health, their disciples take special precautions to ensure that no transgressors come near them. For instance, consider the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche: when Rinpoche was in his 60s and his health was declining, we decided to minimize external visits to him out of concern that a transgressor might be among his visitors.

Here is a story from the *Secret Biography of Do Khyentse Yeshe Dorje*:

Once, Do Khyentse Yeshe Dorje asked his disciple Orgyen Namgyal to jump off a very deep cliff. Orgyen Namgyal prayed to his guru and jumped. However, he did not land on the ground; instead, he was suspended in the air, and all his great qualities from previous lives were revived.

According to Do Khyentse Yeshe Dorje, Orgyen Namgyal was the rebirth of tertön Karma Lingpa, and his wisdom had been dormant due to contamination by a transgressor. However, through this wrathful method, Orgyen Namgyal's wisdom from his previous life was awakened.

There is a widely recognized transgressor of samaya among the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche's disciples. He is the one who obstructed Rinpoche's opening of the terma gateway in the sacred mountain of Drongri.¹¹¹ This person had received tantric teachings such as the Kalachakra Tantra from Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, but later intentionally slandered Rinpoche. It is a consensus in the Tibetan region that he is a transgressor.

This old man is still alive, but the lineage disciples of Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche refuse to speak with him. He holds a certain social status, and once a Buddhist symposium invited him to attend. When we recognized him at the symposium,

¹¹¹ The detailed description can be found in *Golden Garuda: The Extraordinary Life of Modern-Day Mahasiddha Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche*, authored by Khenpo Sodargye, published by Shambhala, 2025.

we quickly found an excuse to leave the meeting. We did not dare stay with him for even a second, let alone speak to him. Being in contact with a transgressor brings significant obstacles to one's life and practice.

Of course, it takes consensus to identify someone as a transgressor of samaya. A transgressor may not be someone whom another person personally considers a transgressor. It does not make sense if a person arbitrarily labels another person as a transgressor. If someone has indeed violated the samayas or slandered the guru behind their back, then it does bring harm to have any contact with them.

Nowadays, people often discuss “harmony” and “coexistence,” which are commendable values from a worldly perspective. However, from a tantric viewpoint, we must be cautious about the individuals we associate with. In particular, concerning the samayas and uncommon accomplishments, it is a serious fault if someone slanders a qualified teacher after having followed them. Please be especially vigilant about engaging with such individuals! It is important to heed this warning! Of course, if the teacher is a charlatan, it can be difficult to determine whether slandering such a teacher constitutes a violation of the samayas.

In addition, the great enlightened master Urgyenpa states in his vajra song:

I, Rinchen Pel, a beggar from the Land of the Snows,
Can be harmed by no other enemy but the contamination of
samaya violations,
And can be protected by no other friend but my guru.

Urgyenpa described his life journey in his vajra songs, urging us to stay away from transgressors and to be grateful to the guru. Indeed, having recognized the nature of all phenomena, the guru offers us Sutrayana and Vajrayana teachings so that we can understand the defects of samsara and the benefits of liberation. In particular, the guru grants us blessings, enabling us to arouse bodhicitta. Their kindness is beyond our imagination. Therefore, it is only the guru who can truly help and save us.

In short, if even highly accomplished masters must avoid contact with transgressors, how can we ignore this? We must be even more vigilant. Not only should we avoid those who have violated the samayas, but we must also carefully uphold our own samayas.

♦ Confess fervently

◉ It is very hard to keep the samayas

Keeping the samayas is incredibly challenging. Those who boast about receiving numerous empowerments but fail to examine their own mindstream, often falling into pride over their perceived adherence to the samayas, will ultimately achieve nothing. As stated in the tantras:

To forget, even for a split second, that the nature of our three doors [body, speech, and mind] is that of the three mandalas¹¹² is to transgress the samayas.

According to this standard, we should not take pride in our own adherence to the samayas, as it is nearly impossible to fully comply with the standard. Some commentaries suggest that failing to always remember that the nature of our three doors is that of the three mandalas does not constitute a violation of the root samayas, but rather a minor infraction. Nonetheless, this illustrates just how challenging it is to keep the samayas.

If categorized in detail, these samayas amount to no fewer than one hundred thousand types, an overwhelming number. The transgression of samayas leads to grave consequences.

Lama Yangtik, or *The Innermost Heart Drop of the Guru*, introduces three types of “ocean”: the liberation ocean of the sequence of vows, the wish-fulfilling ocean of the sequence of tsok offerings, and the accomplishment ocean of the sequence of the guru. Specifically, regarding the liberation ocean of the sequence of vows, the text explains numerous root samayas and branch samayas concerning one’s body, speech, and mind. However, many people overlook these samayas and only focus on the highest practices, which is not advisable.

Strict precepts may not be appreciated by everyone, but those who are unwilling to embrace these teachings are often expelled from the sangha, as they are more likely to break the precepts. Even if few Dharma students value the teachings on precepts, the teacher must still provide the necessary instructions, because those who do not understand the samayas well may commit transgressions. This is akin to worldly legal regulations, where acting without knowledge of the law can lead to legal consequences.

¹¹² Three mandalas of the teacher’s body, speech, and mind.

It is said in *Ascertaining the Three Vows*:

He who broke the samayas but hasn't made confession
Will encounter misfortunes in this lifetime,
And will be reborn in the vajra hell in the next life,
The sufferings of which are incomparable.

According to the tantras, to break the samayas will bring the following retributions:

The Vajra Ogre will drink your heart blood,
Your life will be short and diseased, your wealth will vanish,
enemies will terrify you,
In the extremely frightening Hell of Ultimate Torment,
You will undergo long and unbearable sufferings.¹¹³

Of course, those who keep the samayas will always experience success and the fulfillment of wishes in this lifetime, as well as incredible happiness and peace in future lives. Thus, we must diligently and consistently recite the hundred-syllable mantra while meditating on Vajrasattva to confess all our violations, breaches, faults, and downfalls—whether we are aware of them or not. As the great masters of the past used to say:

One must avoid committing faults in the first place; but if it occurs, confession becomes critically important.

◉ Violations of the three precepts

Through confession, violations of the samayas can be easily purified.

From the Shravakayana perspective, committing one complete root downfall is like shattering a porcelain object—it cannot be restored. Breaking the bodhisattva vows is like breaking an item made of precious metal, which can be repaired with the help of a skilled craftsman. Similarly, bodhisattva vows can be restored with the help of a qualified teacher or through the recitation of certain texts such as *The Sutra of the Three Heaps*.

As for Vajrayana vows, they are akin to a precious item with a slight dent that

¹¹³ Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2011, page 278.

can be fixed with a few taps. This means that through one's own efforts—relying on the deity, mantras, meditative concentration, and reciting the hundred-syllable mantra—one can completely purify these transgressions without any residue.

As we see, on one hand, violations of the tantric samayas can have horrifying effects; on the other hand, they are easy to repair as long as we acknowledge our violations and confess in a timely manner with mindfulness and vigilance.

◉ The deadline to confess

Of course, if we confess a fault immediately after committing it, it is easy to purify it. However, the longer we wait, the more powerful the fault grows, making confession more difficult.

At Larung Gar, regulations stipulate that confessions must be made before midnight. For instance, if two Dharma fellows have a quarrel or fight, they are required to confess their negative actions by that deadline. This rule was established by the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, and we have consistently adhered to it.

If both Dharma fellows involved in a quarrel are aware that it is wrong to be angry with a vajra sibling and make a confession immediately, they will not hold grudges anymore. By doing so, their negative actions are purified.

However, there are times when the two Dharma fellows do not yield to each other and remain indignant in the presence of their guru. Additionally, they feel uneasy around each other when they later meet on the road. This will not be helpful for them in maintaining pure samaya.

In addition to the two situations mentioned above, there is a third scenario: one Dharma fellow does not take the conflict to heart, while the other does. The former may confess to the latter right away; even if the latter does not accept the confession, the former can still purify his own negative actions. As for the latter, who remains angry, his grudge can harm no one but himself.

Afflictions such as anger and desire can harm no one but oneself—this is the nature of afflictions and the cause of one's suffering. Therefore, those who understand this should confess immediately—the sooner, the better.

If more than three years pass, the downfall is considered irreparable through confession, and any attempt to confess it will fail to bring about purification.

As mentioned earlier, a downfall that does not stay overnight is referred to as a violation of samayas, which can be purified by reciting the hundred-syllable

mantra immediately. A downfall that occurred less than one month ago is termed a loss of samayas, which can be purified by confessing it seven times. A downfall that happened less than one year ago is called a transgression of samayas and is more challenging to confess. It can only be repaired by offering gold, silver, possessions, and anything precious to us as a form of confession. A downfall that occurred more than one year ago but less than three years ago is referred to as the destruction of samayas, which can only be repaired by confessing it with our own life. A downfall that happened more than three years ago cannot be repaired.

The Tantra of the Array of Samaya says:

If the downfall occurred over three years ago,
 It is beyond restoration.
 If [the guru] accepts the confession [of the transgressor], both
 will be burned,
 And will definitely fall into the vajra hell,
 Constantly experiencing suffering and nothing else.

Therefore, it is crucial to learn the samayas. Otherwise, if a person has received numerous tantric teachings and empowerments but lacks awareness of the importance of upholding the samayas and pays less attention to them than to the precepts of individual liberation, it is better for that person to receive no empowerments or tantric teachings at all. After receiving an empowerment, if this person experiences serious conflict with their vajra sibling or slanders their vajra guru, it results in a downfall of the samayas. If they do not confess this within three years, the downfall becomes irreparable in this lifetime. Additionally, it is inevitable that their downfall will contaminate anyone with whom they associate.

Regarding irreparable downfalls, the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche made some rectifications in the Land of Snows. At that time, the Larung Gar Buddhist Academy openly expelled a few transgressors of samayas whose downfalls occurred over three years ago without confession. Since then, they have been “isolated” and forbidden to receive empowerments or attend a Dharma assembly with the sangha.

However, these transgressors are scattered in many places, so sangha members at Larung Gar are very apprehensive about encountering them. Therefore, each time we attend a Dharma assembly elsewhere, we must first inquire whether these transgressors will be present. If any of them are there, we will absolutely avoid

attending. As for those notorious individuals who criticized and denounced their gurus during the Cultural Revolution, they are strictly prohibited from attending any empowerment or Dharma assembly. Now, most of these transgressors have already passed away.

♦ Altruism and purification of speech

Those dedicated to benefiting others must also purify speech-related obscurations. Some individuals possess the unique ability and blessings of speech to serve both themselves and others by offering protection, averting frosts, preventing hail, stopping epidemics, healing illnesses in adults and children, and more. However, to sustain these abilities and blessings, they too must regularly purify the obscurations of their speech. The most effective method for this is through the sincere and consistent recitation of the hundred-syllable mantra. This practice should be approached with diligence and unwavering commitment.

Patrul Rinpoche's root guru, Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu, once jokingly remarked, "Those who wish to benefit others while making use of offerings must first purify their obscurations of speech by reciting the hundred-syllable mantra ten million times. This practice is absolutely essential."

Why did Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu say this? His words carried a certain hidden meaning. Perhaps at that time in Tibet, many individuals wanted to work for the benefit of others and make use of offerings. Therefore, Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu suggested that these individuals must first complete ten million repetitions of the hundred-syllable mantra to purify their obscurations of speech.

In comparison, many people today find it challenging to complete one hundred thousand repetitions of the hundred-syllable mantra, let alone ten million. They attempt to recite the mantra, but even after a long time, they still cannot make substantial progress. Perhaps this is because the hundred-syllable mantra is difficult to recite. Regardless of how challenging it may be, we should strive to recite it well, as it brings great merit. Many disciples of Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu, for example, recited the mantra ten or twenty million times, or at least two to three hundred thousand times.

♦ An old lama's mantra recitation

Many of us do not recite diligently enough. If we did, we could also complete a significant number of repetitions. When I was giving lesson twenty of *The Words*

of *My Perfect Teacher*, an old lama, who was a friend of my father, came to see me. He told me he had completed the repetition of the Avalokiteshvara mantra three hundred million times over the past seventeen years. At that time, he was seventy-nine years old and made a vow in my presence, saying, “From now on, I want to complete the repetition of the Avalokiteshvara mantra one hundred million times within three years.”

Today, the old lama came to see me again, saying he had already completed the repetition one hundred million times. I checked the time and found that it took him fewer than three years to accomplish the task. He was seventy-nine years old when he made the vow.

When I was teaching lesson sixty-three of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, I mentioned him to the class again. I did the math: he should be eighty-two years old now. Today he said, “May you spare me some time on the tenth day of this month?¹¹⁴ I want to make another vow that I will recite the mantra another one hundred million times if I can live three more years.”

He is an old lama who practices with great diligence. Aside from eating and sleeping a bit at night, he dedicates the rest of his time to reciting the Avalokiteshvara mantra. If we can be as diligent as he is, we can accomplish many things within three years, including completing the repetition of the hundred-syllable mantra one hundred thousand times, listening to and contemplating the teachings, meditating, reciting prayers, and more. However, we have spent most of our time idling about.

As mentioned before, Geshe Lama Konchog spent sixteen years in a Himalayan hermitage in retreat and accomplished a vast number of practices, including one million two hundred thousand repetitions of the hundred-syllable mantra, one million five hundred thousand prostrations, and one hundred thousand recitations of the *Diamond Sutra* and *The Confession of Downfalls*, respectively, among others. When he passed into parinirvana in 2001, many auspicious signs appeared. Also, many sariras, or precious pearls, were left after his cremation, which have inspired many Buddhists across the world and which also attracted media attention.

From these practitioners, both renowned and lesser-known, I believe everyone can find inspiration. With the power of this inspiration, one should also strive diligently for confession and purification.

¹¹⁴ The auspicious day of Guru Rinpoche.

◉ The hundred-syllable mantra is the king of all mantras

Vajrasattva embodies the essence of all the hundred deities in one. He is referred to as “Vajrasattva, the single deity of the great secret.” The vast and inconceivable array of all peaceful and wrathful deities is entirely encompassed within Vajrasattva.

The *Guhyagarbha Tantra* elaborates on how all buddhas of the ten directions emanate from Vajrasattva and are reabsorbed into Vajrasattva. Specifically, from the single deity of Vajrasattva, many buddhas—a thousand, ten thousand, one hundred thousand, a million, and an infinite number of them—can appear, which is the emanation part.

These infinite buddhas can all be reabsorbed into the single deity of Vajrasattva, which is the reabsorption part. In addition, the essence of all practices, such as Kalachakra, Guhyasamaja, and the Great Perfection, is encompassed in the practice of Vajrasattva.

Furthermore, since Vajrasattva is, in essence, the nature of our root guru, meditating on Vajrasattva also incorporates the practice of Guru Yoga. In other words, it integrates Guru Yoga with the Vajrasattva practice. For this reason, it is referred to as the practice “in the manner of the jewel that includes all,” making it an exceptionally profound and ultimate practice.

In summary, as mentioned earlier, among all mantras, none surpasses the king of mantras: the hundred-syllable mantra. It is superior to all other mantras. Therefore, we must know that there is no practice more profound than this.

Here is the closing verse of this chapter:

*Although I have heard the beneficial instructions, I still
regard them as mere words.*

*Although I have practiced them a little, I am still deceived
by distractions.*

Bless me and all deluded beings like me,

*That we may attain the essence of the generation and
perfection stages.*

In the end, Patrul Rinpoche humbly said the following:

I have heard the most precious instructions, such as those on Vajrasattva, but I only focus on the verbal meaning. I have practiced them a bit, but I am constantly distracted by delusions due to my karmic debts, heavy defilements, and lack of mindfulness and vigilance, preventing me from perfecting my practices.

May the buddhas of the ten directions, lineage masters, dakinis, and Dharma protectors grant blessings upon me and those phantom beings like me, that we may extract the essence of the generation and perfection stages, purify all our negative actions and obscurations through the practice of the hundred-syllable mantra, and perfect our Dharma practices.

[This concludes *Meditation and Recitation on the Teacher as Vajrasattva to Cleanse all Obscurations*.]



Lesson 119

“You know the relative to be a lie ... Whatever material your mandala base is made of, clean it with great cares.” [page 283–285]

Of the uncommon preliminary practices, we recently covered the practice of the hundred-syllable mantra. Today, we’ll proceed to the fourth one—offering the mandala.

- ♦ Regard *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* as your guide for practice

In the course of my teaching on *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, I began to accelerate through the sections on the uncommon preliminaries. Particularly when I taught you the chapter on “Meditation and Recitation of Vajrasattva,” I should have elaborated a bit more. However, due to various reasons, I was unable to provide a more detailed explanation of this chapter. Nevertheless, my teaching this time should still be considered extensive.

The Words of My Perfect Teacher covers essential practices, so all the Dharma teachers at Larung Gar should also teach this text. According to the tradition of our lineage masters, we have not taught or studied these teachings sufficiently, so we should teach and study them more.

For lay practitioners who follow my teachings, I hope you will regard the study of this text as a mandatory task. It is intended to help you establish a deep understanding of the essential points of both the common and uncommon preliminaries, which is why I decided to provide you with extensive teachings this time.

Although *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* serves as a practical guide to Tibetan Buddhism, if you examine it closely, you will realize that many instructions and stories in the text align with those in Chinese Buddhism and Theravada Buddhism. Most stories in the text can also be found in the Tripitaka, with only a few being unique to Tibetan culture.

In my teaching, I have quoted scriptural evidence from the Tripitaka and provided a detailed explanation of the root text. Consequently, this may be the most comprehensive commentary on the text to date.

What remains of my teaching can be compiled into a final volume of transcripts. Once the teaching is complete, these transcripts may serve as a reference for future generations. However, I find it challenging to assess their potential usefulness. Perhaps my belief in their value is merely a personal assumption, and the transcripts could ultimately prove to be worthless. Yet, it is possible that what seems insignificant may, directly or indirectly, provide substantial benefits. Therefore, I cannot say for certain.

Throughout the teaching process, the volunteer staff and I have invested a great deal of effort. In the past, when I was teaching *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, I worried about whether I could complete the course, but both the volunteer staff and I worked so hard that within about two years, we were able to finish ten volumes of my teaching transcripts. To this day, I consider this one of my greatest accomplishments in this life. Even if my teaching may not bring substantial benefits to future generations, it can at least serve as a reference for them.

My intention in teaching *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* is the same as that for *The Way of the Bodhisattva*. While I cannot foresee the future, I hope that both the Dharma students present for my teachings today and those who will study later through recordings and transcripts will consider this text a key practical guide in their lives. I hope that those of you who have received this teaching can transform your minds, eliminate afflictions, and cultivate wisdom through your study of this text. If you can achieve this, your life will certainly experience positive change.

The text in *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* is easy to understand, but its content is profoundly deep. Even a simple analogy or story carries significant meaning. Therefore, one should not underestimate this text, thinking it is merely for beginners.

It is misguided to think that *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* is akin to a

textbook for first graders that becomes irrelevant for second graders and especially for college students. If this were the case, how can we explain that our lineage masters read the text and practiced the preliminaries throughout their entire lives?

As we know, it is not an easy task to internalize the Dharma. Achieving this internalization is unlikely at the very beginning, as it requires long-term effort and diligence. We must practice each preliminary practice for a significant period before its results manifest.

Specifically, we should deeply engage with the practices concerning the precious human life, the impermanence of life, the defects of samsara, and the principle of cause and effect in the common preliminaries, as well as taking refuge, arousing bodhicitta, meditating and reciting on Vajrasattva, offering the mandala, and practicing Guru Yoga in the uncommon preliminaries. We should pay special attention to the common preliminary practices. If some of you are unable to focus on studying the text this time due to volunteer work or other commitments, please ensure you set aside time later to study it over and over again.

♦ Daily recitation of the hundred-syllable mantra

No matter what, we should recite the hundred-syllable mantra twenty-one times every morning. I have emphasized the benefits of doing so multiple times, and the recitation should not be difficult for any of us. Regardless of who we are or how busy we may be with volunteer work, we should be able to do this. Moreover, given the heavy karmic debts we carry, if we cannot even manage this recitation, there is little point in pursuing the Dharma.

May you vow in my presence to recite the hundred-syllable mantra twenty-one times each day? It takes only a few minutes to complete the repetition. If you wish to make this vow, please raise your hand. [Most audience members raise their hands.]

Good! Reciting the hundred-syllable mantra twenty-one times is a lifelong practice, not limited to just one or two days. If you forget to recite it in the morning, you can catch up in the afternoon or at night. Similarly, if you miss it today, you can make it up tomorrow. Does that work for you?

After making the vow, one must adhere to it and establish a corresponding habit. When I was listening to the teachings of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, my teacher did not ask us to make the vow, but I made the commitment in my mind.

After that, even if I occasionally forgot, I would make it up the next day. Therefore, I have never stopped this recitation.

Twenty years from now, you may reflect on the vows you have made. The vow you made today about reciting the mantra should be easy to keep. I hope you have no regrets by then.

Now, let's proceed to the text on offering the mandala.

Unlike other uncommon preliminary practices, in which we can at least recite the prayers while walking, the mandala practice must be performed while seated. As a result, it may seem more tiring and time-consuming. However, this practice is very important, so we must ensure that we complete it with good quality.

Beginning Buddhists often ask perplexing questions, such as, "If I forget to practice today and resume tomorrow, does that mean I've lost my transmission?"

The answer is no; you have not lost anything. Unlike an object that cannot be restored once broken, your Dharma practice can always continue after a pause. For instance, if you stopped prostrating after completing twenty thousand prostrations last year, you can easily resume the practice this year, and all the prostrations you completed still count.

If you have not completed the repetitions of the hundred-syllable mantra, you may continue. Once you finish, you can proceed to the mandala offering. This way, you will not get confused about the visualizations.

It is also acceptable to practice both on the same day, but it is better to set a distinct session for each practice and focus on one at a time. For example, you might recite the hundred-syllable mantra in the morning and offer the mandala in the afternoon. This approach allows you to complete the entire round of each practice.

The mandala practice is quite simple. The Dharma teacher in each cohort at Larung Gar has practiced it before, so they may provide a demonstration when sangha members are practicing together.

You should complete the mandala practice within three months or by next year's Dharma Assembly of Vidyadhara at the latest. For a diligent practitioner, the allotted time is sufficient. However, a lazy practitioner may not finish the practice within this lifetime or even over several lifetimes. Such a practitioner is burdened with afflictions, karmic debts, and misguided thoughts; worse yet, they are unwilling to listen to the teachings, so they will not engage in practice.

Generally speaking, the more merit a practitioner has, the more motivated they are to engage in the accumulation of merit. I hope you all dedicate yourselves to this practice. Those currently occupied with volunteer work may choose to practice it later, but it is beneficial to still make a bit of mandala offering each day. Regardless of which service department you are in at Larung Gar or what task you are working on, I believe you can still find time for this practice.

2.2.4. ACCUMULATING MERIT AND WISDOM THROUGH OFFERING THE MANDALA AND THE KUSALI'S ACCUMULATION

First, Patrul Rinpoche pays homage to his root guru Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu:

*You have mastered relative truth, yet you still practice the
two accumulations.*

*You have realized ultimate truth beyond meditation, yet you
still practice meditation.*

*You have actualized the state of inseparable union, yet you
still practice diligently.*

Peerless Teacher, at your feet, I humbly bow.

Patrul Rinpoche's root guru realizes that, at the relative level, all phenomena are like dreams or magical illusions, lacking inherent existence. Nevertheless, he continues to practice the two accumulations of merit and wisdom. He has realized that, at the absolute level, there is no meditator and nothing to meditate upon, yet he still appears to engage in meditation in the presence of all living beings. He has realized the union of appearance and emptiness and attained the fruition of Vajradhara, yet he continues to practice with great diligence.

In fact, all our gurus are like this: Although they have attained the realization of the indivisible union of relative truth and absolute truth, they still act prudently in accordance with the principle of cause and effect and never stop committing good actions. As Padmasambhava states:

*That is why my view is higher than the sky, but my attention to
my actions and their results is finer than flour.*

Therefore, Patrul Rinpoche bows at the feet of his peerless teacher with great veneration.

I hope this prayer can always serve as a reminder of our own practice. We should reflect on the actions of those great masters. In fact, the more realization a practitioner attains, the more prudent and diligent they become.

In contrast, many people today are doing precisely the opposite: they lack understanding—not only of the teachings in the Mind-Only School, the Middle Way, and the supreme tantras, but also of selflessness in the Shravaka teachings—and they behave improperly. Yet they have the audacity to mislead others, claiming, “There is nothing to meditate on, nothing to accumulate, and no need to be diligent.”

How many people’s sources of merit have been destroyed by the words of those who know little about the Dharma? How many people’s spiritual lives have been ruined by them? I believe many of you know the answers.

Therefore, I encourage everyone to remember the teachings of enlightened teachers, to practice the true Dharma earnestly, and to diligently accumulate merit.

2.2.4.1. Offering The Mandala

2.2.4.1.1. The Need for Offering the Mandala

It is impossible to attain the twofold purity¹¹⁵ of Buddhahood, to obtain the Rupakaya (form body) and the Dharmakaya (truth body), or to fully realize the truth of emptiness, without completing the two accumulations of merit and wisdom. Nagarjuna’s *Precious Garland of the Middle Way* says:

The form body of all the buddhas
Arises from the accumulation of merit;
The truth body, in brief,

¹¹⁵ The twofold purity is to possess the purity of the Buddha nature in the first place, and then the purity of having actualized it and achieved Buddhahood. As said in Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang’s *A Guide to The Words of My Perfect Teacher*: “According to the teachings of the Nyingma tradition, the primordially pure nature which is Buddhahood and the qualities of the three kayas already dwell within us in their entirety, and we do not need to seek them elsewhere. But if we do not use the two accumulations as auxiliary factors, these qualities will not become manifest. It is like the sun: although its rays illuminate the sky by themselves, it is still necessary for the wind to drive away the clouds which hide it.”

Arises from the accumulation of wisdom.

Even the realization of emptiness depends on the two accumulations, let alone Buddhahood.

Of the two accumulations, the accumulation of merit is particularly important. Why can't many practitioners succeed in their Dharma practice? Why do they fail to attain realization? It is because they have not accumulated enough merit. Unlike money, which can be acquired quickly, or blessings, which can be received immediately from an eminent master, merit can only be accumulated gradually through diligent effort. If they did not accumulate merit in previous lives, it may be challenging for their practice to be effective in this life.

The best method for accumulating merit, as taught by the buddhas of the past, present, and future, is the practice of offering the mandala. Like mental offerings, the visualization in this practice can represent real offerings, thereby generating incredible merit.

Therefore, not only ordinary practitioners but also eminent masters of the past have placed great importance on this practice. Take Lama Tsongkhapa, for example. His biography describes a time when he diligently made mandala offerings during a retreat. He initially performed the practice using the inside of his wrist, and when the skin wore away, he switched to the side and back parts of his wrist to continue. Eventually, his bone became exposed due to his mandala offerings.

It is said that, because of his accumulation of merit through this ascetic practice, the Gelug lineage founded by Lama Tsongkhapa was able to establish financially well-supported monasteries and vast Dharma activities. The mandala base that Lama Tsongkhapa used for the practice was later brought to the Naga Palace by the naga king as an object of veneration.

♦ Dharma practice needs merit

In fact, it is not only vast Dharma activities that require merit; even just taking ordination needs merit. It is not the case that a person can receive ordination simply by asking the guru, "Dear guru, please shave my head. I want to be a monk!" How can it be so easy? Without confessing your negative actions and accumulating merit, how is it possible for an ordinary person to suddenly become a "splendid" monk or nun?

According to the tradition of Chinese Buddhism, an individual must engage

in physical work and serve the sangha if they wish to take ordination. Even after becoming a monk or nun, one must continue to accumulate merit by serving the sangha.

Here is a story of a Tibetan monk:

After taking his ordination, a man began to follow a guru. The guru instructed him to print scriptures for the sangha and said, “Wisdom will arise when you have accumulated merit. From now on, you will start to accumulate merit.”

The man then printed scriptures every day using printing boards carved from wood. At that time, printers and photocopiers had not yet been invented, so people had to print manually with these boards. Day by day, night by night, year by year, he printed scriptures for decades.

However, one day he suddenly felt weary, thinking, “Is it possible that my guru is wrong? I have been accumulating merit for so many years, but why hasn’t wisdom arisen, and why am I still so dull-witted? Why don’t I invite Manjushri to testify to this?”

So, he said, “Bodhisattva Manjushri, my guru told me, ‘Wisdom will arise when you have accumulated merit.’ Now I am going to throw a printing board into the air; if it falls, it means my guru is wrong, and if it doesn’t fall, it means my guru is right.” [He merely wanted to find an excuse to stop printing the scriptures, as he believed the board would definitely fall.] Then, he threw the board into the air.

After a while, the board still had not fallen to the ground. The man looked up and saw that Manjushri had appeared in the air, holding the printing board. Manjushri said, “Do not harbor negative thoughts about your guru. What your guru has told you is absolutely correct. You must continue your work for the sangha, and wisdom will arise within you.”

The man stood there, stunned with surprise and delight. The merit accumulated from years of printing scriptures had its effect, and he experienced a vision of Manjushri, similar to how Asanga had a vision of Maitreya. From then on, he harbored no wrong thoughts, only faith and gratitude toward his guru. He continued to print scriptures and eventually unveiled his wisdom.

Having merit is essential, which is the purpose of practicing mandala offerings. Some individuals approach preliminaries for reasons such as, “Without completing preliminaries, I am not qualified to attend tantric teachings,” or “Others are

practicing preliminaries, and I would feel embarrassed if I don't do the same." These perspectives are misguided.

Others have told me, "You promised to give us a Padmasambhava statue if we complete the preliminaries within the prescribed time. I have been practicing very hard to earn the statue." While the Padmasambhava statue is indeed precious, if your practice is motivated solely by the desire to "get this or that," the outcome may not be favorable. This also applies to the vow you just made regarding the recitation of the hundred-syllable mantra. If you made this vow out of pressure, thinking, "Since Khenpo said so, I would better make the vow," and raised your hand reluctantly, you will struggle with the recitation every day. There is no need for you to do so.

You should practice proactively and voluntarily. No matter what practice you engage in, once you understand its benefits, you may continue it for the rest of your life. Take the practice of offering the mandala, for example: Some of you may have practiced it several times because you have completed ngondro many times, but it is still worthwhile to perform the practice one more time. Why is that? Because, on one hand, this practice allows you to accumulate merit, and on the other hand, it serves as a confession practice that can dispel obstacles.

As stated in a saying, "One merit can crush a hundred misfortunes." By accumulating merit, one can dispel all difficulties and obstacles. Here is a relevant story:

In modern China, there was a nun named Master Yuanzhao (1902-1993), who was one of the three great Chinese nuns. She entered parinirvana at the age of ninety-one. In her youth, she had the opportunity to follow Gangkar Rinpoche.

While following Gangkar Rinpoche, she developed great faith in Vajrakilaya,¹¹⁶ so she asked for the teaching from Rinpoche, hoping to protect herself with it during her later retreat. Her guru told her, "The practice of Vajrakilaya is good, but you should primarily practice offering the mandala. It is said that one merit

¹¹⁶ Vajrakilaya (Skt. Vajrakilaya; Tib. རྡོ་རྗེ་ཕུར་པ་, Dorje Phurba, Wyl. rdo rje phur pa) or Vajrakumara (Skt. Vajrakumāra; Tib. རྡོ་རྗེ་གཞོན་ནུ་, Dorje Shönnu; Wyl. rdo rje gzhon nu) — the wrathful heruka Vajrakilaya is the yidam deity who embodies the enlightened activity of all the buddhas and whose practice is famous for being the most powerful for removing obstacles, destroying the forces hostile to compassion and purifying the spiritual pollution so prevalent in this age. Vajrakilaya is one of the eight deities of Kagyé. (Source: Rigpawki.org)

can crush a hundred misfortunes, so when you have accumulated merit, you can dispel all obstacles on the path.”

However, because Master Yuanzhao was concerned that she might face more obstacles as a nun practitioner, and also because she had fervent faith in Vajrakilaya, she requested the teaching repeatedly. Eventually, although reluctantly, Gangkar Rinpoche granted her the teaching.

Having received the teaching, she practiced with great diligence and even gained certain experiences. For example, she could thrust her *phurba*, or vajra dagger, into a stone. The *phurba* would also remain standing when she plunged it into water. Recognizing the power of her practice, she was no longer afraid, so she left her guru and went on retreat in the Zhongnan Mountains.

She spent a considerable amount of time in retreat, and one day, while she was meditating, a rock fell from the opposite hill and rolled toward her. Just as the rock was about to hit her, she took her *phurba* and pointed it at the rock, which split in two, with the pieces rolling away on both sides of her. She felt very fortunate to have practiced Vajrakilaya.

However, she soon fell while walking and broke her arm. At that time, the mountain was covered in heavy snow, and no one was in sight. Fortunately, she eventually encountered an old man collecting herbs, and he helped to cure her broken arm.

After experiencing these misfortunes, she finally came to understand, “My guru is right; one merit can indeed crush a hundred misfortunes. The practice of Vajrakilaya is powerful, but had I followed my guru’s suggestion and offered the mandala, all these misfortunes wouldn’t have even arisen.”

From then on, she began to offer the mandala with great diligence. In her teachings, she often emphasized the importance of accumulating merit and recommended that people practice mandala offering.

This is an inspiring, true historical account. Therefore, if we want to ensure a smooth practice in the future, we must engage in more mandala offerings. In addition, it is beneficial to carry a mandala base with us. Venerable Atisha carried a mandala base with him at all times. Whenever he violated a precept or had a negative thought, he would stop what he was doing and begin offering the mandala as a way to make confession and accumulate merit at the same time.

♦ **Volunteer work also requires merit**

In addition to our practice, our volunteer work also needs merit because it provides a great opportunity to benefit sentient beings. As Mipham Rinpoche states in *The Just King*:

Among men, a position of greatness is rarely achieved by buying
it with jewels and gold.

Rather, it is the king who is the chief cause of someone achieving
an important position.¹¹⁷

The opportunity to engage in volunteer work that benefits others is indeed rare. Some volunteers involved in Dharma activities may be ordinary practitioners, yet their efforts have a profound impact on countless beings. For example, some staff members I know have devoted many years to volunteer work, which I believe reflects their merits.

Those who lack merit may view their volunteer work as a source of stress, saying, “How painful! When are you going to replace me?” When they engage in Dharma activities, it feels as if they are serving a jail term, and they think, “Alas, I have to work on volunteer tasks for six years. When can I be set free?” They constantly count the days, passing each one as if it were a year. Once they are free from their Dharmic work, some simply disappear. I have no idea where they have gone or what they are doing now.

As for me, I am fine with or without help from others in my Dharma activities. I let nature take its course when propagating the Dharma, so I will not impose or pressure anyone. When opportunities arise, I will undertake more Dharma activities; otherwise, I will do less. I do not have any specific goals that must be achieved. However, whether a volunteer can continue to assist with the Dharma activities is truly subject to their merit.

In the past, when the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche taught us the stories of Punyabala, he stressed, “We practitioners really need merit. Without merit, any virtuous deed we attempt cannot succeed.”

Consider the Dharma teachers or tutors at Larung Gar: All of them share a similar level of intelligence, but those who possess merit are able to teach for

¹¹⁷ Mipham Rinpoche, *The Just King: The Tibetan Buddhist Classic on Leading an Ethical Life*, translated by Jose Ignacio Cabezon, Shambhala Publications, 2017, page 49.

many years. The same rationale applies to retreatants. Thus, among all the sangha members who study and practice the Dharma at Larung Gar, those who possess merit and those who do not show significant differences in their progress.

The same is true for lay practitioners who follow my teachings. Those who possess merit may not be diligent at the beginning, but they persevere on the path and continue to pursue the Dharma. In contrast, those who lack merit may start as diligent, intellectual, and capable practitioners, but when obstacles arise, they may change their minds or become completely demotivated to pursue the Dharma. As a result, they may lose the opportunity to return to their previous state of practice.

Therefore, whether it is for our own practice or for the benefit of others, we should offer the mandala to accumulate merit. Some might say, “I am practicing emptiness, so what’s the point of accumulating merit?” This indicates their lack of understanding of the doctrine.

From their remarks, it may seem that they have attained a realization higher than that of Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu and Longchenpa, but those great masters would never have made such a statement.

Upon hearing the word “emptiness,” some individuals think they understand it. In fact, as stated in the teachings of Buddhist logic, they may understand the verbal expression but have no clue about its true meaning. For those who do not genuinely understand emptiness, making grandiose claims about it is utterly meaningless.

The King of Samādhis Sutra says:

To attain enlightenment, one must practice the supreme cause—
The accumulation of merit and wisdom.

What is the supreme cause of enlightenment? It is merit and wisdom. It is a different matter if you do not wish to attain enlightenment. As long as you pursue enlightenment, these two accumulations are indispensable.

Most of you here today are likely seeking enlightenment. However, a small number of you may be attending for a different reason. For that small group, I will not be sharing the true pith instructions (*the audience laughs*).

- ♦ The realization of emptiness needs the two accumulations

As it says in the sutras:

Until the two supreme accumulations are perfected,
One cannot realize the ultimate truth of emptiness.

This verse aligns with what I just mentioned. Some individuals are in a hurry, saying, “Please teach me the Great Perfection! I want to learn how to attain the highest state! I am in a hurry! I really don’t have time for the preliminaries.”

However, even if I taught you the Great Perfection a hundred times, it would be of no use! Did I not provide you with the teachings in the past? Without making the necessary accumulations and purifying your obscurations, you cannot attain realization. Your realization also depends on the right causes and conditions!

Which causes and conditions are they, exactly?

And it says in the sutras:

The ultimate primordial wisdom can be realized
Only through the accumulation of merit and the purification
of obscurations
Along with the blessings of an enlightened teacher.
Knowing this, relying on other means is truly foolish.

The ultimate primordial wisdom of emptiness can only arise out of two means:

First, having accumulated merit and purified obscurations. The practice of mandala offering is to accumulate merit, while the practice of Vajrasattva is to purify obscurations.

Second, through the blessings of an enlightened teacher.

Aside from these two supreme means, it would be foolish to rely on any other means.

This instructional verse holds significant importance. A good practitioner may find inspiration in one or two verses like this and decide to pursue the Dharma. Many great Chan masters and Dzogchen lineage masters have experienced this transformative moment. Some individuals have such merit that, upon connecting with a teaching like this brief verse, they instinctively know how to focus their practice. They resolve by thinking, “From now on, I will never stop accumulating merit and purifying obscurations, and I will always pray to the guru.”

Recently I read an instruction that says:

If you always pray to the guru,
Your mind will be more and more nourished,
More and more flexible and adaptable,
And more and more capable.

I feel the same. Unlike a worldly teacher who only imparts intellectual teachings to students, a spiritual guru transmits the wisdom in their mind to the disciples, a process known as mind-to-mind transmission. Those disciples who have received this transmission possess an indescribable faith in and gratitude toward their lineage gurus.

We all desire liberation and the realization of emptiness, but achieving this realization is not easy and requires specific causes and conditions. Those who can adopt skillful means to create the necessary causes and conditions will have the opportunity to attain realization. Therefore, we must keep these two skillful means in mind: accumulating merit and purifying obscurations, and praying to the guru.

♦ **Bodhisattvas also need accumulations**

Even bodhisattvas who have truly realized emptiness still need the two accumulations of merit and wisdom so that they can maintain their progress along the path until they attain Buddhahood, the perfectly complete enlightenment.

Even bodhisattvas must make efforts to accumulate merit and wisdom, let alone ordinary beings. So please do not become complacent when you actually do not have enough of these two.

Perhaps it is out of pride, but some individuals stop studying and practicing the Dharma after being promoted to the role of Dharma teacher.

The other day, I asked a Dharma fellow at Larung Gar, whom I have known for quite a long time, “Why haven’t you been elected as a Dharma teacher?”

He replied, “It may not be a bad thing that I am not appointed as a Dharma teacher. I am afraid I will become arrogant if I do.”

I think he is right. It is hard to say what changes glory or position will bring to a person. It is like someone who used to be a hard-working student may stop studying altogether when they go to college or become a civil servant. This happens.

Therefore, without a goal, a person will not make efforts to move forward. For practitioners whose goal is to attain enlightenment, we must strive to accumulate merit and wisdom throughout our lives, and even until we attain Buddhahood.

♦ **Instructions from great practitioners**

The great yogi Tilopa once imparted a simple yet profound instruction to his heart disciple Naropa, which benefited him for his entire life. The instruction goes:

Naropa, my son, until you realize
That all these appearances that arise interdependently
In reality have never arisen, never part
From the two wheels of your chariot, the two accumulations.¹¹⁸

However, many people today overlook the importance of the two accumulations. Some so-called teachers even assert, “You do not need to offer the mandala or recite the hundred-syllable mantra... you can skip the preliminaries entirely. Just pay me 600 yuan, and you’ll be all set.” I find such claims alarming. While I am not assigning blame, if this is indeed the case, it simply does not make sense.

Of course, there may be a “special way” to accumulate merit by replacing the preliminaries with money. However, it is better to follow the instructions of the past great masters and make steady efforts in our accumulations. As mentioned, until we truly realize emptiness, all appearances that arise interdependently will not vanish; therefore, we should accumulate merit and purify obscurations. This is a pith instruction we must always remember.

The great yogi Virupa, one of the eighty Mahasiddhas of India, says in his vajra song:

You may have the great confidence of not hoping for relative
Buddhahood,¹¹⁹
But never give up the great accumulation of merit; endeavor as
much as you can.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2011, page 284.

¹¹⁹ This refers to the realization marked by unwavering confidence in the innate buddha-nature within one’s own mind.

¹²⁰ Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2011, page 284.

What kind of confidence do we have? Some of us do not even have the confidence to embark on the lesser stage of the path of accumulation but have stopped accumulating merit. How terrible! The *Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom* says:

It says in the Dharma that the appearances of all phenomena
are empty,
But they do not vanish into nothingness;
Though arising, they are not permanent;
The karmic effects of all actions do not disappear.

Appearances following the principle of cause and effect—where good actions yield positive results and bad actions lead to negative outcomes—remain in place until we achieve Buddhahood. For instance, the sutras mention that even a third-bhumi bodhisattva must engage in the virtuous act of crossing a fire pit in order to pursue the Dharma. Many other inspiring stories convey this message as well.

If a bodhisattva still needs to make an effort to avoid negative actions and perform good deeds, then we ordinary beings should also act accordingly. As long as we are subject to the principle of cause and effect, we shouldn't assert, "There is no need for confession or to accumulate merit!" Otherwise, such a claim will create significant obstacles for ourselves and others.

The peerless Dagpo Rinpoche also says:

Even when your realization transcends the very notions of there
being anything to accumulate or purify, continue still to accumulate
even the smallest amounts of merit.¹²¹

The nature of merit and obscurations is primordial purity; however, before we attain the purity of having actualized buddha-nature and achieved Buddhahood, we must continue to accumulate even the smallest amounts of merit at the relative level, such as offering a flower, burning a piece of incense, lighting a butter lamp, and so on. We should strive to accumulate such merit.

In my home monastery, Dhomang Monastery, there is a Dharma practitioner whom I have known for more than thirty years. I knew him even before I became

¹²¹ Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2011, page 284.

a monk. He always carries a mandala base with him. Wherever he goes, whether to a sacred place or another monastery, he sits down and begins to make mandala offerings and practice tsok. It has become his habit. He was doing this many years ago, and he continues to do it now.

Once, we visited a cave where the Great Tertön Dorje Dechen Lingpa had revealed a terma. In the cave, this Dharma practitioner shared his past experiences with me, including where he had been and how many mandala offerings he had made. It can be said that mandala offering is his primary practice, and he has been practicing it earnestly and unremittingly.

This is a true Dharma practitioner. In comparison, many of us place little importance on the preliminaries and view the practices as limited to a specific time frame. As a result, we stop meditating on the preciousness of human life after completing the required number of sessions, cease reciting the hundred-syllable mantras after reaching one hundred thousand repetitions, and abandon prostrations in the same manner. We do not value the preliminary practices and often do not practice again after completing one round, which indicates that we are not yet true practitioners.

To purify obscurations and accumulate merit, a practitioner must continue to engage in these practices in this life and in future lives, until achieving Buddhahood.

♦ **Offering the mandala is the best method to accumulate merit and wisdom**

With great compassion and skillful means, the Buddha taught innumerable methods for accomplishing the two accumulations. Among these, the mandala offering stands as the best method.

A tantra says:

To offer to the buddhas in all Buddha-fields
The entire cosmos of a billion worlds,
Replete with everything that could be desired,
Will perfect the primal wisdom of the buddhas.¹²²

When practicing the mandala offering, we should visualize offering everything

¹²² Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2011, page 284.

desirable in the entire three-thousand-fold universe, such as all the adornments and supreme qualities, to the buddhas. Thus, the accumulation of merit through this practice will allow the perfect wisdom of our buddha-nature to manifest.

The practice of offering the mandala is highly valued across all schools of Tibetan Buddhism, including Gelug, Sakya, Kagyu, Jonang, and Nyingma. No school considers this practice to be of minor importance. In the Sutrayana practices of Chinese Buddhism, while the term “offering the mandala” is not explicitly used, the act of presenting flowers and fruits before a Buddha statue holds the same symbolic significance. This is because the term “mandala” also denotes “the sacred environment and dwelling space of a buddha.”

Therefore, we should not dismiss the validity of certain practices simply because they are not mentioned in a particular school. Just as a product not manufactured in one factory can still hold value in others, individuals should refrain from rejecting ideas or practices not promoted within their own school or lineage with statements like, “This makes no sense,” or “I’ve never heard of it.” Such reactions often reflect a lack of knowledge rather than a true assessment of value. As we all know, even the function and value of any worldly thing are not determined by whether it is known by everyone. Therefore, we should embrace and uphold valuable practices, ensuring that our accumulation of merit and wisdom is not hindered by an incomplete understanding of their significant implications.

◎ Two separate mandalas

In this Longchen Nyingtik tradition, when making the mandala offering, we use two separate mandalas: the *accomplishment mandala* and the *offering mandala*.

The accomplishment mandala is placed on our shrine table as a support for our offering. We can visualize it as the five buddha families or the field of refuge. The offering mandala is what we will practice with as part of the preliminaries, which can be approached in several ways.

The material from which the mandala is made depends on our financial means. The best type of mandala base is crafted from precious substances such as gold and silver. A medium-quality base is made of fine materials like bronze. For those with very limited resources, a smooth flat stone or a piece of wood can serve as the mandala base.

[Among the prizes given out by the Bodhi Association this time, there is a

mandala that I specially designed. It is quite small, very elegant, and should be very convenient to carry around.]

If a practitioner is financially affluent, they can have a mandala made of gold or silver, which is ideal. If not, that is also fine. Many Tibetans in the past could not even afford a mandala base, so they substituted a smooth flat stone. Some great masters practiced mandala offerings using a flat stone, as mentioned in their life stories. Therefore, we should simply choose a mandala base according to our own financial means.

◉ Four kinds of offering piles

The offering piles placed on the mandala base should ideally consist of precious stones, such as turquoise, coral, sapphires, pearls, and the like.

During my visit to Taiwan, I noticed that many lay practitioners attached great significance to the offering of the mandala. Their offering piles included precious stones such as coral, amber, and agate, which they ground into smaller pieces for frequent mandala offerings. I greatly admired their merit in being able to afford such precious stones for their offering piles. Their merit is already abundant in this life and will likely continue to grow in future lives. I was also a bit concerned about how they would manage the large sum of money coming to them in their next lives (*the audience laughs*).

The second-best offering piles are made up of medicinal fruits like arura and kyurura. Typically, they are composed of grains such as barley, wheat, rice, or legumes.

In any case, when using grains as offering piles, make sure to wash them every two days. When I practiced mandala offering, I prepared two piles of grains. While I used one pile for my practice, the other was washed and left to dry. After a while, the first pile would be washed and left to dry, and I would use the second pile for my practice. The two piles were alternated in this manner.

I think it is good to offer the mandala using grains. I am unsure whether the so-called precious stones available in the market are genuine or not. They appear as colorful stones and can be quite expensive. It is acceptable to use them as precious stones for the offering pile. However, it may not be practical for the practice if the stones are too large. Additionally, it is not ideal if the mandala base is small but the stones are large, so the stones should be ground into smaller pieces. Then, make sure

the offerings are clean and tidy. We can spray some medicinal substance or scented water, which is also very important.

At the very worst, one may practice the mandala offering using materials like pebbles, gravel, and sand, simply as a support for the visualization.

Some great masters of the past had nothing available for the offering piles when practicing the mandala offering, so they used clean sand instead. Nowadays, perhaps no one needs to practice as they once did. At the very least, practitioners can use grains for the mandala offering.

A better offering pile would consist of grains mixed with precious jewels. Many practitioners in the past did this. They would mix coral, crystal beads, and pearls into the grains and use them as offerings, which is also commendable.

In any case, while practicing the mandala offering, the offerings must be clean, and the mandala base should be wiped with earnest attention.



Lesson 120

“Begin by arranging five piles on the accomplishment mandala ... suggested in the basic explanatory text for these preliminary practices.” [page 285–288]

The Words of My Perfect Teacher consists of the common preliminaries, the uncommon preliminaries and the swift path of transference.

This text is very important because it consists of pith instructions for practice. It is a practical guide. Currently, we are studying the chapter on the mandala offering of the uncommon preliminaries.

♦ Combine theories with practice

Many Buddhists today focus solely on theoretical studies, such as the Middle Way, Buddhist logic, Abhidharma, Prajnaparamita, and Vinaya. However, without actual practice, these studies are no different from academic research conducted at universities. This situation resembles a teacher lecturing while students passively listen; although they may grasp the concepts theoretically, they often struggle to apply the theories in real practice, thus failing to make meaningful progress.

Even those who have been studying the Dharma for a long time in Buddhist communities should not focus too much on theoretical studies. If they spend excessive time memorizing, presenting, debating, or even composing, it may create obstacles to their actual practice, as they become too absorbed in conceptual thinking. Therefore, it is essential for practitioners to combine theoretical studies with actual practice.

Personally, my pursuit of the Dharma began with learning *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. Therefore, throughout my life, I have always regarded practicing the preliminaries as particularly important.

Many beginning Dharma students may not understand this point, and they start by pursuing the highest state of realization. This route definitely works for those practitioners with superior faculties, but an ordinary practitioner should follow a practical sequence, starting with meditating on the preciousness of human life and gradually proceeding to the next step. This is the right practical path for us.

♦ **Offer the mandala anytime and anywhere**

Now that many of you have completed the common preliminaries, as well as the refuge, bodhicitta, and hundred-syllable mantra practices of the uncommon preliminaries, the next step is the practice of accumulating merit and wisdom.

In our tradition, of all the methods of accumulation, what past great masters have valued most is the offering of the mandala. The mandala offering should not be considered merely one of the preliminary practices; it should also be regarded as one of the most important practices in general. For example, when visiting a sacred place, a Dharma center, or a monastery, or when staying in front of a Buddha statue or a stupa, we should offer the mandala one hundred times, one thousand times, or as we wish.

I do not know if you have seen it, but when Tibetan practitioners go to Mount Wutai, many of them offer the mandala one hundred thousand times in front of the great stupa. Practitioners do the same in front of the Vajra Seat in Bodh Gaya, India. In 1990, when we visited Bodh Gaya, we saw many Tibetans and Westerners offering the mandala one hundred thousand times in front of the Vajra Seat. This is a truly supreme practice.

Therefore, no matter where we travel, it is necessary to carry a mandala offering set with us. Just like Venerable Atisha, we can also make offerings anytime and anywhere. The mandala offering set I designed this year is a good size to be carried around, but it is more convenient to use a larger base for our daily mandala offerings.

In any case, a true practitioner should often make mandala offerings. If possible, one may set up a Buddha statue and other representations of the Three Jewels in

the shrine room and place the five offerings¹²³ there. Offering the mandala in such an environment brings great merit.

♦ About accumulating merit

Through the mandala practice at this time, I hope you can understand the importance of accumulating merit and try not to disregard this practice.

Some people claim, “Everything is empty, so nothing is worth accumulating!”

It is fine to say this if they have truly attained the realization of emptiness. However, if they had truly realized emptiness, not only would they not need to engage in virtuous actions, but they could also forgo eating dinner or making money. Yet, these individuals discuss emptiness in theory, but because they have not realized it, they cannot apply it in real life. As a result, they are unable to skip all their meals and still work hard to make money. In this case, they also need to engage in Dharma practices and continue accumulating merit.

It is clear that people differ in their levels of merit. Take the people around you, for example: some of them perform poorly in many areas, while others excel in various respects. Why is that? It is due to the differences in the merit they have accumulated from previous lives. The duration of this lifetime is quite short, but the span of future lives is potentially very long, so we must accumulate merit now for our next lives.

Some people may say, “What is the use of offering the mandala? What merit can one gain from rubbing rice on it? One needs to work hard to accomplish something and make money. If one doesn’t work hard, what’s the point of making this offering?”

I understand that people may think this way because sometimes the results of certain actions are beyond the scope of our ordinary understanding. I will use the following story from *The Older Sutra of Parables* to answer the question:

Once, during his alms round in Shravasti, the Buddha came to the house of a laywoman who perfectly observed her precepts. After she placed food offerings into the Buddha’s bowl, the woman withdrew to one side and remained there with respect.

Then the Buddha gave her this teaching: “Plant one, ten will grow; plant ten, one hundred will grow; plant one hundred, one thousand will grow. By making

¹²³ Food, flowers, water, lamps, and incense.

one meal offering, the merit can grow to ten thousand and one hundred million, and one can eventually see the truth.”

The woman’s husband was not a believer in Buddhism. After hearing the teaching, he said to the Buddha, “Monk Gautama, you are overstating here! Can the offering of a bowl of food bring so much merit?”

The Buddha asked him, “Where are you from?”

The husband answered, “The city.”

The Buddha asked, “Have you noticed how tall a nyagrodha tree can grow?”

The husband answered, “As tall as forty dhanushs. Every year the tree can yield one hundred thousand measures of fruit. The kernel of the fruit is as tiny as a mustard seed.”

The Buddha said, “How many seeds do you need to plant in order to grow such a big tree? One liter?”

The husband said, “No, no! Just one seed.”

The Buddha said, “You are overstating here, aren’t you? Is it possible that a seed as tiny as a mustard seed can grow into a tree as tall as forty dhanushs, which yields one hundred thousand measures of fruit?”

He answered, “Yes, it is true!”

The Buddha said, “If the land has no consciousness yet can still yield such a result, the merit of offering the Buddha a bowl of food with joy is immeasurable!”

Upon hearing this, the couple was inspired and attained the fruition of sotāpanna on the spot.

From this story, we can see that the effect of accumulating merit is indeed subtle and profound, so it is normal to have occasional doubts. However, if our doubts persist, they may eventually develop into wrong views. Once the “cancer cells” of wrong views begin to spread, all of our merits and those of others will be destroyed.

Therefore, the wise should pursue truth by clearing up doubts, so that when they gradually establish right views, they will develop fervent faith in the Buddha’s words, including the incredible effect of accumulating merit. As a result, they will start to accumulate merit through engaging in good actions. *The Collection of Deliberate Sayings* says:

All merits are marvelous,
 Their effects are incredibly splendid;
 Nothing compares to merit in bringing liberation,
 So, one should accumulate merit.

♦ Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang's mandala practice

If we want to accumulate merit, offering the mandala is the best method. When making the offering, it is, of course, ideal to have real precious offerings; however, if we do not, visualizing the precious offerings in our minds also works.

The description of how to make the mandala offering in *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* is neither extensive nor overly brief. I still suggest you read *A Guide to The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, in which Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang provides a detailed practical guide on how to practice mandala offering from beginning to end according to his guru's instructions.

In my Chinese translation of *A Guide to The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, I placed the biography of Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang at the very beginning, which includes many of his inspiring stories. You should all read it. Lay practitioners who do not have a copy may find an electronic version on the internet. It is beneficial to use the internet to study the Dharma rather than to read something less meaningful.

According to his biography, Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang went to see his guru Nyoshul Lungtok after completing one hundred thousand repetitions of the hundred-syllable mantra. His guru then asked him to set his practices aside for a few days. *The Way of the Bodhisattva* mentions two reasons for putting things aside:¹²⁴ first, one entirely leaves the task when it is finished; and second, one takes a break and sets the work aside when impaired by weakness or fatigue, and resumes the task when feeling better.

So Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang took a ten-day break and then returned to his guru. This time, his guru asked him to practice the mandala offering and lent him

¹²⁴ If impaired by weakness or fatigue,
 I'll lay the work aside, the better to resume.
 And I will leave the task when it's complete,
 All avid for the work that's next to come.

Shantideva, *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Shambhala, 2011, chapter 7, verse 67.

representations of the Three Jewels: a statue of Buddha Shakyamuni as a representation of the Buddha's body, the scriptures of the *Condensed Transcendent Wisdom* and the *Guhyagarbha Tantra* as representations of the Buddha's speech, and a Kadampa-style stupa as a representation of the Buddha's mind.

[The Kadampa-style stupa looks different from the eight stupas¹²⁵ of the Buddha. It is said that the stupa was brought from Indonesia to Tibet by Atisha. As you know, stupas in Thailand and Indonesia are quite pointed and are indeed similar to the Kadampa-style stupa. In my book *Travelogue in Thailand*, I wrote, "Although I haven't found valid historical accounts, there may be some connection between Kadampa-style stupas and the stupas in Thailand and Indonesia."

In any case, when practicing the mandala offering, we may use the Kadampa-style stupa or any of the eight stupas of the Buddha, as representations of the Buddha's mind.]

Then his guru taught him the symbolic meaning of the Kadampa-style stupa in the context of the three paths for people with different capacities and the threefold training. The guru then gave him a statue of Longchenpa, which contained a piece of Longchenpa's brain and the hair of Jigme Lingpa. The statue was imbued with great blessing power. The guru also provided him with some cotton for making wicks, which he could use while offering the mandala.

When he returned, Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang cleaned his room according to his guru's instructions. [When offering the mandala, if you have a shrine room, it is best to clean it as well. If you do not have a shrine room, you should also tidy the room where you will do the practice.]

He then placed the sacred objects from his guru on a stone slab and set up the five offerings in front of those representations of the Three Jewels.

Then he prepared four bags of grains as offerings for his mandala practice. [Four bags of grains is quite a lot; each bag weighs what a yak can carry, totaling roughly four to seven hundred pounds.] Before starting his mandala practice, Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang carefully removed small pebbles, bird droppings, food

¹²⁵ The eight stupas (Tib. མཚོན་རྟེན་ཆ་བརྒྱད་, chöten cha gyé, Wyl. mchod rten cha brgyad) — eight types of stupa that are found in the Tibetan tradition and which represent eight important events in the life of Buddha Shakyamuni. Nagarjuna relates the eight stupas with specific events and places in the Buddha's life in his Astamahasthanacaitya-stotras. (Source: Rigpawiki.org)

crumbs, and other debris from the grains. He then cleansed the grains and began his mandala practice.

When he had completed about thirty thousand repetitions, Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang went to see his guru, who asked him to continue practicing another seventy thousand repetitions, along with some additional repetitions to make up for any mistakes he might make during the practice. The guru inquired which prayer he was reciting while offering the mandala. Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang replied that it was the prayer composed by King Trisong Detsen, which pleased his guru.

Once, Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang dreamed that the Dharma protector Dorje Yudrön brought him to a mountaintop, where on a clean lawn he met the venerable Longchenpa. There, Longchenpa placed a crystal on his crown and chanted a six-line prayer of the Great Perfection, with the syllable “Ah” at the beginning and end.

At that moment, Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang developed incredible faith and entered a meditative state free from any conceptual thought. When he arose from his state of concentration, he also woke up from his dream. After waking up, he felt very happy and discovered a few miraculous sariras on the statue of Longchenpa.

After Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang completed the mandala practice, he returned the sacred objects to his guru. His guru asked him, “Have you seen the Omniscient Longchenpa?” Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang had forgotten the dream and had not experienced a direct vision of Longchenpa while awake, so he replied, “I haven’t.”

After some time, his guru again asked Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang the same question, and he still answered no. His guru then inquired, “Did you have any relevant dreams?” Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang replied, “I did have a dream.” He then recounted his dream in great detail to his guru. After hearing it, his guru was very pleased, saying that the venerable Longchenpa had transmitted all the teachings of the Great Perfection to him. Later, his guru praised Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang in the presence of other disciples, stating, “He has seen the Omniscient Longchenpa.”

Some historical accounts state that Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang was the incarnation of Vimalamitra. If this is true, he may not have needed to practice the preliminaries; however, he still appeared to have undertaken the practices seriously and completed the preliminaries.

- ♦ Do not wait until old age to practice the Dharma

We must not slacken in our efforts to accumulate merit and practice preliminaries, and we should never wait until we are old to engage in practice.

Some volunteer staff members are indeed very busy. The volunteer work alone has kept them occupied day and night, making it difficult to find time to offer the mandala. Therefore, it is impossible for them to undertake the practice at this moment. They can practice it later when they have spare time.

Apart from these staff members, all of you must practice mandala offering without delay. It is difficult to determine how long a person can live, so now that you have the opportunity, you must practice. Otherwise, you may continue to excuse yourself by saying, “I do not have time. I have to do this or that first. I will practice when I am old.” But in that case, you may never practice.

Yesterday, an administrative leader came to visit me. He is a good person, but his perspective differs from mine. He said, “Here is what I think: now that I am an administrative leader working for the government, I should work hard and contribute something meaningful to the country and its people. Until I am sixty years old, I will continue to work like this.

“After my retirement, I plan to travel with my family and enjoy the company of my grandchildren during my sixties. Then, at the age of seventy, I will begin to practice the Dharma, so I can prepare for my death and accumulate merit for my future life. By doing so, my life will be fulfilled.”

Although I complied with his wish, I kept thinking to myself, “Can one really guarantee living to seventy? It is not easy to reach that age! Moreover, even if one does live to seventy, it may be too late to practice the Dharma due to the impairment of the sense faculties...”

Perhaps many worldly people share similar ideas with him. Especially some young practitioners, who have to work for a living and raise children, may think, “When my kids go to university and start their own families, I’ll engage in the practices then.” It is difficult for those who hold this belief to practice now. However, it may be even harder for them to practice when they are retired and very old.

Therefore, when there is still an opportunity to practice the Dharma, one must engage in the practice. Without it, attaining liberation will be very difficult, even if we genuinely desire it. Worse yet, we may even fall into the lower realms after death. *The Collection of Deliberate Sayings* says:

Those who possess little merit,
 Are hard to tame and will fall into the lower realms;
 It is just as there is no oil in the sand,
 How can they obtain happiness?

There is a reason why our lineage masters paid special attention to the preliminary practices. Those who have practiced the preliminaries well always engage in practice steadily, do not change their practices back and forth, and will hardly regress. In contrast, those who did not practice the preliminaries well may gain fleeting clairvoyance, perceive things invisible to the naked eye, or have certain temporary experiences, but such experiences will ultimately fade away.

Therefore, practitioners must establish a solid foundation. In particular, when it comes to offering the mandala to accumulate merit, we must make an effort to engage in it, especially now. Do not wait until we are older to engage in this practice.

Next, we'll proceed to the formal teaching on the offering of the mandala. There are two separate mandalas: the *accomplishment mandala* and the *offering mandala*.

2.2.4.1.2. The Accomplishment Mandala

We begin the practice by arranging five piles on the accomplishment mandala.¹²⁶ We can visualize the five piles as the five buddha families or the field of merit as in the refuge practice.

When visualizing the piles as the five buddha families, place a small pile at the center to represent Buddha Vairocana and the deities of the Buddha Family. Position another pile in the eastern direction (toward yourself) for Buddha Vajra Akshobhya and the deities of the Vajra Family. In the south, place one for Buddha Ratnasambhava with the deities of the Jewel Family, in the west one for Buddha Amitabha with the deities of the Lotus Family, and in the north one for Buddha Amoghasiddhi with the deities of the Action Family.

When visualizing the piles as the field of merit, the central pile symbolizes

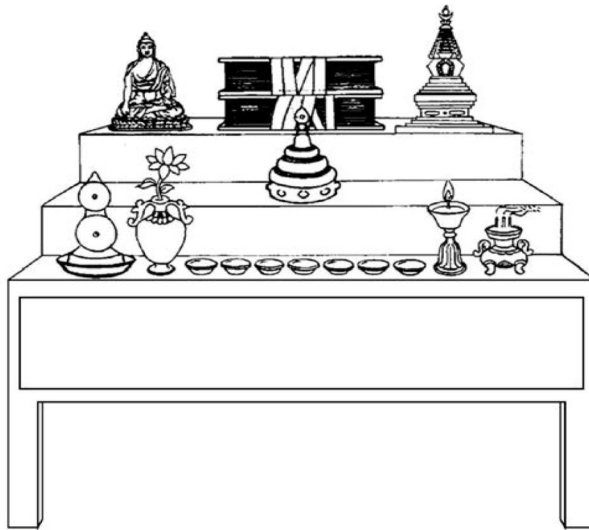
¹²⁶ The mandala offering is made before the accomplishment mandala, which functions similarly to a statue of the Buddha. It represents the Buddhafield of the Five Buddhas, embodying the five wisdoms. Since these five wisdoms are what we aspire to realize, this mandala is referred to as the accomplishment mandala.

Padmasambhava, inseparable from your own root guru, with all the lineage masters of Great Perfection above him, arranged in order, one above the other. The front pile represents Buddha Shakyamuni, surrounded by the 1,002 buddhas of this Good Kalpa. The right pile represents the Eight Great Bodhisattvas accompanied by the noble sangha of bodhisattvas, while the left pile represents the Two Principal Shravakas, surrounded by the noble sangha of Shravakas and Pratyekabuddhas. The back pile represents the Jewel of the Dharma, depicted as stacked books radiating light rays within a lattice.

Regardless of the visualization, place this accomplishment mandala on the altar or shrine table.

♦ The altar

In our tradition, before placing the accomplishment mandala on the altar, we first use this mandala to make the thirty-seven-element mandala offering and the mandala offering of the three kayas.



The three-tiered altar

Then, place the accomplishment mandala on the altar in front of representations of the Buddha's body, speech, and mind, surrounding it with the five offerings.

The altar in the above illustration has three levels: the top level has the representations of the Three Jewels, namely the statue of the Buddha, the scriptures such

as the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*, the *Condensed Transcendent Wisdom*, the *Seven Treasuries*, and the like, and the stupa; the middle level is where the accomplishment mandala is placed; the bottom level is for the five offerings.

The five offerings are food, flowers, water, lamps, and incense. When making offerings, they are arranged from left to right; when removing the water offering, it is done from right to left. It is preferable to offer seven cups of water, but if that is not feasible, fewer cups may be offered; even one cup is acceptable. By doing so, the accomplishment mandala is surrounded by the five offerings. *A Guide to The Words of My Perfect Teacher* provides a clear explanation of how to do this.

If it is not feasible to have both mandala offering sets, it is also possible to forgo the accomplishment mandala altogether and simply visualize the field of merit. Alternatively, one may follow the example of some teachers who first practice the accomplishment mandala and place it on the altar, then remove the mandala from the altar and begin practicing the offering mandala with it.

We should generally practice the accomplishment mandala every morning, placing it on the altar and removing it before going to bed at night. However, if doing this on a daily basis feels cumbersome, we can leave it on the altar until we complete the mandala offering practice.

Recently, a Dharma fellow asked me, “A Dharma friend is moving, and his accomplishment mandala has always been on the altar. Should I move it to his new place?” He hesitated to touch the mandala, fearing that something might go wrong. I reassured him, saying, “It is perfectly fine. That mandala can be removed from the altar every day.” His lack of confidence in performing such tasks may stem from not having studied the relevant teachings.

♦ The offering piles

As for the offering piles, when practicing the accomplishment mandala, it is better to use precious stones because, after the practice is complete, we simply place the mandala on the altar. However, when practicing the offering mandala, we may create loud noises when placing oversized precious stones on the mandala base, and we might find those stones inconvenient to hold in our hands. Therefore, for the offering mandala, it is preferable to use grains such as rice and barley, along with a bit of mung beans, red beans, or a few jewels like coral pieces and pearls. Ultimately, one may decide based on what works best.

If feasible, it is preferable to use new grains each time you practice the mandala offering. For example, after completing today's practice, you should set the used grains aside, and the next time you offer the mandala, you will use new grains. If you do not develop any feelings of reluctance or stinginess, you may change the grains every day or at least once a week. By doing so, you may need a large quantity of grains to complete your mandala offering practice.

[As we already know, Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang used four bags of grains that weighed several hundred pounds.]

When it is not feasible to have this many bags of grains, you could follow the example of some teachers who alternated their offering piles. While offering the mandala with one pile of grains, they washed and dried the other pile; and when it was time to make the mandala offering again, they used the cleaned pile of grains and washed and dried the first pile.

In addition, the offering piles, especially the grains, must be clean. Past practitioners would first wash and dry the grains, as well as remove pebbles, crumbs, and other debris before practicing the offering of the mandala. This is a good practical tradition.

Then, place five piles on the mandala base, and visualize them as the five buddha families or the field of merit as in the refuge practice. By making offerings in the presence of such a supreme support of practice, one can swiftly purify obscurations and accumulate merit.

Then what exactly do you offer? The answer is: all the possessions and wealth in Mount Meru and the four continents, which surpasses a bit of gold and silver or a few thousand dollars. Thus, this practice can accumulate great merit. Notably, this merit is primarily attained through mental offerings. As previously mentioned, if driven by pure motivation, a mental offering brings the same merit as a real offering.

2.2.4.1.3. The Thirty-Seven-Element Mandala Offering

There are several ways to practice the offering mandala, including the thirty-seven-element mandala offering and the mandala offering of the three kayas as outlined in the Longchen Nyingtik text.

♦ Wipe the mandala base

While practicing the offering mandala, you hold the mandala base and the

mala beads for counting in your left hand and wipe the mandala base with your right wrist.

It is commonly acknowledged that one holds the mandala base with the left hand during the practice. However, Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang advises using the right hand in his *A Guide to The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, though I have not found anyone else who supports this. I also tried using my right hand to hold my mala beads while practicing the offering mandala, and it felt inconvenient—I had to manage both the mala beads and the mandala base at the same time.

Especially when the mala beads are made of crystal, using my right hand to grab the rice can become a bit noisy. According to many teachers' traditions, one typically uses the left hand to hold the mala beads. Therefore, we also use the left hand.

As such, you hold the offering mandala base in your left hand and wipe it with the underside of your right wrist while reciting the Seven Branches and other prayers, maintaining focus on your visualization without distraction.

♦ Recite the hundred-syllable mantra once

Before the recitation, some liturgies have the following confession prayer:

May all the negative actions of body, speech, and mind accumulated by me and all living beings since time without beginning be purified, just as the dust on the mandala bases is swept away.

You may recite this confession prayer aloud or simply reflect on it in your mind. Then, recite the hundred-syllable mantra once. After this, according to *A Guide to The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, you should recite the following verse from *The Way of the Bodhisattva*:

To the Buddhas, those thus gone,
And to the sacred Dharma, spotless and supremely rare,
And to the Buddha's offspring, oceans of good qualities,
That I might gain this precious attitude, I make a perfect
offering.¹²⁷

When practicing the offering mandala, we do not necessarily recite this verse

¹²⁷ Shantideva, *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Shambhala, 2011, chapter 2, verse 1.

from *The Way of the Bodhisattva*. Therefore, after reciting the hundred-syllable mantra, we may proceed directly to the liturgy, beginning with “*Om Vajrabhumi Ah Hum*,” and then make the thirty-seven-element mandala offering.

Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang discusses three kinds of purity when practicing the offering mandala. The first is pure motivation: the practice is not intended to seek protection from fear or to improve our circumstances in this life, but to cultivate the precious bodhicitta. The second is pure objects: we are making a perfect offering to pure objects, namely the Three Jewels, rather than to non-Buddhist teachers or others. The third is pure constituents: the offering materials are clean jewels or grains, and the offering is not tainted by stinginess. It is very important to maintain these three kinds of purity.

♦ The symbolic meaning of wiping the mandala base

What is the symbolic meaning of wiping the mandala base during the practice? This action is not only meant to remove dirt from the mandala base. Rather, it symbolizes our effort to cleanse ourselves of the two obscurations that veil our minds.

In fact, the mandala base represents our mind, the dirt on it represents our karmic obscurations, and the act of wiping it signifies the purification of these obscurations. For this reason, many past Kadampa masters considered offering the mandala the most effective method for confession.

It is said that these great Kadampa masters cleaned their mandalas using the undersides of their wrists until the skin wore through and sores developed. Undeterred, they continued by using the edges of their wrists. When sores emerged there, they then switched to the backs of their wrists. This is how Lama Tsongkhapa did his mandala practice. Thus, when cleaning the mandala base, one should avoid using woolen or cotton cloths and instead use only their wrist, following the example of the great Kadampa masters.

♦ Arrange the offering piles

As you arrange the offering piles on the mandala base, follow the liturgy known as *The Thirty-Seven-Element Mandala*, composed by Chögyal Pakpa of the Sakya school. This liturgy is straightforward and easy to practice, so it has been embraced by various traditions of Tibetan Buddhism, both old and new, including Gelug, Sakya, and Nyingma.

Both the old and new traditions include various liturgies of the mandala offering tailored to their respective customs. Notably, each terma, or revealed treasure, of the Nyingma school includes its own prayer for the mandala offering. In the Longchen Nyingtik tradition, there are several extensive offering prayers for the mandala of the three kayas, taught by Longchenpa in the various Nyingtik, or Heart Essence, teachings. Any of these can be selected for the mandala practice.

When making the thirty-seven-element mandala offering, start by reciting the mantra, followed by the prayer.¹²⁸

Om Vajrabhumi Ah Hum,

The earth is the golden ground, completely pure, full of beauty and power.

At the same time, hold the mandala in your left hand while sprinkling it with perfumed water containing bajung¹²⁹ using your right hand. Then, with your right thumb and ring finger, take a small pinch of grain or a few flower petals, and recite:

Om Vajra Rekhe Ah Hum,

Then, circle your hand clockwise on the mandala base and place the pinch of grains or flower petals in the middle. While some teachers recommend circling three times counterclockwise followed by three times clockwise, we usually circle three times clockwise only. Next, place the large mental ring that represents the “fence of iron mountains” on the mandala base and recite:

The circular iron mountain wall completely surrounds it;

In the center is the letter hum—

Meru, the king of mountains;

Then, place a large pile in the center. Next, lay out the four continents and recite:

In the East is Pūrvavideha,

In the South is Jambudvīpa, In the West is Aparagodānīya,

¹²⁸ The translation of the prayer is taken from <https://www.lotsawahouse.org/tibetan-masters/chogyal-pakpa-lodro-gyaltsen/thirty-seven-point-mandala-offering>, translated by Chögyal Pakpa Lodrö Gyaltsen.

¹²⁹ It refers to a ritual preparation made from five different substances collected from a cow.

In the North is Uttarakuru.

Then, begin by placing a small pile in the east, either on the side closest to you or the opposite side, directed toward those to whom you are making the offering. Next, arrange three additional piles for the other continents, going around clockwise from the east. Continue reciting as you proceed:

*Beside them are Deha and Videha, Cāmara and Aparacāmara,
Śāthā and Uttaramantriṇa, Kurava and Kaurava*

For the subcontinents, Deha, Videha, and so on, place a pile on either side of each continent in turn. Then recite:

*The jewel mountain, the wish-fulfilling trees,
The wish-fulfilling cows, the harvest which needs no sowing,*

At the same time, place the jewel mountain in the east, the wish-fulfilling trees in the south, the wish-fulfilling cows in the west, and the harvest which needs no sowing in the north. Then recite:

*The precious wheel, the precious gem,
The precious queen, the precious minister,
The precious elephant, the precious horse,
The precious general, the vase of great treasure,*

Meanwhile, place the seven attributes of royalty plus the vase of great treasure one after another in the four cardinal and four intermediate directions. Then, recite:

*The goddess of beauty, the goddess of garlands,
The goddess of song, the goddess of dance,
The goddess of flowers, the goddess of incense,
The goddess of light, the goddess of perfume,
The sun, the moon,
The precious umbrella, the banner victorious in all directions:*

While reciting, place the four outer goddesses in each of the four cardinal directions, beginning with the goddess of beauty, and the four inner goddesses in the four intermediate directions, beginning with the goddess of flowers.

Place the sun in the east, the moon in the west, the precious umbrella in the south, and the banner victorious in all directions in the north.

As you recite, “There is all the bountiful wealth of gods and men, complete and flawless”—add more grains to cover the remaining space completely. If you have a summit ornament, place it on top at this point. Recite:

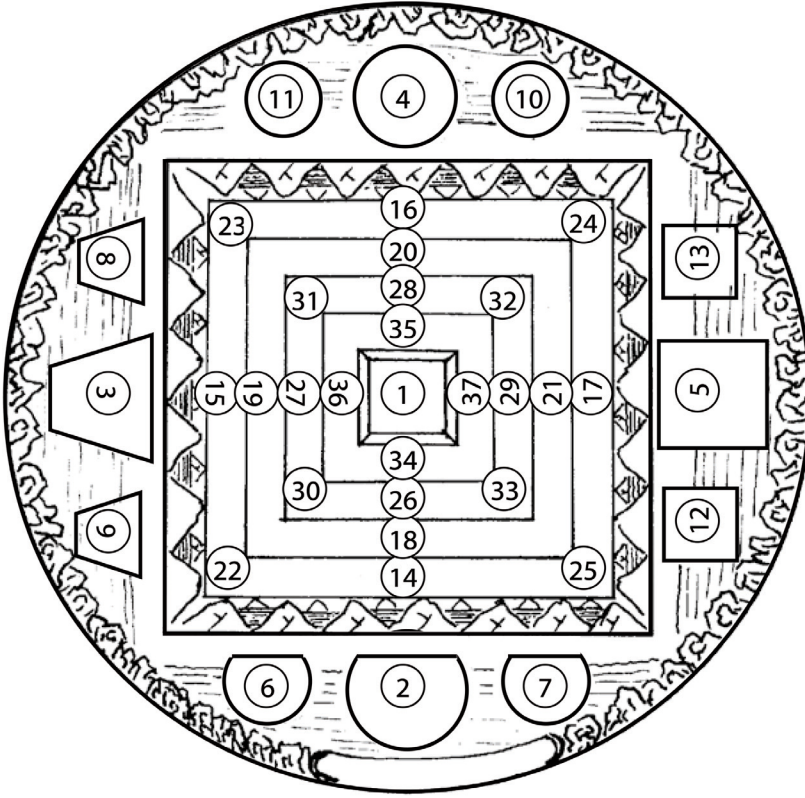
I offer this mandala to all the glorious and sublime root and lineage teachers and to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Patrul Rinpoche mentioned that some people would add the words, “pleasant and complete in all its parts, lacking nothing,” to the aforementioned line, but according to his root guru Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu, these extra words are not included in the original text. [These words are also absent from the Larung Gar prayer book.]

Regarding the visualization in the mandala practice, Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu gave the explanation mentioned above in his oral teachings and did not provide any additional instruction on the subject. For this reason, Patrul Rinpoche did not elaborate further and suggested those who wish to know the details consult the *Detailed Commentary on the Condensed Meaning* for a more comprehensive understanding.

To summarize, the practice of offering the mandala involves offering all the precious jewels and substances from the entire three-thousand-fold universe to the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions, thereby generating great meaning and merit.

When making this offering, practitioners of all schools of Tibetan Buddhism, including Gelug, Sakya, Kagyu, and others, follow the same sequential order. Specifically, after placing the ring representing the iron fence, they place a pile in the center that represents Mount Meru, and then lay out the four continents, going clockwise from the east. When the ring is filled with offering materials, they place the second ring, and when this is filled, the third ring. After placing the sun, the moon, the precious umbrella, and the banner victorious in all directions, they add more grains until there is no space left unfilled. Finally, they place an ornament for



The two-dimensional representation of the
thirty-seven-element mandala offering

- | | | |
|---------------------|--|---|
| (1) Mount Meru | (14) The jewel mountains | (27) The goddess of garlands |
| (2) Pūrvavideha | (15) The wish-fulfilling trees | (28) The goddess of song |
| (3) Jambudvīpa | (16) The wish-fulfilling cows | (29) The goddess of dance |
| (4) Aparagadānīya | (17) The harvest which needs no sowing | (30) The goddess of flowers |
| (5) Uttarakuru | (18) The precious wheel | (31) The goddess of incense |
| (6) Deha | (19) The precious gem | (32) The goddess of light |
| (7) Videha | (20) The precious queen | (33) The goddess of perfume |
| (8) Cāmara | (21) The precious minister | (34) The sun |
| (9) Aparacāmara | (22) The precious elephant | (35) The moon |
| (10) Śāthā | (23) The precious horse | (36) The precious umbrella |
| (11) Uttaramantriṇa | (24) The precious general | (37) The banner victorious in all directions. |
| (12) Kurava | (25) The vase of great treasure | |
| (13) Kaurava | (26) The goddess of beauty | |

the summit on top. They then lift this mandala with both hands to place it on the altar or to offer it to the guru.

In the end, when reciting, “*There is all the bountiful wealth of gods and men, complete and flawless*,” if it is for requesting empowerment, you may add, “In order to request empowerment;” if it is for requesting teaching, you may add, “In order to request the profound nectar of the sacred Dharma.” Then, recite, “I offer this mandala to all the glorious and sublime root and lineage teachers, and to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas.”

More instructions on this can be found in the *Descriptions on the Visualization and Practice of the Mandala Offering*, which was translated into Chinese by Master Fazun. You may consult this text.

♦ The seven-element mandala offering

The practice of repeating the mandala offering one hundred thousand times in the preliminary practices pertains to the seven-element mandala offering. The associated prayer¹³⁰ is:

*The ground is purified with scented water and
strewn with flowers.*

*It is adorned with Sumeru, the king of mountains, the
four-quarters of the universe, and the sun and the moon;*

Thinking of it as the blessed Buddha-fields, I offer it.

*By virtue of this offering, may all beings here and now attain
the happiness of that pure land!*

When making the offering, it is best to recite this verse in Tibetan. Here is the meaning of the verse:

First, visualize the ground is purified with scented water and flowers everywhere; then visualize it is adorned with Mount Meru and the four continents (five piles), along with the sun and the moon (two piles). The so-called seven elements in the practice refers to these seven piles. Therefore, you bring all the

¹³⁰ The translation is from <https://www.lotsawahouse.org/tibetan-masters/jamyang-khyentse-wangpo/seven-heap-mandala-offering>, translated by Adam Pearcey, 2021, revised for the Khyentse Vision Project, 2022.

treasures and wealth from Mount Meru, the four continents, the sun, and the moon into your presence through this visualization.

Next, think of all the buddhas of the past, present, and future in all the Buddha-fields, and offer all the treasures and wealth you have just visualized to them. In the end, you wish that all living beings will be reborn in the Pure Land.

◉ The reason for making the seven-element mandala offering

The mandala offering of the three kayas in Mipham Rinpoche's liturgy for the preliminary practice—*Illuminating the Path to Liberation: A Preliminary Practice*—is an extraordinary practice. However, at this time, we primarily perform the seven-element mandala offering because it is our tradition, and also because the prayer verse comes from the vajra words of King Trisong Detsen.

As recorded in his biography, when Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang was about to make the mandala offering, he wondered whether to use the verse composed by Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo or the seven-element prayer, as both are from vajra words. In the end, he chose the latter.

What is the origin of this prayer? It is said that when Padmasambhava arrived in Tibet, King Trisong Detsen offered all his retinues and wealth to him and recited this prayer.

Since then, this prayer has been widely used for mandala practice. Because it comes from the vajra words of a sublime being, it carries great blessing power. In comparison, a prayer made by an ordinary person would carry no meaning. In some other methods, practitioners are asked to recite mantras while making the mandala offering, but in our tradition, we recite this prayer. Reciting the prayer once denotes making the mandala offering once, so in total, you recite the prayer one hundred thousand times for this preliminary practice.

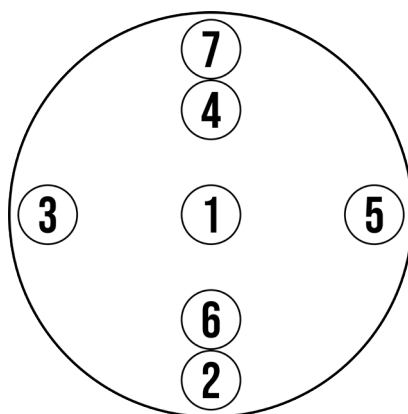
◉ How to make the seven-element mandala offering?

After you complete the thirty-seven-element mandala offering, place the mandala on the altar, then proceed to the seven-element mandala offerings. You need to make this offering one hundred thousand times, which is a significant undertaking. It is important to pay attention to both the pace and the quality of your practice.

When making the seven-element mandala offerings, you do not have to use the rings in the mandala set. You only need to hold the mandala base with your

left hand and recite this prayer verse in Tibetan.

While reciting the first line in Tibetan: *sa shyi pö chü juk shing métok tram* (The ground is purified with scented water and strewn with flowers), hold a handful of offering materials in your right hand and wipe the mandala base with the underside of your right wrist at the same time. You do not place the offering on the mandala base yet at this moment.



The seven-element
mandala offering

When reciting the second line: *rirap ling shyi nyi dé gyenpa di* (It is adorned with Sumeru, the king of mountains, the four-quarters of the universe, and the sun and the moon), begin to place the offering materials, starting from placing a pile in the center of Mount Meru, then the four continents going round in a clockwise direction from the east, followed by the sun and the moon. In total, there are seven piles.

Then, recite the third line: *sangyé shying du mik té pulwa yi* (Thinking of it as the blessed Buddha-fields, I offer it.) while your right hand continues to offer the seven piles. You may complete the offering of the seven piles after reciting this line. Specifically, while reciting the second and third lines, aim to finish placing the seven piles of offering materials, i.e., the grains, on the mandala base.

When reciting the fourth line: *dro kun namdak shying la chöpar shok* (By virtue of this offering, may all beings here and now attain the happiness of that pure land!), you may wipe the mandala base with your right hand, or you may choose not to do this. Place all the grains left on the mandala base back into the basin or the bag that holds the offering grains, and proceed to the next mandala offering. Meanwhile, move one mala bead held in your left hand for counting. Through these steps, you complete one repetition of the mandala offering.

All one hundred thousand repetitions of the mandala offering are completed in this manner.



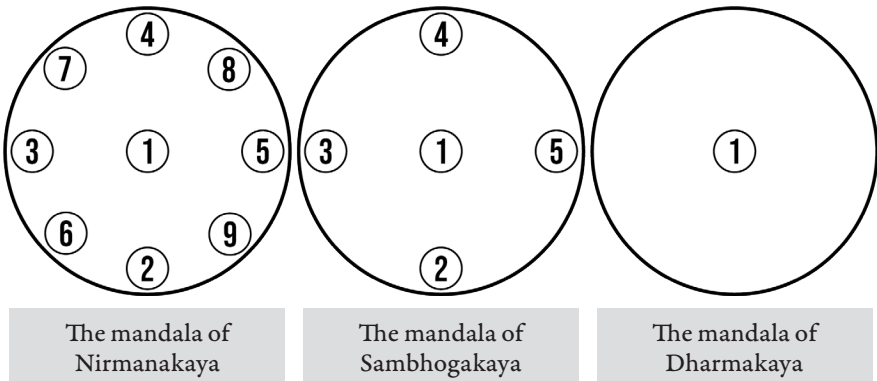
Lesson 121

“The four continents mentioned above in the arrangement ... like, and saturate it with saffron or other scented water.” [page 288–290]

2.2.4.1.4. The Mandala Offering of the Three Kayas According to this Text

When offering the mandala of the Nirmanakaya, place nine piles of offering substances on the mandala base. For the Sambhogakaya, place five piles, and for the Dharmakaya, one pile. In the Longchen Nyingtik tradition, the mandala offering of the three kayas begins with the offering of the mandala of the Nirmanakaya.

♦ Descriptions of the mandala offering of the three kayas



◉ The ordinary mandala¹³¹ of the Nirmanakaya

The ordinary mandala of the Nirmanakaya refers to the universe manifested by a Nirmanakaya buddha. Buddha Shakyamuni is one of such supreme Nirmanakaya buddhas who appeared in front of all living beings of the Universe of Endurance. Visualize that you offer all the exquisite treasures in his universe to the support of practice previously mentioned, that is, the five buddha families or the field of merit as in the refuge practice.

How big is the universe manifested by a Nirmanakaya buddha? It is the three-thousand-fold worlds, or a cosmos of a billion worlds. The four continents, arranged with Mount Meru at the center and the Brahma heavens above, constitute one world. A thousand such worlds form what is known as a “first-order universe of a thousand worlds.” Multiplying this universe by a thousand results in a “second-order intermediate universe of one thousand times one thousand worlds,” comprising a million worlds. Multiplying this million-fold universe by another thousand produces a “third-order great universal system of one thousand million worlds,” also referred to as a cosmos of a billion worlds. This cosmos of a billion worlds is beyond imagination, so is its vastness.

One places nine piles of offering substances when offering the mandala of Nirmanakaya. Regarding the nine piles, some teachers have not clearly indicated what each pile represents. Certain instructions state that seven piles represent the seven attributes of royalty, while the other two piles represent your body and your sources of merit, respectively. Thus, there are a total of nine piles. However, this explanation may not necessarily be appropriate.

It is generally believed that the largest mental ring represents the fence of iron mountains, which is the boundary of a world. Of the nine piles, the one in the center represents Mount Meru, while the eight piles in the four cardinal and four intermediate directions represent the four continents and their subcontinents.

The Buddha-field of one Nirmanakaya buddha encompasses hundreds of billions of such worlds. Imagine a vast collection of the finest treasures from both

¹³¹ Though more ordinary than those which follow, this is nonetheless an offering of an ideal universe, as perceived in the pure vision of highly evolved beings rather than the everyday experience of a universe full of suffering perceived by ordinary deluded perception. (Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2011, note 209.)

the human and celestial realms throughout all these countless and inconceivable worlds, such as the seven attributes of royalty and more, whether claimed or unclaimed. Now, add to this your own body, possessions, lifespan, merits, authority, and strength, along with all the virtues you have accumulated and will continue to gather, as well as everything that brings you joy and fulfillment. Gather all that is best and most desirable, and without even the tiniest desire or attachment, as small as a sesame seed, offer everything—leaving nothing out—to your guru and the Nirmanakaya deities.

When making this offering, use the nine piles of offering substances to represent the finest treasures from all the worlds, and offer them. This is the offering of the ordinary mandala of the Nirmanakaya.

◉ The extraordinary mandala of the Sambhogakaya

Next, continue to visualize, with your imagination, countless celestial realms and inconceivable palaces in the Five Great Buddha-fields, adorned with the goddess of beauty and other goddesses offering endless delights in infinite abundance. Offer all of these to your teacher and the Sambhogakaya deities. This is the offering of the extraordinary mandala of the Sambhogakaya.

The Sambhogakaya Buddha-fields are endowed with the five certainties: the certain place, the certain teacher, the certain assembly, the certain teaching, and the certain time. These Buddha-fields can only be perceived by bodhisattvas from the first to the tenth bhumi, who are also capable of perceiving the celestial realms, goddesses of beauty, and other splendors. This reflects the pure essence of the Sambhogakaya Buddha-field.

In short, five piles of offering substances are placed on the mandala base during the mandala offering of the Sambhogakaya: one in the center and four piles in the directions of east, south, west, and north.

◉ The special mandala of the Dharmakaya

On the mandala base symbolizing the unborn Dharmadhatu, the all-encompassing expanse of reality, place a pile of wisdom offering representing the four visions and all arising thoughts. Offer these entirely to your guru and the Dharmakaya deities. This is the offering of the special mandala of the Dharmakaya.

When practicing the mandala offering of the three kayas, the action of wiping the mandala base remains the same as mentioned previously. When reciting the

verse for the mandala offering of the Nirmanakaya, you place the first ring on the base and arrange nine piles of offering substances inside. When reciting the verse for the mandala offering of the Sambhogakaya, you place the second ring and arrange five piles. When reciting the verse for the mandala offering of the Dharmakaya, you place one pile, which symbolizes the purity of Dharmadhatu. Last, you place the ornament for the summit on top. Thus, you complete the mandala offering of the three kayas.

The above offering utilizes all three rings. However, there is a simpler way to make the offering by using only the mandala base, as in the seven-element mandala offering. In this case, while reciting the prayer of the mandala offering of the three kayas, you add nine piles of offering substances, followed by five piles, and finally one pile, without using the rings. You combine the piles in this manner, then wipe them away and restart the offering. Some teachers adopt this method for offering the mandala of the three kayas.

Some of you have started the mandala offering of the three kayas by following the verse in Mipham Rinpoche's liturgy for the preliminary practices. The number of offerings you have made can be counted toward your mandala practice. In fact, according to the tradition of Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang and other lineage masters, when accumulating mandala offerings one hundred thousand times, a superior practitioner makes the mandala offering of the three kayas by following the corresponding prayer in the Longchen Nyingtik preliminaries. A middling practitioner makes the mandala offering of the three kayas thirty thousand times, and the seven-element mandala offering seventy thousand times. A lesser practitioner only makes the seven-element mandala offering in their preliminary practice. Therefore, it should be the easiest if we only make the seven-element mandala offering.

◉ Recite the prayer for the mandala offering of the three kayas

Once you have mastered the key points of the visualization described above, recite the following prayer¹³² for the mandala offering of the three kayas with fervent, heartfelt faith and devotion:

Om Ah hum!

¹³² The translation is taken from <https://www.lotsawahouse.org/tibetan-masters/yukhok-cha-tralwa/ngondro-compendium-4>, translated by Adam Pearcey, 2006 (revised 2012).

*One billion universes—a hundred times ten million worlds,
 Filled with all the wealth of gods and human beings, like the
 ‘seven precious gems,’
 My bodies, my possessions, and my sources of merit, all
 together, I offer them in their entirety, so that
 I may be born as a Nirmanakaya and turn the wheel of
 Dharma, liberating all beings!
 The highest heaven of great bliss, the realm of ‘Tukpo Köpa,’
 Perfect with the five certainties, the mandala of the five
 buddha families,
 And inconceivably vast clouds of offerings of every variety of
 sensual and emotional stimulants—
 With this offering, may I enjoy the perfection of the
 Sambhogakaya fields!
 Where all appearance and existence are completely pure from
 the very beginning—the youthful vase body,
 Ornamented by the play of Dharmata, unceasing compassion,
 The realm where all clinging to the perception of kayas and
 tiklés¹³³ is naturally liberated—
 With this wisdom offering, may I enjoy the freedom of the
 Dharmakaya reality!*

This prayer, which consists of three sets of verses, is from the Longchen Nyingtik preliminary practice. It takes a significant amount of time to make the offering one time by following this prayer. There is only one verse in Mipham Rinpoche’s liturgy for the preliminary practices, making it easier to recite. However, regardless of which prayer you use, you should offer the three kayas mandala as much as possible in your everyday practice, as it brings great benefits.

Karma Chagme Rinpoche has an instruction for the brief mandala offering, which says:

¹³³ Tiklé (Skt. bindu or tilaka, Tib. ཇིག་ལེ, Wyl. thig le) lit. ‘sphere’ or ‘essence-drop’ – the essences within the psycho-physical system. (Source: Rigpawiki.org)

The mandala offering shouldn't just be part of your preliminary practice. One should practice more of it on a daily basis. For example, it is best to make the thirty-seven-element mandala offering every day. But if this is not feasible, you should offer the three kayas mandala one hundred times every day; if this is still not feasible, you should offer the seven-element mandala one hundred times each day. Last, if these are still not feasible, at least you should recite the mantra in the prayer one hundred times each day.

Thus, making the mandala offering should be part of our daily practices. According to Karma Chagme Rinpoche, such a practice is a pure offering, free from the three kinds of impurity.

If it involves offering something else, an ordinary person may mix impure thoughts at the beginning, in the middle, and after the offering. For example, in the case of using money to make an offering or engage in a good deed, at the outset, you may acquire the money with cunning, deceitful motives, and negative actions such as lying, along with many other unvirtuous elements. In the middle, when you are making the offering, although your intention is to accumulate merit, you may inevitably experience negative emotions such as arrogance and rivalry. After the offering is made, you may often begin to feel regret or stinginess. It is difficult for an ordinary person to refrain from these three kinds of impurity.

The mandala offering is quite different. At the beginning, you prepare the mandala base and the offering substances according to your resources; in the middle, when you are practicing the offering, you primarily make mental offerings. After the mandala offering, there is certainly no stinginess or regret, allowing you to easily overcome these three kinds of impurity.

Therefore, this is an extraordinary method for accumulating merit, applicable not only to the rich but also to the poor. Additionally, all past and present eminent masters have used this practice to accumulate vast merit.

As we know, only by accumulating abundant merit can the thirty-two excellent signs and the eighty exemplary features of a Buddha be manifested. It is a different matter if you do not wish to attain Buddhahood. However, if you want to become a Buddha, you must accumulate merit.

Some people have an excessively high opinion of themselves, believing they possess superior faculties and are therefore exempt from accumulating merit. In

fact, as long as we are ordinary individuals, we carry a significant amount of negative karma and lack merit. Thus, each of us must place great importance on this practice.

Next, I will explain the mandala offering of the three kayas using the following prayer.

◉ The ordinary mandala of the Nirmanakaya

Om Ah Hum!

One billion universes—a hundred times ten million worlds,

*Filled with all the wealth of gods and human beings, like the
“seven precious gems,”*

*My bodies, my possessions, and my sources of merit all
together, I offer them in their entirety, so that*

*I may be born as a Nirmanakaya and turn the wheel of
Dharma, liberating all beings!*

This section of the prayer is for the offering of the ordinary mandala of the Nirmanakaya.

Buddha Shakyamuni is a Nirmanakaya buddha who, after being born in the Universe of Endurance, has turned the Dharma wheel for infinite living beings and taught them the 84,000 dharmas. This is also our goal. When making the mandala offering, we pile up all the exquisite treasures in the cosmos of a billion universes and offer them to all the buddhas of the past, present, and future in the ten directions. We do so not to obtain happiness, beauty, or wealth, but to establish ourselves and others in Buddhahood, the completely perfect enlightenment.

Therefore, adjusting the motivation of our Dharma practice is very important. It is like shooting an arrow: If we do not aim at the right target, we will not obtain the vast accomplishment.

◉ The extraordinary mandala of the Sambhogakaya

*The highest heaven of great bliss, the realm of “Tukpo
Köpa,”¹³⁴*

¹³⁴ The highest heaven of great bliss.

*Perfect with the five certainties, the mandala of the five
buddha families,*

*And inconceivably vast clouds of offerings of every variety of
sensual and emotional stimulants—*

*With this offering, may I enjoy the perfection of the
Sambhogakaya fields!*

The Sambhogakaya Buddha-field refers to the Tūkpo Köpa, or the highest heaven of great bliss, of the five buddha families, which have the five certainties or the five perfections.

During the practice, we should visualize that we offer inconceivably vast clouds of offerings of every variety of sensual and emotional stimulants, in the format of the Samantabhadra cloud offering, to all the deities in the Sambhogakaya Buddha-field. Through this offering, may we and all living beings enjoy the perfection of the Sambhogakaya fields.

◉ The special mandala of the Dharmakaya

*Where all appearance and existence are completely pure from
the very beginning—the youthful vase body,*

Ornamented by the play of Dharmata, unceasing compassion,

*The realm where all clinging to the perception of kayas and
tiklés is naturally liberated—*

*With this wisdom offering, may I enjoy the freedom of the
Dharmakaya reality!*

The pristinely pure youthful vase body is ornamented by the play of Dharmata—unceasing compassion. These are the extraordinary terms of the Great Perfection. That is, the presently accomplished youthful vase body—our primordial Buddha-nature—manifests as the unceasing compassion that appears as the play of Dharmata. Meanwhile, all clinging to tiklés and the perception of kayas are naturally liberated in the Dharmakaya Buddha-field.

Of course, this state is beyond the reach of ordinary consciousness, but we may visualize to offer all this pure wondrous wisdom to the Dharmakaya Buddha-field

and wish that you and all living beings will enjoy the freedom of the supreme Dharmakaya reality.

♦ **The ascetic practice of the mandala offering**

While counting the number of offerings you make, hold the mandala base in your left hand, keeping the offerings from your initial round on it. With each recitation of the text, use your right hand to add another pile. Persist in your practice, holding the mandala base until your arms ache to the point that they can no longer hold it.

[The mandala set made this time is quite light, so it should not tire your arms too quickly; however, after a prolonged session, your arms will still feel the strain.]

When you genuinely cannot hold the mandala any longer, place it on the table before you and continue adding the heaps of offerings while counting. This adjustment is a special exception and is generally not permitted. Ideally, you should always hold the mandala base in your left hand during the practice.

When taking a break, such as for tea, collect all the offerings you have made. When you resume, begin again with the thirty-seven-element mandala before proceeding as you were. Make sure that you complete at least one hundred thousand mandala offerings in this way.

Actually, this is also a form of asceticism, which is necessary for your practice, including the recitation of the hundred-syllable mantra, prostrations, and the mandala offering. Of course, only diligent practitioners can do this. An undiligent person may clearly have the ability to accomplish a task, but they tend to make excuses, saying, “I am sick” or “I am too busy,” and end up achieving nothing. In comparison, even when faced with a busy schedule, a diligent person will prioritize their Dharma practice, viewing it as the most important aspect of life.

Therefore, it is worthwhile for a practitioner to endure some hardships. In this case, when you practice with perseverance and hold up the mandala base until your arms ache, this is also considered an ascetic practice.

“Enduring hardships and showing unwavering perseverance for the Dharma” goes beyond simply enduring a lack of food or clothing. It means steadfastly committing to completing any challenging practice, regardless of the circumstances. In fact, any act of discipline or diligence—such as going to bed late and waking up

early or avoiding slacking off while strictly adhering to a practitioner's lifestyle—can be seen as a form of ascetic practice for the sake of the Dharma.

By practicing the mandala offering with perseverance, we will accumulate a significant amount of merit through our patience and effort. Eventually, we will definitely perfect the accumulation of merit. Therefore, we must make great efforts to undertake this practice.

This applies to the mandala practice as well as to other preliminary practices. It also pertains to the activities aimed at benefiting living beings. A diligent person can always endure hardships in whatever they are doing. As you may have noticed, some volunteer staff at Larung Gar are indeed very diligent: they work on a computer to create teaching videos and transcriptions for eight or nine hours a day, yet they still manage to complete the preliminaries like others and never miss a Dharma lesson, all while handling other tasks.

Some individuals, however, neither work as staff nor attend Dharma classes, yet still struggle to complete their preliminary practices. This makes me wonder what they are doing here at Larung Gar. I empathize with lay practitioners in the city who face challenges in completing their preliminaries due to work, family obligations, and emotional stress. Managing these responsibilities can indeed be quite difficult. However, sangha members at Larung Gar primarily need to listen to a few teachings each day; nothing more is required. If, despite this, some of you still cannot complete your preliminary practices, something may be amiss. It could be that you choose not to engage in these practices, or perhaps you are simply emulating your teacher, whom you regard as a “wish-fulfilling jewel,” but who pays little attention to the practice, which ultimately is not beneficial.

This truly happens here. Similar cases also occur among practitioners outside Larung Gar. Due to indolence, some individuals eventually left the Bodhi Association and abandoned their Dharma groups. What can be done about this? I would like to remind those Dharma friends who genuinely wish to pursue the Dharma that merely claiming to have followed a particular teacher or received certain advanced teachings is not enough. True progress requires dedicated practice to transform your own mind.

You can check how many rounds of preliminaries Patrul Rinpoche completed and what hardships Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang endured during his preliminary practices. Therefore, please practice with great diligence.

I asked you to read *A Guide to The Words of My Perfect Teacher* for two reasons: First, you will know what Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang's pith instructions are, and second, how he did his preliminary practices. His biography introduces how he made mandala offerings. You all have the book, but some of you do not even read it, about which I am not happy.

I understand that you all value this practice and have been busy with various tasks and mandates. However, regardless of the circumstances, a person's level of commitment to studying and practicing the Dharma is ultimately reflected in their actions.

Today, a Buddhist from the UK called me, saying she was a disciple of a certain guru who has a concise practice that combines the mandala offering, the recitation of the hundred-syllable mantra, taking refuge, and more, allowing her to bypass doing the preliminary practices individually. She mentioned that she really liked this concise approach.

Of course, it is fine to undertake such a concise practice if it can have the same effect as the traditional preliminary practices, which should be the skillful means of her guru, and I am okay with it. However, if our Dharma practice becomes increasingly concise while worldly preoccupations grow more extensive, are we not simply making excuses for ourselves?

◉ The seven-element mandala offering

Those who are unable to make the detailed mandala offering of the three kayas can also recite the following prayer and make the seven-element mandala offering:

*The ground is purified with scented water and
strewn with flowers.*

*It is adorned with Sumeru, the king of mountains, the
four-quarters of the universe, and the sun and the moon;*

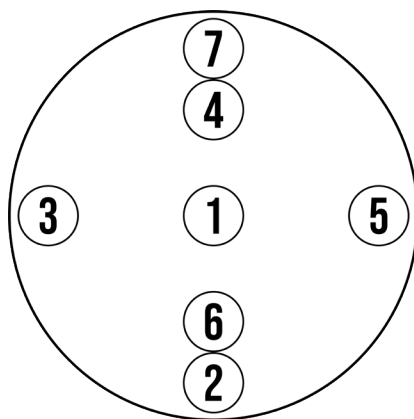
Thinking of it as the blessed Buddha-fields, I offer it.

*By virtue of this offering, may all beings here and now attain
the happiness of that pure land!*

As mentioned previously, this prayer was the one that King Trisong Detsen chanted when he offered all his land, retinues, and wealth to Padmasambhava, who had just arrived in Tibet. Later, many eminent masters and practitioners from

both the new and old schools of Tibetan Buddhism began to use this prayer for making the mandala offerings.

When offering the mandala, you start by placing a pile in the center, which represents Mount Meru, followed by the four continents arranged in a clockwise direction, starting from the east, the side nearest to you. Next, you offer the sun and the moon, with the sun on the east side and the moon on the west. In total, there are seven piles.



The seven-element mandala offering

If your mandala offering is done quickly, you might not be able to create distinct piles on the mandala base, and that is perfectly okay. The most important aspect is the visualization. You should visualize offering all the finest treasures found in human or celestial realms across innumerable and inconceivable worlds to the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions, along with your own body, sources of merit, perfections, happiness, good fortune, and more. It is essential to maintain this visualization in your mind throughout your practice.

◉ The outer, inner and secret visualizations

Karma Chagme Rinpoche describes the outer, inner and secret visualizations.

The outer mandala offering: As previously mentioned, you visualize offering all the treasures of the cosmos of a billion universes to the guru, the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions, the deities, and dakinis. After the offering is made, there is no need to reabsorb the field of merit; simply allow it to vanish on its own or remain in the non-conceptual state of emptiness.

The inner mandala offering: In the presence of the same support of practice, visualize your body as Mount Meru, your four limbs as the four continents, and all the blood and flesh in your body as everything that is best and most desirable. Offer all of these to the guru and to all the buddhas; in the end, visualize that the field of merit dissolves into you.

The secret mandala offering: In the presence of the same support of practice, visualize that from your heart emanates the Samantabhadra cloud of offering, and

that you make the offering with it. In the end, visualize that you are indivisible from the field of merit.

These three kinds of visualization are extraordinary, which you can practice at any time. If you can make such a practice, you can accumulate extremely vast merit effortlessly.

After making the mandala offering of the three kayas or the seven-element mandala offering, you should recite the mantra:

*tram guru ratna mandala puja megha Samudra spharana
samaye ah hum*

◉ Apply the three supreme methods

Regardless of the form of mandala offering, it is important to apply the three supreme methods. Specifically, you begin by arousing bodhicitta, thinking, “The mandala offering I am making this time is for the benefit of all living beings.”

Next, you proceed to the main practice, free from any concepts. An unrealized person can hardly remain in a genuine non-conceptual state; however, as long as you minimize conceptual thoughts and avoid distractions from worldly preoccupations, the practice can be considered “free from concepts.” In any case, if your practice is imbued with an understanding of emptiness or you remain in a state of emptiness at the end of the session, it is regarded as accumulating wisdom. At the end, you dedicate the merit. It is crucial to apply the three supreme methods in this practice, just as in other practices.

Lingje Repa, a renowned Tibetan practitioner, said, “The mandala offering can accumulate immense merit simply by extending your hand. Thus, there is no method more profound than this.”

When you think about it, there is probably no other Dharma practice that can accumulate vast merit simply by using your hands. In fact, it is not easy to accumulate merit, especially vast merit. For example, without the merit accumulated from past lives, it will be particularly difficult for you to engage in good actions such as building a monastery or working in charity. Even if you want to do so, you may not have the opportunity or the sufficient merit to make it happen. But everyone can practice the mandala offering, so we must accumulate merit through this practice.

2.2.4.1.5. Offer Clean Substances

♦ Offer clean and fresh substances

When making mandala offerings with barley, wheat, or other grains, ensure you use fresh grain each time if it is within your means, and avoid reusing the same grains.

Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang used four large bags of grains for his mandala practice, which is quite substantial. Yesterday, I saw many of you carrying rice bags home—some were twenty-five kilos, while others were ten or five kilos—which is perfectly fine. You can replenish the grains based on your own resources. Feel free to change them once a day or once a week. If you prefer not to switch to new grains every time, you can wash and dry the offered grains for your next offering, as mentioned previously. Just ensure that you do this without any sense of stinginess.

It is not advisable to act out of stinginess. This applies not only to the mandala offering but also to other virtuous actions. As long as you are not stingy, you may choose the means that best suit your resources.

Grains that have already been offered can be given to birds, distributed to beggars, placed before a representation of the Three Jewels, or disposed of in a clean location. However, it is important not to consider these grains as your own or to use them for yourself. If you cannot afford to renew the offerings each time, you may reuse them as often as your means permit. For those experiencing extreme poverty, it is acceptable to reuse the same measure of grain multiple times.

Regardless of how frequently you change the grain, ensure it is thoroughly cleaned before offering by removing any impurities such as dust, chaff, straw, bird droppings, or other foreign materials. You may also smoke the offerings with burning cypress leaves. Make sure the grain is fresh and clean, and if possible, soak it in saffron or other scented water.



Lesson 122

“Although the teachings do permit the offering of earth and stones, ... accumulated in the past, one spark of merit is worth more than a mountain of effort.” [page 290–293]

Let us continue to study the chapter on offering the mandala.

♦ Offering the mandala without stinginess

For those who are utterly destitute and possess nothing, as well as for those with superior faculties who can genuinely visualize “countless Buddha-fields within a single speck of dust” and mentally make offerings, the Buddha’s teachings permit offerings of earth and stones. However, for those who have great wealth but refuse to use it for offerings or acts of generosity—choosing instead to make offerings through reciting mantras or visualizations while justifying their inaction— they are only deceiving themselves.

Nowadays, some people are not well-versed in the Dharma. Despite knowing very little, they claim that by reciting a corresponding mantra, they can be exempted from practicing the preliminaries, the faults of consuming meat, and the like. Such a lax and ignorant action, which does not really make sense, will mislead not only themselves but also others.

Some people, while knowing nothing, would dissuade others by saying, “Forget it! Forget it! What is the use of making offerings? Just resting in the state of your mind will be fine. Just visualize everything in your mind!”

However, if you do have possessions, you cannot simply rely on visualization in your mandala practice. It is similar to if you don't actually eat anything and just visualize that you have eaten; can that quench your hunger and thirst? I am afraid you have not reached that level of accomplishment yet.

In fact, the merit of offering is particularly great, and the mandala offering is the best skillful method to make offerings to the buddhas and bodhisattvas. Through this offering, you can attain infinite merit in this lifetime and in many lives yet to come. The *Flower Ornament Sutra* says:

Making offerings can end all sufferings,
 Making offerings can surely obtain wisdom of all buddhas;
 One should make infinite supreme offerings to the object of
 worship,
 So one should make offerings to the Buddha with great joy.

The *Itivuttaka* says:

Making offerings to the Three Jewels, the field of merit,
 Is called the most supreme offering,
 Which brings constant happiness to where you are,
 And the attainment of nirvana in the future.

Moreover, the various tantras and pith instructions clearly state, “clean offerings, cleanly prepared,” or refer to “these cleanly prepared objects of offering.” They never suggest using “dirty offerings, dirtily prepared.” Therefore, it is absolutely unacceptable to use dirty or leftover food as offerings, to reserve the good barley for oneself while offering only the dregs, or to grind inferior barley into tsampa for making offerings to the deities.

Recently, a person told the monastics, “You may take these cans of soft drinks with you. I offer them to you. I do not consume junk food. You may have them!” This offering is not appropriate and actually creates a significant fault.

The great Kadampa masters of the past used to say:

One must not keep the best for oneself while offering moldy oil
 pancakes, yellowed vegetable leaves, or other inferior items to the
 Three Jewels.

We should not make tormas or butter lamps with rancid or spoiled ingredients, keeping the fresh butter for our own use. Such conduct will deplete our merit, so we must refrain from doing it.

When making offerings, some people like to offer things that are redundant to them or food that they no longer eat, which is also inappropriate. Here is the Tibetan custom: People lift their new clothes into the air before wearing them, as a way to offer the clothes to the buddhas and bodhisattvas; before eating their meals, people offer the first part of their food or drink to the buddhas and bodhisattvas; before drawing water, they sprinkle a few drops of water into the air as an offering to the buddhas and bodhisattvas. Such offerings create great merit.

♦ Making the right *shelze* or tormas

When making *shelze*¹³⁵ or tormas, make sure the dough has a consistency that you would personally like. Adding excessive water to the dough simply for the sake of easier handling is inappropriate.

The great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche used to ask sangha members at Larung Gar to make the Samantabhadra cloud offering every day, so every day we would make a large quantity of the five offerings such as three thousand butter lamps, three thousand tormas, and more. At that time, sangha members at the Victorious Subdue-Mara Land¹³⁶ also got involved.

As many of you may know, when making tormas, you should prepare the dough with a consistency that you yourself would like. The dough should be neither too soft nor too hard. If it is too hard, it will not be suitable for making tormas; if it is too soft, it will deplete your merit.

Atisha used to say, “Tibetans will never get rich because they make their torma dough too soft!” Perhaps having had a good living condition in India, Atisha did not have a good impression of the lives of Tibetans, especially when he first came to Tibet. He commented that Tibet was a world of pretas where there was not a single person who could enjoy the karmic result of having offered one measure of barley to a pure object of merit. At other times, he stated that Tibet would not be rich. Of course, Atisha was not referring to all Tibetans. That said, do make tormas properly.

♦ Offering water to accumulate merit

¹³⁵ It refers to an offering of food represented by a type of torma which bears this name.

¹³⁶ The name is for the community of Chinese practitioners at Larung Gar.

Atisha also said, “In Tibet, simply offering water is enough to accumulate merit. In India, due to the heat, the water is not as pure as it is here in Tibet.” Indeed, India is located in the tropics, making it difficult to find water as pure as that in Tibet. When the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche visited India, he noticed that the water there was a bit muddy. Therefore, as long as practitioners living in the Tibetan region are diligent, offering clear water is sufficient to accumulate incredible merit. The water in the Han area of China is also quite good, so offering water with diligence can also accumulate great merit.

When making water offerings, carefully clean the seven offering bowls or other containers and arrange them in a neat row, ensuring they are neither too close together nor too far apart. Align them evenly so that none are out of place. Use clean water free of impurities, such as grains, hair, dust, or insects. Fill the bowls mindfully, ensuring they are full but not overflowing, and avoid spilling water on the offering table. This method creates elegant and pleasing water offerings.

As I mentioned before, I hope that Dharma fellows can offer seven bowls of clean water at home each day. If a daily offering is not feasible, it is acceptable to skip the water offering for a few days. Once, a Dharma fellow told me, “I offered water, and seven days later, it was gone. Perhaps it’s because the Dharma protectors came often.” He was too lazy to change the water every day, so it gradually evaporated, yet he attributed it to the Dharma protectors!

In *The King of Aspiration Prayers: Samantabhadra’s Aspiration to Excellent Conduct*, offerings are described as being “arranged perfectly, distinctively, and sublimely.” Regardless of the type of offering you make, presenting it beautifully and pleasantly—down to its arrangement—shows respect for the buddhas and bodhisattvas, which can generate immense merit. Thus, take the time and effort to arrange your offerings with care and thoughtfulness.

♦ Pure intention and offerings

Dharma fellows who reside at Larung Gar should already be familiar with the teachings on making offerings. I hope you will consistently make offerings to the buddhas and bodhisattvas. Anything pleasant—whether it is a butter lamp, a piece of incense, a flower, a majestic building we see, or people we like—can be used for making offerings.

Although the Three Jewels cling to nothing, making offerings to them can

accumulate vast merit for us practitioners. However, we must ensure that our intentions are pure.

◉ The story of a poor woman offering the Buddha a butter lamp

If a person cannot afford to make decent offerings, there is no fault in offering something unclean or unpleasant, as long as their intention is pure. The buddhas and bodhisattvas are free from the concepts of “clean” and “dirty.” One illustrative story is about a poor woman known as Town Scavenger, who offered a butter lamp to the Buddha.

My mother was the first to tell me this story. She was illiterate but able to recount many Buddhist stories. Before I started school and learned to read, she often told me those stories. I was young at the time, so the stories became deeply ingrained in my mind. As I grew older and began to pursue the Dharma, I noticed that the stories my mother told aligned with the descriptions in the sutras, though some of her phrasing reflected the life habits of Tibetans.

As a child, I often shared this poor woman’s story with others. During my school days in the 1980s, I frequently used this story to encourage my peers to make more offerings. Perhaps many of you are already familiar with it, as we studied it in the past.

Here is the story from the *Sutra of the Wise and the Foolish*:

During the Buddha’s time, there lived a poor woman named Nanta who could not afford to make any offerings. Each time she witnessed the king and his people make offerings to the Buddha and his sangha, she felt sad and guilty. She blamed herself for failing to perform positive actions in previous lives, which left her too poor in her present life to make offerings to the field of merit.

Later, she begged and managed to get a small coin. She took the coin to an oil vendor but found it was only enough to buy the smallest amount of oil, insufficient to make a lamp. Out of sympathy, the vendor gave her double the amount of oil she could afford. Overjoyed, Nanta made an oil lamp, went to Jeta Grove, and offered it to the Buddha with the following vow: “May I in future times be illuminated by the lamp of wisdom. May I eradicate the defilements and darkness of all beings and enlighten them.”

By the next day, all the oil lamps had gone out after burning all night, except for Nanta’s lamp, which was still shining brightly and was full of oil, with a wick as

good as new. When the Buddha's disciple Maudgalyayana came to collect all the lamps, he tried to blow it out, but Nanta's lamp continued to burn.

The Buddha told him, "Maudgalyayana, the person who offered this lamp made a great Mahayana aspiration of bodhicitta. It cannot be extinguished by a shravaka like you." When the Buddha said this, Nanta approached him, and the Buddha prophesied that in the future, this beggar woman would become a perfect Buddha called "Light of the Lamp."

As you can see, even if you offer only an oil lamp, it can bring incredible merit if the offering is made with bodhicitta. Therefore, we should neither neglect to do anything good, even if we consider it petty, nor should we stop others from doing good.

◉ The story of a leper-woman's food offering

There is a story about a leprous woman who offered a bowl of rice gruel to Mahakasyapa, which she had received during her begging rounds. As she presented it, a fly fell into the bowl, and when she tried to remove it, her finger also slipped in. Despite this, Mahakasyapa accepted and consumed the gruel to honor her sincere intention. Her offering sustained him for an entire day, bringing her immense joy. As a result, she was reborn in Tushita Heaven.

Here is a similar story in the Theragatha, a classic scripture of Theravada Buddhism:

Mahakasyapa advised the bhikkhus to be content with less desire and said, "When I was on my alms round, I met a leper-woman whose finger fell into the food she offered to me. While eating her food offering, I did not feel any aversion."

In the Chinese Tripitaka, there is a sutra titled *The Sutra on Mahakasyapa Liberating a Poor Mother*. This short story of the poor mother does not share the same plot as the leper-woman's story, yet it is also very inspiring. I hope you can read this short sutra when you have the opportunity. Here is the story:

When Mahakasyapa was begging alms from the poor in the city of Rajgir, he noticed a poor woman who was penniless, weak, often ill, and without food and clothing. Mahakasyapa, through the samadhi of knowing, understood that this woman had not sown seeds of virtue in her past, which explained her current impoverishment. He also realized that her life was drawing to a close, and if she

was not guided at this moment, she would miss her chance for liberation forever. So, Mahakasyapa approached her for alms.

At that time, the woman had nothing but a bit of stinking rice gruel begged from a wealthy donor. With great sadness, she said, “You should give me alms instead. No one is poorer than I am in this country!”

Mahakasyapa replied, “I am here to relieve you of your poverty. As long as you offer me a small token, you will be rich in the next life.”

Then she offered all her rice gruel to Mahakasyapa, who drank it all on the spot and dedicated the merit to her.

After her death, the poor woman was reborn in the god realm as a celestial goddess with great qualities and powers. Indra asked her, “What did you do in your previous life that brought you such great merit?” The goddess told him the cause.

◉ Intention is the key

As later practitioners, we should cultivate true faith in these stories. Therefore, we do not need to give or offer large sums of money when making offerings if we lack resources; the most essential aspect is to have a mindset of veneration and devotion. As I mentioned before, the essence of charity is a compassionate mind. However, it is unreasonable to offer something only when happy while giving nothing or even rejecting the idea of making offerings when unhappy.

The same principle applies when offering the mandala. Whatever we use should be clean and presented in an appealing manner, and our intention should be completely pure. *The Sutra of the Compendium of Essential Teachings*¹³⁷ says:

This mind can commit misdeeds;
It can also cultivate meritorious karma.

If greed, anger, jealousy, and aversion frequently arise in our minds, and we remain distracted even while listening to teachings, we may commit various misdeeds with the mind. Conversely, if we cultivate a kind mind, even if our conduct is not always impeccable, it still generates great merit. Therefore, we ensure that we discipline our minds well when making offerings.

2.2.4.1.6. The Importance of Accumulating Merit

¹³⁷ Skt. Dharmasamuccaya

♦ **Transcendental attainment arises from the two accumulations**

Diligently accumulating merit, such as through the practice of offering the mandala, is an indispensable part of the path. This practice is vital for everyone, regardless of their status or position.

Some people say, “I do not need to practice preliminaries. I can directly proceed to the practice of the Great Perfection. My guru has a special connection with me, and out of compassion, he has allowed me to do so.” However, I still believe that even if your guru has great clairvoyance and you possess superior faculties, you still need to accumulate merit.

Anuruddha was blind, so he was unable to thread a needle to sew his torn robe. He thought to himself, “Who wants to accumulate merit? Please help me sew my robe!” Then, the Buddha appeared to him and said, “I want to accumulate merit. I will help you with threading the needle.”

Astonished, Anuruddha said, “Honorable Buddha! I am not referring to you! I was actually referring to other people.”

The Buddha said, “Why can’t I do this? One should not stop accumulating merit even after attaining Buddhahood. When it comes to merit, more is better!”

This shows that even the Buddha still aspires to continuously accumulate merit. Therefore, I question whether it makes sense for a practitioner who is in the stage of completing the preliminaries to forgo the mandala practice, regardless of their spiritual attainment. While I hesitate to say that it is definitively wrong—since sentient beings vary in their spiritual faculties, and some practitioners may be like Vimalamitra, capable of instantaneous realization—many lineage masters of the Great Perfection have traditionally emphasized the importance of accumulating merit and purifying obscurations. For instance, the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche never approached any aspect of the practices lightly.

Recently, I had a conversation with a few Dharma fellows. We all feel that the disciples who followed the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche are truly good practitioners because they pay special attention to the practices of accumulating merit and purifying obscurations. However, in this regard, practitioners of the new generation do not match the earlier practitioners. In fact, when many eminent masters were still alive, they could dispel others’ misconceptions with a single Dharma teaching and positively influence them for the rest of their lives.

We must not abandon the accumulation of merit. As the tantras say:

Without merit, accomplishment is impossible;
It's like trying to extract oil from sand.

Hoping to achieve spiritual accomplishment without accumulating merit is akin to attempting to extract vegetable oil by pressing riverbank sand. No matter how many grains of sand one presses, not even the smallest drop of oil will emerge.

On the other hand, seeking accomplishments through the accumulation of merit is like extracting oil from sesame seeds: the more sesame seeds one presses, the more oil one gets. Even pressing a single sesame seed on one's fingernail will leave it oily. As it is said in the sutras:

Trying to attain accomplishment without accumulating merit
is like churning water to produce butter;
Accumulating merit to attain accomplishment is like churning
milk to obtain butter.

We all share the common goal of attaining Buddhahood. This is the most important goal for both Theravada Buddhists and Mahayanists. Many young people often ask, "What is the meaning of life? What is the right goal in life?"

It's a different story if you don't think about future lives, but if you do, you should constantly aspire to "attain Buddhahood."

Here is a paraphrase of what the Buddha said:

A king is preoccupied with many mandates, so he is unable to put the Buddha's teachings into practice one by one. If he can obtain accomplishment through only one practice, what should it be? The answer is to always keep the intention of "I want to attain Buddhahood" in all his endeavors.

This applies to all of us as well. It is difficult to be well-versed in all the Buddhist scriptures and to apply them in practice, so we should consistently aspire: "I want to attain Buddhahood." This is very important for anyone who seeks accomplishment because once we establish this goal, we will focus on its causes: accumulating merit and purifying obscurations.

Indeed, without accumulating merit, no one can attain Buddhahood. Once,

Chan Master Zhaozhou was sweeping the floor of a shrine room when a monk asked him, “You are an accomplished great monk; why are you still sweeping the floor?”

The Chan master answered, “Because there is dust coming from outside.”

The monk said, “The place of Buddhism is a sacred place of purity; how is it that there is dust?”

The Chan master replied, “Look. Here is another speck of dust!” What he implied is that when the mind is tainted with so many discursive thoughts, one must sweep the “floor” of the mind.

I think the reason sangha members of the Chan School of Chinese Buddhism engage in collective labor is to accumulate merit. Master Baizhang advocated for Chan monasticism that includes both farming and meditation. He also made the vow of “one day without work, one day without food,” so he never ceased his own labor throughout his life.

One day in Master Baizhang’s later years, the sangha did not want him to farm at such an old age, so they hid his farming tools. Unable to find his tools, the master had to take a break from his farming duties, and on that day, he refused to eat, saying, “I accumulated no merit. How dare I rely on others for food?” He has inspired later generations of Chan practitioners, who undertake labor every day to accumulate merit.

There are now many large monasteries of Tibetan Buddhism in India. Many great masters there require all sangha members to participate in labor. Unlike sanghas in other places, those at most monasteries in India still engage in labor even though they receive offerings from the faithful. The monastics in India are highly skilled in their work, which is commendable.

Yesterday, I saw several nuns carrying bags of coal near the Accommodation Building for Female Practitioners, one of whom attended this summer’s Buddhist Symposium. At that time, she was still an international student in the United States and had not received her ordination. I had a hard time recognizing her yesterday because she was covered in coal dust. I teased her, “Why do you come here to become a ‘coal person,’ knowing that you can study on a garden-like campus in the United States?”

A joke is a joke, but I always believe that everyone, regardless of who they are—even if they are a president or a dharma master—must undertake a certain

amount of labor. A person should not arrogantly enjoy the results of others' work; instead, they should work harder for the sake of accumulating merit. Many eminent masters of the past have exemplified this.

Nowadays, there are children from affluent families who simply enjoy the services provided by those around them, which is not good. We should cultivate merit by all means. In particular, we should do something meaningful for the sangha and in other fields of merit, which can greatly benefit our future accomplishments.

Thus, attaining the ultimate, supreme accomplishment is the direct result of completing the two accumulations. As stated earlier, without perfecting the accumulations of merit and wisdom, it is impossible to achieve the twofold purity of Buddhahood. Nagarjuna says:

By these positive actions may all beings
Complete the accumulations of merit and wisdom
And attain the two supreme kayas
Which come from merit and wisdom.¹³⁸

The Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment says:

The two accumulations of merit and wisdom
Are the causes of attaining perfect enlightenment.

In particular, by completing the accumulation of merit, which involves concepts,¹³⁹ one attains the supreme Rupakaya, or the form body; by completing the accumulation of wisdom, which is beyond concepts, one attains the supreme Dharmakaya, or the truth body. Nagarjuna's *Precious Garland* says:

The Rupakaya of all buddhas comes from the accumulation of
merit;
The supreme Dharmakaya, in essence, is born from the
accumulation of wisdom.

Therefore, if we accumulate no merit and only meditate on emptiness every day, at a certain point, a "buddha" that has no Rupakaya but only Dharmakaya may

¹³⁸ Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2011, page 292.

¹³⁹ Concepts of subject, object and action.

arise. Of course, this is merely a hypothetical perspective, and nothing like this will occur in reality. On the other hand, it is also not beneficial to only accumulate merit without meditating on emptiness.

A good schoolteacher will pay attention to the multifaceted development of his students, including their moral, intellectual, and physical growth. If the teacher only focuses on one aspect, it may not be beneficial for his students. Likewise, a good spiritual teacher will pay attention to both accumulations of their disciples.

Here, I do not mean to boast about ourselves or belittle others, but we are indeed very fortunate to have encountered the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche. Had we followed a teacher who only emphasized the accumulation of merit and paid no attention to, or worse yet, knew little about or even rejected the teachings of the Middle Way, the Great Perfection, and other instructions on the doctrine of emptiness, we would have focused solely on the accumulation of merit.

Had we followed a teacher who was only well-versed in the teachings of emptiness and showed little interest in the accumulation of merit, we would have focused solely on cultivating wisdom. Therefore, we must value both accumulations and also guide subsequent practitioners in this way.

♦ **Worldly accomplishments also come from accumulating merit**

Even temporary worldly accomplishments arise from the accumulation of merit. Without having accumulated merit, no matter how much effort is invested, the endeavor will ultimately be futile.

A Dharma practitioner has repeatedly asked me, “Please grant me blessings! I want to become wealthy!” I replied, “I have already blessed you many times.” However, without accumulating merit, even acquiring wealth can be very challenging. For instance, some people never have to exert the slightest effort yet are always well-provided for with food, money, and possessions in this life, thanks to the merits they accumulated in the past. In contrast, others spend their entire lives frantically trying to amass wealth through trade, farming, or other endeavors, only to discover that their efforts yield nothing at all, and they may even die of hunger. This is something anyone can observe for themselves.

In the past, there was a man in my hometown who was very poor. Recently, I met him in a monastery, and he was still as poor as ever. Normally, herdsmen in

a village earn similar amounts of money, but his family remains very poor, even though there are a few hard-working young men in the family.

As we can see, the displays of merit in our real life sometimes seem very interesting. Some people do not have to make any effort but become rich easily, whereas others work very hard but have no money left in their pockets. Every time I saw this man, I would think about how important it is to accumulate merit, because he was poor when I was a child, and now that he is green-eyed,¹⁴⁰ he is still very poor.

I am sure you will find similar cases among your friends, family, and neighbors. In the past, a Tibetan king initiated three movements to redistribute wealth equally between the poor and the rich, but later the rich became wealthier while the poor remained impoverished. This reflects the impact of their merits. Therefore, it is very important to accumulate merit.

♦ Merit and help from the sublime

The same principle applies when seeking the favor of wealth deities, Dharma protectors, and others in the hope of achieving supernatural abilities or gaining material wealth. These deities cannot provide us with anything unless we have accumulated merit through our past acts of generosity to support it.

Many Chinese people like to request the empowerment of Yellow Jambhala. For those who possess merit, the empowerment can be beneficial because Yellow Jambhala will find a way to make them wealthy. However, for those without merit, no matter how many times they receive the empowerment, it will not make them rich; at most, it will plant the source of merit in their mindstream.

Nowadays, many people ask, “Could you give me a photo of Jambhala? I want to carry it with me.” “Could you recite the mantra of Jambhala for me? I want to recite it often.” Perhaps they have been praying every day, saying, “Wealth deity! I want to get rich!”

Some gurus cater to the requests of such people. They hold a wooden stick while granting them the blessing, saying, “Get rich, get rich! Get very rich!” But I wonder whether they really do get rich.

Some Dharma protectors, such as Damchen and Tsiu Marpo, are also wealth deities, and it is beneficial to pray to them if you seek wealth. However, for a true practitioner, it is preferable to have less money, as excessive wealth can easily lead

¹⁴⁰ Meaning: he is approaching to the end of his life.

to distractions and afflictions that hinder Dharma practice. Conversely, it can also be stressful for a practitioner to have no money at all. The precepts suggest that one should aspire to live a moderate life, avoiding extremes on either side.

Once, there was a hermit who lived in poverty and owned nothing. Thus, he began to meditate on the Dharma protector Damchen. Over time, he reached a state where he could converse with Damchen as if he were speaking to another person. Despite this connection, he did not attain any accomplishments. Damchen told him, “Because you have not performed even the slightest act of generosity in the past, you cannot experience the effects of generosity. Therefore, I am truly unable to grant you any accomplishments.”

One day, the hermit joined a group of beggars and received a bowl of soup. Upon returning home, Damchen appeared and asked, “Did you notice the accomplishment I granted you today?”

The hermit replied, “All the beggars received a bowl of soup, not just me. I do not see how there was any accomplishment from you.”

Damchen responded, “When your soup was served, a large chunk of lard fell into your bowl. That was the accomplishment I bestowed upon you!”

In the past, some individuals who wanted to eat meat used this story to justify their consumption. They claimed that if Damchen granted a lump of lard to that hermit, it would be acceptable for them to eat meat as well.

However, this is not a correct interpretation of the story. The example of the lump of lard is used solely to illustrate the importance of accumulating merit and how, without it, even the assistance of a Dharma protector can be of little help. If, during the food offering, you receive more pieces of delicious food, it is possible that this is the result of a Dharma protector’s intervention. However, without having accumulated any merit, the Dharma protector will at most grant you a bit more food, but there is no way for you to become wealthy, even if you truly desire it.

One of the past Karmapa masters was quite renowned. He received offerings from everywhere on a daily basis. He had an attendant responsible for collecting these offerings each day. This attendant, who desired wealth, felt particularly envious, thinking, “The guru always receives so many offerings. I have been working so hard, but why does nobody give me any offerings?”

Through his clairvoyance, Karmapa read the attendant’s mind and said, “All the offerings will be yours tomorrow.”

The attendant was very happy, hoping for more offerings the next day. However, there were no offerings at all that day, and it was only at dusk that a villager presented a piece of dried cow skin. He was upset, and Karmapa told him, “Perhaps the merit you accumulated in previous lives could only bring you a piece of dried cow skin, while the merit I accumulated in my previous lives is much greater.” The attendant then realized it had something to do with his actions in past lives.

It is evident that if one lacks the merit accumulated through acts of generosity in the past, even the practice of the wealth deity cannot eliminate poverty. If the worldly gods of fortune were truly able to grant material abundance, then the buddhas and bodhisattvas—whose power and ability to perform miracles surpass those worldly gods by hundreds and thousands of times, and who selflessly benefit all beings without exception—would surely shower the world with abundant riches, eradicating all poverty in an instant. However, this has not happened because material wealth and resources can only be the result of one’s own accumulation of merit. Simply praying to the sublime ones for wealth does not necessarily lead to true prosperity. As the great masters of the past have said: “A single spark of merit holds greater value than an entire mountain of effort.”

The Sutra of the Compendium of Essential Teachings says:

If one doesn’t practice generosity,
It is as if one has no lamp but seeks light.
How can one have a positive karmic result
By abandoning positive actions?

On the other hand, if we have accumulated merit, we can experience positive karmic results without making any effort. As said in Sakya Pandita’s *Treasury of Good Advice*:

Things achieved through the strength of merit,
Like the light of the sun, depend on nothing else.
Things achieved through the strength of effort,
Like the light of a butter lamp, depend on everything else.¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ Sakya Pandita, *Ordinary Wisdom: Sakya Pandita’s Treasury of Good Advice*, translated by John T. Davenport, with Sallie D. Davenport and Losang Thonden, Wisdom Publications, Boston, 2000, verse 235.

Therefore, we should accumulate merit; otherwise, we will face obstacles in whatever we are doing.

Since merit is so important, what can we do? Some people might wonder, “If I am wealthy, I can practice generosity and make offerings. But I don’t have any money right now; what should I do instead?”

In this situation, the only approach is to adopt the skillful method of the mandala offering. Through this practice, one can offer all the wealth in the cosmos across a billion universes to the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions. This is the pith instruction that eminent masters have passed down to us.

In this short lifetime, each of us should do something meaningful for our next lives and the future lives of others. Now that we have understood the relevant teachings, we should no longer remain indolent. Instead, at this stage, we must practice the mandala offering and other preliminaries diligently. It would be very foolish to refuse to practice them.



Lesson 123

“of effort. These days when people see the slightest wealth or power in... impulse to devote yourself to such things for their own sake.” [page 293–295]

Let us continue studying the chapter on offering the mandala. Previously, we covered the importance of accumulating merit. Now, let's proceed to the next paragraph.

♦ Pure intention and the supreme object of offering

In today's world, in some remote and underdeveloped areas, when people see someone with a bit of wealth or social status, they often exclaim in amazement, “Oh, wow! This person is incredible!”

People living in affluent cities are also astonished by the wealth of billionaires such as Bill Gates, Warren Buffett, and Li Ka-shing.

In fact, the wealth these individuals possess is not particularly remarkable. When both the giver's intention in making the offering and the recipient to whom the offering is made are pure, such accomplishments in wealth require very little accumulated merit. This is exemplified by the story of Māndhātṛi.

◉ The story of Māndhātṛi

By offering seven beans, King Māndhātṛi, a previous incarnation of Buddha Shakyamuni, attained sovereignty over everything up to the Heaven of the Thirty-Three.

Here is the story from the *Sutra of the Wise and the Foolish*:

Many kalpas ago, after Buddha Puṣya appeared and turned the Dharma wheel, he traveled far and wide to guide beings onto the Dharma path. Once, a brahmin's son was at his own wedding when he encountered Buddha Puṣya. In a spontaneous act of devotion, he threw a handful of beans toward the Buddha.

At that time, it was customary to throw beans at the bride, a practice akin to throwing flowers at Chinese weddings for “consecration” and setting off firecrackers for “exorcism.” Initially, the brahmin's son had intended to throw the beans to his bride, but upon seeing the Buddha adorned with solemn and majestic characteristics, he felt a surge of faith and joy that inspired him to make the offering right then and there.

Four beans fell into the Buddha's begging bowl, and one landed on his crown. Because the brahmin's son made the offering to a supreme object of merit, he was reborn as King Māndhātṛi, the universal emperor. Because of the four beans that fell into the bowl, he reigned over the four continents. As one bean landed on the Buddha's crown, he became sovereign over the realm of the Four Great Kings and the Heaven of the Thirty-Three.

The *Sutra on the Causes and Conditions of King Māndhātṛi* also has this story, although the storyline is a bit different. Upon the request of King Prasenajit, Buddha Shakyamuni expounded on the karmic cause and effect from a past life that led to the extraordinary blessings received by King Māndhātṛi:

At the time of the Buddha Vipasyin, a merchant encountered the Buddha. Filled with immense joy, he made an offering to the Buddha by throwing him some mung beans. Four beans fell into the Buddha's alms bowl, while one hit the bowl and then fell to the ground.

At that time, the merchant made a vow, “With this offering as the cause for my immense accomplishment, may I obtain the Buddha's pristine wisdom; may I swiftly cross the stream of birth and death; may I liberate all whom the previous buddhas have not liberated.” He was reborn as King Māndhātṛi and reigned over the four continents and the Heaven of the Thirty-Three.

In the sutra, the Buddha also said, “Had the mung bean that hit the bowl not fallen on the ground, the merchant would have been reborn as Indra. Because the bean fell on the ground, he could only reign in the human realm instead of in the god realm.”

Therefore, historical parallels suggest that those who enjoy wealth and admiration from others may not have performed significant actions that accumulated great merit in a past life. A small act of merit can yield great karmic fruition if it is directed toward a particularly supreme object of offering.

Therefore, we should not underestimate the result of a small act of merit. *The Miscellaneous Treasures Sutra* says:

If one plants a bit of virtue
In the fertile field of merit,
One will inevitably reap the rewards later.

and

One should be diligent
In engaging in virtuous acts,
And refrain from harboring inferior thoughts
About minor good actions.

◉ The story of King Prasenajit

Patrul Rinpoche also shared a story of King Prasenajit, whose power was attributed to his offering of a dish of unsalted hot food.

Of course, the story appears in several different scriptures, so the plot varies a bit. As it is said in *Saṅghabhedavastu* of *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*:

When Ananda arrived at the palace of King Prasenajit, the king was overjoyed. He asked Ananda, “I have been experiencing wondrous karmic results since I was born. At every mealtime, a bowl of rice, two cooked pheasants, and a piece of sugar cane fall from the air. Except for one pheasant that falls to the ground, the rest land on a silver plate. May I know the reason for this?”

Hearing this, Ananda didn’t answer right away and simply said, “It’s very rare!”

Ananda shared King Prasenajit’s story with the sangha upon his return. When the bhikkhus asked the Buddha for the reason, he said, “In the past, in this city, an elder once offered a bowl of rice, two cooked pheasants, and a piece of sugar cane to a pratyekabuddha, but one pheasant fell to the ground. Because of this act of merit, this elder enjoyed happiness in the god realm for innumerable lives, and later was born in the human realm as King Prasenajit, experiencing this wondrous

karmic result.” Since one pheasant fell to the ground during the offering, he is now experiencing the same karmic result. Therefore, when making offerings, make sure not to drop the offering materials on the ground.

In Tibetan Buddhism, when making offerings to the sangha, donors typically do not offer items that have fallen to the ground. The same is true in Chinese Buddhism: during food offerings, if a piece of food falls on the dining table, donors will discourage the Dharma master from eating it, which aligns with the fundamental teachings of Buddhism.

As shown in the story of King Prasenajit, if a person makes offerings to the sangha with faith, they will gain merit in this life and in many lives to come. There are many corresponding stories. Even if a person is very poor in this life, if they can offer their wealth, however meager, to a supreme object of offering, it can still bring great merit.

◉ The story of Anathapindika

The Parables Sutra recounts the story of Anathapindika, a wealthy merchant who gave away all his wealth to those in need seven times throughout his life, earning a nickname that literally means “One who gives alms (*pinḍa*) to the unprotected (*anātha*).” During his seventh act of generosity, he left no wealth for himself, so he and his wife lived like beggars.

Later, he found a piece of sandalwood in a pile of manure and sold it for money. Then he bought four buckets of rice. When he returned home, he told his wife, “I’ll go buy some vegetables, and you can cook one bucket of rice.”

At that time, with his wisdom, the Buddha knew it was the right moment for the couple to turn toward the Dharma, so he sent Sariputra to beg alms from them. Upon seeing Sariputra, Anathapindika’s wife offered him all the cooked rice. When she finished cooking the second bucket of rice, the Buddha sent Maudgalyayana on his alms round, and again the wife offered all the cooked rice with faith. When she finished cooking the third bucket of rice, the Buddha sent Kashyapa, and once more she offered the rice. When she finished cooking the fourth bucket of rice, the Buddha appeared in person. Upon seeing the supremely majestic Buddha, fervent faith arose in her, and she again offered him the cooked rice.

Soon, Anathapindika returned. His wife was worried about being scolded, so she asked, “Should we make offerings to the Buddha, Sariputra, Maudgalyayana, and Kashyapa if they come for alms?” Anathapindika was a devoted believer, so

he replied, “If they come, we must certainly give them our best offerings.” His wife then said, “They just visited, and I offered all four buckets of rice to them.” Hearing this, Anathapindika was very pleased.

Because of this act of merit, treasures soon appeared in their home, and they became affluent again. Later, they offered all their wealth to the Three Jewels. After receiving the Buddha’s teachings, they attained enlightenment.

There are similar stories in other Buddhist scriptures. It brings great merit to make offerings to a supreme field of merit with sincere faith. Many people today wish to make offerings, but it is important to examine the recipient first. If you don’t conduct any examination and simply believe others who say, “So-and-so is great!”, you may offer precious possessions or even all your wealth to that person, only to later regret it upon discovering their faults. This is not wise.

Back in the Buddha’s time, his disciples avoided any actions that might give rise to people’s misconceptions about the Three Jewels. However, this may not be the case today. Of course, this does not mean there are no sublime beings in the present; it is just that there are fewer individuals who have attained enlightenment, like Maudgalyayana and Sariputra did during the fruit period of the Dharma.

Before making an offering, you should at least take some time to examine whether a person is a qualified recipient or not, as suggested in sutras and shastras. Otherwise, you may feel bad about the recipient or even slander Buddhism, which is unnecessary.

Of course, making offerings generates great merit. Especially if you offer to a supreme field of merit, you may experience positive karmic results, such as becoming wealthy. Throughout both ancient and modern times, there are many such cases, and in some instances, the donors can clearly notice the karmic results. However, it requires wisdom to make offerings, which must be emphasized.

◉ Venerable Atisha’s vajra words

When Atisha arrived in Tibet, he remarked, “Tibet truly resembles a place of pretas. I see no one here enjoying the karmic result of having offered even a single measure of barley to a pure object!”

Why did Atisha view Tibet as a place of pretas, or hungry ghosts? When the translator Gya Tson Seng was sent to India with gold to invite Atisha to propagate the Dharma in Tibet, he remarked, “Tibet is a poor place, like a place of pretas, so

it is not easy for us to bring you this much gold. We know you do not covet gold, but to honor the preciousness of the Dharma, please accept our offering. We hope you can come to Tibet and teach us the Dharma.”

Perhaps this initial communication truly impressed Atisha, as he frequently referred to Tibet as a place of pretas after his arrival. However, historically speaking, India was not particularly wealthy during that time, either (*the audience laughs*).

In fact, through these words, Atisha meant to convey that one does not need to commit a significant positive action to enjoy tremendous worldly happiness. He said, “There is nobody reaping the fruit of having offered even a single measure of barley to a pure object.”

As I mentioned earlier, Venerable Atisha was a national treasure of India at that time, and the Indian king did not allow him to leave for Tibet. Therefore, Atisha had to depart India under the pretense of going on a pilgrimage to Nepal and eventually entered Tibet from there. At that time, Tibet was divided, and there was no king to unite everyone. When Atisha arrived in Ngari, King Jangchub Ö invited him to give extensive teachings at a monastery. Later, at the request of King Jangchub Ö, Atisha composed *The Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*.

Before arriving in Tibet, Atisha’s best translator, Gya Tson Seng, passed away, and Atisha said, “My tongue is broken. It is of no use for me to go to Tibet because I can no longer work for the benefit of others.” Though full of wisdom, he appeared to know no Tibetan, so he had to rely on translators. Fortunately, there were some other translators, including Lotsawa Naktso, who helped Atisha with translation.

Initially, Atisha planned to stay in Tibet for only three years. Later, the householder Dromtönpa came to Ngari from Lhasa to follow Atisha. He shared with Atisha many accounts of the virtues of Samye, Lhasa, and other places, and invited him to propagate the Dharma in various locations throughout Tibet.

Thanks to Dromtönpa’s eloquence and wisdom, Atisha eventually abandoned his intention to return to India and lived around Lhasa for another ten years. For this reason, Tibetans are very grateful to Dromtönpa, and Atisha ultimately lived in Tibet for thirteen years, working to benefit the living beings of the Tibetan region. In 1054, Atisha passed into parinirvana at the Tibetan village of Nyethang.

To this day, many of Atisha’s relics and blessed objects remain at Nyethang; thus, it is said that a pilgrimage to Nyethang can give rise to bodhicitta. A few days ago, a Dharma fellow offered me a set of mala beads made at Radreng Monastery,

which was founded by Dromtönpa. In Lodrö Gyeltsen's *Opening the Door of Mind Training*, the author recounts stories of Dromtönpa that took place in Radreng Monastery. Whenever I think of those stories, I feel compelled to visit. The next time I go to Lhasa, I will definitely visit Nyethang and Radreng Monastery.

Atisha said Tibet was a place of pretas, and these days many people also ask me, "Why is the Tibetan region so poor? Isn't it true that all Tibetans believe in Buddhism?"

As you may know, being wealthy does not necessarily indicate having merit. The key is to determine whether one can practice the true Dharma, as excessive wealth may distract a practitioner from their practice. Take Bhutan, for example: this country in the eastern Himalayas is reluctant to open up for the sake of pursuing economic prosperity. A tourist visiting Bhutan is charged one hundred dollars a day. Why do they do this? It is to protect Bhutan's own culture and tradition from inferior foreign values and views. Some people may think Bhutanese are too conservative because the rest of the world has opened up. But people have different values: some equate merit with material affluence, whereas others do not believe wealth is a sign of having merit.

The key is to see whether one has wisdom in their mind because money is not synonymous with happiness. In truth, one can truly be happy when possessing spiritual wealth. This is the most important thing!

Moreover, there are four types of karmic effect: the fully ripened effect, the effect similar to the cause, the conditioning effect, and the proliferating effect. Merit may correspond to a specific type of karmic effect and does not always manifest as material wealth. The lack of material abundance in the Tibetan region is linked to a lack of corresponding meritorious actions in the past. However, the Tibetan region boasts an exceptional environment characterized by fresh air, clear springs, blue skies, and white clouds, which is a proliferating result of actions accumulated in past lives. It is important to note that different values can lead to varying perceptions of the same situation.

- ♦ **Why do people admire the worldly accomplishments of others?**

Some individuals find the modest wealth or status of others to be so wonderful and amazing for three reasons:

First: they are ignorant and narrow-minded. They know little about truly wealthy people, both in the present and in the past.

Second, they are strongly attached to ordinary appearances. As I mentioned the other day, in the 1970s there was a bicycle in my hometown. Once, when all the villagers went on a picnic, everyone tried to take a photo with the bicycle, as if it were their own. At that time, there was also a tractor in our community, and many people took photos with that vehicle as if they were the driver. In fact, what you are attached to today becomes merely a dream when you reflect on it tomorrow, so we do not have to cling to ordinary appearances.

Third: they either fail to understand the proliferating effect of actions, as illustrated earlier by the seed of the *asota* tree, or, even if they do understand, they lack belief in it. If they truly believe in the principle of cause and effect, they will not feel the slightest envy when they see a famous state leader, a movie star, or an entrepreneur standing on stage with millions or tens of millions of people cheering for them. This is because what is happening is merely the result of temporary causes and conditions; this person may know how to attract attention through skillful means. However, when they die, they will be no different from any other ordinary person. They will either be cremated or have a water, earth, or sky burial. When their consciousness leaves the body, they will have nothing left but their past karma.

If they have not accumulated any merit through positive actions, only their negative actions will accompany them, and their future will be bleak. This is evident when you consider how miserable some movie stars and state leaders were at the time of their deaths.

Therefore, these vivid and profound vajra words of Patrul Rinpoche are indeed very meaningful and insightful.

♦ Sincere and heartfelt renunciation

Understanding these points, many people often ask me, “Please bless me so I may cultivate genuine renunciation.” Truly, anyone with sincere and heartfelt renunciation understands that all the seemingly perfect things in this world—whether immense wealth like that of a naga, a status as lofty as the sky, power as formidable as a thunderbolt, or beauty as striking as a rainbow—are utterly impermanent and devoid of inherent existence. Such things should evoke nothing but revulsion, much like a plate of greasy food might repulse someone suffering from jaundice.

The Sutra of the Right Mindfulness of Dharma says:

Appearance, cast, wealth,
And other things that bring happiness
Are all impermanent,
So the wise shouldn't trust them.

In a previous chapter, Patrul Rinpoche quoted the following words of his peerless guru, Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu:

Whatever I see of high rank, power, wealth, or beauty in this
world arouses no desire in me.

This is because, in his guru's state of mind, gold was no different from cow dung—a perspective of a realized person as described in *The Sutra of a Hundred Actions*. Therefore, he had no clinging to any apparent perfection to be found in this world.

The Sutra of the Right Mindfulness of Dharma says:

Regard gold and dirt as equal,
Be free from worries and remain mindful,
Then one will not be bitten by the snake of afflictions,
And will obtain infinite happiness.

We can achieve this state when true renunciation arises within us. Although it may be challenging for us to reach this state now, we do not need to be overly attached to any worldly dharmas.

While developing genuine renunciation, we must diligently accumulate merit while recognizing it as illusory, like a dream. Accumulating merit with the aim of gaining wealth or comfort in this life may suit ordinary worldly individuals, but it is far removed from the essence of authentic Dharma, which is rooted in the resolve to be liberated from samsara. True Dharma practice requires abandoning all attachment to worldly life, viewing it as insignificant as spittle in the dust. This means leaving behind one's familiar surroundings and venturing into unknown places, seeking solitude for focused practice. We must face illness with joy, confront death without fear, and cultivate unwavering diligence, following the example of

Milarepa. It is impossible to simultaneously pursue worldly concerns and transcendent Dharma; they are inherently incompatible.

In addition, to achieve transcendent accomplishment, we need to follow a qualified teacher for an extended period. It is not effective to stay with a teacher for only a short time and then leave due to personal issues before learning anything from them. We should have a qualified teacher who accepts us as disciples and guides us appropriately. Only in this way can we cultivate conviction in the Dharma, enabling us to continue studying and practicing it for the rest of our lives.

Many sangha members at Larung Gar graduated from universities, and some studied abroad and had great jobs. However, they renounced all aspects of a seemingly successful worldly life and chose to live a monastic life. Many people do not understand their life choices, but here is my perspective: If a person truly understands the nature of life, as well as the defects and sufferings of samsara, they will embark on the Dharma path as soon as possible. This is very true, so it is not pitiful at all if someone chooses to take ordination. Of course, people may disagree with this if they continue to cling to worldly life, deny the principle of cause and effect, and reject the existence of rebirth.

♦ Dharma practices and provisions

It is very challenging for a true Dharma practitioner to secure the basic necessities of food and clothing. When one is impoverished and lacks financial resources, life can become quite difficult. Should I perform the rituals of the wealth deity or learn an effective method to extract essences?¹⁴² Or should I simply accept starvation and the inevitability of death? What is the best course of action?

There have been compilations of Dharma questions and answers in the past, such as *The Father and Son Teachings of the Kadampa School*, and similar works. These days, worldly people also have many questions, so when I interact with individuals such as intellectuals or politicians, I always encourage them to ask me questions. I may not always answer the questions well, but it is a valuable opportunity to initiate a dialogue.

For those of you present for my teaching, please do your best to engage with others when sharing the Dharma and in your daily life. A statement or truth that

¹⁴² It refers to a method that allows minimal consumption of specific elements, supporting body purification and mental refinement.

seems obvious to us may dispel a long-standing doubt that has been troubling others.

Dagpo Rinpoche responded, “No matter how much effort you invest, practicing the rituals of the wealth deity will be ineffective if you lack the karmic results of past generosity. Moreover, pursuing wealth for this life runs counter to authentic Dharma practice. As for extracting the essence of things, it no longer functions as it did during the ascending kalpa, when the essences of earth, stones, water, and plants were more readily available. Nowadays, this approach is ineffective. Resigning yourself to inevitable death is not a solution either; it could hinder your chances of obtaining another human life with the freedoms and advantages you currently possess. However, if you can truly practice without concern for whether you live or die, you will never lack food or clothing. There is no record of a genuine practitioner ever starving to death. The Buddha proclaimed that even during a famine so severe that a measure of flour costs as much as a measure of pearls, his disciples would still have enough to eat and wear.”

Indeed, very few practitioners throughout the ages have been devoid of food or clothing. For example, in a large Dharma center with a few thousand sangha members, practitioners do not seem to sustain themselves solely through hard work; rather, through the blessings of the guru and the Three Jewels, they naturally have all the provisions needed to support their practices. Even if they may seem to lead a frugal life, they live happily. The *Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom* says:

Although monastics endure hardships in this life,
They will attain happiness and enlightenment in the future life;
Although worldly people enjoy pleasures in this life,
They will experience sufferings in the future life.

Of course, a monastic may seem to experience hardships, but they will not actually face great torments or starve to death. As long as they practice the Dharma and accumulate merit, they will not find themselves in a particularly dire situation.

Therefore, truly wise individuals are willing to engage in positive actions and are unwilling to commit misdeeds for the sake of making a living. The *Dharani Samuccaya Sutra* says:

It's better to be poor and practice all good deeds

Than to be rich and commit evil deeds.

By doing so, one will live a life that benefits this lifetime and many lives yet to come.

Someone may think, “As long as I can make money, it’s fine if I commit misdeeds.” I disagree. As a practitioner, even if you live a modest life in this short lifetime, you must not commit bad deeds. This is the basic principle.

♦ Practice for the benefit of all living beings

All practices for accumulating merit and wisdom or purifying obscurations share a single purpose: to benefit all sentient beings throughout the universe. Seeking perfect Buddhahood solely for oneself, let alone focusing on worldly aims, is contrary to the essence of the Mahayana path. Thus, as Mahayanists, we must always uphold the intention to benefit all sentient beings. This is a crucial point that we must never forget.

Nowadays, many practitioners are quite self-serving. They only think about their own liberation, without considering the welfare of all living beings as important. Why do we need to emphasize the goal of benefiting all living beings throughout our Dharma practice—at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end? It is because that is the essence of Mahayana Buddhism. If a person abandons this fundamental goal, their practice is no longer aligned with the Mahayana path.

Although we may not arouse true bodhicitta at the very beginning, as long as we continue meditating on it, we will gradually be able to develop it. After all, bodhicitta can be cultivated through effort. We may not be accustomed to generating bodhicitta at first, but with continued practice, it will gradually become part of our habit.

When some Dharma fellows first arrived at Larung Gar, they were very self-centered. Later, they became willing to do anything that could benefit living beings, such as volunteering for Dharma activities. In fact, this reflects their bodhicitta.

Thus, whatever practice we undertake, whether it involves accumulating merit and wisdom or purifying obscurations, it should always be done for the benefit of all sentient beings and remain free from self-centered motives. While it may be impossible for ordinary individuals to entirely eliminate self-interest, we must strive to reduce it as much as possible. If we can hold onto bodhicitta, without any deliberate effort, our own needs, comfort, and happiness in this life will be fulfilled

as a natural byproduct of our practice—just as smoke rises naturally when a fire is fanned, or barley sprouts effortlessly after the grain is sown.

In summary, we must abandon any intention to devote ourselves to such things just for our own sake, treating it as if it were poison. By dedicating ourselves to benefiting others, our practice will naturally progress, and numerous virtuous qualities will emerge as a result.

In recent years, I have dedicated myself to spreading the Dharma. Many sangha members at Larung Gar have also volunteered to support my efforts, offering technical assistance and other help. While some may feel sorry for these volunteers for not having enough time to study and practice the Dharma, I do not share that perspective. Their volunteer work allows them to apply their intelligence and skills, ultimately benefiting many living beings, both directly and indirectly.

This also applies to your volunteer work in other departments. Whichever position you have, please do remember to undertake the task with the three supreme methods. For example, if you work in the hospital today, at the beginning of your work, generate bodhicitta for all living beings; in the middle, discipline your mind with mindfulness and vigilance; and after work, dedicate all your merit from the day to infinite living beings. Without applying the three supreme methods, even if you study and practice every day, undertake volunteer work all day long, or teach the Dharma on a daily basis, you may not even accumulate as much merit as a shravaka practitioner who does the same thing. As said in *A Guide to The Words of My Perfect Teacher*:

The most important thing about bodhicitta is not arousing it,
but rather that it has actually arisen.

Even if a true Mahayanist has to clean toilets every day in a place without Dharma, they are still undertaking the acts of a bodhisattva.



Lesson 124

“Now comes a brief offering of one’s own body called ... All the favourable circumstances and good things that you seek are multiplied.” [page 297–300]

Regarding the uncommon preliminary practice of “accumulating merit and wisdom,” we have studied the mandala offering. Now let us proceed to the kusāli’s accumulation.

2.2.4.2. The Kusāli’s Accumulation

2.2.4.2.1. The Meaning of Kusāli

The practice of the kusāli’s accumulation is to destroy the four demons at a single stroke and complete the accumulation of merit.

- ♦ The four demons
 - ◉ The four demons in Sutrayana

According to Sutrayana scriptures, such as *The Great Collection Sutra*, the four demons are the demon of the aggregates, the demon of the destructive emotions, the demon of the Lord of Death, and the demon of the sons of the gods.

The demon of the aggregates: The aggregates refer to the five aggregates— form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness—which are the basis for self-grasping, so they are considered “the demon.”

Specifically, the aggregate of form consists of the four elements and any forms

derived from them, such as the visual faculty, which are the source, basis, and reliance of suffering, so it is a demon.

The aggregate of feeling, whether positive or negative, once aroused, cannot bring us any ease, so it is a demon.

The aggregate of perception, whether related to a major or minor conceptual thought, always leads to self-grasping, so it is a demon.

The aggregate of mental formations constitutes volitional mental actions, such as clinging triggered by pleasant objects or anger triggered by unpleasant objects, so it is a demon.

The aggregate of consciousness, which is divided into six consciousnesses, pertains to the awareness of forms, feelings, perceptions, and formations and produces suffering, so it is a demon.

The demon of the destructive emotions: This consists of the 84,000 types of destructive emotions, including the three poisons of greed, anger, and ignorance, or the five poisons of greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and jealousy.

The demon of the Lord of Death: With regard to gross impermanence, this means death as such, which inevitably brings extreme torments. With regard to subtle impermanence, all phenomena change from moment to moment, which, by its nature, is suffering.

The demon of the sons of the gods: This is what prevents us from proceeding toward the state of liberation and perfect enlightenment. Generally speaking, the demon king becomes upset when he notices someone pursuing liberation and Buddhahood, so he often shoots the five poisonous arrows of greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and jealousy, hoping to activate afflictive emotions in that being's mind.

In short, the so-called demons can take away the wisdom life of living beings that leads to liberation, destroy their path onto the Dharma, and wreck their great qualities. The *Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom* says:

It takes away the wisdom life, and destroys the Dharma path, the great qualities, and the sources of merit, so it's called the demon.

- ◉ The four demons in Vajrayana

According to Vajrayana, the four demons are the tangible demon, the intangible demon, the demon of exultation, and the demon of conceit.

The tangible demon: This refers to disasters pertaining to earth, water, air, and fire, sufferings related to birth, old age, sickness, and death, and exterior obstacles perceived by the sense faculties that hinder our liberation in the course of our Dharma practice.

The intangible demon: This refers to all types of destructive emotions such as greed, anger, and ignorance. Though it does not possess a visible form or shape, it can obstruct one's path to liberation in an intangible manner.

The demon of exultation: This is the infatuation one feels when achieving the slightest sense of "warmth" or power in the course of one's practice. For example, one may feel that one's state of practice is superior because one can communicate with a deity, that one's guru is superior because he grants blessings every day, and that one's physical appearance, clothing, food, and shrine room are superior, among other things.

Those who have truly realized the equanimity of all phenomena will not experience infatuation. For example, they will not be overjoyed when various pleasant things arise in a dream, nor will they feel frustrated when many unpleasant things occur.

Generally speaking, whether you are practicing Sutrayana or Vajrayana, when certain experiences or states of realization arise, you should remain naturally in that state. By doing so, conceptual fabrications and obstacles will naturally dissolve into Dharmadhatu. This is the normal practical state of an experienced practitioner.

However, if a practitioner is constantly in a state of either hoping for this or fearing that, it is a sign that their practice is not yet solid. For example, when they are in a good mood, things are going well, or dreams are often auspicious, the practitioner may feel, "I am about to attain realization! The blessings of the Three Jewels are indeed incredible! I am particularly grateful to my guru, the Buddha, and Padmasambhava, who are so loving and compassionate to me! How wonderful the world is! I will pursue the Dharma for the rest of my life!" However, when things go slightly wrong, the practitioner may feel very sad, lamenting, "Why don't the Three Jewels grant me blessings? Why is my guru leaving me alone?" These reactions indicate that the practitioner does not yet have a solid practice.

The demon of conceit: This is the belief in "I" and "mine," which leads to

self-grasping. This deeply rooted conceit creates obstacles to our Dharma practices and to our liberation from samsara. Only when it is destroyed can we undertake true practice and eventually attain perfect enlightenment.

♦ The kusāli's accumulation and the mandala offering

Through the above analysis, I believe you now understand the harms that the four demons can bring and are motivated to destroy the demons through the practice of kusāli.

As recorded in Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang's secret biography, when he combined the kusāli's accumulation with mandala offering, every night he dreamed of a great charnel ground full of old and new corpses, vultures, and fierce beasts, and he could still offer his body through the kusāli's practice, also known as the practice of Chö, in these dreams.

Later, he shared his dreams with his guru, who replied, "Even Bodhisattva Vajrapani would feel afraid to stay in such a great charnel ground. Aren't you scared?"

Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang responded, "There is nothing to be afraid of, because the 'I' or the nature of the mind is emptiness, just like space."

His guru jokingly remarked, "Do not boast about yourself! Are you more powerful than Vajrapani?" Then, the guru offered him some instructions.

In any case, it is essential to combine kusāli's accumulation with mandala offering.

The brief offering of one's own body, known as the kusāli's accumulation, is linked to the Guru Yoga practice in Longchenpa's *Finding Rest in the Nature of Mind* and *The Excellent Path to Enlightenment*. Thus, it is permissible to combine kusāli with Guru Yoga. The purpose of the Guru Yoga practice is to eliminate self-grasping, and offering one's body is indeed a supreme skillful method for achieving this goal. Therefore, the two practices do not contradict each other at all.

Here, however, in accordance with an oral tradition of his root guru Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu, Patrul Rinpoche introduces kusāli's accumulation as part of the accumulation of merit along with the mandala offering.

In fact, as described in his *Treasury of Precious Qualities* and other teachings, Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa suggested practicing kusāli as part of the accumulation of

merit alongside the mandala offering. Thus, lineage practitioners from Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa to Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang have all practiced in this manner. Why provide such an instruction?

On one hand, when the mandala offering is made with self-centered intentions, the accumulation of merit may not be successful. On the other hand, during mandala practice, one visualizes offering to the guru and the Three Jewels all the most exquisite treasures found on Mount Meru and the four continents, as well as one's own body, wealth, and sources of merit, and then dedicates the merit of this act to all living beings. In the kusāli's accumulation, one visualizes that one's body is transformed into nectar, which is then offered to the guru and the Three Jewels above, and to all beings throughout the six realms below, aligning with the mandala offering.

Therefore, combining the mandala offering with the kusāli's accumulation can lead to a perfect and successful practice.

♦ What is kusāli?

The term “kusāli” refers to a beggar. Yogis who have renounced worldly life, such as hermits living in the mountains, rely on visualization to offer their own bodies as a means to accumulate merit and wisdom, as they have no other material possessions to give.

In truth, all the other material possessions we painstakingly accumulate are ultimately meant for the care of our bodies, which, without a doubt, are what we value most above all else. Someone may claim, “I am so attached to so-and-so,” but this is nothing compared to their attachment to their own body. I believe you all feel this way. If you can truly offer your body, there is nothing else you cannot offer. In other words, once you are no longer attached to your body, you will not cling to external possessions such as your house, car, and jewelry.

Therefore, offering our own bodies to eradicate our attachments to them is far more beneficial and meritorious than offering any other material possessions, as it is said:

Offering your horse or elephant brings a hundred times more
merit than ordinary offerings;

Offering your child or spouse brings a thousand times more
merit;

Offering your own body brings one hundred thousand times
more merit.

Someone may ask, “Isn’t it only a sublime being who can offer their own body? How can an ordinary person offer their body?”

Indeed, according to scriptures such as *The Way of the Bodhisattva* and *The Mountain Dharma*, before attaining the first bodhisattva level, a person should not offer their body to others. This is an act only attainable by a sublime bodhisattva; for instance, Prince Great Courage, a previous incarnation of Buddha Shakyamuni, gave his body to a starving tigress. However, the visualization of such a body offering is permitted for an ordinary practitioner and can, in fact, accumulate merit just like offering one’s physical body.

Therefore, we should not use the excuse, “I am just an ordinary person,” to decline the kusāli’s accumulation. This practice is endorsed by the great masters of the past, and we are encouraged to engage in it often before attaining the first bodhisattva level.

Why is this? It is because we ordinary beings have a strong attachment to our own bodies. For example, when we are sick, we worry, “Am I possessed by a spirit or a demon?” Worse yet, we may subjugate spirits and demons out of hatred. In fact, such actions are not in accordance with the Buddha’s teachings.

At such times, we should practice Chö. That is to say, we should offer our dream-like bodies to the dream-like buddhas and beings in the context of faith and bodhicitta, so we can accumulate merit and purify obscurations. In doing so, spirits and demons will leave us, and our health situation will improve, according to the infallible law of interdependence. Of course, this practice may be of little use for very few fixed karmic results.

Machik Labdrön (1031-1129), the principal holder of the Chö lineage says:

Not knowing that to give away my body without attachment
Was to accumulate merit and wisdom,
I have clung to this dear body of mine.¹⁴³
This I confess to the Nirmanakaya of the Mother.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ The term used here for the body is *phung po*, which also refers to the “aggregates,” i.e., the psychophysical constituents that interdependently make up what one thinks of as oneself.

¹⁴⁴ Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation

According to Machik Labdrön, one may confess such a mistake to the Mother of All Buddhas—Prajnaparamita—in the context of the three spheres of emptiness.¹⁴⁵

In the past, we did not know that the most supreme way to accumulate merit is to offer our bodies. From now on, we must undertake the practice of offering the body. If we offer nothing, we receive nothing; if we offer something, we receive something. In fact, Chö is based on teachings from the Prajnaparamita sutras. Thus, there are also extraordinary supreme pith instructions in the Sutrayana.

2.2.4.2.2. The Practice of Offering the Body

♦ Please place importance on Chö

It is very important to practice Chö. When the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche was still with us, he would ask us to have a collective recitation and practice of the kusāli's accumulation whenever there was an epidemic at Larung Gar. When Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche encountered inauspicious signs while traveling, he would immediately start to practice the kusāli's accumulation. Many of his disciples, whether Han Chinese or Tibetan, have always placed great importance on Chö.

As ordinary beings, we will inevitably encounter various obstacles in the course of our Dharma practice. Therefore, I hope you will always practice Chö to protect yourself when you feel something is amiss, such as when you wonder, "Is there a spirit or a demon harming me?" or when you are ill, or when you visit a place inhabited by many spirits, ghosts, or demons. Of course, you may also choose to rest directly in the state of emptiness.

Unlike other self-protecting methods that provide protection by subjugating and expelling spirits or demons, this practice of Chö protects us by offering our own most precious bodies as a feast to spirits and demons. Therefore, if we can undertake the practice of Chö properly, it can bring great benefit to both ourselves and others.

Perhaps someone may be very afraid that, through the practice, they will be devoured by demons or lose their life. This will not happen, because many

Group, Yale University Press, 2011, page 298.

¹⁴⁵ That is: one rests in the state beyond any concept of an offering, an offerer or a recipient of the offerings.

practitioners have obtained great benefit from this practice. In fact, it is the same as our way of being: If we constantly protect ourselves and fight against others, we will feel less secure; whereas if we take it easy, keep attuned to others, and serve others, we will actually encounter no difficulties or obstacles.

♦ Chö and sky burial

Some individuals today believe that using skull cups or similar items in daily life is a form of practicing Chö. There are Han Chinese monks and nuns who go to charnel grounds or cemeteries to obtain skulls, but they should not take them. Without receiving the pith instruction, acquiring a skull cup is of little value. I may provide special teachings on charnel grounds later.

Recently, while attending a meeting at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, I listened to a presentation titled “The Sky Burial in the Tibetan Region,” given by a doctoral student from a university in Nanjing. Certain aspects of his presentation, such as the use of skull cups, the blowing of a horn made from a femur, and the practice of Chö with human skin, were not adequately addressed.

As Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang explained in *A Guide to The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, the term “Chö practitioners” refers not to those with long hair who blow femur horns, but to those who have cut off their self-grasping in the mind.

The point made by the doctoral student about sky burials being environmentally friendly is quite valid. Take water burials, for example: There is a cemetery in the county of Garzê where a corpse’s flesh and bones are disassembled and thrown into the river by a yogi. I wonder how people downstream feel about this.

As for cremation, there are crematories in major cities in China where smoke rises every day, polluting the air and entering people’s mouths and noses directly or indirectly. This is not fundamentally different from a vulture consuming flesh from a corpse. In the case of sky burials, vultures fly away after devouring a corpse, leaving nothing behind but the deceased’s clothes. This indeed is environmentally friendly.

If you understand the meaning of sky burials, you know that it is a method for accumulating great merit. Many Tibetans choose sky burials as their funeral rite, as specified in their wills. In some countries, there are areas where human skulls are stacked in towers.¹⁴⁶ If the cemetery for sky burials at Larung Gar follows this

¹⁴⁶ One of the examples is the skull tower located in Serbia.

practice, the skulls will also pile up high in ten years. By placing names on the skulls, people can reflect on impermanence when visiting the site.

♦ The practice of offering the body

Regarding the kusāli's accumulation, I will briefly go through the instruction from the text, which is not hard to understand. Apart from following the vajra words in the instruction, we must not add our own fabricated thoughts. *The Sutra on the Contemplation of Buddha Amitayus* says:

To meditate according to this
Is the right meditation;
To meditate in another way
Is the wrong meditation.

Therefore, it is enough for you to visualize and meditate according to the following instruction.

First, if you are adept at visualization, you may imagine projecting your consciousness directly into space, where it instantly transforms into the Wrathful Black True Mother. If not, visualize in your heart the essence of your consciousness taking the form of the Wrathful Black True Mother. She dances and sways, wielding a curved knife aloft in her right hand and holding a blood-filled skull cup at her heart with her left. A black sow's head emerges from behind her right ear, emitting a squealing sound. She is adorned with the apparel of a wrathful dakini.

When you utter the syllable “Phat!”, the Wrathful Black True Mother ascends through your central channel. At that precise moment, she bursts out through the Brahma aperture at the crown of your head, and your body falls lifeless to the ground as a corpse. Do not visualize your body in its usual form; instead, see it as a massive, greasy figure, large enough to encompass the entire three-thousand-fold universe.

Next, visualize your consciousness as the Wrathful Black True Mother, who, with the curved knife in her right hand, points to the eyebrows of the corpse. Swiftly, the top of the corpse's skull at the eyebrow level is sliced off, becoming a skull cup. Visualize the skull cup not as life-sized but as large as the entire three-thousand-fold universe. Using her left hand, the Wrathful Black True Mother picks up the enormous skull cup, positioning it with the brow facing her

on a tripod crafted from three human skulls, each as immense as Mount Meru. She then uses the curved knife in her right hand to lift the entire corpse and place it in the skull cup.

Above the skull cup, visualize a white syllable Hang upside down (𑖇) in space, embodying the nature of nectar. Below the skull cup, visualize the stroke of a short Ah (Λ) in red, embodying the nature of fire.

As you chant “*Om Ah Hum*,” flames emerge from the short Ah, heating the skull cup until the corpse sizzles and liquefies into nectar, bubbling up to fill the entire skull cup. All impurities and foul substances rise as frothy scum. Steam from the nectar ascends and touches the hang, heating it up. The hang releases streams of red and white nectar, which drip down, blending inseparably within the skull cup. Finally, the hang dissolves into light and merges completely with the nectar.

Now let me briefly introduce the following verses. The method of visualization has already been explained earlier. Now, while doing the visualization as described, please recite the verses¹⁴⁷ below:

PHAT! By abandoning all attachment to this body held so dear, the demonic forces of seduction through desire are destroyed.

My consciousness shoots out through the “aperture of Brahma” into all-pervading space, uniting rigpa with space,

Destroys the demonic force of death¹⁴⁸ and transforms into Tröma,¹⁴⁹

In her right hand, the hooked knife that symbolizes destruction of the demonic force of conflicting emotions.

Slicing the top off my corpse’s skull, she destroys the demonic force of the aggregates of ego.

Her left hand holds the skull cup to carry out her activity,

¹⁴⁷ The verses are translated by Adam Pearcey, 2006, edited by Janine Schulz. Longchen Nyینگtik Ngöndro translation courtesy of Rigpa Translations.

¹⁴⁸ We are scared of death, but once our consciousness has transformed into the Wrathful Black True Mother, there is no longer death, so the demonic force of death is destroyed.

¹⁴⁹ The Wrathful Black True Mother.



WRATHFUL BLACK TRUE MOTHER
(SKT. KRODHAKALI)

Places it on the fireplace of three human heads¹⁵⁰—representing the three kayas;

Inside it is the corpse, now an offering as vast as a billion worlds,

Melted into nectar by an “A stroke” and HAM,¹⁵¹

Purified, multiplied and transformed through the power of Om Ah Hum.

As you recite “*Om Ah Hum*,” visualize the om purifying all imperfections in color, smell, taste, and so on; the Ah increasing the nectar; and the Hum transforming it into all desired things. It becomes the immaculate nectar of pristine wisdom, naturally manifesting as clouds that fulfill all wishes and embody its essence.

Next, visualize in the sky before you a soft and comfortable jeweled throne, upon which your kind root guru sits. Above the guru are the lineage masters, around the guru are all the deities, and below, in the space above the skull cup, are the seventy-five Glorious Protectors¹⁵² and other Dharma protectors, including both the wisdom protectors and those constrained by the effects of their past actions, as well as local deities and earth guardians.

Below the skull cup, visualize all beings of the six realms and the three worlds. Among them, the main guests include the eighty thousand types of obstacle makers, the fifteen demons that prey on children, and all other beings who create obstacles. All of them gather as innumerable as dust particles dancing in sunlight.

◉ The white feast for the guests above

Visualize your root guru, the lineage masters, and all the buddhas and bodhisattvas above consuming the nectar through tongues shaped like hollow vajra tubes.¹⁵³ As a result, your accumulations are perfected, your obscurations are eliminated, your samaya violations and breaches are purified, and you attain both common and supreme accomplishments.

¹⁵⁰ The forehead of the skull-up is facing you, who is now the Wrathful Black True Mother.

¹⁵¹ The upside down Hang.

¹⁵² It refers to some of the most famous Dharma protectors of Tibet.

¹⁵³ This is a special way of imbibing the nectar for the buddhas and bodhisattvas, as described in *Bardo Thödol* and some deity practices.

Next, visualize that the deities of the four and six classes of tantra¹⁵⁴ surrounding the root guru also consume the nectar, absorbing it through hollow tongues whose shapes correspond to the symbols of the five buddha families—a vajra, wheel, jewel, lotus, or crossed vajra. As a result, your accumulations are perfected, your obscurations are eliminated, your samaya violations and breaches are purified, and you attain both common and supreme accomplishments.

Then, the dakas, dakinis, seventy-five Glorious Protectors, and all other Dharma protectors also consume the nectar through the hollow sunbeams of their tongues. As a result, your accumulations are perfected, your obscurations are eliminated, all obstacles and unfavorable circumstances that hinder the attainment of enlightenment are removed, and all favorable circumstances and desired positive outcomes are multiplied.

This is the white feast for the guests above.

¹⁵⁴ The four classes of tantra include three outer classes (Kriya Tantra, Charya Tantra, and Yoga Tantra) and one inner class of tantra, which is called Highest Yoga Tantra. The six classes of tantra refer to the three outer classes of tantra and the three inner classes of tantra (which are specific to the Nyingma school), which include the Mahayoga tantras, the Anuyoga tantras, and the Atiyoga tantras.



Lesson 125

“Next, if you are experienced in visualization, ... That we may realize the natural state, the absence of self.” [page 300–307]

Today, we’ll finish the chapter on the accumulation of merit. Now, let’s continue with the kusāli’s accumulation.

◉ The white feast for the guests below

If you are skilled in visualization, visualize yourself as the Wrathful Black True Mother. From your heart, visualize countless activity-performing dakinis in white, blue, yellow, red, and green emanating—hundreds, thousands, even myriad, like dust particles illuminated by the sun’s rays. They distribute the immaculate nectar from the wisdom skull cups to every being in the six realms and three worlds, providing them with complete satisfaction.

If you are less experienced in visualization, visualize yourself as the Wrathful Black True Mother. With your left hand, sprinkle the nectar from the skull cup over all beings in the six realms and three worlds, showering them with a rain of nectar. All beings drink the nectar, feeling completely satisfied.

◉ The variegated feast for the guests above

Next, visualize the inconceivable clouds of offerings arising from the steam of the boiling nectar. These offerings include foot-washing water, fresh flowers, incense, butter lamps, perfumes, divine delicacies, musical instruments, the eight auspicious symbols, the seven attributes of royalty, victory banners, parasols,

jeweled canopies, thousand-spoked golden wheels, right-turning conch shells, and more. Offer all these to the guests above, thereby perfecting the accumulation of merit and wisdom for yourself and all sentient beings while purifying all karmic obscurations accumulated since beginningless time.

[For those who specialize in animation, instead of solely focusing on creating animations that may evoke worldly afflictions, your expertise can have a meaningful impact by depicting the clouds of offerings.]

◉ The variegated feast for the guests below

Now, turn your focus to the guests below—all beings from the six realms. Whatever they long for or wish to receive, such as money, houses, jewelry, and chocolate, is showered upon them like rain, fulfilling their needs and bringing them immense joy.

From beginningless time until now, one has undoubtedly accumulated countless karmic debts in various forms. These include debts from taking lives, leading to our shortened lifespan; debts from stealing wealth, resulting in our poverty; debts from causing physical harm to others, leading to our poor health; debts owed to superiors who have protected us; debts to subordinates who have served us; debts to friends who are equal to us; debts from occupying more houses while in high positions; debts for owing rents to the land when in low positions; debts for owing money to relatives and neighbors; debts owed to children and livestock; debts from consuming others' food; debts from wearing clothes belonging to others; debts from owing others money; debts from taking milk from animals; debts from overworking cattle and horses; debts from plowing fields; debts from using others' resources or wealth, and more.

All your karmic creditors, both male and female, seek vengeance by claiming your flesh and bones, shortening your lifespan, or seizing your life-force. They gather around you, holding containers and demanding repayment. The offerings you make transform into an endless treasury of desirable things, showering down upon them and fulfilling their deepest wishes. Those seeking food receive food, those desiring clothing are given clothing, those wanting wealth gain wealth, those yearning for gardens are granted gardens, those wishing for horses receive horses, those needing houses are given houses, and those longing for companions are blessed with friends and loved ones.

As they enjoy these offerings, your karmic debts are resolved, your obligations

repaid, and you are freed from these vengeful creditors. Harmful deeds and obscurations are purified, leaving everyone content and satisfied as they depart.

[Of course, in reality, you cannot claim that you have repaid money borrowed from others through the practice of Chö. It does not make sense if your creditor asks for their money back and you respond, “I have repaid you!”]

Then, visualize that for all those left behind—the helpless, the weak, the crippled, the blind, the deaf, the mute, and all beings across the six realms who are burdened by pain—the offering transforms into whatever they need. It becomes a refuge for the abandoned, a protector for the unprotected, support for the friendless, companions and loved ones for the lonely, inclusion for the marginalized, medicine for the sick, life-restoring nectar for the dying, miraculous legs for the crippled, wisdom eyes for the blind, flawless hearing for the deaf, and wisdom tongues for the mute. These beings gratefully receive the offerings, finding satisfaction and liberation from the effects of their karma, their suffering, and the habitual patterns associated with the six realms.

[Through such visualization, the world may not necessarily become pure immediately. However, this practice can indeed accumulate merit and dispel obstacles created by demonic forces, as well as alleviate suffering and habitual tendencies in samsara.]

In the end, all the males attain the enlightened state of Avalokiteshvara, all the females achieve the enlightened state of Tara, and the three worlds of samsara are liberated in their very depths. This is the variegated feast for the guests below.

Keep reciting “*Om Ah Hum*,” until you have completed the entire visualization. Afterward, proceed to recite the verses¹⁵⁵ below:

*PHAT! The guests above—the root and lineage lamas and
yidams—by my offering are pleased,
Whereby merit and wisdom are accumulated, and ordinary
and supreme siddhis attained.*¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ <https://www.lotsawahouse.org/tibetan-masters/dodrupchen-I/longchen-nyingtik-ngon-dro>

¹⁵⁶ The white feast and the variegated feast for the guests above have satisfied the guru, the Three Jewels, the buddhas and bodhisattvas, the dakinis, and the Dharma protectors. As a result, you complete the accumulations and attain both the common and supreme accomplishments.

The guests below, belonging to samsara, are satisfied by my offering; karmic debts are repaid.

In particular, by satisfying malicious and negative forces,¹⁵⁷

All illnesses, destructive influences, and obstacles are pacified, dissolving into all-pervading space;

Harmful circumstances and clinging to self are exploded.

Finally offering, offerer and guests—all dissolve into the nature of Dzogpachenpo, the great simplicity: Ah

After reciting the verses, abide in the state beyond the concepts of an offering, an offerer, and a recipient of the offerings. You rest in the state of three spheres of emptiness, or the unfabricated, effortless state of the Great Perfection—the single, perfect, all-pervading sphere. [You abide in the state after reciting Ah three times.] When arising from this state, act in your usual deportment.

♦ The other two kinds of feasts

The Chö texts normally cover four great feasts: white, red, variegated, and black. Here, Patrul Rinpoche only introduces the white and variegated feasts, but no red or black feasts, as per the teaching given by Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu. The Chö texts revealed by tertöns, including Dudjom Lingpa and Dechen Lingpa, include the red feast and the black feast as well. However, following the tradition of the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, we normally only practice the white and variegated feasts.

Let me briefly introduce the red feast and the black feast. There are two kinds of red feast: offering meat to the guests above and giving meat to the guests below. Some deities and beings of the six realms like to eat meat, so we have to visualize in this way. The black feast is a visualization practice to feed the demon of sickness, enemies, and spirits.

♦ Keep away from false Chö practices

Many of today's so-called Chö practitioners misunderstand the essence of Chö, viewing it as a brutal method for destroying harmful spirits through acts of

¹⁵⁷ The white feast and the variegated feast for the guests below have satisfied all the beings throughout the six realms, especially the malicious and negative forces. As a result, you purify all the karmic debts.

killing, slashing, chopping, beating, or driving them away. Their interpretation of Chö is rooted in perpetual anger, and their bravado is fueled by hatred and arrogance. They believe they must assume the role of enforcers of the Lord of Death to intimidate the demon of illness or malevolent spirits into fleeing. As a result, they appear unkempt, wrathful, and ferocious, holding a large skull drum and blowing a long horn made from a human femur.

When performing Chö for a patient or others, driven by hatred and anger, they chant “Phat!” while engaging in excessively violent and ferocious actions—glaring with wide, angry eyes, gritting their teeth, clenching their fists, striking repeatedly, and even tearing the patient’s clothing to shreds. They believe such behavior can subdue spirits; however, they fail to realize that this approach is gravely mistaken.

Marchik Labdrön says:

From beginningless time, harmful spirits have been trapped in an endless cycle of delusion and suffering, driven by the winds of their own negative actions and unfavorable conditions. Upon death, they inevitably fall into the depths of the lower realms. Using the hook of compassion, I draw these spirits to me, nourishing them with my warm flesh and blood. Through the power of bodhicitta, I transform their perceptions and accept them as my disciples. For me, these harmful spirits are treasures captured by the hook of compassion. Yet, in the future, so-called Chö adepts will boast of killing, banishing, or attacking these spirits. Such actions will signal the rise of a false Chö tradition—the teachings of demons.

Marchik Labdrön also predicted that false Chö practices, such as the Nine-fold Black Chö, would emerge in the future. These misguided practices forsake compassion and bodhicitta, opting instead for violent methods to subdue spirits and demons.

Someone who uses those practices might manage to subdue one or two weak spirits, but if they encounter a truly ferocious one, they risk being attacked in retaliation, potentially losing their life. This is a consequence that has been observed many times.

Indeed, some self-proclaimed adepts of Chö have not attained any realization. They have not even cultivated the love and compassion of bodhicitta, yet they dare

to subjugate spirits that harm patients. Some of these practitioners are so bold that they venture alone into particularly dangerous places, such as charnel grounds, in an attempt to subjugate spirits and demons through Chö. Such acts cannot help anyone, and worse yet, these practitioners may end up becoming deranged or dying from a disease.

Therefore, you should have the wisdom to decide what to do and what not to do. Especially before you have developed convictions and a certain level of experience in practice, try your very best to avoid getting close to a person who has died a violent death. If you must do so, you must rely on the guru's blessings and conduct your practices according to proper liturgies because the reason for a violent death typically involves spirits or demons.

When we encounter obstacles such as illness or nightmares, we must not harbor hatred toward the spirits or demons that bring us harm. In particular, we should not subjugate them by throwing black sesame seeds or reciting subjugation mantras, as instructed in certain subjugation liturgies.

Thanks to the blessings of the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche and other sublime beings, sangha members at Larung Gar do not engage in this practice. However, such subjugation often occurs in places where people do not fully understand the Dharma. Their actions cause harm not only to living beings but also to themselves.

Anyone who believes in the principle of cause and effect knows it is never without reason that a spirit or demon harms a person. Sometimes it is due to negative karma accumulated in previous lives, and sometimes it is due to temporary causes that occurred in this life. Nevertheless, spirits and demons are actually very miserable!

Although I am not a good practitioner, blessed by teachings of texts such as *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, I have never tried to subjugate obstacle makers such as the demons of disease. Instead, I always try to offer my own body through Chö. Its effects of dispelling adversities caused by demonic forces are very good.

The practice of Chö might be motivated by the intent to protect oneself, which is understandable. Because offerings to those spirits through Chö do not create a hostile relationship, it avoids demons' future retaliation and harm to oneself. Another reason for practicing Chö is that harmful spirits or demons have been

our family members since time without beginning, so we must treat them with the kindness and compassion of bodhicitta. Otherwise, we are not Mahayanists.

Practitioners often struggle to discern whether signs of success on the path, such as their ability to subjugate demons and their experience of receiving certain blessings, are true indicators of their spiritual progress or obstacles created by demonic forces. This is because individuals possessed by malicious spirits often appear to exhibit supernatural powers and clairvoyance. They can frequently manipulate people's minds and are revered as powerful and capable. Some Qigong masters in the Han region and malevolent masters in the Tibetan region fit this description.

However, as time goes on, what they say and do will inevitably deviate further from the true Dharma. Their faith in the guru and the Three Jewels, as well as their compassion for sentient beings, will diminish. They may recklessly indulge in offerings from the faithful, deceive others, and so on. Ultimately, their mischievous nature will be fully exposed, leaving not even the slightest trace of goodness. As a result, the ripening effect of abusing the offerings will be heaped upon them as heavy as Mount Meru. The small, short-term gains they receive will provide no real benefit, even in this life. In the end, they may find themselves unable to secure even basic necessities or, if they do, will be so miserly that they neither eat nor dress properly, eventually starving or freezing to death. As mentioned earlier, after death, such individuals will inevitably be reborn in the lower realms, such as ephemeral hells, to endure agonizing suffering. This fate is comparable to that of the Black Horse Lama from Tsang that we learned about in a previous chapter.

Therefore, I sincerely hope that all of you, including laypeople and monastics, do not deceive the faithful under the guise of Buddhism or commit fraud in its name.

These days, many non-Buddhists pretend to be Buddhist practitioners and preach various harmful views to others, which is a terrible act that harms both themselves and others. Please remain vigilant! Of course, just as dung cannot change the nature of gold, these harmful views will never alter the truths of true Dharma. If people continue to study and practice the true Dharma and possess the knowledge to distinguish between authentic and false Dharma, there will be less and less room for those charlatans to maneuver, and eventually, there will be no space left for them.

In short, we must not make a living from wrongdoings; otherwise, we will suffer in this life and in many lives to come.

2.2.4.2.3. The Meaning of Chö

♦ What are the spirits to be destroyed?

The so-called spirits to be subdued in the Chö practice are not located outside of us, but within our minds. They are not terrifying entities with heads and tails that exist externally; rather, they are the self-grasping within us. In fact, this self-grasping is the most horrible and fearsome spirit or demon—the true target of the Chö practice.

All external appearances of spirits or demons, as well as the experiences of suffering or happiness they bring, arise entirely from the conceit of believing that an “I,” “me,” or “mine” inherently exists.

Marchik Labdrön says:

The tangible demon, the intangible demon,
The demon of exultation and the demon of conceit—
All of them come down to the demon of conceit.¹⁵⁸

The tangible demon represents external dangers: fires, floods, precipices, lightning, savage beings, diseases, and so on.

The intangible demon refers to inner greed, anger, ignorance, and the other 84,000 negative emotions, which, although intangible, give rise to great suffering.

The demon of exultation is the exultation of attachment and infatuation one feels when thinking, “my practice is superior,” “my teacher is superior,” and the like. Therefore, please do not become overly joyous and share with everyone when you experience even the slightest inner warmth or power from your practice; otherwise, you can easily be possessed by the demon.

A Tibetan proverb says, “A child who laughs too much will soon cry.” Therefore, we do not need to announce our faith in the guru and the Dharma everywhere. It is perfectly fine to keep it to ourselves.

¹⁵⁸ Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2011, page 303.

The demon of conceit is the conceited belief in “I” and “me,” which leads one to think the five aggregates are “me” or “mine.” The demon of conceit is the root of the preceding three demons, as mentioned in *A Guide to The Words of My Perfect Teacher*.

Marchik Labdrön also says:

“The many spirits” means concepts;
 “The powerful spirit” means belief in a self;
 “The wild spirits” means thoughts.
 To destroy these spirits is to be an adept of Chö.¹⁵⁹

Why does “the many spirits” refer to concepts? It is because living beings constantly give rise to innumerable concepts: one concept now, and another one later. Moreover, some conceptual thoughts are baseless. One might think of all kinds of adversities, but in reality, there are none. For example, absurd thoughts can be fabricated in our minds at any time, such as, “All beings and things, including my teacher and Dharma fellows, are manifestations of the demon king,” or “The Manjushri painted on the pillar is trying to cut off my head with his sword. Isn’t he a demon king?”

Thus, conceptual thoughts are “the many spirits,” which can be quite terrible. “The powerful spirit” refers to the conceited belief in “I” and “me.” “The wild spirits” denote thoughts. We are true adepts of Chö if we can destroy these spirits.

Therefore, a Chö adept is not necessarily someone who shakes a skull drum in hand. Of course, we should not consider such an act entirely wrong. For instance, the master of sky burial in a charnel ground still needs to use these items to properly recite and practice Chö according to the liturgy. Additionally, great masters such as Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa specifically composed liturgies for Chö. That said, none of you need to carry a skull cup and a femur horn with you all day, especially those monastics who observe the precepts of individual liberation. Otherwise, you may appear quite strange, which could scare others.

Although Chö is indeed an extraordinary tantric practice, you should engage in it discreetly and understand its profound meaning. However, some people focus only on certain external aspects of Chö. Some individuals like to take photos in a

¹⁵⁹ Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2011, page 304.

charnel ground, while others think it is a good idea to own a piece of human bone. Last year, I noticed many lay practitioners bidding on a set of mala beads made from human bones—some bid three thousand yuan, while others bid five thousand yuan. Well, this is not necessary.

Milarepa once told the Ogress of the Rock:

Belief in an “I” is more powerful than you are, demoness.
 Concepts are more numerous than you are, demoness.
 Thoughts are more spoilt by habits than you are, demoness.¹⁶⁰

Thus, it is the attachment to an “I” that is, in fact, the true demon.

♦ **The Chö practice is to cut through self-grasping**

Milarepa categorized the various kinds of Chö in the following manner:

Outer Chö is to wander in fearsome places and mountain
 solitudes;
 Inner Chö is to cast away one’s body as food;
 Absolute Chö is to sever the root once and for all.
 I am a yogi who possesses these three kinds of Chö.¹⁶¹

Outer Chö is to wander in fearsome places, such as charnel grounds and mountain solitudes, and to undertake the practice there. Inner Chö is to offer one’s body in the form of four feasts to the guru, the Three Jewels, and the beings throughout the six realms. Absolute Chö is to sever the root of one’s ignorance and deluded perceptions—the belief in a self. Those who practice these three kinds of Chö have their states arising in their minds.

All Chö practices aim to cut through the belief in a self, which lies at the core of all ignorance and delusional perceptions. This is encapsulated in the line, “Absolute Chö is to sever the root once and for all.”

Therefore, cutting off one’s belief in a self is the key. Otherwise, even if you find

¹⁶⁰ Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2011, page 304.

¹⁶¹ Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2011, page 304.

yourself in a fearsome place like a charnel ground, you will hesitate to remain there when wild dogs roam around you and skeletons begin to walk.

External demons are nothing more than delusional perceptions, and as long as the belief in a self remains intact, no effort to destroy them—whether by killing, beating, trampling, or chasing—will succeed. These actions are futile because the root cause, the inner conceit of self, has not been addressed. Without cutting this root, eliminating the external illusion of demons or spirits is as impossible as stopping smoke without extinguishing the fire that produces it.

The Ogress of the Rock told Milarepa:

If you do not know that demons come from your own mind,
There will be other demons besides myself!
I am not going to leave just because you tell me to do so.¹⁶²

Milarepa also said:

Take a demon as a demon and it will harm you;
Know a demon is in your mind and you will be free of it;
Realize a demon to be empty and you will annihilate it.
And again:
You who appear as harmful spirits and yaksas, male or female,
Only when one has no understanding¹⁶³ are you demons,
Bringing all your mischief and your obstacles.
But once one understands,¹⁶⁴ even you demons are deities,
And become the source of all accomplishments.¹⁶⁵

In our daily life, we may often think, “Is there any demon in me?” “Is any spirit or ghost harming me?” At this time, we should emulate great Kadampa and Nyingma masters and take good advantage of this opportunity to recognize the nature of a conceptual thought: its essence as emptiness and its intrinsic nature as luminosity. Then, you will understand that all demons are true deities of wisdom.

¹⁶² Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2011, page 304.

¹⁶³ It means “before one realizes that the nature of the demon is emptiness.”

¹⁶⁴ It means “one understands that a demon is in one’s mind.”

¹⁶⁵ Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2011, page 305.

In fact, knowing the mind's nature can be of great benefit to the body, the mind, and Dharma practices. For example, consider a flower; if you recognize its nature as emptiness, it will significantly enhance your practice. On the other hand, if you have distorted perceptions and view the flower as something frightening, it can harm your body and mind. This is particularly true when people are sick, as many deluded and illusory experiences may arise.

[A person I know used to reject the existence of demons and spirits. Despite our sharing of cases involving harmful demons, he remained skeptical. However, when he became very ill, he began to see many spirits and ghosts. From that point on, he started to accept the existence of not only demons and spirits but also Buddha.]

When you are experiencing these distorted perceptions, you must pray to the guru and the Three Jewels and understand that they are simply a natural expression of the mind—the clarity aspect of the mind. Rest your mind in such a state, and all hallucinations will vanish entirely. Even if you are healthy and have not yet experienced them, you should be prepared and consistently engage in this practice.

♦ The right intention for Chö

What is referred to as Chö is about completely eradicating the internal demon of our conceptual thoughts, not about killing, beating, banishing, or destroying external demons. Therefore, it is crucial to understand that the demon to be destroyed is not from outside but from within us.

As a practitioner of Chö and emptiness, one must not remain in a state of constant attachment to demons. Some individuals view all Dharma fellows as mischievous beings or demons and generate negative attitudes and thoughts about everyone, which is a very detrimental habit. Instead, one should always maintain pure perception.

At the very beginning of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, Patrul Rinpoche introduces two kinds of right attitude: the vast attitude of bodhicitta and the vast skill in the means of Vajrayana. The second attitude involves perceiving as pure the place of teaching, the teacher, the teachings, the listeners, the time, and so on. Patrul Rinpoche says:

These visualizations are meant to help us understand how

things are in reality. It is not that we are temporarily creating something that does not truly exist.

Such visualization is meant to help us stay away from wrong thoughts of perceiving everything as impure and to bring us back to the true nature of purity and clarity of all phenomena. Nowadays, many people's ways of thinking cannot bring them closer to the true Dharma but instead drive them further away from it. This is why we must rely on the vast and profound skillful means of Vajrayana, which are far superior to those in Sutrayana and can swiftly guide us on the path of the Dharma.

Generally speaking, most other religious belief systems direct their efforts, aggressive power, and confrontational focus outward, targeting external enemies and obstacle creators as adversaries to be subdued. Some even consider all non-followers of their faith as enemies, subjecting them to oppression or violence. Particularly when it comes to protecting their identity and preserving their religion, they aim to eliminate anyone who opposes them, especially those who have caused them harm.

Buddhism, however, takes a different approach. As Milarepa says:

The goal of our tradition is to completely eradicate self-clinging, abandon the eight worldly concerns, and leave the four demons with no ground to stand on or room to act.

In this light, we view all beings—including demons, spirits, and enemies who harm us—as spiritual teachers and offer our own bodies to them. By doing so, all obstacles and difficulties will actually vanish on their own. If we focus too much on self-protection and are unwilling to lose even one fine hair, we'll instead encounter more attacks and harms. Therefore, when obstacle makers appear in the course of our practice, we must apply this profound pith instruction: Feel free to criticize me, to beat me, and to scold me...

In this regard, we must reflect on how many times Buddha Shakyamuni offered his body or gave up his life for the benefit of all living beings. Such great acts and motivation are unparalleled in the whole world. This is the power of Mahayana Buddhism.

Therefore, our practice should focus inward, channeling all our strength, skill, and energy toward eliminating the self-clinging within. Saying "Eat me! Take me

away!” even once is a hundred times more meaningful than pleading, “Protect me! Save me!” Offering our own bodies as food to a hundred demons or spirits is far superior to seeking help from a hundred protective deities. Practicing Chö once is better than carrying one hundred guardian wheels or amulets. This is because the former annihilates our belief in a self, while the latter only reinforces that belief.

Machik Labdrön also says:

We entrust the sick to the demons.
 We rely on our enemies to guide us.
 One “Devour me! Carry me off!”
 Is better than “Protect me! Save me!” hundreds of times.
 This is the venerable Mother’s¹⁶⁶ tradition.¹⁶⁷

Machik Labdrön’s tradition is the exact opposite of the worldly one: instead of subjugating harmful demons, we entrust the sick to them; instead of having bodyguards, we rely on enemies to guide us. Saying “Devour me! Carry me off!” once is better than crying “Protect me! Save me!” hundreds of times. This is Machik Labdrön’s tradition regarding Chö. The extraordinary aspect of this tradition is its emphasis on severing belief in a self.

If you can cut through belief in a self and practice accordingly, all obstacles and difficulties will vanish naturally. However, because we have not practiced well, belief in a self will emerge immediately when we are criticized, beaten, or framed by others.

Many Chö practitioners appear to have no self-clinging in their daily lives. However, whether one has truly cut through belief in a self becomes evident when they are being slandered or when they must stay in a fearsome place, like a charnel ground, at night.

Nevertheless, Chö is indeed a very effective practice for cutting through one’s self-grasping. Therefore, you should recite the liturgy and practice it more often, especially when you encounter obstacles and difficulties, such as being sick. Otherwise, you may find yourself like those who constantly complain, “Everything sucks for me lately. What should I do? Yesterday my dad was sick, and last night I

¹⁶⁶ “The venerable mother” refers to Machik Labdrön, who is speaking in this quotation.

¹⁶⁷ Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2011, page 305.

had a nightmare. I was not feeling well this morning when I got up. My mother is not doing well at work today. Why am I so unlucky...”

Someone may ask, “What’s the point of cutting through the belief in a self?” We might respond, “The annihilation of self-grasping is the key to success. Throughout history, many practitioners who have overcome self-grasping not only enjoy longevity but also engage in extensive Dharma activities. Therefore, cutting through self-clinging is not a pessimistic approach that appeals to a loser.”

Of course, this answer comes from the perspective of the impure conventional valid cognition—something that ordinary people can perceive. Well, I should share this statement on my Weibo,¹⁶⁸ as it truly resonates with me.

By cutting the root of our inner demons of believing in a self, we will perceive everything as pure, as the saying goes:

Demons become Dharma protectors, and the faces of Dharma
protectors become that of the Nirmanakaya.

Of course, this is stated from the perspective of pure conventional valid cognition—a pure vision of the buddhas and bodhisattvas. After annihilating self-clinging, we will be happy and at ease, and we will have a pure intention to benefit others. Then it will not matter to us when we are slandered or harmed; even harmful demons and spirits will offer their body, speech, and mind to us and make vows in front of us, transforming into Dharma protectors. The faces of those protectors will become the face of a Nirmanakaya buddha, such as Buddha Shakyamuni. This is recorded in the life stories of Padmasambhava and other great Mahayanists.

Although we have not reached this state of realization, we should strive for it as well. We should refrain from appearing so pained and tormented when a mild harm or obstacle arises. In fact, such reactions indicate that our self-clinging is still too intense. Once we sever our belief in a self, tens of thousands of demons and spirits cannot bring us any harm.

There are times when great masters seem to be harmed by demons, either as a deliberate manifestation or as a result of their past life karma. Please take this valuable instruction to heart and incorporate it into your Dharma practice. Otherwise, no matter how much you discuss it, it will be of no use, because it is

¹⁶⁸ Sina Weibo is a Chinese microblogging website.

only through real practice that you will truly assimilate the essence of Mahayana Buddhism.

♦ Watch out for wrong practices

Some individuals who misunderstand the true meaning of Chö yet consider themselves Chö practitioners believe that spirits and demons truly exist outside of themselves. By believing in the existence of external demons, they perceive everything around them as actual spirits or demons. This leads to a constant state of anxiety and unease, prompting them to make statements like, “There are demons up there! There are demons down there!” or “This is a spirit, and that is a demon,” and even, “I saw a spirit and captured it, but it fought back fiercely, so I ultimately killed it.” They may also claim, “There’s a demon lurking in your body. I drove it away, but as it left, it looked back at you with a strange expression. You should practice Vajrakilaya or Sitatapatra to avoid further obstacles.” Such statements are nothing more than baseless lies, absurd fabrications, and groundless nonsense intended to deceive others.

Such a thing rarely happens at Larung Gar, but I have heard that a few of you are somewhat obsessed with similar talk, such as, “I can see that you are possessed by a certain spirit,” or “I had a dream last night that your house has a particular ghost.”

Some laypeople like to initiate such conversations on various occasions as well. Even some university professors engage in such discussions. If so, this may not positively influence their undergraduates and master’s and doctoral students. Therefore, I hope all monks, nuns, and laypeople are self-disciplined and vigilant about what they say.

People who frequently talk about spirits and pretas tend to draw their attention. These beings become aware of such individuals and follow them wherever they go. They may possess women who are prone to trances. Then, they make all kinds of convincing declarations, such as, “I am a deity,” “I am a ghost,” “I am the spirit of someone who has passed away,” “I am your late father,” or “I am your late mother.” At times, they even claim, “I am a deity, a Dharma protector, or Damchen,” and speak of supernatural experiences or make false predictions.

In this way, demons deceive the lamas, and the lamas, in turn, deceive their patrons. As the saying goes, “The son deceives the father, while the enemies deceive the son.”

Such circumstances occur in both the Tibetan and Han regions of China. Some individuals often have strange dreams at first and then gradually become possessed. Such an individual might say, “The spirit within me told this or that to me. It often controls me when I am talking...”

I would suggest that if you have this special karmic experience, it is best to ask the guru for help and practice Chö while confessing your negative deeds. By cutting off your attachment to the self and the demon, you will no longer be possessed by a spirit or demon. However, if you share your experience and your story goes viral, people may see you as a demon and be afraid of you.

However, some individuals make such statements to deceive others. Not only do they end up being fooled themselves, but they also fool those around them, which is truly concerning. When lamas and patrons, gurus and disciples, students and teachers, and others begin to mislead one another, it undermines trust in the entire world. These behaviors are clear signs of a degenerate age and indicate that the demons are taking over. As Padmasambhava prophesized:

In the degenerate era, male demons will enter men's hearts;
Female demons will enter women's hearts;
Goblins will enter children's hearts;
Samaya breakers will enter the monastics' hearts.
There will be a demon in each Tibetan's heart.

Padmasambhava observed many inappropriate practices in Tibet during his time, prompting him to speak in an exaggerated manner to raise awareness. This statement reflects the current situation as well.

In fact, demons and spirits exist at a relative level. Although atheists may initially reject their existence, they eventually come to accept it. This is because there are numerous historical accounts of demons and spirits, often referred to as “mysteries” or “secrets” due to the disbelief prevalent in the general population. In reality, demons and spirits are merely manifestations of our deluded minds. We must not cling too tightly to them; the more attached we become, the scarier the demons appear.

In this degenerate age, a practitioner must undertake pure conduct. At Larung Gar, the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche granted special permission to one or two dakinis and yogis, allowing them to share their clairvoyance with others. Aside

from this, no monk or nun was allowed to discuss their supernatural experiences, including dreams.

In fact, it is better not to speak of supernatural experiences, as doing so can make the world seem quite frightening. Some people indeed have special visions of things that are only visible to spirits. In Tibet, there is a divination method involving a mirror, which can reveal things that are invisible to ordinary eyes.

However, some individuals have no special visions but still dare to share nonsense and lies. I wonder whether they truly uphold the root precept of “telling no phony lama’s lies.” Therefore, in order to avoid hindering one’s practice, it is better not to discuss supernatural experiences.

And Padmasambhava also says:

When goblins are regarded as gods, it truly marks the era of suffering for the Tibetan people.

Patrul Rinpoche says, “These prophecies have come to pass.”¹⁶⁹ Some people regarded it as a prophecy for the Cultural Revolution because, during that period of upheaval, in addition to ordinary worldly individuals, even long-term practitioners were possessed by demonic forces. They began to defame the Dharma and destroy representations of the Three Jewels, as if they had lost their minds.

In summary, we should not regard demons, spirits, and obstacle makers that appear to exist externally as truly existing entities. Instead, at all times, in all places, and during all activities, we should train our minds to view these external appearances as illusory, like a dream. The temporary manifestations of harmful spirits and afflicted beings arise solely from distorted perceptions caused by past negative karma, presenting as both aggressors and victims. In reality, these distinctions do not exist. Therefore, we should not love one and hate the other. Instead, we should develop the impartial love and compassion of bodhicitta toward both, eradicating self-clinging and offering our very body and life without hesitation as food for these demons and spirits.

By doing so, we pacify their anger and aggression and sincerely share the Dharma that can guide them toward the path of liberation while also making aspirations for their ultimate benefit. Eventually, we will uproot all dualistic notions of self and others, harm and being harmed, sacred and demonic appearances, as

¹⁶⁹ It refers to the period when Patrul Rinpoche wrote this text.

well as attachments to gain and loss, love and hatred, good and bad, happiness and suffering. This means we abide in the state of Great Perfection, as explained in Longchenpa's *Treasury of Dharmadhatu*.

These words resonate deeply with me! Every time I suffer from an illness, such as a cold due to the harm inflicted by the demon of disease, or experience a nightmare caused by the disturbance of demonic forces, I either practice Chö or recite the mani mantra and dedicate the merit to the demon. I always remind myself, "I must have harmed them in the past, so now they harm me back in the form of demons. This is reasonable."

I also offer them teachings, such as: "Abandon wrongdoings. Practice virtue well. Master your own mind. This is the Buddha's teaching," or "All conditioned phenomena are like a dream, an illusion, a bubble, a shadow, a drop of dew, and lightning; you should discern them in this way." I also make pure aspirations for both myself and them.

Then I do my best to rest in the state of Great Perfection, devoid of any dualistic perception such as "the deity is good," "the demon is bad," "I hate the demon," and "I love myself."

Regarding the state of Great Perfection, it is said in the teachings:

Neither deity, nor demon: the confidence of the view.

Neither distraction, nor fixation: the vital point of the meditation.

Neither acceptance, nor rejection: the vital point of the action.

Neither hope, nor fear: the vital point of the result.

On the surface, it may seem that a mischievous person who is indifferent to everything and rejects the principle of cause and effect also meets the above criteria. In fact, this is not the case. The state of such a mischievous person is nothing like the realized state described in the verse above. To truly rest in this state, one must first establish the foundation of renunciation and bodhicitta.

When the concepts of anything that can be cut and anyone who cuts dissolve into the expanse of ultimate reality, where all phenomena exist in a state of perfect equality, the demon of conceit from within is eradicated at its root. This marks the realization of the true and ultimate Chö.

At the end of this chapter, Patrul Rinpoche says:

*Although I understand there is no self, my attachment to “I”
remains strong.*

*Although I have resolved to abandon duality, hopes and fears
still arise within me.*

*Bless me and all those like me who cling to the notion of “I,”
That we may realize the natural state of selflessness.*

[This concludes *Accumulating Merit and Wisdom*,
Offering the Mandala and the Kusāli’s Accumulation.]



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

KHENPO SODARGYE was born in 1962 into a nomadic family in a small valley of the Tibetan region of Kham. He was ordained in 1985 and went on to become a lineage holder of the Great Perfection (Dzogchen) tradition, as well as a preeminent practitioner and scholar at Larung Gar Five Sciences Buddhist Academy in Sertar. Khenpo Sodargye was the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche's chief Tibetan-to-Chinese translator. He has traveled extensively in North America, Europe, Africa and Asia to offer teachings at Dharma centers and universities. For more information, please visit www.khenposodargye.org.

ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

The Wisdom and Compassion Translation Group, under the guidance of Khenpo Sodargye Rinpoche, is dedicated to translating authentic Buddhist teachings into languages that resonate with individuals from all walks of life. Comprised of Buddhist practitioners and scholars, the translation team is committed to bringing Dharma students teachings that empower them to engage in the systematic study and practice of Tibetan Buddhism.

