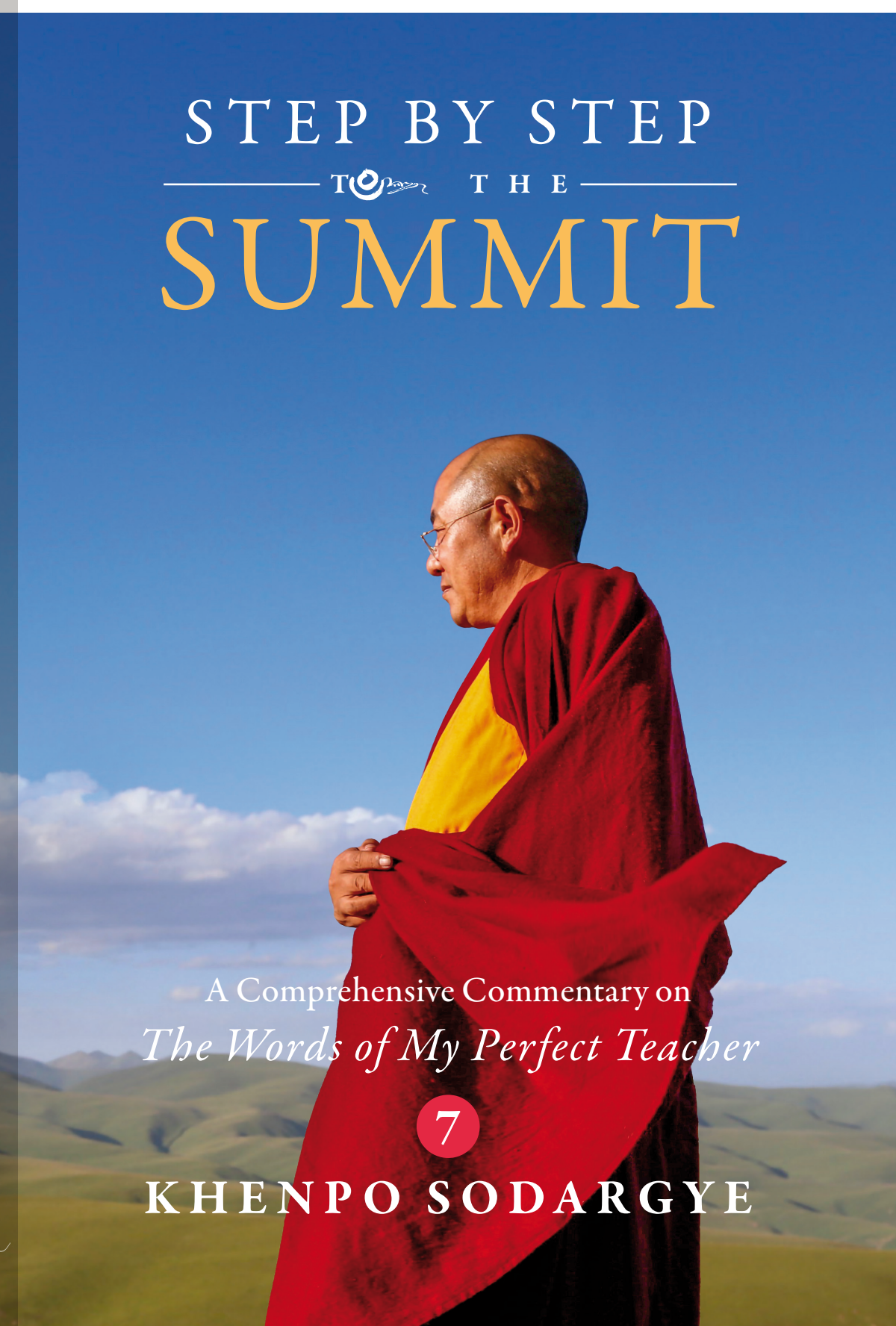




STEP BY STEP — TO — THE — SUMMIT

A Comprehensive Commentary on
The Words of My Perfect Teacher

7

KHENPO SODARGYE

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— T O — T H E —
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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



VAJRAYOGINI



THE THREE SACRED ONES OF
THE WESTERN PURE LAND
(BUDDHA AMITABHA,
AVALOKITESHVARA, AND VAJRAPANI)

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 126

*“First you followed a supreme Master and obeyed him;
... Will have a thousand Buddhas’ accomplishments.”* [page
309–311]

In *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, we have studied the common preliminaries, including the difficulty of finding the freedoms and advantages, the impermanence of life, the defects of samsara, the principle of cause and effect, the benefits of liberation, and how to follow a qualified teacher.

Regarding the uncommon preliminaries, we have completed our study of taking refuge, arousing bodhicitta, meditating and reciting on the teacher as Vajrasattva to purify all obscurations, and accumulating merits through mandala offering and kusāli practice. As of today, we will proceed to the practice of Guru Yoga.

2.2.5. GURU YOGA, ENTRANCE-WAY FOR BLESSINGS, THE ULTIMATE METHOD FOR AROUSING THE WISDOM OF REALIZATION

First, Patrul Rinpoche pays homage to his root guru:

First, you followed a supreme teacher and obeyed his instructions;

Then, you endured great hardships and engaged in true practices;

*Finally, your mind and your teacher's became inseparable
oneness, and you inherited the lineage.*

Peerless Teacher, at your feet, I humbly bow.

♦ Pay homage to the guru, as Patrul Rinpoche did

Many of us here are very fortunate that our gurus are true qualified teachers. Like Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu, our qualified teachers have also followed their own supreme gurus, obeyed them, undertaken great hardships to practice the Dharma, and ultimately realized the wisdom of the guru while inheriting the lineage. To be able to follow such a qualified teacher is certainly a great fortune.

Perhaps due to different causes and conditions, those who are less fortunate may not have the opportunity to follow a guru with the same experience of following a qualified teacher as past eminent masters did. At most, their teachers can only claim that they once followed a guru.

Having said this, there's something I have to say: Regarding following a guru, the situation is quite complicated in the Han region of China these days, as I mentioned in my Weibo. Some charlatan gurus have hidden agendas, so they seek personal gain under the guise of "I am the reincarnation of so-and-so buddha or bodhisattva."

On the other hand, some Buddhists are so deluded that they easily develop "faith" in such charlatans. As a result, they blindly follow the "guru," which eventually leads to misdeeds that contradict Buddhist principles and doctrines. This is a shared fault committed by both parties.

Therefore, in terms of following a spiritual teacher, we must first examine the teacher carefully and follow them impeccably, as mentioned in the chapter "How to Follow a Spiritual Friend." To follow the teacher impeccably means that after we begin to follow them, we must at least refrain from looking for faults in the teacher.

Now we should emulate Patrul Rinpoche and also pay homage to all lineage teachers with great faith.

2.2.5.1. The Reason for Guru Yoga

Guru Yoga is the ultimate method for awakening the wisdom of realization. Regardless of the practice we undertake, as long as it is true Dharma, the blessings

arising from the Guru Yoga practice can forcefully give rise to true transcendent wisdom in our minds.

♦ Find a true qualified teacher

To practice true Dharma, it is essential to first find a qualified teacher who possesses all the necessary qualifications. This is the most important step in your pursuit of the Dharma.

The story of Sudhana following his teachers is well-known. When he first generated bodhicitta in the presence of Manjushri, he was already well-versed in many teachings but still needed guidance in practice. Thus, despite Sudhana's sharp faculties, Manjushri advised him to seek out and follow qualified teachers. Sudhana then traveled south and followed fifty-three teachers, one after another. All of them were qualified teachers, and we should also follow a teacher or teachers like them.

Of course, the criteria for defining a qualified teacher are very strict. If you consider a teacher qualified simply because they are good-looking, charming, or pleasant, you are mistaken, as these are not essential qualifications. Similarly, if your judgment is based on a hunch, such as "I feel that I have a special affinity with this teacher," that feeling cannot serve as a valid criterion either. Additionally, if you believe a teacher is qualified based on others' word of mouth or the teacher's self-introduction, this too is not necessarily a reasonable criterion. You should examine the following: Where is the teacher from? Which gurus have they followed? Do they possess the necessary qualifications as described in the Buddha's teachings?

It is not easy to find a qualified teacher. Nevertheless, it is worth being cautious about this issue. When seeking a business partner, you must carefully evaluate the candidate's capabilities and networks. You would not thoughtlessly approach a stranger on the street to collaborate with them or start a startup together. You are very careful when finding a collaborator for an ordinary worldly business, let alone for establishing a spiritual relationship with a Dharma teacher.

When we are in the process of finding a qualified teacher, we must carefully examine the candidates with discernment.

♦ Seeing the teacher as the Buddha

After finding a qualified teacher, we should follow their teachings, obey their

instructions, see them as a true buddha, and pray to them from the very depths of our hearts. This is extremely important.

However, it seems very difficult for some individuals to see the teacher as a true buddha. They confess, “I really cannot see this teacher as a buddha. In fact, not to mention a buddha, I cannot even see him as a bodhisattva. I feel that it is becoming increasingly difficult to understand why the teacher says this or does that. I am growing more suspicious that something is wrong with him. Please grant me more blessings, or I will soon develop a negative attitude toward him...”

In fact, this occurs because they did not examine the teacher beforehand. If one has decided to follow a teacher after examining them, then no matter what, one must see the teacher as a true buddha.

Some people think, “Seeing the teacher as a buddha is a unique practice in Tibetan Buddhism, which doesn’t exist in Chinese Buddhism.” This is not true. It does exist in Chinese Buddhism. As said in the *Vajrasekhara Sutra*:

Venerate acharyas
Who are the same as all buddhas;
All their instructions
Should be well obeyed.

Thus, a true acharya, or Dharma teacher, is indivisible from all buddhas. This is also frequently mentioned in the *Flower Ornament Sutra*. Consequently, one should not consider it a teaching exclusive to Tibetan Buddhism.

Tibetan Buddhism has long upheld the tradition of seeing the guru as a buddha. In my case, from the day that I had the privilege of becoming a disciple of the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche to this day, I have never regarded Rinpoche as an ordinary person. I do, however, often feel that I do not fully grasp his secret meaning. Nonetheless, I have always seen Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche in one way: he is indivisible from the buddhas.

The actions of a mahasiddha, or great achiever, who is indivisible from the buddhas, are beyond the reach of ordinary people; their power does not stem from self-aggrandizement. However, some spiritual teachers often pressure their disciples by saying, “How can you do this to me? I am a buddha! You cannot hold negative views about me, or you’ll break your samayas!”

Were they truly indivisible from a buddha, they probably would not have

needed to say it. Buddha Shakyamuni never told his disciples, “You must venerate me, or you will have a bad rebirth,” for his own benefit.

◉ Seeing the guru as an ordinary person brings no blessing

From the perspective of a practitioner’s own benefit, regarding the teacher as an ordinary person indeed prevents one from receiving blessings.

Once, Dromtönpa asked Atisha, “Many Tibetans practice the Dharma, but have not attained any supreme accomplishment. Why?”

Atisha replied, “In Mahayana Buddhism, the attainment of accomplishment depends entirely on the guru. You Tibetans see the guru merely as an ordinary person; then how can you receive blessings? How can you attain the supreme accomplishments?”

According to stories like this, Tibetan practitioners initially did not know how to follow the guru properly and lacked faith and veneration for the guru. Thanks to the guidance of Atisha and many other great masters, tantric practitioners began to develop faith and veneration for the guru, and “seeing the guru as a buddha” has become the most fundamental rule to follow today.

Relatively speaking, some Han Chinese practitioners still lack this perspective on the guru. A Buddhist may seem to respect the Dharma teacher with whom they took refuge, but they often lack the faith to see the teacher as a Buddha, or even as a highly accomplished one.

Once a Han Chinese practitioner said to me, “My Dharma master is sick. Without me around, he cannot take care of himself properly. May you grant me a leave of absence so I can return and care for my master? Poor master! I’ve been thinking of him with compassion for the past few days.”

If a teacher is a true buddha, they do not really need their disciples’ compassionate care since they do not experience suffering as ordinary beings do. As we should know, when a teacher appears ill or passes into parinirvana, it is merely a manifestation and a skillful means to teach us ordinary people about impermanence and the suffering of birth, old age, sickness, and death.

“Seeing the guru as a buddha” is a very important practice in the process of following the guru.

♦ **Follow a qualified teacher properly**

If we see the guru as a buddha, with such faith, we can not only receive blessings but also attain realization. As one of the sutras says:

It is through faith that absolute truth is realized.

Therefore, we must follow a qualified teacher properly.

Atisha says:

Dharma friends, until attaining enlightenment, you need a teacher, so it is essential to follow a supreme qualified teacher.

Until realizing the ultimate nature of reality, you need to learn, so it is essential to listen to the teacher's instructions.

All happiness arises from the teacher's blessings, so it is essential to repay the teacher's kindness.

Atisha's words are very important. First of all, before attaining Buddhahood, a practitioner must follow a teacher. The term "teacher" does not necessarily refer to a renowned great master. It also has nothing to do with the teacher's ethnicity or status. Anyone who has taught you more than four verses of Dharma is your teacher. Before realizing the ultimate nature of reality, we need to listen to Dharma teachings. This is actually the most important tradition at Larung Gar. It is common for a sangha member to attend several Dharma classes each day. If they do not listen to a teaching on a particular day, they may feel that something is missing, and that the day has passed in vain.

Some laypeople outside Larung Gar do exactly the opposite. They may feel distressed when attending a Dharma teaching and stressed if they have to listen to even one class per day. They avoid classes as much as possible, using excuses such as poor health, a bad mood, family issues, work, or other worldly preoccupations. In fact, if one truly understands the importance of hearing teachings, one will prioritize Dharma classes above all else.

Refer to the *Flower Ornament Sutra* to see how third-level bodhisattvas eagerly pursue the Dharma and follow a teacher. Why do they do this? Because they recognize the benefit of following a teacher and listening to their instructions. Aware of the benefit, we should commit ourselves to follow a teacher and diligently study the Dharma in this life and in many lives to come.

By doing so, we will undoubtedly achieve both worldly and transcendent success, as well as temporary and ultimate happiness, all of which arise from the teacher's blessing. Therefore, we should always remember the teacher's kindness and consider how to repay it.

◉ The guru is the source of all accomplishments

Geshe Kharak Gomchung of the Kadampa tradition says,

It must be recognized that the teacher is the source of all accomplishment, both worldly and transcendent.

Normally, we believe our transcendent practice depends on the teacher; however, our worldly endeavors also rely on them. Without a qualified teacher to guide us in performing virtuous actions, we may unwittingly engage in many negative behaviors. Thus, both our worldly and transcendent accomplishments depend on the teacher. As Master Xing'an (1686-1734) once said,

Without worldly teachers, one doesn't know morality and ethics;

Without transcendent teachers, one doesn't know the Dharma.

Those who have read the *Platform Sutra* know that after Master Yongjia recognized the nature of the mind through studying the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, he still needed to ask the Sixth Patriarch, Master Huineng, to testify to his enlightenment.

After Master Yongjia attained enlightenment, he encountered Master Xuance and had an in-depth conversation with him. Master Xuance asked, "Dear master, who is your teacher?"

Yongjia replied, "I have followed teachers when listening to Dharma teachings, but when I later read the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, by myself I attained enlightenment. However, no one has testified to my enlightenment."

Xuance said, "If one's enlightenment is not testified to by a teacher, one is considered a follower of Charvaka¹ instead of Buddhism."

¹ Charvaka, also referred to as Lokāyata, is an ancient Indian school of materialist philosophy. It upholds direct perception, empiricism, and conditional inference as legitimate means of acquiring knowledge, while adopting a skeptical approach to philosophy. Charvaka rejects ritual practices and belief in the supernatural. This system of thought was widely embraced in India prior to the rise of Jainism and Buddhism.

Upon hearing this, Yongjia requested Xuance to testify to his enlightenment. Xuance said, “My words are of little worth. You should instead visit the Sixth Patriarch Huineng in Caoxi. Many people coming from everywhere request teachings from him. If you want to see him, I’ll go with you.”

Then Master Yongjia and Master Xuance went to visit the Sixth Patriarch together. After a conversation with Yongjia, the Sixth Patriarch officially confirmed Yongjia’s enlightenment and accommodated him for one night. Thus, Yongjia is since known as “One Night Awakening.” Later, Yongjia composed the popular *Song of Enlightenment*.

Throughout the history of Chinese Buddhism, there has always been an emphasis on following a lineage teacher. Following a teacher is not, as some scholars claim, an unnecessary matter. Some people mistakenly believe they can achieve enlightenment solely by reading and studying Buddhist scriptures on their own, which is impossible.

As we know, lineage blessings from the guru have always been the determining factor in the attainment of enlightenment. For this reason, the tradition of relying on a spiritual teacher has been highly valued in Tibetan Buddhism and has become a distinctive feature of this tradition.

◉ Without guru devotion, one attains nothing

Geshe Kharak Gomchung also says,

Even if one has mastered the Tripitaka, without devotion, trust,
and gratitude toward the guru, one will gain no benefit.

The Water-Tree Treatises: Hundred Waves of Elegant Sayings & Hundred Branches of Elegant Sayings states:

Without devotion to the teacher,
Knowing a hundred treaties is of no use;
It is akin to placing a dead tree in water for a hundred years;
It will never sprout green leaves.

Some individuals are like this: after receiving Dharma teachings, they distance themselves from the teacher by going elsewhere and show no respect to the one who imparted the Dharma to them. As a result, they are unable to assimilate any true Dharma.

There are many such disciples during this degenerate era. When seeking teachings, they appear very eager, saying, “Dear teacher, you are indivisible from a true buddha.” However, when they successfully acquire a bit of wealth and their own disciples, they become reluctant to tell others, “I’ve received teachings from so-and-so teacher.”

Such a person is proud and arrogant and does not feel grateful to others, making it unlikely that they will achieve great accomplishments. Sadly, there are many such individuals in the Tibetan and Han areas of China.

I always tell our current Dharma teachers that some young Han Chinese monks and nuns have the opportunity to be promoted at Larung Gar. For example, a monk who was once a cohort member became a tutor a few years later and eventually a Dharma teacher. His Dharma students may even outnumber those of his previous teacher.

At that time, I tell such a teacher, “Please do not think you have surpassed the teachers who have kindly taught you the Dharma. Do not become arrogant. Do not show disrespect to your teachers. Otherwise, your actions will simply demonstrate that you do not understand the Dharma. Please pay special attention to this in the future.”

This applies to me as well. On one hand, I may not be very learned, so it may not be possible for me to excel. On the other hand, even if I seem to have slightly outperformed some teachers—especially those who have been kind to me—I immediately remind myself, “Do not be arrogant! Otherwise, that mindset is not in line with the Buddha’s teachings, and any temporary success I have achieved will quickly fade as a result.”

All of you Dharma teachers, both male and female, should reflect on which teachers have been kind to you in your pursuit of the Dharma. Do not forget them. Perhaps they have neither fame nor wealth, but from the perspective of Buddhist tradition and values, the teacher is truly the source of our access to the Dharma. From a broader viewpoint, we should also respect all our worldly teachers from elementary school, secondary school, and university.

When I was in the third grade, I had a teacher who taught me just one lesson. Now, whenever he mentions me, he says, “He is my student.” I have to admit, this is true (*the audience laughs*).

♦ **Guru Yoga is the highest practice**

Particularly in all paths of Vajrayana, the guru holds an exceptionally pivotal position. Therefore, all the tantras emphasize the practice of Guru Yoga.

As I have said repeatedly, whether you are in a retreat or engaging in your daily practice, it is best to practice Guru Yoga every day without interruption. In the morning when you wake up, practice Guru Yoga while reciting the prayer, and at noon, in the afternoon, and in the evening before you go to bed, you should recite the prayer once at each of those times.

In addition to regular recitations, a good practitioner always prays to the guru in their daily life and may regard everything they see, hear, and think as the guru's blessings, as the eminent masters of the past did. By doing so, they are always perceiving everything as the display of the guru, and naturally, they will attain enlightenment.

But if a person does not know this and never prays to or visualizes the guru, it will be extremely difficult for them to attain enlightenment solely through studying and understanding the Dharma with their intellect.

◉ **Guru Yoga and the generation and perfection stages**

In fact, the practice of Guru Yoga is superior to all the practices of the generation and perfection stages, as it is said in a tantra:

Better than meditating on a hundred thousand deities
For ten million kalpas
Is to think of one's teacher for a single instant.²

Everyone knows the merit of praying to the Buddha and meditating on a deity. If you can meditate on Manjushri, Avalokiteshvara, Mahasthamaprapta, buddhas, deities, dakinis, and Dharma protectors for one year, ten years, a thousand years, or even ten thousand years, the merit is unimaginable. However, even if you have been meditating on one hundred thousand deities for ten million kalpas, it is still no better than thinking of your root guru for a single instant. For example, if you recite "Lama Chenno" once while visualizing and praying to your root guru in your mind, this brief practice surpasses meditating on one hundred thousand deities.

² Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2011, page 310.

This may sound hard to believe, but it is indeed a tantric teaching. It is a different matter for those who do not believe in the Buddha's teachings. For believers, this tantric teaching is the most supreme pith instruction.

Therefore, we should all consider Guru Yoga the most important practice. Although sometimes when you practice Guru Yoga, you also perform prostrations at the same time, which might require a lot of effort, this practice creates great merit, so you should persevere with it.

◉ Guru Yoga and the Great Perfection

According to the Longchen Nyingtik tradition of the natural Great Perfection, the vajra core teaching, realization can be attained through the practice of Guru Yoga.

In comparison, it is said in the lower vehicles that the profound truth is discerned and established on the basis of logical reasoning and analysis in Pramana (Valid Cognition) and Madhyamaka (Middle Way). According to the lower tantras, one must first attain the eight common accomplishments before achieving the supreme accomplishment of Buddhahood. According to the other higher tantras, the illustrative pristine wisdom of the third empowerment should be used to introduce the true pristine wisdom.

However, according to the Longchen Nyingtik tradition of the natural Great Perfection, by relying solely on a supremely realized guru whose lineage is like a pure golden thread, never tarnished by impairments or breaches of the samayas, seeing the guru as a true buddha,³ and praying to them with fervent devotion and complete faith, an ordinary disciple can merge their mind with the wisdom of the guru into one. The disciple's mind and the teacher's wisdom become indivisible. In other words, through the teacher's blessings, the wisdom of realization can arise within the disciple.⁴

3 *A Guide to The Words of My Perfect Teacher* states: "In what way should one consider him as a Buddha? According to the Lesser Vehicle it is not even necessary to consider one's teacher as a special being or a pratyekabuddha. To consider him as an ordinary being with certain qualities is enough. For the Bodhisattva path it is enough to consider him as a being who has attained one of the supreme levels, as the nirmanakaya of a Buddha or a Bodhisattva who is at least on the great path of accumulating. In the tradition of the Great Perfection, it is inappropriate to consider one's teacher as an ordinary learned person, as an Arhat, as a Bodhisattva on one of the sublime levels, as the nirmanakaya of a Buddha or even as the sambhogakaya. One must consider him as the dharmakaya. If one is capable of praying to him with a faith that is utterly constant, one can arouse the wisdom of inner realization without recourse to other paths."

4 *A Guide to The Words of My Perfect Teacher* explains in detail as follows: "If one has the

This is the extraordinary characteristic of the Great Perfection. Our lineage masters, such as Patrul Rinpoche, Mipham Rinpoche, and the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, often reiterated, “My lineage is pure. The lineage between my guru and me has never been tarnished by impairments or breaches of the samayas.”

It is very fortunate to be able to follow a realized teacher with a pure lineage and samayas, so one should follow them properly. If a teacher has not attained realization, one may still listen to their teachings as long as the teacher’s lineage remains untarnished. That said, it is preferable to follow a realized teacher and see them as a true buddha. By praying to the teacher wholeheartedly in the practice of Guru Yoga, one will naturally attain realization.

As quoted previously:

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.

Accumulating merit and purifying obscurations, as well as receiving the blessings of an enlightened teacher, are both very important. Many practitioners pay special attention to accumulation and purification; they often practice confession, recite prayers, engage in positive actions, and so on, which is commendable. However, in addition to accumulating merit and purifying obscurations, this verse also emphasizes the importance of blessings from a realized teacher. By following a realized teacher and practicing the Dharma according to the teacher’s instructions, we can attain realization through the teacher’s blessings. It is unwise to aim for realization through means other than these two.

◉ The treasure in your palm

Sarahapa says:

For whomever the guru’s words enter their heart,

devotion to see one’s teacher as a buddha, the wisdom of realization will arise even if one does not practice the generation and perfection phases. This opinion is shared by the New Tradition. Nonetheless, in Mahayoga and Anuyoga, the generation and perfection phases are the main practice. If one has no conflicts with one’s teacher and spiritual companions and practices considering the teacher to be the essence of the deities, the accomplishments are near and the blessing will come swiftly.”

It is as if they behold a treasure in their palm.

When the guru's teachings penetrate someone's heart, they are able to effortlessly attain accomplishment whenever they desire.

A disciple who sees the teacher as a buddha will naturally appreciate every word of the teacher's instructions and will put the teachings into practice. At the same time, they recognize that some of the teacher's instructions carry secret meanings intended for beings with different faculties. Therefore, it is crucial to grasp the teacher's secret meanings, as stated in *The Wish-Fulfilling Treasury* and *Finding Rest in the Nature of the Mind*.

However, a disciple who possesses wrong views about the teacher will do exactly the opposite. They do not feel right about anything taught by the teacher, often developing inappropriate thoughts, and, worse yet, rejecting the high teachings imparted by the teacher. This is a demonic obstacle. In the course of our practice, if such a situation arises, we must pay attention to it and correct it immediately.

A disciple who has a genuine and fortunate connection with the teacher will be able to understand the teacher's intentions and secret meanings. For instance, when the teacher provides instructions to Dharma students with shravaka faculties, those students will recognize that these instructions are meant to guide them. Similarly, when the teacher shares Sutrayana teachings of Mahayana Buddhism, the students will receive these teachings with great joy and will aspire to assimilate them so they can eventually share them with others who possess Sutrayana faculties.

When the teacher imparts the highest teachings to those with tantric or superior faculties, the disciples will comprehend the teacher's intentions. It is important to note that the teacher's secret meanings can be very profound and may manifest in various ways through their words and actions. Consequently, these meanings may remain elusive to those who lack depth of wisdom.

However, the so-called secret meanings exist only in those true teachers who possess genuine wisdom and impeccable conduct. If a person is still deluded but pretends to be a "wish-fulfilling jewel," their gibberish will not be regarded by the wise as having secret meaning. Thus, one should be able to discern between the true and the false.

In short, while following a qualified teacher, we should try our very best to have the teacher's words enter our hearts. When this happens, we will behold a treasure in the palm of our hands, as Saraha said.

◉ Directly visualize the guru

In his *Finding Rest in Illusion*, Longchenpa says:

In practices such as those of the generation and perfection phases,⁵ it is not the nature of those paths itself that brings liberation, for that depends on other factors, such as how one makes it a living experience and deepens one's practice. In Guru Yoga, however, the path—by its very nature alone—awakens the realization of the natural state within one and brings liberation. For that reason, Guru Yoga is the most profound of all paths.⁶

Moreover, according to *The Chariot of Excellence: A Commentary on Finding Rest in Illusion*, one must visualize the image of the guru, which must remain unchanged when practicing Guru Yoga. Such a visualization can swiftly give rise to liberation. Therefore, when practicing Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche's Guru Yoga, you may directly visualize the image of Rinpoche.

Of course, this practice applies to faithful disciples. If you lack faith in the teacher, you may visualize them in the form of a buddha or a bodhisattva; otherwise, you may not develop sufficient faith when visualizing the image of the teacher.

This instruction is profound. How each of you applies it in your lives depends on your affinity for this practice and the effort you choose to invest. Some may hear these key instructions multiple times yet still struggle to grasp them, while the wise will remember them after hearing them just once.

Take *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, for example. Some people receive the teaching only once, but they continue to practice it for the rest of their lives. In contrast, others may learn the text several times, but their passion for the practice lasts only a short moment; they practice for a few days and then give it up. In doing so, the Dharma cannot penetrate their mindstream.

Although this is also subject to practitioners' merit accumulated from previous lives and the affinities established in this life, I still hope you will appreciate the profound teachings and apply them in your life consistently. Please do not constantly change your practices. These days, many people do not have steady practices—they engage in one today and another tomorrow; they follow one

⁵ Such as the deity practice.

⁶ Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2011, page 311.

teacher today and another one tomorrow. Of course, if you can practice sufficiently each time for the supreme state to arise, you may undertake as many different practices as you wish and follow as many teachers as you like.

However, if the constant change stems from your pursuit of novelty and aversion to repetition, and your mind falters whenever an external situation arises, this indicates that you are an unsteady practitioner. It can be said that this “unsteadiness” is the most troublesome aspect of your Dharma practice.

If a practitioner engaged in the practices outlined in *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* twenty years ago and continues to do so even twenty or thirty years later, their steadiness can certainly lead to significant changes in their mind.

◉ The great merit of praying to the teacher just once

Especially, if we engage in consistent practice of Guru Yoga every day for many years, we will definitely attain realization. In fact, not to mention practicing it for a long time, even praying to the guru once can bring incredible merit. *The Tantra of the Array of Samaya* says:

Diligently meditating on a deity with all the major and minor
marks
For one hundred thousand kalpas
Is not as powerful as recalling the guru for an instant.
Reciting mantras and undertaking a practice ten million times
Is not as beneficial as praying to the guru just once.

Meditating for a hundred thousand kalpas on a deity with thirty-two major marks and eighty minor marks generates immense merit. In fact, even if we meditate on Buddha Shakyamuni, Amitabha, or Avalokiteshvara for a hundred years, or even just one hundred days, the merit gained is still remarkable. However, no matter how long we meditate—whether for a hundred thousand kalpas or more—it cannot compare to the merit of thinking of the guru for a single instant. Similarly, even if we have recited mantras or engaged in practice ten million times, it is still not as valuable as praying to the guru just once.

By emphasizing the importance of Guru Yoga, we do not intend to reject other practices. I believe many of you will develop conviction on this after contemplating the quoted verses over and over again.

◉ The prayer for Guru Yoga

So, which prayer should we recite when practicing Guru Yoga?

Many people might say, “This is my teacher, so I will only recite his prayer.” While it is true that you may recite any teacher’s prayer, practicing the Guru Yoga of an enlightened teacher like the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche will undoubtedly bring you extraordinary blessings. Whenever I hear someone recite my prayer, I feel genuinely upset. I am not just pretending; my feelings are sincere. You already have the prayer of the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche—why not recite his instead?

Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche is widely regarded as a highly accomplished master across all lineages and schools. Given the realizations of his disciples, the vastness of his Dharma activities, and the many remarkable things we ordinary people can observe, he is undoubtedly an enlightened master.

Praying to a highly accomplished teacher is vastly different from praying to an ordinary teacher, much like the difference between praying to a wish-fulfilling jewel and praying to a regular treasure. The effect of the prayer is utterly different.

Someone says, “I have my own teacher, so I won’t pray to any other teacher.” The use of the term “mine” indicates a strong attachment to their teacher, to the point of rejecting blessings from an extraordinary master. While I understand this viewpoint from a broader perspective, I believe that, from a practitioner’s standpoint, it would be greatly beneficial to recite a true master’s prayer.

One might say, “I am not from the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche’s lineage. Will reciting his prayer still be beneficial for me?”

In fact, from the perspective of the guru’s blessing, the lineage of the guru is not an obstacle. Just like the moon in the sky, no matter where a water vessel is placed, the image of the moon will be reflected in the water.

Likewise, although Buddha Shakyamuni was born in India, anyone in this world, including Han Chinese, Tibetans, or any other people, can pray to him without fear of rejection. With incredible miraculous power, the Buddha will always be present before those who pray to him and will grant his blessings. The Buddha won’t say, “You are a Tibetan instead of an Indian, so I won’t come to you.”

The same is true for a highly accomplished master, who will not be like an ordinary person who says, “You are my lineage disciple, so I will grant you a

bleeding; you are not, so I won't bless you." How could it even be possible for a great achiever to have such discursive thoughts!

Upon the request of his disciples, the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche composed *The Swift Bestowal of Blessings: A Guru Yoga*. A few years ago, I advised you to recite this prayer and practice Guru Yoga accordingly. The reason I did so was not for the sake of self-promotion, saying, "This is my guru, so you must practice his Guru Yoga!" It is not like that! It is just that when I examine the situation with my own wisdom, I know this practice is definitely beneficial to everyone!

Therefore, I hope everyone will pray to the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche. Personally, I do not claim to have attained any special state, but I have had many experiences through this practice.

◉ Guru Yoga and Buddhahood

Once, an enlightened Tibetan master said, "Pray to the guru at least a dozen times a day. If you don't have any experience, feel free to say I'm talking gibberish."

About this, I have no doubt! For those who consistently pray to the guru with devotion and fervent faith, Dharma practice becomes easy. If a practitioner stops praying to the guru and relies solely on their own effort, their practice is unlikely to be successful.

The fourth Panchen Lama (1570-1662) once said,

The method for attaining Buddhahood in one lifetime
Lies in wholeheartedly and sincerely praying to
A qualified teacher—
This is the essence of the profound tantric teachings.

There is also the practice of praying to the teacher in Sutrayana, but the practice in Vajrayana is extraordinary. Thus, to become a true practitioner, it is vital for us to always pray to the guru.

It is said in the *Array of Ati*:

Whoever visualizes their kind teacher
Above the crown of their head,
At the center of their heart,
Or in the palm of their hand

Will attain the accomplishments of a thousand buddhas.

In addition, when practicing Guru Yoga, you should often visualize the guru emitting light and dissolving into your heart, and your mind becoming inseparable from the guru's. As you rise from meditation, regard all that appears and exists as the guru's magical display and carry out your regular activities. This is indeed a supreme state.

Therefore, we must pay attention to this practice, which can lead to the attainment of Buddhahood in one lifetime!



Lesson 127

“The venerable Gotsangpa said: ... from the very depths of your being.” [page 311–313]

Let’s continue to study Guru Yoga, the most profound practice of all paths.

- ◉ Guru Yoga can eliminate all afflictions

The venerable Gotsangpa⁷ said:

If one practices Guru Yoga,
One can eliminate all defects and perfect all attainments.

The consistent practice of Guru Yoga over time can eliminate all our afflictions, such as greed, anger, and ignorance, while also purifying our faults. Additionally, it can grow and perfect all attainments, including the study and practice of the Dharma, the love and compassion of bodhicitta, and more.

Some Dharma practitioners have experienced this. Without the practice of Guru Yoga, their minds can hardly align with the Dharma; with the practice

⁷ Gotsangpa Gönpö Dorje (Tib. རྒོད་ཚང་པ་མགོན་པོ་རྡོ་རྗེ།, Wyl. rgod tshang pa mgon po rdo rje) (1189-1258) was a mahasiddha of the Drukpa Kagyu school, well known for his songs of realization and said to have been an emanation of Milarepa. He was born in southern Tibet, but moved to Central Tibet, where he met his main teachers Tsangpa Gyaré Yeshe Dorje and Sangye Ön. Following his studies, he travelled from one isolated hermitage to another, never staying in the same place twice. He founded the branch of the Drukpa Kagyu school known as the Upper Drukpa (ལྷོ་འབྲུག་, stod ‘brug). His students included Orgyenpa Rinchen Pal. (Source: Rigpawiki.org)

of Guru Yoga, they can align with whatever practice they are doing. In fact, this demonstrates the blessing power of Guru Yoga.

However, someone may think, “It is enough to only practice Guru Yoga. I don’t have to undertake the common and uncommon preliminary practices.”

If this is from practitioners with superior faculties or special affinities, I will not deny it. For them, the practice of Guru Yoga itself can indeed perfect all the attainments I just listed. However, if someone claims that solely practicing Guru Yoga is sufficient for everyone, then that may not be the case. Otherwise, eminent masters of the past would not have felt the need to compose works explaining the preliminaries, and we would not have to practice the preliminaries together now.

The rationale behind practicing only Guru Yoga is essentially the same as the claim that “one only needs to recite the name of Amitabha Buddha.” From one perspective, the name of Amitabha Buddha encompasses the essence of 84,000 teachings. For some individuals, simply reciting this Buddha’s name is sufficient for attaining liberation. But can this apply to everyone? I am afraid not. Mahayana Buddhism encompasses vast and boundless teachings, which is certainly not without reason.

Therefore, since people vary in their faculties, it is most appropriate to align the teachings with their capabilities. In our lineage, we should follow the guidance of lineage masters and the lessons they have imparted, making progress step by step, which is the most reliable and safest approach.

◉ Guru Yoga is the supreme practice

The venerable Gotsangpa also said:

Though there are many practices of the generation stage,
None of them surpasses the meditation on the guru.
Though there are many practices of the perfection stage,
None of them surpasses following the guru with complete trust.

These days, many people like to meditate on a deity or a Dharma protector. Such practices of the generation stage are good, but the most important practice is still Guru Yoga because it is the most profound of all paths. Many people also like the practices of the perfection stage, such as those involving channels, energies, and

essences, which are also good. However, Gotsangpa exhorted people that following the teacher with complete trust is of ultimate importance.

Having said that, I want to remind you of something: without practicing Guru Yoga, it is very likely that you will encounter problems if you constantly meditate on channels, energies, and essences. This is because, without the blessing power of Guru Yoga, your practice of channels, energies, and essences may deviate, resulting in mental derangement and disturbing hallucinations.

As for Guru Yoga, eminent masters of the past have all stated that it is the safest practice. Generally speaking, we will not encounter any demonic obstacles or adversities if we meditate on the guru, nor will we practice incorrectly. Even if one is not skilled at visualizing, it is still extremely beneficial to make an approximate visualization of one's root guru.

Of course, the guru you meditate on should possess great qualities, which should not be based on your clinging or intuition. Previously, I suggested you meditate on the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, but someone mentioned that Rinpoche was not a master from their lineage, so they chose to meditate on their own guru, which I think is also acceptable.

As I mentioned earlier, some individuals have altered the scriptural evidence in my Tibetan-to-Chinese translation of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* and created different versions of their own "translations." They also modified the section on "lineage teachers." I understand why they do this. Although all lineages stem from the Buddha's doctrine of transmission and realization, a disciple is often more attached to their own lineage masters. Therefore, it is also good if you meditate on your own guru.

Nevertheless, I want to make it clear: the guru you meditate on must possess great qualities. You cannot choose a guru based solely on your clinging or a hunch. Some female Buddhists tend to rely on a hunch, saying, "I feel this guru is good; I feel this guru is lovable; I feel a special connection with this guru... so he is my root guru!" In fact, it is not advisable to rely on feelings alone in finding a guru.

A guru who guides you to liberation should possess certain qualifications. In other words, you should only rely on and meditate upon a guru who possesses certain qualities. If you cannot find such a guru, you may choose a well-recognized great master and practice their Guru Yoga. As mentioned earlier, meditation on

the guru surpasses all practices of the generation and perfection stages and is the most profound of all paths.

Maitripa was a great practitioner of Tibetan Buddhism. He once said, “It is said that Avalokiteshvara is white; then let him be white. It is said that Tara is green; then let her be green. It is said that Hevajra is black; then let him be black. In any case, my guru has never parted from my mind, so I am probably not far from attaining Buddhahood.” He had been meditating on the guru day and night and eventually attained accomplishments.

Actually, we can all practice in this way. If the practice goes well, we can regard all deities as the guru: no matter which deity practice we are doing, it is the guru who grants us empowerment, accomplishments, and all the Dharma. From this perspective, the kindness of our root guru indeed surpasses that of the Buddha.

Someone may argue, “This does not make any sense. How can one’s kindness surpass that of the Buddha?”

In fact, a mundane example can be used to answer this question. For instance, your worldly knowledge comes from your parents and schoolteachers; without their guidance, you might not aspire to life goals beyond those of animals. Without them, you might not seek to understand the meaning and value of life. To you, their kindness surpasses that of anyone in the secular world.

Likewise, now that you are in pursuit of Dharma, if it were not for your guru, who guides you bit by bit and leads you onto the path of liberation, you would hardly know anything of transcendent wisdom, let alone practice the Dharma and attain liberation.

Therefore, when we carefully reflect on the trajectory of our spiritual growth and all the corresponding causes and conditions, we’ll understand the statement, “The guru’s qualities are equal to the Buddha’s, and the guru’s kindness exceeds the Buddha’s,” holds significant meaning rather than being mere empty words.

- ◉ Without guru devotion, one receives no blessings

Drikung Kyobpa Rinpoche said:

If the sun of devotion has not risen
On the snow mountain of the guru’s four kayas,
The stream of their blessings will not flow.

Therefore, one should diligently cultivate faith and devotion.

This means the guru is the union of the four kayas: Nirmanakaya, Sambhogakaya, Dharmakaya, and Svabhavikakaya. This union is like a snow mountain, and a disciple's guru devotion is like the sun. If the sun does not rise and shine upon the mountain, the snow will not melt, and no water will drip down. Likewise, if the disciple has neither true guru devotion nor pure faith, they cannot experience the stream of the guru's blessings flowing into their mind. Therefore, a Mahayanist must first strengthen their devotion to and faith in the guru.

This guru devotion is actually a state of inner humility and tenderness, which is beyond the reach of an arrogant person. Some people say, "I am a proud person. I do not want to respect anyone. I don't like anyone." If you do not like anyone, you will not receive any blessings from teachers or the Dharma, no matter how powerful their blessings are.

Some individuals show respect to certain renowned Dharma teachers while disregarding others, including those who have taught them the Dharma. They may show a little respect only when listening to these teachers' instructions but disregard them in everyday life.

This behavior is quite wrong and indicates a need for improvement in their character. As the Chinese saying goes:

Even if someone is your teacher for only a day,
You should regard him like your father for the rest of your life.

Regardless of who has provided you with Dharma teachings, you should always show respect to your teacher; by doing so, blessings will naturally flow into your mind.

Once you have received the guru's blessings, practicing the Dharma will not be too difficult, and all adversities will vanish naturally. Therefore, a practitioner must respect and pray to the guru.

Once you have received the blessings of the guru, you will notice not only an improvement in your practice but also a positive shift in your daily mood and mindset. For instance, many who regularly recite the Guru Yoga prayer and the guru's mantra have experienced a power that can calm their minds. When I feel disturbed or uneasy, I take a break from my tasks, make an incense offering,

recite my daily prayers, and pray to the guru. This practice helps the disturbances gradually fade away, allowing my mind to rest in a state aligned with the Dharma.

- ◉ Without praying to the guru, primal wisdom cannot dawn

Jetsün Rangrik Repa says:

If one does not pray to the guru,
Seeking the dawn of primal wisdom
Is like waiting for sunshine in a cave facing north,
For appearances and mind will never merge.

Without praying to the guru with fervent trust, it is impossible to unveil primal wisdom and obtain great qualities and accomplishments. It is similar to the way that no sunshine can reach a north-facing cave throughout the day, from sunrise to sunset. Likewise, a disciple who lacks guru devotion and does not pray to the guru can never attain the state of realization in which appearances and mind merge. This holds true regardless of how well-versed the disciple is in Sutrayana and Vajrayana teachings, including the five great treatises and the ten sciences.⁸

In fact, this state of realization is the ultimate goal sought in both Sutrayana and Vajrayana. When appearances and mind merge, everything, such as mountains and rivers, becomes the creativity of awareness and the projection of the enlightened mind.

The Supplement to the Serial of the Biography of Eminent Monks talks about a Chan Master named Xiaoshou from the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms Period, whose birth name was Hong Shou. He and Master Yongming Yanshou were Dharma brothers. Thus, to distinguish him from his senior Dharma brother, people referred to him as Master Xiaoshou.

Many Chan masters attained enlightenment out of small incidents, and Master Xiaoshou was no exception. Once, when he heard pieces of firewood falling on the ground, he experienced a sudden realization on the spot.

After attaining enlightenment, he composed a poem that says:

What falls is not something else,

⁸ The ten sciences (Tib. རིག་གནས་བརྒྱུ་), or fields of knowledge, include the five major sciences: craftsmanship, logic, grammar, medicine, and 'inner science' or Dharma, as well as the five minor sciences: synonyms, mathematics and astrology, performance and drama, poetry, and composition.

What overruns is not the dust;
Mountains, rivers, and the earth,
Are all displays of the Dharmakaya.

His master Deshao, the Master of the Empire, verified his enlightenment.

Of course, before attaining the realization that appearances and mind merge into one, praying to the guru is indispensable. Also, we must see the guru as a true buddha while praying.

Some practitioners in Chinese Buddhism are a bit confused, saying, “Where did the ‘fourfold refuge’⁹ come from? Does seeing the guru as the Buddha only exist in Vajrayana?”

Actually, it does not only exist in Vajrayana. Recently, I have been reading *Māyājālamahātantra*, a supreme scripture translated into Chinese by Dharmadeva during the Song dynasty, the content of which is consistent with that in other tantras such as the *Guhyagarbha Tantra*. The text is about the teaching that Mahavairocana gave to Akshobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amitayus, Amoghasiddhi, and other innumerable bodhisattvas. As said in the text, the Buddha said:

Noble men, please listen to me. About this acharya: All buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions come to visit the acharya at the three times of the day and make great offerings to him in the same way they do to the Buddha.

The infinite merit accumulated by all buddhas through three kinds of actions is equivalent to the merit of this acharya’s one hair pore.

This vajra acharya is equal to all the buddhas.

This teaching is worth reflecting on. If you believe there is a difference between the guru and the Buddha, you may consult the Chinese version of such scripture. By doing so, you will be convinced that the teacher, especially the one who bestows empowerment or teachings, is indeed indivisible from all buddhas of the ten directions. It is a different matter if you do not accept the Buddhist scripture. If you do accept it, you will realize that “seeing the teacher as the Buddha” exists in both Tibetan Buddhism and Chinese Buddhism.

⁹ One takes refuge in the Guru, the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.

You will find the outline of *Māyājālamahātantra*, in Ouyi Zhixu's *Tripitaka Reading Guide*. If you do not have the time to read the whole text, you may refer to its outline.

In addition, the *Flower Ornament Sutra* says:

The teacher is the Tathagata,
The teacher is the Dharma cloud,
The teacher is the treasure of all great qualities.

♦ **Guru devotion brings realization of the uncontrived natural state**

In short, the guru is the union of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. The realization of the uncontrived natural state can only arise within us through our practice of Guru Yoga with fervent trust and devotion. Apart from this, there is no other method that can bring about such realization.

Of course, hearing and contemplation are also important. You are currently studying the five great treatises—Vinaya (precepts), Abhidharma (superior knowledge of phenomena), Pramāṇavartika (valid cognition), Madhyamaka (the middle way), and Prajñāparamita (the perfection of wisdom), which I have always found fascinating. Yesterday, some Dharma fellows had their oral exams, during which they delivered great presentations! It is very meaningful to engage in hearing and contemplation in this way.

However, some of you who are not steady in mind often change your topic of study whenever you struggle to keep up with the teachings. This is not good.

Starting tomorrow, no one is allowed to change their enrolled course! Even if you do not understand a word, you must stick to the topic of study for a year. Otherwise, some of you may constantly change the enrolled course: today you study Pramāṇavartika, tomorrow Abhidharma, and the day after tomorrow Vinaya. Sampling back and forth among all the topics will not be beneficial, as you will end up learning very little. In contrast, if you persevere in studying the topic with trust and appreciation in your mind, you will gradually come to understand the teachings.

It is essential for a Buddhist to engage in the intellectual study of the Dharma, as this can help establish a comprehensive understanding of the Buddha's teachings.

Especially if you grasp the more profound teachings found in Abhidharma, Pramanavartika, or Madhyamaka, you will find it easier to comprehend the less profound teachings.

Take *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* for example. When I first studied it, I found many scriptural citations in the text hard to understand. But after having studied *Treasury of Abhidharma*, I no longer had any problem understanding them. Also, after having studied the *Treasury of Cognition and Reasoning*, *The Sword of Wisdom* was easier for me to understand.

Therefore, sangha members at Larung Gar, please do not change your topic of study as soon as you encounter difficulties with the teachings. Isn't it true that there are parts hard to understand even when you study *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*?

Of course, while studying the five great treatises, you should still practice Guru Yoga, recite prayers, make prostrations, and accumulate merit. Otherwise, if you only gain an intellectual understanding of the teachings, you will be merely a scholar and not a practitioner. As you probably know, many postdoctoral researchers and doctoral supervisors of Buddhist Studies at universities are articulate in presenting the Dharma, but they have never developed faith in the Three Jewels.

Therefore, those of you who study the five great treatises can be considered Buddhist “scholars,” but your most important role should still be as a Buddhist “practitioner.” As a practitioner, you should pursue the realization of the uncontrived natural state. To achieve this, practicing Guru Yoga is crucial. The following are several cases of great achievers that explain how guru devotion leads to realization.

◉ Naropa's story

Naropa was a pandita well-versed in the teachings of all three vehicles and capable of defeating all the tirthikas in debates. Thus, he was appointed as the pandita guardian of the northern gate at Vikramasila.¹⁰ One day, while Naropa was reading the texts of the five great treatises in a secluded place, an old woman with thirty-seven unattractive features, including her ugly hair, eyes, nose, ears, and more, appeared.

She asked Naropa, “What are you studying?”

¹⁰ One of the three great monastic universities of Buddhist India, the others being Nalanda and Odantapuri.

Naropa answered, “I am studying *Pramanavartika* (valid cognition) and other *Sutrayana* teachings.”

“Do you understand them?”

“I understand the words.”

Upon hearing this, the old woman was overjoyed and started to dance. Naropa thought, “She is happy when I said I understood the words. If I tell her I also understand the meaning, she must be even more delighted!” So Naropa added, “I understand not only the words but also the meaning.”

Hearing this, the old woman was no longer happy. She started shivering and crying out loud.

Confused, Naropa asked her, “How is it that you laugh happily when I say I understand the words, but cry aloud when I say I also grasp the meaning?”

The old woman said, “Dear pandita, you are honest when saying you understand the words, so I am happy. But you are lying when saying you grasp the meaning, so I am very sad.”

Naropa was very embarrassed and asked her, “Who can truly grasp the meaning?”

She answered, “My brother can. You should go and follow him.”

Then, the old woman vanished. It turned out she was the manifestation of a dakini.

[From now on, whenever you encounter a weird or unattractive person, you must pay attention! Perhaps they are a manifestation of a buddha or a bodhisattva. When I visit a place and see a beggar, especially a severely handicapped one, I always pay extra attention to them, wondering, “Is this person a Vajrayogini? Or perhaps a manifestation of Manjushri?” Therefore, I will make an offering to them regardless.

In 1987, when the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche took us to Mount Wutai, he told us, “Manjushri is ever-changing. When you see a beggar or a weird person, please pay extra attention.” Since that time, each of us has done so accordingly.

Once, I encountered a very unattractive person with messy hair who was kneeling on the ground and kept looking down. In that moment, I thought, “Is this person a manifestation of a buddha or a bodhisattva?”]

Following the dakini’s guidance, Naropa followed Tilopa and underwent a

series of trials. Then, one day, Tilopa exclaimed, “Despite all the teachings I have given you, you still haven’t grasped it!” With that, Tilopa struck Naropa’s forehead forcefully with the sole of his shoe. In that moment, Naropa immediately realized the natural state, and his wisdom became identical with Tilopa’s. The blessing Naropa received from Tilopa was akin to all the nectar from a full vessel being poured into another.

This is clearly the act of a truly accomplished guru. Some disciples, eager to attain realization quickly, may request, “Dear guru, please strike me on the forehead with your shoe, just as Tilopa did to Naropa.” However, if a guru who is not a great achiever believes they are no different from Tilopa and grants their blessing by hitting a disciple with a shoe or a stick, it may lack any real significance.

Marpa once told Milarepa, “There are very few teachers like me who are great achievers; there are also very few disciples like you who have pure perception. Therefore, when you guide disciples in the future, please do not adopt my methods. You should guide them with ordinary means, such as giving them teachings, which are more reliable.”

◉ The story of Nagabodhi

According to the brief biography of Nagarjuna, Nagabodhi was one of his four main disciples and attained the rainbow body. Some also state that Nagabodhi achieved supreme accomplishment with the help of a specific pith instruction from his guru, Nagarjuna. It is further said that he attained supreme accomplishment by snatching up and consuming a piece of mucus dropped by Nagarjuna.

Of course, an ordinary teacher hardly possesses the same blessing power as Nagarjuna, and an ordinary disciple hardly has the same guru devotion as Nagabodhi. That said, when we follow a teacher, we should maintain proper conduct and obey the instructions of our lineage masters. For some disciples, it is sufficient to maintain pure perception and refrain from speaking negatively about the teacher.

Not bad-mouthing the teacher is a very important quality of a disciple. In his *Commentary on The Fifty Verses of Guru Devotion*, Lama Tsongkhapa quoted scriptural evidence from Vinaya texts to explain that if the teacher has faults, such as teaching something that is not in accord with the Dharma, one may point it out in a proper manner. However, as the *Sutra of Skillful Veneration* says:

One must not criticize when the teacher has made an error,
Let alone when the teacher has made no error at all.

Therefore, we must not speak ill of a teacher at any time. However, some individuals like to make a fuss, saying, “The teacher did wrong on this and that...” In fact, this is a big fault for the disciples.

This scriptural evidence is very inspiring, so I hope you will read the *Sutra of Skillful Veneration*, which was translated into Chinese by the Indian translator Jnanagupta during the Sui dynasty. *Māyājālamahātāntra*, which was mentioned earlier, was translated by Dharmadeva in the Song dynasty. All these scriptures are from the Chinese Tripitaka. After reading them, you will understand that Tibetan Buddhism and Chinese Buddhism share the same views about following the teacher.

Speaking of the Tripitaka, I believe it is worthwhile to read. Last year, during a talk in the city of Haikou, I advocated for reading the Tripitaka. In my opinion, it is a great pity if we have come to this world and followed the Dharma path but know nothing about the Tripitaka. I would like to finish reading the Tripitaka in my lifetime, but it is uncertain whether I can achieve that. Anyway, my talk was transcribed, and the text was compiled in my work titled *The Dream-like Buddhist Matters*, which you can read if you are interested.

In short, as a Buddhist, you should have a proper understanding of the basic doctrines of Buddhism. This understanding should, of course, be based on reliable sources. For example, the verse I just quoted is very convincing and serves as an important guideline for disciples to follow.

Those who do not understand this and constantly find faults in the teacher will encounter difficulties and obstacles in their practice and realization. Those who do understand will not only discipline themselves accordingly but will also cultivate gratitude and pure faith in the teacher, as Nagabodhi did. In doing so, they will surely attain accomplishments.

Nagabodhi was a great achiever. When the fourth Panchen Lama (1570-1662) was consecrating the Reconciliation Stupa at Tashilhunpo Monastery, Nagabodhi and Chökyi Dorje appeared in a vision on top of the stupa and offered consecration. There is a historical account about this.

◉ The story of Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa

Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa says:

After studying the writings of the second Buddha, Longchenpa, I realized that he was truly a buddha. Filled with fervent devotion, I prayed to him wholeheartedly. His wisdom body then appeared to me in a vision and accepted me. As a result, primordial wisdom dawned within me. From that moment on, I began guiding over a hundred disciples. Among them, the diligent ones attained transcendent meditative states, while the wise ones avoided straying into the mistaken path of conceptual analysis. They all came to understand that the realization of absolute truth is entirely dependent on unwavering devotion and fervent trust in the guru.

Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa began to practice great compassion when he was still very young. He said, “I have dedicated seven years to the practice of great compassion. With this merit, my lineage and works can surely benefit innumerable beings.” Later, he completed a three-year retreat at Chimpu, during which he read *The Seven Treasuries* and *The Four Parts of the Heart Essence* while praying to the Omniscient Longchenpa, who appeared to Jigme Lingpa three times in a vision and bestowed upon him the blessings of body, speech, and mind.

When the cause and condition to give terma teachings had ripened, Jigme Lingpa accepted many students and vastly offered tantric instructions. His Dharma lineage is called Longchen Nyingtik, or the Heart-Essence of the Vast Expanse. In other words, it was Jigme Lingpa who initiated the lineage of Longchen Nyingtik.

Jigme Lingpa (1730–1798) lived several hundred years after Longchenpa (1308–1364), so he was accepted by Longchenpa not in person but in a vision. This happened because he saw Longchenpa as a true buddha through reading his writings and fervently prayed to him.

I think many people must have experienced reading the work of a past great master and feeling as if they are meeting the master in person. I, too, have had this experience. Writings composed a few hundred or even a thousand years ago can inspire me immensely, and sometimes I say to myself, “This great master was truly a Buddha! His wisdom and compassion are unparalleled!” Then, I often pray to him.

According to some Kagyu masters, such a great past master can be regarded as

your root guru. For example, I never met Nagarjuna because we are separated by a few centuries, but each time I read *The Root Stanzas of the Middle Way*, fervent faith arises within me. Therefore, I consider myself a disciple of Nagarjuna, whose kindness in imparting me the teaching is no different from that of my gurus who teach me in person.

Similarly, in this information age, some teachers provide teachings online, which has greatly benefited you. Even if you may not meet or follow such a teacher in person, you can still consider the teacher your root guru.

What I just said is based on the teachings in *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. As I have mentioned again and again, this text provides the best practical instructions, and each story, scriptural evidence, and phrase is composed of vajra words, which have outer, inner, and secret meanings. Therefore, you must internalize the text and put it into real practice accordingly.

◉ The story of Pang Miphan Gönpö

In *The Life Story of Padmasambhava*, it is mentioned that during his exile in Gyalmo Tsawarong, the renowned translator Vairotsana taught the elderly Pang Miphan Gönpö how to take the teacher's blessings as the path.

Vairotsana had been in exile for many years, and later, when he was on his way back to Tibet with Yudra Nyingpo, they met an old man and stayed overnight in his house. It was said that Pang Miphan Gönpö was over one hundred years old at that time, though some claimed he was around eighty years old. In either case, he was undeniably a very old man.

Pang Miphan Gönpö said, "May I ask where you two are coming from, and where you are going?"

Yudra Nyingpo said, "We are from Gyalmo Tsawarong. We are going to Tibet."

The old man said, "You must have made a mistake. Since you are from Gyalmo Tsawarong, you should know that a great master named Vairotsana lives there, who is no different from a true Buddha. It would be a great pity if you do not request teachings from him. By receiving teachings from him, you can attain accomplishment in your practice. Although I have immense faith in him, I am too old to go and visit him. I definitely cannot meet him in person in this lifetime."

At that moment, Vairotsana said, "I am Vairotsana."

Greatly shocked, the old man looked at him carefully, then immediately hugged him in tears, asking Vairotsana for teachings.

Thus, Vairotsana tied a meditation band around Mipham Gönpö's body so that he could remain upright during meditation. He then imparted the teaching on the practice of Guru Yoga. As a result, Mipham Gönpö swiftly attained realization of the primordial purity of trekchö without error. Later, his body dissolved into infinitesimal particles, a sign that he had attained Buddhahood.¹¹ His lineage disciples of the following seven generations have all attained the rainbow body, which is recorded in *Short Stories of Rainbow Body Accomplishers in Mantrayana* that I compiled. Of course, his disciples' accomplishments also relied on their guru devotion.

It is said that Mipham Gönpö met Vairotsana near a sacred mountain in Dawu County, where I went on a pilgrimage in the past. It is also said they met somewhere in Drago County, and so on. There are many different accounts about the place, and I do not know exactly where they met.

Nevertheless, Pang Mipham Gönpö achieved his realization through his practice of Guru Yoga. Therefore, regardless of your age, as long as you have faith, it is not difficult to attain realization through the practice of Guru Yoga.

♦ **Guru Yoga is the ultimate key point of all main practices**

From the above stories, it is evident that all attainments are achieved through the practice of Guru Yoga. Thus, among all the paths of the nine vehicles, there is no better or more supreme practice than Guru Yoga. Although it is referred to as a "preliminary practice," in truth, it is the ultimate key point of all main practices.

Geshe Chengawa said:

The core of the body is the heart;
Without the heart, the body is simply a pile of flesh and blood.
Likewise, the heart of Dharma practice is Guru Yoga;
Without Guru Yoga, all instructions are nothing but words on
paper.

Therefore, in our practice, we must emphasize the importance of Guru Yoga. What we are practicing now is the Guru Yoga of the great Jigme Phuntsok

¹¹ This is a form of the phenomenon known as the rainbow body.

Rinpoche. On one hand, the liturgy is concise and brief, not as extensive as others, making it easy to put into practice. On the other hand, it is a precious opportunity to have encountered such a great lineage guru, so I hope you will cherish it.

Of course, if you have another reliable teacher with a pure lineage, you may practice his Guru Yoga. Regardless, if you want to become a true practitioner, you should practice Guru Yoga every day without interruption.

These days, many of you are overwhelmed by work, burdened by afflictive emotions, and find it difficult to practice the Dharma. Sometimes, when you are in a bad mood, you may not want to read Dharma books, recite prayers, or chant mantras for days on end.

These difficulties may also stem from the afflictive habitual tendencies of previous lives. You might feel deluded, show little interest in virtuous deeds, and simply rest mindlessly. During such times, you should pray to the guru, whether in the morning, evening, while walking, or during work. By doing so, the guru's blessing will naturally merge into your mind, just as the image of the moon is naturally reflected on the surface of the water.

The guru is ubiquitous. To receive the guru's blessing, the key lies in our guru devotion. If we can always make Guru Yoga the heart of our practice in all circumstances, it alone is sufficient, even if we engage in no other practices. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that we dedicate ourselves to the practice of Guru Yoga wholeheartedly.

Tsangpa Gyare (1161-1211) said:

As long as you always remember the guru,
It's fine if you neither recite prayers nor meditate.

Of course, this does not mean that everyone can practice in this way. If it were so, Patrul Rinpoche would not need to discuss the preliminary practices in the text. The emphasis on Guru Yoga here serves to illustrate its importance as a crucial practice, rather than to suggest it can replace all other practices. Therefore, it is essential to properly interpret and analyze the words of Tsangpa Gyare. A truly wise person will not take any teaching out of context, including the most essential teachings, nor will they use a teaching as evidence to refute all other teachings simply because they prefer it. As stated in *The Ornament of the Mahayana Sutras*,

only the wise can grasp the hidden intentions of the Buddha and the lineage masters.

Thus, it is not true for everyone that the practice of Guru Yoga alone is sufficient to replace all other practices.

Nevertheless, we must understand that Guru Yoga is of the utmost importance among all practices. It may be referred to as a preliminary practice, but in fact, it is the ultimate key point of all main practices. Therefore, it is extremely important to devote ourselves wholeheartedly to the practice of Guru Yoga.



Lesson 128

“For the actual practice of this profound path of Guru Yoga ... becoming one with them like water poured into water.” [page 313–317]

We have already studied the section on “The Reason for Guru Yoga.” Let us proceed to the section on “How to Practice Guru Yoga.”

Many people emphasize the importance of receiving instructions on how to visualize, contemplate, and meditate in practical applications, but only a few can maintain these practices over the long term. The same holds true for listening and contemplation. Take the study of the five great treatises, for example: at the beginning, many individuals seem highly motivated and eager to study well, but when past karmic forces and present afflictive emotions arise, they lose their motivation and give up halfway. This is the most significant obstacle for an ordinary person’s practice: a lack of mental resilience.

To cultivate a strong mind, I believe that praying to the guru and the Three Jewels often, as well as making regular offerings to the Dharma protectors, is the most essential and effective means. Therefore, when you make offerings to the Dharma protectors, whether individually or in a group setting, you should pray for their blessings with a focused mind. You should also frequently recite the Padmasambhava mantra and prayers for dispelling adversities. Additionally, it is important to aspire for your practice to succeed from start to finish. When the blessings merge with you, everything—whether your Dharma study or your practice—will proceed smoothly and successfully from beginning to end.

♦ Be a Dharma professional

Speaking of the Five Great Treatises, it is still essential to study them. Generally speaking, many Buddhists don't delve deeply into the Dharma. They are content with studying texts like *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* and the *Aspiration to Be Reborn in the Pure Realm of Sukhavati* and enjoy Buddhist stories. However, regarding the Five Great Treatises, except for a few individuals, most Buddhists show little interest in studying them.

It can be said that sixty to seventy percent of Buddhists still focus primarily on seeking benefits for this life and engaging in simple recitations. Consequently, the overall level of learning and contemplation within the Buddhist community is not satisfactory.

Buddhists outside our academy may study something simple, but should we here at Larung Gar do the same? Absolutely not. By studying the Five Great Treatises, you can assimilate the profound teachings of Buddhism. As professional Buddhists, you shouldn't limit yourselves to a superficial understanding of the Dharma; you should also grasp the subtleties of the Buddha's teachings.

Therefore, it is essential to study subjects in greater depth, such as the five great treatises. Of course, young Buddhists living outside Larung Gar shouldn't fall behind; they should also strive to become professional Buddhists.

People today prefer to read something simple and easy. In the course of introducing the Dharma through a blog and microblog, I have found that when it comes to deeper content, few viewers engage with those posts. Even if they read them, few truly understand them. In this ever-changing society, most people seem to be interested only in texts similar to *Chicken Soup for the Soul*. This is the reality we all face today.

Nevertheless, professional Buddhists shouldn't limit themselves to studying only simple and easy subjects. With the blessings of the guru and the Three Jewels, you now have the opportunity to study the Dharma; please seize this chance to cultivate wisdom, reinforce and strengthen your faith, renunciation, bodhicitta, and other qualities, bringing them closer to fruition.

♦ The long-term study of the Dharma

Of course, this requires long-term, systematic listening and contemplation.

Any Sutrayana and Vajrayana practice, including Guru Yoga, has two

approaches to enlightenment: one based on scholarly study and the other on meditative practice. Each approach has its own comprehensive system. To assimilate them, it is essential for you to undertake continuous study in this lifetime.

Many sangha members at Larung Gar have always been interested in hearing the Dharma. While you were chanting prayers before the start of today's teaching, I looked around and recognized some sangha members, both male and female, who enjoyed hearing the Dharma ten years ago and continue to do so today. Although they are not in an advanced cohort designated for debating and presenting the Dharma, I can see that their joyful attitude toward listening is genuine and very stable, which brings me great joy and happiness.

Maintaining a long-term, joyful attitude toward studying the Dharma is vital. You shouldn't treat hearing the Dharma the same way as watching a film or a show, which you do occasionally when you're in the mood. For Buddhists, it is crucial to sustain your practice by recharging yourself through daily study of the true Dharma.

2.2.5.2. How to Practice Guru Yoga

The Guru Yoga practice has three stages: visualizing the field of merit, offering the seven branches, and praying with resolute trust.

2.2.5.2.1. Visualizing the Field of Merit

In different practices, the field of merit you visualize may vary. In the practice of taking refuge, you visualize the refuge deities; in the practice of meditating and recitation on Vajrasattva, you visualize Vajrasattva; in the practice of Guru Yoga, the field of merit you visualize is Padmasambhava and his vast realm.

Actually, visualizing the Buddha-field depends on the strength of your mind. Those who lack mental strength cannot visualize well, nor can they engage in Dharma activities or study the Dharma effectively. In short, they may struggle in any virtuous endeavor. Therefore, practitioners must work to increase their mental strength.

♦ Visualizing everything as the Palace of Lotus Light

Transforming your perception of the world requires a strong and open mind. Begin by visualizing everything, as far as you can see, as the Palace of Lotus Light,

the sacred abode of Padmasambhava, adorned with every perfect feature and radiating light that illuminates all directions.

The depiction of the Palace of Lotus Light can be found in many monasteries and thangkas. Its splendor was described in the *Autobiography of Traktung Dudjom Lingpa*,¹² and Dorje Dechen Lingpa's *Ocean of Wonders: A Pure Vision of Traveling the Glorious Mountains*.

When practicing Guru Yoga, visualize yourself in such a palace. Although you may currently be living in a cabin, a concrete house, or any other ordinary accommodation in this conventional world, you should not perceive it that way during practice. As long as your mind is strong and open, strive to visualize everything around you as the Palace of Lotus Light, pure and majestic, just as those who recite the name of Amitabha visualize the Land of Great Bliss.

♦ Visualizing yourself

- ◉ Visualize yourself as having the nature of the dakini Yeshe Tsogyal

Visualize yourself at the center of the Palace of Lotus Light and think of yourself as having the nature of the dakini Yeshe Tsogyal.

Why think of yourself as having the nature of the dakini Yeshe Tsogyal? There are three reasons:

First, this will ensure that you are a suitable vessel for receiving empowerments. When Padmasambhava imparted the highest tantric teachings, such as *Lama Yangtik (The Innermost Heart Drop of the Guru)*, the primary recipients were Yeshe Tsogyal and other qualified and fortunate disciples.

Second, this will awaken the primal wisdom of bliss and emptiness. According to the meaning of tantric empowerment, when you visualize yourself as the dakini consort and your root guru as Padmasambhava, this can spontaneously give rise to the extraordinary primal wisdom of bliss and emptiness.

Third, this will establish an interdependent link, allowing the guru to take the disciple under their care with delight. Among all of Padmasambhava's disciples, Yeshe Tsogyal, Nanam Dorje Dudjom, and other main disciples were regarded by

¹² Traktung Dudjom Lingpa, *A Clear Mirror: The Visionary Autobiography of a Tibetan Master*, translated by Chonyi Drolma, Rangjung Yeshe Publications, 2012.

Padmasambhava as his heart disciples. Therefore, such visualization would please the guru and encourage them to accept you as their disciple.

Due to these three supreme interdependent links, when practicing Guru Yoga, you should think of yourself as having the nature of the dakini Yeshe Tsogyal.

◉ Visualize yourself as Vajrayogini in form

In form, however, you should visualize yourself as Vajrayogini, with a radiant red body, one face, two arms, and three eyes, gazing longingly at the heart of the guru. The word “longingly” conveys the joyful and eager demeanor of seeing the guru, filled with immense joy, faith, and devotion. Many people naturally feel this way when they first encounter their guru, overflowing with joy and reverence.



Vajrayogini Next, visualize Vajrayogini as follows: she raises a small skull drum in her right hand, its sound awakening beings from the slumber of ignorance and confusion. In her left hand, resting on her hip, she holds a curved knife that severs the root of the three poisons. She is naked, adorned only with six bone ornaments and garlands of flowers. She appears visible yet insubstantial, like a rainbow in the sky.

This is the visualization for practicing the Longchen Nyingtik Guru Yoga. The Guru Yoga practice in *Illuminating the Path to Liberation* by Mipham Rinpoche also requires you to visualize yourself in the form of Vajrayogini. Regardless of whether you are male or female, visualize yourself as Vajrayogini.

- ♦ The main deity is Padmasambhava, the lotus-born



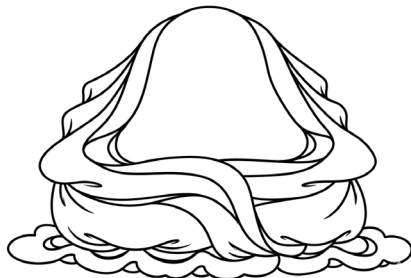
GURU RINPOCHE PADMASAMBHAVA

Next, visualize in the space about one arrow's length (or one elbow's length) above the head of Vajrayogini, there is a lotus seat with a hundred thousand petals, adorned with many exquisite and precious jewels. Upon the lotus seat is a sun disc, and atop it, a moon disc. Seated on this radiant throne is your revered root teacher—the one you trust and hold in the highest regard—an unparalleled treasure of compassion and the embodiment of all buddhas of the past, present, and future, appearing in the form of Guru Rinpoche, Padmasambhava.

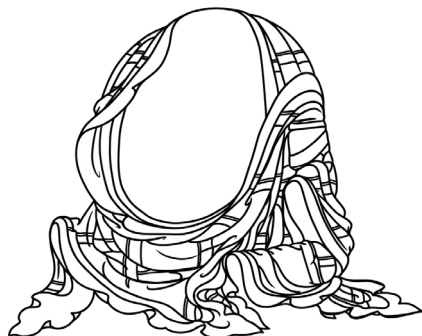
In other Guru Yoga practices, such as that of the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, you should directly visualize your root teacher in his own form. However, in this Longchen Nyintik practice of Guru Yoga, you visualize your root teacher, the embodiment of the Buddhas of the past, present, and future, in the form of Padmasambhava.

◉ Padmasambhava's apparel

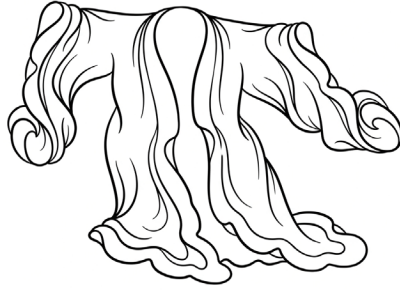
Padmasambhava has a white complexion with a hint of red. He has one face, two arms, and two legs. Seated in the royal posture, he wears a brocade cape, a monk's robe, and a long-sleeved blue gown.



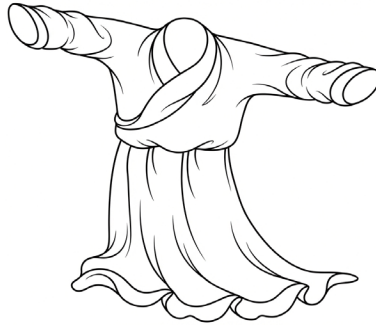
His brocade cape was offered by Arsadhara, King of Zahor. The cape symbolizes his kind guidance of worldly kings, humans, non-humans, and others.



His monk's robe symbolizes his untainted prātimoksa, or personal liberation vows. Some individuals violate these vows after entering the tantric path. As for Padmasambhava, although he appeared as a householder, his vows of personal liberation remained pure and untainted.



The long-sleeved blue gown symbolizes that his tantric samayas are pure and untainted.



Other liturgies mention his undergown, which symbolizes the perfection of his bodhisattva vows.

Those who hold incorrect views believe that Padmasambhava's attire is overly elaborate. Many people also fail to understand the symbolic meaning of the attire for Dharma protectors, wrathful deities, and even bodhisattvas in Chinese Buddhism.

In fact, what they wear carries specific meanings. As you should know, any form taken by a buddha or a bodhisattva is a manifestation for the benefit of sentient beings and does not align with an ordinary person's perception.

Whatever an ordinary person wears, be it white or red, is self-centered and subject to their preference or modeling. In contrast, the attire of a sublime being

carries profound symbolic meaning. Therefore, those who lack study or research in Buddhism should not misunderstand or misinterpret the meaning of the attire.

Not to mention the attire of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, even the garments of ancient kings should not be carelessly denigrated. Each piece of clothing found in ancient plays or historical images carries specific symbolic meaning. Therefore, we shouldn't dismiss the apparel simply because it doesn't align with today's dress code. Instead, we should adopt a pure perception and strive to understand its embedded meaning. Once we grasp this, we will avoid forming incorrect interpretations.

When I was translating *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, I asked a visual artist to illustrate Padmasambhava's apparel and provide the corresponding descriptions. At that time, I consulted several artists about certain aspects of the apparel that were difficult to discern. I also consulted the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche in person regarding matters with differing opinions. Consequently, the illustrations and descriptions of the apparel have been rendered in a complete, clear, and accurate manner.

◉ Padmasambhava's hat

In your visualization, Padmasambhava wears a lotus hat. There are three different hats associated with him.

1) The Lotus-bud Hat. Padmasambhava was neither conceived by a father nor born from a mother. Instead, he was born in the southwest (in today's Afghanistan) on the Lake of Milk, emerging from the heart of a lotus—a spontaneous birth of awareness, the profound realization that all phenomena arise from the primordial ground. King Indrabhuti, while gathering precious gems from the sea, saw the young child in the lotus, brought him back to his kingdom, and crowned him as prince. The hat that the dakinis offered Padmasambhava at that time, to crown him as the lord of their family, is called the *Lotus-bud*.

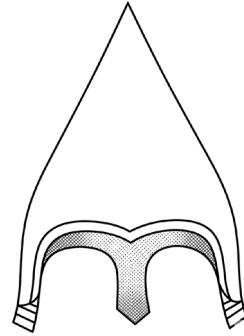


2) The Deerskin Hat. Later, when Padmasambhava practiced extraordinary activity¹³ in the Eight Great Charnel Grounds and transcended all notions of

¹³ The unconventional lifestyle adopted by the most advanced practitioners as a means of

good and bad actions, the dakinis offered him the *Deerskin Hat*¹⁴ as a symbol of his greatness.

Regarding the illustration of the Deerskin Hat, I consulted several experts as well as Gendün Chöphel's travelogue *Journey to Countries*, but received varying opinions. Many Khenpos and Dharma masters also do not know what the hat looks like, as it is quite rare to see one these days. Later, I asked the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche and drew the Deerskin Hat based on his description, which is what you see here.



3) The hat called The Lotus which Liberates on Sight. This hat was a gift to Padmasambhava from Arsadhara, the King of Zahor. After attempting to burn Padmasambhava alive, the king was astonished to find his vajra body unharmed, seated naked and completely unscathed in the center of a miraculous lotus, cool and radiant. Overwhelmed by wonder and moved by newfound faith, the king commanded, “Open my store of silken garments and bring me all the hats and robes.”



At that moment, the king offered this hat, along with all his other belongings, as well as his retinue, kingdom, and subjects. The hat is known as *The Lotus which Liberates on Sight*, or alternatively, *The Petaled Hat of the Five Families*.

The great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche often wore a hat like this when bestowing empowerments. Many esteemed masters in India and the Tibetan regions also wear similar hats. This is “The Lotus Hat that Liberates on Sight,” with “Liberates on Sight” meaning that whoever sees this hat will plant the seed of liberation in their mind, making this hat a symbol of great merit and virtue. You may examine the hat of this type that I bring to class. It features five colors, a vajra on the top, as

perfecting their confidence in the view. “Having transcended ordinary activities, engaging in extraordinary ones.” (Source: The Great Tibetan-Chinese Dictionary)

¹⁴ The deer represents peacefulness. In depictions of Avalokiteshvara, he is frequently shown with a deer skin resting over his shoulders. This hat is adorned along its edges with the skin of a young deer.

well as representations of the sun and the moon. The meanings of these elements are explained below.

In 1986, I attended a summer retreat at a small monastery in the Ngawa Autonomous Prefecture of northwestern Sichuan. At that time, the monastery required the khenpo, who was the summer retreat master, to wear a khenpo hat, so I had to comply with the rule. Someone took a picture of me wearing the hat.

Last year, I saw the picture and felt very embarrassed. I said, “Could you please burn it? Please burn it!” I requested that they destroy the picture because I believe it is inappropriate for an unremarkable monk like me to wear a large hat that carries significant meaning.

However, one should wear such a hat when undertaking extraordinary tantric activities, such as bestowing empowerments or performing tantric practices. This is because some tantric acts are exceptional and carry great powers of blessing. Nevertheless, I dare not wear it for the time being, as I fear others will tease me.

When practicing Guru Yoga, you visualize Padmasambhava wearing a hat called *The Lotus which Liberates on Sight*, or *The Petaled Hat of the Five Families*. This particular hat consists of two layers—inner and outer—symbolizing the unity of the generation and perfection stages. Its three points represent the three kayas—Dharmakaya, Sambhogakaya, and Nirmanakaya—while its five colors signify the five kayas¹⁵ working for the benefit of all beings. Adorned with a sun and moon, it embodies the union of skillful means and wisdom. The blue border represents boundless samaya. At the top is a vajra that symbolizes unwavering meditative concentration and a vulture’s feather that signifies the realization of the highest view and the culmination of the practice.



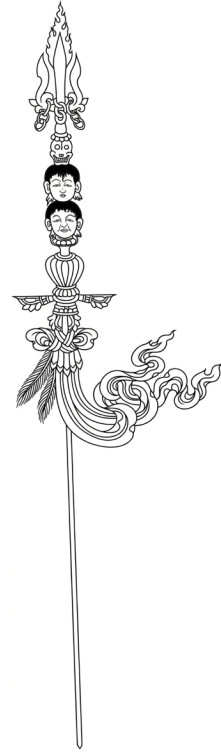
◉ Padmasambhava’s mudra and khatvānga

With his right hand held at his chest, Padmasambhava makes the threatening

¹⁵ The three kayas to which are added the Vajra Kaya and the Kaya of Perfect Enlightenment.

mudra while holding a pure golden vajra. His left hand rests in his lap in the meditation gesture, holding a skull cup filled with the wisdom nectar of immortality. Inside the skull cup is a long-life vase adorned with a sprig from the wish-fulfilling tree on top.

Under his left arm, Padmasambhava holds his consort Dakini Mandarava in a hidden form as his *khatvāṅga*.¹⁶ The three prongs at the top of the khatvāṅga symbolize emptiness, luminous clarity, and compassionate energy. Beneath the prongs are three severed heads: a dried one symbolizing the Dharmakaya, a decayed one signifying the Sambhogakaya, and a fresh one representing the Nirmanakaya. The nine metal rings encircling the prongs represent the nine vehicles of the path, while the five-colored silk streamers symbolize the five wisdoms. The khatvāṅga is also adorned with hair from both the living and the dead, signifying the subjugation of all female spirits and wrathful dakinis during his extraordinary practices in the Eight Great Charnel Grounds.



◉ All around Padmasambhava

Next, visualize that Padmasambhava is surrounded by a sphere of five-colored light rays, with swirling rainbows. In the center of the light are the Eight Vidyadharas of India, the Twenty-five Disciples of Tibet, and an ocean-like assembly of the Three Roots and the Dharma protectors. All of them appear in sublime, extraordinary forms.

◆ Three ways of visualizing the lineage

In general, there are three different ways of visualizing the lineage when practicing Guru Yoga.

First: in the refuge practice, we visualize the lineage masters one above the other. All the masters of the Great Perfection lineage appear above Padmasambhava's head, one above the other.

Second: the visualization for the meditation and recitation of Vajrasattva

¹⁶ A particular kind of trident.

is known as the jewel that includes everything. In this practice, all the root and lineage masters are embodied in Vajrasattva alone.

Third: when practicing Guru Yoga, we visualize the lineage masters as a crowd. All the masters of the Great Perfection lineage, along with the ocean of the Three Roots and the Dharma protectors, are gathered in a crowd around Padmasambhava.

♦ Recite the Guru Yoga prayer

After the visualization, you may recite the following text, while paying attention to the meaning of the words:

*Emaho!*¹⁷

*My entire perception, spontaneously perfect, is a realm of infinite purity,*¹⁸

The “Copper Colored Mountain of Glory,” arrayed in complete and perfect detail. Here, in its very center,

My own body is Vajrayogini,

With one face and two hands, brilliant red and holding a hooked knife and skull,

My two feet gracefully poised, my three eyes gazing into the sky.

Above my head, on a blossoming hundred thousand-petaled lotus, sun and moon disc seat,

Inseparable from my own root master, embodiment of all sources of refuge, appears

Guru Rinpoche, in the supreme nirmanakaya form of the “Lake-born Vajra.”

His body glows with youth, white with a tinge of red.

He wears a gown, monastic shawl, cloak and robe.

¹⁷ An exclamation of wonder. As it is said in *A Guide to The Words of My Perfect Teacher*: “What does one find wonderful? The purity and infinitude of phenomena.”

¹⁸ This verse is also translated into “Everything I perceive is the spontaneously formed, pure and infinite Buddha-field...”

*With one face, two hands and seated in royal poise.
 In his right hand he holds the vajra, in his left a skull-cup
 containing the vase of immortality.
 On his head he wears a five-petaled lotus hat.
 Cradled in his left arm he holds the “supreme consort” of bliss
 and emptiness,
 Concealed as the three-pointed khatvanga trident.
 He presides amidst a shimmering aura of rays and rings of
 rainbow light.
 All around him, enveloped in a beautiful lattice of white,
 blue, yellow, red and green light,
 Are King Trisong Detsen, the twenty-five disciples,
 The pandits, siddhas and vidyadharas of India and Tibet,
 yidam deities,
 Dākinīs, and dharmapalas and protectors who keep the
 samaya—all gather like billowing clouds,
 Visualized vivid and distinct, in the great equality of clarity
 and emptiness.¹⁹*

While reciting the text, visualize accordingly. Then, with intense devotion recite the Seven-Line Prayer:²⁰

*Hūm! In the northwest of the land of Oddiyana,²¹
 In the heart of a lotus flower,
 Endowed with the most marvelous attainments,
 You are renowned as the “Lotus Born.”
 Surrounded by many hosts of dakinis.
 Following in your footsteps,*

¹⁹ Rigpa Translations, 2023.

²⁰ Rigpa Translations, 2023.

²¹ This verse is also translated into: “Hūm! On the northwest frontier of the land of Oddiyāna...”

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

guru padma siddhi hum.

After reciting the prayer, visualize all the wisdom deities and the Palace of Lotus Light of the Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain coming into reality and dissolving into your being, merging with you, the visualized samaya deity of Vajrayogini—just as water pours into water and becomes one.

♦ **Jigme Gocha attained accomplishment through Guru Yoga practice**

In his youth, he received the empowerment of the Guru Yoga practice from Lama Jigme Rigdzin of Kathog Monastery and developed profound faith in Guru Rinpoche Padmasambhava.

One day, while herding sheep, he encountered a massive rocky mountain. Knowing there was a cave on the mountain where Padmasambhava had once retreated, he fervently prayed to Padmasambhava at that site. Soon, in his vision, the entire mountain transformed into the majestic form of Padmasambhava, who displayed a threatening mudra while holding a vajra.

Jigme Gocha then prayed with greater intensity, reciting the Seven-Line Prayer and the Padmasambhava mantra. Afterward, the image of Padmasambhava vanished, and in that moment, he recognized the nature of mind.

In his forties, he recalled this experience and expressed it in his song of enlightenment: “As a child, I had a direct vision of Padmasambhava and attained enlightenment. Since then, I have not encountered a single adversity in my practice or Dharma activities.”

I hope all of you will consistently pray to Guru Rinpoche Padmasambhava. Last year, I gave you the teaching of *The White Lotus: An Explanation of the Seven-Line Prayer to Guru Padmasambhava* composed by Mipham Rinpoche, and many of you have developed great faith in Guru Rinpoche.

When you practice Guru Yoga, visualize your root guru in the form of Padmasambhava, seated an arrow’s length above your head, and visualize yourself as Vajrayogini. Then, pray with intense devotion.

According to the practice of the generation stage, you can also invoke Padmasambhava from the Palace of Lotus Light and visualize him dissolving into

the Padmasambhava above your head. After fervent prayer, visualize Padmasambhava and everyone around him dissolving into light, which then dissolves into you.

This practice of Guru Yoga can be challenging for practitioners with a Sutrayana mindset, as they may still be hindered by ordinary thoughts and are not yet ready for this practice. However, devoted practitioners with a favorable connection to Guru Yoga should strive to engage in it, as it is indeed the most important practice.



Lesson 129

“The Vajrayana path includes many methods and is without ... Do not associate with companions who set limits to their samayas.” [page 317–320]

We’ve already studied the section on “The Reason for Guru Yoga,” and we are currently covering the section on “How to Practice Guru Yoga.” Today, we will study the part on “Offering the Seven Branches.”

2.2.5.2.2. Offering the Seven Branches

The Vajrayana path provides an abundance of skillful methods and does not require great hardships. It is well-suited to those with sharp faculties—individuals possessing faith, diligence, wisdom, and more. For those with considerable mental strength, through the accumulation of merit and consistent practice, it is possible to achieve, in a single moment, the merit that would otherwise take an entire great kalpa through Sutrayana practices. Thus, one can attain liberation in this very lifetime.

In short, the Vajrayana path enables the attainment of liberation within a single lifetime because it offers many skillful methods that are unavailable in Sutrayana.

♦ **Vajrayana encompasses all vehicles**

Some people believe that Vajrayana is unique to Tibetan Buddhism, asserting that all Buddhist teachings in the Tibetan region are Vajrayana teachings, while those in Chinese Buddhism are categorized as Sutrayana teachings.

This is by no means true. Those who are learned in Buddhist scriptures know that Vajrayana teachings can also be found in Chinese Buddhism, and many texts in the Chinese Tripitaka praise Vajrayana. For example, it is stated in *The Vajragarbharatnarājatantra Sutra*:²²

All the Tathagatas praise it, saying:
 This Great Vajra Vehicle encompasses all vehicles,
 And it has been, is, and will be like this—
 This Great Vajra Vehicle encompasses all vehicles.

Here, “all vehicles” include the Shravaka and Bodhisattva vehicles in Sutrayana.

It is clear that Vajrayana—the Great Vajra Vehicle—is not unique to Tibetan Buddhism. It can encompass all vehicles and is praised by the buddhas of the ten directions.

The supreme tantric teaching, which offers many skillful methods and enables practitioners to attain liberation in a single lifetime, should be respected and sought after. However, some individuals with only a limited understanding of Sutrayana teachings slander it relentlessly instead. This reflects their ignorance, and in the process, they also commit grave faults. How naïve they are! How terrible their behavior is! Unfortunately, individuals of shallow wisdom often commit the serious fault of slandering the Dharma in this way.

The reason I reference the sutras available in Chinese Buddhism is to convey that Vajrayana exists in both Tibetan Buddhism and Chinese Buddhism, and it is indeed extraordinary. Without a doubt, the vajra teacher stands as the most supreme, secret, and unparalleled field of merit.²³ Some Sutrayana scriptures, such as the *Flower Ornament Sutra* and the *Lotus Sutra*, also greatly praise the teacher. That is why the practice of accumulating merit is combined with Guru Yoga.

In the previous section on “visualizing the field of merit,” you learned that what you visualize is your root teacher in nature and Padmasambhava in form. You then offer the seven branches in the presence of such an object of merit through prostration, offerings, confession, rejoicing, and more. The merit you accumulate through this practice is unparalleled and surpasses that of any other practice.

²² It was translated into Chinese by the Indian translator Dharmadeva during the Song dynasty. The text has two volumes.

²³ “Secret” refers to the vajra master’s hidden capacity to amplify the merit of one’s actions.

♦ Real practice and vast hearing

Perhaps you've encountered teachings about Guru Yoga in the past, or perhaps you haven't. Now that you are receiving the teaching, you should make some changes after attending just one class. What changes? Having learned this teaching from the text, you will no longer be indecisive in your practice, nor will you waver about what to practice. Instead, you'll establish a clear direction from now on, focusing on practicing Guru Yoga for the rest of your life. Why is that? Because this practice is truly extraordinary!

If you have the opportunity, it is beneficial to pursue more teachings. However, if such opportunities are lacking, the practice of Guru Yoga alone is sufficient. A Buddhist must prioritize putting the teachings into practice. It holds little value to simply receive one teaching after another without ever practicing it accordingly.

That said, does this mean you should stop seeking more teachings? Of course not. Today's individuals, especially the younger generation, often have significant doubts and insufficient faith in the Three Jewels. If their misconceptions are not addressed, it will be challenging for them to engage more deeply with the Dharma. Furthermore, our deeply rooted afflictions and habitual tendencies cannot be eliminated after just one or two Dharma classes. Therefore, we must have vast hearing of the Dharma, and this hearing should be consistent and sustained over time. Whether or not you hear the teachings will indeed lead to very different outcomes, which you may have experienced firsthand. Gradually, this difference will be reflected in your actions.

Someone may argue, "I don't think so! Why is it that the more I hear the teachings, the worse I feel about myself? I used to have a bit of pure perception before attending Dharma studies, but why do I find my mind harder to pacify after hearing the teachings?"

In fact, this is because you didn't know how to observe your mind in the past, so you were content with yourself. But now that you've studied the Dharma, you can see your faults in the mirror of the Dharma and even realize that some faults are extremely grave. This leads to feelings of disgust regarding your actions.

This indeed happens with some people, but you should know that it is not the fault of hearing the teachings; rather, it is a reflection of your increased ability to recognize your faults. Therefore, when this occurs, you should seek to hear

more teachings, practice Guru Yoga, and accumulate merit so that you can swiftly transform your mind.

♦ Offering the Seven Branches includes all methods

The Offering of the Seven Branches encompasses all the numerous methods for accumulating both merit and wisdom. Particularly, when the offering is made to the guru, its merit is truly inconceivable, as mentioned earlier.

Why is the Offering of the Seven Branches included in Guru Yoga? Because this offering practice is essential. As Longchenpa states in *The Great Chariot: A Treatise on the Great Perfection*, Vajrayana is intended for those who possess great diligence, wisdom, and skillful actions. Therefore, this offering practice is a genuinely skillful method, and if you recognize its importance, you should definitely engage in it.

As you know, in this world, a wise, diligent, and skillful person can complete any task quickly and successfully, while a dull-witted, lazy, and unskillful person will not only botch the same task but will also often offend others.

Therefore, a tantric practitioner must possess both wisdom and skillful methods.

2.2.5.2.2.1. Prostration, the Antidote to Pride

While prostrating, visualize yourself manifesting hundreds, thousands, and eventually countless bodies identical to your own, as numerous as the dust particles in the universe. Meanwhile, visualize all sentient beings, as infinite as space, joining you in prostration.

This is a very basic visualization that brings great merit. As a Mahayanist, it is inappropriate to visualize oneself prostrating alone while ignoring other sentient beings. Of course, if you truly cannot visualize prostrating with all sentient beings, you can still accumulate merit by performing the prostration alone. However, the merit you accumulate will vary based on how you visualize the practice. Those who possess both wisdom and skillful actions can accumulate exceptional merit.

While prostrating, recite the following verse:

Hrih! I prostrate, emanating as innumerable bodies

As the dust particles in the entire universe.

While reciting this verse, visualize accordingly: In the presence of your root guru, who appears as Padmasambhava, along with the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the past, present, and future, you and all sentient beings are prostrating respectfully with your body, speech, and mind.

♦ Combining the practice of prostration with Guru Yoga

Generally speaking, for those ngöndro practitioners completing the five hundred thousand accumulations, it is acceptable to combine prostrations with refuge practice—reciting the refuge prayer while making prostrations. Many great masters of the past adhered to this specific practice tradition. However, in the present context, it is most appropriate to integrate the practice of prostration with Guru Yoga.

The great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche also supported combining the practice of prostration with Guru Yoga. He said, “In the refuge practice, you should focus on taking refuge and reciting the refuge prayer wholeheartedly so that you develop a refuge mind. In the prostration practice, you align your body, speech, and mind, and prostrate single-mindedly in the presence of the guru, the buddhas, and the bodhisattvas.”

That said, since both the practices of taking refuge and prostrations take Padmasambhava as the field of merit, it is acceptable to combine them, although it is best to engage in the practices separately.

When taking refuge, the practice should culminate in the conviction that, “From now on, I take refuge in the guru and the Three Jewels in this life and in many lives to come.”

When practicing prostrations, you concentrate on the practice with your body, speech, and mind. The outcome of practicing in this way should be somewhat different.

According to worldly rules, it is in accordance with social norms and etiquette to prostrate, praise, and make offerings in the presence of kings. Likewise, when a practitioner offers the seven branches, including prostration, offerings, rejoicing, and more, in the presence of their guru—the unsurpassable field of merit—such an offering is not only appropriate but also leads to immense merit.

Regarding prostrations, the great Jigme Phuntsok also suggested, “If there is a specific prostration prayer, you may prostrate while reciting it. If there isn’t, you may recite this verse from *The King of Aspiration Prayers: Samantabhadra’s Aspiration to Excellent Conduct*:

What little virtue I have gathered through my homage,
Through offering, confession, and rejoicing,
Through exhortation and prayer—all of it
I dedicate to the enlightenment of all beings!

♦ Prostrating with body, speech, and mind

A key aspect of performing prostrations is aligning body, speech, and mind. While prostrating physically with your body, recite the prostration text or prayer with your speech. At the same time, engage your mind by visualizing yourself prostrating alongside all sentient beings. Practice with sincere respect and devotion, fully trusting in the guru and wholeheartedly entrusting yourself to their guidance.

The most important point is this: You are prostrating alongside all beings, doing so impeccably with your body, speech, and mind, wholeheartedly.

Fayuan Zhulin, or *Forest of Gems in the Garden of the Dharma*, says:

In order to obtain the Buddha’s divine eyes, one must prostrate
with one’s body;
In order to obtain the Buddha’s divine ears, one must recite with
one’s speech;
In order to obtain the Buddha’s divine mind, one must visualize
with the mind...
It lists many benefits and merits of doing prostrations with one’s
body, speech, and mind.

Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom says:

There are three ways to pay reverence: the first is through speech; the second is by bending the knees without the head touching the ground; the third is by touching the ground with one’s head, which represents the utmost reverence. Of (all parts) of a human body, the head is the most superior, while the feet are the most inferior.

Touching another's feet with one's head demonstrates ultimate reverence.

Therefore, we should often prostrate with the body, speech, and mind. You should perform prostrations not only for your preliminaries but also for the rest of your life, and even until your attainment of Buddhahood.

In terms of your Dharma practice, prostrating in this way can help diminish your pride. From a worldly perspective, it is also an excellent way to exercise your body. In particular, if you practice full-length prostrations regularly, this whole-body exercise can significantly help maintain your physical health. Of course, as practitioners, we place greater importance on the attainment of liberation, which should be the primary focus of our prostrations.

♦ Prostrating with concentration

It is very important to prostrate with concentration. Otherwise, you'll find yourself speaking carelessly, your gaze wandering aimlessly, while your mind becomes distracted by various external happenings. That would be unreasonable.

However, some individuals are easily distracted. When someone passes by or speaks to their right, their eyes and attention shift in that direction, causing their joined hands to press against their left cheek. When something occurs on their left side, their eyes and mind turn to the left, leading to their joined hands pressing against their right cheek. This is highly improper. It is important to recognize that performing prostrations in this manner—allowing your mind to be consumed by distractions while your body mechanically moves up and down—is nothing more than a meaningless physical effort that serves no purpose whatsoever.

As the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche explained, the phrase “that serves no purpose whatsoever” is used here from a strict perspective, meaning the practice brings only minimal benefit. According to the *Lotus Sutra* and other Buddhist teachings, even if a person engages in a virtuous action—such as raising one hand or lowering their head with distractions—they will still eventually see infinite buddhas and attain Buddhahood.

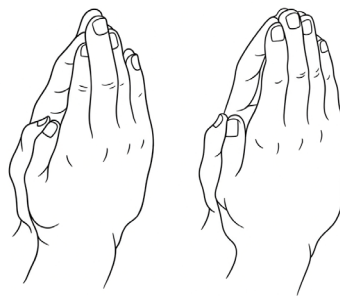
Therefore, as long as you prostrate, you will certainly accumulate merit. However, compared to impeccable prostrations, improper prostrations yield significantly less merit. Because of this, it is said that such a prostration “serves no purpose whatsoever.” It's like someone starting a business but not making much

money. When asked about it, they might say, “The business is a failure, and I didn’t make any money.” What they actually mean is that they didn’t make a lot of money, but they did earn a little.

Therefore, certain words and phrases should be interpreted or understood in accordance with their context.

Moreover, when you prostrate, your hands should be placed together in a hollow, cupped shape, resembling a lotus bud about to blossom. The palms should not be pressed so tightly together that there is no space left in between, nor should only your fingertips touch.

This illustration shows two ways to join your hands: one in the shape of a lotus bud and the other in the shape of a relic case. You should place your hands accordingly.



The Sutra of Great Liberation says:

Place your palms together above your head,
Like a lotus bud about to blossom.
With countless bodies gathered like clouds,
You prostrate to the buddhas of the ten directions.

As Jigme Lingpa states in his *Treasury of Precious Qualities*:

It is not merely a prostration with distraction.
Place your palms reverently at your heart.
Your hands should be joined as if forming a lotus bud
Or shaped like a relic case.

However, according to certain masters of Chinese Buddhism, one must press one’s palms tightly together, which is also supported by scriptural evidence. In *The Commentary of the Mahāvairocana Sutra*, which was taught by Śubhakarasiṃha of the Tang dynasty and transcribed by Chan Master Yixing, there are twelve ways to join the hands, one of which involves pressing the palms tightly together, leaving no space between them, with fingers slightly separated. This specific way of joining hands is still adopted by sangha members in many temples.

This commentary also describes cupping the hands with a space in the middle: the ten fingers are joined at the tips, while the palms remain slightly apart. It introduces another way of cupping the hands in the shape of a lotus bud about to bloom: the fingers are joined at the tips, creating a hollow space in the center while the backs of the palms are raised slightly. Additionally, there are other ways, such as cupping the hands in the shape of a newly opened lotus or in the gesture of surrender. In total, there are twelve distinct ways to place the hands together.

Of course, when making the seven-branch offering in the Guru Yoga practice, we join our hands either in the shape of a lotus bud or a relic case, as this is our tradition. If you follow the liturgy of Chinese Buddhism, it is also in accordance with tradition to press your palms tightly together, leaving no space between them. Both ways are acceptable.

From this discussion, we should recognize the importance of understanding the traditions of each lineage or school. Otherwise, it is problematic to accept one-sided views and the instructions of a single teacher while entirely rejecting all others.

♦ Prostrating with your body at five points

Put your hands together and place them sequentially on the crown of your head, at your throat, and then at your heart. This symbolizes the purification of the obscurations of body, speech, and mind, respectively. Specifically, when you join your hands together on your crown, you purify the physical negative acts of taking life, taking what is not given, and sexual misconduct; the verbal acts of lying, sowing discord, harsh words, and worthless chatter; and the mental acts of covetousness, wishing harm on others, and wrong views. Prostrating with your body at five points involves touching the floor with your forehead, the palms of both hands, and both knees.²⁴

◉ Teaching others to prostrate as well

I believe you understand how to prostrate, but to develop a good habit, you need to engage in consistent, sustained practice. It's important to immerse yourself in real practice. Merely having an intellectual understanding without the intention or ability to apply it effectively does not align with the goals of someone who has been pursuing the Dharma for a long time.

²⁴ This refers to the full prostration.

Moreover, we should share the proper way to prostrate with others. Many Buddhists, as you may notice, lack knowledge about how to prostrate correctly. Not only do they know little about prostrations, but their speech and actions often do not align with the Dharma. While I cannot read minds, I can infer that their thoughts are likely not in accordance with the Dharma based on their inappropriate behavior and speech. It is understandable that non-Buddhists may not act in accordance with the Dharma; however, it is truly unfortunate when seasoned Buddhists fail to do so.

Therefore, we should apply the Buddhist code of conduct, along with its norms, values, and teachings, to our own lives. Meanwhile, motivated by altruism, we should share these teachings with others.

◉ Prostrating in the right way

What's the benefit of prostrating with your body at the five points? Simply put, it can purify the obscurations of the five poisons and allow one to receive the blessings of body, speech, mind, qualities, and activity. These are the reasons we practice prostration.

You first prostrate by touching the floor with your body at five points. Then, stand up straight, bring your hands together once more, and continue the prostrations in the same manner.

However, some people don't follow this properly. Before even standing up, they casually put their hands down, which seems disrespectful. It is improper to wave your arms without properly joining your hands. Likewise, simply bending forward without allowing your knees and forehead to touch the ground is incorrect. Additionally, failing to stand up straight and remaining hunched over is equally inappropriate. Prostrating in this manner shows a lack of respect.

Strictly speaking, each of your prostrations should be performed properly. Even if you are doing the last few prostrations after the practice session or making just three prostrations daily, you should stand up straight before prostrating again. It is very important that each of your prostrations is done properly and respectfully. Otherwise, it can result in negative karmic consequences.

It is said that failing to stand upright during prostrations can result in being reborn as a hunchbacked dwarf. Since the purpose of performing prostrations is to gain positive benefits, doing them improperly and risking such an outcome renders the practice pointless.

Even if you are unable to make many prostrations, focus on ensuring that each one is done properly. Taking shortcuts, such as prostrating on a slope or using other methods to make it easier, serves no purpose.

Once, I witnessed a monk prostrating near Dharmapala Mountain at Larung Gar. The slope was so steep that he didn't have to bend much, making it very easy for him to prostrate.

However, it is not appropriate to prostrate in this manner. At that time, I thought, "He might be a newcomer here. If he had received the teachings of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, he would have known that such a prostration is improper."

There are also individuals who stack quilts and pillows in front of themselves to avoid bending much during prostrations. While this may make it easier for them, it is not appropriate. It is better to prostrate on the floor without placing anything in front. This is the correct way to perform prostrations.

Patrul Rinpoche provides a clear explanation in the text. For people of the degenerate era, it is challenging to understand instructions that are explained only briefly. Therefore, I must elaborate on the important aspects of the teachings.

Additionally, it has become common for Tibetan people, when paying respects—such as when visiting a lama—to perform one proper prostration, followed by two additional bows for which they simply bend over. This is normally how important individuals behave, yet many uninformed people imitate and adopt this practice as well. In fact, such a manner of prostrating is considered highly inappropriate.

According to the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, when you encounter the guru, you don't need to show reverence by bending your body; venerating the guru in your mind is sufficient. The outward display is not important.

However, when making prostrations, you must do so properly and consistently. The purpose of requesting a teaching, even on something as basic as how to perform prostrations, is to receive the teacher's instruction on aspects you do not know, and then consistently put it into practice without forgetting any details.

◉ Putting the teaching into practice

Prostration is a practice that is so simple to do. However, if you only discuss concepts like "all phenomena are empty" or "everything is created by your mind"

without ever engaging in prostrations, then studying the Dharma holds little meaning for you. Here is a story about Emperor Xuanzong of Tang during his time as a novice monk.

Li Chen, known before his reign as the Prince of Guang and later as Emperor Xuanzong of Tang, was an imperial prince. To prevent Li Chen from taking the throne, Emperor Wuzong sought to kill him. With the help of a eunuch, Li Chen managed to escape the palace alive.

He became a novice monk in a temple. One day, Chan Master Huangbo traveled to Yanguan, Zhejiang, to attend a Dharma assembly. While the master was prostrating in the main shrine hall, Li Chen noticed him. Having received the master's instructions and understanding the teachings of "all phenomena are empty" and "there is nothing to seek," Li Chen, the novice monk, approached the master and asked, "It is said that one asks for nothing from the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Then, what are you seeking through prostrations?"

The Chan master replied, "I don't seek anything from the Buddha, the Dharma, or the Sangha. I simply prostrate like this."

The novice monk asked, "If you seek nothing, then why bother with prostrations?"

The Chan master slapped him. The novice monk immediately protested, "You are so rude!"

The Chan master responded, "Where are we now? How dare you speak of being 'rude'!" Then, he slapped the novice monk again.

The Chan master intended to teach him that if someone only talks about "emptiness" or "seeking nothing," yet doesn't even want to make prostrations, the person is merely filled with arrogance and pride. The master slapped him to shatter his pride.

At that time, Emperor Wuzong was launching a large-scale anti-Buddhist persecution. Some historical accounts suggest that this persecution was initiated to find Li Chen, prompting Emperor Wuzong to dismantle temple after temple. However, three years later, Wuzong died, and Li Chen ascended to the throne as Emperor Xuanzong. Under his reign, he quickly revitalized Buddhism. After all, he had previously been a novice monk in a temple.

This story teaches us that we must put the teachings into real practice.

♦ Emulating the teacher

Those who have studied the Dharma should demonstrate greater proficiency, even in something as simple as performing prostrations, compared to those who have not.

Those who have not studied the Dharma may struggle to engage in impeccable speech and conduct, much like illiterate individuals with limited worldly knowledge may find it difficult to present themselves or behave appropriately. Someone says, “When you meet a guru, you prostrate upon arrival, but you cannot prostrate when you leave. This is stated in the sutras.” However, this is not actually mentioned in the sutras. Such misconceptions arise from a lack of understanding, leading them to erroneously attribute this idea to the teachings found in the sutras.

◉ Milarepa’s prostration

When Milarepa asked Lama Ngokpa for teachings, he arrived while Lama Ngokpa was teaching the Hevajra Tantra to a large assembly of monks. When Lama Ngokpa was teaching the verse: “The teacher is the ‘I,’ the Dharma is the ‘I,’ the assembly who listens to the teaching is also the ‘I’... ‘I’ is the primordial bliss and freedom,” Milarepa was prostrating from a distance to show his reverence. Observing this, Lama Ngokpa was delighted and removed his hat as a gesture of returning the reverence to Milarepa, asking, “What an auspicious interruption! The person prostrating over there is doing so in the style of the disciples of Marpa of Lhodrak. Please go ask who he is.”

Just like this, the impeccable conduct and actions of a Buddhist are well accepted by everyone. I don’t mean to boast about the sangha members at Larung Gar, but when our monastic members visit elsewhere, people see them and comment, “Are you from Larung Gar? The way you wear your shawl and monastic robe is impeccable...”

Of course, I dare not refer to “everyone at Larung Gar,” but it is fair to say that “most of you” are very different from monastics who haven’t received formal teachings on the Dharma. You have studied the Vinaya and other authentic teachings of the Buddha and possess a pure and elegant monastic demeanor, so you are welcomed wherever you go.

To be well received, one must exhibit good deportment, which inspires confidence in others. Of course, for a specific individual, having impeccable demeanor may not necessarily bring benefit or harm. However, from the perspec-

tive of Buddhism as a whole, whether a monastic behaves impeccably or not does influence others' perceptions and can even lead to misconceptions about Buddhism.

Recently, I mentioned two monks in Beijing who defamed Buddhism. Later, it was discovered that they were impostors. Having been deceived by a so-called Buddhist in the past, they chose to tarnish Buddhism in this manner. I heard that during that time, many monks were reluctant to appear in public.

Typically, one or two individuals cannot represent the entire community. However, it is common for people to generalize a few cases to the broader population. Therefore, when you, the monastics at Larung Gar, visit other places or teach the Dharma, it is crucial to be mindful of your deportment at all times. In particular, new monastics who haven't studied the precepts should not assume they can neglect their deportment when the guru or the head monastic staff is not present. Undisciplined actions can harm the reputation of Buddhism. Consequently, please take this matter seriously and strive to behave impeccably.

Milarepa prostrated so impeccably that Lama Ngokpa could tell he was doing it in the style of Marpa's disciples, which delighted Lama Ngokpa.

◉ The analogy of dyeing a piece of cloth

After following a teacher and receiving the teachings, one should be like a piece of cloth being soaked in dye, undergoing a significant transformation in all aspects of oneself.

Before being dyed, the cloth is white, and once dyed, it turns red. Similarly, a person might have been an evildoer constantly involved in fighting in the past, but after studying the Dharma, they should have made changes. Otherwise, hearing the teachings every day is merely planting a source of merit, which holds little meaning. Therefore, now that you have followed a teacher and received their teachings, you ought to emulate the teacher.

Of course, what you should emulate are the good qualities and exemplary actions of the teacher. However, some disciples fail to do this. They don't emulate the teacher's great compassion and wisdom but instead imitate seemingly improper actions, such as eating meat (perhaps the teacher has a hidden purpose for this). While it may not be appropriate for a teacher to openly demonstrate such a "pith instruction" regarding meat-eating, as disciples, you must emulate the teacher's great qualities, including their good character, pure precepts, vast wisdom, great

compassion, fervent diligence, and more. I believe many teachers possess these qualities.

Therefore, whether a disciple understands what to emulate is an important issue. Some individuals regard the teacher as an ordinary person, saying, “He is no different from me. It is only by luck that he has become my guru. Actually, in some respects, I am doing better than he is...” They will gain no benefit by “following” the teacher in this way.

When you truly follow a teacher, you should be like a piece of cloth being soaked in dye. Although the dyeing may go right or wrong, the cloth won’t remain unchanged after being soaked in dye. Likewise, a person who has truly followed a teacher won’t remain unchanged.

In this regard, I often think of how the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche followed his root guru, Thubga Rinpoche. Although Rinpoche stayed with his guru for only six years, he acquired all the great qualities of his guru, just like the contents of one vessel being poured entirely into another.

However, when I reflect on myself, I feel a bit embarrassed. I have been following Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche for many years, and I have certainly obtained some of his great qualities due to his incredible blessings. However, because of my karmic debts and the fact that I am living in this degenerate era, I have acquired far fewer great qualities than the lineage masters of the past.

Nevertheless, after following a teacher, each of us should be like a piece of cloth soaked in dye, showing noticeable changes from how we were before.

◉ Avoiding becoming an impervious practitioner

Nowadays, some individuals have received the Dharma teachings hundreds of times but show no signs of personal improvement. They continue to behave like ordinary worldly people in every way. Instead of fostering their transformation, the Dharma seems to have turned them into impervious practitioners and samaya breakers.

The Dharma can never merge with the minds of impervious practitioners. No matter how many Dharma classes they have attended or how profound the teachings are, no change occurs within them. For example, after hearing teachings such as those on the “Patience” or “Vigilance Introspection” chapters of *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, most people experience noticeable changes in their minds.

However, this transformation will not happen to impervious practitioners, who are like a piece of cloth that never absorbs dye. This can be inferred from their speech and actions.

Even more disheartening is that some impervious practitioners are highly learned and can articulate the Dharma with great eloquence, yet they fail to tame and pacify their own minds, leaving no genuine sign of progress in their practice. As stated in *Sutralankara*:

Those who show no signs of practical progress,
Despite their extensive knowledge,
Are like a blind man holding a lamp,
Who brings light to others while remaining blind to themselves.

The Dharma has the power to inspire transformation in those who commit wrongdoings, but it cannot influence practitioners who have become impervious—similar to how grease can soften stiff leather but fails to affect the hardened leather of a butter bag.²⁵

A beginning Buddhist tends to be greatly inspired by the Dharma teachings, as if they are drinking nectar. However, some individuals grow weary of the teachings after studying the Dharma for a long time. For example, when encountering the teaching of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* or that of *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, such a person might say, “Oh! I’ve studied this. The next chapter is this. I know it.” The more they hear the teachings, the less inspired they become; worse yet, they no longer regard the texts as the true Dharma of great benefit.

Such a person is an impervious practitioner. They have received many teachings and can articulate the Dharma well, but their mind remains unchanged. Furthermore, even if they are reborn as hungry ghosts, they will remain the same. There is an old saying: If a ghost or spirit is reborn from an impervious practitioner, no teacher can transform their mind.

Please avoid becoming an impervious practitioner. If you do, even if you understand the benefits of positive actions, the harms of negative actions, and the qualities of the Buddha, you will only be subscribing to those beliefs without truly embracing them. This will hinder your ability to cultivate the certainty and faith needed to genuinely transform your mind. As mentioned in the *Aspiration to be*

²⁵ The bag used for transporting butter is already saturated with grease. Once it becomes stiff, adding more grease will not be effective.

Reborn in the Pure Realm of Sukhavati, being impervious is a fault that prevents liberation.

For practitioners who have become impervious to the Dharma, even the perfectly enlightened Buddha himself would be unable to help them. No matter how great the teacher or how supreme the teachings, their minds remain unchanged. As Padmasambhava said:

Do not accept as your retinue those who are impervious to the
Dharma;
Do not associate closely with companions who have broken
their samayas.

As we know, a true practitioner won't become impervious. The more Dharma they hear, the more inspired they become, and the more faith they develop. Today, I heard a story about an elderly Dharma master in his 80s. This master doesn't like to hear about worldly preoccupations; when he becomes involved in such conversations, he loses interest and stops talking.

However, whenever the conversation turns to the Dharma, he is eager to listen, even if he is not in good health. After such discussions, he feels very happy, saying, "Ah! What a good day I have had!" Even though he has lost his eyesight, he remains exceptionally joyful about the Dharma and enjoys listening to it.

What about us? When we read a Dharma book and present the Buddha's teachings, some of us may find it challenging. Even if the teaching lasts only five minutes, we complain, "It is so tiring!" or "It is so hard!" However, when the subject is not about the Dharma, we keep our eyes wide open and engage in watching and talking day and night without stopping.

In fact, Buddhists should listen, contemplate, and meditate more. It's beneficial to immerse ourselves in the Dharma. Of course, this doesn't imply that you should completely abandon worldly matters. If a Dharma master becomes disengaged from worldly endeavors, they may struggle to propagate the Dharma and benefit others, as they know little about what others think and do. Therefore, a Dharma teacher must understand what should and should not be done. On the other hand, if you show too much interest in worldly preoccupations, you may have strayed from the Dharma path.

In short, while pursuing the Dharma and benefiting others, each of us should

strive to do what is right and virtuous and to avoid what is wrong, harmful, and unhelpful to ourselves and others.



Lesson 130

“In this way, you should let the teacher’s outer, inner and secret qualities ... I confess all wrong thoughts, words and deeds.” [page 320–322]

Let us continue to study “prostrations” in the seven-branch offering.

Previously, it was said that we must not become impervious practitioners when following the teacher and receiving their teachings. Then, what should we do?

- ◉ Assimilate the teachings into your mind to tame afflictions

As a practitioner, you should tame afflictive emotions and thoughts. That is to say, when you listen to Sutrayana and Vajrayana teachings, such as the five great treatises and tantras, even if you comprehend the meaning of just a single phrase, you need to know how to assimilate it into your mind and put it into practice. The purpose of practice is to antidote afflictions.

When you understand this and can have also developed an ability to discern things, then any of the 84,000 teachings can serve as a skillful method for you to antidote afflictions and eliminate ignorance. Otherwise, even if you have learned the Dharma extensively, it brings no benefit to your mind. *The Water-Tree Treatises: Hundred Waves of Elegant Sayings & Hundred Branches of Elegant Sayings* states:

If one hears many teachings but doesn’t put them into practice,
It brings no benefit to one’s mind;
A stone soaking in water for one hundred years

Remains dry inside, as is its nature.

I liked this verse when I was a school student. I understand that actual practice is essential for transforming my mind. Even if one has received the teachings, without putting them into practice, one's mind cannot be nourished by the nectar of Dharma. When the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche taught us *The Treasury of Dharmadhatu*, he said, "The ultimate purpose of all the Sutrayana and Vajrayana teachings is to antidote mental afflictions." Therefore, a practitioner must put teachings into practice.

Then, what do you put into practice? All teachings, from the preciousness of human life, the impermanence of life, to Guru Yoga, should be put into practice. Although the instructions of these teachings may seem simple, understandable, and easy to recite, if you do not practice them, you will remain far disconnected from the teachings. Therefore, you must practice.

◉ To follow a teacher is to emulate them

When practicing the Dharma, the best method is to emulate the teacher. In fact, the purpose of following a teacher is to observe their thoughts, speech, and actions, and strive to do as they do.

As long as you learn to emulate the teacher—their soft and gentle movements, their skillful speech, and their profound wisdom—you will naturally progress on the path. If you constantly find faults in the teacher—thinking, "The teacher said this wrong yesterday" or "The teacher did that wrong today"—and privately treat them as a subject of ridicule, you are making a serious mistake. This is not a proper way to follow the teacher.

To truly follow the teacher, you should emulate their realizations and actions. The teacher possesses many great qualities. For example, they have boundless compassion and wisdom, along with a profound sense of renunciation. In benefiting sentient beings, the teacher demonstrates unwavering patience and courage, with each action embodying skillful means. The teacher handles worldly and transcendent matters with complete mastery. These qualities are what we should strive to emulate in the teacher.

As the proverb goes:

All actions are merely imitation:

Mastery arises through imitation.

Whoever imitates well will become wise. In worldly life, students should begin by imitating their teachers while acquiring knowledge, and if they do not imitate well, it indicates they are not learning effectively. Therefore, the shortcut to progress is through imitation.

Likewise, when we follow a teacher in our pursuit of the Dharma, true transformation comes only through imitating the teacher. Of course, it is not easy to imitate the teacher and lineage masters of the past. I have noticed certain behavioral patterns among some Buddhists: When a person first embarks on the path, they may become very diligent for a short period—resting neither by day nor sleeping at night. Similarly, when a person first takes ordination, they may uphold impeccable deportment for the first two or three years—walking with downcast eyes, never glancing around. However, ten or twenty years later, these initial efforts may fade away. Without a steady and sustained “spirit of imitation,” even the most diligent early efforts may fail to bring about true spiritual transformation.

Of course, a true teacher possesses qualities worth imitating. To truly emulate the teacher means allowing their outer, inner, and secret qualities to be imprinted on our own being, like a tsa-tsa perfectly taking shape from its mold.

I have a tsa-tsa statue in my house that I wanted to bring to class, but I forgot it. Many of you may have seen a tsa-tsa. It is cast in a mold, and when it is removed, all the lines and details of the mold are precisely imprinted on the tsa-tsa. In fact, this is how Buddha statues are made today. Mass-produced statues are created using a mold, and when the statue is taken out, all the fine patterns are clearly imprinted on it.

Likewise, a disciple should allow their teacher’s qualities to be imprinted on them. For example, we are disciples of the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche. What are the primary qualities of our teacher? The answer is his dedication to propagating the Dharma and benefiting beings.

This so-called benefiting beings means helping all living beings with love and compassion. The way to help them is not simply by offering aid and expressing loving-kindness but by giving them the Dharma, which can entirely uproot their afflictions and bring them liberation.

Therefore, whether one can truly be called a disciple of the lineage teacher depends on their actions—specifically, on whether they have continued the teacher’s compassion and wisdom. Otherwise, if someone spends just a month or

two at Larung Gar and then claims, “I am a disciple of the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche,” who would believe it?

Moreover, those who interact with such a person will feel disappointed—“How can a lineage disciple of a great teacher act this way?” “How can a lineage disciple be irresponsible toward sentient beings and the Dharma?”

If one is constantly seeking alms for themselves and engaging in improper conduct, how is it even possible that such a person resembles a tsa-tsa coming out of the “mold” of the teacher? They are definitely coming out of some other “mold.”

If you want to claim yourself a tsa-tsa of the teacher, you may want to check whether this tsa-tsa truly resembles the teacher. A true tsa-tsa disciple can be easily recognized by everyone. Some self-identified tsa-tsa disciples are good at talking the talk but offer no assistance to the teacher’s Dharma activities; worse yet, they may even cause harm to others. Such a tsa-tsa individual lacks any imprint from the guru, so how can they be considered qualified as the teacher’s lineage disciple?

Therefore, when following a teacher, we must emulate their great qualities. It all begins with having respect and trust for the teacher.

♦ The benefits of impeccable prostrations

The term “prostration” broadly refers to a gesture of reverence and respect. There are various forms²⁶ of prostration, with traditions differing across regions and cultures. For example, many Buddhists in the Han region of China perform prostrations while kneeling and maintain this posture when reciting sutras or mantras in the shrine room. In contrast, some Tibetans make full-length prostrations on the road during their pilgrimage trips. Regardless of how people prostrate, it is a gesture of veneration.

◉ Disrespectful prostration is meaningless

Prostrations should be performed with reverence and respect. According to teachings in Buddhist scriptures, such as *The Sutra of Great Liberation* and Jigme Lingpa’s works, the teachers have clearly explained the proper way to make prostrations. Nevertheless, if one knowingly prostrates in the wrong way, whether out of arrogance or for convenience, it reflects one’s disrespectful and contemptuous attitude toward the act of prostration.

²⁶ The detailed explanation on the different ways to do prostrations can be found in *The realisation on the Great T Perfection of Wisdom* and other scriptures.

In fact, it is easy to tell whether one has reverence or not. A person with reverence shows impeccable conduct and deportment. For example, in a group setting where people are practicing preliminaries together, some individuals prostrate in a way that each of their prostrations is performed properly and inspires confidence in others, whereas others do not prostrate properly and always appear to lack veneration.

So, please prostrate properly. Whether you are in a group setting, at home, or on a pilgrimage trip, you should perform each prostration the right way.

It is very difficult to find signs of pride in a person who frequently prostrates. Why is that? It is because the practice of prostration serves as an antidote to pride. Many worldly leaders and intellectuals are unwilling to prostrate when visiting a Buddhist place. Why? It is due to the pride in their minds.

A proud person is unable to bend down. Their pride is like an iron rod that keeps their body upright. Because of this, it is extremely difficult for them to kneel and prostrate. They are very reluctant to do so.

But for a person who venerates the Three Jewels, making prostrations is easy, and they actually enjoy prostrating. They believe that the Three Jewels possess boundless qualities and are the most supreme objects of merit. They also understand that ordinary beings are burdened with karmic debts and have committed countless misdeeds in this life; given all this, how can they not prostrate? They are eager to make prostrations.

In fact, we are all the same, with imperfect bodies—what is there to feel pride about? Therefore, before we abandon this body and move on to the next life, we should make good use of it. The best way to use this body is to prostrate and perform positive deeds.

I have noticed that many great masters often engage in prostration, whether they are giving teachings, attending a Dharma assembly, or on other occasions. Their actions provide an excellent example for us as followers, and I hope we can all emulate them. However, performing prostrations properly at all times requires a strong mind; it is essential to cultivate genuine and lasting veneration within.

Prostration only has meaning when performed with veneration and respect. Otherwise, it becomes as forced as paying taxes, involving improper visualization and actions that are not in accordance with the Dharma. It merely becomes a matter of completing a count, which can only be regarded as a semblance of

prostration. This kind of “prostration” will only bring harm to oneself and holds no true significance.

- ◉ Prostrations done with veneration bring immeasurable benefits

Proper prostrations done with veneration can bring immeasurable benefits. According to *The Empowerment Sutra*, if a person has prostrated to the buddhas of the past, present, and future from the ten directions before their death, no matter where they are reborn, they will encounter a buddha. Moreover, the karmic effects of serious faults committed over thousands or even billions of kalpas will be purified. Therefore, it is a great blessing to be able to prostrate in this lifetime.

Then, what can be the benefit of making one prostration? Here is a story from *The Vinaya Sutra*:

Once, a monk was prostrating before a stupa that contained the Buddha’s hair and nail clippings. Ananda asked the Buddha what the benefits of this action might be. The Buddha responded:

A single prostration is so powerful that even if one were to become a universal monarch as many times as there are grains of dust beneath one’s body down to the deepest parts of the earth,²⁷ the benefits of that single act would still not be exhausted.

This is the benefit of a single proper prostration. Imagine that each grain of dust represents one lifetime as a universal monarch; the total number is beyond imagination! As it is stated in a sutra:

A single prostration to the Buddha results in
Becoming a universal monarch as many times as
The number of grains of dust beneath one’s knees,
down to the golden foundation of the universe.

The Buddha Speaks of the Differences in Karmic Retribution for Elder Śuka Sutra lists ten benefits of the act of prostration:

- 1) Having a wondrous body: Those who prostrate can acquire a wondrous body and an elegant look, life after life.

²⁷ Literally meaning “the golden foundation of the universe,” this refers to the base of the universe in traditional cosmology.

2) Having convincing speech: Those who prostrate will be trusted by others in everything they say.

3) Being fearless in a crowd: Those who prostrate have no fear when in the presence of a crowd.

Some of you may experience shaky hands when making an oral presentation²⁸ to a few hundred people. This is the karmic effect of having made no prostrations in a previous life. Therefore, you should prostrate in this lifetime. By doing so, when you have to give an oral presentation in the next life, you will not have shaky hands and a blushing face. Instead, you will stand still and feel confident.

However, oral presentations are good training for you. The more you practice, the better you will become. The key is to review the material thoroughly; otherwise, you may become even more nervous. After going through the material, you will feel more assured, and even if you are a bit nervous at the beginning, you will be fine very soon.

4) Being protected by all the buddhas: Those who prostrate will be protected and cared for by the buddhas and bodhisattvas.

5) Having great deportment: Those who prostrate, whether householders or monastics, will exhibit proper conduct and impressive deportment that inspire confidence in others.

6) Being approached by others: Those who prostrate will be kindly approached by many people, so they will rarely experience loneliness and social neglect. Some individuals struggle to get along with others and harbor feelings of dislike. This is the result of making no prostrations in a previous life.

7) Being cared for and respected by celestial beings: Those who prostrate are cared for and respected by celestial beings and are always under their protection. Because of this, they do not need to make specific offerings to the Dharma protectors. Those who frequently prostrate will naturally receive the protections of the Dharma protectors.

8) Having great merit: Those who prostrate will acquire great merit.

²⁸ A format of examination at Larung Gar that evaluates a Dharma student's understanding of the teachings.

9) Being reborn in the Pure Land: Those who prostrate will be reborn in the Pure Land after death.

10) Attaining nirvana swiftly: Those who prostrate will swiftly attain nirvana.

These ten benefits are not ordinary ones; that is why the act of prostration is considered an extraordinarily virtuous deed. Even a single prostration to the Buddha can result in inconceivable positive results.

Here is a story from *The Miscellaneous Treasures Sutra*:

At the Buddha's time, an elder went to see the Buddha every day, which made his wife suspicious. She thought, "Is he seeing another woman every day?"

So she asked her husband, "Where are you going every day?"

The elder answered, "To see the Buddha."

The wife asked, "Is the Buddha good-looking? Is he more handsome than you, so you always go to see him?"

Then the elder praised the Buddha and told his wife all his great qualities. Hearing this, the wife rejoiced and immediately went to see the Buddha at his residence.

However, at that time the Buddha was surrounded by kings and ministers, so she could not approach him. She simply prostrated once to the Buddha from afar and returned home. Soon after, the wife died and was reborn in the Thirty-Three Heaven. Then she realized, "The Buddha has been so kind to me! Just a single prostration to him can bring me rebirth in the celestial realm." It is said in the sutra that the elder's wife praised the Buddha with the following verse:

Having received the Buddha's great kindness,

The merit of a single prostration led me to be reborn in the celestial realm.

If a single prostration can bring such great benefits, then the benefits are immeasurable when we prostrate one hundred thousand times with bodhicitta. We are indeed very blessed. As beings in Jambudvipa, despite having committed misdeeds, we also engage in positive actions. Simply making three prostrations in the morning and at night holds great significance for our human existence, given the aforementioned benefits.

Last year, we had a fifteen-minute group prostration practice after each class. Most of you were able to complete more than one hundred prostrations, so the group practice went well. When I was listing the benefits a few minutes ago, I felt a strong desire to continue the prostration practice. However, on one hand, I need to attend the oral presentations given by the cohort studying the five great treatises at Larung Gar; on the other hand, I have just returned to Larung Gar and am still experiencing a bit of altitude sickness. So, let's wait and see.

Anyway, fifteen minutes can pass quickly. When you are engaged in something else, such as chatting with someone or sitting alone, you may easily spend more than fifteen minutes, or even one or two hours. Additionally, some of you can sit for an entire day, neither visualizing nor contemplating, but merely letting distorted or fabricated thoughts come and go. In that case, you would be better off spending the time making prostrations.

◉ Group practice with the sangha brings great power

In particular, if you are able to practice in a group setting with other sangha members, the source of merit will be more powerful.

Dharma fellows at Larung Gar should have had the experience that, when engaging in virtuous deeds together with the sangha, it is easier to complete the practice due to the collective strength of the sangha. Moreover, the merit you accumulate through Dharma practice is immersed in the merit generated by the entire sangha, causing the merit to grow incredibly. Therefore, an individual's power is as small as a spark, while a group's power is as great as a blazing fire. This truth is quite profound, as stated in Patrul Rinpoche's *The Lotus Garden's Play*.

Some monastics prefer to be unconstrained and often desire to leave the sangha to wander alone. While it may be acceptable for them to wander for a few days, if it continues for too long, it is difficult to predict the outcome, and it is quite possible that their attitude and conduct will gradually become increasingly improper.

Some laypeople have expressed, "When I am in a group study with others, I feel annoyed and struggle to get along with them. I'd be better off studying the Dharma online by myself." However, within less than a month, these individuals may drop out and stop their studies, lacking the self-discipline to continue their Dharma study. Therefore, I urge laypeople outside Larung Gar not to leave the Buddhist group due to temporary unfavorable conditions.

This group can provide you with long-term refuge. Unless you are truly

self-disciplined, you should stay in the group and engage in virtuous deeds with others. Each of you should reflect on yourself, “Do I have enough mental strength or self-control to study and practice the Dharma alone?”

Personally, I can go on retreat for a maximum of eight or ten days. If it lasts longer, I may not do well: my source of merit may stop growing, and my afflictions may intensify. Therefore, I will return to the sangha promptly and join in group practice with others. By doing so, at least my faith will not regress.

The Precious Garland of Mountain Practices, which you have received before, often emphasizes the importance of not leaving the sangha or a Buddhist group. I believe this is a very important suggestion.

You may reflect on this and check whether it is true. If you disagree, please raise your hand and say, “I do not need the sangha. I can stay out there alone for eight years without any problem, and my bodhicitta will definitely grow.” If that is the case, we can grant your departure and even issue you a “certificate.” But who can be so certain?

Therefore, our spiritual growth must rely on the power of the sangha. Perhaps you are still not entirely clear about the benefits of collective practice. Let me provide some examples. We all know that hearing a Dharma teaching is beneficial, but the impact is significantly greater when you hear it with fellow practitioners than when you hear it alone. This difference, over the long term, can lead to positive changes within you at a subconscious level. This effect stems from the support of the sangha. This is my own “Theory of Relativity,” developed after years of examination and research (*the audience laughs*).

In short, the benefit of a proper prostration is immeasurable. As stated in the sutras:

The Buddha’s unfathomable crown protuberance comes from
having prostrated respectfully before his teachers.

That is to say, having prostrated to the teacher and the buddhas is the cause of attaining the unfathomable crown protuberance—the sign of ultimate and perfect enlightenment.

The above commentary is on “prostrations,” which is the first branch of the seven-branch offering in the Guru Yoga practice. It is very important to accumulate merit through chanting prayers, reciting mantras, performing prostrations, making

offerings, and more. Do not cease engaging in the meritorious deeds that should be done.

Meanwhile, if capable, you can also meditate on the ultimate truth of emptiness and engage in tantric practices. The accumulations of merit and wisdom are both important, and it is essential to maintain a good balance between the two without overly leaning toward either one. Grasping this key point in your Dharma practice is crucial.

2.2.5.2.2.2. Offering²⁹

♦ The pure intention for offering

When making offerings, it is essential to maintain a pure intention. Arrange as many offerings as your means allow, following the guidance in the chapter on the mandala offering—using clean and perfectly pure offerings while avoiding stinginess, pretense, or the desire to show off. Ultimately, these offerings serve as the support for your concentration.

As long as you are not ensnared by miserliness, no matter what, how many, or how much you offer, it is all good. You may make offerings to the Buddha or the sangha or donate money to build a shrine hall. Any offering made with good intentions can generate boundless merit. If a monastery or Dharma center solicits donations by stating, “You have to donate \$100, \$10,000, or \$10 million,” then such a compulsory approach can hardly ensure that the donors maintain pure intentions.

These days, some monasteries establish rules that require individuals to pay a certain amount of money to request the sangha to perform Buddhist rituals on their behalf. In this case, even if the donor reluctantly gives the money, it does not bring great benefit if he is ensnared by miserliness.

Also, one should not show off their virtuous deeds. Some people often go around flaunting, saying, “I made such-and-such offering,” just like the Tibetan proverb says: “When they see a rider, they stand and talk about it; when they meet a walker, they sit and talk about it.” By bragging everywhere like this, they exhaust their merit.

²⁹ *A Guide to The Words of My Perfect Teacher* says: “Offering should serve as an antidote to attachment and avarice.”

Therefore, you must eliminate these wrong attitudes when making offerings. You should generate bodhicitta first, then present your offerings with pure intention, and make various offerings accordingly.

♦ The noble Samantabhadra's cloudbanks of offering

◉ The visualization of offering objects

The offering objects can include the five offerings of flowers, incense, lamps, perfumed water, and food. If you do not have these items, you may visualize them in your mind. You may also visualize palaces, mansions, Dharma halls, the seven attributes of royalty, the eight auspicious symbols, and the sixteen vajra goddesses gracefully singing and dancing while playing musical instruments. You can make a mental offering by visualizing all the offerings in both the human realm and the celestial realm.

Here, the key is your visualization. If you cannot visualize, you may simply offer the objects that are physically present. If you have a certain level of concentration or mental focus, you may make an effort to visualize.

First, visualize the offering objects. Whether you live in the city or the countryside, you can mentally gather all the beautiful scenes or wealth and offer them to the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions. You may expand your visualization by mentally collecting all the elegant and beautiful things from one city to one country, to Jambudvīpa, to the four continents, to the entire human realm, and the celestial realm, and offer them to a supreme field of merit.

◉ The manner of offering

It is best to make mental offerings in the manner of Bodhisattva Samantabhadra³⁰—making offerings through emanations.

The visualization is as follows:

Through his meditative power,³¹ Bodhisattva Samantabhadra emanated countless multicolored rays of light from his heart, as innumerable as dust particles in limitless Buddha-fields. At the tip of each ray of light, a form identical to Samantabhadra appears, and each of those forms likewise emits identical rays of

³⁰ It is also referred to as “the Samantabhadra’s cloud offering” or “the noble Samantabhadra’s cloudbanks of offering.”

³¹ At this time, the practitioner should visualize themselves in the form of Bodhisattva Samantabhadra.

light from their hearts. At the end of each of these rays of light, countless inconceivable Samantabhadras manifest, each making infinite and immeasurable offerings to the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions. Offering in this way—the Samantabhadra’s cloud offering—generates inconceivable merit.

Of course, while this may be easy to describe, it is difficult to visualize. At Larung Gar, four major Dharma assemblies are held regularly, one of which, in the sixth month of the Tibetan calendar, is known as the Dharma Assembly of Samantabhadra’s Cloud Offering. During this assembly, participants recite *The King of Aspiration Prayers: Samantabhadra’s Aspiration to Excellent Conduct* and mentally offer countless offerings—such as flowers, incense, lamps, perfumed water, and food—to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas.

The act of offering is a very important practice. Before each class, we recite an offering prayer, which includes “the clouds of offering mantra.”³² Some Dharma fellows still do not know how to recite this mantra. When the sangha is reciting it three times, they simply utter some random sounds. What a pity! This mantra does not have many words, so it is advisable to recite it fluently or even memorize it. By doing so, you will be able to recite it together with the sangha.

Last year, I read a commentary that stated the offering mantra brings great benefits, such as dispelling adversities and multiplying the offering objects. In fact, this mantra is very useful for us. If we lack the power of meditation, we can always rely on the mantra’s blessing power to multiply the offering objects. In this way, we can still make a substantial number of offerings.

This mantra is not found in the Nyingma transmissions, such as those of Patrul Rinpoche or Khenpo Genhor. It was the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche who specifically added it to our recitations. Another mantra that Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche added is the mantra for multiplying the power of recitation.³³ This mantra originated from Atisha, as recorded in *The Kadampa Lineage Master’s Answers to*

³² namo ratna-trayāya | namo bhagavate
vajrasārapramardane tathāgatāyārhatē
samyaksambuddhāya tadyathā | om
vajra vajra mahāvajra mahātejavajra
mahāvidyāvajra mahābodhicittavajra
mahābodhimaṇḍopasaṃkramaṇavajra
sarvakarmāvaraṇaviśodhanavajra svāhā

³³ om sambhara sambhara vimana sara
maha dzambha bha hung phat svāhā!

Questions. Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche believed this mantra has tremendous blessing power, so he included it at the very beginning of our recitation.

When the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche was still alive, all his fourfold disciples valued the practice of offering, as they do now. Each time we held the Dharma assembly of the Samantabhadra's cloud offering, there would be flowers and various offerings both inside and outside the main Dharma hall. In summer, many flowers would be available, so monastics and laypeople would offer flowers to all buddhas and bodhisattvas.

As the tsa-tsas of the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, it is only natural for us to enjoy making offerings. Regularly arranging offerings in the Dharma hall or our personal shrine and reciting the clouds of offering mantra is a wonderful spiritual practice.

According to the instructions for this practice, after arranging the physical offerings, one should also make mental offerings to the best of their ability while reciting the following verse:

*With both real offerings and those created in the mind
through the power of samadhi,
I offer the entire universe in one vast "gesture of offering."³⁴*

That is to say, you first arrange physical offerings and, at the same time, mentally visualize offerings. Then, by the meditative power of Bodhisattva Samantabhadra, you offer everything in the universe to the gurus, buddhas, and bodhisattvas.

♦ The buddhas and bodhisattvas can accept all kinds of offerings

As long as one has the ability to make offerings, the buddhas and bodhisattvas certainly have the power to accept them. Therefore, all favorable things in the world, whether owned or unowned, as well as all the enjoyments of gods and humans, can be visualized and offered mentally. For example, you can mentally take cash, diamonds, cars, planes, and other pleasant items and offer them to the buddhas and bodhisattvas. You can offer anything you wish to them, without worrying about whether they can accept it.

However, some teachers have concerns about accepting offerings. Disciples

³⁴ Rigpa Translations. Revised for Longchen Nyingtik Project, 2023.

faithfully present items they value to the teacher, but the teacher does not really need them, so he simply sets them aside. Therefore, for many teachers, receiving offerings can be a significant burden. However, all the buddhas and bodhisattvas do not share this issue, so you may mentally make as many offerings as you like to them.

The Flower Ornament Sutra says:

Make offerings to each and every buddha
Until the end of the future;
Never grow weary of it, even for a moment,
Thus attaining the ultimate path.

Likewise, in our pursuit of Buddhahood and for the benefit of all beings, we should wholeheartedly make offerings. From the perspective of accumulating merit, mental offerings are no different from material ones. Therefore, one should not think, “I don’t have the resources to make offerings,” or “My merit is so small that I have no money to offer.” In truth, as long as you have the intention, you can make offerings at any time and in any place. Whatever resources you possess, or whenever you see something beautiful, you can immediately visualize in your mind: “I offer this to the Three Jewels! I offer this to my root guru and lineage teachers!”

Let me stress this again: Not only are your mental offerings exactly the same as real offerings in terms of accumulating merit, but the field of merit in your visualization is also exactly the same as the real field of merit. That is to say, the Buddha in your mental visualization is exactly the same as the real Buddha in life. When you practice in this way, you can purify negativities and accumulate merit exactly in the same way, whether you are in the presence of a visualized Buddha or a real Buddha. Why is that? It is because everything is illusory by nature, as Master Ouyi said:

With the illusory faculties,
You rely on the illusory Buddha,
Eliminate the illusory misdeeds,
And accumulate the illusory merit.

♦ Online mental offering

It is for this reason that we recently launched an online service through which you can make mental offerings on the website.

Someone asked, “Is making offerings to the Buddha online the same as making offerings to the Buddha on a thangka?” Absolutely! It is, because whether the Buddha’s image is on a webpage or in a thangka, it is equally unreal. Furthermore, even this so-called real world and everything in it, including iron, copper, and our bodies, are actually no different from the digital items displayed online. They are all illusory. Therefore, you can make offerings online to the illusory Buddha while also making an aspiration and dedication. By doing so, you can accumulate illusory merit as well.

Since the inception of this online service, there have been a great number of participants, which makes me very happy. As you know, many people are unable to make material offerings to the Buddha in their own lives, so it is very precious that they have the opportunity to accumulate merit in a virtual setting.

When I taught the *Ketaka Gem*—Mipham Rinpoche’s commentary on the wisdom chapter of *The Way of the Bodhisattva*,³⁵ I also quoted the following verse from Master Ouyi:

With the illusory faculties,
You rely on the illusory Buddha,
Eliminate the illusory misdeeds,
And accumulate the illusory merit.

Of course, because you have accumulated illusory merit, you will certainly attain illusory Buddhahood.

Having understood this, you should make more mental offerings in your daily life.

♦ The story of the monk named “Jewel of the Gods”

Here is a story from the *Sutra of the Wise and the Foolish*:

During the Buddha’s time, a son was born to the wife of a householder. At the moment of his birth, there fell from the sky a shower of the seven jewels, which filled the entire house. For this reason, the boy was named “Jewel of the Gods.”

³⁵ *The Wisdom Chapter: Jamgön Mipham’s Commentary on the Ninth Chapter of The Way of the Bodhisattva*, translated by Padmakara Translation Group, Shambhala, June 13, 2017.

When the boy grew up, he received ordination from the Buddha and soon became an arhat.

Thereupon, Ananda asked the Buddha, “World Honored One, this monk by the name of Jewel of the Gods—what good deeds did he do in a former lifetime that showers of jewels fell from the sky when he was born, and that everything he requires appears by itself? What is the reason for this?”

The Buddha answered, “In times long past, when the Buddha Vipasyin had come to this world, once many of his sangha members were traveling through the villages, where householders invited them and made various kinds of offerings. There was a beggar who, upon seeing this, rejoiced and developed great faith. As he had nothing of value to offer, he filled his palms with white pebbles that resembled pearls and offered them to the sangha by scattering them into the sky, vowing to attain perfect enlightenment.

This monk, Jewel of the Gods, was that beggar who offered pebbles to the sangha. The karmic effect of that offering is that he has been endowed with jewels and provisions for ninety-one kalpas, and everything he has needed has appeared by itself. Because of his fervent faith at that time, the fruit of that faith and offering is that he has now met me and attained liberation.”

From this story, we can see that one does not need to have a lot of money to make offerings and accumulate merit. In fact, what matters most is one’s veneration and pure intention. Many old nuns and monks at Larung Gar would throw rice into the air while reciting *The King of Aspiration Prayers*, visualizing that they were making offerings to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas, which can bring great merit.

However, we are no longer allowed to throw rice in the air in the Dharma halls, as it would result in rice scattered everywhere. So now we are asked to make mental offerings instead. Throwing rice into the air and visualizing it as jewels for making an offering is still a good practice.

When we pilgrimage to a sacred place or prostrate ourselves before a Buddha statue or a stupa, it is certainly good to make offerings of gold, silver, and jewels. However, if we do not have those offerings, we can always offer pebbles, flowers, or clean water with pure intention, which is also meritorious.

Some non-Buddhists think making offerings is unnecessary, saying, “This is so silly! Why are you doing this?” In fact, we have our reasons for making offerings, and such acts are meaningful. Worldly people also have all kinds of rituals, so it does

not make sense for anyone to despise them without a legitimate reason. Therefore, it is unreasonable for anyone to denigrate something they do not truly understand.

As mentioned earlier, the buddhas and bodhisattvas have the power to accept any offerings made to them. Given this, we should make offerings anytime and anywhere. When we see a gently flowing stream by the roadside, a field covered in blooming flowers, a summer rainbow, or a winter snowfall—any beautiful and pleasing sight—we can mentally offer it to the Three Jewels. Even in the city, when stuck in traffic and seeing rows of twinkling car lights, or upon entering an airport and witnessing its majestic architecture, we can make an offering in our mind. By visualizing in this way, we naturally and effortlessly accumulate merit. Therefore, we should make a habit of doing so.

2.2.5.2.2.3. Confession of Harmful Actions³⁶

♦ Confessing with intense shame and regret

When confessing, you should cultivate deep remorse and openly confess all past downfalls and harmful actions—both those remembered and those forgotten—committed since beginningless time while wandering in samsara. This includes the ten negative actions of body, speech, and mind; the five crimes with immediate retribution; the five nearly as grave; the four serious faults; the eight perverse acts; the misuse of offerings dedicated to the Three Jewels; and all other negative deeds. With unwavering resolve, you should vow: “From this moment onward, I will never commit these misdeeds again.”

With this in mind, you should engage in confession as explained in the chapter on Vajrasattva, applying the four powers.³⁷

Such a confession can definitely purify all your negative actions. *The Buddha Speaks of the Differences in Karmic Retribution for Elder Śuka Sutra* says:

If one who has committed a grave crime
Deeply condemns oneself, feels remorseful,
And vows never to do it again—

³⁶ *A Guide to The Words of My Perfect Teacher* says: “The confession of negative actions is the antidote to aversion.”

³⁷ 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.

This can uproot all its downfalls.

After confessing with the four powers, continue to visualize all negative actions and obscurations converging into a black mass on your tongue. Then, visualize rays of light streaming from the body, speech, and mind of the deities in the field of merit, shining upon the impurities and purifying your defilements—just as all the dirt were being washed away.

Only when your negative actions and obscurations are purified can signs of progress arise in practices such as the generation and perfection stages, as well as in the realization state of the buddhas and bodhisattvas. *The Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* says:

Always be diligent in confessing
The wrong deeds one has committed from time without
beginning;
When all the wrong deeds are eliminated,
The state of the Buddha will arise.

At that time, you will often dream of the guru, the deity, and the Dharma protectors who come to grant you blessings.

♦ The caveat about confession

On the other hand, if none of your misdeeds are purified, no transcendent state can arise in you. Therefore, a practitioner must confess misdeeds often and avoid procrastinating confession. Whenever you commit a wrongdoing, confess it on the spot. *The Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* says:

There are two kinds of wise men:
One those who never commit misdeeds,
The other those who confess the misdeeds.

So, even if you occasionally find yourself committing misdeeds, you must confess them immediately without delay or hesitation.

Someone says, “I transgressed a precept today, but there is no hurry. I will confess it a few days later when I have another transgression.” Such a thought is very wrong! Here is a story from *The Hundred Parables Sutra*:

There was once a foolish man who had seven children. One day, a child died. The man kept the child's corpse at home and did nothing.

Others asked him, "Why don't you bury him?"

The man thought, "If it is not right for me to simply leave the corpse aside and I have to bury it, then I should kill another child. This way, I can have a corpse on each end of my carrying pole, allowing me to walk with better balance."

Then he indeed killed one more child and took both bodies with his carrying pole to a charnel ground. People laughed at him, calling him foolish.

What is the meaning of this story? If one commits a transgression, one must confess it immediately and avoid covering it up. However, when someone is supposed to confess their misdeeds, they may think, "Since I am going to confess, I'd better commit more misdeeds so I can confess them all at once." As a result, they commit additional transgressions and other negative actions. This is akin to the man in the story who, after losing one child, chose to kill another. How very foolish! A practitioner may adopt the same faulty reasoning. Therefore, after each wrongdoing, we must confess right away.

Take venerable Atisha, for example: Though he was a great pandita, whenever he discovered that a wrong thought had arisen—even if he was walking—he would immediately sit down and begin to confess by making mandala offerings with his wooden mandala set, which he always carried with him. If Atisha felt the need to confess his wrong thoughts immediately, how much more should we ordinary beings?

When you make a confession, you may adopt the following practice. Bring to mind the guru and the Three Jewels, then recite the following verse:

All the harmful actions of my body, speech and mind,

I confess and purify in the luminosity of Dharmakaya.³⁸

In fact, many of the verses in this Longchen Nyingtik liturgy are related to tantric teachings. This verse states that you should confess all your misdeeds of body, speech, and mind in the luminous Dharmakaya. In other words, there is no person who confesses, no misdeeds that are confessed, and no act of confession. You confess without conceptualizing the subject, object, and action.

³⁸ Rigpa Translations. Revised for Longchen Nyingtik Project, 2023.

So far, we have studied three branches—prostration, offering, and confession—in the seven-branch offering. These are all valuable “nourishment” for our wisdom. A person with a good appetite wants to enjoy all the delicious food offered to them. So please “consume” as much as you can in this short lifetime if you have a good appetite for the Dharma.



Lesson 131

“Rejoice profoundly and sincerely at the turning of the Great Wheel ... the good of beings until samsara is emptied.”
[page 323–325]

We are currently studying the section “How to Practice Guru Yoga,” which consists of three parts: visualizing the field of merit, offering the seven branches, and praying with resolute trust. In today’s class, we’ll begin with the fourth of the seven-branch offering—rejoicing.

2.2.5.2.2.4. Rejoicing, the Antidote to Jealousy

♦ What to rejoice in?

The practice of rejoicing is the antidote to jealousy. As I mentioned when teaching you *The King of Aspiration Prayers: Samantabhadra’s Aspiration to Excellent Conduct*, the text is easy to understand, but what truly matters is whether we can put it into real practice and apply it in our daily lives.

What do we rejoice in? We should sincerely and profoundly rejoice in the great turning of the Dharma wheel by all buddhas for the benefit of all sentient beings, the vast practice of the six perfections and myriad activities of all bodhisattvas, the virtuous deeds of all ordinary beings according to their karmic merit and capacity for liberation, and all the positive actions we have done in the past, are doing at present, and will do in the future.

Here, “all the positive actions we have done in the past, are doing at present,

and will do in the future” means that we rejoice in all our sources of merit across the three times. This is the literal meaning of the Tibetan text, which allows for this interpretation. Additionally, it can be understood as our rejoicing in all positive actions accumulated by the buddhas, bodhisattvas, and ordinary beings throughout the past, present, and future.

Here it talks about all the positive actions from the three times, which we should often keep in mind and recite the following verse when rejoicing:

*Whether they be relative or absolute,
I rejoice in all positive, virtuous actions.*³⁹

Here, “relative or absolute” refers to the two truths—the relative truth and the absolute truth.⁴⁰ All teachings of the nine vehicles are encompassed within these two truths. Normally, we rejoice in the positive actions within the relative truth, but we often neglect to rejoice in the positive actions within the absolute truth, which are, in fact, the most virtuous. Therefore, we should rejoice in all positive actions encompassed by the two truths, whether tainted by emotions or perfectly pure, whether they are done by ourselves or others.

A good practitioner can rejoice anytime and anywhere while carrying out regular activities. Whatever good they see or hear about, they will rejoice, as it has become part of their habit. They rejoice at all positive actions, whether tainted by emotions or perfectly pure, and whether included in the relative truth or the absolute truth. The act of rejoicing may seem like just a split-second thought, and it does not require much effort. However, its merit is indeed substantial. It is often emphasized as a pith instruction in the teachings of many great masters.

Therefore, having gained intellectual understanding, we should put it into practice.

♦ The benefits of rejoicing

The benefits of rejoicing are infinite. Here is the story of a leper woman who rejoiced in King Prasenajit’s offerings to the Buddha and his sangha. Many of you may already know this story.

³⁹ Rigpa Translations. Revised for the Longchen Nyingtik Project, 2023.

⁴⁰ Absolute truth is also referred to as “ultimate truth.”

◉ A leper woman's story

Here is the story from the *Mulasarvastivada Vinaya*:⁴¹

On his alms round, Mahakasyapa encountered a leper woman with exposed bones, covered in sores and pus. In order to benefit her, Mahakasyapa begged for food from her.

Impressed by Mahakasyapa's majestic deportment, the leper woman developed great faith and offered him a bowl of rice gruel she had received on her begging round. As she was presenting it to Mahakasyapa, a fly fell in. When she tried to fish it out, her broken finger also fell in.

Mahakasyapa drank it anyway to fulfill her good intention and told the leper woman, "You should rejoice at your offering. From now until tomorrow's meal time, you have provided me with a whole day's worth of food."

[We monastics must remember never to be picky about what is offered by a donor. I have heard that some monastics, while on their alms round, are overly particular about the provisions they receive, dismissing them with comments like, "This isn't good," or "That isn't right." They behave in a troublesome and demanding manner, as if they were royalty who could never be satisfied. But consider Mahakasyapa—a great disciple of Buddha Shakyamuni, who upheld the complete transmission of all his teachings—who willingly drank a bowl of rice gruel mixed with pus and a broken finger, solely to honor the pure intention of the giver.]

At that time, the leper woman was filled with joy, thinking, "What a supreme benefit I have received today! Mahakasyapa accepted my humble offerings." Having developed pure faith in Mahakasyapa, the leper woman passed away and was reborn in the Tushita Heaven.

◉ The story of an elderly beggar woman

At that time, Indra witnessed the leper woman making an offering to Mahakasyapa but did not know where she was reborn. So, Indra went to ask the Buddha. The Buddha replied, "She was reborn in Tushita Heaven."

Soon everyone heard about this, including King Prasenajit. The king went to see the Buddha, prostrated at his feet, and sat down beside him. The Buddha

⁴¹ It is in the section on medical issues.

expounded the Dharma to the king, which made him very happy. Then the Buddha remained in silence.

King Prasenajit stood up, straightened his clothes, put his palms together, and said to the Buddha with great reverence, “Because of the action of Mahakasyapa, may the Buddha and your sangha accept my humble offerings for seven days.”⁴²

The Buddha agreed. Knowing the Buddha would accept his offering, the king prostrated at his feet and left. He returned to the palace and had a variety of fine foods prepared that night. The next morning, he set up seats and prepared clean water and toothpicks. Meanwhile, the king sent someone to invite the Buddha, saying, “The meal is ready. May the Buddha be aware of it.”

At mealtime, the Buddha and his sangha came to the palace. When they were seated, King Prasenajit served them the meal in person.

At that time, an elderly beggar woman came, sitting across from the Buddha and the sangha. Her heart was filled with pure faith, and she felt deep reverence, thinking, “King Prasenajit has attained his wealth and status due to the merit he accumulated in the past. Now, having encountered the Buddha—such an extraordinary field of merit—he continues to amass vast stores of merit. How truly rare and remarkable this is!” With a heart of genuine and wholehearted rejoicing, she thus accumulated immeasurable merit.

After serving food to the Buddha and his sangha, as well as providing them with clean water and toothpicks, the king sat in a lower position, ready to receive the teaching.

The Buddha was fully aware of the beggar woman’s rejoicing. That evening, when it was time to dedicate the merit, he asked King Prasenajit, “The merit you have accumulated from today’s offering—do you wish to dedicate it to yourself, or to someone who has gained even greater merit than you?”

The king thought, “The Buddha received my offering today, so how could anyone gain greater merit than I?” After this reflection, he said, “Please dedicate the merit to the person who has gained even greater merit.”

So the Buddha dedicated the merit in the name of the elderly beggar woman. This occurred for five or six consecutive days.

King Prasenajit was frustrated and thought, “Why does the Buddha accept

⁴² The sutra mentions “seven days,” while *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* states “four months.”

my offerings yet dedicate the merit in the name of a beggar woman?” He then consulted with his ministers to find a way to resolve the situation.

One senior minister proposed, “Tomorrow, we should prepare twice as much food. When the Buddha and his sangha arrive for the offering, we will fill their bowls with one portion and intentionally spill another portion over the edges of their bowls. When the beggars come to get the food on the ground, we’ll beat them up to stop them from taking it.”

The next day, as expected, when the food fell to the ground, the elderly beggar woman rushed to pick it up. However, the attendants serving the meal stopped her. The woman pleaded, “The king possesses immense wealth and endless food. Why should those of us who suffer be forbidden from gathering what would otherwise go to waste?” This disturbed her mind and filled her with resentment, ultimately destroying the pure merit she had gained through rejoicing. That day, the Buddha dedicated the merits by reciting the king’s name.

◉ The cause of Prasenajit becoming a king

During the dedication, the Buddha said a verse:

You have elephants, horses, chariots, and infantry soldiers,
And enjoy food with ease in your country.
Do you know why you can have all these?
Because of the power of offering salt-free rice paste.

Therefore, this is the effect of King Prasenajit’s act of offering salt-free rice paste to a sublime being in a previous life. This exemplifies making a humble offering to a supreme field of merit and receiving a significant karmic result.

There are many similar stories in Buddhist scriptures. We learned from the chapter of “Offering the Mandala,” that Mandhatri became a king because he offered seven peas to a buddha. Here is the story of how King Prasenajit became a king in *The Vinaya Sutra*:

A long time ago, there was a merchant in a clan who married a wife and had a son. When the son grew up, the merchant left home for business but soon lost all his money.

While the merchant was away, his wife gave birth to another son. To support the family, she asked her elder son to work as a laborer on a neighbor’s farm.

Once it was time for a festival. The merchant's wife knew the neighbor was busy preparing meals to offer to monks, brahmins, and other guests the next day, so no one would feed her son that day. Worried that her son would go hungry, she brought him the only salt-free rice roll available at home.

On that day, a pratyekabuddha happened to pass by. The son was impressed by his peaceful demeanor and majestic deportment, and thought, "It is because I never made offerings to such a supreme field of merit that I have to endure suffering in this life. If he can accept this salt-free rice roll, I will definitely make an offering to him."

Fully aware of the son's thoughts, the pratyekabuddha extended his begging bowl to him, saying, "If you wish to make an offering, you may place it in my bowl." With great joy and reverence, the son placed the rice roll in the bowl.

Because of this meritorious action, the son was reborn as a celestial king for the next six consecutive lives, and as a king of the human realm in the following six consecutive lives. With the remaining merit, he was reborn as King Prasenajit in this life. Now that the karmic effect from that offering was exhausted, the Buddha spoke the above verse.

Therefore, we must not denigrate small positive actions. A seemingly insignificant positive action may lead to an incredible karmic result. This is the case with offering and rejoicing. Especially if we can rejoice as the elderly beggar woman did, we can make significant progress in our Dharma practice.

♦ About the recipient of your offering

In these stories, the offerings lead to incredible karmic results. A significant reason for this is that the recipient of the offering was a sublime being, such as an arhat, a pratyekabuddha, a bodhisattva, or a buddha. Do we generate the same merit when we make an offering to a teacher? It is hard to say. For this reason, I want to elaborate on this topic.

My suggestion is that you make offerings to the monastic sangha, which is the best and safest recipient of your offerings. My words may displease some teachers, but for the benefit of most donors, I feel compelled to remind you of this.

◉ Don't mistake a piece of cow dung for gold

In Buddhist teachings, it is often stated that "the teacher is the Buddha," but it

is important to understand that a buddha-like teacher must possess all the necessary qualities. Only such a teacher can be considered equivalent to the Buddha. This does not apply to a teacher who holds the title but lacks the qualifications. *The Vinaya Sutra* even uses venomous snakes and thieves as similes to describe unqualified teachers, illustrating the potential harm they can bring.

Sadly, many people today lack the wisdom to discern who is a qualified teacher and who is a charlatan. After offering everything with pure intentions to a teacher, a person may realize that the teacher is a charlatan and that they have mistaken a piece of cow dung for gold—how can someone without precepts, compassion, and wisdom be qualified to be a teacher?

◉ A suspicious teacher

Today, a layperson came to see me early in the morning and shared her experience. She was distressed about her teacher. She showed me some photos of the teacher, but I do not typically assess whether a teacher is qualified or a charlatan. I also lack the ability to make that judgment based solely on photos. However, I feel sympathy for her, as she truly lacks basic discernment.

She said, “I saw his introduction on the internet, saying he is so-and-so.”

I said, “There are so many things on the internet, including introductions. Some introductions for products or medicines are accurate, but others can be misleading, especially those of a teacher.”

She said, “His introduction should be true.”

“Why is that?” I asked.

“Because the teacher is very kind to me. He requested offerings from me. My cell phone is worth 2,000 yuan, but he asked me to offer him a cell phone that costs 7,000 yuan.”

This was the reason she developed faith—because she was asked to offer a mobile phone. Indeed, those who lack basic discernment act blindly in everything they do. But more importantly, it comes down to the teacher. If teachers do not prioritize the Dharma and the attainment of liberation, and if they do not take disciples out of compassion but instead demand offerings from disciples simply by saying, “I am your teacher,” then this is so very sad!

Especially when a so-called teacher proposes, “You should offer me this or that,” I cannot help but become suspicious of him. I am not saying that making an

offering to a teacher is not good, but generally speaking, a true teacher does not need a lot of money and possessions, even in today's world. Therefore, it is indeed concerning that a teacher who is supposed to pay attention to the Dharma offerings made by students focuses more on material offerings, and worse yet, it is the teacher himself who requests such offerings.

Recently, a layperson told me, "I am quite worried about the development of Tibetan Buddhism." His words resonated with me. Although there are some concerning issues in Chinese Buddhism, they do not compare to those in Tibetan Buddhism.

Some so-called teachers of Tibetan Buddhism travel to the Han region of China solely to collect offerings, including cell phones, computers, cars, houses, and more. I do not know what this will lead to in the future.

Does making an offering to a teacher who solicits your offering really bring merit? It is hard to say.

◉ Mistakes related to choosing the recipient of your offering

As said, the statement "the teacher is the Buddha" does not imply that all teachers are buddhas. Moreover, even if they are your teacher, it does not mean that you must obey everything they say. Therefore, regarding the issue of "following a teacher and making offerings," I hope you have the wisdom to discern what to do.

How do people typically determine the recipients of their offerings? Two naive reasons often mentioned are a teacher's photo and their past-life account.

One person says, "He must be a true teacher because I saw a photo of him living in a cabin at Larung Gar."

This person's reasoning is based on "a photo showing his cabin at Larung Gar." But even if it is a cabin at Larung Gar, does this photo prove that it is really his cabin, given the many cabins there? Even if it is indeed his cabin in the photo, what else can you conclude from the photo alone?

Someone else finds a group photo convincing, saying, "Look, he had a group photo with this great master, so he must be a real teacher." In fact, this is not a wise argument. There is nothing in the sutras that says when you follow a teacher, you should check with whom he has taken a photo.

Devadatta⁴³ would certainly have been in a photo with Buddha Shakyamuni,

⁴³ As previously mentioned, Devadatta was a cousin of the Buddha, so he would likely appear

if there had been cameras at that time. Therefore, it is too hasty and careless to evaluate a teacher based solely on a photo.

Some people tend to believe in a teacher's past-life account. Speaking of his past lives, as I mentioned on my Weibo,⁴⁴ if you don't even know about his present life, how is it possible that you know about his past lives?

Even if he was a so-and-so Dharma King or a national master in a previous life, the person you are following now is what matters in this life. Does he still possess the same great qualities he had in his past life? If not, his past-life account is only relevant to that previous existence.

As you know, the Buddha never instructed us to check a teacher's past life when deciding to follow them. No great master has stated that a person's past-life account is a prerequisite for following them in this life.

Moreover, even if a person had a remarkable past life, if their great qualities cannot be reactivated in this life, there is no reason for you to follow them. There have indeed been many great masters in Tibet who were no different from the Buddha, but why have they changed after their "reincarnations?"

I often hear people say, "This person is the reincarnation of a so-and-so great master," and sometimes I joke, "That great master probably didn't know who they would become in this life."

Therefore, to discern whether a person is a qualified teacher or a charlatan, their photo and past-life account are not reliable points of reference. They are not even important.

So, what is truly important? It is to get to know the teacher through the Buddha's teachings. I believe that understanding who they are in this life is more important than knowing who they were in a past life.

The reason I mention this today is primarily in response to the negative influence some individuals have brought to Buddhism. Both teachers and disciples are, of course, responsible for what has happened: the disciple may lack wisdom, and the teachers may desire too much. If people are unaware of this, I fear that more harm will be done to Buddhism.

If it only matters to a few individuals, I do not need to say much. After all,

in a photo if there had been a camera at the time. However, he was also known as the evil cousin, making him hardly a qualified teacher.

⁴⁴ Weibo is one of the largest social media platforms in China.

in such a vast world, there are those who do things properly and those who do not. However, if what has happened concerns Tibetan Buddhism or the legacy of the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, it is necessary for me to analyze the origins and causes of some inappropriate phenomena to avoid further confusion and misunderstanding. This issue also warrants everyone's attention.

The reason I want you to pay attention to this is that negative influences are already present. However, I do not believe that all or most teachers are charlatans. On one hand, I do not have the right to make such claims, and on the other, I genuinely do not know, because the manifestations of buddhas and bodhisattvas are unfathomable. Nevertheless, regarding Dharma studies and practice, there are fundamental teachings on how to choose and follow a teacher, which you must learn.

As you know, even if you want to find a worldly teacher, business partner, or friend, you need to spend a certain amount of time getting to know them. If you need to examine the person you associate with for worldly matters, it is even more important to do so for your spiritual teacher, who is the source of all your worldly and spiritual happiness.

You are supposed to examine the teacher first before following them; yet you choose to follow them blindly, much like a starving dog devours meat at first sight. You accept their teachings and receive their empowerments, but eventually, you feel distressed and begin to lament your choice of teacher. What is the purpose of this?

Where is my teaching heading? Am I going off topic?

Well, it should be fine. After all, instructions on how to follow a teacher do not deviate from the general outline of the Guru Yoga practice in this chapter (*the audience laughs*).

♦ The benefits of rejoicing

As we know, many people value positive speech and deeds. However, it is the doer's intention alone that defines whether an action is positive or negative, rather than how that intention is expressed in words or deeds. Consequently, the benefit of a positive action is not determined by its actual execution, but by the underlying intention.

◉ Rejoicing and an ostentatious good action

For example, when you witness others performing virtuous actions, try to observe them with a pure mind, free from jealousy, and sincerely rejoice, thinking, “They have built a stupa—how wonderful, I rejoice!” or “So many people are studying the Dharma—rejoice, rejoice!” Then, dedicate this merit to all sentient beings and the attainment of perfect enlightenment. The merit you accumulate through this sincere rejoicing will far exceed that of ostentatious good deeds that are tainted by afflictions.

What do we mean by ostentatious good deeds? For instance, even if someone engages in virtuous actions, if they harbor a competitive mindset when seeing others do good, or if they act out of pride, thinking, “I must also achieve such great deeds,” their ostentatious virtuous actions are compromised by the eight worldly concerns, such as the desire for fame and recognition. Compared to such ostentatious good deeds, a sincere act of rejoicing indeed brings greater merit.

Patrul Rinpoche said this teaching is mentioned in *The Sutra of Instructions to the King*. The relevant instruction can be found in the Tibetan version of the sutra. I also checked the three translations by Amoghavajra, Danapala, and others, all of which contain mostly tantric teachings. One verse in the sutra states:

Because of my rejoicing and offerings,
I can swiftly attain Buddhahood.⁴⁵

I have referenced this sutra multiple times in my teachings. If time permits, you may wish to read it.

◉ Long-term hearing and contemplation of the Dharma

Buddhists should focus on scriptural studies, as I have emphasized. By doing so and engaging in long-term hearing and contemplation of the Dharma, you will undoubtedly reap significant benefits.

It is not right for a practitioner to ignore Buddhist doctrines and focus solely on worldly concerns. What is the purpose of engaging in worldly preoccupations? We have already embarked on the path of the Dharma, which encompasses vast and profound teachings. At this time, if you do not study, research, and practice the Dharma—a wish-fulfilling jewel—and instead devote yourself to worldly knowledge, do you think it is worthwhile?

⁴⁵ Khenpo Sodargye Rinpoche added, “I am not sure whether this scriptural evidence is what Patrul Rinpoche referred to.”

Even if you are studying political science, economics, or literature, which are valuable subjects, they offer only temporary, occasional benefits that are limited in scope. What is the point of dedicating your time and energy to these worldly pursuits?

I have always believed that the Dharma encompasses the essence of everything and is, therefore, worthy of a lifetime of dedication. I often vow never to part from the Dharma throughout my life. Not only do I strive to stay connected to it, but I also work to contribute to it by, for example, teaching and engaging in Dharma discussions with others. Of course, as an ordinary person, there are times when I do not feel like teaching, but I try to overcome that and continue.

You may find yourself in similar situations: at times, you might not feel inclined to listen to teachings or study the Dharma. This is a natural response when faced with suffering and habitual tendencies, and I understand that. However, it is important to address those feelings when they arise. Remember, hearing, contemplation, and meditation are not activities meant for just a day or two; they are long-term commitments that require ongoing effort.

Recently, a Han monk came to my house. At first glance, I thought he was ten years older than me. We chatted for a bit, and I asked him, “How long have you been here?” He replied, “Ten years. I’ve never missed a transmission and have received them all completely.” I was very pleased to hear that. Later, I asked about his age, and it turned out he was five years younger than me.

I sincerely rejoiced at his devotion to the Dharma. Except for one or two occasions when he had to skip the teachings due to his volunteer tasks, he has been receiving the Dharma quietly but steadily. I believe he is not exceptional; many Dharma practitioners at the Bodhi Association are the same.

Although they are usually very busy, they have consistently engaged with the teachings earnestly and properly. What they are doing indeed requires mental strength. With such strength, they are able to immerse themselves in the Dharma for extended periods, gradually making progress and transforming their minds in subtle ways.

Normally, such a transformation cannot be achieved in a short period. I have heard of a Dharma training program where participants receive the beginner’s course on the first day, the intermediate course on the second day, and the advanced course on the third and final day. This approach may be acceptable if the teacher

aims to create a specific dependent origination. Otherwise, it is impossible to convey all the profound Dharma in three days. Moreover, it is even more unrealistic to expect the Dharma to merge into the mind in such a short time.

Therefore, it is essential to engage in long-term hearing, contemplation, and meditation. Reflect on our afflictions and habitual tendencies, as well as the misdeeds we have committed. Not to mention other misdeeds, just the killing you have done before embarking on the Dharma path may require you to recite the hundred-syllable mantra of Vajrasattva for many lifetimes. Just think how many animals were killed for just one of your meals? The karmic consequences of consuming such a meal could take hundreds of years to purify!

Having accumulated so many misdeeds, if you do not make an effort to engage in good deeds, you will end up in the lower realms in a future life. We all know that life is as brief as autumn clouds, which can vanish in an instant. Now that you recognize how short life is, why not focus on studying and practicing the Dharma?

- ◉ The merit of rejoicing equals that of the rejoiced positive action

Chagme Rinpoche said:

When hearing of others doing good,
If one abandons all negative feelings of jealousy,
And sincerely rejoices from the depths of one's heart,
The Buddha says one will gain equal merit to theirs.

This is similar to a verse in the *Genealogy of the Sakya Clan*:

When we see offerings made by others,
If we sincerely rejoice,
The merit of our rejoicing
Is equal to that of the offering.

The Condensed Transcendent Wisdom says:

The weight of all Mount Merus in a billion worlds could be
measured,
But the merit of rejoicing in virtuous actions is immeasurable.

The Golden Light Sutra also says:

The merit of rejoicing is boundless;
It can encompass all merit from the three times.

Therefore, rejoicing is a practice that yields significant benefits with minimal effort, making it worthwhile to incorporate at all times and in all places.

2.2.5.2.2.5. Exhorting the Buddhas to Turn the Wheel of Dharma⁴⁶

Visualize that you are in the presence of the buddhas, bodhisattvas, spiritual teachers, and all other noble beings who bear the great responsibility of benefiting others. Think that, disheartened by the ingratitude and discouragement from sentient beings, they grow weary and choose to remain in a meditative state of peace and bliss, rather than imparting the Dharma. In response, visualize yourself emanating hundreds of thousands of millions of bodies, offering Dharma wheels, jewels, and other precious treasures, and earnestly requesting them to turn the wheel of Dharma. Then, recite:

*According to the receptivity and needs of different beings,
I implore you to turn the wheel of Dharma of the three
yanas.*⁴⁷

♦ The story of Mahabrahma exhorting the Buddha to turn the wheel of the Dharma

After Buddha Shakyamuni attained perfect and complete awakening, it was the celestial kings who exhorted him to turn the wheel of the Dharma. Then, the Buddha started to teach. Because of this, teachers and great masters of later generations would only turn the wheel of the Dharma upon request. Moreover, the merit of pleading for the turning of the Dharma wheel is enormous.

The process of exhorting the Buddha to turn the Dharma wheel is described in sutras, such as in the twenty-fifth chapter “Exhortation” of *The Lalitavistara Sutra*.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ As stated in *A Guide to The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, this is the antidote for confusion.

⁴⁷ Rigpa Translations. Revised for the Longchen Nyingtik Project, 2023.

⁴⁸ The sutra is also referred to as *The Play in Full*. The cited text is translated by the Dharmach-

While the Thus-Gone One was seated at the foot of the Bodhi tree, in the privacy of solitude after he had first attained perfect and complete awakening, he had the following thought about the conventions of the world:

“Alas! This truth that I realized and awakened to is profound, peaceful, tranquil, calm, complete, hard to see, hard to comprehend, and impossible to conceptualize, since it is inaccessible to the intellect. Only wise noble ones and adepts can understand it.

“It is the complete and definitive apprehension of the abandonment of all aggregates, the end of all sensations, the absolute truth, and freedom from a foundation. It is a state of complete peace, free of clinging, free of grasping, unobserved, undemonstrable, uncompounded, beyond the six sense fields, inconceivable, unimaginable, and ineffable. It is indescribable, inexpressible, and incapable of being illustrated. It is unobstructed, beyond all references, a state of interruption through the path of tranquility, and imperceptible like emptiness. It is the exhaustion of craving, and it is cessation free of desire. It is nirvana.

“If I were to teach this truth to others, they would not understand it. Teaching the truth would tire me out and be wrongly contested, and it would be futile. Thus I will remain silent and keep this truth in my heart.”

At that time, the Buddha uttered these verses:

Profound, peaceful, stainless, lucid, and unconditioned—
Such is the nectar-like truth I have realized.
Were I to teach it, no one would understand,
So I will silently remain in the forest.

At that time the Thus-Gone One radiated light from the center of his forehead, which illuminated the entire trichiliocosm with its brilliance. Then, by means of the Buddha’s power, Great Top-Knotted Brahma, lord of the trichiliocosm, became aware of the Thus-Gone One’s notion. Having understood that the Blessed One was set on keeping the Dharma to himself without teaching it, he thought, “I will most certainly approach and solicit the Thus-Gone One to turn the wheel of Dharma!”

So right then Great Top-Knotted Brahma addressed the other gods of

the Brahma realms: “Friends! Even though the Thus-Gone One has awakened to unsurpassable, perfect, and complete Buddhahood, he is set on keeping the Dharma to himself without teaching it. Alas! This world is doomed! Alas, O friends, this world is really doomed! Thus we must surely go and solicit the worthy one, the perfectly and completely awakened Thus-Gone One, to turn the wheel of Dharma.”

Then the Great Top-Knotted Brahma, surrounded and escorted by 6.8 million Brahmās, went to the Thus-Gone One. When he arrived, he bowed his head to the feet of the Thus-Gone One, and with palms joined, said to him, “Thus-Gone One, even having awakened to unexcelled, perfect, and complete awakening, you are bent on keeping the Dharma to yourself without teaching it. Alas, Blessed One! This world is doomed! Alas, Blessed One, this world is really doomed!

There are intelligent beings of good disposition with the potential, fortune, and ability to comprehend the meaning of what the Blessed One says. Such being the case, O Blessed One, please eloquently teach the Dharma! Please, O Well-Gone One, teach the Dharma!”

In order to show kindness to the world of gods, humans, and non-humans, the Thus-Gone One looked upon this world with compassion and silently acquiesced to Great Top-Knotted Brahma. Indeed, once Great Top-Knotted Brahma understood that this Thus-Gone One had silently acquiesced, he anointed the Thus-Gone One with divine sandalwood powder and divine aloeswood powder, became joyful and ecstatic, and then vanished that very instant.

By the power of the Buddha, the Great Top-Knotted Brahma once again became aware of this thought of the Thus-Gone One, and he went to see Śakra, lord of the gods.

When he arrived, he told Śakra, lord of the gods, “Understand, Kauśika, that the venerable, perfectly and completely awakened Thus-Gone One is bent on not teaching the Dharma and thus keeping it to himself! And since the worthy one, the perfectly and completely awakened Thus-Gone One, is bent on not teaching the Dharma and thus keeping it to himself. Alas, O Kauśika, this world is doomed! Alas, O Kauśika, this world is really doomed! Alas, this world will be plunged into the great darkness of ignorance! Why don’t we then go and request that the worthy one, the perfectly and completely awakened Thus-Gone One, turn the wheel of

Dharma? Because the Thus-Gone One does not turn the wheel of Dharma without being requested!”

And so when the night had passed, Śakra, Brahma, the earth gods, the sky gods, and the gods of the Heaven of the Four Great Kings, the Heaven of the Thirty-Three, the Heaven Free from Strife, the Heaven of Joy, the Heaven of Delighting in Emanations, the Heaven of Making Use of Others’ Emanations, the Brahma Realm, the Luminous Heaven, the Heaven of Great Fruition, the Heaven of Perfected Virtue, and the pure realms—many hundreds of thousands of divinities of beautiful appearances—illuminated the area surrounding the tree of liberation with their divine beauty and their divine luminosity, and approached the Thus-Gone One. They bowed their heads to the feet of the Thus-Gone One, circumambulated him, and stood to one side. Then Śakra, lord of the gods, bowed down with palms joined in the direction of the Thus-Gone One and praised him in verse:

Your mind is completely liberated,
Like a full moon free of eclipse.
May you rise, O Victor in Battle!
May you shine the light of insight in this dark world!

But at these words the Thus-Gone One remained silent. Then Great Top-Knotted Brahma said to Śakra, lord of the gods, “O Kauśika, venerable, perfectly and completely awakened Thus-Gone Ones are not requested to turn the wheel of Dharma the way you requested it.”

So Great Top-Knotted Brahma draped his robe on one shoulder, knelt on his right knee, and bowing down to the Thus-Gone One with palms joined, spoke this verse to him:

May you rise, O Victor in Battle!
May you shine the light of insight in this dark world!
Beings will become knowledgeable.
O Sage, may you teach the Dharma!

At these words the Thus-Gone One repeated to Great Top-Knotted Brahma, “O great Brahma, this truth to which I awakened is profound, subtle, luminous, hard to comprehend, inconceivable, and beyond the intellect. Understood only by

the clever and the wise, it is out of step with all worldly people and difficult to see. It is the abandonment of all aggregates, the cessation of all formations, a state of interruption through the path of tranquility, and imperceptible, like emptiness. It is the exhaustion of craving, and it is cessation free of desire. It is nirvana.

If I were to teach this truth, and if others did not comprehend it, this would be harmful to me. And these verses, O Brahma, are my reply to you, time and again:

My path, going against the stream, is profound.
It is difficult to see,
Since those blinded by desire do not see it.
Therefore teaching it will not be of any help.

Beings, bound to their desires,
Are continuously swept away in the stream.
I discovered this with great effort;
Therefore teaching it will not be of any help!

When Great Top-Knotted Brahma and Śakra, lord of the gods, understood that the Thus-Gone One would remain silent, these two great beings and their retinue of gods, saddened and dejected, disappeared then and there. And so the Thus-Gone One had thrice made up his mind to remain disinterested.

At that time all sorts of negative, inauspicious opinions started to circulate among the people of Magadha. Some said that winds would no longer blow, and some that fires would no longer burn. Some said that rains would no longer fall, some that rivers would no longer flow, and some that crops would no longer grow. Some said that birds would no longer fly in the sky, and some that pregnant women would no longer give birth safely.

The Great Top-Knotted Brahma knew the nature of the Thus-Gone One's thoughts, and he was aware of the opinions among the people of Magadha. So at the close of night, he illuminated the entire area surrounding the tree of liberation with divine light beautiful in color, and he approached the Thus-Gone One. When he arrived, he bowed his head to the feet of the Thus-Gone One, draped his robe on one shoulder, knelt down on his right knee, and bending forward with palms joined, spoke in verse to the Thus-Gone One, exhorting him to turn the wheel of the Dharma.

The Thus-Gone One then looked throughout the entire world with his awakened eye and saw sentient beings that were base, mediocre, and advanced; those that were high, low, and middling; those of good disposition and easy to purify, those of bad disposition and difficult to purify; those that can understand through just a cursory statement, and those for whom the words are paramount and who rely on a detailed explanation for their understanding.

He thus saw that sentient beings were grouped into three categories: one that was sure to be wrong, one that was sure to be correct, and one that was undetermined. Just as when a person standing on the bank of a lotus pond sees some lotuses submerged in the water, some lotuses at water level, and some lotuses above the water, this was how the Thus-Gone One saw sentient beings situated in three groups when he looked throughout the whole world with his awakened eye.

The Thus-Gone One thought, “Whether I teach the Dharma or not, this group that is sure to be wrong will not understand the Dharma. And whether I teach the Dharma or not, this group that is sure to be correct will understand the Dharma. Yet the group that is undetermined will understand the Dharma if I teach it but will not understand the Dharma if I do not teach it.”

The Thus-Gone One then engendered great compassion, starting with the sentient beings situated in the undetermined group. From the perspective of his own perfect wisdom, the Thus-Gone One then understood the request made by Great Top-Knotted Brahma, and thus spoke to him with this verse:

O Brahma, the gates of nectar are opened
 To those sentient beings of Magadha
 With ears and with devotion,
 Who constantly listen with attention and without doing harm.

Once Great Top-Knotted Brahma understood that the Thus-Gone One had acquiesced, he rejoiced with satisfaction and glee. Ecstatic and elated, he bowed with his head to the feet of the Thus-Gone One and vanished right there.

Once the gods of the atmosphere heard this from the earth gods, they announced it to the gods in the Heaven of the Four Great Kings. The gods in the Heaven of the Four Great Kings told those in the Heaven of the Thirty-Three. The gods in the Heaven of the Thirty-Three told those in the Heaven Free from Strife. The gods in the Heaven Free from Strife told those in the Heaven of Joy and

the Heaven of Delighting in Emanations. The gods in the Heaven of Joy and the Heaven of Delighting in Emanations told those in the Heaven of Making Use of Others' Emanations. Finally, they announced and proclaimed this to the gods of the Brahma realms.

As such, upon the pleading of the Great Top-Knotted Brahma, the Buddha came to the Deer Park in Sarnath and turned the first wheel of the Dharma.

This is how the Dharma was spread in this world at the very beginning. Of course, after the Buddha attained perfect enlightenment, he appeared to stay in silence and eventually turned the Dharma after several rounds of pleading. He did so because he wanted to make the world venerate the Dharma, not because he did not want to give the teaching. The sole purpose for the Buddha to come to this world was to turn the Dharma wheel and benefit all beings.

Therefore, when practicing the branch of “exhorting the buddhas to turn the wheel of Dharma,” you should think and visualize in this way:

“When the buddhas, bodhisattvas, and great teachers have grown weary of the ingratitude and discouraging attitude of sentient beings and consider remaining in the meditative state of peace and bliss without giving teachings, I will emanate infinite bodies, each of which offers conch shells, golden wheels, jewels, and other precious objects to them all, exhorting them to always turn the wheel of Dharma.”

♦ Requesting the teachings of the nine vehicles

When exhorting the turning of the wheel of Dharma, it refers to requesting the teaching of the nine vehicles—the entire teachings in Sutrayana and Vajrayana. Specifically, the teachings may be subdivided into nine vehicles:

The three outer vehicles that liberate from the origin of suffering: the Shravaka vehicle, the Pratyekabuddha vehicle, and the Bodhisattva vehicle;

The three inner vehicles of Vedic-like asceticism:⁴⁹ the vehicle of Kriya Tantra, the vehicle of Caryā Tantra, and the vehicle of Yoga Tantra;

The three secret vehicles which provide powerful transformative methods: the vehicle of Mahayoga, the vehicle of Anuyoga, and the vehicle of Atiyoga.

Therefore, the nine vehicles encompass not only the Sutrayana teachings but also the Vajrayana teachings, catering to every type of Dharma student. The

⁴⁹ This tradition places great emphasis on ritual cleanliness and outer conduct.

qualified teacher, who embodies the Buddha, always provides teachings appropriate for different disciples.

For example, at Larung Gar, there are groups studying Sutrayana teachings, as well as groups studying Vajrayana teachings. In this way, we provide the complete Buddha's teachings. Recently, we established a cohort among Han monastics at Larung Gar to study the five great treatises. As soon as the classes began, we could see clearly that people indeed have different dispositions: some individuals have a disposition for Abhidharma studies, some for Madhyamaka, and some for Abhisamaya.

However, there are a few individuals who do not know their dispositions, so they start to learn one of the five treatises and find that they do not like it. Then they switch to another one and still do not like it, and then they switch again. Eventually, they have "sampled" all the classes but find nothing suitable for them. In this case, they may have no choice but to choose a tirthika's path (*the audience laughs*).

What they have done may be a bit too much. While some Buddhists may resonate strongly with specific teachings, it is crucial to study all of them to the best of your ability, regardless of whether you feel a personal connection to certain ones. This is very important.

As stated in the *Ornament of Clear Realization*, the Buddha's omniscient wisdom encompasses both ground wisdom and path wisdom. Thus, there is no Buddha who lacks understanding of Abhidharma, Madhyamaka, and Abhisamaya. Therefore, for any practitioner aspiring to attain the Buddha's wisdom, it is essential to grasp the doctrines of Buddhism from various perspectives.

That said, while conducting scriptural studies, you must not forget to practice the preliminaries. Otherwise, without taming your mind through practice, even if you are well-versed in the Dharma, your anger may grow, your behavior may become more violent, and even Indra himself cannot suppress your hatred. This is truly troubling. In fact, no matter what you study and practice, you must ultimately internalize the Dharma in your mind so that you become kind and pacified.

In short, when pleading for the turning of the Dharma wheel, we should visualize and exhort the buddhas, bodhisattvas, and great teachers to turn the Dharma wheel for the sake of transforming the minds of all beings.

2.2.5.2.2.6. Requesting the Buddhas Not to Enter Nirvana⁵⁰

In this world or any other realm, whenever a buddha, bodhisattva, or qualified teacher has completed their activity of benefiting sentient beings and is about to enter nirvana, visualize yourself in their presence. Just as the layman Cunda supplicated Buddha Shakyamuni to remain in this world, you mentally produce many emanations of yourself, each of which beseeches all the noble ones, saying:

Till saṃsara is completely empty, and all beings liberated,

*Do not pass into nirvana, but remain here among us, I pray.*⁵¹

Then think that because of your prayer, all the noble ones remain in the world to benefit sentient beings until saṃsara is emptied.

♦ Requesting that great masters live long lives

In this world, it has been more than 2,500 years since Buddha Shakyamuni manifested and passed into parinirvana. Many great teachers have also appeared in this world and entered parinirvana one after another. So many years have passed since the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche entered his parinirvana. Many other great teachers, who have bestowed upon us the kindness of the Dharma, have also passed into their parinirvana.

However, before these great masters enter their parinirvana, if you request them to live a long life, they will extend their lifetimes.

◉ Upon request, great masters will extend their lifetimes

Take the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, for example: According to prophecies, Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche's life expectancy was between sixty-six and sixty-seven years, but due to the earnest pleading of the sangha, he remained in this world for a few more years. I heard from his audio clip that as he approached seventy years old, he told the sangha, "Actually, my life should have long since ended. Because the sangha always pleads with me not to pass into nirvana, I have been staying in this world in an illusory way. But I won't stay for too long."

Some prophecies state that the great Jigme Phuntsok could remain in this world for a long time, possibly up to ninety or one hundred years, but Jigme

⁵⁰ *A Guide to The Words of My Perfect Teacher* describes this as the antidote for wrong views.

⁵¹ Rigpa Translations. Revised for the Longchen Nyingtik Project, 2023.

Phuntsok Rinpoche refuted this claim by quoting vajra words from Longchenpa, as mentioned in the biography of Longchenpa. Thus, Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche manifested his parinirvana at the age of seventy-one.

This is true not only for the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche himself but also for all the teachers. When these truly great teachers approach parinirvana, we should still request them to remain in this world. When Khenpo Munsel from Qinghai was about to pass into parinirvana, the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche sent a few Dharma masters from Larung Gar to beseech him not to enter parinirvana, and as a result, Khenpo Munsel indeed stayed in this world a bit longer. When Akhyuk Rinpoche was very ill, we also went to request that he extend his life, and Rinpoche agreed to remain in this world a bit longer. Later, he indeed prolonged his life for some time.

So, when great masters are about to enter parinirvana, we must beseech them to remain in this life for a while longer. As you know, even if they can only live for one more day, it can bring incredible benefits to this world.

◉ The purpose of manifesting nirvana

Of course, for the buddhas and true teachers, entering parinirvana is merely a manifestation.

As said in *The Sutra Expounded to Mahasatyā Nirgrantha*:

All sentient beings often hold views of permanence,
 So I manifest impermanence.
 With this life that can actually last for infinite kalpas,
 I manifest having a short lifespan.

In fact, the buddhas and the great masters who have attained the state of Vidyadharas can live for countless kalpas. However, to help beings understand the truth of impermanence, they appear to have a lifespan as short as that of ordinary worldly people.

In addition, the *Flower Ornament Sutra* lists the ten hidden purposes,⁵² which explain why the Buddha manifested parinirvana.

⁵² “When buddhas have done their buddha-work, they manifest final extinction because of ten considerations: to show that all activities are really impermanent; to show that all created things are unstable; to show that ultimate nirvana is the abode of peace, without fear; to show those attached to the physical body that the physical body is impermanent, so that they will aspire to dwell in the pure body of reality; to show that the power of imperma-

That said, some great masters manifested parinirvana in a peculiar manner. As mentioned in the biography of Nagarjuna, which was translated into Chinese by Kumarajiva,⁵³ a shravaka master often held grudges and jealousy toward Nagarjuna. Once, Nagarjuna asked him, “Do you wish for me to live a long life?” The master answered, “No, I really don’t.”

Nagarjuna then returned to his room and remained inside for a few days. Later, his disciple came to check on him and discovered that Nagarjuna had already passed into parinirvana.

Perhaps you may wonder, “Why would a bodhisattva follow the wish of a jealous person and pass into parinirvana?”

A bodhisattva must have a hidden purpose for their actions. Additionally, a bodhisattva does not necessarily have to remain in one place. For example, when Thogme Zangpo was about to enter parinirvana, his disciples pleaded with him, saying, “For the benefit of all beings in this world, please live a long life!”

He responded, “There are beings in other realms as well.”

Of course, all realized teachers have achieved mastery over birth and death. They may benefit more beings in another realm. Thus, for them, there is no difference between here and there. However, for us disciples, when a teacher who holds a supreme lineage—especially the teacher from whom we have received extraordinary blessings—is about to pass into parinirvana, we feel that there is no longer a refuge for us, as if the sun has set. Therefore, at that time, we must request the teacher not to enter parinirvana.

If such an occasion hasn’t arisen yet, when you practice this branch you may visualize and think, “If the teachers, the buddhas, and the bodhisattvas now wish

nence cannot be overturned; to show that all created things do not remain as one wishes and are not under one’s control; to show that all existents are like magical productions and are not hard and fast; to show that the nature of nirvana is ultimately stable and indestructible; to show that all things have no birth or origin, yet have the appearance of assemblage and dissolution. Once the buddhas have finished their buddha-work, have fulfilled their vows, have turned the wheel of teaching, have enlightened and liberated those who could be enlightened and liberated, and have made the predictions of Buddhahood of the enlightening beings who become honored ones, as a matter of course they enter unchanging, great, ultimate nirvana. These are the ten points of consideration because of which they manifest ultimate extinction in nirvana.”

The Flower Ornament Scripture: A Translation of The Avatamsaka Sutra, translated by Thomas Cleary, published by Shambhala, 1993.

⁵³ Some also said Kumarajiva was not the translator of this work.

to enter parinirvana, I will emanate innumerable bodies, each one entreating them to live a long life in this world.”

♦ **Practicing the seven-branch offering with faith**

The seven-branch offering is a common practice in Mahayana Buddhism and holds profound meaning. Due to its profundity, there may be aspects of the practice that you cannot fully grasp. Nevertheless, as a Buddhist, you should strive to understand what you can during your practice, accept what you cannot comprehend at present with faith, and apply these teachings accordingly. This, in itself, is a form of wisdom.

The reason why faith is crucial is reflected here. With faith, you can naturally enter many practices, including chanting prayers, reciting mantras, prostrating, making offerings, and the like. Without faith, you can easily reject a practice, saying, “This is not right,” or “That is wrong,” because of some moderate confusion.

Especially practitioners who have studied materialism in philosophy are often not in accord with the Dharma due to the imputed knowledge they have received in the past.

Therefore, we must cut off wrong thoughts through Dharma study and develop faith by cultivating pure perception. By doing so, we will gradually embrace the Buddhist teachings as vajra words and accept and enjoy them with joy.

Reaching such a practical state is the true benefit of studying the Dharma.



Lesson 132

“Follow the example of Mañjuśrī by dedicating to all beings ... will lead to perfect enlightenment.” [page 325–328]

Let us continue to study *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*.

♦ A Few Words About the Teaching

Hopefully, I can complete teaching *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* this year. This is a relatively big project for me in this life, and it is for you as well, isn't it?

The teaching has lasted quite a long time. I wonder how many attendees who followed the teaching from the beginning will stay until the end. Bravo to those of you who have never missed a class and who will eventually receive the complete teaching. Bravo to me as your teacher as well, if I can finish teaching the entire text. I hope we all will pray and strive to complete this project together.

I also hope that you can propagate *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* in the future. When it is your time to give the teaching, it may not be possible for both the teacher and the Dharma students to engage in as extensive a teaching as we are doing now because we are currently in an era when people want to get things done quickly. Therefore, not to mention teaching a text for as long as I do, simply completing the whole text within one month or two is already a significant achievement. In the future, whenever possible, you should strive to propagate *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, whether at a group study of the Bodhi Association, at another Dharma center, or in the presence of a few individuals.

It is essential that your teaching is grounded in your own practice. Simply discussing the text without having engaged in the practices yourself may not be effective. Regardless of what you teach, even if you have not fully completed the practice, you must at least have developed a sincere interest and faith in what you teach. You should value it highly, have received the transmission, and have practiced it to some degree. This way, your teaching can genuinely benefit others. Without this foundation, any discussion will only provide an intellectual understanding rather than a meaningful connection to the practice.

As you know, it is *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* that has brought me the greatest benefit. I can say that the transformation of my entire life and the establishment of my overall practices have benefited from the study and practice of this text.

Because of this, when I see certain beginning practitioners pay no attention to the preliminary practices and chase only the highest teachings, I cannot help but feel deep compassion for them. I sincerely wish to tell them: “Without a solid foundation built through the preliminary practices, it will be difficult for you to engage in any practice. Even if you’re practicing the highest teaching, it may be to no avail.”

Therefore, I sincerely hope you will all value the preliminary practices. In the future, when Dharma teachers of my generation have departed this world, and practitioners of later generations encounter our teachings—whether through reading or hearing them—I hold this hope and firm belief: Whoever encounters, studies, and truly values the preliminary practices will undoubtedly receive the blessings of the lineage masters. They will find themselves naturally aligned with the Dharma and effortlessly awakening to the hidden wisdom of the lineage masters.

I am even more certain of this: When such practitioners later engage in any Sutrayana or Vajrayana practices, they will progress with remarkable ease and clarity.

This is my heartfelt advice for you.

2.2.5.2.2.7. Dedication⁵⁴

To make the source of your merit the cause of liberation, you should practice dedication.

⁵⁴ As said in *A Guide to The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, the practice of dedication is the antidote for uncertainty.

When dedicating merits, you may focus primarily on present virtuous actions—such as attending teachings, reciting scriptures, practicing meditation, liberating lives, and so forth—while also incorporating all the positive actions accumulated by yourself and others throughout the three times. Then, just as Manjushri, Samantabhadra, and Buddha Shakyamuni dedicated their merits, seal this dedication with non-conceptual wisdom and offer it entirely to all sentient beings. Then, recite the following verse:

*All the merit and positive actions of past, present and future,
I dedicate so that all beings may attain supreme enlighten-
ment.*⁵⁵

♦ A few points to note about dedication

◉ Using vajra words as your dedication prayer

The prayer to seal your dedication should be vajra words from a buddha, a bodhisattva, or an enlightened great master who has attained at least the first bhumi or above.

A dedication prayer composed by an ordinary person lacks blessing power. Once, someone told me, “*The King of Aspiration Prayers* is too long, and the four-line dedication prayer⁵⁶ is too short. I composed a dedication prayer consisting of ten verses. It is beautiful and full of meaning. I hope it can be widely promoted among members of the Bodhi Association.”

His composition is merely the fabrication of an ordinary person, unable to surpass the classical dedication prayers composed by noble beings.

Therefore, having done something good, we should dedicate the merit by using a buddha’s, a bodhisattva’s, or a great lineage master’s vajra words—words endowed with the power of truth—such as *The King of Aspiration Prayers*, the dedication chapter of *The Ways of the Bodhisattva*, the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche’s *The Quintessence of Oceanic Prayers of Aspiration*, or other prayers composed by great

⁵⁵ Rigpa Translations. Revised for the Longchen Nyingtik Project, 2023.

⁵⁶ Through this merit, may all beings attain the omniscient state of enlightenment,
And conquer the enemy of faults and delusion,
May they all be liberated from this ocean of samsara
And from its pounding waves of birth, old age, sickness and death!

masters from various lineages. Reciting these prayers can definitely bring you true benefits.

These prayers differ greatly from words fabricated by ordinary persons.

◉ Dedication as a cause of perfect enlightenment

Now that you have done something good and have a dedication prayer, to whom do you dedicate the merit?

As stated in the verse, “I dedicate so that all beings may attain supreme enlightenment.” You dedicate the positive actions you have just performed, along with all sources of merit, whether contaminated or pure, that are accumulated throughout the past, present, and future as a cause of perfect enlightenment. In other words, you dedicate the merit to all living beings, wishing that these sources of merit will become the cause of their attainment of perfect enlightenment. Although the merit cannot lead to their attainment of perfect enlightenment right now, it can certainly become the cause of their Buddhahood.

During the dedication, if you can think like this, even for just a split second, its merit is incredible. When today’s class is over, you may recite the four-line prayer while thinking, “Through this merit of listening to the teaching, as well as all the merits accumulated throughout the past, present, and future, may all beings attain the state of enlightenment. May this source of merit be the cause of their perfect enlightenment.”

Thinking in this way, you then continue with *The King of Aspiration Prayers*. In this way, you can create extremely vast merit.

◉ The size of merit is determined by aspiration and dedication

A superior practitioner can transform any of their good deeds, such as observing precepts, reciting prayers, or meditating, into a Mahayana source of merit. A middling practitioner cares only about their own liberation, limiting their deeds to a middling source of merit. A lesser practitioner can only turn their good deeds, however grand they may seem, into the cause of rebirth in celestial or human realms.

This is because the size of merit is determined by one’s aspiration and dedication.

Take observing precepts, for example. Observing them for the sake of attaining perfect enlightenment is to follow the Mahayana precepts. Observing them for your own liberation is to follow the shravaka precepts. Observing them in pursuit of temporary happiness, rather than seeking freedom from samsara, is to follow the worldly precepts. Although householders have taken the five lay precepts,⁵⁷ the merit and karmic effects of doing so depend on the different aspirations they have in their minds.

It is the same with listening to the Dharma. Some individuals begin by generating supreme bodhicitta, then listen to the teachings with non-conceptual wisdom, and dedicate the merit as a cause of perfect enlightenment at the end. In doing so, this hearing becomes a Mahayana source of merit.

Others start with the wish to obtain individual liberation and dedicate the merit to their own liberation and happiness. Although these individuals also attend the same Dharma class, their actions result in a shravaka source of merit.

There is another type of attendees who just sit there without generating any aspiration. They think, “Everyone is listening to this teaching, so I’ll do it as well.” They do not have any specific aspiration in mind, good or bad, and just sit mindlessly in the Dharma hall.

During the class, they either get distracted or look around, hardly focusing on the Dharma. Worse yet, some of them even hide behind a pillar and read a novel during class. When the class is over, they may feel joyful, thinking, “Ah! Finally, the class is over! It’s time to go back and sleep!”

[I am not saying that everyone sitting behind a pillar is reading a novel during class. But a certain person especially likes to sit behind a pillar, which makes me a bit suspicious. I used to do this when I was a school student, so now I suspect others may do the same.]

Can you accumulate merit by listening to the Dharma in this manner? Hearing the vajra words of the Dharma with your ears is indeed a source of merit, but if you distract yourself with other activities in a Dharma class, strictly speaking, it is a source of negative karma.

Having learned how beneficial it is to dedicate your merit as a cause of perfect

⁵⁷ The five lay precepts are: not to kill, not to steal, not to lie, not to commit sexual misconduct, and not to take any intoxicants.

enlightenment, why not dedicate your good deeds as a cause of perfect enlightenment?

◉ Always dedicate the meritafter good deeds

Many people pay little attention to dedication, believing that performing a good deed alone is sufficient, which it is not. A Dharma practitioner should always remember to dedicate the merit at the end of any meritorious act, great or small. For example, after circumambulating a stupa or offering incense and a cup of water in a shrine room, do not forget to dedicate the merit afterward.

If time permits, you may perform a full dedication. Otherwise, you can make a simple dedication by reciting a four-line, six-line, or twelve-line verse. Whether you recite a full prayer or a short verse, it is essential to perform a dedication.

Any source of merit that is not dedicated in this way will bear fruit only once and will then be depleted. As mentioned before, one of the four causes of destroying the source of merit is the failure to perform dedication. The other three are incorrect dedication, showing off, and regretting the good deed.

◆ **Whatever is dedicated to perfect enlightenment will never be exhausted**

Even if you avoid the four causes that destroy the source of merit, it is still a great pity if your dedication is merely for rebirth in celestial or human realms. Dedicating merit is like shooting an arrow—you can aim for a distant goal or a near one.

If you direct the arrow of merit only toward present happiness, you are like an ordinary person who, though practicing generosity and other virtues, seeks only security, comfort, and prosperity. Due to the unfailing law of cause and effect, you will certainly receive the corresponding karmic results. However, even if your wishes are fulfilled, the merit will soon be exhausted.

Here is an inspiring story from the *Ekottara Agama*. Hopefully, you will be inspired after hearing it.

◉ The Lord of the Land's story on dedication

Once, King Prasenajit made a three-month offering to the Buddha and his sangha, during which the king and his retinue served meals and all other provisions.

When the offering was completed, the king sat on a lower seat and told the Buddha: “I have heard your teachings on the principle of cause and effect. As you said, by offering food to animals, one receives one hundred times the merit; by offering food to monks who break vows, one receives one thousand times the merit; by offering food to monks who observe vows, one receives ten thousand times the merit; by offering food to the sage who has cut off desires, one receives a hundred million times the merit.

“By offering food to those who are about to attain the fruition of sotāpanna, or stream-enterer, one receives incredible merit, not to mention the merit from offering food to those who have attained the fruition of sotāpanna. By offering food to those who are about to become a pratyekabuddha, to those who have become a pratyekabuddha, to those who are about to attain Buddhahood, and to those who have attained Buddhahood and their sanghas, one receives inconceivable merit. Making offerings to the supreme field of merit can yield immeasurable merit.

“So, now that I’ve made this great offering to you, World Honored One, and to your sangha, I can say that I’ve perfected the merit and my accumulation is complete.”

The Buddha told him, “King, please do not say that. It is said that the actions of performing good deeds and accumulating merit are never enough, so why do you say, ‘My accumulation is complete’? As you know, the path of birth and death is too long to measure.”

[The Buddha intended to convey to the king that he should not feel he had done enough to accumulate merit. Additionally, if the merit accumulated from making a three-month offering is not dedicated as a cause for liberation, it will soon be exhausted.]

Then the Buddha told a story about what happened in one of his previous lives as a warning to the king:

A long time ago, there was a king known as “The Lord of the Land,” who ruled over the entire Jambudvīpa. The king had a minister named Sumati, who was appointed as a sub-king and given half of the kingdom to govern. Later, Sumati had a son named Dipankara, who took ordination at the age of twenty-nine. Dipankara was ordained during the day, and on the night of the same day, he attained Buddhahood and became Lamplight Tathagata.

When King The Lord of the Land learned of this, he invited the Buddha and

his eight billion arhats to receive his offerings for seventy thousand years. After the Buddha had completed his Dharma activities, he passed into parinirvana, and his eight billion arhats also gradually passed beyond suffering into the state where nothing is left of the aggregates.

The king sent eight billion people to collect their relics and constructed the Tathagata temple along with eight billion arhat temples. He then continued to make offerings to the temples for the next seventy thousand years, until the Buddha's teachings vanished.

King The Lord of the Land was a previous incarnation of Buddha Shakyamuni. The Buddha said, "I made offerings to Lamplight Tathagata for seventy thousand years. After his parinirvana, I made offerings to his statue and relics for another seventy years. However, I did not seek liberation at that time; instead, I dedicated all sources of merit as a cause for the temporal happiness of gods and humans, hoping to receive protection in samsara.

"But, King, are any of these sources of merit left today? No, not even merit the size of a dust grain remains. The path of life and death is too long to measure, so all those contaminated sources of merit have long since exhausted. So, King, don't say, 'I've perfected the merit, and my accumulation is complete.' Instead, you should say, 'All sources of merit accumulated through my body, speech, and mind are dedicated as a cause for liberation, not fortune and happiness in samsara.' In this way, you'll attain inexhaustible peace."

Hearing this, King Prasenajit was frightened, his hair standing on end. He wept with sorrow, prostrated at the Buddha's feet, and confessed, "How foolish I am! I will never say that again. Please accept my confession!"

The Buddha said, "Well said, well said! I accept your confession. Please never say that again!"

At that time, a nun named Katyayana rose from her seat, prostrated at the Buddha's feet, and said, "World Honored One, how profound and wonderful your words are! You told King Prasenajit to make the following aspiration: 'All sources of merit accumulated through my body, speech, and mind are dedicated as a cause for liberation, rather than for fortune and happiness in samsara. By doing so, you will attain inexhaustible peace.' This teaching is truly profound and wonderful!"

She continued, "World Honored One, now I remember.⁵⁸ Thirty-one kalpas

⁵⁸ She was a nun who had attained Arhathood, so she was able to remember her past lives.

ago, a buddha named Shikhin came to this world. One day, this buddha was on his alms round in the city of ‘Wild Horse’ when he was seen by a civil servant named ‘All Black.’ The servant went home, took some food, and offered it to Buddha Shikhin. The servant sincerely made a vow, ‘With this merit, may I never fall into the three lower realms. In my future life, may I encounter a sublime being like this Tathagata, receive his teachings, and ultimately obtain liberation.’

“World Honored One, the civil servant All Black is none other than me in one of my previous lives. With the power of that offering and my aspiration, I have not fallen into a lower realm for the last thirty-one kalpas and have always been reborn in the human or celestial realms. In this life, I encountered you and became an ordained practitioner. I have attained the exhaustion of contaminations and obtained Arhathood.”

The Buddha told the sangha, “Of all my shravaka disciples, Bhikkhuni Katyayana is foremost among my shravakas in having faith in liberation.”

I hope you can all remember this story well. King The Lord of the Land had been making offerings for one hundred forty thousand years, but the sources of merit were all exhausted because he did not dedicate the merit as a cause for liberation.

The civil servant All Black only made an offering once, but because he dedicated the merit as a cause for liberation, he experienced happiness and peace in the human or celestial realm for thirty-one kalpas, and then encountered the Buddha and attained the sublime state. What an enormous difference!

However, ordinary people do not understand this difference.

Not to mention non-Buddhists; even some Buddhists do not know how to dedicate the merit accumulated through positive actions, such as making offerings to the Buddha and the sangha. Even when they do perform dedications, they often dedicate the sources of merit toward their own happiness, peace, health, longevity, and the like. It is a great pity if one only pursues these worldly goals, as the karmic results in such cases are not superior.

As previously stated, you should dedicate all sources of merit as a cause for perfect enlightenment and the liberation of all beings. While many of you may still be unclear about the meanings of “perfect enlightenment” and “liberation of all beings,” you should nevertheless strive to transform your mind by shifting your dedication from yourself to all beings.

For example, when reciting *The King of Aspiration Prayers*, remind yourself in the moment: “I cannot dedicate the merit only to myself. I must dedicate all sources of merit to all living beings. May they not only be freed from suffering but also attain enlightenment.” By doing this, the karmic result of your dedication is completely transformed.

◉ The inexhaustible sources of merit

Why is the karmic result of your dedication completely transformed? As mentioned, if you dedicate the sources of merit as a cause of fortune and happiness in the human or gods realm, they will soon be exhausted. However, whatever is dedicated to perfect enlightenment will never be exhausted, even after bearing fruit one hundred times. Instead, the merit will increase and grow until perfect Buddhahood is attained.

It is said in *The Sutra Requested by Sagaramati*:

Just as a single drop of water falling into the ocean
Will never vanish until the ocean dries up,
The merit dedicated to perfect enlightenment
Will never be exhausted until enlightenment is attained.

I have not found the sutra in the Chinese language that is titled *The Sutra Requested by Sagaramati*. It should be in the Chinese Tripitaka, but perhaps it is under a different translation title.

This analogy is also used in other Buddhist scriptures. For example, as it is said in the *Sutra on the Mahayana Practice of the Six Perfections*:

Just as dense clouds spread across the sky and pour down heavy
rain,
If the rain falls on dry land or salty soil, it will soon evaporate.
But if a drop of rain falls into the ocean, it will never disappear
until the ocean itself dries up.
The same is true for the merit accumulated by bodhisattvas.
If the merit is for one’s own liberation, it is like rain falling on
dry land—it will soon evaporate.
But if one dedicates virtuous deeds to all sentient beings
And casts them into the great ocean of nirvana with the vow of

great compassion,
Then, as long as sentient beings exist, the merit will never be
exhausted.

In addition, *The Sutra on the Seal of Definite and Indefinite Rebirths*⁵⁹ says:

Just as a drop of water that falls into the ocean
Will never disappear until the fire at the end of the kalpa appears,
Manjushri, it is the same for a bodhisattva—
The small merit that a bodhisattva has dedicated as a cause for
Buddhahood
Will never disappear until the fire of omniscient wisdom is born.

That is to say, until you attain the vajra-like meditative stabilization, the merit you dedicate as a cause of perfect enlightenment will never be exhausted.

The importance of dedication is emphasized throughout the Shravaka and Mahayana scriptures, indicating that dedication is a crucial component of one's practice. Those who understand this can obtain a great fruition through even small meritorious actions. Conversely, those who do not recognize this can destroy the sources of merit through an outburst of anger or one of the four previously mentioned causes,⁶⁰ regardless of how grand their positive actions may be or how abundant their sources of merit are.

Therefore, you must cultivate the good habit of performing dedication. Because Buddhism is integrated into the everyday life of Tibetans, even an illiterate villager has the good habit of dedicating merit. When a villager is reciting the mani mantra and has accumulated a few hundred or thousand repetitions, if you want to speak with them, they will say, "Wait a minute. Let me dedicate the merit before we talk."

They may worry that if they do not dedicate their merit and end up quarreling with you during the conversation, their merit will be destroyed.

♦ Dedicate merit to your goal

All in all, no matter what your end goal or pursuit is, dedicate your merit to it.

⁵⁹ Skt. Niyatāniyatagatimudrāvātārasūtra

⁶⁰ The four causes of destroying the source of merit are: not performing dedication, the wrong dedication, showing off, and regretting doing the good deed.

Some people have the right perspective and recognize that sentient beings are suffering. Despite the path to Buddhahood being long and arduous, they aspire to enlightenment and vow to liberate sentient beings. In contrast, some feel that Buddhahood is too distant and believe that attaining the level of a shravaka or pratyekabuddha is sufficient. Others aim only for rebirth in the Pure Land, disregarding everything else. The majority, however, seek health, longevity, an attractive appearance, or happiness in the human or god realms in their next life. Regardless of your goal, the merit you accumulate through virtuous actions should ultimately be dedicated to achieving it.

As long as you make the dedication, you will receive what you wish for, thanks to the extraordinary blessing power of the source of merit. Drikung Kyobpa Rinpoche says:

The two accumulations are like wish-fulfilling jewels,
But without being polished by aspiration prayers,
They will not bring forth the desired results.
Therefore, one should always make the dedication
wholeheartedly.

That is to say, the two accumulations of merit and wisdom are like wish-fulfilling jewels, but if you do not rub the jewels with the cloth of aspiration, namely, if you do not dedicate the sources of merit, you will not get what you wish for. Therefore, a practitioner must constantly dedicate their merit. You will achieve the results to which your dedication goes.

In the quoted verse, it mentions “aspiration prayers.” So, what is the difference between “making an aspiration” and “dedicating the merit”? As explained by some great masters of the past, “making an aspiration” refers to setting a goal, which is the ripening result of a meritorious act in the future.

For example, if you wish to achieve a certain goal, you accumulate merit through meritorious actions to reach that goal; if you wish to be reborn in the Pure Land, you may recite *The King of Aspiration Prayers*, the name of Buddha Amitabha, mantras, and so forth. In short, you make an aspiration first, followed by conducting the meritorious actions immediately or in the future. In comparison, “dedicating the merit” means to give the merit accumulated through accomplished actions to all living beings.

To summarize, in the course of your practice, you should first set up a goal that you wish to achieve, then engage in the two accumulations, and dedicate all sources of merit as the cause of your goal—perfect enlightenment.

♦ Dedication and perfect enlightenment

It is the power of dedication that determines whether positive actions lead to perfect enlightenment or not. In other words, you must dedicate your merit as the cause for all beings to attain perfect enlightenment, doing so fervently and wholeheartedly.

However, not to mention the cause of enlightenment or the power of dedication, many Buddhists have not set any goals pertaining to their spiritual pursuits. They never even consider becoming a Buddha or being reborn in the Pure Land. If you ask one of them, “Why did you become a monk?” They would answer, “Because I was distressed as a worldly person. I noticed that monastics live a pure life, so I decided to take ordination myself.”

Some lay practitioners also lack a purpose or goal. If you ask one of them, “Why did you choose to pursue the Dharma?” They might answer, “Because it makes me happy and comfortable. It is hard for me to express the exact feeling. I listen to the Dharma every day, but I do not know why. I just enjoy attending the classes.”

It is great that you enjoy the class, but the most important thing is to set your goal. It is essential to establish a goal for your life, and even more crucial to set a goal for your practice.

When you aim for liberation, all your sources of merit can be dedicated to this goal. Once the dedication is made, it can be said that your actions are directed toward liberation. Conversely, no matter how significant the virtue of your conditioned positive actions may seem—such as listening to the Dharma, making offerings to the sangha, or serving sangha members—these actions cannot lead to your liberation without your dedication of the merit to that goal.

Geshe Khampa Lungpa says:

All conditioned positive actions have no direction of their own;
Only when dedicated to sentient beings do they yield vast
benefits.

No conditioned positive actions have their own directions. Therefore, it is only when you dedicate the merit accumulated through positive actions to all living beings that this merit can become the cause of perfect enlightenment, fulfill its true value, and activate its true benefits. These are the vajra words of Geshe Khampa Lungpa.

- ♦ **Dedication and Dharma rituals**

- ◉ **Benefiting others through dedication**

As you should know, nothing brings greater benefit to sentient beings than the Dharma. If you wish to benefit your parents, relatives, or friends, perform Dharma rituals, or pujas, for them; if you wish to benefit the deceased, conduct pujas on their behalf. But remember—dedicating merit is essential. Without dedication, they will not receive the benefits. Once the merit is dedicated—whether to the living, the dead, animals, pretas, or even beings in hell—they will definitely receive the benefit, and sometimes it can happen very quickly.

Not to mention other situations, sometimes by dedicating the merit accumulated through reciting prayers to a patient, the patient can recover quickly. This is the power of the Dharma, which can be miraculous. This is also the blessing of the Buddha, which cannot be comprehended by ordinary thoughts.

Of course, this blessing power is beyond the reach of our naked eyes, but it indeed brings real benefit to all living beings. Therefore, in the Buddhist tradition, Dharma activities such as reciting prayers have always been important skillful methods for the benefit of all living beings.

Some individuals are unwilling to perform wholesome deeds and dedicate their merit to others, saying, “Isn’t it stated in the sutras that one will experience the karmic retribution of their own past actions? How can others take the merit accumulated from my good actions?”

In fact, such a thought is misguided. It is true that one reaps what one sows—when a person engages in positive actions, they receive corresponding positive results—but this does not prevent them from receiving merit granted by others. For instance, a farmer can grow his own crops and feed himself from the harvest, but if someone offers him fruits and vegetables, he can also accept the gift.

Similarly, while the Buddha emphasizes the infallible law of karma, stating that one reaps what one sows, he does not deny the practice of dedicating merit

for the benefit of others. Not only does the Buddha not reject this practice, but he also mentions in many scriptures that one must dedicate the merit accumulated from positive actions, such as making offerings to the sangha and reciting prayers, for the benefit of both the deceased and the living. Therefore, when we dedicate merit to others, they can definitely receive it.

In fact, the deliverance service offers compelling evidence. When a Tibetan dies, their family typically invites monastics to recite the *Bardo Thödol* (*The Tibetan Book of the Dead*) or other scriptures for the deceased over a period of forty-nine days. This meaningful tradition offers substantial benefits to the deceased. Similarly, practitioners of Chinese Buddhism engage in deliverance services for their deceased loved ones, reciting the Buddha's name, sutras, prayers, and more—a practice that is equally commendable.

In contrast, non-Buddhists do things quite differently, which is unfortunate. When a family member dies, they simply handle the corpse and do not perform any puja for the deceased. Worse yet, they may gather all the funeral attendees at a restaurant and order the killing of animals for their meal.

As you know, this meal alone is enough to lead the deceased to the hell realm. What the deceased truly needs at that time is meritorious actions; instead, they receive negative karma. One cannot help but feel sad for the deceased after hearing or witnessing what has happened.

Therefore, everyone should study the Dharma. By doing so, one will be able to adopt the Buddhist approach to benefit others, including one's deceased family and friends.

- ◉ The story of Vaishali inhabitants dedicating merit to their preta parents

Now let's talk about this story. What is told in *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* is slightly different from that in *Century of Noble Deeds*, but the storylines converge.

During his alms round, Maudgalyayana encountered five hundred pretas who were very happy to see the venerable monk. They said to him, "We are the parents of the inhabitants of Vaishali. Can you reach out to our family members and ask them to make offerings to the Buddha and his sangha, along with other donors, so we can be freed from the lower realm?" Maudgalyayana agreed and soon helped them fulfill their request.

When the people of Vaishali invited the Buddha and his sangha for a meal the next day, the Buddha accepted.

After they departed, five hundred pretas appeared and pleaded, “Please dedicate to us the merit from the offerings that the Vaishali inhabitants will make to you and your sangha tomorrow.”

“Who are you?” the Buddha asked, although he already knew the answer. “Why should the merit of the people of Vaishali be dedicated to you?”

“We are their parents,” the pretas replied. “We were arrogant and indulgent. Though we were wealthy, we did not practice generosity. We clung to worldly pleasures, did not believe in the Three Jewels, committed no meritorious actions, and prevented others from practicing generosity. Because of our miserliness and other negative actions, we were reborn as pretas as a result of our miserly behavior.”

The Buddha said, “In that case, come along at the time of the dedication, and I will fulfill your request.”

Our bodies are like charred pillars, our bellies as large as mountains, and our throats as thin as needles. We are too ugly. Our joints are on fire, and we search for food everywhere but cannot find any. Even if we do find food, it immediately turns to pus and blood when we approach it. With such ugly bodies, we are too ashamed to show up.

The Buddha rebuked them, saying, “Your shame should have arisen when you were committing those misdeeds. What is the point of feeling ashamed now, after you have already been reborn in this wretched state? If you do not come, I will have no way to dedicate the merit to you.”

“In that case, we will come,” they said, and departed.

The next day, after the meal offering was completed and it was time for the dedication, the pretas still had not arrived. Maudgalyayana searched for them with his clairvoyance but could not find them anywhere in the sixteen major countries, across all of Jambudvīpa, the four continents, the first-order universe of a thousand worlds, or throughout the entire cosmos of a billion worlds. Puzzled, he went to the Buddha for an answer.

The Buddha said, “The pretas were supposed to come, but now they have been carried away to another world by the karmic wind. Now they reside in a realm that

is beyond the reach of your shravaka's power. However, I can bring them here." Then, the Buddha brought over all the pretas with his divine power.

[The karma of living beings is indeed unimaginable. This is true for some Dharma fellows at Larung Gar. When their karmic wind arises, they insist on leaving, and no one can dissuade them. In an instant, they are swept away by the karmic wind. Humans can be like this; let alone pretas.]

The five hundred pretas arrived, requesting the Buddha to dedicate the merit to them. However, the people of Vaishali were horrified and started to run away.

"There is no need to be afraid," the Buddha assured them. "These are your parents, now reborn as pretas—they told me so themselves. Do you want me to dedicate the merit accumulated from your meal offering to them or not?"

[A meal offering can generate great merit, so you should make such an offering often. After making the offering, while you feel happy about the accumulation of merit, you should also think about the pretas, non-humans, and other suffering beings who especially need that merit. Therefore, after each meritorious action, you should think, "I dedicate the merit to whoever needs it. May they be freed from suffering and obtain happiness and benefits." It is essential to do so.

Not to mention the vast number of sentient beings, our family and friends in this life may still be wandering in the intermediate state after their death or may have already fallen into a lower realm and found themselves in a miserable situation. At this time, they are truly in need of merit, just as the poor in this world need money. They will be very grateful to those who are able to help them.

Now that we have the merit to study the Dharma and the opportunity to engage in meritorious actions, even if we have not developed divine visions or the capability to read others' minds, we can still help many people around us and in this world by dedicating our merit to them. There are many more beings in need of merit than those in need of money. So think about this often and always dedicate the merit to them, as it is both important and necessary.]

"You certainly should!" the people of Vaishali responded.

[Worldly people are like this. They are willing to do whatever is needed for their family and friends but are very reluctant to help strangers with whom they have no connection.]

The Buddha said:

May the merit of this offering
 Be dedicated to these pretas.
 May they be freed from their wretched forms
 And attain the happiness of higher realms!

[This dedication prayer said by the Buddha can be found in many recitation books. When we have a health issue, it is sometimes caused by the demons of disease, who are, in fact, pretas and spirits. When reborn into those forms, they are driven by their karma and cannot help but take away your essence, blood, or energy. Therefore, when you have nightmares, feel uneasy, or even suspect that you are being possessed by spirits or your karmic creditors, you may make a smoke offering and recite this prayer to dedicate the merit to all non-humans, spirits, and pretas, so that they may be satisfied. Thus, through the blessings of the Buddha's vajra words, your adversities will be dispelled.]

That evening, the pretas all died and were then reborn in the Thirty-Three Heaven.

This story illustrates that when we perform positive actions and dedicate the resulting merit to the deceased and beings in lower realms, they will undoubtedly receive the benefit. While we do not have the power of the Buddha, our pure faith and the blessing power of the Three Jewels can ensure that those to whom we dedicate our merit truly benefit. For instance, during times of frequent natural disasters, man-made crises, or pandemics, if many practitioners engage in Dharma practices with pure intention, it can bring significant benefits to the world.

Therefore, a Buddhist must have a deep understanding of the Dharma. You should not behave like those materialists who constantly claim, "Pujas are of no use," or "What's the point of doing good deeds?" Nor should you act like those fatalists who, on the other hand, say, "Everything is predetermined," or "Nothing can be changed." Such careless refutation or misinterpretation of the Dharma is groundless.

♦ The essence of interdependence is dedication

In fact, the essence of interdependence is dedication, as Milarepa says:

Between the hermit meditating in the mountains
 And the donor who provides his sustenance

There is a link that will lead them to enlightenment together.
Dedication of merit is the very heart of that link.⁶¹

As stated in his biography, when Milarepa was living a very challenging life, his sister Peta Gönkyl and his fiancée Dzesé brought him nutritious food. After eating, Milarepa's body was energized. According to Chinese medicine, his qi (vital energy) and blood were replenished. Later in his practice, his central channel knot was loosened, and he attained an unprecedented state of realization.

At that time, he sang the *Song of the Essence of Interdependence*, in which he described various essential points of interdependence. For example, one verse says:

The compassion of an excellent lama
And the enduring meditation of an excellent student—these
two
Form the interdependence for upholding the teachings.
The essence of interdependence is the sacred commitments.⁶²

This song also talks about the essence of interdependence as the Dharma, diligence, emptiness, compassion, and auspicious fortune, respectively. “The essence of interdependence” is translated into “the very heart of that link” in the above-quoted verse, which is from this song.

The verse in the text states that the hermit and the donors form the interdependence in reaching Buddhahood together, and that the essence of this interdependence is the dedication of merit. Once the merit is dedicated, both the hermit and the donors can receive the benefits. Otherwise, if the hermit simply offers compliments, such as “my donors are very lovely, very nice,” it may not produce any real benefit.

In my book *Travelogue in Thailand*, I expressed my appreciation for the monastics' practice of dedicating merit. In Thailand, it is a tradition for a monk to immediately dedicate the merit after receiving a meal offering from a donor.

The same is true for our sangha members at Larung Gar. Whenever we receive a meal offering, we dedicate the merit by reciting *The Noble Sutra of Recalling the*

⁶¹ Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2010, page 327.

⁶² Tsanghyön Heruka, *The Life of Milarepa*, translated by Andrew Quintman, Penguin Books, 2010.

Three Jewels and *The King of Aspiration Prayers*. It is very important to dedicate the merit promptly. If a monastic does not dedicate the merit in a timely manner, they are likely to forget to do so. Though they may believe they are a worthy recipient of the offering, they may not be and thus owe the donor karmic debts according to the infallible law of cause and effect.

Many novice monastics do pay attention to this. For example, during the first year or two after my ordination, I was very cautious when receiving the offering of 1 or 10 yuan because I was afraid of not being a worthy recipient. As a result, I would immediately recite mantras several times and dedicate the merit to the donor by reciting a dedication prayer. However, I do not do so as well as I used to in the same situation. That is not good.

Therefore, I hope that the more you practice, the more importance you place on dedicating merit. Just as the hermit meditating in the mountains should dedicate his merit, so too should the donors who make offerings to the hermit. Otherwise, if someone has made an offering to a teacher in hopes of benefiting from the positive effects of that action through the teacher's dedication of merit, what happens if the teacher forgets to dedicate it? Will the offering go to waste? Will they not receive what they wish for?

♦ The non-conceptual dedication

For any dedication of merit to be the cause of perfect enlightenment, it must be guided by wisdom free from the three concepts. Dedication tainted by attachment to those concepts as real is referred to as poisoned dedication.

The Condensed Transcendent Wisdom says:

The Buddha taught that performing virtuous deeds with
concepts
Is like consuming a lavish meal mixed with poison.

Eating any food mixed with poison will undoubtedly bring harm. Clinging to the three concepts as real is the poison in dedication. If someone dedicates the merit with such clinging, it will harm the source of that merit. Therefore, we must perform non-conceptual dedication after engaging in a meritorious action.

When dedication is free from any concepts, it is transcendent wisdom that leads to enlightenment. When dedication is tainted by clinging to concepts, it is

merely worldly wisdom. After explaining the great qualities of the first bodhisattva stage, Chandrakirti says this in his *Introduction to the Middle Way*:

Giving, void of giver, gift, receiver,
Is called a paramita that transcends the world.
But when attachment to these three occurs,
The teachings have defined it as the perfect act of worldly ones.⁶³

This applies not only to the practice of generosity, but also to discipline, patience, and more.

Then, what are the three concepts? *The Profound Vast Dedication Sutra* says:

There is neither someone who is performing the dedication,
Nor a source of merit to dedicate,
Nor someone to whom the merit is dedicated—
A bodhisattva mahasattva should dedicate in this manner.
During the dedication, all three concepts are pure.

The three concepts discussed here are the concepts of there being a source of merit to dedicate, the recipient of the dedication, and the person making the dedication.

At the relative level, the three concepts exist like a dream or an illusion; at the absolute level, their nature is emptiness.

♦ **Dedicating merit in the same manner as the buddhas and bodhisattvas**

If one could dedicate merit in the state of transcendent wisdom, fully realizing that the three concepts lack inherent existence, such a dedication would indeed be free from poison. This may be beyond the reach of ordinary people like us, who still cling to concepts. When we consider the three concepts, we tend to believe they truly exist; yet, upon reflecting on their nature of emptiness, we may perceive them as mere nothingness. Thus, it is impossible for an ordinary person to engage in non-conceptual dedication.

Nonetheless, simply believing that one is dedicating merit in the same way

⁶³ Chandrakirti, *Introduction to the Middle Way*, with commentary by Jamgon Mipham, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Shambhala, 2012.

as the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the past will serve as a dedication entirely free from the three concepts. The great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche emphasized the importance of this method of dedication. For us, it represents a supreme skillful means.

When reciting *The King of Aspiration Prayers*, if you struggle to visualize the content of each verse, you can start by reminding yourself: “I am dedicating the merit in the same way as the buddhas, bodhisattvas, lineage masters, and sublime beings of the past.” This should be an easy task, and you can certainly dedicate in this way. By doing so, it also serves as an alternative dedication that is completely free of the three concepts.

This instruction actually comes from the sutras. For example, it is stated in *The Confession of Downfalls to the Thirty-Five Buddhas*:

Just as all the buddhas of the past perfectly dedicated merit; just
as all the buddhas of the future will perfectly dedicate merit;
and just as all the buddhas of the present perfectly dedicate
merit, in the same way, I too perfectly dedicate merit.

The King of Aspiration Prayers says:

Emulating the hero Manjushri,
Samantabhadra and all those with knowledge,
I too make a perfect dedication
Of all actions that are positive.

Always remember to seal your virtuous actions with a proper dedication, as this is the only unfailing way to ensure that the merit will lead to perfect enlightenment. Therefore, we should diligently dedicate merit at all times.

♦ Developing the habit of dedication

You may summarize the key points from the teaching on dedication and put them into practice accordingly. For instance, after performing a virtuous action, take a moment to think: “Just as all the buddhas and bodhisattvas dedicate merit, and as the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche and other lineage masters dedicated merit, so too do I dedicate all merit.” Alternatively, you may think, “Through this

merit, along with all merit from the past, present, and future, may all beings attain the omniscient state of enlightenment.”

Such a dedication takes less than one minute, but its merit is boundless.

Dharma practice involves consistently applying the Buddha’s teachings in your daily life. When practiced regularly over time, whether it is generating bodhicitta or performing dedication, it eventually becomes much easier. For instance, when you first began using the prayer wheel before and after teachings, many of you often forgot to use it. However, now that it has become a habit, you find it effortless to incorporate it into your routine.

Likewise, if you make dedication a part of your habit, you will always remember to dedicate the merit right after a positive action. When performing the dedication, you will remember the way the buddhas, bodhisattvas, and lineage masters dedicate merit. You will think of dedicating the merit to all living beings and their perfect enlightenment, rather than solely focusing on yourself.

As long as you make Dharma practice a habit, it will not be difficult for you to succeed in any practice.



Lesson 133

“This is to bring one’s mind to accomplish the nature of
... as well as the Prayer of the Copper-coloured Mountain.”
[page 328–330]

In the section on “How to Practice Guru Yoga,” we have already studied the stages of “visualizing the field of merit” and “offering the seven branches.” Today, we will proceed to the stage of “praying with resolute trust.”

In the stage of “visualizing the field of merit,” you visualize yourself as Vajrayogini, and in the center of the field of merit is your guru in the form of Padmasambhava. Having visualized in this way, you then make the seven-branch offering in the presence of the guru, including prostration, offering, confession, rejoicing, exhorting the buddhas to turn the Dharma wheel, requesting the buddhas not to enter nirvana, and dedication. Having offered the seven branches, you proceed to the stage of “praying with resolute trust.”

♦ Guru Yoga practice for today’s people

In our tradition, there are three kinds of Guru Yoga practice. Specifically, the Guru Yoga practice from the Longchen Nyingtik cycle is extensive. The Guru Yoga practice in Mipham Rinpoche’s *Illuminating the Path to Liberation* follows the same stages⁶⁴ outlined in *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, after which the practitioner visualizes the guru emanating light, merging into their mind, and

⁶⁴ The actual practice of this Guru Yoga also consists of three stages: visualizing the field of merit, offering the seven branches and praying with resolute trust.

bestowing the four empowerments. The practitioner then dedicates the merit at the end. This practice is simple yet supreme.

The Guru Yoga of the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche⁶⁵ is the most concise practice. This quintessential practice does not include the seven-branch offering and the four empowerments, making it quicker to complete, which is more suitable for people living in this “fast food” era.

In the past, many Tibetan Buddhists devoted themselves entirely to Dharma practice without having to deal with worldly preoccupations. They were able to recite long liturgies and engage in extensive practices. However, it is not the same today.

Nowadays, even monastics, including those who devote themselves to actual practice, are overwhelmed by various obligations, leaving them little time for extensive liturgy. Therefore, I believe that many concise practices by the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, including this Guru Yoga practice, are well-suited for modern individuals.

Although people nowadays have numerous worldly preoccupations and are often lax, there are still individuals who wish to practice the Dharma. If they have faith, these individuals may practice this Guru Yoga every day.

2.2.5.2.3. Praying with Resolute Trust

- ♦ **The teacher has the nature of Heruka⁶⁶ in every mandala of deities**

Pray to the teacher wholeheartedly with resolute trust and bring your mind to accomplish the nature of the four vajras.⁶⁷ Reflect that your supreme guru—your glorious protector—embodies the nature of Heruka in every mandala of deities and has perfected all empowerments.

A true supreme guru, as your glorious protector, must possess all the necessary

⁶⁵ *The Swift Bestowal of Blessings: A Guru Yoga* by the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche

⁶⁶ The term *Heruka* is often used for wrathful deities, but it actually refers to any form that represents one's ultimate nature.

⁶⁷ It is said in *A Guide to The Words of My Perfect Teacher*: “What has to be accomplished is the level of the four vajras. The purified channels are the vajra body, or Nirmanakaya; the purified energies are vajra speech or the Sambhogakaya; the purified mind is vajra mind, or the Dharmakaya; the purified nature (of these three) is vajra inseparability, or the Svabhavikakaya.”

qualities. Those who lack these qualities are not eligible to be vajra gurus. A true vajra guru is fundamentally different from ordinary people in every aspect, including the empowerment they have received, their mastery of tantric practices, their state of wisdom and compassion, and their attainment of the lineage masters' realization. Therefore, one does not become a vajra guru through self-designation or self-promotion, such as posting an autobiography online.

Many individuals are unaware of the qualities that a vajra guru should possess. Consequently, some so-called gurus use the saying, "the guru is a buddha," to justify their actions, claiming, "Isn't it said in *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* that the guru is a buddha...?"

Without critically examining a "guru" to determine whether they possess the necessary qualities, naive individuals assume that since all gurus are buddhas, this particular "guru" must also be a true buddha. However, given the actions of this "guru," people eventually realize that they are not even a bodhisattva, let alone a buddha. This "guru" cannot be compared to an arhat, let alone a bodhisattva; they are not even at the level of a knowledgeable university professor, let alone an arhat. They do not even measure up to an elementary school teacher, let alone a university professor. If such a "guru" is considered a buddha, then the status of the buddhas is truly diminished. Therefore, the tantric teaching that "the guru is a buddha" does not apply to this type of person.

Only those gurus who are indivisible from the buddhas can be considered true buddhas. Many masters, such as the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, are true buddhas to anyone who examines them, so they deserve to be called "buddhas." These great masters have surpassed the state of ordinary people in all aspects, including the transmissions and empowerments they have received, as well as the meditative practices they engage in day and night. They are revered teachers and our glorious protectors, embodying the nature of Heruka in every mandala of deities.

As said in *A Guide to The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, "the guru has the nature of Heruka" means they are the one in whom the absolute space (he) and primal wisdom (ka) are united (ru). That is to say, Heruka is the indivisible union of space and wisdom.

In addition, Heruka is the name of a category of wrathful deities. Among the one hundred peaceful and wrathful deities, the main deity at the center of the

fifty-eight wrathful deities is Heruka. Moreover, in the practice of the Medicine Buddha, Heruka is also the main deity in the mandala of the Medicine Buddha. The same is true for the mandalas of Buddha Amitayus, Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, and others.

Therefore, a true guru is the root of all practices, embodying the nature of Heruka in every mandala of deities and having perfected all empowerments.

♦ The guru and the seed of liberation

To a practitioner, simply seeing the guru, hearing them, touching them, or thinking about them plants the seed of liberation. Since their activities are the same as those of all the buddhas, the guru is the fourth Jewel.

Having established a connection with such a guru, a person with exceptionally sharp faculties can attain liberation immediately upon seeing the guru's image, hearing their name or voice, thinking about them, receiving their blessing through a touch on the crown, receiving their empowerment, and the like. A person with middling faculties will no longer fall into a lower realm. A person with lesser faculties can have the seed of liberation planted, which will ultimately sever the cycles of samsara for them.

As said in *Finding Rest in the Nature of the Mind*:

Such teachers are the glorious lords of Dharma.
No matter where they are, they are the peers of all the buddhas.
Through seeing them or hearing them,
Remembering or touching them, samsara is undone.⁶⁸

Therefore, it is very fortunate to meet or, even just to see, a true guru like the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, even if only once.

When I gave talks at universities, I often started with a polite opening, saying, "Today it is my great pleasure to..." even though I did not genuinely feel as happy as I appeared. This phrase is commonly used to open a public talk, so I adopted it as well. As you can see from the lecture video, my facial expression did not convey much happiness at that moment.

We all know that when ordinary people meet, it creates mere samsaric

⁶⁸ Longchenpa, *Finding Rest in the Nature of the Mind, The Trilogy of Rest*, Volume 1, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Shambhala, 2017.

connections that are not particularly worthy of happiness or honor. In contrast, meeting a great enlightened teacher, who is inseparable from the Buddha, is truly a profound blessing, an occasion for deep affinity, and a significant source of merit.

If a disciple can follow such a great teacher and see them as the Buddha, the disciple can be freed from the karmic results of all their negative actions and grow their virtue and merit. *Triumphant Yoga of the Nonduality of Sameness, Great King of Tantras*⁶⁹ says:

Seeing the teacher as the Buddha,
All of one's negative actions are purified.
If a disciple possesses this quality,
All their merits will be growing.

This verse is from a scripture of Chinese Buddhism, and I have previously quoted similar scriptural evidence. Why do I reference verses from Chinese Buddhism? I do so to provide you with new perspectives. Some individuals believe that teachings such as “The guru is the Buddha,” “The four refuges,” and “The teacher is the fourth jewel” are exclusive to Tibetan Buddhism. However, the scriptural evidence I present demonstrates that this is not the case. The phrases and instructions on “seeing the teacher as the Buddha” are found in numerous scriptures of Chinese Buddhism, particularly in sutras translated during the Tang and Song dynasties.

Disciples who can see the teacher as the Buddha can accumulate incredible merit. Therefore, for each practitioner, “seeing the teacher as the Buddha” is the most important view to establish and hold onto.

♦ The five knowings regarding “seeing the teacher as the Buddha”

How can we truly establish the view that the teacher is the Buddha? Here are the five things we should know, as listed in *A Guide to The Words of My Perfect Teacher*.

1) Knowing that the teacher is the Buddha.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Danapala translated the text into Chinese.

⁷⁰ Some parts of the following translations are directly taken from Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang, *A Guide to The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by Dipamkara and the Padmakara Translation Group, Shambhala, 2004.

According to the expedient meaning, the teacher is actually a Nirmanakaya buddha. In order to benefit living beings in ways appropriate to their needs, they appear interdependently, like the moon reflected in water. If you still take the teacher to be a “form body” in the sense of something solid and real, and see them as an ordinary person, your prayer will not serve as the perfect means for developing primal wisdom. As it is said in the *Diamond Sutra*:

Those who see me as a form,
Or think of me as words
Are on the wrong path.
They are not seeing me.

Moreover, it is taught that the teacher is a manifestation of a buddha, as said in the sutra:

Ananda, do not be sad.
Ananda, do not lament.
In the final five hundred years,⁷¹
I will return as spiritual friends
And act for your and others' sake.

So, this is how the common tradition of the sutras and tantras sees the accomplishment of the teacher, perceiving them as a buddha.

2) Knowing that everything the teacher does is the activity of a buddha.

There are two kinds of activity: common and supreme. Take common activities, for example: If the teacher acts as a great arbitrator and conciliator, settling quarrels and resolving people's differences, this is their activity of pacifying. If the teacher spends their time getting rich, running a successful business, building houses, and so on, this is their activity of increasing. If their charisma attracts men and women and entices a certain number of people, this is their activity of magnetizing. Even if the teacher slaughters hundreds of beings, this is their activity of fierce subduing.

Through supreme activities, the teacher shows beings the path to liberation

⁷¹ The Buddha's teachings are said to remain in this world for ten phases of “five hundred.” According to some traditions, this doesn't refer to literal five-hundred-year spans, but rather to five hundred alternating cycles of rise and fall, influenced by the appearance of virtuous beings at times and malevolent ones at others.

according to the three kinds of enlightenment and brings beings to liberation and omniscience.

These activities of the teacher are inseparable from those of the buddhas.

3) Knowing that for us, the teacher is even kinder than the Buddhas.

Many buddhas have come to this world in the past, and Buddha Shakyamuni, the closest buddha to us, has come and turned the wheel of the Dharma, but none of them have been able to liberate us. To guide us, beings who are difficult to tame, the teacher has come in the guise of a human being and propagates the Dharma on behalf of the buddhas. As far as the qualities arising from riddance and realization are concerned, the teacher is the same as all the buddhas, but as far as we are concerned, the teacher is even kinder than all the buddhas.

Neither our father, nor our mother, nor our lover, nor even the greatest and most benevolent being in the world can help us as much as the teacher. By teaching us how to abandon negative actions, the teacher closes the door to the lower realms. By teaching us how to engage in positive actions, the teacher sets us on the ladder leading to the higher realms and liberation. By helping us to cultivate bodhicitta, the teacher sows in us the seed of omniscience. By introducing tantric instructions to us, the teacher ultimately bestows upon us the legacy of the Dharmakaya.

Therefore, it is important to understand that, as far as we are concerned, the teacher is even kinder than all the buddhas.

4) Knowing that the teacher embodies the wisdom of the infinite refuges.

Outwardly, the teacher embodies the Three Jewels: their body is the Sangha, their speech is the holy Dharma, and their mind is the Buddha. Inwardly, the teacher is the essence of the Three Roots: the lama, the deity, and the dakini. The teacher's mind is the Dharmakaya, their speech is the Sambhogakaya, their body is the Nirmanakaya, their qualities are the wealth deities, and their activities are the Dharma protectors. Thus, the teacher is the source from which the infinite sources of refuge emanate and in whom they are all incorporated.

Therefore, in our practice, we should primarily pray to the teacher. Some individuals have told the teacher, "I pray to your Dharma protector for blessings; I pray to your deity for blessings," but in doing so, they may not receive what they wish for. Historical accounts show that when a practitioner chose the deity over

their teacher to receive empowerment, the deity completely dissolved into the teacher, so they were unable to receive the empowerment.

Therefore, you should understand the teacher to be the embodiment that emanates and incorporates all refuges.

5) Knowing that if you pray to the teacher with all this in mind, the wisdom of realization will take birth in your mind.

Having understood the four points mentioned above and developed the conviction that the teacher embodies the Three Jewels, we should know that when we see the teacher as the Buddha and fervently pray to them at all times, the wisdom of realization will arise in our own minds. This will occur without our needing to rely on external methods, such as the generation and perfection stages.

I translated *A Guide to The Words of My Perfect Teacher* into Chinese many years ago. I remember when I was working on the translation of the “five knowings,” I constantly emphasized in my class, “The five knowings are so important!”

Therefore, if you know the five things when practicing Guru Yoga, you will be able to see the teacher as the Buddha. When you pray to the teacher with such devotion and faith, their essence and realization will naturally dissolve into you. At that time, whatever you practice will be very easy, and you will not encounter any obstacles on the path.

When ordinary people engage in Dharma practice, it is like a small boat navigating a stormy sea—sometimes steady but frequently tossed by strong winds. The journey is incredibly challenging. Without constantly praying to the teacher with devotion and faith, one will inevitably be swept away and lost in the vast ocean of worldly existence.

So, I hope you will understand the “five knowings” well and engage in real, genuine prayer. You may consult *A Guide to The Words of My Perfect Teacher* for specific instructions. This guide is the work of Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang, whose writing may seem ordinary but is actually filled with faith and wisdom, as his teacher’s blessings have entirely dissolved into his mind. Such a work can undoubtedly bring us extraordinary blessings if we embrace it.

Meanwhile, we should reflect on how the great masters of the past followed and prayed to their teachers. In contrast, we may feel embarrassed about how we follow and pray to our own teacher.

At times, we may develop a fleeting sense of faith in our teacher, but it often fades quickly. Over time, due to negative karma from past lives and the persistent influence of the Mara King, some of us may not only lose our faith but also begin to criticize the teacher. Worse still, we may resort to slandering and defaming them. Initially, we sought to learn about the Dharma, but if something fundamental goes awry, we risk gaining nothing and even undermining our merit. As a result, we may lead an inauspicious life in this lifetime and inevitably fall into a lower realm in future lives.

Therefore, our practice should not head in the wrong direction. When the direction is not right, then no matter how diligently we practice, it is to no avail.

The above teaching on the “five knowings” is from *A Guide to The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. Let’s now continue with the text in *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*.

♦ **The teacher’s kindness is greater than that of all the buddhas**

For us disciples, the kindness of our teacher far surpasses that of all the buddhas because the teacher can swiftly establish us—in a single lifetime and in this very body—at the level of Vajradhara, solely through the profound path that ripens and liberates and the blessing of their compassion.

Of course, those with sharp faculties can be directly established at the level of Vajradhara in a single lifetime. As for others, thanks to the kindness of the teacher, now that they have encountered teachings of liberation, such as those of transcendent wisdom, they are like a hooked fish that remains in the ocean of samsara for now but will soon be pulled out and placed on the land of liberation.

Therefore, we must be grateful to the teacher. As we know, no one could have uprooted ignorance and attained liberation without the Buddha’s nectar of the Dharma. That is certain! Thus, the Buddha’s kindness is unparalleled. However, without the teacher’s teachings, how could it be possible for all the buddhas’ wisdom and compassion to enter our minds? Who else in this world, including our parents, schoolteachers, relatives, and friends, can offer the same level of kindness as the teacher?

A person who disbelieves in rebirth and liberation is grateful to those who provide them with life, money, and social status. However, a person who understands the value of liberation is grateful to the spiritual teacher because they

realize that if they had not met the teacher, they would have sunk deeper into samsara, and it would be uncertain when they might finally encounter the Dharma. Today, thanks to the teacher's compassionate blessing and powerful skillful means, this person is swiftly and easily established on the path to liberation.

You will truly understand this kindness once you have internalized it. No matter how much I explain it, my words are pale and powerless and cannot convey its true essence.

♦ **The teacher's qualities are inconceivable**

As for the teacher's qualities, their realization is as vast as the sky. In other words, every action of the teacher embodies their profound realization, which is as vast and inconceivable as the sky. It is only later that we finally grasp it, saying, "Oh! So that's what the teacher meant by that statement!"

The teacher's wisdom is as limitless as the ocean. The ocean is unfathomable and inexhaustible; so too is the teacher's knowledge. Whether it is the profound view of emptiness or the adept's skills in worldly dharma, the teacher's knowledge is like a boundless ocean.

The teacher's compassion is as powerful as a great river. A powerful river always flows rapidly, much like the teacher's compassion. The teacher has deep and unceasing compassion for all living beings.

The teacher's nature is as steadfast as Mount Meru. Ordinary people, when engaging in virtuous deeds, are often swayed by various circumstances. But a true teacher is not. Throughout the teacher's Dharma activities in this lifetime and in many lives, all their views and actions remain as steadfast as Mount Meru.

The teacher perceives all beings as parents, as the teacher's heart goes out equally to everyone. Worldly people care about their family, relatives, and friends, remain indifferent to strangers, and harbor hatred for enemies. However, a true teacher is different. A true teacher cares for all living beings equally, as if they were the teacher's own parents.

From this, it is clear that every aspect of the teacher's qualities is immeasurable.

♦ **Praying wholeheartedly**

- ◉ Recite the Prayer and the Padmasambhava Mantra

By relying solely on praying to the guru at all times and in all places, one can effortlessly attain all the accomplishments one has longed for.

During the practice, we should think, “I rely entirely on you—my teacher, who is like a wish-fulfilling jewel; I place all my hopes in you; I pledge myself to you alone!” Then, with tears of devotion and gratitude, recite the following verse for the practice of receiving the accomplishments:

*O Guru Rinpoche, Precious One,
You are the embodiment of
The compassion and blessing of all the buddhas,
The only protector of beings.
My body, my possessions, my heart and soul—
Without hesitation, I surrender to you!
From now until I attain enlightenment,
In happiness or sorrow, in circumstances good or bad, in
situations high or low:
I rely on you completely, O Pemajungne, you know me!*⁷²

Through this recitation, we wholeheartedly express the following:

Dear teacher, who is inseparable from Padmasambhava, you are the embodiment of the compassion and blessings of all the buddhas of the past, present, and future in the ten directions, and you are the only one who offers impartial protection to all beings.

I offer you, without hesitation, my body, my possessions, my heart, mind, and soul—everything of body, speech, and mind. From now until I attain enlightenment, in happiness or sorrow, in good or bad circumstances, in high or low situations, I rely entirely on you, my honorable teacher, who knows everything about me.

Such complete offering and reliance is very important.

When teaching us *The Great Perfection of Peaceful Manjushri*, the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche also mentioned that when praying to the guru, we must

⁷² Rigpa Translations. Revised for the Longchen Nyingtik Project, 2023.

completely surrender to them with devotion, saying, “From now on, and in all lifetimes, in happiness or sorrow, and in everything in this samsara, dear teacher, I rely entirely on your decision and guidance. If you think I should suffer, then please punish me and make me experience the suffering of sickness; if you think I should enjoy happiness, then please grant me food, clothing, peace, and happiness...”

However, some individuals would indicate what they prefer when praying to the guru, saying, “Actually, I would like to be happy because I cannot stand experiencing a lot of suffering and obstacles. Otherwise, my faith may regress. Therefore, it’s better for me to have more happiness, but it’s up to you.”

It is the same when some sangha members ask for a leave of absence, saying, “Dear guru, I want to go back to my hometown, but I will listen to you. Although I really want to go back, it’s up to you to decide.” Hearing this, I know they have already made up their minds.

In the Guru Yoga practice, once we have developed a deep-rooted sense of taking refuge in the guru, we then concentrate on reciting the Padmasambhava mantra wholeheartedly, as an invocation prayer:

Om Ah Hum Vajra Guru Padma Siddhi Hum

◉ Praying with devotion

As Mipham Rinpoche said in *The White Lotus: An Explanation of the Seven-Line Prayer to Guru Padmasambhava*, if you can move yourself while praying, then all the buddhas and bodhisattvas to whom you pray will be moved as well.

If you do not have any particular feelings—neither faith nor devotion has arisen—then whatever mantra or prayer you are reciting, the blessings of the buddhas and bodhisattvas may not arrive swiftly. Therefore, although many people do not understand why beginner Buddhists appear so enthusiastic and excited, such devotion and faith in all the buddhas and bodhisattvas are crucial. The more devoted a practitioner is, the more likely they are to receive the blessings.

After studying the Middle Way, some people conclude that everything is nothingness and does not really exist, which makes them appear emotionless when reciting prayers and mantras. They merely follow others in the practice, even though they are reluctant to do so. When looking at a statue of the Buddha, they do

not take it seriously and simply think, “So, that is the way it is! Fine, fine!” Praying in such a manner will not be effective.

Some university professors exhibit this attitude: they regard Buddhism as an academic subject and do not truly believe in it. Even if they pray occasionally, their efforts are halfhearted. In this case, true blessings will not enter their minds.

As stated in the instructions for the practice of Avalokiteshvara and Tara, if you pray wholeheartedly with devotion, you will undoubtedly receive blessings.

For example, when you encounter a significant unfavorable condition that makes you feel powerless, in the urgency of the situation, you cannot help but start to pray earnestly, saying, “Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, help me! Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, help me!”

When you pray wholeheartedly in this way, the bodhisattva’s blessing will undoubtedly reach you swiftly and fervently. Therefore, your external expression and internal feeling are very important when you pray. During the Guru Yoga practice, if immense devotion sweeps over you, causing every pore on your body to tingle, heavy tears to flow, and your whole body to respond strongly, it means you have prayed in the best way possible. By praying in this manner, the guru’s blessings will swiftly enter your mind. At that time, many things will naturally happen unexpectedly.

◎ Invoking accomplishments

After every hundred repetitions of the mantra, recite the prayer “O Guru Rinpoche, Precious One...” once more. Halfway through the time you have set aside for reciting the mantra, proceed to the invocation of accomplishments. After every hundred repetitions of the mantra, recite the following prayer:

*I have no one else to turn to;
In these evil times, the beings of the Kāliyuga
Are sinking in a swamp of intense and unbearable suffering.
Free us from all this, O great Guru!
Grant us the four empowerments, O Blessed One!
Direct your realization into our minds, O compassionate
one!*

*Purify our emotional and cognitive obscurations, O powerful one!*⁷³

Through reciting this prayer, we praise Guru Rinpoche Padmasambhava's wisdom, compassion, and power, while at the same time praying for the accomplishments he bestows upon us.

◉ Taking the four empowerments

When the time comes to request accomplishments, visualize yourself in the form of Vajrayogini and receive the four empowerments.⁷⁴

Visualize the syllable om (ཨྐ) between Padmasambhava's eyebrows—radiant like a moon-crystal—streaming rays of light that enter the crown of your head. This purifies the negative karma of your three negative physical actions—taking life, stealing, and sexual misconduct—as well as all obscurations within your channels, from which the physical body develops. In doing so, you have received the vase empowerment, allowing the blessings of Padmasambhava's vajra body to enter into you. The potential to attain the level of Nirmanakaya has been established within you. Thus, you are empowered to practice the generation stage.

Then, visualize the syllable ah (ཨ) blazing like a ruby in Padmasambhava's throat, emanating rays of light that enter your throat. This purifies the negative karma of your four harmful verbal actions—lying, sowing discord, harsh words, and worthless chatter—as well as all obscurations of your energies, from which speech develops. In doing so, you have received the secret empowerment, allowing the blessings of Padmasambhava's vajra speech to enter into you. The potential to attain the level of Sambhogakaya has been established within you. Thus, you are empowered to practice the perfection stage.

Then, visualize the deep blue syllable hum (ཨུ) in Padmasambhava's heart emanating rays of light that penetrate your heart. This purifies the negative karma of your three harmful mental actions—covetousness, wishing harm on others, and wrong views—as well as all obscurations of your essence, from which mental processes develop. In doing so, you have received the wisdom empowerment, allowing the blessings of Padmasambhava's vajra mind to enter into you. The potential to attain the level of Dharmakaya has been established within you. Thus, you are empowered to practice the union of the generation and perfection stages.

⁷³ Rigpa Translations. Revised for the Longchen Nyingtik Project, 2023.

⁷⁴ Khenpo Sodargye Rinpoche explained that they belong to the path empowerment.

Then, visualize from the hum in Padmasambhava's heart, a second hum, like a shooting star, streaking down and mixing completely with your mind. This purifies all the karmic and conceptual obscurations in your alaya, or all-ground consciousness, which is what underlies the body, speech, and mind. In doing so, you have received the precious word empowerment, allowing the blessing of Padmasambhava's vajra primal wisdom to enter into you. From that moment, the potential to reach the ultimate fruit, the level of the Svabhavikakaya, has been established within you. Thus, you are empowered to practice the most profound instructions of the ultimate Great Perfection.

[You may also refer to the section on the four empowerments in Mipham Rinpoche's *Illuminating the Path to Liberation: A Preliminary Practice*.]

Recite the prayer while visualizing it accordingly. Finally, merge your mind completely with the teacher's mind, so that your mind is inseparable from the teacher's wisdom, and abide in that state.

[In this practice, we visualize the teacher emanating rays of light that dissolve into us, after which we abide in that state. In Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche's Guru Yoga, we visualize the teacher becoming a sphere of five-colored light that dissolves into us, and then we rest in that state. There is a slight difference between the two practices.]

As I mentioned before, some senior Tibetan practitioners practice Guru Yoga before going to bed. When they recite this part of the prayer, they merge the guru's wisdom with their mind and rest in that state. Then they make a brief dedication and go to sleep. In the course of falling asleep, they recite the guru's prayer while abiding in the state that the guru's wisdom is inseparable from their own mind, eventually drifting off in that state.

The senior practitioners I had the opportunity to stay with all practiced in this way. I now realize that they were indeed true practitioners. During the upheaval of the Cultural Revolution, engaging in any Dharma-related activity—even something as simple as reciting a mani mantra—could lead to imprisonment. Yet even under such harsh conditions, these senior practitioners found ways to uphold their practice. They would recite the Guru Yoga prayer behind closed doors and fall asleep resting in the corresponding state.

◉ The conclusion of the session

At the conclusion of the session, with deep devotion and heartfelt longing, recite the following prayer:

*When my life is at an end,
 With my entire perception the heaven of Ngayab Ling—‘the
 Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain,’
 The Nirmanakaya pure land of indivisible appearance and
 emptiness—
 My body, Vajrayogini,
 Is transformed into a radiant, shimmering sphere of light
 And merging, inseparable, with Padmasambhava,
 I shall attain Buddhahood.
 Then, from the play of vast primordial wisdom,
 Which is the miraculous manifestation of bliss and emptiness,
 For every single being in the three realms,
 Let me appear as their true guide, to lead them to liberation—
 Jetsün Padma, grant this, I pray!
 I pray to you from the bottom of my heart,
 It is not just words or empty mouthings:
 Grant your blessings from the depth of your wisdom mind,
 And cause all my good aspirations to be fulfilled, I pray!⁷⁵*

Specifically, here “all my good aspirations” mainly refers to anything related to liberation, because the aspiration for liberation matters the most among all kinds of aspirations.

As you recite this, visualize with deep devotion Guru Rinpoche smiling, his gaze filled with compassion. A ray of warm red light radiates from his heart. The moment this light touches you—while still visualizing yourself as Vajrayogini—you are transformed into a small sphere of red light, the size of a pea. This light shoots upward toward Guru Rinpoche like a crackling spark and dissolves into his heart. Remain in that state.

⁷⁵ Rigpa Translations. Revised for the Longchen Nyingtik Project, 2023.

[In this practice, you, in the form of Vajrayogini, are transformed into a sphere of light and dissolve into the heart of Padmasambhava. In other practices, it is the teacher Padmasambhava who is transformed into light and dissolves into you. In fact, whether you are transformed into light and dissolve into Padmasambhava or vice versa, there is no intrinsic difference. Both forms of visualization require you to rest in the state where the teacher's wisdom is inseparable from your own mind.]

When you arise from the meditative state, perceive everything that exists as the manifestation of the teacher.

Here, it does not mean that everything is the teacher or that the teacher has truly transformed into something ugly or someone bad-tempered. That is not the case. Instead, this means that everything is the manifestation of the teacher.

For example, a magician can use simple objects as the basis of dependent arising to create the illusions of elephants, horses, and more. Although many things appear, they are merely illusions arising from those simple objects.

Likewise, all you see are the forms manifested by the teacher; all you hear are the sounds manifested by the teacher; all you think are the thoughts or wisdom manifested by the teacher. Although various appearances arise in front of you, their nature is that of the teacher, and it is the teacher who manifests everything.

Having established this perspective, when you meet an unkind person, your thoughts will shift. You may think, "Though he seems unkind, he could be a manifestation of my teacher, who embodies great kindness. The teacher's intention in presenting this unkind individual must be a skillful and deliberate effort to guide and benefit sentient beings." By thinking this way, your negative perception of him will dissipate.

A good practitioner can perceive everything as the manifestation of the teacher, including their disease and adversities, which supports their practice. Therefore, when encountering these unfavorable conditions, they are not only distressed, but their practice also progresses smoothly.

Then, does this mean we are compelled to perceive something impure as pure? No, it does not. Everything is pure in nature. Once we recognize this nature, we will understand that our mind is inseparable from the teacher's wisdom, and that what we see and hear are manifestations of the ultimate teacher.

Therefore, you should visualize in this way during your daily life and practice. As long as you frequently pray to the teacher, for example, by reciting the four-line

prayer and regularly practicing Guru Yoga, it is possible for you to perceive everything that exists as the manifestation of the teacher.

At the end of the session, conclude by reciting the following dedication verse:

By the merit of this practice may I quickly attain

The level of the glorious teacher, my protector.

May each and every one of the living beings

All achieve the state of this accomplishment.

Or you may dedicate by reciting the *Prayer of the Copper-Colored Mountain*, which I have translated into Chinese. It is a dedication prayer expressing the aspiration to be reborn in the pure realm of Guru Rinpoche Padmasambhava.



Lesson 134

“Whenever you are walking around, you can also practise Guru Yoga ... He taught the twenty-one thousand sections of the Fourth Pitaka.” [page 330–333]

In yesterday’s teaching, we learned that one can perform dedication by reciting the Prayer of the Copper-Colored Mountain.

♦ Practicing Guru Yoga in your daily activities

You should practice Guru Yoga not only on a meditation cushion but also in all your daily activities. For instance, while walking, you can practice Guru Yoga by visualizing your teacher⁷⁶ in the sky above your right shoulder and imagining that you are circumambulating the teacher clockwise. In doing so, no matter how far you walk, each step becomes a step in circumambulating the teacher, which brings great merit.

Therefore, an adept practitioner does not necessarily have to practice the Dharma by meditating in a secluded retreat; they can still visualize and meditate while working in an office, walking on a crowded city street, and so forth.

While sitting down, you can visualize the teacher above your head as the focus of your prayers.⁷⁷ At this time, you may quietly visualize the teacher emanating rays of light and granting you blessings. Even when you are talking with others, you can

⁷⁶ It can also be the field of refuge, or the mandala.

⁷⁷ In the same way when we visualize the teacher for the Guru Yoga meditation, as mentioned previously.

visualize that you are reciting the teacher's prayer. In short, no matter what you are doing while seated, always visualize the teacher sitting above your head.

While eating and drinking, you can visualize the teacher inside your throat and offer them the first portion of your food or drink.

Here, the key point of visualization is to understand that everything appears visible but is insubstantial. You are not visualizing something solid and inherently existing; that is to say, you do not need to focus on a specific part of your throat in your visualization. You may simply visualize respectfully offering the teacher the first portion of your food and drink within your throat, and that will be sufficient.

Those who somewhat understand the practice of the tantric generation stage know that all visualizations should be devoid of grasping. There is not anything or anyone solid and inherently existing located in a specific spot or positioned right above so-and-so. You do not need to dwell on such details.

In fact, when you visualize Guru Rinpoche Padmasambhava, whether he is above your head, inside your throat, or at the center of your heart, as your thought shifts moment by moment, Padmasambhava will also manifest himself spontaneously. Padmasambhava is everywhere: wherever you visualize he is, he is there. It is just that we do not visualize him. Without such visualizations, the teacher and his blessings are indeed very far away from us.

Therefore, for every practitioner, it is through visualization that one can receive blessings from the teacher, the deity, and the buddhas and bodhisattvas. If you can often visualize and remember them, they will always be with you, offering protection and guidance. In fact, they have never departed from you for even a moment.

Conversely, if you merely recite the prayer or mantra without visualizing the teacher in your mind, it will be very difficult to obtain the blessings or accomplishments you aspire to, aside from having a seed of merit planted in your mind.

Before falling asleep, visualize the teacher abiding at the center of your heart—this is the essence of the sleep yoga technique known as “putting everything that can be known into the vase,”⁷⁸ a term of the Great Perfection. In other words, you dissolve everything into a sphere of light in the center of your heart, as if placing everything into a vase; then the sphere of light dissolves into all-pervading space.

⁷⁸ This is one of the instructions on the yoga of sleep found in the Great Perfection teachings.

At this moment, you visualize the teacher in your heart, which is the essence of this practice, and you fall asleep in this state.

That said, you can also visualize according to your own situation. If you find it difficult to visualize the teacher at the center of your heart, you may visualize him above your head, sitting in a circle of light. This can also work.

♦ Transforming everything onto the path through the practice of Guru Yoga

In short, you should transform everything onto the path through the practice of Guru Yoga.

This Guru Yoga practice focuses on Guru Rinpoche Padmasambhava, so you should first visualize your own dwelling as the Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain—the pure realm of Padmasambhava—and maintain this thought at all times. Everything that appears—whatever you see, hear, or receive—should be perceived as the teacher’s manifestation and bestowal. If your perception and awareness remain inseparable from the teacher’s form, then no external condition can possibly harm you.

So if you need armor, Guru Yoga is the best armor and protection circle.

Of course, when truly applying Guru Yoga to transform everything onto the path, you still need to make an effort to cultivate your guru devotion at all times, in every situation. Therefore, you should always keep in mind the instruction from *A Guide to The Words of My Perfect Teacher*:

As you experience happy moments or go through difficult times,
see your teacher in everything. Cultivate devotion and pray.⁷⁹

◉ How to perceive adversities

Whenever you encounter illness, obstacles from negative forces, or other unfavorable conditions, do not simply try to eliminate them. Instead, take them as blessings from your teacher’s compassion—opportunities to help purify your past negative karma. When your cabin collapses, your business fails, you are criticized by others, your volunteer work goes awry, and more, you should perceive the adversity in this way.

⁷⁹ Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang, *A Guide to the Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by Dipamkara and the Padmakara Translation Group, Shambhala, 2004, page 280.

Of course, only an adept practitioner can do this. A second-rate practitioner views a good dream or a happy event as a blessing from the teacher, thinking with great joy, “I dreamed of the teacher last night! How wonderful!” But when they are sick or face challenges in their volunteer work, they complain, “Why doesn’t the teacher bless me? I’ve prayed not to encounter any problems!”

In fact, this is not the case. As stated in many pith instructions, the teacher always provides the appropriate blessings or methods to help disciples tame their minds according to their varying levels of faculties. For example, the teacher grants favorable circumstances to some disciples, allowing them to accomplish their tasks smoothly and progress well in their Dharma practices; meanwhile, the teacher offers unfavorable circumstances to other disciples, enabling their karmic obscurations and negative forces influenced by Mara to be exhausted.

Whether a person is a good practitioner becomes evident when faced with adversity. Even if a good practitioner has cancer and is hospitalized, they still perceive it as the teacher’s blessing, thinking, “This is definitely the teacher’s blessing, allowing the karmic results of my serious faults, which are supposed to ripen in a future life, to manifest lightly in this lifetime.” Thus, they are joyful and filled with gratitude.

Thus, for a practitioner, a seemingly “bad thing” may not necessarily be bad. When things go wrong, you may immediately think it is an unfavorable condition created by Mara and pray to the teacher to remove it; such an attitude is not necessarily beneficial in dealing with adversity.

◎ How to perceive happiness

When you experience material abundance, comfort, and happiness, or when your virtuous qualities, practices, and efforts to benefit others are progressing well, recognize all of these as manifestations of your teacher’s great compassion. Be careful not to let arrogance arise or to become overly proud.

People often feel proud in these situations, attributing their success to their own abilities and good practices. They might think, “Look! Others lack experience in practicing Guru Yoga, while I have many signs of progress.”

Ordinary people are like this. Even if it is about a dream, they wake up happy and proud after having a good dream in which they received the teacher’s instructions, but feel upset after a bad dream. A few days ago, I had a nightmare. In my

dream, there were human heads everywhere, and I was walking while holding a head whose eyes were still moving. I was terrified.

When I woke up, I worried that I might get sick, so I immediately prayed to my guru. After some time, I began to wonder, “Could this be the guru’s blessing? It must be his blessing!” Even though I tried to view it as a blessing, I still felt unsettled by the dream, leaving me lost in thought for quite a while.

Many of you Dharma practitioners may feel as I do: while you recognize that experiencing difficulties is a blessing from your teacher, you still prefer good dreams to bad ones and dislike facing challenging situations.

However, you should not feel this way. If you understand that nightmares and hardships are given by your teacher out of compassion, you should feel grateful. It is through confronting adversities, obstacles, and sickness that your negative actions can be purified. Furthermore, it may not yet be the right time for you to experience happiness and favorable conditions. Those who have studied *The Seven Points of Training the Mind* should understand this very well.

Of course, some of you live happy and comfortable lives and accomplish everything with ease. However, you must recognize that all your happiness and success are the results of your teacher’s blessings, so be grateful and avoid pride.

◉ How to merge your awareness during meditation

During meditation, if you experience fatigue, dullness, discouragement, laziness, or mental agitation, merge your awareness inseparably with the teacher’s wisdom mind. Abide in the view of the natural state, maintaining its innate brilliance. It is truly supreme to practice in this way.

Some of you always want to see the teacher in person, but when you merge your mind inseparably with the teacher’s wisdom during the Guru Yoga practice and abide in this state, you are actually seeing the ultimate teacher. The teacher with a form—the one who physically appears in front of you, or the one who is in a photo or a dream—is merely a non-definitive illusion, a pure appearance. When you abide in the state where your mind is inseparable from the teacher’s wisdom, you are seeing the ultimate teacher—the root guru who is indivisible from Buddha Samantabhadra—the Dharmakaya Buddha.

In the Guru Yoga practice we perform for the daily chanting before class, we are required to rest in that state for half a minute, during which some fortunate

practitioners meet the teacher each day. They experience the natural state of the ultimate teacher. Such a “meeting” is more important than seeing the teacher’s physical form.

◉ Reciting the Vajra Guru mantra

While abiding in the state, recite the Vajra Guru mantra with single-minded focus:

Om Ah Hum Vajra Guru Padma Siddhi Hum

According to the Longchen Nyingtik tradition, lineage disciples are expected to recite the Vajra Guru mantra ten million times. Beginning with Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa, all the lineage masters, including Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu and Patrul Rinpoche, have done so.

It is highly beneficial to recite the mantra ten million times. Over the past three years, many of you have recited the mantra one million times each year, which is commendable. While it may be challenging for those focused on learning the doctrines to complete the ten million recitations quickly, those who primarily focus on actual practice should strive to recite the mantra diligently.

In your practice, make it a point to pray often with the *Seven-Line Prayer* and practice Guru Yoga as much as possible. Additionally, aim to complete the recitation of the Vajra Guru mantra ten million times. By doing so, the blessings of Padmasambhava and all the lineage masters will surely merge into your mind, helping to dispel your obscurations and adverse circumstances.

Nowadays, many householders are truly dedicated to Dharma practices, and numerous laypeople have reached the milestone of reciting the mantra ten million times. There are even more who have completed one or two million repetitions. To my knowledge, many have at least recited the mantra one hundred thousand times.

As I have mentioned before, it is most beneficial to use this precious human life to practice the Dharma. It would be wise to refrain from worthless chatter and dedicate your time to reciting the Vajra Guru mantra. It is important to integrate the Dharma into your body, speech, and mind, and to recite the mantra as much as possible.

If you can practice Guru Yoga in this way, then all appearances—people, demons, and all phenomena—will arise as the teacher and deities. All your actions

will become positive, be transformed onto the path, and enter the mandala of Vajrayana.

♦ Milarepa's instructions

Of course, as a practitioner, regardless of the practice you are engaged in, you should always use mindfulness as an antidote to afflictions. Here is a story about female devas requesting teachings from Milarepa.

◉ The story of the eight female devas and Milarepa

In accordance with his deity's prophecy, Milarepa came to a place called Ku Tang and lived in a cave shaped like a rhinoceros, absorbing himself in the meditation of the Great Illumination.

One day, a pigeon adorned with golden ornaments came to Milarepa. The bird nodded, bowed, and circled him several times before flying away in the direction of the Immaculate Rock. Milarepa thought, "This must be a celestial being." He followed the pigeon up the hill, where he discovered a pile of white rice. The pigeon pecked at the rice with its bill and offered some to Milarepa. Then the bird appeared to circumambulate him and prostrated before him. Surprised and delighted, Milarepa sang a song of realization, whereupon the pigeon, accompanied by seven others, approached him.

They all bowed to him and circumambulated him several times, just as the first bird had done before. Milarepa asked, "Who are you, and why have you come here?" The pigeons then performed magic, revealing their true forms as female devas. Their leader said, "We are the celestial maidens of the god realm. Because we have great faith in you, we have come here to learn the Dharma from you. We beseech you to give us your instructions."

In response, Milarepa sang a song on the themes of impermanence and the defects of samsara, urging them to transform adversities onto the path. The devas were delighted.

Milarepa asked, "Why did you come here in the form of pigeons?" They replied, "Through our divine visions, we know that you are a yogi who has no attachment to your own benefit or desire for worldly life. It is solely for the sake of attaining enlightenment and the benefit of sentient beings that you have remained in solitude and meditated without distraction."

Therefore, with respect and faith, we now come to you for Dharma. However, to conceal our true form from sinful beings who harbor erroneous views, we have transformed ourselves into pigeons. We pray that you will now be kind enough to ascend to the god realm with us to teach us the true Dharma.”

Milarepa answered, “I will spend this lifetime in the human realm to benefit sentient beings. Even the god realm is impermanent, lacking essence. What I have to teach is none other than the following words—now listen carefully and practice accordingly.”

Then, Milarepa sang another song of realization, in which there are verses like:

The white and radiant celestial royal seat,
 Though you have managed to get to it, is without any essence.
 The youthfulness and beauty of you devis,
 Though it is a pleasant appearance, will quickly go.
 This illusory deception, a magical display,
 Though the enjoyment is great, is a cause for downfall.⁸⁰

Upon hearing the song, the devas said, “We are beings plagued by ignorance, burdened by afflictions that constantly linger in our minds. Out of compassion, please share with us a practice to consistently cultivate mindfulness and counter these afflictions!”

In response to their request, Milarepa sang another song with the following verses:

You devas who are endowed with faith,
 If you want to practice in a continual way:
 Inside, meditate with the concentration of shamatha;
 To abandon activity is one great ornament.
 Outside, stably take hold of the antidote;
 To relax body and speech is one great ornament.
 Continuously take the seat of mindfulness;
 To have few affairs is one great ornament.

and

⁸⁰ Milarepa and Tsangnyon Heruka, *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa*, translated by Christopher Stagg, Shambhala Publications, 2017.

Whatever you may meet in your daily doings,
You should contemplate its void and illusory nature.⁸¹

The celestial devas were all very happy, and in their delight and satisfaction, they once again transformed into pigeons, and flew back to the god realm.

The instruction that Milarepa gave to the celestial devas primarily focuses on maintaining a mindful state. When combined with the guidance on praying to the teacher and perfecting the Guru Yoga practice, you will naturally remain in a pristine state throughout your daily endeavors. Being in such a state, you will naturally be free from worldly karmic habits.

◉ Transforming everything onto the path

In another song of realization, Milarepa shares the methods of transforming everything onto the path:

As I walk, I transform all perceptions onto the path;
This is the way of walking in which the six consciousnesses
naturally liberate themselves.⁸²

That is to say, when Milarepa walks, he perceives all experiences as part of the path, and his way of walking is one in which the six consciousnesses of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind naturally liberate themselves.

As I sit, I sit in unaltered naturalness;
This is the essential and ultimate way of sitting.

That is to say, when Milarepa sits, he does so in the unaltered natural state, which is the most essential and ultimate way of sitting in Vajrayana.

When a practitioner sits in this manner, they will immediately visualize the teacher above their head and dissolve all conceptual thoughts into the great bliss of wisdom. This is the essential and ultimate way of sitting. When you observe how an

⁸¹ Milarepa and Tsangnyon Heruka, *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa*, translated by Christopher Stagg, Shambhala Publications, 2017.

⁸² At this level, taking perceptions as the path means experiencing them without any concept of an intrinsic reality of either perception or perceiver. The six consciousnesses and their objects become ungraspable, like space. They no longer give rise to attachment and thus are no longer a source of suffering. [Source: Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2010, note 271.]

adept practitioner rests on a cushion, you can infer that they have an extraordinary state of realization.

As I eat, I consume the food of emptiness;
This is the way of eating free from any dualistic notions.

That is to say, when Milarepa eats, he consumes only the food of emptiness. Although he is eating, there is no sign of attachment, which allows him to eat without any dualistic notions.

As I drink, I drink the spring of mindfulness and vigilance;
This is the way of drinking with perseverance and continuation.

That is to say, when Milarepa drinks, he drinks the spring water of mindfulness and vigilance, which is how he drinks unceasingly and with perseverance.

Milarepa transformed every ordinary activity onto the path, so his way of living was completely different from ours. We often grapple with attachments and greed, leading us to engage in negative actions. Consequently, it becomes challenging for us to connect with the Dharma. This is why we should devote ourselves more to the practice of Guru Yoga.

When a practitioner engages deeply in Guru Yoga, they begin to see their teacher in everything around them. Whether at Larung Gar or elsewhere, sitting in a car or walking down the street, they can perceive all experiences as the teacher's blessings and manifestations. With consistent practice, such individuals will undoubtedly make progress in their spiritual journey and experience a genuinely happy life. In the presence of such practitioners, no negative obstacles will arise, aside from the blessings and accomplishments bestowed by the teacher.

However, when following the teacher, some disciples do not perceive things in the aforementioned manner. When everything goes smoothly, they attribute it to the teacher's blessing; but when faced with a setback, they start to worry, thinking, "Does it mean the teacher is unhappy with me? Has the teacher abandoned me?" Even worse, they might wonder, "Is the teacher intentionally cursing me?"

A layperson I know exemplifies this situation. She has followed several teachers but often found herself preoccupied with worries and fears that her teachers might be unhappy with her. In an attempt to comfort her, I said, "A spiritual teacher is

not like a teenage girl with emotional ups and downs, so you don't need to be concerned."

She took my words to heart. A few years later, she shared that of all the teachings she received from me, those words had been the most beneficial. Initially burdened by her worries, she found that my advice helped to broaden her perspective.

In fact, how can a true teacher be jealous, narrow-minded, or irritable? It is simply not possible. When I first began following the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, I often felt anxious. I would think, "If I get too close to my guru, will he be annoyed? I would better not go to see him. But if I don't go, will he wonder why I'm not seeing him?"

After contemplating this back and forth, I reached a conclusion. Since the guru embodies all the buddhas and bodhisattvas, I believe that as long as I do my best to serve him, he won't be so "petty." At that time, I also reassured myself, "The guru is not a teenage girl!" I do not mean to suggest that all teenage girls are petty; it is simply a common expression.

Therefore, try to get rid of such unnecessary concerns during your practice. As long as you see everything as the teacher's manifestation and wholeheartedly practice Guru Yoga, your practice will undoubtedly be successful!

♦ The basics of empowerment

Furthermore, once you embark on the Vajrayana path, it is essential to receive empowerments from a qualified teacher, as these empowerments mature and liberate.⁸³ They repair violated and broken samayas and enable you to meditate on all the paths of the generation stage, the perfection stage, and the Great Perfection. They prevent obstacles and errors from arising and allow your attainments to grow continuously. As it is said:

In Vajrayana, accomplishment is impossible without
empowerment,

Just as a boatman cannot navigate without oars.

and also:

Accomplishment is impossible without empowerment,

⁸³ The empowerment brings one to liberation through maturing one's mindstream.

Just as one cannot extract oil from pressing sand.

It is clear that in Vajrayana, the guru's empowerment is extremely important, as the source of all attainments relies on it. However, even if you have gone through all the steps in an empowerment, does it mean you have truly received the empowerment? This question warrants careful examination.

◉ Two causes and four conditions

To really get the empowerment, there need to be two causes and four conditions. The two causes are the associated cause and the cooperative cause.

1) The associated cause: The empowerment recipient has all their sensory faculties intact, and their channels, energies, essences, and mind are capable; they are able to hear and understand. As such, they possess the necessary causes and conditions for accepting the empowerment.

2) The cooperative cause: There are all the required substances for the empowerment, such as the vase, the image of the Buddha, the nectar, and so forth. Additionally, the substances should be consecrated or blessed by a qualified guru.

In general, it is easy to have both causes if they are not examined strictly. In contrast, it is harder to have all four conditions, namely the causal condition, the dominant condition, the objective condition, and the immediate condition.

1) The causal condition is that the disciple has faith and discernment. Such a disciple is a Dharma vessel of the empowerment.

Generally speaking, beneficial empowerment requires the disciple to have faith. Among the five types of empowerment in the category of potent empowerment, for the empowerment of hearing the secret and the empowerment that brings spiritual attainment, the disciple is required to have the intention of benefiting and liberating oneself. For the empowerment of explaining the secret and the empowerment ritual of performing enlightened activity, the disciple is required to have the intention of benefiting others. Last, for the empowerment of the vajra king's infinite command, the disciple is required to have the intention of benefiting both oneself and others.

Therefore, an empowerment recipient must have faith, discernment, and right views. They should also understand the importance and supremacy of Vajrayana. Otherwise, even if they are among the empowerment recipients in the crowd,

without faith, they lack the causal conditions. As a result, they may not receive the empowerment despite going through the process.

2) The dominant condition is that the vajra guru is fully qualified. Tantric vows concerning the vajra guru represent the most supreme samaya commitments. To bestow empowerment, the vajra guru must have perfected all corresponding recitations and meditations.

For example, in the case of the Vajrakilaya empowerment, the vajra guru must have mastered both the generation and perfection stages of Vajrakilaya practice and attained the necessary level of mastery. They must have completed the required number of repetitions of the corresponding mantra, and it is preferable that they have had a direct vision of the deity or, at least, a vision in a dream.

In summary, the guru who grants empowerment must possess conviction in tantric views, meditation, and actions, along with a certain level of accomplishment in tantric practices. Thus, they are qualified to bestow empowerment.

Many people often request, “Dear guru, please bestow upon me empowerment. I have been waiting for this.” However, it is not easy to grant empowerment. Not all teachers are qualified to confer it. Moreover, a teacher is not even permitted to give tantric teachings before they are ready. Therefore, a wise guru will not easily say “yes” to such requests.

3) The objective condition is the empowerment objects with special powers, along with mantras, samadhi, and others. Both the guru and the disciples should have this condition.

The vajra guru must carry out proper visualizations when bestowing empowerment. For instance, when granting the Vajrasattva empowerment, the guru should visualize step by step according to the liturgy and recite the mantra. When it is time to use empowerment objects such as the vase, nectar, and crystal, the guru must complete all corresponding visualizations. The disciples should follow the guru’s instructions and perform the visualizations as well.

It is actually very hard to obtain the objective condition. Especially, when you do not understand the guru’s language, you are unsure how and when to visualize. Therefore, you do not know whether you have received the empowerment. After reciting a liturgy, the guru told you, “I just bestowed upon you the Lama Yangtik empowerment.” And you took it for granted, thinking you have got it.

But did the guru recite the *Wang Dū Prayer*⁸⁴ or really grant the empowerment? It is hard to say. Even if the guru did give the empowerment, did you truly receive it without the corresponding visualization? It is also hard to say.

Han disciples face a language barrier, making it difficult for them to follow instructions and visualize accordingly. Furthermore, even some Tibetan disciples do not visualize properly during empowerment. While the guru recites the liturgy, these Tibetan disciples may be absentminded. Although the recitation is in Tibetan, which they understand, they often choose not to visualize.

During my travels to India with the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, I noticed that some gurus provided detailed explanations while bestowing empowerment. They explained each point clearly, instructing disciples to visualize accordingly—layer by layer, with each explanation followed by a visualization. This approach enables disciples to fully grasp the entire empowerment process. Without such guidance, recipients may only establish an auspicious connection with the guru and the Dharma.

4) The immediate condition is the previous phase of empowerment, as each phase prepares the disciples for what follows. This is why empowerments must be given in the proper sequence.

Take the vase empowerment as an example: Before the disciples receive this empowerment, the guru must perfect all the immediate conditions; without completing the previous phase, moving on to the next step is impossible.

The guru must accomplish the necessary practice before bestowing empowerment. During the practice, the guru enters the deity's mandala and visualizes receiving the empowerment from the visualized deity. After receiving the empowerment, the guru prepares to bestow it upon the disciples. First, they instruct the disciples to confess and enter the mandala. Then, the guru visualizes themselves as the deity and begins to bestow the vase empowerment upon the disciples. Throughout this process, the guru first prays, then offers the empowerment, and finally recites mantras while giving empowerment substances to the disciples.

Once the vase empowerment is complete, the guru may proceed to the next empowerment, known as the secret empowerment.

The same applies to the subsequent secret empowerment, wisdom empower-

⁸⁴ It refers to *The Great Cloud Blessings—The Prayer Which Magnetizes All That Appears and Exists*, by Mipham Rinpoche.

ment, and precious word empowerment, where the previous phase or empowerment prepares the disciples for the next phase or empowerment. The immediate condition is the previous phase or empowerment. If this condition is lacking, such as missing a key factor or having an incorrect sequence, the disciples cannot receive the empowerment, just as a flawed or incomplete agenda will result in a futile meeting.

The above is a brief explanation of the two causes and four conditions of empowerment. Based on this, although many people seek empowerments, whether they have truly received them still requires some examination.

Empowerment matures one's mindstream, allowing primal wisdom to be revealed in the future. But does it mean that you have achieved accomplishment after receiving the empowerment? Not yet. To truly reach that state, you need to receive pith instructions and engage in the corresponding practices.

For instance, if you have received the Vajrasattva empowerment, you are permitted to enter this mandala, and your mind is ready to undertake the tantric practice. The next step is to receive the pith instructions and engage in the Vajrasattva practice. This is referred to as "the empowerment that matures and the pith instructions that liberate." Thus, without receiving empowerment, one cannot embark on the tantric path; however, simply having received empowerment without engaging in practice will not lead to liberation.

Unfortunately, many people do not understand this.

"Have you received the empowerment?" one asked.

"Yes, I have," the other answered.

"And have you undertaken the tantric practice?"

"No, I haven't. My guru didn't remind me, so I haven't practiced anything."

Just like this, a disciple may have received many empowerments from this guru and that guru, but without engaging in tantric practice, they still cannot attain liberation. While empowerment plants the seed of liberation in one's mindstream and nurtures the mind with good Dharma, the most crucial step for a practitioner is to actively engage in the corresponding practice after receiving the empowerment.

The above teaching has covered the basics of empowerment.

◉ Chinese Buddhism and empowerment

In fact, the content related to empowerment is also found in the doctrines of Chinese Buddhism. For example, *Notes on the Teaching and Meaning of the Uṣṇīṣa Vijaya Dhāraṇī* lists five kinds of empowerment: light empowerment, nectar empowerment, seed empowerment, wisdom mudra empowerment, and precious word empowerment.

In the past, some Sutrayana masters claimed, “Empowerment is of no use; empowerment is this or that...”

They made these statements due to their lack of understanding of empowerment. However, if they wish to deepen their understanding, they can find answers in the scriptures of Chinese Buddhism as well, if not from Tibetan Buddhism. I have elaborated on this topic in my book *Dispelling Doubts about Vajrayana Buddhism*.⁸⁵

But even if they do not understand the significance and validity of empowerment, it is unnecessary for them to commit wrongdoings due to a lack of understanding. For example, one Dharma master stated, “Empowerment, well, it is no different from ‘empowering’ disciples with water.”

Such a statement is incorrect, and making it appears to accumulate negative karma. Of course, it is a different matter if the master who made this statement is an emanation of a bodhisattva. However, if not, the master should have a deeper understanding of this issue to avoid making such inappropriate statements.

◉ The ground, path, and fruit empowerments

The empowerment we receive when first introduced into the mandala by an authentic Vajra Master is the ground empowerment. Therefore, the empowerment we normally receive from the vajra guru is the ground empowerment.

The fourfold empowerment we take through our practice of Guru Yoga, without depending on anyone or anything else, is the path empowerment. As you have learned, in the Guru Yoga practice, rays of light emanate from the guru’s body, speech, mind, and heart-center, dissolving into your own corresponding parts.

The empowerment we receive at the moment of ultimate fruition (that is, at

⁸⁵ Khenpo Sodargye Rinpoche wrote this book in 1998 in Chinese. It provides a clear and accessible explanation of Vajrayana Buddhism. Addressing common misunderstandings, it systematically clarifies key principles and practices, helping readers develop correct views and confidence in the tantric path through scriptural reasoning and authentic lineage teachings.

the end of the tenth bodhisattva level), known as the “great ray of light empowerment” or the “empowerment of indivisible profundity and radiance,” is the fruit empowerment—the completely perfect Buddhahood.

The *Flower Ornament Sutra* says:

One who attains the state of the Dharma king
Will have boundless freedom,
Just as one ascends to the throne
After receiving a worldly empowerment.

Just as a prince ascends to the throne as a universal monarch upon receiving worldly empowerment, bodhisattvas at the end of the tenth level are praised by all the buddhas. By emanating infinite rays of light from their hearts, the buddhas bless the bodhisattvas, allowing them to enter the level of the Buddha, attain perfect enlightenment, and experience boundless freedom.

Of the three types of empowerment, given our current situation, it is unrealistic for us to achieve fruit empowerment, and opportunities for ground empowerment are limited. However, we can often attain path empowerment through our own practice.

For instance, after you wake up in the morning or before you go to bed at night, you might visualize Padmasambhava emanating rays of light that enter your body, speech, and mind, enabling you to receive path empowerment. Having path empowerment is extremely important! If you practice it regularly, your mind will become more peaceful and capable. Therefore, it is essential to commit to this practice over the long term.

♦ The indispensable Guru Yoga practice

In short, Guru Yoga also possesses three inconceivably profound characteristics: purifying one’s attachment to the three worlds, perfecting one’s qualities of the three kayas, and maturing one’s wisdom of clear light. Generally speaking, even when we are doing the main practice, we should not set aside the preliminary practices. In particular, when meditating on the generation stage, the perfection stage, and the Great Perfection, it is essential to start each session with the path empowerment of Guru Yoga—this is a crucial and indispensable instruction.

Normally, Guru Yoga is the preliminary practice that allows us to advance to

the generation stage, the perfection stage, and the Great Perfection. Yet, for those whose devotion and samaya are completely pure, simply completing the path up to Guru Yoga—without even undertaking the main practice—will lead to rebirth in the South Western Continent.⁸⁶

According to historical accounts, some great practitioners received only the teachings of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, yet they were reborn in Padmasambhava's pure realm. As recorded in *Short Stories of Rainbow-Body Accomplishers in Mantrayana*,⁸⁷ there are practitioners who, despite having done none of the main practices, attained the rainbow body simply through the preliminaries. There are many such cases.

Once reborn in the pure realm, practitioners will traverse the path of the four Vidyadhara levels even more swiftly than the movements of the sun and moon, ultimately reaching the level of Buddha Samantabhadra.

This concludes the teaching on “How to Practice Guru Yoga,” which is very profound. However, the extent to which you can benefit from it depends on the importance you attach to it.

♦ One must value *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*

You must place great importance not only on the Guru Yoga practice but also on all the teachings in *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*.

Today, a khenpo borrowed a Tibetan book of this text from an old practitioner living elsewhere. The khenpo was in a hurry to photocopy the text, so he asked me for help. I contacted the print office to make a copy for him. After the job was done, I flipped through the book. In total, there were more than one hundred pages, and the old practitioner had added commentaries on certain scriptural evidence. That is why the khenpo wanted to photocopy this book.

I asked why the khenpo was in such a hurry and learned that the old practitioner cherished the book as if it were his own life. He had requested the khenpo to return it within two or three days.

I was quite impressed when hearing this, thinking, “Many Tibetan practitioners indeed value *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, including the lineage

⁸⁶ Another name for the Copper-Colored Mountain.

⁸⁷ This work by Khenpo Sodargye Rinpoche, written in Chinese, compiles the stories of accomplished tantric practitioners.

disciples of Lama Yukhok and Thubga Rinpoche. This Tibetan version just has a bit more commentary, yet they place great importance on it.”

However, some Han Chinese practitioners affiliated with the Victorious Mara-Subduing Land⁸⁸ are only interested in high teachings such as *Lama Yangtik*, and rarely value *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*.

To prepare for the teaching, I have spent considerable time searching for scriptural evidence and Buddhist stories in the sutras. Since Patrul Rinpoche wrote this book, there has rarely been such an extensive teaching on the text in the history of Tibetan Buddhism. The same holds true for my comprehensive teaching on *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, the transcripts of which were compiled into ten volumes. While there are many other extensive teachings on *The Way of the Bodhisattva* in India and the Tibetan regions, mine is the most comprehensive.

Later, I thought, “Had I taught *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* in Tibetan and had the transcripts edited and compiled in Tibetan, I would have become quite ‘famous’ in the Tibetan regions.”

It is unfortunate that although I teach the text in Chinese and many people attend the teaching sessions, many of you focus solely on empowerment, high teachings, or even Qigong, and do not appreciate *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* and *The Way of the Bodhisattva*. I have yet to meet anyone who consistently carries a copy of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* with them, and there are seldom those who pay attention to the scriptural quotes and Buddhist stories in the text.

Therefore, I really admired the old practitioner who lent the book to that khenpo. He told the khenpo, “Please do return it in two or three days. Do not stain it! Do not lose it! Otherwise, it would be just like losing my own life.”

In contrast, some of you seem very happy when someone borrows your copy of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, saying, “You want to borrow it? You do not need to borrow it; just take it with you! It is yours now. That is fine with me. Anyway, I found the copy too heavy. Take it, and you don’t need to return it.”

Could it be so? Maybe it is just my fabrication, or perhaps it is what really happened.

Nevertheless, the transcripts of my teachings on *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* will be compiled into several volumes. I do not know whether anyone

⁸⁸ It refers to the Chinese sangha members at Larung Gar.

will read the transcripts in the future. Had the teachings been in Tibetan, when the practitioners of my generation leave this world, the transcripts would likely be compiled as the teacher's treasury work.

However, there are too many books of this and that in Chinese, and also, due to historical reasons, not many students value the preliminary practices. Not to mention people outside Larung Gar, even the attendees of the teachings at Larung Gar have not shown much interest, as evident from their expressions. From your faces, I can tell whether you have faith in this text or not.

I want to address this not out of disappointment but because I have some special feelings. My feelings may reflect reality, or they may not.

♦ **Suggestions on transcribing the teachings and making videos**

One more thing I would like to address is my gratitude to the Dharma fellows who have been diligently creating the class videos and transcribing my teachings.

While editing teaching transcripts and creating videos, the volunteer Dharma fellows should work collaboratively as a team. It is natural for individuals to have their own opinions during this process. However, it is crucial to encourage other capable members to contribute to the editing work to ensure a unified format and style, ultimately enhancing the quality of the final product.

The other day, I was proofreading the transcript of my talk in Tibetan. Once I finished, I still felt uncertain about the text, so I sought assistance from two khenpos. After their review and edits, I was finally satisfied with the accuracy and coherence of the transcript.

I appreciate your commitment to the volunteering task, but when someone becomes overly stubborn about their responsibility, they often become possessive. They might say, "I am in charge of this part, and no one is allowed to modify or edit it. If that happens, I will take action..."

You do not have to be like this. It is beneficial to present your work and invite others to evaluate it from different perspectives, just as you do when debating topics of the Middle Way or Buddhist logic. Of course, it is normal for each person to have a different verbal style, but it is still necessary to refine the text from various angles and to discuss it in person.

However, some Dharma fellows hesitate to do so. Some may be concerned that

others will check and comment on their work, while others are reluctant to provide feedback, fearing they might offend someone. They wonder, “What if this person doesn’t want to volunteer anymore?” “What if they get upset?”

In fact, that is perfectly acceptable. After our generation departs from this world, the videos and transcripts we have created together will continue to circulate for some time, as long as they have the protection of all the buddhas and bodhisattvas. Therefore, for the benefit of both current and future Dharma students, you should give your best effort in this task while also engaging in discussion and debate with one another to improve the quality of the videos and transcripts.

In short, I am truly grateful for everyone’s efforts in the volunteer work. The teachings on *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* that I have been giving this time are the most extensive I have ever taught. It is the first and last time I will provide such a comprehensive teaching on the text. I will not spend a few years teaching this text again in the future. Nonetheless, delivering this teaching marks a significant milestone in my life.

2.2.5.3. The History of the Advent of the Early Transition Doctrine

At this point in the teachings on preliminary practices, to inspire joy and devotion in the Dharma students, it is traditional for the teacher to provide a suitably detailed account of the history of how the teachings in general and the three inner yogas in particular came into being.

Thus, Patrul Rinpoche offers a brief account of how the three inner yogas of the Nyingma tradition⁸⁹—Mahayoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga—which correspond to the practices of the generation stage, the perfection stage, and the Great Perfection, respectively, have been transmitted to us. These teachings have been passed down through three lineages: the mind lineage of the Conquerors, the symbol lineage of the Vidyadharas, and the hearing lineage of ordinary beings.

2.2.5.3.1. The Mind Lineage of the Conquerors

Buddha Samantabhadra is enlightened from the very beginning. His infinite, magical display of great compassion gives rise to the pure realms of all buddhas, as well as the places where teachings are imparted and the teachers of the four kayas.

⁸⁹ Also known as “the Old Translations.”

His circle of disciples includes the spontaneously accomplished Vidyadharas of the five kayas and an inconceivable, infinite assembly of Conquerors, along with great bodhisattvas such as Manjushri and Avalokiteshvara.

He teaches without teaching, transmitting all doctrines without words or symbols, through the natural and effortless clarity of the great compassion that radiates spontaneously from primordial awareness. His disciples, including the buddhas of the ten directions, flawlessly actualize the meaning of this absolute teaching within themselves, merging their qualities of freedom and realization with those of Buddha Samantabhadra.

For those not fortunate enough to understand this first transmission, there are the other vehicles that involve a progressive path.

Buddha Samantabhadra taught these by manifesting countless forms throughout the inconceivably infinite worlds of the universe, benefiting beings by guiding each one through the most appropriate means. *The Sutra of the Dense Array* says:

Given that all the beings
Have different preferences,
The Buddha manifests different forms
To guide them by appropriate means.

Thus, Buddha Samantabhadra has various manifestations, which include not only the form of sentient beings, such as humans and animals, but also the form of non-sentient entities, such as bridges, roads, lamps, and more, guiding each being by the most appropriate means.

Specifically, the forms in which he trains the six classes of beings are the Six Munis, which consist of Indra Kaushika for the god realm in white, Vemachitra for the asura realm in green, Buddha Shakyamuni for the human realm in yellow, Shravasingha for the animal realm in blue, Jvālamukhadēva for the preta realm in red, and Dharmarāja for the hell realm in black. The Six Munis have been covered extensively in the Liberation in the Intermediate State through Hearing, and they are all emanations of Buddha Samantabhadra.

In this world of Jambudvīpa, Buddha Shakyamuni turned the wheel of the Dharma three times for gods and humans. He taught the causal vehicle of characteristics, which comprises the Vinaya, the Sūtras, the Abhidharma, and the outer Vajrayana—Kriya Tantra, Upayoga Tantra, and Yoga Tantra. As it is said:

As the antidote to the emotion of attachment
 The Buddha taught the 21,000 sections of the Vinaya Pitaka;
 As the antidote to the emotion of hatred
 He taught the 21,000 sections of the Sutra Pitaka;
 As the antidote to the emotion of bewilderment
 He taught the 21,000 sections of the Abhidharma Pitaka.
 As the antidote that subdues all three poisons together
 He taught the 21,000 sections of the Fourth Pitaka.⁹⁰

From this scriptural evidence, it is clear that rejecting Vajrayana teachings is illogical. As mentioned earlier, without recognizing Vajrayana, the 84,000 teachings are incomplete. However, if one acknowledges the existence of these 84,000 teachings, acceptance of Vajrayana teachings becomes necessary.

This is also mentioned in the scriptures of Chinese Buddhism. For example, it is said in the twenty-ninth volume of the *Sutra of the Great Assembly*:

Those who have the emotion of attachment have 21,000 actions,
 Those who have the emotion of hatred have 21,000 actions,
 Those who have the emotion of bewilderment have 21,000
 actions,
 Those who have all the negative emotions have 21,000 actions.
 Seeing and knowing the 84,000 actions of all living beings,
 (The Buddha) has given the teaching that corresponds to each
 of the actions.

I hope you can keep this scriptural evidence in mind.

This verse does not distinguish among the 21,000 sections of the Vinaya Pitaka, the Sutra Pitaka, and the Abhidharma Pitaka; however, it conveys the same meaning.

The extensive version of the *Sutra of the Great Assembly* consists of sixty volumes in total. In addition to teachings on the six transcendent perfections and emptiness, it also includes teachings on Vajrayana and Dharani.⁹¹ This extensive

⁹⁰ Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2010, page 333.

⁹¹ Dharani (Skt. dhāraṇī; Tib. རྒྱུངས་, zung, Wyl. gzungs) — long mantras that are placed inside sacred statues and stupas. Dharanis are seen as goddesses in themselves.

version is a compilation based on the thirty-volume version,⁹² and incorporates other sutras, such as the *Sūryagarbha Sutra* and the *Mahāsaṃnipāta-candragarbha Sutra*.

In conclusion, the mind lineage of the Conquerors refers to the communication or transmission of wisdom among the buddhas. For those beings in the six realms who cannot receive the transmission in such a way, Buddha Samantabhadra manifests in the forms of the Six Munis to guide them with the appropriate teachings.

Especially for us human beings, Buddha Shakyamuni taught the Vinaya Pitaka to those with the emotion of attachment, the Sutra Pitaka, which includes the teachings on love and compassion, to those with the emotion of hatred, and the Abhidharma Pitaka to those with the emotion of bewilderment.

As you can see, those who are heavy on one specific emotion do not necessarily have to take the tantric path; they can antidote the specific negative emotion just by studying the Vinaya, the Sutra, or the Abhidharma alone. Those who are heavy on all the negative emotions or have equal levels of attachment, hatred, and bewilderment should better take the tantric path.

So, not everyone has to study Chan Buddhism or take the tantric path. The Buddha offered 84,000 teachings, allowing everyone to choose the one that best aligns with their disposition.

The above teaching has covered a brief introduction to the mind lineage of the Conquerors.

⁹² The thirty-volume version was translated into Chinese by Dharmakṣema.



Lesson 135

“At the time of his passing away into nirvana, ... level of the Great Perfection.” [page 333–339]

According to the Longchen Nyingtik tradition, when teaching the Guru Yoga section of ngöndro, or the preliminary practices, teachers typically introduce the lineage masters. Following this tradition, Patrul Rinpoche also included a historical account of the lineage masters in *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* within the Guru Yoga section. In our last class, we studied the mind lineage of the Conqueror. Today, we’ll study the symbol lineage of the Vidyadharas.

- ♦ **The transmissions of Chinese Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism are converging**

The three lineages of transmission mentioned above also exist in Chinese Buddhism. Specifically, the mind lineage of the Conquerors, although not referred to by the same name, is explained with the same meaning in Chinese Buddhism. The symbol lineage of the Vidyadharas appears in the history and accounts of Chan Buddhism, with many enlightened Chan masters attaining enlightenment through means of the symbol lineage, which is the same as that of the Vidyadharas mentioned here by Patrul Rinpoche. The hearing lineage of ordinary beings is also the means by which lineage transmissions are passed through in Chinese Buddhism.

As you can see, there is no significant difference between Chinese Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism; it is just that we did not understand this very well in the past. To help you understand this, when teaching you *The Words of My Perfect*

Teacher, I often draw on doctrines from Chinese Buddhism to explain certain teachings and terms.

I have been doing this since the beginning of the teaching until now. In doing so, I aim to help you realize that the teachings across all lineages and schools are converging, and it is not the case that Tibetan Buddhism and Chinese Buddhism are as distinct from each other as fire and water.

For a true yogi or a realized practitioner, the teachings do not contradict one another. Instead, the diverse teachings in Buddhism serve as skillful means, adapted for different individuals. While these teachings may seem distinct, they all ultimately lead to the same outcome.

The same is true for the teaching of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* and that of Pure Land. Initially, I established the group for the study of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, and later I wanted to introduce the teaching of Pure Land. Therefore, I established another group for Pure Land studies, believing that eventually this new group could be merged with the group for the study of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*.

However, it has now been almost six years since the Pure Land cohort was established, and it still has not been merged with the other cohort as planned. Why is that? Many members of the Pure Land cohort consider *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* to be a tantric study, thinking, “If the cohort continues to focus on Pure Land practice, I will continue to study it; but if the cohort is positioned as a tantric study group, I will have to quit out of caution.”

Many members of the Pure Land cohort still think this way, so I have no choice but to keep all the cohorts as they are. Now there are cohorts studying Pure Land practice, the preliminaries, Buddhist logic, and more. It is not easy for me, the only teacher, to teach so many different cohorts.

What is the cause of this? This issue arises from a few influential masters who have made inappropriate comments. These masters primarily follow the Pure Land School and lack extensive knowledge of other lineages and schools. Consequently, their negative opinions about the teachings of other lineages and schools have swayed many individuals, making it challenging for us to change their attitudes despite our various efforts.

Therefore, this time when teaching you *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, I have tried to back up my teachings with teachings of Chinese Buddhism.

2.2.5.3.2. The Symbol Lineage of the Vidyadharas

♦ Buddha Shakyamuni's prediction

How did the symbol lineage of the Vidyadharas arise? When Buddha Shakyamuni was nearing parinirvana, he prophesied that the unsurpassable Vajrayana teachings would one day appear in the world.

The unsurpassable Vajrayana teachings consist of two parts. The first part includes tantric teachings, such as the *Kalachakra Tantra*⁹³ and the *Guhyasamaja Tantra*,⁹⁴ which were taught by Buddha Shakyamuni himself when he manifested in the form of a Vidyadhara. The second part was not taught while Buddha Shakyamuni was alive, but the Buddha himself prophesied that these teachings would emerge in the future.

This history is essential for anyone studying or practicing Vajrayana to understand. It is similar to how a Chan practitioner should know the history of Chan Buddhism—if they are unaware of its history as well as the conduct and realizations of the Chan masters who upheld the tradition, they will naturally have doubts about its teachings and the states of realization it promises. Similarly, those who study Vajrayana should begin by learning about its origins. Once they understand the purity and authenticity of its source, anyone with the right views will have no problem accepting tantric teachings.

The Buddha says clearly in the *Cakrasamvara Tantra*:

Twenty-eight years
After I have passed into nirvana,
In the Heaven of the Thirty-Three,
The lord of the teachings, Devaputra Adhicitta,
Will descend to the human world.
In the east of Jambudvipa,
A noble and fortunate human being—

⁹³ The Kalachakra Tantra is one of the main tantras practiced by the Sarma or New Translations schools. The name means “wheel of time” or “time-cycles.” It has a unique presentation of cosmology. There’s a tradition of offering this empowerment to large public audiences. (Source: Rigpawiki.org)

⁹⁴ The Guhyasamaja Tantra is the main Guhyasamaja tantra of the Desire Class of Father Tantras. According to the Blue Annals, it was first taught by Buddha Shakyamuni to King Indrabodhi of Oddiyana. (Source: Rigpawiki.org)

A king named Ja—
 Will appear, accompanied by auspicious signs.
 On the peak of Fearsome Mountain,
 Vajrapani will appear
 And give teachings to the Five Excellent Ones of Sublime
 Nobility,
 The Lord of Lanka, and more.

After making this prophecy, the Buddha displayed his passing into nirvana.

Fearsome Mountain, also known as Mount Malaya,⁹⁵ is located in present-day Sri Lanka. It was here that the Buddha taught the *Lankavatara Sutra*. In his book, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism: Its Fundamentals and History*, Dudjom Rinpoche wrote, “This Mount embodies the nature of all the mountains,” and provided detailed descriptions of its summit, its middle, and other aspects. I once saw a photo said to be of Mount Malaya, the place where the tantric teachings were first imparted. This place has become a world-famous tourist destination for Buddhists.

Specifically, it was on this Mount that Vajrapani gave the tantric teachings to the Five Excellent Ones of Sublime Nobility:⁹⁶ a god, a naga, a yaksa, a rāksasa and a human being. These five noble ones were among the first to receive the tantric teachings. Later, the teachings were also conferred to the Lord of Lanka. Certain great masters have suggested that the term “Lord of Lanka” actually refers to the prophecy concerning Guru Rinpoche Padmasambhava, as he later indeed became the Lord of Lanka.

In accordance with the Buddha’s prophecy, twenty-eight years after his parinirvana, the unsurpassable inner tantras—the generation stage, the perfection stage, and the Great Perfection—indeed subsequently appeared in the world. It has been more than 2,500 years since these tantric teachings appeared in this world.

♦ The Mahayoga tantras

The Mahayoga tantras appeared twenty-eight years after the Buddha’s parinir-

⁹⁵ Mount Malaya is in Sri Lanka, now known as Adam’s Peak, which is also the site of a footprint of the Buddha and was visited by Guru Rinpoche.

⁹⁶ The Five Excellent Ones of Sublime Nobility were a god, a naga, a yaksa, a rāksasa, and a human being; alternatively, according to some sources, the god Indra is listed in place of Vimalakirti.

vana. At that time, King Je received seven omens, or prophetic signs, in his dreams. Also, on the roof of his palace, he miraculously discovered numerous tantric scriptures written with powdered lapis lazuli on sheets of gold and a one-cubit-high statue of Vajrapani.

Through fervent prayer, King Ja was able to comprehend the chapter known as *The Vision of Vajrasattva* from these scriptures. For six months,⁹⁷ he meditated using that chapter along with the Vajrapani statue as the support for his practice. Eventually, he attained a direct vision of Vajrasattva, who blessed him so that he understood perfectly the meaning of these tantric scriptures. From that time on, the Mahayoga teachings gradually spread throughout the human realm.

This historical account is extensively covered in other works on Buddhist history. It is only briefly mentioned in this text.

♦ The transmission of Anuyoga

It was also twenty-eight years after the Buddha's parinirvana that, on the summit of Mount Malaya, the Five Excellent Ones of Sublime Nobility focused their minds on all the buddhas of the ten directions and recited a twenty-three-verse lament, beginning:

Alas! Alas! Alas!

Now that the sunlight of the Buddha has gone,
Who will dispel the darkness of the world?

Then, all the tathagatas invoked Vajrapani, the Lord of Secrets, saying:

O Vajrapani, Lord of Secrets, please listen to us!
Have you abandoned the armor of your past promise?
Can you not see the suffering of the world?
With your compassion, please descend to this earth,
And alleviate the world's suffering!

Vajrapani agreed and said:

Without beginning, without end,
I have never abandoned my promise.

⁹⁷ Some also said it was seven months.

Now, invoked by all the buddhas,
I shall manifest miraculous display.

After making this declaration, Vajrapani descended upon the summit of Mount Malaya and appeared before the Five Excellent Ones of Sublime Nobility, where he expounded *The Sutra of the Condensed Meaning*⁹⁸ and other teachings to them.

The Nyingmapa, or the Old Translation School of Tibetan Buddhism, identifies three fundamental doctrinal pillars—the mind essence, the illusion essence, and the sutra essence. “The mind essence” refers to Dzogchen (The Great Perfection) teachings; “the illusion essence” refers to the *Guhyagarbha Tantra* (*The Glorious Web of Magical Illusion*); and “the sutra essence” refers to *The Sutra of the Condensed Meaning*. Many Nyingma teachers mention the three essences when encouraging disciples to practice. One of the teachings Vajrapani gave to the Five Excellent Ones is *The Sutra of the Condensed Meaning*.

Furthermore, Vajrapani went to Dhanakosha, located in the western land of Oddiyana, where he taught The Tantra of the Secret Essence along with its pith instructions and the tantras of Kila, Mamo, and others to the Nirmanakaya, Garab Dorje. These teachings were passed down in an unbroken lineage and were eventually transmitted to Guru Rinpoche Padmasambhava,⁹⁹ after which they gradually spread.

There are two ways Anuyoga was spread. One way is that the Lord of Secrets, Vajrapani, taught it to the Five Excellent Ones, who then shared it with others. The other is that Vajrapani taught it to Garab Dorje, who subsequently passed the teachings to Padmasambhava. Therefore, Padmasambhava is also the lineage master for Anuyoga.

I have done some translations on the history of the lineage masters of the Great Perfection, which can be found in the *Lama Yangtik* (*The Innermost Heart Drop of Guru*) and in the *Bardo Thödol* (*The Tibetan Book of the Dead*).

♦ The pith instructions of Atiyoga

⁹⁸ Although it is called a sutra, this text is, in fact, one of the four root tantras of Anuyoga.

⁹⁹ Padma Thötrengtsel of Oddiyana is also a name that refers to Guru Rinpoche Padmasambhava.

Patrul Rinpoche specifically described how Atiyoga came into existence in the god realm and the human realm, respectively.

◉ Atiyoga in the god realm

Atiyoga was first taught in the god realm. In the Heaven of the Thirty-Three, a god named Devabhadrapala had around five hundred sons, all born miraculously simply through his wish. His eldest son, Anandagarbha, stood out for his sharp intellect and exceptional physical qualities. He enjoyed practicing the vajra recitation in solitude within a meditation hut. He became known as Devaputra Adhicitta, meaning “The god’s son of superior mind.”

In the year of the Water Ox, Devaputra Adhicitta experienced four symbolic dreams. In the first dream, all the buddhas were radiating rays of light that illuminated the ten directions, while the forms of the Six Munis, made of beams of light, were circling around sentient beings before dissolving into the crown of his head. In the second dream, he swallowed the three principal Hindu gods—Brahma, Vishnu, and Pashupati—in one gulp. In the third dream, the sun and moon appeared in his palms, instantly filling the entire universe with light. In the fourth dream, a rain of ambrosia fell from a jewel-colored cloud, and all at once there burst forth lush forests, precious plants, blooming flowers, and abundant fruits and berries.

The following morning, Devaputra Adhicitta recounted his dreams in full detail to Kaushika, the king of the gods, who offered this praise:

Emaho!

Now is the time for the effortless essence of the Dharma to
appear!

Bodhi Superior Mind, the emanation of the buddhas of the
three times,

Lord of the tenth level, a supreme lamp that illuminates the
entire world—

What a wondrous adornment for the celestial realms!

[Whether in the god realm or the human realm, the appearance of a sublime being is always wondrous.]

The first dream foretold that Devaputra Adhicitta would assimilate the

essential teachings of the Great Perfection and the wisdom mind of all the buddhas, becoming their Dharma heir.

When teaching us *The Treasury of Dharmadhatu*, the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche said, “I do not mean to boast, but the doctrine of the Great Perfection is in the hands of us teachers and disciples at this sacred place of Larung Gar.”

At that time, Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche requested us to give tutoring sessions for *The Treasury of Dharmadhatu*, and many of us were hesitant at first. However, Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche assured us, “I am very confident that the three primary Dharma protectors fully support your efforts to give the tutoring sessions.” With that, we found the courage to proceed.

In fact, not everyone is capable of conveying the profound tantric teachings of Dzogchen. Regardless of who the teacher is, if they lack the necessary qualities and teach solely with a personal agenda, the teachings may not be effective. Furthermore, if they have not assimilated the wisdom mind of all the buddhas and bodhisattvas, they will provide no benefit to others by imparting the teachings of the Great Perfection; worse still, they may invite many inauspicious consequences upon themselves.

The second dream revealed that Devaputra Adhicitta would subjugate all demons and eliminate the three poisons: attachment, hatred, and ignorance. The three celestial gods he swallowed symbolize these demons or poisons. Just like the garuda images we recently created, if the garuda has three snakes in its mouth, those snakes represent attachment, hatred, and ignorance; whereas if the garuda has one snake in its mouth, that snake represents all afflictions. Thus, if you dream of swallowing a snake, it is a sign that you have eliminated the three poisons.

The third dream meant Devaputra Adhicitta would dispel the darkness in the minds of sentient beings and illuminate the lamp of the true teachings.

The fourth dream signified the alleviation of the scorching heat of afflictions through the nectar of the naturally arising Dzogchen teachings, and the dissemination of the effortless, spontaneously accomplished fruition vehicle of the Great Perfection.

Devaputra Adhicitta’s four dreams symbolized that he would accomplish the tasks of perfectly bringing true benefit to himself and others. Sometimes, we ordinary practitioners can also reflect on our own practice through observing

dreams. *The Sutra of the Fourfold Accomplishment* provides instructions on observing dreams, for example:

When obscurations of negative emotions arise, four types of dreams may occur. You may dream of being disturbed by a venomous snake, of herds of animals making horrifying noises, of falling victim to thieves or robbery, or of being covered in dust and dirt.

When you are entangled in karmic obscurations, four types of dreams may occur. You may dream of falling into a perilous place, of an uneven and rugged path, of a winding, twisting road, or of losing your way and becoming terrified.

When you are about to have a vision of the Tathāgatha, four types of dreams may occur. You may dream of a moonrise, of a sunrise, of a lotus blossoming, or of seeing Mahabrahma in the posture of utter quiescence.

According to the *Tripitaka*, some dreams indeed carry symbolic meanings, while others may simply reflect the dreamers' habitual tendencies during the day. Unlike Devaputra Adhicitta, the dreams of us ordinary beings are often shaped by our thoughts from the day, encompassing both positive and negative aspects. As a result, it can be trivial to discuss and dwell on such dreams, and practitioners should avoid becoming overly attached to them. Nonetheless, it remains important in our Dharma practice to recognize and understand the symbolic meanings behind both good and bad dreams.

At the very moment Devaputra Adhicitta was having the dreams, all the buddhas of past, present, and future gathered together and invoked Vajrasattva, saying:

You who possess the jewel of miraculous power,
Please open the doors to all that beings desire,
Grant them this precious jewel free of any effort.

They pleaded with Vajrasattva to open the doors of practice for all beings under his guidance, so they could effortlessly attain the wish-fulfilling jewel of the Great Perfection.

Upon the request from all the buddhas, from Vajrasattva's heart appeared a glowing wish-fulfilling wheel, which he offered to Vajrapani,¹⁰⁰ saying:

¹⁰⁰ Another name is Sattvavajra.

To your assembled disciples, you must reveal
 The secret meaning of nondual wisdom—
 No action, no effort, and primordially Buddha.
 This path is known as the Great Middle Way.

Vajrasattva instructed Vajrapani to reveal to the assembled disciples the secret meaning of nondual wisdom: that everything is primordially with no effort and action and that everyone is primordially a buddha. This is the hidden reality of primordial purity and the path of the unsurpassable Great Perfection.

[It goes without saying that those who understand and have practiced the Great Perfection should have a clear understanding that the nature of the mind is primordial clarity.]

Vajrapani promised to teach, saying:

Vajrasattva, as vast as the sky,¹⁰¹
 Is beyond the scope of words.
 It is very hard for me to convey.
 But for those who have not yet realized it,
 I shall use words to explain the meaning,
 So that they may realize it,
 I shall use any necessary means to liberate fortunate practitioners.

In fact, the individuals who benefit from Vajrayana teachings are typically those who are faithful, rather than everyone. Even if those without faith pursue the tantric path, the limited merit they have accumulated from past lives may prevent them from receiving any benefits in this life. Worse yet, some may even develop erroneous views, which could lead to rebirth in the lower realms.

Those faithful ones may find every word and phrase in the tantric teachings very familiar, and they feel delighted when reading and hearing the tantras. This sense of familiarity and appreciation is difficult to articulate with words. Such devoted practitioners can be found in the Tibetan region, the Han areas, and many Western countries.

¹⁰¹ “Vajrasattva” means vajra mind, and here Vajrasattva should be understood in the ultimate sense of primal awareness (rigpa) which is indestructible. Khenpo Sodargye Rinpoche said that this analogy—Vajrasattva is vast as the sky—can be found in *The Treasury of Dharmadhatu*, *The All-Creating King Tantra*, and other tantras.

Here, “I shall use any necessary means to liberate fortunate practitioners” means Vajrapani will liberate these practitioners with faith and appreciation, using whatever means are suitable for them.

Having made the promise, Vajrapani went to Vajraloka, the Eastern Buddha-field, and received teachings from the Buddha Vajraguhya and the tathagatas of the Vajra Family. In Ratnāloka, the southern Buddha-field, he received teachings from the Tathagata Ratnapada and the Tathagatas of the Jewel Family. In Padmakūta, the Western Buddha-field, he received teachings from the Bhagavān Padmaprabha and all the innumerable tathagatas of the Lotus Family. In Viśuddhasiddha, the northern Buddha-field, he received teachings from the Tathāfata Siddhyāloka and the countless tathagatas of the Action Family. In Viyogānta, the central Buddha-field, he received teachings from the Tathagata Śri Vairocana and many other Conquerors of the Tathagata Family.¹⁰²

Vajrapani thus received the supreme essence of all the Dharma—Atiyoga—whose profound meaning is beyond effort, naturally arising, and transcending cause and effect, thereby cutting through all conceptual elaboration. Having assimilated the essence of the buddha’s wisdom, he came to know that in the central chamber of the All-Victorious Palace, located in the Heaven of the Thirty-Three and marked by a central pillar of a nine-pronged vajra, resided Devaputra Adhicitta, a suitable vessel for the tantric teachings with the right karma and good fortune. Thus, he went to the All-Victorious Palace.

At that time, Devaputra Adhicitta arranged a jeweled throne atop the nine-pronged vajra on the central pillar, inviting Vajrapani to take his seat. Devaputra Adhicitta spread out a canopy made of various jewels and offered numerous divine objects.

Then, through means of symbols, Vajrapani transmitted to Devaputra Adhicitta the complete direct empowerment through the “pouring of the conquerors’ means.”¹⁰³ Along with this, Vajrapani granted Devaputra Adhicitta the ten

¹⁰² Khenpo Sodargye Rinpoche commented: The fact that Vajrapani traveled everywhere to receive teachings is merely his manifestation; it’s not because he lacked knowledge of the teachings and needed to go to the Buddhafields. Similarly, to effectively confer teachings to others, Dharma teachers of later generations should also repeatedly receive teachings in the presence of qualified teachers. It is crucial for teachers to thoroughly understand the teachings they are about to impart.

¹⁰³ Empowerment without any ritual or visible process, simply the complete and instantaneous transfer of enlightened realization from mind to mind. “Pouring” refers to this direct transfer, while “conquerors; means” can be understood as referring to Buddhahood and

transmissions of the miraculous pith instructions, the seven empowerments, the five pith instructions, and numerous other tantras and pith instructions—all transmitted in their entirety in a single moment. Vajrapani empowered him as the foremost Dharma heir of the buddhas and declared the following words:

May this miraculous, quintessential teaching
 Spread throughout the entire Heaven of Thirty-Three
 And be widely propagated across Jambudvīpa
 By a heart-son who is the emanation of an emanation.¹⁰⁴

◉ The coming of Atiyoga to the human realm

In the western part of India lies the land of the dakinis, known as Oddiyana. Within this sacred place, in the area of Dhanakośa, there was a lake called Kutra. Along its tranquil shore, nestled in a lovely grove blooming with vibrant flowers, was a cave called the Place of the Vajra. There lived a young girl named Bright Flower, the daughter of King Uparaja and Queen Alokabhasvati.

She displayed all the marks of perfection, with a kind heart and immense bodhicitta. Having renounced hypocrisy and negligence, she entered the monastic life as a nun and upheld her vows flawlessly. She was accompanied by a retinue of five hundred fellow nuns.

[After renouncing worldly life, a true monastic possesses a remarkably pure state of mind, which sharply contrasts with the portrayals often seen in films or sitcoms. While there are indeed charlatans who, lacking genuine belief in Buddhism and without true renunciation or bodhicitta, don monastic robes merely to escape worldly life, they represent a minority.]

In the year of the Wood Ox, at dawn on the eighth day of the fourth month, she dreamed of all the tathagatas radiating beams of light that transformed into a sun and a moon. The sun dissolved into her through the crown of her head, moving downward, while the moon entered her through the soles of her feet, rising upward.

also, metaphorically, to the sovereignty conferred, as by a king to his heir. [Source: Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2010, note 284.]

¹⁰⁴ The “emanation of an emanation” because Garab Dorje is an emanation of Vajrasattva, who is himself an emanation of Samantabhadra. [Source: Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2010, note 285.]

The following morning, as the princess woke up, her realization deepened, and she went to bathe on the shore of Lake Kutra. At that time, Vajrapani had taken the form of a swan, the king of birds. He had transformed Devaputra Adhicitta into the seed syllable *hum* and then manifested as four swans. These four swans descended from the sky to bathe in the lake. Afterward, three of them took flight back into the sky, but one of these manifestations of Vajrapani first touched the princess three times on the heart with its beak, and a radiant hum dissolved into her heart. Then, this swan also flew away.

The princess found the event extraordinary and eagerly shared her entire experience with her father and followers. The king, filled with amazement, joyfully exclaimed, “Could it be that an emanation of a buddha is about to be born?”

He then treated the princess with great care, instructed his attendants to serve her wholeheartedly, and organized extensive pujas in her honor.

Though the princess showed no visible signs of pregnancy, nine months later, a radiant nine-pronged vajra emerged from her heart. It then vanished, and in its place appeared a child adorned with all the major and minor marks of a buddha. In his right hand, he held a vajra, and in his left, a rod made of precious jewels. As he appeared, he was reciting the lines beginning, “Vajrasattva, as vast as the sky...”

[His ability to recite the verse at the moment of his birth clearly indicates that he possessed this knowledge from a previous life. Naturally, it is quite effortless for an emanation of a buddha or a bodhisattva to recite a tantra.]

Everyone was filled with joy and amazement. The king invited a brahmin astrologer to interpret the signs for the child.

Utterly astonished, the brahmin declared, “This child is a Nirmanakaya manifestation who would uphold the teachings of the supreme great vehicle.”

[Indian brahmins are skilled at reading signs. This is true not only in ancient times but also today. I have heard that in some parts of India, a brahmin is invited to interpret signs for a newborn.]

As everyone was extremely happy and the child was holding a vajra, he was named Garab Dorje, meaning “Vajra of Supreme Happiness.” Because of the joy he brought to everyone, he was also called “Vajra of Joy.” And as everyone’s heart was filled with laughter, he was also named “Vajra of Laughter.”

According to another historical account, the princess nun had a dream and

gave birth to a boy ten months later. Horrified, she buried the infant in an ash cave. During that time, many auspicious signs appeared in the cave. Three days later, she returned to check on the cave and found the infant standing there with a smile. She then brought the infant back and took good care of him.

When the child was seven years old, he asked his mother for permission to debate with panditas. During his debate with five hundred panditas, none of them could answer his questions, while he provided flawless responses to all of theirs. As a result, he won the debate. The king was delighted and bestowed upon him the name “Garab Dorje.”

Garab Dorje is the first human teacher of the Great Perfection. In the prayer to the lineage masters of the Great Perfection, it first mentions the Dharmakaya Samantabhadra, followed by the Sambhogakaya Vajrasattva, then the supreme Nirmanakaya Garab Dorje.

When Garab Dorje ascended to the throne, Vajrapani appeared before him and granted him the complete direct empowerment by the pouring of the conquerors’ means, along with other empowerments. In an instant, Vajrapani also transmitted to Garab Dorje all the tantras and pith instructions, including the twenty thousand volumes of the Nine Expanses, and empowered him as the holder of the teachings.

[At that time, Vajrapani also transmitted to Garab Dorje all the 6.4 million verses of the Great Perfection, some of which comprise the Seventeen Tantras of the Great Perfection in the innermost cycle of Longchen Nyingtik. The root tantra of all is *The Seed Tantra That is the Sole Heir of All Buddhas*. Those who have received the Dzogchen empowerment and completed the preliminaries can carry this root tantra with them, which can ensure they do not fall into a lower realm. As you can see, the Great Perfection indeed possesses abundant supreme qualities and the power of blessing.]

After the empowerment, Vajrapani instructed the Dharma protectors to wholeheartedly assist and diligently protect the teachings.

[Since the transmission of the Great Perfection has been passed down through Garab Dorje, Shri Singha, and others, three primary Dharma protectors, including Ekajati, along with many others, have committed to protect Vajrayana. They protect not only the tantric teachings but also all practitioners who engage in these practices appropriately. Thus, they protect both the teachings and the practitioners.

In fact, during our practice and propagation of Vajrayana, the assistance and protection of the Dharma protectors are essential.]

Effortlessly and in a single moment, Garab Dorje attained completely perfect enlightenment in the state of the Great Perfection. Later, his teachings, organized into the Three Sections of the Great Perfection, were documented in writing. Consequently, many practitioners in subsequent generations have been able to practice the supreme teachings of the Great Perfection.



Lesson 136

“At that time, in the noble land of India... which is in Lhasa. It was during this reign that the Dharma really took root in Tibet” [page 339–342]

In the unsurpassable Vajrayana, there are three lineages of transmission: the mind lineage of the Conquerors, the symbol lineage of the Vidyadharas, and the hearing lineage of ordinary beings. Currently, we are studying the symbol lineage of the Vidyadharas.

The transmission of Atiyoga in the symbol lineage came into existence in both the god realm and the human realm. We have already studied how Atiyoga was first taught among the gods. As for the coming of Atiyoga to the human realm, we reviewed the birth of Garab Dorje and his attainment of Buddhahood.

Garab Dorje, or Vajra of Supreme Happiness, was the first master of the Great Perfection in the human realm. His role in the Great Perfection parallels that of Patriarch Bodhidharma¹⁰⁵ in the Chinese Chan School. His story mentioned in yesterday’s class was quite brief. Those interested in learning more about Garab Dorje can consult *History of Buddhism in India*, the *White Annals*, the *Red Annals*, and other relevant historical accounts on Vajrayana. These works describe each lineage master from various perspectives, so feel free to refer to them if interested.

¹⁰⁵ Bodhidharma was a semi-legendary Buddhist monk who lived during the 5th or 6th century. He is traditionally credited as the transmitter of Buddhism to China, and regarded as its first Chinese patriarch. According to Chinese legend, he also began the physical training of the monks of Shaolin Monastery that led to the creation of Shaolin kungfu. He is known as Dámó in China and as Daruma in Japan. His name means “dharma of awakening (bodhi)” in Sanskrit. (Source: Yang Xuanzhi’s *The Record of the Buddhist Monasteries of Luoyang*)

♦ The key is to practice Guru Yoga

In my teaching of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, the historical accounts are only briefly mentioned. We are not conducting academic research, nor do we intend to validate anything or publish an article in a journal. None of this explains our goal of studying history here. What we truly focus on is the practical application and the pith instructions.

Especially for Guru Yoga, the most essential aspect is to practice it, and you should recite Guru Rinpoche's mantra ten million times. This is what truly matters! It has been about three years since we began studying *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* together. During this time, I also asked you to recite Guru Rinpoche's mantra one million times each year. If you can achieve this and eventually complete the recitation of the mantra ten million times, the blessings of the lineage masters will surely merge into your mind.

Of course, to achieve the goal, you must make an effort. In ancient times, aside from hearing, contemplating, and meditating, practitioners were largely free from worldly obligations, allowing them to fully devote themselves to their Dharma practice. During that period, spreading the Dharma was not easy, even to the other side of a mountain or within a local region. It could take several hundred years for the Dharma activities of a great master, such as Venerable Longchenpa or Lama Tsongkhapa, to finally take effect. However, practitioners of the past fully committed themselves to the teachings once they received the Dharma. This is an important quality we should learn from them.

They did not just devote themselves to hearing, contemplation, and debate, but also to meditation. This dedication extended to their recitations. For example, when they recite the *Bardo Thödol* for the deceased, they would do so for forty-nine consecutive days without growing weary.

Recently, I had the opportunity to converse with a few Dharma masters, and we all agreed that today's monastics would be reluctant to recite like this for an entire day, every day, for a total of forty-nine days, starting at dawn and finishing at dusk. Such perseverance was common among past practitioners but is becoming rarer among those today.

Nevertheless, many conveniences are available in today's world. For example, due to rapid technological advancements, you can share the Dharma with people on the other side of the globe in no time. While pursuing their own practice,

competent Dharma practitioners with the aspiration of bodhicitta should also utilize these convenient means to engage in work that benefits others.

When these means are misused, such as using the internet to disseminate false knowledge and harmful views, negative consequences can quickly proliferate. Conversely, when these means are used effectively, such as using the internet to share the true Dharma and promote ideas that benefit the entire world, positive outcomes can also spread rapidly.

With these convenient means, many people can enjoy the Dharma right away. However, today's individuals see more, hear more, and think more, making it challenging for them to fully dedicate themselves to the Dharma while navigating such a chaotic world.

To transcend this situation, the only support we can rely on is the powerful blessing of the lineage masters. As long as you consistently pray to the guru with faith and devotion, the guru's blessing will eventually merge with your mind. At that point, engaging in any Dharma practice will become effortless.

When the guru's blessing is absent, your practice resembles land in fall and winter, where nothing can grow. Conversely, when the guru's blessing is present, your mind is like springtime soil, fertile for any virtuous seed to flourish. Thus, the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche often emphasized the importance of the blessings from lineage masters.

When you learn about lineage masters and consistently pray to them, you will naturally cultivate faith. At that point, whenever you see their images or hear their teachings, even if it is just a single sentence, you will venerate them as if they were wish-fulfilling jewels. Consequently, you will also naturally receive supreme benefits.

Let us continue with Patrul Rinpoche's text:

- ♦ **The Symbol Lineage of the Vidyadharas in the human realm**
 - ◉ Manjusrimitra received and compiled the teachings

At the time when Garab Dorje attained the completely perfect enlightenment, in the noble land of India, a brahmin named Sukhapala and his wife Kuhana gave birth to a son, an emanation of Bodhisattva Manjushri. This brahmin child was

named Sarasiddhi and was also known as Samvarasara. Later, he took ordination as a monk and became the chief of five hundred panditas. He received the name Manjushrimitra due to his eloquence and connection with Bodhisattva Manjushri.

[In our case at Larung Gar, it is unlikely that each of our five hundred sangha members is a pandita. Some of you are quite learned, while others possess moderate knowledge. There are also some sangha members who lack affinity from previous lives and demonstrate a lack of diligence in this life, making it difficult for them to grasp the teachings.]

In a vision, Bodhisattva Manjushri once instructed him, “Go westward to the land of Oddiyana. On the banks of Lake Kutra lies a vast charnel ground known as the Golden Place of Mahāhe. At its center is a cave called the Vajra Place, where resides Garab Dorje, the Nirmanakaya manifestation of Vajrasattva. He upholds the effortless teachings of all the buddhas and has received the empowerment from all of them. You should go to him and request the marvelous essence of the Dharma—the Atiyoga teachings—through which Buddhahood can be attained effortlessly. Additionally, you should be the compiler of this teaching.”

Thus, Manjushrimitra told his fellow panditas, “In the western land of Oddiyana, there is a master who expounds a teaching that goes beyond the principle of cause and effect. We should go and refute him with logic.”

After reaching a consensus, seven learned panditas, including Manjushrimitra and the elder Rajahasti, endured countless hardships to journey into the land of Oddiyana. However, no matter how hard they debated with Garab Dorje—whether on topics related to cause and effect or the teachings of the outer and inner tantras—they could not defeat him.

This debate is present in the historical accounts of the Great Perfection. Not only Garab Dorje, but all the lineage masters of the Great Perfection are renowned for their invincibility in Dharma debates and discussions on worldly matters.

It is the same today: the views of those truly enlightened practitioners and lineage masters of the Great Perfection are indestructible. When teaching *The Treasury of Dharmadhatu*, the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche said, “Thanks to the protections from the Dharma protectors and the dissemination of Dzogchen teachings in the human world, today the Great Perfection is right in the possession of our hands. This is not mere self-aggrandizement, but a true reality.”

I believe so. Nowadays, those at Larung Gar and outside it who have attained

experience and realization in the practice of the Great Perfection are quite authoritative in terms of spiritual achievement, as well as knowledge of the Dharma and worldly affairs. Whether you are a Sutrayana practitioner or a non-Buddhist, if you have doubts and concerns about Vajrayana, you may discuss them with such practitioners.

We do not claim that we can defeat anyone in a debate like Garab Dorje did. However, given our years of study in Sutrayana and Vajrayana, along with our experience in communicating with other religions and academia, no one can successfully refute the ultimate views of the Great Perfection to defeat us or make us abandon our practice. This has not happened, is not happening, and will not happen.

In my opinion, many people's biases stem from a lack of understanding of Vajrayana. If they took the time to learn more about it and explore it deeply, they would be better equipped to engage in unbiased debates and would likely find no compelling reason to reject Vajrayana.

Let's go back to the story in Patrul Rinpoche's text:

Manjushrimitra was defeated by Garab Dorje in the debate, and then he asked the other panditas, "Shall we request this Nirmanakaya manifestation to give us his teachings beyond the principle of cause and effect?"

The elder Rajahasti wished to request the teachings but admitted, "I dare not do so, given how disrespectfully we have treated him."

Others said, "At first, we did not know much, but once we receive the teachings, certainty will arise within us. Thus, we should request his teachings."

After discussing among themselves, they all decided to sincerely confess to Garab Dorje. Some began to prostrate and circumambulate him, while others started to weep, tears streaming down their faces.

Manjushrimitra bowed low in prostration, sobbing uncontrollably, and thought to himself, "I have insulted this Nirmanakaya manifestation with many reckless words in debate. Therefore, I must cut off my tongue to express my confession."

[A mere theoretical debate does not indicate disrespect. Perhaps Manjushrimitra and the other panditas were arrogant during the debate, as they initially believed they could easily defeat Garab Dorje with logic.]

With this thought, Manjushrimitra began searching for a razor. Knowing what he was thinking, Garab Dorje stopped him, saying:

“You will never purify your negative actions by cutting off your tongue! Compose a teaching that far surpasses those dependent on the principle of cause and effect. That will purify your negative actions.”

In fact, composing a teaching is one of the best forms of confession.

Before pursuing the Dharma path, some intellectuals showed little respect for Buddhism and tantras in their writings, which they later came to regret. They attempted to purify their negative actions by reciting the Vajrasattva mantra. Aware of the gravity of their faults, some even sought to express their remorse for slandering the Dharma by piercing their tongues.

In fact, they do not need to pierce their tongues. If they truly want to confess, it would be better for them to publish another article in which they can say, “I stated so-and-so in the past, but my perspective was incorrect, and I did not fully understand the issue. After carefully studying and researching the Dharma, I have gained new insights and an updated viewpoint, which is...” This way, they can share their understanding and experiences, which is the best form of confession.

Recently, we received a submission of papers from university scholars and graduate students. It reveals that some authors have a deep faith in Buddhism and a solid understanding of the Dharma, while others make grand claims but demonstrate little comprehension or even misunderstanding of Buddhism.

Therefore, it is normal to make a mistake due to a lack of understanding. Later, when you recognize your error, it is beneficial to confess by composing a teaching or writing an article.

Many of you may be familiar with the story of Vasubandhu. He initially studied Shravaka Buddhism with the panditas of Kashmir and later gave corresponding teachings to many people. When he learned that his half brother, Asanga, had composed numerous works on Mahayana Buddhism, he slandered those works. Asanga worried that his brother would commit severe faults, so he sent two persons to recite two Mahayana scriptures—*The Sutra on the Ten Levels* and *The Sutra on the Teaching of Akṣayamati*—near Vasubandhu.

Upon hearing the sutras, Vasubandhu did not initially accept the teachings. However, he later came to fully understand the supremacy of Mahayana Buddhism and realized he had committed the wrongdoing of slandering the Mahayana

teachings in the past. He went to Asanga, intending to express his confession by cutting off his tongue, but Asanga stopped him. After consulting Bodhisattva Maitreya, Asanga told his brother, “You must compose Mahayana treatises to purify your faults.”

From then on, he started to compose Mahayana works, including *Commentaries on the Five Treatises of Maitreya*, *Commentary on The Sutra on the Teaching of Akṣayamati*, *Commentary on The Sutra on the Ten Levels*, *Thirty Verses of the Mind-Only*, *Twenty Verses of the Mind-Only*, and many other works.

Knowing that Asanga could converse with Maitreya as if he were speaking to another person, Vasubandhu asked his brother, “I would like to have a vision of your deity, Maitreya, as well.”

After making the request to Maitreya, Asanga conveyed Maitreya’s reply: “Your fault of slandering Mahayana Buddhism is so severe that you will not be able to see me in this lifetime. Once this fault is purified, you may see me in the next life.”

Just as Vasubandhu did, if you have made inappropriate comments during your Dharma research due to a lack of understanding, you may confess by publishing articles that reflect the correct views after recognizing your mistakes.

There is a renowned master in Chinese Buddhism who has acknowledged his previous incorrect views on Vajrayana in articles published later in his life. There are other masters who, likely due to external circumstances, passed away before they could confess their slander of Vajrayana. In such cases, they may face certain obstacles on their Dharma paths in future lives.

That said, things have changed in the Han areas of China. With a better understanding of Vajrayana, most people now accept it. However, a few individuals’ improper conduct within Tibetan Buddhism has led to widespread misconceptions about all aspects of Vajrayana Buddhism, which is a great pity.

As tantric practitioners, we have a responsibility to clarify misconceptions about Vajrayana when we encounter them. For example, we can explain to others the essence of Vajrayana, the achievements that can be attained through tantric practice, and share the accomplishments of various Tibetan masters in their own practices, among other topics when appropriate.

In fact, Tibetan Buddhism is no longer confined to Tibet; it has gained widespread acceptance in both Western and Eastern countries, and people’s faith in Vajrayana is unprecedented. This is due to the fact that Tibetan Buddhism not

only possesses a clear theoretical framework but also offers significant benefits to individuals' daily lives and meditation when applied in real practice. This is quite evident.

However, some individuals exploit Tibetan Buddhism by posing as gurus and soliciting donations from lay Buddhists, which has negatively impacted the propagation of Tibetan Buddhism. These individuals do not represent Tibetan Buddhism, and their misconduct is unrelated to the teachings themselves. A brief investigation will reveal that they are not qualified teachers of Tibetan Buddhism. If you have studied the doctrines of Buddhism, you will recognize that the methods they use to collect donations and deceive the faithful are unimpressive.

Some Chinese may regard them as gurus, but no one in the Tibetan community considers them Dharma masters. Consequently, their words and actions have no connection to Tibetan Buddhism.

Such an issue should be addressed when encountered. Some Buddhists refrain from speaking out on this, saying, "As long as I practice well, everything is fine." While it is commendable to focus on Dharma practice, one must also express what needs to be voiced in order to be responsible to Buddhism.

Back to the text:

Some panditas confessed to Garab Dorje and requested teachings on the Great Perfection. The other panditas, who lacked the necessary karma and good fortune, returned home.

Whenever I read this part, I cannot help but sigh, reflecting on how those without merit or fortune missed the opportunity to receive teachings from Garab Dorje, the first human lineage teacher of the Great Perfection, even while in the presence of the guru.

However, this is not uncommon throughout history. No matter how great a guru may be, even if they are the Buddha himself, they cannot lead unfaithful individuals onto the Dharma path and liberate them. Here is a story from *The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom*:

Once, the Buddha and Ananda went to Shravasti for their alms round. At that time, a poor old woman was standing on the street. Ananda said to the Buddha, "Poor old woman! World Honored One, please liberate her!"

The Buddha replied, "She has no affinity with me."

Ananda responded, “All you have to do is approach her. As soon as she sees you, she will be filled with appreciation. This way, isn’t it possible she is connected with you?”

So, the Buddha walked up to her. When the Buddha came near, she immediately turned her back on the Buddha. When the Buddha tried to approach her from the four directions, she always turned to the opposite side. When the Buddha manifested into four buddhas and each of them stood at one side of the four directions close to her, she looked up. When the Buddha appeared above her, she looked down. When the Buddha arose from the ground, she simply covered her eyes and refused to look at the Buddha.

The Buddha told Ananda, “What else can I offer? There are indeed such people in this world who don’t have the karma and fortune to be liberated, so they can’t see me.”

This story conveys a very clear message: Even the Buddha requires specific causes and conditions to liberate individuals, let alone other teachers. Therefore, when a being lacks the necessary causes and conditions for liberation, it is futile no matter how hard you try. This also applies to your parents and friends. You may wish to guide them onto the Dharma path, but if they completely disregard you, even if you could manifest as six buddhas, they would still choose not to see you, just as the old woman did. How stubborn!

Some Dharma practitioners have been earnestly trying to help their parents embark on the Dharma path out of love. However, after ten or twenty years, if the parents have not changed at all—and worse yet, if they have become more obstinate and further slander Buddhism—such efforts may prove fruitless.

Back to the text: After those panditas who lacked the necessary karma and good fortune had departed, Manjushrimitra assimilated the entire Dharma, attaining instantaneous realization simply by seeing a gesture from Garab Dorje.

He attained realization through the symbol method. The teacher makes a gesture or gives a symbol, and the disciple obtains realization. This also occurs among Chan practitioners. Here is a story:

Once, Chan Master Baizhang (720–814) was with Master Mazu (709–788) when a flock of wild ducks flew overhead.

Mazu asked Baizhang, “What are these?”

Baizhang replied, “Wild ducks.”

“Where did they go?”

“They flew away.”

At this point, Master Mazu twisted Baizhang’s nose hard, and the latter cried aloud in pain. Mazu said, “When did they ever fly away?” Baizhang attained realization on the spot.

This is an example of symbol transmission.

Returning to the account of Manjushrimitra: in order to ensure the complete transmission of the teachings, Garab Dorje bestowed upon Manjushrimitra the full direct empowerment by the pouring of the conquerors’ means, along with all the tantras and pith instructions without exception, including the twenty thousand volumes of the Nine Expanses. It was at this time that Garab Dorje conferred upon him the name Manjushrimitra.

Afterward, Garab Dorje recorded the meaning of these instructions in writing and gave Manjushrimitra the following teaching:

Mind’s nature is Buddha from the beginning.

It has neither birth nor cessation, like space.

When you realize the real meaning of the equal nature of all things,

To remain in that state without searching is meditation.¹⁰⁶

In fact, such a state is also mentioned in Sutrayana scriptures. For example, it says in *The Sutra of the Questions of Bodhisattva Gaganagañja*:

Sentient beings have neither birth nor cessation,

Sentient beings have always been primordially pure,

Sentient beings’ nature is like an illusion,

Sentient beings have already attained enlightenment.

Manjushrimitra fully understood the teaching that Garab Dorje imparted to him and expressed his own realization as follows:

I am Manjushrimitra,

¹⁰⁶ Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2010, page 340.

I have attained the accomplishment of Yamantaka.
 I have realized the great equality of samsara and nirvana;
 Omniscient primal wisdom has arisen.¹⁰⁷

Later, he wrote the *Instructions on Bodhicitta Written in Gold on Stone*¹⁰⁸ as a confession and compiled the teachings of Garab Dorje. He then passed these teachings onto Shri Singha.¹⁰⁹

◉ Shri Singha received and transmitted the teachings

Shri Singha was born in China in a place called Shosha¹¹⁰ to a father named Virtuous and a mother named Clear Perception. He became well-versed in the five sciences, including language, logic, astrology, and so on, which he studied under the guidance of Hastibhala.

The other day, I gave a talk at a university in Xi'an. The audience appreciated Vajrayana, and some of the university professors present were also researchers in Chinese Esoteric Buddhism and Tibetan Vajrayana. During my talk, I mentioned, "Shri Singha is Chinese. Wasn't he from Xi'an?" We then had a brief discussion on this question.

At the age of twenty-five, Shri Singha met Manjushrimitra, from whom he received the entire teachings of the Great Perfection, including the tantras, transmissions, and pith instructions. He attained the highest realization, free from all mental fabrications.

As stated in the teachings of the Great Perfection, if a practitioner fails to achieve accomplishment in this life, as long as they can meet their root guru before the age of twenty-five in the next life, they will be able to attain enlightenment in that very life. I arrived at Larung Gar at the age of twenty-three and met my vajra guru, but I do not know if I will attain enlightenment in this life. This scriptural

¹⁰⁷ Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2010, page 340.

¹⁰⁸ Khenpo Sodargye Rinpoche added, "This work has a Tibetan version, and we should all study it; there are many texts of the Great Perfection that are worth studying, so we should study more."

¹⁰⁹ The name is also spelled as Śri Simha.

¹¹⁰ According to Khenpo Sodargye Rinpoche, Shosha was an ancient city name, and no one had validated its exact location, but it is mentioned in historical accounts that Shri Singha had stayed in Xi'an and Mount Wutai.

evidence brings me comfort, leading me to believe that I may be able to attain enlightenment in this life.

After attaining enlightenment, Shri Singha transmitted the teachings to Guru Rinpoche Padmasambhava, the scholar Jnanasutra, the great pandita Vimalamitra, and the great translator Vairotsana.

One day, Vajrasattva appeared to Vimalamitra and Jnanasutra and made a prophetic declaration: “O sons of the enlightened family! You have both been born as panditas five hundred times and have practiced the true Dharma. However, you have not attained Buddhahood in past lives, nor will you in this one if you continue on your previous path. If you wish to achieve perfect enlightenment in this very life, you must go to the Bodhi Tree Temple in China to follow Shri Singha.”

Vimalamitra immediately set out and met Shri Singha in China. After studying under the teacher for twenty years, Vimalamitra returned to India and shared his experiences of following Shri Singha with Jnanasutra.

Jnanasutra also made great efforts to travel to China, where he met Shri Singha in the great Siljin charnel ground. After following Shri Singha for many years, he ultimately attained perfect enlightenment.

The great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche often reminded us, “Some people believe that following a guru is not essential and that a practitioner of the Great Perfection only needs to receive empowerment and pointing-out instructions. This is incorrect. Lineage masters, such as Vimalamitra and Jnanasutra, devoted many years to following their guru. As practitioners of the Great Perfection, we must also rely on our guru over the long term in order to attain enlightenment.”

The above teaching describes the symbol lineage of the Vidyadharas.

In fact, each lineage master has many inspiring stories, but I have not covered them extensively here. For us practitioners, it is very important to frequently pray to the lineage masters.

I have created a CD of Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche’s previous recitation of the *Prayer to the Lineage Vidyadhara Masters*, which I will soon play for you. I often listen to the recitation at home and in the car. Sometimes I fall asleep while listening to the prayer, and I feel joyful when I wake up.

Mipham Rinpoche composed this prayer in which he prayed to Garab Dorje, Jnanasutra, Vimalamitra, Guru Rinpoche Padmasambhava, Vairotsana, and all

the other lineage masters who preceded him. The way Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche prayed to the lineage masters can truly invoke them. Therefore, when the recitation audio is played, you should also pray in your mind.

The recitation was recorded in October 1987, when the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche was teaching *The Great Perfection of Peaceful Manjushri*. At that time, the technology was not as advanced as it is today, so the recitation was captured using a standard tape recorder. Last year, the audio was processed and converted into a CD.

This prayer was recited over twenty years ago when the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche was teaching nearly one thousand disciples. I recall him noting that his audience for that Great Perfection teaching was quite substantial, comprising nearly one thousand people.

By playing the recitation audio for you this time, I sincerely wish, “With the blessing of the lineage masters, may the experience and realization of the Great Perfection truly arise in each of us, and may we cultivate a conviction about the preliminaries, such as the preciousness of human life, the impermanence of life, and more.”

I believe that when convictions arise in you through the blessings of lineage masters, you will become good practitioners. Otherwise, even if you are listening to the teachings today in the same Dharma hall, a few years from now, some of you may change your views; worse yet, you may even reject the principle of cause and effect. [Of course, this does not refer to the state of the Great Perfection, which transcends this principle.] It would be truly disheartening if you were to develop such a misguided perspective later on.

Therefore, through the blessings of all lineage masters, Mipham Rinpoche’s vajra words, and the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche’s vajra words, may each of us unveil the true bodhicitta of love and compassion, and the luminous awareness indivisible from emptiness of the Great Perfection.

[Next is the *Prayer to the Lineage Vidyadhara Masters*, recited by the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche:]

Emaho!

In the self-radiant pure realms of the ten directions

Are the lineage Vidyadhara Masters, O compassionate ones!

*I, the lowly one, pray to you fervently:
Care for and bless me with compassion!*

*In the vast and all-pervading realm of the Dharmadhatu
Are Samantabhadra and Samantabhadri—the
Dharmakaya with blessings;
Please care for me swiftly with unwavering wisdom and
compassion,
And bestow upon me, the faithful one, empowerment and
blessing!*

*In the five-colored realm of self-radiant non-cessation
Are the Fathers and Mothers of the Five Families of
Sambhogakaya with blessings;
Please care for me swiftly with unwavering wisdom and
compassion,
And bestow upon me, the faithful one, empowerment and
blessing!*

*In the realms where living beings are liberated
Are Protectors the Nirmanakaya of the three attributes¹¹¹
with blessings;
Please care for me swiftly with unwavering wisdom and
compassion,
And bestow upon me, the faithful one, empowerment and
blessing!*

*In Dhanakośa, the central citadel of dakinis,
Is Garab Dorje, the emanation of an emanation, who
possesses blessings;
Please care for me swiftly with unwavering wisdom and
compassion,*

¹¹¹ The three attributes refer to wisdom, compassion, and power.

And bestow upon me, the faithful ones empowerment and blessing!

In the charnel ground at Sosaling

Is Vidyadhara Shri Singha who possesses blessing;

Please care for me swiftly with unwavering wisdom and compassion,

And bestow upon me, the faithful one, empowerment and blessing!

In the garden of the great Siljin charnel ground

Are the supreme Eight Vidyadharas¹¹² who possess blessing;

Please care for me swiftly with unwavering wisdom and compassion,

And bestow upon me, the faithful one, empowerment and blessing!

In the accomplishment realm of the sacred charnel ground

Are the male and female accomplished Vidyadharas who possess blessing;

Please care for me swiftly with unwavering wisdom and compassion,

And bestow upon me, the faithful one, empowerment and blessing!

In the majestic Lotus Light Palace

Is the skull-garland Lotus of Oddiyana who possesses blessing;

Please care for me swiftly with unwavering wisdom and compassion,

¹¹² They are: Vimalamitra, Humkara, Manjushrimitra, Nagarjuna, Prabhahasti, Dhanasamskrita, Rambuguhya-Devachandra, and Shantigarbha.

And bestow upon me, the faithful one, empowerment and blessing!

In the auspicious place of the Land of Snows

Are the twenty-five disciples known as the King and Subjects, who possess blessing;

Please care for me swiftly with unwavering wisdom and compassion,

And bestow upon me, the faithful one, empowerment and blessing!

In the unknown, hidden, secluded places of magnificence

Are the 108 Tertöns who benefit others and who possess blessing;

Please care for me swiftly with unwavering wisdom and compassion,

And bestow upon me, the faithful one, empowerment and blessing!

In the palace where infinite beings are tamed

Are lineage masters of the transmitted percepts and the revealed treasures who possess blessing;

Please care for me swiftly with unwavering wisdom and compassion,

And bestow upon me, the faithful one, empowerment and blessing!

In the boundless vast space

Are Bodhisattvas, Vidyadharas, and the Sublime Ones who possess blessing;

Please care for me swiftly with unwavering wisdom and compassion,

*And bestow upon me, the faithful one, empowerment and
blessing!*

*On the lotus seat with a sun and a moon above my head
Is my root guru of great kindness who possesses blessing;
Please care for me swiftly with unwavering wisdom and
compassion,
And bestow upon me, the faithful one, empowerment and
blessing!*

*Those who have unparalleled wisdom, compassion, and
power,
Bless us that we can gather with the root lama Rinpoche,
The lineage masters, their consorts, and retinue
In the infinite palace of a pure realm.*

*The miraculous display of great equality,
The dance by the body of appearance and emptiness, Lam
Sah Lam,
The melodious sound of laughter, Dhih Ra Ra,
The realization of the union of bliss and emptiness, Tah Lah
Lah,
The blessing clouds and mist of wisdom, Teh Sah Teh,
The red light, the rain of flowers, Tabh Loh Loh,
The accomplishment, the nectar, the precious rain, Dah Lah
Lah,
Now they all come here in an instant!*

*To you I pray—bestow upon me the blessing of body, speech,
and mind;
To you I pray—bestow upon me the empowerment of five
kinds of wisdom!*

*May the fruit of my practice ripen instantaneously,
May I be granted the common and supreme accomplish-
ments!*

*Om Ah Hum | Vajra Maha | Guru Buddha Ya | Dak La
Jungwar | Samaya | PünPün | JnanaAhWah | Shawa Ah
Ah | Om Ri Lo Ri Lo Hum Jü Hum*

2.2.5.3.3. The Hearing Lineage of ordinary beings

Then, how was the essence of Vajrayana teachings propagated in Tibet, the Land of Snows?

During the time of the Buddha, the Tibetan region was uninhabited by humans. Eventually, it was populated by a human tribe descended from an ape—an emanation of the noble Avalokiteshvara—and a crag-demoness—an emanation of Tara. In those early days, Tibetan society was chaotic, lacking religion, laws, and leadership. This period roughly corresponds to the era of the Zhou dynasty in Chinese history.

♦ The age of Nyatri Tsenpo, “King of the Throne on the Shoulders”

At the same time in India, a king named Shatanika had a son. The boy was born with webbed hands and feet, resembling those of a swan, and his eyelids closed upward like a bird’s. Believing the child to be of non-human origin, the king decided to eventually exile him.

Once the boy had grown a bit older, he was sent away. Driven by his karma, he set off on foot and eventually found himself in Tibet, where he encountered a group of shepherds.

When asked where he had come from and who he was, the boy simply pointed to the sky. The shepherds took this as a sign that he must be a god descended from the heavens and made him their leader. They built a throne for him using earth and stones, which they carried on their shoulders. Because of this, he became known as Nyatri Tsenpo, meaning “King of the Throne on the Shoulders.” He was the first king of Tibet and an emanation of Bodhisattva Sarvanivāranaviskambhin.

In fact, most Tibetan kings and gurus were manifestations of various buddhas

and bodhisattvas. I don't believe this is merely a fabricated statement; otherwise, how is it that in today's world, where Buddhism has faced many setbacks, Tibet can provide such abundant "spiritual food" to the entire world?

As you may know, although you were not born in Tibet, your understanding of the Dharma and spiritual growth is closely connected to the efforts of the Tibetan kings and eminent masters in protecting and transmitting the Dharma. One should feel grateful to them.

Ancient practitioners who sought Dharma teachings were profoundly grateful to their teachers. At that time, Tibetan translators and panditas had a tradition of traveling to monasteries in India, such as Nalanda and Vikramashila, to request teachings.

Upon their return, whenever they gazed at the clouds toward India, they would shed tears and join their palms together, praying: "Beneath those white clouds lies the sacred land of India, where I pursued the Dharma. Over there is Nalanda, where my great teacher resides." They had returned to Tibet, but their nostalgia and gratitude remained deep.

I believe the same applies to those of you currently pursuing Dharma at Larung Gar. Regardless of where you have encountered the true Dharma, you should remain grateful to the Dharma center, the people there, and even the nature of the land. It is not that I am clinging to my own ethnic group, but if you take a broader perspective on the Dharma, you will recognize that all your knowledge and wisdom are intertwined with the land you once lived in, the people around you, and its history.

When Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche took me on a pilgrimage to Nalanda in India, I felt a wave of sentimentality as soon as I entered the site. I thought, "Many great masters walked here in the past, including Nagarjuna, Chandrakirti, Dharmakirti, Shantideva, and others. I have studied their works for many years, and finally, I am here today, but this place has been reduced to ruins."

However, as I walked through the ruins with a sense of sadness, I truly felt their presence. This was especially true when I visited the Vajra Seat and saw the Bodhi Tree; an extraordinary faith arose within me. At the same time, I felt a deep gratitude toward the Buddha, who came into this world over 2,500 years ago.

♦ The age of Lha-Thothori Nyentsen

Roughly twenty-eight generations after the age of Nyatri Tsenpo, during the reign of Lha-Thothori Nyentsen, an emanation of Bodhisattva Samantabhadra, a number of sacred objects appeared on the roof of the Yumbu Lakhar Palace. These included the image known as the *Cintāmani*, meaning “wish-fulfilling jewel,” which represents the body of the buddhas; the *Sutra Designed like a Jewel Chest* and the *Sutra of a Hundred Invocations and Prostrations*, which represent their speech; and a cubit-high crystal stupa, which represents their mind. At that time, a voice from the sky prophesied: “Five generations from now, someone will understand the meaning of the sutras.” This marked the beginning of Dharma in Tibet.

[I will not elaborate too much on history here. In fact, I was very interested in history before my ordination and even aspired to be a historian. However, fate had other plans for me.]

Therefore, the beginning of Dharma in Tibet dates back to the era of Lha-Thothori Nyentsen. Taranatha of the Jonang School stated in his *History of Buddhism in India* that Lha-Thothori Nyentsen lived around the same period as Vasubandhu, whereas Gendün Chöphel noted in his *White Annals* that Dignaga, one of Vasubandhu’s four principal disciples, lived around the same period as Songtsen Gampo. The time gap between these two assertions is quite large.

For this reason, Dungkar Lobzang Trinlé, a scholar from Minzu University of China, said in his *Great Dungkar Tibetan Dictionary*: “The two proposed time periods don’t converge, which requires further research and verification.” I read it a long time ago, so my memory may be accurate or not. However, this note just came to mind, and I wanted to share it for your reference.

♦ The age of King Songtsen Gampo

Five generations later, King Songtsen Gampo, regarded as an emanation of Avalokiteshvara, ascended the throne. He constructed the Thadul and Yangdul temples, along with the central temple in Lhasa. He married two princesses—Princess Kongjo of China, considered an emanation of Tara, and Princess Tritsun of Nepal, viewed as an emanation of the goddess Bhrikutī. As part of their dowries, each brought a sacred statue of the Buddha. These two revered statues became known as the Jowo statues.¹¹³

During the reign of King Songtsen Gampo, a Tibetan alphabet was introduced

¹¹³ The two statues depict the Buddha at the ages of twelve and eight, respectively. They are now enshrined in the Jokhang and Ramoché temples in Lhasa.

for the first time by Thönmi Sambhota, who studied languages under the Indian pandita Devavit Simha before embarking on the translation of *The Cloud of Jewels* and other sutras. Thönmi Sambhota translated twenty-one sutras and tantras of Avalokiteshvara into Tibetan. He also translated the sacred texts that fell onto the palace roof during the time of Lha-Thothori Nyantsen, including the *Sutra Designed like a Jewel Chest* and *The Sutra of the Six Syllables*. The so-called Old Translations began with Thönmi Sambhota and continued until Rongzom Chökyi Zangpo.

King Songtsen Gampo manifested a monk named Akarmati from between his eyebrows. This monk traveled to India, where he converted non-Buddhist kings and discovered five spontaneously arisen statues of Avalokiteshvara—known as the Five Noble Brothers—inside the trunk of a special sandalwood tree called “snake’s essence,” located at the Place of Sands in the region between India and Tamradvīpa. He also made the particularly sacred statue of the eleven-headed Avalokiteshvara that is now in Lhasa. It was during King Songtsen Gampo’s reign that the Dharma truly began to take root in Tibet.



Lesson 137

“After five more generations, King Trisong Detsen, ...
Follow our spiritual teacher.” [page 342–347]

After teaching the practice of Guru Yoga, Nyingtik teachers would always introduce the lineage masters. Patrul Rinpoche also briefly explained the history of the three lineages of transmission. With this historical context, practitioners of later generations will undoubtedly develop faith in the teachings of the Nyingma School.

In fact, no matter which doctrine you are studying and practicing, you must understand its lineage and origin. Even when studying a secular discipline, it is important to be aware of who founded it and how it has been passed down, let alone the profound and transcendental tantric teachings. Therefore, when you study Tibetan Buddhism, it is essential to know its history.

Nowadays, many people have only a superficial understanding of Vajrayana. After receiving tantric instructions, participating in an empowerment, and reciting a few mantras, they consider themselves true tantric practitioners, but in reality, they are not. Regardless of the knowledge you pursue, fully assimilating it can be challenging. If you aspire to be a true tantric practitioner, you should at least have a comprehensive understanding of Vajrayana, as this is the appropriate approach.

I have nearly completed translating Dudjom Rinpoche’s *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism: Its Fundamentals and History*, and the manuscript is expected to be published this year or next. The text contains numerous names and places, making it less accessible than a novel. However, reading it will provide you with a comprehensive understanding of the lineages of Mahayoga, Anuyoga, Atiyoga, and

termas, and you will undoubtedly cultivate faith in them. Therefore, I encourage you to read Dudjom Rinpoche's book.

As you know, faith and wisdom do not develop overnight. Not to mention transcendental knowledge; even for secular knowledge, it takes at least five to ten years to master. If you simply visit a monastery, meet a Dharma master, have a brief conversation, take a photo together, and participate in an empowerment in Tibet, then claim to have studied Tibetan Buddhism, this is not appropriate. At most, you are merely a student of Tibetan Buddhism in name, but not in essence.

Buddhism is so profound that those who truly wish to assimilate it must dedicate a significant amount of time to studying it.

Let's now continue with the text on "the hearing lineage of ordinary beings."

♦ The age of King Trisong Detsen

◉ The King aspired to propagate Buddhism

Five more generations after King Songtsen Gampo, King Trisong Detsen, an emanation of Bodhisattva Manjushri, was born.

When he was thirteen, his father passed away. After ascending the throne and until the age of seventeen, he consulted on state affairs with ministers such as Ngam Tara Lugong and Lhzang Lupel. He proved to be highly capable in worldly matters and subjugated a large number of countries by force of arms. However, at that time, he did not appear particularly devoted to the Dharma. This was recorded in his biography, which was later made into a documentary by people from the country of India. The documentary accurately reflected that history.

In fact, when history is presented—whether in an article, a film, or a documentary—maintaining its integrity should be the top priority. If true events are distorted or fabricated, it simply does not feel right.

For example, if the film is about Master Xuyun, it should accurately portray him as a practitioner and a renowned Buddhist leader. If the film focuses on Master Xuanzang, the storyline should center on his character and authentic experiences. However, if the film is filled with dramatizations and fabricated events, it loses the essence of Buddhism and becomes inappropriate. We must respect history and facts.

Back to the text:

Later, when King Trisong Detsen went through his ancestors' archives, he became aware that the Dharma had first come to Tibet during the reign of Lha-Thothori Nyentsen and had begun to take root under King Songtsen Gampo. Eventually, he realized that all previous kings had relied on the Dharma to govern the kingdom. He then made a firm resolution to also devote himself entirely to spreading the Dharma.

Having set such an aspiration, he eventually achieved a series of accomplishments, including inviting Shantarakshita and Guru Rinpoche Padmasambhava to the land of Tibet, as well as establishing the sangha and translating scriptures, which enabled Buddhism to thrive.

Actually, not just King Trisong Detsen; those kings before him, and even most kings throughout the history of the Tibetan region, respected and believed in Buddhism. Except for King Langdarma, who nearly destroyed Tibetan Buddhism, the very few non-Buddhist kings of Tibet hardly inflicted any deliberate harm on Buddhism.

Speaking of anti-Buddhist movements, similar events occurred in the history of Chinese Buddhism as well. Many scholars have been researching this subject. The day before yesterday, a government official stated, "The upheaval of the Cultural Revolution was the biggest anti-Buddhist movement." I replied, "You are the one who said this. I didn't say anything, did I?" (*The audience laughs.*)

Anyway, the age of King Trisong Detsen was indeed an extraordinary period, when many emanations of the buddhas and bodhisattvas came to Tibet.

◉ Inviting Shantarakshita to Tibet

After making his aspiration, King Trisong Detsen consulted his minister of religious affairs, Go Pema Gungtsen, and skillfully sought the opinions of the other ministers, leading to their unanimous agreement on the construction of a temple. At that time in Tibet, there was not yet a temple that housed representations of the Three Jewels.

When looking for a master to pacify the ground,¹¹⁴ King Trisong Detsen consulted Nyang Tingdzin Zangpo, the teacher most revered by the king, who lived at Samye Chimpu.

Through his meditative insight, Tingdzin Zangpo came to know that a great

¹¹⁴ A ritual to purify the site and subdue the earth's forces before constructing a building.

abbot named Shantarakshita, the son of the devout king Gomadeviya, was residing in Zahor, a region in Eastern India. He shared this revelation with the king, who then invited the abbot to come to Tibet.

In AD 763, Shantarakshita arrived in Tibet. At that time, through the introduction of the king of Nepal, Bavsalnang, the emissary of King Trisong Detsen met Shantarakshita in person and conveyed the king's intention to invite him to Tibet. Shantarakshita, interested in propagating the Dharma in Tibet, accepted the invitation.

Immediately, Bavsalnang returned to Tibet and reported to the king. Delighted, the king wrote an invitation letter and sent Bavsalnang, along with a few other emissaries, back to Nepal to formally invite Shantarakshita to Tibet.

Shantarakshita accepted the invitation letter with great pleasure and traveled to Tibet together with the emissaries.

When they arrived at Lungtshug Palace in Samye Chimpu, King Trisong Detsen welcomed Shantarakshita by prostrating before him and singing *The Song of Thirteen Happinesses*. Following their cordial meeting, Shantarakshita granted the king and his two queens the three refuges and provided teachings on the ten positive actions and the twelve links of interdependence.

However, the propagation of the true Dharma offended all the demons and spirits in Tibet, leading them to initiate all kinds of disasters. Meanwhile, Shantarakshita was under great pressure from the Bön ministers, so he returned to Nepal.

Later, with the assistance of his other ministers, the king subdued the Bön ministers through his wisdom, and a referendum was passed among his people in support of building a temple. In AD 771, the king sent an emissary to Nepal to invite Shantarakshita once again. After Shantarakshita returned to Tibet, he began planning and constructing the first temple in Tibet, the Temple of Samye.

Mipham Rinpoche said in his *Commentary on the Ornament of the Middle Way*: “We should all be very grateful to the great abbot Shantarakshita. Because of his aspiration and blessings, Tibet was able to construct the first temple and establish the first sangha at a time when tirthikas and demonic forces were rampant.”

Of course, we should also be grateful to King Trisong Detsen and Guru Rinpoche Padmasambhava. When I accompanied the great Jigme Phuntsok to India, I heard Penor Rinpoche say, “In fact, all lineages of Tibetan Buddhism

should be grateful to the Noble Three.¹¹⁵ Had they not subjugated the demons and spirits, established the Dharma centers, and hoisted the victory banner of the Dharma, how could it even have been possible that all Tibetans are faithful to Buddhism? From this perspective, Nyingmapa, or the Old Translation School, deserves our respect. However, it is a great pity that some monastics, including certain geshe, seem to lack gratitude...”

For this reason, Penor Rinpoche sponsored a film titled *The Life of Guru Rinpoche*. We received the videotape from him. Last year, I tried to watch the film again, but the tape was too old. It was made in the 1990s, and I can no longer play it.

Back to the text about constructing the temple:

Shantarakshita attempted to consecrate the temple site, but a naga residing in a place called Aryapalo, realizing that his wooded habitat was about to be cleared, summoned various spirits for support. In response, the twenty-one spirits (*genyen*),¹¹⁶ along with both human and non-human allies, gathered like an army. Each night, the spirits undid all the construction work completed during the day, returning the earth and stones to their original positions.

The way this story was filmed in Penor Rinpoche’s film was actually quite decent. I watched it over a dozen years ago, but I still remember the scene vividly: the spirits took the form of terrifying skeletons typically found in Thailand, and at night, the skeletons would come and destroy all the walls.

Thus, the men built during the day, and at night, the spirits dismantled what had been constructed. Five years later, the temple was still not completed.

Because of this, nowadays when a Tibetan comes across a slow construction project, they might joke, “Are you building the Temple of Samye?” So, if you are constructing a small monastery and cannot complete it five or six years later, perhaps it is because the demons and spirits are not cooperating. It could also be that the patrons are not being supportive (*the audience laughs*).

At the outset of the construction, the patrons may have made generous promises regarding donations, but halfway through, they change their minds, and no one can persuade them otherwise.

¹¹⁵ The Noble Three refers to Guru Rinpoche Padmasambhava, Abbot Shantarakshita, and King Trisong Detsen.

¹¹⁶ Khenpo Sodargye added: At that time the twenty-one *genyen* were not yet converted; it was later that they were converted in the presence of Guru Rinpoche Padmasambhava.

◉ Inviting Guru Rinpoche Padmasambhava

The Temple of Samye is actually quite small. I have been there and found it even smaller than the Nuns' Dharma Hall at Larung Gar. Its courtyard is somewhat larger, however. Samye Monastery has three floors, each built and decorated in Han Chinese, Tibetan, and Indian styles, respectively. The monastery caught fire twice but did not burn down. It sustained some damage during the Cultural Revolution, yet it survived the upheaval. Originally a Nyingma monastery, it now belongs to the Sakya lineage.

During the reign of King Trisong Detsen, the Temple of Samye could not be constructed. The king asked Shantarakshita for an explanation, "Did this happen because my karmic obscurations are too great? Or is it because you, Venerable Abbot, have not bestowed your blessings? Or does it mean that the construction of the monastery cannot be realized?"

Shantarakshita replied, "Although my bodhicitta has ripened, my peaceful methods alone are insufficient to subdue these gods, spirits, and demons. They can only be subjugated through wrathful approaches. Currently, at the Vajra Seat of Bodh Gaya in India, there is a teacher known as the Lotus-Born of Oddiyana. He entered this world through a miraculous birth. He has mastered the five sciences and addresses all situations through the ultimate view. He has achieved both common and supreme accomplishments. He crushes demons and binds the eight classes of spirits to his will. He makes all gods and demons tremble and subjugates the element spirits. If you invite him here, no demon or spirit will be able to resist him, and all your wishes will be fulfilled."

Guru Rinpoche Padmasambhava, the Lotus-Born of Oddiyana, possesses extraordinary power in subduing demons and spirits. As mentioned in my teaching on the *Seven-Line Prayer*, it can be quite challenging to tame certain demons and spirits with only bodhicitta and peaceful methods; we can only liberate them through the practice of Guru Rinpoche in his wrathful form. In this degenerate age, demons are rampant, so we must frequently pray to Guru Rinpoche.

In the past three or four years, I have had many statues of Guru Rinpoche made. They have been sent as rewards to Dharma practitioners outside of Larung Gar who have completed the preliminaries. We will see when the statues become available to Dharma practitioners at Larung Gar.

As you know, wherever there is a statue of Guru Rinpoche, there is extraordi-

nary power. Take, for example, our Larung Gar Buddhist Academy: the fact that so many people can still gather here to practice the true Dharma during this degenerate age, and that the practice has been very effective and powerful, is beyond the reach of human efforts alone. This cannot occur without the protection of dakinis and Dharma protectors, particularly the incredible blessings and protection from Guru Rinpoche Padmasambhava.

Therefore, if we want everything to proceed smoothly and perfectly for our practice, our Dharma centers, and our Dharma activities benefiting others, we should build statues of Guru Rinpoche. This is especially important in the present era. Imagine if each major city in the world had a statue of Guru Rinpoche, consecrated by the sangha; what a tremendous blessing this could bring to the entire world!

Individuals from any lineage can venerate Guru Rinpoche. It is important not to assume that Guru Rinpoche is solely a master of Indian origin or belongs exclusively to Tibetan Buddhism. His blessings are not limited to any specific lineage, ethnicity, or nationality. Guru Rinpoche Padmasambhava is like the sun, shining spontaneously upon every mountain, valley, animal, and plant. No matter who you are or where you live, as long as you pray to him, you will receive his blessings.

As one of the three main panditas of the Svatantrika, or Autonomous School, of the Middle Way, Shantarakshita had mastered bodhicitta. However, he felt powerless in the face of the challenges posed by spirits and demons. Thus, he recommended that the king invite Guru Rinpoche Padmasambhava to Tibet.

Upon hearing Shantarakshita's suggestion, the king felt a mixture of joy and concern. He asked, "Is there a possibility that we won't be able to invite this great master?"

Shantarakshita replied confidently, "Because of the prayers made in the past, Guru Rinpoche will certainly accept the invitation and come to Tibet. Long ago in Nepal, a woman named Samvari, daughter of Salé the chicken farmer, had four sons with four different men—a horse breeder, a swineherd, a poultry farmer, and a dog breeder. When constructing the Boudhanath Stupa,¹¹⁷ the four sons vowed that they would come together in the future to spread the Dharma in Tibet."

At that time, the four sons made a collective vow to spread the Dharma in

¹¹⁷ It is also called Jarung Khashor.

Tibet. One son dedicated the merit of constructing the stupa to his future rebirth as a Tibetan king, intending to further the propagation of the Dharma. Another son committed his merit to establishing a pure Dharma center, fueled by his bodhicitta. The third son pledged to become a tantric teacher and subdue all demons and spirits to support the king's Dharma activities. The last son vowed to serve as an emissary, assisting his brothers in communicating their Dharma activities.

When the four sons were making their vows, an ox nearby overheard them and realized that no one had dedicated the merit to him, despite his hard work carrying stones every day. Consequently, the animal made a malevolent vow: "While they hoist the victory banner of the Dharma, I will destroy Buddhism."

Later, the ox was reborn as King Langdarma, who, during the period between the earlier and later propagation periods, destroyed the Buddhism in Tibet that had been established and spread by the Noble Three.

When the ox was making the vow, a crow immediately declared, "If he destroys Buddhism, I will subdue him." As the crow wished, he was later reborn as Lhalung Palkyi Dorje, who subdued King Langdarma.

Such karmic connections between past and present lives are mentioned multiple times in the *Sutra of a Hundred Actions*. The seemingly intricate connections between people and events arise from the causes, conditions, and aspirations—both positive and negative—from previous lives.

Therefore, when participating in a Dharma assembly, whether at Larung Gar or elsewhere with fellow sangha members, it is essential to cultivate virtuous aspirations rather than harmful ones. Some individuals may inadvertently harbor negative intentions, thinking, "I may not accomplish anything in this life, but in my next life, I will become someone powerful and seek revenge." Such malevolent vows, expressed through thought and speech, can lead to negative karmic consequences.

After hearing Shantarakshita's words, the king sent Ba Trisher, Dorje Dudjom, Chim Shakyaprabha and Shübu Palgui Senge to India. Each of them carried a measure of gold dust and a gold knot of eternity as offerings. They explained to Guru Rinpoche that his presence was needed in Tibet to bless the site of a temple. Guru Rinpoche accepted the invitation.

On his way to Tibet, Guru Rinpoche at times revealed terma and at other times subdued spirits. He successively subjugated the twelve *tenma*, the twelve protectresses, the twenty-one genyen, and other gods and spirits.

[Wherever true great masters go or simply pass by, they subdue the local demons and spirits, either by subjugating them or by inspiring them to cultivate bodhicitta. Consequently, the Dharma activities of these great masters always proceed smoothly.]

◉ The temple of Samye was built

After arriving at Trakmar, Guru Rinpoche began to pacify the site. At that time, all the demons and spirits were subdued and took refuge in the Three Jewels. Consequently, they made every effort to assist rather than harm. As a result, the Spontaneously Arisen Temple of Samye was successfully constructed. It featured a three-story central building, surrounded by structures representing the four continents and the eight subcontinents. The two yaksa temples, upper and lower, symbolized the sun and moon. The entire complex was enclosed by a wall.

[I believe that the success of the construction projects at Larung Gar was also due to the support of the Dharma protectors and the local deities. They must have also made firm oaths to the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche.]

When the construction of the temple was completed, Shantarakshita, Guru Rinpoche Padmasambhava, and Vimalamitra tossed flowers for its consecration three times, and many marvelous signs and miracles were witnessed. At that moment, all the wrathful and peaceful deities and dakinis in the main shrine hall rushed outside. They circumambulated the Dharma hall and the stupa once before returning inside.

As flowers were scattered on the crowns of the wrathful Dharma protectors, the flames of wisdom emitted from their bodies. The fire from one of the Dharma protectors spread to the ground. The king was concerned that the entire Dharma hall would catch fire, but Padmasambhava quickly extinguished the flames with pure water. The traces of the fire on the ground were clearly visible.

Some tourist guides at the Temple of Samye are very good at telling these historical accounts. When you visit, make sure to ask them to tell you these stories. The temple houses many precious objects, including Padmasambhava's rod and Shantarakshita's skull, among others. Remarkably, despite the upheaval of the Cultural Revolution, these sacred objects have been well preserved.

In 1986, when the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche gave the Bardo teaching, he shared his experience as Dorje Dudjom in a previous life, during which Padmasambhava consecrated the Temple of Samye and imparted the teachings of *Bardo*

Thödol. Upon hearing this, we disciples were filled with an overwhelming sense of faith.

The Temple of Samye is the first temple in the Tibetan region, similar to how the White Horse Temple is the first temple in the Han region of China. When visiting Lhasa, make sure to embark on a pilgrimage to Samye, which is renowned for its powerful blessings.

Once Samye was completed and consecrated, Abbot Shantarakshita began to teach the topic of discipline (Vinaya) and the teachings of the Sutrayana path. At the same time, Guru Rinpoche Padmasambhava and Vimalamitra established the Vajrayana teachings. It was during this period that Guru Rinpoche and Vimalamitra transmitted profound tantric teachings to the three heart disciples: the King, the Subject, and the Friend, along with Nyangwen Tingdzin Zangpo and other fortunate disciples who were fit vessels for the teachings.

For these fortunate disciples, they imparted the teachings of the three inner yogas, including the Atiyoga, or the Great Perfection (Dzogchen). They clearly pointed out the three key points: distinguishing, clear decision, and self-liberation. The lineage of transmission from this point on is known as “the hearing lineage of ordinary beings,” passed down through direct oral transmission from Guru Rinpoche and Vimalamitra to our present root teachers.

In the Chinese translation of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, I included images of the lineage masters of the Great Perfection, from the Dharmakaya Buddha Samantabhadra all the way to the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche.

However, some authors include their own gurus’ names on the list of lineage masters of the Great Perfection. While this is understandable, as others may receive teachings from their own gurus, one must consider whether some masters should be regarded as lineage masters of the Great Perfection.

A lineage master must have made significant contributions to the propagation of the Great Perfection. It is illogical to consider a master who only briefly provided the relevant teachings and transmissions as a lineage master. This is akin to a novice monk claiming to be a lineage master after the Sixth Patriarch of the Chan School, which is clearly inappropriate. Therefore, a lineage master must genuinely embody the title.

Whatever you do, make sure to observe carefully. For example, one should not carelessly list all their teachers as lineage masters of the Great Perfection without

proper examination. In reality, if a master lacks the power of aspiration or if the necessary conditions are absent, even if they hold the title of “lineage master of the Great Perfection,” they may not genuinely be a true Great Perfection master.

Therefore, it is important to maintain a pure perception when learning about the lineage masters of the Great Perfection mentioned in the book.



ཨོཅ་མ་ཀུན་འཕེལ་བཤམ་པའི་བླ་མ་།

1. The Dharmakaya Buddha Samantabhadra



འོཅ་མ་ཀུན་འཕེལ་བཤམ་པའི་བླ་མ་།

2. The Sambhogakaya Buddha Vajrasattva



ཨོཅ་མ་ཀུན་འཕེལ་བཤམ་པའི་བླ་མ་།

3. The Nirmanakaya Buddha Garab Dorje



འོཅ་མ་ཀུན་འཕེལ་བཤམ་པའི་བླ་མ་།

4. Manjushrimitra



ལྷ་སྒྲིབ་པ།

5. Shri Singha



ལྷ་སྒྲིབ་པ།

6. Jnanasutra



ལྷ་སྒྲིབ་པ།

7. Vimalamitra



ལྷ་སྒྲིབ་པ།

8. Guru Rinpoche Padmasambhava



ལྷ་སྒྲིབ་པ།

9. King Trisong Detsen



ལྷ་སྒྲིབ་པ།

10. Vairotsana



ཡེ་ཤེས་མཚོ་བྱེད།

11. Yeshe Tsogyal



ལྷོ་རྩེན་རབ་འབྱམས།

12. Longchen Rabjam



རིག་འཛིན་འཛིགས་མེད་ལྷིང་པ།

13. Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa



འཛིགས་མེད་བྱེད་འཕྱི་ལྷུ།

14. Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu



པཌལ་བྱེད་པོ་ཆེ།

15. Patrul Rinpoche



འཇམ་དབྱངས་མཁྱེན་འཛིན་དབང་པོ།

16. Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo



17. Mipham Rinpoche



18. The Great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche

♦ *Terma*, the extraordinary Nyingma teaching

Guru Rinpoche, Padmasambhava, also bestowed upon each of his twenty-five disciples—who possessed the necessary merit—the specific teachings of the Buddha that corresponded with their karmic disposition. These Vajrayana teachings were then recorded on “yellow scrolls” and concealed as *termas*, or treasure teachings. Padmasambhava sealed them with prayers, intending them as a legacy for future generations of disciples, and appointed Dharma protectors to guard them until the appropriate time for their revelation.

The *terma* teachings are rare and precious. I have had faith in *termas* since childhood and have explored them a bit, so I am not inexperienced in this area. In the future, when the right causes and conditions arise, I will introduce the origins of the *termas* and the *tertöns* who revealed them.

Padmasambhava prophesied the existence of charlatans alongside true *tertöns*. If a so-called *tertön* is a charlatan, his “*terma*” consists of fabricated thoughts, rendering the *terma* harmful to practitioners. A true *terma*, in fact, possesses immense blessing power.

The great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche explained the difference between the two, while Mipham Rinpoche offered guidance on how to discern true from false *tertöns* in his works as well.

Buddhists should possess a level of intelligence that aligns with societal development. For instance, in situations where reality and deception coexist, one

should have the ability to discern between them rather than accept things without discernment.

Having worldly wisdom is crucial, and unlike transcendental wisdom, this ability is relatively easy to cultivate. Just as a worldly person lacking wisdom will be dismissed in any workplace, a Buddhist who is unaware of basic Buddhist doctrines and moral standards—whether a householder or a monastic—does not qualify as a member of any Buddhist community.

As we have just learned, Guru Rinpoche concealed teachings to be revealed at specific prophesied times—typically several centuries later. At those destined moments, the reincarnations of the accomplished practitioners for whom the prayers had been made would be born and reveal these profound treasure teachings. The fortunate disciples who followed these reincarnations and engaged in the Dharma activities to benefit beings helped establish the lineages known as those with the six or nine transmissions.¹¹⁸

Based on the common transmissions, which encompass the mind lineage of the Conquerors, the symbol lineage of the Vidyadharas, and the hearing lineage of ordinary beings, additional transmissions are incorporated to form either six or nine transmissions. For instance, there is the lineage of prophetically declared succession, in which Guru Rinpoche foretold who would reveal a particular terma, as well as when and where it would be revealed. The lineage of sealing and entrusting to the dakinis involves Guru Rinpoche concealing the treasure and entrusting it to specific dakinis or Dharma protectors for safekeeping. The final transmission in the six is the lineage empowered by prayers, where the terma is concealed in the mind of a destined disciple through Guru Rinpoche's aspirational power and will arise spontaneously in the disciple's mind in a future life when the necessary conditions are present.

There are many such termas, or concealed treasures, in the Nyingma School. They also exist in other lineages, but their number is limited. In particular, the six

¹¹⁸ The six transmissions are: the mind lineage of the Conquerors, the symbol lineage of the Vidyadharas, the hearing lineage of ordinary beings, the lineage of prophetically declared succession, the lineage of sealing and entrusting to the dakinis, and the lineage empowered by prayers.

The nine transmissions are: the mind lineage of the Conquerors, the symbol lineage of the Vidyadharas, the hearing lineage of ordinary beings, the lineage of sealing and entrusting to the dakinis, the lineage empowered by prayers, the lineage of prophetically authorized succession, the lineage of practicing and blessing, the lineage of hearing and practicing, and the lineage of engaging in Dharma activities.

transmissions mentioned here are extraordinary Nyingma teachings, as said by Rongzom Chökyi Zangpo and Longchen Rabjam.

As stated in his biography, the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche revealed many termas during his lifetime. Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche was indeed very different from an ordinary person in many ways. Why is that? As some of us disciples have witnessed, he could accomplish things beyond the capacity of an ordinary mind spontaneously. For example, he composed works so effortlessly that all the verses flowed from him naturally; his writings are filled with vajra words that cannot be fabricated by ordinary thoughts.

In the same way, the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche composed *The Great Perfection of Peaceful Manjushri* and other works on Manjushri at Mount Wutai. How precious! Once, while on pilgrimage to the sacred mountain at Samye Chimpu, he revealed a terma on Kurukulla,¹¹⁹ among others, some of which belong to the lineage of sealing and entrusting to the dakinis and were given directly by dakinis or Dharma protectors. When Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche visited a cave in Nepal, a terma on Vajrakilaya, concealed during the time of Guru Rinpoche Padmasambhava, appeared in his mind. This specific terma belongs to the lineage empowered by prayers.

I often reflect on how meaningful my life is because I have encountered such a great teacher and received extraordinary teachings. Therefore, I hope you will also appreciate this lineage. There is no need for you to constantly switch between lineages, as this may undermine your virtuous connection with the lineage you are in. If the initial interdependent connection is severed, it will be challenging for you to succeed in any practice you undertake. You must contemplate this with wisdom!

♦ Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa, the promulgator of the Longchen Nyingtik

Of the countless *tulkus* and treasure revealers, the one who concerns us here is Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa. He was truly Avalokiteshvara Resting in the Nature of Mind¹²⁰ himself and took on the form of a spiritual teacher. It is also said that he was the emanation of Vimalamitra and King Trisong Detsen.

¹¹⁹ Kurukulla (Skt. kurukullā; Tib. རིག་བྱེད་མ་, rikjéma; Wyl. rig byed ma) is a female deity of the Lotus family, associated with the activity of magnetization or enchantment. She is usually depicted as red in color, in dancing posture and holding a flowery bow and arrow. She is also one of the twenty-one Taras mentioned in the ancient Tara tantras. (Source: Rigpawiki.org)

¹²⁰ A form of Avalokiteshvara.

He received the complete transmission of all three lineages—the mind lineage, the symbol lineage, and the hearing lineage—from Guru Rinpoche Padmasambhava, the great scholar Vimalamitra, and the Omniscient Longchenpa.¹²¹ He turned the wheel of Dharma flawlessly and perfectly for fortunate individuals with the right karmic connection and remained in the state of perfect and complete enlightenment.

In particular, Jigme Lingpa revealed the Longchen Nyingtik teaching as a mind terma at the age of twenty-eight and recorded it in writing. He kept this terma secret for seven years before he began to impart the teaching and established the Longchen Nyingtik lineage. Jigme Lingpa passed into parinirvana in 1798.

◉ A few things about following a guru

Nowadays, some individuals claim to be the reincarnation of Jigme Lingpa, but I remain skeptical when I hear such assertions.

Great masters, such as Longchenpa, Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa, Mipham Rinpoche, Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu, and Patrul Rinpoche, are true buddhas who took on the form of spiritual teachers in this world. Since a buddha can manifest in various forms, such as a prostitute or butcher, it is certain that a buddha can certainly appear as a Dharma master.

All these great masters have dissolved their ordinary thoughts into the Dharmadhatu and are inseparable from Buddha Samantabhadra. Those who claim to be their reincarnations are most likely not even qualified to be the disciples of the great masters, let alone the masters themselves.

Tibetan Buddhism indeed acknowledges “reincarnation,” but I will not readily accept all self-proclaimed tulkus as genuine reincarnations of the enlightened ones, nor will I dismiss them entirely. Those great masters of the past may appear quite ordinary when they return to this world. As I often joke, perhaps they have pretended so convincingly that they have failed to recognize how mediocre they have become in this life.

This is because some of their conduct is simply inappropriate, which has had negative impacts on Buddhism. Sometimes I find myself in a dilemma: on one hand, I have great faith in the great masters of the past; on the other hand, I cannot

¹²¹ All of these masters lived long before Jigme Lingpa's time. He encountered them and received detailed teachings from them through visions. Despite having studied very little, he is renowned for the extraordinary knowledge he gained in this way.

help but develop biases toward those self-proclaimed tulkus, especially when I see them engaging in actions detrimental to Buddhism.

After many years of studying the Dharma, I have come to understand that all phenomena are primordially pristine. Therefore, I recognize the importance of maintaining the pure perception that not only self-proclaimed tulkus but also ants are manifestations of Buddha Samantabhadra. However, despite my mindfulness and vigilance, I still find myself influenced by ordinary thoughts. This may stem from my background in Buddhist logic, which often leads me to rely on conceptual thinking for analysis.

As you may know, our lineage masters possess the essential quality of selfless altruism. In both their words and actions, they never prioritize themselves; everything they do is solely for the benefit of others. Throughout the years I have followed the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, I have consistently witnessed this selflessness in him.

Many of Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche's disciples also embody this quality. While they may not be exactly like Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, they are equally selfless and have devoted everything to the Dharma and the benefit of beings. Their state of realization is also no different from that of the buddhas and bodhisattvas. Such teachers are truly worthy of our trust and devotion.

Nowadays, many people seek a teacher to study and practice the Dharma. However, before following a teacher, it is important to exercise caution. You should at least be aware of the teacher's background, character, Dharma training, and reputation.

For instance, if I were considering following a master of Chinese Buddhism, I would not rush to prostrate myself and receive teachings from someone in a yellow monastic robe with a long set of mala beads simply because I believe he is an emanation of the Sixth Patriarch. Instead, I would first seek to learn more about him: Is he from Zhejiang or Beijing? If he is from Zhejiang, which temple is he affiliated with?

Once I identify his temple, I would call them and ask, "Is there a Dharma master named so-and-so at your temple? He is visiting my city today, and I would like to know if he is a qualified teacher to follow..." If he has taken on disciples at his temple and possesses the qualifications to teach the Dharma, then I will decide to follow him.

It is essential to remain prudent in this regard. It would be irrational to follow a teacher blindly, like a hungry dog chasing after a piece of meat, without taking the time to examine the teacher. The analogy of “a hungry dog pursuing a piece of meat” is quite fitting. When a dog is starving, it does not assess its options before eating; it simply devours any meat in front of it, regardless of whether it is poisonous. If you follow a teacher in this manner, you are likely to regret it later.

Some individuals only begin to know more about a teacher after receiving their teaching. Clearly, this sequence is entirely backward. That said, regarding “receiving their teaching,” it can be difficult to determine whether a disciple has truly received it. As I have mentioned before, only when certain conditions are met for both the teacher and the disciple can the disciple genuinely receive Dharma teachings from the teacher.

I should have practiced my pure perception today, but when the topic of relying on a teacher came up, I ended up speaking extensively. If anything I have said is inappropriate, I confess in the presence of the lineage masters and all the Dharma fellows.

◉ Jigme Lingpa is a true buddha

What kind of teacher was Jigme Lingpa? As the saying goes:

Though his body is that of a god or human,
His extraordinary mind is that of a true buddha.

He took the form of an ordinary god or man, but his inner wisdom, compassion, power, and all the extraordinary essence were those of a true buddha.

This is true not only for Jigme Lingpa but also for other lineage masters such as Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu and Patrul Rinpoche. They are certainly not ordinary beings, which you must understand clearly. A teacher who is a true buddha must embody the genuine qualities of a buddha. Simply adopting a title, such as “I am Buddha Samantabhadra,” does not actually make one Buddha Samantabhadra.

Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu once told Patrul Rinpoche, “For those who are capable of practicing and praying, my unparalleled teacher, Jigme Lingpa, is truly a perfect buddha. I do not say this merely to praise or honor him; he truly is the Great Perfect Vajradhara, manifesting as an ordinary human. Between him and you in this lineage, there is no one but me. Since the moment I first met Jigme Lingpa, I

have followed his guidance in every way. I have served him in the three ways and have never acted in a manner that would displease him or even make him frown. Therefore, you can be assured that there has been no breach of samaya to tarnish the golden chain of this lineage. Its stream of blessings is different from that of any other lineage.”

When the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche praised and expressed his gratitude to his root guru, he often shed tears and quoted the words mentioned above, saying, “My root guru, Thubga Rinpoche, the Great Perfect Vajradhara of all beings, is a true buddha. He came to benefit beings in the form of an ordinary human. This is not fabricated by my devotion and faith. If you pray, then between my root guru and yourselves in the lineage, there is no one but me. I have not done anything to displease my guru since I began to follow him.”

This phrase from Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche truly inspired me and remains vivid in my mind.

As for me, I cannot claim to be a lineage master. From the moment I began following Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche until his passing into parinirvana, I must have done something that displeased him. Especially when I accompanied him abroad, I occasionally upset him, even though it was not my intention. “Today my guru was unhappy,” “This time my guru was displeased.” Whenever I reflect on these instances, I can only confess.

Therefore, I dare not claim to have always kept the lineage pure. But I indeed have devotion to the guru that encompasses three states of my mind: joy, faith, and awe.

I especially rejoice in Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu’s way of following a guru: he never even made his guru frown. That said, in the course of long-term following of the guru, except for a very few disciples who always obey the guru’s orders, it is really hard for most disciples to achieve this.

It is acceptable if you cannot do it. What truly matters is that you have genuine faith in the guru. The worst outcome is developing incorrect perceptions about the guru. Once you slander your guru due to these misconceptions, or even entirely break your samaya vows, no matter which teachings you give or what Dharma activities you engage in, they will not bring benefit to others. Therefore, in following the guru, one must maintain a pure perception.

In short, we must know that truly qualified teachers are inseparable from the

Buddha. Because they have followed their gurus according to the Dharma, attained certain states in their practice, and preserved a pure lineage, they are able to bring infinite blessings upon us, their subsequent disciples.

The above teaching briefly introduced the lineage masters. *The Tantra of the Union of Sun and Moon* says:

If the historical origin is not explained,
People will fall into the error of not believing
In the profound true teachings of Vajrayana.

Thus, to inspire the confidence of disciples, Patrul Rinpoche explains the history of lineage masters in the context of Guru Yoga, detailing how their lineage can be traced back to its authentic source.

♦ Practicing Guru Yoga with great diligence

In the Guru Yoga practice, it is of the utmost importance to recite the Guru Rinpoche Mantra ten million times. Therefore, one should make every effort to fulfill this requirement.

Some people do not manage to recite the mantra as many times as required, dismissing the preliminary practices as unimportant. Others, inspired by the profundity of the main practices, become overly ambitious. However, to believe they can jump straight into generation and perfection stage practices without adequately engaging in the preliminaries is akin to the old saying:

Tasting the tongue before the yak's head is cooked.
Stretching out your legs before the bed has warmed.

“Tasting the tongue before the yak's head is cooked” means that when a yak's head is being boiled, if the external flesh is not fully cooked, the tongue won't be cooked either. Therefore, if you want to eat the yak's tongue at this time, it is certainly a waste of effort.

“Stretching out your legs before the bed has warmed” means that once the bed is warm, you can stretch your legs out without feeling cold. However, if you stretch your legs out before the bed is warm enough, you will definitely feel cold.

The two analogies illustrate the importance of following a proper sequence in practicing the Dharma. Specifically, you should first practice the preliminaries

and then proceed to the main practice. Ignoring this sequence only leads to wasted effort.

Despite this, many people hesitate to engage in the preliminaries. They often request empowerment and pith instructions right away, insisting, “I don’t have time to wait; could you please give me a pith instruction?” This attitude underscores the necessity for great masters to emphasize the importance of a practical sequence.

Fortunately, the situation at Larung Gar is encouraging. Sangha members engage in hearing, contemplating, and meditating in the proper sequential order, and pith instructions are not given prematurely.

Practicing the preliminaries without completing the entire process makes no sense. Please keep this in mind.

If you proceed directly to the practice of the generation stage, the perfection stage, or the Great Perfection of *trekchö* (thoroughly cutting through) and *tögal* (direct crossing) without first practicing the preliminaries, such as contemplating precious human life and impermanence, then any small momentary signs of “warmth” that arise will be unstable, like a building without foundations.

Some people approach the preliminaries superficially and merely go through the motions. Later, when they engage in the main practice, they might think, “Those were just preliminaries—there’s no need to continue them now,” and abandon them altogether. This mindset is no different from completely giving up on the preliminaries.

If you neglect the preliminaries, the foundation of the path, you sever the very root of Dharma. It is akin to attempting to paint a fresco without a wall. If a practitioner has made significant progress, they must have grasped this essence. With this foundation of the path, all other practices become possible. Therefore, some great masters believe that until a practitioner has completed their preliminaries, there is no need for them to read or study the main practice.

Therefore, each practitioner, regardless of when or where, should apply themselves diligently to the preliminary practices and strive to cultivate genuine conviction in these preliminaries.

It has been a few years since I began teaching *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. Simply listening to the teachings once is not enough. You should read the text at least once a year to cultivate genuine conviction in the preliminary practices. Throughout my observations over the past twenty years, one thing has become very

clear to me: Those who value the preliminaries will successfully accomplish their practice, whereas those who do not will struggle to achieve success in their practice.

It is actually quite easy for a vajra teacher to give the pith instructions on trekchö and tögal, but unless the disciples are extremely fit vessels, it is very hard for them to put the teachings into practice. Therefore, according to the practical sequence of Patrul Rinpoche and other lineage masters, a practitioner must dedicate significant time to the preliminaries to establish a solid foundation, which is crucial!

Hearing and contemplating the Dharma is also very important. Especially for young people, studying the five great treatises is essential, as it helps dispel doubts for oneself and allows for the propagation of the Dharma for the benefit of others. Therefore, engaging in extensive study of the Dharma is important.

However, once you have eliminated doubts through study, it is essential to put the teachings into practice. We all grow old and will eventually face death, at which point it may be challenging to apply your understanding of Buddhist logic, the Middle Way, and the Abhidharma. In that moment, you should rely on the pith instructions from *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, as those teachings will be most beneficial.

Therefore, when you have the opportunity to hear and contemplate the Dharma, you should do so extensively. In my case, my extensive study in my youth has allowed me to build a solid foundation in Buddhism. When it comes time to practice, you should begin with the preliminaries and complete the corresponding practices one by one, following the proper sequence before proceeding to the main practice. This is a reliable approach that is free of risk and danger. Focus particularly on Guru Yoga, the entrance-way for blessings, and make it the very foundation of your practice. That is the essential point.

I hope you can reflect on this repeatedly. Some people are only interested in the higher tantric teachings, but when I teach tantra, it often seems to merely help you establish karmic connections with these teachings. Last year, I taught you the *Guhyagarbha Tantra*, but it seems that only a few of you attained enlightenment through it. Achieving such a state is quite challenging without sufficient learning and preliminary practice.

In fact, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* is the most profound teaching, yet unfortunately, even though you receive the teaching every day, hardly anyone truly knows it.

♦ The closing verse

*Although I regard my kind teacher as a true buddha,
 My stubborn nature causes me to disobey his instructions.
 Although I know that all beings in the three worlds have been
 my parents,
 My bad temper leads me to mistreat my Dharma fellows.
 Bless me and all beings burdened by evil karma like mine,
 So that in this life and every future life
 We may follow our spiritual teacher
 With humility, steady discipline, and flexibility in mind and
 deed.*

This is Patrul Rinpoche's closing verse for this chapter. He prays to the guru, buddhas, bodhisattvas, dakinis, and Dharma protectors for blessings.

[This concludes *Guru Yoga, Entrance-way for Blessings, the Ultimate Method for Arousing the Wisdom of Realization.*]

**The section on
 the *Uncommon Preliminaries*
 is hence complete.**

THE SWIFT PATH OF TRANSFERENCE



TRANSFERENCE OF CONSCIOUSNESS,
THE INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE DYING:
BUDDHAHOOD WITHOUT MEDITATION





Lesson 138

“Supreme if your compassionate action for confused beings ... summoning the consciousness back into the body after death.” [page 351–353]

2.3. THE SWIFT PATH OF TRANSFERENCE, A DIRECT METHOD THAT COMPLEMENTS THE MAIN PRACTICE OF MEDITATION

The Words of My Perfect Teacher consists of three sections: the common preliminaries, the uncommon preliminaries, and the swift path of transference. Starting today, we will begin studying the third section.

When a teaching extends over a long period, such as *The Way of the Bodhisattva* that I taught previously and *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* that I am currently teaching, I often feel a sense of concern throughout the course. I worry about whether I can complete the teaching and also fret that the supporting staff might neglect their role in broadcasting my teachings to those outside of Larung Gar. Fortunately, it seems that there is not much left in the teaching of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, so I hope it will be concluded successfully.

The practice of transferring consciousness is of great importance. As you know, whether we are Buddhists or not, none of us can escape death. If there exists a swift practice that can help us achieve rebirth in the Pure Land at the moment of death, I am certain everyone will seek it. The transference of consciousness is such a swift practice.

Having attained the state of this practice, you will not be scared of death no matter when it happens.

This chapter begins with the prayer that Patrul Rinpoche composed for his root guru:

*Supreme is your compassion toward beings lost in ignorance,
 Supreme is your guidance for great evil-doers,
 Supreme are your skillful means in taming those hard to
 guide—
 Peerless Teacher, at your feet I humbly bow.*

As mentioned in the prayer, his root guru Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu had three extraordinary qualities:

- 1) He was especially compassionate toward beings lost in ignorance.

In the eyes of a sublime being, although all sentient beings are pitiable, those who are ignorant and deluded deserve more compassion. This perspective is in stark contrast to that of worldly people, who tend to favor capable and talented individuals while avoiding those they consider vulgar and inferior. Driven by great compassion, Patrul Rinpoche's root guru extended greater care and compassion to those ensnared by misguided thoughts and harmful views.

- 2) He especially took great evil-doers under his guidance.

"Evil-doers" refers to those who have committed severely wrongful deeds, such as the five crimes with immediate retribution or the ten grave negative actions, including killing and sexual misconduct, among others. Evil-doers also include those who have transgressed the three types of vows, such as breaches of the root vows of individual liberation, that result in expulsion from the sangha, transgressions of the bodhicitta vows, or violations of the tantric samayas.

Typically, no one wants to accept evil-doers burdened by heavy afflictions who lack mindfulness and vigilance; however, Patrul Rinpoche's root guru especially embraced these great evil-doers as his disciples.

Of course, this does not mean the guru disregarded the three types of vows or insisted on keeping those who had transgressed them, including samaya breakers,

in the sangha. Instead, with great compassion, he guided those evil-doers through other means.

3) He adopted skillful methods to tame those hard to guide.

Each being has their own level of faculties, dispositions, and preferences. Thus, a guru, as the true manifestation of a buddha or bodhisattva, knows how to guide living beings using various skillful means. Even with those who have stubborn natures and are difficult to tame, the guru has the skillful means to tame them.

In broader terms, the guru adapts their approach based on the being present: they would use methods suited for an animal when dealing with an animal, employ miraculous manifestations for a hungry ghost, and provide Dharma teachings and similar guidance for an ordinary person.

For example, when delivering a teaching, a guru with skillful means can bring joy to all listeners. In contrast, a guru lacking skillful means, despite good intentions, may lead listeners to develop misunderstandings or even erroneous views due to rigid and inflexible approaches, which is not beneficial.

Therefore, it is important to utilize skillful means. Among all the people we encounter, not everyone observes pure precepts or possesses knowledge and wisdom. Some may have limited understanding of the Dharma, while others may repeatedly engage in wrongdoings and refuse to change.

When dealing with such individuals, you must adopt a skillful approach. You may present yourself as either peaceful or wrathful and guide them appropriately with patience. If you insist on applying a single method to everyone, accepting only those for whom the method works and rejecting those for whom it does not, you may find it challenging to guide beings effectively along the path.

Skillful means are rooted in great compassion and a genuine understanding of others. Some gurus possess wisdom that enables them to connect effectively with diverse audiences; they can communicate with blue-collar workers and farmers while also relating to intellectuals on their level.

Even when faced with someone who holds misguided views or disparages Buddhism, these gurus can engage in dialogue, gradually disarming their opposition to the Dharma and leaving them with a positive impression, such as, “So this is what Buddhists are like! Buddhism is not what I previously thought...” In this way, the gurus can reach and transform individuals from varied backgrounds and attitudes.

If a person lacks skillful means and is too hasty in hoping that others will accept the Dharma, then no matter what they do or say, they may become overly rigid and extreme. While this approach may be acceptable under certain circumstances if they have no other choice, applying the same hasty method to every situation is unlikely to yield positive results.

Therefore, in the future, when you take on disciples or even just socialize, you should be equipped with skillful means to accept and guide all kinds of individuals. Some people struggle to get along with anyone except for one or two individuals; when they speak, they often offend or frustrate others, leading them to hesitate to engage in conversation and causing others to avoid contact.

A guru who truly embodies a buddha or a bodhisattva can guide and tame all types of people. No matter how obstinate a person may be, the guru is capable of leading them onto the Dharma path.

Returning to the prayer, Patrul Rinpoche's root guru had the above-mentioned three extraordinary qualities, so he says, "Peerless Teacher, at your feet I humbly bow."

We can all recite this prayer in our daily practice. As long as the guru in whom you have the greatest faith possesses these three qualities—supreme compassion toward beings lost in ignorance, supreme guidance for great evil-doers, and supreme skillful means in taming those hard to guide—you may visualize your guru while reciting this prayer and prostrate before them with reverence.

♦ **The practice of transferring consciousness should be done as of now**

Regardless of your age, you should start practicing the transference of consciousness, or *phowa*, as of now.

If you do not practice well in advance, when the signs of approaching death appear, it will be too late, as you will be experiencing intense torment at that moment, which will prevent you from practicing. Whether you are in a hospital or at home at the time of death, no one can bear the pain on your behalf, no matter how many people are around you. As it is stated in *The Way of the Bodhisattva*:

There I'll be, prostrate upon my bed,
And all around, my family and friends,

But I alone shall be the one to feel
The cutting of the thread of life.¹²²

It is not easy for us to engage in a practice when we are in pain. If we can hardly practice while experiencing ordinary minor discomfort, how much harder is it when we are under great torment at the moment of death?

Therefore, in our daily lives, we should engage in practices that will benefit us at the moment of death. We should accumulate more merit through our everyday activities. By doing so, when we face the impermanence of life, all the merits we have accumulated through acts of generosity and other virtuous deeds will accompany us into the next life. In fact, they are the only things that will follow us into the next life. *The Samyuktagama Sutra* says:

The body and sensations, which are the objects
Destroyed by aging and death, will all perish.
Only the merit accumulated through generosity
Will be following you.

Even if you have no interest in other Dharma practices, you should still practice the transference of consciousness for your death and familiarize yourself with the practice before that time comes. Just as a soldier who has mastered various weapons or martial arts can use them skillfully and fearlessly in battle, if you have mastered the transference of consciousness, you will navigate your death with ease, regardless of when it occurs.

This is the difference between a practitioner and a worldly person. A worldly person fears death. Regardless of their wealth or social status, they are afraid of death due to a lack of Dharma practice.

In contrast, a practitioner is not afraid of death. Of course, they should have mastered the practice and learned enough about death. When I taught you *The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*, I quoted Kadampa's nine-point meditation on death.

First, death is inevitable for three reasons: 1) the Lord of Death will inevitably come, which you cannot stop; 2) your lifespan cannot increase but is decreasing unceasingly; 3) the time available for your spiritual practice is very limited.

¹²² Shantideva, *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Shambhala, 2011, chapter 2, verse 40.

Next, the time of death is uncertain for three reasons: 1) in Jambudvīpa, people's lifespans are uncertain; 2) the causes of death are numerous, while the causes of life are very few; 3) this body is so fragile that it may vanish at any moment.

Last, only Dharma practice can be of help at the time of death for three reasons: 1) at the moment of death, wealth is of no help; 2) at the moment of death, friends and family are of no help; 3) at the moment of death, this body is of no help.

Only after we have practiced the Dharma can we confront death with calmness and ease. In particular, we should master the practice of phowa, the swift path to rebirth in the Land of Great Bliss, which integrates both Sutrayana and Vajrayana practices. Among the various instructions for attaining rebirth in a pure realm, most are brief and lack the specificity and detail found in the teachings presented here in *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*.

Therefore, upon receiving the transmission, it is important to put the teaching into practice. After you have effectively practiced, be sure to revisit the practice periodically.

Just as a skilled warrior regularly reviews weapon usage and checks the condition of their weapons, now that you are well prepared for your death and rebirth in the Land of Great Bliss through the mastery of phowa, you can apply this practice to ensure a smooth transition at the moment of death.

2.3.1. CLASSIFICATION OF TRANSFERENCE

There are five different kinds of transference of consciousness:

- 1) Superior transference to the Dharmakaya through the seal of the view.
- 2) Middling transference to the Sambhogakaya through the union of the generation and perfection stages.
- 3) Lower transference to the Nirmanakaya through immeasurable compassion.
- 4) Ordinary transference using three metaphors.
- 5) Transference performed for the dead with the hook of compassion.

2.3.1.1. Superior Transference to the Dharmakaya Through

the Seal of the View

Practitioners who have cultivated and established familiarity with the unmistakable view of the unfabricated natural state during their lifetime can, at the moment of death, apply the pith instruction of awareness of Dharmadhatu via the secret path of the primordial purity of trekchö. This allows them to transfer their consciousness into the expanse of the Dharmakaya.

This is the superior transference of consciousness, which is the same as the method of transference to the Dharmakaya described in *Bardo Thödol*. To achieve this transference, one must first receive empowerment and complete the necessary preliminaries. Then, through the guru's pointing-out instructions of Dzogchen, one recognizes that awareness is indivisible from Dharmakaya. Having achieved and established this state of realization, one may obtain enlightenment in the ground of primordial purity at the moment of death, swiftly reaching the level of Buddha Samantabhadra.

This transference may take place under two circumstances: first, when the signs of approaching death have appeared, one abides in the aforementioned enlightened state when reminded by the guru or Dharma fellows; second, one abides in that state by oneself and transfers one's consciousness accordingly.

♦ Being reminded by the guru or Dharma fellows

After being ill for a long time, the practitioner can sense from the expressions of doctors, nurses, or those around them that there is no turning back, or they may notice that the process of dissolution has already begun. Recognizing the evident signs of approaching death, they understand that death will arrive soon, perhaps today or tomorrow.

[However, at Larung Gar, someone misjudged the situation. He told others he would die soon and gave away all his possessions, but then he recovered the next day.]

If the guru lives nearby, the practitioner should send someone to invite them over. First, they must confess all the wrongdoings they have committed in this life and even since time without beginning, either by visualizing Vajrasattva or in the presence of the guru. This confession is crucial before one's death. Next, they should give away the belongings to which they are most attached or offer them

to the guru or the sangha. Additionally, if possible, they should take laypeople's precepts or monastic precepts if they have not already done so.

After completing these steps, the practitioner may adjust their sitting posture and ask the guru or vajra companion, with whom they received the empowerment in the same mandala, to remind them of the corresponding bardo teaching, such as that in *Lama Yangtik* or other instructions.

The guru or Dharma companion must keep reminding the practitioner: "Rest in the natural state you have recognized and do not deviate from that state! Remain in the true nature of Buddha Samantabhadra..." After being reminded to meditate in this manner repeatedly, the practitioner remains in that state and then transfers their consciousness.

♦ Transferring consciousness by oneself

Some practitioners can abide in the enlightened state on their own, without reminders from a guru or Dharma companion. When the signs of impending death have already manifested, such a practitioner can adopt the seven-point posture of Vairochana or sit comfortably in a chair with their feet touching the ground, reflecting on the view of primordial purity—the union of clarity and emptiness—that the root guru has pointed out to them. They can then remain in their recognition of this ultimate view of Dzogchen, known as the clear light of the path, which will merge with the clear light of the ground. In this way, they will attain accomplishment in the primordial purity of Dharmakaya.

This is the superior transference to the Dharmakaya through the seal of the view. Such a practitioner does not need to undergo the lengthy process of the intermediate state and will swiftly attain enlightenment in the luminous bardo of Dharmata.

However, Padmasambhava also stated that this kind of transference of consciousness can never occur for a person who has never practiced or recognized pristine awareness, regardless of how much they are reminded at the moment of death. This is akin to describing colors to a blind person or introducing stars to a ferocious dog; reminding someone who knows nothing about it will not be effective. Therefore, this kind of transference of consciousness applies only to superior practitioners who have recognized and established the ultimate view of the Great Perfection. Many accomplished practitioners of the Great Perfection transfer their consciousness at the time of death in this manner.

What are the signs of this kind of transference of consciousness? Generally, the outer sign is a clear sky without any clouds, the inner sign is a glossiness of the body that lasts for an extended period, and the secret sign is the appearance of a seed syllable, such as the blue syllable *hum* (ཧཱུྃ) or the red syllable *ah* (ཨ) on cremated ashes.

Certain tantras within the Seventeen Tantras of the Great Perfection provide detailed explanations of practical instructions, signs of achievement, methods of cremation, and more, related to this kind of transference of consciousness.

♦ A swift transference of consciousness

Transference to the Dharmakaya, Sambhogakaya, and Nirmanakaya, respectively, often takes place when the signs of impending death appear, and the practitioner has sufficient time to prepare for death through meditation. However, in situations where death occurs suddenly, one must utilize the swift transference of consciousness described in *Bardo Thödol*.

Regardless of whether you are a superior practitioner or not, this swift transference of consciousness is of utmost importance. Therefore, in addition to maintaining the practice of some other kind of transference of consciousness, you should also practice this swift transference.

How can one practice the swift transference of consciousness? It is essential to constantly remind oneself, “If I suddenly die, I must focus my mind single-mindedly on the top of my head.” This is the key to this practice. By training in this manner, when faced with an abrupt death, a good practitioner can immediately visualize their guru or deity, such as Amitabha or Buddha Shakyamuni, above their head. In doing so, the practitioner can attain liberation in the luminous expanse of primordial purity.

2.3.1.2. Middling Transference to the Sambhogakaya, Through the Union of the Generation and Perfection Stages

Practitioners who have mastered the practices of the generation and perfection stages as one indivisible yoga, and are adept at seeing the form of the deity as a magical display can, when the hallucinations of the intermediate state arise at the moment of death, transfer their consciousness into the wisdom kaya of the union of appearance and emptiness.

Unlike those who can transfer their consciousness to the Dharmakaya, practitioners of this middling transference primarily practice the generation and perfection stages, such as meditating on Guru Yoga or visualizing the deity, such as Vajrasattva, Buddha Samantabhadra, Buddha Shakyamuni, or Avalokiteshvara.

Those of you who practice the middling transference to the Sambhogakaya can meditate on your own if there is not a guru available to guide you when the signs of impending death appear. Specifically, adopt the seven-point posture of Vairochana or sit comfortably in a chair with your feet touching the ground, and visualize above your head the deity to whom you are most devoted, whose nature is your root guru. Then, at the lower end of your central channel below the navel, visualize your mind-consciousness transforming into the white syllable *ah* (ཨ), the blue syllable *hum* (ཧུམ), the red syllable *hrih* (ཧྱི), or another seed syllable of the deity.

Next, concentrate solely on the syllable in your central channel, and as you recite “Hik! Hik!”, eject your consciousness upward to the aperture of Brahma at the top of your head, through which the consciousness dissolves into the heart of the deity.

As the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche stated in *The Great Perfection of Peaceful Manjushri*, at the moment of death, one may visualize one’s consciousness as the white syllable *ah* (ཨ), which is propelled upward by wind energy and eventually dissolves into the heart of the guru who sits above one’s head. The guru then rises higher and higher to the Land of Great Bliss. Finally, rest in the state in which one’s mind becomes indivisible from the guru’s wisdom and eventually transfer the consciousness.

This is the middling transference to the Sambhogakaya. Since you have primarily practiced the generation and perfection stages and often visualize a deity such as Vajrasattva, at the moment of death, you may visualize the deity in whom you have the greatest faith above your head and dissolve your consciousness into the deity’s heart. When your mind is indivisible with the deity’s wisdom, you will swiftly transfer your consciousness to the Sambhogakaya in the union of appearance and emptiness.

It is best if you can meditate clearly in this way. However, as mentioned in some tantric instructions, at the moment of death, even if you cannot visualize well, you can still achieve accomplishment if you have fervent faith in your guru, your deity, or the hundred peaceful and wrathful deities.

For example, if you usually have strong faith in your root guru, even if you are unable to clearly visualize the white syllable *ah* (ॐ) at the moment of death due to fear, torment, or delusion, your guru will appear in your vision because of your guru devotion. As soon as you generate faith upon having the vision of the guru, you will attain liberation in the wisdom of primordial purity—the union of clarity and emptiness.

The signs of a successful transference to the Sambhogakaya are as follows: The outer sign is that the practitioner's residence and surroundings, such as the nearby mountain, are adorned with a rainbow. The inner sign is the presence of blood, yellow liquid, water droplets, or swelling around the practitioner's aperture of Brahma. The secret sign is the appearance of one or more of the five types of vajra relics, along with symbols of the deity, such as a sword and seed syllable.

- ♦ **Liberation through connection with the hundred peaceful and wrathful deities**

What is even simpler and more miraculous is that by simply establishing a good connection with some supreme support of practice, such as deities, one may also attain liberation.

As Karma Chagme Rinpoche stated in his instructions, even if one has never received empowerment or any tantric transmission, it is still possible to attain liberation by establishing a good connection with the images of the hundred peaceful and wrathful deities or the Guhyagarbha Tantra Mandala, or through seeing, hearing, or getting to know them. The practice of the hundred peaceful and wrathful deities is an extraordinary teaching of Padmasambhava, making it distinct from other tantric teachings.

There are many stories about achieving liberation through establishing a good connection with the hundred deities.

- ◉ **A shepherd attains liberation after seeing a deity's image**

There was a shepherd who herded sheep on a mountain, and at noon he would take his lunchbox to a nearby monastery and eat there.

The place where he took his lunch was near a monastery wall adorned with a fresco of a wrathful deity—one among the hundred peaceful and wrathful deities. As you know, the fifty-eight wrathful deities all have distinctive forms, and the one in the fresco had a human body and a deer's head.

However, the shepherd did not know who the deity was or what he represented; he simply had lunch every day beneath the fresco and shared part of his meal with the deity, saying, “Dear friend, this portion is for you. Let’s have lunch together!” In this way, he repeated this ritual day after day.

Later, the shepherd died. When that deity appeared in his intermediate state, he immediately recognized him and said, as usual, “Dear friend, let’s have lunch together!” Thus, he attained liberation. This is a true story.

◉ An old woman attains liberation after seeing a deity’s image

There was once an old woman who often passed by a monastery and heard the sangha’s recitation. Very often, she would hear the chanting of this phrase: “...the deity has the head of a red woodpecker, a human body, holding a bow and arrows in his hand, and emitting light... at this deity’s feet I prostrate and pray.”

This phrase would come to her mind from time to time, prompting the old woman to wonder: “How could this be possible? A human body with a red woodpecker’s head? He is holding a bow and arrows while also emitting light?” Since she heard the recitation so often and was intrigued by it, she contemplated it day and night, wishing for a vision of this deity.

Later, when she died, the deity who had a human body, a red woodpecker’s head, holding a bow and arrows, and emitting light appeared in the intermediate stage. The old woman immediately recognized him. In this way, she not only dispelled her doubts but also attained liberation.

◉ Attaining liberation upon recognizing the peaceful or wrathful deity in the intermediate state

During the intermediate state, the appearance of the deities lasts only a brief moment. Those who have never established a good connection with the bardo teachings on the hundred peaceful and wrathful deities may not recognize the deities. Instead, they might perceive the deities as strange animals, missing the opportunity for liberation.

It is important to establish a good connection with the deities. Not to mention having a good connection with all the hundred deities, just making a connection with a specific deity, as the shepherd and the old woman did, can already yield incredible benefits. Equally supreme as these deities is the Guhyagarbha Tantra

Mandala at Larung Gar, which depicts the mandala of the peaceful deities. According to tantric teachings, one can attain liberation simply by seeing the external image of the mandala or the stupa adorned with images of the hundred peaceful and wrathful deities, thus providing great benefits.

If you can pray often to the hundred deities and engage in the corresponding practices, the benefits will undoubtedly be immense. Each of the hundred peaceful and wrathful deities manifests in accordance with our conceptual thoughts. Upon encountering the deity, those who understand will develop faith, while those unfamiliar with Vajrayana teachings may mistakenly wonder, “Why are there so many deities with animal heads in Buddhism?” In fact, such individuals are unaware that upon death, as we enter the intermediate state, we will encounter these deities.

If you are already familiar with the teachings regarding these deities, you will recognize them as manifestations of the buddhas of the five families at that moment. When peaceful deities appear, you will recognize them as peaceful deities; when wrathful deities appear, you will identify them as wrathful deities. As soon as a pure thought about the deity arises, all your attachment, anger, and ignorance dissipate instantly, leading you to liberation.

2.3.1.3. Lower Transference to the Nirmanakaya Through Immeasurable Compassion

Those who have received the ripening empowerments of Vajrayana, uphold pure samaya, have an inclination for the generation and perfection stages, and have received bardo instructions can prevent any undesirable entry into an impure womb by visualizing the seed syllable *hum* (ཧུམ་). Motivated by great compassion and applying the practice of taking rebirth as a Nirmanakaya emanation, they subsequently transfer their consciousness to a pure land for rebirth. As it is said in *Bardo Thödol*:

To block the entry to the womb, remember to turn back.¹²³

This moment requires determination and pure perception.

The verse in *Bardo Thödol* means that when a scene such as a man and woman engaged in sexual conduct appears, one should maintain a pure view and visualize

¹²³ This refers to turning back before the consciousness enters a womb.

them as the deity in yab-yum¹²⁴ union with his consort, and the surroundings as a pure Buddha-field.

As stated in Padmasambhava's bardo instructions, at the time of death, those who adopt the lower transference to the Nirmanakaya can lie down on their right side and visualize Buddha Shakyamuni, Avalokiteshvara, Padmasambhava, or the root guru in front of them.

If you are incapable of visualizing this, have a statue or image of the deity or guru placed before you, and make a vow for the benefit of all living beings: "I am about to leave this world. Through this death, may I achieve the transference to the Nirmanakaya, so that I can benefit all living beings."

Then, you can visualize your consciousness as a bindu of energy, which rises higher and higher along the central channel as you recite "Hik! Hik!" Once the bindu reaches your left nostril, it shoots out and dissolves directly into the heart of the guru or deity you have visualized in front of you. If your consciousness can leave you in such a state, you can certainly be reborn as a Nirmanakaya emanation who will work for the benefit of others.

The signs of a successful transference to the Nirmanakaya are as follows: The outer sign is the appearance of beautiful clouds in the form of flowers or an unfurled khata. The inner sign consists of yellow liquid, red and white essences, or water droplets coming from the left nostril. The secret sign is that, after cremation, many small relics appear, the entire skull or heart remains intact, or some bones or flesh in the body are not burned, and signs of the deity may also appear.

Many emanations who were reborn through transferring their consciousness in this way actually return to this world to benefit all living beings. Nowadays, many of the emanations of so-and-so are like this. Such an emanation wishes to benefit beings; they do not desire to be reborn in a pure land, nor do they seek to attain the accomplishments of the deity, so they choose to come to this world in the form of a Nirmanakaya emanation.

What this emanation appears to be depends on the aspiration a practitioner holds at the moment of their death. If the practitioner wishes to become a man with wisdom, they should visualize their consciousness as the syllable *dhīh* (ཧྱིཿ), before dissolving it into the heart of the guru or Buddha Shakyamuni. If the practitioner

¹²⁴ Yab-yum (Tibetan: ཡཔ་ཡུམ། literally, "father-mother") represents the primordial union of wisdom and compassion, depicted as a male deity in union with his female consort.

wishes to effectively propagate the Dharma and benefit sentient beings, they should visualize their consciousness as the syllable *hum* (ॐ). If the practitioner wishes to have immeasurable compassion, they should visualize their consciousness into the syllable *hrih* (ॐ).

All the above practices are extraordinary. Of course, they are extraordinary to practitioners, not to worldly people who do not care about rebirth. Worldly people only care about making a living, such as how to earn money, how to buy a house, how to purchase a car, how to make friends, and the like. Day after day, all they care about are just these.

They will not consider how to face death and where they will go in the next life because they do not believe in rebirth. Even if they believe there is a next life, most of them simply think, “I’ll take care of it when the time comes.” As for the thought of benefiting living beings, it does not even occur to them.

Therefore, these practices of transference are intended solely for practitioners. As a practitioner, even if you cannot transfer your consciousness to the Dharmakaya or the Sambhogakaya, you should not have much difficulty transferring your consciousness to the Nirmanakaya at the moment of death. If you consistently aspire to benefit all living beings in your daily life, this aspiration will naturally and fervently arise at the moment of death. Consequently, in your next life, you may truly become someone capable of benefiting sentient beings.

Yesterday, the Han Chinese Dharma practitioners affiliated with the presentation cohort at Larung Gar were asked to fill out a form. One practitioner wrote “benefiting living beings” in the column for “expertise.” I was very pleased to read this. With such “expertise,” at the time of death, you will undoubtedly vow to attain the transference to the Nirmanakaya, allowing you to return as an emanation to work for the benefit of living beings.

This practitioner just blushed. No worries. I am the only person who saw your form. Since you have already written it down, I believe you will be able to take on the responsibility.

2.3.1.4. Ordinary Transference Using Three Metaphors

Ordinary people engage in this kind of transference by imagining the central channel as the path, the bindu of consciousness as the traveler, and the Pure Land of Great Bliss as the destination. Further explanations of this kind of transference

will be provided in a later section. Because it does not require a relatively high level of realization from the practitioner, it is well-suited for ordinary people.

When using this form of transferring consciousness, we must recognize that the Pure Land of Great Bliss is the very destination we aim to reach. Through our recitation of the Buddha's name or meditation, or by relying on the recitation and guidance of our guru or Dharma friends, we strive to be reborn in the Pure Land of Great Bliss. If we are able to do this, then even if we do not attain rebirth there, we will certainly not fall into one of the three lower realms. There is ample scriptural evidence supporting this point.

♦ How not to fall into a lower realm

According to Guru Rinpoche Padmasambhava, if someone recites the sacred names of Avalokiteshvara, Amitabha, or other noble beings near a dying person, that individual will not fall into a lower realm after death.

In addition, according to some bardo teachings, at the moment of death, if the dying person recites “Namo Ratnashikhin”¹²⁵ or if someone else recites it for them, invoking the aspirational power of Buddha Ratnashikhin from many kalpas ago, that person will definitely not fall into a lower realm. This is a very important pith instruction. Whenever we see a living being about to die, be it a human or an animal, we may recite “Namo Ratnashikhin” for the dying one if we are unable to transfer their consciousness through phowa.

Or, we may also recite this prayer to the Three Jewels from *The Sutra of Great Liberation*:

Namo Buddhaya, Namu Dharmaya, Namu Sanghaya.

In addition, Guru Rinpoche stated that if a person lies on their right side with their head facing north at the moment of death, they will not fall into a lower realm after death. This is because this posture is the one that Buddha Shakyamuni adopted when he entered parinirvana.

The methods mentioned above are very reliable. As someone who embraces the principle of cause and effect, you should do your utmost to perform the recitations outlined here for dying Dharma practitioners and other beings, or to assist them in lying down in the proper posture.

¹²⁵ It means: Homage to the Buddha with the Jewel-like Crown.

2.3.1.5. Transference Performed for the Dead with the Hook of Compassion

This kind of transference is intended for a being who is either on the brink of death or already in the bardo state. It can be performed by a yogi with highly developed realization, mastery over their mind and perceptions, and the capability to identify the consciousness of a being in the bardo state.

In general, one should have definitely attained the path of seeing in order to perform transference for the deceased. As Milarepa says:

Unless you have directly realized the truth of the path of seeing,
Do not engage in the practice of transference for the dead.

A person who has not realized the emptiness of reality may not bring any benefit to a deceased being by attempting to transfer the consciousness by saying “Phat! Phat!”

The best moment to perform transference for the deceased is when the outer breath has ceased but the inner breath is still continuing.¹²⁶ If this decisive moment arrives and a realized bodhisattva is not present, it is acceptable to invite someone with a little experience in the instructions on transference. This can still be very beneficial for the dying person. It is akin to a traveler who has just embarked on a journey: a companion can easily alter the traveler’s direction. Similarly, at this critical moment when a person is about to transition to their next life, even a little guidance can help them avoid rebirth in one of the lower realms.

Conversely, if the body and mind of the deceased person have completely separated and they have become a bardo being, drifting according to karmic winds, it becomes more difficult to perform transference for that individual. It requires a yogi who has mastered their own mind and perceptions and can locate the deceased in the bardo state.

It is easy for a realized yogi to influence a bardo being who no longer has a material body. When performed by such a yogi, transference from the bardo state itself can effectively direct the being’s consciousness to a pure land. The yogi begins by guiding the bardo being to the card marked with that person’s name and then facilitates the transference of their consciousness to a pure land.

¹²⁶ The moment when the outer breath has stopped but the heart has not yet stopped beating.

♦ The story of Patrul Rinpoche

According to the accounts in *The Brief Biography of Patrul Rinpoche*, the great master often went vagabonding alone as an ordinary monk, and no one truly knew who he was. One day, he passed by a household in the Kham area where the houseowner's mother had just died, and a renowned lama was invited to perform a transference service. Because Patrul Rinpoche was also in monk's attire, the house owner invited him in as well.

After entering the house, Patrul Rinpoche noticed that the lama was seated in a high position, with his young attendant beside him, both reciting the phowa prayer. Patrul Rinpoche took a seat in a corner. Through his clairvoyance, he realized that while reciting the prayer, the lama was actually thinking, "Once the transference service is over, will the owner offer me his best horse, the black one?"

Meanwhile, the houseowner's mother, in the bardo state, was also aware of the lama's thoughts and chose to hide away. Patrul Rinpoche then turned his attention to the young attendant, who was filled with great compassion for the deceased and was chanting the phowa prayer wholeheartedly. As a result, the houseowner's mother in the bardo state returned, but the attendant was unable to transfer her consciousness.

Patrul Rinpoche thought, "Without establishing a connection with the deceased, I cannot transfer her consciousness." So he asked the houseowner, "May I have something to eat? I am hungry." The houseowner was upset and replied, "I'll give you some after the service is finished."

After the transference service was completed, the lama received the black horse, the compassionate young attendant was given a piece of black cowhide, and Patrul Rinpoche got a bowl of yogurt. After eating the yogurt, Patrul Rinpoche established a connection with the deceased and then silently transferred the deceased to a pure land.

Then, Patrul Rinpoche smiled and said to himself, "The greedy lama got the black horse, the compassionate attendant got a cowhide, and the one who transferred the deceased got yogurt."

♦ The story of Jamyang Shayba

Although the young attendant in the story was unable to transfer the deceased, his compassion allowed her consciousness to draw near to him. The great Jigme

Phuntsok Rinpoche once shared a story about a lama guiding two bardo beings with love songs.

Jamyang Shayba of Kumbum Monastery once performed a transference service for two girls who had unnatural deaths. During the transference, the lama initially recited various liturgies and prayers but eventually switched to singing popular love songs from the grassland areas of the Tibetan region.

According to Tibetan traditions, people should not laugh, sing, or dance when someone has just died. As a result, the lama's attendant was very nervous, and those around him were also confused.

After Jamyang Shayba finished singing, he resumed reciting the phowa prayer, after which the service was completed.

Later, his attendant asked, "Why did you sing love songs today?"

The lama answered, "The two girls were famous singers before their deaths. Now that they had suddenly entered the bardo state, I could not bring back their consciousness no matter how hard I tried to recite the transference prayer. So, I had to attract them by singing love songs. They were drawn to the songs, allowing me to bring them back. While they focused on the songs, I managed to transfer their consciousness."

As you can see, if the lama performing the transference does not have highly developed realization, it is very difficult to transfer the consciousness of a bardo being. Patrul Rinpoche also said that at that time, the consciousness is like a wild dog wandering everywhere. Thus, it is quite meaningless to claim that transference can be performed by an ordinary person simply by summoning the consciousness back into the body after death.

Of course, it is definitely of great benefit to the deceased if someone with compassion and faith in the Three Jewels recites the name of Amitabha or mantras on their behalf. For instance, the young attendant showed compassion, allowing the consciousness of the bardo being to return. It is sufficient for the consciousness to return because, even if it cannot be transferred, at least it will not generate strong afflictions. Otherwise, the deceased may fall into a lower realm. As illustrated in this case, when the consciousness does return, it may be transferred to the Pure Land of Great Bliss through the unwavering power of the Buddha's words and the blessings of the sangha.

This instruction on transference is pertinent to us as well. When we are in

the bardo state and someone is performing the transference service for us, we should clearly recognize, “Now that I am in the bardo state, if I can follow the verses in the liturgy and transform my consciousness, I can be reborn in a pure land immediately.” By holding this thought, we can facilitate a swift rebirth in the Pure Land. The great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche noted, “In comparison to the dull consciousness of a living person, the consciousness of a bardo being is nine times more aware and highly volatile, allowing the bardo being to go wherever they wish.”

Having understood this, on one hand, we should remain altruistic while chanting prayers for the deceased, aiming to benefit them through pure recitation. On the other hand, we should pray that when we enter the bardo state, we can bring these instructions into our keen consciousness so that we can swiftly be reborn in the Land of Great Bliss.



Lesson 139

“Many people nowadays, who are lamas or tulkus ... The instructions are in two parts: first the training, and then the actual practice.” [page 353–357]

Let us continue to study the section on “transference performed for the dead with the hook of compassion.”

- ♦ **Those who have not attained liberation cannot transfer others’ consciousness**

When it comes to transferring the consciousness of others, Patrul Rinpoche believes that many who carry out such rituals—though called lamas or tulkus—often lack genuine spiritual attainment. Still, if they perform the transference with the love and compassion of bodhicitta, entirely free from selfish motives, it is indeed possible for them to truly help the deceased. In such cases, the power of bodhicitta alone can bring benefit to the deceased without obscuring their own minds.

However, anyone who has neither reached the level of a bodhisattva nor possessed altruistic motivation, and who performs the transference solely for personal gain—merely reciting the words and accepting a horse or other valuables as payment—is truly despicable.

The custom of offering a horse as payment still exists in the Tibetan region. If the most renowned tulku in a monastery performs the ritual of transference, he can receive the offering of a horse by simply reciting the transference liturgy once. However, if a person is unable to perform the transference but still accepts

the offering, it will create obstacles for their spiritual progress. Additionally, such transference brings no benefit to the deceased.

As it is said:

One who has not yet reached the dry ground of liberation
 But strives to guide others
 Is as contradictory as a drowning person
 Trying to save another who is also drowning.

If a person has not attained liberation but devotes themselves to guiding others, their two states—having not been liberated versus transferring others—are contradictory. In other words, they are unable to perform transference. This is akin to someone who is helplessly drowning; they cannot rescue others who are also drowning.

As you can see, to successfully transfer consciousness, the person performing the transference must meet very strict requirements. This is beyond the reach of an ordinary person who, nonetheless, can still provide certain benefits to the deceased. As mentioned earlier, as long as you have altruistic intentions, even if you have not reached the level of a bodhisattva, it is perfectly reasonable for you to benefit others by teaching the Dharma. Otherwise, very few people would be eligible to give teachings. Moreover, the Buddha never imposed such a requirement; he never stated that a teacher must be someone on the path of accumulation or the path of joining. The Buddha did emphasize that, under all circumstances, one must have the motivation of bodhicitta.

The same is true for the transference of consciousness. As ordinary beings, although we cannot be like sublime beings who can directly and truly perform transference, it does not mean that we are incapable of doing so. For example, when providing deathbed chanting assistance, well-intentioned lay practitioners can recite the phowa prayer or transference liturgy, which is definitely beneficial to the deceased. As mentioned in sutras, such as *The Original Vows of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva Sutra* and *The Sutra on the Contemplation of Buddha Amitayus*, recitations and transference are not only beneficial to the deceased but also to those who offer the service.

- ♦ After receiving funds on behalf of the deceased, one must make recitations and dedicate the merit

Today, some Chinese Buddhist temples charge specific fees for certain rituals. For instance, a specific amount must be paid to request a fire puja. When the sangha receives this payment, it signifies a commitment to the requester to perform the ritual properly. If the sangha fails in this duty, the deceased may not receive any benefit, leaving them to watch the sangha in helplessness, which can be quite unsettling.

Recently, the Bodhi Association¹²⁷ established a rule that when a lifelong member passes away, I will recite the Avalokiteshvara mantra one hundred times for them, a promise I intend to keep. Two days ago, I received the names of three such individuals, but I somehow forgot to recite the mantra for them. However, when I woke up this morning, I suddenly remembered and sat up to recite the mantra three hundred times. At that moment, I felt as if the three deceased individuals were staring at me. For me, reciting the mantra one hundred times is an easy task, but for them, even having it recited once on their behalf is very precious.

Whether as an individual, a sangha group, or a lay group, when you have promised to perform transference for the deceased, you should do so properly. It may be challenging to directly transfer the deceased to a pure land, but as long as you diligently chant the names of the buddhas and bodhisattvas and recite the Buddhist scriptures filled with blessing power, you will certainly benefit the deceased. If you accept the offering but do not engage in the corresponding recitation, it can lead to significant negative consequences.

As for me, I do not dare to use the money I receive from performing transference for myself. Instead, I will use the funds to pay someone to inscribe the Avalokiteshvara mantra on stones or to have the sangha recite prayers. I know I am unable to perform transference, but since I have received the money, I will dedicate it entirely to Buddhist rituals. It would be quite unsettling to be stared at by the deceased for doing nothing.

Here are a few such stories.

◉ The story of Tendzin Chöpel

Once, when the great master Tendzin Chöpel was circumambulating the sacred mountain of Tsari, he had a vision of a person for whom he had once performed a transference. In return, he received the offering of a horse. In his vision,

¹²⁷ It refers to the Buddhist group for laypeople who study Buddhism under the guidance of Khenpo Sodargye Rinpoche. The association was dissolved in December 2019.

the deceased person emerged from a lake of crimson blood and called out to Master Tendzin Chöpel by name, saying, “You accepted my horse but did not perform the transference for me properly. What am I supposed to do now?”

Feeling afraid, Tendzin Chöpel replied, “I dedicate the merit of my circumambulation of this sacred mountain to you.” With that, the vision disappeared.

Tendzin Chöpel, a realized being, had the deceased appear in his vision. While I do not share his level of realization, I awoke this morning with a peculiar feeling—or perhaps a distinct intuition—that the three individuals were waiting for me. So, I immediately recited the mantra three hundred times.

When Tendzin Chöpel dedicated the merit of his pilgrimage around Tsari to the deceased, the vision of that person vanished. In fact, this is like repaying a debt.

◉ The story of Gyurme Thekchok Tendzin

Even for a highly realized master, accepting offerings intended for the deceased without actually performing a ritual or practice to benefit them can create obstacles on their spiritual path.

When Gyurme Thekchok Tendzin, the second Dzogchen Rinpoche, passed away, Trime Shingkyong Gönpö was invited to lead the funeral ceremonies. For an entire day, he focused solely on rituals of purification and consciousness retrieval, repeatedly performing the transference, just as he would for the death of any ordinary person.

[Typically, a realized master does not need a ritual to bring back his consciousness or to purify demonic forces. Simply reciting *Liberation upon Wearing, The King of Aspiration Prayers*, or other prayers is sufficient, as they are not an ordinary being.]

The monks asked Trime Shingkyong Gönpö for clarification, and he explained: “Long ago, Dzogchen Rinpoche neglected to perform the ritual and dedication prayers for an individual on whose behalf a black horse had been offered. This individual was a notorious evil-doer. The failure to perform the ritual and dedication prayers caused the levels and paths to become somewhat obscured for Rinpoche. Now, he and I have joined forces to resolve the issue.” It is said that the evil-doer mentioned in this story was named Golok Tendzin.

If such a great master is subject to such an influence, we should exercise even greater caution. It is important to perform a dedication by reciting mantras not

only after receiving a substantial offering but also after even a small one made on behalf of a deceased person. I recall times when I was walking down the street, and people would give me cash, usually 10 or 20 yuan, with the names of the deceased written on them. Upon receiving the money, I would immediately recite the Avalokiteshvara mantra several times. Additionally, I made it a point not to use this money for myself. Instead, as I mentioned earlier, I would use it to have someone inscribe the Avalokiteshvara mantra on stones or to request the sangha to recite prayers.

There has always been a tradition in the Tibetan region: When a person dies, their family writes the person's name on a piece of paper and places it in an envelope along with some money, typically 8 or 10 yuan, depending on their means. They then offer each Dharma teacher one of these envelopes, requesting their transference service and blessing. This is a meaningful tradition. After the sangha or Dharma masters establish a connection with the deceased by accepting the offering, they can often dedicate the merit of teaching the Dharma to the deceased, which is of great benefit. As a monastic or practitioner, it is essential to properly perform dedication for the deceased upon receiving the offering, regardless of its size.

◉ The story of being reborn as a snake

Here is a story from *The Great Commentary of the Prayer of Sukhavati*:

Once, Thang Tong Gyalpo saw on a rock a large snake being incessantly gnawed by countless small frogs. Through his clairvoyance, the great master knew that in a previous life, the snake had been a monk who accepted many offerings from the faithful and funds on behalf of the deceased, but who rarely performed proper transference and dedication. Eventually, the monk was reborn as the snake, and all the small frogs had been his donors in that previous life.

As you can see, performing transference is not easy, and the principle of cause and effect never fails. Whenever the law of karma is mentioned, you may feel concerned or even frightened, which is a positive sign. It indicates that the Dharma has been internalized within you and is beginning to take effect.

We experienced this after receiving the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche's teaching on the *Sutra of a Hundred Actions*. We constantly worried, thinking, "This is not right; that is not okay. Will I fall into a lower realm when I die? What should I do?" Nevertheless, those who feel this way tend to remain cautious in their practice, which can actually be of great benefit throughout their lives.

In summary, even for high lamas or tulkus, it is of no benefit if they have received the possessions of the deceased but neither apply bodhicitta nor perform dedications, prayers, or rituals, thinking, “I am such a great lama, tulku, khenpo, or Dharma master, so I deserve others’ offerings.”

Situations were much better in ancient Tibet when Buddhism was flourishing and life was simpler. However, today there are many such lamas or tulkus. Think about this: You may have wealth, status, and fame in this lifetime, but what about the next? Once this life ends, everything could be completely different. Additionally, it is unlikely that you will return to this realm in the future.

Knowing how terrible it can be, why not be cautious about your actions in this life?

♦ Tulkus shouldn’t focus on accepting offerings

As Patrul Rinpoche commented, it is a serious mistake for those holding the title of great lamas or tulkus to accept offerings on behalf of the deceased while merely thinking, “I am such-and-such a great figure,” yet failing to cultivate bodhicitta or perform the necessary prayers, rituals, and dedications with genuine care and efficacy. Even prominent tulkus, recognized as the reincarnations of renowned masters, must relearn basic skills like reading, starting from the alphabet—just like anyone else. If they have forgotten how to read from their past lives, it is reasonable to assume they have also forgotten much of their previous experience in generation and completion stage practices.

I particularly appreciate this reasoning and have applied it on various occasions in the past. In other words, tulkus should possess great qualities, yet their incarnations often do not even remember how to read the alphabet, let alone recall all their qualities from past lives. If they lack qualities or have not yet attained realization through studying and practicing the Dharma in this life, it makes little sense for them to use their “tulku” title merely to accumulate offerings.

Nowadays, both laypeople and monastics in the Han area of China are fond of tulkus, which I have no objections to. Personally, I hold no grudges against any great masters or tulkus, but from a responsible perspective, I want to dissuade certain individuals from harming Buddhism or deceiving the faithful.

It is normal and acceptable if a lama or tulku occasionally acts imperfectly or displays a bit of selfishness. In this world, apart from Buddha Shakyamuni and the

genuine emanations of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, no one is perfect. However, when these imperfections become excessive, they can be detrimental.

For instance, a so-called Buddhist or even a renowned teacher may claim to engage in Dharma activities, but their actions may not align with Buddhism. Essentially, they exploit the titles of “tulku” or “lama” to deceive others for financial gain and engage in wrongdoing. Their actions yield no benefits whatsoever.

Many laypeople worship tulkus. Whenever they hear that someone was a notable figure in a past life, they cannot help but feel a sense of admiration. However, analyzing information about one’s previous life is challenging. As I mentioned on my Weibo, a Chinese social media platform similar to Twitter, when seeking a guru, one should examine whether the guru possesses the qualities of a qualified teacher in this life, rather than focusing on who they were in a past life. Buddha Shakyamuni never stated in any scripture that a qualified teacher must have been a notable figure in a previous life.

In fact, it is difficult for an ordinary person to know who others were in a previous life. Because of this, when individuals claim that they were Buddha Samantabhadra, Longchenpa, Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa, Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu, Mipham Rinpoche, Patrul Rinpoche, Thang Tong Gyalpo, Nagarjuna, Chandra-kirti, and so on in a past life—suggesting that all the great Indian and Tibetan masters have emanations in this life—it does not make sense. While I acknowledge that the emanations of the buddhas and bodhisattvas are indeed everywhere, is this truly the case concerning the past lives of those individuals?

My words may offend some, and I may face direct or indirect, even aggressive, backlash. However, my intention is for the sake of the Dharma and all living beings. As such, I offer my opinions and suggestions or send a warning message.

However, the fact that some individuals influence others by highlighting or even fabricating their past lives likely reflects the perspectives of many followers. Their viewpoint on this issue is the exact opposite of mine. They believe that when following a teacher, knowledge of the teacher’s past life is sufficient, so they do not feel the need to examine the teacher’s qualities in this life. However, as Patrul Rinpoche clearly stated, even a true tulku or lama must learn everything anew in this life.

This is indeed the case. Even important tulkus recognized as authentic incarnations of great teachers from the past must still relearn how to read, starting with

the alphabet. Why is that? It is because they forget everything after reincarnating. The thirty letters of the Tibetan alphabet are relatively easy, allowing individuals from different ethnic backgrounds to master them quickly as well.

However, the tulkus have even forgotten the art of reading, let alone the yogas of the generation and perfection stages. Due to the “confusion through rebirth,” even an authentic reincarnation of a great master must learn everything from scratch. For this reason, a tulku should not hastily take on disciples in this lifetime based solely on his title from a previous life.

Sadly, many so-called tulkus have done so. For this reason, we can understand why the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche never endorsed any tulku during his lifetime, which now stands as one of his significant contributions to Buddhism. In fact, Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche was more qualified, capable, and authoritative than anyone else in this regard, yet he chose not to do so.

Nowadays, there are individuals who have gone to the Han area of China and claimed to be tulkus endorsed by Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche. However, Dharma practitioners who have been around Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche for over twenty years know that he never endorsed any tulku. This reflects a responsible attitude toward Buddhism.

Of course, that does not mean I deny the existence of a tulku. There are indeed tulkus who are reincarnations of great masters from the past. All the lineages of Tibetan Buddhism, including Sakya, Kagyu, Nyingma, Gelug, and Jonang, have tulkus who are verified through Buddhist rituals and endorsed by eminent masters. However, even those tulkus should be mindful of their conduct.

I am not a tulku; I am merely a khenpo in name. However, as a khenpo, I feel frightened whenever I think of the offerings I have accepted. I believe I have accepted too many, which may lead to my rebirth in either a hell or a preta realm. I know I do not deserve these offerings, and often, after receiving them, I have not performed dedications properly. Given all these, I am so sure my next life will be awfully bad.

Therefore, those who just want to obtain offerings and even carry them out by hook or by crook should be cautious about their conduct. Otherwise, if they only regret it after things are done, it may be too late.

Therefore, Patrul Rinpoche says:

I wonder if it would be more beneficial for those tulkus to spend some time training in bodhicitta and learning about practice and retreats, rather than immediately seeking offerings as soon as they can ride a horse.

Patrul Rinpoche's remark is very sound. The law of karma is quite complex, making it difficult for an ordinary person to navigate it properly. Therefore, whether you are a prominent figure or not, you will not go wrong if you adhere to a vajra comment like this.

As an ordinary practitioner studying the Dharma, you may observe the conduct of others, from which you can discern what is right and what is wrong. By doing so, you will learn how to behave appropriately, which is essential. Otherwise, if you, as a Buddhist, simply follow others blindly in what to say and do, and if you are too naive or too extreme, you may struggle to demonstrate that Buddhism is the path of truth. That said, we should remain clear-sighted and embark on the path of right faith and wisdom.

♦ Ordinary transference using three metaphors

This kind of transference is referred to as “ordinary transference using three metaphors” or “the transference of consciousness into the teacher.” It also aligns with what the *Tantra of Immaculate Confession* describes as “the transference of the ball of light using sound at the moment of death.”

In the practice of “transference of the ball of light using sound at the moment of death,” you visualize your consciousness as a bindu circle of energy, and as you recite “Hik! Hik!”, it is transferred to a pure land. The practice we are discussing here, the ordinary transference using three metaphors, aligns with the instruction in that tantra. Furthermore, it is also in accord with certain Sutrayana practices.

This kind of transference practice is unnecessary for those who already have a high degree of realization, as they can achieve liberation through the transference to the Dharmakaya, Sambhogakaya, or Nirmanakaya.

◉ Death is a small enlightenment for a yogi

In fact, for those who have achieved a high degree of realization, “death” is merely a concept, as stated in the *Tantra of Immaculate Confession*:

“Death” is only a concept,

Something that leads to the realm of dakinis.

Once you go beyond this stage of perceiving “death” as a concept, your consciousness can be directly transferred to the realm of dakinis.

Therefore, death carries different meanings for different people. When a worldly person learns they have a terminal illness and are approaching death, they must be mentally tormented. When a lifelong Buddhist faces the same situation, whether monastic or layperson, they may still experience sadness. However, an adept yogi will not suffer from this at all, because death is a small enlightenment for them. As stated in the tantras:

The so-called death
Is a small enlightenment for a yogi.

While it may not be a “great enlightenment,” achieving a small enlightenment is still a significant accomplishment. So, if you have reached a certain level of realization, why feel sadness at the prospect of death? You are on the verge of attaining a small enlightenment—how wonderful!

Most true practitioners share this perspective. Those who have captured the stronghold of ultimate truth in their lifetime and have achieved mastery over birth and death still appear to die. For them, however, death is no different from moving from one place to another.

◉ Ordinary people need the ordinary transference using three metaphors

Of course, this mastery over birth and death is not attainable by everyone. What is most crucial for an ordinary person is to refrain from wrongdoing and engage in good deeds. Meanwhile, they should also cultivate the right mindset at the time of death.

Here is a story from *The Abhidharma Mahavibhasha Shastra*:

Once in the city of Shravasti, there lived two men. One man always did virtuous deeds, and the other had been committing vicious deeds. Upon his death, the virtuous man saw scenes of hell because the karmic effect he was supposed to experience in the next life ripened earlier. He was a bit surprised, thinking, “I have been doing good for all my life and never committed any wrongdoing, so why did the scenes of hell appear?” Then he thought, “It may be that the karmic effect that

was supposed to happen in the next life ripened earlier, so I don't have to experience it anymore."

Therefore, he happily accepted the scenes of hell. Because of his unwavering faith in the law of cause and effect, the scenes of hell vanished on the spot, and scenes of the god realm appeared. In this way, he was reborn as a celestial being.

When the vicious man was about to die, he saw scenes of the god realm. This was because he had been committing wrongdoings throughout his life, and the karmic effect he was supposed to experience in the next life ripened in advance. He thought, "I have done nothing but wrongdoings in this life. I have never committed positive actions. If there is indeed a principle of cause and effect, I should fall into a lower realm instead of being reborn in the god realm. Why am I seeing scenes of the god realm?"

Then he said, "The principle of cause and effect doesn't exist!" Because of his wrong thought about cause and effect, the scenes of the god realm vanished, and scenes of hell appeared. In this way, he immediately fell into hell.

From this story, on the one hand, we should understand that the principle of cause and effect never fails. Whether you commit virtuous or vicious deeds, the corresponding good or bad results will never be wrong. As a Buddhist, you believe in rebirth, so you cut off wrongdoings and engage in good deeds. As a result, you are peaceful at the time of death and will be happier in the next life.

Those who reject the existence of rebirth, including some renowned scientists, hold a nihilistic view of life, believing that death denotes nothingness, which makes them very fearful at the time of death. Additionally, if a person commits many wrongdoings and lacks virtuous deeds, their afterlife will be filled with more suffering.

On the other hand, this story emphasizes the importance of one's thoughts at the time of death. Those experienced in the essential practices of the generation and perfection stages can utilize one of the three practices for death, the bardo state, or rebirth to transfer their consciousness into one of the three kayas. However, for those lacking such experience, even if they have engaged in positive actions throughout their lifetime, they may still become frazzled at the moment of death. Worse yet, they may become deluded, and once they lose their mindfulness, they are unable to transfer their consciousness.

As it is said, individuals lacking sufficient training can be guided through

the practice of transference. This practice is vital for practitioners who have not yet attained stability on the path or who have committed many serious negative actions.

◉ Liberated by the ordinary transference using three metaphors

Anyone who holds these pith instructions will not fall into the lower realms, no matter how grave their negative actions may be. Even those who have committed a crime that warrants immediate retribution—causing them to plunge directly into the lower realms—will definitely not have a bad rebirth if they apply this teaching. According to the Sutrayana teachings, no crime is more severe than the five crimes with immediate retribution. Nevertheless, those who use this teaching of ordinary transference can still be liberated.

As it is said in a tantra:

You might have killed a brahmin every day
Or committed the five crimes with immediate retribution,
But you will still be liberated by this path.
None of those crimes will defile you.¹²⁸

A brahmin is a practitioner who seeks the state of Brahma, comparable to a priest in Christianity or a Taoist in Taoism. As you know, the karmic effects of killing an ordinary person differ from those of killing a practitioner, with the latter resulting in more severe negative consequences. This example is used in the verse to illustrate the power of this transference practice. In other words, even if you were to kill a brahmin every day or commit the five crimes with immediate retribution, you would still attain liberation through this practice of ordinary transference and would not be tainted by your negative actions.

And the tantra also says:

Whoever practices the transference,
Concentrating on the opening above the other nine¹²⁹
Will not be defiled by his negative acts,

¹²⁸ Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2010, page 355.

¹²⁹ The aperture of Brahma.

And will be reborn in a pure Buddha-field.¹³⁰

The nine openings on a person are the gateways to samsara. Above these openings is the aperture of Brahma, the place where, if consciousness comes out, the person will not be tainted by negative actions and will be reborn in a pure Buddha-field.

It is also said in another tantra:

At the feet of your father, the qualified teacher
Enthroned on a sun and moon on the crown of your head,
Follow the white silk pathway of your central channel,
And you will be liberated, even if you have committed the five
crimes with immediate retribution.¹³¹

At the moment of death, visualize a throne with a sun disc and a moon disc above your head, on which sits your root guru, looking at you with a smile and great compassion. Next, follow the pathway of your central channel and visualize your consciousness as the seed syllables “*Ah*,” “*Hum*,” “*Dhib*,” or “*Hri*,” which ascend through your central channel and dissolve into the guru’s heart. Then, the guru gradually rises to a pure Buddha-field. Those who practice this transference can attain liberation, even if they have committed a crime with immediate retribution.

Therefore, I hope you will value this practice because, at the end of your practice, the ultimate main practice is the transference of consciousness. To put it bluntly, the future of each one of us is death. Maybe it does not sound auspicious, but this is the reality. At the time of death, if you can use this practice, then everything in your future life will be very different. Of course, whether you can apply the transference practice at the moment of death depends on your present efforts.

Khenpo Karpo is a practitioner from whom I received teachings. He attained the rainbow body, and many auspicious signs appeared when he passed away. His story can be found in my book titled *Short Stories of Rainbow-Body Accomplishers in Mantrayana*. Although he had attained a high level of realization, he would

¹³⁰ Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2010, page 356.

¹³¹ Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2010, page 356.

practice phowa every night. When he called out “Hik! Hik!”, people outside his cabin could hear him.

If a great practitioner like Khenpo Karpo chose to practice phowa every day, we should certainly follow his example. This transference practice of phowa should be engaged in throughout our lives. If you do not practice it now and merely receive the teachings like a scholar would treat ordinary knowledge, you may not be able to utilize it at the moment of death. If you truly wish to be liberated from samsara, you should regard this practice as the most meaningful endeavor of your life and commit to it wholeheartedly.

Once you have mastered the practice, as mentioned earlier, you will be liberated regardless of the severity of the crimes you have committed.

♦ A way to Buddhahood without meditating

These instructions on the profound path of transference are therefore a method for attaining Buddhahood without the need for meditation and a secret path that forcefully brings liberation to those burdened with heavy negative karma.

Here, “without the need for meditation” does not mean you do not have to engage in any practice. Rather, it means that you do not have to engage in practices with strenuous efforts for three asamkhyā kalpas before attaining liberation. As long as you have well practiced this simple instruction of transference, you can achieve liberation. It can even bring forceful liberation to those who have committed serious wrongdoings.

Therefore, compared to the practices in the Pure Land School of Sutrayana, which consist of supreme methods of recitation, this practice of phowa encompasses the pith instruction that, without a doubt, can directly transfer your consciousness in an effortless manner.

Therefore, it is a great pity if you do not practice it after coming across such a great method of transference. It is as if you find a wish-fulfilling jewel but just put it aside without using it. What a great waste!

◉ Do apply this transference practice for your liberation

Buddha Vajradhara said:

You might have killed a brahmin every day
Or committed the five acts with immediate retribution,

But once you encounter these instructions,
You will, beyond any doubt, be liberated.¹³²

This verse is similar to the previously mentioned scriptural evidence.

You may reflect as follows: before encountering the Dharma, even if you have not killed a brahmin every day, you have certainly committed many wrongdoings. In addition to other negative actions, the number of killings you have participated in at the dining table is substantial. Furthermore, you must have committed numerous intentional or unintentional killings since childhood. Other inherent misdeeds of your body, speech, and mind are also countless. You may have also engaged in many misdeeds prohibited by the Buddha due to strong afflictions or a lack of mindfulness and vigilance after you began pursuing the Dharma and took the precepts of individual liberation, the bodhisattva vows, or samayas.

If we can emulate venerable Atisha, who would promptly confess his misdeeds—even wrong thoughts—by making a mandala offering with his wooden mandala base, then our practice can truly advance. However, can we replicate his actions? Unfortunately, we cannot. As ordinary beings, we often fall short. We excel at committing misdeeds, but when it comes time to confess or engage in virtuous actions, we tend to become slack and unmotivated, rendering our practice ineffective.

Therefore, this transference practice could not be more suitable for us. At the time of death, the only thing we can rely on is this practice.

In the following teaching, we'll learn the actual practice of this transference. Here, we first need to understand its importance. Those who have come across this practice possess a supreme opportunity, so I hope you will appreciate it.

Recently, I reviewed my notes and discovered that the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche had previously taught us the transference practice of phowa. This teaching took place near the sacred Khuwu Mountain in Dawu County, attended by only five or six Chinese sangha members. Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche dedicated six days to this teaching. Upon returning from the trip, I translated the root text and delivered the corresponding teaching, as well as transcribed Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche's Tibetan oral teaching.

During his teaching, Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche remarked, "It is a great pity if

¹³² Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2010, page 356.

you have encountered such a supreme instruction but fail to put it into practice. Most great practitioners have achieved mastery over their death, and even an ordinary practitioner can find ease at the time of death and attain liberation, especially by using this transference practice.”

◉ Padmasambhava’s path without meditation

Guru Rinpoche Padmasambhava said:

Methods that lead to Buddhahood through meditation exist in
all (traditions),
But I alone know a path to Buddhahood without meditation.

When Milarepa first encountered Rongton Lhaga, an adept of the Great Perfection, and learned that fortunate beings do not even need to meditate and will achieve liberation simply by hearing the teachings, he just stayed in bed sleeping without meditating after receiving the empowerments and instructions, waiting for his attainment of Buddhahood. If you also think this way, such as, “Now that I have encountered Padmasambhava and his path without meditation, I must be very fortunate,” and just idle away your time, this is completely wrong.

The term “without meditation,” as just said, means that one does not have to engage in ascetic practices for kalpas. However, if you want to apply this transference at the time of death, you must put it into practice throughout your lifetime. Doing no meditation on it at all will not work.

Therefore, we must put it into real practice. That said, practicing this method of transference is indeed different from practicing other instructions. On the one hand, Buddha Amitabha has enormous aspirational power, and on the other hand, the instructions from Padmasambhava and all our lineage masters have extraordinary blessings.

◉ The good connection with the Dharma

Especially when we encounter pith instructions on transference, such as *Liberation in the Intermediate State through Hearing*, *Liberation in the Intermediate State upon Wearing*, and phowa, it truly creates a virtuous connection and a great blessing that we should rejoice in.

The great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche said in a song of realization:

The six realms of samsara are filled with pains and pleasures that come and go.

They constantly alternate and shift like the unpredictable weather in spring. How fickle and unreliable they are!

Only the fortunate ones whose past actions have created favorable conditions for practicing the authentic Dharma can always remain in a state of happiness. How joyful!

This is indeed the case. Worldly people are ensnared by the pains and pleasures of samsara. They may be happy today but miserable tomorrow; they may be wealthy today but bankrupt tomorrow. Life is filled with constant changes and fluctuations, so there is no true happiness to be found. In contrast, a true practitioner will hardly experience such emotional ups and downs. Through their Dharma practice, they can transform everything into happiness, which reflects the principle of interdependence in life.

Here is another instruction from the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche:

At a young age, I was called upon by the melodious song of the cuckoo birds of good fortune and came to the Dharma garden of my guru, Thubga Rinpoche. Thus, I enjoyed the scrumptious nectar of Mahayana Buddhism. The initial cause of all this is the fact that I encountered the Dharma in my childhood.

I believe this is true for many of you as well. The favorable conditions created by your past actions are like the songs of cuckoo birds that attracted you to Larung Gar, inspiring you to study and practice Mahayana teachings at a young age. You undoubtedly possess extraordinary causes and conditions that have led to this.

Generally speaking, if you establish a good connection with the Dharma at a young age, even if later your practice is not very successful, your lifelong view and conduct will not regress. In contrast, if you encounter an evil dharma at a young age and befriend bad people, your practice in this life will be affected. Therefore, you must appreciate any good connection with the Dharma. While you are alive, you can tame and pacify your mind through the Dharma and lead a fulfilling life. When you die, you can be reborn in a pure Buddha-field through Dharma practice and attain even greater happiness.

Of course, if you have not encountered the Dharma at a young age and

only begin to pursue it in middle or old age, you should appreciate it even more. Especially if you have practiced phowa well, you will undoubtedly have a favorable next life. Nowadays, many people place great importance on “signs.” For example, when a practitioner dies, they ask, “Is there any auspicious sign?” or “Are there any relics after the cremation?” In fact, whether such signs exist or not is not crucial. The most crucial thing for you is how you begin your next life.

The moment you die in this life is the starting point of your next life. If you have done good throughout your life and pass away peacefully, you can expect a happy beginning in the next life, transitioning from this happiness to another. Conversely, if you have committed wrongdoings throughout your life and pass away in fear, you will face the flames of hell at the start of your next life. Once this happens, when can you expect liberation?

Therefore, I hope you can all appreciate the good connection you have established with the Dharma. Regardless of how you have practiced in this life, it is essential to master this transference practice and use it to create the best start for your next life.

♦ **Instructions from three great masters**

◉ The instruction of Naropa

Naropa said:

The nine openings are windows to samsara
But one opening leads to Mahamudra.
By closing the nine openings and opening the one,
There is no doubt it leads to liberation.

◉ The instruction of Marpa

Marpa said:

I have practiced transference until now,
Repeating the training over and over again.
Even if my death is ordinary, there is no cause for fear—
Steady practice has brought me perfect confidence.

Once, when Marpa and his disciples were walking along a river, they saw a

hunting dog chasing a deer. In a panic, the deer jumped into the river and drowned. Marpa intended to transfer his consciousness into the deer to revitalize it, so he instructed his disciples, “Some of you block the dog from capturing the deer, while others look after my body.” After saying this, he transferred his consciousness into the deer. A moment later, the deer that had previously drowned jumped out of the water, came to Marpa’s courtyard, and collapsed.

Marpa came back to life and went to see the drowned deer with his disciples. At that moment, the hunters arrived and wanted to take the deer away. Marpa laughed and said, “If I had not transferred my consciousness into the deer, it would have been swept away by the water. Therefore, you cannot take it.” The disciples then explained to the hunters how Marpa had performed the practice.

The hunters didn’t believe it, so they said, “If you can perform it again and show us, we’ll offer you the deer.”

Marpa did it again. The deer revived on the spot, walked a short distance, and collapsed again when Marpa came back to his consciousness.

In great awe, the hunters developed a fervent faith and offered the deer and other gifts to Marpa. After making their offerings, they requested teachings, prompting Marpa to sing a song of realization about “having perfect confidence.” It is this song that contains the above-quoted verse—“Steady practice has brought me perfect confidence.”

◉ The instruction of Milarepa

Milarepa said:

These pith instructions on transference through dissolving¹³³
 Are the essential guide to shattering the bardo state.
 Is there anyone who holds such a path?
 When the life-energy enters the central channel, one experiences
 bliss—
 One will enter the Dharmadhatu, Emaho!

After following Marpa and undertaking ascetic practice for a long time, Milarepa received Marpa’s empowerment of Samvara. During the empowerment,

¹³³ The practitioner’s consciousness dissolves into the heart of Buddha Amitabha.

Marpa invited Milarepa into the mandala and pointed to the Samvara mandala, saying, “This is called the symbolic mandala. The actual mandala is there. Look!”

Pointing to the sky, Marpa made the mandala of its sixty-two deities clearly appear. Milarepa was able to see the twenty-four supreme Buddha-fields, thirty-two auspicious scenes, eight great charnel grounds, dakinis, and other surrounding sublime beings. At that moment, Milarepa was filled with fervent faith and bliss.

Marpa, along with the deities and the sublime assembly, said, “Now you have the secret name of Shepa Dorje.”¹³⁴ This is how Milarepa received the name.

As recorded in *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa*, when Milarepa was staying at the Red Rock Height of Drin, a monk named Dre Dun, who was greatly impressed by his fame, came to visit him. Upon reaching Milarepa’s cave, the monk saw only a cooking pot and nothing else. He thought, “How is it that there is not even a single page of Buddhist scripture or an image of Buddha here? Given the miserable life he is living now, I wonder what will happen to him when he dies.”

Milarepa knew what the monk was thinking and said, “Venerable Monk, you need not worry about that. I have the most extraordinary image of the Buddha and the scriptures. At the moment of my death, I will have no regrets and will be very happy.” Then, he sang a song of realization with the following verses:

My body is the sacred mandala itself,
Where the buddhas of the three times reside.
.....
I use the “ink” of great wisdom,
Writing the words of the five senses.
All appearances are the Dharmakaya.
There is no need for scriptures—my heart is at ease.

Hearing this, the monk realized that Milarepa indeed possessed miraculous powers, thinking, “This also confirms that the other claims about him must be true.” Therefore, he developed a fervent faith in Milarepa and earnestly requested to be his disciple.

Recognizing that this monk was well-endowed, Milarepa bestowed empowerment and transmitted pith instructions before asking him to meditate. After putting the instructions into practice, the monk experienced profound bliss and

¹³⁴ It means “Adamantine Laughter.”

returned to Milarepa, saying, “In the past, I was strongly attached to wealth. But now, seeing how completely free you are from attachment, I too wish to follow your example and live in retreat in the mountains for the long term.”

Hearing this, Milarepa was very happy and sang the song of *The Eight Wondrous Joys*, which describes a practitioner’s joy and freedom. The quoted verse pertains to the practice of transference in the bardo stage. Specifically, the pith instruction on dissolving one’s consciousness in the heart of Buddha Amitabha serves as the guide that can overcome the bardo state.

Hearing this song, Dre Dun the monk and the other disciples were greatly uplifted and inspired. Dre Dun then requested guidance on the view, meditation, action, and fruition, which are easy to understand and practice.

Today, we have come to understand the importance of the transference practice, which serves as the essential guide to ending samsara. However, how many of you can truly apply it at the moment of death? In the next hundred years, some individuals will experience an auspicious death by applying this instruction at that critical moment, while others may struggle to utilize it and, worse yet, may generate misguided thoughts along the way, ultimately falling into a lower realm.

So, I hope you will appreciate this practice as well as your opportunities to practice this instruction on transference.



Lesson 140

“Using the explanations on transference that you have received ... are the same whether you are training yourself in it or using it at the actual moment of death.” [page 357–359]

Now, let us move on to the practical instructions for transference.

The instructions consist of two parts: first, the training; and second, the actual practice.

2.3.2. PRACTICAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR TRANSFERENCE

2.3.2.1. Training for Transference

We should begin training for transference while we are still in good health and have not yet faced a serious illness.

The practice of transferring consciousness is called *phowa* in Tibetan. During our pilgrimage trip to Mount Wutai, a Han Chinese monk wanted to request the *phowa* teaching from the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche and asked me to translate his request.

At that time, I was not familiar with the Buddhist terminology in Chinese, and also, the phonetic sound of *phowa* means both “transference” and “belly” in Tibetan. So, when he mentioned “*phowa, phowa*,” I did not quite understand. He repeated it several times, and eventually, I realized he was requesting the instruction on transference.

No matter how you are living your life, at the time of death, what you need most is phowa. You may not be concerned about illness and death when everything is going well and you are happy, or you may not have time to think about it when you are too busy with family and work. However, once you receive a terminal diagnosis, such as late-stage cancer, you will have no choice but to confront your impending death and the next life.

If you believe in the existence of future lives and the Pure Land, you should choose to practice phowa. This is because when death arrives, you must set aside everything you are attached to, including family, friends, fame, wealth, and even your body in this world. In such a situation, what can you truly rely on? The answer is the practice that is most beneficial for your next life.

Perhaps someone might ask, “If I practice phowa now, will it alleviate my suffering in this life?”

In fact, the goal of phowa practice is to alleviate suffering in this life and in many lives to come. Compared to the suffering you may experience in future lives, the suffering you are currently enduring is relatively insignificant. If you wish to be free from present suffering, you can choose any available method; however, if you desire to be free from suffering life after life, at the moment of death, you must transfer your consciousness to a place of rebirth in one of the pure lands.

The sufferings in samsara are excruciating. Not to mention the suffering in the lower realms, the sufferings in the human realm alone—the suffering of birth, old age, sickness, and death; the suffering of suffering; the suffering of change; the pervasive suffering; the suffering of not getting what one desires; and more—are already unbearable.

Therefore, to be completely free from all sufferings in samsara, we should train for transference and ultimately achieve rebirth in the Pure Land.

♦ Train yourself over and over again

After receiving the instructions on transference from a teacher, we should train ourselves over and over again with diligence until the signs of success appear.

Being diligent is essential, even for achieving small goals. Take the small business owners at Larung Gar, for example: to earn a living, they must rise at 4 a.m. for work. If a practitioner applies the same level of diligence to their Dharma practice, regardless of who they are, they will have perfect confidence at the time of

death. That said, among all the practitioners listening to my teachings, how many of you wake up at 4 a.m. for Dharma practice?

A Dharma fellow recently returned from his hometown and told me, “There are many stores and factories near my home where people are still working at 3 a.m.” This appears to be the reality for many as they strive to make a living today. Whether in bustling cities or rural areas, people are putting in considerable effort to earn a modest income.

Yet, what they seek through this hard work is merely a better life that lasts only a few decades. What a trivial goal! Nevertheless, they are willing to exert themselves for it. As Buddhists, our goal is far more profound, centered on future lives and liberation—no other pursuit can compare. But are we truly putting in the same level of effort toward this goal? Perhaps not.

Therefore, we Buddhists must motivate ourselves in the course of our practice. Especially before signs of success appear in our transference practice, we must train ourselves over and over again with diligence, for as many years as necessary.

In the course of your practice, one important thing to understand is this: when your body and mind are still relatively healthy, and your channels, energies, and essences remain intact and vigorous, it is difficult to rely solely on the transference practice to be directly reborn in the Pure Land of Great Bliss.

What does this mean? It means that you cannot “commit suicide” through transference practice. When feeling depressed, some Dharma practitioners may fervently attempt to practice phowa, calling out “Phat! Phat!” loudly in the hope of transferring their consciousness and ending their life. They hesitate to adopt conventional methods of suicide, such as taking sleeping pills or cutting their wrists, believing that phowa is the best form of euthanasia and practicing it out of desperation.

However, transferring consciousness in such circumstances is quite challenging. Why is this the case? It is because your current physical condition may not permit it. While you can practice phowa and become familiar with it, actually achieving the transference before the signs of impending death appear is not easy.

This is the vajra speech of Patrul Rinpoche, and I hope you will remember it. The entire text of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* is so precious that no single phrase can be discarded. You should uphold everything in the text.

♦ Training for transference is important

You cannot actually achieve the transference during your daily training for it. However, once you reach your final moment due to terminal illness or extreme old age, it becomes much easier.

Consider the fruit on a tree as an example: it is difficult to pick in the summer while it is still growing. I once visited Barkam County and saw children trying to knock apples down with a long stick. However, the apples were not ripe yet, so no matter how hard they tried, none fell to the ground. In contrast, when the apples are ripe and ready to fall in autumn, a gentle brush of your clothing against them is enough to make them drop from the branch.

Likewise, when feeling depressed, no matter how many times you call out “Phat!”, there is no way to actually transfer consciousness. However, when you are dying, you can easily apply the practice and successfully transfer consciousness.

Of course, this also depends on your training for transference throughout your lifetime, as well as your ability to remember to apply it at the moment of death. If you do not value this instruction and fail to put it into practice, treating it merely as ordinary knowledge, then when death arrives, you will struggle to recall this transference practice. This is because your mind may be clouded at that time, and confusing scenes of the next life may emerge.

Therefore, you must train for transference during your lifetime. With the power of consistent practice, you will not only remember the practice at the time of death but also be able to apply it effectively and smoothly.

Nevertheless, I know this is easier said than done. While I often discuss transference, whether I can apply it to my own death remains uncertain. If I do not use it, I will be like a deaf person playing a musical instrument, claiming, “My music can entertain you,” even though I cannot hear it myself. That said, it is still beneficial for me to share the instructions on transference with you.

Alongside your other Dharma studies, it is essential to engage in the practice of transference. Without this preparation, when death arrives, your world will be turned upside down, and your consciousness will have to let go of everything familiar and journey alone into an unfamiliar place. In that moment, you will encounter an unprecedented experience. Overwhelmed by fear and anxiety, you may come to realize that crying and wailing are of no help, regardless of who you are, and that your superficial understanding of the Dharma will be ineffective.

Then what can be of help? It is your ongoing training for transference. This training should be repeated throughout your lifetime, similar to how you should become familiar with weapons before entering battle, memorize your lines and actions before performing on stage, or train rigorously in your sport before competing. Have you noticed the effort that worldly people typically invest in rehearsals or training in pursuit of fame and honor? They engage in training tens of thousands of times!

In comparison to their perseverance, we Buddhists may feel embarrassed about our own Dharma practice. We might believe we are practicing diligently, but when compared to these worldly individuals, we are actually lacking in diligence.

Therefore, I hope you will place great importance on phowa and engage in consistent practice. Once the signs of successful practice appear, you may practice it occasionally to stabilize your practice. When the time of death arrives, you can immediately apply what you have practiced and directly transfer your consciousness.

This practice of transference is truly extraordinary. Of course, there are many similar practices of transference in Vajrayana teachings that those familiar with tantric teachings must acknowledge. In Chinese Buddhism, *The Sutra on the Contemplation of Buddha Amitayus* lists nine kinds of transference that correspond to practitioners' levels of faculties. However, it does not address the specific kind of transference in which practitioners with the sharpest faculties rest in the natural state and directly transfer their consciousness. Although not mentioned in this sutra, it is also part of Buddhist teaching.

2.3.2.2. Actual Transference

Then, when is the time to put transference into actual practice?

When the signs of impending death appear, and you clearly know that death is unavoidable and the process of dissolution has begun, it is time to put transference into actual practice. At any other time, you must not attempt to do so; otherwise, it is equivalent to committing suicide.

Suicide is a common occurrence in our world today. Many individuals are mentally vulnerable, and when confronted with challenges related to family, relationships, work, or life in general, they may feel that life has lost its purpose. However, life offers multiple pathways, and if there were only one, it would be

easy to feel trapped when that path becomes obstructed. In truth, this is not the reality we live in.

It is especially unwise for a Buddhist to attempt suicide through an actual transference. Naturally, monastics typically do not engage in such acts. There are not many monastics in this society, and it is rare to hear of them committing suicide. This is because a true monastic does not have a stronghold of worldly preoccupations; thus, how could they commit suicide?

As for lay practitioners, I believe that once you embark on the Dharma path, you should distinguish yourself from non-Buddhists. Why is that? It is because, as you begin to internalize the wisdom in the Dharma, you will gradually become more open-minded and tolerant. Therefore, how could you then desire to commit suicide?

Some Western philosophy may not encompass the same depth of views as Eastern philosophy and Buddhism. However, when Westerners apply those philosophical principles to psychotherapy, they can enhance people's mental health. If this is the case, why should we Buddhists, who have learned the wisdom of the Dharma, choose the narrow path of suicide?

Therefore, you should not abandon this human life. Instead, you should use it to accumulate merit for future lives or, as previously mentioned, to train for transference in order to achieve actual transference when death arrives. Otherwise, regardless of the method you choose to end your life, you may escape suffering in this life, but what awaits you may not be happiness in the next life. Due to the karmic consequences of your negative actions in taking your own life, you may immediately encounter various ominous signs that bring further suffering after suicide. Furthermore, once you fall into a lower realm, it may be a very long and unpredictable time before you regain the opportunity to live as a human again. Therefore, please consider this carefully.

Moreover, performing transference at the wrong time also generates severe faults. As it says in the tantras:

Perform transference when the time is right;

To do so prematurely is to kill the deities.¹³⁵

¹³⁵ In Vajrayana teachings, the body is regarded as a sacred mandala of deities. Therefore, performing transference before the appropriate time is seen as prematurely ending one's life, thereby destroying the mandala.

Therefore, if a practitioner leaves this world before the right time by performing transference, they have committed the fault of killing deities. The Vinaya also states that a monk has committed a “degenerating downfall” if he takes his own life. Therefore, it is not permitted in Buddhism to perform transference at an inappropriate time.

When is the right time to perform transference? It is after the signs of impending death have already appeared.

♦ Three types of dissolution

The signs of impending death refer to the process of dissolution. There are many stages in this process, but to make it easy to understand, the stages can be grouped into three main categories: the dissolution of the five sense faculties, the dissolution of the four elements, and the phases of clarity, increase, and attainment.

It is essential to understand these stages of dissolution. Without this knowledge, you might miss the optimal moment to apply the practice of transference. Of course, if death is sudden and unnatural, the sequential process of dissolution will not occur, as consciousness leaves the body in an instant. In such cases, it is best to use the method of swift transference.

Another situation arises when an elderly individual is unable to recognize the signs of impending death because they pass away while sleeping, reciting prayers, or eating. I have encountered such cases at the Buddhist laity center in my hometown. This type of death does not involve the suffering typically associated with dying and is considered a good death. However, the issue is that the individual may be unable to perform transference.

When a person is ill, their condition often acts as a reminder. This prompts the individual to reflect on the practice of transference and to be more attentive to signs of impending death. As a result, they may find it easier to manage their transference.

◉ The dissolution of the five sense faculties

In Tibetan tradition, when a person approaches death, it is customary to invite monks to gather and recite prayers. The dissolution of the five senses begins when the monks’ recitation sounds like a vague hum, with individual syllables becoming indistinguishable, or when surrounding voices seem distant, as if coming from afar,

and their words can no longer be understood. This signals the fading of auditory consciousness.

[If you have been ill for a long time and are temporarily unable to hear clearly, this may not indicate impending death. Be careful not to misinterpret the situation.]

When forms can no longer be seen clearly and everything appears blurred, it indicates that visual consciousness is nearing its end.

When the senses of smell, taste, and touch also fade away and reach their final dissolution, that is the appropriate time to receive guidance for transference.

[If you have a cold or another health issue that results in diminished sensations, you do not need to worry that you are nearing death. The obvious signs of impending death can be recognized by you, as mentioned here.]

At this moment, if a qualified teacher is present, the dying person may request the empowerment of one thousand buddhas. Alternatively, if the dying person has received the empowerment of the Great Perfection and has engaged in the corresponding practice or has even developed familiarity with the view of primordial purity—despite being unable to remain in that state at this moment—they may ask the teacher or a Dharma friend with pure observance of precepts to point out the pristine nature of mind. As stated in *Lama Yangtik*:

Rest in the state of luminosity you are recognizing at this moment. Do not regress. Take the stronghold of the natural state...

After receiving such a pointing-out instruction over and over again, one will be able to keep it in mind. This is similar to how a king's servants listen attentively and remember the king's commands. Likewise, a dying person is very likely to pay close attention to their guru's or Dharma fellow's instructions and will clearly retain them in their mind.

Even if the dying person cannot perform the aforementioned actions, those around them should keep a close watch. When the dying person's external breath is about to cease and they can no longer move, it is the right moment to seek assistance from capable monks or Dharma friends for transferring their consciousness or for deathbed chanting support.

This is the dissolution of the five sense faculties. Consider this: all the sense

faculties and sensations you are currently clinging to will eventually undergo this process of dissolution.

◉ The dissolution of the four elements

Next, when the inner element of flesh begins to dissolve into the outer element of earth, it brings a sensation like falling into a deep hole. According to the *Treasury of Abhidharma*, a person's inner elements of flesh, bones, and other parts of solidity correspond to the outer element of earth. As these inner elements dissolve, a sense of heaviness arises, as if being pressed by a massive weight. At this stage, the dying person may ask to be lifted up or have their pillow elevated.

At this moment, an ordinary person may feel frightened, while a practitioner remains unafraid due to their preparation. As Milarepa expressed in his vajra song:

Out of fear of death, I went into retreat in the mountains.
Over and over again I meditated on death's unpredictable
coming,
And took the stronghold of the deathless' unchanging nature;
Now I have been long free from the fear of dying!

Milarepa was indeed an exemplary practitioner. Some of you are also doing very well. Although you are still young and had a promising career before ordination, once you embark on the Dharma path, you soon realize that no matter how high your salary is or how attractive you may be, you cannot escape the inevitability of death. You come to understand that instead of living a mundane and trivial life, you should seek solitude and engage in Dharma practices in pursuit of liberation while you are still in good physical and mental condition. When it is time to leave this world, you will have complete confidence and be at great ease.

I believe that many people choose to practice Dharma or take ordination because of this very kind of reflection. With such contemplation, combined with diligent practice, when the moment of death arrives, they will surely experience neither fear nor suffering.

After the flesh has dissolved into the earth element, the blood then dissolves into the outer water element, leading to salivation and a runny nose.

Next, the body's heat element dissolves into the outer fire element. The dying person's mouth and nostrils feel dry, and heat begins to leave the body, starting

from the extremities. In some cases, vapor may emerge from the crown of the head at this stage.

The last stage involves the inner breath dissolving into the outer air element. According to tantric teachings, a human has five kinds of energy: the upward-moving energy resides in the upper body and governs breathing; the downward-clearing energy is located in the lower body and controls the actions of evacuation; the fire-accompanying energy can be found in the middle of the body and regulates body temperature and food intake; the all-pervading energy oversees all bodily movements; and the life-supporting energy sustains one's life.

These are the five kinds of outer energy. There are also five kinds of inner energy, five kinds of secret energy, and so on, which are detailed in *Finding Rest in the Nature of the Mind*, *Treasury of Word and Meaning*, and other teachings.

As the inner breath, or energy, element dissolves into the outer air element, the other four kinds of energies—the upward-moving energy, the downward-clearing energy, the fire-accompanying energy, and the all-pervading energy—dissolve into the life-supporting energy. Inhalation becomes difficult, while exhalation turns into a panting release from the lungs through the throat.

Then, all the blood in the body converges into the life channel, and three drops trickle into the heart's center, one after the other. After releasing three long sighs, the outer breath abruptly ceases.

[Some individuals may only take one last long sigh. For example, some patients who have been very ill for an extended period may suddenly cease to breathe after one long sigh.]

At this point, a person is typically considered dead. In the field of medicine, be it Chinese medicine or Western medicine, there are criteria to determine the moment of death. However, these criteria are limited to the physical aspect.

Buddhism not only addresses this physical aspect but also offers a clear explanation of how consciousness departs from the body, undergoes the bardo stage, enters a womb, or is transferred to a pure land. This explanation of consciousness is extraordinary and is not found in secular writings or the doctrines of other religions.

Therefore, not to mention other Buddhist teachings, just the fact that we have had the opportunity to understand the process of dying properly is something we should feel extremely fortunate about.

◉ The phases of clarity, increase and attainment

When the outer breath ceases, the phases of clarity, increase and attainment start.

The phase of clarity: the white element or “semen” received from the father rapidly descends from the crown of the head. As the outward sign, one perceives a whiteness resembling a clear sky illuminated by moonlight or a flash of white lightning. As the inward sign, one experiences clarity of consciousness, and the thirty-three types of hostile thoughts vanish. This state is known as “clarity.” At this moment, the consciousness associated with the five sense faculties dissolves into the mind consciousness.

The phase of increase: next, the red element or “blood” received from the mother ascends swiftly upward from the navel. As the outward sign, one perceives a redness resembling a clear sky illuminated by the sun’s glow or a flash of red lightning. As the inward sign, one predominantly experiences bliss in one’s consciousness, and the forty kinds of lustful thoughts cease. This state is known as “increase.” At this moment, the mind consciousness dissolves into the seventh consciousness—the defiled mental consciousness.

The phase of attainment: as the red and white elements converge in the heart, one’s consciousness enters between them. The outward sign is a perception of blackness resembling a clear sky in complete darkness. The inward sign is that one’s consciousness experiences a state devoid of thought, and the seven kinds of ignorant thoughts cease. Then, one faints away into utter darkness. This is known as “attainment.” At this moment, the defiled mental consciousness dissolves into *alaya*, or the all-ground consciousness.

In fact, every being will go through these phases. It is just that we will not recognize them if we do not receive the teaching.

Then, there is a brief emergence from that swoon state into an experience resembling a sky unaffected by any of those three previous conditions. This marks the appearance of the “ground luminosity” or “clear light of the time of the ground.” According to instructions in *Lama Yangtik* and other texts, this is called “full attainment.”¹³⁶ At this moment, the all-ground consciousness dissolves into the luminosity of Dharmadhatu.

This part of the teaching is very important. As mentioned earlier, when

¹³⁶ Therefore, there are a total of four phases: clarity, increase, attainment, and full attainment.

consciousness enters between the white and red elements, there is a brief moment of the swoon state. This swoon is very brief, followed by an emergence. However, this emergence from that swoon is quite different from regaining consciousness after fainting in life—when the body is still intact and one can physically rise. At this moment, due to the dissolution of the four elements, rising is no longer possible. Yet, the ground luminosity appears.

According to the teachings of the Great Perfection, if you have developed and established familiarity with the view of the natural state through practice, you can recognize it as your own nature and rest in it at this very moment. This is referred to as “superior transference to the Dharmakaya.”

You can also attain the middling transference to the Sambhogakaya. Additionally, you can achieve the lower transference to the Nirmanakaya by visualizing your consciousness as the seed syllable, such as “*dhīh*” or “*hum*,” so your reincarnation can return to this world and benefit living beings. For each of the three kinds of transference mentioned in this paragraph, it is Buddhahood without passing through any bardo state.

This “ground luminosity” also appears for those evil-doers who have committed a crime with immediate retribution. However, if they fail to recognize it, they will be dragged directly into the very depths of hell by the karmic forces of their misdeeds.

For other people, the vision of the Pure Land of Great Bliss may arise at this very moment. Such guidance from Amitabha is also present from the beginning of the dissolution process until the moment of swoon occurs. Generally speaking, when you emerge from that swoon, Amitabha responds to your virtuous aspirational power and appears directly, making recognition easier.

Therefore, if you have not attained the superior transference to the Dharmakaya or the middling transference to the Sambhogakaya, you may then directly achieve rebirth in the Pure Land of Great Bliss if you recognize Amitabha at this very moment. This is what the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche taught us during his teachings on *Khandro Nyingtik*, or *The Heart Drop of the Dakini*.

Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche actually gave us many extraordinary pith instructions. However, I have not yet put them into real practice due to my heavy karma, which, to put it nicely, is related to my abundant Dharma mandates, or, to put it bluntly, pertains to my entanglement in various preoccupations. It is the most

regrettable thing in my life that I have not practiced properly, although I followed and approached my guru, who is no different from the Buddha. Although I did not commit many misdeeds, I still regret not living a life filled with Dharma practices.

After the ground luminosity has appeared, the bardo state of absolute reality and the bardo state of becoming unfold sequentially. However, these stages will not be described here, as they pertain to the instructions on the main practice. As a result, Patrul Rinpoche chose not to elaborate further.

It should be of benefit to us if those stages were briefly described. Regarding the main practice, it has been five or six years since I gave the teaching of *Bardo Thödol*. Have you put the instructions into practice? Regardless of whether you have practiced or not, it is essential to understand the bardo states. Specifically, what should you do during the bardo state of dying, the bardo state of absolute reality, and the bardo state of becoming, respectively?

In addition to *Bardo Thödol*, texts such as *Lama Yangtik* and *Chetsün Nyینگtik* also offer detailed instructions on the bardo states or liberation upon hearing.

The above teaching covers the process of dissolution, which includes the dissolution of the five sense faculties, the dissolution of the four elements, and the phases of clarity, increase and attainment.

♦ The best moment to apply transference

For practitioners lacking adequate experience of the path,¹³⁷ the most suitable time to apply the practice of transference is at the onset of the dissolution process.

◉ Cut through all attachment to this life

According to *The Seven Points of Training the Mind*, when death is approaching, the most important thing to do is confession. You must confess all your misdeeds committed in the past. You can do this alone in your mind, or if possible, confess in the presence of the sangha or Dharma friends, saying, “My lifespan is over; now I am confessing in your presence...”

Next, completely cut through all attachment to this life and avoid thoughts such as “my wealth,” “my family,” and the like. As stated in the *Great Commentary on the Aspiration to be Reborn in the Pure Realm of Sukhavati*, whatever one clings to at the moment of death is likely to influence their rebirth in the next life. For example,

¹³⁷ They haven’t established unwavering stability in the practice and firm faith in the view that are necessary for the aforementioned transference.

if you are clinging to a monastic robe, a begging bowl, or a Dharma instrument at that moment, you may be reborn as a being who guards that object. There are many corresponding stories. Today, people are attached to their smartphones, homes, and cars; if they continue to cling to these objects at the moment of death, a similar fate may await them.

Some individuals are not only concerned about their possessions but also about making arrangements, such as, “My house should be handled in this or that way,” “My bank account contains this or that amount of money,” and more. In fact, what they should keep in mind is their future life as they approach death, since credit cards are useless in the bardo state of dying.

Therefore, you should let go of everything at this moment and stop clinging to anything. *The Precious Garland of Mountain Practices* states that the most disgraceful act for a practitioner is to focus on their wealth at the time of death. Why is this? It is because when a practitioner is not attached to wealth, they will not mention it at all.

It is their attachment to wealth that compels them to bring it up, even when they are too weak to speak. As a result, the practitioner remains preoccupied with managing their possessions, such as their home, bed, clothing, and more, even as death approaches.

To be free from all attachment to this life at the moment of death, it is best to reflect on these matters regularly while still alive and to train your mind accordingly. With sufficient training, you can then face death without clinging and think: “I am about to die. Now, I will rely on the instructions given by my teacher and ascend to the Pure Land like an arrow shot by a warrior. What a joy this is!” As such, you are filled with confidence and courage.

It will be challenging to remember clearly all the visualization and other key points of transference, so it is helpful to have a Dharma companion who can offer timely reminders—ask someone capable to assist in this way.

◉ The deathbed recitation assistance

Of course, when our Dharma peers are dying, it is also our responsibility to offer them assistance with deathbed recitations.

A few years ago, I compiled *The Ritual of Deathbed Recitation Assistance*, which has garnered much praise for its effectiveness, as many auspicious signs have

emerged during the recitation for the deceased. I attribute this to the blessing power of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, and other lineage masters. Personally, I prefer not to discuss miraculous signs, and at Larung Gar, sangha members are generally discouraged from doing so. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the names of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, along with the prayers included in this compilation, are imbued with powerful blessings.

When someone is nearing death, if possible, Dharma fellows should willingly provide assistance with deathbed recitations. This support should stem from your own motivation, not from a desire to gain merit or pressure from others.

However, some Dharma fellows may be unaware of this duty and refuse to help despite multiple requests, citing reasons such as, “I am so busy,” or “I have other responsibilities.” Such refusals violate bodhisattva vows. If you are capable of offering assistance but choose not to while a suffering individual is dying nearby, it is a serious mistake.

In comparison, some Dharma fellows have done very well. They have organized a team specializing in deathbed recitation assistance. After offering the service to one person, they get ready for another. Their phones are always on, even at night, to ensure they can be informed in time when someone is dying. They are very devoted to this assistance!

Actually, *The Ritual of Deathbed Recitation Assistance* encompasses both Sutrayana and Vajrayana prayers, meaning it is not limited to tantric texts alone. When Buddhists utilize this ritual for transference assistance, it is also valued by other Sutrayana assisting groups and centers with numerous lay practitioners for its effectiveness. After the recitation, auspicious signs frequently manifest, such as changes in the deceased’s skin tone, as well as experiences reported by family members and those nearby. These occurrences of auspicious signs are not confined to a single location; they happen in many different places.

If we can set aside our own benefit and focus on others’ liberation, I believe we will willingly take on the responsibility of assisting others with their deathbed recitations.

Of course, this applies not only to humans but also to animals. When we witness animals being slaughtered, if we cannot rescue them, we should immediately recite the names of the buddhas a few times. Even in situations where we cannot perform a formal ritual, as long as we recite names such as “Namo Buddha Ratnashikhin,”

“Namo Amitabha,” “Namo Seven Medicine Buddhas,” or the verses of the Seven Tathagatas, such as “Abandon evil-doing, practice virtue well,” those unfortunate animals will not fall into the lower realms. This is also a transference performed with the mind of bodhicitta.

Providing transference assistance whenever and wherever possible often leads to numerous positive outcomes. For instance, many Dharma practitioners willingly travel to various locations at their own expense to offer their services. They remain undeterred by the smell and stains on the deceased, doing their utmost to assist with deathbed recitations. Additionally, they support the family in addressing other funeral-related matters. Such compassion is truly remarkable!

Thanks to their selfless and kind support, family members of the deceased—who may have initially been skeptical of Buddhism or even opposed to Dharma studies—can be deeply moved and inspired by the actions of these Buddhists. As a result, many have ultimately embraced Buddhism themselves, a phenomenon that has occurred frequently in various places.

Therefore, I hope we will not neglect our responsibility to provide deathbed assistance.

◉ Making deathbed assistance a tradition

Given the benefits to living beings and our responsibilities, I believe establishing deathbed assistance as a tradition in the Han area of China is essential.

This tradition has long been a part of Tibetan culture, embraced by everyone from esteemed masters to ordinary individuals. For advanced practitioners, deathbed assistance primarily serves as a reminder. For instance, before Gendün Chöphel entered parinirvana, he asked a disciple to recite Lama Tsongkhapa’s *In Praise of Dependent Origination* and Mipham Rinpoche’s *An Aspiration toward the Meaning of the Indivisible Ground, Path, and Fruition of the Great Perfection Manjushri*.

After the recitation, he remarked, “How marvelous! I, the crazy man Gendün Chöphel, have seen the rainbow light of the whole world. Now you may close my door and return tomorrow morning.” He entered parinirvana the following morning. The prayers recited at his deathbed included two essential prayers from Sutrayana and Vajrayana, respectively. His passing reflects the experience of practitioners with superior faculties and strong confidence in their practice.

Of course, the same way of passing may be challenging for many of us. However, if you have received the empowerment of the Great Perfection and have developed familiarity with the view of primordial purity through practice, then upon your death, you may invite a Dharma friend to recite *The Seed Tantra that is the Sole Heir of All Buddhas, An Aspiration toward the Meaning of the Indivisible Ground, Path, and Fruition of the Great Perfection Manjushri*, or other supreme texts. If you are not a Dzogchen practitioner, at the very least, you should leave this world listening to Buddhist prayers or recitations, which can greatly assist your transition to the next life.

This is also why I believe Tibetans have been fortunate. When a Tibetan dies, their family spends money to invite monks to conduct a recitation service for at least seven consecutive days, regardless of their financial situation. The tradition is to offer the service for forty-nine days, but if that is not feasible, the family ensures the service is performed for at least the first seven days. Resourceful families may also request the service for additional seven-day periods. There is no family that does not request the recitation service for their deceased loved ones.

Also, when a Tibetan learns of someone's passing, they immediately recite the mani mantra "*Om Mani Padme Hum*" "*Om Mani Padme Hum*" several times for the deceased. This tradition is well-established in the Tibetan region. I hope that a similar practice will emerge in the Han area of China, where people will also adopt the habit of reciting the mani mantra for the deceased.

Otherwise, if a person has died, simply sighing about their passing without reciting the name of Amitabha or the mani mantra for the deceased does not offer them any real assistance, even if there is a genuine desire to help.

Therefore, it may be beneficial to adopt this new tradition in the Han area of China. By embracing this tradition, you will recite "*Om Mani Padme Hum*" a few times when a family member, friend, or acquaintance passes away, when a stranger dies, or even when you notice a mouse or an ant die. Your recitation can be of great benefit to the deceased.

At least 90 percent of Tibetans adhere to this tradition, except for young Tibetans who grow up in metropolitan cities outside the Tibetan region. Since it is a good tradition, regardless of the ethnic background or the people practicing it, we should all embrace it, shouldn't we? The tradition of adopting a vegetarian diet in Chinese Buddhism is also commendable, which is why we are actively promoting

this practice throughout Tibetan regions and during events such as symposia and debates.

Therefore, the good tradition of deathbed assistance in the Tibetan region can also be adopted in the Han area of China. If possible, consider assembling a team to provide deathbed assistance and invite other Dharma practitioners to participate. This initiative will not only benefit the deceased but also enhance your own practice. I hope to see such assistance groups established throughout the country.

Of course, you are not required to use *The Ritual of Deathbed Recitation Assistance* that I compiled. You may also choose to recite the *Kshitigarbha Sutra*, the *Diamond Sutra*, the liturgy commonly used in the Pure Land School, or other Buddhist texts. Once this service becomes a tradition, it can bring great benefit to many deceased beings.

Many deceased beings are unfortunate because, at the time of their death, they lack the positive karmic effects of good actions to guide them. As a result, they may face a bad rebirth due to their past misdeeds. However, if we offer recitation services for them, it is possible they will not fall into a lower realm and may even have the opportunity to attain liberation by cultivating the intention to reach the Pure Land.

There are many stories that illustrate this, and you may have heard or read some of them. We all recognize the importance of helping others, and when we assist them at such a critical moment, the merit of our actions becomes evident.

So, let's begin by reciting "*Om Mani Padme Hum*" whenever we learn of someone's passing, whether it is a person or an animal. Eventually, we can establish deathbed recitation assistance as a tradition.

◎ The forceful transference

Let's now go back to the discussion on our own transference.

At the time of death, we must utilize various forms of transference, whether through our own visualization or with the help of a Dharma companion, and engage in forceful transference.

The transference is powerful. "Powerful" means that with the help of Buddha Amitabha's vast and profound aspirational power, along with our own pure and virtuous aspirations, as long as we follow the transference instructions, we will certainly achieve rebirth in the Pure Land of Great Bliss, much like being firmly

pulled away by someone gripping our hair. Anyone who receives this supreme instruction will gain confidence in their future lives, as it offers genuine assurance of happiness in this life and many more to come.

Having such assurance, why bother crying at the time of death? Of course, we need to remind our family and friends not to cry during that time. In some cultures, it is traditional to express grief openly when someone dies, and a lack of wailing can be perceived as disrespectful. Thus, those close to the deceased may feel compelled to cry, while those who do not wish to weep may force themselves to do so, which is entirely unnecessary.

If our family and friends insist on doing something for us when we pass, we can arrange in advance for them to assist with the deathbed recitation, which can aid in our transference.

If the dying person is an enlightened master or your vajra friend who is a great Dzogchen practitioner about to enter the luminous state at the time of death, ensure that there are no noisy distractions, except for the sound of recitations.

In short, regarding transference, Buddhists must have a clear understanding of how to create conducive conditions that can enable a smooth transference at the moment of death, including both the instructions and the external and internal conditions. We must implement everything related to transference so that the transference practice can genuinely benefit ourselves and others.



Lesson 141

“Sit comfortably on a cushion, with your legs crossed in the vajra-posture, ... take my refuge.” [page 359–362]

Now we are studying the last section of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*: the “The Swift Path of Transference,” which is called phowa in Tibetan, meaning the transference of consciousness.

Some people believe that death leads to nothingness, which is not the case. Our consciousness is propelled by karmic forces and continues to wander through the six realms. To escape the cycle of samsara, a practitioner can perform transference and be reborn in a pure realm, thereby avoiding descent into a lower realm. In contrast, those who are unaware of this essential practice will, at the time of death, be drawn into a lower realm by their negative karmic forces and will endure countless torments.

This is true! Some of you fully embrace it, some are skeptical, and others do not believe it at all. Regardless of your stance on this issue, such a matter of life and death deserves your serious exploration and contemplation, so you do not fall prey to wrong views.

Some individuals in this degenerate age lack wisdom. They possess only a fraction—less than one ten-thousandth—of the wisdom held by great masters like Nagarjuna, Chandrakirti, Longchenpa, Mipham Rinpoche, and Patrul Rinpoche, and they fall far short of the wisdom of Buddha Shakyamuni. Despite this, they often express their ignorance publicly, making statements like, “Rebirth doesn’t exist,” and “It’s pointless to train for transference.” While we should feel

compassion for these individuals, we must also engage them in scholarly debate to challenge and dismantle their erroneous views.

After all, it is our responsibility to spread the truth.

♦ **The swift path of transference is the guarantee at the time of our death**

A practitioner, while accepting the truth, should also be skilled in applying practical instructions. Take the practice of transference, for example: it is a truly effective method that can address the issue of life and death, something everyone needs and that is easy to practice. It is one of several teachings from Guru Rinpoche Padmasambhava that leads to Buddhahood without meditation.

Of course, the phrase “without meditation” does not imply that you do not have to engage in any meditation. Rather, it means that signs of practical success can appear in a relatively short period. Sometimes, it may take only one or two weeks to achieve accomplishment in your practice of transference.

In addition to the instruction on transference, Padmasambhava also conferred other methods with extraordinary blessing power, such as *Liberation upon Wearing*, *Liberation upon Seeing*, *Liberation upon Passing*, *Liberation upon Hearing*, and more. I have read Karma Chagme Rinpoche’s teachings on the merit of liberation upon hearing, which are incredible. Therefore, as a practitioner, while practicing some profound high teachings, we should also pay attention to these skillful methods. Having mastered the skillful method of transference, we then have perfect confidence at the time of death. Otherwise, given our current level of practice, it is hard to tell whether we can have a good death.

◉ **The heavy karmic effect of our negative actions**

We have spent most of the first half of our lives committing misdeeds, not to mention our other lives.

Most of you who attend my teachings are no longer in high school or elementary school; you are in your 20s, 30s, 40s, or 50s. This may prompt you to reflect on the misdeeds you have committed throughout your life. You might argue that these actions stemmed from a lack of understanding of the Dharma, intense afflictions, inadequate education, or the complexities of your environment. Regardless of the reasons, it is possible that you have spent a significant portion of

your life engaged in wrongdoing. For many, the first half of life may not only feel devoid of meaning but also be marked by numerous negative actions.

What should you do now? Spend the rest of your life, however long that may be, practicing the Dharma. If you can make significant changes, you may achieve liberation in this very life. If that is not possible, focus on engaging in virtuous actions. If you find that challenging, at least aim to commit fewer misdeeds and perform more good deeds, breaking free from the patterns of your past. It is truly unfortunate to fill your life with wrongdoing!

What is even more unfortunate is that our pursuit of the Dharma is often interrupted. Initially, there are opportunities to practice, but some monastics who have taken ordination choose to disrobe, and some laypeople who have been studying the Dharma develop misguided thoughts and eventually abandon the path. Whenever I hear such news, I feel deep sadness for them. Life is so short; now that they have encountered the Dharma, why not appreciate it? Perhaps it is the result of their strong karma from past negative actions.

◉ Our lack of appreciation of the Dharma

Those of you who are currently studying the Dharma may also reflect on this question: “Do I place enough emphasis on the Dharma?”

Many of you may respond with “No.” While attending a Dharma teaching, some of you treat it as no different from a worldly workshop on business management or professional skills. As a result, you attend the Dharma teaching but do not truly appreciate it. This is because you may not fully understand the value of the Dharma.

If you understand its value, even attending a single Dharma class can be incredibly precious. Considering the endless cycle of samsara, this class is indeed rare to encounter over tens of thousands of kalpas. You do not encounter it by mere chance or without reason. You must have followed many teachers and buddhas and accumulated boundless merit through positive actions in past lives, which has granted you the opportunity to attend that Dharma class.

In particular, when you encounter the Mahayana teachings and teachers, even the briefest moment of virtue arising in the mind—fleeting like a flash of lightning—should be recognized as anything but a coincidence.

Therefore, we should place great importance on the Dharma. The past is

already behind us, but if you can integrate the Dharma into your life moving forward, it will be immensely beneficial. Otherwise, if you engage in misdeeds during your life and face endless despair and torment at the time of death, what is the purpose of living?

◉ Our tendency to find faults with others

Some practitioners appreciate the Dharma and have engaged in extensive study, but they do not apply it to themselves. Instead, they use it solely to examine others and often find fault with them.

From the perspective of this practitioner, it appears that no one is truly good. This person is flawed, that one is lacking, and aside from themselves, no one meets the standards. Such a viewpoint reveals their own inadequacies as a practitioner.

In contrast, a good practitioner who maintains a pure perception will see all external circumstances as pure. Moreover, upon self-reflection, they may recognize their own imperfections, acknowledging that many of their faults have not yet come to light.

Therefore, an ordinary person has little to be proud of and should instead reflect on their own faults. They should consider, “What have I done wrong before embarking on the Dharma path? How have I purified my faults since becoming a Buddhist? What good actions have I performed? Have I done enough good deeds?” After examining ourselves from multiple perspectives, we may feel a sense of shame.

With so many behaviors of our own that we should be ashamed of, why do we still find fault with others?

◉ Our lack of understanding on death

When it comes to the challenges we face in Dharma practices, a significant reason is our lack of understanding about death.

No one can escape death, as we all know. A person may die from illness or old age. They may also die suddenly, as is often reported in the news. One may be alive this minute but enter the bardo state of dying the next. In fact, this can happen not only to others but also to ourselves.

For example, every time I travel somewhere and finally arrive at my destination, I think, “Ah! How lucky I am that I didn’t die on the road this time!” This is because

I know that no matter how skilled my driver is, when the circumstances of death arise, it is possible for the car to plunge into a river or go over a cliff.

This is about the uncertainty of the circumstances of death. Because of this, even if a traveler chooses the safest method of travel, such as walking, they may unexpectedly fall ill and die. Even if the traveler returns home safe and sound, they may fall asleep that night and not wake up the next day. As it is said in Nagarjuna's *Letter to a Friend*:

With all its many risks, this life endures
No longer than wind-blown bubbles in a stream.
How marvelous to breathe in and out again,
To fall asleep and then wake up refreshed.¹³⁸

In fact, this is the truth: life is as fragile as a tiny butter lamp that, when exposed to a gale, may extinguish at any moment. Only when a practitioner embraces this understanding of death can they truly devote themselves to practice.

Here is a well-known Tibetan story:

A man's son took ordination and became a monk. One day, the father asked his son, "What will it be like when a person dies? What should I do at the time of death? Please give me a pith instruction!"

The son replied, "How can I know such a pith instruction? I am not dead yet."

"You are not a true practitioner," the father said. "A true practitioner knows death so well as if he had died a few times already."

This instruction may seem ordinary, but it is actually extraordinary. Only when a practitioner understands death well—whether it is sudden or caused by illness, as if they have experienced death several times—and is fully prepared for it through practice, can they have complete confidence at the time of death.

◉ Transferring consciousness at the time of death

Therefore, we should train ourselves for transference now to ensure that we can effectively implement it at the moment of death.

The current practice of transference is training. Just as a soldier undergoes extensive training in physical movements and weaponry before facing the enemy,

¹³⁸ Nagarjuna's *Letter to a Friend*, with commentary by Kyabje Kangyur Rinpoche, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Snow Lion, 2013.

we too must train ourselves to confront life's challenges with courage. This training is essential for navigating the complexities of our current life.

However, even more important is our need to train for transference for the sake of our next life. By applying the practice of transference, we can ensure that when this life comes to an end, we have the opportunity to be reborn in a pure land.

At the moment of death, the state of your mind is crucial, as mentioned in Vinaya and bardo teachings. Even if you have committed grave crimes, as long as you can meditate on the thought that "all my negative actions are purified" at the time of death and apply the instruction to transfer your consciousness, you will die without fear. This will lead to your rebirth in a pure land.

The steps for the meditation on transference will be covered shortly. Once you receive the teaching, you can begin to practice it regularly. Typically, you may start to notice signs of success within seven to fourteen days of practice. After that, you do not need to continuously recite the corresponding prayers day and night. You may meditate on it briefly from time to time to reinforce your familiarity with the practice. When the time of death arrives, you will be able to apply transference directly.

Numerous successful cases of phowa practice exist within Tibetan Buddhism. One notable practitioner is Khenpo Karpo, who successfully transformed his consciousness, and his story is detailed in my book, *Short Stories of Rainbow-Body Accomplishers in Mantrayana*.

Khenpo Karpo began his Dharma journey at the Sershul Buddhist Institute alongside the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche. Later, at Larung Gar, he would teach during the day and practice phowa at night. It was common to hear him calling out "Hik!" "Phat!" from outside his cabin. When he passed away, he did so peacefully, leaving behind many auspicious signs.

Master Yuanzhao was a nun born in the early twentieth century. She studied Tibetan Buddhism under Gangkar Rinpoche. Before her passing, she vowed to be reborn as a man and prophesied the names of her future parents. She then attained accomplishment through the practice of phowa, and many auspicious signs appeared.

The accomplishments of these practitioners suggest that they have truly mastered profound teachings that can be challenging for an ordinary person

to comprehend. This is also why the *Bardo Thödol* has gained appreciation and interest in the West.

Therefore, our goal should not be limited to the next few decades; it should instead extend to the next millions of kalpas and to life after life. If we aim for future lives, we should seek the instruction of transference and put it into practice. By doing so, when the time of death arrives, we will be able to die peacefully. If our minds can remain in a peaceful state, we will not fall into the hell realm, and we can even enter a pure realm directly.

However, if one lacks the instruction of transference and dies in a state of anger or attachment, one is likely to experience a negative rebirth. Once falling into a lower realm, it will be very difficult to escape. It is like trying to rescue someone who might be jailed; it is best to intervene before they are actually put in a cell. Once incarcerated, it will be much harder to get them out.

Why do we practice phowa? Why do we put the profound instruction into practice? It is because by applying the practice of forceful transference, we can “rescue” our consciousness and achieve liberation from samsara at the time of death.

This is the very reason why our lineage masters have placed great importance on the practice of transference.

♦ Preliminary practices require no empowerment

Before receiving the teachings of transference, it is advisable to first receive empowerment, as it, like the practice of Vajrasattva, encompasses both the generation and perfection stages. However, when the great masters of the past, including the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, taught *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, they did not indicate that empowerment should be a prerequisite. If you have not received empowerment but have faith in tantric teachings, you may still receive the instruction.

If you wish to receive tantric teachings such as *Khandro Nyingtik* and *Chetsün Nyingtik*, you must first receive empowerment; otherwise, you will not be permitted to receive the teachings. In addition to receiving empowerment, you should have completed the preliminary practices. This is the tradition established by the great masters of the past. Only by adhering to this tradition can we obtain

the true benefits. Therefore, I encourage you to complete the preliminaries if you wish to pursue the tantric path.

You should follow a practical sequence, like climbing a ladder step by step. However, many individuals today who believe they possess sharper faculties than others choose a reversed sequence by starting from the top. They first practice the primordial purity of the Great Perfection; when this proves unfruitful, they move on to the perfection stage and the generation stage. If this practice also fails, they then seek empowerment and turn to the preliminary practices. Finally, they revisit meditation on the four thoughts, such as the preciousness of human life, only to realize, “Oh! This human life is so precious! One must have the freedoms and advantages to practice the Dharma!”

Given this, I hope you can respect the practical sequence and move upward step by step in your practice.

♦ **Dharma practice is not a short-term endeavor**

In fact, your Dharma practice is not a short-term endeavor that lasts just a few days.

Soon, for a special reason, I am going to teach *The Fifty Verses of Guru Devotion, Instructions to the People of Tingri*¹³⁹ by Padampa Sangye, which I just translated, *The Wheel Blade of Mind Transformation and Peacock in the Poison Grove* by one of Atisha’s masters, Dharmaraksita. These are all very practical instructions on mind training.

While studying long sutras and shastras, it is very necessary to receive guidance on mind training as well. We have learned some teachings on mind training, such as *The Precious Garland of Mountain Practices* and *Opening the Door of Mind Training*, and many of you have found them beneficial.

At Larung Gar, many of you are excelling in your scripture studies. While you may not possess the same level of knowledge as some academic scholars, you demonstrate greater professionalism and competence. Recently, we received numerous submissions of academic papers for the upcoming Buddhist Symposium on the themes of “Buddhism and Science,” “Life and Science,” and more.

In reviewing these papers, committee members from Larung Gar recognized that a deep understanding of Buddhist doctrines and theories requires systematic

¹³⁹ Or, the *Dingri One Hundred*.

study and practice. Without this approach, even a scholar from a prestigious university can remain an amateur in the field. Therefore, I encourage those academic scholars dedicated to Buddhist Studies to pursue a more structured learning of the Dharma to enhance their understanding.

For us practitioners, studying doctrines and theories in Buddhism serves merely as a foundation; what matters most is our Dharma practice, for we are, after all, practitioners. As Atisha stated, if we practitioners have not diminished our afflictions and pacified our minds, no matter how profound the scriptures we study or how high the instructions we practice, at the time of death, we are no different from an ordinary worldly person.

Therefore, we must practice the Dharma. Of course, Dharma practice is not an easy task that can yield results after just one or two days. An old saying regarding worldly education states, “It takes ten years to grow trees, but one hundred years to educate people.”

If it takes this long for worldly education, what about transcendental Dharma training? Thus, it is perfectly normal to see no results after practicing the Dharma for two or three years. However, if you can incorporate Dharma practice into your life, it will be of great benefit to both yourself and others in this life and in many lives to come.

Next, we’ll proceed to the actual practice of phowa. The practical instruction is easy to understand and does not require extensive explanations, so I will just briefly go through the text.

♦ The steps of the meditation on transference

Whether you are training yourself for transference or applying it at the actual moment of death, the steps of the meditation on transference remain the same. The sequence for practicing transference is as follows:

Sit comfortably on a cushion in the vajra posture, keeping your back upright and straight. First, go through all the preliminaries, starting with reciting the *Calling the Teacher from Afar*, and continuing clearly and precisely through each step up to the point of dissolution in the practice of Guru Yoga.

I have translated the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche’s *Calling the Teacher from Afar* into Chinese.¹⁴⁰ Do you have a copy? While praying for the guru’s blessing,

¹⁴⁰ It refers to Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche’s *Calling the Guru from Afar: The Stream of the*

many great masters would first recite a prayer of *Calling the Teacher from Afar*, and then begin practicing Guru Yoga.

Guru Yoga should be practiced in its entirety, starting with visualizing the field of merit, followed by prayer, and concluding the session by having the guru, in the form of a ray of light, dissolve into your heart. You then rest in the state where your mind is inseparable from the wisdom of the guru. After that, you proceed to the recitation and meditation on phowa.

The visualization consists of four parts: First, visualize yourself as Vajrayogini; second, visualize your central channel in a specific way; third, visualize your consciousness as the syllable “hrīh” in the central channel at the heart level; fourth, visualize the root guru in the form of Amitabha sitting above your head.

1) Visualize yourself as Vajrayogini.

After reciting *Calling the Teacher from Afar* and completing Guru Yoga, you may now proceed to the main visualization for phowa:

First, visualize the entire world as the Pure Land of Great Bliss, where everything is spontaneously present and pure. Then, visualize that your ordinary body instantly transforms into the form of Vajrayogini. She appears red in color, with one face and two arms, standing with both legs together and her right foot lifted in the “walking posture.” Her three eyes gaze upward toward the sky. Whether you are male or female, it is important to visualize yourself as Vajrayogini.

For the purpose of this transference practice, Vajrayogini has a facial expression that is both peaceful and slightly wrathful. Her right hand is raised high, shaking a small skull-drum that awakens beings from the slumber of ignorance and delusion. In her left hand, held near her hip, she wields a curved knife that cuts through the root of the three poisons. She is naked, adorned only with a garland of flowers and bone ornaments. Her appearance, like a tent of red silk, is vivid yet insubstantial, lacking any solid essence like flesh and bone. This is the visualization of the outer body.

In the case of training for transference, visualize your own body as Vajrayogini, and recite the verse, “My own body is Vajrayogini.” When performing transference for the deceased, visualize the corpse before you as Vajrayogini and recite, “Your body is Vajrayogini.”

This is the first part of your visualization.

2) Visualize your central channel.

Visualize the central channel extending straight through the middle of the upright body of Vajrayogini, like a pillar within an empty house. It is referred to as the “central” channel because it is positioned precisely along the body’s central axis, without tilting to either side.

It possesses four characteristics. First, it is blue, resembling a layer of indigo, which symbolizes the unchanging Dharmakaya. Second, its fabric is as delicate as a lotus petal, representing the tenuousness of the obscurations of habitual tendencies. Third, it shines as brightly as the flame of a sesame oil lamp, symbolizing the illumination that dispels the darkness of ignorance. Last, it is as straight as a segment of bamboo, indicating that it never leads to lower or misguided paths.

If you are capable, you should visualize all four characteristics one by one. If not, you may briefly visualize the form of Vajrayogini, then visualize a straight central channel in blue running down her body.

As for this central channel, its upper end opens directly out into the aperture of Brahma at the top of the head, like an open skylight, symbolizing that it is the pathway to liberation and higher rebirths. The aperture of Brahma, which is on the top of the head, is located at the junction of two lines going upward from the ears and the line going upward from the middle of the forehead. Its location is also described in my teaching of *The Great Perfection of Peaceful Manjushri*. You may touch the area to determine whether it feels slightly concave. Some of you may not sense it, but in your visualization, you know where the aperture of Brahma is, like an open skylight.

The lower end of the central channel is closed off four fingers below the navel, with no opening, symbolizing that all access to samsara and lower rebirths is sealed.

It is very important to visualize the upper end of the central channel as open and the lower end as closed. The phowa practice we are currently engaging in involves no risk, which distinguishes it from other practices in the perfection stage. In some of those practices, if you do not manage your energies and channels properly, it can lead to problems. However, nothing will go wrong when you practice phowa. Particularly, if you consistently visualize the central channel as open at the top and closed at the lower end, your consciousness will not move downward.

If, at the time of death, a person's consciousness descends, they will typically fall into a lower realm. As mentioned in some teachings, when a person dies, we can check the extremities of their body to determine their destination for the next life. For instance, if their body cools down starting from the top of the head, it indicates they have fallen into a lower realm; if the body heat remains at the top of the head for an extended period, it is a sign that they have likely attained liberation.

This is the second part of your visualization on the central channel.

3) Visualize your consciousness as the syllable “*brih*” in the central channel at the heart level.

Next, visualize a swelling in the central channel at the heart level, resembling a knot in a bamboo stem. Above this knot, visualize a vibrant bindu of energy, glowing light green in color. Just above it lies the essence of your consciousness, represented by the red syllable *brih*, adorned with the long vowel sign (ॱ) and two dots (ॡ). Make sure you visualize the consciousness as the Tibetan seed syllable:



The red syllable *brih* flutters and vibrates like a flag in the wind. This represents your consciousness. In other words, before attaining enlightenment, this syllable represents your mind, and upon your recognizing its nature, it embodies your pristine awareness. Therefore, you must visualize this red syllable (ॱḥ).

This is the third part of your visualization on your consciousness.

You should train yourself to visualize in this way. In the later part of the practical session, when you call out “Hik!” you should visualize the red syllable *brih* being lifted upward by the vibrant light green bindu of energy that emerges from the aperture of Brahma and dissolves into the heart of Buddha Amitabha.

After such training, it becomes much easier to actually transform your consciousness at the time of death. However, if you have not trained adequately for transference, it is difficult to predict what will happen when you die. Especially in the case of sudden death, it may be nearly impossible to remember this practice.

Therefore, while still healthy and alive, one should begin training for transference. At the time of death, you will think, “There is no way for me to remain alive. It is time to die. What should I do? Oh, I’ve practiced phowa, so now I can apply the transference practice.” By applying phowa, you can successfully transfer your consciousness.

It is also a natural rule that a person can apply what they have been training for at critical moments. For example, a man who has been using a cane as a walking aid will instinctively rely on it to support himself when he is about to fall. Similarly, when we consistently train ourselves for transference, we recognize that this practice serves as our aid at the time of death. Thus, when the moment arrives, we can apply phowa immediately.

Why did so many Tibetan practitioners depart from this world so peacefully? Some passed away while calling out “Hik!,” while others left the world while resting in an auspicious sitting or lying posture, all of which are related to their training for transference.

4) Visualize the root guru in the form of Amitabha sitting above your head.

Above your head, visualize a jeweled throne supported by eight great peacocks. Atop the throne is a multicolored lotus, layered with the discs of the sun and moon, forming a three-tiered cushion. Seated on this cushion is your glorious root guru, an unparalleled treasure of compassion, embodying the essence of all the buddhas of the past, present, and future, and taking the form of Buddha Amitabha.

As often mentioned, in any deity practice, one should visualize the deity as your root guru in essence. For example, when you visualize Amitabha, you recognize that his essence is your own root guru; similarly, when your practice pertains to Guru Rinpoche Padmasambhava, you understand that his essence is also our root guru.

Someone may wonder, “What should I do? I have a few root teachers. If I visualize one of them, will the others be upset?” They will not be, because all the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions share the same nature, let alone just two or three of them.

The visualization of Amitabha is as follows: he is adorned in radiant red, resembling a mountain of rubies illuminated by a thousand suns. He has one face, and his two hands rest in the meditation gesture, holding a begging bowl filled with the wisdom nectar of immortality. He is dressed in three monastic robes,

symbolizing the pure conduct of a supreme Nirmanakaya. His body bears the thirty-two major and eighty minor marks, such as the protuberance atop his head and Dharma wheels on the soles of his feet. His body emits a brilliant light, from which countless rays of light shine forth.

This is the visualization of Amitabha, who rests in the air a cubit above the head of Vajrayogini, who is you. You can find images of both Vajrayogini and Amitabha in my published Tibetan-to-Chinese translation of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, for which I specifically commissioned artists to create the illustrations.

To Amitabha's right stands the noble Avalokiteshvara, the embodiment of all buddhas' compassion. He appears in white, with one face and four arms. The palms of his upper two hands are joined together at his heart. In his lower right hand, he holds a white crystal rosary, while his lower left hand cradles the stem of a white lotus, its blossom fully open near his ear.

To Amitabha's left is Vajrapani, the Lord of Secrets, who embodies the power and strength of all buddhas. He has crossed his arms at his heart, holding a vajra in one hand and a bell in the other.

Both Avalokiteshvara and Vajrapani are adorned with the thirteen ornaments of Sambhogakaya.

The appearances of both deities differ from those described in Karma Chagme Rinpoche's prayer of Sukhavati—*Aspiration to be Reborn in the Pure Realm of Sukhavati*. In the phowa practice, Avalokiteshvara has four arms, while in the prayer of Sukhavati, Avalokiteshvara is depicted with one face and two arms, also standing, with his left hand holding the long stem of a white lotus and his right hand resting in the gesture of refuge.

In the phowa practice, Vajrapani, also known as Mahasthamaprapta, holds a vajra and bell in his hands, whereas in the prayer of Sukhavati, his left hand holds a vajra-adorned lotus in the gesture of refuge, and his right hand also rests in the gesture of refuge.

If you practice Karma Chagme Rinpoche's prayer of Sukhavati, you should visualize the three principal deities according to the corresponding descriptions. If you practice phowa in *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, you should adjust the visualization accordingly. In other words, you should visualize the deities according to the descriptions in the specific prayers.

Someone might wonder, “Why is the same deity visualized this way here, but differently there?”

This is actually nothing strange. Not only in Tibetan Buddhism but also in the Pure Land School of Chinese Buddhism, the three principal deities either stand or sit, each with various attire and gestures. However, these differences pose no contradictions. Just consider us humans: we may stand or sit at different times. Compared to us, the buddhas and bodhisattvas have infinite forms of manifestation, so why should they always remain in the same attire and posture?

Why do they manifest different postures? It is to attract the beings they aim to liberate. Each being has a distinct disposition; for instance, for those who will develop faith in a sitting buddha, Buddha Amitabha appears in a seated posture, whereas for those who feel joy at a standing buddha, Buddha Amitabha manifests in a standing posture. In this way, the buddhas can establish a positive connection with them and ultimately guide them onto the path.

Buddhas and bodhisattvas manifest in various forms, differing not only in posture but also in appearance. While some beings can be tamed through peaceful methods, others may require a more wrathful approach. Consequently, some gurus adopt a wrathful appearance to instill obedience and discipline in their disciples. This is illustrated by the initial disregard that the gods and demons in Tibet had for the peaceful Shantarakshita, which changed when they were subdued by Guru Rinpoche Padmasambhava. Following this, they took firm oaths to always protect the Dharma.

What are the symbolic meanings of the sitting or standing postures of the three principal deities?

Buddha Amitabha is seated in the vajra posture, with his legs crossed, symbolizing that he dwells neither in the extreme of samsara nor in that of nirvana. The two bodhisattvas are standing, symbolizing that they never grow weary of benefiting sentient beings.

Surrounding the three principal deities are the lineage masters of this profound path of transference, dakinis, Dharma protectors, and deities, appearing like a mass of clouds in a clear sky. With expressions of warmth and compassion, they gaze upon all beings—including you—with gentle, smiling eyes and hearts filled with joy. They are the noble guides who bring liberation from the torments of samsara and the lower realms, leading all beings to the Pure Land.

This is the fourth part of the visualization, in which you visualize the three principal deities above your head (Vajrayogini's head).

2.3.3. TRANSFERENCE PRAYER

When reciting this liturgy, it is important to visualize accordingly at the same time.

The meaning of the verses in this liturgy was already explained in the previous section on the four-part visualization. Let's briefly review the text again:

Emaho!

Emaho is an interjection that expresses the exclamation of wonder and amazement.

*My entire perception, spontaneously perfect, is a realm of
infinite purity,*

*The realm of Great Bliss, arrayed in complete and perfect
detail.*

First, visualize the place where you are as a realm of infinite purity that arises spontaneously. This realm is the Pure Land of Great Bliss, presented in complete and perfect detail. By "spontaneously perfect and infinite purity," it means that this realm is neither nothingness nor inherently existent, and it embodies the nature of primordial purity.

It is essential to make such a visualization first, which aligns with the tantric practice of pure perception. In the views and practices of the generation and perfection stages, everything is primordially pure and free from any impediment. Therefore, even if you live in a small makeshift cabin, when practicing phowa, you should regard the entire world as pure and magnificent as the Pure Land of Great Bliss.

Here is the first part of the main visualization:

My own body is Vajrayogini,

*With one face and two hands, brilliant red and holding a
hooked knife and skull,*

My two feet gracefully poised, my three eyes gazing into the sky.

Visualize your body transforming into that of Vajrayogini, who is red, with one face and two arms, holding a curved knife and a small skull-drum in her hands respectively. She is standing in the “walking posture,” with her three eyes gazing upward toward the sky.

Here is the second part of the main visualization:

In the middle of her body runs the central channel

As thick as a hollow reed arrow,

Empty and clear like a tube of light.

Its upper end is open at the Brahma-aperture,

And its lower end extends below the navel center.

Running down the center of your body, visualize the central channel as thick as your thumb or a bamboo arrow. The central channel is a hollow and pure channel of light rather than a tube made of flesh. It is not visible when examined by a CT scan. In fact, what we visualize with our minds, such as the wheel of syllables in the body, the bindu of energy, or the vajra chain, which we can have a direct vision of, cannot be identified by worldly equipment.

Therefore, you should not consider the central channel to be made of substances like flesh and blood. It is a channel of light with the nature of emptiness and purity. Its upper end opens straight out into the aperture of Brahma at the top of the head, symbolizing that it is the pathway to liberation and higher rebirths. Its lower end is closed off four fingers below the navel, without any opening, symbolizing that all access to samsara and lower rebirths is sealed.

Here is the third part of the main visualization:

Upon the notch at the heart-center,

In the center of a light green sphere of inner air (lung),

Awareness clearly appears as a red syllable Hrih.

Upon the notch in the central channel at the heart level, visualize the bindu

of energy, or the inner air, light green in color. Just above it is the red syllable *hrih* that represents your consciousness.

This visualization is very important. If you practice this frequently while still alive, you may visualize your consciousness as a seed syllable, such as *hrih*, *hum*, or *dhīh*. Then, when it is time to depart from this body, the transference of your consciousness will be much easier.

Here is the fourth part of the main visualization:

*A forearm's length above the crown of one's head
Appears the Buddha Amitabha, 'Limitless Light,'
Complete with all the major and minor marks.*

Visualize that in the air, around a cubit above your head, is seated Buddha Amitabha, whose body bears all the major and minor marks. This verse is so brief that it does not mention Avalokiteshvara and Vajrapani, but if possible, you should also visualize these two deities.

Then, with complete faith and trust, while your body tingles and tears stream down your face, repeat the following prayer as many times as you can:

*Blessed One, Thus-Gone One, Arhat, completely perfect
Buddha, protector Amitabha, I pay homage to you. I make
offerings to you. I take refuge in you.*

This only covers several of the ten names of the Buddha.

This section of the liturgy concerning visualization that we have covered in today's teaching is recited only once, during the transference service conducted by sangha members at Larung Gar. During your daily training or the final actual application, you may also recite it once. Afterward, you may recite the names of Amitabha three or seven times.

Next, let's recite it together in Tibetan. During the recitation, you should also visualize according to the text. We are reciting in the same way that the sangha members at Larung Gar conduct the transference service.

That concludes today's lesson. Now, let's recite the liturgy together.

[Khenpo Sodargye Rinpoche led everyone to recite the following verses once and the Buddha's names three times.]

Emaho!

*My entire perception, spontaneously perfect, is a realm of
infinite purity,*

*The realm of Great Bliss, arrayed in complete and perfect
detail. Here,*

My own body is Vajrayogini,

*With one face and two hands, brilliant red and holding a
hooked knife and skull,*

*My two feet gracefully poised, my three eyes gazing into the
sky.*

In the middle of her body runs the central channel

As thick as a hollow reed arrow,

Empty and clear like a tube of light.

Its upper end is open at the Brahma-aperture,

And its lower end extends below the navel center.

Upon the notch at the heart-center,

In the center of a light green sphere of inner air (lung),

Awareness clearly appears as a red syllable Hrih.

A forearm's length above the crown of one's head

Appears the Buddha Amitabha, 'Limitless Light,'

Complete with all the major and minor marks.

*Blessed One, Thus-Gone One, Arhat, completely perfect
Buddha, protector Amitabha, I pay homage to you. I make
offerings to you. I take refuge in you.¹⁴¹*

¹⁴¹ Translated by Adam Pearcey and Han Kop, 2020.

Appendix:

Calling the Guru from Afar:

A Stream of the Treasury of Siddhi

by The Great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche

The embodiment of infinite buddhas,
The protector of all beings without exception,
The revealer and explainer of Sutrayana and Vajrayana—
My gracious guru, please care for me.

Adorned with the ornament of immaculate moral discipline,
Having the treasury of selfless meditative stabilization,
Possessing the unequaled divine sight of wisdom—
My gracious guru, please care for me.

The crown ornament of one hundred thousand learned ones,
The lord of a thousand great accomplished ones,
The conqueror of five poisons—
My gracious guru, please care for me.

Seeing all phenomena clearly,
Loving all sentient beings unwaveringly,
Commanding the treasury of the ten powers—
My gracious guru, please care for me.

Eradicating the two obscurations completely,
Attaining the supreme throne of the four kayas,
Being the source of the ocean of benefit and happiness—
My gracious guru, please care for me.

The regent of the holders of the three lineages,
 The all-pervasive sovereign of peaceful and wrathful deities,
 The captain of dakinis of the three realms—
 My gracious guru, please care for me.

The crown prince of the ocean-like Conquerors,
 The source of the ocean of the sacred doctrines,
 The sovereign of the ocean-like sangha—
 My gracious guru, please care for me.

Upholding the teachings of Shangpa Kagyu,¹⁴²
 Ornamenting the teachings of the three trainings,¹⁴³
 Explaining the instructions of the “Six Unions,”¹⁴⁴—
 My gracious guru, please care for me.

The pillar of the teachings of Path & Fruit,¹⁴⁵
 The origin of the teachings of pacification,¹⁴⁶
 The treasury holder of the teachings on approach and
 accomplishment—
 My gracious guru, please care for me.

The master of the Madhyamika teachings,
 The sun of the Mahamudra teachings,
 The great chariot of the Dzogchen teachings—

¹⁴² The Shangpa Kagyü (Tib. ཤངས་པ་བཀའ་བརྟུན་, Wyl. shangs pa bka' brgyud) school was founded by Khyungpo Naljor (1002-1064) who was prophesied by the Buddha. He made his seat in a place called Shang in the Tsang region of Tibet. He was therefore known as the Lama Shangpa and his lineage the Shangpa Kagyü. Thangtong Gyalpo and Jetsün Taranatha were among the great masters who upheld this lineage, which is one of the Eight practice lineages. In the 19th century, when the lineage was almost extinguished, the great masters Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Thayé and Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo gathered together the transmissions of the different branches and gave renewed energy to the lineage. Kalu Rinpoche and Bokar Rinpoche were the recent heads of this school, and founded a great number of centers in the West. (Source: Rigpawiki.org)

¹⁴³ It refers to the threefold training of the Kadampa school.

¹⁴⁴ The Six Unions of Kalachakra Tantra.

¹⁴⁵ The main teaching of the Sakya school.

¹⁴⁶ It refers to Padampa Sangye's practice of pacification.

My gracious guru, please care for me.

The conduct of Lama Tsongkhapa,
The meditation of Milarepa,
The treasury of the views of Lotus-Born—
My gracious guru, please care for me.

The discipline of Atisha,
The meditative stabilization of Taranatha,
The possessor of Sakya Pandita's wisdom—
My gracious guru, please care for me.

The power of Padampa Sangye,
The compassion of Orgyenpa,
The collection of Khyungpo Naljor's wisdom—
My gracious guru, please care for me.

To the fortunate sons who supplicate,
You think of them with inseparable compassion,
And bless them with the successive rain of ambrosia
That irrigates the lotus in the heart.

All the tormented living beings
Wandering in horrifying samsara,
May you grant them the ultimate happiness of enlightenment,
Bestow upon them the great relief of supreme accomplishment.

All the sufferings of the degenerate age
Become just in name only.
The glorious qualities of the Buddha-field of Manifest Joy,
May you bring them here.

This sixteen-verse prayer was composed upon the request of heart-friend Padzin, and a few liberation-seekers, by Ngawang Lodrö Tsungmé on a midday of the wood-snake year, of the 16th Rabjung of the Tibetan calendar. May virtue increase!



Lesson 142

“Then recite the next prayer three times in full ... That we may be able to practise with perseverance.” [page 362–365]

Let us continue with “the steps of meditation on transference.” Yesterday, we learned the prayer of transference, which, according to the Larung Gar tradition, is used for both our own training and for the transference service for others. Not only Larung Gar, but also most Nyingma monasteries, use this prayer for phowa.

Of course, some masters of the Dzogchen lineage and the Palyul lineage also recite other prayers of transference or even use some terma instructions for phowa. But for us, wherever we are, we primarily use this prayer of transference.

♦ *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* is applicable to everyone

Not only this instruction of transference, but also the whole text of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, is studied by people of all lineages.

Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo, the teacher of Mipham Rinpoche, was well-versed in the teachings of all eight major lineages of Tibetan Buddhism. His practice and instruction were always tailored to meet the specific needs and circumstances at hand, rather than being confined to the teachings of a single lineage. As practitioners of a later generation, we should not dismiss other authentic teachings that have been widely propagated simply because we have chosen a particular teacher, monastery, or lineage.

In particular, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* encompasses all the essential

instructions. It is not a niche practice limited to a specific domain, nor does it belong solely to the Nyingma lineage. Today, practitioners from the eight principal lineages of Tibetan Buddhism are all studying it.

I have visited many monasteries of Gelug, Jonang, Kagyu, and other lineages. During our discussions, practitioners from these lineages consistently indicated that this text carries great blessing power. Although the author, Patrul Rinpoche, was from the Nyingma lineage, the instructions in the text are universally applicable, and the language is rich with pith instructions.

Many geshe of the Gelug lineage near Larung Gar are currently studying the *Longchen Nyingtik*, or the *Heart-Essence of the Vast Expanse*, from the Nyingma tradition. To my knowledge, many scholars and practitioners from other lineages are also engaging with this cycle of teachings. Therefore, regardless of the center or lineage you are affiliated with, I encourage you to embrace this teaching. Embracing it means welcoming the truth with an open mind.

◉ Do not interrupt others' Dharma study and practice

An open-minded practitioner can uphold proper conduct. In contrast, if someone thinks, "I am following such-and-such a teacher," and attempts to entice capable members away from their current Buddhist study group to "assist" that teacher, this behavior is problematic. In a Buddhist study group, pursuing personal agendas beyond studying and practicing the Dharma may hinder the progress of others.

As you know, what is truly needed nowadays are great masters who understand the Dharma and have attained realization, along with devoted Buddhists who possess some training in Buddhist doctrines. Try to avoid performing too many rituals. While using rituals to inspire faith in others is worthwhile, if the daily focus is solely on fire pujas or chanting prayers, it may not yield substantial benefits for oneself or others.

Recently, some Dharma fellows have been discussing meditation. I believe meditation is beneficial and can be practiced both in the morning and at night. However, if you meditate merely for the sake of meditating, without applying the teachings you have received, the practice becomes superficial and is unlikely to yield substantial benefits.

What is essential is to first engage in hearing and contemplation. This foundational work will guide you on what to practice during meditation.

Unfortunately, many people hesitate to receive Dharma teachings and commit to systematic training. Instead, they use their participation in meditation, retreats, or other positive activities as an excuse to avoid the sequential process of hearing, contemplation, and meditation. This reflects a misunderstanding of what true Dharma practice entails.

Therefore, for those who are capable of hearing and contemplating the Dharma, I encourage you to do so first. For those who are not, I hope you refrain from negatively influencing others and obstructing their opportunities to gain merit through studying the Dharma. Those of you currently studying the Dharma may not notice immediate progress. However, as long as you continue your studies over the long term, you will come to understand in your later years that it is because of your Dharma studies that you have lived a meaningful life.

◉ We should receive the true Dharma

The Longchen Nyینگtik teachings you are currently studying represent the true Dharma. As such, you should embrace them regardless of their transmission source, whether from India or the Tibetan region. Many temples and Dharma groups within Chinese Buddhism are open-minded, embracing teachings with authentic lineages. This acceptance has greatly benefited those fortunate enough to receive such teachings.

One person used to say, “*The Way of the Bodhisattva* is from India, so we can study it; *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* is from the Tibetan region, so I am a bit concerned.” From this, it sounds as if India is the only place where the true Dharma comes from, whereas the Tibetan region is not.

Of course, I understand why he made that statement. India is the birthplace of Buddha Shakyamuni and the origin of Buddhism, while Tibet is not. However, in terms of spreading the Dharma, today’s Tibetan region resembles India in the past. Those who have visited centers or monasteries in the Tibetan region that offer formal Dharma teaching and training will know what I mean. If you have spent a few years in such a center or monastery, you will come to realize that the true essence of Buddhism exists wherever the Dharma is practiced.

Then, what is the essence of Buddhism? It is the Dharma of transmission and the Dharma of realization. Therefore, geographic location is not important. What is really important is receiving the Dharma of transmission and attaining the Dharma of realization through hearing, contemplation, and meditation.

When studying the Dharma, it is better to rely on the teachings rather than the teacher. While it is essential to receive Buddhist teachings from a teacher, it is crucial to remember that a teacher's demeanor is not what truly matters; what is important is whether they have received the transmission of the Dharma and attained its realization.

In other words, you should examine whether the teacher observes the precepts, upholds their vows, embodies compassion, and possesses wisdom.

If they are indeed a qualified teacher, you should also determine whether their teachings align with your needs. After examining the teacher in this way, you may choose to follow them to study the Dharma.

After receiving the teachings, you should practice them throughout your life. Additionally, strive to share the nectar of Dharma with those around you who are suffering, so they do not face their struggles in helplessness. Any benefit you provide to others through genuine Dharma, no matter how small, can yield remarkable merit.

◉ Engage in constant study and practice of the Dharma

A monastic should not adopt a passive attitude toward their practice, as if nothing matters as long as they have food to eat. There is a popular worldly Chinese saying that carries such a negative connotation: “Be a monk for one day; strike the bell for one day.” However, we can reinterpret it to inspire our practice: Be a monk for one day; study and practice the Dharma for one day.

In fact, it is not only monastics who should hear, contemplate, and meditate; all Buddhists should do the same. Therefore, lay practitioners should conduct themselves similarly: be a layperson for a day; study and practice the Dharma for one day.

Laypeople are often very busy. Yet amid their busyness, some lay practitioners practice more diligently than monastics. They also surpass certain monastics in their pure perception, intention to study and practice the Dharma, and overall accomplishments. In theory, monastics are free from distractions related to family, career, and romantic relationships, allowing them to fully devote themselves to studying and practicing the Dharma. However, it is not uncommon for some monastics to struggle with their studies and practice compared to dedicated lay practitioners.

Of course, I am not referring to all monastics; many of them are indeed remarkable, as you have noted. Thus, we should analyze everything within its specific context.

In summary, regarding your Dharma study and practice, you should continue your good work as always. Meanwhile, you should keep pure perception and never reject any true Dharma. As I mentioned earlier, cultivating mindfulness, vigilance, and open-mindedness while being willing to accept authentic instructions will benefit everyone.

A person once claimed, “*The Words of My Perfect Teacher* is a teaching of Tibetan Buddhism, and I am following Pure Land teachings, so I won’t study it!”

In fact, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* ultimately guides practitioners to the Pure Land, which you can confirm by checking the instructions on phowa here. However, this person chose not to receive the teaching. His decision brought no harm to me or to those who assist in spreading the teaching. Who was harmed then? It was himself.

Therefore, if you lack faith, it is like a Dharma vessel being covered. You will not receive anything, no matter how bright the moonlight of blessing and wisdom is. That said, this is also the result of individual karma.

Let’s continue with the instruction on transference. Yesterday, we covered the first part of the transference prayer. The corresponding visualization consists of four parts: first, visualize yourself as Vajrayogini; second, visualize the central channel in your body; third, visualize your consciousness as the red syllable “*hrih*” in the central channel at the level of the heart; fourth, visualize the root guru in the form of Amitabha sitting above your head.

These visualizations are clearly explained in Patrul Rinpoche’s text and the corresponding prayer. After the visualization, it is the recitation of the names of Amitabha.

Let’s proceed to the second part of the transference prayer.

- ♦ **Pray to Amitabha and concentrate upon the syllable “*hrih*”**

After reciting the names of Amitabha, recite the following prayer three times in full, starting from:

Emaho!

*In the self-appearing realm, the ultimate Akanishtha,
Is an expanse that teems with rainbow light of intense
devotion.*

*Here, the embodiment of all objects of refuge, one's own root
guru,*

*Not in ordinary form but with a body of light,
Abides as the essence of glorious Buddha Amitabha.*

With intense devotion, we pray:

Inspire us to accomplish the path of transference!

Inspire us to reach the realm of Akanishtha!

May we capture the domain of Dharmakaya expanse!¹⁴⁷

Emaho!

Emaho is an interjection, meaning “how wondrous!”

In the self-appearing realm, the ultimate Akanishtha,

First, visualize that the place where you are is the self-appearing realm, the ultimate Akanishtha. Generally, Akanishtha is understood in five ways, including “the Pure Land” and “the realm of absolute reality.” This realm is pure and supreme, in contrast to the restless and chaotic world we currently experience.

*Is an expanse that teems with rainbow light of intense
devotion.*

*Here, the embodiment of all objects of refuge, one's own root
guru,*

Not in ordinary form but with a body of light,

In such a realm, visualize that above the head of Vajrayogini, which is yourself, there is an expanse that teems with rainbow light of intense devotion, in which is your own root guru, the embodiment of all objects of refuge. The guru you are most

¹⁴⁷ Translated by Adam Pearcey, 2018. Revised with assistance from Gyurme Avertin, 2021.

faithful to is the one represented in this visualization. The guru's body, unlike that made of ordinary flesh and bones, is vividly present and transparent, yet without any substance of its own, like a rainbow.

Abides as the essence of glorious Buddha Amitabha.

Having the nature of the root guru, he appears in the form of Buddha Amitabha, also called "Buddha of Infinite Light."

With intense devotion, we pray:

Inspire us to accomplish the path of transference!

Inspire us to reach the realm of Akanishtha!

May we capture the domain of Dharmakaya expanse!

Having visualized Amitabha above your head, you now pray with intense devotion and faith: "Through this session of meditation, may I accomplish the path of transference. Dear guru Amitabha, please grant me blessings! May I reach the realm of Akanishtha, the Western Pure Land. Dear guru Amitabha, please grant me blessings! May we attain Buddhahood—the domain of Dharmakaya expanse which is indivisible from Amitabha."

As we know, after taking rebirth in the Pure Land, one can perfect the qualities of all levels and paths in the form of a bodhisattva within one life and eventually attain Buddhahood. Therefore, during this practice, you should pray with intense devotion while visualizing according to the text.

◉ Recite the prayer in either Tibetan or other languages

When reciting the prayer, you may do so in Tibetan, as instructed by the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche. It is advisable to first familiarize yourself with the meaning of the text before reciting it in Tibetan.

However, if you find it challenging to recite in Tibetan while visualizing, you may recite the translation of the text in your own language, which works just as well. This approach may make it easier for you to recite the prayer and to make the corresponding visualization.

Therefore, you can recite the prayer in either Tibetan or another language. For example, you may recite *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras* in Tibetan, which

embodies the blessing of vajra speech. You may also recite it in Chinese, which has been blessed by the sangha with the mantra of dependent arising. This way, you will know which Tara you are praising, including her image and qualities, and will visualize her accordingly. Therefore, whichever language you choose to recite the prayer in is perfectly acceptable. Simply select the language that resonates best with you.

Another example is *The King of Aspiration Prayers*, which we occasionally recite in Tibetan and at other times in Chinese. We sought permission from the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche to do this, and it seems that there is no significant difference between the recitations in Tibetan and Chinese.

This is similar to Buddhist translation practices: when Sanskrit scriptures are translated into other languages, some mantras are left untranslated, retaining their phonetic sounds, while other texts require translation to convey their verbal meanings clearly.

◉ How to recite the prayer

Recite the aforementioned prayer three times,¹⁴⁸ then recite the following concluding part three times:

With intense devotion, we pray:

Inspire us to accomplish the path of transference!

Inspire us to reach the realm of Akanishtha!

May we capture the domain of Dharmakaya expanse!

Finally, recite three times the last line alone:

May we capture the domain of Dharmakaya expanse!

While you pray, concentrate solely on the syllable *brih* (𑖧𑖫𑖞𑖳),¹⁴⁹ which represents your consciousness. Devote yourself to your teacher and protector, Buddha Amitabha, to the point that your eyes fill with tears.

This is what you should do in your practice: Visualize yourself as Vajrayogini with your guru sitting above your head, and while praying to the guru with intense

¹⁴⁸ If time permits, you may recite this prayer three times; otherwise, you may recite it just once.

¹⁴⁹ Make sure you concentrate on the syllable in Tibetan.

devotion, concentrate solely on the Tibetan syllable “*hrih*,” which represents your consciousness.

In the case of performing transference for others, while reciting the first prayer on visualizing Vajrayogini and the central channel, you will say:

...*Your body is Vajrayogini,*

and for the corresponding visualization, you’ll visualize the deceased person’s consciousness, not your own, as the syllable *hrih*. There is such a difference here.

Therefore, when you offer phowa service near the corpse of a deceased person, you should first visualize the person standing up in the form of Vajrayogini, and then imagine their consciousness transforming into the syllable *hrih*. The essence of the practice remains the same: while praying to the guru with intense devotion, you also concentrate solely on the syllable *hrih*, which represents the deceased person’s consciousness.

◉ The Practice on *hrih*

Next is the practice of ejecting consciousness. While reciting *hrih* five times from the back of your palate, visualize the red syllable *hrih*, which represents your consciousness being lifted upward by the vibrant, light-green bindu of energy. The bindu rises higher and higher, vibrating all the while. As it emerges from the aperture of Brahma at the crown of your head, call out “Hik!” and visualize the bindu shooting up like an arrow shot by a warrior and dissolving into the heart of Buddha Amitabha.

Go through the process seven, twenty-one, or more times, visualizing the *hrih* in your heart and repeating “Hik!” as before. At Larung Gar, we typically call out “Hik!” three times instead of seven or twenty-one. However, you may repeat the process more times for your own training. In other traditions, one says “Hik!” as the consciousness shoots up and “Ka” as it comes back down, but here we do not say “Ka” during the descent.

In your usual training for transference, you may simply visualize your consciousness as the syllable *hrih* once again. Someone might wonder, “Since the syllable *hrih* has already dissolved into Buddha Amitabha’s heart, if I don’t visualize its descent, how can I continue the practice?”

In fact, this practice is merely a training for transference, in which you do

not actually shoot up your consciousness; instead, you may simply visualize your consciousness as the syllable *hrih* again. At the time of death, by calling out “Hik!” once, then your consciousness may dissolve into Amitabha’s heart.

After calling out “Hik!”, you may go through the ritual as before as many times as you wish, then recite:

*Bhagavan, Tathagata, Arhat, utterly perfect Buddha,
protector Amitabha, I prostrate before you. I make offerings
to you. In you I take my refuge.*

♦ The transference prayer called inserting the grass stalk

After completing the aforementioned prayer, you then proceed with the concise transference prayer known as *Inserting the Grass Stalk*, which was written by the great treasure revealer Nyi Da Sangye and transmitted through the lineage of Dzogchen Monastery:

*Buddha Amitabha, I prostrate before you;
Padmasambhava of Oddiyana, I pray to you;
Gracious root teacher, hold me with your compassion!
Root and lineage teachers, guide me on the path.
Bless me that I may master the profound path of transference.
Bless me that this short path of transference may take me to
the realm of celestial enjoyment.¹⁵⁰
Bless me and others that as soon as this life is over,
We may be reborn in the Land of Great Bliss!¹⁵¹*

You prostrate before Buddha Amitabha and Padmasambhava and request your gracious root guru to take you with great compassion.

Then, you pray to your root guru and lineage masters to guide you along the path and bless you to master the profound path of transference. In this way, at the

¹⁵⁰ Here, the “realm of celestial enjoyment” refers to a Buddha-field, manifested for the benefit of beings.

¹⁵¹ Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2010, Page 363.

time of death, by applying this swift path of transference, you can reach the Land of Great Bliss, which is known by different names in various teachings.

You should pray with intense devotion, saying, “Homage to Amitabha, Padmasambhava, my root guru, and all my lineage masters! Please bless me so that I may master the profound path of transference and attain rebirth in the Land of Great Bliss.”

It is very important to pray to the guru for blessing. This prayer text mainly involves addressing the lineage gurus, while the previous prayer text focuses on visualizing Amitabha as indivisible from the guru, praying to him, and practicing the technique of transference. You pray that upon your death, you may have a swift rebirth in the Land of Great Bliss.

Here, “*Bless me and others...*” can be adjusted based on the goal of your practice. If you are training for transference, you may recite, “Bless me and others that as soon as this life is over...” If you are performing transference for a dying person, you may recite, “Bless you and others that as soon as this life is over...” If you are performing transference for a deceased person and providing the phowa service for their corpse, you may recite, “Bless the deceased that as soon as their life is over...”

Recite this prayer three times,¹⁵² and then repeat the last line—“*We may be reborn in the Land of Great Bliss*”—three additional times. Continue practicing the technique of ejection for as long as you wish, as you did previously. Afterward, begin again from reciting this:

*Bhagavan, Tathagata, Arhat, utterly perfect Buddha,
protector Amitabha, I prostrate before you. I make offerings
to you. In you I take my refuge.*

♦ The Transference Prayer from the Sky Doctrine

Next is to recite the *Transference Prayer from the Sky Doctrine*, transmitted through the lineage of Palyul monastery:

*Emaho! Most marvelous protector Amitabha,
Great Compassionate One and powerful Vajrapani,
With one-pointed mind, for myself and others I beseech you:*

¹⁵² Khenpo Sodargye said it was also fine to recite this prayer once.

Bless us that we may master the profound path of transference.

Bless us that, when the time comes for us to die,

*Our consciousness may be transferred to the state of great bliss!*¹⁵³

In this prayer, you pray to the three principal deities, saying, “How wondrous! Most marvelous Amitabha, great compassionate Avalokiteshvara, and powerful Vajrapani, I pray in your presence for myself and others: bless us so that we may soon master the profound path of transference. At the time of death, please bless us that our consciousness may be swiftly transferred to the Land of Great Bliss, instead of wandering in samsara.”

When you train yourself for transference, you may recite, “*when the time comes for us to die*”; when you recite the transference prayer for a dying person, you recite, “*when the time comes for you to die*”; and when you perform phowa for a deceased person, you recite, “*when the time came for so-and-so to die*.”

Recite this prayer three times, repeating the final line—“[Bless us that] our consciousness may be transferred to the state of great bliss!”—an additional three times. Next, practice the ejection of consciousness as before. Specifically, repeat *brih* five times and call out “Hik!” three times, followed by saying “Phat!” five times.

In the Palyul lineage, there are many liturgies of the Sky Doctrines and the Medicine Buddha, as well as extraordinary aspirational prayers. The *Transference Prayer from the Sky Doctrine* is a terma, or a hidden treasure, that many practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism have put into practice. If time is limited, some people skip all the preceding prayers and simply recite this prayer three times then proceed to calling out “Hik!” and “Phat!”

At Larung Gar, there are tulkus, khenpos, and teachers who often recite the phowa prayer in the presence of corpses, but some of them do not seem adept at doing so. However, I have noticed that the residential monks and nuns here seem to be very good at this recitation. Perhaps you have trained yourself for transference very often at home.

¹⁵³ Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2010, page 363.

- ♦ **The liturgy of deathbed recitation assistance will be more popular**

At Larung Gar, we practice phowa according to the liturgy outlined by Patrul Rinpoche in *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. This practice is not only embraced by the sangha members at Larung Gar but also by many practitioners in the Han region of China. Consequently, if you wish to offer transference services to others, it is essential to receive the transmission and properly engage in the practice beforehand.

If you are unable to do so, you may use *The Liturgy of Deathbed Recitation Assistance*, which I compiled to facilitate the transference service. While this compilation does not include specific transference prayers, it features excerpts from the scriptures of Chinese Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism that carry supreme blessing power. This approach allows individuals from various lineages and traditions to embrace this compilation. It has been utilized in many settings, often resulting in auspicious signs and spiritual responses following the deathbed recitation assistance.

I aim to collect real stories that illustrate auspicious signs at the time of death following the recitation of this liturgy and compile them into a book to help readers strengthen their faith. Although it has not been long since *The Liturgy of Deathbed Recitation Assistance* was introduced, it truly carries the supreme blessing power of the buddhas, bodhisattvas, and lineage masters. Therefore, you may refer to this compilation when offering deathbed recitation assistance or performing transference services in the future.

I believe that *The Liturgy of Deathbed Recitation Assistance* may become more widely spread and appreciated after my generation. While we are still alive, many from this generation may fail to acknowledge the importance of this liturgy, much like certain lineages overlook the teachings of others. However, after this era has passed, the blessing power of this liturgy may enable it to flourish even more. By then, many of us will have already departed for the Land of Great Bliss.

- ♦ **Transmissions of the last two prayers**

The last two prayers—*Inserting the Grass Stalk* and the *Sky Doctrine Prayer*—do not originate from the Longchen Nyingtik root text and were not directly transmitted by Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa. Rather, they have been transmitted by Dzogchen Rinpoche, Gochen Rinpoche, and other lineage masters, eventually to

Kyabjé Dodrup Chen Rinpoche, who brought them together into one cohesive form and adopted them into his own practice.

Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu, the root teacher of Patrul Rinpoche, also practiced these two prayers. Additionally, Dodrup Chen Rinpoche received the Kagyu teachings on transference that were transmitted from Gampopa, which is why his compilation of transference prayers includes some composed by Gampopa. However, Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu himself did not typically recite those particular prayers. Nevertheless, the visualization process across all these different traditions is identical, clearly showing that the streams of these instructions were unified into one great river.

[Great masters like Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu and Patrul Rinpoche would meticulously record the instructions given by their gurus and share the same teachings with others. In contrast, many practitioners of later generations do not place enough emphasis on the guru's instructions.]

As can be seen, it does not matter which lineage the instruction comes from. What truly matters is whether the teaching is authentic and can be put into practice. Take a packaged food item, for example: it does not matter which factory produced it or who delivered it; what is most important is whether it is beneficial to the body.

Therefore, it is important to cherish one's own lineage, as it is the source of the teachings received. At the same time, any teaching that is authentic and reliable should be welcomed, regardless of its lineage. This is why teachings from all schools of Tibetan and Chinese Buddhism are embraced at Larung Gar.

As you probably know, the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche is from the Palyul tradition of the Nyingma lineage, which is a small sub-lineage. There are eight principal lineages in Tibetan Buddhism, including the Nyingma lineage that consists of eight sub-lineages, with Palyul being one of them. Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche once remarked, "Had I only focused on propagating the Palyul teachings, my Dharma activities would have been very limited."

Therefore, in the future, while you dedicate yourself to propagating the teachings of your lineage masters through your Dharma activities, it is also important to embrace and disseminate all Buddhist teachings and the instructions of qualified teachers, provided that the lineage is pure and the teachings can truly benefit beings.

When I founded the Bodhi Association for lay practitioners, I prayed to the

great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, saying, “Regardless of the lineage or school from which the teaching originates, as long as it is the true Dharma from an authentic lineage, I will strive to share it for the benefit of others.” In fact, when it comes to learning and propagating the Dharma, we should adopt an open-minded and inclusive attitude.

However, such an attitude cannot be generalized to all situations. For example, anyone who pursues the Dharma with a misguided personal agenda or intention, or seeks to use the Bodhi Association for inappropriate purposes, is firmly rejected from the study group. The same principle applies to the Larung Gar Buddhist Academy: only authentic Dharma teachings are accepted. Any teaching from a tirthika tradition or a non-Dharma teaching disguised as Dharma will certainly not find a place here.

In summary, it is normal to receive teachings from other lineages. Patrul Rinpoche also stated, “My root guru received the transference instructions multiple times from Kyabjé Dodrup Chen Rinpoche. I believe that all those who received these instructions from my teacher also received the Kagyu tradition of transference instructions at the same time and are therefore authorized to recite the corresponding lineage and other prayers.”

As you can see, gurus have been receiving teachings from various lineages. The same is true for us sangha members at Larung Gar. We embrace teachings from a variety of lineages, including Nyingma, Gelug, Kagyu, and others. How wonderful!

Patrul Rinpoche also said, “The last two concise prayers were probably compiled by Dodrup Chen Rinpoche, as they differ slightly from other versions. I have therefore written them down exactly as my root guru taught them.”

Thus, when Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu practiced phowa, he would follow the aforementioned prayers. Specifically, he would:

First, visualize himself as Vajrayogini;

Second, pray to Buddha Amitabha above his head, recognizing him as inseparable from his root guru;

Third, pray to the lineage gurus, including Amitabha, Padmasambhava, his root guru, and all lineage masters;

Fourth, pray to the three principal deities.

This is definitely a great practice that can be embraced not only by practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism but also by those of the Pure Land School of Chinese Buddhism.

In this practice, you pray to the three principal deities of the West, similar to the approach of the Pure Land School. Padmasambhava, who emanated from the heart of Buddha Amitabha, is another object of veneration. Moreover, your root guru is the source of all your qualities. Therefore, it is reasonable for Pure Land practitioners to embrace this instruction. If your rejection of this practice arises from unfamiliarity with Padmasambhava, consider learning more about this great master; his teachings may inspire your faith. In reality, we likely possess only a very small fraction of Padmasambhava's qualities, so it is unwise to dismiss him solely because he is a teacher of Tibetan Buddhism.

As an ordinary person, if you reject the great enlightened Tibetan masters, especially the lineage master who is inseparable from the Buddha, it would be quite ridiculous. It is akin to a foolish Tibetan rejecting the Sixth Patriarch of Chan or Master Huiyuan in Chinese Buddhism; this Tibetan would be ridiculed by others.

Therefore, be careful not to reject sublime beings and their teachings blindly. Their wisdom, compassion, and qualities are far beyond our reach. Given our current mental state, we should earnestly study and practice their teachings to benefit ourselves and others.

Consider a fool who, unaware of the value of gold, picks up cow dung while discarding gold. If we lack awareness of what to embrace and what to reject in our pursuit of Dharma, we risk being no different from that fool. Although we may not realize it, the wise perceive us as truly pitiable!

In addition, according to Patrul Rinpoche, when his root guru Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu was performing transference for the deceased using the *Sky Doctrines Prayer*, he would replace “when the time comes for us to die” with “all of these (*di nam*), when the time comes for them to die.” However, some people in the crowd did not capture this change, so they would say “... this life's perceptions (*dir nang*)...” or “... hence (*di ne*)...” which, in Patrul Rinpoche's opinion, is slightly incorrect.

Here, Patrul Rinpoche provided explanations regarding the transmission of the last two prayers and background information on certain verses in this liturgy.

♦ The conclusion of the session

After you have recited the *Sky Doctrines Prayer* and repeated the practice of *brih* many times, it is now the time to conclude your session and seal it in the expanse of the five kayas by saying “Phat!” five times. According to our tradition, the last “Phat!” should be called out louder.

At this point, you have visualized your consciousness dissolving into Amitabha’s heart. Now that you are saying “Phat!”, it is as if you are securing a piece of wood to the wall with nails. Thus, “Phat!” seals your consciousness so that it does not return, allowing it to rest in Amitabha’s heart and become inseparable from the guru’s mind.

In fact, such training aims to establish favorable conditions. One might wonder, “If I train myself for transference now by saying ‘Phat!’, does this mean my mind becomes sealed with that of Amitabha, and I cannot live normally afterward?” You need not worry, as engaging in this practice now merely helps you become familiar with this instruction. At the end of the session is the Amitayus practice that will be covered in the following teaching.

After saying “Phat!” five times, you then rest in the natural state, free from any concepts and elaborations.

Then, continue with the following visualization:

All the lineage teachers above your head (i.e., Vajrayogini’s head) dissolve into the three central deities. The two bodhisattvas then dissolve into Amitabha, who then transforms into light and merges into you.

♦ Recite the mantra of Amitayus

Instantly visualize yourself in the form of Amitayus, or the Buddha of Boundless Life—red in color, with one face, two hands, and two legs—seated in the vajra posture. His hands rest in the gesture of meditation, holding a life vase filled with the wisdom nectar of immortality, topped by a wish-fulfilling tree. He is adorned with the thirteen Sambhogakaya ornaments.

Amitabha and Amitayus share several similarities: both are depicted in red, and their names convey the meaning of “boundless”—“boundless light” for Amitabha and “boundless life” for Amitayus. However, they differ in several ways: Amitabha is portrayed holding a begging bowl, while Amitayus holds a life vase topped with a wish-granting tree. Additionally, Amitabha represents the Nirmanakaya form, similar to Buddha Shakyamuni, whereas Amitayus embodies the Sambhogakaya

form. The appearance of the Nirmanakaya form is quite distinct from that of the Sambhogakaya form, the latter adorned with thirteen ornaments, including a necklace and bracelets.

While visualizing yourself as Amitayus, recite the mantra “*Om Amaranī Jivantiye Svāhā*” one hundred times, followed by the dharani of long life and other mantras.

This step ensures that the practice does not shorten your lifespan and, through the truth of interdependence, dispels any obstacles that might threaten it. However, it is not necessary to recite the mantra of Amitayus when performing transference for someone who is dying or already deceased, or when carrying out actual transference at the moment of your death.

Therefore, when a guru is reciting phowa for a severely ill patient who has no hope of coming back to life, they will skip chanting the mantra of Amitayus one hundred times; if there is still hope for the patient’s recovery, the guru will recite the mantra.

Almost every Tibetan is familiar with this step of the phowa practice from *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. When a Tibetan falls ill and seeks to understand their condition, they may observe whether the guru is reciting the mantra of Amitayus. If the guru skips this recitation, the patient understands that their situation is dire and may feel a sense of despair. Conversely, if the guru does recite the mantra, the patient sees a glimmer of hope for recovery.

But some gurus are very compassionate. Once they have finished reciting the phowa prayer, knowing that the patient is about to die, they will still recite the mantra of Amitayus a few times, so the patient will not feel too desperate.

♦ Integrate Buddhism into our daily life

These details from the daily lives of Tibetans, such as the guru’s compassionate transference service and a dying person’s observation of the transference recitation, demonstrate that Buddhism is deeply integrated into their everyday experiences.

The appreciation and faith in Buddhism among Tibetans, both monastics and laypeople, reflects the conducive Buddhist environment in which they are raised. It is a pity that many of you do not know the Tibetan language. Otherwise, exposure to Tibetan traditions would naturally provide you with an education in the Dharma.

This type of education is nearly nonexistent in the Han region of China. While some Chinese Buddhists consider Buddhism their religion, it often has little impact on their daily lives, and they struggle to incorporate the Dharma into all aspects of their lives.

In contrast, the situation in the Tibetan region is entirely different. There, Buddhism permeates everyday life. Activities such as reciting prayers, chanting mantras, venerating the Buddha, and circumambulating stupas are ingrained habits for Tibetans. Buddhism has become deeply intertwined with their traditions and customs.

It is essential to integrate Buddhism into your life. In the Han region of China, it seems unrealistic to expect every household to become a Buddhist family. However, for those already practicing Buddhism, it is a significant achievement to live in accordance with the Dharma.

Take the education of a young child, for example: If a child can develop faith in the Buddha from an early age, learn to pray to the Three Jewels, and incorporate Dharma teachings into daily life, their conviction in the Dharma will be steadfast. Conversely, if a child is merely asked to recite prayers alongside adults without other opportunities to integrate the Dharma into their everyday life, its impact may be minimal.

♦ The signs of success in phowa practice

The signs of success in the practice of phowa are described in the root text:

The headaches; a drop of serum, shining like dew, appears;
A grass stalk can slowly be pushed in.¹⁵⁴

Some individuals may experience signs of success after six or seven days of practice. Some practitioners report feeling an itch at the top of their head or an ache at the aperture of Brahma. During this time, it becomes easy for a guru or Dharma friend to insert a grass stalk into their aperture of Brahma.

In fact, whether a grass stalk can be pushed in or not is not very important, but many Han Chinese practitioners are particularly concerned about this. I have heard that someone faked a sign of success by sharpening the tip of the grass stalk

¹⁵⁴ Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2010, Page 365.

to a point like a toothpick and pushing it into his aperture of Brahma. That must have really hurt and is completely unnecessary.

As long as you practice phowa diligently for seven consecutive days, following the instructions listed above—such as calling out “Hik!” and visualizing the movements of the syllable *brih*—by the end of your practice, a grass stalk can easily be pushed into your aperture of Brahma.

I once led the practice of phowa when there were only a few members in the sangha at Larung Gar. About twenty people participated in the group practice. After seven days, half of them experienced signs of success, allowing me to easily insert a grass stalk into their aperture of Brahma. However, the other half was unable to have the grass stalk inserted, and it broke halfway through the attempt.

One elderly monk, who seemed to lack practical experience with phowa, began the group practice by stating, “I have heavy karmic debts, so I will definitely fail in this practice.” Unfortunately, he did not achieve any signs of success: his head did not ache, no drop of serum appeared, and the grass stalk could not be pushed into his aperture of Brahma.

Perhaps because some Han Chinese like Qigong, they insist on taking pictures with a grass stalk in their head and share anecdotes about how others have achieved success through this practice. In fact, if you have faith in the guru, the Three Jewels, and phowa practice, then whether a grass stalk can be inserted into your aperture of Brahma is not that important. Yes, it is a sign of success, but it is not the most essential aspect. It is not necessary to become overly fixated on this particular sign in your phowa practice.

When a phowa practice is successful, it can create a small opening in the skull. Some successful phowa practitioners in the West underwent a CT scan and discovered a niche or a few holes in their skulls. Such a sign is a sort of interdependence, which is incredible.

In short, if you have experienced the sign related to the skull, the sign of a drop of serum, or a headache, it means you have achieved success in phowa practice. Before these signs appear, you should practice diligently.

Thus, Dharma fellows in each cohort, especially those in the senior groups, should undertake group practice of phowa for seven consecutive days, if possible. However, if you all gather in the Dharma hall for the practice, it may influence others’ hearing and contemplation, making it difficult to conduct the group

practice. Therefore, you may practice individually; for example, you can recite the prayer and visualize accordingly before going to bed.

But be careful not to call out too loudly, as you may disturb others. Today in a committee meeting, someone mentioned that there was a speaker in the nuns' residential area playing the phowa recitation at a loud volume every day, which disturbed some practitioners' meditation. Therefore, we decided that, except for the common recitation for all Larung Gar sangha members, no other recitations, including phowa, are allowed to be broadcast.

So, when you practice phowa, do take others into consideration and avoid calling out loudly. The visualization is the most important aspect, and the volume of your voice is not, because it is the consciousness that emerges, not your voice. Some individuals undertake no visualization during the practice and simply call out "Hik!" very loudly, which is not necessary. The key is your visualization, such as the movement of the syllable *brih*.

In any case, you must practice until signs of success appear. Until then, you must do the practice over and over again.

♦ Dedication

To conclude, dedicate the merit and recite the *Prayer for Rebirth in the Pure Land of Great Bliss* and other prayers, such as the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche's *The Quintessence of Oceanic Prayers of Aspiration* or the *Concise Prayer for Rebirth in the Pure Land of Great Bliss*.

♦ The teaching that brings buddhahood without meditation

Unlike other generation and completion stage practices, the profound transference instructions do not require extensive training over a long period. Signs of success will certainly emerge after just one week of practice. This is why the method is known as "the teaching that leads to Buddhahood without meditation," and why it is highly recommended as a daily practice for everyone, as it is an unsurpassable shortcut.

We are truly fortunate to have encountered this teaching. I often reflect on how lucky we are that, in this life and even in our later years, we have come across the Buddha's teachings. For instance, it is a privilege to study the five great treatises

or tantric doctrines and to put the instructions on preliminaries or mind training into practice.

Some people encountered the Dharma at a young age, and later in life, they felt profound gratitude whenever they recalled their studies at Larung Gar. They might say, “In this valley, I’ve received so many teachings that are far more valuable than all the treasures in the world combined.” Although they now live in big cities, they continue their Dharma practices and find great happiness in doing so. Thanks to the training they received at Larung Gar, they can face any circumstance in life and are always grateful for that experience.

♦ The closing verse

*Not yet able to liberate myself, I transfer the consciousness
of the deceased.*

*Not yet practicing myself, I unfold the canopy of my endless
teachings.*

Bless me and others of the same deceitful kind

So that we may be able to practice with diligence.

I feel this closing verse speaks to me directly. Although I have not attained realization, I often perform transference for others. Despite not engaging in genuine practice myself, I find myself teaching the Dharma daily. Given that a great master like Patrul Rinpoche humbly refers to himself as a fraud, I feel unqualified to give teachings and perform transference.

Of course, the most important aspect of performing transference is compassion. As Patrul Rinpoche stated in his text, if a person possesses fervent faith and compassion, they can truly benefit the deceased with pure intentions. This person might think, “This deceased individual is so unfortunate! He probably did not encounter the Dharma or engage in virtuous deeds during his life. I do not know where his consciousness is wandering now. Nevertheless, although I am not an enlightened practitioner, I do believe in the incredible blessings of the buddhas and bodhisattvas. As long as I pray to Amitabha and Padmasambhava for him, it will undoubtedly be of benefit. Today, I come here to participate in the transference service because I genuinely wish for this deceased person to be

liberated. Aside from this reason, I have no selfish intentions. So right now, I will pray wholeheartedly.”

All in all, one should walk the walk rather than just talk the talk regarding their Dharma study and practice.

[This concludes *Transference of Consciousness, the Instructions for the Dying: Buddhahood Without Meditation.*]

Appendix:

*Phowa Prayer*¹⁵⁵

Emaho!

In the self-appearing realm, the ultimate Akanishtha,

Is an expanse filled with rainbow light of intense devotion.

*Here, the embodiment of all objects of refuge, one's own root
guru,*

In an extraordinary form and with a radiant body,

Abides as the essence of Buddha Amitabha,

With intense devotion, we pray:

Inspire us to accomplish the path of transference!

Inspire us to reach the realm of Akanishtha!

May we capture the domain of Dharmakaya expanse!

(Three times)

With intense devotion, we pray:

Inspire us to accomplish the path of transference!

Inspire us to reach the realm of Akanishtha!

May we capture the domain of Dharmakaya expanse!

(Three times)

May we capture the domain of Dharmakaya expanse!

(Three times)

brih brih brih brih brih

¹⁵⁵ The sources of the prayers in this compilation are already indicated in the transcript.

hik hik hik

*chomdendé deshyin shekpa drachompa yangdakpar dzokpé
sangye gönpo ö pak tu mepa la chaktsal lo chö do kyab su
chi o*

*Blessed One, Thus-Gone One, Arhat, completely perfect
Buddha, protector Amitabha, I pay homage to you. I make
offerings to you. I take refuge in you.*

(Three times)

*Buddha Amitabha, I prostrate before you;
Padmasambhava of Oddiyana, I pray to you;
Gracious root teacher, hold me with your compassion!
Root and lineage teachers, guide me on the path.
Bless me that I may master the profound path of transference.
Bless me that this short path of transference may take me to
the realm of celestial enjoyment.
Bless me and others that as soon as this life is over,
We may be reborn in the Land of Great Bliss.*

(Once)

We may be reborn in the Land of Great Bliss.

(Three times)

hrih hrih hrih hrih hrih

hik hik hik

*chomdendé deshyin shekpa drachompa yangdakpar dzokpé
sangye gönpo ö pak tu mepa la chaktsal lo chö do kyab su
chi o*

Blessed One, Thus-Gone One, Arhat, completely perfect

Buddha, protector Amitabha, I pay homage to you. I make offerings to you. I take refuge in you.

(Three times)

Emaho!

*Most marvelous protector Amitabha,
Great Compassionate One and powerful Vajrapani,
With one-pointed mind, for myself and others I beseech you:
Bless us that we may master the profound path of transference.*

*Bless us that, when the time comes for us to die,
Our consciousness may be transferred to the state of great bliss!*

(Once)

Our consciousness may be transferred to the state of great bliss!

(Three times)

*hrih hrih hrih hrih hrih
hik hik hik*

Phat Phat Phat Phat Phat

Om Amarani Jivantiye Svāhā

(100 times)

[After the recitation, dedicate the merit.]

CONCLUSION



Lesson 143

“The main subject of the chapter ... freeing all beings, our old mothers, from samsara’s dungeon. This includes all the most crucial instructions.” [page 367–370]

In the conclusion section, Patrul Rinpoche, with his remarkable wisdom, provided a concise summary of the entire text, which included the outer preliminaries, the inner preliminaries, and the swift path of transference.

♦ The twelve principal points

The instructions in *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* consist of twelve principal points, the first six of which concern the outer or common preliminaries:

◉ The six common preliminaries

1) To make meaningful use of this human life by reflecting on how difficult it is to find the freedoms and advantages. It is not easy to develop the will to practice the Dharma. A person must first recognize how difficult it is to find the freedoms and advantages, as said in *The Jingde Record of the Transmission of the Lamp*:

Once you lose this human life,

You won't regain it in ten thousand kalpas.

Only then will they be motivated to dedicate their lives to practicing the Dharma, so that they will not waste their precious human life.

2) To motivate oneself to practice diligently by contemplating the impermanence of life. If human life were to last for thousands of years, it might be acceptable to postpone Dharma practice to a later time. However, life is so impermanent. By closely observing news reports and accidents around us, we come to understand that life is fragile and impermanent.

Only when a practitioner has developed a conviction in the truth of impermanence can they consistently motivate themselves with thoughts like, "I should not oversleep, I should not idle away my time, I should not engage in meaningless activities," thus fostering genuine diligence.

3) To develop renunciation and compassion by recognizing that the nature of samsara is suffering. If the nature of samsara were not suffering, it would be acceptable to wander in it over and over again. However, the truth is that regardless of the realm you are in, even the god realm, you must experience suffering and eventually fall into a lower realm. This applies to you as well as to all other sentient beings. Given this understanding, who would still wish to remain in samsara? Who does not develop compassion for the unfortunate beings still trapped in samsara?

4) To renounce negative actions and embrace positive ones through a thorough understanding of the principle of cause and effect. Positive actions lead to happiness, while negative actions result in suffering. The seed of a positive action yields happiness, whereas the seed of a negative action results in suffering, which never fails. By grasping this principle, you will clearly know what to pursue and what to avoid.

These are the four reflections that turn the mind from samsara.

5) To cultivate a deep yearning for Buddhahood and generate profound faith by reflecting on the benefits of liberation.

6) By following a qualified teacher, to train oneself to emulate their realization and actions. Many people nowadays do not place importance on following a qualified teacher, which means they have failed to grasp the essential

point of the spiritual path. In fact, even seemingly simple instructions, such as the preciousness of human life and the impermanence of life, cannot be truly understood or practiced without the guidance of a qualified teacher. Moreover, what we call studying and practicing the Dharma is nothing other than emulating the teacher's realization and actions. Therefore, one must rely on a qualified teacher.

These are the first six principal points that concern the common or outer preliminaries.

The brief summary of each preliminary practice is like the tagline in an advertisement, which hopefully will help practitioners recognize its true value and appreciate its importance.

Some of today's practitioners are truly unfortunate. They overlook such an important practical guide yet place great emphasis on—and even actively promote—rituals that hold little real significance for achieving liberation. Why is that? It is due to their misguided thoughts!

◉ The five uncommon preliminaries

1) To lay the foundation for liberation by taking refuge in the Three Jewels. A building is solid only when it has a foundation. Without a foundation, it will inevitably collapse at some point. Similarly, the path to liberation requires a foundation, and taking refuge serves as that foundation. Only with sincere motivation to take refuge can a practitioner progress on the path to liberation.

2) To establish a framework for the countless activities of a bodhisattva by arousing the supreme bodhicitta. Upon a solid foundation, one may begin to construct an architecture by first establishing a framework for the building. With this framework, the architecture can gradually take shape. Similarly, as a Mahayanist, when you wish to build a Dharma mansion, you should start by arousing the supreme bodhicitta, through which you can establish the framework for the countless activities of a bodhisattva. In doing so, the state of perfect and complete Buddhahood, which benefits both yourself and others, will spontaneously arise.

3) To confess misdeeds and downfalls—the root of all negativities—through the four powers, using the meditation and recitation on Vajrasattva. The misdeeds we have committed throughout this life and since time without

beginning are countless. Without purifying them, we cannot succeed in any Dharma practice. Therefore, we must meditate on Vajrasattva and recite the mantra to confess our misdeeds through the four powers, allowing our mindstream to be purified.

4) To accumulate merit and wisdom—the source of all spiritual progress—by making the mandala offering of the three kayas. Once the foundation is laid and the framework of the building is established, walls must be constructed, the interior finished, everything cleaned and furnished, and so on. Similarly, after taking refuge, arousing bodhicitta, and purifying the mindstream, it is essential to accumulate merit and wisdom. The mandala offering is the most supreme skillful means for achieving this.

5) To awaken the supreme wisdom of realization within oneself by praying to the teacher, the source of all blessings. The teacher possesses infinite wisdom, compassion, and qualities. The practice of Guru Yoga can forcefully illuminate the lamp of wisdom in your mind. Therefore, to attain ultimate realization, a practitioner must pray to the teacher.

These are the principal points concerning the inner or uncommon preliminaries.

These eleven principal points about common and uncommon preliminaries provide valuable, skillful methods for your Dharma practice, and I hope you will truly appreciate them. If you do not value these preliminaries, you will not affect me either way, but I worry that you may struggle in your practice. While it may be easy for me to offer you comforting words that might make you feel happy and fulfilled for now, the results of your practice will ultimately speak for themselves over time.

It has been a long time since I began teaching *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. In preparing for the classes, I diligently researched scriptural evidence, Buddhist stories, and more, striving to explain each practical guidance in detail. I believe I have done a fine job because most of the guides or notes from past Tibetan masters are quite brief. I have compiled many Tibetan and Chinese materials for my teaching, which I feel makes my teaching relatively satisfactory.

The purpose of this extensive teaching is not for me to publish more commentaries later for the sake of gaining fame, wealth, or anything else. That thought has never crossed my mind. I believe that a more comprehensive teaching may benefit future practitioners who value the preliminaries. Moreover, it is

uncertain whether opportunities and favorable conditions for extensive teachings of this text will remain available in the future.

You should know that it is through the blessings of the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche and the lineage masters that many people can come together to study the Dharma in this secluded place, Larung Gar. Such an opportunity is both rare and precious, so it is essential to appreciate it and make the most of it.

Personally, I find immense joy in this collective study of the Dharma and consider it truly extraordinary. Why? Despite the challenges of this degenerate age, there are still many fourfold Dharma practitioners who have devoted themselves to studying Mahayana Buddhism for a long time, which is truly remarkable! I believe this is made possible by the blessings of the lineage masters and Dharma protectors, as well as the aspirational power within each of us. Otherwise, how could such a spectacular occurrence take place here?

Therefore, I hope you will appreciate the instructions in this text. Whether you are a sangha member from Larung Gar or a householder living in a big city, if you wish to pursue the Dharma, there is nothing more important than studying and practicing the instructions on the preciousness of human life, the impermanence of life, following a spiritual teacher, taking refuge, arousing bodhicitta, and more. Without knowing these, or only having a superficial understanding, genuine practice will likely be very difficult.

◉ The transference practice that can bring buddhahood without meditation

If death arrives before the path is fully completed,¹⁵⁶ one can be reborn in a pure land through the transference practice that can bring Buddhahood without the need for meditation.

It is uncertain when you will die. If you pass away before attaining realization, you should apply phowa to achieve rebirth in a pure land. This is the fastest, best, and most skillful practice that can lead to Buddhahood without meditation. We have just finished learning phowa, so the Dharma teachers in each cohort at Larung Gar can guide a group practice for the class.

Thus, there are in total twelve principal points in the text, including the instruction on phowa.

¹⁵⁶ That is, before one has attained enlightenment.

♦ Practitioners should know what to do and avoid

I have provided you with all the teachings you need, and now it is time to put them into practice. If you wish to practice phowa, I believe Larung Gar is the best place for our sangha members to do so.

Recently, I heard that some individuals were planning to leave for another place. Of course, you may depart if you find an extraordinary teacher elsewhere, as it is best to receive phowa teachings from an accomplished master. Some people appear to believe in Buddhism and pursue the Dharma, but when they ask questions, it becomes evident that they have hardly read the texts or studied them carefully, which truly disappoints me. Certain Dharma practitioners at Larung Gar are similar: They have been here for quite some time, yet their conduct remains problematic and occasionally quite puzzling.

In a few days, we will take a short break. I have heard that Dharma masters elsewhere have invited some of you female practitioners to conduct a consecration service. While I appreciate the invitation for you to consecrate a Buddha statue belonging to a master, it is important to recognize that only great masters can truly perform consecrations. Therefore, it is not necessary for laywomen and nuns to be involved.

In recent years, Larung Gar has constructed Dharma halls that have cost millions of dollars, yet we have never particularly invited laywomen or nuns from Chinese Buddhism to consecrate these buildings. It has always been the sangha members who have performed the consecrations.

When a female sangha member requested leave to consecrate a building at the invitation of her root teacher, I did not fully understand her decision. I have no objections to the consecration service itself. However, I hope that you, especially young nuns, will be mindful of protecting yourselves from breaking any precepts. Taking ordination and becoming a monastic is not easy, so it is crucial to safeguard yourselves from any circumstances that could lead to a violation of your precepts.

Whether you are male or female, as a true monastic practitioner, you should know what to do and what not to do by constantly remaining mindful and vigilant. Otherwise, no matter how well you speak as a teacher or disciple, if you do not practice what you preach, things will become difficult to manage once you break your precepts.

- ♦ **This text encompasses all essential Sutrayana and Vajrayana essential instructions**

The twelve principal points have, in fact, encompassed all the essential instructions in Sutrayana and Vajrayana.

- ◉ It encompasses all the Sutrayana instructions from other lineages

These preliminary practices can also be described as follows: Reflecting on the four thoughts that turn the mind away from samsara¹⁵⁷ and recognizing the benefits of liberation inspire a genuine renunciation, thereby opening the gateway to the entire path.

As Lama Tsongkhapa stated in the *Lamrim (Stages of the Path to Enlightenment)*, reflecting on the difficulty of finding freedoms and advantages, along with the impermanence of life, allows practitioners to let go of attachment and cultivate disenchantment with this life.

Furthermore, contemplating the infallible principle of cause and effect and the defects of samsara helps practitioners realize that, no matter in which realm they are reborn, happiness will be elusive, allowing them to detach from the desire for a future life. When you desire neither this life nor future lives, you can turn your mind away from worldly attachments and foster the motivation for Dharma practice.

Through reflecting on the benefits of liberation, you aspire to be freed from samsara, which opens the gateway to the path. Once the gateway is open, by following a qualified teacher—the source of all good qualities—you create the conditions favorable to the path.

For a practitioner, if they do not encounter a qualified teacher at the outset, or if the teacher they meet leads them astray, they may struggle to establish favorable conditions for their path. Conversely, meeting and following an authentic teacher can set them on the right track and create the favorable conditions for their spiritual journey.

In one of Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche's vajra songs, he expresses that following Thubga Rinpoche at a young age provided him with a favorable condition for his

¹⁵⁷ The four reflections refer to the reflection on how difficult it is to find the freedoms and advantages, the reflection on life's impermanence, the reflection that the nature of samsara is suffering, and the reflection on the principle of cause and effect.

studies of the Dharma. As a result, his practice and propagation of the Dharma in this life have been exemplary.

I believe many of you here at Larung Gar are also doing well because the teachers you initially encountered are genuinely qualified. This has created favorable conditions for you, ensuring that your practice will continue to progress smoothly in the future.

If the initial conditions are unfavorable, no matter how many detours you have taken, you may still find it difficult to enter the right path. This has happened to some individuals. Over the past twenty years, they have encountered various teachers and spent all their money and effort, yet they have achieved little.

It is not that they do not want to practice; in fact, they genuinely wish to study authentic Dharma and engage in the right practice. However, due to unfavorable initial conditions, they simply cannot enter the right path. Even if they discover an authentic Dharma center, after staying there for two or three days, they might change their minds and unknowingly veer off onto the wrong path again. Such occurrences do happen.

Therefore, the teacher provides the most important favorable condition for your pursuit of the Dharma. As for me, I have been following the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche since 1985. At that time, he was not as well-known as he is today, and many other tulkus or masters were more famous. Nevertheless, I chose to follow him. Looking back, I feel that whether due to my positive karma from previous lives or the merit of this life, it is a profound honor to have encountered Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche and the teachings of this lineage.

The same applies to you. No matter which Dharma teacher you encountered at the beginning, as long as they guided you onto the path to liberation, a favorable condition has been created for which you should feel grateful.

After following a qualified teacher, one should establish the foundation through taking refuge, then arouse bodhicitta and train in the practice of the six transcendent perfections. In this way, one can be guided onto the authentic path to perfect and omniscient enlightenment.

In fact, the essential points of the paths outlined in other instructions—such as the three kinds of perception¹⁵⁸ of the Sakya tradition, the three levels of beings’

¹⁵⁸ The preliminaries for the “Path and Fruit” practice of the Sakya tradition are based on the three kinds of perception: impure perception, mixed perception experienced by yogis

ability of the Gelug tradition, and the Sutrayana guidance on Mahamudra of the Kagyu tradition—can all be fully encompassed within the text of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. This is also clearly explained in the preface to my Chinese translation of the text, written by the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche.

While contemplating the translation of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, I sought the guidance of the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, who seemed quite pleased with my decision. Later, as I worked on the translation, Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche wrote the following preface for the book:

Preface

The *Longchen Nyingtik*, or the *Heart-Essence of the Vast Expanse from the Great Perfection*, encompasses the essence of Longchenpa's Seven Treasuries—the extensive works of the pandita tradition—and *Nyingtik Yabshyi*, or the *Four Parts of the Heart-Essence*—the practical instruction of the profound Kusāli tradition—into one. It is a profound and authentic teaching that can lead to the attainment of the level of Vajradhara in one lifetime.

The Words of My Perfect Teacher: A Guide to the Preliminaries for the Heart-Essence of the Vast Expanse from the Great Perfection not only covers all three stages of the path to enlightenment but also includes all the essential points of the paths. Therefore, everyone who seeks liberation must put it into real practice. In particular, many people today bypass preliminary practices and jump directly to the high teachings of the main practice, such as Mahamudra or Dzogchen, which causes practitioners to drift further away from the teachings. Therefore, it is extremely important for all of you to first focus on the preliminary practices.

This profound instruction encompasses all the essential points of Sutrayana and Vajrayana teachings, including the practice guides of the main schools of Sakya, Gelug, Kagyu, and Nyingma in Tibetan Buddhism, as well as the instructions of the Pure Land, Huayan, and Chan schools in Chinese Buddhism. This work also carries the supreme blessings of the Vidyadhara masters of the lineage. May the

through practice, and pure perception.

Three Roots and the Dharma protectors bestow blessings upon those fortunate ones who engage in the practice properly and bring them the wondrous ambrosia rain of accomplishment.

Patrul Rinpoche gave the transmission of this text to Khenpo Lushul, who then passed it to Lama Lodrö Rinpoche. I received the transmission from my gracious teacher, Lama Lodrö Rinpoche.

I sincerely rejoice in the Chinese translation, proofreading, and teaching of this text. Meanwhile, may Dharma activities be auspicious and perfect!



Shakya bhikshu Jigme Phuntsok Yonglé

On the 3rd day of the first month in the Iron Dragon year, at the age of 68

Feb. 08, 2000

Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche composed this preface in 2000. I began translating *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* in 1999 and finished the section on the common preliminaries before accompanying Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche to Singapore. I completed the entire text after returning from the trip.

In the preface, the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche states, “May the Three Roots and the Dharma protectors bestow blessings upon those fortunate ones who engage in the practice properly and bring them the wondrous ambrosia rain of accomplishment.”

This is the most essential part of the preface. Therefore, I encourage you all to put *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* into proper practice. As long as you do so, lineage masters, the Three Roots, and Dharma protectors will always bestow blessings upon you. With this blessing power, your Dharma practice will be transformative, so you must hold *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* in high regard.

I have translated numerous Dharma works, but the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche only wrote the preface for two of my translations: his commentary on Mipham Rinpoche's *Pointing Out the Nature of the Mind*¹⁵⁹ and Patrul Rinpoche's *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*.

Both prefaces hold great significance for me. After the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche's parinirvana, there were various comments regarding my Chinese translation. However, people eventually ceased their judgments because of the phrase that Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche included in the aforementioned preface. It is evident that a sublime one will say something with a hidden meaning in advance.

I hope all fourfold Dharma practitioners will cherish *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche did not write a lengthy preface, but his words deserve our deep reflection. Those capable Dharma practitioners should memorize this preface.

In the past, some sangha members made a vow to memorize the entire text of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. I was informed that they attempted to memorize the text but struggled with it.

In short, this is both my first and last time giving such an extensive teaching on *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. It is unlikely that I will teach the text again in the future as I have this time. If I do teach it again, I will most likely complete the teaching in two or three months at most. Therefore, I hope you will appreciate this teaching.

◉ The peerless teachings particular to this tradition

The Words of My Perfect Teacher not only encompasses all the Sutrayana instructions from other lineages but also includes teachings particular to this tradition, such as purification and accumulation using the two supreme methods, namely Vajrasattva practice and the mandala offering; Guru Yoga—the secret path of profound blessings—and the instructions on the transference that brings Buddhahood without meditation.

◉ One can enter the main path after completing the preliminaries

You should practice all twelve principal points mentioned above. In particular,

¹⁵⁹ The full title of the text is: *A Lamp to Dispel Darkness: An Instruction that Points Directly to the Very Essence of Mind in the Tradition of 'the Old Realized Ones'*

everyone present for this teaching, as well as those who will listen to it in the future through videos, must complete five hundred thousand repetitions of the preliminaries.

Once you have completed the preliminaries, when the right causes and conditions align, I will provide you with a series of tantric teachings. Those who have not finished the preliminaries will not be eligible to receive the tantric teachings, regardless of who they are. Therefore, it is essential for each of you to place great importance on the preliminary practices.

Upon completing the preliminaries, one may proceed to the extraordinary main path of the vajra core teaching of the Longchen Nyingtik. This includes special preliminary practices that lead to the three kayas, to mind, and to awareness.¹⁶⁰ For example, *The Great Perfection of Peaceful Manjushri* contains specific instructions on the three kayas. After being introduced to the natural state through the empowerment of the creativity of awareness,¹⁶¹ one may practice the naked instructions based on the evolution of one's own experience.¹⁶²

This sequential order is clear, and I hope you will not overlook it. Some teachers may have a secret intention, saying they have a special instruction that requires neither preliminaries nor empowerment, to which I do not object. However, it is important for you to understand your own level of faculties: Are you a practitioner capable of achieving sudden or gradual enlightenment? This is easy to assess since you know yourself well. If you are among the majority suited for gradual enlightenment, you must first complete the preliminary practices. Once you have finished these preliminaries, you can move on to the main tantric practice. This is the most reliable and safest approach.

Before you begin the main tantric practice, you must first undertake the special tantric preliminary practices as mentioned earlier. While learning *The Great Perfection of Peaceful Manjushri*, you also need to engage in specific tantric preliminaries, including Guru Yoga. Following this, you may receive instructions on the main practice of primordial purity and spontaneous presence, which will mature your mindstream. Through this process, your practice will resemble a building with a solid foundation, ensuring its stability.

If you neglect to establish a solid foundation, disregard the tradition of

¹⁶⁰ In this practice, you recognize that samsara and nirvana are of the same nature.

¹⁶¹ Such as the precious word empowerment.

¹⁶² This paragraph refers to the practices specific to the Great Perfection.

lineage masters, and rush into the high teachings, your efforts will be futile. Just as a building requires a foundation, no matter how urgent the construction may seem, you must first lay that groundwork. Once the foundation is in place, you can then proceed to build the structure layer by layer.

In fact, you should practice in the same manner, layer by layer. This is a more reliable approach to practicing the Dharma, but unfortunately, many people are unaware of it. Some individuals are in a great rush, starting directly with the main practice without establishing a foundation through the preliminaries.

You may find it good that they do not need to lay a foundation and have the “green light” from the guru by receiving the instructions for the main practice directly. However, they may not have truly received the instructions, and even if they have, their state of practice may not be stable.

Therefore, I hope you will first practice the preliminaries well, and then proceed to the main practice, as requested by lineage masters.

♦ **The text faithfully records the teacher’s oral instructions**

While writing *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, Patrul Rinpoche prioritized faithfully recording the oral instructions of his root guru over aesthetic or literary considerations. His goal was to present these teachings in a clear and accessible manner that would be beneficial for the mind, ensuring that his own words and ideas did not dilute their essence.

Although Patrul Rinpoche excelled in aesthetic writing, as evidenced by his work *The Lotus Garden’s Play*, he believed that excessive elegance or poetic language would not enhance the text’s value. Consequently, he opted for everyday language in his writing.

As Patrul Rinpoche noted, he faithfully recorded the oral instructions of his peerless teacher in this text. Patrul Rinpoche received the instructions of the preliminaries twenty-five times from his guru, Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu, and he compiled them into the text.

The oral instructions on the preliminaries given by Yukhok Chöying Rangdrol were highly regarded in the Tibetan region, and I received a copy of the transcript in the past. Lama Yukhok’s teachings are not extensive. Whether it is Patrul Rinpoche’s *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* or Lama Yukhok’s oral instructions,

their oral instructions on the lineage teachings are indeed invaluable. You will notice this is especially true after they have departed from this world.

Therefore, when Patrul Rinpoche recorded his teacher's instructions, he aimed to avoid mixing in his own words or ideas. However, even if he did include them, his words or ideas are not merely ordinary; they are likely to be quite extraordinary as well.

When I had just quit school to become ordained, the Dharma teaching I received from Khenpo Depa was on *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. After learning it, on Khenpo Depa's recommendation, I focused solely on following the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche wholeheartedly. It was a milestone in my life that is truly unforgettable.

Now the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche has gone to a pure realm. Although I still experience afflictions, they bring me no pain. What truly causes me pain is that, except in my dreams, I can no longer see my guru. I often feel this sense of loss.

Had I not met Khenpo Depa and the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, I would have been lost regarding my future direction. Most likely, I would have lived a life similar to that of my classmates and other worldly people.

Patrul Rinpoche wrote *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* in a manner that is both accessible and beneficial to the mind, which was his main objective. In my teaching of this text, I cannot claim to have recorded the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche's oral instructions word for word. However, having followed Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche for many years and deeply appreciating both this text and my guru's teachings, I have made every effort to share the instructions I can recall from my guru throughout my teachings. Although I may not have explicitly stated, "This is what my guru taught us," or "That is what my guru said," I have always aimed to convey his oral instructions to you.

Once my teaching of this text is transcribed, it is possible that people of your generation may not hold the transcript in high regard. At least those present here are still engaged with my teaching. I notice that some of you are hesitant to embrace this teaching, participating in classes mainly to pass exams, receive the Dharma book, or for other reasons, as reflected in your "practice records."

On the other hand, some of you have genuine faith in the text and are studying it with the same dedication you showed for *The Way of the Bodhisattva*. This truly brings me joy.

In addition, I would like to extend my special thanks to the volunteers who have contributed to this teaching, including those at Larung Gar who record videos, capture audio, create DVDs, and handle transcriptions, as well as those outside Larung Gar who print Dharma books, manage participants, and disseminate teaching news. Many people have been involved.

Thanks to your collective efforts, numerous Dharma students have come to understand the sequence of the preliminaries. Here, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to all of you volunteers.

Tomorrow, I will give you the final class for this text, and then my job will be complete. I don't think I am going to die tonight, right? But *c'est la vie* if that happens. There is still more work to do on transcribing the teaching, and everything will be ready in four to five months. The exact timeline depends on the progress of the work.

It has not been easy for the volunteers, some of whom have faced various challenges that have brought them tears, sweat, and a range of emotions. However, all these experiences are meaningful because they are for the benefit of living beings.

♦ Use the instructions to transform one's mind

As mentioned earlier, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* is easy to understand, yet it contains abundant pith instructions within its straightforward language.

In particular, the text includes numerous special instructions from Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu that directly reveal hidden faults. Patrul Rinpoche stated that he had recounted all the ones he could remember in the most suitable places within the text.

Of course, Patrul Rinpoche didn't specify his source of reference on each occasion, saying, "My guru Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu said so-and-so..." I understand this well because I also often reference the supreme instructions of the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche in my own teachings, but I don't always say, "Here my guru said this," and "There my guru said that." Listeners can become weary of excessive repetition, even though it can help them develop faith.

Nevertheless, the special instructions from Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu are not meant to be used as a lens to judge others—asking questions like "Why is he acting that way?" or "Why does she behave like that?" Instead, they should serve as a mirror for self-reflection. We ought to examine ourselves closely to see if we carry

those same hidden faults. If we find them within, we should acknowledge and eliminate them, adjusting our mindset and firmly setting it on the correct path.

This is what you should do while studying *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. You should look carefully within yourself; otherwise, the study will not transform your mind and thus will not carry much meaning. I believe those who value this text will be good Dharma practitioners, whereas those who do not value it and simply throw the book aside after class may not have a successful Dharma practice unless they are manifestations of the buddha and bodhisattvas.

The transcription of my teachings on *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* will be compiled into several volumes. Many of you may not have the time or energy to read them all. A few days ago, someone counted that the transcriptions of my teachings in the past six years have been compiled into more than thirty books. Some of you may have read all the transcriptions, while others may have read none. It does not matter whether you read those transcriptions or not, but the text of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* is only about four hundred pages long. I hope you can read through the text once a year, or at least once every two or three years.

The following are the precious instructions from Atisha:

The supreme teacher is the one who reveals your hidden faults.

The supreme instructions are those that hit those faults.

The supreme allies are mindfulness and vigilance.

The supreme motivators are enemies, obstacles, and the sufferings of illness.

The supreme method is not to fabricate anything.

The supreme teacher reveals your hidden faults through their teachings. What is the point of only offering sweet words? You need someone to expose your faults.

The supreme instructions hit your faults. Whenever you listen to a teaching and feel that the teacher is criticizing no one but yourself, it indicates that you are receiving the best instructions. As a practitioner, after you have received such instructions, you will begin to recognize your own faults.

The supreme allies are mindfulness and vigilance. Mindfulness allows you to observe your body, speech, and mind at all times, while vigilance reminds you of your positive actions; together, they are the best allies of a practitioner.

The best motivators are those unfavorable circumstances in your practice.

When faced with obstacles, enemies, and the suffering of illness, you become more mindful and dedicated to your practice. This instruction resonates deeply with me.

For example, when I was ill, I immediately reflected on the impermanence of life, but once I recovered, that awareness faded. When I encountered obstacles, I would earnestly pray to the Three Jewels, but when things returned to normal, I became slack again. Therefore, obstacles, enemies, and the suffering of illness are indeed the best motivators for our Dharma practice.

The supreme method is not to fabricate anything. Among all the instructions, the best one is to directly point out the nature of mind, so the mind remains unfabricated and rests in the natural state. In the ultimate Great Perfection, crystal is sometimes used as a symbolic object to help people recognize the unfabricated nature of the mind.

Recently, someone from Australia offered me an eight-sided crystal. In the past, it was difficult to find such a kind of crystal. The great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche searched for an eight-sided crystal in many stores in Singapore, Malaysia, and the United States, but he could not find many. There are many more available now.

So, I placed the crystal on my desk. Today, a government official came by, saw the crystal, and asked, “Why do you have a crystal here?”

I said, “It represents the unfabricated nature of the mind.”

“What is the unfabricated nature?”

I replied, “In the highest empowerment of the Great Perfection, one may recognize the nature of the mind through seeing a crystal.”

“How does one recognize the nature of the mind?”

I could not tell him too much, so I explained, “Crystal can heal heart conditions. My heart isn’t doing well, so I like crystal.”

He seemed to understand my answer this time and said, “Oh! So that’s what ‘unfabricated nature’ means [audience laughs]!”

In *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, there are many great instructions, which were summarized by Patrul Rinpoche as follows:

It is crucial to follow the instructions to address your hidden faults, to integrate the Dharma into your mind, to remain mindful and vigilant at all times, to take full responsibility for all your

misdeeds, to never allow even a single negative thought to run loose,
and to use the teachings to tame your mind.

While in retreat, Rinchen Zangpo¹⁶³ had three doors to his hermitage. On the outer door, it was written: “Within this door, if I crave the worldly life for even a split second, may the Dharma protectors smash my head.” The middle door displayed vows focused on eradicating “self-interest,” while the inner door contained vows against “ordinary thoughts.” These commitments to eliminate wrong thoughts demonstrate the determination of a true practitioner in his Dharma practice.

As mentioned previously, we may have committed many misdeeds in the first half of our lives, so hopefully we’ll make changes in the second half. Even if we cannot become perfect practitioners, we should no longer engage in wrongdoings. Instead, we should embrace the Three Jewels in the later stages of life and prepare for our future lives. Even if we still occasionally lose our temper or commit wrongdoings due to strong afflictions, as long as we make a sincere effort to confess and perform good deeds, our lives as humans still remain meaningful.

We should grasp the aforementioned instructions and practice them with mindfulness and vigilance. By doing so, we are doing a favor to both ourselves and others. The Dharma will bring benefit to our minds, and following a teacher will take on real meaning.

Atisha also says:

The supreme way to help others is to lead them into the Dharma.

The supreme way to benefit others is to turn their minds to the
Dharma.

What is the best way to help others? It is to lead them to take up the Dharma. Some people believe, “The best way to help me is to give me money”; others think, “Those who love me are the best ones”; some feel, “Those who provide me with status and fame help me the most.” People have different values. However, the best and most long-lasting help we can receive in life is when someone leads us to take up the Dharma, take refuge, and study Mahayana Buddhism.

Why do we say we should be grateful to our teachers and Dharma friends,

¹⁶³ Rinchen Zangpo (Tib. རིན་ཆེན་བཟང་པོ་, Wyl. rin chen bzang po) (958-1055) was one of the greatest translators of the New Translation period in Tibet. (Source: Rigpawiki.org)

claiming their kindness far surpasses that of our own parents? It is because, in this brief life, they guide us to embrace the Dharma, which is exceptionally rare to encounter.

People often say, “It benefits me greatly,” but some, after reading novels or watching movies and TV shows, end up with more afflictions in their minds yet still believe they have received great benefit. What kind of “benefit” is that? In fact, true benefit lies in turning our minds to the Dharma. For example, when you receive the teachings of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, truly understand the instructions, and then put them into practice properly—this is what it means to truly benefit.

Atisha’s instructions that Patrul Rinpoche quoted in the text are concise and direct. They hit the faults and clearly indicate the right path. Therefore, I hope you can all grasp these instructions and use them to correct your minds and perfect your practice.

♦ Strive to practice the right Dharma

In short, now that we have the precious human life with all freedoms and advantages, and we have met a qualified teacher and received profound instructions, the opportunity to attain Buddhahood through the practice of the nine vehicles of the teachings is now ours. It is now that we can shape the course of our future lives or abandon ourselves to chance.

Therefore, one must appreciate the opportunity to study and practice the Dharma available to us. This is not a joke or a statement made for a ceremony. A practitioner should truly recognize that encountering the Dharma is rare and that practicing it holds profound significance.

People often say, “Now is the most critical time for my career. I am about to launch a project in a few days, and it is vital because my whole life depends on it.”

Similarly, throughout our long journey in samsara, this life is the most critical because all our future lives depend on it. If you dedicate this life to proper Dharma practice, you will create supreme conditions favorable for all your future lives. Once this life is over, your future lives will be beyond your control and may differ significantly from your current one. If you miss the opportunity to study and practice the Dharma in this life, how many more lives will pass before you encounter the Dharma again, let alone attain liberation? It is difficult to say.

Those who believe in the principle of cause and effect and embrace the teachings of Buddhism will certainly understand this. If we view our lives through the lens of a single lifetime, our childhood—from the age of six or seven to our teenage years—should be the critical period for education. However, if a person does not engage in learning during this time, they may struggle to pursue intellectual studies in the future. Conversely, if the person takes full advantage of this period, they will reap the benefits for the rest of their life.

Why do practitioners deeply cherish their precious human life? Its significance transcends the comprehension of those focused solely on worldly matters. This lack of understanding often leads them to act carelessly.

In contrast, we practitioners recognize the preciousness of human life and understand the importance of making the most of it. As we know, it is now that we can direct our minds toward goodness or succumb to negativity. Once this opportunity is lost, it cannot be regained. Thus, we must hold tightly to this rare opportunity, which is difficult to attain over countless kalpas.

I have noticed that some people are doing very well. They recognize that they encountered the Dharma later in life and truly do not want to waste any more time—they are determined to dedicate their remaining years to practice. This is indeed very wise. If a practitioner genuinely dedicates a few years, a decade, or even just the final decades of their life to spiritual practice and transforming their own mind, they will undoubtedly reap significant benefits. Moreover, if they are more capable, they may also benefit others. How meaningful and valuable it is to spend your life in this way!

Otherwise, if your primary focus in life is solely on cars, houses, success, failure, and so forth, how can these truly be regarded as accomplishments in the long run? In the broader context of endless samsara, they are not significant at all.

As you should know, this very moment is the watershed between the right and wrong direction of your entire existence. This opportunity is akin to finding food after having had only one meal in a hundred lifetimes. However, not everyone recognizes how precious this opportunity is. You have the opportunity to receive Dharma teachings and engage in practice every day, yet many of you lack mindfulness and vigilance, thinking, “Hearing and practicing the Dharma is not particularly rare!” You should not think this way.

Here is a story from *The Marvelous Dharma Discourse*.¹⁶⁴

After taking his ordination, the Buddha's son Rahula enjoyed playing around and disliked listening to the teachings. Later, the Buddha told him, "It is rare that a Buddha comes to this world. It is rare to have the opportunity to hear the Dharma. It is hard to live a long life, and it is even harder to attain enlightenment. You now have a human life and have encountered the Buddha, so why do you idle around and choose not to listen to the Dharma?"

Rahula said, "The Dharma is exquisite, but my mind is too shallow. How can I understand your teaching? I used to listen to your teachings but forgot them immediately. What a waste of my effort! I gained nothing! So I think I should enjoy myself as much as possible while I am still young, and when I grow older, I will naturally become more receptive to the teachings."

The Buddha said, "Everything is impermanent, and so is your life. Can you guarantee that you will grow older?"

"You are right, World Honored One! Rahula cannot guarantee that. But can't you, the Buddha, keep your son alive?"

"Impermanence is the rule of everything. I cannot guarantee continued existence for myself, let alone for you!"

"But I don't understand you when I listen to the teachings, so I cannot attain any realization. Then what's the point of hearing the Dharma?"

The Buddha told him, "After hearing the Dharma, even if you cannot attain realization in this life, you can still receive great benefits when you are reborn in the five realms of samsara in the future. As I mentioned before, Prajnaparamita, or transcendent wisdom, is also referred to as nectar, elixir, a bridge, and a boat. Have you never heard of this?"

After hearing the Buddha's words, Rahula began to pursue the Dharma with great diligence.

From this story, we learn that Buddhists should practice self-discipline. Monastics excel in this regard, as their ordination reflects their commitment to embracing the Dharma. In contrast, laypeople encounter more external challenges and greater afflictions, which can easily sway their minds and hinder their practice, making self-discipline essential for them.

¹⁶⁴ Skt. Adbhutadharmaṃparyāya

Whether you are a monastic or a householder, self-discipline is essential. What do you use to discipline yourself? It is the teachings on the preciousness of human life and the impermanence of life that inspire reflection: “This human life is so precious; I must use it to perform good deeds rather than misdeeds,” or “I must practice the Dharma now, for what if I die two days from now? Anyone, regardless of age, can die unexpectedly. Why wouldn’t I?”

Therefore, we should diligently practice the Dharma day and night, always using the awareness of death to motivate our efforts. We should relinquish all attachments to this life, persevere in our practice even at the cost of our lives, and strive to abandon wrongdoings and cultivate virtue.

When you truly begin to practice in this way, you will persevere regardless of how tired you are, how challenging the situation may be, or how many obstacles you encounter. Think about the great masters of the past and reflect on how they strove for even just a four-line verse despite enduring various hardships.

Now that you have access to all the Dharma online, why not engage with the teachings properly? Distractions and trivial pursuits are endless and detrimental to your liberation.

♦ Follow the teacher and benefit all beings

We should follow an authentic teacher who possesses all the necessary qualities and embrace their guidance without hesitation. We should wholeheartedly take refuge in the Three Jewels.

When we experience happiness, we should recognize it as a blessing from the compassion of the Three Jewels. Conversely, when we encounter suffering, we should acknowledge it as a consequence of our past negative actions.

Having known this, our happiness and suffering can be transformed onto the path. As Thogme Zangpo said in his *Song of Happiness*:

This illusory heap of a body, which like others, I possess—
If it falls sick, so be it! In sickness I will rejoice!
For it will exhaust my negative karma from the past.

...

If I am healthy, so be it! In freedom from sickness I will rejoice!
When body and mind are well and at ease,

Virtuous practice can develop and gain strength.¹⁶⁵

Therefore, a true practitioner understands that both happiness and suffering are blessings from the Three Jewels and will always keep this in mind.

After following the teacher and taking refuge in the Three Jewels, we should diligently engage in the practices of accumulation and purification with the pure motivation of bodhicitta.

Among all the practices, Guru Yoga should be your central focus. For instance, before we meditate on the preciousness of human life and the impermanence of life in the morning, we should first complete a session of Guru Yoga. Before we engage in the practice of bodhicitta, we should start with a Guru Yoga session. As mentioned previously, eventually, we are practicing Guru Yoga in everything we do. Through immaculate devotion and immaculate samaya, our mind and the wisdom of the lineage masters become one.

Speaking of “immaculate samaya,” it is extremely important. The breach of precepts by some practitioners is often related to irresponsible remarks made by those around them. Therefore, as practitioners, we must refrain from finding faults with others and discussing them constantly.

Nowadays, some individuals, in the course of pursuing the Dharma, begin to develop negative thoughts about their Dharma fellows, their teacher, and the Three Jewels due to irresponsible and tainted remarks made by others. Once these negative thoughts arise, these individuals find it difficult to restrain them, ultimately leading to the destruction of their sources of merit. How awful!

Therefore, to be responsible to ourselves and others, we should focus on examining our own faults rather than pointing out those of others. A person who frequently discusses the faults of Dharma fellows or others may risk becoming a source of conflict and wrongdoing. What may have started as a minor issue can escalate uncontrollably when fueled by such comments.

A true practitioner rarely speaks of others’ faults and avoids associating with those who tend to make irresponsible remarks, as such individuals can fabricate anything. A practitioner should concentrate on their own practice.

In the practice of Guru Yoga, a true practitioner practices so effectively that their mind becomes inseparable from the wisdom of the lineage masters. In the

¹⁶⁵ Translated by Adam Pearcey, 2007. Edited by Phillippa Sison. Revised 2012.

preliminary practices, they do not merely engage for a limited time to receive the instructions for the main practice of the Great Perfection; instead, they commit to practicing for the rest of their life. As long as they do not stop practicing these profound instructions, they will undoubtedly make progress on the path.

Moreover, by engaging in these practices, the practitioner will definitely receive the supreme blessings of the lineage masters, along with protection from the deities and Dharma protectors. As a result, not only will the path of practice progress smoothly, but the practitioner may even attain perfect enlightenment in this very life. Once the practitioner has attained true experience and realization, they will no longer cling to personal happiness. Instead, they will courageously take on the responsibility of benefiting all beings, helping them to be free from the dungeon of samsara.

♦ The “promotional material” of the text

The conclusion section in *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* summarizes the principal points of the text. I have just spent an entire class covering it. If this section were to be placed at the beginning of the text, it would serve as the “promotional material” for this precious work.

These days, many people appreciate simplicity. If you want to understand the instructions in *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* through the simplest language, you may refer to this section of the text. If you wish to hear a teaching that explains the text, you should listen to today’s class. After that, if you have faith, you may continue to listen to all the classes of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*.

So far, I have taught you over one hundred and forty lessons on the text. All the content from those lessons can be summarized in today’s teaching. As Patrul Rinpoche said, “This includes all the most crucial instructions.”



Lesson 144

“The pith instructions from the threefold lineage in a river of nectar ... expanse of the primordial Buddha!” [page 370–374]

Today is the final class for *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. We will study the closing verses in the conclusion section.

I will not provide an extensive explanation of the following verses; otherwise, I would only be able to cover three or four verses in each class, which would take several days to finish. Therefore, I will simply go over the literal meaning of the verses.

The nectar river of pith instructions from the threefold lineage,

The sweet ambrosia from the lips of lineage teachers,

The essential points of the nine vehicles of practice

Are all collected here, flawlessly and without distortion.

The pith instructions from the threefold lineage—the mind lineage of the Conquerors, the symbol lineage of the Vidyadharas, and the hearing lineage of ordinary beings—in a river of nectar, the ambrosia of the oral instructions from the Longchen Nyíngtik lineage masters, starting with Longchenpa and Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa, and the essential points of the practice of the nine vehicles, from Shravakayana to the ultimate Atiyoga, or the Great Perfection, are all unerringly encompassed in the text of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*.

Patrul Rinpoche directly stated that this work encompasses all the essential points of practice in both Sutrayana and Vajrayana, and that it is unparalleled in its transmission, pith instructions, and practical sequence. Such a work is certainly worthy of our study and practice. This is why I often encourage Dharma students to read the text and to apply its instructions in real practice.

♦ The similes about this text

The following verses use several similes to illustrate how supreme and great *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* is.

*Discarding the chaff of fancy words and phrases,
Flavored with the crucial points of super profound practice,
Simmered in the essence of instructions based on experience—
This fine work is like a well-cooked meal.*

The Words of My Perfect Teacher is like a well-cooked meal.

Just as one winnows away the chaff before cooking rice, the author of this text has discarded all fancy words and phrases lacking substantial meaning. Just as one seasons cooked food, this text is flavored with the crucial points of deep practice, from the preciousness of human life to the swift path of transference. Just as a meal consists of the essence of food, this text contains the essence of instructions based on the experiences of lineage masters. Therefore, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* is like a remarkably well-cooked meal, and anyone who partakes in it will be nourished.

Nowadays, people around the world greatly lack an understanding of the truths in Buddhism. Those who are spiritually hungry cannot find the “food” they seek and are in a state of deficiency. They genuinely long for the truth and wish to practice, but unfortunately, they know little about even the most basic practical steps. For such individuals, I believe *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* is their best “food,” and it is also quite nourishing. I hope you will take the opportunity to enjoy it right away. After that, you will no longer experience spiritual hunger or deficiency.

*Across the wasteland of harsh nature steeped in the three
poisons,*

*The adamantine plowshare of pith instructions breaks the
ground to unearth hidden faults,*

*Skillfully irrigated with the water of authentic and wondrous
Dharma—*

This fine work is like a skilled farmer.

The Words of My Perfect Teacher is like a skilled farmer.

Our minds are savage and coarse, filled with the three poisons of attachment, anger, and ignorance. They resemble a wasteland that has never been plowed. The pith instructions in *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* are like an adamantine plowshare, capable of tilling the wasteland of your mind and uncovering hidden faults. Once the mind is plowed, it can be skillfully irrigated with the water of authentic, wondrous Dharma, allowing the crops of virtue to grow. In this way, this text is like a skilled farmer.

A skilled farmer excels at farming. No matter how barren the land may be, through his plowing and irrigating, it will become fertile. *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* is like such a farmer, undeterred by even the most barren and obstinate wasteland of the mind. This is because his plowshare is not ordinary; it is the adamantine plowshare of pith instructions, and his water is not mundane but the skillful water of authentic Dharma. Plowed by the adamantine plowshare and irrigated with the water of authentic Dharma, any barren land will become fertile.

Patrul Rinpoche is skilled at poetry. He compared *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* to a well-cooked meal that everyone can taste and savor. He also likened the text to a skilled farmer who helps us plow and irrigate the barren wasteland of our minds, preparing it for the sowing of the seeds of good Dharma in the future. These similes are quite accurate.

Many people have experienced the unprecedented joy of studying *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. Moreover, after receiving the teachings, they become peaceful and composed in their thoughts, regardless of how aggressive and stubborn they once were. In addition, they behave carefully in accordance with the principle of cause and effect. When they reflect on themselves, they feel they have transformed from barren wasteland to fertile soil.

As you can see, this text truly possesses great power and blessings.

*In the fertile soil of renunciation,
 The seed of bodhicitta is skillfully sown
 Nurtured by merit and purification, the fruit of accomplish-
 ment grows—
 This fine work is like a bountiful harvest.*

The Words of My Perfect Teacher is like a bountiful harvest.

When the mind's barren wasteland has been plowed and irrigated, it transforms into the fertile soil of renunciation, aided by the four outer preliminaries. In this soil, the seed of bodhicitta is carefully sown. Once the seed is in the soil, how can it be nurtured to grow? It is nourished by the merit accumulated through mandala offerings and purification through meditating on and reciting Vajrasattva, so that the seed of bodhicitta will sprout and eventually yield the fruit of spiritual accomplishment. Thus, this text is like a bountiful and perfect harvest.

Whoever completes the study of such a great work will not only bring their mind to maturity and grasp the truths of the Dharma but will also cultivate genuine renunciation and bodhicitta through real practice, allowing the good seeds to sprout, blossom, and bear fruit through the accumulation of merit and purification.

*Exposing one's hidden faults and uprooting them,
 Exhorting virtues through hundreds of skillful means,
 Always diligent in actions that benefit others—
 This fine work is like a loving nanny.*

The Words of My Perfect Teacher is like a loving nanny.

The nanny loves the child, so she will firmly stop their misdeeds and guide them on what to do and what not to do. She explains the principles of being a good human being and cares for their growth and development in every way. Likewise, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* is like a loving nanny who reveals our hidden faults and uproots them. Through skillful words, this work exhorts the merits of good deeds and the Buddha's teachings. Its only focus is to help our minds improve and grow. Therefore, this text is like a loving nanny.

A loving nanny is a fitting simile. Now you are studying *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, and in the future, you will share these teachings with others. When you

share the teachings, even in just one lesson, the instructions in the text are like the words of a loving nanny that naturally flow into the hearts of the listeners. They will then understand what to do, what not to do, and the merits of good Dharma. Though written in everyday language, the text can provide true benefits to everyone.

Therefore, in Tibetan Buddhism, both beginner and advanced practitioners should study *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. The instructions in this work differ from a typical school curriculum, which, once completed, need not be revisited in secondary school or university.

This is not the case for *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. You must study it when you first embark on the Dharma path, and you will continue to need it throughout your life. Why is that? Because the text encompasses all the essential points of the practice of the nine vehicles.

When I “escaped” from school in the early 1980s, the first Buddhist text I studied was *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. Yesterday, a Dharma friend told me that when he left his school, his parents, teachers, and classmates all tried to dissuade him, leaving him feeling quite conflicted. I experienced the same feelings back then. However, after I received the teachings from *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, I found my footing. It has been more than twenty years since then, but I have always believed that as long as one wants to practice the Dharma, this text is indispensable. I hold this belief strongly.

Not only are the words nice, but their meaning is also profound.

They still carry the warmth of my peerless teacher’s breath.

These excellent teachings are like a wish-fulfilling jewel of the heart—

Whoever embraces them will surely enter the true path.

The Words of My Perfect Teacher is like a wish-fulfilling jewel of the heart.

The text is well written, though it does not rely on fancy language from an aesthetic or literary standpoint. Instead, the phrases and words are fluent, down-to-earth, and easily understood by everyone, including the wise and the dimwitted. Not only are the words nice, but their meanings are particularly profound. Further-

more, the words still carry the warmth of the breath of Patrul Rinpoche's peerless teacher, Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu.

Therefore, this work is unlike external wealth, which can be both beneficial and detrimental. It is the authentic wish-fulfilling jewel of the heart. Whoever studies and practices the instructions in this work and remains committed to it can undoubtedly enter the true path to liberation, directly or indirectly.

Those who are on the path to liberation will eliminate their afflictions sooner or later. With his intelligence and wisdom, Patrul Rinpoche recorded his teacher's oral instructions in this work, which has benefited countless practitioners. This success is a result of the gurus' blessings. As we often say, "The teacher's blessing is incredible." Indeed, it is.

♦ The work is an imperturbable teacher

When engaging in Dharma activities, the bodhisattvas have special skills. What are the skills?

*Practicing the sacred teachings solely for the benefit of others,
Not relying on elegant prosody or poetic rhyme,
But revealing the true path through everyday language—
These are the special skills of all bodhisattvas.*

Everything that bodhisattvas do is intended to benefit others. They gain mastery of the profound teachings found in sacred texts. When propagating the Dharma, they do not rely on elegance, poetry, rhetoric, rhyme, or complex language. Instead, they use everyday language to convey the true path, ensuring that the benefits and practices can be taken to heart. These are the special skills of bodhisattvas.

Chinese poetry is renowned for its elegance and refined structure. Often composed in rhythmic lines with end rhymes, it captivates many with its aesthetic beauty and lyrical flow. Throughout Chinese history—especially during the Tang dynasty—numerous poets created works that continue to be admired for their artistic merit and emotional depth. However, while these poems are enjoyable and moving, one might question whether they possess the power to truly alleviate the inner afflictions and suffering of the human mind. It is difficult to say.

Take worldly teachers' talks, for example. Some teachers use numerous idioms and poetic expressions, making their talks enjoyable and presenting themselves as eloquent speakers. However, once the talks conclude, students often realize they remember nothing.

Other teachers may not be as eloquent and use only everyday language, but they communicate directly and clearly what students should adopt, what to avoid, what to do in the morning, what to do at night, and outline the key issues and plans for the week. These teachers use simple words and may not appear as articulate as their students, yet students appreciate them. Why? Because after these teachers speak, students know exactly what to do next.

Similarly, Patrul Rinpoche used everyday language to write *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, which is easily understood by Tibetans. Lay practitioner Yuanxing Guo translated this text from Tibetan to Chinese, but the manuscript is somewhat difficult to grasp. I was informed that Master Fazun also translated the text, but I have not yet found the translation.

When I began translating the text, I aimed to make my version easy to read and understand, except for the quoted scriptural references. However, it seems the Tibetan version is more accessible. This reflects the special skill of bodhisattvas, which is beyond the capacity of an ordinary person.

In any case, the Chinese translation of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* has benefited many people. Today at noon, I met a few Buddhists who asked me, "Of all Buddhist works, what should we read?" I replied, "*The Words of My Perfect Teacher*." In fact, whenever people ask me what to read, I always recommend this work because it is accessible and easy to understand.

When a master teaches the Dharma or gives instructions, they should use clear and straightforward language. If the master is familiar with the local dialect or expressions, it is best to use them to explain the Dharma. As said in *The Kalachakra Tantra*:

If the truth can be understood in dialect,
What is the use of other languages?

Therefore, whether you are a Dharma teacher or a tutor, you do not necessarily need to prioritize eloquence in your teachings. If you focus too much on eloquence,

you may miss out on conveying the meaning of some profound pith instructions. Your teaching will be easier to understand if you use simple, everyday language.

Though some texts are extensive and rich in detail,

They rarely penetrate the minds of the dimwitted.

*Elevated discussions on philosophical views and profound
practices*

*Are hard to practice for those with limited understanding in
this degenerate age.*

If a Buddhist work is rich in detail and extensive explanations, it may be challenging for the less astute. Especially in this degenerate age, ordinary people prefer texts that are easy to understand and simpler to read rather than those with elevated discussions on philosophical views and profound practices. Some people have even said to me, “Could you please stop teaching us those lengthy treatises? Just teach us something simpler, such as Langri Thangpa’s *Eight Verses of Training the Mind* or Gyalse Tokme Zangpo’s *The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*?”

Moreover, if a teacher uses sophisticated language and elevated discussions to explain the profound view, meditation, action, and fruition of the ultimate Great Perfection, the Great Seal, or Yamantaka, it can be challenging for individuals with limited intellectual capacity and lower moral conduct to put these teachings into practice.

Recently, a Buddhist asked me, “When are you going to teach us the Great Perfection? Please do let me know when you do!”

I replied, “I am teaching it!”

“Really? You are?”

“Yes. I am teaching *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*—a guide to the preliminaries for the Great Perfection.”

“Oh!” he said. “Then, don’t count me in.” (*The audience laughs.*)

In fact, while you appreciate receiving profound teachings such as the Great Middle Way and the Great Perfection, many of you do not or cannot put these teachings into real practice after receiving them. In contrast, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* provides practical instructions that can effectively address your

challenges in Dharma practice and in life, making it accessible for everyone to apply to a certain extent.

Some people said, “Sangha members at Larung Gar devote too much time to studying the preliminaries of the Great Perfection instead of the higher teachings. You focus too much on theory!”

Here is what I think: You should begin by establishing a foundation in the study and practice of the preliminaries; only then can you truly embrace and benefit from the higher teachings.

Otherwise, as Longchenpa said, “If an ordinary person starts with learning profound teachings in the Great Perfection, such as primordial purity, they will not only reject the teachings but also develop incorrect views.”

Therefore, I hope you will all establish a solid foundation. Otherwise, if you go directly for the highest teaching, not only will you fail to attain realization, but you will also encounter various obstacles. This is possible.

Therefore, this text is easy to understand and captures the essential points—

Like a jewel of gold in the minds of those with limited understanding,

Like a lamp illuminating the darkness of a dull mind,

Like an imperturbable teacher, imparting the right meaning clearly on its own.

Thus, when writing *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, Patrul Rinpoche not only used words that are easy to understand but also encompassed all the essential points of the practices. Even those with limited understanding can read the text and feel as if they possess all the precious jewels, like gold and silver, in their minds. Even someone of weak intellect, upon reading the text, feels as if they have a lamp illuminating the darkness in their minds. Therefore, for everyone, this work is like an imperturbable teacher that imparts the right meaning clearly on its own.

Someone once said, “In the past, I knew very little about the Dharma and even found it ridiculous to study it. But after studying *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, I came to understand that ‘Good actions bring happiness, while negative actions result in suffering.’”

Why did he gain understanding so quickly? The answer lies in the many supreme instructions found in this work, which allow the profound and exquisite meaning of the Dharma to unfold naturally in your mind. When you open *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, no matter the chapter—be it “the principle of cause and effect,” “following a spiritual teacher,” or “the swift path of transference”—it feels as if an imperturbable teacher is guiding you with instructions that lead to immediate understanding.

Where can you find such a remarkable teacher? If you want to find a teacher in whom you can instantly develop faith, it is better to seek a pratyekabuddha who can captivate you by levitating into the air and meditating in the vajra posture, surrounded by fire or emanating nectar. But where can you find such a person today?

If the teacher is not a pratyekabuddha, you may perceive him as an ordinary person, thinking, “Look, he says this or that, he sees things this way or that way, he eats this way or that way... so he is undoubtedly just an ordinary person.” As a result, you may develop numerous wrong thoughts.

In such a case, you might as well read *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. As you engage with the text, the true meaning of the Dharma will naturally reveal itself to you. No matter how you approach it, the work will never become frustrated with you, so it is regarded as “an imperturbable instructor.” Therefore, carrying a copy with you is akin to having a great teacher by your side. In contrast, some Dharma teachers may be too preoccupied, while others may not fully meet your needs.

Recently, a Dharma fellow told me, “I’ve lost faith when I see you.”

I said, “Why is that?”

“Because each time I want to ask you a question, you are so busy and simply go away. I’ll never come back for your teaching!” (*The audience laughs.*)

Therefore, no matter who you are, if you have questions about the Dharma, it may be challenging to find answers from a teacher or a Dharma companion. In particular, someone like me, who has a difficult personality, a short temper, poor health, and fluctuating moods, may not always provide the answers you seek, as I am full of faults myself. However, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* is flawless, like an imperturbable teacher, while I am a teacher who can easily become agitated.

Of course, I am not a true teacher, and at times I may not even qualify as a good disciple. I do not mean to sound humble by saying this; I genuinely feel quite

embarrassed about myself. However, since I am already seated on the Dharma seat, I feel compelled to act with pretense. I hope you will consider *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* as your root guru and read it frequently. In this way, the text can guide you at all times.

This text is like an imperturbable teacher, serving as the most reliable guide for practitioners of the degenerate age to follow.

*For the intellectuals who enjoy verbose discourse,
For the renowned scholars who do not grasp the texts,
Once they drink the nectar of these supreme pith instructions,
They will surely find their strength for practice greatly
enhanced.*

In this world, there are many so-called intellectuals who enjoy verbose discourse, including those who specialize in poetry, history, and literature. Such individuals may focus excessively on the aesthetic or literary aspects of writing, often neglecting the underlying meaning. There are also renowned scholars who articulate their thoughts eloquently, including those with doctoral degrees in religious studies or those who supervise graduate programs. Additionally, some Dharma masters, while engaged in scholarly research and scripture verification, fail to grasp Lama Tsongkhapa's instruction: "One should regard all Buddhist scriptures as the instructions and teachings that antidote afflictions." To these intellectuals and scholars, Patrul Rinpoche suggested that if they embrace the essence of the excellent pith instructions in *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, they will undoubtedly find their strength for practicing those essential teachings significantly enhanced.

Nowadays, many people lack the strength to practice the Dharma, and it can even be said that they experience a significant deficiency in motivation. Why is that? It is because they focus solely on scriptural studies and presentations, without applying the teachings to real practice. For example, the teachings that "form is not different from emptiness, and emptiness is not different from form," "all phenomena are empty," or "arousing bodhicitta for the benefit of all beings" may seem very simple and unworthy of study in the eyes of intellectuals and scholars. However, a superficial understanding is far from sufficient. Without genuine practice, it is challenging to develop the right views and faith.

Therefore, I hope that those who specialize in Buddhist Studies will engage deeply with *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. After that, you will no longer merely discuss or write about the Dharma. Otherwise, what is the point of feeling superior simply because you can write a doctoral dissertation or have a background in historical studies? You should gauge the depth of your understanding of the Dharma by assessing the extent of your mental afflictions.

But for these people, Patrul Rinpoche would criticize them at one moment and encourage them at another. In this verse, Patrul Rinpoche encouraged them by saying they would become revitalized by studying the instructions in *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* and by putting those instructions into proper practice.

*For those hermits who meditate on emptiness without
guidance, as if casting stones into the dark,*

*For those practitioners who flaunt their practice with mere
outward display,*

For those charlatan siddhas who overrate themselves—

Encountering this path is like a nail piercing their hearts.

Three types of people will suffer as if nails were being pierced into their hearts when they are exposed to the right path described in this work.

The first type of people is those who seem to meditate daily, like great practitioners, claiming they are meditating on emptiness and non-attachment. However, their meditation practice resembles casting stones into the dark, unaware of where the stones land. It can be said that their qualities of renunciation, bodhicitta, and nondual wisdom have barely increased, they have not attained any realization, and their meditation is merely a practice without guidance.

The second type of people consists of those who boast about all the practice they have done. In the presence of others, they engage in various Dharma activities while showing off by saying, “I’ve recited this prayer so many times” or “I’ve read this many books.” However, they never reflect on their own minds, focusing solely on numbers and external appearances.

The final type of people is charlatan siddhas who overrate themselves and have never faced their own limits. They may act irresponsibly toward the Dharma and even toward themselves in pursuit of insignificant benefits.

If these people have the opportunity to read through all the instructions in *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, such as the preciousness of human life, the principle of cause and effect, and arousing bodhicitta, they will feel such pain, as if nails were being driven into their hearts. They will reflect, “I made a mistake here; I made a mistake there.”

This discomfort is why some Dharma practitioners hesitate to receive the teachings of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. During class, they often feel as though they are being scolded, which makes them very uneasy. However, if they can correct their mistakes, their practice will progress well.

Some people, however, face a different challenge—they are unable to delve deeper into the teaching. One person once told me, “I have read your translation of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. One part of the text contains stories, while the other offers instructions. It is a fine text. Not too bad!” His remark about the text is not too high; it is simply “not too bad.” (*The audience laughs.*) If one truly wishes to practice, one must study thoroughly and learn how to transform one’s own mind.

♦ The essence of the peerless teacher’s words

How did Patrul Rinpoche write this text?

Though I have extensively studied ornate discourses rich in words,

And am skilled in painting, poetic rhythm, and depicting rainbows,

These are not the oral teachings of my gracious teacher—

Thus, no fabricated words of my own are mixed in here.

From Patrul Rinpoche’s biography, we see that he was not only an enlightened practitioner but also a knowledgeable scholar and intellectual—a distinguished figure of his time. Patrul Rinpoche excelled in painting and particularly in poetry, as reflected in his work *The Lotus Garden’s Play*. He was highly accomplished in poetry, including Indian forms. While he could have easily written *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* in poetic format, he believed that doing so would disconnect it from the oral teachings of his root teacher, Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu, and other lineage teachers. For this reason, he avoided using superficially versed and complex words

intertwined with his own ordinary thoughts. Instead, he faithfully recorded the words of his teacher.

The phrase “faithfully recorded the words of his teacher” does not imply that Patrul Rinpoche would document his teacher’s yawns or coughs. Today, some disciples feel compelled to transcribe every detail during teachings. For example, when the teacher yawns, the disciple might write “ahhhh-hhaaaaa,” and if the teacher coughs, they would note “koff, koff.” This practice stems from the disciple’s fear of injecting their own thoughts into the transcription. However, this approach is not ideal.

A disciple tasked with transcribing the teacher’s teachings does not need to record every word and phrase verbatim. Instead, they should adapt the language when transcribing oral instructions. This is important because there is a distinction between delivering an oral presentation and composing a written work, as noted in some Tibetan sayings:

A written work must be extremely rigorous,
While an oral instruction should align with the context.

Consequently, it is unrealistic to expect a speaker to always use precise wording or avoid logical errors during spontaneous speech.

A good transcriber can understand the essence of what the teacher means in the talk while also enhancing the wording of the text. Therefore, I hope transcribers who volunteer for your gurus’ talks and teachings will remain faithful to their oral teachings.

If you merely depict the rainbow of poetry existing in your own mind and transform your guru’s talk into something entirely different without preserving the guru’s voice, this is certainly not acceptable. If you do not grasp what the teacher is conveying, your transcription will be inaccurate, which is also unacceptable.

However, if you are too rigid and simply transcribe every single word the teacher says, it may not accurately reflect what the teacher truly wishes to communicate. This is because, during oral instruction, the teacher may convey a clear message without paying close attention to their wording.

Nowadays, many Dharma teachers, especially those in Tibetan Buddhism, have capable disciples who assist in transcribing oral instructions, compiling them

into books, creating videos, and developing other teaching materials. In doing so, they help preserve the teachers' instructions, which is very necessary.

It is not enough to preserve the teachings of just one teacher, two teachers, or even a hundred teachers. The reason is simple: there are countless beings in need of guidance, and each teacher can bring specific kinds of beings onto the path.

When the teachings—particularly the teachings of those who have compassion, wisdom, and the blessings of lineage teachers—are transcribed into texts, they can undoubtedly benefit future generations. As you can see, Patrul Rinpoche recorded his teacher's oral instructions in this work, and a century later, we still benefit from them. Therefore, if the teachings of many contemporary teachers are also documented in texts or videos, future beings at various levels may also benefit from them greatly.

Volunteering to transcribe teachings can be challenging, especially when interpersonal conflicts and differing opinions surface. For instance, if X has transcribed an oral instruction and Y wishes to modify the manuscript, X might feel frustrated, particularly if X is an intellectual. Some volunteers express their concerns by saying, "If so-and-so has to review my transcriptions, I will not volunteer for this task anymore. He used to mess up my work a lot..."

Such experiences can leave volunteers feeling disheartened and annoyed, and I completely understand their frustration.

Nevertheless, Buddhism is flourishing these days, and many teachers' Dharma activities are progressing smoothly, so volunteers should continue their work. Of course, when engaging in volunteer tasks, it is important not to go to extremes.

*My peerless teacher, a true buddha, appeared in this world,
And great virtue and goodness have flourished throughout
the Land of Snows.
It has not been long since his parinirvana,
So my vajra brothers can still bear witness that I faithfully
record his teachings.*

Patrul Rinpoche continued to explain, "It is not an exaggeration to say that I have faithfully documented my teacher's oral instructions. My peerless teacher, Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu, is a true buddha manifesting in this world, who has brought

immense joy, benefit, and blessings to the Land of Snows. His parinirvana occurred not long ago. As for whether this work accurately reflects my teacher's instructions without incorporating my own ordinary thoughts, many of my vajra brothers who still live in this world can attest to it."

It seems that Patrul Rinpoche worked on the text shortly after his teacher's parinirvana. It is very important to transcribe the teacher's oral teachings or record them in audio or video while they are still alive or soon after their passing.

When I first arrived at Larung Gar, I tried to note down every instruction given by the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche. However, I later thought, "My root guru teaches us every day, so it is fine to take notes later," and I stopped taking notes after that. Just like that, more than a decade passed.

At Larung Gar, there was an ordinary monk named Tsering Gönpö, who diligently recorded every instruction from Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche. After Rinpoche entered parinirvana, Tsering's notes were compiled into a manuscript that was later proofread by Tulku Tendzin. A few years ago, this Tibetan manuscript was published as a two-hundred-page book.

After this, all the disciples of Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche were especially grateful to Tsering and delighted while reading the manuscript. Why is that? It is because Tsering captured even the seemingly ordinary words spoken by Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche. Whenever we read Tsering's compilation, Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche's smile, voice, appearance, and other things naturally come to mind. Additionally, his compilation includes instructions that many of us had never heard. How precious!

After reading the book, I realized that my greatest regret was not documenting the teachings and actions of the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, including his inspiring efforts to spread the Dharma abroad. At the time, I believed I would remember everything, so I only jotted down brief notes with a few words, never formally recording the events. Eventually, I lost the notebook, and many memories faded over time. This experience underscores the importance of transcribing a teacher's instructions into written texts when following their guidance.

Therefore, I compiled the authentic, noble instructions.

The kindness of my teacher inspires my diligent effort.

With devotion and good intention, I composed this work.

May Dharma friends and celestial beings rejoice in it.

Thus, Patrul Rinpoche compiled the authentic words of his noble teacher. He did this with great diligence to repay his teacher's immense kindness. Patrul Rinpoche stated, "I compiled this work with deep devotion and good intentions, which should be blessed and rejoiced in by my Dharma brothers and even by celestial beings."

In fact, many volunteers are like this: on one hand, they wish to repay the teacher's great kindness; on the other hand, they believe the teacher's instructions will undoubtedly bring immense benefits to all living beings. With these intentions in mind, they engage in Dharma activities. Some Dharma fellows maintain a very pure intention and never compete with others for anything. They have no personal agenda and focus solely on completing the transcription. By doing so, they benefit many people, both in the present and in the future.

If I were to handle the transcriptions, it would have been quite challenging for me to work on a piece of scriptural evidence or even a phrase, let alone an entire book. In fact, working on a book is a significant undertaking that is not easy to accomplish. Therefore, whenever a book project is completed, all the vajra fellows should rejoice, and all the celestial beings and Dharma protectors should praise and safeguard it.

I often think that the great masters of the past were indeed remarkable; they left behind valuable teachings like *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* and many other works. In their time, great masters such as Longchenpa and Mipham Rinpoche might not have been widely recognized. However, decades and centuries later, people came to understand their wisdom and compassion and began to truly appreciate them.

Fortunate ones of future generations:

*When you encounter this work, may you cultivate the same
devotion and faith*

As if you were meeting my teacher, a true buddha, in person,

For I believe it faithfully conveys the essential teachings.

After compiling the work, Patrul Rinpoche hoped that all his vajra brothers and the Dharma protectors would rejoice in it and protect it. For fortunate beings

in future generations, when encountering *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, we should feel the same joy, devotion, and faith as if we were meeting Patrul Rinpoche's buddha-like teacher in person. Patrul Rinpoche believed that the instructions in the text capture the essence of his teacher's words without any errors.

When I first came across this verse, I realized what kind of teacher Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu was and what level of realization Patrul Rinpoche had attained. They were both true buddhas who manifested in human form. Indeed, their Dharma activities and the works they left behind clearly demonstrate that they were indeed enlightened practitioners. Therefore, we should cultivate profound faith in *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, its author, and the author's teacher.

Nowadays, there are many so-called *tulkus* in the Tibetan region, and many of them claim to be the reincarnations of Patrul Rinpoche, Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu, Mipham Rinpoche, Longchenpa, or other great masters. We do not deny that true reincarnations of buddhas and bodhisattvas exist in this world. Such reincarnations occur not only among humans but also among animals. However, as mentioned in the chapter on the transference of consciousness, some so-called *tulkus* are not comparable to the great masters of the past.

If you wish to follow a teacher and place your faith in someone, let it be in the “teacher” of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*—you will not go wrong. Even if you had met Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu in person, the way he would have benefited you would have been none other than by giving you his Dharma instructions. These instructions flowed from his bodhicitta of great compassion, and they are entirely capable of benefiting you and all beings. Beyond that, there would have been little else. In this degenerate era, if you struggle to discern a teacher, you may focus on discerning the Dharma teachings and make your choice accordingly.

I do not reject any emanation or reincarnation of a sublime being. However, the great master from a past life and his present reincarnation should exhibit some similarities upon examination.

Take the Sixth Patriarch, for example: His work is regarded as a “sutra,” and he himself is recognized as a true buddha in history. But if his reincarnation is merely an ordinary monk, and worse, if the monk's behavior is misguided and even defames Buddhism, who would be willing to accept that this monk is the reincarnation of the Sixth Patriarch?

I hope you will come to trust and appreciate *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*,

as if you had met Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu or Patrul Rinpoche in person. Both were enlightened masters. As noted in Patrul Rinpoche's biography, he was one of the five reincarnations of Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa. According to another account, outwardly, Patrul Rinpoche was the reincarnation of Shantideva; inwardly, he was Shavaripa,¹⁶⁶ and secretly, he was Avalokiteshvara himself, making him a reincarnation of them all.

Why did Patrul Rinpoche especially like *The Way of the Bodhisattva* and carry a copy with him at all times? It was because it was the work he composed in a previous life, which made him quite "attached" to it (*the audience laughs*).

You may do the same: if you have composed a work in this life, you may carry it with you at all times in a future life.

♦ Dedication

*May all the merits accumulated from this work
Be dedicated to all sentient beings, my mothers from the past,
So that they are taken by a supreme teacher,
Put their instructions into practice, and ultimately attain
enlightenment.*

*May I see that those who have been nourished by the nectar
Of the words of my peerless teacher, a perfect buddha,
Attain the unsurpassed, perfect enlightenment together,
And engage in the Dharma activities of guiding sentient
beings.*

We should also make an aspiration: "May the fourfold disciples, who are nourished by the precious teachings of the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, be reborn in the Land of Great Bliss, perfect all qualities of the levels and paths, attain Buddhahood, and benefit countless living beings." May we all witness such accomplishments. We are also among the disciples capable of achieving these goals.

In fact, it is essential to cultivate such an aspiration.

¹⁶⁶ Shavaripa (Sanskrit: Śābara) was an Indian Buddhist teacher and one of the eighty-four Mahasiddhas.

In the Land of Great Bliss, many sangha members practice together and embark on a journey to benefit all future beings. Similarly, in worldly life, students from the same school will enter society and begin their own lives after graduation.

Therefore, all the sangha members who are currently pursuing the Dharma at Larung Gar should also make this aspiration: “May I witness that all my fellow practitioners and I attain Buddhahood together and bring benefit to all living beings.”

*May all those fortunate enough to partake in the nectar of
these perfect words,
Who are enchanted by the joyful melody of this teaching,
As well as all the successors of my gracious teacher,
Long keep their lotus feet firmly upon the vajra throne.¹⁶⁷*

The individuals for whom Patrul Rinpoche made the aspiration have all passed away, but we can certainly replicate his aspiration. For instance, our aspiration could be: May all the disciples of the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche (or your own root guru) and all the great masters nourished by the nectar of his instructions live long and continually turn the wheel of Dharma.

*From this life onward and in all lives to come,
May I be a servant to my perfect teacher and emulate him.
May I always heed his words and fulfill his requests.
May I please him and always be guided as his disciple.*

Patrul Rinpoche had extraordinary faith and devotion to his teacher. As a result, he only mentioned his teacher in all his closing verses, rather than naming a specific buddha or bodhisattva. When someone has such deep faith in their teacher, their Dharma activities will surely be very vast.

*Before all sentient beings are freed from samsara,
May I relinquish my body, belongings, and merit.*

¹⁶⁷ An expression often used to wish long life and good health to Dharma teachers.

*May I become a servant to all my old mothers burdened by
their afflictions,*

So they may embrace the perfect, wondrous Dharma.

We can set the same aspiration in our work. For instance, when we feel tired and burdened during a volunteer task, we might make an aspiration as follows: “In my volunteer role, I aim to serve all living beings. I am willing to endure challenges and make sacrifices for the sake of my service. May my efforts help all beings embrace the Dharma freely and effortlessly.”

A person with such altruistic intentions is truly admirable. For instance, some Dharma fellows told me, “I may feel tired, but it does not matter. As long as others can study and practice the Dharma, I am willing to contribute everything to create favorable causes and conditions for them.”

May the brilliant sun of the lineage masters’ blessings

Dawn in my heart for now.

May I dedicate this life to practicing in seclusion,

*And ultimately attain the supreme fruition of my peerless
teacher.*

Patrul Rinpoche said, “Before the attainment of Buddhahood, may the blessings of this precious lineage arise within my heart like the perfect rising sun. May I dedicate my life to practicing in seclusion and ultimately achieve the supreme fruition of my peerless teacher.”

We truly need the teacher’s blessing. With that blessing, our practice will proceed smoothly and effortlessly, and we will not encounter many obstacles, as we can always feel its presence. Whether it is day or night, for our practice or for daily tasks, and even in the face of significant challenges, serious illness, or major obstacles in our worldly and spiritual lives, as long as the sunbeam of the teacher’s blessing is present, its warmth and invisible power will continually motivate us to persevere. Therefore, even when relying solely on the teacher’s blessing, one will never stray from the path of practice or retreat from the work of spreading the Dharma.

If one fails to pray to or approach the teacher, or, worse yet, goes against their instructions, one will sever the favorable connection with the teacher, making it

impossible to receive their blessing. Without this blessing, achieving anything becomes challenging. This insight comes from my years of experience following my own teachers and my reflections on the matter.

Of course, some volunteers may occasionally argue with or disobey the teacher, but in my opinion, this is not an issue. For example, if the teacher asks you to make a management decision and you choose not to follow it for your own reasons, it should not be seen as disobedience or a violation.

However, because of these minor issues, some people hesitate to get involved in volunteering and even consider leaving Larung Gar, saying, “Ah! I disappoint my teacher every day. I’d better leave!”

This is unnecessary. Generally speaking, occasional disagreements among Dharma fellows, Dharma masters, or team leaders regarding administrative issues will not lead to any significant fault.

However, some individuals often say to others, “I used to teach you the Dharma, so you are my disciple. If you don’t treat me nicely, you break your vows...”

What they did is absolutely unacceptable! Things should be very simple, and it does no good to make such a big deal out of it. I hope all the Dharma fellows can get along with one another. When you exchange ideas on Dharma-related issues, it is best to speak openly if something bothers you. For example, you might directly tell me, “You are not doing the right thing,” and while I may feel frustrated upon hearing that, my frustration will soon pass.

Recently, during a discussion with Khenpo Tsultrim Lodrö, he made a statement that resonated with me. He said, “While vajra brothers should not become angry with one another, it is natural to annoy or offend each other at times regarding issues related to Dharma activities and the administration of Larung Gar. There may even be moments when we feel upset with one another. However, once we resolve the issue and leave this conference room, we should not hold grudges or cling to it.”

Therefore, it does not matter if you have a minor conflict with one another. It is not a big deal, so do not dwell on it. If you still hold a grudge years later because someone said something and continue to treat them unfriendly, that is not acceptable. This should not occur among Mahayanists, especially vajra brothers and sisters. It is also not permissible between Dharma teachers and students. If it does happen, the teachers are no longer qualified to teach.

However, if you do not intend to offend others deliberately, when minor issues arise, the teacher will not be displeased, and you will not be considered to have committed a serious fault.

Sometimes, whether the teacher is pleased or not should be understood in the context of the teacher's secret meaning. For example, during the time I followed the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, there were moments when he seemed displeased with me.

Despite this, I always felt that, overall, Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche valued me as a disciple and held no negative opinions about me, because while following him, I made every effort to put all his instructions into practice and faithfully adhere to his guidance.

Therefore, when you follow any teacher in the future, you should follow them properly. Meanwhile, you do not have to feel, "Oh! I am doomed because I have offended my teacher," when you disagree with the teacher on minor issues.

Let's continue our discussion on Patrul Rinpoche's aspiration. In short, during our practice, we should pray for the teacher's blessings to illuminate our minds and keep us from being distracted throughout the day. If possible, lay practitioners in urban areas should also seek opportunities to practice in seclusion.

According to the *Sutra of the Great Heap of Jewels*, the merit accumulated by a monastic who walks seven steps toward an aranya¹⁶⁸ far surpasses that accumulated by a householder who makes offerings to the buddhas and the sangha as numerous as the grains of sand in the Ganges over kalpas as countless as the grains of sand in the Ganges. This is because the monastic will swiftly attain ultimate enlightenment.

Thus, even if you spend only two or three days at Larung Gar, the merit from this experience is already substantial.

In this verse, Patrul Rinpoche expressed his aspiration to devote his life to practicing in seclusion and ultimately attain the fruition of his peerless teacher. Since Patrul Rinpoche's teacher was an enlightened master, "the fruition of his teacher" refers to ultimate enlightenment.

♦ Colophon

¹⁶⁸ A secluded place for Buddhist practice. Monastics often lived in quiet environments such as forests to minimize distractions and focus on their practice. Aranya refers to a forest, wilderness, or distant land. In the Chinese version of Buddhist scriptures, aranya is interpreted as "a deserted and quiet place" or "an empty and silent place."

According to Patrul Rinpoche, this guide to the common and uncommon preliminaries of *Longchen Nyingtik*, or the *Heart-Essence of the Vast Expanse*, faithfully reflects the oral instructions of his peerless teacher.

This guide was composed in response to numerous requests from several individuals. First, Drönma Tsering, a dedicated and disciplined fellow disciple, gave Patrul Rinpoche a set of notes detailing everything he could recall about Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu's oral teachings. He persistently urged Patrul Rinpoche to write an explanatory text based on these notes to faithfully record the teachings of their peerless teacher. Additionally, Kunzang Thekchok Dorje, a noble tulku who was the holder of Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu's tantric teachings, also provided Patrul Rinpoche with sheets of paper and made the same request multiple times.

In the past, paper and ink were scarce resources. When old masters received offerings of pens, paper, and ink, they would often start composing Buddhist works immediately. For instance, just a few days ago, several lay practitioners offered Khenpo Depa thick notebooks and requested him to write a work, to which he graciously agreed.

At that moment, I joked, "Today, paper is readily available, but it was quite different in the past. Masters of the past would often say, 'So-and-so disciples offered me paper, so I must compose a work. While paper may be rare, my wisdom is abundant.'"

In contrast, while paper is abundant today, teachers who can compose Dharma works are rare, as not all teachers possess abundant wisdom. My desk is cluttered with numerous messages asking me to compose, write, or translate this or that text. However, I find myself unable to fulfill these requests because I have plenty of paper but lack the wisdom needed to create meaningful work.

Later, Kushab Rinpoche Shenpen Thaye Özer—the Dharma sovereign of all doctrines and the foremost among the spiritual heirs upholding the lineage of Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu's pith instructions—also urged Patrul Rinpoche to document their teacher's teachings. He told Patrul Rinpoche, "If our teacher's instructions are recorded as he originally conveyed them, it will not only help our disciples remember him but also reinvigorate our devotion to him. Therefore, I sincerely urge you to write them down, no matter what."

This is the third person to make the request. Indeed, if done well, the work can

capture the true voice of the teacher while remaining precise and concise, ensuring that it does not bore the readers.

In the colophon, Patrul Rinpoche also states:

I was also uplifted and inspired by many of my kind vajra brothers and sisters, who are as precious to me as my own eyes. They will surely remain close to me, like a flame to its wick, until we all attain perfect enlightenment.

Patrul Rinpoche's vajra brothers might tell him, "So you are working on the guide to the preliminaries of Longchen Nyingtik? Excellent! Very good!" Such encouragement is very important. If there is too much opposition, an author may lose motivation to continue with the work.

When I was translating *Di Zi Gui*, or *The Standards for Students*, a few Tibetan Dharma masters told me, "Great! It is very necessary to have it translated. The content is very good."

Their encouragement motivated me, and I soon completed the translation from Chinese to Tibetan. Without their support, I would have hesitated, questioning, "Is it necessary to do this translation?" Thus, encouragement is important.

This is how Patrul Rinpoche introduced himself in the colophon:

Thus, this was how the work came to be written—by someone whom the great Rigdzin Changchub Dorje, the crown ornament of a hundred siddhas, named Orgyen Jigme Chökyi Wangpo. However, behind the elegance of such a name stands none other than Ragged Abu, coarse in conduct and consumed by the flames of the five poisons.

Of course, Patrul Rinpoche was being humble here.

Where was *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* written?

In Patrul Rinpoche's own words, this text was completed at a secluded retreat site belonging to the remote Rudam Orgyen Samten Chöling,¹⁶⁹ known as Yamantaka's Terrifying Palace—a place remarkably adorned with all the qualities of solitude. There, the trees bask in the golden warmth of the sunrays while their roots absorb the cool nectar of the earth. Vines, thickets, and foliage of every

¹⁶⁹ Dzogchen Monastery.

kind—branches, flowers, and fruits—interweave like delicate filigree and garlands, catching the nectar of the radiant smile of the Daughter of the Azure Heavens¹⁷⁰ as it gently flows down. This sight brings him a deep sense of ease and delight.



At the very end, Patrul Rinpoche says: “By the merit of the auspicious completion of this work, may all infinite beings follow this supreme path and be totally liberated into the ground expanse of the primordial Buddha!”¹⁷¹

The text of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* was translated by
Khenpo Sodargye Rinpoche at Larung Five Sciences Buddhist Academy,
Sêrtar, China.

The Tibetan to Chinese translation was completed on Jan. 27, 2000,
and the editing and proofreading of the manuscript were completed on
April 18, 2007.

¹⁷⁰ The ornate language used here, drawn from the Indian poetic tradition, follows the customary style typically found in a colophon. Khenpo Sodargye Rinpoche added, “The forest there was particularly dense, with many trees beside the cave. Through the gaps in the tree branches, Patrul Rinpoche could see the blue sky, which he compared to a beautiful celestial daughter.”

¹⁷¹ Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Yale University Press, 2010, page 374.

♦ The tsok offering and dedication

Now, the teaching of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* is completed.

I have taught this work a few times already. I first taught it when I had just started the translation, then I taught it again after completing the translation. I also taught it in 2007. This marks the fourth time I am teaching the text.

According to the great Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche's tradition, after the teaching of a lengthy text concludes, we should have a tsok, or feast offering, to express our gratitude to the Three Roots, the Dharma protectors, and the gods of the sky and earth. I would also like to extend my deep gratitude to all the vajra brothers and sisters.

We have prepared some offerings at the Dharma hall. Although those attending online cannot partake in them, through the blessings of the Three Roots, you may visualize yourself enjoying the feast offering. By doing so, you can also receive the power and nourishment of the feast offering.

In addition to the tsok, there is typically a break for a few days. However, we will hold the Dharma class tomorrow. We will take a break and relax in two days.

Overall, the teaching of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* has endured for a long time, during which all volunteers have worked incredibly hard. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to them once again. The Chinese transcription of my teachings will consist of a total of eight volumes. The seventh volume has been printed, and someone recently placed a copy on my desk. What a great dependent origination!

Now that I have finished teaching you the text, there is still one volume of the transcription left to complete. Once the eighth volume is finished, the volunteers will also conclude their work.

This work indeed carries great blessings. Whether you are among those who have been following the teachings in the Dharma hall or online, or those who will read the book or study it through recorded videos later, I encourage you to carefully read the original text of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. If time permits, you may also refer to the commentaries from my teachings.

In my teaching, I have integrated my teacher's instructions, scriptural evidence from Tibetan Buddhism and Chinese Buddhism, as well as my own reflections, all of which can be found in the transcript. I have reviewed the transcript of my

teaching on *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* and *Aspiration Prayer of Sukhavati*, along with their corresponding videos, which are very well done.

I am quite particular, but I am very satisfied with what you volunteers have accomplished. Meanwhile, I hope you will continue your excellent work and not let your emotions about the quality of your work affect you. A few hundred years from now, this text will represent us, so it is important to start and finish the work well.

In fact, volunteers also need encouragement and support. As I mentioned earlier, even simple verbal affirmations like “Great!” can be very helpful. It is not easy to be a volunteer for Dharma activities. Personally, I have been giving teachings for many years, so I am used to dedicating myself to the Dharma. However, volunteers still need encouragement from their peers. If someone can say something like, “Great work!” or “Nice job! Thank you,” they will feel appreciated and motivated.

Of course, many Dharma fellows have been working diligently to ensure that people outside Larung Gar can also read the text and listen to the teachings of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. Therefore, I would also like to express my gratitude to these Dharma fellows for their assistance.

Finally, I would like to express my special thanks once again to the Three Roots, the Dharma protectors, the celestial gods, the gods of the earth, and the many invisible non-humans and other beings who have offered support during my teaching of the text.

Meanwhile, by the merit of the auspicious completion of this teaching, may all infinite beings arouse genuine bodhicitta, attain temporary happiness, and achieve ultimate liberation, with the blessings of the lineage masters!

I will also dedicate the merit to all the great living masters: May they live long in this world and widely turn the Wheel of the Dharma!

May the nectar of the Dharma pervade throughout this world!

May all infinite beings achieve true liberation!

The teaching was completed by Khenpo Sodargye Rinpoche
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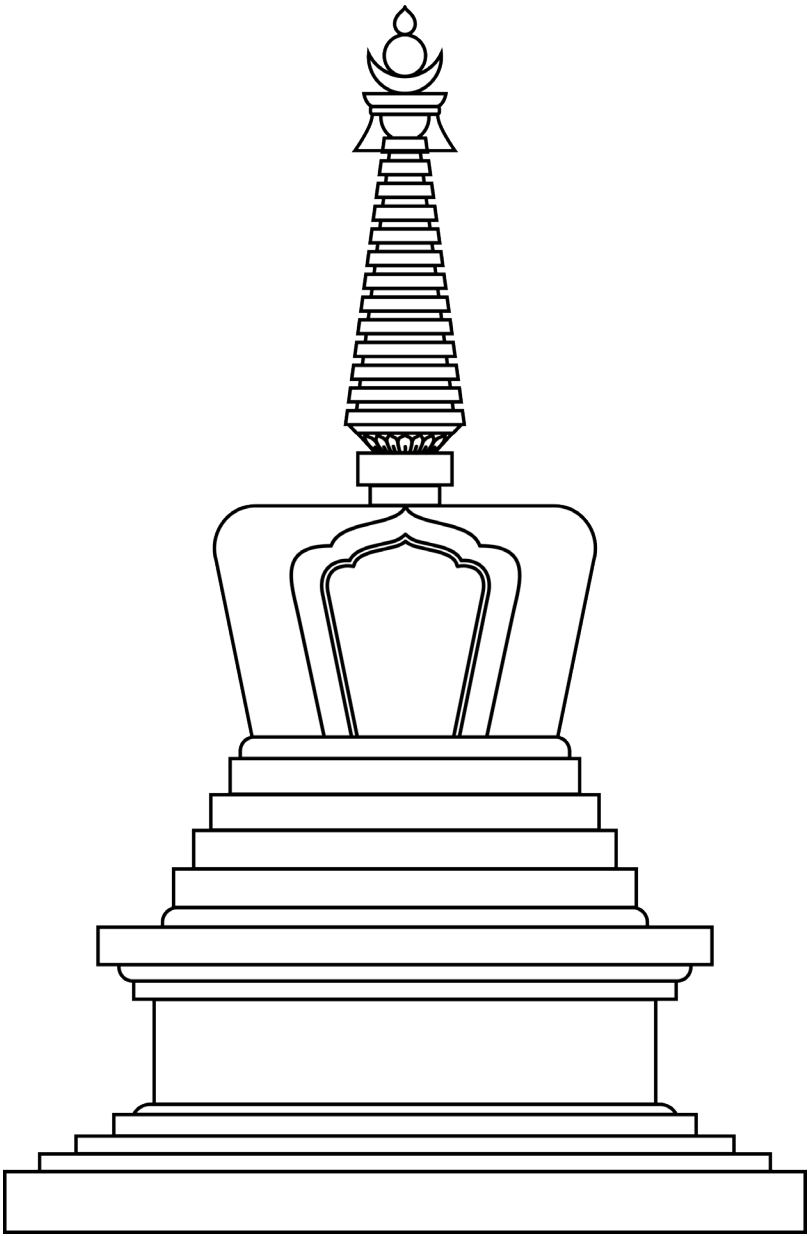


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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.





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