



## A Synopsis of the Vajra-Guru Mantra

*by Tertön Sogyal Lerap Lingpa*

### *Homage to the Guru!*

A long time ago, when the Dharma had hardly even appeared in the central and border regions of Tibet, one particular master caused the immaculate light of the Victor's teachings—Sutra and Mantra in their entirety—to fill the whole land, where they continued to spread long after he left. Out of his immeasurable kindness he brought us—red-faced Tibetans, obstinate and obnoxious, humans and spirits—onto the authentic path. This master was none other than the immortal Padmakara, the Second Buddha.

Our supreme and peerless Teacher, the King of the shakyas, displayed his passing into nirvana on the fifteenth day of the fourth lunar month of the Iron Dragon year. Then, on the tenth day of the fifth lunar month of the Wood Monkey year, he was miraculously reborn upon a blossoming lotus in the middle of the Dhanakosha Ocean, in the north-west of Uddiyana.<sup>1</sup> This emanation of the Sugata was clearly foretold in his own authentic prophecies. For example, The Tantra of the Perfect Embodiment of the Unexcelled Nature states:<sup>2</sup>

Ten years and two after I pass into nirvana,  
The Supreme Victor in all worlds,  
Whose name will be Padmakara,  
Will take birth in Uddiyana upon a blossoming lotus  
And teach Secret Mantra. This is my prophecy!

Regarding the number of years that elapsed after the Teacher displayed his passing into nirvana, one tantra states that the ten years should be understood as half-years, giving five whole years in total. Accordingly, between the Buddha's passing and Guru Rinpoché's birth there are 1) the Iron Dragon and 2) the Iron Snake years; 3) the Water Horse and 4) the Water Sheep years; and 5) the Wood Monkey year. The two in the prophecy imply two partial years. Thus, within the five whole years, not all twelve months of the Dragon and the Monkey years are included. This refers respectively to the period from the first month of the Iron Dragon year until the fifteenth day of the fourth lunar month, and to the period from the tenth day of the fifth lunar month of the Wood Monkey year to the end of that year.

Continuing on, **in all worlds** generally refers to the fifty three-thousand-fold Saha world-system of the infinite number of buddhahelds found in all directions. Padmakara appeared there, to be praised in countless and unimaginable forms and by an infinity of names, including those of the ten Teachers of Mantra, instructing each and every being according to their individual perceptions. **Supreme Victor** implies that he taught the Secret Mantra far and wide, and that he still remains without ever having passed into nirvana. **In Uddiyana** refers to his birthplace, which is specifically in this realm of ours. **Padmakara** or “Lotus-Born” foretells the name of the Guru, and upon a **blossoming lotus** refers to the special quality of his birthplace, meaning, a completely flawless place. The phrase, and teach Secret Mantra means that the Lord of Victors, Padmakara will be a teacher of the resultant vehicle of Secret Mantra. **This is my prophecy!** means that this comes from the Blessed One himself. The *Sutra of Predictions in Magadha* states:<sup>3</sup>

Four years and two  
After I disappear from here,  
On the northwestern border of the land of Uddiyana,  
On one of Dhanakosha’s isles,  
A person will appear, superior to all.

According to this sutra, **four years** passed after the supreme King of Sages displayed the disappearance of his physical form in the perception of the ordinary disciples of this realm—a period that may be understood as the five years explained above. For if we examine this statement in detail by counting the number of months, we will arrive at a total of around **four years and two months**, following the Kalacakra system in which each year consists of twelve months. Regarding the two extra months, if the counting is done correctly, the period of time was precisely four years, two months and six days. Therefore, the description of the time and place of Padmakara’s birth undoubtedly matches the detail in the tantra quoted above. The qualities of his manifestation will clearly be **superior to all** other sages, however great their learning and accomplishment, and so he will be a supreme **person**, unrivalled by anyone. In this way the Teacher extolled the virtues of Padmakara.

I have seen a few scriptures which explain this issue by reckoning the two solar transits as years, but the predictions given above, as found in the sutras and tantras, are straightforward and easy to understand. The *Nirvana Sutra* states:<sup>4</sup>

I shall pass into parinirvana.  
Please do not grieve!  
Within lustrous and immaculate waters,  
A person will appear, superior to me.

The statement that this person will be superior to the Lord of Sages himself implies that Padmakara will appear in an immortal vajra-rainbow-body and

carries the same meaning as the tantra quoted above. It was out of compassion itself, therefore, that our Teacher returned and took miraculous rebirth. He trained once more in the path, taking ordination with the noble ananda. Following the Vajrayana path, he actualized the stages of the supreme vidyadhara and perfectly upheld the teachings of Sutra and Mantra in their entirety. As glorious Saraha, the second Teacher, he took ordination again from the Buddha's son Rahula. While engaged in Secret Mantra with a hunter's maid, he proclaimed "I am both the glorious Heruka and the Supreme Vinaya-Holding Monk!"—thereupon acting as preceptor and giving ordination according to the tradition of the noble and supreme Nagarjuna. Indeed he is the extraordinary sovereign lord of all the Sutra and Mantra teachings. Trusting in the reasons that establish him as such, we should pray to him constantly with one-pointed faith and devotion. The prayers to the Guru, revealed as treasures, or composed by learned and accomplished beings, are exalted in the blessings that their words and meaning carry. Nonetheless, here I shall explain only a little of the meaning of their essence—the Vajra Guru mantra. The explanation has three parts:

1. A general explanation of the quintessence of the teachings: the Guru, the Sovereign of the Victors of the three kayas
2. A specific explanation of meaning of the names of the Guru, the embodiment of all sources of refuge
3. How to pray for all our wishes to be granted.

### **1. The General Explanation**

According to the general system of the Hinayana shravakas, when the buddhas, like our Teacher, reach their final existence upon the path in which they've previously trained, they take birth as a human of the warrior or brahmin caste. As such, they train as ordinary persons who generate bodhicitta on the great path of accumulation. Meditating upon a single teaching, they reach the stages of 'heat', then 'peak', and so on, proceeding to actualize the four paths. It is asserted that they only attain buddhahood as a sambhogakaya. There are some, though, who state that at the moment of reaching buddhahood their body becomes the nirmanakaya, their speech the sambhogakaya and their mind the dharmakaya. According to the common system of the Mahayana of characteristics, it is proposed that, having the support of a divine body in the heaven of Akanishtha, such a bodhisattva on the final level attains buddhahood as a sambhogakaya, and therefore also actualizes the dharmakaya and displays the nirmanakaya in this and other worlds. In this context, according to the uncommon resultant vehicle of the Secret Mantra Vajrayana, such beings reach complete enlightenment within the dharmadhatu palace of Akanishtha. Simultaneously to exalted bodhisattvas they arise as the sambhogakaya buddhas of the five families endowed with the five certainties. And, to noble shravakas, Pratekyabuddhas, ordinary beings, and those who have not yet entered the path, the supreme nirmanakayas appear as buddhas, while animate nirmanakayas appear as humans and created nirmanakaya forms appear as inanimate objects.<sup>5</sup> They also effortlessly appear in the limited perception of childish beings as nirmanakayas that take whatever appearance is necessary to bring happiness and benefit to

beings. In this way, we assert that all buddhas embody the three kayas and the three kayas encompass all buddhas.

Here, then, we need to understand at the outset that the quintessence of the three kayas is the Guru, for he is the Sovereign who emanates and reabsorbs the Victors of the three kayas.

**om** is the quintessence of the infinite and inconceivable nirmanakaya buddhas of the three times and ten directions.

**ah** is the quintessence of the sambhogakaya buddhas endowed with the five certainties, without a single exception, whether of the hundred families, five families or single family.

**hung** is the quintessence of the all-pervading lord, the dharmakaya of all the victorious ones.

Therefore, those who uphold this mantra will attain, all at once, the limitless benefits of the quintessence of all the Victors of the three kayas.

## 2. A Specific Explanation

Now follows the specific explanation of the Guru, who has

- a) The three distinguishing qualities,
- b) The five resultant qualities, and
- c) The three spontaneously present qualities.

### *a) The Three Distinguishing Qualities*

The illustrious Nagarjuna explained the meaning of the word “buddha” in terms of his 1) wisdom, 2) qualities and 3) deeds. [The term “Vajra Guru Padma” can be explained likewise.]

The term **Vajra** conveys indestructibility, and thus it expresses non-dualistic *wisdom*. Moreover, the great wisdom of the Mahaguru’s enlightened mind can be divided into *two aspects*. Firstly, there is the wisdom of knowing things just as they are. This aspect directly perceives the natural state of reality, free from complexity and luminous in nature. Secondly, there is the *wisdom that knows things in their multiplicity*. This aspect precisely, clearly and effortlessly perceives all the causes, results and characteristics of all objects of knowledge throughout the three times, while never straying from the first aspect, the wisdom of knowing things just as they are. The modes of perception of these two wisdoms are in fact no different in their nature.

Wisdom, likewise, can also be divided into *the five wisdoms* and explained according to *the seven qualities of the vajra*. Accordingly, since the *wisdom of the dharmadhatu* is the primordially pristine nature that has never been tainted by

even the smallest stains, it is *invincible*. Since the nature of wisdom, whether at the time of the ground, path or fruition, never changes even the tiniest bit for better or worse, it is *stable*. Furthermore, all the habitual tendencies of the two obscurations which arise as unreal, fleeting appearances have been exhausted from the perspective of the great primordially pure essence, and the twofold purity has already been actualized. Therefore, it is now completely impossible, from our conventional perspective, for this wisdom to be tainted or stained by even the smallest obscurations or faults, for as long as space remains, and thus it is *solid*. Since *mirror-like wisdom* is the great luminosity that cannot be destroyed by any gross or subtle dualistic concepts, it is *indestructible*. Since the wisdom of equality cannot be cut by concepts like attachment, it is *uncuttable*. Since *discriminating wisdom* is the unerring and direct perception of the way all phenomena are, it is *true*. Since *all-accomplishing wisdom* effortlessly tames, using methods that defy the imagination, it is totally *unobstructed*.

In conclusion, the five wisdoms are inseparable and their nature is the twofold wisdom. Moreover, naturally-arising wisdom, which pervades everything, is unconditioned and spontaneously present, and it cannot be separated even the slightest bit from suchness, the dharmadhatu.

**Guru** literally means “weighty” and translates as “lama” [in Tibetan, and as “teacher” in English], and it conveys the meaning of *qualities*. Accordingly, the Guru is someone who has the *qualities of realization* through having actualized the dharmakaya—the excellent benefit for oneself. The Guru also has the qualities of great compassion, having spontaneously accomplished the two form kayas, unimaginably glorious—the excellent benefit for others. Thus, the Guru is “weighty” because he possesses a boundless ocean of unsurpassable qualities.

**Padma** [or lotus] refers to the Guru’s *deeds*, which are faultless and pure like his birthplace. For though the Guru remains in samsara to enact the benefit of beings for as long as they wander there, he remains completely untainted and flawless. Like a lotus that grows from mud and yet itself is unblemished, the Guru is master of a vast array of deeds that are free from all desire and obstruction, and he shall continue to enact them endlessly, for as long as space remains.

#### *b) The Five Resultant Qualities*

From amongst the five resultant qualities—enlightened body, speech, mind, qualities and activities—the term **vajra** refers to the *three vajras*. The Guru’s pristine rainbow *vajra-body* is solid, since it is the earth element purified. It is *stable*, since it is the water element purified. It is unobstructed, since it is the wind element purified. It is totally invincible, since it is the fire element purified. The Guru’s undeceiving *vajra-speech* is the epitome of *truth*. The Guru’s wisdom *vajra-mind* is *uncuttable* by the afflictive obscurations and *indestructible* by the cognitive obscurations.

**Guru** refers to the *qualities* of his *three secrets*. His enlightened *body* is endowed with the excellence of the thirty-two major and eighty minor marks. His enlightened speech is endowed with the sixty melodious tones of the *voice* of Brahma. His enlightened *mind* is endowed with the ten strengths and four fearlessnesses, and so forth. Thus the Guru possesses immeasurable qualities.

**Padma** refers to his enlightened activities. In general, when the time is ripe for beings to be tamed, without delay the Guru arranges for them to have a proper support for the path, and sets them on the actual path, and places them on the resultant stage of the path. As with all the buddhas, his deeds are spontaneously present, everlasting and all-pervasive. In particular, the supreme Teacher of this fortunate eon, the Prince of the shakyas, displayed for us the twelve dispassionate deeds of a buddha as described in the sutras. Then, once again, the Buddha manifested an emanation—to display the marvelous great deeds of Secret Mantra:<sup>6</sup>

1. Taking miraculous birth in the miraculous and exalted birthplace of a lotus flower.
2. Becoming the King of Uddiyana, and then abandoning his kingdom through skillful means.
3. Binding the worldly dakinis to his service through the conduct of the heruka, and receiving the blessings of the transcendent dakinis in the charnel ground of shitavana.
4. Gradually training and taking ordination in order become the supreme support, all as a teaching for beings.
5. For the benefit of disciples, he stopped being a teacher who spontaneously accomplishes the Dharma of Sutra and Mantra and became a disciple of various teachers.
6. Accomplishing the immortal vidyadhara of vajra-life.
7. Establishing entire kingdoms in the Dharma, such as Zahor and Uddiyana, by means of his miraculous powers.
8. Defeating the heretic teachers and their followers at Bodhgaya, by means of his great strength and skill.
9. Actualizing the supreme siddhi, the great seal of mahamudra, at Yangleshö.
10. Subduing all the arrogant male and female spirits of Tibet, the harm-doers, and then spreading the sacred Dharma far and wide.
11. Filling Tibet with *terma* treasures, then leaving to go elsewhere to suppress demons extremely hard to tame, and establishing them in the Dharma.
12. Continuing to remain in a deathless rainbow vajra-body, without ever passing away, for as long as space remains.

The **Guru** is master of all the enlightened activities of the victors, inconceivable in their infinite display, and this aspect is represented by the twelve deeds—all performed dispassionately, like a lotus.

c) *The Three Spontaneously Present Qualities*

The three spontaneously present qualities are:

1. naturally arising wisdom,
2. the dharmadhatu, and
3. effortless omnipresence.

**Vajra** refers to naturally luminous wisdom. The *ground wisdom* is awareness, tathagatagarbha, the primordially pure essence without restriction or limit. The *path wisdom* is the manifest expression of the insight that realizes twofold selflessness, serving as the antidote to the obscurations. The fruition wisdom is the complete realization of the essence, endowed with the twofold purity. If the aspects of ground, path and fruition are distinguished according to *the seven qualities of the vajra*, then the great depth and clarity of wisdom-awareness is *uncuttable* by afflictive concepts such as attachment. It is *indestructible* by the concepts of cognitive obscuration, such as dualistic grasping. It is true, since it is the undeceiving dharmata, primordial and naturally present, rather than a created, adventitious phenomenon arising from causes and conditions. It is *solid*, since it is unconditioned, completely free from birth and destruction. It is *stable*, this wisdom-awareness, since it is uncontrived and self-luminous, fresh and perpetually changeless. It is totally *unobstructed*, since it pervades existence and peace without differentiation. It is totally *invincible*, since its very essence primordially possesses all qualities and is free from all faults. Thus it is known as “the indivisible ground of Samantabhadra.”

**Guru** refers to the *dhatu*, the all-encompassing space that is the source of all qualities. The *ground dharmadhatu* is where, within great primordial emptiness, all thoughts arise and cease, apparent yet empty. For as soon as they arise, they disappear, being in themselves empty and groundless. The *path dharmadhatu* is where, within the wisdom that recognizes the natural state, any thoughts that arise will naturally dissolve without a trace as soon as their nature is recognized. At the time of the *fruition dharmadhatu* the fabrications of dualistic grasping are completely purified, together with their habitual tendencies. And, thus is captured the stronghold of the ultimate, natural state, which is without even the merest trace of a birthplace. Although the dharmadhatu is indivisible in terms of its essence, it can be distinguished conceptually in terms of ground, path and fruition. When realization and experience dawn on the path and during the fruition, the qualities of the dhatu—all-encompassing space—will expand and increase through the power of purifying the obscurations, and this becomes known as “the indivisible ground of Samantabhadra.”

**Padma** refers to that great compassion without attachment that is *omnipresent* throughout the entire universe. Wherever all-encompassing space is found, indivisible from awareness, it is present there as the sole cause of abundant benefit to others. The noble heart of great compassion is the chief remedy for all suffering. Without it, it would be impossible to get rid of suffering. The main causal

*compassion of the ground* appears as effortless but is partial. The great *compassion of the path* refers to the effortless dawning of appearance in multiple directions and forms, increasing ever further and further. The inconceivably immeasurable compassion of the result dawns effortlessly, without any bias, all-pervasive, and completely unassailable. Its essence should be known as indivisible all-encompassing great bliss, beyond the conceptual mind—of single taste, like water and its waves.

The uncontrived view, the union of all-encompassing space and awareness, is the natural state that is primordially and spontaneously accomplished. When the wisdom of the utterly unchanging great bliss, wherein perceiver and perceived are non-dual, is realized, it is called “the indivisible ground of Samantabhadra.” Then all phenomena are complete within the single taste of the essence of the single bindu of the dharmakaya, and one’s own benefit is perfected. Furthermore, there appear the form kayas of the effortless, spontaneously accomplished conduct of great compassion, pervading all of space, and through this the benefit of others is perfected. The one who has perfected these two benefits is none other than the glorious buddha Padmaraja, the Lotus King, the primordial Lord, glorious Samantabhadra in actuality.

### 3. How to Pray for All Our Wishes to Be Granted

The third point has two topics:

- a) A prayer to grant all our wishes, and
- b) An invocation of his wisdom mind

#### *a) A Prayer to Grant All Our Wishes*

**Siddhi**, or accomplishment, means to actualize the undeceiving result of whatever is desired. These words of supplication can be 1) all-powerful, like a king; 2) all-pervading, like a minister; 3) effective, like a messenger. According to the treasure teaching that I have revealed, it is actually the first of these that applies here—meaning that whatever you wish, desire or hope for will, without exception, be accomplished.

Moreover, the practitioner’s accomplishment of excellent qualities within his or her mind-stream can be condensed into two categories—the ordinary and supreme accomplishments.

The ordinary accomplishments are: attaining the seven qualities of a higher rebirth; reaching the paths of accumulation and joining; attaining the eight common siddhis; enacting the four kinds of activities; gaining power over the mind; and actualizing defiled wisdom. The illustrious Vasubandhu distinguished the seven qualities of a higher rebirth as:<sup>7</sup>

A long life, freedom from illness, a good physical body, within a good con, within a good family, wealthy, and intelligent.



These qualities are also mentioned in the sutras. The eight common siddhis are described in the *Tantra of the Vajra Cage*:<sup>8</sup>

>With these, nothing will be difficult—the balm of magic sight, fleet-footedness, pills, netherworlds, invisibility, extracting the essences, the sword, and the enslavement of yakshas.

The supreme accomplishment combines the path and fruition aspects of liberation and omniscience, defiled and undefiled wisdom, and all possible qualities.

*b) An Invocation of His Wisdom Mind*

“Grant these desired accomplishments, swiftly and without hindrances!” This is the fervent invocation of the wisdom heart of the precious Guru, and it is accomplished through the vajra-syllable hung, which is the seed of his wisdom mind or the supreme essence of his life-force. As soon as you invoke the Guru—the embodiment of all the buddhas—with this mantra-syllable, there is no doubt that he will swiftly turn his gaze upon you!

By reciting this mantra of the Guru’s vajra-name, even just once, immeasurable benefits will come. The tantras state:<sup>9</sup>

Better than a million recitations  
Is a single word of prayer to the Guru.

*From the infinite depth of meaning of the vast, profound, and marvelous vajra-name of the single embodiment of all the victors of the three kayas—the King of the Dharma from Uddiyana, the Second Buddha—this commentary clearly and concisely draws upon the vajra-speech of the great awareness-holder Palgyi Sengé. It was composed by Lerab Lingpa. Through accumulation, confession, and virtue, may all wandering beings attain the vajra-kaya. Mangalam!*



### Translation Origin

Translated by [Samye Translations](#), 2019 (trans. Peter Woods and Stefan Mang; ed. Libby Hogg).

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### Bibliography

#### *Tibetan Source*

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1 This appears to follow the widely accepted view of the Padma Shelung (Padma zhal lung), according to which the Buddha took birth in the Iron Monkey year and passed into mahaparinirvana in the Iron Dragon year. Following the standard calculations of the Tibetan era beginning in 1027 CE, the Buddha's parinirvana would have fallen in the year 881 BCE, most probably an Earth Dragon year, and the birth of the Buddha would have occurred in 961 or 962 BCE, an Iron Monkey year. This would mean that Padmakara's birth fell in the Wood Monkey year of 877 BCE. (See: Andrei Ivanovich Vostrikov, *Tibetan Historical Literature*, transl. Harish Chandra Gupta, London and New York: Routledge Curzon 1994, 116 n. 354. And: His Holiness Dudjom Rinpoche, "A Brief Analysis of Some Important Chronological Events in the History of Buddhism and Tibet," *The Tibet Journal* Vol. 12, No. 3 (Autumn 1987), 6-7.)

2 The *Tantra of the Perfect Embodiment of the Unexcelled Nature* (*bla med don rdzogs 'dus pa'i rgyud*)

3 The *Sutra of Predictions in Magadha* (*dbus 'gyur tshal lung bstan pa'i mdo*)

4 The *Nirvana Sutra* (*mdo sde myang 'das*)

5 For example, scriptures and statues.

6 The activities of Guru Rinpoche's life that illustrate each of the twelve deeds can vary from text to text. At times, his life is exemplified by eleven deeds, rather than twelve. Orgyen Topgyal Rinpoche explains that this is because Guru Rinpoche has not performed the twelfth deed of passing into parinirvana.

7 This quotation appears to be from Vasubandhu's *Discourse on the Seven Qualities* (Toh. 4163, *saptagunaparivarnanakatha, yon tan bdun yongs su brjod pa'i gtam*)

8 The *Tantra of the Vajra Cage* (Toh. 419, *vajrapañjaratantra, rdo rje gur gyi rgyud*)

9 The quotation is probably from the *Tantra of the Array of Samayas* (*dam tshig bkod pa'i rgyud*). The same quotation appears in Patrul Rinpoche's *Words of My Perfect Teacher* in the chapter on Guru Yoga. See: Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, trans. Padmakara Translation Group. (Boston: Shambala, 1998): 311.