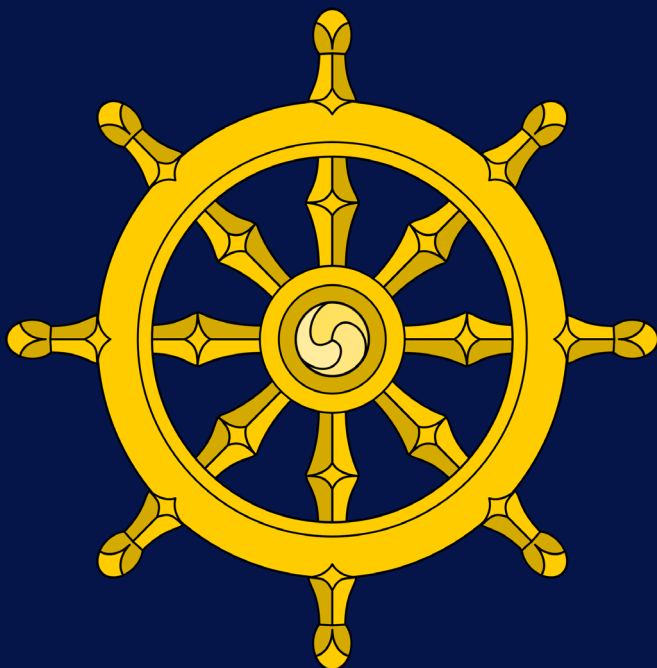


**A Lamp Illuminating
the Path to Liberation**
**An Explanation of Essential Topics
for Dharma Students**



By Khenpo Gyaltzen

Translated by Lhasey Lotsawa Translations



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Foreword

This book was composed in 2014 by Khenpo Gyaltsen at the request of Kyabgön Phakchok Rinpoche, as part of a general effort to revive, preserve, and uphold the Buddha's teachings in Nepal, the land of Buddha's birth. With the wish to benefit the general public, and in particular Buddhist practitioners in remote areas of Nepal, Rinpoche requested Khenpo to write an introductory dharma book in simple, accessible language that would elucidate the fundamental points of the Buddhist doctrine and explain the significance and benefits of popular practices such as making offerings, prostrations and the like. The book, composed in Tibetan and drawing from the writings of many great Indian and Tibetan teachers, was then translated into Nepalese and distributed to several thousand Buddhist practitioners and lamas from all over Nepal. Thinking that this book would also be of benefit to English-speakers, Rinpoche then asked us to translate it into English.

When translating the text, we divided the book's thirty-nine chapters among a team of five translators. As a result, there is some variation in the translation styles of the various chapters and also in terminology used. However, rather than laboring over the manuscript for many more months in an attempt to standardize and smooth out these different styles, we

have simply edited the translation for accuracy and now present it here with the aspiration that it may be of benefit to all those with an interest in the buddhadharma.

Our sincerest thanks to Kyabgön Phakchok Rinpoche for initiating this worthwhile project, and to Khenpo Gyaltzen for writing this valuable book and for answering all our questions, and our sincere apologies for any mistakes.

Lhasey Lotsawa Translation Team
23rd March, 2016



Chapter I
**The Reasons for Practicing
Buddhadharma**

As it is said:

Dispeller of all suffering
And all obscurations – this is the sacred dharma.

The sacred dharma taught by our Teacher, the Buddha, is something applicable to everyone. Whoever applies it and puts it into practice—regardless of whether they are from the East or West, regardless of their ethnicity, culture, and background—will find that it pacifies their temporary and ultimate sufferings and purifies their misdeeds and obscurations. This being so, it is something that is applicable to everyone and anyone.

Just as His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama has said, as Buddhists of the twenty-first century we need to develop confidence in the Buddha’s teachings through coming to understand its fundamental points. We must not think, “My parents are Buddhist so I will simply follow along and say that I go for refuge in the Buddha.”

In that vein, most of us from the Himalayan region carry malas and recite *om mani padme hum*.ⁱ But to be unaware of the meaning of this mantra and just recite it verbally is no different from a parrot chanting. It will be difficult for this to become genuine dharma. If you want to practice the dharma authentically, it is crucial that you know the reasons for doing so, and this comes from actually studying the dharma. If you regard the Buddhist scriptures as merely an object of homage, there is very little chance of you coming to know the real reasons for practicing the dharma.

If even modern scientists, who are usually quite sceptical about spiritual traditions and religion, regard the buddhadharma as a very appealing and reasonable doctrine, would we not be fooling ourselves to neglect and ignore it in this way?

So, whether you choose to have faith in the dharma or not is up to you. But, to begin with, you need to gain some understanding and knowledge of the dharma through reasoning and study, since it is the dharma that you will be choosing to have faith in or not. This is an extremely important point.

In particular, for beginners, it is study that is the most important from within the threefold discipline of study, reflection, and meditation. This is because it is precisely through study that you come to know how

ⁱ *om mani padme hum* is the mantra of Avalokiteshvara, the buddha embodying compassion.

the buddhadharma surpasses other spiritual traditions and that you can thereby gain conviction in it. Based on that conviction, you will naturally gain confidence in the Buddha who expounded this dharma and in the sangha (the community of practitioners) who practice it.



Chapter 2

The Benefits of Practicing the Buddhadharma

It is said in the *Bodhisattva Pitaka*:

Through study, you come to know the dharma.
Through study, misdeeds are countered.
Through study, the meaningless is relinquished.
Through study, nirvana is attained.

In this way, by coming to understand the tenet systems of both Buddhists and non-Buddhists, you come to understand what should be engaged in and what should be avoided and given up. By training in discipline, you turn away from negative conduct. By training in meditation, you relinquish meaningless and futile desires. By training in wisdom (*prajna*), the exhaustion of defilements is actualized and nirvana is thereby attained.

It is said in the *Karikas* (the accounts of Buddha Shakyamuni's previous lives):

Study is the lamp that dispels ignorance.
Unassailable by thieves, it is the supreme wealth.
It is the weapon that vanquishes the enemy of
confusion.

Teaching you methods and means, it is the best
of companions.

In the *Uttaratantra Shastra* (*The Supreme Continuum*) by
Maitreya, the victor's regent, it is taught:

Someone striving for enlightenment may turn to
the Dharma kings, offering golden fields
adorned with gems

Of equal [number] to the atoms in the
buddhafields, and may continue doing so every
day.

Another may just hear a word of this, and upon
hearing it become filled with devotion.

He will attain merits far greater and more
manifold than the virtue sprung from this
practice of giving.¹

Moreover, in *The Sutra of the Recollection of the Noble
Three Jewels* and other such sutras, the benefits of the
dharma are explained extensively. For example, it says
there:

The holy dharma is good at the beginning, good
in the middle, and good at the end. Its meaning
is excellent. Its words are excellent. It is
uncorrupted. It is completely perfect and
completely pure. It completely purifies. The
bhagavat teaches the dharma well. It brings
complete vision. It is free from sickness. It is

always timely. It directs one further. Seeing it fulfils one's purpose. It brings discriminating insight for the wise. The dharma which is taught by the bhagavat is revealed properly in the vinaya. It is renunciation. It causes one to arrive at perfect enlightenment. It is without contradiction. It is pithy. It is trustworthy and puts an end to the journey.²

In *Lung Namché*, it is taught:

There are five benefits to being learned: being expert in the aggregates, being expert in the elements, being expert in the sense sources, being expert in dependent arising, and not needing to rely on others for the oral instructions of these.



Chapter 3

The Way the Teacher Expounds the Dharma

The Qualities of a Dharma Teacher

The teacher's qualities and characteristics are explained in various ways in the different scriptures. In *Ornament of the Great Vehicle Sūtras*, it is taught that a dharma teacher must have ten specific qualities:

One should follow a spiritual teacher who is
gentle, at peace, thoroughly at peace,
Possesses superior qualities, is diligent, rich in
terms of scripture,
Realized with respect to reality, skilled in
teaching,
Loving in nature, and has relinquished
weariness.³

As explained therein:

1. Endowed with discipline, the teacher is gentle;
2. Endowed with samadhi, the teacher is at peace;
3. Endowed with wisdom, they have thoroughly pacified the afflictions;
4. Possessing qualities that surpass all others, they possess superior qualities;

5. Free of laziness when it comes to benefiting others, they are diligent;
6. Having studied extensively, they are rich in terms of scripture;
7. Knowing the true nature as that which is to be known, they are realized with respect to reality;
8. They are eloquent and skilled in teaching;
9. They are loving in nature and not influenced by concerns for material wealth;
10. They have relinquished weariness with regard to teaching the dharma.

These are the ten qualities.

The Way the Teacher Expounds the Dharma

Teachers expound the dharma in a manner that is endowed with the six paramitas, as follows.

1. Giving to others the words and meaning they have realized themselves is generosity;
2. Binding the negative conduct of their three doors of body, speech, and mind is discipline;
3. Enduring heat, cold, and other such hardships is patience;
4. Taking joy in explaining the dharma is diligence;
5. Keeping their own mind in one-pointedness is concentration; and
6. Examining and explaining the contradictions and connections between words and meaning is wisdom.

In this way they expound the dharma in a manner that is sealed with the six paramitas.



Chapter 4

The Way the Student Listens to the Dharma

The Qualities of the Student

The qualities of the student, the listener, are as taught in the *Four Hundred Stanzas*:

An unprejudiced, intelligent, and interested
Listener is called a vessel.

As explained there, if you listen to the dharma whilst holding your own view to be supreme, then even if the speaker gives an excellent discourse it will not be of any benefit to you. This being so, we first of all need to have an unprejudiced attitude. This is a very important point.

The student should have the following four qualities. Regarding the first quality, an unprejudiced attitude, it is taught in *The Essence of the Middle Way*:

By being biased, the mind is anguished
And peace will never be attained.⁴

The second quality is to be intelligent; the student needs a natural intelligence through which he can understand the words and meaning of the teaching that

is being explained. The third quality is that the student needs to have the interest that wishes to understand the words and meaning of the teaching. The fourth quality is that the student needs to have respect and be free of pride.

The Manner in which the Student Listens to the Dharma

At the outset, the manner in which the student listens is the most important factor, and his motivation even more so. For, as it is said:

What makes an action good or bad?
Not how it looks, nor whether it is big or small,
But the good or evil motivation behind it.⁵

And:

Everything is circumstantial
And depends entirely on one's aspiration.⁶

In this way, if your motivation is to gain status and reputation for yourself then, no matter how much dharma study and practice you may do, it will not be authentic. Therefore, at the very outset it is crucial to correct your motivation.

The vast mind-set, the motivation of bodhicitta (the mind of enlightenment) is to think as follows:

“All sentient beings here in samsara, without a single exception, have been my parents. When they

were my parents, they gave me the best of the food that they had, they lovingly clothed me, and they raised me with intense love and care. They were extremely kind. These kind parents long for happiness but do not know how to engage in the causes of happiness – the ten virtues. They do not want to suffer, yet they do not know how to abandon the causes of suffering – the ten non-virtues. In this way, their most basic wish and their actions are in contradiction. They have stumbled onto a mistaken path and are in a state of utter confusion, just like a blind person stranded in the middle of a plain. These poor sentient beings! I will now listen to the sacred dharma and put it into practice and accomplish their aims. I will purify the karmic appearances and habitual tendencies of each of the six classes of sentient beings. I will do this for all my parent sentient beings, tormented as they are by the sufferings of the six classes, and I will establish every single one of them at the level of ultimate omniscience, enlightenment.”

This motivation is of utmost importance in all contexts, whether you are studying, reflecting upon, meditating, or practicing the dharma.

The Student's Conduct When Listening to the Dharma

When listening to the dharma, you should abandon the fourteen faults of the vessel (the receptacle for the teaching) and cultivate the fourfold perception.

The Fourteen Faults of the Vessel:

1. The Three Defects of the Vessel

Not to listen is to be like a vessel (or pot) turned upside down. Not to be able to retain what you hear is to be like a pot with a hole in it. To mix negative emotions with what you hear is to be like a pot with poison in it.

The upside-down pot. When you are listening to the teachings, listen to what is being said and do not let yourself be distracted by anything else. Otherwise you will be like an upside-down pot on which liquid is being poured.

The pot with a hole in it. If you just listen without remembering anything that you hear or understand, you will be like a pot with a leak: however much liquid is poured into it, nothing can stay. No matter how many teachings you hear, you can never assimilate them or put them into practice.

The pot containing poison. If you listen to the teachings with a mind full of the five poisons of attachment, aversion, ignorance and so on, the dharma will not only fail to help your mind; it will also be changed into

something that is not dharma at all, like nectar poured into a pot containing poison.⁷

2. *The Six Stains*

In the *Well-explained Reasoning*, it says:

Pride, lack of faith, and lack of effort,
 Outward distraction, inward tension, and
 discouragement;
 These are the six stains.

Avoid these six:

Proudly believing yourself to be superior to the
 teacher who is explaining the dharma;
 Not trusting the master and his teachings;
 Failing to apply yourself to the dharma;
 Getting distracted by external events;
 Focusing your five senses too intently inwards;
 Becoming discouraged if, for example, a teaching
 is too long.⁸

3. *The Five Wrong Ways of Remembering*

The five wrong ways of remembering are as follows:

1. To remember the words but forget the meaning;
2. To remember the meaning but forget the words;
3. To remember both but with no understanding;
4. To remember them out of order; and
5. To remember them incorrectly.

Having abandoned these fourteen faults of the vessel, you should then listen with the fourfold perception as taught in *The Sutra Arranged Like a Tree*.

The fourfold perception is as follows:

1. To think of yourself as sick;
2. To think of the dharma as medicine;
3. To think of the virtuous spiritual friend as a skilled doctor; and
4. To think of the ardent application of the dharma as the healing process.

With this fourfold perception, you should listen to the dharma.



Chapter 5

Faith ~ the Root of All Dharma

These days, with the increase and advancement of modern education, together with the significant changes that have come about in recent times, many people have begun to equate blind faith with faith itself. There are many who seem to think that when blind faith is refuted, faith as a whole is refuted. However, if you follow this train of thought, it simply shows that they have failed to ascertain the true nature of faith itself, which then poses the serious risk of confusing the positive and virtuous with the negative and non-virtuous.

For example, it would be like me seeing through the mistaken belief that supplicating a deity will result in them automatically dispelling all beings' suffering, and as a result loosing even the slightest wish to perform positive deeds and on top of that constantly and instinctively engaging in negative actions with all three doors (of body, speech, and mind), and all the time to feel very comfortable about behaving this way.

Moreover, these days, there are many people who don dharma robes and talk constantly of faith, yet fail to act in accordance with the Buddhist precepts. When you look at the way they behave, they are trampling all

over the precepts taught by the Buddha with regard to what is permitted and prohibited in relation to certain vows. When such is the case, it is doubtful whether these people have any real faith at all.

This being so, in a calm and measured state of mind we should analyze and discern the true nature of faith. If as a result you come to have sincere confidence in the Three Jewels (the Three Jewels of buddha, dharma, and sangha), then it is certain that your observance of the precepts taught by Buddha will become all the stronger.

In short, we should have a thorough understanding of the difference between the faith that is infused with wisdom, which is the kind of faith taught in the buddhadharma, and “blind faith” – which is devoid of wisdom. Understanding this difference, you should henceforth engage in the sincere and genuine practice of the dharma in accordance with your own ability and disposition, rather than sticking with “blind faith” and letting your life slip by, leaving you empty-handed.

Faith that is endowed with wisdom is taught in great detail in the buddhadharma. As it is said:

In people lacking faith
Virtue will not arise.

And:

Faith is like a mother who first gives birth
And then protects and fosters all good qualities.

The gateway or entry point to all dharma is the act of going for refuge, and the gateway to going for refuge is faith. Therefore it is taught to be of great importance that we develop stable faith at the outset.

What is meant by faith? Faith is a synonym for confidence. It can be divided into (1) inspired faith, (2) longing faith, and (3) confident faith.

When you visit somewhere like a temple, where there are many supports of enlightened body, speech, and mind, you will meet teachers, virtuous spiritual friends, or you will hear about their wonderful qualities. The way that this inspires you is what is known as “inspired faith.”

Longing faith is our eagerness to be free of the sufferings of lower realms when we hear them described; our eagerness to enjoy the happiness of higher realms and of liberation when we hear what they are; our eagerness to engage in positive actions when we hear what benefits they bring; and our eagerness to avoid negative actions when we understand what harm they cause.

Confident faith is the faith in the Three Jewels that arises from the depth of our hearts once we understand their extraordinary qualities and the power of their blessings. It is the total trust in the Three Jewels alone that comes from the knowledge that they are the only unfailing refuge, always and in all circumstances.

The Precious Master of Uddiyana
(Padmasambhava) said:

For all men and women with faith in me, I,
Padmasambhava,
Have never departed—I sleep beside their door.
For me there is no such thing as death;
Before each person with faith, there is a
Padmasambhava.⁹

In this way, if you have developed true “confident faith,” the compassion of the buddhas will enter you, wherever you are. That being so, it is of vital importance to develop all three types of faith so that they become unshakeable and genuine.



Chapter 6

Refuge ~ the Gateway to the Doctrine

The Meaning of Refuge

Refuge means to accept or take a refuge object as genuine. It means being afraid of the sufferings of samsara and the lower realms. Knowing that the supreme buddha, dharma, and sangha have the power to protect us from these sufferings, it means trusting them or accepting them as genuine objects of refuge.

The Cause of Going for Refuge

The perfect, complete cause of going for refuge is confident faith, which is to fear the sufferings of samsara and the lower realms, to know that the Three Jewels have the ability to protect us from those sufferings, and so to have confidence in them.

As it is taught in *The Treasury of Precious Qualities*:

The root of every good is faith itself....¹⁰

The Objects to Which One Goes for Refuge

It is taught in *The Seventy Verses on Refuge*:

The buddha, dharma, and sangha
Are the refuges for those who long for
liberation.

In this way, the objects of refuge are the Three Jewels—the supreme buddha, the supreme dharma, and the supreme sangha—them and them alone. Aside from these, there are no powerful worldly gods, even such as Brahma, Indra and so on, that can protect us from the prison of samsara, since the gods themselves are also bound within the prison.

As the great master Padmasambhava said:

Samsaric leaders, no matter how excellent they
 may be, will let you down.
 The Three Jewels, the objects of refuge, will
 never let you down.

It is taught in *The Thirty-seven Practices of All the Bodhisattvas*:

For whom are the ordinary gods of this world
 ever capable of helping,
 As long as they themselves are trapped within
 samsara's vicious cycle?¹¹

The great mahasiddha Mirror said:

In the unsurpassable Three Jewels
 Entrust your heart and soul.
 For they are undeceiving and fulfil all wishes.

How to Go for Refuge

In *The Treasury of Precious Qualities* it is taught:

Before embarking on it [i.e. going for refuge],
therefore, we must understand
The qualities of both the Teacher and his
Teaching.¹²

As it is said here, one should go for refuge with an understanding of the qualities of the Three Jewels. This being so, what sort of qualities do they have? From among the qualities of the buddha, the dharma, and the sangha, we shall first of all look at the qualities of the buddha in general, and then in detail.

The Qualities of the Buddha

A General Explanation

As for the buddha's qualities in general, it is written in *The Sutra of the Recollection of the Noble Three Jewels*:

...bhagavat, tathagata, arhat,
samyaksambuddha...

In this way, it is commonly explained that “buddha” (*sangye*) refers to one who has awoken (*sang*) from the sleep of ignorance and in whom the intelligence that regards objects of knowledge has expanded (*gye*) in all directions. Having understood the true nature of phenomena exactly as it is, buddha is known as *tathagata* (the Thus-gone One). Having completely

uprooted all faults together with all afflictions and habitual tendencies, buddha is known as *arhat* (foe-destroyer). Since a realization of primordial wisdom has been attained which is neither impure nor incomplete but perfect and unsurpassable, buddha is known as *samyaksambuddha* (the completely and perfectly awakened one). The buddha's vast qualities are described in this and many other ways in that sutra.

Similarly, in *The Treasury of Precious Qualities*:

The qualities of the Munis are infinite.

As it is said, the qualities of Shakyamuni Buddha and the inexhaustible adornment-wheel of the enlightened body, speech, and mind of all the tathagatas are equal to the basic space of phenomena. They are endless. This being so, even the qualities of a single one of their hair follicles is beyond measure.

Also from *The Treasury of Precious Qualities*:

Boundless are the qualities of buddhahood...¹³

In the *King of Samadhi Sutra*, it is said:

Anyone who measures the buddhadharma
Is utterly insane.

The immeasurable cannot be measured.

The qualities of the guides are inconceivable.

It also says there:

Even if, for as many eons as there are grains of
 sand in the Ganges,
 The buddhas themselves were to praise with
 their wisdom
 A single hair of the buddha's body, they would
 not be able to finish.

A Detailed Explanation

Secondly, the detailed explanation of a buddha's
 qualities involves a discussion of the qualities of
 abandonment and the qualities of realization.

Regarding the first, the qualities of abandonment, it
 is said in *The Treasury of Precious Qualities*:

...When two eliminations are victorious
 Over veils emotional and cognitive.¹⁴

As is mentioned here, although there are infinitely
 many divisions of conceptual thoughts obscuring the
 natural element (i.e. buddha nature), they can all be
 included within the afflictive and cognitive
 obscurations. This is because conceptual thoughts
 mistakenly impute true existence. The remedy for these
 obscurations is the primordial wisdom of the paths of
 seeing and meditation, in which the true nature is seen
 directly. Using these two remedies, a buddha
 completely uproots these obscurations and thereby
 relinquishes them. In this way, the ultimate qualities of
 abandonment are actualized.

As for the qualities of realization, in *The Treasury of Precious Qualities* it says:

The eyes of vision, knowledge preternatural,
 Ten powers, four dharanis, and ten strengths,
 Four fearlessnesses, perfect knowledge,
 Eighteen distinctive qualities:
 Buddhahood is all of these complete.¹⁵

The five eyes, the five preternatural knowledges, the ten powers, the four gateways of dharani, the ten strengths, the four fearlessnesses, the eighteen distinctive qualities, the four perfect knowledges—the enlightened mind is endowed with all of these qualities, completely free of increase and decrease. It is actualized and manifest when the sun-like primordial wisdom that is replete with all such qualities—undefiled, and beyond count and the limits of conceptual mind—is freed of all adventitious obscurations in the sky-like basic space of phenomena. And at that point, complete and perfect enlightenment is realized. These are the qualities of perfect realization.

The Qualities of Dharma

Regarding the qualities of dharma, there is likewise a general explanation and a detailed explanation.

A General Explanation

In this context, “dharma” refers to the sublime dharma. From among all objects of knowledge, the

most sacred, excellent, and perfect are cessation and the path, along with their concordant cause, the dharma of scripture.

As it is said in *The Sutra of the Recollection of the Noble Three Jewels*:

The holy dharma is good at the beginning, good in the middle, and good at the end. Its meaning is excellent....¹⁶

By arousing confident faith at the outset when first listening to the dharma, it is good (or virtuous) at the beginning. When in the middle through the insight gained from contemplation you experience the meaning of the dharma, you gain certainty in the path of lasting bliss and so give rise to an extraordinary joy. For this reason, it is good (or virtuous) in the middle. Finally, when you meditate on the dharma, genuine primordial wisdom arises and therefore it is good (or virtuous) at the end. In this and other ways, the sutra explains the dharma's vast qualities.

A Detailed Explanation

In *The Treasury of Precious Qualities* it is said:

The dharma is nirvana, path, and virtue: these are what it teaches.

It is both fruit and all the acts whereby the fruit is gained.

It therefore has two natures, called two truths:

Cessation and the Path.¹⁷

“Merit” refers to the aspect of skilful means, such as generosity and the like. “The path” refers to the aspect of wisdom that realizes the lack of self. “Nirvana” refers to being free of all that needs to be discarded, through the power of the path. These three are the subject matter of the dharma of scripture. Moreover, that which is free of stains and that which liberates from stains are the two truths of complete purification, the two truths of the path and cessation.

Also in this vein, it says in *The Uttaratantra Shastra*:

....It is free from attachment and frees from attachment.

This is the dharma with its features of the two truths.

Freedom from attachment [as fruit and means] Consists of the truths of cessation and path.¹⁸

As for the qualities of these two truths, it is explained in the same text:

Inconceivable, free from the two [veils] and from thought,
Being pure, clear, and playing the part of an antidote....¹⁹

The truth of cessation is endowed with the following three qualities: it is inconceivable to the

ordinary consciousness, it brings pacification of karma and the afflictions, and it is free from all thoughts of incorrect mental engagement.

The truth of the path is endowed with the following three qualities: it is pure and untainted by the stains of obscuration, it is bright with the light of primordial wisdom, and it acts as the antidote for adverse conditions.

As it says in *The Sutra of the Recollection of the Noble Three Jewels*:

The dharma's qualities are inconceivable.²⁰

The Qualities of the Sangha

In *The Sutra of the Recollection of the Noble Three Jewels*, it says:

As for the sangha of the great yana, they enter the path completely. They enter insightfully. They enter straightforwardly. They enter harmoniously....²¹

By reining-in their mindstreams with flawless training, they enter the path completely. Endowed with samadhi, the training in meditation, they enter insightfully. Since their mindstreams are liberated through the wisdom that rests in the genuine view, free of the extremes of permanence and nihilism, they enter straightforwardly. Free from all discord with the view, they enter into nirvana. Therefore, they enter

harmoniously. This and their other qualities are taught in detail in this sutra.

In *The Treasury of Precious Qualities*, it says:

The Sangha is, in essence, those
Who are both wise and free.²²

As explained here, the essence of the supreme sangha is the quality of being endowed with twofold awareness. This means that they have realized the genuine meaning to a certain extent, and that they have attained liberation to a certain extent from the stains of the two obscurations (i.e. all that needs to be relinquished).

In the *Uttaratantra Shastra*, it is taught:

The assembly of those who have understanding
And thus do not fall back has unsurpassable
qualities,
Since their vision of inner primordial wisdom,
Which knows correctly and knows completely, is
pure.²³

As it says here, members of the supreme sangha are endowed with a threefold awareness: the awareness which knows correctly, the awareness which knows completely, and the awareness of inner primordial wisdom.

Thus, in *The Sutra of the Recollection of the Noble Three Jewels* it says:

The qualities of the sangha are
inconceivable....²⁴

Alternatively, it can be explained that one goes for refuge out of one's own fear of the sufferings of samsara and the lower realms and in order to free all other sentient beings from the sufferings of the same. In doing this, one perceives the buddha as the guide who shows the way, the dharma as the true refuge, the path itself, and the sangha as companions on the path.

Different Ways of Going for Refuge

The Way Lesser Beings Go for Refuge

Having seen the unbearable suffering of the pretas and so on within the three lower realms, you become filled with intense fear and dread. In order to free yourself from such suffering, you go for refuge in the Three Jewels.

The Way Middling Beings Go for Refuge

Understanding the constant torment that is the suffering of the six classes of beings, for instance within the hell realms, you become filled with fear and dread. In order to free yourself from these sufferings, you go for refuge in the Three Jewels.

The Way Supreme Beings Go for Refuge

Observing the suffering of the six classes of beings, and in order to free all sentient beings without exception from those sufferings, you go for refuge in the supreme buddha, the supreme dharma, and the supreme sangha.

In *The Wish-fulfilling Treasury*, it says:

It is said that with causal refuge acting as the cause,
One's own mindstream becomes the Three Jewels, the resultant refuge.

As it is explained here, going for refuge in the Three Jewels that have already arisen in another's mindstream is what is known as "causal refuge." When, based on this causal refuge, one's own mindstream becomes the essence of the Three Jewels, that is what is known as "resultant refuge."

The Refuge Precepts*The Precepts of Prohibition*

In *The Seventy Verses on Refuge*, it says:

Having taken refuge in the buddha,
Do not attend or take refuge
In other gods.
Having taken refuge in the dharma,
Rid yourself of malice and spite.
Having taken refuge in the sangha,

Do not keep company with heretics.

In that way, having gone for refuge in the buddha, do not regard samsaric deities as ultimate refuges. Having gone for refuge in the dharma, avoid harmful actions. And, having gone for refuge in the sangha, do not keep company with heretics (or negative friends), those whose views and conduct are not in accord with your own.

The Precepts to be Adopted

Avoid being disrespectful to all representations of the Three Jewels, even a fragment of a buddha image, a patch of the robes of the ordained sangha, or a single syllable of dharma, and, with faith and devotion, pay homage and make offerings to them.

There is also the set of five common precepts, as listed in *Ascertaining the Three Vows*:

To never forsake the Three Jewels, even for one's life or rewards; to not search elsewhere, regardless of how pressing the need may be; to not fail to make offerings at the correct time; to actively establish oneself and others in refuge; and, before travelling, to bow to the buddha of that direction: These are the five common precepts as taught by Lord Atisha.²⁵

The Benefits of Going for Refuge

All misdeeds and downfalls will be overcome. The two accumulations will be gathered in vast abundance. One will be protected from all harm. Going for refuge acts as the support for the pratimoksha vows. It awakens one's potential, and it leads one to the swift attainment of enlightenment.

These are just some of the qualities of going for refuge. In *The Wish-fulfilling Treasury*, it says:

As for its benefits, in the short-term your aims
 will be accomplished,
 You will become Buddhist, it acts as the basis for
 all teachings.
 You will be untouched by harm and be reborn at
 the Buddha's feet.
 Ultimately you will yourself become the true
 Three Jewels.
 For these reasons, to begin with, you should go
 for refuge.

And, as is taught in *The Condensed Prajnaparamita Sutra*:

If the merit of taking refuge were to take form,
 All the three worlds could never contain it.
 Could the vast amount of water in all the great
 oceans
 Ever be measured with a quarter-pint scoop?²⁶



Chapter 7

Compassion ~ the Essence of the Path

What is meant by “compassion”? When you naturally give rise to compassion for someone who is destitute and impoverished, you also experience anguish and feel uncomfortable. This compassion arises because of your understanding that this person, regardless of gender or ethnicity, is destitute and impoverished, and is suffering as a result. In this way, your compassion at that moment is rooted in the concern for others and the wish to help others, and is free of self-interest.

There is another kind of compassion which is the love and affection that arise towards your close family and friends, such as your spouse and children, or your lover. This is rooted in attachment. So there are these two kinds of compassion.

The first is not based on attachment. It is a mind of love that is not stained by attachment and it is therefore a mind of genuine love.

The second type of compassion is not a mind of genuine love, since it is rooted in attachment. And since this attachment that is at the root is liable to change, then your love will also be liable to change. It is even possible that you will completely lose your love.

In short, if you engender the wish to benefit others for as long as there remain any among the infinite number of sentient beings who are tormented by suffering, your compassion will not decline but will prevail and endure.

We need to persevere in methods for arousing and then expanding this kind of compassion within us, so that our limited compassion can develop into a limitless compassion. Once we reach the point of being able to arouse a natural, limitless, immeasurable compassion that seeks to benefit all sentient beings free of any partiality and bias, we will be able to feel the same love and affection for enemies who harm us as we naturally feel for close friends and family.

For what reason, though, do we need to develop compassion? We can think of it this way: all of us beings, without a single exception, are equal in our longing for happiness and in not wanting to suffer. All sentient beings have taken rebirth with the wish to attain happiness, albeit with this wish rooted in self-grasping, and all sentient beings have an equal right to fulfil this wish.

Alternatively, we can simply compare the infinite number of other sentient beings to ourselves. We are just one person and others are many, so from this perspective we can see that other beings are more important than ourselves and that we should therefore regard them as more significant.

Moreover, from a Buddhist perspective it is taught that we should regard all sentient beings as our beloved mother. Since we have all taken rebirth an immeasurable number of times, it is impossible for there to be a single sentient being who has not been our parent in the past. When they were our parents, they showed us such tremendous kindness. We must repay this kindness with more kindness. Indeed, to repay others' kindness is something that is regarded as an excellent trait even in the mundane world, so there is no need to mention it in terms of the dharma.

If we view things from the perspective of the buddhadharma, regardless of whether someone believes in the dharma or not, there is not a single person who does not appreciate love and compassion. From the moment we were born, we were nurtured by the love of our parents. Throughout life when we fall sick and when we reach the suffering of ageing, we must rely on the kindness of doctors, nurses and others. This being so, we should avoid looking down on others and any kind of jealousy and resentment. Rather, with respect for others, we should cultivate the warm and loving heart that regards everyone as close friends. Obviously, it is not necessary to believe in the dharma in order to cultivate this kind of goodness of heart.

How is compassion taught in the buddhadharma?
Chandrakirti said:

Of buddhahood's abundant crop, compassion is
the seed.

It is like moisture bringing increase and is said
To ripen in the state of lasting happiness.

Therefore to begin, I celebrate compassion!²⁷

Whether listening to the dharma or practicing it, whatever the situation may be, to have compassion throughout—at the beginning, middle, and end—is indispensable. Compassion can be divided into the compassion that focuses on sentient beings, the compassion that focuses on the dharma, and the compassion that is free from focus.ⁱ

The first type is the compassion that arises when you see the sufferings of those in the lower realms and the like.

The second type of compassion arises when, having reversed our own perception of ourselves as permanent and singular, we then generate compassion by thinking of how other sentient beings, lacking an understanding of cause and effect, continue in their delusion to regard themselves as permanent and singular.

ⁱ These three types of compassion can also be translated as the compassion that has beings for its object, the compassion that has transience for its object, and compassion that is devoid of reference.

The third is the compassion that arises once you have realized emptiness and call to mind all those sentient beings who have not realized it.

From among these three types of compassion, we are currently discussing the first, the compassion that focuses on sentient beings. The object of this compassion is all sentient beings. The expression of this compassion is the wish to free them from suffering.

How to cultivate compassion? Think of the sufferings of the six classes of sentient beings such as those experienced in the hell realms and imagine that it is yourself suffering, or your parents, or someone else you care for dearly. Imagining that, cultivate compassion. Imagine your beloved mother being butchered and hacked to pieces by people, being boiled and burnt alive, or frozen until blisters appear on her body. As you do this, cultivate compassion. Imagining these things, train in compassion, with the thought, “May they be free of suffering and its causes!”

As for the benefits of compassion, as it says in Avalokiteshvara’s *Account of Realization*:

If you were to have one dharma it would be like placing all the dharmas of the buddha in the palm of your hand. What is that one dharma? It is great compassion.



Chapter 8
The Four Seals ~
the Hallmark of the Buddhadharma
and the Essence of the Path

Although there are many different spiritual traditions in the world, almost all of them practice the qualities of loving kindness, compassion, patience, and contentment. They are likewise similar in upholding the precepts of their own particular traditions. There may be differences in the way individual traditions emphasise these qualities, but they are all alike in regarding them as qualities to be cultivated.

What distinguishes the various spiritual traditions from one another is, for instance, whether they assert the existence of a world creator or not and whether they assert the existence of a self (or atman or soul) as being something other than a collection of aggregates.

Regarding the assertion of a world creator, most non-Buddhist traditions do assert such a thing, saying that this creator is a permanent, self-arisen being. Loosely speaking, they assert that a permanent, self-arisen being created the entire universe—the external environment and the beings within it—and that, if one has faith in this permanent, self-arisen being and

follows the same path, one will be able to attain ultimate bliss.

Those following the path of the buddhadharma explain that there is no self separate from the aggregates, and that all experiences of pleasure and pain occur as a result of engaging in virtue and misdeeds. They are the result of our confusion regarding what to engage in and what to avoid.

It is taught in the sutras:

You are your own protector;
 No one else can bestow you protection.
 If you fully tame yourself,
 You will become truly learned and ascend to the
 higher realms.

And:

Taming the mind is wonderful, for a tamed mind
 brings happiness.

Thus, all happiness and suffering depend entirely on oneself. This being so, those who assert the existence of a self that is separate from the aggregates are propounding a spiritual tradition at odds with the buddhadharma. Conversely, any teaching that does not assert the existence of a self that is separate from the aggregates can for the most part be said to form part of the Buddhist tradition.

In any case, if we were to distil the very essence of the buddhadharma, it could be contained within the view of dependent arising and within the conduct of non-harm. The conduct of non-harm does not refer merely to refraining from inflicting harm. Rather, it refers to actively working for the benefit and happiness of others, from the standpoint of compassion. Even if you are unable to do this, then at the very least it means consciously avoiding harming others. That is the meaning of the conduct of non-harm. Moreover, the conduct of non-harm should be upheld on the basis of a particular set of tenets, or viewpoint. Just light-heartedly avoiding inflicting harm is not enough.

This being so, what is this set of tenets? It is the view of dependent arising. This view is something unique to the buddhadharma; it is not taught anywhere else. Within the Bhagavan's teachings, there is a specific teaching called "the view of the four seals that is the hallmark of buddhadharma." These are:

1. Everything conditioned is impermanent.
2. Everything defiled is suffering.
3. All phenomena are empty and selfless.
4. Nirvana is peace.

These are known as "the four seals that are a sign of the teachings." The implication of the word "seal" is that, just as with an official seal, they should not be

tampered with. They are the four roots of the entire tenet system of the buddhadharma.

1. Everything conditioned is impermanent.

“Conditioned” means something that is composite and produced, something that comes about due to the gathering of causes and conditions. It is anything whose existence is based solely on causes and conditions, rather than something that arises from an adverse cause, from permanence, or without a cause.

Something conditioned is something that arises from a concordant cause. Based simply on concordant causes and conditions, a myriad of results come about. There is no other cause for their occurrence, such as having been created by Ishvara or by God.

It is taught in *The Rice Sprout Sutra*:

Because of this, then that occurs. Because that has arisen, this arises. Due to the condition of ignorance, there are formations....

When it says, “Because of this, then that occurs,” the meaning is that things arise from their respective causes and conditions and that, aside from this, there is no other cause. There is neither a world creator nor a permanent cause.

When the sutra says, “Because that has arisen, this arises,” the meaning is that the presence of a cause alone does not suffice for something to come about.

Rather, in order for a resultant phenomenon to arise through causes and conditions, it needs assistance from other phenomena which themselves have arisen due to causes and conditions. In this way, the statement refutes the notion of a permanent cause and demonstrates that things by necessity must arise from impermanent causes.

There then follows the statement, “Due to the condition of ignorance, there are formations.” This is not stating that formations, which are by nature impermanent, are the cause from which a plethora of different results can arise. Rather, it is showing that the results that arise correspond to the productive power of their respective causes. It is not the case that any and every type of result can arise from a single cause.

“Formations” in this context refers primarily to the formations that propel existence, or in other words that produce samsara. The cause of this is taught as being the cause of the sufferings of birth, ageing, sickness, and death, these being the result that arises. This is taught from the perspective of inner dependent arising.

Generally, the Buddhist tenet systems mention two types of dependent arising: the dependent arising of causality, and the dependent arising of designation.

As Mipham Rinpoche explained:

Entities arise in dependence

And non-entities are designated in relation.

Thus, both entities and non-entities
Are empty of their own essence.

As mentioned here, within the dependent arising of designation there are several variations. There are the dependent arisings that are designated based on their parts, such as tables or houses being designated based on wood. Likewise, there are things designated relative to their basis, such as a person designated based on his or her aggregates. This teaching on dependent arising is one of the unique features of the buddhadharma.

Even if someone does not accept the dharma itself, if they nonetheless have an understanding of this principle of dependent arising, this will surely be of benefit throughout their lives in helping them to develop an open and broad-minded perspective. The crux of many of the difficulties we face in life rests on whether or not we understand our basic, common wish for happiness and not wanting to suffer and whether or not we know how to go about fulfilling this wish. Whether it be longed-for happiness or unwanted suffering, we fail to see that they both come about based on many causes and conditions. Instead, we assume that happiness and suffering exist truly within objects, or that they are something created by the Three Jewels, or something that come about based on a single, exclusive cause or condition. With this basic outlook, we vainly go about trying to gain happiness and dispel suffering.

In actual fact though, this is not how it works. Whatever it may be, whether happiness or suffering, everything comes about based on a collection of many different causes and conditions. There is absolutely nothing that comes about through just a single cause or condition. If, in spite of this fact, we persist in our pursuit of happiness and our flight from suffering with the notion that these can be accomplished through a single factor alone, we will accomplish nothing other than tiring ourselves out. This is because our efforts are not in accordance with the way things are.

This being so, if we do not want suffering then we first of all need to understand that the cause of suffering is ignorance. Having understood this much, we can then apply ourselves to the methods for counteracting the cause of suffering. We do this through the efficacy of the Truth of the Path. When ignorance—the cause and origin of suffering—is counteracted, the accumulation of the causes of suffering is thereby brought to a halt. Once this cause is brought to a halt, then its undesired results—the sufferings of birth, ageing, sickness, and death—will also come to a halt.

Likewise, when seeking happiness, you need to know what its causes and conditions are. Once you identify the causes and conditions, you will naturally be inclined to place importance on them.

In general, when you understand this, you will naturally gain trust in the path of dependent arising. In

particular, in terms of our human society, you will be able to see what you must focus on in order to have happiness yourself. You will be able to identify the causes and conditions for happiness, namely taking care of the environment and other sentient beings, those around you, your neighbours and so on.

Once you have understood this, then as a result, mutual care, harmony, and cooperation within families and local communities and between countries will naturally come about. If this were indeed to occur, there would be joy and wellbeing for all sentient beings, and there would be world peace and happiness. There is no way to accomplish happiness and peace through causes and conditions other than these.

What I have been discussing here is the dependent arising of cause and effect. Through this type of dependent arising, no matter what the phenomena may be, it is undoubtedly the case that a vast array of different things can come about through the gathering together of various causes and conditions.

For that reason, things are said to be “conditioned” (*‘dus byas*). Here, “conditioned” refers to that which is produced (*byas*) and comes about through the assembly or gathering together (*‘dus*) of many different causes and conditions. It is taught that all such conditioned phenomena are impermanent. Here, “impermanent” means that which is not constantly stable and static. It refers to something that is constantly changing.

Why are things constantly changing? If it were the case that things change simply upon encountering new conditions that trigger change, it would be possible for things to remain unchanged when not encountering such conditions. However, what is meant by this term “impermanence” is a constant process of change or flux. Take, for instance, the four seasons of spring, summer, autumn, and winter. Here is a process of change that is clearly evident to us. If some change were not occurring moment by moment, the evident change that we perceive could not come about. For example, if we were to photograph the leaves of a deciduous tree each day and later on examine the photographs, we would clearly be able to see the process of change.

If we look at external phenomena in general, they are comprised of a conglomeration of subtle particles and each of these particles is by nature in constant motion and in a constant process of change and flux. This being so, we can conclude that all entities are in a constant process of change and flux. This is what is meant by impermanence. Likewise, if we look at the non-physical phenomenon of the inner consciousness, it is made up of moments, a continuum of constant change.

In short, all these things undergo change due to the coming together of causes and conditions. This process of change is their very nature, since from the moment they come into existence they are in a

constant state of flux. This is the nature of entities that are conditioned by causes and conditions. For this reason it is said that everything conditioned is impermanent.

2. *Everything defiled is suffering.*

The term “defiled” can be understood in many different ways, but here “defiled” means to be tarnished by the afflictions. It refers to something, a defiled entity, whose essential producing cause arises out of that which is defiled, namely the afflictions. Whether or not the appropriating cause for its production is an affliction, the co-emergent conditions for its occurrence are stained by the inner afflictions. This definition pretty much covers all defiled phenomena. Anything based on conditions that are stained by the afflictions and their habitual tendencies is termed “defiled.”

When it is taught that everything defiled is suffering, this means that any phenomenon endowed with defilement is essentially suffering by nature and is also a condition for the arising of suffering. For these reasons it is said that everything defiled is suffering.

As Dharmakirti states in his *Pramanavarttika*:

Having taught suffering, the Buddha taught
impermanence;
Having taught impermanence, he taught the
absence of self.

Since things are produced by causes and dictated by causes, they also undergo disintegration moment by moment. Ignorance, the cause, acts as the root of suffering. This being so, we can come to understand that, if something is dictated by conditions whose very root is suffering, then that thing is by its own nature suffering.

Is there a way to eradicate this suffering, or not? If there were no way to eradicate suffering, there would be no virtue or benefit in contemplating it; we would just be buying into meaningless mental suffering for ourselves. It is because suffering can be eradicated that we reflect on it, acknowledging it as such, seeking a way to gain freedom from it. And if we train in the methods for attaining freedom from suffering, it will be possible to free ourselves from it.

It is for these reasons that teachings are given on the defects of samsara in the manuals for the preliminary practices.

3. All phenomena are empty and devoid of self.

The root of suffering is the afflictions. As a way to completely eradicate the afflictions, it was taught by the Buddha that all phenomena are empty and devoid of self. What does this mean?

Non-buddhist scriptures also regard the afflictions as faults, and the mundane practice of vipashyana of peaceful and coarse aspects is taught as a remedy.

However, it is the buddhadharma alone that explains how the view of self acts as the root of the afflictions and how, in order to relinquish the afflictions, it is necessary to relinquish the view of self. The reason that the buddhadharma teaches this view of the lack of a self is that the root of all the afflictions, such as attachment and aversion, is the self-grasping that clings to a sense of “I.”

As the master Chandrakirti taught:

Perceiving that all faults and all afflictions
Flow from the idea of the transitory composite,
And knowing that its focus is the very self,
This self is what the yogi will disprove.²⁸

Is it possible to relinquish self-clinging, this grasping to “I”? Yes, it is. For grasping to “I” is an outlook that does not accord with reality. This being so, if you generate an outlook that does accord with reality and which contradicts that other mode of perception, it is possible to relinquish self-grasping. If grasping to “I” were an outlook that accorded with reality, things would exist exactly as you cling to them and it would be impossible to generate any outlook in accordance with reality that opposed it.

For any state of mind that perceives things in a mistaken way, it must also be possible to generate a state of mind that is the opposite of this. How is this so?

Since such a state of mind is deluded, it automatically follows that one can generate an undeluded state of mind that recognizes the other state of mind to be deluded. If the perception and grasping of the mind that perceives and clings to a self were logically valid and in accord with the way things are, an opposing state of mind could not come about. Therefore, the mind that clings to “I” is a deluded mind. Moreover, it is a mistaken outlook, and one with a powerful “opposing factor.” What is an opposing factor?

When something has logic to support it, it is a powerful opposing factor. If it lacks the support of logic, even if it is an opposing factor it will not be a powerful one. Since the opposing factor is based on reason, the more you examine and meditate on it the more powerful an outlook it becomes.

As it says in the *Pramanavartika*:

Based on the intellect's varying levels of
engagement,
Wisdom and the like increase,
While obscurations are purified.

The outlook of self-grasping has no foundation. It is simply that one is habituated to it and, because of the habituation, it has a strong hold. However, if you examine and analyze it, you will find no basis. This being so, if you maintain these two states of mind, then

gradually, just as hot and cold cannot co-exist side by side, your outlook will transform.

This is taught in the scriptures, for example in *The Uttarantra Shastra*, where it says:

The nature of mind is luminous.
Stains are adventitious.

With these words, it is explained that the nature of mind is luminosity and that stains are adventitious. When these stains come into contact with a powerful antidote they can be removed and thus they are not part of mind's nature.

In his *In Praise of Dharmadhatu*, the master Nagarjuna says:

A garment that was purged by fire
May be soiled by various stains.
When it's put into a blaze again,
The stains are burned, the garment not.

Likewise, mind that is so luminous
Is soiled by stains of craving and so forth.
The afflictions burn in wisdom's fire
But its luminosity does not.²⁹

As explained there, when you place a stained piece of fabric in fire, the stains tarnishing the fabric are burnt up by the fire, but the fabric itself is not. Likewise, when our minds, stained as they are by the afflictions of attachment and so on, meet with the fire

of primordial wisdom that knows the mind's natural state, the fire of primordial wisdom burns up and completely destroys all such attachment and grasping. It does not however destroy the naturally luminous mind.

It is taught in the Prajnaparamita sutras:

Mind is devoid of mind; mind is naturally
luminous.

Since the mind is naturally luminous, it is taught that, even though the defilements of attachment and the other afflictions may temporarily be very powerful, they have no solid grounding and no foundation.

In short, if defilement ceases, then the suffering that arises from it can be removed. This is because defilement is itself the source of defiled phenomena, and defiled phenomena constitute suffering. When they are removed, the ensuing state is nirvana, peace.

4. Nirvana is peace.

There are many different ways of explaining what is meant by "nirvana." However, it can be explained simply in the following way. The mental proliferations of grasping to reality are the root of suffering and can therefore be posited as sorrow. To fully transcend such sorrow, or in other words to pacify and thus fully transcend it, are what is termed "nirvana", passing beyond sorrow.



Chapter 9

A Brief Explanation of Cause & Effect

It is said in *The Sutra of One Hundred Verses*:

The happiness and suffering of beings
Is karma, so the Muni taught.
Karma is manifold,
And thus beings act in manifold ways.

As taught here, happiness and suffering arise from one's previous karma. The meaning of the term "karma" can be explained with the following short sentence.

If you perform a positive deed, the outcome will be positive and pleasant. If you perform a negative deed, the outcome will be negative and unpleasant.

"Karma" is a Sanskrit word which means action. In terms of the accumulation of karma, we can accumulate physical, verbal, and mental karma. In terms of the results of those actions or karmas, there are three possibilities: virtuous, non-virtuous, and neutral karma. In terms of time, there is the karma of mental intentions and the karma of performed physical

and verbal actions. For example, I am now discussing this topic with a particular motivation. At the same time I am accumulating verbal karma, and by moving my hands around I am accumulating physical karma. Whether these karmas are positive or negative depends on their root source, my motivation.

As it is said:

What makes an action good or bad?
 Not how it looks, nor whether it is big or small,
 But the good or evil motivation behind it.³⁰

And as it is said in the sutras:

There were two people, both with good hearts:
 One placed a shoe over Buddha's head,
 And the other took it off;
 Both enjoyed great riches as a result.

In *The Application of Mindfulness Sutra*, it is taught:

The appearance of this array of bodies,
 Enjoyments, happiness, and suffering
 Are imagined by the mind, created by the mind,
 Just like a dream.

If you act with a pure intention, with respect, and with a benevolent motivation, your actions will be positive and virtuous. On the other hand, if you act whilst motivated by pride, anger, criticism, and other such negative states of mind, your actions of body and

speech will be non-virtuous. This being so, we are constantly accumulating karma. If you speak with a positive motivation, one of the immediate results of this is that all the people around you will appear friendly. Furthermore, that action will place a habitual tendency within your mind which will bring about happiness in the future as well. Conversely, if you speak with a negative motivation, those around you will immediately appear as enemies, and moreover this will lead to your further suffering in the future.

Buddha taught that we are our own protectors and that everything depends on ourselves. That being so, he explained that happiness and suffering do not come from outside but from within – from the virtuous and non-virtuous karma already present in our own mindstream. There is a common saying: “If you have good intentions, your situation and destination will also be good.”

Confidence in the principle of cause and effect is extremely useful in day-to-day life, because once you have this confidence you will constantly and intentionally keep checking yourself, regardless of whether there is anyone else watching or keeping track of you. To examine and keep a check on yourself is extremely important, as this is the pre-eminent way of circumventing negative, harmful behaviour.

As for the different types of karmic results, a wide variety are taught and explained.

One of these is the “ripened” result. This is likened to a person taking rebirth as an animal in the lower realms due to non-virtuous karma.

Secondly, there is the result of “experience in accord with the cause.” This, for instance, is like someone who, due to the karma of killing, is born in the lower realms and then gradually takes rebirth as a human, but with a short lifespan. The result, a short lifespan, comes from having cut short the lifespan of someone else. It is an experience that is similar to its cause.

Thirdly, there is the result of “action in accord with the cause.” An example of this is someone who naturally takes joy in killing during his next life as a result of the habitual tendencies created in a previous life by instinctively engaging in such non-virtuous acts. Fourthly, there are also the karmic results that are our shared experiences. These occur when many people accumulate karma in unison and then experience a common, shared result. An example for this is the external environment and other such factors, which are experienced in common by us all.

Using similar examples and illustrations, these same categories of karmic result can also be applied in respect of virtuous karma.



Chapter 10
The Ethics of the Ten Virtues and Ten
Non-virtues

Without the ethical discipline of the ten virtues and the ten non-virtues, there is no way that peace and well-being will come about in our world in general or in our countries, communities, businesses, and families in particular. Therefore, we should certainly consider and make a careful examination of what constitutes positive and negative actions.

The Ten Virtues

Any actions we do that cause both oneself and others to experience happiness as a result are known as virtuous actions.

The classification of virtuous actions is:

1. Not taking the life of living beings
2. Not taking what is not freely given
3. Abstaining from sexual misconduct
4. Speaking truthfully
5. Not engaging in divisive speech
6. Speaking gentle words
7. Not gossiping
8. Not coveting the wealth of others

9. Not holding ill-will towards others
10. Right view

Whoever maintains practices such as these, in both dharmic and worldly affairs, is recognized as a respectable person with proper conduct. Thus it is extremely important.

The Benefits of the Ten Virtues

In the short term, you will be happy, joyful, and get along with everybody. Not only will others esteem your elegant behaviour, but also your life will not stray from the ways of courtesy and honesty. You will consequently be able to act as a competent guide showing the path that will eliminate the suffering of many hundred millions of sentient beings. In the long term, practicing the virtues in this way will aid you in attaining the ultimate state of mental peace and happiness – enlightenment itself.

The Ten Non-virtues

Any actions we do that cause unhappiness and suffering to both ourselves and others are known as non-virtuous actions.

The classification of non-virtuous actions is:

1. Taking the life of living beings
2. Taking others' possessions when not given
3. Engaging in impure conduct, or sexual misconduct

4. Telling lies
5. Divisive speech
6. Speaking harshly
7. Indulging in idle gossip
8. Being covetous
9. Holding ill-will towards others
10. Holding wrong views, such as believing that things like karmic cause and effect, or past and future lives do not exist

The Drawbacks of the Ten Non-Virtues

In the short term, in general, due to a lack of courtesy and honesty, there will be no harmony between countrymen, neighbours, and families. Because of this, you will yourself become uptight and unhappy. On the mundane level, you will be identified as one of the world's immoral people and everyone will despise you. In the long term, your clinging to "me" and "mine" – the very root of samsara – will grow, and you will experience boundless suffering.



Eleven-faced Avalokiteshvara



Chapter 11

The Difference Between the One-day Vow and the Fasting Vow

Even in these modern times, here in Nepal, through the kindness of our Tibetan teachers, the precious sunlight of the vinaya – the basis and foundation of the entire buddhadharma – has spread in all directions. Consequently, not only male and female householders but even children are sometimes taking the one-day vows that are specific to lay practitioners. However, there is a danger of confusing these one-day vows (as discussed in the context of pratimoksha vows of individual liberation) with the fasting vows that come from the eleven-faced Avalokiteshvara or even with the Mahayana restoration of vows. Therefore, because of the risk of confusion, it is crucial to know how to distinguish them.

As the *Abhidharmakosha* says with regard to the eight branches of the one-day vow:

The branch of discipline, the branch of
heedfulness, and
The branch of ascetic discipline, respectively
Follow the stages of abandoning the four, the
one, and the three.

Thus, the branch of discipline is the relinquishment of the four root downfalls; the branch of heedfulness is the abstinence from alcohol; and the branch of ascetic discipline is the abandonment of big or high beds, dancing and jewelry and so on, and eating at the wrong times. Upholding these observances for twenty-four hours is known as *the one-day vow* or the *eight branches of temporary discipline*.

To explain further, the four root downfalls are:

1. Taking life
2. Taking what is not given
3. Sexual misconduct
4. Falsely proclaiming to possess exalted qualities

On top of these four:

1. *Big or high beds* are explained as beds and seats that are either too expensive or higher than a cubit.
2. *Dancing* refers to dancing, singing songs, and playing music at inappropriate times.
3. *Jewelry* refers to adorning the body with jewels and ornaments, anointing yourself with fragrances such as perfume, and applying make-up such as rouge to the lips or cheeks.
4. *Eating at the wrong time* means having a meal after the sun has passed noon in whichever continent one resides. This is known as an

“afternoon meal” or “eating at the wrong time.”

Agreeing to abstain from these eight objects of abstinence in the case of the fasting vow makes the fasting vow similar to the one-day vow. Nevertheless, six differences should be distinguished: the support, the place, the motivation, the ritual, the manner of upholding the vows, and the result of the achievement.

The Support for Receiving the Vows

The one-day vows are pratimoksha vows that are specific to male and female householders. They are appropriate for householders to take up, but not for novices or fully-ordained monks. If you take the one-day vows with an incorrect mindset, it is said that this will cause the higher vows to be relinquished. As for the fasting vows, these are appropriate not only for male and female householders to receive, but also for the five types of ordained monastics. Hence, they are different in terms of support.

The Object From which the Vows are Received

When one-day vows are first taken, they should only be received from an individual who himself has at least the pratimoksha vows of a layperson. If you try to take them up in front of a representation of enlightened body, speech, or mind, they will never arise. As for fasting vows, these should be taken up from someone such as your guru so that there will be shame and

decency with regards to breaking them, or, as explained in the *Sutra of Manjushri's Buddhafield*, they can be taken from a representation of enlightened body, speech, or mind. Contrary to the situation with one-day vows, the fasting vows will arise if taken in front of an enlightened representation. Thus, the two sorts of vows are different in terms of the object from which they can be received.

The Motivation

The one-day vow should be taken with at least the mind that is set on renunciation from samsara for oneself alone. The fasting vows should be taken at least with the mindset that desires awakening for the benefit of others, namely bodhicitta. Thus, the vows are different in terms of motivation.

The Ritual

The ritual for the one-day vow uses the refuge prayer as the basis. One performs the refuge recitation, self-recitation, and other-recitation three times, and at the end of the recitation the vows are received through the symbolic gesture of a finger snap. The fasting vows are obtained by agreeing three times to practice following the ways in which all previous buddhas and bodhisattvas have practiced. Thus, the vows are different in terms of rituals.

The Manner of Upholding the Vows

In the case of one-day vows, one does not have to abandon meat that has the three-fold purity.ⁱ Yet, if one does happen to abandon it, it becomes one of the ascetic disciplines of Devadatta.ⁱⁱ In the case of fasting vows, as said in *The White Lotus of Compassion Sutra* says:

Bodhisattvas, under the sway of compassion, will not eat any meat at all.

Accordingly, one should avoid even meat that has the threefold purity. Thus, the vows are different in terms of the manner in which they are upheld.

The Results

The levels of arhats, pratyekabuddhas, and buddhahood – the results of all three vehicles – arise as the result of one-day vows. It is not the case that by gathering the accumulations of the higher vehicles, the results of the lower vehicles are brought about. This being so, since the fasting vows relate only to the higher vehicles they lead to the attainment of great

ⁱ This is meat that you neither heard, saw, nor suspected being killed for your own consumption.

ⁱⁱ This is referring to the five yogic disciplines of Devadatta, which are (1) to not eat meat, (2) to not drink milk, (3) to not eat salt, (4) to not wear patchwork clothing (unlike the Buddha who specified sewn robes in a patchwork style for his monks), and (5) to not stay in isolated places.

awakening, the state of enlightenment and that alone. Thus, the vows are different in terms of results.

The key points of these vows may be learned in more detail from the great scriptural traditions.



Chapter 12
The Benefits of Constructing the
Three Representations of Enlightened
Body, Speech, and Mind

The benefits of constructing the three representations of enlightened body, speech, and mind are mentioned as follows by the glorious protector, the noble Nagarjuna, in *Letter to a Friend*:

The wise will always honor and bow down
 To Buddha statues, though they're made of
 wood;
 So too, although these lines of mine be poor,
 Do not feel scorn, they teach the Holy Way.³¹

Just as it says above, it does not matter whether a statue of the tathagata is constructed from high or low quality materials. If one constructs a statue properly, based on the proportions found in the sutras and commentaries, then limitless benefits will arise. This is elicited and explained in the commentaries on sutra and tantra.

First, from the sutra *White Lotus of the Sacred Dharma*:

Some make statues of the sugatas
 From the seven precious substances

And some from copper and bronze.
All of them will attain enlightenment.

Lead, iron, or even earth is fine.
Those who have made statues of the sugatas
Pleasant to gaze upon, though made from clay,
All of them will attain enlightenment.

It is said that by constructing a statue of the sugatas out of the seven precious substances, such as copper, bronze and so on, or by drawing a picture of the sugatas' form, one will swiftly attain the ultimate result, unsurpassed enlightenment.

From the sutra *The Inquiry of King Prasenajit*:

Those who make statues of the victorious ones
Will themselves be endowed with a fine form,
fortune, and virtues.
Everyone in the world will be pleased
As though seeing humility or sunshine.

Those who construct statues of the tathagatas
Will have immaculate bodies, be free from
disease and
Worldly sufferings. They'll be gentle and light,
Their nature like a lotus.

Those who make statues of the conquerors
Will not enter servitude nor find themselves
poor.

They will not need to toil, nor take inferior birth.
They will not be handicapped, but become
supreme beings.

Thus it is said that the short term results of making statues are having an excellent form; having self-control; radiance; making others happy when they see you; a fragrant body; being rid of enemies, fear, sorrow, and suffering; and being light and gentle, like a lotus.

In future lives you will never become a servant, impoverished, nor a worker dependent on remuneration. You will never take a low birth as a woman,ⁱ nor with impaired faculties (i.e. be handicapped). Rather, you will become a supreme person.

From the sutra, *The Inquiry of King Prasenajit in Verse*:

The number of particles found
In stupas and statues of the bhagavan
Is the number of people on earth
Who are bound to attain dominion over celestial
realms.
Through experiencing all the supreme states of
excellence—

ⁱ During Buddha's time and until recently in many parts of Asia to be a woman was regarded as an inferior birth, primarily because of the hardships and dangers women have to undergo during childbirth and the like.

The samadhis of the form and formless realms—
 They will finally attain the level of buddhahood
 Free from the sufferings of birth, aging and so
 forth.

It is thus taught that those who construct statues of the buddhas and stupas will receive endless benefits equal to the number of particles present in the statue or stupa. Having attained all worldly and transcendent paths and bhumis, such as attaining the dominion of a chakravartin and the samadhis of the form and formless realms, they will swiftly attain the level of buddhahood and so forth.

The benefits of building new temples and restoring deteriorated ones are spoken of in the sutras as follows.

What are the seven benefits? Consider this, Chunanda: if faithful sons and daughters of noble family offer a garden as part of the monastic compound to the sangha of bhikshus of the four directions, the merit from this material object will be foremost because it will bring the greatest of results, benefits, and glory. The merit will solely increase, continuously and forever, whether this faithful son or daughter of noble family is walking, sitting, sleeping, or awake.

From the *Avalokiteshvara Sutra*:

Whoever fashions a statue or paints on cloth, on the wall, or builds out of gold a representation of our Teacher, the supreme one among humans, will have special qualities. Listen, I will teach all of these without exception: they will not have a wrong view, nor be blind. They will not be hunchbacked nor repulsive in limbs. They will have a beautiful body and complexion. They will have a pure and excellent body possessing the splendid thirty-two major marks. They will have confidence and an attractive voice. They will be mindful and the chief among all worldly beings. Seeing them, all will be happy and joyful.

From the *Samadhiraja Sutra*:

Thus, having made fine statues,
Elegant and extremely lovely to behold
Out of gold, silver, or sandalwood,
They will attain the supreme samadhi before
long!

Extremely elegant and lovely to behold,
Their statues of clay, of stone or wood,
Their painted images;
They will attain the supreme samadhi before
long!

There are thus many quotes stating that many benefits will arise, such as swiftly actualizing the excellent, authentic path. Generating single-pointedly faith and respect, free from doubt, we should strive in planting pure seeds in our mindstreams through various means, such as constructing representations of enlightened body, speech, and mind, in order to reap the harvest of permanent happiness.

Nevertheless, in these degenerate times, there are many individuals who go about raising funds to erect representations of enlightened body, speech, and mind solely for their personal benefit and to accomplish their private aims. Thus, I humbly suggest we exercise caution so that such things do not occur.



Chapter 13
How to Make Mandala Offerings to
Gather the Accumulations, and their
Benefits

In general, mandala offerings are made by dharma practitioners as offerings to the Three Jewels, in order to gather the accumulations and purify obscurations, and also when giving and receiving dharma teachings and the like. In particular, without perfecting the two accumulations enlightenment endowed with the twofold purity cannot be attained. And not only that, emptiness cannot be realized precisely and unmistakably until the two accumulations are complete. In the sutras it is stated:

Until one has completed the two sacred
 accumulations,
 One will never realize sacred emptiness.³²

Moreover, it is taught:

Innate absolute wisdom can only come
 As the mark of having accumulated merit and
 purified obscurations....³³

That being so, from among the inconceivable skilful means taught by the victor, the perfect buddha for gathering the two accumulations, the most eminent and supreme is said to be the offering of mandalas.

Though there are many different ways of making mandala offerings according to the traditions of the New and Old Schools, for the sake of lay practitioners I will explain in a way that is easy to apply how to visualize both the longer thirty-sevenfold mandala offering and the shorter sevenfold mandala offering, how to perform them, and their benefits.³⁴ To do this, I will explain the different types of mandalas, the substances to be offered, the visualization process, how to arrange the heaps, and the benefits.

The Different Types of Mandalas

As explained in the collected liturgies for Pema Garwang (one of the treasure teachings of Chokgyur Lingpa), one should have a support, or practice mandala and also an offering mandala. On the support mandala, you arrange seven heaps. This you use as the support for the visualization of the offering recipients and arrange it on the shrine together with the other offerings. You request the recipients, the deities to whom you are making the offering, to remain seated there. Then in front of this support mandala you make offerings with the offering mandala, as explained below. It is taught that if you cannot acquire a practice, or support mandala it is okay to do without.

The Substances to be Offered

The collected liturgies for Pema Garwang explain:

When offering a mandala to gather the
 accumulations,
 On a mandala of precious substances, wood, or
 clay,
 Sprinkle water anointed with the cow substances
 and the like.³⁵
 Then arrange jewels, grains, medicines and so on
 in heaps...

As explained there, the mandala itself can be made of different materials, depending on what you can afford. If you can afford it, you should make the mandala from precious substances such as gold and silver. This is the best type of mandala. Second best is to make the mandala from copper, iron and other such pure materials. If this is also not possible, it is taught that you can make a mandala from stone slates, planks of wood, or anything else that provides a smooth surface.

As for the substances you offer in heaps on the mandala, at best you should offer precious jewels like turquoise, coral, and pearl. Second best is to offer medicinal fruits like yellow myrobalan and embolic myrobalan. At the least, you should offer grains such as wheat, rice, lentils and so on. It is also okay to use

things like pebbles, stones, and sand as a support for your visualization if nothing else is available.

The Visualization Process

When accumulating mandala offerings as part of the five-hundred-thousandfold accumulation,ⁱ you should perform the visualization as taught in your specific liturgy and its commentaries. When making mandala offerings on other occasions, such as on special days of the month or special anniversaries, or in the mornings and evenings you can simply visualize as follows.

In the space before you visualize our teacher, Buddha Bhagavan, or Guru Rinpoche, the Lotus-born One. In nature, they are indivisible from your own gracious root guru. They are surrounded by a great gathering of the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the three times, their number surpassing thought. Visualize them clearly and vividly before you, thinking that they are really there in person. In front of them, together with your friends, foes, parents, and all sentient beings pick up the mandala plate in your hands and, with one-pointed heartfelt devotion and faith, verbally recite the offering all together.

How to Arrange the Heaps

Hold the offering mandala in your left hand and while wiping the mandala plate as if cleaning it with the back

ⁱ The five-hundred-thousandfold accumulation refers to the *ngondro*, or preliminary practices.

side of your right wrist chant the seven branches free from distraction. If you do not know the extensive liturgy for the seven branches, you can simply recite a shorter liturgy, such as the following verse from *The King of Aspiration Prayers*:

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!³⁶

We do not wipe the mandala plate because it is dirty and needs to be cleaned; rather we wipe the mandala plate as an exercise in purifying the stains of our own mind, namely the two obscurations. It is said that the great Kadampa masters of the past would do this to such an extent that they would wear away the skin on the back side of their wrist until a wound opened up. Then they would wipe the mandala plate with the side of their left wrist, and then a wound would form there as well, so then they'd use the upper side of their wrist.

Arranging the Heaps for the Thirty-sevenfold Mandala Offering

You then begin to arrange the heaps. If you are chanting the thirty-sevenfold mandala offering then when you say, “*om vajra bbumi ah hum*” and so on, while holding the mandala plate with your left hand sprinkle it with cow substances and saffron water using your

right hand. It is taught that this is done in order to prevent the moisture of wisdom from evaporating. Then, when you say, “The earth is the golden ground, completely pure, full of beauty and power” pick up a heap of offering substances with the thumb and ring finger of your right hand, and when you next say, “*om vajra rekhe ah hum*” circle your right hand over the mandala plate and then place the heap in its center. If you have the rings for the mandala plate (the *iron mountains*) then place the largest ring upon the mandala plate at this point.

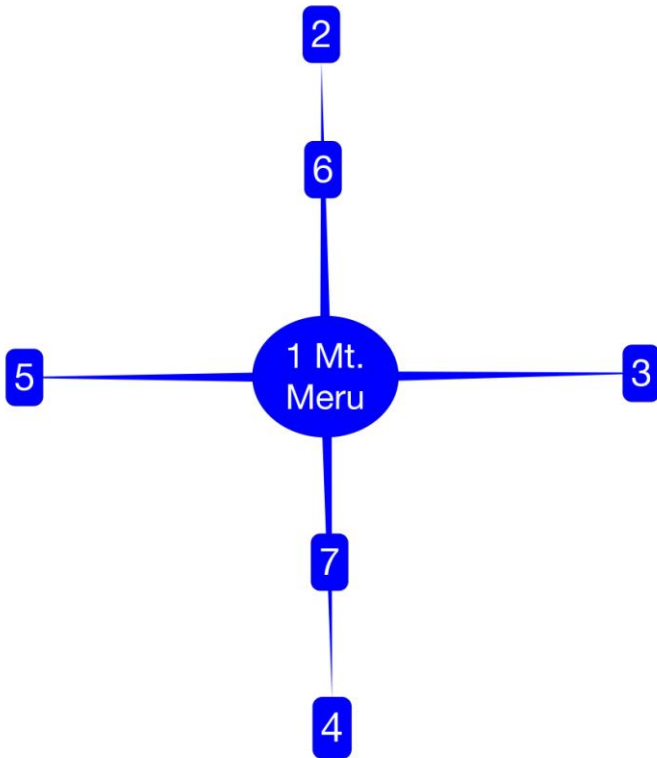
As you say, “Here is Meru, king of mountains” place a large heap in the center of the plate to indicate (1) Mount Meru. When you say, “In the east is Purva Videha” and so on for the four continents place one heap for each of them in the respective directions. Regarding the directions, in this context you can view the east as being your east, i.e. the side nearest to you, or you can regard it as being the east of the recipients of the offering. The great bodhisattva Patrul Rinpoche explained it this way. In either case, you should arrange a heap for each of the four continents—(2) Purva Videha in the east, (3) Jambudvipa in the south, (4) Aparagodaniya in the west, and (5) Uttarakuru in the north—beginning in the east and then moving in a clockwise direction.

Then for the subcontinents—(6) Deha and (7) Videha, (8) Chamara and (9) Aparachamara, (10) Shatha and (11) Uttaramantrina, (12) Kurava and (13)

Kaurava—place heaps on the east and west of each of the four subcontinents in the respective order.

After this arrange heaps in the following directions: for (14) the jewel mountain in the east, (15) the wish-fulfilling trees in the south, (16) the wish-fulfilling cows in the west, and (17) the harvest which needs no sowing in the north. Then for the next eight offerings—(18) the precious wheel, (19) the precious gem, (20) the precious queen, (21) the precious minister, (22) the precious elephant, (23) the precious horse, (24) the precious general, and (25) the vase of bounty—arrange heaps first in the four cardinal directions and then in the four intermediate directions.

After this, for the four outer goddesses—(26) the goddess of beauty, (27) the goddess of garlands, (28) the goddess of song, and (29) the goddess of dance—arrange heaps in the four cardinal directions. And then, for the four inner goddesses—(30) the goddess of flowers, (31) the goddess of incense, (32) the goddess of light, and (33) the goddess of perfume—arrange heaps in the four cardinal directions. Arrange a heap for (34) the sun in the east, for (35) the moon in the west, for (36) the precious umbrella in the south, and for (37) the royal banner victorious in all directions in the north. Then, as you say, “There is all the bountiful wealth of gods and men, complete and flawless” heap up offerings all over the plate, in no particular direction, and if you have a top ornament arrange it at this point.



A diagram of the sevenfold mandala offering

Then, as you say, “All this to the glorious, sacred root and lineage gurus and to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas, I offer” present the offering while visualizing as explained above.

Arranging the Heaps for the Sevenfold Mandala Offering

Alternatively, if you are offering the sevenfold mandala, as you say, “The earth is perfumed with scented water and strewn with flowers” sprinkle the mandala plate with cow substances and saffron water using your right hand. The reason for doing this is as explained above. Then with your right hand pick up heaps of offerings and arrange them as follows. First arrange a heap in the center for (1) the king of mountains, Mount Meru. Then in the east arrange a heap for (2) Purva Videha, in the south for (3) Jambudvipa, in the west for (4) Aparagodaniya, and in the north for (5) Uttarakuru. Between the heaps in the center and the south arrange a heap for (6) the sun, and in between the heaps in the center and the north arrange a heap for (7) the moon. Arrange the seven heaps in this order and then say, “Imagining this as the buddha realm, I offer it so that all beings may enjoy that pure realm, *idam ratna mandala kam nirya tayami.*”

Imagining and offering the four continents together with all the enjoyments of gods and humans, equal in number to particles in the universe to the glorious, sacred root and lineage gurus and to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas is the outer mandala offering.

Offering one’s own aggregates, elements, and sense sources, and all of one’s cherished possessions is the inner mandala offering. To seal all of this with the view that is free of concepts of the three spheres is the

secret mandala offering. Present all of these three types of mandalas together again and again.

When you make mandala offerings in this way using grains, such as barley and wheat, if you can afford it you should use fresh grains for each offering, rather than offer the same grains again and again. You should give away the old grains that you have already offered to birds and other animals, or to beggars; you should not keep them and use them yourself. If you cannot afford to replace the grains each time, just replace them as often as you can according to your means. And if you are unable to replace them at all, it is also okay to offer the same batch of grain again and again. In short, the grains and so on that we offer should be clean, free of any stones, dirt, husks, bird droppings and so on, and in addition they should be moistened with saffron water.

The Benefits of Making Such Offerings

In the root tantras it is taught:

In order to bring about the desired siddhis,
The learned and wise fill the entire universe
With the seven precious substances
And make offerings of this every day.

Another tantra explains:

By offering the entire three-thousandfold
universe

Adorned with every sense pleasure
 To the buddhas' purelands, each and every one,
 Enlightened wisdom is perfected.

In *Lama Gongdü* it is said:

The virtues and true result of someone offering mandalas with perseverance are taught in the scriptures, where it is said that the virtue of offering mandalas is so vast that even the noble ones dare not describe it. This being so, by making mandala offerings, in the short-term one will enjoy an abundance of wealth, be freed from the suffering of poverty, attain great riches, attain unshakeable faith in the gurus and yidams and deep confidence in the teachings of the great vehicle. One will be attractive and appealing to all beings and respected by all.

In yet another tantra it is taught:

The virtue of offering mandalas—
 That which gives birth to vast qualities—
 Cannot be expressed even by the noble ones.

In the *Collected Songs of Shabkar*, it says:

If you make many mandala offerings,
 Realization will naturally arise,
 Wisdom will increase of itself,
 Whatever you wish for in accord with the

dharma, all of it will be accomplished,
You will understand both the words and
 meaning of the scriptures,
Traverse the paths and stages step by step,
And ultimately attain enlightenment.
For these reasons, persevere in making mandala
 offerings,
The most eminent method for gathering the
 accumulations.

 In this way, mandala offering is the uttermost
supreme method for gathering the accumulations, and
is thereby the source of everything excellent, both
temporary and ultimate. This being so, we should all
endeavour in this practice.



Chapter 14
**How to Make Water Offerings, and
 their Benefits**

Offering butter lamps and making water offerings are known as material offerings. Making prostrations, circumambulations, and the like are known as offerings of veneration. Striving in study, contemplation, and meditation are known as offerings of practice.

Water Offerings Themselves

This tradition was accepted by the masters of the past as a practice unique to Tibet, established there by the peerless master Atisha and not found in any other land. The story goes that, when he first arrived in Ngari, Atisha was exceptionally taken with the landscape of the region. It made him think that one could accumulate limitless merit by simply offering water to the Three Jewels using the pure ground water so readily available in Tibet. Thereby, the tradition of making water offerings is said to have originated in that region. According to Gendun Chöpel, however, this tradition had already long been propagated in countries such as India and Burma.

Water offerings are said to have more powerful benefits than other material offerings, including even gold and silver. This is because water is unlike any other offering substance, for rich and poor alike can relinquish water more easily than any other offering substance. It can be offered without regret, untainted by stinginess and the like, for the sake of merit and virtue.

How to Make Water Offerings

When you make a water offering, it is best not to be attached to a specific number of offering bowls and to just offer as many bowls of water as possible. In general, it is not absolutely necessary to offer seven individual bowls except when making the seven traditional types of offering (drinking water, rinsing water, flowers, incense, lamps, perfumed water, and food). In olden times, offering bowls made of precious materials such as gold, silver, copper, and bronze, as well as those made of iron, were rare. Nevertheless, earthenware offering bowls and vessels are said to contain all the five precious substances, and so were regarded as important.

First, wipe clean the offering surface and the offering bowls. Then, stack the offering bowls and pour just a little water in the top bowl. Distribute that water to the other offering bowls, one by one, and arrange them in a line. When aligning them, you should start from the right and place them in a perfectly

straight horizontal line.ⁱ It is taught that one should leave an empty space, enough to fit a single grain of barley, between the rims of the offering bowls and also between the rim and the top of the water. When offering the bowls, proceed from the right hand side. When collecting them, they should be gathered up from the left. If possible, you should use separate containers for offering the water and for collecting it. The actual water to be offered should ideally be endowed with the following eight qualities:

Cool, tasty, and light,
Soft, clear, and odorless,
Not harming the throat
Nor the stomach when drunk –
These are the qualities eight.

As stated above, the eight qualities are cool, tasty, light, soft, clear, odorless, not upsetting the stomach, and not harming the throat when drunk. If you cannot get such water, there is nothing wrong with offering the water you regularly drink yourself.

How to Adjust Your Initial Motivation When Making a Water Offering

As was said by the protector Nagarjuna:

ⁱ Note than this is said from the perspective of the shrine itself, for instance the shrine's right being one's own left when facing the shrine.

Desire, anger, and ignorance
 Generate karma which is non-virtuous.
 Lack of desire, of anger, of ignorance—
 These produce karma which is virtuous.

Thus, if one is able to generate the motivation that thinks, “In order to attain the state of buddhahood for the benefit of all my mother sentient beings, I will first make offerings to the Three Jewels in order to accumulate merit!” then the entire karma of the actual practice of making water offerings will become virtuous.

Atisha has said:

If the root itself is medicine, then the branches
 become medicine.

What should you recite when making water offerings? It is said that one should recite *om ah hum* as much as possible and sprinkle the offerings with clean water in order to consecrate them. This is done in order to make the offerings unassailable to non-humans and the like. If one wishes to make the practice more elaborate, one should recite the *dharani of increasing offerings*, along with such sacred verses for making offerings as are appropriate to the situation.

Chanting the three syllables mentioned above, one imagines the blessings of the enlightened body, speech, and mind of the victorious ones and their heirs in the

form of countless *om ah hum* syllables descending and dissolving into the offerings.

The dharani of increasing offerings is as follows:

*namo ratna trayaya, namo bhagavaté bendža sara
tramadarné, tathagataya, arbaté samyaksambuddhaya,
tayata, om bendžé bendžé, maha bendžé, maha tedžo
bendžé, maha bidya bendžé, maha bodhitsitta bendžé,
maha bodhi mandopa samkramana bendžé, sarva karma
avarana bishodbana bendžé soba*

If you recite this dharani seven times, or even three times or just once, a great rain of offerings will descend before all the victorious ones and their heirs.

If on certain occasions you need or wish to recite a sacred verse while making the offerings, you can use the following:

Ocean of Siddhis: Words for Making Water Offerings

HUM! This pool of nectar, replete with the eight qualities,

I offer to the Bhagavan and to his retinue.

Through their acceptance, may the accumulations be complete for both myself and all beings,

And may all our obscurations be purified! May we be saved from the depths of samsara!

*om sarva tathagata saparivara argam pratitsa puja megha
samudra saparana samaya ah hum*

One night in a dream, deluded appearances arose in which a pure woman claiming to be the dakini Susiddhi spoke this entire verse for making water offerings, along with an aspiration for the benefit of beings. It was written down by the mendicant Dudjom Dorje. May it be virtuous!

Benefits

It is said that there is no difference between directly offering to the victorious ones and offering to those who have already passed into parinirvana.

From the *Noble Ratnakuta Collection*:

O Great Sage, the karmic fruition of making offerings to the bhagavans, who have already passed into parinirvana or to those who presently remain, is equivalent. It is identical. It is the same. This I have explained. Why is that? It is because the tathagatas are distinguished by the dharmakaya, not the rupakaya. Therefore, since making offerings to any of the tathagatas who presently remain or who have already passed into parinirvana is of equal merit, there is not even the slightest difference in merit between the two.

Also from the Sutras:

Venerating me now and
 Venerating my relics later
 Are both of equal merit and result.

Thus it is taught in the *Karmavibhaga Sutra* that there are ten benefits of joining your palms together in front of stupas of the tathagatas, for instance:

You will attain vast veneration, vast respect, vast wealth, vast learning, vast faith, vast recollection, vast wisdom, and vast realization.



Chapter 15

Butter Lamp Offerings and their Benefits

Offering Vessel

First of all, it is said that the more valuable, clean, and well-crafted your offering vessel, the greater the merit accumulated.

Butter Lamp

Although both butter and oil are suitable for lamp offerings, fat, it seems, should only be used in connection with the wrathful activities (from among the four activities). Nevertheless, whether the ingredient is clarified butter or grain oil, if it is of an excellent color and rich in smell and taste, then the merit will be complete and immense.

The Wick of the Lamp Offering

The wick is most commonly made from cotton. Different types of leaf can also be used, as can cloth. However, fabrics made by worms, such as silks, give off a smell of burning flesh when burnt and are not appropriate types of material. There is also a type of wick made by wrapping cotton wool around a golden or silver needle. Some people in olden times would do

this, using just an ordinary small needle, in order to attain perfect wisdom. In any case, you can also simply make the wick using a central shaft of fragrant wood, not terribly thick but straight and dry, and around it wrap cotton wool, neither too tight nor too loose. Its height should be made according to the height of the offering vessel.

Although some people say that this additional central shaft in the wick of the butter lamp is a necessity, I personally think its fine without the shaft, because butter lamps are primarily an offering of light. That being so, it is alright to simply make the wick out of cotton wool.

In addition, we now live in an age where the tradition of offering electric lamps is spreading and we cannot say that these cannot function as offering lamps. For it is taught that the light of luminous jewels is the best light offering. This being so, there is no reason why electric lights cannot be used in place of butter lamps. Not only that, but they also seem better in some ways, as there are none of the drawbacks of insects such as moths dying in the flames.

Some people let the lamps burn very dimly, hardly omitting any light, trying to keep it burning for as long as possible, but this is improper. On the other hand, the lamp should not burn too quickly, which happens if the wick is extremely thick. It is best if the lamp gives off light and at the same time burns slowly.

These days, mostly in the summertime, butter lamps of various sizes are being placed before objects of offering without a container. Many hundreds of thousands of moths and other small insects circle around the lamps like flocks of geese around a lotus pond. Unlike the geese, however, they fall in and are then boiled alive, which creates a state similar to that of hell beings boiled in molten copper!

Some people have no concern for the many corpses that will dot the butter lamps as they place them in front of their objects of offering, despite knowing that by doing this they are arranging for display the deaths of many beings. They are moreover irritated by these insects, thinking or saying that they have no choice but to die on account of their karma. These people run the risk of being categorized along with those who offer slaughtered cattle. Therefore, wouldn't it be of greater benefit and virtue not to light such offering lamps as these?

Great quantities of non-virtue are accumulated through these attitudes that forsake the lives of beings. The Buddha himself taught that butter lamps without an offering house are not suitable. We must therefore use whatever method is available, such as using wire mesh to cover the doors and windows of the offering house and the vicinity around the lamps themselves.

If, for lack of any other option, these lamp offering activities harm the lives of many beings, there will be no way for the Three Jewels to take joy in them. Thus,

I wonder if it's not best to put such activities aside for the time being.

The Motivation When First Offering Lamps

When lighting the butter lamp, you should think, “Based on this offering, may all the darkness of ignorance in myself and all other beings be dispelled! May we swiftly attain the stainless wisdom which correctly illuminates all that is to be accepted and rejected!”

When you make a lamp offering, it is best if you can recite the mantra of increasing offerings as previously described, or some sacred verses for butter lamp offerings, and whatever you find suitable among the many lamp aspiration prayers. If you want a convenient such prayer, you can recite this one by Mipham Rinpoche:

This illuminating lamp of original pure awareness
I offer to the mandala deities of Vidyadhara
Padmakara.
May all beings, my mothers, wherever awareness
pervades,
Attain the dharmakaya level of aware emptiness.

The Benefits of Offering Butter Lamps

It is taught that the particular benefits of offering butter lamps are threefold: dispelling the darkness of ignorance in yourself and all others; causing the light of wisdom to shine ever more vast and clear; and

accomplishing swiftly the attainment of the higher perceptions.

Also, in the *Karmanibhaga sutra*, the benefits are described as tenfold:

You will become like a butter lamp for the world. Your vision will never be impaired. Your physical eyes will become purified. The wisdom that discerns virtue and non-virtue will emerge. The darkness of ignorance and stupidity will be dispelled. You will attain the light of wisdom. For as long as you are in samsara, you will never remain in darkness. You will be reborn in the higher realms. You will soon attain parinirvana. These are the ten benefits.



Chapter 16

The Benefits of Offering Things such as Parasols and Flowers

Continuing on from the previous chapters, let us also briefly describe the benefits of offering objects such as parasols and so forth. They are described in the *Karmavibhaga Sutra* as follows:

The ten benefits of offering parasols:

1. You yourself will become like a parasol for the world
2. Your body will not be tormented
3. Your mind will not be tormented
4. You will become an ornament of the world
5. You will perform and accumulate the karma of a sovereign lord
6. You will repeatedly attain the status of a chakravartin
7. You will be renowned as being powerful
8. Your resources and wealth will increase
9. You will be reborn in the higher realms
10. You will soon pass into parinirvana

The ten benefits of offering bells:

1. You will attain an excellent body
2. You will have a pleasant voice
3. You will be endowed with attractive speech
4. Your speech will be mellifluous like the Indian cuckoo
5. You will keep your word
6. You will be supremely joyful
7. The music of vast resounding joy will reach your ears
8. Your resources and wealth will increase
9. You will be reborn in the higher realms
10. You will soon pass into parinirvana

The ten benefits of offering banners:

1. You will yourself become like a victory banner for the world
2. You will be respected by officials, relatives, and siblings, who will elevate, honor, and worship you
3. In all the cardinal and intermediate directions you will enjoy great renown, and many sayings, words, and verses about you will arise
4. Your body will be excellent, pleasant to behold, and beautiful
5. You will live long in your future lives
6. You will be renowned as being powerful

7. You will be born into a respectable social group
8. Your resources and wealth will increase
9. You will be reborn in the higher realms
10. You will soon pass into parinirvana

The eleven benefits of offering cloth:

1. You will be beautiful and pleasant to behold
2. Your skin will be smooth
3. Your skin will be soft
4. Dust and dirt will not cling to your body
5. You will have excellent clothes
6. You will acquire fine rugs and garments
7. You will have a perfect sense of modesty and decency
8. Others will be happy to see you
9. Your resources and wealth will increase
10. You will be reborn in the higher realms
11. You will soon pass into parinirvana

The ten benefits of offering flowers:

1. You will yourself become like a flower for the world
2. Your sense of smell will never be impaired
3. Your body odors will be completely purified
4. You will have a pleasant scent

5. The fragrance of your discipline will spread throughout all the cardinal and intermediate directions
6. You will be a great person within the world
7. You will attain delightful qualities
8. Your resources and wealth will increase
9. You will be reborn in the higher realms
10. You will soon pass into parinirvana

The ten benefits of offering garlands:

1. You will yourself become like a garland for the world
2. Your body odors will be completely purified
3. The pleasant fragrance of your discipline will spread throughout the cardinal and intermediate directions
4. You will always smell fragrant
5. You will yourself be ornamented
6. Your servants and retinue will not become divided
7. You will be attractive to men and women
8. Your resources and wealth will increase
9. You will be reborn in the higher realms
10. You will soon pass into parinirvana

The ten benefits of offering incense:

1. You will yourself become like incense for the world

2. Your sense of smell will be completely purified
3. All unpleasant body odor will be completely purified
4. You will always smell nice
5. You will attain an excellent body
6. You will be a great person within the world
7. You will attain delightful qualities
8. Your resources and wealth will increase
9. You will be reborn in the higher realms
10. You will swiftly pass into parinirvana

The ten benefits of offering music:

1. You will have an excellent body and be pleasant to behold
2. You will have a pleasant voice
3. Your speech will be pleasing
4. You will enjoy the glory of fame
5. You will keep your word
6. You will always be joyful
7. You will always hear vast sounds of joy
8. Your resources and wealth will increase
9. You will be reborn in the higher realms
10. You will swiftly pass into parinirvana

The ten benefits of sweeping:

1. You will have an excellent body
2. You will be pleasant to look at
3. You will become beautiful

4. Your voice will be pleasant
5. Your passion, anger, and stupidity will be restrained
6. Where you walk, there will be no gravel, no weeds, no grit underfoot
7. You will be reborn into a respectable social group
8. Your resources and wealth will increase
9. You will be reborn in the higher realms
10. You will soon pass into parinirvana

Elsewhere, in the *Little House Sutra*, the benefits of sweeping are listed as five:

Ananda, there are five benefits to sweeping.
What are they?

1. Your mind will become serene
2. The minds of others will become serene
3. The deities will be pleased
4. You will perform and accumulate beautiful karma
5. After death, you will be reborn in the higher realms

As well as all those listed above, the scriptures describe many other benefits to be derived from making offerings. For instance, in the *Questions of Jayamati Sutra*, it is said:

Wishing to attain all positive qualities, you should make offerings to the Three Jewels.

In the *Kritigarba Sutra*, it is said:

All the happiness and joy in the world
 Come from making offerings to the Three
 Jewels.
 Thus, if one wishes to be happy and joyful,
 One must strive in making offerings to the Three
 Jewels.

From the mahayana sutra entitled *Avalokiteshvara*:

The great mass of merit earned by those who honor the pure tathagatas with pure intelligence, with flowers, garlands, incense, parasols, victory banners, draped standards, musical sounds, and unguents is inconceivable. As for the extent of this merit, it cannot be exhausted even at the end of all future lives. The only exception to this is when it naturally exhausts in the final attainment of nirvana through one of the three vehicles.

From the *Sutra of the White Lotus of Holy Dharma*:

Those who offer just a single flower,
 Or to a mural painting of the tathagata
 Make mental offerings, even with a disturbed
 mind,
 Will gradually come to see millions of

buddhas.



Chapter 17

The Method of Prostrating and its Benefits

When generally speaking of prostrations, the Sanskrit term is *nam*, meaning to bow respectfully. Specifically, “to bow” means to bend down.

The Purpose of Prostrations

Prostrations are primarily an antidote to pride so the main purpose of prostrating is to reduce this afflictive emotion. The learned Kadampa masters have said, “The water of qualities cannot collect on the ball of pride.” Because it is said that pride is the primary obstructor of developing one’s own qualities, it is important to rely on its antidote.

How to Prostrate

From the *Great Liberation Blossoming in the Ten Directions Sutra*:

Joining the two hands above the crown of the
head
In the form of a blooming lotus,
With one’s bodies countless as cloudbanks,
Prostrate to the buddhas of the ten directions.

Some learned ones explain that the empty space in one's joined hands represents the dharmakaya and one's hands being in the shape of a jewel represent the rupakaya. Joining the palms flat together is the practice of non-Buddhists so is inappropriate for us. So rather, keep some empty space between the two hands and bring the thumbs in so that your two hands form the shape of a jewel. Then touch the hands to your crown, throat, and heart-center; this is a gesture of paying respect with your three doors of body, speech, and mind. It can also be understood as arranging the auspicious conditions for accomplishing the qualities of enlightened body by touching your hands to your crown, the qualities of enlightened speech by touching them to your throat, and the qualities of enlightened mind by touching them your the heart-center.

Visualization while Prostrating

According to the preliminary instructions of one's own individual lineage, visualize expansively the objects of refuge, the field of accumulation.

Although unborn and lacking true existence, visualize in the space before you, surrounded by an assembly of innumerable buddhas and bodhisattvas, the All-victorious Sage Shakyamuni, or Guru Padmasambhava, who, in essence, are one's own kind teacher. Imagine that they are residing there in person.

Then, in the presence of the assembly, visualize yourself among your enemies, friends, mother, father,

and all sentient beings. With your palms joined, prostrate with everyone, all together,

It is said that if one recites the refuge prayer heartily and prostrates with devoted interest, the merit accumulated will be unfathomable, equal to the number of atoms of earth underneath your prostrating body.

The Recitation During Prostrations

Reciting the following fourfold refuge prayer, make prostrations:

I go for refuge in the guru.

I go for refuge in the buddha.

I go for refuge in the dharma.

I go for refuge in the sangha.

Or, recite the following verse from *The King of Aspiration Prayers*:

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!

If you wish to do recite something more extensive, you can recite any other confessional prayers you know, for example the general confession to the

tathagatas, etc.³⁷ In brief, as explained in the *Aspiration for Rebirth in Sukhavati* by Karma Chakme Rinpoche:

Confessing without a mind of regret will not cause purification.

Past negative actions are like swallowed poison. Thus, confess with shame, terror, and great regret.

A mind without the vow to abstain from future negativity will not cause purification.

Thus, henceforth, even at the cost of your life Vow to refrain from non-virtue.

In the same way, remind yourself of the general negativity and obscurations accumulated since beginningless time, and specifically, the negativity amassed in this very life. With a mind of great regret for past negativity, along with the vow to never again commit non-virtue, even at the cost of one's life, confess with intense remorse. If done in this way, the confession will be an extremely strong antidote that will certainly purify one's negativities and obscurations.

Mantra to Increase the Power of Prostrations

Before starting prostrations, recite the following mantra three times. This multiplies each prostration by one thousand:

*namo manjushriyé soba, namo sushriyé soba, namo
uttamasbriyé soba*

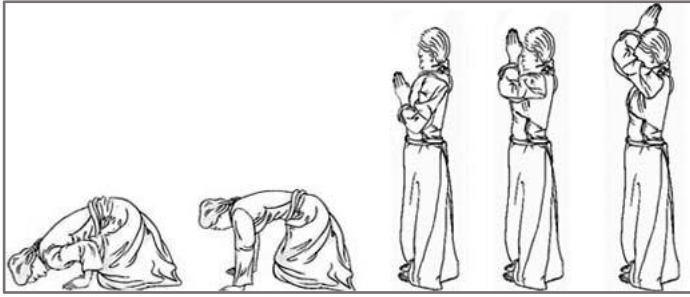
If you are making prostrations primarily to purify negativities and obscurations, accumulate the prostrations while reciting the confession of downfalls. This is very important in order to purify negativities and obscurations.

Also, it is said that when offering prostrations, if you prostrate by merely bending and stooping down rather than touching your forehead properly to the ground, you will be flung head-first into the hell realms in your next life, and even when free from hell you will be born with a hunched back.

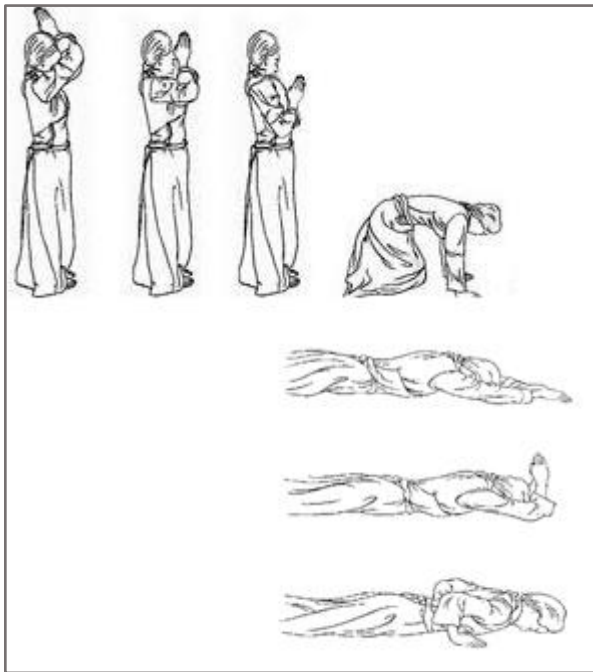
Types of Prostrations

There are two different types of prostrations: the half prostration (lit. bent prostration) and full prostration (lit. lengthened prostration). When the five limbs—the forehead, two palms, and two knees—are touched to the ground, this is called a half prostration. A full prostration is when the entire body is lain face-down on the ground like a fallen tree. Both hands are lengthened directly out in front, and then joined together above the head, while the forehead touches the ground.

Further types include prostrations of the body, speech, and mind.



A half prostration



A full prostration

Etymology of Prostrations

The first word for prostration in Tibetan is *phyag* (Eng. hand), which, in this context, refers to joining the hands. The second word is *'tshal ba*, which means to offer. Together, the word prostrate (*phyag 'tshal ba*) means to offer one's respect with folded hands. Furthermore, the word *phyag* can be understood as meaning to purify, while *'tshal ba* can be understood as referring to one's desired aim. In this way, to prostrate can be explained as meaning to purify one's misdeeds and obscurations while seeking the excellent qualities of the refuge objects.

Even today there is the custom in India and Nepal to touch the feet of parents, elders and so forth with one's hand. It seems that the great Tibetan translators created the Tibetan word for prostration with reference to this custom of paying respect.

The Benefits of Prostrations

The benefits of prostrations include the accumulation of merit and purification of negativities and obscurations. In this life prostrations can free one of phlegm disorders, cancer, and diseases of the heart, lungs, digestion and so on, bring about good health, and as a result prolong one's life. There are many stories of people who have accumulated several hundred thousand prostrations and thus been completely cured of cancer.

The Discrimination of Karma Sutra states that by making prostrations, one's body will become healthy and develop a golden color, one will become very beautiful and attractive, and one's speech will become pleasant to the ear and influential. One will be freed from anxiety and nerves in large crowds, gods and humans will look upon one with affection, and one will have a majestic presence. This being so, one will be accompanied by buddhas, bodhisattvas, and shravakas. One will become ever more prosperous, be reborn in the higher realms, and swiftly reach nirvana. These are the ten benefits taught in that sutra.



Chapter 18

How to Make Circumambulations and their Benefits

Motivation

When making circumambulations (or doing *kora*), what should our intention be? Generally speaking, we should do kora with the intention to purify all the obscurations of body, speech, and mind of oneself and all other beings. Specifically, we should do kora with the wish to free oneself and all beings from the three lower realms and from samsara as a whole. We should first give rise to this motivation and imagine that the object of circumambulation, even if it be a single support of enlightened body, speech, and mind, is the very essence of the Three Jewels, that all the supports of the buddha, dharma, and sangha abide there, and that oneself and all sentient beings, including one's enemies, friends, and parents, are simultaneously doing kora, all together.

The Way to Circumambulate

In the Bon and other non-Buddhist traditions, there is a custom of doing kora counter-clockwise. However, in our own Buddhist tradition, kora is solely done in the clockwise direction.

Specifically, while doing kora, all meaningless talk, gossip, and chatter should be abandoned, and instead one should recite mantras and prayers. In that case, what recitations are considered good to do? In general, any recitations are appropriate, but particularly for purifying obscurations you can recite the hundred-syllable mantra (Vajrasattva mantra) or the *Bodhisattva's Confession of Downfalls* liturgy (from *The Three Heaps Sutra*), the dharani of Akshobhya, or *mani* mantras. Recitations such as these, or others are taught to be extremely meritorious and beneficial.

The Requisite Number of Kora

Generally speaking, it goes without saying that the more kora one can do in a sacred place where the supports of the buddha, dharma, and sangha abide, the greater the benefits. Nevertheless, because of the benefits, great beings adept in skilful means have created a set number of koras to complete in a single day in certain sacred places. For example, of the three great stupas of Nepal, it is said that in a single day one should do 113 circumambulations around the supreme Jarung Kashor stupa (the Boudhanath stupa), or thirteen circumambulations around the great self-arisen stupa of Swayambunath.

Mantras for Kora

By reciting either of the following two mantras while doing kora, the merit of doing kora will be increased:

*namo bhagavaté, rata ketu rasdi ya,
tathagataya, arhaté samyaksambuddhaya,
tayata, om ratné ratné maha ratné ratna
bidzaya soha*

Or,

*nama dasha dikyikala sarva ratna trayaya,
nama pradakya supra dakya sarva papam
bishodhani soha*

Also, while doing kora you should avoid stepping on the shadow of the stupa or other supports. If it is the case that you must walk over the shadows then chant the mantra *om bendza bega akrama hung* and imagine that you have gone underneath the shadow rather than over it. By doing that, you will be free of the fault of stepping on the shadow of the sacred supports.

Benefits of Doing Kora

The Avalokiteshvara Sutra describes the following benefits of kora:

Giving rise to the mind of enlightenment
For the benefit of all living beings,
Whoever circumambulates
The stupa of the world protector,

In this life and all others
 While practicing the conduct of bodhisattvas
 Will be endowed with
 Mindfulness, intelligence, merit, and fearlessness.
 By circumambulating a sacred stupa,
 Gods, nagas, yakshas, and spirits
 Will make offerings to them
 In this and all lifetimes.
 The eight unfree states I have taught
 Will all be abandoned.
 Buddhahood will be excellently attained,
 All will be gladdened by this freedom.
 One will have a perfect body of excellent color,
 Be adorned with the excellent marks,
 And endowed with power and strength.
 Laziness will not befall such a person.
 One will be rich and prosperous,
 One will be meritorious and will not be harmed.
 Having pleased the lamp of the world,
 One will be constantly revered.
 If such a person hears the teachings on the
 emptiness of self,
 To them phenomena will not be confused.
 Quickly giving rise to faith,
 One will become wise and learned in accord with
 the meaning of the dharma.
 Born as a merchant and householder,
 Prosperous and wealthy,
 Such a person

Will become a master of generosity and strength,
 Giving without miserliness.
 Wherever in the world
 The teachings are, such a person
 Will be born of excellent family,
 Having abandoned all inferior ways.
 By circumambulating a sacred stupa,
 In all one's lifetimes
 One will become a powerful and renowned
 householder,
 Endowed with glory and majesty.
 As a Brahmin, like a great Sala tree,
 One will be disciplined and knowledgeable.
 As a Ksatriya, like a great Sala tree,
 One will be wealthy and have great riches.
 In all lands, from mountains to sea,
 One will become
 The sovereign of the four continents,
 A king endowed with the dharma.
 One will become a great and miraculous
 chakravartin
 Endowed with the seven types of riches.
 Having established a kingdom
 One will venerate the buddha without end.
 At death, one will ascend to the higher realms.
 There, one will have faith in the Buddha's
 teachings,
 Becoming Indra, lord of gods
 At the summit of Mount Sumeru.

One will abide in the realms of Indra: Freedom
 from Strife,
 Likewise, the Joyous Heaven,
 Enjoyment of One's Own Emanations,
 And Ruling Without Fear.
 By circumambulating a sacred stupa,
 In the Abode of Brahma,
 One will become the learned Lord Brahma,
 Where millions of gods will make offerings to
 you.
 If you were to extol
 The benefits of circumambulating
 A sacred world-protecting stupa
 You would never finish, not even in a
 million kalpas.
 Whoever gives rise to an enlightened intention
 And makes prostrations at a stupa of the
 Buddha,
 Will never be blind or crippled,
 Even for millions of eons.
 One who makes a great many
 circumambulations
 Around a world-protecting stupa,
 Will have pure eyes
 Like beautiful emerald beetles.
 By circumambulating a sacred stupa,
 One will, with constant certainty,
 Acquire all that is in accordance with the
 meaning of the dharma

And abandon all that which is meaningless.
By circumambulating a sacred stupa,
One will be endowed with strength and power,
Be without laziness,
And have constant conscientiousness.
By circumambulating a sacred stupa,
One will have stable diligence,
Stable strength, great stability,
And quickly become learned.
One will never be killed by
Fire, poison, or weapons.
Having first become perfectly learned,
Only then will one pass away.
By circumambulating a sacred stupa,
One's kingdom, nation,
And city will be prosperous,
With unparalleled physical beauty.
When practicing the way of the bodhisattva,
One will be without desire,
One's body and clothing will be clean,
And one will abide in the stainless dharma.



Chapter 19
The Dharani Mantra of Buddha
Shakyamuni:
How to Visualize and its Benefits

The dharani mantra for our teacher, the great compassionate and unequalled Shakyamuni is:

om muné muné maha munayé soba

This mantra is taught in the *Concise Prajnaparamita* as a way to invoke our teacher's wisdom mindstream. It is potent with blessings. To practice it, it is vital to first of all cultivate a mind of faith and trust. As taught in *The Samadhiraja Sutra*:

Those who, while walking, sitting, standing, or
 sleeping,
 Recollect the moon-like Buddha,
 Will always be in Buddha's presence,
 And will attain the vast nirvana.³⁸

And, in the same sutra:

His pure body is the color of gold,
 Beautiful is the Protector of the World.
 Whoever visualizes him like this,

Practices the meditation of the bodhisattvas.

Furthermore:

Should anyone think of the Buddha,
He is there, right in front of them....

As explained in the above quotes and more extensively throughout the scriptures, we should generate a vivid faith and trust that our teacher, Buddha Shakyamuni, is actually present before us and then focus one-pointedly on his physical form.

Regarding how to visualize Buddha, as omniscient Mipham Rinpoche wrote in his practice of Buddha Shakyamuni, *The Treasury of Blessings*:

Ah! As the union of unborn emptiness and the
ceaseless
Appearances of interdependence, magically there
appears
Before me in the sky, amidst vast clouds of
offerings,
On a jewelled lion throne, and lotus, sun and
moon disc seats,
The incomparable teacher, Lion of the Shakyas.
His body the color of gold, adorned with major
and minor marks.
Clad in the three Dharma robes, he sits in vajra
posture.
His right hand gracefully poised in the earth-

touching mudra,
 And his left hand in the gesture of meditation,
 holding an alms-bowl full of nectar.
 Like a mountain of gold, magnificent, he shines
 in splendour,
 Spreading beams of wisdom light across the
 whole expanse of space.
 The Eight Close Sons, Sixteen Elders and the
 like—
 A vast, ocean-like retinue of noble beings
 encircles him all around.
 Simply think of him and he grants the glory of
 the highest bliss:
 Liberation from samsara and nirvana, the two
 extremes.
 He is the Great Being, perfect embodiment of
 every source of refuge.

As described there, visualize that in the sky before
 you, seated on a lion throne and moon disc seat is our
 teacher, Lion of Sages, his body golden in color,
 replete with the excellent marks and signs. He wears
 the three dharma robes, and sits with his legs in vajra
 posture. His right hand is in the earth-touching mudra,
 while his left is in the mudra of equipoise. From his
 body, light and light-rays countless in number radiate
 out filling the whole of space. He is completely
 surrounded by the eight close sons and the sixteen
 elders, amongst others. Visualize him vivid and clear in

that way. Then, with one-pointed faith recall our teacher's amazing qualities and with your palms joined together at your heart, slowly recite the following lines:

Supreme teacher, bhagavan, tathagata, arhat,
complete and perfect Buddha, glorious
conqueror, Shakyamuni Buddha, to you I pay
homage! To you I make offerings! In you I take
refuge!

Recite this as a supplication as many times as you can. Then recite the following mantra for a while:

teyata om muné muné maha munayé soba

After that, recite the mantra from *om* onwards as much as you can (i.e. *om muné muné maha munayé soba*). At the end, imagine that:

From the Buddha's body there emanates a great radiance of multi-colored rays of wisdom light dispelling all our own and others' obscurations, and causing all the genuine qualities of the Mahayana path to arise within us, so that we attain the level of perfection from which we will never return again to samsara.

The Benefits of Practicing This Way

The benefits of clearly visualizing our teacher's form and reciting his names and dharani mantra are explained in the sutras, where it says:

Should anyone think of the Buddha,
He is there, right in front of them,
Constantly granting his blessings
And freedom from all harm.

In *The Avatamsaka Sutra* it is explained:

By seeing, hearing, or offering to the buddhas,
A boundless store of merit is amassed.
Till we are rid of all the destructive emotions and
the suffering of samsara,
This compounded merit will never go to waste.

And as it says in the *Teaching on the Qualities of Manjushri's Pure Land*:

Everything is circumstantial
And depends entirely on our aspiration.
Whatever prayers of aspiration we make,
The results we will gain accordingly.

As Mipham Rinpoche mentions, it is said in many sutras that merely hearing the name of our teacher, the Buddha, ensures that one will gradually progress along the path to great enlightenment, without ever falling

back. This is taught extensively throughout the scriptures.



Chapter 20

The Stages of Visualization of the Mani Mantra, and its Benefits

The six syllable mantra *om mani padme hum* is the name-mantra of noble Avalokiteshvara, the embodiment of the compassion of all the Buddhas. This mantra is the quintessence of the dharma and contains the essence of all 84,000 dharma teachings. It is the very heart-essence of the five sugata families and the core of all the classes of tantra. It is the source of all good qualities and the root of all accomplishments.

In terms of the etymology of the mantra *om mani padme hum*, the mantra signifies emptiness endowed with compassion. This refers to full engagement in the supreme loving kindness that focuses on all sentient beings, the embodiment of which is the awakened mind of noble Avalokiteshvara. It represents non-conceptual wisdom, the abiding nature, emptiness, and all of his awakened knowledge, love, and power.

In terms of the literal meaning of the syllables, *om* is the tantric protector, *mani* is the jewel, *padma* is the lotus flower, and *hum* is the seed syllable of vajra mind. The mantra is an invocation that says, “Please take care of me.” More particularly, it asks, “Holder of the lotus jewel, or the jewel lotus, please protect me!” Indeed,

noble Avalokiteshvara holds a jewel in his right hand and a lotus in his left, and is therefore addressed as “the holder of the lotus and jewel.”

Thus, whenever we call out, “Oh, Lotus-jeweled One!” we are thereby requesting blessings so that loving-kindness, compassion, and the precious mind of awakening might arise in the mindstream of ourselves and all other sentient beings.

ॐ मणि पद्मे हूँ

Stages of Visualization for the Mani Mantra

First, in the sky in front of you, visualize noble Avalokiteshvara complete with his one thousand arms, which have one thousand eyes, and his eleven heads. His body is adorned with silken garments and a variety of precious jewels. From his body infinite light-rays radiate out to all sentient beings of all six classes, purifying all of their misdeeds and obscurations and leaving no trace. Think also that the space around you is the pure land of the Potala realm and that all the sounds of the elements, namely earth, water, fire, and air are noble Avalokiteshvara’s six-syllable dharani mantra. Imagine that whatever thoughts come into your mind are the unceasing, natural expression of

noble Avalokiteshvara’s primordial wisdom. In short, recite the *mani* mantra while resting your mind one-pointedly on noble Avalokiteshvara’s Body, Speech, and Mind.

The Benefits

The *Karandavyuha Sutra* says:

The Buddha said, “Noble son, in the great city of Varanasi there is a dharma teacher who recites, upholds, and correctly understands the six syllable mantra.”

The Bodhisattva Nirvirana-vishkambin replied, “Bhagavan, I will go to the great city of Varanasi in order to see that dharma teacher. I will pay homage and honor him.”

“Excellent, excellent! Do so, noble son! Dharma teachers who actually uphold this six-syllable knowledge-mantra are rare and should be considered equal to the tathagatas...”

In the *Amoghapasha Hridaya Sutra*, it is said:

When fasting on the eighth day of the month, if you recite noble Avalokiteshvara’s mantra while directly visualizing his form, the seeds of harmful actions will rot away and you will attain awakening in no time at all.

According to the *Lotus Crown Tantra*:

The noble Avalokiteshvara said the following:
 “Any son or daughter of noble family who recites the knowledge-mantra *om mani padme hum* while thinking of me, if they recite or think of the mantra but a single time while keeping my form in mind, all their misdeeds will be purified including the five with immediate results and their five associated actions. They will cast off rebirths in the eight unfree states, such as the hells, the hungry ghost realm, and the animal realm. They will no longer have to endure any suffering of body, speech, or mind. Having realized the dharmakaya, they will see the form bodies of great compassion.”

Moreover, as the Dharma King Songsten Gampo said:

By reciting the six-syllable knowledge mantra, one perfects the six paramitas: (1) *om* perfects the paramita of generosity; (2) *ma* perfects the paramita of discipline; (3) *ni* perfects the paramita of patience; (4) *pad* perfects the paramita of diligence; (5) *me* perfects the paramita of concentration; and (6) *hum* perfects the paramita of wisdom.

By reciting this six-syllable mantra, one will obtain the six siddhis: (1) Through *om*, one obtains the supreme siddhis; (2) through *ma*, the

common siddhis; (3) through *ni*, the siddhi that pacifies illness and negative influences; (4) through *pad*, the siddhi that increases lifespan and merit; (5) through *me*, the siddhi that has power over people, wealth, and food; and (6) through *hum*, one attains the siddhi that blocks enemies and puts an end to harm.

By reciting this six-syllable mantra, the six root afflictions will be purified: (1) Through *om*, the affliction of ignorance is purified; (2) through *ma*, anger; (3) through *ni*, stinginess; (4) through *pad*, attachment; (5) through *me*, jealousy; and (6) through *hum*, pride.

(1) Through *om*, one obtains the body of Avalokiteshvara; (2) through *ma*, the speech of Avalokiteshvara; (3) through *ni*, the mind of Avalokiteshvara; (4) through *pad*, the qualities of Avalokiteshvara; (5) through *me*, the awakened activity of Avalokiteshvara; and (6) through *hum*, one obtains the enlightened deeds of Avalokiteshvara.

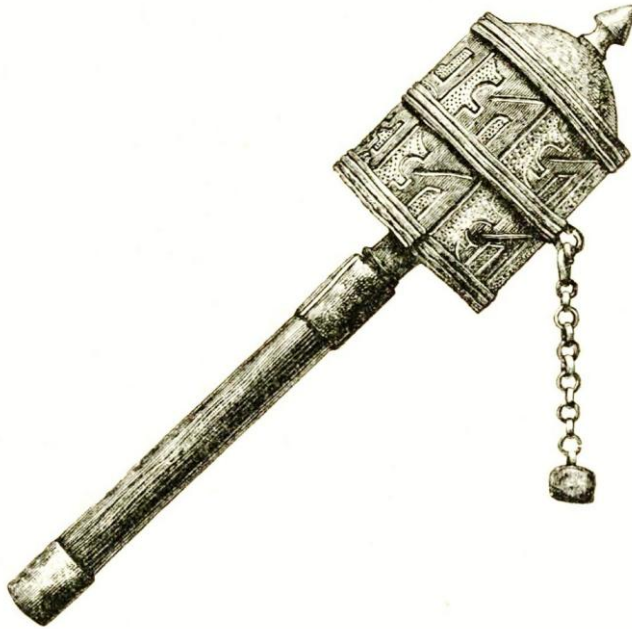
(1) Through *om*, one will obtain the qualities of the path of accumulation; (2) through *ma*, the qualities of the path of joining; (3) through *ni*, the qualities of the path of seeing; (4) through *pad*, the qualities of the path of meditation; (5) through *me*, the qualities of the path of no more learning; and (6) through *hum*, the qualities of omniscience.

Thus, through recitation of the six-syllable knowledge-mantra, when Amitabha's time to be the central figure in Sukhavati finishes, Avalokiteshvara will become the central figure there and will be known as Buddha Özer Künlé Pakpa Paltsek Gyalpo. Entering into a lotus, one will be born there as part of his retinue and will attain the level of a non-returner.



Chapter 21 The Significance of the Mani Wheel

Here follows an explanation of the visualization and benefits associated with turning the *mani* wheel.



The Significance of the Mani Wheel

The *Sutra of the Great Winding River* explains:

The base is of wood from the bodhi tree,
For bodhicitta to be naturally engendered.

The 'life tree' (central axel) is made from hard
 iron,
 For the yogi's lifespan to endure and be stable.
Mani hum is inscribed on the base.
Om spins outwards, turned by the spindle.
 Merit, enjoyments, and riches thereby grow.
 The ornament spinning on top
 Symbolizes Amitabha, the dharmakaya.
 It is the mark of attainment of the level of
 dharmakaya.
 The wheel turning in the middle
 Symbolizes great compassion, the
 sambhogakaya.
 It is the sign of the unity of the two truths.
 Its revolving fringe is the sign of the
 nirmanakaya
 That accomplishes the benefit of beings.
 The hanging conch that revolves around like a
 stone
 Is the sign of the spreading of enlightened
 activities to tame beings.
 The great parasol spinning in the center
 Will bring about the perfection of abandonment,
 realization, and emptiness,
 After the completion of all paths and bhumis.
 One should know this to be so.

The Benefits

The King of the Shakyas (Buddha Shakyamuni) taught:

Nirvirana-vishkambin, listen carefully:
 Spinning the revolving stone hanging on the
mani wheel once is superior
 To practicing the supreme purification
 Of the essential truth for one year.
 Turning the dharma wheel once is superior
 To practicing the middling meditation
 On essential truth for seven years.
 Turning the dharma wheel once is superior
 To practicing the inferior meditation
 On the essential truth for nine years.
 Turning the dharma wheel once is superior
 To eons of listening, contemplating, and
 meditating.

The Buddha, purifier of all obscurations, taught:

Turning the dharma wheel once is superior
 To exerting oneself in the practice
 Of the ten perfections for one thousand eons.
 Turning the dharma wheel once is superior
 Even to teaching and studying the three baskets
 of sutras
 And the four classes of tantra until the end of
 the eon.

The protector Maitreya taught:

If one offers fine drapes
 To the profound wheel of dharma,
 One will, for five hundred lifetimes, be well-
 dressed oneself.
 Through the merit of offering a hook for the
 wheel,
 One will traverse all paths to liberation.
 Through the merit of offering a revolving stone,
 One will become a protector of beings.
 By means of reciting secret mantras by the
 million,
 One will be worshiped by deities of wealth
 And gain control over humans, wealth, and food.
 All encounters will become meaningful.
 Sentient beings afflicted by obscurations
 Will be liberated from the lower realms.
 As for the temporary benefits of turning the
mani wheel,
 One will withstand infectious diseases and
 contagion,
 Destroy harmful demons and
 hostile obscurations,
 And overcome the impure defilements of strife.
 One will defeat whole armies of demons and
 obstructers.

As Manjushri taught:

The four great kings and the protectors of the
 ten directions
 Will safeguard us all from every obstacle
 In the main and intermediate directions.
 They will purify us from the karma of the lower
 realms,
 From the five deeds of immediate result,
 And from the ten non-virtues.
 We will go from buddha realm to buddha realm
 And be miraculously reborn in the pure land of
 Sukhavati
 Upon a lion throne at the heart of a lotus.
 Thereby, the awakened activity of all of the
 buddhas of the ten directions
 Will spread throughout the ten directions.

As Vajrapani taught:

This *mani* wheel can block all those who harm:
 The negative spirits from the upper regions,
 The evil spirits of the lower regions, the nagas,
 The assembly of tsen spirits and elemental spirits
 That inhabit the middle regions.
 Why does the *mani* wheel have this ability?
 Because this is the wheel of the dharani mantra
 That embodies the individual essences of
 the five buddha families,
 Mighty King, the buddha of the upper direction

and all the others.

As the noble Avalokiteshvara taught:

This great wheel of dharani mantras
Is distinctively superior to all other wheels.
These fortunate beings who, while maintaining
their focus,
Resting their minds on the dharma wheel,
Turn it and make supplications,
These are the supreme protectors of the future.



Chapter 22
The Vajra Guru Mantra ~
Stages of Visualization and the
Resultant Benefits

ॐ॑ ॐ॑ वज्र॑ गु॑रु॑ पद्म॑ सिद्धि॑ ॐ॑

In general, the Great Master of Uddiyana was blessed by the dharmakaya buddhas; he was empowered by all the sambhogakaya buddhas; and he was approved by all the nirmanakaya buddhas. He is the enactment of the speech of the sugatas in the nirmanakaya aspect. His form body, fully endowed with all the major and minor marks, blossomed forth from the syllable *brih* radiating from the heart-center of Amitabha Buddha in the Milky Lake to the southwest of Uddiyana. The great master Padmasambhava's dharani mantra, known as Vajra Guru, is a supreme mantra, the syllables miraculously manifesting as an antidote to generally tame disciples in all worldly realms, and in particular those of the future degenerate times.

The meaning of the syllables *om ab hum vajra guru padma siddhi hum* can be explained as follows. *Om* is the

dharmakaya; *ah* is the sambhogakaya; *hum* is the nirmanakaya. Those are the three kayas. *Vajra* is the vajra, *guru* the teacher, *padma* the lotus, and *siddhi* signifies the supreme and common accomplishments. *Hum* means “Please bestow!” and refers to invoking the accomplishments. Thus, the mantra means “Lake-born vajra-master of the three kayas, please bestow the supreme and common accomplishments upon me.”

Stages of Visualization

With strong faith, one should think, “Orgyen Padmasambhava is actually seated in the sky in front of me. He is looking at me with super-human divine pure vision, listening with super-human divine pure hearing, and thinking of me with his pure, super-human divine mind.”

The Teacher said:

Shakyamuni is right there in front of anyone who is thinking of the buddhas.

The Precious Master said:

For all men and women with faith in me, I,
Padmasambhava,
Have never departed—I sleep beside their door.
For me there is no such thing as death;
Before each person with faith, there is a
Padmasambhava.³⁹

And also:

When free of doubt, all wishes are fulfilled.
For those who have devotion, the blessings
enter.

In this manner, there is no doubt that
accomplishments will arise if, with stable, trusting faith,
one invokes the mindstream of the guru.

In brief, as taught by the Vidyadhara Terdak Lingpa:

Appearances, sounds, and thoughts have the
nature of deities, mantras, and dharmakaya.

Thus, all appearances are the embodiment of the
primordial wisdom of the ocean-like assembly of all the
oath-bound protectors, of the wisdom dakinis, and of
Guru Padmasambhava. All sounds are the natural self-
expression of the Vajra Guru. All thoughts are the
natural manifold display of the Guru's wisdom mind.
Knowing this, recite the mantra with one-pointed
devotion.

After completing the recitation, imagine that myriad
light-rays radiate from the Guru's heart-center,
purifying the outer vessel, the world, and all the karma,
afflictions, misdeeds, downfalls, and obscurations of all
sentient beings, its inner contents. The purified outer
vessel transforms into the pureland of the Copper-
colored Mountain, while the purified inner contents
transform into the gathering of deities of Guru

Padmasambhava together with his retinue of vidyadhara lineage holders.

The Benefits of Reciting the Vajra Guru Mantra

The great master, Padmasambhava said:

Diligent people's recitation of mantras
 Will prove helpful,
 As through this they will effortlessly purify
 Innumerable harmful actions.

Also, as it is said:

If pure, it is worth a hundred times more,
 And a thousand times more with samadhi.

Thus it is said that, regarding mantra recitation, compared with impure pronunciation, the benefits of pure, or correct pronunciation are a hundred times greater. And if one accompanies the recitation with visualization, the benefits are a thousand times greater. Moreover, if one prays to Guru Rinpoche, invoking his sacred mindstream with faith and fervent yearning, his compassion will radiate out from the Chamara Island like billowing clouds, bestowing empowerments, blessings, protection and so forth.

The Great Master has also said:

Samantabhadra in the dharmadhatu,
 The great Vajradhara in Gandavyuha,
 And Shakyamuni in Bodhgaya—

All are spontaneously present, indivisible with me, Padmasambhava.

It is said that the Lake-born Vajra Guru is the embodiment of the single wisdom that condenses the essence of the three kayas. Thus, if one supplicates him alone and attains but the realization of him alone, this is equivalent to attaining the realization of all the victors of the three times and to receiving all of their blessings.

Also, as the great master himself said:

Seeing me, you see all buddhas.

Attaining my realization, you attain that of all buddhas.

I am the essence of the sugatas.

In brief, the resultant benefits of reciting the Vajra Guru mantra are that having pacified all obstacles in this life, you will have all your wishes fulfilled, and be reborn without difficulty in the Copper-colored Mountain in your next life.



Chapter 23

The Benefits of Hanging Prayer Flags



According to oral tradition, what we now know as prayer flags were originally military banners. Others, however, say that they acted as landmarks. It is uncertain which of these explains how they later came to be a religious custom.

The Significance of Prayer Flags

Various astrological texts claim that, in general, the five colors of the flags (the squares of cloth in blue, white, red, green, and yellow) upon which sacred texts are traditionally printed symbolize the five elements. The astrology scriptures describe the elements as follows:

East is the wood element, south is fire,
 West is iron, north is water,
 And the four directions together are earth.

Thus the five elements are wood, fire, iron, water, and earth. However, when arranging the colors of the prayer flags, most often they are arranged following the generic enumeration of the five elements, namely earth, water, fire, wind, and space. In this case, it is explained that blue symbolizes space, white symbolizes clouds, red symbolizes fire, green symbolizes water, and yellow symbolizes earth.

The Pennons (small strips, lit. silk tongues)

Astrological texts clarify that a pennon of one's elemental color should be placed on the very top. Below this, in descending order, are placed those pennons of the five colors that correspond to the astrological enemy figure of the previous pennon's element.

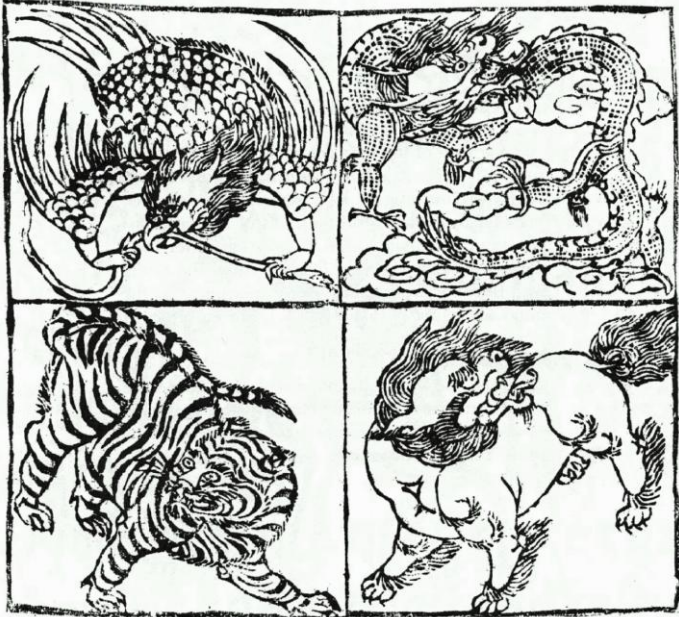
The Benefits of Prayer Flags

Buddhism teaches that any being who is touched by wind that has blown through flags printed with mantras will never again be reborn in the lower realms. Also, in terms of worldly benefits, it is said that prayer flags avert all negative disharmonious factors, such as the 404 diseases of humans, diseases of animals, the 80,000 types of harmful spirits, the 21,000 kinds of accident, all negative conditions and obstacles, the 360

types of danger and so forth. Prayer flags are thus an auspicious omen for the continued propagation of all harmonious factors, such as longevity, merit, power, fortune, fame, and reputation.



Chapter 24
The Significance of Wind-horse
Banners



The garuda, dragon, tiger, and lion

The wind-horse banners used by Himalayan Buddhists often display a central image of the supreme horse, either ornamented with a jewel or mounted by King Gesar. This is surrounded in the four corners by printed images of a tiger, lion, garuda, and dragon.

Even though it is said that “wind-horse” (*rlung rta*) was initially spelt like “river-horse” (*klung rta*, which can also mean “fortune”), in later times this spelling changed to that of “wind-horse” (*rlung rta*). It is said that this is because the meaning came to be understood as “the mount of the wind.”

In my own view this later spelling was probably adopted because it accords with the actual function of raising wind-horse banners into the sky and having them flutter in the wind.

The Meaning of *klung rta* Banners

When spelled as *klung rta*, the syllable *klung* symbolizes the omnipresent essence and the syllable *rta* the thoroughbred mount, thus symbolizing swift travel. These particularly auspicious omens symbolize the spread of good fortune and successful activities. The great horse positioned in the center symbolizes moving away from harmful actions onto the right path. The jewels ornamenting the great horse symbolize the fulfillment of all the hopes and wishes of beings.

The tiger, lion, garuda, and dragon that are placed on each side symbolize the elements themselves. It is taught that, since the tiger lives in the forest, it represents the wood element or wind. Since the lion lives in the mountains, it symbolizes the earth element. Since the garuda lives in the air and streams fire from its blazing horns, it symbolizes the fire element. Since the dragon lives in the sea, it symbolizes the water

element. Finally, since they are all surrounded by air, they also all symbolize the space element. Alternatively, these embodiments of the four elements indicate the complete victory that is the four fearlessnesses of a buddha.



Chapter 25

Smoke Offerings (*Sang*)

Smoke offerings are ritual offerings of incense smoke made to local deities and guardian spirits. Primarily, accomplished siddhas make this offering in order to bind under oath and please the virtuous protector deities in individual regions. To this end, as an offering one casts onto a fire and burns a dry powder of juniper, rhododendron, and other plants, mixed with the three whites (milk, yoghurt, and butter) and the three sweets (honey, molasses, and sugar). Beginning with prayers of refuge and bodhicitta, and maintaining the dignified awareness of whichever yidam deity is appropriate, one makes offerings following a specific smoke offering liturgy, and entrusts minor activities to the protectors.

Alternatively, it can be performed as a preliminary ritual in order to clear away all defilements in the area before inviting deities.

It is important to understand that when making these kinds of smoke offerings to local deities and the like, you rely on them merely for their help in accomplishing temporary aims, and do not regard them as objects of refuge for this and future lives. It is

important to understand this distinction, and when you make the offering to use clean substances.



Chapter 26

The Benefits of Saving Lives



It is said that in the past, in India, there lived a non-buddhist king named Trichen, who enjoyed eating meat so fresh that the blood was still warm, and who killed ten thousand animals. Through the karmic ripening of these actions, he was reborn in Vajra Hell, one of the eighteen hell realms, where the extent of his suffering was such that he died a hundred times and each time fell back into hell as he was revived. The venerable Ananda saw the suffering of this impure being and asked the Bhagavan about it. The Bhagavan replied, “This is the karmic ripening of a man who enjoyed eating meat so fresh that the blood was still warm, and who enjoyed killing animals.” Then Ananda

asked the Dharma King, Buddha Shakyamuni, “Is there any way to liberate him?” and the Lord of Death, King of Dharma (Buddha), answered, “If you want to liberate this man from hell, save the lives of animals in the worldly realms and he will be freed.” So Ananda saved lives for the man’s benefit, and he was liberated from Vajra Hell.

The Animals That are to be Saved

Generally, there is no difference in the size or species of the animal to be saved. However, buying and liberating animals that were certainly destined to be killed by butchers in a slaughterhouse naturally brings the greatest benefit.

The Manner of Releasing Lives

Saving old and emaciated livestock, or animals that are of no use to us, is less beneficial than saving predominantly healthy and valuable livestock. At the time of saving a life, lamas, monks and so forth will cleanse the animals by wafting the smoke of burning incense over them and burning juniper, throw charmed mustard seeds and so on in order to expel obstructing spirits, and perform ablution rituals. They will then recite the ritual chants for saving lives, such as the Amitayus sutra and the Amitayus dharani, and aspire that the animals may enjoy long lives and remain for a hundred years starting from that very day. They will then remove the halters from their heads, the saddles

from their backs and so on, and vow never again to make use of these animals. They will then release them and send them off.

The Right Time to Save Lives

The main days for releasing animals are the 8th, 10th, 15th, 25th, and 30th days of the lunar month. This is because if one frees animals on these days, the resulting virtue is a hundred thousand times greater than on other days. For specific purposes, you can also save lives on indefinite astrological days (i.e. days of no specific astrological significance), on Buddhist festivals and so forth.

Benefits of Releasing Lives

The benefits obtained by releasing the lives of animals are similar to the benefits obtained by holding full monastic vows. By freeing a single sheep, a single rebirth in the lower realms is purified. By freeing a single goat, seven such rebirths in the lower realms are purified. Even if one has committed the harmful action of killing one hundred men and one hundred horses in this world, the act of saving a single life can purify those harmful actions and obscurations. By saving thirteen lives, one purifies the harmful actions and obscurations of ten thousand eons. If one releases life on behalf of a being whose life is coming to an end, their life will be prolonged. If one liberates thirteen lives on behalf of someone who only has three days to

live, that person's life will definitely be extended by three years.

At the same time, in the sutras of the Blessed One, it is said that killing a single liberated animal (i.e. an animal that has been released in this way) is equal to killing one hundred humans, and that such an action brings countless other negative consequences.



Chapter 27
**The Origins and Benefits of Ritual
Dance**



The Origins of Ritual Dance

In general, in the past in India when our teacher, Buddha Shakyamuni turned the dharma wheel of the secret mantra, when performing fire puja, or the throwing of Zor tormas, practitioners would don the attire of the peaceful and wrathful deities and perform ritual dances (*cham*), or vajra dances. So this is a custom that was already present in India during Buddha's time.

In Tibet however, the first instance of ritual dance occurred when the dharma king Trisong Deutsen invited Acharya Padmasambhava and Abbot Shantarakshita from India and they built the glorious temple Samye Migyur Lhüngyidrubpé Tsuklhag Khang (The Immutable, Spontaneously Accomplished Temple that Surpasses Thought) and translated many secret mantra tantras into Tibetan. When Padmasambhava was consecrating the glorious temple of Samye, he performed the majestic vajra stance as described in the tantras. This was the very first instance of ritual dance in Tibet. Moreover, it seems that the tradition of vajra ritual dance spread and developed in Tibet from this point onwards.

The Face Masks

These masks (*zhal bag*, literally meaning 'likeness of a face') are made in the likeness of the individual deities and worn by the dancers on their faces.

How the Dances are Performed

The dances are to be performed in their proper order in time with the musical instruments and the liturgies chanted with melodies. Regarding the actual dance movements, these differ from tradition to tradition. There is a wide variety of dance styles and different dance steps, such as drawing the right hand and leg in while extending the left hand and leg out and so on. For it is said that the dances are rooted in the pure visions of the accomplished siddhas of the various traditions from whom these dances then spread.

One's Outlook When Performing a Ritual Dance

It is taught that when performing ritual dance, you should discard all notions of your ordinary self and assume the divine pride of the deity whose dance you are performing.

The Different Types of Ritual Dance

Regarding the different types of dances, the majority can be subsumed within three categories: peaceful, wrathful, and semi-peaceful semi-wrathful.

Musical Instruments Accompanying the Dances

The main instruments played to accompany the dances are the cymbals and drum, the long horn, the gyaling (Tibetan oboe), kangling (short horn), the white conch, the hand drum, bell, the silnyen (another type of cymbal), and the damaru, amongst others.

The Colors

The colors vary according to the color of the deity being danced. For instance, they may be white, yellow, red, blue and so on corresponding to the color of the deity and whether they are peaceful, increasing, magnetizing, or wrathful. The colors of the costumes and the colors of the masks are usually the same or at least similar. Regarding the costumes, typically the upper garments are quite tight while the lower garments are loose.

In particular, the costumes for the Black Hat dance all have very wide sleeves. This goes back to when Lhalung Palgyi Dorje hid a bow and arrow in his sleeves when performing a dance and assassinated King Lang Darma. With all of its various details, this art of ritual dance is a wonderful and unique tradition.

The Benefits of Ritual Dance

It is said in *The Secret Essence (Gubhyagarbha) Tantra*:

Vast cloudbanks of song, dance,
 And music radiate out.
 Through the mudra of song and dance,
 The Blazing King is accomplished once and for
 all.
 Through the mudra of song and sound,
 The supreme siddhis are attained.

Likewise, in the *Lasso of Skilful Means Tantra* it is explained:

When, with these mudras
 You demonstrate fierce and mighty wrath,
 You will leap forth from the three realms.
 All states shall be accomplished.
 Of this there is no doubt.

And in *Yeshe Ngamlok* it says:

If you hold the mudras and the dance postures,
 Bind with them and traverse through space,
 You will be freed from the whole of samsara
 And even attain enlightenment.
 That being so, what need to mention the other
 siddhis?

In Sangye Lingpa's *Gongpa Diipa*, it is taught:

The dance postures, ritual dances, and their
 many poses
 Should be performed in accord with one's
 practice and following the texts.
 Thereby, the blessings will descend, the mamos
 and dakinis will be gathered,
 And influence, wealth, and prosperity will
 increase.

Furthermore, in the tantras it says:

When one remains in these postures and stances
 Infused with the samadhi of one's deity,
 Even the buddhas will be scared;

No need to mention the haughty spirits.

Thus, the benefits of performing ritual dances are stated clearly in many sutras and tantras.

There are also countless benefits to watching ritual dances. When such ritual dances are being performed at monasteries on special days and occasions, you should go to watch them not for entertainment or fun, but with sincere faith, devotion, and pure perception viewing the dancers as the deities in person. If you do so, it is taught that your temporary and ultimate illnesses, negative influences, and obstacles will be appeased, and that you will enjoy good health, long life, and the fulfilment of your wishes and aims, together with many other benefits.



Chapter 28
**An Introduction to Malas and the
Commitments Connected to Them**



The meaning of the word ‘mala’ (*phreng ba* in Tibetan) is to arrange in order, or to string many beads together one after the other to form a rosary or garland.

The essence, or nature of a mala is a samaya substance used for keeping count of mantras or, alternatively, one of the wisdom deity’s hand implements. Its purposes are beyond count. For instance, it helps one to attain the power of perfect recall and to swiftly accomplish the activities of

pacifying, increasing, magnetizing, and subjugating. This being so, it is taught that it is very important for practitioners endowed with samaya to keep and use a mala whose material and number of beads are in accord with the section of tantra they are practicing. This, it is taught, forms a very important auspicious condition.

Regarding malas, we can discuss them in terms of (1) material; (2) number of beads; (3) the string; (4) how to hold the mala; (5) the head bead; (6) the different types of counters; and (7) the commitments connected to them.

1. The Materials

It is taught in *The Dakinis' Secret Treasury*:

For peaceful, beautify with crystal,
 Mother of pearl, sapphire, and conch.
 For increasing, use gold, silver, and ivory.
 Thus one will live long and enjoy good health
 and virtue.
 Coral, copper, and red sandalwood
 Swiftly accomplish the magnetizing activities.
 Ruraksha, the lungtang seed,
 And skull bone are for subjugating,
 While bodhicitta is swift for all.

2. Number of Beads

This is explained in *The Lucid Lamp of Mantra*:

Regarding the number of beads on a mala,
In general one hundred and eight beads are
advised.

Alternatively, use half that—fifty-four,
Or twenty-one, or eleven....

In that way, it is taught that for peaceful practices you should use eleven beads, for increasing practices one hundred and eight, for magnetizing practices fifty-four, and for wrathful practices twenty-one.

3. The Mala String

It is explained that for peaceful practices, you should use three-ply string made from wool or white cotton; for increasing practices, you should use four-ply yellow cotton thread; for magnetizing practices, you should use two-ply red silk thread; and for wrathful practices, you should use nine-ply string made from leather.

Regarding the color of the mala string, it is taught that you should use white string for peaceful practices, yellow for increasing, red for magnetizing, and black for wrathful.

4. How to Hold the Mala

It is said in the scriptures:

For peaceful, place the mala on your index

finger,
 For increasing, on your middle finger, and for
 magnetizing on your ring finger.
 For wrathful, it is said to count the mantras on
 your little finger,
 And to rotate them away from you in reverse.

Understand these differences as they are taught.

5. The Head Bead

It is taught in *The Lucid Lamp*:

The head bead of a mala should be like this:
 For peaceful, white, round, and with strings
 entwined.
 For increasing, yellow and knotted,
 Or tiered with the pattern of a stupa.
 For magnetizing, use a red flower.
 As for its shape, flat, crescent-shaped,
 Or elongated are auspicious.
 For wrathful, black in color,
 Triangular in shape, with triangular patterns,
 Pointed sides, and deep holes—
 In short, rough and sharp.
 A mala for various activities
 Should have head beads of the three kayas, the
 seal of enlightened mind—
 Thus decorate it with beads white, red, and blue.

In this way, it is taught that the head bead should accord with the particular activity. In general, it is taught that the head bead should be of three tiers as a sign of the three vajras: on the top, a blue bead to symbolize enlightened mind, the immutable wisdom of dharmadhatu; in the middle, a red bead to symbolize vajra speech; and on the bottom a white bead to symbolize vajra body. Alternatively, they can be explained as signs of the three kayas that are beyond meeting and parting: the empty essence, dharmakaya on top; the luminous nature, sambhogakaya in the middle; and the all-pervasive compassion, nirmanakaya on the bottom.

6. The Counters

The counters are used to keep track of the number of one's mantra recitations. They are designed as miniature malas with a vajra and bell at the end. They can be made from gold, silver, copper and the like. Regarding their shape and color, for peaceful activities they should be white and round; for increasing, yellow and square-shaped; for magnetizing, red and either flower-shaped or crescent-shaped; and for wrathful, black and triangular, as taught in the tantras.

7. The Commitments Connected to the Mala

There are a. root commitments, and b. subsidiary commitments.

A. The Root Commitment

An individual striving for liberation and enlightenment should maintain their sacred commitment (samaya) of engaging in the practice and recitation of their yidam deity, and while continuously striving for that deity's blessings and siddhis they should keep a genuine mala on their body at all times. This is the root commitment.

B. The Subsidiary Commitments

When reciting the essence mantra of your deity, do not use another mala. Never place your mala on the bare ground, leave it lying around, let it pass under one's feet and so on. Do not let others touch it, and in particular keep it away from the hands of people with damaged sacred commitments, people who are obscured, or who do not share the same sacred commitments as oneself. Do not pass it excessively slowly through your hands while counting mantras.

You should not use a mala with uneven sized beads, with crooked beads, cracked beads, the wrong number of beads, beads of inferior color or shape, or malas that are of a different type or mixed. Do not wear a mala as jewellery. Do not use a mala that comes from a very negative person. Do not use your mala for calculating and other such things. Do not hold it with pretence or to show off. Do not use a mala that has not been consecrated. Do not use a genuine mala to beat dogs and other animals.

Also, if the mala string breaks you must replace it as soon as possible and not let it remain broken for more than one day. It is taught that if you keep and use a mala properly, observing these and the other related commitments, the siddhis will come swiftly.



Chapter 29
A Short Introduction to Tormas



Tormas are used not only in the tantric tradition, but also in the sutra tradition. For instance, in the past in the noble land of India, one day Ananda was in the forest in Kapilavastu. As he was contemplating the dharma, before him low down in the sky appeared a preta with fire blazing from its mouth, terrifying to look at. It said, “In seven days time you will die!” Upon hearing this, Ananda was filled with fear and then told the Bhagavan what had happened. Buddha then taught a majestic dharani mantra and immeasurable torma offering and by offering that torma, Ananda was freed from the terror of untimely death and attained many excellent qualities.

The Essence of Tormas

Tormas are in essence the identity of indivisible basic space and wisdom.

The Etymology of Torma

As the Precious Master, Guru Rinpoche said:

Since they do not hold, but cast away, they
are called ‘tor’,

And since they pervade everything, they are
called ‘ma’.

In that way, because they are given free of grasping and attachment they are described as ‘tor’ (meaning to scatter and disperse), and because they appear in front of all guests they are described as ‘ma’.

The Different Types of Guests

How many types of guests, or recipients of tormas are there? The different types of guests can be condensed into two types: objects of homage, and objects of generosity. To describe them in a little more detail, there are the following four types of guests: the guests of honor, the objects of refuge; the guest of qualities, the glorious protectors; the guests of compassion, beings of the six classes; and the guests of karmic debtors, negative spirits and obstructers.

Tormas are dedicated to the guests of honor in the way that you would pay your taxes to a king. They are dedicated to the guests of qualities in the way that you would give a present to a friend of equal standing. They are dedicated to the guests of compassion as a feast or banquet. And they are dedicated to the guests of karmic debtors like paying back a debt.

By dedicating tormas to the first guests in that way, one gathers vast accumulations and is protected by their compassion. By dedicating to the second guests in that way, beneficial activities are accomplished and obstacles are prevented. By dedicating to the third guests in that way, one accomplishes the benefit of others and thereby becomes a follower of the great vehicle. By dedicating to the fourth guests in that way, grudges are purified and future harm is averted.

The Different Types of Torma

There seem to be many different divisions regarding tormas. For instance, if you divide them in terms of the recipients to whom they are given, you can divide tormas into: tormas for the gurus of blessings; tormas for the yidams of siddhis; tormas for the oath-bound dharma protectors; tormas for the dakinis of activities; tormas for the eight classes of drekpas; and tormas that embody all. Alternatively, you can divide them in terms of their essence. For instance, accomplishment tormas, offering tormas, sustaining tormas, empowerment tormas and so on. Likewise, if you divide them in terms of the principal torma and their functions, you can divide tormas into white tormas and red tormas and so forth.

However, here I will explain the division in terms of outer, inner, and secret tormas. Outer torma refers to the tormas made from the three white and three sweet food substances, consecrated as the five meats and amritas, and then presented and dedicated. Inner torma is to arrange the torma plate of the outer vessel of the world and the torma of the inner contents of sentient beings and offer that, and to offer gathering offerings (*tsok*) to one's body. Secret torma is to maintain the view of the great indivisibility of the truths of the purity and equality of appearance and existence. This is the torma of suchness, the most supreme of all tormas.

The Visualization of Tormas and How to Perceive Them

Some tormas are visualized as celestial palaces and yidam deities. Some are visualized as wrathful weapons that are then hurled upon the enemies and obstructers. This is a sublime method for pacifying and dispelling all hindrances and adversity created by spiteful enemies and malicious obstacle-making spirits and then effortlessly establishing oneself and all others in virtuous karma.

The Commitments Connected to Tormas

The commitment regarding practice is to offer tormas on a regular basis. The commitment regarding the vessel is to use a torma vessel that is not cracked or broken and that is clean. The commitment regarding substances is to use clean, untainted substances. The commitment regarding how to arrange tormas is to arrange them on a raised platform, in a straight and beautiful way.

Benefits of Tormas

Acharya Padmasambhava explained:

Tormas are the most supreme of all activities.

They should precede all activities.

In that way, tormas are used and needed in order to pacify illness, to increase lifespan and enjoyments, to free one from adversity, to magnetize, to free enemies

and obstructers and so forth. They also act as an amendment for not fully completing the activities since all acts of amending and replenishing make use of tormas. Tormas are also needed to increase lifespan and dispel obstacles. As it says in *The Hevajra Tantra*:

To protect sentient beings' life-force
From obstructers and false guides,
The vajracharyas give tormas.



Chapter 30

How to Practice Shamata, and its Benefits

How to Practice Shamata

Introduction

Here I will offer a brief introduction to shamata. First, the word “shamata” (Eng. calm abiding) means pacifying all conceptual thoughts, then resting the mind serenely on an object of focus. The essence of shamata is the samadhi infused with pliancy capable of engaging with its object of focus as desired. Such shamata is mentioned in *The Way of the Bodhisattva*:

Penetrative insight [vipashyana] joined with calm
 abiding [shamata]
 Utterly eradicates afflicted states.
 Knowing this, first search for calm abiding,
 Found by those who joyfully renounce the
 world.⁴⁰

Similarly, if you or anyone else has the wish to cross beyond samsara’s ocean of suffering and reach liberation, the sublime township of peace, and the state of omniscience, you will need to remove the mental afflictions, such as clinging to the self and so on, from

the very root. In order to remove them, you will need vipashyana and, since you need shamata in order for vipashyana to arise, for an individual in pursuit of liberation shamata is indispensable. Although it is generally difficult for authentic shamata and vipashyana to arise in our mindstreams immediately, you will become skilled in whatever you familiarize yourself with. In *The Way of the Bodhisattva* it is said:

There's nothing that does not grow light
Through habit and familiarity.⁴¹

As the omniscient Mipham has said:

That which is difficult to conquer is fluctuating
conceptual thoughts.
That which is difficult to find is excellent
samadhi.
If one strives continuously and properly, year
after year,
The enemy – thoughts – will be subdued, and,
moreover, the treasure of meditative
concentration will be gained.

When you persevere and habituate yourself, some stability of mind will develop. Not only that, but it is certain that eventually the paramita of meditative concentration will manifest. There is no doubt about this.

Solitude and the Four Conditions

Furthermore, in order for shamata to be easily accomplished by beginners, it should be practiced in reliance upon a solitary place and the four conditions for practice. First, as for a solitary place, it is said in *The Way of the Bodhisattva*:

And so, revolted by our lust and wanting,
Let us now rejoice in solitude ...⁴²

In the *Thirty-seven Practices of All the Bodhisattvas* it says:

The practice of all the bodhisattvas is to take to
solitary places,
Avoiding the unwholesome, so that destructive
emotions gradually fade away,
And, in the absence of distraction, virtuous
practice naturally gains strength;
Whilst, with awareness clearly focused, we gain
conviction in the teachings.⁴³

As explained there, when you rely upon a solitary place, your awareness will become clear and certainty about the dharma will arise, and as a result practice naturally improves. Such are the virtues of relying on solitary places.

The four conditions for practice are spoken of by the exalted Maitreya in the *Ornament of the Great Vehicle Sutras*:

The place of practice of the wise
 Is well equipped, a good dwelling,
 A good ground with good company, and it is
 endowed
 With qualities that delight a spiritual
 practitioner.⁴⁴

As stated there, the following four conditions should be complete:

1. Excellent provisions
2. An excellent abode
3. An excellent location
4. An excellent companion

As for the first point, excellent provisions, when you go off to a solitary place for the purpose of training in shamata meditation, you should take with you just enough food and clothing. Otherwise, if your provisions are excessive in amount or quality, a multitude of faults and harmful factors are almost certain to arise. For instance, you could become attached to your provisions, or you could be murdered by robbers and thieves for the sake of obtaining your provisions and so on. Therefore, you should take care.

As for the second point, an excellent abode, it is best if you can take up the practice of shamata meditation in a blessed place. However, if that is not possible it is still excellent if you can find a solitary place that is delightful and joyful – not a land where

many people are being killed by fighting and war, and not a place like a slaughterhouse where many animals such as goats, sheep and so on are butchered.

As for the third point, an excellent location is a place for practicing shamata meditation that does not present difficulties regarding drinking water, firewood, or climate. If you can find a beautiful, solitary place safe from thieves and wild animals, which is not far from neighbouring people (for the purpose of easily finding the food and clothing you require), that is very good.

As for the fourth point, an excellent companion, if you can find a spiritual teacher, a companion who is skilled in learning, contemplating, and meditating and in particular who is experienced in the practice of meditation. That is best. Even if you do not find such a friend, if you meet someone who is in harmony with your own view and conduct, who performs all their actions of body, speech, and mind in a well-mannered way, and who is in harmony with the laws of the sublime and sacred dharma, then they are an excellent companion who will help your shamata to grow. On the other hand, if, when practicing meditation, you find yourself in the company of a dharma friend who is talkative and distracting, devoid of the fruits of practice, it is certain you will experience a great deal of agitation, rather than shamata. Thus, you need to exercise extreme caution in searching for a companion and spiritual teacher.



A traditional painting illustrating the nine stages of resting the mind, as explained below.

The Key Points of Body, Speech, and Mind

Once those four conditions for practice are complete, you need to cultivate the key points of body, speech, and mind for practicing shamata.

First, the essential point for the body is to sit according to the sevenfold posture of Vairochana. For the sevenfold posture, you need to have:

1. the legs in vajra posture;
2. both hands in the gesture of meditative equipoise;
3. the shoulders spread open like the wings of a vulture;
4. the spine straight as an arrow;
5. the chin slightly tucked in;
6. the tongue touching the top of the palate; and
7. the eyes directed toward the tip of the nose without being too open or too closed.

The reason for this is that, as is said, when your body is straight, your channels (*nadis*) are straight; when your channels are straight, your winds (*prana*) are straight; and when your winds are straight, the mind is straight.

Second, the essential point regarding speech is that you should give up all speaking and remain like a mute person for the time being.

Third, the essential point for the mind is to pacify all subtle and coarse conceptual thoughts, then rest

single-pointedly on your object of focus. You should not fall under the influences of discursiveness and agitation, or dullness and lethargy. In order to practice such shamata, the exalted protector Maitreya has said in *Distinguishing the Middle from Extremes*:

This comes about in reliance on its cause,
The eight applications that eliminate the five
flaws.⁴⁵

That being the case, what are the five shortcomings?
From the same text:

Being lazy, forgetting the instructions,
Dullness and agitation,
Non-application, and application—
These are held to be the five flaws.⁴⁶

Accordingly, the five are as follows: (1) laziness; (2) forgetting the instructions, and thus forgetting your supporting object of focus; (3) dullness and agitation (considering these two separately, there are six shortcomings; taken as one, there are five); (4) non-application of the remedy for dullness and agitation once they have arisen; and (5) over-application of the remedy when dullness and agitation have not arisen.

The remedies that abandon the five shortcomings are said to be the eight applications. The eight applications are mentioned in that same text:

The basis and what is based on this,
 Cause and result,
 To not forget one's focal point and
 To notice dullness or agitation,
 To fully apply oneself to the elimination of these
 factors
 And rest naturally once pacified.⁴⁷

The basis refers to (1) intention, the abode of perseverance. What is based on this is (2) perseverance. Cause refers to (3) faith, the cause of intention. Result refers to (4) pliancy, the result of perseverance. Among these, it is pliancy that does not occur immediately. Once pliancy is attained, you will be free from physical and mental rigidity and will thereby be fit to employ your body and mind for virtue however you wish. Such pliancy only comes about later in the context of the ninth stage of resting the mind; nevertheless, you should recollect its positive qualities.

In the same vein, there is (5) mindfulness, not forgetting the focal object, and (6) alertness, recognizing whether or not dullness and agitation have arisen. Together with (7) non-application of the remedy, and (8) application of the remedy, these are the eight.

In addition to pliancy, faith from seeing the positive qualities of samadhi at the outset, intention to pursue it based on that faith, and perseverance based on that intention are the four remedies for laziness. The

remedy for the fault of forgetting the focal object is said to be mindfulness. The primary remedy for dullness and agitation is alertness. Next, to counter non-application of the remedy when dullness and agitation arise, rely on volition that applies the respective remedies. For over-application of the remedy when dullness and agitation have not arisen, you should rely on being equanimous regarding the application of the remedy.

Objects of Focus

Well then, what sort of supporting object of focus do we need for practicing shamata? In terms of a supporting object of focus, there are generally four found in the sutras spoken by the Bhagavan: objects of focus of learned ones, objects of focus that quell behavior, objects of focus that subdue mental afflictions, and pervasive objects of focus.

Pervasive objects of focus encompass all of shamata's objects of focus; they pervade all acts of focusing and all objects of focus. The meaning of objects of focus that quell behavior is to use the particular object that relates to whatever afflictive emotion you have previously experienced most strongly. That is to say, if your desire is strongest you meditate on repulsiveness as the object of focus. As the remedy for anger, you meditate on loving-kindness. As the remedy for ignorance, you contemplate dependent arising. As the remedy for pride, you

analyze the various elements. As the remedy for conceptual thoughts, you meditate on the inhalation and exhalation of the breath. As for objects of focus of learned ones, these are the aggregates, elements, the sense sources, the twelve links of dependent arising, and what is appropriate or inappropriate, all together making five. Objects of focus that subdue mental afflictions have two aspects: aspects that are peaceful or coarse, and aspects that are true.⁴⁸ This is a general explanation of objects of focus.

What sort of object of focus should we consider at the present time? When first practicing shamata, one should train with an object of focus and ideally this object should be in tune with your individual constitution. For example, as was mentioned above, if you experience strong attachment, meditate on repulsiveness; if you experience strong aversion, meditate on loving-kindness and so forth. Beyond these, you can focus on the form of a deity directly in front of you, a seed syllable, a bindu, a sphere of light, the inhalation and exhalation of the breath, sound and so on. You should focus on whatever object is comfortable for you, without letting the mind become distracted. It is also good if the object of focus is small. It will be easier to collect the mind if you practice in that way.

It is said to be excellent if your meditation sessions are short but frequent. When you first meditate, you should do so for just five or ten minutes, and then

gradually lengthen your sessions. Otherwise, if your meditation sessions are long from the very first, it is possible that the sharpness of your mindfulness and alertness will decline, such that you may not recognize discursive thoughts. You should be aware of these crucial points.

Well then, what should you do when dullness and agitation emerge? If agitation predominates, practice in a place with less light, in a dark room for instance. Lower your body's elevation and close your eyes. If dullness predominates, practice in a place that is very light, spacious, and open. Raise your body's elevation and look slightly upwards. All this should be in harmony with your individual state of mind and constitution. (This will also be briefly explained below.)

At any rate, since discursive thinking tends to be strong for those new to shamata, it is good if the coming and going of the breath is made the object of focus. This is because the breath does not have a shape or color and it is therefore easier to rest the mind there than on other objects of focus. Without breathing too forcefully nor deliberately seeking to breathe lightly, the movement of the breath should be just the way it naturally is – leisurely, relaxed, and steady. The length and strength of the breath is determined by the strength of your own body. That being so, when inhaling through both nostrils, if your inhalation is short, you should imagine the breath travelling to your throat; if it is long, imagine the breath travelling to your

navel and to the soles of your feet. When exhaling (again, through both nostrils), if your exhalation is short, imagine the breath going out to a distance of about six inches; if it is long, imagine the breath going out to a distance of somewhere between one and a half and three feet. Initially, count to between five and ten cycles of breath each time. Later you can gradually increase the count more and more. Spiritual teachers of the past have said that this method of shamata meditation, focusing on the coming and going of the breath in the above way, is easier than other methods of shamata meditation and has many virtues and benefits.

The Deity's Form as an Object of Focus

Alternatively, how do you practice shamata focusing on the body of a deity as an object of focus? In *The Samadhiraja Sutra*, it says:

His pure body is the color of gold,
 Beautiful is the Protector of the World.
 Whoever visualizes him like this,
 Practices the meditation of the bodhisattvas.⁴⁹

If you meditate on the form of the Thus-gone One as your object of focus, set the image directly in front of you around eye level, four feet away in distance. Moreover, if you imagine Buddha's form to be heavy, this will help prevent your mind from becoming discursive. If you imagine his body to emanate rays of

light in great profusion, it will help prevent dullness. In the beginning, you should have a good look at a representation of the Buddha's form, carefully studying his expression and so forth.

If you focus on the image of a deity with a crooked face that has been painted by someone with only partial knowledge of thangka painting instead of an image correctly painted by a qualified thangka artist, there is a risk that, on the occasion that you later attain buddhahood, the same will befall you yourself! Therefore, having confirmed at the outset the proportions of the body, the shape, the color and so forth, you should meditate using that form as the focal object until completely pure samadhi of shamata emerges.

What do you need to do after you have committed the object of focus to mind? The samadhi to be practiced here should have two distinctive qualities: stability and clarity. While the quality of stability, in and of itself, is nothing particularly astonishing, the need for clarity is taught to be extremely important. Clarity is not understood in this case to refer merely to clarity of the focal object; it is the mind that focuses on the object that needs to be extremely clear. In addition to that clarity of focus, the mind should also be clear in the sense of being alert, sharp, and aware.

What is it that interrupts stability? In general, interruptions are caused by discursiveness. However, since we experience agitation more forcefully than

discursiveness, it is really agitation that causes the interruptions. Agitation belongs to the category of desire and attachment.

Dullness is what interrupts mental clarity. If when settled single-pointedly upon the object of focus while having stopped all mental discursiveness the mind is blank and dull, this is fogginess. The mind is in a state of lethargy and stupor. This is not dullness itself, but a cause of dullness.

Coarseness and Subtlety as They Apply to Both Dullness and Agitation:

1. Coarse dullness: after having completely lost your object of focus, the mind becomes bored and has nothing to think about or to remember. It is similar to falling asleep.

2. Subtle dullness: even though you do not completely lose your object of focus, your mind is not so clear. At that point, the object of focus is on the brink of being lost. An indication of an increase in subtle dullness is that the movement of the breath through the nose becomes weak. The fault is that your awareness becomes dull. This being the case, it is important not to fall under the power of subtle dullness.

1. Coarse agitation: this is typified by falling under the power of the three poisons, the mental afflictions, and thus becoming distracted.

2. Subtle agitation: this is typified by one's mind being distracted by objects that give rise to the three poisons, such as song, dance and so forth.

In addition to these, there is what is called discursiveness. Your mind does not remain on the object of focus and gets distracted by other things such as faith, cause and effect and so on.

How should you apply methods to prevent both dullness and agitation occurring in these ways? If you have previously trained in holding the focal object with mindfulness and have maintained this without letting it decline, alertness will have been brought forth through that. Thus, one method is this great power of mindfulness, the cause of alertness. Another method is alertness itself, the sentry who stands guard to see whether faults are present or not. The extraordinary cause of such alertness arising is alert mindfulness: keeping watch as to whether or not dullness and agitation have emerged from some corner of the mind, regardless of having settled the mind serenely on the focal object. This is the extraordinary cause of alertness.

What should one do with such mindfulness and alertness? If the mind is extremely disheartened, agitation will not arise. Discursiveness will be reduced to the extent to which the mind is subdued. However, there is a risk of dullness arising at that time. If the mind is too elevated, there is a risk that agitation will

arise even though dullness has been dispelled and reduced. That being the case, if, after having inquired into your individual experience, you think that the risk of agitation arising is mostly due to an elevated mind, you should subdue the mind slightly. On the other hand, if you think there is a risk of dullness arising due to the mind being too subdued, you should elevate it slightly.

Well then, how should one use these methods of elevating the mind or causing it to subside? For the method of uplifting the mind, you should think about objects that the mind enjoys. However, they should not be objects that give rise to desire and attachment. For instance, you should think about such things as the positive qualities of shamata, the positive qualities of this human body you have obtained, or the excellent fortune of encountering the sublime dharma so hard to find. If you do this, you will experience a sense of self-confidence and the mind will then become slightly elevated. If the previously drowsy mind is still present and will not be cleared up despite elevating it, you should conclude the session. After concluding the session, you should go to a wide, open space, or a vast plain. Heading off to the mountainsides and such, gazing out over far distances, breathing in fresh air, and washing your face with cold water – these are all said to be skillful means.

On the other hand, if the mind is over-elevated and you notice faults such as discursiveness, there is a way

to make the mind subside. This is known as the method of collecting the mind inwardly. For this, you should think about the nature of suffering, the samadhi that focuses on repulsiveness, fear and so forth. If you think in this way, the mind will be able to subside slightly. Understand that the more you analyze a given subject through study and contemplation, to that degree confidence and certainty in the view will develop.

Recognizing dullness and agitation on the occasions that they emerge in the above ways and knowing how to apply the relevant methods is extremely important.

The Nine Stages of Resting the Mind

As it is said in *The Essence of the Middle Way*:

The retreating elephant of the mind
Should be surely bound with the rope of
mindfulness
To the firm pillar of the focal object,
Then gradually directed with the iron hook of
wisdom.

Just as was taught through this analogy of taming the great wild elephant of the mind with the rope of mindfulness and the iron hook of alertness, when practicing shamata you should train according to the stages of the nine methods for resting the mind. Thus, it is said in a sutra:

To settle, to settle completely, to gather and settle, to settle thoroughly, to tame, to pacify, to pacify thoroughly, to bring into one continuum, to be in meditative absorption or equipoise.⁵⁰

From *The Ornament of the Great Vehicle Sutras*:

Having directed the mind to the focus,
The mind is not distracted from the continuum,
Distraction is realized quickly,
And the mind is summoned once more.

The wise individual increasingly
Gathers the mind within.
As the qualities are seen,
The mind is tamed within meditative absorption.

As the defects of distraction are seen,
Lack of joy is pacified.
The occurrence of covetousness, mental
discomfort and so forth,
Is likewise pacified.

The one who persists in the vows
Applies the mind,
And attainment occurs naturally.
Through familiarization with that, there will be
no formation.

When body and mind
Have thereby attained great agility,

This should be known to involve directing the
mind.

When that is then enhanced,

The development reaches far

And so there will be abidance in the main part.⁵¹

Just as it is said, the first of the nine stages of resting the mind is:

1. Inward Settling

Collecting the mind away from external objects of focus, focus inwardly upon the inner object of focus. This is accomplished through the power of hearing oral instructions from your guru on objects of focus. Moreover, since you cannot, for the most part, remain on the object of focus apart from just a little mental settling, you will be unable to sustain your focus. This might be likened to bees that enjoy the nectar landing again and again on top of flowers, but are unable to stay for a long time atop any single flower. Similarly, birds flutter and hover over thorny branches.

In the analogy, the example is given of a black elephant being forced along by a furious black monkey. Although the elephant of the mind is stainless white by nature, it is being forced along with great fury after having been completely suffocated by darkness, and dominated by agitation, which is the monkey. Since dullness has taken control over even agitation itself, there is no freedom whatsoever. At this point, you

become aware through the power of inspecting the mind that it has fallen under the influence of discursiveness and agitation, and you thereby get the feeling that you are thinking more than before. When that happens, you might end up wondering, “Am I always thinking like this?” In actuality, it is not that your thoughts have increased; rather, this is a sign that you have recognized conceptual thoughts.

2. *Continuous Settling*

Next, you are able to continue settling the mind on the object of focus for short periods of time. This is similar to when you meditate on the *mani* mantra for the length of time it takes to make just a single round of your mala, for instance, managing to remain undistracted for just that long.

In the analogy, the elephant is being pulled along by the monkey and a little whiteness appears on each of their heads. This illustrates that the elephant is white by nature. The monk chases after the elephant, clutching an iron hook and rope in his hands in order to catch it.

As in the analogy, the shamata practitioner strenuously exerts herself in the methods of catching the elephant of the mind with the rope of mindfulness and the iron hook of alertness. At this stage, out of the five sense pleasures, it is said that agitation is associated primarily with physical sensations. Conceptual thoughts are occasionally pacified and occasionally arise, so the feeling of having found rest from

conceptual thoughts is experienced at this point. There is a difference in terms of the duration of resting regarding the first and second stages of resting.

3. Repeated Settling

Next, from among the qualities of abiding and distraction, distractions become fewer and the qualities of abiding greater. As soon as discursiveness causes the mind to wander away from the object of focus for a little while, you draw the mind back together and settle it again. That is to say, based on your foundation in continuous settling, you know immediately that you have become distracted from the object of focus, and you repeatedly bring the mind back to the supporting object of focus, just like sewing a patch on to the foundation as if it were cloth. This is called repeated settling.

In the analogy, when the monk who is pursuing the white-headed monkey and elephant tugs on the rope and iron hook, the elephant is made to look back. Likewise, when you arrive at this turn in the path, you are able to rest repeatedly on the object of focus, having recognized the distractions for yourself. This is a sign that you have the individual ability to recognize coarse and subtle dullness and agitation. At this point, a feeling of exhaustion comes. Between this and the second stage, there is a difference in terms of the duration of distraction.

4. Close Settling

During the phase of close settling, you collect the mind again and again, subtly settling it. That is to say, you settle it on the supporting object of focus while generating strong mindfulness. For the most part, at this stage there is no risk of losing the supporting object of focus. However, subtle dullness and agitation start to appear in precisely this state where the object of focus has not been lost.

In the analogy, although the monkey continues to march in front of the elephant, the heads and hands of the monkey, elephant, and rabbit have all turned completely white. The three of them look back at the monk. As in the analogy, when you arrive at this turn in the path, there is a slight decrease in the power of dullness and agitation to lead the great elephant of the mind to uncertain lands. You persevere in the methods which enable you to achieve a more subtle close settling. This and the third stage are differentiated in terms of whether or not it is possible to lose the supporting object of focus.

5. Taming

Next, in the context of taming the mind, you are mostly free from the dangers of coarse dullness and agitation, since the mind has been intensively gathered in the four previous stages. Despite that, the risk of subtle dullness becomes increasingly strong.

In the analogy, the monk secures the rope around the neck of the elephant, whose body has already become half-white along with the rabbit's. He is about to suppress the elephant's head with the iron hook. The monkey, having lost the power to direct the elephant, walks along clutching the elephant's tail. As in the analogy, when you arrive at this turn in the path, the elephant of the mind is naturally drawn here. It has been tightly bound to the object of focus. It is prevented by the iron hook of alertness from straying to other objects. It thus remains on the object of focus, and coarse and subtle dullness and agitation are about halfway to being purified. This and the fourth stage are differentiated in terms of whether or not coarse dullness arises.

6. Pacifying

Next, in the context of pacifying, subtle agitation will arise. In the analogy, the monk travels the path ahead, leading the elephant with the rope while holding aloft the iron hook. At this point, the elephant follows without the monk having to tug on the rope. Both the elephant and monkey have become almost entirely white, except for a bit of blackness on their hindquarters. The rabbit is no longer present, and the old powerless monkey is exhausted but still walks along clutching the elephant's tail.

As in the analogy, when you arrive at this turn in the path, the elephant of the mind has been fastened with

the rope of mindfulness to the pillar, the supporting object of focus, and is being beckoned forth by alertness. At that point, the practitioner is able to rest their mind quite steadily in the state of shamata. This and the fifth stage are differentiated in terms of whether or not you need to be wary of subtle dullness.

7. Completely Pacifying

Next, in the context of completely pacifying, it is quite unlikely that the faults of coarse dullness and agitation will arise. This is due to having intensively uplifted the mind in the previous five stages. Although your experience, for the most part, is now without dullness and agitation, you still need to be diligent in employing methods.

In the analogy, the elephant's body has become completely white except for just a little bit of blackness beneath its tail and it proceeds of its own accord. Behind the elephant, the monk puts his hands in the gesture of meditative equipoise and, as he turns to face and look at the old monkey, that powerless old monkey is preparing to grasp the corner of the monk's robes.

As in the analogy, the obstacle of agitation, the old monkey, no longer has a chance to make the elephant of the mind become discursive. This is the time when only extremely subtle and powerless dullness remains. This and the sixth stage are differentiated in terms of whether or not you need to be very wary of the danger

that you might lose yourself to subtle dullness and agitation.

8. Working at One-pointedness

In the context of working at one-pointedness, if you depend slightly on perseverance at the start of the session, thinking “I must be careful that dullness and agitation do not arise,” you will be able to go the length of the session without any subtle dullness or agitation at all.

Dullness and agitation progressively decrease as in the following example: an enemy has power, some of his power decreases, and then the power completely decreases. Therefore, from the eighth stage onwards, you no longer need to persevere in cultivating alertness. From here on, you proceed mostly without faults.

In the analogy, the monk proceeds in front of the elephant without carrying anything in his hands, while the white elephant follows along of its own accord without anyone leading it from in front or driving it from behind. As in the analogy, when you arrive at this turn in the path, the single-pointed mind, even subtle dullness is exhausted. You should then persevere mainly in cultivating the clear and lucid object of focus of the most stable type of samadhi. This and the seventh stage are differentiated by the presence or absence of dullness and agitation.

9. *Settling Evenly*

In the context of settling evenly, the mind is in equanimity. Here you engage in practice effortlessly – it comes naturally without needing to think at all, just as the mouth is naturally skilled in reading aloud.

In the analogy, while the shamata practitioner sits in the sevenfold posture of Vairochana, the white elephant sleeps nearby, its body curled up. The analogy signifies that when you arrive at this turn in the path, the mind attains freedom. Then, exalted magical displays and positive qualities progressively arise, such as flying through the sky and traveling beneath the earth.

This and the eighth stage are differentiated in terms of whether or not you have to rely on some degree of effort.

Well then, how are the nine methods of settling accomplished by the six powers and included in the four modes of mental engagement?

As for the way they are accomplished by the six powers, the first stage of mental resting is accomplished through hearing the guru's oral instructions. The second is accomplished through the power of contemplation. The third and fourth are accomplished through the power of mindfulness. The fifth and sixth are accomplished through the power of alertness. The seventh and eighth are accomplished

through the power of diligence. The ninth is accomplished through the power of familiarization.

As for the way they are included in the four modes of mental engagement, the first and second stages are forcible engagement. The middle five stages are interrupted engagement. The eighth stage is uninterrupted engagement. The ninth stage is spontaneous engagement. In this way, unshakable pliancy is attained at the end of the sequential accomplishment of the nine stages of resting the mind, and the shamata that constitutes the preparatory stage for the first meditative concentration (*dhyana*) is simultaneously accomplished.

The fresh lotus of vipashyana quickly blossoms in the fertile soil of such shamata.

2. The Benefits of Shamata

The exalted protector Maitreya has said in *Ornament of the Great Vehicle Sutras*:

With their concentration they [i.e., the bodhisattvas] establish all beings in the three kinds of enlightenment.⁵²

Accordingly, when there is the genuine meditative concentration of shamata, even the enlightenments of the three vehicles will be obtained. The protector Nagarjuna has also said in *A Letter to a Friend*:

Lacking wisdom, concentration fails,

And without concentration, wisdom too.
 For someone who has both, samsara's sea
 Fills no more than the print left by a hoof.⁵³

Thus, it is taught that without the cause, shamata, there is no way for the result, vipashyana – the wisdom that realizes selflessness – to emerge. It is no hardship for anyone with both shamata and vipashyana to dry up the ocean of cyclic existence. For them it is like a puddle in an ox's hoofprint. Similarly, the bodhisattva Shantideva says in *The Way of the Bodhisattva*:

Penetrative insight [vipashyana] joined with calm
 abiding [shamata]
 Utterly eradicates afflicted states.
 Knowing this, first search for calm abiding,
 Found by those who joyfully renounce the
 world.⁵⁴

If you know that you need to conquer ignorance, the root of samsara, as well as the result born from it, the mental afflictions, and that this can be achieved through vipashyana joined with shamata, it is important to first practice shamata. That being so, if you are endowed with such shamata and practice it properly, you will gradually triumph in the battle to abandon the two obscurations, armed with the sharp sword of wisdom – the samadhi which unifies shamata and vipashyana. The great crowning glory of the four kayas will then manifest and the enlightened activities

that spontaneously fulfill the hopes of wandering beings will emerge without interruption for as long as space endures.

To conclude, one last aspiration:

Bhikshus who have received the precepts,
May you also obtain solitude.
Having forsaken all distractions,
May the mind be cultivated to suit the task at
hand!



Chapter 31

An Introduction to the Bardo (the Intermediate State)

For us Buddhists of the Himalayan region, when someone passes away we have various observances. For the sake of the deceased we gather the roots of merit. In particular we invite a lama to perform the transference of consciousness (*phowa*), to bestow empowerment, and to perform the ritual of purifying the obscurations of the six realms of existence in order to guide the deceased to a better rebirth. There is also the tradition of introducing the deceased to the visions, occurrences, and dissolution stages of the bardo (the intermediate state).

Here I will speak a bit about the bardo. In general, in the abhidharma teachings, although there are explanations on bardo beings and the bardo itself, there are not any explanations on guiding bardo beings to liberation through introducing them to the path. However, in the mantra traditions there are general instructions and specific teachings such as those of the *BardoTödrol: Liberation in the Bardo Upon Hearing*. These teachings contain the skillful means for leading bardo beings to liberation by introducing them to the nature of mind and so on and by bestowing blessings. These

skilful means are emphasized and explained extensively in the tantric teachings.

This being the case, it is not that the discussions of bardo beings found in the Foundational Vehicle of the Theravada are not the basis for the current presentation of guidance for bardo beings. For as taught in *The Treasury of Abhidharma*:

With the strength of karmic paranormal capacity
And with all faculties intact they [bardo beings]
move unimpededly.

By considering the intention of this scriptural text as the basis, likewise in the context of secret mantra if bardo beings are introduced to the true nature it is said to be easier and more effective than when introduced to living beings. Regarding the reasons for this:

1. Bardo beings have karmic paranormal abilities and defiled clairvoyance. Therefore whatever pointing-out instructions the lama offers, bardo beings have the power to understand with little difficulty.

2. With all faculties intact, whatever is spoken they have the power to understand.

3. Tormented by the terror of the bardo, in order to gain freedom from this terror they listen to and follow whatever pointing-out instructions the lama gives.

4. As the consciousness lacks the support of a coarse body, they can easily travel to wherever appears in their mind and whatever is focused on.

5. Because their clarity is sharpened by awareness, being nine times stronger than while alive, whatever pointing-out instruction is given is readily recognized by the deceased.

These five reasons illustrate the need and purpose for giving instructions to the deceased. That being said, are the teachings of the *Bardo Tödrol* instructions that are solely for the deceased to carry onto the path? Such is not the case. These instructions are not pointing-out instructions solely for the dead. In any situation, whether deceased or living, all occasions are subsumed within the six bardos. Therefore, by relying on the particular essential points of practice for each of the six bardos there are likewise six individual opportunities for liberation.

The six bardos are:

1. The bardo of this life
2. The bardo of dreams
3. The bardo of meditative concentration
4. The bardo of death
5. The bardo of dharmata
6. The bardo of becoming

If while alive you have developed a level of realization in practice, then there is no need to mention the benefit of receiving these instructions during the bardo; even if you simply received the pointing-out from a qualified teacher and so the mere habitual seed

of that is within you, if you are then given the pointing-out at the moment of death it will be very easy for you to recognize and will bring about tremendous benefit.

Now will follow a brief explanation of the pointing-out instructions for the deceased. This is divided into three sections and all instructions are contained within these three:

1. The introduction to the dharmakaya at the moment of death;
2. The introduction to the sambhogakaya in the bardo; and
3. The introduction to the nirmanakaya at the time of birth.

These three as well as the various visions of the dissolution stages that occur at the time of death, the appearances of the various visions of forms, light-rays, and sounds following one's death, the meaning and symbolism of each, and the reasons behind their arising, as well as the benefits of recognizing these aspects are all explained extensively in the *Bardo Tödrol* and other scriptures. Here though, for the sake of beginners, I will explain these points succinctly in an accessible and easily comprehensible manner.

The Bardo of This Present Life

First, I will give an explanation of the bardo of the present life including (1) its nature, (2) the way it

appears, and (3) the instructions on how to take it onto the path.

1. *Nature*

The bardo of the present life is the duration starting from the moment of birth from your mother's womb until meeting with the final condition leading to your death.

2. *The Way It Appears*

Right now we are experiencing the bardo of this present life. However, generally speaking, based on the level of one's faculties and capacity, the experience differs.

For instance, to the supremely fortunate beings of highest capacity, appearances, sounds, and awareness dawn as deities, mantra, and the display of dharmakaya. All appearances and beings are by their nature the three vajras of enlightened body, speech, and mind, primordial infinite purity. Or you could say, whatever appears arises as the wheel of primordial wisdom.

Regarding ordinary individuals who lack such spiritual realization, from the moment of birth until they die, through the power of negative habitual tendencies they chase after the deluded appearances of things seeming to be solid and true. They cling to things as true where they are not true; cling to things as permanent when they are impermanent; and cling to and confuse suffering for happiness. Because of this

deluded clinging, they subdue enemies and protect loved ones. With attachment and aversion towards 'I' and 'you', they protect what they have amassed, guarding their lifestyle, while engaging in the eight worldly dharmas. Such beings, for the most part, engage solely in these meaningless delusions, activities driven by clinging, while their human life passes by.

The *Noble Arising Jewel Sutra* explains:

Through the power of attachment to wrong perspectives,
All these wandering beings roam aimlessly far and wide.

3. *The Instructions on How to Take it Onto the Path*
From the *Bardo Tödrol*:

Alas! Right now, during the arising of the bardo of the present life,
I have no time for leisure. So, having abandoned laziness....

If we investigate how many years have gone by from our birth up to now, we can see that there is not a single being with the capacity to not die but remain here, for we are all under the power of impermanence. This being so, if you let this precious time and opportunity go to waste because of falling under the sway of distraction and laziness, then, one day when

your life runs out, you will be faced with the anguish of regret and have nowhere else to turn.

Therefore, now, not falling under the sway of laziness and distraction, in order to bring benefit to your future lives, first seek out an authentic guru, and attend him or her by pleasing them in many ways through thought, word, and deed. The basis of the buddhadharma is to receive the three vows and having done so to then guard them so they remain uncontaminated even by subtle stains of broken vows and degenerated samaya. In short, one should engage in virtue and abandon non-virtue as much as one is able. This is the dharma that will leave no need for regret at the time of death. This is the real spiritual training of the bardo of the present life.

In particular, the essential points of all the following bardos depend on this very practice. Therefore, in the bardo of this present life when you have leisure and opportunity, if you do not endeavor in spiritual training, then when the cause of your death arrives and time has run out, even though you regret, it will be too late. As Guru Rinpoche said:

Those with leisure, at the time of death try and
try,
But such lamentations of regret come too late.

The Bardo of Dreams

The explanation of the bardo of dreams includes (1) its nature, (2) the way it appears, and (3) the instructions on how to take it onto the path.

1. Its Nature

The bardo of dreams is the duration between going to sleep at night until awaking the next day.

2. The Way It Appears

At the time of the bardo of dreams, form, sound, smell, taste, tangible objects, namely the five sensations all gather back into the expanse of the alaya. At this point there is also no arising of dreams; instead one is in a deep and full darkness. At this stage one is unconscious. At the moment of awakening from this state, the luminosity of one's own mind briefly and quickly dawns. If you recognize it, in that very bardo you will seize the throne of attainment. If you do not make this recognition, then again, stirring from the alaya, the karmic winds arise and through the strength of clinging, appearances of dreams arise as the appearances of the five sense objects. When such appearances arise, just like the appearances of daytime while awake, they are conditioned by delusion. For the entire night one remains dreaming. It is no more than that.

3. *The Instructions on How to Take it Onto the Path*

Supplicate the precious guru in order that you may recognize the experience of dreams as delusions, and that through practice you may understand that there is no difference between the appearances of dreams and the appearances of waking life. If this is understood, then even while dreaming you will be able to engage in virtue and be able to engage in the practices of transformation and emanation and so on. Once this happens, you have grasped the heart of the practice.

The Bardo of Meditative Concentration

The explanation of the bardo of meditative concentration includes (1) its nature, and (2) the instructions on how to take it onto the path.

1. *Its Nature*

This bardo is the duration beginning from when we place ourselves in meditative equipoise until we rise from that state.

2. *The Instructions on How to Take it Onto the Path*

While training in meditative equipoise, in order to not lose yourself to the thief of thoughts, engender the power of mindfulness and vigilance. One must endeavor to attain a stable mind. These are crucial points.

In brief, the bardo of the present life, the dream bardo, and the bardo of meditative concentration, although divided in three are all divisions of the bardo

of the present life. You should understand that whichever of these three you practice they are all spiritual trainings of the bardo of the present life.

The Bardo of the Suffering of Death

The explanation of the bardo of the suffering of death includes (1) its nature, (2) the stages of dissolution, and (3) the instructions on how to take it onto the path.

1. *Its Nature*

The bardo of the suffering of death is the period of being overcome by the ailment of the given cause of your death up until the dawning of the luminosity of the first bardo, the bardo of dharmata.

2. *Dissolution Stages*

Individuals of supreme capacity are able to be liberated while in their physical body. For such individuals, the subsequent bardos do not arise. Furthermore, in the Great Perfection scriptures it is taught that for the best type of practitioner there are four modes of dying: (1) like a vase being broken, the space inside and outside mix, the mind and body dissolving into dharmakaya emptiness; (2) ceasing just like once firewood is exhausted the fire is extinguished; (3) the sky filling with masses of light, the death of awareness holders; and (4) dying but not discarding the body, the immortal dakini mode of death. As they are the ways of dying of the best kind of practitioner, such death does not involve the elaborate dissolution stages.

There are three modes of death for practitioners of middling capacity: (1) lacking any particular preference towards dying or not dying is called the young child-like mode of death; (2) the beggar-like mode of death is being fearless and without bias towards things and circumstances; and (3) with the fetters to material things and circumstances cut, dying in empty lands and snowy retreats is the lion-like mode of death. These ways of dying also require no particular visualization but instead are processes of dying based on the confidence of one's spiritual realization.

However, for ordinary beings the body first comes about based on the five elements and likewise remains based on the five elements, and in the end during the disintegration of the body the elements draw together through the phases of dissolution resulting in disintegration. The way the elements dissolve is as follows.

First, the earth element dissolves into the water element. The outer signs of this are the loss of physical strength and the ability to move oneself. One shivers uncontrollably, the teeth chatter, and you cannot stop yourself from drooling. The inner sign is the consciousness becoming dull and foggy. Forms begin to disappear and your arms spasm. You ask to be lifted up and take your clothes off. Your eyes gaze into space. At this point the secret signs are the appearances of optical illusion-like appearances of shimmering blue light like moving water and soft misty rain.

Next the water element dissolves into the fire element. The outer signs of this are the mouth and nose becoming dry. The nose cracks and you can no longer see the tip of your tongue which becomes crooked. The inner sign is that your consciousness becomes agitated and languid making you irritable. The secret sign is seeing smoke-like appearances diffuse through space.

Next the fire element dissolves into the wind element. The outer sign is the body's warmth gathering in from the limbs and the digestive heat waning. The inner sign is one's consciousness vacillating between spells of cognizance and lacking clarity leading to not recognizing those you know. The secret sign is the arising of red crackling and sparking firefly-like appearances.

Next the wind element dissolves into consciousness. The outer sign is longer exhalation of the breath and being unable to inhale. The movement of the coarse breath ceases. The inner sign for evil individuals is the appearance of Yama, Lord of Death. Seeing him they are terrified and cry out in fear. Alternatively it is taught that for virtuous individuals free of misdeeds, dakas and dakinis appear to welcome them and visions of virtue arise. The secret signs are the arising of blazing butter lamp-like appearances and arrangements of garlands of lamps.

Next consciousness dissolves into the space element. At this point the outer breath has ceased. The

inner sign is lucid consciousness, and the outer signs are lustre and softness of the body and slight warmth from the heart up. The secret sign is the arising of a cloudless sky-like vision.

Following this, the space element dissolves into luminosity. The internal breath ceases. At this point the white aspect bindu from one's father, which abides in one's brain, gradually descends and the red aspect from one's mother, which abides at the navel, gradually ascends. When they collide at the heart, one's consciousness departs.

Once consciousness departs, individuals who lack spiritual training may stay unconscious for a long time. If you are a practitioner with experience in spiritual training you will remain for a few moments. It is taught that the two aspects having merely touched, the person's consciousness dissolves into the space element which then dissolves into the space of luminosity. This occurrence progresses, dissolving upward through the four stages of appearance, proliferation, attainment, and full attainment. By the inherently karmic three poisons and eighty thought patterns and so forth coming to a halt, the luminosity of the ground dawns. The outer signs are like the appearance of a pure sky free of any clouds, and empty lucidity without limit or circumference. The inner signs are the abiding in non-conceptual innate primordial wisdom.

Based on recognizing this, if you rest in this state of meditation now, then by mingling the childlike and mother-like luminosities you will be liberated in the first bardo.

If at this point you do not recognize luminosity, the primordial wisdom of the ground, then again the four stages arise in reverse order: full attainment to attainment, then proliferation followed by appearance. Copiously permeated by delusion and secondary delusion, samsara is established. These dissolution processes are extensively explained in the Great Perfection tantra *Self-Arising Awareness*.

3. *The Instructions on How to Take it Onto the Path*

In general, all compounded things are impermanent and in particular, the time of one's own death is uncertain. In contemplating the fact that specifically at the time of death, besides the instructions of the teacher and one's own dharma practice, nothing will be of benefit, seek out an authentic guru. Then, through establishing skill in spiritual training, there will be no need for regret at the time of death. If this occurs you will be affording yourself the greatest kindness.

Likewise from *The Verse Summary of the Essence of the Doctrine*:

In order to gain offspring and wealth, people are attached to what they already have and then proclaim, "This is now complete, this is to be

done, and with that complete, this I will do.”
 People, while deceiving themselves with
 distraction, depart, carried off by the Lord of
 Death.

Right now, while having the opportunity,
 completely rid yourself of any attachment or aversion
 towards anyone, be they high or low, or towards your
 dear loved ones and companions. Having cut through
 clinging and attachment towards them, with the
 highest of intentions give all material possessions in
 generosity to the poor, and make offerings to your
 spiritual teacher and the Three Jewels. Then when
 death arrives, without needing to suffer terribly at the
 time of death or experience the pains of the lower
 realms that could follow, you should make
 supplications with single-pointed focus to your
 spiritual teacher and the Three Jewels. Additionally,
 train extensively right now in the practice of phowa,
 the transference of consciousness, because when the
 time of death has arrived it is best if you yourself are
 able to perform the actual transference.

If this is not done, then your spiritual teacher or
 dharma companions with whom you have clean
 samaya can perform the transference. In that case, the
 moment the breath ceases, in reliance on someone else,
 the transference is performed.

In short, the above described dissolution stages are
 just a general facsimile of how these processes arise

across individuals. However, it is possible for myriad variations to occur in the changeable stages of dissolution contingent upon various conditions such as different individual compositions of the channels, winds, fundamental disposition, capacity, as well as illness and negative influences or spirits. In any event, it is important to become familiar with the way the outer, inner, and secret signs arise before you meet with death.

When the time of your death arrives there are also crucial points regarding the body. It is best if you remain in a seated posture. If you are unable to do that, rest on your right side in the lion-like lying posture. Merge your mind with whatever spiritual training you are previously accustomed to. You should strive in that practice until arriving at basic luminosity. Once arriving there, liberation will occur without difficulty.

At first, when the earth element dissolves and luminous mirage-like appearances arise, meditate on your spiritual teacher at your heart-center. With single-pointed devotion, mentally make supplication prayers. When the water element dissolves and the smoke-like appearances dawn, meditate on the spiritual teacher all around you. When the fire element dissolves and the firefly-like appearances arise, meditate on the spiritual teacher at your forehead. When the wind element dissolves and the lamp-like appearances are seen, it is taught that this is the time when you should emphasize the guru phowa of supreme recollection.

The Bardo of Luminous Dharmata

The explanation of the bardo of luminous dharmata (the true nature) includes (1) its nature, (2) the way it appears, and (3) the instructions on how to take it onto the path.

1. *Its Nature*

This bardo begins once the above described dissolution stages are all complete and lasts up until the moment of the joining of the white and red pure essences, the syllables *ah* and *ham*, which represent skillful means and wisdom. Then through the gathering together of the mind and wind, the timeless luminosity—great bliss, uncontrived, inherent primordial wisdom—actually dawns.

2. *The Way It Appears*

During the bardo of death if you recognize the dawning luminosity as your own nature, then based on that recognition you become fully enlightened in great primordial purity. In such a case, the below elaborations are not necessary.

However, if due to lacking familiarization with the recognition of luminosity you are unable to be liberated, then once the breath ceases the red aspect appears in the form of blood or lymphatic fluid coming out of the right nostril. The white aspect is expelled through the secret path. At this point the consciousness is expelled through one of the gates of

the body like a spark from a fire. It is expelled from the eyes or any given gate depending on the individual. This is the dawning of the vision of the bardo of dharmata, the true nature of reality. This is also called the “luminosity of dharmakaya,” primordial purity.

During this process, once the dissolving of the space element into luminosity is complete then luminosity dissolves into unity. At that moment, the blood-drinking heruka wrathful deities with their myriad implements, garments, and adornments appear filling the entire world. The spontaneous natural sound of dharmata is like the roar of a thousand dragons. Countless terrifying visions arise of masses of radiance and light-rays and weapons falling like rain. For individuals who lack acquaintance with such appearances, their minds, overwhelmed with terror, lose consciousness.

Upon awaking, the appearances disappear without a trace and the peaceful deities gradually arise and all apparent objects, earth, rock, mountains, cliffs and so forth appear totally devoid of materiality. They are sparkling and transparent with a nature of light. Visions appear that are vast, lucid, and luminous, magnificent and ravishing with a boundless nature. In every direction above and below, visions of spheres of five-colored rainbow lights appear. In the spheres appear the buddhas of the five families, the male and female bodhisattvas, and the various deities of the vajra expanse. Their demeanor and appearance is

magnificent. You could gaze upon them forever. From each of the deities' heart-centers, tiny, subtle light-rays emanate out and dissolve into your heart-center. All the visions and deities dissolve into you and you become filled with light.

In summary, during these appearances if you remember the main points of whatever instructions you have received and apply them, you will certainly be liberated. However, if the power of habituation is weak and you are not liberated, then by viewing the bardo of becoming as no more than the appearances of a dream you will be assured a birth in a natural nirmanakaya realm.¹ There you will quickly traverse the paths and stages and reach complete enlightenment.

Regarding the duration that one remains in each of these stages, beginning with the bardo of the moment of death and the subsequent appearances of the other bardos as explained here, although it seems it would be quite long, in actuality it is not.

The duration of the initial dissolution phases is not certain, being based on various individual conditions such as one's channels, fundamental constitution, ailments and so forth. That being said, most of these phases last no more than a moment. In particular it is said that most individuals remain no longer than the

¹ This is also often called the half-sambhogakaya and refers to the way the sambhogakaya can appear to ordinary beings, in contrast to the sambhogakaya proper which is only perceived by enlightened beings.

duration of the appearance of the white, red, and black phases accompanying the stages of appearance, increase, and attainment. After that, the innate primordial wisdom, the dharmakaya luminosity of death, dawns. For all ordinary individuals who lack spiritual training, they remain in that state for no longer than it takes to snap your fingers. A few individuals are able to remain for as long as it takes to have a meal. For those with a little experience in spiritual training, they will remain equal to the duration they are able to remain in the expanse of the main practice of meditative equipoise in this life. Other individuals remain in the “day of samadhi” variously for a single day or up to five days. Practitioners with inner confidence in their spiritual realization can remain in equipoise in the expanse of luminosity for as long as they wish.

For such individuals, the process culminates with their awareness being expelled through the crown of the head by the force of wisdom wind. In doing this, they accomplish the great unobstructed ascent of enlightenment. The sign of this is the white bodhicitta appearing at the crown or from the left nostril. This happens because of the wisdom wind’s movement to the left. Also generally speaking, attaining capacity based on one’s recognition of luminosity and remaining for a long time without the consciousness leaving the body is the main point needed for what people these days call, “remaining in *tukdam*.”

That being said, it is not definite that the consciousness remaining in the body for a long period qualifies as remaining in *tukdam*. Some individuals remain like this due to attachment to their bodies. Whatever the case and status of the deceased, it is absolutely impermissible to perform cremation or cleanse the body until the departure brought on by the melting and coming together of the upper white and lower red elements occurs. Why is this? If the individual is remaining in *tukdam*, to cremate their body will obstruct them. And for ordinary individuals whose consciousness has yet to depart because of their attachment, it is said that you will be committing the fault of taking life.

3. *The Instructions on How to Take it Onto the Path*

Furthermore, during the bardo the supreme means for recognizing the luminosity and for liberation is to become fully resolved regarding the great dharmakaya luminosity, the ultimate true nature of reality in the bardo of the present life, and to bring forth the warmth and signs of progress in your spiritual training.

If you can do that, it will be of benefit not only in the bardo, but in all situations for this is the essential main point of practice in all contexts. This very point is the ultimate essence of the enlightened intent of all the pith instructions of both sutra and tantra. Therefore, if you do not strive wholeheartedly in the definitive meaning, your many intellectual efforts and activities

will prove ineffective in the time of need. As is said in the *All-doing King Tantra*:ⁱ

If you realize the suchness of your own mind,
 You will no longer abide on the path of buddha's
 words,
 But that very moment attain the sublime yoga.ⁱⁱ
 Lacking the karma, those of lesser fortune
 Do not understand it even if the hidden is made
 manifest.
 For someone who wants a precious jewel,
 By polishing a piece of wood it will not come
 about.

It is vital that from this very moment on you strive towards the unmistakable meaning. In particular, gain independent mastery of luminosity by focusing intently on the stages of training in luminosity through the various pith instructions taught in scriptures such as *Liberation upon Hearing* and so forth. Once this happens then the basic luminosity will be grasped without any difficulty. For such individuals there is no need for the name-burning ritual or purification rituals to be performed in order for them to gain accomplishment.

ⁱ *The All-doing King Tantra* or *Kunjé Gyalpo* is the main Great Perfection Tantra of the mind section (*sems sde*).

ⁱⁱ (*shin tu rnal 'byor*) This is a synonym for atiyoga, the vehicle of Great Perfection.

The Karmic Bardo of Becoming

The explanation of the karmic bardo of becoming includes (1) its nature, (2) the way it appears, and (3) the instructions on how to take it onto the path.

1. Its Nature

Regarding the bardo of becoming, when the mind and body separate and the subsequent appearances of light, light-rays, and sounds are not recognized as one's own nature, they dissolve and vanish. Following this, from the moment of the habitual tendencies of delusion arising up until entering into a womb is the karmic bardo of becoming.

Superior and middling capacity Great Perfection practitioners attain liberation in the aforementioned bardos. Practitioners of the lowest capacity however may have been introduced to the true nature and caught a glimpse of it, yet they lack the capacity for liberation in the bardo. Nevertheless, if such practitioners view the visions of the bardo of becoming as nothing but dreams, then through recalling the instructions they received previously and through the blessings of the truth of dharmata, they are born miraculously from a lotus in a natural nirmanakaya realm. Then, just like waking from a dream, they attain mindful meditative equipoise. Following this, they meet face-to-face with the buddhas of the five families, receive prophecies, and purify obscurations. Then within five hundred years

they attain enlightenment in the dharmakaya of great primordial purity, and emanate many nirmanakaya manifestations to work for the benefit of beings.

2. *The Way It Appears*

Furthermore, for ordinary individuals who lack the crucial points of profound instructions and have strong karma and obscurations, it is quite hard to apply the various pith instructions such as phowa. Even if phowa is performed, because the deceased lacks certainty and familiarity, it is extremely difficult to transfer their consciousness to the visualized realm. Consequently, when the initial experiences of pain during the dissolution stages occur followed by the dawning of the basic luminosity, ordinary individuals, not recognizing their own essential nature, lose consciousness.

Then when the white and red elements are expelled from the upper and lower doors, the consciousness, carried by karmic wind is expelled from one of the nine orifices. At this point the natural sound of dharmata that occurs is terrifying to them. The visions of luminosity are frightening. The beings run away from the light beams of compassion. By perceiving the various deities of self-arising primordial wisdom as the henchmen of the Lord of Death, they are horrified. The array of the precious realms of spontaneous accomplishment, all appearances of samsara and nirvana, appear like reflections in a mirror, crystal clear.

However, because of their negative habitual patterns of clinging, even though they encounter the pure realms of the three kayas they cannot bare it. Instead, they automatically enter into the appearing visions of the downward six realms of samsara. Also, when the eighty inherent thought states and the arising wind and so forth previously dissolve into the ground, at that point the natural luminosity of the true nature of reality dawns, but they fail to recognize it.

In not recognizing the natural luminosity, once again the all-pervading wind of ignorance stirs the karmic wind resulting in more wind arising. From this movement fire-wind arises, from which water-wind arises, and from that earth-wind arises. Gradually, as deluded concepts become coarser and coarser, the forty thought states connected to desire and the thirty-three thought states of anger all rise up. By the power of the wind of the five elements and consciousness uniting, a mental body with all faculties complete appears.

This body is made from light and nourished by scents. Such individuals also have clairvoyance and are aware of the thoughts of others. With the exception of one's mother's womb and Bodhgaya, these beings can travel anywhere in the three realms of existence, simply by the intention to do so. Being similar, other bardo beings are all able to see each other; however, they are not seen by other types of beings.

During this phase, even if you see your previous life's corpse you still do not understand that you have died. Though dead, through great attachment you still cling to your home, valuables, property, and possessions as your own. When seeing friends and companions enjoying your things, you are saddened and angered more strongly than while alive, but they are unaware of your feelings. Because the inner essences—the white and red elements—are gone, wherever you travel outside there is no appearance of the sun or moon. Although tormented by hunger and thirst, if food and drink are not dedicated to you, you cannot partake of them. Lacking the support of a physical body, you are carried around helplessly like a feather in the wind, wandering from place to place and experiencing all sorts of particularly coarse feelings of suffering.

In brief, from the first week up to the forty-ninth day, or for some for months or years, individuals experience the suffering of the bardo of becoming. Most beings remain for less than seven weeks, and every seven days they experience their death again and thus repeatedly undergo feelings of suffering. Concisely speaking, however long one remains in the bardo, for the first half of the entire duration one experiences the appearances of one's previous life and body. For the rest of the period in the bardo, one predominantly experiences the appearances of the life to come.

During this time, it is especially important and vital

to accomplish virtue for the deceased during the first nine days as well as up to the twenty-first day.

When the bardo is approximately half complete, one arrives in Kyamo Island, the land of the dead, surrounded by the Lord of Death and his retinue of terrifying henchmen. It is also said that visions appear of spontaneously arising deities and demons who measure your virtue and non-virtue by counting out white and black stones.

Following this, during the second half of the bardo, through the natural radiance of the interdependence of one's habitual tendencies of karmic wind and the five poisons, the five paths of light to purification arise as harbingers of whichever place of birth is suitable from among the six classes of beings. To elaborate, for birth in the god realms a dull white path of light appears and likewise a red path for the jealous gods, blue for the human realm, green for animals, and pale yellow for hungry ghosts. It is taught that for those destined to take birth in hell, at this phase they transfer directly down to the hell realms with no other opportunity to remain.

Whichever of the five paths of light appear, once you recognize that path of light you understand that you have died and, deeply grieved and full of sorrow, with your mental bardo body you then do nothing but search out your birth place. As a result, whichever of the six realms of existence you possess the karma to be born in dawns along with its distinct appearances.

If taking birth in a god realm the appearances of celestial palaces begin to take form. If taking birth in a jealous god realm, appearances such as wheels of light, or for some appearances of being in the midst of battle, begin to arise. Animals will see nests, earthen pits, or caves. Fragments of trees, jungles, or woven cloth-like appearances arise for hungry ghosts. For hell beings, visions of being led against one's will into black holes and pits, and appearances of iron cities take shape. For some beings to be born in hell, pleasant music and entertainments as well as their lovers call out to them. Clinging to these appearances, they go after them and arrive in hell.

For human beings, there are various individual modes of appearance. Seeing an ocean adorned with male and female ducks leads to birth in the Eastern Continent of Sublime Bodies. Oceans with male and female horses wandering about are connected to the Northern Continent of Unpleasant Sounds. Oceans adorned with cows are connected to the Western Continent of The Abundant Cow. As for this world of Jambhu, if visions of entering into a fog-like expanse arise, one will take birth in a situation lacking the freedoms, and with an ordinary human body. If visions of being in the midst of many beings and excellent houses and cities appear, then one will attain a precious human body.

Whether or not one's physical support will be male or female is decided while wandering in the bardo

searching for a womb. If in seeing one's parents having intercourse, jealousy arises towards one's father and desire arises towards one's mother then one will take a male physical support. Likewise, if jealousy arises towards one's mother along with desire towards one's father one will take a female physical support. As for other types of birth such as instantaneous birth and birth through heat and moisture, the arising of concepts of attachment or aversion towards the very place one will be born leads to arriving there.

3. *The Instructions on How to Take it Onto the Path*

In these ways the fearsome and terrifying sufferings, like the ever-turning blades of a waterwheel, the continuous turning of the twelve links of dependent arising, must be severed this time around by whatever means necessary. The crucial points of instruction mentioned repeatedly above are the trainings we need to become accustomed to. For the best kind of practitioner, the instructions on never parting from mindfulness and awareness, the training which leads to mastery over one's mind, is sufficient in and of itself. As the Precious Master of Uddiyana himself said:

Furthermore, if during the bardo you wonder why it is that stability is attained in a mere instant of recognition [of mind nature], consider the current situation. Right now you lack independence and self-control, as the mind and

awareness are ensconced by the seal of karmic wind. This karmic wind in turn is shrouded by the seal of physical flesh and blood [the corporeal body]. When this body's matter and awareness separate up until one is again ensconced by the seal of a subsequent body, the energetic mind has paranormal powers while lacking the basis of a material form. While lacking such a substantial, tangible support one has independence and self-control to recognize [mind nature]. Regarding gaining stability through a mere recognition, it is like the darkness which has endured for an aeon being eliminated in the instant a lamp is lit. If in the bardo one recognizes in the way it is pointed out right now, there is no doubt that you will be enlightened. Therefore, from right now familiarize yourself!

In particular, if with mindfulness and determination you continuously recollect the individual key points of practice, there will be no way not to be liberated. However, most individuals cling to current appearances regarding them as true and actually existent. This way of grasping at the substantiality of things severs at the root the means for ascertaining the bardo. Therefore, first decide definitively on the certainty of death and cut through all clinging to and connections to this life. Confess from the depths of

your heart all misdeeds, failings, degenerations, and breakages of samaya.

By remembering your own misdeeds, remorse and fear of death arise. In not entertaining clinging and so forth to this life for a single instant there is spacious bliss and expansive lucidity. Then if you recognize the luminosity of death, or even if you do not, it will certainly be easy to travel from the bardo to a celestial realm such as the Unsurpassed Buddhafield (Akanishta), the Glorious Copper-colored Mountain, or the Realm of Bliss (Sukhavati). Thus do not forget the strong aspiration of thinking, “I will go to those pure realms!”

In brief, relax and rest in the state of whatever spiritual practice is most vivid in your mind. When the continuity of one’s life-force is expiring, do not practice pith instructions that you are not familiar with, but engage in whatever practice is clear for you.

Secondly, engage your mind in aspiring to go to a pure realm such as the Glorious Copper-colored Mountain and so forth. These are very special key points, and it is of critical importance that we remain aware of them uninterruptedly, both day and night.



Chapter 32

The Four Great Buddhist Festivals

The four great festivals are the Festival of Miracles (Chotrul Düchen) in the first month of the Tibetan calendar, Saga Dawa in the fourth month, the fourth day of the sixth month (Drugpa Tseshi), and the Descent from Heaven festival (Lhabab Düchen) in the ninth month.

The Festival of Miracles

How many years after the Blessed One accomplished buddhahood did this day occur? Based on commentaries on the Vinaya scriptures, it was six years after attaining enlightenment that the Buddha met with his father. The main day of the Festival of Miracles occurred seven years after his attainment of buddhahood, on the 15th day of the first month of the Tibetan calendar. That day, in the Indian city of Shravasti, the peerless King of the Shakyas triumphantly defeated the six heretic teachers Purna Kashyapa, Makkhali Gosala, Pakudhakaccayana, Sanjayabellattiputta, Nighantanathaputta, and Ajitakeshakambala, along with their followers by displaying miracles. Thus, he hoisted the victory

banner of the sublime dharma in the ten directions and this special day was named the Festival of Miracles.

It is said that if one endeavors in accomplishing virtue and abandoning non-virtue on this day, one will gather a particularly great amount of merit.

Saga Dawa

The fourth month of the Tibetan calendar is called the Month of Saga (Saga Dawa). Among the indescribable deeds said to have been performed by our teacher Shakyamuni in order to establish disciples in the state of liberation and omniscience, it was during this month of Saga Dawa that he performed the deeds of taking birth, taking ordination, vanquishing demons, accomplishing buddhahood, and passing into nirvana. Thus, these five holy days all converge in this month.

In particular, the 15th day (Saga Dawa Düchen) is an extraordinary day where three great events converged, namely his birth, his attainment of buddhahood, and his passage into nirvana. Accordingly, the blessings and benefits of accumulating pure virtuous actions on this holy day are extremely great. On that day, take full advantage of the Saga Dawa festival to accomplish excellent virtuous actions, such as receiving dharma teachings, hanging prayer flags on holy mountains, making monetary offerings to beggars with a heart full of love, visiting nearby monasteries to pray and make offerings and the like.

The Festival of the Turning of the Wheel

The Festival of the Turning of the Wheel (Chökhör Düchen), on the fourth day of the sixth month, is the extraordinary sacred day on which the wheel of dharma was first turned.

Before this although our peerless Teacher, the Lord of Sages, had already attained awakening in Bodhgaya, the time had not yet come for him to turn the wheel of dharma. The Buddha himself said:

I have found a nectar-like dharma that is
 profound,
 Peaceful, non-conceptual, luminous, and
 unconditioned.

Whomsoever I teach it to will not understand.
 Therefore I will not speak, but will stay in the
 forest.

At the moment that he was thinking like this, of staying in the forest for a short time without speaking, he was approached by Indra, the Lord of Gods, and Brahma, who offered a resplendent thousand-spoked golden wheel and the white conch of dharma which coils to the right. In this way they entreated the Buddha to turn the wheel of dharma. Seeing that the time had come on this fourth day of the sixth month of the Tibetan calendar, the Buddha went to the Deer Park in Sarnath, next to Varanasi, and gave his first set of teachings on the Four Truths of Noble Ones to the

retinue of the five excellent disciples. Thus he turned the wheel of dharma for the first time.

On account of those events, this day is recognized as an especially important and sacred day by all Buddhists in general and by Tibetan Buddhists in particular. If, on this day at dawn, one makes vast and profound offerings to stupas and temples in commemoration of the kindness of our Teacher, one will gather the excellent accumulations of merit and wisdom.

The Festival of the Descent from Heaven

The twelve deeds performed by our Teacher, the supreme Buddha Shakyamuni, in order to guide his disciples toward liberation and omniscience have been enumerated in many different ways. Among these, some include the sacred day of his descent from heaven, a feat which he performed at the age of forty-one. Tibetan Buddhists mark the 22nd day of the ninth month as being this day when he descended from the god realms to the human realm. Every year, on this date, they visit their local monasteries and endeavor in pure and virtuous actions, such as prostrating and making offerings.



Chapter 33
The 10th, the 25th, and Other Special Days

The 10th day is a great day of worship within the Nyingma School. Indeed, Guru Rinpoche displayed his main feats in this world on the tenth day of the waxing moon of each month. Therefore, this is a special day on which Guru Rinpoche, together with his assembly of dakas and dakinis, appears for the world in general and for Nyingma followers in particular, accomplishing the benefit of beings. Accordingly, elaborate offerings are traditionally prepared at every Nyingma monastery on this sacred day.

The 25th day is the tenth day of the waning moon, and is the day that is sacred to the gathering of dakinis. On this day too, Tibetan Buddhists assemble in vast gatherings and prepare elaborate gathering offerings.

Additionally, it is said that the full moon day (the 15th of the month), the new moon (the 30th), and special days of solar and lunar eclipses are times of great strife between the gods and demi-gods. Moreover, these eclipses are said to be times when the sun and the moon have been caught by Rahu (the eclipse-making demon), and the Buddha is trying to liberate them. Likewise, some eminent scholars say that

the 8th of the month is a time when crocodiles kill many sea creatures. It is therefore said that if one especially endeavors to do prostrations, pay homage, and make offerings on these days, then the merit is greater than at other times.



Chapter 34

The Way of Offering Food and Drink

Whenever we eat or drink anything, independent of its quantity or quality, there is the custom of first offering it to the Three Jewels. This is not just a custom for us Buddhists, but is present in non-Buddhist traditions as well. As for Buddhists, the object to whom we offer is the Three Jewels; and the method, or approach, to do this is quite a wonderful way of accumulating merit.

Before enjoying whatever food or drink we have, we first offer a portion of it to the precious buddha, dharma, and sangha. The reason for doing this is that by offering a portion to the Three Jewels, any defilements or impurities within the food are diminished. And through the act of outwardly offering the food, blessings enter into our mindstreams and obstacles of sickness and evil forces are pacified among with many other benefits.

Specifically when offering, having faith that they are actually and vividly present, we visualize in the sky before us the guru surrounded by a vast ocean-like gathering of the Three Jewels and Three Roots. Then with our palms joined before us, we recite the liturgy of offering:

OM AH HUM

To the precious buddha, the unsurpassable teacher,
To the precious dharma, the unsurpassable protector,
To the precious sangha, the unsurpassable guide;
To our refuge, the Three Jewels, we offer this.

Throughout all our lifetimes,
May we never be parted from the Three Jewels,
And by making constant offerings to the Three Jewels,
May the blessings of the Three Jewels enter us!

If one recites this one-pointedly while offering, it is said that immeasurable merit will be accumulated.



Chapter 35
The Wheel of Life



A traditional illustration of the Wheel of Life

The entirety of the six classes of sentient beings circle and wander within either the lower realms of affliction or the higher realms of comfort. The Wheel of Life is an illustration showing the reasons for this cycling or wandering.

It is said that the Wheel of Life was initially made according to Buddha Shakyamuni's instructions as a reciprocating gift given to the ancient Indian king of Rashasa from the king Bimbisara.

In the center the images of a chicken, snake, and pig represent the three poisons that are the principle causes for the six realms of beings to wander endlessly in samsara. First, the chicken represents desire and attachment; second, the snake represents anger and aversion; and third, the pig represents delusion and ignorance. Both the chicken and snake are portrayed as emerging from the mouth of the pig. This signifies that the principle cause of desire and anger is ignorance itself.

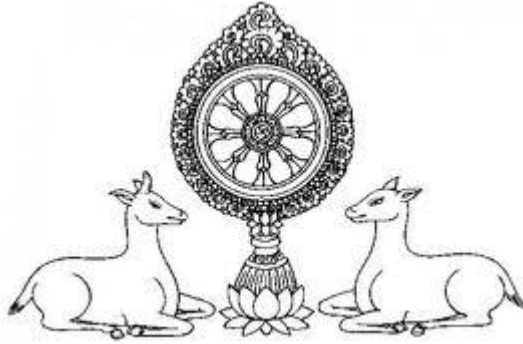
The drawing of the black and white edges illustrates the virtuous 'white' karma and negative 'black' karma, distinguishing the pleasant and unpleasant realms of existence. Through the ripening of negative actions, one will certainly fall into the lower realms. Within the intermediate state, one will experience being led with your head slumped downwards, pulled by the ropes of the Lord of Death's henchmen. However, through the power of merit, one is born in the higher realms. In that case, similar to when moonlight spreads over the

night sky, or when the sun's rays first touch the white snowy mountains, beings experience traversing along an ascending path, or experience a direct transcendence upwards, where there is no suffering or terror of the Lord of Death's henchmen.

The realms of gods, humans, and asuras (demi-gods) are the three higher realms, and the realms of hell, hungry-ghosts (pretas), and animals are the three lower realms and each one is depicted between one of the six spokes of the wheel in order. The principle teaching portrayed in the Wheel of Life is the suffering of the six classes of beings: for as long as our mother sentient beings do not attain liberation, they continue to transmigrate from life to life undergoing the sufferings of samsara.



Chapter 36
The Dharma Wheel with a Pair of
Deer



As Buddhists, when visiting a monastery, the first thing we see is a pair of male and female deer at either side of an eight-spoked dharma wheel at the highest point of the monastery roof. Regarding the essential meaning of the dharma wheel, from a historical perspective it is said to have been offered in the form of a thousand-spoked wheel to Shakyamuni Buddha by Brahma when requesting him to teach the sacred dharma. At that moment, from the forest came a pair of male and female deer, also known as the krishnasara antelope of compassion. With unblinking gaze, they looked at the wheel with joy and delight. Subsequently, the Buddha related the noble eightfold path with the wheel.

Likewise, he related the male and female beings whose mindstreams are touched by this path with the pair of male and female deer. Ever since then, the wheel flanked by a pair of deer has been a special symbol for Buddhists.

Its Symbolism

The eight-spoked wheel represents the first turning of the dharma wheel by the Buddha. The male and female deer on the right and left represent the male and female disciples who one-pointedly enjoy and take pleasure in listening to the teachings of the holy dharma. The interior eight spokes represent the moral conduct of discipline from among the Three Trainings. The intermediate eight spokes represent the training in wisdom and the noble eightfold path. The outer eight spokes represent the training in samadhi, or meditative concentration. The entirety of the Buddha's teachings are contained within the Three Trainings and noble eightfold path. The pair of deer represent skilful means and wisdom, and based upon the unity of skilful means and wisdom, buddhahood can be attained.

In brief, just as all the world's different religions and countries have their own symbols and insignia, the dharma wheel with the pair of deer is the sign of Buddhism. Furthermore, this symbol was also the seal of the glorious Buddhist University of Nalanda in India long ago.



Chapter 37

The Buddhist Flag



Generally speaking, flags are used to display a group's excellent qualities and to express their individuality; but specifically, a flag's utility is to express one's identity, and to indicate victory and success. For the same purpose, the Buddhist flag was created with this intention.

In 1884, the Buddhist flag was created in Sri Lanka by the American military officer, Mr Henry Steele Alcott on Lord Shakyamuni's birthday. The flag has six colors representing the six colored lights that the Buddha radiated at the time of complete enlightenment. The colors of the flag were decided

upon in 1956 after six conferences were held in friendship among the Buddhist community in Burma.

The meaning of the six colored stripes of the flag in subsequent order are: (1) The blue stripe represents the blue light-rays that radiated from the Buddha's hair, pervading the whole cosmos with love, compassion, peace, and happiness. (2) The gold stripe represents the golden light-rays that radiated from the Buddha's skin, displaying the Middle Way, free from the extremes of permanence and nihilism. (3) The red stripe represents the red light-rays that radiated from the Buddha's flesh, displaying excellent realization from practice and virtuous merit. (4) The white stripe represents the white light-rays that radiated from the Buddha's bones and teeth, displaying genuine accomplishment without flaws or stains, along with the truth that the Buddha's teachings on the nature of liberation are ever-present, whether in an excellent or empty kalpa (meaning whether the Buddhas teach or whether no Buddhas are present). (5) The orange stripe represents the orange light-rays that radiated from the Buddha's palms, heels, and lips, displaying the power of wisdom and the majestic brilliance of the dharma's rich essential meaning. (6) The last stripe of combined colors represents the universal truth of the Buddha's teachings. The horizontal stripes represent the world's people in harmony, peace, and happiness, and the vertical stripes show the continuous tranquility of the Buddhist community.

The Buddhist flag in its entirety signifies the indivisibility of all sentient beings regardless of situation, race, nationality, class, color and so forth. For all sentient beings have within them the seed of omniscience and each has the capacity and potential for enlightenment.



Chapter 38

The Benefits of Dedication and Aspiration

The Difference Between These Two

The difference between dedication and aspiration depends on whether or not there is virtue to dedicate. By means of the presence and power of having a specific virtuous act to dedicate, one makes aspirations for such and such to be accomplished. This is called dedication. If there is no specific virtuous act to be dedicated, and one makes aspirations for such and such to be accomplished, this is called aspiration.

The Benefits

From the sutras:

Just as a drop of water that falls into the ocean
 Will never disappear until the ocean runs dry,
 Merit totally dedicated to enlightenment
 Will never disappear until enlightenment is
 reached.⁵⁵

The amassing of the two accumulations of merit and wisdom relies upon the dedications and aspirations made continuously throughout all our lifetimes. And ultimately, the effortless accomplishment of the benefit

of beings and the emptying of samsara also arises from dedications and aspirations. If one makes aspirations, it is like a wish-fulfilling jewel; if not, the necessary result will never come about. Therefore, it is vital to seal all virtue with a dedication.

The Witnesses of the Dedication of Virtue

The witnesses of the dedication of virtue are the gurus and the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions.

The Dedicated Object

What is to be dedicated is all the virtue one has performed and rejoiced in throughout the three times. That is the primary virtue that one dedicates.

To Whom One Dedicates

One dedicates to all six classes of beings.

The Purpose of Dedication

One dedicates so that the single remedy to the suffering of sentient beings, the sacred and precious dharma of scripture and realization, may, in all places and times, spread and remain steadfast, and that through the strength of this dedication, it becomes the cause for the freedom of sentient beings from suffering and its causes, and ultimately the attainment of omniscient buddhahood.

How to Dedicate

When dedicating, one makes a dedication that is free from the three spheres. It is said in the scriptures:

Naturally free from any reference to
 The dedication, dedicator, and what is
 dedicated,
 Dedication free from reference points
 Is said to be unsurpassable dedication.

Beginner practitioners may not be able to make a dedication genuinely free of three spheres. In that case, they can make concordant dedications, meaning to dedicate while arousing confidence in the fact that things appear yet lack true existence. Alternatively, if one also doesn't know how to do that one should dedicate thinking, "I dedicate this virtue just as the bodhisattvas Manjushri, Samantabhadra and so on dedicated."

The noble ones, unbound by clinging to the three spheres as truly existent, dedicate infused with emptiness endowed with all supreme qualities. This is the meaning of genuine dedication free from the three spheres. It is very important that we transform our intentions with dedications and aspirations. Therefore, we should exert ourselves in this with great effort.



Chapter 39

Conclusion

These collected words of the wise
 I have compiled with pure intention, white like
 snow mountains,
 As an aid to striving and interested beginners
 And to help spread the Buddha's teachings
 throughout the world.
 Therefore, whatever virtue is accumulated thus,
 I quickly dedicate it so that I and all my mothers,
 As vast as the sky, may be liberated from the
 Impure and limitless ocean of samsara.

The explanations contained within these chapters I
 compiled for the benefit of diligent and enthusiastic
 practitioners new to the dharma, so that they can come
 to understand and realize the meaning of the victory
 banner of the excellent speech of the great learned
 ones of Tibet and India.

As an ordinary being, it is possible that additions or
 omissions regarding both the words and meaning, as
 well as mistakes and misunderstandings, may be
 present. Thus, I pray that those of wisdom and
 scholarship, from all directions, look upon me with
 patience and forgiveness.

Completed in the common year of 2013, on 30th
December. May these teachings transform into
medicine for beings!

SARVA MANGALAM! VIRTUE! VIRTUE!

Endnotes

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- ¹ *Buddha Nature, The Mahayana Uttaratantra Shastra with Commentary*, translated by Rosemarie Fuchs (Snow Lion, 2000), 73.
- ² *The Sutra of the Recollection of the Noble Three Jewels*, translated by the Nalanda Translation Committee under the direction of the Vidyadhara, Venerable Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche.
- ³ *Ornament of the Great Vehicle Sūtras*, translated by the Dharmachakra Translation Committee (Snow Lion Publications, 2014), 579-580.
- ⁴ *Aryadeva's Four Hundred Stanzas on the Middle Way*, translated by Ruth Sonam (Snow Lion Publications, 2008), 239.
- ⁵ *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, Patrul Rinpoche, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group (Sacred Literature, 1998), 8.
- ⁶ Ibid. 9.
- ⁷ Ibid. 11-12.
- ⁸ Ibid. 12.
- ⁹ Ibid. 173.
- ¹⁰ *The Treasury of Precious Qualities, Book One*, Jigme Lingpa, Longchen Yeshe Dorje, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group (Shambhala, 2010), 52.
- ¹¹ Translated by Lotsawa House. www.lotsawahouse.org
- ¹² *The Treasury of Precious Qualities, Book One*, 52.
- ¹³ *The Treasury of Precious Qualities, Book One*, 53.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ *The Sutra of the Recollection of the Noble Three Jewels*.
- ¹⁷ *The Treasury of Precious Qualities, Book One*, 53.

¹⁸ *Buddha Nature*, 21.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *The Sutra of the Recollection of the Noble Three Jewels*.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *The Treasury of Precious Qualities, Book One*, 54.

²³ *Buddha Nature*, 21.

²⁴ *The Sutra of the Recollection of the Noble Three Jewels*.

²⁵ *Perfect Conduct: Ascertaining the Three Vows*, Ngari Penchen with commentary by Dudjom Rinpoche, translated by Khenpo Gyurme Samdrub and Sangye Khandro (Wisdom Publications, 1999), 159.

²⁶ WMPT, 191.

²⁷ *Introduction to the Middle Way*, Chandrakirti with commentary by Jamgön Mipham, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group (Shambhala, 2005), 59.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 85.

²⁹ *In Praise of Dharmadhatu*, Nagarjuna and the Third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje, translated and introduced by Karl Brunnhölzl (Snow Lion, 2007), 50.

³⁰ WMPT, 8.

³¹ *Nagarjuna's Letter to a Friend, with commentary by Kyabje Kangyur Rinpoche*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group (Snow Lion Publications, 2005), 84.

³² WMPT, 283.

³³ *Ibid.*, 283-284.

³⁴ Translations of both the thirty-sevenfold mandala offering as well as the sevenfold mandala offering are available on www.lhaseylotsawa.org.

³⁵ "Cow substances" refers to a set of five substances from a cow that are regarded as having cleansing properties, namely urine, dung, milk, butter, and curd. Alternatively, these five

are sometimes enumerated as urine, dung, mucus, saliva, and milk.

³⁶ From *The King of Aspiration Prayers*, translated by Lotsawa House.

³⁷ The general confession to the tathagatas is the *Three Heaps Sutra*, also know as the *Bodhisattva's Confession of Downfalls*. A full translation of it is available for download at www.lhaseylotsawa.org.

³⁸ This and all the following quotations in this chapter are translated by Lotsawa House. See www.lotsawahouse.org, or www.lhaseylotsawa.org for a full translation of this practice.

³⁹ WMPT, 173.

⁴⁰ *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, by Shantideva, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group (Shambhala, 1997), 110.

⁴¹ Ibid. 80

⁴² Ibid. 122

⁴³ Translated by Lotsawa House.

⁴⁴ Maitreya, *Ornament of the Great Vehicle Sūtras: Maitreya's Mahāyānasūtralamkāra with Commentaries by Khenpo Shenga and Ju Mipham*, transkated by Dharmachakra Translation Committee (Snow Lion, 2014), 434.

⁴⁵ Maitreya, *Middle Beyond Extremes: Maitreya's Madhyāntavibhāga with Commentaries by Khenpo Shenga and Ju Mipham*, translated by Dharmachakra Translation Committee (Snow Lion, 2006), 105.

⁴⁶ Maitreya, *Ornament*, 106.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 107.

⁴⁸ See Book Eight, Chapter One of *The Treasury of Knowledge* (Snow Lion, 2013) for more details.

⁴⁹ Translated by Lotsawa House.

⁵⁰ Maitreya, *Ornament*, 467.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 462-3.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 531.

⁵³ *Nagarjuna's Letter to a Friend with Commentary by Kyabje Kangyur Rinpoche*, 69.

⁵⁴ *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, 110.

⁵⁵ WMPT, 367.



Please do not leave this book lying on your shrine, but keep it close to your heart.

Take it out of the dark and read it again and again.

Take the meaning of the words to heart and put them into action.

Thus I humbly request you to engage correctly in what is to be accepted and what rejected.

~ Patrul Rinpoche

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