



Shenpen Ösel

The Clear Light of the Buddha's Teachings Which Benefits All Beings

Volume 4, Number 1

June 2000



Through cultivating the stages of the practice of the Medicine Buddha—the generation stage and the completion stage—we not only achieve benefit for ourselves, but we are actually cultivating the potential to benefit others. And by doing these practices we actually bless the environment and all the beings in that environment.

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Contents

This issue of Shenpen Ösel is devoted to a series of teachings on the Medicine Buddha Sadhana given by the Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche in the Cascade Mountains in Washington state in June of 1999. In addition to the translated, transcribed, edited text of the teachings, we have published the text that was the subject of Rinpoche's commentary.

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Shenpen Ösel is a tri-annual publication of Kagyu Shenpen Ösel Chöling (KSOC), a center for the study and practice of Tibetan vajrayana Buddhism located in Seattle, Washington. The magazine seeks to present the teachings of recognized and fully qualified lamas and teachers, with an emphasis on the Karma Kagyu and the Shangpa Kagyu lineages. The contents are derived in large part from transcripts of teachings hosted by our center. Shenpen Ösel is produced and mailed exclusively through volunteer labor and does not make a profit. (Your subscriptions and donations are greatly appreciated.) We publish with the aspiration to present the clear light of the Buddha's teachings. May it bring benefit and may all be auspicious. May all beings be inspired and assisted in uncovering their own true nature.

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Introduction

All of the Buddha's teachings can be subsumed under the two categories of shamatha and vipashyana—calm abiding and insight. In the hinayana traditions of Buddhism the intention of the vipashyana teachings is to establish the lack of true existence of the individual—sometimes called one-fold egolessness, the selflessness of the individual, the identitylessness of the individual—and the lack of true existence of gross phenomena or things. The intention of the vipashyana teachings of the first half of the mahayana teachings—the second turning of the wheel of dharma—is to extend this understanding to include the lack of true existence even of the most subtle phenomenon, including atoms and subatomic matter and energy, time, and all forms of consciousness itself. These two understandings together are referred to as two-fold egolessness, the selflessness of the individual and the selflessness of phenomena, and are both included in the terms sunyata or emptiness.

The second half of the mahayana teachings—the third turning of the wheel of dharma—goes on to teach that emptiness is not simply a mere nothingness, nor merely the other side of the coin of interdependence, nor even simply a state beyond all conceptuality. The third turning teaches that this emptiness—while lacking any limiting characteristics, such as color, shape, size, location, substance, or gender, and being empty of all cognitive and emotional obscurations—is not empty of its own nature, the radiant clarity of mind and reality, which we refer to as clear light, in which all the positive qualities of intelligence, wisdom, compassion, skillful means, devotion, confidence, etc., inhere as one undifferentiable quality. Various manifestations of this quality arise out of the clear light nature in the form of the deities of the vajrayana tradition such as the Medicine Buddha, Vajrayogini, Tara, or Chenrezig. And although it is said from the standpoint of relative truth that these deities actually do exist as individual beings who can be supplicated, they exist as such because, and only because, the qualities that they embody were already inherent in the clear light nature, the buddha nature, of their own minds when they were confused sentient beings, just as they inherently exist today in the minds of all confused beings.

The essential nature of all deities can be better understood by understanding the essential nature of their body, speech, and mind. The body of the deity is the union of appearance and emptiness and emerges in the practitioner's experience when the experience of perceiver and perceived is purified. What is it purified of? Grasping and fixation. Grasping or clinging to a self, and fixating on an other. In the words of Guru Rinpoche, "Perceiver and perceived when purified are the body of the deity, clear emptiness."

The speech of the deity is the union of sound and emptiness. We all know that sound is intangible, but sounds without the experience of their emptiness have tremendous power

to hurt us, to insult us, to exalt us, to exhilarate us, etc. But when sounds and verbal communications are experienced as mere sounds, as the union of sound and emptiness, their power over us dissolves and we experience perfect equanimity.

The mind of the deity is the union of awareness and emptiness. The experiences of the five sense consciousnesses and of the mental consciousness give rise to a constantly changing kaleidoscope of thoughts, mental afflictions, and subtle dualistic perceptions which have the power, in the absence of the experiential understanding of their emptiness, to involve us in the most outrageous, outlandish, though sometimes very subtle, melodramas of the mind. But when their essential emptiness is recognized, and one ceases to welcome and reject, they dissolve or are self-liberated in their own place, the space of empty awareness. All deities share these three aspects of the essential nature—which we also call mahamudra or dzogchen—and all practitioners who practice deity meditation with sufficient diligence and perseverance will come to realize this very same nature—the body, speech, and mind of the deity—in themselves as they become the deity.

At the same time, each deity has its own particular relative blessing. If one meditates on Chenrezig, ultimately one will realize mahamudra or dzogchen, and attain buddhahood. But in the short run, one will experience a strengthening of one's loving kindness and compassion. If one meditates on Green Tara, ultimately one will attain enlightenment, but in the short run, one will experience freedom from fear and mental paralysis, the increased ability to accomplish one's objectives, and an increase in active compassion. If one meditates on Manjushri, in the end one will attain enlightenment, but in the short run one will experience an increase in intelligence, insight, and wisdom. If one meditates on the Medicine Buddha, one will eventually attain enlightenment, but in the meantime one will experience an increase in healing powers both for oneself and others and a decrease in physical and mental illness and suffering. Whether or not we have a very strong motive to attain buddhahood, we all desire these sorts of relative objectives, so deity meditation provides tremendous incentive for the practice of dharma.

And yet deity meditation is just another version of shamatha and vipashyana. When one meditates on the form, the attire and other attributes, the entourage and environment, and the internal mandala of a deity, and when one recites the deity's mantra, one is practicing shamatha; and when one realizes that all that one is meditating on is mere empty appearance, one is practicing vipashyana. But because meditation on the deity and on the union of the deity and one's own root lama instantly connects one with the empty clear light nature—which is the essence of the deity, the guru, and the lineage, as well as being one's own essential nature—the power of this form of shamatha to purify the mind of the practitioner of the mental obscurations blocking his or her insight is immeasurably greater than that of ordinary tranquillity meditation on mundane objects like the breath or a flower or a candle flame. And since the forms upon which one is meditating are mere mental fabrications, their emptiness is more immediately apparent than, say, the emptiness of something like the Jefferson Memorial or the Washington Monument.

This is all possible because of the special quality of the vajrayana, which takes enlightenment as the path, rather than seeing it merely as a goal. Through the three processes of abhisheka, which ripens the mental continuum; oral transmission, which supports one's practice; and the teachings, which liberate, one is connected directly to the enlightened state transmitted by the guru and the lineage. Thereafter, when one practices or merely brings to mind those teachings, one is instantly reconnected with that compassionate

primordial awareness, and this constant reconnecting then becomes one's path, bringing with it the rapid purification of mental defilements and the rapid accumulation of merit and wisdom. The recognition of this connection is the uncovering of one's own wisdom. If it goes unrecognized, it still exists in the practitioner's mental continuum as a seed, which will gradually ripen according to conditions.

The teachings on the Medicine Buddha in this issue of *Shenpen Ösel* present the stages of practice of the Medicine Buddha Sadhana. In it the Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche elucidates not only the details of this particular practice, but also many of the basic principles of tantric theory and practice in general: the notion of deities and buddha realms, the principles of samayasattva and jnanasattva, the principles of emanating and gathering, and the use of offerings to cultivate qualities, to mention a few. For anyone engaged in any vajrayana practice, this teaching is very useful in understanding the foundations of tantric practice, and a garden of delights.

Thrangu Rinpoche's teachings on the Medicine Buddha Sutra—the next seven teachings in this series—will be carried in the next issue of *Shenpen Ösel*.




The reader will notice that most of the deities in this particular mandala are male. One should not conclude therefrom that this is typical of tantric mandalas. There are some mandalas—such as Arya Tara, Vajrayogini, and Chöd—in which the deities are virtually all female, others that are balanced, and others that vary slightly more one way than the other.



Also included in this issue is a remarkable teaching on mahamudra by Gampopa, elucidated by the Very Venerable Tenga Rinpoche. It will be of notable interest to anyone who thinks that they are getting somewhere or anyone who actually is getting somewhere with their mahamudra practice. In five short sentences, Gampopa describes the stages one must accomplish on the path to buddhahood.



Finally, one will find an update on the activities at Kala Rongo, the women's monastery in eastern Tibet, and on the other activities of Lama Norlha and Kagyu Thubten Chöling in eastern Tibet. 

—Lama Tashi Namgyal



The Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche

Medicine Buddha

A Practice That Is Extremely Effective In the Removal of Sickness

In the Cascade Mountains in Washington, in June of 1999, the Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche led an eight-day retreat to teach the Medicine Buddha Sadhana and Medicine Buddha Sutra. Rinpoche gave the teachings in Tibetan; they were orally translated by Lama Yeshe Gyamtso. The following is an edited transcript.

Iwould like to begin by welcoming all of you here today and thanking you all for coming. I am delighted to have this opportunity to meet with you, to study the Medicine Buddha practice together with you, and to talk with you about dharma. As usual, we are going to begin by reciting the lineage supplication. While doing so, please generate strong devotion for the root guru and the other gurus of the lineage, such as Vajradhara, Tilopa, Naropa, and so forth.

[Recitation of lineage supplication.]

First, in order to listen to the teachings properly, please generate the attitude of bodhicitta, which is necessary for the practice of dharma in general, and

particularly for the practice of something like the Medicine Buddha. While listening to the teachings, please think that you are listening to them and will practice them in order to be of the greatest possible benefit to all beings.

We might think that there is something of a contradiction between the motivation with which we might practice the Medicine Buddha and the motivation of bodhicitta. We might think that fundamentally we are practicing the Medicine Buddha in order to benefit our own bodies, whereas the motivation of bodhicitta is the wish to benefit all beings. But in fact there is no contradiction, because, in order to be effective in benefiting other beings, we need to accomplish an excellent samadhi or meditative absorption; and in order to accomplish that, together with the insight and realization that it brings, we need to have a stable practice. In order to have a stable and profound practice, we need to be physically and mentally healthy or comfortable, because by being comfortable in our body, and comfortable in our mind, we will be free of obstacles to diligence in practice and free of obstacles to the cultivation of meditative absorption. So therefore, we are practicing the Medicine Buddha in order to attain states of mental and physical health or balance, not merely for our own benefit, but for the benefit of others as well.

There is, therefore, no contradiction between the motivation you might have for practicing the Medicine Buddha and your motivation for practicing dharma in general. We practice dharma in order to attain buddhahood, and we practice the Medicine Buddha in order to attain that same goal. We may be practicing it specifically in order to attain a state of mental and physical health in this life, but when we practice the Medicine Buddha in this way, we are not really limiting our motivation to our attainment of

We are practicing the Medicine Buddha in order to attain states of mental and physical health or balance, not merely for our own benefit, but for the benefit of others as well

mental and physical health, because by means of that practice we can accomplish great benefit for ourselves and others; and we can successfully complete our practice of dharma in the sense of attaining buddhahood.

Furthermore, by practicing the Medicine Buddha, we not only achieve health in this life but we cause ourselves to be blessed by the Medicine Buddha throughout all future lives as well. And through cultivating the stages of the practice of the Medicine Buddha—the generation stage and the completion stage—we not only achieve benefit for ourselves, but we are actually cultivating the potential to benefit others. And by doing these practices we actually bless the environment and all the beings in that environment.

The practice of the Medicine Buddha is fundamentally a mental practice, a practice of meditation. Now, you might wonder how something you are doing primarily with your mind could affect your body. How could practicing the Medicine Buddha preserve your physical health or alleviate physical sickness? You might think that the mind and body are fundamentally unrelated, and that therefore the practice of meditation cannot affect our bodies. In fact, our bodies and minds are extremely interrelated. The body supports or is the container for our mind, but the body is also based upon or supported by the mind. Therefore, the practice of meditation does affect your body and your physical state. Specifically, in the meditation practice of the Medicine Buddha, in addition to visualizing the Medicine Buddha in front of you, you are also visualizing your own body as the body of the Medicine Buddha. These and other visualizations, and the recitation of the mantra and so forth, which initially or primarily seem only to affect the mind, do, therefore, eventually affect the body as well.

We practice fundamentally with our minds, but this practice does affect and benefit both the mind and the body. As is generally taught, what we identify as our mind consists of eight different consciousnesses, or functions of consciousness. These arise the way they do because of the connection between body and mind. For example, one of the eight consciousnesses is the eye consciousness, the visual consciousness. This consciousness is a function of three things: its object, which is visible forms; its organic support, which is the eye as an organ of vision; and the consciousness, which is the mind functioning in connection with these two. Now, the point of this is that the visual consciousness never arises in isolation from an object and an organic support. It arises *because* the organic support is capable of detecting its appropriate object—in this case, visible form. Therefore, because the object, the organ, and the consciousness are so intimately interrelated or interconnected, the transformation of any one of these will necessarily affect the aspect or manner of the other two. Therefore, just as when an object is changed, that affects the visual consciousness of that object in dependence upon the organ; and when the organ is changed, that affects the visual consciousness and therefore the perceived objects; in the same way, when the consciousness is transformed, as it is through the practice of meditation, that affects the perception of objects and the organic support itself.

In the same way, our other senses arise as consciousnesses in connection with their objects and their organic supports. Based upon the organ of the ear, there arises what is called the ear consciousness or hearing, which experiences its object, audible sounds. In dependence upon the organic support of the nose, there arises the nose consciousness, which detects smells. In dependence upon the organ of the tongue, there arises the tongue

consciousness, which detects tastes. And in dependence on the organic support of the body and the nerves of the body, there arises the body consciousness, which detects or experiences tactile sensations. All of these consciousnesses arise or are generated by the presence of an object which is encountered by its appropriate organ. Sometimes they arise based upon the organ itself experiencing the sensation, but in any case, the sensations of the five senses that we experience are functions of the organs and the objects experienced by these organs, which generate appropriate consciousnesses. Because the consciousness pervades the experience of its object and the experience of the organ itself, if the consciousness is transformed, or one's mode of experience of consciousness is transformed, into pure appearance, then the appearances of the objects, and also of the organs themselves, will become pure or sacred. It is in this way that

the practice of this form of meditation can benefit not only your mind but also your body.

In addition to the five sense consciousnesses, the sixth consciousness, which is the mental consciousness, also arises in connection with physical experience. Now, according to the abhidharma, the mental consciousness does not rely exclusively upon a specific physical organ support the way the five sense consciousnesses do. The condition that leads to the arising of the mental consciousness is the previous moment of that consciousness itself. Generally speaking, this

arises to some extent on the impressions produced by the physical experience of the senses. So, indirectly, we could say that the organ support for the mental consciousness is the momentum of all of the consciousnesses connected with sense experience. But the mental consciousness itself is that which generates and experiences all of the varieties of emotion and thought that we

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know—attachment, aversion, bewilderment, apathy, pride, jealousy, feelings of joy and delight, feelings of sadness, feelings of faith and compassion, etc.—all of these different emotional states and all of the thoughts connected with them are varieties of experiences of the sixth or mental consciousness. Now, as these various thoughts and emotions pass through our minds, they transform and influence that consciousness itself. But not only that—they also affect the five sense consciousnesses. For example, when you are very sad and you look at something, you will perceive it as sad, or as unpleasant. If you look at the identical object when you are happy, you will see the same thing as pleasant. And if you look at it when you are angry, you will see, again, the same object as entirely different. This is a very simple example of how the mental consciousness in particular and our mind in general affects our experience of sense objects and the sense consciousnesses and the sense organs themselves.

Of the eight consciousnesses, the most evident in our experience are these six consciousnesses, or six functions: the five sense consciousnesses and the mental consciousness. But there are, in addition to these, two other functions of mind, which are called stable or underlying consciousnesses or functions. These are the seventh consciousness, which is the subtle mental affliction, and the eighth consciousness, which is called the all-basis. The seventh consciousness, the consciousness which is the root of mental affliction, refers to the subtle, fundamental misapprehension of an existent self, the fixation on a self. This fixation is itself the root of samsara. It is not, however, regarded as an unvirtuous or negative thing in itself. It is morally neutral. But because it is ignorance and the basis of further ignorance, it

By replacing the thought of yourself as yourself with the thought of yourself as the Medicine Buddha, you gradually counteract and remove the fixation on your personal self

is regarded as the most fundamental and important thing to be abandoned or relinquished. In fact, we could say that the teachings of buddhadharma are mainly about how to abandon this fixation on self. It is for that reason that there is so much emphasis in buddhadharma on the meditations on selflessness, emptiness, and so forth. Through these meditations one can realize selflessness, through which one relinquishes the kleshas, through which one attains liberation.

The meditation upon selflessness, however, and specifically the meditation upon the lack of true existence of the personal self,* does not consist of trying to imagine or convince yourself that you are nothing whatsoever. It is done, especially in the visualization practices of the generation stage of tantra, by replacing your solid sense of your own existence with something else. In the case of the Medicine Buddha practice, you relinquish the thought, “I am me, I am the person I think I am,” and replace it with the thought, “I am the Medicine

Buddha.” The primary technique in the meditation consists of imagining yourself to be the Medicine Buddha, conceiving of yourself as the Medicine Buddha. By replacing the thought of yourself as yourself with the thought of yourself as the Medicine Buddha, you gradually counteract and remove the fixation on your personal self. And as that fixation is removed, the power of the seventh consciousness is reduced. And as it is reduced, the kleshas or mental afflictions are gradually weakened, which causes you to experience greater and greater well-being in both body and mind.

***Editor’s note:** The meditation on selflessness is traditionally divided into realizing the lack of true existence of a personal self, what we usually think of as the self, and realizing the lack of true existence of phenomena.

The eighth consciousness is the all-basis consciousness, so called because it is the ground on which habits, both good and bad, accrue. We experience things the way we do because of the habits we have accumulated. As we accumulate good habits we have positive experiences, and as we accumulate bad habits we have negative experiences. The fundamental reason for our immersion in samsara is the accumulation of bad habits, some more virulent than others. The process of getting ourselves out of samsara consists of gradually weakening the bad habits and strengthening the good habits. For example, when we begin to practice, we have no confidence whatsoever that we really are the Medicine Buddha. We have a strong negative habit of regarding ourselves as whomever we regard ourselves to be. But through cultivating the technique and attitude of regarding ourselves as possessing the body, the speech, the mind, the qualities, and the blessings of the Medicine Buddha, then these natural qualities within us will increase.

The main practice in vajrayana consists of the generation stage, the cultivation of the practice of regarding oneself as a deity. From an ordinary point of view, we might regard this as useless. We would think, “Well, I am not a deity. What use is there in my pretending to be a deity?” But in fact, the root of samsara is the habit of impure perception. By regarding oneself as a deity one gradually purifies, weakens, and removes that habit and replaces it with the positive habit of pure perception. It is for this reason that the meditation upon oneself as a deity is considered so important.

In most religious traditions, the deities of that tradition, when they are related to or imagined, are imagined in front of one. Then, visualizing the deity or deities as being present in front of one, one prays to them, and by doing so hope-

fully one receives their blessing, which benefits one in some way. In the vajrayana tradition, however, we regard the blessing and the power and the qualities of the deities as being innate, as being within one’s own mind.

The process of getting ourselves out of samsara consists of gradually weakening the bad habits and strengthening the good habits

This innate presence of the wisdom and blessings of the deities in our own minds is called the unity of the expanse and wisdom, or the unity of space and wisdom. Of course, it is true that when we look at our minds, we have mental afflictions, we have thoughts, we have all kinds of suffering and problems. But at the same time we always have the innate potential to transcend these. And the reason why we have this innate potential is that the

nature of the mind and the nature of everything that arises in the mind is emptiness. Regardless of what is passing through your mind, your mind is always a boundless space of emptiness.

The innate potential of our minds lies in the very fact that our minds are empty. Because our minds are empty, all of the problems and sufferings and defects that arise in our minds can be removed or purified, because they too are empty. This emptiness of the mind is not absolute nothingness; it is not a static or dead or neutral emptiness, because, while emptiness is indeed the nature of the mind, the nature of that emptiness is wisdom—it is the innate potential for the arising of all qualities. In Buddhist scriptures this innate potential is called buddha nature.

Now, the process of working with our life situation through practice in tantric Buddhism consists first of acknowledging that one’s own basic nature is that potential, that buddha nature, and then of meditating upon its presence within one by regarding oneself as a deity. The form of the deity is the embodiment or expression of that potential, that unity of emptiness and wisdom, within one. It is through regarding oneself as the deity that defects are gradually eradicated and qualities gradually revealed. The

primary technique of visualization is to visualize ourselves as the deity, because the potential to transcend our problems is innate rather than external to us. Therefore, our main practice in meditation upon deities is the self-generation of the deity, visualizing oneself as the deity.

If you ask is this the only way in which we work with deities, the answer is no. We also visualize deities in front of us. Now, in the common tradition* of Buddhism, as is found in the scriptures of the Theravadin tradition and so on—which I cannot read in the Pali but have read in Tibetan translation—we find an extensive presentation by the Buddha that there is no external deity to be relied upon, that the path consists fundamentally of eradicating one’s own kleshas, thereby eventually attaining the state of an arhat or arhati without remainder. Thus in the sutras of the common vehicle, the state of liberation is presented as freedom from all kleshas, limitations, and attachment, but not particularly as an abiding wisdom.

However, in the sutras of the mahayana, and especially in the teachings of the vajrayana, it is clearly taught that once someone attains full liberation and buddhahood, they do not become nothing. The process of purification finally reveals, and therefore there remains, an enduring wisdom that is of the nature of nonconceptual compassion. The attainment of buddhahood, the path through which it is attained, really begins with the generation of bodhicitta, which is the intention to attain liberation so that one can bring all beings to the same state. Because that is the motivation with which the path is begun, when the result, which

***Editor’s note:** “The common tradition” is a way of referring to those teachings held in common by all traditions of Buddhism, which are the teachings on personal liberation of the hinayana or lesser vehicle.

The primary technique of visualization is to visualize ourselves as the deity, because the potential to transcend our problems is innate rather than external to us

is buddhahood, is attained, the result of that path is naturally spontaneous, impartial, and nonconceptual compassion. Therefore, we regard buddhas as having an awareness that is responsive to the needs of beings, and therefore as being open and accessible to our prayers and supplication. For that reason, while we primarily

visualize ourselves as deities, we also visualize the deities as present in front of us.

We supplement the visualization of ourselves as the deity with visualizations such as imagining the actual wisdom deities themselves dissolving into ourselves again and again, by means of which we receive their blessing. Sometimes we visualize the deity in front of us, separate from ourselves, thinking that rays of light from the deity’s heart engulf and pervade us, granting the blessing of the deity. And sometimes we visualize that rays of light, which embody the blessing of that deity in front of us, strike all beings, removing their obstacles,

increasing their longevity, wisdom, and so on. All of these visualizations are methods by which we arouse the compassion of all buddhas and cause their blessings to enter into ourselves and others.

All the yidams and deities used in meditation have the same fundamental nature and are utterly pure. Nevertheless they have different appearances, which reflect the different activities that they embody and engage in. These different activities are primarily determined by the individual aspirations they made at the time of their initial generation of bodhicitta. For example, in the case of the Medicine Buddha, there is a specific set of aspirations, as there is in the case of the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara or the bodhisattva Arya Tara. It is primarily for this reason that deities manifest in their varied appearances— sometimes appearing as male, in

which case they primarily embody upaya or method; sometimes appearing as female, in which case they primarily embody prajna or wisdom; sometimes appearing as peaceful, sometimes appearing as wrathful, and so on. In the case of the Medicine Buddha, at the time of his initial generation of bodhicitta—with which act he began the path that culminated in his attainment of buddhahood—his primary motivation was to remove all suffering of beings in general, but especially to remove the physical and mental sufferings of beings caused through the imbalance of the elements, which we know of as mental and physical illness. This was his primary motivation or aspiration throughout the three periods of innumerable eons during which he gathered the accumulations of merit and wisdom that culminated in his attainment of buddhahood as the Medicine Buddha. Therefore, as the Medicine Buddha, he possesses extraordinary ability and engages in extraordinary activity to pacify sickness. Whether you access this activity through visualizing yourself as the Medicine Buddha, or through arousing the compassion and activity of the Medicine Buddha as conceived of as external to yourself, in either case, the practice of the Medicine Buddha is supremely effective in the removal of sickness.

The practice of the Medicine Buddha comes primarily from the uncommon tradition of the vajrayana, which means that the transmission of the practice is done using three processes called the empowerment, which ripens; the instruction, which frees; and the reading transmission, which supports. The function of empowerment, the formal ceremony or ritual of empowerment, is to introduce you to the practice and to the process of visualization and so forth, which will make up the practice. The function of the instruction, which frees, is to give you complete access to the practice by means of telling you literally how to do it—what you do with your body, what you say with your speech, and what you think with your mind. The function of the reading transmission, which supports, is to transmit the blessing of the

lineage of the practice which serves to consecrate or bless your practice in the form of sound. Because the lineage has been transmitted as the sound of the words of its transmission, when the reading transmission is given to you, you simply listen to the sound and think that by doing so you receive the blessing of the lineage.

Today I will give the reading transmission, the *lung*, for the Medicine Buddha practice. The empowerment for the practice, I will give on Sunday. With regard to the empowerment, you should understand that the Medicine Buddha practice is not solely a vajrayana practice. Like the practice of mahamudra, it is a combination of vajrayana [tantra] and sutra. For example, while we could say that mahamudra is primarily taught in the vajrayana, it is also found in certain sutras, such as the *Samadhiraja Sutra*, and so forth. In the same way, this practice of the Medicine Buddha is a combination of what the Buddha taught about the Medicine Buddha in the sutras of the Medicine Buddha and in various tantras. Because it is connected with vajrayana, it is most appropriate to receive the empowerment to enhance the practice; but because it is also connected with the sutras, it is acceptable to do the practice without the empowerment as well. As you are receiving the reading transmission today, there is no particular visualization you need to do. Maintain the motivation of bodhicitta for receiving the transmission, and think that simply by hearing the sounds of the words as I read them you receive the transmission or blessing of the lineage of this practice.

[Rinpoche gives the reading transmission.]

To give you a support for your visualization of the Medicine Buddha when doing the practice, I am going to give each of you a small image of the Medicine Buddha. So please, in order to receive it, come up.

[Rinpoche hands out cards.]



Medicine Buddha

The Great King of Medicine Is Active in Pacifying the Suffering of Beings



Continuing the Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche's teaching on the Medicine Buddha.

We are now going to start going through the text itself, the liturgy for the practice, so that you will understand how to do it. As you will have noticed, the first part of the Medicine Buddha practice is the lineage supplication, which consists of the supplication of the principal Medicine Buddha, the seven accompanying Medicine Buddhas, the sixteen bodhisattvas, and finally, the holders and propagators of the teachings of the Medicine Buddha. The purpose of reciting this supplication at the beginning of the practice is to invoke and receive at the very beginning of the practice the blessing of the Medicine Buddha through the power of your faith in and devotion to the deity and to the lineage of this teaching.

The supplication begins with one line in the language of Sanskrit:

NAMO BEKENDZE MAHA RADZAYE

This means, “Homage to the great king of medicine.” The initial homage to the Medicine Buddha as the great king of medicine is done in Sanskrit because the source of the teachings of the vajrayana in particular, and of the buddhadharma in general—the original sutra and tantra teachings of the

Buddha Shakyamuni—were given primarily in Sanskrit. Moreover, the mahasiddhas, bodhisattvas, and shravakas of India also primarily used Sanskrit as their dharma language. Therefore, in order to maintain a connection with the source of the tradition, and because the Sanskrit language itself is held to bear great blessing, the initial supplication is made in Sanskrit, after which follows the main body of the supplication of the Medicine Buddha in Tibetan.

The first stanza of the supplication is addressed to the principal Medicine Buddha, and is based on the Buddha Shakyamuni's presentation of the Medicine Buddha's initial motivation for his path and the aspirations he made in connection therewith, as recorded in the sutras on the Medicine Buddha.*

**You are endowed with an oceanic treasury of qualities and merit;
By the blessing of your inconceivable compassion
You calm the suffering and torment of sentient beings.
I supplicate you, Light of Lapis Lazuli.**

The meaning of the stanza is that, because of the quality and special nature of his initial motivation and ensuing aspirations, the Medicine Buddha very quickly accumulated vast amounts of merit, as a result of which, while on the path and finally at the time of fruition or buddhahood, he came to embody a vast treasury of qualities associated with awakening. Therefore, because of his initial compassionate motivation and because of the qualities of his awakening, he possesses inconceivable blessing, by virtue of which, in accordance with his aspiration and motivation, he is active in pacifying the sufferings of beings. So in chanting the beginning of the supplication, you mention him by name, referring to him as the Light of Vaidurya.

***Editor's note:** The Medicine Buddha, when understood as an individual buddha who once was a sentient being, predates the Buddha Shakyamuni. Therefore, our knowledge of him is based, at least initially, on the teachings that arose spontaneously out of the supersensible cognition of the Buddha Shakyamuni.

The second stanza is also addressed to the Medicine Buddha, and it continues from the presentation in the first. In the first stanza you were essentially praising the fact that he embodies extraordinary merit and qualities as a result of his extraordinary motivation and aspirations. Upon his initial generation of bodhicitta the Medicine Buddha made twelve particular aspirations. In connection with these, the benefits of recollecting the name of the Medicine Buddha begin to be specified in the second stanza.

**Those bound by very intense greed
Are born in the hungry ghost realm.
If they hear your name, they are born human and
take delight in generosity.
I supplicate you, victorious Menla.**

Recollection of the name means keeping the name of the Medicine Buddha in mind by having an attitude of faith and devotion to the Medicine Buddha. The stanza says that even someone who, as a result of intense greed, is destined to be reborn as a preta or hungry ghost, if such a person hears the name of the Medicine Buddha, they will be reborn as a human being and will delight in generosity. In that way, you supplicate the Medicine Buddha by referring to the power or blessing of his name.

The next stanza gives a second benefit of recollecting and hearing the name of the Medicine Buddha.

**Violating morality and abusing others,
Beings are born in the hell realms.
Hearing your name, they are said to be born in
the higher realms.
I supplicate you, King of Medicine.**

Those who violate moral commitments and who actively harm or abuse others will be reborn in the hell realms. This refers to those who have no interest in maintaining the dharma commitments they have undertaken, who have no interest in benefiting others, and who are only interested in harming them. But if even such a person hears the name of the Medicine Buddha, they will be reborn in higher realms. By simply hear-

ing the name of the Medicine Buddha, their inherent capacity for virtue will be awakened and they will gradually become interested in acting appropriately and benefiting others. Changing their course of action, they will not be reborn in a lower realm.

The next stanza describes a third benefit of hearing or recollecting the name of the Medicine Buddha.

**Whoever by repeated dissension and slander
Creates serious schisms and takes life,
Hearing your name, they cannot harm others.
I supplicate you, King of Medicine.**

Those who are naturally jealous, competitive, and arrogant, and as a result, find themselves always trying to produce dissension; who, when seeing that others are friendly and harmonious, automatically try to create discord; who create schisms where there is harmony and discord even to the point where it leads to loss either of their own life or the lives of others; even someone with this jealous, competitive, and arrogant nature—if they hear the name of the Medicine Buddha, will be unable to cause harm. Unable to cause harm means that their mindset and their attitudes will change. They will cease to be jealous, cease to be arrogant, and will gradually find themselves unwilling and therefore unable to intentionally bring this kind of harm to others.

There are two sutras principally concerned with the Medicine Buddha. One is the *Sutra of the Medicine Buddha*, which is concerned with the principal Medicine Buddha, his twelve aspirations, and the benefits of recollecting his name. The second is the *Sutra of the Eight Medicine Buddhas*, or the *Sutra of the Eight Medicine Buddha Brothers*. The medicine buddhas referred to in this sutra are the previously mentioned principal one and seven others who form his retinue. The next stanza in the supplication is concerned with the other seven medicine buddhas. They each have their own individual aspirations. Some of them have made eight aspirations; some have made four. And the

recollection of their names brings benefits similar to those brought about by the recollection of the name of the principal Medicine Buddha.

**Excellent Name, Appearance of Stainless Fine Gold,
Glorious Supreme One Free of Misery, Resounding Dharma Melody,
King of Direct Knowledge, King of Melody,
And King of Shakyas, I supplicate you all.**

These seven buddhas are named Tshen Lek, or Excellent Name; Ser Zang Dri Me Nangwa, or Appearance of Stainless Fine Gold; Nya Ngen Me Chok Pal, Glorious Supreme One Free of Misery; Chö Drak Yang, Resounding Dharma Melody; Ngön Khyen Gyalpo, King of Direct Knowledge; Dra Yang Gyalpo, King of Melody; and Shakya Gyalpo, King of the Shakyas.

The next stanza is a supplication to the other deities in the mandala of the Medicine Buddha. These are not listed in their entirety, but each set of deities is mentioned briefly and a few of the names of each set are mentioned.

**Manjushri, Kyabdröl, Vajrapani,
Brahma, Indra, the Four Kings of the Four Directions,
The twelve great Yaksha chiefs, and so forth,
I supplicate you, entire and perfect mandala.**

The first class of deities after the eight medicine buddhas are the sixteen bodhisattvas. Here three of them are mentioned: Manjushri, Kyabdröl, and Vajrapani. The next class are the ten protectors of the world, or of the directions, of whom two are mentioned, Brahma and Indra. The next class are the four great kings of the four directions, who are also protectors, not mentioned here by their individual names. Finally there are the twelve yaksha chieftains, or yaksha generals, and they too are just mentioned as a class. The last line of the stanza indicates that this is the supplication of the entire mandala of the Medicine Buddha.

Up to this point you have supplicated the principal Medicine Buddha and his retinue, and in doing so have supplicated the body of the Medicine Buddha and the mind or the emana-

tions of the Medicine Buddha. What remains is to supplicate the speech of the Medicine Buddha; having supplicated the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the mandala, you next supplicate the dharma.

**The Sutra of the Seven Tathagatas' Aspirations,
And the Sutra of the Medicine Buddha,
The treatise by the great abbot Shantarakshita,
and so forth,
I supplicate all the volumes of the genuine
dharma.**

Mentioned first are the two sutras taught by the Buddha Shakyamuni about the Medicine Buddha: the *Sutra of the Aspirations of the Seven Tathagathas*, which means the seven medicine buddhas in the retinue, and the *Sutra of the Medicine Buddha*, which is the principal medicine buddha. Mentioned in the same stanza are the shastras,* which also form part of the scriptural source for the Medicine Buddha tradition. These are referred to by mentioning as an example the treatise of the great abbot Shantarakshita, which is one of the oldest or original sources of the Medicine Buddha practice. And then you chant, "I supplicate the genuine dharma in the form of books." The reason for this is that in general, of course, dharma exists in the form of the written word. But it has a special significance in the case of this mandala. The self-generation—the form of the Medicine Buddha with which you identify your own body—is the Medicine Buddha alone, without retinue. But the front visualization is the Medicine Buddha surrounded by all the rest of the mandala. The first circle of the mandala immediately surrounding him consists of the other seven medicine buddhas and the volumes of the dharma as the eighth member of the retinue. During this supplication you visualize the Medicine Buddha seated in the sky in front of you in the center of a fully opened eight-petaled lotus and surrounding him, on each of the seven petals other than the one directly in front of him, the

***Editor's note:** Shastras are commentaries on the original teachings of the Buddha.

seven other medicine buddhas. On the lotus petal directly in front of the principal Medicine Buddha, you visualize the volumes of the dharma, the sutras, and so forth, that present his practice.

The next stanza of the supplication supplicates the lineage of this practice.

**Bodhisattva Shantarakshita, Trisong Deutsen,
and others,
Translators, scholars, kings, ministers,
bodhisattvas,
And all genuine lamas of the lineage,
Powerful One of the Dharma, and others, I
supplicate you.**

First mentioned are those who first brought this tradition of the Medicine Buddha from India to Tibet. Where it says bodhisattva, it means the abbot Shantarakshita, who bestowed this teaching on many students, including the Tibetan dharma king Trisong Deutsen, who is mentioned next. Then supplicated are all of the translators of Tibet and the panditas of India who enabled this tradition to spread to Tibet through translating it, teaching it, explaining it, and so on. Next are supplicated all of the other inheritors of this tradition, bodhisattvas who took the form of dharma kings, ministers and so on. Finally, all the gurus of the lineage of this practice are supplicated, and in particular one's own root guru. This supplication was composed, and the practice in general was edited, by the learned and accomplished master Karma Chagmey Rinpoche, and so he supplicates his own root guru, Chökyi Wangchuk, by name here.

The final stanza of the supplication dedicates the power of the supplication to the ends that you wish to achieve.

**Through the blessing of this supplication,
May the diverse temporal diseases and dangers
of this life be stilled.
At death, may all fear of the lower realms be
calmed.
Grant your blessing that afterwards we are born
in Sukhavati.**

The stanza reads, "Through the blessing of

supplicating in this way,”—which means by the blessing of supplicating the Medicine Buddha, his retinue of buddhas, bodhisattvas, and protectors, and all the teachers of the lineage, with devotion—“in the short run may the various diseases, dangers, and fears be pacified, and at the time of death, after all fear of being reborn in the lower realms has been pacified, grant your blessing that we may be born in Sukhavati, the land of great happiness and great bliss.” You are expressing your wish here to be protected from suffering both in the short term and in the long term. In the short term you are asking to be protected from sickness and various other dangers—from whatever can go wrong—in this life. In the long term, you are asking that you not be reborn in lower states or in lower realms, and that, once the danger and fear of being reborn in the lower realms have been transcended, you may achieve rebirth in Sukhavati, the realm of Amitabha. That completes the lineage supplication.

After the lineage supplication comes the taking of refuge and the generation of bodhicitta, which, as necessary preliminaries, are always recited at the beginning of any vajrayana practice. Each has a specific function. The function of taking refuge is to prevent your practice from becoming an incorrect path. The function of generating bodhicitta is to prevent your practice from becoming an inferior path. In the case of this practice, each of these aspects—refuge and bodhicitta—occupies two lines of a four-line stanza.

**NAMO to the sources of refuge, the three jewels
And the three roots, I go for refuge.**

The first line of the refuge identifies the sources of refuge, and they are two: the three jewels and the three roots. The three jewels, which are the common sources of refuge,* are the Buddha, in whom one takes refuge by accept-

ing him as a teacher and an example; the dharma, in which one takes refuge by accepting it as a path; and the sangha, in which one takes refuge by accepting the sangha as companions and guides on that path. Identifying the three jewels as the initial source of refuge indicates that by taking refuge in them you are freeing yourself from the possibility of an incorrect path.

Then there are the uncommon sources of refuge, which are unique to vajrayana. They are known as the three roots: the gurus, who are the root of blessing; the yidams or deities, who are the root of attainment; and the dharmapalas, or dharma protectors, who are the root of activity. First of these are the gurus, who are the root of blessing. Blessing refers to the power of dharma—that which in dharma is actually effective, that actually brings the result of dharma. Obviously in practicing we need that effectiveness—that power or blessing of dharma—to enter into us. The original source of this blessing, of course, is the

Buddha, who first taught the dharma in this particular historical period. Unfortunately, we do not have the ability in this life to meet the Buddha or hear the Buddha’s speech directly. But we do have the opportunity to practice his teachings and to attain the same result we could have attained had we met the Buddha, because the essence of his teachings—and therefore the blessing or effectiveness of his teachings—has been passed down through the lineage, beginning with the Buddha himself and culminating with our own personal teacher or root guru. Therefore, the first source of refuge in the vajrayana are root and lineage gurus—and, especially the root guru—who are the source of the blessing of dharma.

The second source of refuge in the vajrayana, the second root, are the yidams, the deities, who are the sources of attainment or siddhi. While the guru is the source of the blessing and effec-

***Editor’s note:** common to all traditions of Buddhism.

tiveness of dharma, the guru cannot simply hand you the result or attainment of dharma practice. The source or root of that attainment is your practice. And your practice is embodied by the yidam or deity which is the basis of that practice. This means that you attain the result of dharma practice through engaging in the techniques of visualizing the body of the deity and engaging in the generation and completion stage practices which are associated with that deity. In this specific instance, the yidam is the Medicine Buddha. By identifying with the body of the Medicine Buddha, you attain the result, the attainments or siddhis, associated with the Medicine Buddha, which include the pacification of sickness and other sufferings.* The reason why these deities are referred to as *yidams*, which literally means mental commitment, is that in order to practice dharma you have to have a clear direction and strong focus in the technique and method of practice. The idea of yidam is that a certain practice and, in the case of vajrayana a certain deity, is identified by you

***Editor's note:** The practice of any yidam deity will result in the attainment of both the ultimate and relative siddhis. The ultimate siddhi is the stable realization of the radiant clarity or clear light nature of mind and all reality which we know as complete and perfect enlightenment or buddhahood. The relative siddhis are such qualities as loving kindness, compassion, intelligence, the wisdom of insight, spiritual power, protection and the removal of obstacles, good health, longevity, wealth, magnetism, etc. The practice of a deity yields first the relative siddhis. If we pray to Chenrezig, the first result beyond the simple development of concentration will be an increase in loving kindness and compassion in our experience. If we pray to Manjushri-Sarasvati, we will gradually experience greater perspicacity, strength of intellect, and facility with music and language. If we practice Mahakala, we will experience protection and the removal of obstacles, if we practice White Tara we will develop greater insight and longevity, if we practice Green Tara we will experience liberation from fear, the quick removal of obstacles, joy, compassion and upliftedness. If we practice Vajrayogini we will begin to develop mahamudra siddhi and increased warmth and magnetism. If one practices both the development and completion stages of any deity with sufficient devotion and application, one will eventually attain full realization, at which point all of the siddhis of all of the yidams will be spontaneously present.

The function of generating bodhicitta is to prevent your practice from becoming an inferior path

as that practice to which you commit yourself, that direction in practice which you will take. A yidam is the deity about which you think, "I will practice this. I will come to attain this result."

The third vajrayana source of refuge, the third root, are the dharmapalas, the protectors, who are the root of activity. Activity here means the protection of your practice from obstacles, so that you can successfully complete it and bring it to the appropriate result, so that you will be able to benefit others

effectively in a way that is in accordance with the practice. In order to achieve these ends you need this blessing of activity or protection. This is gained chiefly from specific bodhisattvas who take the form of protectors, and, in certain cases, dakinis. In the specific case of the Medicine Buddha, when the Buddha taught the Medicine Buddha sutras, there were certain deities who committed themselves to protecting these teachings and all practitioners of these teachings, including even those who merely recollect the name of the Medicine Buddha. These protector deities are represented in the mandala, and they include the twelve Yaksha chieftains, the four great kings, the ten protectors of the world, and so on. In this way, you are taking refuge by accepting the Buddha as a teacher; his teachings, the dharma, as a path; the sangha as companions and guides on that path; and you are taking refuge by requesting the blessings of the gurus, attainment through the yidam, and the protection of the dharmapalas and dakinis. That is the taking of refuge, which serves to protect your practice from becoming an incorrect path.

Next comes the generation of bodhicitta, which serves to protect your practice from becoming an inferior path.

**To establish all beings in buddhahood,
I awaken a mind of supreme enlightenment.**

It is true, of course, that our basic motivation

for practicing is that we all wish to be free from suffering. This wish to be free from suffering is good. But it is often somewhat limited, which is to say that it is somewhat selfish, and it is often somewhat petty or small-minded in scope. The idea behind generating bodhicitta is to recollect that all beings without exception wish to be happy in exactly the same way and to exactly the same degree as we do. If you bring that to mind fully, then your aspiration to attain freedom for yourself will expand and become an aspiration to bring all beings to that same freedom. This aspiration has to be a long-term aspiration. It is not enough simply to aspire to free beings from a certain type of suffering, or to free them from the suffering they are undergoing now, or to free them from this year's suffering. For it to be the aspiration of bodhicitta, which is the fullest and most extensive motivation, you must have the attitude of wishing to establish beings in a state that will permanently free them from all suffering. Now, the only way that you can actually make beings permanently happy is to bring them to a state of full awakening, to buddhahood. So ultimately, the only way to protect beings from suffering is to establish them all in awakening, because they simply will not be happy until they have attained it. If you understand this—that all beings wish to be happy just as much as we do and that none of us can be happy until we attain awakening—then you will naturally give rise to bodhicitta, which is the intention to bring each and every being to a state of full and perfect awakening. Bodhicitta also includes within it, of course, the aspiration to be of any other assistance you can to beings along the way to accomplishing that ultimate goal. So it is not limited to any specific form of assistance.

If bodhicitta has been genuinely generated, then your motivation for practice will be re-

The idea behind generating bodhicitta is to recollect that all beings without exception wish to be happy in exactly the same way and to exactly the same degree as we do

flected in your thinking, “I am practicing in order to bring all beings to awakening; I am not practicing merely because I am afraid of my own suffering or because I wish to protect a few others from suffering or because I wish to protect all others from a few types of suffering.” In that way your motivation for the practice of the Medicine Buddha becomes bodhicitta, which is the attitude: “In order to bring all beings to a state of buddhahood I must first attain the state of the Medicine Buddha in order to be able to do so effectively, because in my present state I cannot effectively protect or benefit others.”

The refuge and the generation of bodhicitta are followed by the blessing or consecration of the place and the materials of practice.

**From the expanse of primordial purity come forth
Clouds of offerings filling the earth and sky
With mandalas, articles of royalty, and goddesses.
May they never be exhausted. PUD DZA HO.**

The reason for this stage of the practice is that at any given moment we have an impure perception* of and an impure attitude towards ourselves, towards others, and towards the environment as a whole. The more we invest in that impure perception or attitude—in the perception of things as impure—the worse our situation will become, and the more attachment and aversion and apathy we will find ourselves

***Editor's note:** It is important to note that these impure perceptions and attitudes are not stable, but are constantly changing moment by moment according to changing causes and conditions. Thus, in one moment one might think quite highly of oneself and actually see oneself as attractive, intelligent, and charming, and in a subsequent moment feel quite depressed about oneself and see oneself as tiresome and dreary. These perceptions and attitudes go through myriad changes, but they are all impure in the sense that we are always seeing *projections* of ourselves, others, and the environment, and not things as they truly are.

generating. The remedy for this is simply to change our attitude and to regard things as pure. Initially, of course, this takes some conscious effort. But by regarding things as pure, you will gradually start to perceive things as pure, which will purify the habitual tendency to perceive them as impure.

At this point the liturgy reads, “Clouds of offerings emanated from the primordially pure expanse fill the sky and the earth.” You imagine that the place in which you are practicing is a completely pure realm filled with every imaginable type of pleasant offering substance. This realm and these offerings, although you are imagining them, are not imaginary. They have been there from the very beginning, which is why it says in the liturgy “emanated from the primordially pure expanse.” From the very beginning, this is how things actually are, how things actually have been. You are not creating them by imagining them, nor are you fooling yourselves by imagining them. It is rather that our present mode of perception is like being in the midst of a nightmare from which we hope to wake up; and when we wake up from it, we will see things as they are. It is important to understand that you are imagining things to be what in fact they really are.

The offering substances contained in this pure realm include such things as offering mandalas, the seven articles of royalty, and various other kinds of offerings that are specified in the liturgy, together with gods and goddesses who present them, and so on. All of these offerings are inexhaustible; they are unlimited in amount, they are perfect in quality, they do not just disappear, and they never get used up. This section is both the consecration of the offerings and the consecration of the place of practice. And the attitude with which this is done is that you are starting to purify your otherwise impure perception of your environment—of your body, of your mind, and of

all the other materials and implements in your environment.

By regarding things as pure, you will gradually start to perceive things as pure, which will purify the habitual tendency to perceive them as impure

Following the consecration of the offerings is meditation on the four immeasurables. The four immeasurables are four attitudes that are to be cultivated without limit, which is why they are known as immeasurable, or unlimited. Unlimited means no limit on “how much” and no limit on “for whom.” The first immeasurable, in the usual enumeration, is love. Immeasurable love means no limit on how much love and how much compassion you generate, and especially no limit on for whom you generate it.

May all beings be happy and free of suffering. May their happiness not diminish. May they abide in equanimity.

Intrinsic to all four of these attitudes is impartiality. When enumerated separately, impartiality is the fourth of the four immeasurables—love, compassion, empathetic joy, and impartiality. However, when you actually practice them, you need to begin with the cultivation of impartiality. We all have some degree of love, some degree of compassion, and some degree of empathetic joy. But in order to make these genuine and to make them immeasurable we need to cultivate impartiality, which is why it is to be cultivated first. When we say that we all have some degree of love, we mean that we all wish that some beings be happy and possess causes of happiness. We all also have some degree of compassion—we all wish that some beings be free from suffering and the causes of suffering. The problem is that we generally wish these things only for certain beings and do not particularly care about what happens to other beings. Although our love and compassion are indeed love and compassion, they are partial; and because they are partial,

they are impure and incomplete. If you cultivate impartiality, they become unlimited—which means that they become perfect. So the first stage in the cultivation of the four immeasurables is to cultivate impartiality towards beings, which means cultivating the attitude that you have the same amount of love and the same amount of compassion for all beings. And then, on that basis, you can strengthen the attitude of love—the desire that beings be happy and possess causes of happiness—and by strengthening it you will strengthen that attitude towards all beings in general. If you do not cultivate impartiality in the beginning, by strengthening your love for some you may generate aggression for others. Therefore, you need first to cultivate impartiality, and then, on the basis of impartiality, to cultivate the other three—love, compassion, and empathetic joy. However, in the text they are listed in the usual order, which places impartiality—here referred to as equanimity—at the end.

Essentially love consists of wanting others to be happy, and compassion consists of wanting others not to suffer. These two attitudes, of course, are excellent. But if they are present without any way to bring about what you wish—if your love is without any way to bring about the happiness of beings and your compassion is devoid of any way to remove the sufferings of beings—then they will actually become a cause of greater suffering and sadness for you. You will be more sensitive to the sufferings of others because of your attitude, but will feel unable to help. And so, instead of just the other being suffering, two beings will suffer—you will suffer as well. If, however, the attitudes of love and compassion include the understanding of how you can actually bring about happiness and freedom from suffering, then these attitudes do not become sources of depression. Therefore we

If you do not cultivate impartiality in the beginning, by strengthening your love for some you may generate aggression for others

expand the attitude of love from “may all beings be happy” to “may all beings be happy and possess causes of happiness,” and expand the attitude of compassion from “may all beings be free from suffering” to “may all beings be free from suffering and free from causes of suffering.”

While you cannot confidently expect to be able to make all beings happy on the spot, you can gradually cause beings to accomplish or accumulate causes of happiness and to avoid and get rid of causes of suffering. And because you understand that in the long term you will be able to make beings happy and free beings from suffering, then these attitudes of love and compassion become not only confident but actually joyous. In this way, the effect of love and compassion is no longer sadness and depression but empathetic joy, which is the third immeasurable. In this

way, you train or cultivate the four immeasurables as a preliminary for meditation on the Medicine Buddha.

Now to apply the four immeasurables to the specific context of the Medicine Buddha practice: Since the primary cause of suffering in this case is the physical affliction of sickness, and since that is the initial focus of this practice, you can focus on that in your meditation on the four immeasurables. Thinking that it is in order to remove the sickness of beings that you are praying to the Medicine Buddha, meditating upon the Medicine Buddha, reciting the Medicine Buddha’s mantra, and so on, you could formulate the four immeasurables in the following way: Immeasurable love would be the attitude, “May all beings possess the happiness of well-being and the causes of that.” Immeasurable compassion would be, “May all beings be free from sickness and the causes of sickness.” Immeasurable empathetic joy would be rejoicing in the well-being of others and in their freedom

from illness. And immeasurable impartiality would be generating these aspirations and attitudes not merely for those you know, such as your own friends and family, but for all beings without exception.

When you do the Medicine Buddha practice with the intention and aspiration to benefit yourself and others in this way, sometimes you will perceive an evident benefit: Either you or someone else will be freed from sickness in a way that you identify as a result of your practice. This will give you greater confidence in the practice. At other times, no matter how much you practice and how hard you pray and how many mantras you say, you will not perceive any evident benefit. And this will cause you to doubt the practice, and you will think, “Well maybe it doesn’t really

There is always a result from doing this practice, but the way in which the result will manifest is not absolutely definite

work.” But you need to remember that the benefit of this practice is not like the direct physical effect of the function of a machine, such as something that emits a laser beam.

There is always a result from doing this practice, but the way in which the result will manifest is not absolutely definite. So in your attitude towards the results of practice, you need to have a long-term focus. In that way you can keep the practice focused on the four immeasurables.

That completes the preliminaries to the Medicine Buddha practice. I am going to stop there for this afternoon, and we will conclude with the dedication of the merit of this teaching to the liberation of all beings.

[Dedication of merit.]





Medicine Buddha

The Visualization Uncovers the Inherent Purity of Phenomena

Continuing the Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche's teaching on the Medicine Buddha.

Yesterday we discussed the lineage supplication of this practice, the refuge and bodhicitta, the consecration of the practice place and the materials, and the meditation on the four immeasurables. Today we are going to begin with the actual visualization of oneself as the Medicine Buddha, which causes the blessing of the Medicine Buddha to enter into one, and the simultaneous visualization of the mandala of the Medicine Buddha in front of one, which serves as an object of one's supplication and a field for the accumulation of merit through making offerings.

The visualization is begun by purifying your perception of the entire world, including your own body and mind. This is done initially through the single recitation of the mantra of the pure nature or the mantra of the purity of dharmata:

OM SOBHAWA SHUDDHA SARWA DHARMA SOBHAWA SHUDDHO HAM

The meaning of the mantra reflects its significance. Following the initial syllable *Om*, the next word is *swabava*, which means the nature, and then *shuddha*, which means pure. Ordinarily the things that appear to us—the world of external appearances and our internal perceiving mind—appear to us as being impure because of the presence of the kleshas and other obscurations in our minds. What is meant here by the pure nature is that, although we perceive appearances and our minds in this impure way, this is not their actual nature. While they seem to be impure, in fact, in their nature, in and of themselves, they are pure. Following the statement “pure by nature,” are the words *sarwa*, which means all, and *dharma*, which means things. So the mantra states that “all things are pure in their nature.”

The term *dharma* usually has one of two meanings. One meaning is *sadharma* or the genuine dharma, the teachings of the Buddha, and the other meaning is thing, things in general, anything that can be known. Here it refers to things.

The mantra continues with the words *swabava shuddha* a second time and then *A Hum*. Because of the way that Sanskrit links words, the second *shuddha* and *A Hum* are joined together to become *shuddho ham*. Again *swabava shuddha* means pure in its nature or their nature; *A Hum* can mean self or the very embodiment of something. Here it is understood to mean that not only are all things pure in their nature, but that they are in and of themselves the very embodiment of that purity. So this mantra is essentially a statement of why the path can lead to the result. Because things are pure in their nature, because this purity is present within the nature of things, then it can manifest as experience and as a result—through taking that inherent purity as a path. For example, because sesame oil is present within sesame seeds, then by pressing the seeds you can extract the oil. If there were no oil present

within the sesame seeds, you could not get oil, no matter how hard you pressed the seeds. Because the hidden nature of things is their purity, then by regarding things as pure, you can directly experience them as pure; you can directly experience their purity. The *swabava* mantra is used here to point this out, and also to introduce or begin the samadhi which will culminate in the visualization of yourself as the Medicine Buddha.

Following the recitation of the *swabava* mantra, you say the Tibetan words, *tong pa nyi du jur*, which means that everything becomes empty or becomes emptiness.

Everything turns into emptiness.

This describes the beginning of the visualization. At this point you imagine that everything disappears, that everything becomes emptiness—not only in how it is but in how it manifests. However, it is important to remember that you are not pretending here that things are other than they are. You are using the imaginary dissolution of things into emptiness as an acknowledgment of the fact that things have been, from the very beginning,* empty in their nature.

The dissolution of ordinary impure appearances into emptiness is the first part of a two-step process that serves to counteract our usual superimposition of impurity onto appearances.** The second step is the emergence from or within that expanse of emptiness of the pure appearances which are the realm and palace of the Medicine Buddha.

From the depth of emptiness, this triple universe

***Editor's note:** Buddhism, of course, does not assert any sort of cosmological beginning, so the use of “beginning here” has the same meaning as “from beginningless time.”

****Editor's note:** This superimposition of impurity onto appearances is the same as referred to by Nagarjuna, in *In Praise of the Dharmadhatu*: “The phenomena that appear to the mental consciousness, the chief of them all, are conceptualized and then superimposed. When this activity is abandoned, phenomena's lack of self-essence is known. Knowing this, meditate on the dharmadhatu.” The *swabava* mantra and the ensuing sadhana, as well as all other sadhanas and completion stage practices are methods for training the mind to abandon this activity of superimposition.

becomes

The exquisite palace, where

The first step is to think that all of the impure appearances dissolve into emptiness, and the second is that from within that emptiness the realm and palace of the Medicine Buddha emerge. Now when you imagine that the place in which you are practicing has become the realm and palace of the Medicine Buddha, you do not limit this consideration to this world or to this planet alone. As it says in the liturgy, it is the entire billion worlds of this larger world system, or galaxy.

There are two ways that you can do this practice. The simplest way is to visualize yourself as the Medicine Buddha. The more elaborate way, which is indicated in the liturgy, is also to visualize the Medicine Buddha, surrounded by his retinue, present in front of you as well. It is easier for beginners to do the self-visualization alone; on the other hand, doing the front visualization as well gives one the opportunity to gather the accumulation of merit. In either case, in the midst of the realm of the Medicine Buddha, which you have visualized as emerging from the expanse of emptiness, there is a palace. This palace is square, and quite symmetrical. In the center of each of the four sides is a large gateway, each forming an entry into the palace. If you are doing the practice with both self and front visualizations, you need to visualize two palaces: one in the center of which you will sit as the self visualization; and one in front of you and somewhat elevated, which will serve as the residence for the front visualization.

On lion thrones, each with a lotus and moon disk on top

Appear deep blue HUNGS, the seed syllable of myself and the main figure visualized in the front,

The significance of the lion throne is primarily the sense of utter fearlessness—indicating the deity’s freedom from fear and danger of any kind

In the center of the self-visualization’s palace is a throne made of gold and jewels and other precious substances that is upheld by eight snow lions. The significance of the lion throne is primarily the sense of utter fearlessness—

indicating the deity’s freedom from fear and danger of any kind. On top of the throne is a fully opened lotus flower, on top of the center of which, lying flat, is a moon disc, on top of which you will be visualizing yourself seated in the form of the Medicine Buddha. In the center of the palace in the front visualization, you visualize a sixteen-petaled lotus, in the center of which you visual an eight-petaled lotus. In the center of the eight-petaled lotus, you visualize another lion throne, lotus, and moon disc seat, as in the self-visualization.

There are eight- and sixteen-petaled lotuses in the front visualization because there will be additional buddhas and bodhisattvas in those places.

Next, on top of the moon discs in both the front and self visualizations, you visualize a blue syllable HUM.* The HUM syllable on top of the moon disc in the self-visualization palace represents the essence of the mind or wisdom of the self-visualization deity, and the blue HUM on top of the moon disc in the front-visualization palace represents the essence of the mind or wisdom of the front-visualization deity. This particular syllable HUM is used because HUM is the sound of dharmata, the expression as sound of the nature** itself. It is blue because that is the color of the deity who will emerge from the syllable—the Medicine Buddha is blue, as is Vajradhara—but also because blue represents that which is unchanging and unfabricated.***

***Editor’s note:** These syllables are to be visualized in Tibetan script.

****Editor’s note:** the true nature, the ultimate nature

*****Editor’s note:** This color blue is generally described as deep blue, the color of an autumn sky high in the mountains.

Having visualized the syllables, you then visualize innumerable rays of light radiating from each of these syllables simultaneously. On the end of each ray of light are innumerable offering goddesses holding various offering substances which they present to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas in all the directions throughout space. This vast array of buddhas and bodhisattvas receives these offerings with pleasure, and as a consequence their nonconceptual compassion is aroused, which manifests as their blessings' coming back in the form of rays of blue light which dissolve into the HUM. Rays of light which went out bearing offerings are reabsorbed bearing blessings back into the two HUM syllables. Once again rays of light radiate outward from both HUM's simultaneously, this time purifying the entire external world, the entire universe, of everything in it that could possibly cause harm or suffering of any kind, and also purifying the mental continuums of all beings without exception of any kind of suffering or misery or cause of suffering. Then the rays of light are reabsorbed again into their respective HUM's. At that moment the syllables are instantly and simultaneously transformed into the Medicine Buddha.

From which, arises Menla, his body the color of lapis lazuli and radiating light.

After this transformation, the self-visualized Medicine Buddha that you are identifying with is now considered your own body, and the front visualization is in front of you. The Medicine Buddha is a brilliant blue in color—the color of a precious stone called vaidurya, generally considered to be lapis lazuli. In appearance the Medicine Buddha is luminous and majestic and radiates innumerable rays of light primarily the color of his own body. Yidams can appear in a number of different ways—peaceful or wrathful and frightening; nirmanakaya or sambhogakaya in form, and so on. The Medicine Buddha is peaceful and in the nirmanakaya form.

He is clothed in the three dharma robes.

Saying that he appears in nirmanakaya form means that, though some yidams appearing in sambhogakaya form wear lots of jewelry and silken robes and so on, the Medicine Buddha manifests in what is called the passionless appearance of a nirmanakaya buddha, wearing only the three dharma robes commonly worn by the monastic sangha: the inner and outer upper robes and the lower skirt.

The Medicine Buddha has two arms.

His right hand in the mudra of supreme generosity holds an arura.

His left hand in meditation mudra holds a begging bowl.

His right hand is extended, palm outward, over his right knee in the gesture called supreme generosity. In it he holds the *arura*, or myrobalan, fruit. This plant represents all the best medicines. The position of his right hand and the *arura* which he holds represent the eradication of suffering, especially the suffering of sickness, using the means of relative truth. Sickness can be alleviated by adjusting the functioning of interdependent causes and conditions by the use of relative means within the realm of relative truth, such as medical treatment and so on. The giving of these methods is represented by the gesture of the Medicine Buddha's right hand.

His left hand rests in his lap, palm upward, in the gesture of meditative stability or meditation, which represents the eradication of sickness and suffering—and, indeed, the very roots of samsara—through the realization of absolute truth. From the point of view of either relative truth or absolute truth, the fundamental cause of sickness and suffering is a lack of contentment and the addictive quality of samsara. Therefore, to indicate the need for contentment, in his left hand he holds a begging bowl.

Because the mind of the Medicine Buddha is stainless and pure, his form reflects this in its excellence and physical perfection.

With the major and minor marks complete, he sits in the vajra posture.

He is adorned by what are called the marks and signs, the primary and secondary indications of the awakening of a buddha. In all aspects of his physical form—the crown protuberance, or *ushnisha*, the image of wheels on the soles of his feet, and so forth—the Medicine Buddha is identical to the Buddha Sakyamuni, with the single difference that the Buddha Sakyamuni's skin is golden in color, while the Medicine Buddha is blue. Because the Medicine Buddha is immersed in an unwavering samadhi of absorption within the realization of the nature of all things, and because this samadhi is utterly stable, he is seated with his legs fully crossed in the vajra posture. You visualize yourself in this form, and you visualize the front visualization in the same form as well.

Everything described up to this point—the palace, the throne, and the Medicine Buddha—pertains to both the self and the front visualizations. In the case of the front visualization, however, you will remember that the lion throne sits in the center of an eight-petaled lotus, which in turn sits in the center of a sixteen-petaled lotus. Now on seven of the eight petals of the eight petaled lotus, which surround the Medicine Buddha in the front visualization—on the seven petals other than the one directly in front of the Medicine Buddha—are the seven other medicine buddhas, the Buddha Shakyamuni and six others. As is the principal Medicine Buddha, they are all adorned by the thirty-two marks and the eighty signs of physical perfection which grace the body of a buddha.

**In particular, on the lotus petals of the front visualization
Are the seven Buddhas, Shakyamuni and the others, and dharma texts.**

On the eighth petal, directly in front of the principal Medicine Buddha, is a volume of the dharma. The reason for this is that in the end it is the dharma that liberates us from samsara and

from sickness. When we talk about the *sadharma*, or the genuine dharma, we are referring fundamentally to the third and fourth of the four noble truths: the truth of the cessation of suffering and the truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering. The truth of cessation is the result of practice, which is the abandonment or transcendence of everything that is to be abandoned or transcended.* The truth of the path is the dharma we practice that leads to that transcendence. The dharma in essence is the experience and realization of the meaning of dharma** that is present within the minds of those who practice it and achieve its result. By extension, the dharma also refers to the tradition of passing on that meaning, and therefore

one visualizes that meaning passed on from the Buddha down to the present day in the form of books on the petal directly in front of the Medicine Buddha visualized in front.

Around them are the sixteen bodhisattvas,

Around them are the ten protectors of the world,

And the twelve great chiefs with their respective retinues.

The Four Great Kings are at the four gates.

Surrounding the seven Medicine Buddhas and the volumes of dharma, are sixteen bodhisattvas on the petals of the sixteen-petaled lotus. These are the sixteen bodhisattvas who were the main recipients of the teachings of the Medicine Buddha sutras given by the Buddha. They all manifest in the sambhogakaya form, wearing ornate jewelry and so forth. Beyond the perimeter of that lotus, but still within the palace of the front visualization, are twenty-two other main deities, each of whom has a retinue.

***Editor's note:** Which thereby brings about the cessation of suffering.

****Editor's note:** Expressed variously as the nonconceptual wisdom of emptiness, the nonconceptual wisdom of clear light, radiant clarity, primordial awareness, the empty, clear, and unimpeded nature of mind, etc.

On the Medicine Buddha's right, forming a semicircle to the right of the principal deities, are the ten protectors of the directions—otherwise known as the ten protectors of the world. These are deities such as Brahma, Indra, and so forth. Likewise, forming a semicircle on the left side of the palace are the twelve yaksha chieftains or generals. Each of these figures is surrounded by a vast retinue of their own. Finally, in the four gates or gateways of the palace visualized in front are the four kings of the gods. They are visualized here because they are protectors of the buddhadharma in general. Specifically whenever the Buddha taught, and especially whenever he exhibited miracles, he would emanate a magnificent magical palace like this one, and, to signify their function as protectors of his teachings, these four kings of the gods would guard each of the four gates as gatekeepers.

When you are practicing, if you can, visualize all of these deities. But if you cannot, do not be discouraged. Do not feel that somehow the practice has become ineffective or invalid because you cannot visualize each and every one of them. It is sufficient to generate as clear a visualization as you can of yourself as the Medicine Buddha and of the Medicine Buddha in front of you. If, in addition to that, you can visualize the seven additional medicine buddhas and the volumes of dharma, good. If, in addition to that, you can visualize the sixteen bodhisattvas, that is also good. But you should gauge the extent of the visualization to what you actually can do. In any case, the practice will be effective and will cause the blessing of dharma in general and the blessing of the Medicine Buddha in particular to enter you. It will serve its function and be effective, regardless of how you do the visualization. More important than how many deities you visualize is to understand what you are doing. And most important is to understand that by visualizing yourself as the Medi-

cine Buddha you are not pretending to be something that you are not, and that by visualizing the Medicine Buddha and his retinue in front of you, you are not pretending that they are in a place where they are not. By definition, buddhas are omniscient. Whenever someone thinks of them, brings them to mind, or supplicates them, they are aware of it and respond with their compassion and blessing. In the final analysis, the situation is identical to their actually being present anywhere they are thought of. Therefore, it is always appropriate to regard a buddha that is present in one's mind as actually being

present in front of one. When you think that the Medicine Buddha, together with his retinue, is present in front of you, it is really true that they are.

Visualizing yourself as the Medicine Buddha is also appropriate, because your fundamental nature—what you truly are—is buddha nature. Buddha nature is essentially the potential to attain awakening. At some point in the future you will attain the same awakening or buddhahood as the

Medicine Buddha himself. By visualizing yourself as the Medicine Buddha, you are assuming the appearance of what fundamentally you are even now and what manifestly you will be upon your awakening. It is to acknowledge this truth that you assume the aspect of the body, speech, and mind of the Medicine Buddha, which is, therefore, entirely appropriate.

While it is entirely appropriate to visualize yourself as the Medicine Buddha and to visualize the Medicine Buddha and retinue in front of you, you may still have some hesitation or doubt that the visualization is anything more than just a visualization. This is understood, and therefore the next phase of the practice is designed to counteract that doubt. In order to alleviate any residual doubts you may have, you next invite the actual wisdom deities and dissolve them into the visualization.

When you think
that the Medicine
Buddha, together
with his retinue,
is present in
front of you, it is
really true that
they are

From the three syllables in their three places and
the HUNG in their hearts,
Lights radiate, invoking from their own eastern
buddha realms, countless
Wisdom deities which dissolve into myself and
the one visualized in front.

The first step in inviting the wisdom deities is to visualize in the three places of the self-visualized Medicine Buddha, in the three places of the Medicine Buddha visualized in front, and, if possible, in the three places of the rest of the deities in the retinue, the three syllables, OM AH HUNG. Inside your head you visualize a white OM, which is the essence of the body of the Medicine Buddha; in your throat a red AH, which is the essence of his speech; and in your heart a blue HUM, which is the essence of his mind. Visualizing these in the body of the self-visualized Medicine Buddha and in the bodies of the deities visualized in front, you then think that from these syllables rays of light of the corresponding colors—and most particularly rays of blue light from the HUM syllables in the heart centers of the deities—radiate. This radiation of light invites, from their individual buddha realms, the deities of the mandala. Each of the eight Medicine buddhas—the principle one and the seven buddhas of the retinue—has his own realm, all of which are understood to be in the eastern direction.* From these different pure realms the eight Medicine Buddhas and their retinues of deities are invited and they all dissolve into you as the Medicine Buddha and into the front visualization. In practice you do not think that they immediately dissolve into you, but that they present themselves and are present in the sky in front of you, between the two palaces of the self and front visualizations.

Having described the visualization, you then recite a stanza that is an actual invitation to the deities to approach.

HUNG
The eight Menla companions and all deities

without exception
I invite here to this place. Kindly rain upon us
your great blessings.
Bestow the supreme empowerment on those who
are worthy and faithful.
Dispel false guides and obstacles to long life.
NAMO MAHA BEKENDZE SAPARIWARA
BENZA SAMAYADZA DZA BENZA
SAMAYA TIKTRA LEN

First you invite the eight Medicine Buddhas together with their retinues, saying, “Please come to this place and rain down your great blessing upon me, the practitioner, and upon others.” Then you ask that they, “Bestow the supreme empowerment upon me, the fortunate one, who has faith,” and that, by so doing, they, “Please dispel obstacles, such as obstacles to life and longevity and other obstacles in general.”

The mantra that follows seals and reinforces this act of invitation. The mantra means, “Great King of Medicine, together with your retinue, *vajra samaya jaja*.”** *Vajra samaya* means unchanging commitment or samaya. Here you are reminding these buddhas of their commitment to liberate beings. From their initial generation of bodhicitta, up to and including the moment of their attain-



***Editor’s note:** Unlike Amitaba’s realm of Sukhavati or Dewachen, which is thought of as being in the western direction, these buddha realms of the Medicine Buddhas are thought of as being in the eastern direction. However, it is important to understand how these directions are understood in the practice of vajrayana. All deities are thought of as facing east. If you are visualizing yourself as the Medicine Buddha or as Chenrezig or as Vajrayogini, regardless of the direction in which you would find their individual buddha realms, you are facing east. And the same is true of the deities of the front visualization, who are also thought of as facing east. Therefore, if in “real space” you happen to be facing south or north, as far as the visualization is concerned, you are still facing east. You would not think that the deities resided in their buddha

realms somewhere far off over your left or right shoulder. “To a yogi or yogini,” as Kalu Rinpoche once said, “all directions are east.”

****Editor’s note:** Sanskrit, like Latin, is no longer a spoken language. Here the translator is reading the mantra in what scholars suspect was the original Sanskrit pronunciation. The mantras, as they appear in this text, are our English versions of the Tibetan versions of the original Sanskrit mantras. In this case *Vajra samaya ja ja* reads *Benza samaya dza dza*.

ment of full buddhahood, the motivation for their entire path was the wish to liberate beings. They therefore have an unchanging commitment—a vajra-like or indestructible samaya—to the liberation of beings. So when you say these words, *vajra samaya jaja*, you are saying to these buddhas, “You must come here and bless me because you have committed yourself to do so.” At that point, then, think with confidence that all of the wisdom deities of the mandala have actually come and are present in the sky in front of you.

The mantra that follows is *vajra samaya tiktralen*. *Vajra samaya* means unchanging commitment, and *tiktra* means to remain stable. With this mantra you are saying, “Through the power of your unchanging commitment to the welfare and liberation of beings, please dissolve inseparably into me and remain within me stably or permanently.” At that point you think that all of the invited deities, reminded of their commitment and with their compassion aroused in that way, dissolve both into the self visualization and into the deities of the front visualization. And at that point think that your body, speech, and mind visualized as the Medicine Buddha and the body, speech, and mind of the Medicine Buddha have become indivisible.*

We are going to stop there for this morning, but if you have any questions, you are welcome to ask them.

Question: Does the Medicine Buddha ever have a consort and, if so, what is her name?

Rinpoche: In this case, because he is visualized in the form of a supreme nirmanakaya, he does not. There could be cases in which he is visualized in a sambhogakaya form with a consort in order to indicate the unity of upaya and prajna—

When you say these words, *vajra samaya jaja*, you are saying to these buddhas, ‘You must come here and bless me because you have committed yourself to do so’

it is possible, but I cannot think of an instance, and so I cannot say his consort’s name is this or that.

Question: Rinpoche, in the visualization, there are eight petals and then sixteen petals around that. Petals aren’t really that large and so it is difficult for me to visualize each of them containing a bodhisattva and his retinue. Is it like a window to their world or what is the best way to visualize this realistically?

Rinpoche: In pure realms flowers can get really big. But if it makes it easier to relate to, these are basically thrones that are somewhat connected with one another and that have the basic shape or style of

***Editor’s note:** In connection with this process it is helpful to be familiar with two terms: *samayasattva* and *jnanasattva*, which could be roughly translated as “commitment being” and “primordial awareness being.” The *samayasattva* is one’s own personal visualization which one performs in order to maintain one’s commitment to one’s lama and to the practice of one’s yidam. The *jnanasattva* is sometimes thought of as the “actual” deity which is a manifestation of the clear light nature of mind or the radiant clarity of mind and reality, which for the purposes of the visualization is thought of as residing off somewhere in its own particular buddha realm. When the *jnanasattva* finally dissolves into the *samayasattva*, the *jnanasattva* and the *samayasattva* are thought to have become one and indivisible. In the *ati yana*, the *samayasattva* and the *jnanasattva* are considered from the beginning to be simultaneously present.

In *The Heart of the Buddha*, Chögyam Trungpa describes this process from a psychological perspective as it relates to the practice of Vajrayogini: “The visualization of oneself as Vajrayogini is called the *samayasattva*: the ‘sacred bondage of one’s being.’ The *samayasattva* is basically the expression of the samayas of body, speech, and mind. It expresses one’s commitment to the teacher and the teachings and one’s trust in one’s fundamental state of mind.

“Having visualized the *samayasattvas* of basic being, one invites what is known as *jnanasattva*. The *jnanasattva* is another level of being or experience. *Jnana* is a state of wakefulness or openness, whereas *samaya* is an experience of bondage, in being solidly grounded in one’s experience. *Jnana* literally means ‘wisdom’ or, more accurately, ‘being wise.’ One invites this state of wisdom, this level of wakefulness, into one’s own imperfect visualization, so that the visualization comes alive with a feeling of openness and humor.”

flower petals.

Question: Rinpoche talked about the front visualization as being a field for the accumulation of merit. Why does the front visualization have something to do with accumulating merit?

Rinpoche: In this practice, as the liturgy indicates, merit is accumulated through paying homage and making various offerings—the mandala offering and the offering of praises and so forth—primarily to the front visualization. You accumulate merit by performing offerings to that in which you have absolute confidence, which is the actual Buddha. Therefore, it is easier to accumulate merit by making offerings to the front visualization, which you are perceiving as different from and possibly superior to yourself.

Question: When doing the mantra towards the end of the practice, do we focus our attention primarily on ourself and the mantra in our heart or do we alternate attention between the Buddha in front and ourselves?

Rinpoche: You apply it to both. You visualize the seed syllable and the mantra garland within the heart of both the self and front visualizations, and in both cases, you identify it as the embodiment of the wisdom or mind of the deity. Then normally you would think that rays of light radiate from the seed syllable and mantra garland in the heart of the self visualization. These rays of light strike and enter the hearts of the deities of the front visualization, arousing their compassion, causing rays of light to come from the front visualization and to dispel the sickness and suffering of all beings and so forth.

Question: I can't manage to visualize the front visualization and myself as the Medicine Buddha simultaneously. Should I alternate between

them? Should I spend a chunk of time doing the front visualization and then come back to the self visualization for an amount of time?

Rinpoche: That's fine. You can go back and forth.

Question: Quickly or slowly or what?

Rinpoche: The best thing is to go back and forth as frequently as is comfortable.

Question: Rinpoche, does this particular sadhana have any special significance for you? Is this of special significance to the Thrangu lineage?

Rinpoche: This does not have any particular significance for me or my monastery, except that it is one of the three Medicine Buddha practices which is normally done in the Kagyu tradition as a whole. There is a long one, a medium one, and this one, which is the short one. We are practicing this one because it is the short one.

Question: What Tibetan word is being translating as “pure?” And do you translate this word in any other way?

Translator: *Takpa*.

Question: Is it always translated as “pure”?

Translator: By *me*, yes. A lot of people do a lot of different things; I cannot guarantee that they always call it “pure.”

Question: Maybe Rinpoche could say what the word means.

Rinpoche: You can think of synonyms for pure as being “free of impurity,” which by extension would mean “free of defect or imperfection.” It

You accumulate merit by performing offerings to that in which you have absolute confidence, which is the actual Buddha

would indicate that which is stainless, that which is perfect, flawless, and so on.

Question: Rinpoche, is there a particular significance for the light radiating from the eastern Buddha realms?

Rinpoche: In the sutras of the Medicine Buddha, the Buddha described their realms—the principal realm of the principal Medicine Buddha and the other realms of the attendant buddhas—as all being in the east.

Question: When we visualize light going out to the universe, does that include everything? Rocks and trees and chairs and buildings?

Translator: At which point? During the creation of the deity or during the recitation of the mantra?

Question: During the recitation of the mantra.

Rinpoche: Yes. Initially, before the generation of the deity, you purify your perception of the

entire universe by visualizing that it all dissolves into emptiness. Theoretically, from that point onward all impurity has ceased. But when you get to the repetition of the main mantra you can renew that purification by once again bringing to mind impure appearances and purifying them with the rays of light which emerge from the heart of the deity.

Question: Rinpoche, in other visualization practices, sometimes there's a sense of seeing one's own root teacher in the form of that deity. Is there anything like that in this practice?

Rinpoche: Yes, it is appropriate to identify the front visualization with your root guru. People relate to the front visualization in slightly different ways. If they feel particularly devoted to the Medicine Buddha, then they will primarily think of the front visualization as the actual Medicine Buddha. But they can also think of the front visualization as in essence their root guru.

So we will conclude by dedicating the merit.



Medicine Buddha

Because of Its Vastness, Offering The Entire Universe Produces Great Merit



Continuing the Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche's teaching on the Medicine Buddha.

This morning we went over the visualization of oneself as the Medicine Buddha, the visualization of the Medicine Buddha in front, and finally the dissolving of the actual wisdom deity into both the self and front visualizations as a remedy for one's habitual perception of things as impure or ordinary.

Having just dissolved the wisdom beings into oneself and into the front visualization—as a remedy for one's obscurations, one's wrongdoing, and one's conceptualization, we then receive empowerment. This phase of the practice is represented in the liturgy simply by the mantra:

OM HUM TRAM HRI AH ABHIKENTZA HUM

The visualization which accompanies the mantra is as follows: Once again you visualize the three syllables—OM AH HUM—in the three places of oneself as the Medicine Buddha and of the deities of the front visualization, and once again rays of light radiate from them—especially from the HUM in your heart—inviting this time the five male buddhas of the five families with their retinues from their pure realms. The buddhas are holding in their hands precious vases* filled with the ambrosia of wisdom, which they pour into you as the self-visualized Medicine Buddha through the aperture at the very center of the top of your head. The first part of this mantra—OM HUM TRAM HRI AH—represents this empowerment being administered by the five buddhas simultaneously. OM represents Vairocana; HUM, Akshobya; TRAM, Ratnasambhava; HRI, Amitabha; and AH, Amogasiddhi.** Visualizing that this pure ambrosia fills your entire body, you think that it purifies all the wrongdoing, obscurations, and defilements of any kind whatsoever of your body, speech, and mind. The words *Abhikentsa* mean empowerment.

The next section of the practice is the accumulation of merit through making offerings. As indicated earlier, the self visualization presents offerings to the front visualization. Rays of light emerge from the heart of the self visualization. On the ends of these rays of light are offerings goddesses holding various offering substances, which they present to all the deities of the front visualization.

***Editor's note:** Vases made of precious jewels and metals.

****Editor's note:** When represented in a seated posture and at rest, Vairocana is white with his hands in the teaching mudra; Akshobya is blue with his left hand in the mudra of meditation and his right hand in the earth touching mudra; Ratnasambhava is yellow with his left hand in the mudra of meditation and the right hand in the mudra of generosity; Amitabha is red with both hands in the meditation mudra; and Amogasiddhi is green with his left hand in the mudra of meditation and his right hand in the mudra of fearlessness.

HUNG

Flowers, incense, lights, scents,
Food, music and so forth;
Forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touch, and all
dharmas,
I offer to the deities.
May we perfect the two accumulations.

OM BENZA ARGHAM PADYAM PUPE
DHUPE ALOKE GENDHE NEWIDYE
SHABDA RUPA SHABDA GENDHE RASA
SAPARSHE TRATITSA HUNG

First they present a set of eight related offerings. First is drinking water, which is offered to the mouths of the deities. Second is water for washing or rinsing the feet, which is offered to the feet of the deities. Third is flowers, which are offered to the eyes of the deities. Fourth is incense, the scent of which is offered to

In general,
offerings can be
categorized into
four types: outer,
inner, secret, and
ultimate

the nose of the deities. Fifth is lamps, which are offered again to the eyes of the deities. Sixth is perfume, which is offered to the whole body of the deities. Seventh is food, offered to the mouths of the deities. And eighth is musical instruments symbolizing the sound of music, offered to the ears of the deities.

Offered with these eight offerings are the five offerings of pleasant things which are perceived by the five senses. These are beautiful forms, pleasant sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations.

In general, offerings can be categorized into four types: outer, inner, secret, and ultimate. Outer offerings are essentially the offering of whatever is beautiful and pleasant in the external world. What is being presented to the deity here are all things in the external world that are appropriate and beautiful. By making these offerings, you gather the accumulation of merit. Therefore it says in the text, "By making these offerings to the deities, may we complete the two accumulations." The two accumulations are the conceptual accumulation of merit and the nonconceptual accumulation of wisdom. The making of the offerings themselves gathers or

completes the conceptual accumulation of merit; when these offerings are made within the recognition of the ultimate unreality of the offerings, the offerer, and the act of offering—when there is recognition of the emptiness of the offerings, the emptiness of the offerer, and the emptiness of the act of offering—then the nonconceptual accumulation of wisdom is also completed.

Finally the offerings are presented at the end of the stanza with the offering mantras that denote them. The word *vajra* at the beginning of the mantra indicates that the nature of the offering substances is emptiness. Then the individual offerings are named in order, and finally *tra ti tsa*, or *pra ti cha*, means individually to each. So to each of the deities the offerings are presented.

At this point in most vajrayana practices the outer offerings would be followed by the inner, secret, and ultimate offerings. The inner offering is generally the offering of some kind of tormas. Torma is referred to in this context as an inner offering because the offering of it is a way to increase your samadhi, your meditative absorption, which is an internal phenomenon. The secret offering is the offering of the unity of bliss and emptiness, which is made in order to induce or stabilize this recognition in the practitioner. In the same way, the ultimate offering, the offering of the recognition of the ultimate nature itself, is made in order to stabilize that recognition in the practitioner. Here these offerings are not given because this practice, while it is vajrayana in tradition, tends to follow the sutras in style. Therefore, the offerings that follow are those which are commonly presented in the sutras themselves.

The next two sets of offerings presented are the eight auspicious substances and the eight auspicious signs or marks.

HUNG

**The eight foremost auspicious substances,
The best royal white mustard seed, and the
others,**

I offer to the deity.

May the two accumulations be perfected.

MANGALAM ARTHA SIDDHI HUNG

The eight auspicious substances are so called because they are eight substances or things which are connected with the arising of dharma in this world. They are considered auspicious because they were significant in bringing about the arising of the teachings. The eight auspicious signs or designs appear on the body of a buddha

and are therefore considered auspicious. The eight auspicious substances include such things as the conch shell with the swirl going clockwise, which the god Indra offered to the Buddha when he requested him to turn the wheel of the dharma. Based on Indra's offering, the Buddha first taught the dharma, as a consequence of which beings have the opportunity to encounter the dharma and attain its results. For that reason, the conch shell with its clockwise swirl, is considered auspicious.

Another of the substances is

durva grass, which a grass cutter and seller, whose name was also auspicious, offered the Buddha when he encountered him just before the Buddha's awakening. The Buddha used the durva grass to make a seat, on which he sat while he attained awakening. Therefore, because it is connected with the Buddha's awakening, which is the event that transformed this period of history from a period of darkness into a period of illumination, durva grass is also considered an auspicious substance.*

Thus, you offer the eight auspicious substances to the Medicine Buddha and his retinue,

The eight
auspicious
substances . . .
are considered
auspicious
because they
were significant
in bringing about
the arising of the
teachings

***Editor's note:** Rinpoche discusses these and other offerings in greater detail in the next teaching.

making the aspiration to complete the two accumulations by offering them. The mantra at the end of that stanza is *mangalam*, which means auspicious, and *artha siddhi*, which makes it the accomplishment of auspiciousness.

The next set of offerings are the eight auspicious signs or marks.

HUNG

**The eight foremost auspicious symbols,
The peerless royal vase and all others,
I offer to the deity.**

**May sentient beings perfect the two
accumulations.**

MANGALAM KUMBHA HUNG

In general, every buddha is adorned with the thirty-two marks and the eighty signs, but of all of these, eight are foremost. These eight are actually the shapes of particular parts of his body, which are reminiscent of certain emblems. For example, the shape of the top of the Buddha's head is reminiscent of a parasol, so the precious parasol is one of these auspicious signs. The shape of his eyes is like the shape of a certain golden fish, so the golden fish is another one. The shape of his throat is like a certain kind of vase, so the precious vase is yet another, and so on. Again, one offers these eight shapes or signs to the deities in order to bring about the auspiciousness of them, making the aspiration that by making these offerings all beings without exception will perfect the two accumulations: the conceptual accumulation of merit and the non-conceptual accumulation of wisdom. The mantra at the end of this stanza is *mangalam kumbha hum*. *Mangalam* means auspicious; *kumbaha* means vase. The vase is used here to indicate all eight of these signs or shapes. Because it represents the shape of the Buddha's throat, and because it was out of the Buddha's throat originally that the dharma issued forth, the vase is considered of foremost importance.

The next offering is the offering of the seven articles of royalty, which are seven possessions* unique to a certain type of monarch called a chakravartin.

**HUNG The foremost desirable qualities, the
seven precious articles,
The most excellent royal one, the jewel, and the
others,
I offer to the deity.
May I perfect the two accumulations.
OM MANI RATNA HUNG**

A chakravartin appears during the best or finest periods of history, during what is called a fortunate eon or period. These seven articles distinguish a chakravartin from any other monarch; however the true internal meaning of these seven articles is that they represent the seven aspects of the path to awakening, which is traversed by all buddhas and bodhisattvas. So when you make this offering to the deities, you think that externally you are offering the seven articles of royalty as representations of the seven aspects of the path to awakening.

You present these offerings to all the deities of the mandala visualized in front, making the aspiration that by doing so you will complete the two accumulations—the conceptual accumulation of merit and the nonconceptual accumulation of wisdom. The mantra used to complete this offering refers to the first of the seven articles, the precious jewel. *Mani* means jewel and *ratna* means precious.

The next offering, which completes the main section of the offerings, is the offering of a mandala.

***Editor's note:** Though these seven "articles of royalty" or seven "possessions" may appear as such—as articles or possessions—to an observer lost in dualistic perception who sees everything as "my and mine," "her and hers," "him and his," etc., they are better understood by adhering more closely to the actual meaning of the Tibetan words used here, *död yön*. *Död* means desirable, and *yön* means quality, skill or attribute. Thus, if one understands these seven "whatevers" as seven qualities or attributes of a chakravartin's mind—whether the chakravartin is thought of as male or female—it will be easier to understand that these "articles" or "possessions," to the extent that they appear to be external phenomena, appear naturally and effortlessly and totally without coercion in his or her mandala or world. Without this understanding, the notion of precious queen might appear as nothing more than another aspect of an androcentric universe. This misunderstanding is further undermined by understanding them as aspects of the path, as Rinpoche explains.

**HUNG The foremost of all, Mount Meru
With its four continents and subcontinents
I offer to the deity.
May the two accumulations be perfected.
OM RATNA MANDALA HUNG**

In general, of course, we make these offerings in order to gather and complete the accumulation of merit. We do not make them for the benefit of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, who are their ostensible recipients. Buddhas and bodhisattvas are not particularly pleased by the presentation of offerings or displeased by their absence. The only real reason for making offerings is that the person making them gathers the accumulation of merit by doing so. We make offerings for our own benefit,* and it is how it affects us that is important. Offerings are not limited to that which you can actually physically assemble around you as offering substances. Offerings can be of any of three types,

***Editor's note:** And, by extension, for the benefit of all beings. In the view of the practice of vajrayana, which is rooted in the mahayana aspiration to attain budhahood in order to liberate all sentient beings, the mandala of the yogin or yogini's body, speech, and mind is the entirety of animate and inanimate existence, and whatever affects the one beneficially affects the other beneficially as well. Specifically, offerings are made as an antidote to desire and attachment and the self-clinging that underlies them. As one continues to make these offerings to enlightened sources of refuge, there begins to develop the understanding and then the direct experience of the emptiness or lack of inherent existence of all that to which one has been clinging, and one's desire and attachment and self-clinging begin to dissolve and give rise to the wisdom of discriminating awareness, to the transparent self-liberating kaleidoscopic vision of what is as the mere interdependent appearances of the clear light nature of mind, and to a palpable blessing that benefits beings. It is not in order to become a good person that one makes offerings; at root, one is already a good person. One makes offerings in order to discover the truth of reality or the truth of things, and in order to access the profound effectiveness in helping others that arises from that discovery.

Buddhas and bodhisattvas are not particularly pleased by the presentation of offerings or displeased by their absence. The only real reason for making offerings is that the person making them gathers the accumulation of merit

which are called actually assembled, mentally emanated, and produced through the power of aspiration. Actually assembled offerings are physically present and under your power to offer. Mentally emanated offerings are offerings that you imagine, that you do not actually have physically present before you, but that you can imagine clearly enough to offer in your mind. Offerings offered through the power of aspiration are things that are so vast and limitless that you cannot even encompass them in your mind or imagine them, but you can at least make the aspiration to offer them to the buddhas and bodhisattvas. It is said that any of these three

types of offerings will all produce the accumulation of merit. We use the offering of the entire universe as a mandala because the vastness of it produces great merit.

Specifically mentioned are the central mountain, Mount Meru, together with the continents surrounding it. These together, along with everything that goes with them, make up the mandala, which is considered the principal among all offerings. In detail, the offering consists of Mount Meru, which includes on top of Mount Meru the second of the desire god realms—enumerated from the bottom up—called the heaven or god-realm of the thirty-three. Surrounding Mount Meru are seven concentric rings** of golden mountains with lakes in between them. In these seven golden mountains and on their lakes live the gods of the first realm of the desire god realms and the four great kings—the same four kings

who are guardians in the mandala of the Medicine Buddha. When you offer Mount Meru, you also think that you are offering all of the wealth

****Editor's note:** These are usually represented as concentric squares.

of those god's realms. Outside those seven golden mountains are the four main continents with their eight subcontinents, which are the habitation of humans—all of the wealth, possessions, splendor, and beauty of which you offer as well. In short, you offer the world, indeed the whole universe, and all it contains to all of the deities, and you make the aspiration that by so doing, you complete the two accumulations and that you and the whole world be free from sickness.

After the fundamental offerings—the eight traditional offerings of water, flowers, incense, and so forth, and the offering of everything that is pleasing to the five senses—there have occurred four different sets of offerings: the eight auspicious substances, the eight auspicious signs, the seven articles of royalty, and finally the offering of the mandala. The next offering is the offering of ablution—of washing the bodies of the deities. This is done in order to create the auspicious basis for the removal of your own wrongdoing, your own defilements, and your own obscurations—the afflictive obscurations and the cognitive obscurations.

HUNG

With scented water

I bathe the sugata's body.

Although the deity is flawless,

This creates the auspicious connection for purifying all wrongs and obscurations.

**OM SARWA TATHAGATA ABIKEKATE
SAMAYA SHRIYE HUNG**

Here you think that from the heart of yourself visualized as the Medicine Buddha rays of light are emanated. On the tips of each of these rays are offering goddesses holding precious vases filled with ambrosia. With the ambrosia from these vases, they bathe the bodies of the primary Medicine Buddha, the seven other Medicine Buddhas, the sixteen bodhisattvas, and all of the other deities in the mandala. The words of the text say, “With scented water I bathe the sugata's body; although the deity is without stain, this creates the auspicious basis for purifying all wrongdoing and obscurations.”

This offering of ablution is culminated with the mantra, *Om Sarwa Tathagata Abikekate Samaya Shriye Hung*. *Sarva* means all. *Tathagata* means tathagatas or buddhas. And *abikekate* refers to this process which in some contexts means empowerment, but in this context means ablution. Through this offering you increase the splendor and majesty of the deities; therefore, there is the words *shriye*, which means splendid, majestic, or glorious.

The next offering, which goes along with ablution, is drying the bodies of the deities, which is done by visualized offering goddesses holding fine white cotton towels scented with perfume.

HUNG

With a scented, soft white cloth

I dry the victor's body.

Though your body is flawless,

This creates the auspicious connection for freedom from suffering.

OM KAYA BISHODHANI HUNG

You state in these two stanzas that you are not washing and drying the deities because they are dirty or have stains that need to be washed away, and so on; you are drying the bodies of the deities after washing them because it creates the interdependent cause of drying up or removing the suffering of all beings. Therefore, you make the aspiration that the suffering of all beings—especially the sufferings of physical sickness and mental affliction—be removed. *Kaya vishodani* means the purification of the body.

Next is the offering of clothes or robes to the deities of the mandala.

HUNG With these beautiful saffron robes

I clothe the victor's body.

Although your body is never cold,

This creates the auspicious connection for vitality to flourish.

OM BENZA WAYTRA AH HUNG

Having bathed and dried them, next we have to offer them appropriate robes. The robes that are actually mentioned in the first line of this stanza are those that are offered to the Medicine Buddha and to the seven buddhas in his retinue,

all of whom, since they are manifesting in supreme nirmanakaya form, wear only the beautiful saffron red and yellow robes which are worn by buddhas. As the visualized goddesses offer the robes, you recite, “With these I clothe the Victor’s body.” As in the previous offerings, you are making this offering, not because the Medicine Buddha is in any danger of becoming cold, but in order to create the auspicious basis for benefitting yourself and others. Therefore, you say, “Although your body is never cold, this creates the auspicious basis for the flourishing of vitality and physical splendor.” As a result of this offering vitality and physical splendor will arise in you and others through the power of your aspiration. Although not mentioned specifically in the liturgy, the clothing offered to the bodhisattvas is appropriate to their appearance [in sambhogakaya form]: elegant garments of multicolored silk and jewelry made of gold and jewels, and so on. The bodhisattvas are offered fine clothes and jewelry not because they are particularly attached to them, but because by offering them you create the auspicious basis for the increase of vitality. The word *vastra* in the mantra means robes or clothing or fabric.

Each of these sections—ablution, drying, and offering clothing—has its own particular significance. The fundamental significance of all three of them is indicated in connection with the second, where it says, “I make this offering in order to establish the auspicious basis for the removal of suffering.” The point of making these offerings is to remove the suffering of beings, which is primarily accomplished on the level of auspicious interdependence by the second offering, drying. But to remove the suffering of beings you must first remove the causes of suffering, which are wrongdoing and obscurations. So therefore, drying is preceded by ablution, the symbolic function of which is to purify the wrongdoing and obscurations of all beings. Finally, once the suffering has been removed, what develops in its place is a state of mental and physical well-being—including physical vitality, splendor and health—and a state of wisdom and peace within the mind, the interde-

pendent cause of the arising of which is established by the offering of robes and clothing, which is the third part.

Following the offerings come the praises. The praises are performed by imagining that offering goddesses emanated from the light rays from your heart sing the praises of the deities in the words of the liturgy with beautiful melodies. Praised are the qualities of body, speech, and mind of the Medicine Buddha and his retinue. These praises are not done in order to please the Medicine Buddha; buddhas and bodhisattvas are not pleased by praise nor displeased by its absence. One performs the praises to remind oneself, the practitioner, of the qualities of the deities. This increases one’s devotion and one’s resolve or desire to attain the state of the deities, which increases one’s diligence in practice.

The praises consist of three stanzas. The first is a praise of the Medicine Buddha. The second is a praise of the other seven medicine buddhas and the sixteen bodhisattvas. And the third is a praise of the remaining deities of the mandala, including the ten protectors of the ten directions, the twelve yaksha chieftains, and so forth.

The first stanza is addressed to the Medicine Buddha.

HUNG

Your body is like a mountain, the color of lapis lazuli.

You dispel the suffering of illness in sentient beings.

Surrounded by a retinue of eight bodhisattvas, Holder of Medicine, precious deity, I praise and prostrate to you.

The first line praises the appearance of his body or form: “The color of your body is like a mountain of lapis or vaidurya,” which is to say that in appearance his body is like the stainless mass of a blue jewel, like a lapis or vaidurya, and radiant with rays of light. So that is a praise of the majesty of his appearance. The second line is praise of his activity, and it says, “You remove the sufferings of sickness of all beings.” Sufferings of sickness here refer expressly to the literal suffering of physical illnesses, but also by

implication ultimately to the sickness and the suffering of the sickness of samsara itself, which the Medicine Buddha also dispels.

Having praised his appearance and activity, you then praise his retinue. Here the retinue referred to in the liturgy is not the retinue of the mandala; what is referred to here are the eight great bodhisattvas who exemplify the mahayana sangha. These are not the same as the sixteen bodhisattvas in the mandala; in fact, not all eight of these eight primary bodhisattvas are among the sixteen, although some of them are. Generally speaking, when we talk about the sangha, there is the ordinary sangha of the common vehicle and the exalted sangha of the mahayana, which is made up of bodhisattvas. These are exemplified by what are called the eight close offspring of the Buddha, eight great bodhisattvas such as Manjusri, Avalokiteshvara, Vajrapani, and so on.* Then in the last line you say, “I pay homage to and praise that deity who holds the precious medicine,” which is another way of referring to the Medicine Buddha himself.

The second stanza of praise praises the three jewels in general, exemplified by the buddhas, dharma, and sangha found in this mandala.

**Excellent Name, Precious Moon, Fine Gold, Free
of Misery,
Resounding Dharma Ocean, Dharma Mind,
Shakyamuni,
The genuine dharma, the sixteen bodhisattvas
and others,
To the precious three jewels, I offer praise and
prostrate.**

First mentioned are the seven other medicine buddhas—Excellent Name, Precious Moon, Fine Gold, Free of Misery, Resounding Dharma Ocean, Dharma Mind, and Buddha Shakyamuni. Then, following that, is mentioned the dharma itself, visually represented in the mandala by the sutras and commentaries but also understood as being the essence of the path. Finally, for the sangha it mentions “the sixteen

bodhisattvas, and so forth,” which means all of the mahayana sangha, as exemplified by the sixteen bodhisattvas found within this mandala. Then one completes the praise by saying, “I pay homage to and praise the three precious jewels.”

The final stanza is a praise to the remaining deities of the mandala and to all others who are associated with the mandala.

**To Brahma, Indra, the Great Kings, the Protectors
of the Ten Directions,
The twelve yaksha chiefs and all their assistants,
Vidyadharas and rishis of medicine, divine and
human,
To the deities of ambrosial medicine, I offer
praise and prostrate.**

First mentioned are Brahma and Indra, who are two among the ten protectors of the ten directions; and then the four great kings; the twelve yaksha generals or chieftains, together with their retainers; and then finally all of the holders of the knowledge of medicine and those who have mastered medicine, who here are referred to as vidyadharas and rishis of medicine, both those living in the realms of the gods and those living in the realms of humans. In short, one pays homage to and praises all of the deities of this mandala of ambrosial medicine.

All of the stages of the practice we have gone through today—the visualization of the bodies of the deities, the dissolution of the wisdom deities into them, the presentation of offerings and of praises to the deities—are aspects of the practice of the generation stage. In general, generation stage practice needs to have three characteristics: clear appearance or clarity of appearance, stable pride, and recollection of purity. What is meant by clear appearance is simply that there be a clear and distinct visualization of whatever it is you are visualizing. Whether you are visualizing the Medicine Buddha alone, that is to say yourself as the Medicine Buddha and the Medicine Buddha in front of you, or in addition to that you are visualizing the seven other medicine buddhas surrounding the front visualization, or in addition to that you are visualizing the sixteen bodhisattvas, or in addition to that

***Editor's note:** The other five are Kshitigarbha, Sarvanivaranavishkambhi, Akashagarbha, Maitreya, and Samantabhadra.

you are visualizing the entire mandala with the ten protectors and the twelve chieftains, and so on, in any case, whatever you are visualizing, clear appearance means that the appearance of the deities—the color, the shape, the ornaments and costumes and robes, the scepters and other things that are held in the hands, and so on—should be visualized in a way that allows your mind to remain stable and calm while nevertheless generating a clear and vivid image.


The second characteristic of generation stage practice is stable pride. Generally speaking, of course, pride is something we want to get rid of—it is a *klesha*. But here the word pride means something that is very necessary in vajrayana practices. Pride means being free of the misconception that, in visualizing yourself as the Medicine Buddha or in visualizing the Medicine Buddha in front of you, you are pretending that things are other than what they are. Stable pride here means recognizing that, although you are meditating on the Medicine Buddha as a conscious act, nevertheless, that is what you actually are. It is acknowledging that you actually are the Medicine Buddha. In the case of the front visualization it is acknowledging or recognizing that the front visualization is the actual presence of the Medicine Buddha, right in front of you. So stable pride really refers to an attitude of confidence, trust and belief. It is important to recognize that when you do the self visualization and the front visualization you are not merely imagining something that is fictitious. You are not pretending that things are other than they are. When you make these offerings—admittedly mentally emanated—to the deities, you should reflect upon the fact that these offerings are actually occurring, they are actually taking their effect. By making these offerings, you are actually gathering the accumulation of merit. To the extent that you have this confidence in the

In general, generation practice needs to have three characteristics: clarity of appearance, stable pride, and recollection of purity

validity and accuracy of the practice, you will have that much delight in it, that much devotion, and that much benefit.

The third characteristic of the generation stage is the recollection of purity. This has several meanings. Most obviously it means the recognition that the forms of the deities are wondrous and splendid, that the deities are not unpleasant in appearance, that they are not strange or of an inappropriate form; they are beautiful and pleasing in every way. But beyond that, it is the recognition that the nature of the deity's form is the embodiment of the deity's wisdom. The deities'

bodies are not flesh and blood—coarse bodies like our own—nor are they inanimate solid objects, as though made of earth and stone or wood. They are the pure embodiment of wisdom, which means that they are the expression of emptiness in the form of a clear, vivid appearance. Practically speaking, when visualizing them, you should see them or imagine them as being a vivid appearance—with their distinct colors, ornaments, scepters and so on—that is nevertheless without any coarse substantiality. Their appearance is luminous and vivid but insubstantial, like that of a rainbow. The fundamental meaning of this third point is that the deities are the embodiment in form of wisdom, and therefore their form is not samsaric in any way—it is not produced in any way by samsaric causes and conditions.

We are going to stop here for this afternoon and conclude with the dedication of merit. When performing the dedication of merit, think that you dedicate the merit of this session to the awakening of all beings in general and especially in the short term to the freedom of this world from all forms of sickness. 



Medicine Buddha

On the Origin of Auspiciousness In the Substances and Symbols

Continuing the Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche's teaching on the Medicine Buddha.

I would like to begin by wishing all of you a good morning. As you have no doubt noticed, I usually begin teaching sessions with the short lineage supplication that begins with the words “Great Vajradhara.”* We use this supplication because it is the one most often practiced at the seats of the Kagyu tradition and by Kagyu practitioners elsewhere. It was composed by Pengar Jampal Zangpo, the foremost disciple of the Sixth Gyalwang Karmapa, Thongwa Dönden, and the root guru of the Seventh Gyalwang Karmapa, Chödrak Gyamtso. After receiving instructions from the Sixth Gyalwang Karmapa, Pengar Jampal Zangpo went to Sky Lake in the north of Tibet to practice. In the middle of this lake, there was an island called Semodo and on that island there was a mountain with a cave in it. In this cave in utter isolation he practiced for eighteen years. The isolation there is complete, because it is very difficult to get to that island except in the middle of winter. He practiced, therefore, in total isolation for eighteen years and developed extraordinary realization of mahamudra. This lineage supplication, which he composed after that period of retreat, is regarded as containing the essence and blessing of his realization,

***Editor's note:** See Shenpen Ösel, Vol. 3, No. 3, page 11, for an English translation.

which is therefore why we use it. So when you chant it, please do so with faith and devotion.

[Rinpoche and students recite supplication prayer.]

Before we discuss the recitation of the mantra, I would like to expand upon what I said yesterday about the offerings. During our discussion of the eight auspicious substances, we mentioned the conch shell and the durva grass, but I would like to discuss the origin of the auspiciousness of each of them in greater detail. The first of these is the conch shell. Immediately after the Buddha's awakening he realized that, although he himself had seen perfectly and completely the nature of all things, the dharmata—which is profound and tranquil and beyond all elaboration—he felt that were he to try to explain this to anyone else, they would be unable to understand it. So he resolved to remain in samadhi, alone in the forest. After he had remained in samadhi for forty-nine days, the god Indra, who was an emanation of a bodhisattva, appeared in front of the Buddha and offered him a white conch shell with its spiral going clockwise as an offering to encourage the Buddha to teach. It was in response to that first offering that the Buddha decided to turn the dharmachakra, or to teach the dharma.

The second auspicious substance is yogurt. This is connected with the Buddha's teaching that in order to practice dharma properly we need to abandon or transcend two extremes in lifestyle or conduct. One of these extremes is hedonism, in which your goal and your endeavor is to seek as much pleasure as possible—including the acquisition of fine clothes, fine food, and so on. The problem with this extreme is that, if it becomes your goal or obsession, it leaves no time or energy for the

The second auspicious substance is yogurt. This is connected with the Buddha's teaching that in order to practice dharma properly we need to abandon two extremes in lifestyle or conduct

practice of dharma. But we also need to abandon the other extreme, which is mortification of the body,* because the attempt to attain something through tormenting or depriving your physical body of what it needs does not lead to awakening, and in fact can slow down your progress towards the development of profound wisdom. In order to show by example that it is necessary to abandon the extreme of hedonism, the Buddha left the palace of his father, who was a king, and lived for six years on the banks of the Naranjana River in conditions of utmost austerity. But in order to show that one must also abandon the extreme of mortification, he accepted immediately before his awakening an offering of a mixture of yogurt and extremely condensed milk, which was given to him by a

Brahmin woman named Lekshe. Immediately upon his consuming this offering of yogurt, all of the marks and signs of physical perfection which adorn the body of a buddha, which had become somewhat indistinct during his years of austerity, immediately became distinct and resplendent.

The third auspicious substance is durva grass, which was offered to the Buddha by the grass-cutter and seller Tashi—meaning auspicious—shortly before his awakening, from which he made the mat-like seat on which he sat at the time of his awakening.

The fourth auspicious substance is vermilion. The origin of the auspiciousness of vermilion is this: When the Buddha was in the process of attaining awakening or just about to attain it, Mara appeared and, exhibiting various sorts of unpleasant magical displays in order to obstruct the Buddha, finally challenged him, saying, "You cannot attain awakening; you

*Editor's note: i.e. extreme asceticism

cannot do this.” In response to which the Buddha said, “Yes, I can, because I have completed the two accumulations over three periods of innumerable eons.” In response, Mara said, “Well, who is your witness? Who can you bring to prove this?”—in response to which the Buddha extended his right hand down past his right knee and touched the earth. The goddess of the earth then appeared out of the earth and, offering the Buddha vermilion, said, “I serve as witness that he has completed the two accumulations throughout these three periods of innumerable eons.”

The fifth auspicious substance is bilva fruit. The origin of the auspiciousness of this fruit is that when the Buddha, while living in the palace compound of his father, the king of the Shakyas, first observed the sufferings of birth, aging, sickness, and death and resolved to attain freedom from them, he initially went to the root of a tree and practiced meditation there. During that time he developed a perfect state of shamatha, in acknowledgment of which the goddess or spirit of the tree offered him a bilva fruit.

The sixth auspicious substance is a mirror. The origin of the auspiciousness of the mirror is that when the Buddha had received and consumed the yogurt which he was offered by the Brahmin woman Lekshe, his physical form, which had become emaciated from his six years of austerity, was restored to its full vigor and majesty, causing the thirty-two marks and eighty signs of physical perfection to be vivid and apparent, in response to which the goddess of form—which in this instance appears to be a

goddess of the desire realm gods—appeared in front of the Buddha and offered him a mirror so that he could witness his own physical majesty and splendor.

The seventh auspicious substance is called *givam*, a medicinal substance that is derived from some part of the body of the elephant—possibly from the elephant’s gall bladder. It is auspicious because it commemorates an occasion long after the Buddha’s awakening when the Buddha’s cousin, Devadatta—who was always attempting to kill or otherwise harm the Buddha and had been doing so for many lives because he was afflicted with great jealousy of the Buddha—finally attempted to assassinate the Buddha by sending a mad elephant running out into the path where the

Buddha was walking. The Buddha emanated ten lions from his ten fingers, which slowed the elephant down. The elephant then bowed to the Buddha and offered himself, including his body, to the Buddha. Since *givam*, which is an effective medicine, comes from the body of an elephant, it commemorates that occasion in which the Buddha conquered the aggression of the mad elephant.

The eighth auspicious substance is white mustard seed, which was offered to the Buddha by Vajrapani on one of the fifteen days during the Buddha’s period of exhibition of miracles. At one time during the Buddha’s lifetime there were six prominent non-Buddhist religious teachers in India. At one point they gathered together and, in order to attempt to discredit the Buddha, they challenged him to a competition of



The Buddha, practicing austerities

miracles. The Buddha accepted,* and the competition occurred at the beginning of what is now the first month of the Tibetan and Asian calendars. The Buddha's exhibition of miracles occurred from the first to the fifteenth day of the first lunar month. For the first eight days, the six other religious teachers competing were still present, but on the eighth day the Buddha scared them off in the following way: From the Buddha's throne the bodhisattva Vajrapani, accompanied by five fearsome *rakshasas*, emerged. Seeing that, the six *tirtika* teachers ran off as fast as they could and did not come back.

For the remaining week the Buddha exhibited miracles alone without any competition. When Vajrapani emerged from the Buddha's throne, he offered the Buddha white mustard seed, which therefore commemorates this occasion.

These eight auspicious substances are seemingly common things, but they have great auspicious significance because each of them commemorates a specific occasion connected with the arising of dharma in this world, its teaching, its increase, and the demonstration of its power and benefit.

The second set of offerings are the eight auspicious signs or marks.** The marks or shapes of these items resemble the shapes of particular parts of the Buddha's body, and have therefore come to serve as emblems of the buddhadharma. The first of these, which I mentioned yesterday, is the parasol. The round shape of the parasol is like the beautifully round shape

***Editor's note:** This is very interesting story, for the Buddha actually accepted and then postponed this event many times, before finally accepting the challenge. For a further description of this event, see Thich Nhat Hanh's *Old Path White Clouds*.

****Editor's note:** Generally referred to as the eight auspicious symbols.

*****Editor's note:** sometimes called the endless knot or the knot of eternity.

of the Buddha's head.

The second sign or symbol is the auspicious fish; the shape of the fish represents the shape of the Buddha's eyes when his eyes were half-closed in the posture of meditation. The third is the auspicious vase, which represents the Buddha's throat, in part because of the shape of his neck, but also because out of the throat of the Buddha emerges the sacred dharma which, like the ambrosia from a precious vase, satisfies all the needs of beings, assuages the thirst of samsara, removes suffering, brings happiness, and is inexhaustible.

The fourth is the auspicious conch, which in this case represents the speech of the Buddha. The conch is used as a musical instrument and as a horn to call people from a great distance. It is famous as having a resounding and clear sound. In the same way, the Buddha's speech is always of an appropriate volume and melody. If you are sitting close to the Buddha, his voice does not sound too loud, but if you are sitting very far away

from him you can still hear it.

The fifth is the precious victory banner. The precious victory banner represents the fitting and beautiful quality of the Buddha's form in general, which is perfectly proportioned. All of his body parts are the right size for the rest of his body; it is not as though he has a huge head and his arms are too short or his legs are too short or anything like that. His body is perfectly proportioned.

The sixth one is the glorious knot,*** which represents the Buddha's heart or mind. This doesn't mean that he literally has the design of the glorious knot on his chest. It means that his mind or his heart knows everything completely and clearly, without limitation.

The seventh is the lotus, which represents the tongue of the Buddha, which is supple, fine, and slender. With it he can speak clearly. In whatever he wants to say his enunciation is

The fish represents the shape of the Buddha's eyes when his eyes were half-closed in the posture of meditation

perfect; also his tongue and saliva improve the taste of all food.

The eighth is the auspicious wheel, which is actually found as a design on the soles of the Buddha's feet—the image of a golden wheel. This represents his turning of the wheel of the dharma, by means of which beings are liberated.*

Because these eight marks or signs are images that naturally occur on a buddha's body or resemble certain qualities of the Buddha, then they have become embodiments in and of themselves of auspiciousness and goodness. Therefore, it is believed that to keep them in your home, or to wear them on your body, brings auspiciousness. In this sadhana, we offer them and by offering them we accumulate great merit, through which inauspicious circumstances that inhibit the dharma practice of the practitioner, and of beings in general, are averted.

The third set of offerings in this section of the practice are the seven articles of royalty, which are, literally speaking, things [and types of animals and people] that are always found in the entourage of a chakravartin, a monarch who rules over an entire world or universe. As I mentioned yesterday, they correspond internally to the seven limbs of the path of awakening, which are seven qualities that all buddhas and bodhisattvas possess as factors of their attaining awakening. The first of the seven articles of royalty is the precious jewel, which corresponds to the virtue of faith. A bodhisattva must possess abundant and excellent faith to serve as ground for the development of all good qualities. The meaning of this is that if one has faith, then all other qualities, such as meditative

***Editor's note:** The takeoff point for this description is the Buddha Shakyamuni, but it should be understood that these attributes are present in male and female buddhas alike.

stability, diligence, insight into the meaning of dharma and so on, will definitely arise, and on the basis of their arising, one will be able to eradicate all that is to be transcended or abandoned.

The second branch of awakening is knowledge or insight, prajna. Of the seven articles of royalty, this knowledge corresponds to the

precious wheel, which enables the chakravartin to be victorious against any kind of invasion or warfare. In the same way, it is knowledge, or prajna, that enables one to conquer the kleshas and ignorance.**

The third branch of awakening is samadhi or meditative absorption, which serves as the necessary ground for knowledge or prajna. If prajna is grounded in samadhi, then it will be stable, tranquil, effective, and appropriate or correct. If it is not grounded in samadhi then prajna goes off the track, becomes incorrect and runs wild, so that it actually is more of a problem

than a benefit. The third article of royalty is the consort of the monarch. The consort serves to keep the monarch on track, to pacify and tame the monarch. So therefore, the consort corresponds to samadhi.

The fourth branch of awakening is joy, which arises from the correct presence and application of both samadhi and prajna. Joy here refers, for

****Editor's note:** It is important to understand that the term prajna includes in one term the notions of knowledge, wisdom, and primordial awareness or transcendental awareness, which is the highest form of prajna. Worldly knowledge—medicine, literature, business management, economics or anthropology—is one form of prajna. Knowledge of the teachings of the Buddha and other enlightened beings is spiritual prajna. Both worldly and spiritual prajna are based on the acquisition of information, and though they may have a great deal of practical benefit, they will not by themselves liberate one from the root causes of suffering. Only the highest form of prajna, jnana—primordial awareness, which is liberated from the superimposition on experience of perceiver and perceived—will free one from the root causes of suffering.

If it is not grounded in samadhi then prajna goes off the track, becomes incorrect and runs wild, so that it is actually more of a problem than a benefit

example, to the joy of the attainment of the first bodhisattva level, which is called the Utterly Joyful. Of the seven articles of royalty, joy corresponds to the precious minister. In most enumerations this is a minister who gives wise council to the monarch and therefore promotes joy. Sometimes it is also called the precious householder, which is the subject of the monarch who also brings appropriate advice.

The fifth limb of awakening is diligence and this corresponds to the precious excellent horse. Just as an excellent horse enables the monarch to travel anywhere they wish to go with great speed, in the same way the possession of diligence enables the bodhisattva to cultivate the qualities of samadhi and prajna, and, through cultivating them, to eradicate the kleshas and to increase all positive qualities.

The sixth article of royalty is the precious elephant. The significance of this elephant is that it is extremely peaceful and tame, so it represents, from among the seven limbs of awakening, the faculty of mindfulness, which is a mind kept tranquil and always consciously aware of what is going on in the mind and what one's actions are.

The seventh and last limb of awakening is equanimity, a state of mind in which the bodhisattva is free from the afflictions of attachment to some things and aversion to other things. Through the faculty of equanimity, the bodhisattva overcomes the warfare of the kleshas. Of the seven articles of royalty, it is represented by the precious general, because the precious general overcomes all warfare and aggression. So these are the seven articles of royalty, which are offered as symbols of the seven limbs or factors of awakening.

Externally one is symbolically offering the seven articles of royalty, but internally one is offering the seven limbs of awakening. Offering

Externally one is symbolically offering the seven articles of royalty but internally one is offering the seven limbs of awakening

the seven limbs of awakening means cultivating these virtues within oneself. By cultivating them within oneself, one enters the true and genuine path leading to awakening, which is the most pleasing of all things to all buddhas and

bodhisattvas. The cultivation of these and other virtues is the ultimate or true offering to buddhas and bodhisattvas, which is why they are offered at this point.

Next we come to the visualization that accompanies the repetition of the mantra. In the text it says to visualize in the center of the heart of oneself as the Medicine Buddha, and in the heart of the front visualization of the Medicine Buddha, the seed syllable HUM surrounded by the garland of the mantra. In detail, one visualizes a moon disc—a

disc of white light that represents the moon—lying flat in the very center of one's body at the level of the heart. Standing upright upon this disk is visualized the seed syllable of the deity, a blue HUM, which represents the deity's mind or wisdom. Surrounding the HUM is visualized the garland of the mantra from which rays of light will emanate and so forth.*

The HUNG in the heart of the self and front visualizations is surrounded by the mantra garland.

TAYATA OM BEKENDZE BEKENDZE MAHA BEKENDZE RADZA SAMUDGATE SO HA

Having visualized the moon disc, the HUM syllable, and the mantra garland in the heart of both the self and front visualizations, you then

***Editor's note:** The syllable HUM standing in the center of the deity's heart in both the self and front visualization faces forward, in the same direction as the deity. The mantra garland, visualized in Tibetan, faces outward—which means that one could read it standing outside the Medicine Buddha but not from the perspective of the HUM in the heart, beginning with TAYATA directly in front of the central seed syllable HUM and arranged in a circle surrounding the seed syllable.

think that from the syllable HUM and the mantra garland in the heart of the self-visualization rays of multicolored light shoot out towards the front visualization. These rays of light strike the heart of the front visualization, arousing its nonconceptual compassion and causing rays of multicolored light to emerge from the mantra garland and syllable HUM in its heart, which proceed to the eastern pure realm of the Medicine Buddha, called the Light of Vaidurya. On the tips of each of these multicolored rays of light are offering goddesses who make innumerable offerings to the Medicine Buddha, the seven other medicine buddhas, the sixteen bodhisattvas, and so on. These offerings serve to arouse their compassion; to remind them of their promises, vows, and aspirations to benefit beings; and to cause them to release their blessings.

The blessings of their body take the form of innumerable forms of the Medicine Buddha and his retinue—huge ones, tiny ones, and every size in between. These innumerable forms of the principal Medicine Buddha, the other medicine buddhas, and the bodhisattvas, rain down and dissolve into you as the self-visualization and into the front visualization, granting you the blessings of the body of the Medicine Buddha and his retinue.

At the same time, the blessing of their speech is emitted in the form of the mantra garlands, which in this case are multicolored. Mantra garlands of various colors rain down from the pure realms of the Medicine Buddha and dissolve into you as the Medicine Buddha and into the front visualization, granting you the blessings of their speech.

Finally, the blessing of their mind, which strictly speaking has no form, is for the purpose of this visualization embodied in the form of what is held in the Medicine Buddha's hands—the arura and the begging bowls filled with ambrosia. These are emitted and rain down and

dissolve into you as the Medicine Buddha and into the front visualization, granting you the blessing of their mind.

If you can visualize clearly, it is best to do all of this very slowly and gradually. While you continue to say the mantra, you think that rays of light emerge from the self-visualization, go to the front visualization, and then from the front visualization outwards to the pure realms, proceeding gradually and slowly. Especially when the blessings of body, speech, and mind rain down upon and dissolve into you, you can do the visualizations in sequence: first, visualizing the blessings of body raining down, without being in any kind of a hurry and so quite distinctly; and then visualizing the blessings of speech and then the blessings of mind. If you

find that the visualization is extremely unclear, if you wish, you can do it all at once. But if you do it gradually and slowly, you will find that you will get a much stronger sense of the blessings actually entering into you. By taking your time with the visualization, you will develop real confidence, a real feeling of the blessings entering into you.

When you receive the blessing of the Medicine Buddha, and of buddhas and bodhisattvas in general, various unpleasant things—obstacles, sickness, demonic disturbances—will be pacified, and compassion, faith, devotion, insight, and so on will flourish and increase. In order to practice the descent of blessing most effectively, it is a good idea to focus the blessings on whatever is afflicting you most at that time. For example, if you are having a particular physical problem—an illness or some other physical problem—or a particular mental problem—a particular klesha, a particular type of stress, or particular worries—you can focus the absorption of the blessings of the buddhas and bodhisattvas on that. You can focus it on the removal of wrongdoing and obscurations in general, but focus it especially on

By taking your time with the visualization, you will develop real confidence, a feeling of the blessings entering into you

what you regard as your greatest concern at the moment. For example, you may feel that you lack a specific quality: If you feel that you lack insight or you lack compassion or you lack faith, then think that the blessing serves to promote that quality that you feel you are most lacking. And feel that through the absorption of these blessings you actually become filled with that quality as though it were a substance that were actually filling your whole body.

Those visualizations are for the usual, formal practice of the Medicine Buddha. In his book *Mountain Dharma: Instructions for Retreat*, Karma Chakme Rinpoche recommends the following visualization for the actual alleviation of sickness. You can visualize yourself as the Medicine Buddha, if you wish, but the main focus is to actually visualize a small form of the Medicine Buddha, no larger than four finger-widths in height, in the actual part of your body that is afflicted. So if it is an illness or pain in the head, visualize a small Medicine Buddha in the head; if it is in the hand, visualize a small Medicine Buddha in the hand; if it is in the foot, then visualize a small Medicine Buddha in the foot. Visualize the Medicine Buddha in that place, and think that from this small but vivid form of the Medicine Buddha rays of light are emitted. These rays of light are not simply light, which is dry, but liquid light having a quality of ambrosia. This luminous ambrosia or liquid light actually cleanses and removes the sickness and pain—whatever it is. You can do this not only for yourself, by visualizing the Medicine Buddha in the appropriate part of your own body, but you can do it for others as well by visualizing the Medicine Buddha in the appropriate part of their body or bodies. The radiation of rays of light of ambrosia and so on is the same.

This can be applied not only

to physical sickness but to mental problems as well. If you want to get rid of a particular type of anxiety or stress or depression or fear or any other kind of unpleasant mental experience, you can visualize the Medicine Buddha seated above the top of your head and think in the same way as before that luminous ambrosia or liquid light emerges from his body, filling your body and cleansing you of any problem, whatever it is.

You might think that all of this sounds a bit childish, but in fact it actually works, and you will find that out if you try it.

Following the repetition of the mantra comes the conclusion of the practice.

**I confess all wrongs and downfalls and dedicate all virtue to awakening.
May there be the auspiciousness of freedom from sickness, harmful spirits, and suffering.**

First is the admission of defects. With an attitude of regret for anything that you have done that is wrong or inappropriate, you simply say, “I confess all wrongs and downfalls.” Immediately after that you dedicate the merit or virtue of the practice to the awakening of all beings saying, “And dedicate all virtue to awakening.” Then you make an auspicious aspiration which focuses your dedication, saying, “Through this dedication of merit, may there be freedom from sickness, harmful spirits, and suffering for all beings.”

Next comes the dissolution of the mandala:

**The wordly ones return to their own places. BENZA MU.
The jnana and samaya sattvas dissolve into me,
And I dissolve into the expanse of all goodness, primordial purity. E MA HO.**

First a request to depart is addressed to the mundane deities, which is followed by the dissolution of the front and self-

If you feel that you lack insight or you lack compassion or you lack faith, then think that the blessing serves to promote that quality that you feel you are most lacking

visualizations of the wisdom deities. When you say, “Worldly ones return to your own places, *vajramu*,” you think that the ten protectors of the ten directions, the twelve yaksha chieftains, and the four great kings—all mundane deities visualized in the entourage of the front visualization—return to where they would normally reside.* That leaves the eight Medicine Buddhas and the sixteen bodhisattvas in the front visualization. These deities, who are the wisdom deities embodying the visualized images of them,** dissolve into your heart as the self visualization. Then the self-visualization gradually dissolves into light and then into the expanse of emptiness, at which point you say, “And I dissolve into the expanse of the all-good primordial purity.” At that point you rest your mind in the experience of emptiness.

All yidam practices include two stages: the generation stage and the completion stage. Everything up to this point—the visualization of the forms of the deities, the presentation of offerings and so on, the repetition of the mantra with the accompanying visualizations—are all aspects of the practice of the generation stage. When, subsequent to the dissolution of the visualization, you rest your mind in emptiness,

***Editor’s note:** What the translator is here calling mundane deities—in fact, if we met one of them, one suspects that one would think of them as anything but mundane, just as if we met Flash Gordon or Darth Vader we would hardly regard either of them as mundane—are what are oftentimes referred to as worldly deities, which means that, although they are said to reside somewhere in the gods’ realms and are said to be very powerful, they are not said to be enlightened. Buddhists recognize the relative reality of such deities, make offerings to them in order to please them, ask them politely not to bother dharma practitioners, ask for their protection, even ask them sometimes to help out with the weather, but never take refuge in them, for they themselves are not thought to be liberated from samsara.

****Editor’s note:** i.e. the jnanasattvas and the samayasattvas.

Visualization and other generation stage practices function to weaken the kleshas, while completion stage practices, which include . . . shamata and vipashyana, serve to eradicate them

this is the practice of the completion stage. It is through the practice of these two stages that you actually come to realize dharmata, the nature of things. Visualization and other generation stage practices function to weaken the kleshas, while completion stage practices, which include the practices of shamata and vipashyana, serve to eradicate them.

I mentioned yesterday that there are three Medicine Buddha practices that are used in our tradition—a long one, a medium one, and a short one—and that this is the short one. While this is the shortest, it is nevertheless considered the most effective. The long and medium forms of the Medicine Buddha are entirely sutra-oriented in style and content. This practice is a blend of the sutra tradition and the tantric or vajrayana tradition. So while

it is the shortest liturgically, it is the most complete because it has the most elaborate visualizations.

In the long and intermediate forms of the Medicine Buddha practice, because they are entirely sutric in approach, there is a preliminary meditation on emptiness, after which you imagine a palace as a residence for the front visualization and then you invite the deities to abide within that. There is not the precise development of the form of the deities, as in this case, nor is there any self-visualization, because it is entirely sutric. This practice which we are using includes the vajrayana practice of self-visualization and the precise details of the visualization. Therefore, it is considered to be more effective, to have more power.

Question: Rinpoche, I was interested in hearing your different elaborations on the “seven articles” of the mandala offering. I have done the mandala offering in my ngöndro practice and

there the offerings seem so much more concrete than the descriptions of the same articles we heard from you earlier today. Your descriptions of the “seven articles” of the chakravartin presented them much more as symbolic representations. Are they more concrete in some practices? Are there different practices? Are these different views? Do they come from the sutras, from the commentaries, from the vajrayana? Or do they vary for certain people?

And then I have a particular question about the person of the chakravartin, the universal monarch. We in the West, wrongly or rightly, have the notion that democracy is the best way. I’m just wondering—this chakravartin seems like a wonderful being, yet he or she—you didn’t mention any gender—this person seems to need help with faith, stability, exertion, with many different qualities. We in the West have found that a universal sort of monarch or ruler usually eventually goes wrong. Could you tell me what is different about this chakravartin that is going to make their rule so very successful, because we haven’t had that experience?

Rinpoche: With regard to your first question, the correspondence between the “seven articles” of royalty, which are the characteristic possessions of a chakravartin, and the “seven limbs of awakening”—which are necessary resources on the path for bodhisattvas—is a standard one. In cases where the symbolic meaning of offering the “seven articles” of royalty is not explained, it simply means that it is a briefer explanation of the significance of that offering. This correspondence definitely does function in all uses of those things as offering substances or items.

With regard to your second question, the chakravartin only arises in certain periods of history, which are called the best times or the best ages. What distinguishes a chakravartin from some kind of cosmic dictator is the arising of the chakravartin in human society at that point as a solution to problems rather than the beginning of them. A chakravartin arises at a time when there is disputation as to who should lead the society. The chakravartin him or her-

self, is not particularly [eager or] anxious to do so, but is altruistic, capable, and acclaimed by the society at large, which places them in their position of authority. Now, it is entirely possible that after the reign of a chakravartin, if a dynasty is established, things could degenerate, as your question indicates. But then they would no longer be chakravartins.

Question: So, are you saying there could be a female universal monarch, a chakravartini?

Rinpoche: Of course.

Question: What is the Sanskrit name of Sangye Menla?

Translator: The most common name found in the sutras is *Bhaishajyai Guru*, which means the teacher of medicine. That is translated into Tibetan as *Mengyi Lama*, or *Menla* for short. That’s why we call it Sangye Menla or the Medicine Buddha. Menla literally means Medicine Guru.

Question: Rinpoche, over and over again you talk about how in a way almost all of these practices are a backdrop for what the real practice is, which is faith and devotion that the practice will actually work. It seems that all practices in a way should be aimed at intensifying that. You say, “intense supplication,” and there have been times in my practice when that just came, and I felt a fervor of faith. Then other times I really wished I had it, because I really felt like I needed it. You talk about generating bodhicitta or generating faith. What is the process of generating? I can put the thought in my mind, but if there is also pervasive doubt and pervasive cynicism . . . I come from a kind of culture of doubt and of questioning and of philosophical b.s., so it’s very difficult to talk about these concepts with absolute faith. What is the method of generating intense faith?

Rinpoche: The approach is to try to develop informed faith. Informed faith comes about through investigation. Through investigating the

meaning of dharma you discover valid reasons why it is appropriate to have faith in it. That will naturally make faith a matter of common sense.

Question: Rinpoche, what is the translation of the mantra? And when does the visualization of the blessings' coming down in the form of small Medicine Buddhas and the begging bowl and the fruit and the mantra stop? And when it stops, it's not yet the dissolution, is it? What are we resting in at that point?

Translator: You mean after the descent of blessings ends, and before you dissolve the visualization?

Question: Right.

Rinpoche: The mantra that you recite is basically an elaboration of the name of the Medicine Buddha. It is more or less reciting the name of the Medicine Buddha in Sanskrit. The point at which you stop visualizing the blessings of body, speech, and mind being absorbed into you again and again is up to you. You can continue that visualization for the entire duration of your recitation of the mantra, in which case there is not much in-between that and the dissolution of the mandala. Or from time to time, you can stop visualizing and just rest in devotion. It is not the case that you need to spend absolutely every instant of your mantra recitation dissolving these things into you. As long as there is faith and devotion, then it does not have to be constant.

Question: Is this mantra best used for animals that are dying, and what about animals that might have just recently died, perhaps quickly?

Rinpoche: It will also benefit an animal that has recently died; it is going to be most effective, of course, if it is used just before the animal dies.

But it will still benefit them afterwards.

Question: Rinpoche, thank you for the teaching. Given the aspirations of the Medicine Buddha, would it be appropriate to have a representation of the Medicine Buddha in the heart of the house, the family room, and particularly if the rest of one's family thinks the mother is completely strange. [laughter] And I've been told to recite *om mani peme hung* around dying and dead animals. Would it be more appropriate to recite the Medicine Buddha mantra?

Rinpoche: Reciting *om mani peme hung* or the Medicine Buddha's name or mantra to a dying animal will have pretty much equal benefit, so it is up to you. Both Avalokiteshvara and the

Medicine Buddha have made specific aspirations to be of benefit to beings in that way. It does not matter, either one. With regard to your first question: While placing a large and prominent image of the Medicine Buddha in the very center of your home would ultimately have long-term benefits for the members of your family, it might, as your question indicates, create more problems in the short-term. Specifically, it might create more resistance. It would probably be better to allow your family to

encounter the Medicine Buddha sort of incidentally, rather than having it thrust in their face.

Question: A small thangka on the wall, would that be better?

Rinpoche: If it does not cause disharmony within the home, then of course that would be fine. If it does, then it would be better that they encounter it somewhere outside the home.

We're going to stop here for this morning and conclude with the dedication of merit. ॐ

Through investigating the meaning of dharma you discover valid reasons why it is appropriate to have faith in it



From the Sky Dharma, which is a Mind Treasure,
An Ornament of the Clear Expanse of Mind,
Comes a Ritual of Menla Called

A Stream of Lapis Lazuli

Namo. Maha Bekandzeya. If they are available, arrange in front of a Menla thangka as many peaceful offerings as you can, such as a mandala and so forth; in this way the accumulations are completed. If these are not available, it is enough to make mental offerings while imagining the front visualization in the sky—nothing else is needed. Since this is the anuttara, the practitioner need not refrain from meat and alcohol nor perform the rituals of purification, such as taking the blessing of pure water. It is definitely necessary, however, to receive the empowerment and reading transmission for this practice, as it belongs to the anuttara tradition. Since it belongs to the nyingma tradition, the self and frontal visualizations are simultaneously generated; it is not necessary to create them separately. As it is a chanted meditation of the nyingma, your mind should meditate on the meaning of the words.

The supplication:

NAMO BEKENDZE MAHA RADZAYE

SÖ NAM YÖN TEN GYA TSHÖ TER NGA ZHING

You are endowed with an oceanic treasury of qualities and merit;

SAM GYI MI KHYAB THUK JEY JIN LAP KYI

By the blessing of your inconceivable compassion

DRO WAY DUK NGEL DUNG WA SHI DZE PA

You calm the suffering and torment of sentient beings.

BEN DUR YA YI Ö LA SOL WA DEB

I supplicate you, Light of Lapis Lazuli.

SHIN TU SER NA DRAK PÖ RAB CHING PE

Those bound by very intense greed

YI DAK NE SU KYE WAY KYE WO YI
Are born in the hungry ghost realm.

KHYÖ TSHEN THÖ NA MIR KYE JIN PA GA
If they hear your name, they are said to be born human and take delight in
generosity.

CHOM DEN MEN GYI LA LA SOL WA DEB
I supplicate you, victorious Menla.

TSHÜL THRIM CHAL DANG ZHEN LA SHE TSÖN PE
Violating morality and abusing others,

NYAL WAR KYE WAY DRO WA DI DAK GI
Beings are born in the hell realms.

KHYÖ TSHEN THÖ NA THO RI KYE WAR SUNG
Hearing your name, they are said to be born in the higher realms.

MEN GYI GYEL PO DE LA SOL WA DEB
I supplicate you, King of Medicine.

GANG DAK YEN DANG THRA MA DU MA YI
Whoever by repeated dissension and slander

RAB TU JE CHING LÜ SOK THRAL WA DAK
Creates serious schisms and takes life,

KHYÖ TSHEN THÖ NA DE DAK TSHE MI NÜ
Hearing your name, they cannot harm others.

MEN GYI GYEL PO DE LA SOL WA DEB

I supplicate you, King of Medicine

TSHEN LEK SER ZANG DRI ME NANG WA DANG

Excellent Name, Appearance of Stainless Fine Gold,

NYA NGEN ME CHOK PEL DANG CHÖ DRAK YANG

Glorious Supreme One Free of Misery, Resounding Dharma Melody,

NGÖN KHYEN GYEL PO DRA YANG GYEL PO DANG

King of Direct Knowledge, King of Melody,

SHAKYAY GYEL PO NAM LA SOL WA DEB

And King of Shakyas, I supplicate you all.

JAM PEL KHYAB DRÖL CHAK NA DOR JE DZIN

Manjushri, Kyabdröl, Vajrapani,

TSHANG WANG GYA JIN CHOK ZHI GYEL PO ZHI

Brahma, Indra, the four Kings of the four directions,

NÖ JIN DE PÖN CHEN PO CHU NYI SOK

The twelve great Yaksha chiefs, and so forth,

KYIL KHOR YONG SU DZOK LA SOL WA DEB

I supplicate you, entire and perfect mandala.

DE ZHIN SHEK PA DÜN GYI MÖN LAM DO

The Sutra of the Seven Tathagatas' Aspirations,

MEN GYI LHA YI DO DE NYI DANG NI

And the Sutra of the Medicine Buddha,

KHEN CHEN ZHI WA TSHÖ DZE ZHUNG LA SOK

The treatise by the great abbot Shantarakshita, and so forth,

DAM CHÖ LEK WAM TSHOK LA SOL WA DEB

I supplicate all the volumes of the genuine dharma,

BO DHI SA TO THRI SONG DEU TSEN SOK

Bodhisattva Shantarakshita, Trisong Deutsen, and others,

LO PEN GYEL LÖN JANG CHUP SEM PA DANG

Translators, scholars, kings, ministers, bodhisattvas,

GYÜ PAY LA MA DAM PA THAM CHE DANG

And all genuine lamas of the lineage,

CHÖ KYI WANG CHUK SOK LA SOL WA DEB

Powerful One of the Dharma, and others, I supplicate you.

DE TAR SOL WA TAB PAY JIN LAP KYI

Through the blessing of this supplication,

NE KAP NE DANG JIK PA NA TSHOK ZHI

May diverse temporal diseases and dangers of this life be stilled.

CHI TSE NGEN SONG JIK PA KÜN ZHI NE

At death, may all fear of the lower realms be calmed.

DE WA CHEN DU KYE WAR JIN GYI LOP
Grant your blessing that afterwards we are born in Sukhavati.

NAMO KÖN CHOK SUM DANG TSA WA SUM
To the sources of refuge, the three jewels

KYAB NE NAM LA KYAB SU CHI
And the three roots, I go for refuge.

DRO KÜN SANG GYE LA GÖ CHIR
To establish all beings in buddhahood,

JANG CHUB CHOK TU SEM KYE DO
I awaken a mind of supreme enlightenment.

KA DAK LONG NE TRÜL PA YI
From the expanse of primordial purity emanate

NAM SA GANG WAY CHÖ PAY TRIN
Clouds of offerings filling the earth and sky

MEN DEL GYEL SI LHA MOR CHE
With mandalas, articles of possessions, and goddesses.

ZE ME GYUR CHIK PUD DZA HO
May they never be exhausted. PUD DZA HO.

DRO KÜN DE DEN DUK NGEL DREL
May all beings be happy and free of suffering.

DE LE NYAM ME TANG NYOM SHOK

May their happiness not diminish. May they abide in equanimity.

OM SOBHAWA SHUDDHA SARWA DHARMA SOBHAWA

SHUDDHO HAM

TONG PA NYI DU GYUR

Everything turns into emptiness.

TONG PAY NGANG LE TONG SUM DI

From the depth of emptiness, this triple universe becomes

TA NA DUK GYI PHO DRANG DU GYUR PAY NANG DU

The exquisite palace, where

SENG GEY THRI PE DA SO SÖ TENG DU

On lion thrones, each with a lotus and moon disk on top

RANG NYI DANG DÜN KYE KYI TSO WÖ SA BÖN HUNG THING
KHA LE

Appear deep blue HUNGs, the seed syllable of myself and the main figure
visualized in the front,

MEN LA KU DOK BE DUR YA TA BU Ö ZER THRO WAY KU CHEN

From which, arises Menla, his body the color of lapis lazuli and radiating light.

CHÖ GÖ SUM GI LUP PA

He is clothed in the three dharma robes.

CHAK YE CHOK JIN A RU RA DANG

His right hand in the mudra of supreme generosity holds an arura.

YÖN NYAM ZHAG LHUNG ZE DZIN PA

His left hand in the meditation mudra holds a begging bowl.

TSEN PE DZOK SHING DOR JE KYIL TRUNG GI ZHUK PA

With the major and minor marks complete, he sits in the vajra posture.

KHYE PAR DU DÜN KYE KYI DAB MA NAM LA

In particular, on the lotus petals of the front visualization

THUB WANG LA SOK PAY SANG GYE DÜN DANG CHÖ PU TI

Are the seven Buddhas, Shakyamuni and the others, and dharma texts.

DE GYAB SEM PA CHU DRUK

Around them are the sixteen bodhisattvas,

DE GYAB JIK TEN KYONG WA CHU DANG

Around them are the ten protectors of the world,

DE PÖN CHEN PO CHU NYI SO SÖ KHOR DANG CHE PA

And the twelve great chiefs with their respective retinues.

GO ZHI LA GYEL PO CHEN PO ZHI

The four Great Kings are at the four gates.

DANG CHE PAY NE SUM YI GE SUM DANG THUK KAY HUNG

LE Ö ZER

From the three syllables in their three places and the HUNG in their hearts,

THRÖ PE SHAR CHOK KYI SANG GYE SO SÖ ZHING KHAM NE YE
SHE PA

Lights radiate, invoking from their own eastern buddha realms, countless

PAK TU ME PA CHEN DRANG NE DAK DÜN NAM LA THIM PAR GYUR
Wisdom deities which dissolve into myself and the one visualized in front.

HUNG MEN LA CHE GYE LHA TSOK MA LÜ NAM
HUNG. The eight Menla companions and all deities without exception

NE DIR CHEN DREN JIN CHEN WAB TU SOL
I invite here to this place. Kindly rain upon us your great blessings.

KAL DEN DE DEN DAK LA WANG CHOK KUR
Bestow the supreme empowerment on those who are worthy and faithful.

LOK DREN TSHE YI BAR CHE SEL DU SOL
Dispel false guides and obstacles to long life.

NAMO MAHA BEKENDZE SAPARIWARA BENZA SAMAYADZA DZA
BENZE SAMAYA TIKTRA LEN OM HUNG TRAM HRI AH
ABHIKENTSA HUNG

HUNG ME TOK DUK PÖ MAR ME DRI
HUNG. Flowers, incense, lights, scents,

ZHEL ZE RÖL MO LA SOK DANG
Food, music and so forth;

ZUG DRA DRI RO REK JA CHÖ

Forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touch, and all dharmas,

DAK GI LHA LA CHÖ PA BUL

I offer to the deities.

DAK CHAK TSHOK NYI DZOK PAR SHOK

May we perfect the two accumulations.

OM BENZA ARGHAM PADYAM PUPE DHUPE ALOKE GENDHE
NEWIDYE SHABDA RUPA SHABDA GENDHE RASA SAPARSHE
TRATITSA HUNG

HUNG TRA SHI TSO WO DZE GYE DE

HUNG. The eight foremost auspicious substances,

TSO CHOK GYEL PO YUNG KAR SOK

The best royal white mustard seed, and the others,

DAK GI LHA LA CHÖ PA BUL

I offer to the deity.

TSHOK NYI YONG SU DZOK PAR SHOK

May the two accumulations be perfected.

MANGALAM ARTHA SIDDHI HUNG

HUNG TRA SHI TSO WO TAK GYE DE

HUNG. The eight foremost auspicious symbols,

TSO CHOK GYEL PO BUM PA SOK
The peerless royal vase and all others,

DAK GI LHA LA CHÖ PA BUL
I offer to the deity.

SEM CHEN TSOK NYI DZOK PAR SHOK
May sentient beings perfect the two accumulations.

MANGALAM KUMBHA HUNG

HUNG DÖ YÖN TSO WO RIN CHEN DÜN
HUNG. The foremost desirable qualities, the seven precious articles,

TSO CHOK GYEL PO NOR BU SOK
The most excellent royal one, the jewel, and the others,

DAK GI LHA LA CHÖ PA BUL
I offer to the deity.

DAK NI TSHOK NYI DZOK PAR SHOK
May I perfect the two accumulations.

OM MANI RATNA HUNG

HUNG KÜN GYI TSO WO RI RAB LING
HUNG. The foremost of all, Mount Meru

RI RAB LING ZHI LING TREN CHE
With its four continents and subcontinents

DAK GI LHA LA CHÖ PA BUL

I offer to the deity.

TSHOK NYI YONG SU DZOK PAR SHOK

May the two accumulations be perfected.

OM RATNA MANDALA HUNG

HUNG DAK GI DRI DEN DRI CHAB KYI

HUNG. With scented water

DE SHEK KU LA KU THRÜ SOL

I bathe the sugata's body.

LHA LA DRI MA MI NGA YANG

Although the deity is flawless,

DIK DRIB DAK PAY TEN DREL GYI

This creates the auspicious connection for purifying all wrongs and
obscurations.

OM SARWA TATHAGATA ABIKEKATE SAMAYA SHRIYE HUNG

HUNG RE KAR JAM DRI DEN PA YI

HUNG. With a scented, soft white cloth

GYEL WAY KU NYI CHI WAR GYI

I dry the victor's body.

KU LA DRI MA MI NGA YANG

Though your body is flawless,

DUK NGEL DREL WAY TEN DREL GYI

This creates the auspicious connection for freedom from suffering.

OM KAYA BISHODHANI HUNG

HUNG NA ZA DZE DEN NGUR MIK DI

HUNG. With these beautiful saffron robes

GYEL WAY KU LA SOL WAR GYI

I clothe the victor's body.

KU LA SIL WA MI NGA YANG

Although your body is never cold,

TRAK DANG PHEL WAY TEN DREL GYI

This creates the auspicious connection for vitality to flourish.

OM BENZA WAYTRA AH HUNG

HUNG KU DOK BE DUR YA YI RI WO DRA

HUNG. Your body is like a mountain, the color of lapis lazuli.

DRO WA SEM CHEN NE KYI DUK NGEL SEL

You dispel the suffering of illness in sentient beings.

JANG CHUB SEM PA GYE KYI KHOR GYI KHOR

Surrounded by a retinue of eight bodhisattvas,

RIN CHEN MEN DZIN LHA LA CHAK TSHAL TÖ
Holder of Medicine, precious deity, I praise and prostrate to you.

TSHEN LEK RIN DA SER ZANG NYA NGEN ME
Excellent Name, Precious Moon, Fine Gold, Free of Misery,

CHÖ DRAK GYA TSHO CHÖ LO SHA KYA THUB
Resounding Dharma Ocean, Dharma Mind, Shakyamuni,

DAM PAY CHÖ DANG SEM PA CHU DRUK SOK
The genuine dharma, the sixteen bodhisattvas and others,

KÖN CHOK RIN CHEN SUM LA CHAK TSHAL TÖ
To the precious three jewels, I offer praise and prostrate.

TSHANG DANG GYA JIN GYEL CHEN CHOK KYONG CHU
To Brahma, Indra, the Great Kings, the Protectors of the Ten Directions,

NÖ JIN DE PÖN CHU NYI YOK DANG CHE
The twelve Yaksha chiefs and all their assistants,

LHA MIN MEN GYI RIK DZIN DRANG SONG TSHOK
Vidyadharas and rishis of medicine, divine and human,

DÜ TSI MEN GYI LHA LA CHAK TSAL TÖ
To the deities of ambrosial medicine, I offer praise and prostrate.

DAK DÜN THUK KAY HUNG LA NGAK TRENG KOR WAR MIG LA
The HUNG in the heart of the self and front visualizations is surrounded by the
mantra garland.

Through radiating many-colored light rays, offerings are made to Menla in the pure realm appearing in the east as the color of lapis lazuli. These lights invoke his mind stream, whence Menla's bodies, large and small, his speech as the mantra garland, his mind as the hand symbols of the arura and the begging bowl filled with amrita, all falling like rain, dissolve into myself and the front visualization.

TAYATA OM BEKENDZE BEKENDZE MAHA BEKENDZE
RADZA SAMUDGATE SO HA

Repeat as much as possible and then at the end:

DIK THUNG KÜN SHAK GE WA JANG CHUB NGO
I confess all wrongs and downfalls and dedicate all virtue to awakening.

NE DÖN DUK NGEL DREL WAY TA SHI SHOK
May there be the auspiciousness of freedom from sickness, harmful spirits, and suffering.

A prayer to return back and dissolution:

JIK TEN PA NAM RANG NE BENZA MU
The worldly ones return to their own places. BENZA MU.

YE SHE DAM TSHIK LHA NAM DAK LA THIM
The jnana and samaya sattvas dissolve into me,

KA DAK KÜN ZANG LONG DU E MA HO
And I dissolve into the expanse of all goodness, primordial purity. E MA HO.

This ornament that is a mind treasure was compiled from the Sky-Dharma and arranged by Raga Asya. If there are contradictions, I confess them before the deity. Through this virtue, may all sentient beings, once freed from sickness, swiftly attain the level of Menla. Though the sutra rituals have the practice of washing [which is not done here], as this is a higher practice, found at the end of the [supreme] yoga tantra, there is no contradiction.

If you take this as your regular practice, the benefits are the following. If you are ordained, your discipline will be maintained; though there might be an occasion when it is not, having purified this obscuration, you will not fall into the lower realms. Having purified the negative karma of being born as a hell being, a hungry ghost, or an animal, you will not take such a birth. Even if you do, immediately liberated, you will take a felicitous rebirth in a higher realm, and gradually attain awakening. In this life as well, you will easily obtain food and clothing and not be harmed by disease, negative spirits, sorcery, or the punishments of rulers. You will be protected and guarded by Vajrapani, Brahma, the Great Kings of the four directions, and the twelve great Yaksha chiefs each with their 700,000 assistants. You will be freed from all harm: from the eighteen kinds of untimely death, the harm of enemies, carnivorous beasts, and so forth.

All your wishes will be fully realized, and so forth. In the two more extensive sutras of Menla, the benefits are said to be inconceivable.

In the great monastic centers, such as Jang Damring Pelkhor Chöde, and their philosophical colleges, where the scholars find fault with most dharma and are difficult to satisfy, only this Menla ritual for prolonging life and clearing away the obscurations of death has spread widely. The ritual to be performed before the Jowo in Lhasa, Tibet's Bodhgaya, and before the Great Awakened One at Samye is this ritual of Menla. You should trust that within any of the new and the ancient transmissions, the sutras and the tantras, nothing is more beneficial than Menla. There are many extensive and concise versions; this one has few words and the full meaning. Since it belongs to anuttara yoga, rituals of purification are not needed. Since the offerings are mental, it is all right not to offer tormas. Everyone should practice this.
SHUBHAM DZAYENTU.

Translated under the guidance of Thrangu Rinpoche and Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche by Michele Martin with assistance from Ngodrup Burkhar and reference to translations by Lama Yeshe Gyamtso and Sarah Harding, Woodstock, N.Y., 1984, 1999, Kathmandu, 1999.

Short Menla Practice

HUNG KUN DOK BEN DUR YA YI RI WO DRA
HUNG. Your body the color of a mountain of lapis lazuli,

DRO WA SEM CHEN NAY CHI DU NGAL SEL
You dispel suffering of disease from all sentient beings.

CHANG CHUB SEM PA JAY CHI KOR JI KOR
Your retinue of eight bodhisattvas surrounds you—

RIN CHEN MEN DZIN LHA LA CHA TSAL TÖ
I praise and pay homage to the Deity Who Holds the Precious Medicine.

TAYATA OM BEKENDZE BEKENDZE MAHA BEKENDZE RADZA SAMUDGATE SO HA

SEM CHEN NAY PA JI NYAY PA
May the many sentient beings who are sick

NYUR TU NAY LAY TAR JUR CHIK
Quickly be freed from sickness

DRO WAY NAY NI MA LÜ PA
And may all the sicknesses of beings

TAK TU JUNG WA MAY PAR SHOK
Never arise again.

Shorter Menla Practice

CHOM DEN DAY DE SHIN SHEK PA DRA CHOM PA YANG DAK PAR DZOK PAY
To you, Bhagavan, Tathagata, Arhat, perfect and fully

SANG GYE MEN GYI LA BE DUR YA Ö KYI GYEL PO LA CHAK TSEL LO
Awakened Menla, king of lapis lazuli light, I offer prostrations.

Bhagavat, who is compassionate equally to all beings,
The very hearing of whose name pacifies the three lower states,
Medicine Buddha, who eliminates the illnesses of the three poisons,
May there be the goodness of the Vaidurya Light.

May sentient beings, whatever illnesses they suffer,
Be liberated quickly from those illnesses.
May all the illnesses of beings, without exception,
Forever not arise.

May medicines be effective,
And may the intentions of the recitations of the secret mantra path be accomplished.
May demonesses, cannibal demons, and so forth
Attain compassionate mind.

The Very Essence of Mind, Mahamudra, the One Sufficient Path

by Gampopa

Homage to the genuine gurus.

The Mahamudra of Gampopa, the One Sufficient Path, has three sections:

- 1) To Have a Decisive Understanding About the True Nature,
- 2) The Introduction to the Fundamental Character, and
- 3) Training on the Path of Suchness.

To Have a Decisive Understanding About the True Nature

Mahamudra has no causes.

Mahamudra has no conditions.

Mahamudra has no methods.

Mahamudra has no path.

Mahamudra has no result.

The Introduction to the Fundamental Character

“Mahamudra has no causes,” and yet faith and devotion are the causes of mahamudra.

“Mahamudra has no conditions,” and yet genuine gurus are the conditions for mahamudra.

“Mahamudra has no methods,” and yet uncontrived mind is the method of mahamudra.

“Mahamudra has no path,” and yet undistracted mind is the path of mahamudra.

“Mahamudra has no result,” and yet the mind liberated into dharmata is the result of mahamudra.

Training on the Path of Suchness

As the preliminary practice, meditate on guru yoga with faith, devotion, and respect, three times during the day and three times at night.

As the main practice, rest within the state of uncontrived mind with undistracted recognition.

As the conclusion, recognize whatever appears as your own mind and train your awareness with skill.

Relying upon the sequential arising of experiences, exert yourself in meditation until conceptual mind is exhausted.

There are two ways in which experiences arise: as unfavorable experiences and as favorable experiences.

As for the first: All unfavorable experiences—whatever they are, such as dullness, agitation, illness, fear, fright, or doubt—arise from your meditation. Therefore, recognize them to be experiences. Without abandoning them, meditate, taking those very things as the object of your view and meditation.

As for favorable experiences:

First, the experience of the mind's abiding arises.

Based on that, the experience of the essence, emptiness, arises.

Based upon that, the experience of attaining realization arises.

Based upon that, the experience of turning away from attachment arises.

With that sequential arising of experiences, you should exert yourself in practice without any complacency.

The mind's merely abiding at first is not sufficient—you must meditate in order to see the essence.

Merely seeing the essence is not sufficient—you must meditate in order to attain realization.

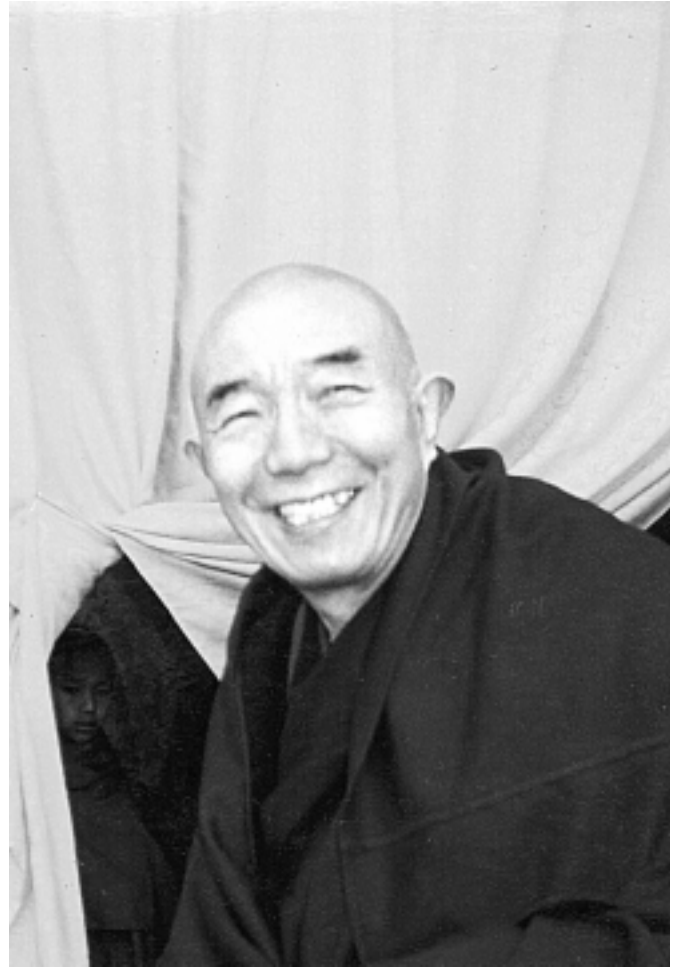
Merely attaining realization is not sufficient—you must meditate in order to turn away from attachment.

Merely turning away from attachment is not sufficient—you must meditate so that, through the liberation of conceptual mind into dharmata, conceptual mind is exhausted, phenomena are exhausted, and you awaken.

This completes *The Very Essence of Mind, Mahamudra, the One Sufficient Path*.

Translated into English orally and later revised by Elizabeth Callahan.

Tenga Rinpoche's Commentary on
**The Mahamudra
of the Venerable
Gampopa, the
One Sufficient Path**



The Very Venerable Tenga Rinpoche

The following is an edited transcript of a commentary given by the Very Venerable Tenga Rinpoche at the Kalachakra for World Peace program at Madison Square Garden in 1991, translated by Elizabeth Callahan.

Iwould like to extend my welcome to all of you who have gathered here today. My greetings to all the gurus, scholars, teachers, and dharma practitioners who have come because of a shared connection with the dharma.

We are extremely fortunate to have gathered here at this very special time, which is unlike any other time. We are very fortunate because His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the master of all the traditions of the Buddha's teachings found in Tibet, is here. His Holiness is considered to be an emanation of Chenrezig [Sanskrit: Avalokiteshvara], the Bodhisattva of Compassion, emanated in human form as a vajra master residing on a very high level of spiritual attainment. Chenrezig is the embodiment of the compassion of all buddhas and bodhisattvas. Thus, His Holiness the Dalai Lama is the actual embodiment of compassion, and as such works for the benefit of all beings throughout this world to pacify their sufferings, both on a temporal level and on an ultimate level. Through his great compassion he is able to bring this about. In particular, His Holiness is the leader of the people of Tibet and is able through his great compassion to bring benefit to them on both a temporal and an ultimate level. So, even in a very specific sense, he is able to be of great benefit to beings. In these next

few days His Holiness will continue in his effort to bring peace and benefit to all beings in the world by bestowing the empowerment of Kalachakra—by manifesting the form, [speech, and mind] of Kalachakra in order to grant us this empowerment. We are very fortunate to have this opportunity to receive such an empowerment.

The empowerment and the teachings of the Kalachakra Tantra were first requested of the Buddha Shakyamuni by the dharma king Dawa Zangpo at the place called the Drepung Stupa. In response, the Buddha Shakyamuni bestowed both the tantra and the oral instructions of Kalachakra. In general there are said to be four classes or divisions of tantra, of which the fourth is called anuttara tantra.

Anuttara tantras are divided into father tantras and mother tantras. The Kalachakra Tantra is considered to be a mother tantra, and within these mother tantras the Kalachakra Tantra is considered to be like the monarch. It is also considered to be the pinnacle of all the vehicles or yanas. Thus, there are no higher or greater empowerments or special instructions than those connected with the Kalachakra Tantra. For that reason it is said to be like the monarch of all tantras.

For these reasons we are extremely fortunate to be able at this time to receive from such a great vajra master such an empowerment with these teachings, which are like the monarch or pinnacle of all teachings. So, from my heart, I would like to extend my thanks to all the patrons who have made this event possible and to all those who have helped bring this event about in any way.

While I am explaining a bit about the teachings of mahamudra, I request all of you to give rise to a very special attitude and aspiration while you are listening. You should think that it is in order to bring about the peace and

happiness of all beings that you are now listening to these instructions on the path of mahamudra. And what type of aspiration or aspirational prayer should you make in this connection? You should wish that all the roots of virtue that are accumulated due to having received these instructions on mahamudra will bring about the peace and happiness of all beings.

It is the negative mind that produces these confused appearances and creates a hell realm for itself

In general, peace and happiness depend upon one's mind. Whether one attains happiness or does not attain happiness is entirely dependent upon one's own mind. All beings have mental afflictions—the six poisons, which are anger, attachment, ignorance, pride, greed, and jealousy. Based upon thoughts that arise out of these poisonous mental afflictions, one

performs actions with one's body, speech, and mind. Based upon such actions, one accumulates karma, and if these actions harm other beings, they are considered to be negative or nonvirtuous actions accumulating negative karma. Such negative actions give rise to suffering both temporarily and in the long term. As long as one has negative states of mind that give rise to negative actions, one will not experience peace, but will only experience suffering. The different types of suffering that we experience in this lifetime are called temporary suffering. The suffering which arises in future lives, such as being born in any one of the lower states—the hell realms, the hungry ghost realms, or the animal realms—is considered to be more long-term suffering. The cause of both of these types of suffering is the mental afflictions. Both types of suffering arise for oneself and for other beings.

In general, the appearances of a hell realm with all of its very fearful attributes—with all the great suffering that appears to exist within that realm—are actually not truly existent. They are merely the confused appearances of a mind that has accumulated evil actions. It is the

negative mind that produces these confused appearances and creates a hell realm for itself. For an individual without these negative states of mind, who has only a virtuous mind, there will never appear any such hellish appearances. So, since a hell realm appears only as the confused appearances of a negative mind—of a mind that has engaged in negative actions—one should not [allow oneself to be impelled by the mental afflictions to] engage in negative actions of body or speech. Instead, one should engage as much as one can in developing compassion, loving kindness, and diligence, in being generous to all beings, in maintaining discipline, in practicing patience with other’s anger, and so forth. One should engage in virtue and follow in virtuous ways as much as one can. By practicing virtue, one will be of benefit to others. And if one acts in ways beneficial to others, one will also attain happiness for oneself in this lifetime, in the next, and in all future lives, and eventually one will attain enlightenment. One will be able to bring about both the temporary and long-term happiness of others. This is what is called happiness and peace.

In addition to these types of methods* that need to be taught, the Buddha Shakyamuni also taught many other methods for disciplining and training one’s mind. These methods are included in such teachings as mahamudra, dzogchen, madhyamaka, prajnaparamita, and so forth. All of the profound teachings given by the Buddha were taught in order that one be able to discipline and train one’s own mind.

There are many methods taught for the

***Editor’s note:** It may seem strange to consider giving up evil deeds and states of mind and cultivating virtuous deeds and states of mind as “methods” of mental training that lead to happiness. That virtuous action leads to happiness and evil action leads to suffering seems so tautological that to consider teaching them as a “method” might seem simplistic. But if one considers the world view of the Buddha Shakyamuni’s contemporaries in Greece, for example—one of the cradles of our Western civilization—one finds the notion that happiness arises through the force of arms, the strong destroying the weak, robbing them of their goods, pillaging their villages, raping their women, killing their men, and enslaving their women and children. Indeed, if one turns on CNN, one is hard pressed not to think that that view still holds sway in many of the realms of this world.

practice of mahamudra meditation, but in brief, all of these methods can be included under two types: those connected with the sutra path,** and those connected with the secret mantra or vajrayana path.***

Referring to the teachings connected with the sutra tradition, Nagarjuna wrote, “There is one path to liberation taught by the buddhas, pratyekabuddhas, and shravakas. It is definite that there are no others.” “No other” means there is no other way to attain liberation than that one path. At the place in India called Vulture Peak, the perfect Buddha Shakyamuni—a supreme nirmanakaya—turned the wheel of the dharma a second time, teaching the vehicle without characteristics, and explained the meaning of emptiness in the extensive, middle length and concise presentations of the *Prajnaparamita*. This is something all of us should meditate upon using our intelligence.

If one were to wonder, “Since the Buddha Shakyamuni taught this middle turning of the wheel of the dharma, then is it not sufficient for us just to meditate upon these teachings under our own power or volition, not relying upon another teacher?” No, it is not sufficient. Jowo Palden Atisha said, “If one asks, ‘Who realizes emptiness,’ it is Nagarjuna and his student Chandrakirti, who were prophesied by the Tathagata and who saw the truth of dharmata.**** Through the instructions of their lineage, buddhahood is attained, not through any other means.” In this quote Atisha mentions Nagarjuna and Chandrakirti, but there were also countless other Indian mahasiddhas who realized the truth of dharmata or the true nature of reality, and by relying upon their instructions, their teachings on the *Prajnaparamita*, and so forth, and by putting such teachings into practice, one will be able to attain enlightenment.

If one were to wonder, “How is this term, mahamudra, explained in the sutras,” there is a

****Editor’s note:** The exoteric mahayana path

*****Editor’s note:** The esoteric tantric path

******Editor’s note:** the true nature of things, the essence of reality, the completely pure nature, suchness

quote from the *Samadhiraja Sutra* which says, “The nature of all phenomena is mahamudra.” This means that the nature of all phenomena is emptiness. Mahamudra in Tibetan is *chakgya chenpo*. *Chak* refers to emptiness, and it means then that the nature of all phenomena is emptiness. Realizing the meaning of emptiness, one is liberated from samsara, which is expressed by the word *gya*. This is how the term *chakja chenpo* or mahamudra is explained in the sutras.*

The way one achieves mahamudra realization through the path of the secret mantra—which is the second method of realizing mahamudra—is explained through the following quote: “Through engaging in skillful means, such as penetrating the vital points of the subsequent vajra body,** there is luminosity, great bliss. This is mahamudra, the quintessential essence of the highest section of tantras, which is taught through the cycles of the essence of accomplishment by Saraha, Nagarjuna, Naropa, and Maitripa. In the beginning, in order to practice secret mantra or vajrayana, one must rely upon a genuine guru who is trained in the tantras, and one begins by requesting from him or her the four empowerments of the secret mantra tradition.”

To receive a complete empowerment in the secret mantra tradition from a genuine guru is something we all have the opportunity to do during the next few days, since His Holiness the Dalai Lama will be bestowing the Kalachakra empowerment. While one is receiving this em-

***Editor’s note:** *Chenpo* means great, and, according to Kalu Rinpoche, indicates that mahamudra is the ultimate experience and that there is nothing greater.

****Editor’s note:** The result of the attainment of enlightenment in the vajrayana is sometimes referred to as the vajra body. The use of this term is anticipated in the mahayana by the use of the term “the vajra-like samadhi,” the indestructible samadhi, which is the defining event in the attainment of buddhahood.

In order to practice secret mantra or vajrayana, one must rely upon a genuine guru who is trained in the tantras

powerment, one should think that the guru bestowing the empowerment is in actuality Kalachakra, and that the place where the empowerment is being given is in actuality the palace of Kalachakra. One should think that the entire environment surrounding one, the whole world, is the pure land of Kalachakra. And one should have the attitude that these ways of regarding the guru, the structure or building, the environment, and the world are really the way they are in actuality.

When one is receiving an empowerment, whatever sounds one hears—all the words expressed in the empowerment, all the instructions given—one should listen to and hear undistractedly. One should be focused one-pointedly on the meaning of these words. If one is not focused one-pointedly, if one becomes distracted while one is listening to the empowerment being given, although one will receive the blessings of the empowerment, one will not be able to understand or receive the meaning of it.

Having received empowerment—for example, the Kalachakra empowerment—one then engages in the practice of the sadhana associated with it. One begins with the generation stage, with the visualizations and the mantra recitations, and then one engages in the completion stage practices—which, in the case of Kalachakra, would be “the six stages of union.”*** If one practices meditation in this way, then one will be able to penetrate the vital points of the vajra body.

*****Editor’s note:** Each system of tantric practice has its own particular generation and completion stage practices. In the Kagyu lineages, the principal generation stage practices are Vajrayogini and Chakrasamvara, and the completion stage practice is the Six Doctrines of Naropa. In the Shangpa Kagyu lineage, the generation stage practice is Chakrasamvara and The Deities of the Five Classes of Tantra, while the completion stage practice is the Six Doctrines of Niguma. In the Nyingma system, the completion stage practices are Trekchöd and Thögal.

Based upon penetrating the vital points of the vajra body, the karmic prana or winds enter into, abide and dissolve within the *avadhuti* or central channel. Through the force of that, one's karmic prana is purified and coemergent wisdom, great bliss, arises as what is called a mental image or a mental approximation of wisdom,* which is known as the luminosity of example or the mahamudra of example. Through meditating repeatedly upon the luminosity of example-mahamudra one will be able to realize the actual luminosity or ultimate luminosity-mahamudra.

There are many terms that can be applied to such a realization, such as mahamudra, the indestructible bindu, or the innate natural mind. In the path of secret mantra the term mahamudra is explained in the text, *The Bindu of Mahamudra*, by breaking the Tibetan term down, as before, into three parts. *Chak* means the wisdom of emptiness. *Gya* means liberation from the phenomena of samsara. *Chenpo*, which

***Editor's note:** The meaning of coemergent wisdom is succinctly explained by Chögyam Thruppa in *The Heart of the Buddha* in connection with the sadhana of Vajrayogini: "Fundamentally, the magic of the vajrayana tradition is the ability to transform confusion into wisdom on the spot. From the point of view of vajrayana, real magic, or *siddhi*, in Sanskrit, is the ability to work with and tame one's mind. This is completely different from the usual notion of magic as a supernatural power over the universe. As mentioned in the previous discussion of the samayas of body, speech, and mind, any potential confusion and neurosis become an opportunity to experience sacred outlook. At the beginning of the path of meditation, we work to tame our minds and subdue the forces of confusion. In the mahayana, we see the emptiness of self and phenomena; out of that, we rouse compassion for beings who do not realize the emptiness, and therefore the freedom, of their nature. In the vajrayana, we could actually bring together confusion and enlightenment on one spot, and thereby completely overcome the dualism of samsara and nirvana.

"The simultaneous experience of confusion and sanity, or being asleep and awake, is the realization of *coemergent wisdom*. Any occurrence in one's state of mind—any thought, feeling, or emotion—is both . . . a statement of confusion and a message of enlightened mind. Confusion is seen so clearly that this clarity itself *is* sacred outlook. Vajrayogini is called 'the Coemergent Mother.' In fact, the sadhana of Vajrayogini according to Tilopa is entitled *The Sadhana of the Glorious Coemergent Mother Vajrayogini*. By practicing the sadhana and by identifying ourselves with the body, speech, and mind of the yidam, we become able to experience the coemergent boundary between confusion and wakefulness. Then we can use confusion itself as a steppingstone for realizing further sanity and further wisdom."

translates as great or *maha*, means integration or union. *Chak gya chenpo* or mahamudra. So the first part of this word refers to the fact that the essence of the mind is the integration or union of emptiness and wisdom. The second part, *gya*, means that once one has realized the essence of the mind, the integration of emptiness and wisdom, one is not obscured by the adventitious stains of samsaric phenomena. And the third part of the word, *chenpo*, meaning great, means that the essence which is emptiness and the nature which is clarity are primordially integrated or are primordially in union.**

How were these teachings of mahamudra transmitted? The teachings were first given by the Buddha Shakyamuni, who appeared in the form of Vajradhara and spoke *The Flawless Tantra* and many other tantras that express the mahamudra teachings. These teachings then came down to such masters as Lodro Rinchen, Saraha, Nagarjuna, and so forth, all of whom, through practicing them, attained siddhi and became great siddhas. The same teachings were further transmitted to the mahasiddha Tilopa, who received all the tantras and special instructions. Tilopa held four transmissions, teachings which came from four lineages of teachers, and although there were many teachers within these lineages, they can be abbreviated into four: the mahasiddhas Nagarjuna, Nakpopa, and Lawapa, and the dakini mahasiddha Kalpa Zangmo. The essence of all of the teachings that he received from these four lineages were summarized in the teachings which are known as the Six Doctrines of Naropa.

The main student of the mahasiddha Tilopa was Naropa, who underwent twelve austerities in order to receive the teachings from Tilopa. At the end of all of his training, he attained a realization equal to his teacher Tilopa's. Naropa's main student was Marpa, who visited India from

****Editor's note:** It should be clearly understood that there is no bringing together or integrating of clarity and emptiness. Clarity and emptiness are primordially in union; they always have been, are, and always will be inseparable. The only thing new is our recognition of the fact, which comes about as a consequence of purifying impure perception.

Tibet three times and spent altogether sixteen years and seven years with Naropa, receiving all of his teachings and special instructions. Then Marpa Lotsawa returned to Tibet, where he had many students. Of these the best were four main students, the supreme of which was Milarepa, who received the transmission of practice. Milarepa also had many students, the supreme among them were called the two sons who were like the sun and the moon. His sun-like disciple was Gampopa; his moon-like disciple was Rechungpa.

The Kagyu teachings have since come through the master Gampopa, and from his many different students there have come many other divisions of the Kagyu tradition. There are the Karma Kamtsang, the Baram Kagyu, Tsalpa Kagyu, Padrup Kagyu, Drikung Kagyu, Drukpa Kagyu, Taklung Kagyu and others, many different sections. These traditions are different in name only. Their teachings are the same. As lineages of teachings they have all come from the same teacher.

And so in order to explain the teachings of mahamudra I will explain a text by the master Gampopa called *The Very Essence of Mind, Mahamudra, the One Sufficient Path*. If one wonders what does this mean to say *The One Sufficient Path*, it means that by practicing these instructions of the master Gampopa, one will be able to attain all the levels and paths which lead to enlightenment.

The text, which begins by saying, *Homage to the genuine gurus*, goes on to say: **The Mahamudra of Gampopa, the One Sufficient Path, has three sections: 1) To Have a Decisive Understanding About the True Nature, 2) The Introduction to the Fundamental Character, and 3) Training on the Path of Suchness.**

When one has attained enlightenment, one merely has purified the adventitious or temporary stains obscuring the mind. The true nature of mind has not changed

The first section, which is called, *To Have A Decisive Understanding About the True Nature*, explains ground mahamudra. There are three ways to speak of mahamudra: ground mahamudra, path mahamudra, and fruition mahamudra. This first section explains the true nature of ground mahamudra.

The first section, *To Have a Decisive Understanding About the True Nature*, has five parts. The first says, **Mahamudra has no causes**. In general all relative or apparent phenomena arise from causes. They first arise, then they abide, and then they cease. This is the nature of relative phenomena. However, mahamudra is noncompounded. It is not composite, and so therefore it is beyond arising, abiding, and ceasing. For that reason it is said that mahamudra has no causes.

The next point says, **Mahamudra has no conditions**. In general all things have conditions or contributing factors. These conditions are sometimes explained as being four in number, and they contribute to things changing. The essence of mahamudra is unchanging, and therefore it is said to have no conditions.

The next point says, **Mahamudra has no methods**. This means that mahamudra from the [beginningless] beginning or primordially is present within one's own mind. It is not newly attained. So there are no methods for giving rise to the new attainment of mahamudra.

The next point says, **Mahamudra has no path**. This means that when one is practicing mahamudra, one investigates one's own mind by oneself. One does not look for the path anywhere else. And so for that reason it is said mahamudra has no path.

The next point says, **Mahamudra has no result**. A result in this case would be the attainment of enlightenment, but when one has attained enlightenment, one merely has purified

the adventitious or temporary stains obscuring the mind. The true nature of the mind has not changed.

When it is said that mahamudra has no causes, no conditions, no methods, no path, and no fruit or result, one is speaking from the point of view of the essence of the mind. This essence of the mind is beyond being an object which can be expressed through speech. It is beyond being an object which can be experienced by the conceptual mind of ordinary beings. The essence of the mind does not have a shape, does not have a color; its nature is beyond arising, abiding, and cessation. This first section has expressed that meaning.

When it is said that mahamudra has no causes and no conditions, one might wonder, “Well is this then like empty space?” No it is not. The essence of the mind is emptiness, free from mental elaborations, but its nature is luminosity. And within [this luminous emptiness or empty luminosity, which is] the nature of the mind, there is naturally present all the kayas—all the dimensions or bodies—of the buddha, all the excellent qualities of a buddha, all of a buddha’s activity.

The second section of the text is *The Introduction to the Fundamental Character*. In this section one is introduced to the practice of path mahamudra, again in five parts. With reference to the practice of meditation on the path of mahamudra, the first part says,

“Mahamudra has no causes,” and yet faith and devotion are the causes of mahamudra. Faith and devotion are the causes that give rise to mahamudra. To illustrate this point there is a quote from the *Sutra of the Ten Noble Dharmas* which says, “The virtuous dharma does not arise for people with no faith, just as a sprout will not arise from a seed burnt by fire.” Those who have no faith will not be able to give rise to the perfect dharma. The example used to illustrate this is a seed, such as a rice seed or a wheat seed,

that has been burnt by fire, which will never give rise to a sprout even though one may bury it in the ground, and so forth.

In the *Buddha Avatamsaka Sutra* it says, “Those with little faith, who abide within cyclic existence, cannot understand bodhicitta and buddhahood.” Those beings whose minds have only a little bit of faith, nothing more than that, are unable to attain the level of a buddha and are unable to give rise to the two types of bodhicitta. Therefore, when one is practicing mahamudra meditation, one should begin by giving rise again and again to faith.

In general there are said to be three types of faith. The first is called the faith of confidence. When one has given rise to great confidence or trust in karma—in the infallibility of the law of cause and result in action—then one has the faith of confidence. The second is the faith of longing. When one’s mind has become determined to attain the level of a buddha, then one is said to have the faith of longing. The third is called inspired faith. When one has developed great faith and devotion in a one-pointed manner in the buddha, dharma, and sangha, and has given rise to the aspiration always to follow them, then one has what is called inspired faith.

The second cause of mahamudra is said to be devotion. What type of object of devotion does one need? One needs to give rise to devotion towards a spiritual teacher who shows the perfect path, who is able to bestow empowerments and

perfect oral instructions. What is the reason that one needs to give rise to devotion to one’s teacher? It is that, although the Buddha Shakyamuni appeared in this world, and after him there were many scholars and siddhas who appeared in India, we did not actually have the good fortune to meet them. But we have had the good fortune to meet the gurus and teachers we have met. And therefore, we should recognize that these teachers who bestow upon us the oral instructions which were taught by the Buddha

Faith and devotion are the causes that give rise to mahamudra

are very kind to us. Recognizing their great kindness, one develops devotion towards them.

How does one meditate upon or give rise to devotion? This can be illustrated by quoting

Jetsun Milarepa when he was speaking to his disciple Gampopa. He says, “Gampopa, when you are going to central Tibet, sometimes the memory of the guru will arise. When the memory of the guru arises, supplicate him as being inseparable on the top of your head.

Meditate upon him as being in the center of your heart without forgetting him.” Jetsun Milarepa is saying to Gampopa that when the memory of me, Milarepa, arises, then how should you meditate? You should meditate upon me, your guru, as being on top of your head, inseparable from yourself. You should meditate upon your guru as being in the center of your heart, never forgetting him.

What is the result of meditating with devotion in the way just described? This can be illustrated through another quote: “If the sun of devotion does not shine on the snow mountain of the guru’s four kayas, the stream of blessings will not flow. Therefore, exert your mind in devotion.” In this verse the four kayas of the guru are being expressed using the metaphor of the snow mountain. For streams of water to flow from a snow mountain the sun must shine on it. And in order for the stream of blessings to flow from the snow mountain of the guru, the sun of one’s own devotion must rise. Having received the blessings of the guru, one will be able to realize one’s own mind as mahamudra. The true nature of the mind is beyond being an object of speech or conceptuality,* yet through receiving the blessings of one’s guru one is able to realize the nature of mahamudra [nonconceptually and nonverbally]. Therefore, it is said that faith and devotion are the causes of mahamudra.

The second point says, “*Mahamudra has no*

Genuine or perfect spiritual teachers are the conditions for mahamudra

conditions,” and yet genuine gurus are the conditions for mahamudra. Genuine or perfect spiritual teachers are the conditions for mahamudra. One must first attend upon spiri-

tual teachers, receive the oral instructions from them, and then put these instructions into practice. By doing so one will be able to realize mahamudra. For that reason it is said that gurus or spiritual teachers are the conditions for realizing mahamudra.

To illustrate this there is a quote from the *Noble Compendium* which says, “Excellent students endowed with respect for their gurus or teachers should attend continuously upon learned gurus. Why is that? Because the excellent qualities of learning arise from them.” Excellent students should study with excellent gurus, because through relying upon excellent gurus we are able to give rise to all the virtuous qualities within our own minds.

Spiritual teachers are the ones who show us the path. Without spiritual teachers we do not know the path on which we are going or wish to go. We are like the blind or like someone who is going to a new place who doesn’t know how to get there. If one wants to get there, one needs to have a friend who knows the road and the way to go. In the same way, we do not really know at this point the way to achieve the level of a buddha, so we need a guide, someone who can show us how to get there. That guide is the guru. In the same way, if we are in a very dangerous place where there are lots of very scary things, scary noises, and so forth, then we need a guide and escort who can lead us out of that place. Our minds are like that place. Our minds are filled with the mental afflictions, the six poisons, and the guru is the guide and escort who leads us from that dangerous place into the level of enlightenment. Similarly, if one wishes to cross the ocean one needs to have a boat and one needs to have a captain of the boat. Sometimes boats are rowed, and then one needs to have an oarsman. Without a boat and an oarsman or captain, one wouldn’t be able to get to the other

*Editor’s note: i.e. it cannot be accurately understood or expressed verbally or conceptually.

side. Similarly, in order to cross over the ocean of samsara, one needs to have the oarsman of the teacher.

For these reasons, in order to attain the realization of mahamudra, one should always rely upon spiritual teachers. Therefore, it is said that gurus or spiritual teachers are the conditions for mahamudra.

The next point in this section says, ***“Mahamudra has no methods,” and yet uncontrived mind is the method of mahamudra.*** When one is actually engaged in the practice of meditation upon mahamudra, the method for doing so is to rest within the uncontrived mind. In order to understand this notion, we must explain what is meant by saying uncontrived mind. In general, when one is speaking about the true nature of the mind, one says that its essence is emptiness. Because the essence or true nature of the mind is empty, it does not have a color, a shape, or any defining characteristic. Because it is empty, this true nature of the mind is beyond being an object of speech or an object of conceptuality, and therefore is inaccessible for untrained ordinary beings. Though the essence of the mind is emptiness, the reflexive expression* of this emptiness is the aspect of clarity, which gives rise to all the appearances of the phenomena of samsara and nirvana. For that reason all the appearances of suffering, which are connected with the samsaric state, and all the pure appearances, which are present during the enlightened state, are the reflexive expression or display of mind itself.

***Editor’s note:** What the translator is trying to avoid here with this expression is any notion that emptiness is a phenomenon that exists in any way independent or separate from the totality of experience. The interdependent manifestation of phenomena, which are all just mere appearance, arise out of the clarity aspect of the indivisible union of clarity and emptiness, which themselves are one and the same thing. Clarity is emptiness; emptiness also is clarity. Therefore, whatever arises out of clarity is also not other than emptiness itself, and in that sense can be thought of as the reflexive expression of emptiness, as is clarity.

How does one come to realize the essence of mind, which is the union of luminosity and emptiness? It is through supplicating one’s guru, one’s spiritual teacher, and through gathering the accumulations of merit that one will come to recognize the true nature of one’s mind. Realizing the true nature of the mind, the union of luminosity and emptiness, is called ground mahamudra or view mahamudra.

If one realizes view mahamudra but does not meditate upon path mahamudra, upon mahamudra as the path, then, although one has had a realization of mahamudra, one will not be able to give rise to all the excellent qualities of relinquishment** and realization. Having realized view mahamudra one needs to sustain or maintain this realization in a nondistracted way, and this is what is called mahamudra meditation.

When one is meditating upon mahamudra, one should do so in a way in which the mind is uncontrived. When one is meditating, if one thinks, “Oh, maybe my meditation will be very good,” and clings to that type of an attitude, or if one gives rise to fear or concern, thinking, “Oh, my meditation isn’t going very well,” and clings to that type of an attitude, then one is engaging in hopes and fears. This is a contrived type of meditation and will not bring about the perfect practice of mahamudra. When one is meditating on mahamudra one should not be performing any type of contrived meditation. For example, when one is meditating upon a deity, then one is meditating upon the aspects of that deity—that its color is white, it has one face, it has four arms, and so forth. That is a type of contrived meditation, and mahamudra meditation is not like that; it is an uncontrived meditation.

****Editor’s note:** Relinquishment of all the causes that bind us in samsara—the kleshas or afflictive emotions and the push-button reactivity that arises out of them, the grasping at a self and the fixation on other that arises out of the habitual tendency to cognize one’s reality dualistically, and fundamental ignorance itself.

When one is meditating upon mahamudra, one should do so in a way in which the mind is uncontrived

What is meant by resting in uncontrived mind means that one's past thoughts have ceased and future thoughts have not yet come. So one rests in the uncontrived state, which is between these two. One rests in the true nature of the mind or rests in seeing the essence of the mind. It is difficult to rest in meditation like that for a long time. So after some time thoughts will arise. If one does not recognize the very essence of these thoughts but follows after them, then thoughts will continue to arise in an uninterrupted stream. However, if one recognizes the essence of these thoughts, they will be naturally liberated and one will not be bound by thoughts. The uncontrived mind is beyond being an object of speech. Therefore, it is difficult for me actually to express this to you in words. For those of you who have received the blessings of a guru and who have experienced the uncontrived mind, then you know what I am talking about. But for those of you who have not had such an experience, then it is difficult for me to actually explain it to you or to show it to you, and therefore, you might have some doubts about this. However, if you engage in practice and give rise to devotion to your guru and gather the accumulations of merit, then you will be able to recognize this uncontrived mind and you will no longer have any doubts about it.

Saraha said "If one rests within noncontrivance and freshness, realization will arise. If one maintains this like a river's flow, realization will arise again. Yogis and yoginis, completely abandon all reference points and characteristics; rest continually within equipoise." If one rests naturally settled without any contrivance in the true nature of the mind, then one will actualize or actually bring forth the realization of this true nature.

The mahasiddha Saraha also states, "If one tightens, this will cause thoughts to go in the ten directions. If one abandons this one can rest unmoving and still." When one is meditating, if one thinks that one needs to be free of all

Plant the watchman of undistracted mindfulness

thoughts and conceptuality, and one clings to that attitude, then more thoughts will come. However, if one abandons that type of thinking and just says, "Well, whether there are thoughts or no thoughts, that's fine," and if one remains free of hopes and fears, then one will be able to rest the mind without many thoughts in the mind.

To quote Padampa Sanjay: "The gurus' teachings reside in one's heart. This is like seeing a hidden treasure sitting in the palm of one's hand." It is through receiving the pointing-out instructions on the true nature of mind and through receiving the guru's blessing that one is able to recognize the true nature of the mind. It is these instructions that one receives from one's guru, then, that are like having a jewel in the palm of one's hand. If one has a jewel in the palm of one's hand, one is able to see the shape and characteristics of the jewel clearly. And it is through the blessings and pointing out instructions of one's guru that one is able to see the true nature of one's mind.

The fourth point says, "***Mahamudra has no path,***" and yet ***undistracted mind is the path of mahamudra.*** To practice mahamudra one needs first to have received the pointing-out instructions and to be able to rest [the mind] without any contrivance, and then one needs to practice these instructions as one's path in an undistracted way. Maitreya says, "Plant the watchman of undistracted mindfulness, which is not simply blocking mental activity like being unconsciousness or asleep." When one is unconscious, the five sense consciousnesses have ceased and one has no conceptuality. When one goes to sleep, the five sense consciousnesses dissolve into the all basis consciousness. But the undistracted awareness which one should have is not merely the ceasing of the five sense consciousnesses nor their dissolving into the all basis consciousness. It is rather an awareness with which one constantly observes one's mind. One looks to see whether one's mind is abiding,

whether one's mind is engaged in thinking, to see whatever [it is doing or whatever state it is in]. One maintains one's awareness like a watchman. To plant the watchman of undistracted mindfulness means that no matter what activities one is engaged in—whether one is walking, sitting, eating or talking—one should maintain mindfulness as much as one can.

Gyalwa Yangönpa says, “Do not regard thoughts in the mind as faults. Not meditating intentionally upon nonconceptuality, rest the mind in its own fundamental state and plant the watchman. Within shamatha meditation stability will arise.” Not to regard the thoughts of the mind as faults means that one should not think that it is very bad if one has lots of thoughts while one is meditating. One shouldn't think that one is trying to free oneself from thoughts, because thoughts are the reflexive expression of the mind. Therefore there is no necessity to think, “Oh, I definitely have to free myself of thoughts while I am meditating.” One should abandon all hopes and fears in regards to this, which is what is meant by saying, “not meditating intentionally upon nonconceptuality.” Instead, one should rest the mind in its own fundamental state and plant the watchman of undistracted mindfulness. Through practicing in this way, then, within the practice of shamatha stability of mind will arise.

At this point the explanations concerning uncontrived mind and not abandoning thoughts are mostly concerned with the practice of vipashyana. If one is only practicing shamatha,* then one does need to bring the mind to rest or to be able to cause the mind to abide,** and so at that point one does need to have thoughts cease.

The fifth point is, “***Mahamudra has no result, and yet the mind liberated into dharmata is the result of mahamudra.***”

When one has become free of all obscurations, then the habitual patterns of clinging to true existence are also purified and one is able to truly recognize that external appearances are an aspect of mind

Through practicing mahamudra meditation one purifies all the adventitious obscurations of the mind which are explained sometimes as being of two types: the obscuration of mental afflictions and the obscurations to objects of knowledge. When these obscurations have been purified, then one has attained the result of mahamudra. That is the result of mahamudra. When one has become free of all obscurations, then the habitual patterns of clinging to true existence are also purified and one is able to truly recognize that external appearances are an aspect of mind—and one will have reached a level where appearances and one's own mind have mixed. When one has become free of clinging to true existence***—together with the habitual patterns for

such clinging or apprehension, then it is said that one's own mind and appearances are mixed. At that point then one is able to perform miracles, as were performed by the siddhas of both India and Tibet. They were able to touch fire but not be burned by it. They were able to walk on water and not sink in it. They were able to walk through the walls of buildings, and so forth. These miracles arise naturally at that level. At that point one has also purified the four elements of one's physical body and is able to transform one's body into such things as a large

***Editor's note:** as opposed to the unified practice of shamatha and vipashyana

****Editor's note:** i.e. abide single-pointedly in nondiscursive tranquillity

*****Editor's note:** The existence of phenomena as other than mere appearance arising as the expression of the interdependence of merely apparent causes and conditions; permanent substantial existence independent of causes and conditions that give rise to it.

mass of fire or a large body of water. One is able to perform many different types of miracles and practice many different types of samadhi.

At that level one has also purified the nadi, prana, and bindu* of one's own physical form and because of that one is able to arise in or manifest the form of many different yidams or deities, and one is also able to meet with these many various yidams. At that point it sometimes also occurs that one's students are able to see one's form as being that of the yidam. Then as is said, "Just like fire and firewood, the remedy and what is to be abandoned are exhausted together. Whoever has perfected all qualities in the expanse is a yogin or yogini of nonmeditation." What is to be abandoned are the obscurations of mental afflictions and the obscurations to objects of knowledge, and when these have been exhausted, then the path which is the means to abandon them is also exhausted. The illustration of this is the exhaustion of firewood and fire. When one has a

***Editor's note:** The concepts of nadi, prana, and bindu [Tibetan: rtsa, rlung, thig-le] are further explained in a note from *The Life of Marpa the Translator*, by Tsang Nyön Heruka, Shambhala, Boston and London, page 235: "According to the yogic teachings of the path of skillful means [Sanskrit: upayamarga; Tibetan: thabs-lam], realization is attained through the synchronization of body and mind. This may be achieved through meditating on nadi, prana, and bindu—the psychic components in the illusory body. Prana is the energy, or 'wind,' moving through the nadis, the channels. Bindu is the quintessence secreted within the body. As is said, 'Mind consciousness rides the horse of prana on the pathways of the nadis. The bindu is mind's nourishment.'

"Because of dualistic thinking, prana enters the lalana [Tibetan: rkyang-ma] and rasana [Tibetan: ro-ma], the left and right channels. This divergence of energy in the illusory body corresponds to the mental activity that falsely distinguishes between subject and object and leads to karmically determined activity. Through yogic practice, the pranas can be brought into the central channel [Sanskrit: avadhuti; Tibetan: dbu-ma], and therefore transformed into wisdom-prana. Then the mind can recognize its fundamental nature, realizing all dharmas as unborn.

"This belongs to advanced practice and can only be learned through direct oral transmission from an accomplished guru. Once the meditator is well established in the experience of the fundamental nature of mind, he or she can meditate on it directly, dissolving the nadi, prana, and bindu visualization. Meditation using the concept of psychic channels belongs to the category of 'samppannakrama [Sanskrit for the completion stage] with signs.' The formless practice, which contemplates the nature of mind directly, is 'samppannakrama without signs.'"

lot of firewood, then one will have a big fire. When all the firewood is burned up, the fire will also go out. At that point one is liberated from all hopes and fears. One is liberated from the fear of wandering in samsara and one is liberated from the hope of attaining liberation.

How is one liberated from hopes and fears? Through achieving the level of a buddha. Once one has achieved that level—the level of the dharmakaya—then one is naturally and automatically liberated from samsara, and there is no need for hopes or fears. At that point one is able to accomplish benefit for both oneself and others. One accomplishes one's own benefit because one has completely abandoned all obscurations and has actualized the dharmakaya. Attaining the dharmakaya is achieving benefit for oneself. Based on the blessings of the dharmakaya one manifests the sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya in whatever way is needed for students who are to be trained, thereby accomplishing benefit for others.

Within path mahamudra we speak of four levels of yoga: one-pointedness, simplicity or freedom from elaborations, one taste and nonmeditation. When one has achieved the level just described, then one has achieved the level of nonmeditation. The fruit of mahamudra meditation is called nonmeditation.

That completes the second section, *The Introduction To The Fundamental Character*. Now we come to the third section, ***Training On The Path Of Suchness***, which explains in four main points how beginners can practice the path of mahamudra meditation. The first point says, ***As the preliminary practice, meditate on guru yoga with faith, devotion, and respect, three times during the day and three times at night.*** One begins the preliminary practice by going for refuge to the three jewels, giving rise to bodhicitta, meditating upon loving-kindness and compassion, and practicing the six paramitas, and having done that, then one can practice the guru yoga.

After one has practiced the guru yoga, the

text says in the next point, ***As the main practice, rest within the state of uncontrived mind with undistracted recognition.*** The main practice is to rest within uncontrived mind as has already been explained.

As the conclusion, recognize whatever appears as your own mind and train your awareness with skill. The practice of meditative equipoise is to rest without contrivance, and in the post-meditation one should merely recognize all appearances as being one's own mind and in that way train with awareness.

The fourth point says, ***Relying upon the sequential arising of experiences, exert yourself in meditation until conceptual mind is exhausted.*** During one's formal practice, from the beginning to the end, one gives rise to many different types of experiences. Some people give rise to the experiences associated with shamatha practice. Some give rise to the experiences associated with vipashyana practice. But regardless of the nature of one's experience, one must continue to practice until one reaches the level of nonmeditation where conceptual mind is exhausted, where phenomena are exhausted. Each time one gives rise to certain experiences in meditation, one should not think, "Oh these experiences are fine. This is enough. I don't need to do anymore." Instead one must practice until one attains this level of stability or fruition—the exhaustion of conceptual mind—because if one doesn't, if one just thinks that whatever level of practice one has achieved or whatever type of experience comes up is enough, one will not reach the final level of fruition and there will be no benefit.

There are many different types of experiences that can arise in meditation, but in general, as it reads in the text, ***There are two ways in which experiences arise: as unfavorable***

experiences and as favorable experiences.

As for the first: All unfavorable experiences—whatever they are, such as dullness, agitation, illness, fear, fright, or doubt—

arise from your meditation.

Therefore, recognize them to be experiences. Without abandoning them, meditate, taking those very things as the object of your view and meditation.

Sometimes, when one is meditating upon the true nature of one's mind, one's mind is very dark or sunken, or one falls asleep. This is known as dullness. Sometimes, when one is resting within uncontrived mind, practicing mahamudra, many different thoughts or concepts arise. This is the experience of agitation. Sometimes people practicing mahamudra become physically sick, or have a lot of

mental suffering. Sometimes, seemingly for no reason at all, fear arises, as it were, naturally, and sometimes one has doubts about the dharma or about one's teachers. All of these things can arise within one's practice.

If one has attained some stability in the practice of mahamudra meditation and were to become sick, for example, then one would be able to mix this physical feeling or sensation of being sick with one's own realization or experiences of the true nature of one's mind. In this way one would be liberated from the sickness through the practice of mahamudra, or one would at least be able to bring the illness onto the path of mahamudra. In like manner, whatever arises—be it fear or doubts towards one's teachers or the dharma—one should not rely upon other remedies, but should bring all of these experiences onto the path of the practice of mahamudra. If one practices in this way, favorable experiences will arise naturally.

The text continues, ***As for favorable experiences: First, the experience of the mind abiding arises.*** This is an experience of the

One must continue to practice until one reaches the level of nonmeditation where conceptual mind is exhausted, where phenomena are exhausted

practice of shamatha. **Based on that, the experience of the essence, emptiness, arises. Based upon that, the experience of attaining realization arises.** One has a true realization of the true nature of the mind. **Based upon that, the experience of turning away from attachment arises.** All of these experiences are considered to be good or favorable. But when these good experiences arise, if one clings to them, if one thinks that one always needs to give rise to such good experiences, then this clinging to positive experiences binds one.

With that type of sequential arising of experiences, you should exert yourself in practice without any complacency. There are many types of experiences which can arise, but no matter what arises, you should practice without any complacency. Once you have begun meditating upon the true nature of the mind, you should continue to do so as much as you are able to for as long as you live. You should never become satisfied with your meditation, thinking, “Oh, now I’ve done enough; I don’t need to do anymore.” You should meditate again and again.

The mind’s merely abiding is not sufficient—you must meditate in order to see the essence. When you begin practicing meditation, you may achieve stability in the practice of shamatha, but you should not think, “Oh this is fine, this is enough that I have achieved this stability.” You must continue to practice with diligence until you come to the realization of emptiness, associated with the practice of vipashyana. **Merely seeing the essence is not sufficient—you must meditate in order to attain realization.** Although you may have truly realized vipashyana, you should not think, “Oh, now I’ve realized this, this is enough, I don’t need to do anymore.” You should continue to practice until you attain stability in that realization.

Merely attaining realization is not sufficient—you must meditate in order to turn away from attachment. It is not enough merely to have attained a stable realization, you must continue to meditate until you have turned away from your attachment to samsara.

Merely turning away from attachment is not sufficient—you must meditate so that, through the liberation of conceptual mind into dharmata, conceptual mind is exhausted, phenomena are exhausted, and you

awaken. It is not enough merely to turn away from attachment to samsara; that alone is of no benefit. You must meditate until conceptual mind is exhausted, phenomena are exhausted, and you attain the level of nonmeditation.

This completes The Very Essence of Mind, Mahamudra, the One Sufficient Path.

Saying the very essence of mind and what is meant by that means that the instructions contained within this text are the very essence of all the instructions of the master Gampopa.

Once you have begun meditation upon the true nature of mind, you should continue to do so as much as you are able and for as long as you live

We have now come to the conclusion of this text. I received what is called in Tibetan the *trilung*—the oral transmission—for this text in the form of a commentary from the Sixteenth Gyalwa Karmapa, Rangjung Rigpe Dorje, when he gave me the transmission for the collected works of Dagpo Rinpoche, which is another name for Gampopa.

[Rinpoche chants, giving the oral transmission for this text.]

That completes the explanation of mahamudra. Although one could explain what is necessary for the practice of mahamudra in a very extensive way, to put it very briefly, one should give rise to faith and confidence in whatever guru one regards as one’s root guru and meditate upon the guru yoga, supplicating the

guru, and then imagine that the guru dissolves into light and that this light is absorbed into one's own mind, one's own heart center. In this way, one's own mind and one's guru's mind are mixed together. Then rest one's mind in this state of the inseparability of one's own mind and the guru's mind. If one practices in this way one will naturally give rise to the realization of mahamudra. One should meditate in that way not just once, but again and again. Again and again, one should supplicate one's guru and then practice mahamudra meditation, resting the mind in the uncontrived state. If one does that, then one will be able to achieve the same level of actualization or realization of mahamudra that was achieved by all the mahasiddhas of India and Tibet, because this is a path without faults. It is a perfect path, and you now have this path with its opportunity in your own hands. If you practice meditation in this way, you will be able in the future to attain the fruits of this practice, all the excellent qualities of relinquishment and realization. Whoever practices meditation in this way—whether or not one is ordained, whether one is male or female, whether one is old or young, it makes no difference—[can attain this result.] There is no difference in terms of the realization of mahamudra that one can achieve, because everyone's mind has what is called

This is a path without faults

tathagatagarba or buddha nature. Therefore, the excellent qualities of the dharmakaya can be achieved by everyone. Whoever meditates upon this path will be able to achieve the same excellent qualities of relinquishment and realization.

It is through the great kindness of His Holiness the Dalai Lama that I was able to come here and give you these instructions on mahamudra. It is through his great kindness that we have been able to come together, that you have been able to listen to these teachings, and that I have been able to give them. And so we now have a very special dharma connection. I make the aspirational prayer that all of you will be able to practice the meditation on mahamudra and attain the result, and that, having attained the result, you will be able to attain the siddhi of flying in space, so you will be able to fly here and fly there.

Now I would like to conclude with the aspirational prayer that, on the basis of all the roots of virtue which have been accumulated here today through this dharma teaching, the master of all the Buddha's teachings who appears now in this world, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, may live long, and that all his aspirations and all his intentions for beings may be quickly and perfectly fulfilled. I also make the aspiration that through the accomplishment of all his intentions and wishes, this world may become peaceful. ⑤



In 1999, a surprising and auspicious event occurred: Three nuns from Jiangsu, in southwestern China, arrived at Kala Rongo, the monastery for women that the women of Nangchen, with the help of Lama Norlha and his students, have built in Tibet

Re-establishing the Dharma in Tibet

The second issue of *Shenpen Ösel*, which appeared in October 1997, featured the story of the Venerable Lama Norlha's efforts to rebuild Korche Monastery and establish a monastery for nuns in his native region of Nangchen, eastern Tibet. Since that time, the monasteries have flourished as Lama Norlha continues to sponsor and supervise new projects in both places.

The nuns' monastery was begun in 1990 at Kala Rongo, a holy site where Guru Rinpoche meditated and concealed the terma *Barchay Kunsel*. Years earlier, on three separate occasions, the Sixteenth Gyalwa Karmapa had requested Lama Norlha to establish a dharma center there, prophesying immense benefit to the entire world. A group of 150 nuns built the monastery and a six-mile access road with their own hands while living in huts on the surrounding hillsides. They worked on construction during the hours between morning and evening chanting sessions, and rotated key positions such as cook, treasurer, chant master, ritual master, and disciplinarian.

In 1992, Lama Norlha inaugurated the first traditional three-year retreat at Kala Rongo. Only twenty-five nuns had originally been scheduled to enter the retreat, but their enthusiasm inspired them to share their tiny rooms, allowing fifty nuns to participate in the first retreat cycle.

Kala Rongo Convent now has more than 250 residents and is in its third cycle of three-year



The Chinese nuns in their Tibetan wool robes, which replaced the light cotton robes they arrived in

retreats. About ninety nuns have completed the retreat program, and fifty more are currently in retreat. Four nuns participating in their second retreat are serving as assistant teachers for the first-time retreatants.

In 1999, a surprising and auspicious event occurred: Three nuns from Jiangsu, in southwestern China, arrived at Kala Rongo. Determined to receive advanced training in Tibetan Buddhism, the Chinese nuns had consulted Palpung Monastery and had been directed to Kala Rongo Monastery as the best source of training in the Kagyu tradition for nuns in Tibet.

The Chinese nuns are in the process of adapting to the climate and culture of eastern Tibet. During Lama Norlha's visit to Kala Rongo in the fall of 1999, he gave each of them a set of traditional Tibetan maroon wool robes to replace their light cotton robes that were more suited to the warm weather of southwestern China. After a few weeks of sampling the Tibetan diet of roasted barley flour (tsampa), dried yak cheese, butter, yogurt, and dried meat, they shyly asked if they could have rice as their staple grain. Rice has been prepared for them ever since, but recent reports suggest they are also developing

a taste for tsampa. Currently immersed in the study of written and spoken Tibetan, they are scheduled to enter the next three-year retreat two years from now.

The presence of the Chinese nuns at Kala Rongo is significant for several reasons. It distinguishes Kala Rongo as a serious, respected monastery in the eyes of the government, and will greatly facilitate communication with Chinese officials should the need arise. Also, according to Lama Norlha, Chinese monks and nuns are known for their especially strict observance of vows and discipline—an example that will greatly benefit all the nuns at Kala Rongo. Finally, the Chinese nuns will be able to share their wider education with the Tibetan nuns, who have never had an opportunity to attend school and therefore lack many basic skills, such as the arithmetic necessary for financial transactions and record-keeping.

Creating New Opportunities for Women

The success of Kala Rongo Convent is especially striking in light of the ingrained Tibetan perception that women belong at home churning butter, and that education and religious training would

only be wasted on them. Having seen the relative equality achieved by Western women in recent decades, Lama Norlha has been able to make gradual inroads into these traditional attitudes in rural Tibet. Still, it hasn't been easy. When Lama Norlha first presented his plan to build a monastery for women in 1990, local officials and residents were incredulous. If women didn't want to get married, why couldn't they just live as nuns with their families?

Lama Norlha proceeded to sponsor the convent in spite of protests, and everyone now recognizes how much the nuns have achieved. They also recognize the monastery's considerable benefit to the surrounding community, which often calls upon the nuns for prayers and special rituals in times of need.

Even Lama Norlha had to admit the nuns were not at first capable of running the monastery themselves, due to their lack of education and practical experience in areas traditionally reserved for men. For the first few years the monastery was administered by a group of men, while the nuns devoted their time to study, prayers, construction, and administrative training. In 1997, the nuns took over all the administrative functions, and the male staff was reduced to a single consultant, mostly for help with bookkeeping and purchasing. By 1999, the nuns were running the monastery without any outside assistance at all. Again, the once-skeptical community was won over by their accomplishments.

Nevertheless, even with such an impressive, decade-long track record, the next step envisioned by Lama Norlha for Kala Rongo Monastery is again meeting with local resistance. After establishing a flourish-

ing monastic college, or *shedra*, for monks at Korche Monastery, Lama Norlha is now determined to offer the same opportunity for advanced study to the nuns at Kala Rongo. Local people have come to accept that unmarried women can be useful as nuns who spend their days praying, but can't conceive of any benefit from offering them higher education.

Once again, Lama Norlha is disregarding the overwhelming weight of local opinion and proceeding with plans to fund and build a women's monastic college. Though its primary function will be the same as that of the *shedra* at Korche Monastery—to provide advanced religious training to graduates of the three-year retreat program—because women in Tibet have no access to a basic education, the college will also offer such courses as mathematics, basic science, and business skills.

American dharma students have donated most of the means for building and maintaining Kala Rongo Monastery, and have sponsored hundreds of thousands of recitations of the Green Tara practice and of the fasting practice of 1,000-armed Chenrezig, known as Nyungnay. The nuns have recently completed a Nyungnay shrine room, where they take turns maintaining this profound practice of purification and benefit



Nuns at Kala Rongo spinning wool to make rope for the monastery

to all beings.

Korche Monastery and Monastic College

The story of Kala Rongo Monastery is remarkable, particularly since Lama Norlha has had to overcome deeply rooted traditional attitudes toward women in order to create a place for them to flourish as dharma practitioners. No less important, however, is the rebuilding of Korche Monastery, begun in 1982 by Lama Norlha and his students at Kagyu Thubten Chöling Monastery in upstate New York.

Korche Monastery in eastern Tibet is where Lama Norlha, beginning at age five, received his own training as a monk in the Kagyu tradition. After completing two three-year retreats at Korche before the Communist takeover in 1959, Lama Norlha escaped to India, where he became a disciple of Kyabje Dorje Chang Kalu Rinpoche. Lama Norlha served as retreat master in Kalu Rinpoche's three-year retreat program until 1976, when Rinpoche sent him to New York City to open a dharma center at the request of his students there.

Meanwhile, Korche Monastery, which had been home to about 500 monks, had been completely destroyed.

In 1982, as soon as it became possible to re-establish communication with his native region, Lama Norlha began sending donations to rebuild the monastery at Korche. In 1984, he was permitted to visit for the first time in twenty-five years. By that time, the three-year retreat facility and a few houses had been rebuilt, and reconstruction of the main shrine building had begun.

For more than 15 years, Lama Norlha has been sponsoring and personally overseeing the

rebuilding of Korche Monastery. Currently home to about 150 monks, Korche is in its sixth three-year retreat cycle since reopening its doors. A monastic college was established in 1996, offering a ten-year intensive program to monks who have completed the traditional three-year retreat. The program consists of detailed analysis of Buddhist scripture and commentaries and training in traditional Buddhist logic and debate. The abbot of the monastic college is a native of the area who took full ordination at age

seventeen and returned to Korche after receiving his khenpo degree. He is also known in the region for his strict adherence to a vegetarian diet, which he adopted at age twelve—a rare choice in Tibet, with its harsh climate and limited variety of foods.

Even though the college has been in operation for four years, the building is still under construction and was scheduled for completion this spring.

Lama Norlha also founded the Lama Gyupa, a group of senior monks at Korche who have completed their training in the three-year retreat pro-

gram. These monks maintain the daily and monthly chanting services at the monastery and perform special ceremonies as needed. Without the ongoing support provided by Lama Norlha, these monks would be forced to seek their living outside the monastery, rather than devoting all their time to religious service.

Schools, Medical Care, and Stupas

Besides the two monasteries, Lama Norlha has established a free school system for the children of Nangchen, eastern Tibet, where access to education has been severely limited for several decades. The schools will equip children with



Lama Norlha (left) at Korche Monastery

the knowledge and skills needed to participate in the modern world, while also preserving Tibetan language, history and culture. The main school, Yönten Gatsal Ling near Korche, opened its doors in 1996, and now has 110 students. In remote areas, 41 satellite schools teach basic literacy and arithmetic. Lama Norlha is also funding a network of Tibetan doctors in Nangchen, enabling them to provide medical care to nomads and farmers.

Lama Norlha and American donors are sponsoring three stupas currently under construction in Nangchen. A single patron from New York is sponsoring a stupa at Kala Rongo Monastery; the other stupas are being built at Korche Monastery and Yönten Gatsal Ling primary school. The two monastery stupas will be constructed in the traditional closed style. At Yönten Gatsal Ling school, a shrine room will be built in the

base of the stupa, giving the children a place to learn about and practice their Buddhist heritage.

All of Lama Norlha's projects in eastern Tibet are administered by Kagyu Thubten Chöling Monastery in Wappingers Falls, NY, and by NYEMA Projects, Inc. (the Nangchen Yushu Educational and Medical Association), a charitable organization founded in 1996 by Lama Norlha and Pema Dorje, MD. The projects are funded almost entirely through private donations, with less than five percent needed for administrative overhead. More information, and many photos, can be found at Kagyu Thubten Chöling's website, www.kagyu.com. Lama Norlha plans to make his annual visit to Nangchen this summer. New developments and photos will be posted on the website.



Nuns in three-year retreat wearing hats knitted by an American sponsor

If you would like to make a donation towards Lama Norlha's efforts to re-establish the dharma in eastern Tibet, and to preserve Tibetan language, culture and religion, please fill out this form and mail or fax to:

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KSOC Meditation and Class Schedule

Saturday, June 24

10 a.m., 2 p.m. White Tara teaching and practice

Sunday, June 25

9:30 a.m. Chenrezig practice
1 p.m. White Tara teaching and practice

Beginning July 1

Saturdays

10 a.m. White Tara practice
1 p.m. 3-hour sit

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9:30 a.m. Chenrezig practice
11:30 a.m. Chants, formless meditation, and teachings by Lama Tashi

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In the case of the Medicine Buddha practice, you relinquish the thought, 'I am me, I am the person I think I am,' and replace it with the thought, 'I am the Medicine Buddha.'

**—from Thrangu Rinpoche's teaching
on the Medicine Buddha Sadhana**

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